

The Quest for the Pāśupata Weapon*

The Gateway of the Mahādeva Temple at
Madhyamikā (Nagarī)

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INTRODUCTION

The village of Nagarī is situated in the Chittorgarh District (Rajasthan), 11 km north of the famous fort. The present archaeological site lies to the south of the village on the right bank of the River Berach. The original citadel along the river extended further northwards and included the space presently occupied by the village (Plate 129).



Plate 129
The citadel of the old town of Madhyamikā

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The remains of the Mahādeva Temple are found in the southern part of the archaeological site (Plate 130).



Plate 130
The site of the Mahādeva Temple

These remains consist of a reconstructed brick platform surrounded by some stray pieces of architecture: parts of a *dhvajastambha* (pillar), pillar capitals having bull and lion, a pedestal, an architrave of a *toraṇa*, a beam with *gavākṣas* and *makara*, and a *torāṇa* post (Plate 131).



Plate 131
Remains within the precincts of the Mahādeva Temple

The architrave and post have sculptured panels on both sides, indicating that

they must have been part of a free standing gateway, as the following (partial) reconstruction may show (Plates 132, 133):¹



Plate 132
Torana east face



Plate 133
Torana west face

Before we discuss the iconography of the *torana*, we will give a brief sketch of the historical setting of the site.

THE HISTORY OF THE NAGARĪ SITE

Inscriptions and coins

Many coins are reported to have come from Nagarī. Bhandarkar found in his excavations sixteen legible punch-marked coins pertaining to the Śibi-janapada. The legend of these coins reads: *majhimikāya śibijanapadasa*.² Bhandarkar (*op. cit.* 123 f.), following an earlier suggestion by Kielhorn, identified this Majhimikā ‘with the Madhyamikā mentioned by Patañjali as having been invested in his time by a Yavana king’,³ and takes it to be the old name of Nagarī. He

1 For another, well-preserved example of such a gateway from the same period and area, compare the tall post found at Khilchipura, now at Mandasor Fort (below, p. 573). Joanna Williams (1982, 142) draws attention to the striking similarity; she considers the Khilchipura piece to be slightly later.

2 Bhandarkar 1920, 122; Allan 1936, CXXIII f.

3 Patañjali *ad* P. 3.2.111: *aruṇad yavano madhyamikām*.

translates the legend as ‘Coin of the Śibi *janapada* of the Madhyamikā country’. This distinguishes the Śibis of Nagarī from those of the Punjab. Bhandarkar (and historians after him) had little doubt that Madhyamikā ‘was the old name of Nagarī and also the district around it’.⁴

Five inscriptions have been reportedly found in Nagarī and surroundings, one of them is the famous *Ghoṣūṇḍī Well Stone Inscription*,⁵ recording the establishment of a stone enclosure around the Nārāyaṇa Vāṭikā, which was dedicated to the two gods Saṃkarṣaṇa and Vāsudeva. The site of this Vāṭikā has been identified by Bhandarkar (1920, 128 ff.) with the so-called Elephant Pen of Akbar (Hāthī-bāḍā), ‘half a mile east of the village [Nagarī]’. Bhandarkar found here, among other things, a stone with grafitto reading: *śrīviṣṇupādābhyām* in seventh-century characters.⁶

For our present purpose, the inscription reportedly found ‘not far from the shrine of Mahādeva’ is of greater relevance. It is dated 481 in the Kṛta (= Vikrama) Era, corresponding to AD 424. It records ‘the erection of a temple to Vishnu by the three Baniā brothers’, Satyaśūra, Srugandha (Śrīgandha?) and Dāsa, and thus testifies to a Viṣṇu temple, established at or near the site of the Mahādeva temple during the reign of Emperor Kumāragupta.⁷ At this time Western Mālava was under control of the feudatory Early Aulikara prince (*nṛpati*) Viśvavarman, who was ruling from Daśapura (Mandasor), c. 100 km to the south of Nagarī.⁸

Some fragments belonging to the Gupta period were discovered by Bhandarkar in the area: two capitals of pillars with addorsed lions and bulls (in the Kaṅkāli Mātā shrine in Nagarī village). Other pillars and images were found c. 4 km southeast of Nagarī at the shrine of Sāḍū Mātā.⁹

One more inscribed stone relevant to our present discussion was found in Chittorgarh in 1959, ‘while clearing debris in the fort area’. This stone, containing two brief fragmentary, but related inscriptions, was published by Sircar

4 Bhandarkar 1920, 123 f.

5 The Ghoṣūṇḍī village lies c. 6 km NE of Nagarī, but the inscribed stone came originally from the so-called Hāthī-bāḍā at Nagarī. There exist apparently three copies of this inscription, one still *in situ*. EI 16, 25–27; EI 22, 198–205; Sircar in SI I, 90 f.: ‘2nd half of the 1st cent. BC’.

6 Bhandarkar 1920, 129; Agrawala 1987.

7 Bhandarkar 1920, 121. The text of this inscription has not been published, although it is referred to in several publications. We only know about the basic contents of this inscription from Bhandarkar’s original description. According to Bhandarkar it was ‘deposited in the Rajputana Museum, Ajmer’. Although the line of the inscription that mentions the Kṛta Era has been extensively discussed in CII III (1981), 192 ff., and the inscription clearly falls within the category of ‘Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings’, the editors of the revised edition of Volume III of the CII (B. Chhabra & G.S. Gai) refrain from including and editing this inscription in their volume, nor do they give any more information about the inscription itself and its whereabouts. It shows again the limited value of this ‘revised edition’.

8 CII III (1880), 72–78; SI I, 399–405; Salomon 1989, 19 f.

9 Bhandarkar 1920, Plates XIV (a), XV (b).

and Gai in *Epigraphia Indica* 34 (1961–62). The second inscription attests to the building of a temple, which was, in all likelihood, dedicated to Śiva, since the *maṅgala* verse speaks of ‘the one who hides the moon in the pile of his curling, tawny matted locks’.¹⁰ Its construction seems to have been commissioned by a *rājasthānīya* or viceroy who was ruling in Daśapura and Madhyamā. The (Śiva) temple is said to be located to the north of the (Viṣṇu) temple of Manorathasvāmin.¹¹

Madhyamā has been identified with Madhyamikā, and the *rājasthānīya*, son of Viṣṇudatta and grandson of Varāha(dāsa), belonged to the powerful merchant (Naigama) family that kept the office of chief minister or viceroy under the Later Aulikara kings of Daśapura, in particular Prakāśadharman and Yaśodharman (between AD 510 and 533).¹² The two Chittorgarh inscriptions belong to this period and record the importance of the Madhyamā/Madhyamikā province within the kingdom of Daśapura in the first four decades of the sixth century. They also testify to shifting religious affiliations amongst regional rulers: the Early Aulikaras, like their Gupta overlords, were Vaiṣṇavas; the Later Aulikaras, who came to power after the turbulent period that saw the fall of the Gupta Empire, were devotees of Śiva. It would seem that the archaeological remains in Nagarī reflect this revolution.

The fort of Chittorgarh dates from the post-Aulikara period, when Daśapura and Madhyamikā had lost their prominence. It is conceivable that the inscribed stone slab came from nearby Nagarī along with other materials, when the newly built fort provided safety to a successor state, possibly that of the Mori Rajputs (Mauryas) in the seventh century.¹³

Archaeology

Excavations at Nagarī were conducted by D.R. Bhandarkar in the ‘second decade of the [20th] century’, and after him by K.V. Soundara Rajan in 1962–63.¹⁴ The archaeological situation is summed up by R.P. Sharma in A. Ghosh’s *Encyclopaedia of Indian Archaeology*, volume II s.v. ‘Nagari’.

[...] Three periods were distinguished, the first two being anterior to the stone fortification and seemingly without baked-brick structures, though limestone structures were known. They had both red and grey wares; the occurrence of the NBPW was negligible, though associated red ware was available. The settlement seems to have originated in c. 400 B.C. [...] Period III was marked by the presence of the Red Polished Ware. The other finds of the site include terracotta human and animal figures in Śuṅga and Gupta styles [...] The fortification probably originated in Gupta times.

10 EI 34, 57: *āpiṅgabhaṅgurajātācayalīnacandram*.

11 It is impossible to say whether this temple is the one erected by the Baniā brothers in the fifth century.

12 Sircar & Gai in EI 34 (1961–62), 53–58; Salomon 1989, 18.

13 Cecil 2016, 116 f. HCI III, 161 f.

14 Bhandarkar 1920; IAR 1962–63, 19.

The main site of Bhandarkar's excavation was around the small Mahādeva Temple. This temple itself is of recent date, but the installed *liṅga* may be old (Plate 134).



Plate 134
Liṅga of Mahādeva Temple

The structure exposed in the excavations consists of a square brick platform (Plate 135).



Plate 135
Excavated brick platform in Nagarī

It will be seen from the plan that the east side was unlike the other sides of the platform and shows that it and its superstructure faced that direction. The maximum height preserved of its moulded walls is 4' [122 cm] and is found in the west wall. This seems to be nearly half of the original height of the platform. Though the upper half of its walls has fallen down, it appears from the terracottas picked up from the débris, to have been covered with decorative tiles of at least three types, some of them probably arranged in string courses. One type is represented by what may be styled bird terracottas. [...]

The centre of the platform was originally occupied by a superstructure, very little of which has now survived. It is 43' 6" [13.30 m] square at the base. Immediately below each side of this square is a foundation wall, 6' [1.80 m] thick. [...] Of the superstructure only the lowermost moulding has been preserved, which is nearly two feet high. (Bhandarkar 1920, 135 f.)

The original temple of the Gupta period may have been of brick, but, as observed by Bhandarkar (*op. cit.* 138), 'to the second period of additions characterised by the introduction of stone work, or possibly to a period slightly later, belong the remains of a stone *toraṇa* exhumed in front of the mound'. It is this *toraṇa* which is the subject of this article.

THE TORAṆA OF THE MAHĀDEVA TEMPLE

In describing this gateway Joanna Williams (1982, 140 f.) observed that,

The most impressive carvings at Nagaṛī are the remains of a gigantic gateway or *torāṇa* that must belong to the early sixth century on the basis of its relationship to works from Mandasor. The decorative side face of the post bears fluted bands and medallions [Plate 136], which elaborate upon forms found at Mukundara.

Passing through the temple gateway is entering a new world. The *torāṇa* as such epitomizes the rite of passage and the symbolism of this rite informs the iconography of the gateway (below, p. 599). It begins with the gatekeeper and his trident at the bottom of the gate post, eastern side, at the entry of the temple compound, which is oriented toward the east (Plate 137).¹⁵

15 That this is the eastern, that is entry side, follows from the fact that it has the figure of a Dvārapāla, and because it fits only the eastern face of the architrave. The latter face is the eastern one, because it contains a Dakṣiṇāmūrti, which would be without meaning if it faced west (Bakker 2004c), and an image of Śiva in meditation (Yogeśvara), which should likewise face east. It also seems to follow from the iconographic programme of the architrave itself, which begins, as we will see, in the panels at the entrance, that is the eastern side, and continues with the panels at the exit, that is the western side.



Plate 136
Side face of toraṇa post



Plate 137
Gatekeeper with trident facing east

Just as Bhandarkar, Williams assumes that the fragment with *candraśālā* arches lying near the architrave is part of a second tier of the *torāṇa* (Plate 138). She observed that ‘the top half of the double-*candraśālā* arches have diagonal projections from their lower corners, a detail mentioned as characteristic of pieces found in Deogarh’.¹⁶



Plate 138
Candraśālā arches in the second tier of toraṇa

The original Mahādeva Temple in Nagarī may have resembled the architectural structures that are depicted next to the *candraśālās* (Plate 139).¹⁷ An

¹⁶ Williams 1982, 140f. Cf. Williams 1982, Plate 202 (Deogarh).

¹⁷ This feature/structure has been described by Michael Meister in EITA II.1, 143:

āmalaka (1' 9" high), like the one depicted, has been found in Nagarī village (Plate 140).¹⁸



Plate 139

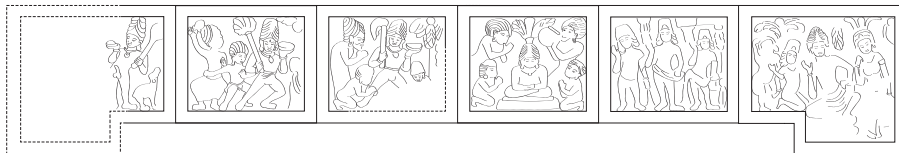
Miniature temple; detail of Plate 138



Plate 140

Āmalaka found in Nagarī

The eastern face (E) of the gateway architrave



S

Plates 141–142

N

Architrave of the gateway, facing east

Reconstruction of the architrave of the gateway, facing east

The upper cross-beam had makara heads at each end with architectural representations on the cross-lintel that show dvibhūma Phāṃsanā structures [i.e. 'tiered, pyramidal roof-type'] faced with candraśālās and with small, square, stone platforms supporting globular āmalakas represented to either side of the upper bhūmi. Such units have been found at Bhūmarā and Sārnāth, are suggested at Sōndani and earlier at Bilsaḍ, are still utilized on structures in Surāṣṭra in the seventh century, and contribute conceptually to the formation of the Nāgara superstructure, where they become incorporated as bhūmikhaṇḍas.

18 Bhandarkar *op. cit.* 125, Plate XIV(b) (probably upside-down).

The full length of the architrave must have measured about 4 metres, but the southern-most panel has broken off at one-third and the concluding sculpture of a garland bearer is missing at that end (Plates 141–142; cf. Plate 115). The whole architrave consisted, in our reconstruction, of two garland bearers on either end and six panels in between. The middle of the architrave must have been between the third and the fourth panel, which we deduce from the turn of the torsion in between the third and fourth panels in the garland at the bottom of the crossbar. The height of the architrave is 65 cm, its width 38 cm. The architrave is broken at two places: in the first panel at the northern end and in the middle, between the third and fourth panels.¹⁹

The iconography of the eastern face of the architrave, seen by visitors when they entered the temple complex, has been discussed in Bakker 2004c, 131–34, in particular its panel at the northern end, which, it was argued (above, p. 525), contained a Dakṣiṇāmūrti. The latter interpretation still stands, but the person who is instructed in this *mūrti* has to be reconsidered.

At the time Bakker worked from a photograph kindly sent to him by Joanna Williams, which he re-published.²⁰ Williams (1982, 141) had observed that: ‘The subjects of the reverse [i.e. eastern face] of this same crossbar remain to be identified.’ In a letter to Bakker she added to this that she wondered ‘whether the scene at the left end of this face might not represent the destruction of Dakṣa’s sacrifice’.²¹ Bakker (2004, 132 ff.) accepted this suggestion and interpreted the Dakṣiṇāmūrti scene as representing the initiation of King Dakṣa in the Pāśupatavrata.

The present revision of this interpretation has been prompted by a visit to the excavation site at Nagarī by Bakker and Bisschop and a study of the architrave in the field (15 January 2016). For it turned out that the panel at the southern end (E 1), although incomplete since it has broken off at one-third,

19 Bhandarkar 1920, 139 thinks that ‘enough has been recovered to show that each broader side was originally divided into nine panels [including garland bearers]’. Bhandarkar’s reconstruction in Plate XXIII shows that he conjectures that one complete panel plus garland bearer is missing at the southern end. In view of the turn of the torsion between the third and fourth panels (E 3–4, W 3–4), we think this is less likely. An argument against our assumption, as voiced by Véronique Degroot, is that the architrave panels show alternating indentation and protrusion: panels E 2/W 5, E 4/W 3 and (northern-most) E 6/W 1 are protruding and so, assuming symmetry, one might expect a southern-most panel to be protruding as well. Another argument, however, against a missing 7th panel, in addition to the change in torsion, seems to be that the breaking point in the southern-most panel (E 1/W 6) corresponds with the crack in the northern-most panel (E 6/W 1), the positions where the architrave supposedly rested on its two posts. The collapse of the *torāṇa* thus seems to have taken place by a break in the middle and at the two junctures. Six panels on each side makes sense according to the iconographical analysis offered in this article. If a 7th, lost panel was originally part of the architrave, the iconography of panels E 1 and W 6 that we conjecture may have been divided, broadly speaking, over two panels.

20 Williams 1982, Plate 216; Bakker 2004c, Figure 4.1 (above, Plate 115).

21 Letter dated 10 March 2001, quoted above, p. 524 (Bakker 2004c, 132).

actually contains significant information that had been invisible in the above-mentioned photograph. This evidence was spotted by Bisschop and debated in the field. It resulted in the acknowledgement that the earlier interpretation of the panels of the eastern face as depicting the Dakṣa myth needed to be reconsidered.

The incomplete panel at the southern end (E1) deserves a full discussion (Plate 143).

Two features of this sculpture catch the eye and suggest a new identification. The pronounced ithyphallic character and the brush with peacock feathers, which is held in the ascetic's left hand. It invites comparison to an image found at the bottom of the seventh-century doorpost built into the Deur Temple in Malhar, Chhattisgarh (Plate 144).²²



Plate 143
The first panel of the eastern face of the architrave (E1)

²² This Deur Temple in Malhar and its ancient doorposts is discussed in Bosma 2018, 193 ff.



Plate 144
Lower-most panel in Malhar doorpost

As emerges from this and other panels of the same doorjamb, the Malhar panel depicts Śiva's entry as a naked ascetic into the Devadāruvana. The earliest account of this myth is found in the *Skandapurāṇa*. The description of his appearance there matches the present panel:

THE Trident-bearer once entered that forest for the sake of alms. The sages saw the Lord of Gods there with his phallus erect.²³

Like in the Nagarī panel, Śiva carries the ascetic attribute of a brush and is ithyphallic, while his left hand holds a begging bowl ready to receive alms.²⁴ These features do not figure in the Dakṣa myth.

In the Nagarī panel E1 the protagonist carries something in his raised right hand. The elevated position suggests the object is significant, auspicious it would seem. It is held in such a way as if it is being shown to an audience

23 SP_S 167.74: *bhikṣāhetor vanaṃ tat tu prāviśat kila śūladhr̥k | sa dr̥ṣṭas tatra deveśo munibhiḥ stabdhamehanaḥ ||* For the Devadāruvana myth in the *Skandapurāṇa* etc. see Bisschop 2006, 195 f. Cf. above, p. 548.

24 Although the ascetic brush (*sthalapavitra*; *picchikā* in Jaina texts) is usually associated with Jainism, it was a mark of mendicants in general and of Pāsupatas as well. Cf. *Pañcārthabhaṣya ad Pāsupatasūtra* 1.6: *tathā bhikṣos tridaṇḍamuṇḍakamaṇḍalukāṣāya-vāsopajalapavitrasthalapavitrādi liṅgam*. The sieve and brush are listed as donations to be given to the *śivayogin* in *Śivadharmasāstra* 12.70 (De Simini 2013, 291). On the adoption of the principle of *ahiṃsā* by the Pāsupatas, see Hara 2002, 67–76. For Bhikṣāṇanamūrtis with staff (trident) with peacock feathers see Donaldson 1986, 56.

that populated the missing two-thirds of the panel. This interpretation of the gesture is reinforced by the two following Nagarī panels (E2 & 3), in which apparently the same object is raised, but in the left hand this time, in order to hold it away from the attackers, whereas the right hand now holds the ascetic brush. Moreover, the object seems to contain something in the first panel whereas it appears empty in the second and third, a difference that might have significance and which we will discuss below. A deer in the incomplete first panel (E1) and a clearly visible tree in the third one (E3) suggest a forest setting (Plates 143, 146).



Plate 145

Second panel from the left (E2)



Plate 146

Third panel from the left (E3)

That this forest in the Nagarī panel is also the Devadāruvana, follows from another significant difference between the first panel on the one hand and the second and third panels on the other: the protagonist in the latter two is no longer ithyphallic, or phallic at all. This is not due to damage, but seems to be an intrinsic part of the sculpture. This feature proves, in our view, that the myth depicted on the eastern face of the Nagarī architrave is, like its Malhar counterpart, that of Śiva in the Pine Forest:

OUT of envy the bewildered sages felled the great *liṅga* of the god, O Vyāsa, in the Pine Forest hermitage.²⁵

A problem remains: what is the object that Śiva holds first in his raised right and then in his left hand? Erosion of the object in all three panels hampers its identification. The earlier view that saw in these panels the depiction of the Dakṣa myth naturally interpreted this object as the sacrificial cake (*puroḍāś*), seized from the sacrifice, but this could apply to the second and third panels only (E2 & 3), not to the first one (E1), in which the object is shown by Śiva.²⁶

25 SP_S 167.75: *īṣayā munibhir liṅgaṃ tasya devasya tan mahat | vimūḍhaiḥ pātitaṃ vyāsa devadāruvanāśrame ||*

26 Cf. below, n. 57 on p. 595.



Plate 147
Fertility goddess, Mathurā



Plate 148
Gaṅgā, Ahicchatra ²⁷

The hand gesture in this panel recalls images of goddesses of life and natural fertility holding a vase or pot with *amṛta*, the elixir of life, such as, for instance, the maiden on the stūpa railing found in Bhūteśvara, or the terracotta image of Gaṅgā found in Ahicchatra (Plates 147, 148). This *pūrṇakalāśa* carried in the raised palm of the hand symbolizes vitality and natural growth. And although the Devadāruvana myth is all about life, growth and natural reproduction, depictions of this myth in which Śiva carries a vase are not known to us. ²⁸

Another terracotta piece found in Ahicchatra may be considered in this connection. It has been described by Agrawala and Banerjea as a panel depicting a Śiva Dakṣiṇāmūrti (Plate 149), ²⁹ an identification that is, however, untenable in our understanding of a Dakṣiṇāmūrti (Bakker 2004c). This panel shows

²⁷ Photo courtesy National Museum New Delhi. <http://www.nationalmuseumindia.gov.in/prodCollections.asp?pid=24&id=2&lk=dp2> (accessed 17-5-2016).

²⁸ In depictions of Śiva as a beggar he generally holds the begging bowl in his hand held low, but a strikingly similar sculpture from Alampur shows him displaying a filled object in his raised, left hand and holding a brush in his right. See Parlier-Renault 2007, 135, fig. 89.

²⁹ V.S. Agrawala in *Ancient India* 4, pp. 169–170. Banerjea 1956, 471 Pl. 7:

The four-armed god seated in the *ardhaparyāṅka* pose holds a rosary in the back right hand and a vase with foliage in the left; the lower right hand (broken) seems to have been either in the *jñāna* or *vyākhyāna* pose, the front left hand resting on the thigh.

a four-armed deity represented as an ascetic (matted hair, rosary), holding a *pūrṇakalāśa* with foliage in his back left hand. Apart from the general characteristics of the ascetic, none of Śiva's usual iconographic markers is apparently present and the question is justified whether we are really concerned with an image of this god.³⁰



Plate 149
Terracotta panel, Ahicchatra

There are two figures on the left of the god, one male and the other female with hands in the *namaskāra mudrā*.

- 30 A new interpretation of this panel has recently been proposed by Laxshmi Greaves (2015, 308–13, 450–55). After a comparison of this plaque with the depiction of the sages Nara and Nārāyaṇa on the east face of the Gupta temple at Deogarh and a terracotta plaque from Bhitargaon, Greaves proposes to identify the four-armed figure in the Ahicchatra panel with Nārāyaṇa. The nymph standing to his left, Greaves argues, is the Apsaras Urvaśī, and the panel depicts the myth told in the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* 1.129.1–19, 3.35.1–18), which describes how the sage Nārāyaṇa created Urvaśī by drawing her outline in mango juice on his thigh: ‘It is apposite then that Sage Nārāyaṇa has been depicted with his left hand on his thigh, perhaps illustrating that the creation of Urvaśī has just taken place’ (Greaves *op. cit.* 454). We consider this interpretation interesting, but conclude that for the moment the Ahicchatra panel, whether Nārāyaṇa or Śiva, cannot help us to decode the iconographic programme of the Nagarī architrave. One of our doubts concerns the *upanayana* cord. Could this be a snake, whose head appears at the deity's left ear? If so, this would point to Śiva, rather than Nārāyaṇa. In the present state of conservation it is impossible to see if the deity is ithyphallic. However, his vexed look and the way the vessel in the left upper hand is kept off suggest a certain similarity with the Nagarī panels E2 and E3 (Plates 145–46); they may point to a Devadāruvana scene, in which the male in the background is the seer in a pose of resignation, while his wife in front of him is full of admiration for the intruder.

We will return to the unidentified object in Śiva's raised right/left hand later, but first we should have a look at the remaining panels of the architrave.

The second and third panels of the eastern face of the cross-beam correspond closely to the second and third panels from below in the Malhar doorpost and thus reinforce the Devadāruvana interpretation (Plates 150–153).



Plate 150
Second panel from left (E2), Nagarī



Plate 151
Second panel from bottom, Malhar



Plate 152
Third panel from left (E3), Nagarī



Plate 153
Third panel from bottom, Malhar

In both cases Śiva is attacked by furious sages and in both cases the latter realize their mistake, fall to his feet and cry forgiveness:

THEREUPON the gods, beginning with Brahmā, and the sages striving for liberation realized that the terrible calamity was all caused by Śaṃkara. After praising him with various hymns, they propitiated Śaṃkara.³¹

³¹ SP_S 167.77: *brahmādayas tato devās te ca siddhā mumukṣavaḥ | jñātvā śaṃkarajaṃ sarvaṃ tad apāyaṃ sudāruṇaṃ | saṃstutya vividhaiḥ stotraih śaṃkaraṃ paryatoṣayan ||*

In the fourth and fifth panels the Nagarī and Malhar stories go separate ways. The Malhar panels refer to the Devadāruvana myth as told in the *Saromāhātmya*, in which Śiva in the form of an elephant plays a central role in re-installing the *liṅga*.³² We will focus on the Nagarī story.

When we pass from the third (E 3) to the fourth panel (E 4) we cross the middle of the architrave and therewith, it seems, we leave behind the Devadāruvana myth proper. The right half of the architrave is rather concerned with the consequences of the events told in the myth: Śiva is recognized as supreme god, who alone is capable of bestowing power (*siddhi*), grace (*prasāda*) and deliverance from all suffering (*duḥkhānta*). This is what the begging sages in the third panel (E 3) realize; the fourth panel (E 4) shows this new insight. God is depicted sitting under a tree, deep in concentration, as the master of yoga, Yogeśvara (Plate 154).³³



Plate 154
Fourth panel from the left (E 4), Nagarī

The reason that his Yogeśvara form and not the *liṅga* is chosen to represent him may have its origin in the fact that the designer of the architrave wanted to

32 VmP *Saromāhātmya* 23.29–35. Cf. Donaldson 1986, pp. 53–54.

33 The iconography of Śiva steeped in meditation underneath a tree is obviously derived from Buddhist examples.

tell another story. Realization of one's aim in this world and the acquisition of (yogic) power is achieved by following the path (*sādhana*) that he contemplates and is ready to communicate to the world of men. The four acolytes around Yogeśvara may intimate the spread of this *sādhana* over the earth, since they evoke the image of the four disciples:

AND in the present age as well, when the Supreme Lord had seen the suffering in the world, He emitted four men (*puruṣa*) from His four faces and spoke to them, since it was His wish to bestow grace upon mankind:

‘YOU four should go to earth and become twice-born ascetics; O Masters of Yoga, return to me after you have led the brahmins to the highest station.’³⁴

These *puruṣas*, the *Skandapurāṇa* (SP) continues, will become the four disciples (*śiṣya*) of Śiva, whose own incarnation on earth is known as Lāguḍi in the SP or Lakulīṣa in later literature. This incarnation, characterised by his attribute the club (*lakula*), is not depicted on the architrave, but any *guru* pertaining to the four *paramparās* inaugurated by him, may be imagined to be implicitly involved in the last panel of the eastern face, since these *ācāryas* are believed to impersonate Śiva when they initiate and instruct their pupils.³⁵ The four acolytes around Yogeśvara perform different acts of veneration and they do not seem all to be of the same standing. The one at the viewer's lower right may be a householder, indicating that not only ascetics, but the whole world had come to recognize Śiva as supreme god.

The following, penultimate panel (E5, Plate 155) shows someone set on the path towards instruction in the doctrine, which is the subject of the last panel (E6, Plate 156, cf. Plate 116).

The interpretation that conceived of these east-facing panels as depicting the myth of the destruction of Dakṣa's sacrifice obviously saw in the central figure King Dakṣa (Bakker 2004c). In our present understanding of the iconographic programme, however, this is no longer evident.

Of the three figures in a row, the one at the viewer's right seems to stand within a architectural structure of which roof and pillars are still partly visible. In his left hand he carries something that looks like a quiver. If this is the case, we could expect that there would be a bow somewhere, but the panel is too much eroded to make it out. Twisted locks of hair fall from under his crown-like headgear. This feature recurs in the next panel in the kneeling figure and we infer that both depict the same person.

34 SP_S 167.119–120:

varṭamāne kalau cāpi jñātvā duḥkḥārditaṃ jagat |
catvāraḥ puruṣān sṛṣṭvā svasmān mukhacatuṣṭayāt |
provāca paramēśāno lokānugrahalīpsayā || 119 ||
yūyaṃ yāta mahiṃ sarve dvijā bhūtvā tapasvinaḥ |
mām evaiṣyatha yogīśā nūtvā viprān param padam || 120 ||

35 Bakker 2004c, 124 f. (above, p. 514). Kauṇḍinya *ad* PS 1.1. Dalal 1920, p. 9: *Ratnaṭikā ad Gaṇakārikā* 5c.



Plate 155
Fifth panel from the left (E 5), Nagari

The figure at the viewer's left seems to be of a different standing than the two persons to the right. He is naked and of plump build. His headdress seems plain and his right hand makes the 'do-not-fear' gesture. His left hand is something of a puzzle. It would seem that this hand is raised and holds an object at head height, if this is not the raised right arm of the central figure.

The tallest figure in the middle is clearly a senior person. His left hand holds the knot of his *dhotī*. His right arm, if it is not raised, appears to lean on the left arm of his companion to the right, while his hand seems to hold something; a stick? It is clear that he wears a high crown with an ornament.

As a working hypothesis we conjecture that the figure carrying the quiver and who reappears in the next panel is Arjuna, who is being dispatched by his elder brother Yudhiṣṭhira, the figure in the middle, on the advice of Vyāsa, who stands on the (viewer's) left side.

Mahābhārata 3.37–38 tells the story.³⁶ Vyāsa instructs Yudhiṣṭhira to pass on to Arjuna a spell, a *vidyā* named Pratismṛti, also referred to as *yogavidyā* or *brahman*, which will enable him to acquire the necessary weapons from Indra, Rudra, Varuṇa, Kubera and Dharma.³⁷ Yudhiṣṭhira explains to Arjuna that their enemies possess mastery in the use of all sorts of weapons and therefore, for the Pāṇḍavas to win the war, it is necessary to obtain superior weapons. He will initiate him into this secret knowledge (Upaniṣad) received from Vyāsa,

³⁶ Cf. *Kirātārjunīya* (KA) 3.10–29.

³⁷ MBh 3.37.25–28.

thanks to which the whole world will become visible to him and through which he should seek the grace of the gods.³⁸

AFTER these words the lord King Dharma (i.e. Yudhiṣṭhira) taught him (i.e. Arjuna) that magic, when he was ritually consecrated and controlled in word, body, and thought; then the elder brother told his heroic brother to depart.³⁹

In the *Mahābhārata* Indra is the first person that Arjuna visits on his quest, but the Śaiva world view, which conceived this temple and architrave, shifted the Vyāsa-Yudhiṣṭhira line of initiation onto Śiva, as we will see in the next panel. It is Śiva's help that is sought first, since only instruction in the Pāśupata path will enable Arjuna to reach his goal. This is the lesson that the seers on earth had learned in the Devadāruvana, illustrated in the first three panels. We move on to the last one (E 6, Plate 156).



Plate 156
Sixth panel from the left (E 6): a Dakṣiṇāmūrti

This panel shows Śiva facing east, with Pārvatī to his left. The necklace and headdress are the same as that of Yogeśvara in the fourth panel (E 4). And the twisted locks of hair falling from under a crown-like headgear with ornament

38 MBh 3.38.9–10:

kṛṣṇadvaiṣṇavanāt tāta gṛhītopaniṣan mayā |
tayā prayuktayā samyag jagat sarvaṃ prakāśate || 9 ||
tena tvam brahmaṇā tāta saṃyuktaḥ susamāhitaḥ |
devatānāṃ yathākālāṃ prasādaṃ pratipālaya || 10 ||

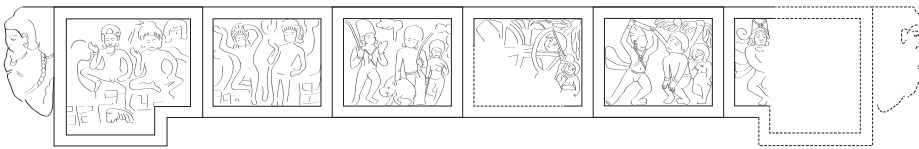
39 MBh 3.38.14 (tr. van Buitenen): *evam uktvā dharmarājas tam adhyāpayata prabhuh |*
dikṣitaṃ vidhinā tena yatavākkāyamānasam | anujajñe tato vīraṃ bhrātā bhrātaram
agrajaḥ || 14 || Cf. Kirātārjuniya (KA) 3.24–29.

identifies the figure to Śiva's right (*dakṣiṇā*), towards whom he slightly bends, as the same princely figure that we have tentatively identified as Arjuna in the preceding panel (E5). Arjuna is on his knees now, facing north, receiving instruction. The scene is set on a mountain, in a forest. A powerful *gaṇa*-type of figure stands behind him, bending the hero's arms behind his back by his front hands, or so it seems; his right back hand sticks up holding something above his head, whereas the contour of his raised left back arm is only vaguely visible. We will discuss below who this four-armed helper of Śiva could be.

As we have argued earlier, this panel (E6) shows a Dakṣiṇāmūrti in the original meaning of the term (Bakker 2004c, 132 f.; above, p. 525). The neophyte who is instructed or initiated in the Pāśupata doctrine is not Dakṣa, according to our present understanding, but the princely figure depicted in the penultimate panel E5, who is there about to be dispatched by his elder brother and a saintly advisor.

The Devadāruvana myth that is told in the first three panels (E1–3) does not immediately suggest a figure that would be the recipient of Śiva's instruction, let alone the figure of Arjuna. Our tentative interpretation of this panel E6, which sees in it Arjuna's instruction in the Śaiva *sādhana*, needs further underpinning. This will be furnished by the iconographic programme of the western face of the architrave, which will make clear that we should read both sides of the architrave as one continuous story.

The western face(W) of the gateway architrave



N

S

Plates 157–158

Architrave of the gateway, facing west

Reconstruction of the architrave of the gateway, facing west

The panels of the reverse side of the architrave (Plates 157–158), which faced west and were seen by visitors leaving the temple complex, have been identified by Joanna Williams (1982, 141); they depict scenes from the Kirātārjunīya myth. This interpretation has been accepted by Bakker 2004c and still stands.

It accords well with the fact that the poet Bhāravi probably wrote his famous *Kirātārjunīya* at the court of the Later Aulikara king Yaśodharman, also known as Viṣṇuvardhana.⁴⁰ Either he or, more likely, his father, King Prakāśadharman, was responsible for the building of this temple and its gateway.

The first or northern-most panel (W 1, Plate 159) shows, according to Williams, ‘Nara and Nārāyaṇa seated in the wilderness’. She compares it with the great Deogarh relief (Plate 160).

The scene interpreted in this way may represent the dialogue between both seers as given in the *Mahābhārata*.⁴¹ The function of this piece of Vaiṣṇava philosophy, however, within the story told in the Nagarī architrave remains entirely obscure. In the Deogarh relief, the scene is overseen by Brahmā, who had sent both seers to earth to fight demons.



Plate 159

Nagarī:

First panel on the western face (W 1)



Plate 160

Deogarh:

Panel on the eastern face

In the Nagarī panel there appears in the viewer’s right top corner a third figure. His left hand is visible and holds something rounded. Nothing points to Brahmā. And also unlike the Deogarh relief, Nara or Arjuna sits to the right of the ascetic figure with whom he has an argument and who seems to be two-

⁴⁰ Bakker 2014, 35–37.

⁴¹ MBh 3.13.37–41 (tr. van Buitenen):

After the Pāṇḍava (i.e. Arjuna), who was the very self of Kṛṣṇa, had thus spoken to himself, he fell silent and Janārdana (i.e. Kṛṣṇa) said to the Pārtha (i.e. Arjuna). ‘You are mine and I am yours, and my people are yours. He who hates you hates me; who follows you follows me. You, invincible hero, are Nara and I am Hari Nārāyaṇa. Nara and Nārāyaṇa, the seers, have come from their world to this world. You are no other than I, Pārtha, I none other than you, Bhārata, no difference can be found between the two of us, bull of the Bharatas.

armed. The scene is set in the mountains, where the rest of the Kirātārjunīya myth takes place. A lion is visible in a mountain cave at the foot.

Despite the striking similarities between the Deogarh and Nagarī panels, we are not convinced that the figure to the left of Arjuna is indeed Nārāyaṇa. Instead we think it more likely that the person Arjuna is speaking to is ‘the ascetic (*tapasvin*), blazing with the lustre of *brahman*, tawny, with matted hair and lean’,⁴² who is no other than Indra in disguise. This brahmin asks Arjuna why he has come in full armour and requests him to leave behind his bow (MBh 3.38.32–34). The bow may indeed be visible in the present panel to Arjuna’s right side.

After this brahmin failed to have Arjuna give up his resolve, he reveals his true identity and offers a boon. Arjuna replies:

I DO not want wishes of worlds, or divinity, still less happiness, nor the sovereignty over all the gods, overlord of the Thirty! If I leave my brothers in the wilderness without avenging the feud, I shall find infamy in all the worlds for time without end.⁴³

These are the proud words of the Kṣatriya, the quintessence of the Kirātārjunīya. Confronted with so much self-confidence, Indra can think of nothing better than to refer Arjuna to ‘the three-eyed, trident-bearing Lord of Beings, Śiva’.⁴⁴

The similarity of the Nagarī panel with the one in Deogarh and other Nārāyaṇa representations is, however, not coincidence, but serves as a reminder to the onlooker that Arjuna is Nara. In Bhāravi’s *Kirātārjunīya* (12.33) Śiva explains to the seers that Arjuna is in fact an incarnation of Nara, a part of the Primaeval Man (Ādipuruṣa). And, he says, there is Acyuta. Nara and Acyuta have been asked by Brahmā to go among men to protect creation by killing demons,⁴⁵ but ‘Nārāyaṇa’ as such does not figure in Bhāravi’s work.

Nara is said to have been created by Deva Nīllohita in *Skandapurāṇa* 6. He had issued from the mirror image of Viṣṇu, who was reflected in the blood that the latter had himself donated to Nīllohita’s begging bowl. This begging bowl is said in SP 6.1 to be Brahmā’s Head (*brahmaṇaḥ śiraḥ*), that is, his fifth one, which had been chopped off in SP 5 and was then used by Śiva/Nīllohita on his rounds for alms.⁴⁶

AFTER Deva (i.e. Nīllohita) has seen (Viṣṇu’s) reflection in the liquid (*rasa*) within the skull (*kapāla*), he issues forth (a) man (*puruṣa*) resembling Viṣṇu in strength.

42 MBh 3.38.31: *tato ’paśyat savyasācī vṛkṣamūle tapasvinam | brāhmyā śriyā dīpyamānaṃ piṅgalaṃ jaṭilaṃ kṛśam || 31 ||*

43 MBh 3.38.40cd–41 (tr. van Buitenen): *na lokān na punaḥ kāmān na devatvaṃ kutaḥ sukham || 40 || na ca sarvāmaraśvaryaṃ kāmāye tridaśādhīpa | bhrātṛṃś tān vipine tyaktvā vairaṃ apratīyātya ca | akīrtiṃ sarvalokeṣu gaccheyaṃ śāśvatīḥ samāḥ || 41 ||*

44 MBh 3.38.43: *bhūteśaṃ tryakṣaṃ śūladharaṃ śivam.*

45 KA 12.35–36; Warder 1989–92 III, 206.

46 SP 6.2d: *bhaikṣāya pracacāra*, see below, n. 55 on p. 594.

He says to him: You (shall) be immortal, exempt from old age and decay and invincible on the battle field; Viṣṇu will be your best friend, and you (shall) live with him performing divine tasks.

BECAUSE you are born from the ‘waters’ (*nārā*) that rose from Viṣṇu’s body, you shall be called Nara (i.e. ‘man’) and be dear to him.⁴⁷

Evidently these two sixth-century Śaiva, i.e. Pāśupata, texts play down Viṣṇu’s role; the story told in the Nagarī architrave might do just the same.

With Arjuna we move from Mount Indrakīla, where the meeting with Indra had taken place (MBh 3.38.30), to Mount Himavat (MBh 3.39.11), where the extreme *tapas* will take place, illustrated in the second panel (W 2, Plate 161).



Plate 161

Second panel from left (W 2): Arjuna’s penance

The overall idea of this panel W 2 is clear: it shows Arjuna’s severe asceticism by standing on one leg in order to propitiate Śiva.⁴⁸ Nārāyaṇa does not belong to this context, nor has Indra a role to play any longer. It is not immediately clear, however, who the figure to his left could be.

⁴⁷ SP 6.10–12. For Sanskrit text and notes see SP I, 71, 144.

⁴⁸ MBh 3.39.23: *caturthe tv atha samprāpte māsi pūrṇe tataḥ param | vāyubhakṣo mahābāhur abhavat pāṇḍunandanah | ūrdhvabāhur nīrālamah pādāṅguṣṭhāgraviṣṭhitaḥ ||* 23 ||

If we follow the *Mahābhārata* story, the seers, afraid of Arjuna's ascetic powers, go to Mahādeva, who acknowledges Arjuna's mortifications and gives his approval:

THE Great Lord said: 'Swiftly return in joyous spirit and unwearied whence you have come. I do know the intention that is lodged in his mind. He does not desire heaven, nor sovereignty, nor long life; this very day I shall accomplish what he desires.'⁴⁹

We tentatively propose that it is this important moment of Śiva's consent (and his resolve to put him to the test first) that has been depicted in this panel. It is also conceivable that the figure of Śiva here is a representation of Arjuna's thought.

The figure seems to be four-armed, though only three are visible; his left back hand, if that is what it is, is raised and carries an object not unlike the mysterious object in the first three panels of the eastern face of the architrave (E 1–3). We postpone the discussion of this object and move on to the third panel (W 3), in which the test starts off.

The scene in this third panel from the left is without problems (Plate 162).



Plate 162
Third panel from left (W 3): Who shot the boar?

It shows the boar and the Kirāta with his wife, a disguise that Śiva and Pārvatī had taken on. Arjuna and the hunter argue about whose arrow pierced the boar.

49 MBh 3.39.28–29; tr. van Buitenen. Cf. *Kirātārjunīya* canto 12.

The Kirāta is about to pull out the arrow, which enrages Arjuna and a fight is inevitable (Plate 163).⁵⁰



Plate 163

Fourth panel from the left (W4)
Arjuna's bow-fight with the Kirāta



Plate 164

Fifth panel from the left (W5)
Arjuna assails the Kirāta

SHOUTING again and again, they bored each other with arrows like poisonous snakes. Arjuna shot at the mountain man (Kirāta) a shower of arrows and Śaṃkara received them with a tranquil mind. (MBh 3.40.25–26; tr. van Buitenen).

Then, in the following panel (Plate 164):

MY arrows are gone. Who is this man who devours all my arrows? I shall attack him with the nock of my bow, as one attacks an elephant with the point of a spear, and send him to the domain of staff-bearing Yama! (MBh 3.40.37–38; tr. van Buitenen.)

We arrive at the dénouement in the sixth panel (W6, Plate 165), at the southern end of the western face of the architrave.

The Kirāta had been a form adopted by Śiva to test his devotee Arjuna. The latter is allowed a vision of the Great God. In the *Mahābhārata* version of the story Mahādeva reveals himself as the god carrying the trident, dwelling in the mountains together with Devī; in the *Kirātārjunīya* he assumes 'his own form', smeared with ashes and ornamented with the crescent.⁵¹ Neither of these are visible to us, since, like its counterpart E1, the panel is broken off at one-third. But we do see Arjuna, no longer as an ascetic, though, but as a princely figure, wearing his ornamental crown from which his locks fall down, very similar to his representation in the two panels at the end of the eastern face of the architrave (E5 & 6). This is one of the elements that convinces us

50 Cf. Bakker 2014, 36 f., in which Bhāravi's *Kirātārjunīya* 14.14 is quoted to illustrate the scene.

51 MBh 3.40.55–56, see above, n. 50 on p. 523. Bhāravi gives the following description: *atha himaśucibhasmabhūṣitaṃ śirasi virājitam indulekhayā | svavapuḥ atimanoharam haram dadhatam udikṣya nanāma pāṇḍavaḥ ||* (*Kirātārjunīya* 18.15).

that the eastern and western faces of the architrave tell a continuous story, the story of Arjuna and his quest for the Pāśupata Weapon. The other element is this weapon itself.

Just as in the first panel of the obverse (E 1), we cannot but speculate on what has been depicted in the missing two-thirds of the reverse side (W 6). The motive and theme of the *Kirātārjunīya* story is Arjuna's quest for the Pāśupata *astra*, the weapon which alone is powerful enough to counteract all other weapons and which leads its owner to victory over his foes. Arjuna asks Śiva for it:

If it pleases you to grant me my wish, Bull-bannered God, then I wish that divine weapon (*astra*), the dreadful Pāśupata Weapon, my lord, which is called Brahṃa's Head (*brahmaśīras*), gruesome (*raudra*), of terrible power, which at the horrible end of the Eon will destroy the entire world. With it I may burn down in battle the Dānavas and the Rākṣasas, the evil spirits and Piśācas, Gandharvas, and Snakes. From its mouth (*yataḥ*), when properly spelt (*anumantritāḥ*), issues forth thousand of tridents, awful-looking, clubs and missiles like venomous snakes. With it I shall embattle Bhīṣma, Droṇa, and Kṛpa, and the always rough-spoken son of the *sūta* (Karna). This is my wish, my lord, who took Bhaga's eyes, so by your grace I may go forth competent!⁵²



Plate 165
Sixth panel from the left
(W 6, southern end)
Arjuna receives the Pāśupata Weapon

Śiva gives this powerful weapon to Arjuna,⁵³ but warns him to use it cautiously, since launched against a person of insufficient strength it may have apocalyptic consequences. If the panels of the architrave are to make any sense, this gift of the Pāśupata Weapon must have been represented somehow. Aside from final release (*duḥkhānta*), it is the ultimate boon for the Māheśvaras.

52 Tr. van Buitenen. MBh 3.41.7–12 (above, n. 50 on p. 523).

53 In the *Kirātārjunīya* 18.44 Śiva gives Arjuna the Raudra Weapon, encompassed by flaming fire (*jvaladanalaparītaṃ raudram astraṃ*).

The Pāśupata Weapon

If we work on the assumption that this boon must have been represented in the narrative of the architrave, we should answer the question how it has been depicted in its iconographic programme. The weapon (*astra*) is called ‘belonging to Rudra’ or ‘fierce’ (*raudra*), but more significantly: ‘Head of Brahmā’. This may refer, as we have seen above (p. 589), to one of the Pāśupata key myths, namely the cutting off of the fifth head of Brahmā by Śiva/Nīlahohita. This myth was known in the last phase of the *Mahābhārata* composition, where Śiva is called Brahmaśiropaharta (sic).⁵⁴

The full story is first told in the *Skandapurāṇa*.

THEN, ordered by Parameśvara, this lord Nīlahohita, his (matted) hair coiled into a top-knot (*kapardīn*), took the Head of Brahmā.

AFTER he had taken that shining head, he assumed a disguise, entered a playful state of yoga and started going around begging.⁵⁵

This ‘Head of Brahmā’ is Śiva’s begging bowl and, according to the *Mahābhārata*, the Pāśupata Weapon seems to be just that, the Holy Grail of Saivism.⁵⁶ We should therefore look for a (begging) bowl, and this leads us to the mysterious object that we encountered in the first three panels of the eastern face (E1–3) and in the second one of the western (W2).

We return to E1, the first, incomplete panel of the eastern face. What we see in Śiva’s right, raised hand could agree to the shape of a begging bowl or skull. The function of the bowl/skull shown here is not so much the collecting of alms, rather than exposing it to an audience. This makes sense only if the begging bowl is more than just that. We consider it a rebus, representing the word *brahmaśīras* in visual (iconographic) form.

54 MBh 13 App. I, No. 6 l. 45. Yuko Yokochi (personal communication) has questioned van Buitenen’s translation of *brahmaśīras* with ‘Brahmā’s Head’ in MBh 3.41.8a (above, n. 50 on p. 523). Admittedly, there is no reference to the myth of the decapitation of Brahmā here. The Brahmaśīras, like all divine weapons, is a *mantra* weapon and should be ‘properly spelt’ (*anumantrita*) to yield the desired result, that means that this skull of Brahmā (*kapāla*)/begging bowl has the potency to issue forth the most powerful weapon. As such the word may signify ‘the foremost (*śīras*) of the Vedic mantras (*brahman*)’. We consider it plausible that the ambiguity was deliberate and was made use of by the designer of the architrave.

55 SP 6.1–2 (only in the R and A recensions):

tataḥ sa bhagavañ devaḥ kapardī nīlahohitaḥ |
ājñayā paramēśasya jagrāha brahmaṇaḥ śīraḥ || 1 ||
tad gṛhītvā śīro dīptaṁ rūpaṁ vikṛtaṁ āsthitaḥ |
yogakṛdāṁ samāsthāya bhaikṣāya pracacāra ha || 2 ||

56 MBh 3.41.7–8 (above, n. 50 on p. 523); cf. MBh 14.62.15, 133* ll. 3–4. According to MBh 3 App. 27, l. 1 the Pāśupata weapon is an arrow (*śara*); the *brahmaśīras* may be thought to be the *mantra* that makes this weapon so effective. SP_{Bh} 98.7–8ab seems to distinguish between the Pāśupata Weapon and the Brahmaśīras when it lists the four weapons that form the four tusks of Varāha:

catvāry astrāṇi daṁṣṭrās ca kṛtāni sumahānti vai |
astram pāśupataṁ pūrvaṁ dvitīyaṁ cakram eva ca || 7 ||
brahmadāṇḍam tṛtīyaṁ ca caturthaṁ brahmaṇaḥ śīraḥ ||

If our analysis is correct, it represents the ne plus ultra, the power that devotees who pursue the Pāśupata *sādhana* aspire to obtain in this world: the Pāśupata Weapon or ‘Head of Brahmā’, the Śaiva equivalent of the *pūrṇakalaśa*, the source of life (*nara*) and death (*antaka*).⁵⁷ This equivalence is further expressed by the fact that in the first panel the bowl seemed to have been filled, whereas the bowl appears empty in the following two panels, when it is withdrawn.

The token that was held out at the beginning in the first relief (E 1) was thus finally obtained by Arjuna in the addorsed panel at the end of the architrave’s narrative (W 6). It is the *kṣatra* or fighting spirit of Arjuna and his unswerving devotion to Śiva that won him this award at long last, the Pāśupata Weapon, and therewith the power to defeat all enemies. The *Mahābhārata* again describes the scene.

HEARING this, the Pārtha (Arjuna) hurriedly and attentively purified himself; and when he embraced the feet of the lord of the universe, the God said to him, ‘Now learn!’ Then he taught the best of the Pāṇḍavas about the missile (*astra*), along with the secrets of its return, this missile that is Death incarnate (*mūrtimantam ivāntakam*). [...]

WHEN the moment came, there was an outcry of conches, drums, and kettledrums by the thousands, and a huge quake occurred. The Gods and the Dānavas witnessed how that fiercely burning dreadful missile stood bodily deployed (*mūrtimat*) at the side of the boundlessly lustrous Pāṇḍava.⁵⁸

And we believe the visitors to the Mahādeva Temple in Nagari witnessed it too. Arjuna’s pose in the final panel (W 6) is one of vacillation. The ends of his cloth flutter. His knee is bent, as if he is taken aback. In front of him, we speculate, the Pāśupata Weapon may have stood in bodily form, next to Śiva in all his glory. What the weapon may have looked like, we know from another sculpture telling the same story.

Joanna Williams discusses ‘a pair of pillars found at Rajaona, 60 km east (and slightly north) of Rajgir’, Bihar (Plate 166). Its subject matter, according to her, ‘resembles that of the Nagari lintel’. ‘The remaining face shows Śiva seated with Pārvatī on his mountain, whilst in front Arjuna kneels before the chubby four-armed personification of the Pāśupatāstra, the weapon that has been his goal throughout the story.’⁵⁹

Arjuna, however, is not *on* his knees in Nagari; in that pose he had been depicted when he was brought to Śiva for instruction by a four-armed figure in the last panel of the eastern face (E 6).

57 Above, p. 589, and below. SP_{Bh} 84.3 compares the battle with the sacrifice. The ‘heads’ are the ‘sacrificial cakes’ (*puroḍāśāḥ śirāṃsi*), the divine weapons are the *mantras* (*mantrās cāstrāṇi divyāni*).

58 MBh 3.41.17–22 (tr. van Buitenen). [...] *athāstraṃ jājvalad ghoram pāṇḍavasyāmitaujasah | mūrtimad viṣṭhitam pārśve dadṛśur devadānavāḥ || 22 ||*

59 Williams 1982, 151, Plate 240. Lutzker 1984, 36 f. This fragment is presently located at Calcutta, Indian Museum: A 25106.



Plate 166

Rajaona, column: the presentation of the Pāśupata Weapon

We now conjecture that the four-armed figure in that panel E6 (Plate 156) may be the Pāśupata Weapon personified, not waiting on the Pāṇḍava hero, but conducting him to deference. The vigorous way in which this seems to be done could point to the forceful nature of the allegorical figure. The object that he seems to hold above his head may have been the skull, although the sculpture is too much worn to be certain about it. But if so, it would make this four-armed ‘chubby figure’ in the Dakṣiṇāmūrti panel a true *āyudhapuruṣa*.

A similar allegorical figure must, if our theory is correct, have been depicted in the missing part of the final panel (W6), this time, however, ‘waiting on the great hero’ (*upatasthe mahātmānaṃ*).⁶⁰

The Pāśupata Weapon thus seems to be the true subject of the Nagarī architrave. It is represented as a begging bowl made of Brahmā’s fifth head (Brahmaśiras), and in personified form as *āyudhapuruṣa*. In either form it appears throughout the iconographic programme: in the eastern-face panels E1–3, and E6 (embodied), and in the western-face panels W2 and W6 (embodiment conjectured). A close comparison may illustrate this point (Plate 167).



Plate 167

Begging bowls in panels 1, 2, 3 (east), and in 2 (west)

60 MBh 3.41.19: *upatasthe mahātmānaṃ yathā tryakṣam umāpatim | pratijagrāha tac cāpi prītmān arjunas tadā ||* 19 ||

The showing of the begging bowl or skull in the second panel of the western face (W 2) makes sense. It is not offered to Arjuna yet—as it had been to the ascetics in the first panel of the eastern face (E 1), who, however, rejected it in their ignorance—but raising it in the back left hand means that it is displayed as a boon that will be awarded, if Arjuna stands the test.

Having reached this point in our analysis, we venture the suggestion that within the first panel of the western face (W 1) the figure of which only a head and a left forearm are visible (to the viewer's right, above the ascetic who is Indra in disguise), may be the Pāśupata Weapon, presenting itself in iconic, that is bodily, and in aniconic form, as the begging bowl in his left hand (Plate 168).⁶¹



Plate 168
W 1 (detail of Plate 159): the Pāśupata Weapon?

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Like the composers of epic and puranic lore, the architect of the Mahādeva Temple and the designer of the iconographic programme of the *torāṇa* shared in the universe of myths. Like textual composers, the designer made his selection from this universe to compose his narrative. And like written texts, his visual narrative is inevitably an incomplete rendering of the stock of myths that circulated in his days. Like a textual author he extracted from this stock, adapted it to his needs and in this way contributed to its evolution. A textual source that tells exactly the same narrative as the architrave and that would

61 An alternative sees in this figure the Yakṣa (*rājarājānucara*, KA 3.30) who leads Arjuna to Indra in Bhāravi's *Kirātārjuniya*.

thus be considered to be its source is not likely ever to turn up. The narrative of the architrave is the text, and as such it shows instances of intertextuality, thanks to which we can try to understand its message.

Without doubt the designer was well acquainted with the *Mahābhārata*, whose story of the Kirātārjunīya was at the basis of his work.⁶² He could not yet know the *Skandapurāṇa*, since we believe that its composition only began in the second half of the sixth century, but the universe of Śaiva myths had substantially expanded from the days that the composition of the great epic was coming to a close. The myth of Brahmā's decapitation by Śiva, for instance, is only referred to through an epithet of the Great God in an Appendix passage of the epic, but the full story must have been around in Pāśupata circles before it was put down in the *Skandapurāṇa*. The same is true of the Devadāruvana myth. Familiarity with this lore is to be presupposed, not only for the designer, but for the general visitor at the time.

Arjuna's quest for the divine Pāśupata Weapon and the Devadāruvana story are both mythical in nature and as such convey general, timeless truths. As all myths, however, they may serve as templates for human action and their depiction in art may function as historical allegory.

It is appealing therefore to read the architrave as a metaphor and to speculate on its connection with the *rājasthānīya*, the Aulikara viceroy who ruled in Madhyamā/Madhyamikā under Prakāśadharman and Yaśodharman (between AD 510 and 533), and who had, according to the Chittorgarh inscription (above, p. 570), commissioned the building of a Mahādeva temple. The educated contemporary onlooker may have seen in its iconographic programme evidence of his governor or king embracing the Śaiva religion by being instructed in its observances; other visitors may have seen only the template, the myth, an ambiguity inherent in Indian—and not only Indian—plastic art in general.

We have discovered the central theme of the Nagari architrave, the one that connects both faces. It appears to be the recovery of the Pāśupata Weapon, which alone was believed to secure victory in difficult times. It helped the Pāṇḍavas to win back their kingdom, and it may have been thought to bring victory to the Later Aulikara kings Prakāśadharman and Yaśodharman of Daśapura and their allies in Madhyamikā, when they were locked in a deadly conflict with their archenemies, Toramāṇa and Mihirakula, who were commanding the dreaded armies of the Huns.

This theme also links the Devadāruvana myth to the Kirātārjunīya. In addition to Śiva's stark naked and ithyphallic appearance, misunderstood and causing offence, it is the bowl made out of Brahmā's head and symbolizing the Great God's benevolence, that the seers failed to recognize in the first panel (E 1). Standing alone and being despised is, after all, the fundamental attitude

62 We have not found references specific to Bhāravi's *Kirātārjunīya*, which was being composed at about the same time or slightly later (above, p. 588; cf. n. 61 on p. 597).

of the Pāśupata ascetic.⁶³ When the seers attack him in the next panel (E2), he keeps it away from them.

In the earliest written version of the Devadāruvana myth that we possess,⁶⁴ *Skandapurāṇa* 167.72–80, the ‘audience’ are the Vaikhānasa hermits. It is quite possible that only these or similar sages were depicted in the missing part of the first panel. The role of the wives of the sages may have come more to the fore in later versions, such as the narrative on the doorpost in Malhar, when the connotations of ‘Brahmaśīras’ either were no longer recognized, as ‘Brahmā’s Head’ had subsided into just a bowl to collect alms, or had come into bad grace due to its association with the Kāpālikas.

The exclusive focus in the Pine Forest myth on the *liṅga* may therefore have been the result of a development, which gradually replaced the idea that underlies the Nagarī architrave. This would explain that the *liṅga* as object of worship does not feature in the architrave. Instead, it was the supreme good that only Śiva can bestow, object of his meditation in E4, and symbolized in his Brahmaśīras attribute, that took centre stage.

The irony that will not have been lost on the designer of the architrave and the educated Pāśupata visitor of the temple thus seems to be that, if we follow the *Skandapurāṇa*, Arjuna at the end of his quest recovers the *fons et origo* from which he, as Nara (above, p. 589), had once emerged, namely the Head of Brahmā. This cycle illustrates the superiority of the high god of the age, Mahādeva.

When they passed through the temple gateway, the king and his subjects were reminded of the major realities of Śiva’s World—asceticism, His benevolence, His revelation of the doctrine. After worshipping God, they saw, while they were leaving through the gate, the path which would lead to His grace and which held out to them the prospect of the acquisition of the highest good in this world, the Pāśupata Weapon—through steadfastness, self-control and bravery.

It was this faith, embraced by the Later Aulikara kings and their court, that was imparted to the visitors of the Mahādeva Temple in Madhyamikā, at the moment that they came to be involved in the powerful World of the Great God.

⁶³ *Pāśupatasūtra* 3.3: *avamataḥ*.

⁶⁴ Bisschop 2006, 195 f. In MBh 13 App. I No. 4 ll. 66–67 it is only said that Śiva ‘sports with the daughters and wives of the sages, with bristled hair, with a great penis, naked, with distorted eyes’. No doubt, an idea like this was the source of the Pine Forest myth.