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PULLAMANGAI

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*This is the fourth in a new series designed to supplement the Guide Books already in course of publication by the Bhulabhai Memorial Institute. This series, the Heritage of Indian Art, will deal with those monuments and sites which are off the beaten track and rarely visited by the tourist, but are nevertheless vital for the understanding and appreciation of Indian Art.*

The  
Brahmapurisvara Temple  
At  
**PULLAMANGAI**

JAMES C. HARLE

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We are indebted to the following for photographs: Department of Archaeology (Plate 6), Julia J. Norsell (Plates 19, 20, 23 and 24), and the author (Front and Back Cover, and Plates 1, 2, 5, 7-16, and 22).

With the final overthrow of the Pallava hegemony of South-East India by the rising Cola dynasty, in the ninth century, the centre of artistic activity in the Tamil-speaking region shifted southward. With the exception of the cave temples at Tiruchirappalli, the more important monuments of the Pallavas, whose capital was at Kanci (Conjeeveram), were built or excavated in the present districts of Chingleput and North Arcot, near Madras. The Colas, on the other hand, were associated from immemorial times with Uraiyur (now a suburb of Tiruchirappalli) and the centre of their empire, even at its greatest extent, far exceeding that of the Pallavas, remained the region of the Kaveri and adjacent parts of South Arcot. It is there that the most important, as well as the most numerous Cola monuments are found. The distinction between Pallava and Cola is thus not exclusively one of succeeding historical periods; at the same time, Cola art and architecture, by and large, are the continuation and development of Pallava achievements in these fields.

Vijayalaya, the first of the Imperial Colas, came to power about A.D. 847. Only one important temple, that which bears his name at Narttamalai, in the former state of Pudukkottai, can be said with any certainty to have been built during his reign, and most of the Early Cola temples which have survived date from the tenth century. The term Early Cola, moreover, refers essentially to political rather than artistic development. While it was not until the reigns of Rajaraja I, who came to the throne in A.D. 985, and his successors, that the Cola empire reached its zenith, matched by the unequalled size and grandeur of the two great temples at Tanjore and Gangaikondacolapuram, many of the finest Cola works in sculpture and architecture belong to the earlier time. Among the notable Early Cola temples are the Nagesvara at Kumbakonam, the Koranganatha at Srinivasanallur, Tiruchirappalli District, the Muvarkovil at Kodumbalur, formerly in Pudukkottai State, and the Brahmapurisvara Temple at Pullamangai.

In the main, Early Cola temples continue the tradition of the Pallavas. The most important changes are in plan, both as regards the central shrine and the temple complex as a whole. The practice



of building subsidiary shrines, containing lingams, abutting on the main shrine is abandoned. Their place was taken by independent parivara shrines, usually seven in number and dedicated to the parivara or attendant deities, within an enclosing wall with a tower-gateway (gopuram). All the Early Cola temples are relatively small in size. A fair-sized porch (ardha-mandapa or antarala) is invariably affixed to the main shrine and both commonly rise from slightly below ground level in a masonry-lined pit. Most Early Cola shrines are built entirely of stone, a practice which was later abandoned.

Some of the earlier temples of the period (which have been termed transitional) still bear marks of the Pallava style ; in others, details are crudely executed or experimental. In the more characteristic Early Cola temples, which include the shrine at Pullamangai sculpture and bas-relief ornaments are used both more lavishly and with a greater ability to incorporate them into the general design of the temple. There is, furthermore, an obvious concern to shape such traditional elements as pilasters, mouldings and niches into fuller, richer, and more beautiful forms. As might be expected in a period of aesthetic striving, there is considerable variation from temple to temple.

Innovations include octagonal or round pilasters, capitals with rounder, fuller and more clearly defined elements, and, for the first time, rounded mouldings are introduced into the base. These include the beautiful reverse-curve padma, or lotus moulding, with a denticulated edge to simulate the spiked petals of the lotus. The bases of the pilasters are frequently carved into delicate bas-relief panels, illustrating scenes from the Epics or Puranas. Figures appear on the walls, on either sides of the niches, iconographically related to the image in the niche. Frequently superimposed, in high relief, they sometimes fill the entire wall space. Traditional features such as the ornaments over the niches and the yali frieze,\* which appears for the first time in the base, all show an unparalleled freshness, boldness of relief and inventiveness of detail.

In Cola temples, much of the finest sculpture is thus incorporated into the fabric of the temple. Of at least equal importance are the large images, in high relief and sometimes almost in the round, and usually placed in niches. These continue the Pallava tradition, frequently with a greater mastery of stone-cutting

\* Mythical leonine animal, often portrayed with horns or an elephant's trunk.

technique and a more fluent style. Early Cola sculpture at times lacks power and intensity of religious feeling ; at others it attains an almost ethereal serenity and sweetness not found elsewhere in India. The sacred thread is no longer shown looped over the right arm, and emblems held in the kartari hasta position, with index and third finger outstretched, are a fairly certain indication of post-Pallava date (though not the contrary). Detailed, individualised and fairly realistic treatment of jewelry and costume, and particularly light drapery, is the hall-mark of Early Cola sculpture. It is at its best in the architectural setting for which it was intended.

The Brahmapurisvara temple is situated in the tiny hamlet of Pullamangai, on the outskirts of Pasupatikoyil, Tanjore District, State of Madras. The latter is nine miles from Tanjore, on the excellent metalled road to Kumbakonam. The temple lies a mile or so to the north, as the road enters Pasupatikoyil, and can be reached by car. There is also a station at Pasupatikoyil, served by local trains on the Tanjore-Mayavaram-Cuddalore-Villupuram line of the Southern Railway.

The whole region is of exceptional interest. The vast and fertile plain watered by the Kaveri, including Tiruchirapalli, Tanjore and Kumbakonam, is famed for the purity of its Brahmanical culture, its religious associations, and the number and importance of its holy places. The ancient Cola heartland is particularly rich in architecture and sculpture of the Cola period.

The temple, which dates from the early years of the tenth century, is known locally by the name of Brahmapurisvara. It is a shrine of God Siva, and faces east. The temple is entered through the small tower-gateway (gopuram) on the eastern side of the enclosing wall. Both of these, along with the mukha-mandapa, or hall, directly in front of the entrance, are of relatively recent date, as are various subsidiary buildings on either side of the gopuram and the goddess shrine north of the hall. The original parivara shrines of the attendant deities have disappeared. A section (on the north side) of the enclosure wall, however, composed of very large stone blocks without mortar, is presumably original and in all probability the temple occupies approximately the limits of the original foundation.

The original Cola structure consists of the ardha-mandapa, or porch, measuring about 26 ft. by 22 ft., and the central shrine (prasada), which is 25 ft. square. Both are surrounded

by a shallow masonry pit which fills with water. The walls, of a very hard yellowish sandstone, are in places entirely covered with inscriptions (Plate 9). These record, in Tamil of the tenth and eleventh centuries, various gifts to the temple in the form of land or sheep, a meeting of the village assembly, and a fatal quarrel, with the compensation exacted. The earliest inscription which can be identified with certainty belongs to the 11th year of Parantaka I, (about A.D. 918), at which time the temple was already built and consecrated. The original shrine is nevertheless in an almost perfect state of preservation. The worst obstacles to its appreciation are the large hall and the crude brick and plaster porticos built, at a very recent date, in front of several of the niches.

It is assumed that the visitor will circle the temple in a clockwise direction.

The ardhha-mandapa, or porch, is a flat-roofed building surmounted by rectangular pavilions in the middle of the north and south sides, and square pavilions (kutas) of stone at the outer corners. The latter are the only upper-story pavilions which have not been remodelled in plaster. Note the bas-relief figures in the entrances. Large stone bhutaganas, grotesque pot-bellied dwarfs, line the sides of the roof in a variety of attitudes (Plate 22). There are two on each side of the rectangular pavilions. In the Pallava period, pavilions formed a complete 'wall of shrines' above the vestibule, as well as on the main shrine. The pavilions here are a survival of this practice, generally abandoned in Cola temples.

In the niche on the south side of the vestibule is Ganesa, the elephant-headed God, with attendant bhuta-ganas (Plate 5, Front Cover). Ganesa as Vighnesvara (The Lord of Obstacles) is placed here so as to be worshipped first before any other divinity. Otherwise, impediments will prevent the worshipper reaping the fruits of his devotions. The god, with four arms, is seated on a double lotus throne surmounted by a parasol-canopy with an elaborate fringe and an ornate central pendant. Two saluting figures are shown in flying posture above and there is an elliptical aureole (prabhavali), bordered with flames, behind the god. Iconographically, the image presents some unusual aspects, and not all the objects held by the god have been identified with certainty. The rear left hand holds a vegetable or floral symbol, possibly a radish. The trunk hangs vertically, and then curves to the left, in the form of an inverted question mark. Held in the trunk is

either the wood-apple (jambu) or the wine-jar (kalasa); the latter, in conjunction with the flowered sacred thread worn by the god, may indicate an unmatta, frantic or lubricious, aspect. The sculptor apparently intended to show the tusk on the right as the broken one, although neither are complete.\* The grotesque dwarf ganas, depicted in very high relief on either side of the niche, are the attendants of Ganesa. In three superimposed rows, several are shown as bearing his favourite foods (Front Cover). One holds his vehicle, a large rodent, by a lead. These figures have a beautiful plastic quality. The niche is surmounted by a makara-torana ornament of exceptional workmanship and wealth of detail. From the mouths of two pairs of opposed makaras (semi-aquatic mythical monsters) pours a stream of yalis, some with human riders. Below, an arch of bhutas frames a group of human figures. A medallion, also containing a human figure, is set in the top of the ornament. The lower pair of makaras terminate in luxuriant foliage. Equally fine are the round and octagonal pilasters with full rounded capitals, elaborate scroll-work designs, and the large abacus typical of the developed Early Cola style. Combining sculptural and architectural elements of equally high quality, this bay is unsurpassed in any Early Cola temple.

The prasada, or central shrine, consists of two stories above the main cornice, surmounted by a square 'high temple'. The bulls (nandis) at the corners of the topmost story denote that this is a Siva temple, the bull being his vehicle. Originally built entirely of stone—details in stone may still be discerned—the upper stories have been extensively remodelled in plaster. The large fan-shaped antefixes on the pavilions, as well as most of the sculpture, are relatively modern. At each floor, a rampart of pavilions surrounds the central block, with square pavilions (kutas) at the corners, and rectangular ones, with barrel-shaped roofs, between them. This arrangement, characteristic of South Indian temple buildings of all periods, is believed to be derived from the disposition of cells in early Buddhist monasteries. The shapes of the pavilions, as well as many characteristic elements of style, perpetuate early forms of architecture in wood.

The beautifully preserved lower story of the temple is one of the finest examples of the Early Cola style. The characteristic elements of the style are all present to an unusual degree, individual

\* Right and left refer, in all cases, to the image and not the observer.

details are exceptionally elaborate, and at the same time a harmonious and beautifully proportioned whole is achieved. The following features should be noted :

The main cornice, with kudas and typical Cola circles at the bottom edge. The horse-shoe shaped 'window' ornaments (kudas) are of the same derivation as the Buddhist chaitya windows. The interiors are empty, except on the north side where they occasionally contain small human heads or animal figures. The lion-masks (kirti mukhas) above are missing in most cases.

The bhuta frieze below the main cornice, of great variety and verve (Plate 11). The bhutas, some with elephant or monkey heads, gambol in a great assortment of attitudes. Interspersed amongst them are birds, a pair of cows, a monkey delousing another, and other figures.

Angular corbels, with a roll ornament below including complicated involutions at the angle. The central band bears scrollwork ornamentation. Rearing yalis, with riders, and female figures of dancers or musicians (frequently unfinished) are placed as brackets underneath the cornice (Plate 10).

Bas-relief decoration of the pilasters (Plates 15 and 16), inspired by the practice of hanging garlands around columns. Floral scrolls, festoons and strings of beads frame spirited dancing figures, as well as birds and yalis.

The base mouldings and the yali frieze (Plate 24). Note the curved mouldings (padma = lotus) with denticulated edges to simulate the petals of the lotus. The huge reverse-curve padma at the base of the small projecting pavilions embodies the conception of the edifice rising out of a lotus (padma-kosa) resting on the waters, here actually present. The large smooth rounded torus moulding is typical of the more developed Early Cola temples. Makara heads, from which emerge yalis or armed men, are placed at the corners of the frieze of yali heads.

Projecting pavilions on either side of the central bays (Plate 13). These are two storied, the top enclosed in a large kudu inserted into the main cornice. In the entrances above are placed two-armed male and female figures (Plates 2 and 14) wearing a variety of head-dresses and notable for their graceful poses. These pavilions, and particularly the mouldings of their bases,

provide an intentional break in the general ordering of architectural elements in the temple. Somewhat similar pavilions are found in certain Pallavan temples, but they are an innovation at this time.\*

The small panels at the bases of the pilasters, some sixty-five in all, depict a great variety of scenes and figures. Manmatha, the god of love, is portrayed in one panel, riding with his consort in a chariot. Others show God Siva as Gajasurasamharamurti or The Slayer of the Elephant Demon (Plate 17), as Kalarimurti, The Enemy of Time, or Death (Plate 18), and in an unusual dancing pose (Plate 21). God Visnu, as the Boar, is seen carrying Bhu Devi, Goddess of the Earth (Plate 19). One attractive scene, presumably from the Ramayana, shows monkey-headed figures, with several women among them, surrounding the couch on which reclines a crowned monkey-headed figure (Plate 20).

The niche on the south side of the shrine is partially blocked with masonry, the original image having perhaps been badly damaged. A portion of a tree, in bas-relief, can still be seen near the top, indicating that a seated image of God Siva in a teaching aspect (Daksinamurti) was originally placed there. The bas-relief figures on either side of the niche remain. They include (on each side) a seated pair of beardless young sages, a lion, with a lioness or cub on the other side, and a pair of bhutas. These figures are almost identical to those on either side of the image of Daksinamurti at the temple of Koranganatha, Srinivasanallur. The figure of God Siva as Daksinamurti is almost invariably placed in the niche on the south side of the main shrine (Sanskrit Daksina = south).

The image set in the west wall of the shrine is known as Lingodbhava (Plate 7). God Siva is represented as emerging from the column of fire while Brahma (flying, above) and God Visnu (with the head of a boar, below) unsuccessfully attempt to fathom its infinite extension. Note the flames bordering the lenticular-shaped opening of the column. The figure of God Siva is unfortunately badly weathered, but the crescent moon atop his crown can still be distinguished. In addition, Brahma, with three faces, and Visnu stand on either side in anthropomorphic form and approximately half life-size. God Visnu wears the appropriate type of crown (kirita makuta) and a sacred thread with a bell-type clasp and tassel.

\* It is exceedingly rare that an entirely new element is introduced into the South Indian architectural style.

Brahma's sacred thread is of folded cloth, and both wear jewelry of the individualised Early Cola type. The emblems of the two attendant gods are held in the stylised pose known as *kartari hasta*, with the index and middle fingers outstretched. God Visnu and Brahma are portrayed as handsome young princes, serene and gracious, but without intense religious feeling. Due largely to the unusual size of the attendant figures, this is nevertheless one of the most striking versions of the Lingodbhava icon.

In the niche on the north side is Brahma (Plate 8) on a high double lotus pedestal, with a parasol-canopy above. The god has four arms, and three faces are visible. He wears a long dhoti, a sash with prominent bows, and a sacred thread made of cloth. The crown is composed of piled-up locks of hair (*jata makuta*). The rear hands hold the water pot and the rosary in the *kartari hasta* position. The right front hand makes the gesture of reassurance (*abhaya mudra*). The tall slender form and serene youthful countenance are typical of many Early Cola sculptures. A youthful two-armed figure, wearing an ascetic's head-dress, kneels on either side. The image is placed over a projecting water spout known as a *soma-sutra*. It carries off the water and liquid offerings poured over the lingam inside the shrine. It is invariably placed on the north side.

The niche in the north wall of the porch is occupied by Durga (Plate 6) with eight arms, standing on the buffalo's head. A thick coating of blackened oil has obscured many details. The goddess is tall and slender, with very full breasts, and stands with marked tilt of the hips to the left. The feathered butts of three arrows, protruding from a quiver, appear above each shoulder. The eight hands of the goddess are posed, or hold emblems, as follows: Right Side, 1. a disc, 2. a long sword, 3. broken, 4. *abhaya mudra*. Left Side, 1. a conch, 2. a small circular shield, 3. a long straight bow, 4. placed on hip. A trident (*sula*) on a long shaft, standing amongst the weapons on the right side, is not held by the goddess. Both disc and conch are tilted inwards at angles of 45°. A kneeling man is depicted in high relief on the wall on either side of the niche. The figure on the right holds his top-knot with the left hand, and is about to cut off his head with a short sword held in the right. He wears a beard, moustache and has narrow, heavy-lidded eyes. The other figure is about to cut off his leg above the knee. They are perhaps intended to portray a particular type of soldiery. Devotees in the act of sacrificing their heads to the goddess are

depicted in other temples, and there is literary evidence for the practice. On the right, above, is a small stylised lion and on the left a deer, held by a bhuta. Both are saddled. The lion is usually considered Durga's vehicle.

The building of the mukhamandapa has caused the two dvarapalas (door guardians) on either side of the entrance to the ardha-mandapa to be in almost total darkness. Both figures have only two arms. The one on the right (Plate 3) leans on a rude club or section of a tree trunk, which his right hand in the tarjani position of warning or admonition (the index finger is broken off). The door guardian on the left (Plate 4) stands with his body turned towards the entrance, and his left foot raised and resting on the blade of a large axe. Both figures wear lion-mask armlets, flowered sacred cords and high tapering crowns. It has been suggested that they are not a pair on account of their different attitudes, that on the right being more typical of door guardians in the Pallava period. In style and in details of costume and ornament, they are practically identical and very similar to the other images in the temple. Each figure has a third eye, small tusks, and the prescribed 'terrible' expression. Nevertheless, these tall, slender figures, have an air of nobility and gentleness. As individual sculptures, although unfortunately not in the best condition, they are the finest in the temple.

The interior of the ardha-mandapa contains four columns, the only free-standing columns in the temple. There is a similar number of pilasters on the north and south walls, in line with the columns. The pillars are round, with plain square bases, bulging capitals and large thin abacus'. They support heavy angular corbels, with roll ornaments and a median band. Beyond is the entrance to the sanctum (garbha-grha), which contains the lingam.

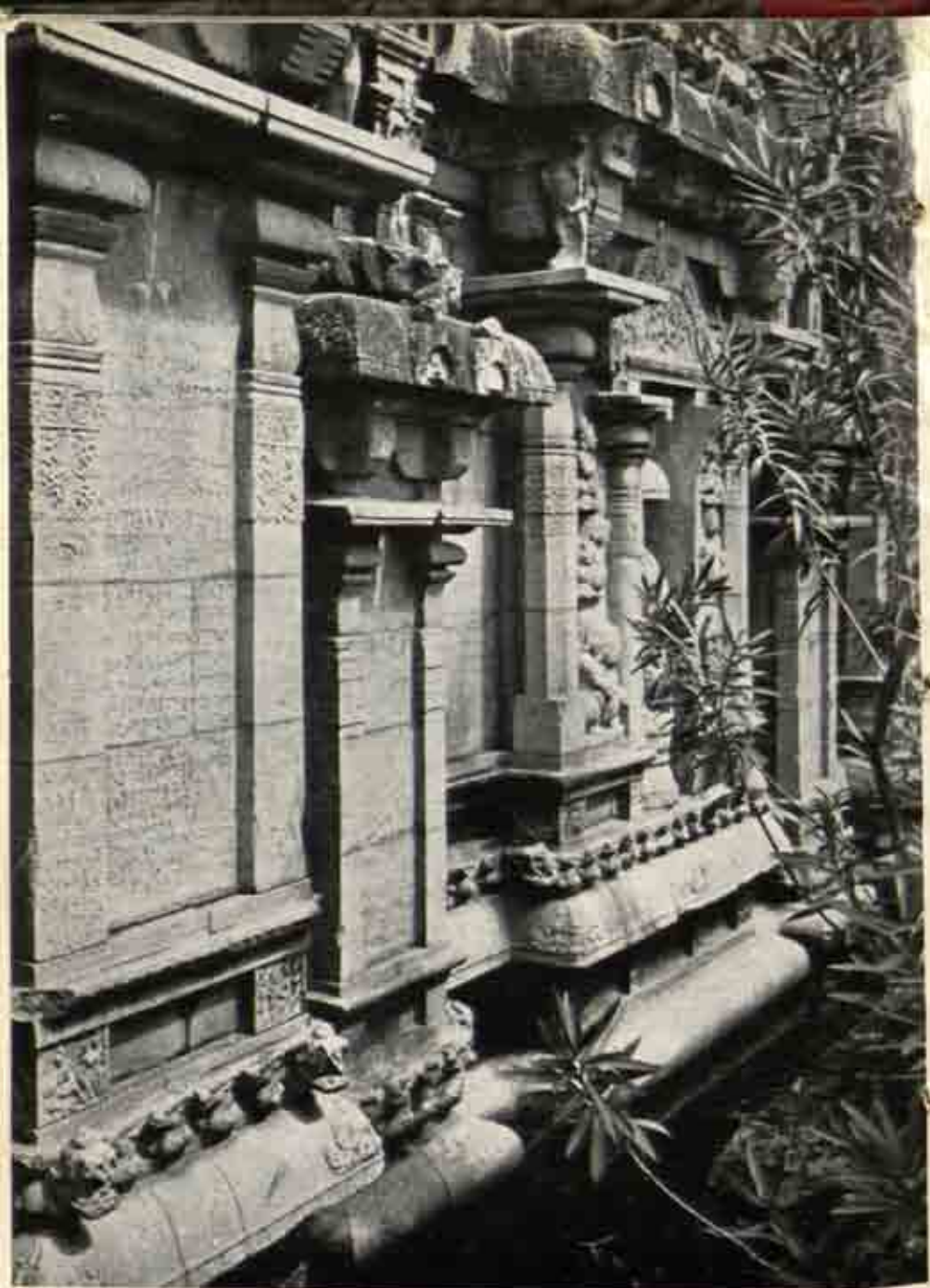
*The following books may be consulted :*

*Annual Report in South-Indian Epigraphy for the year 1920-21.*  
(Inscription No. 558 of 1921).

K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Colas.* Madras, 1955.







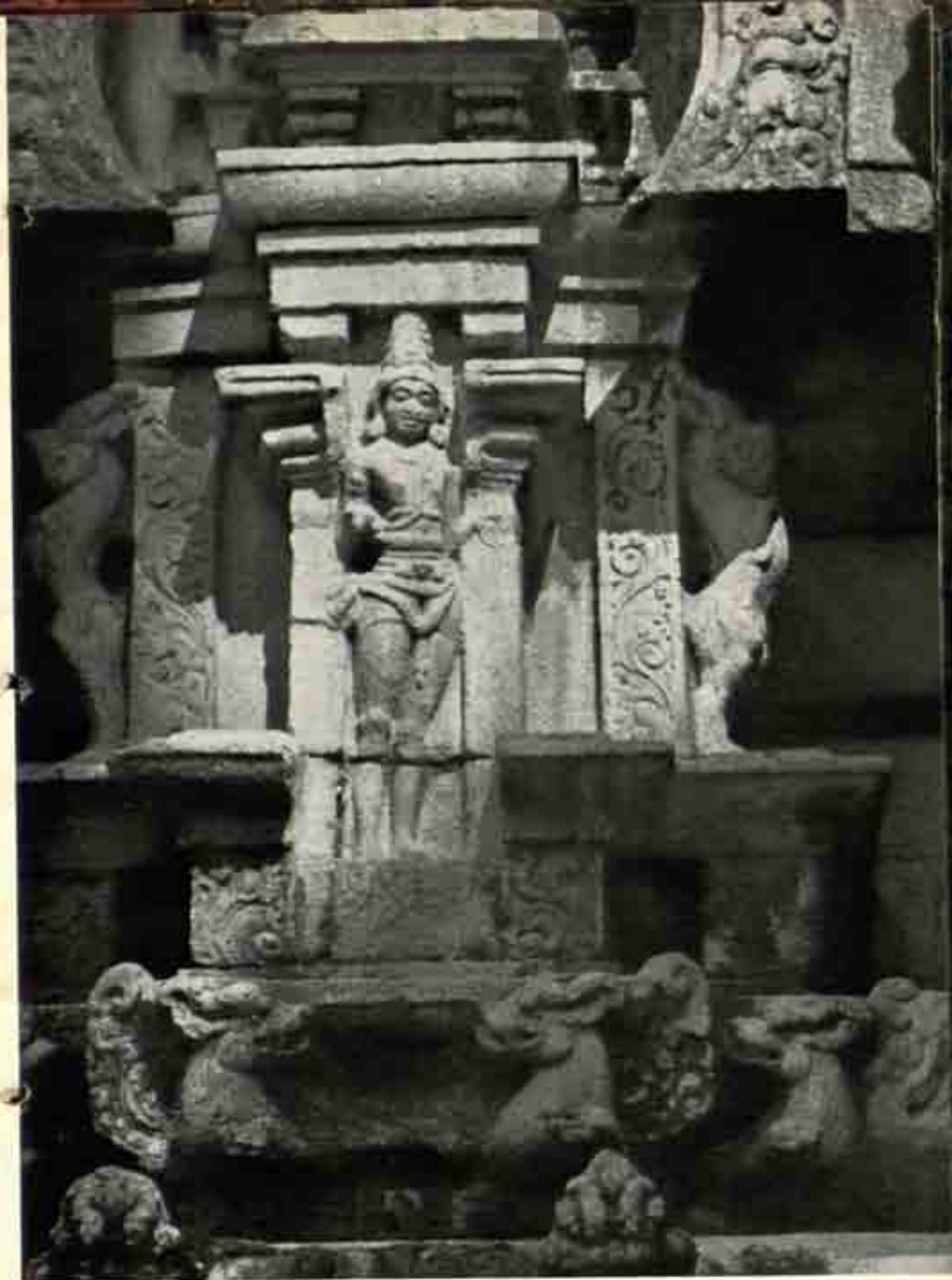


PLATE 2





PLATE 4





PLATE 4

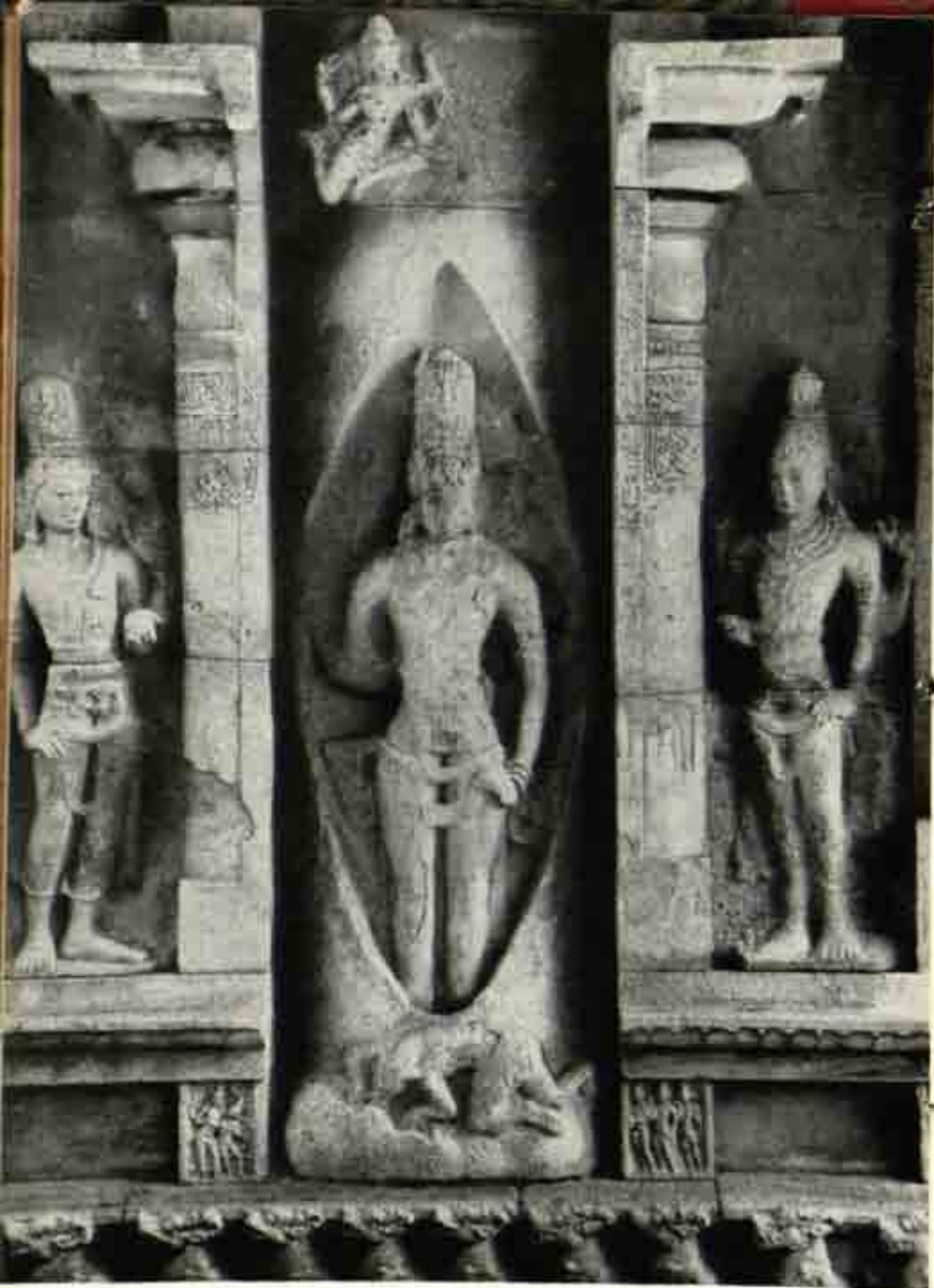


PLATE 7



PLATE 8



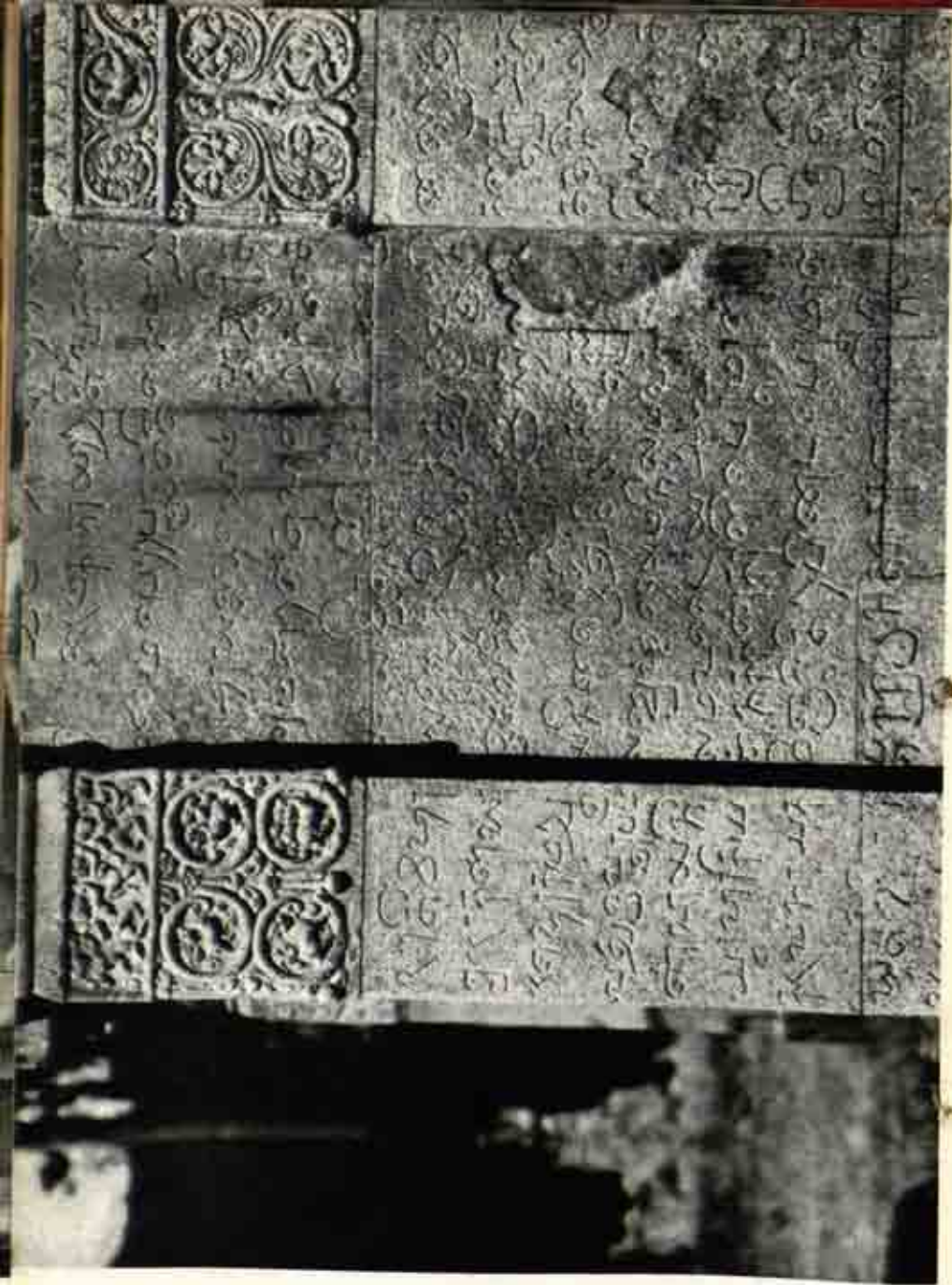




PLATE 10









PLATE 14





PLATE 16















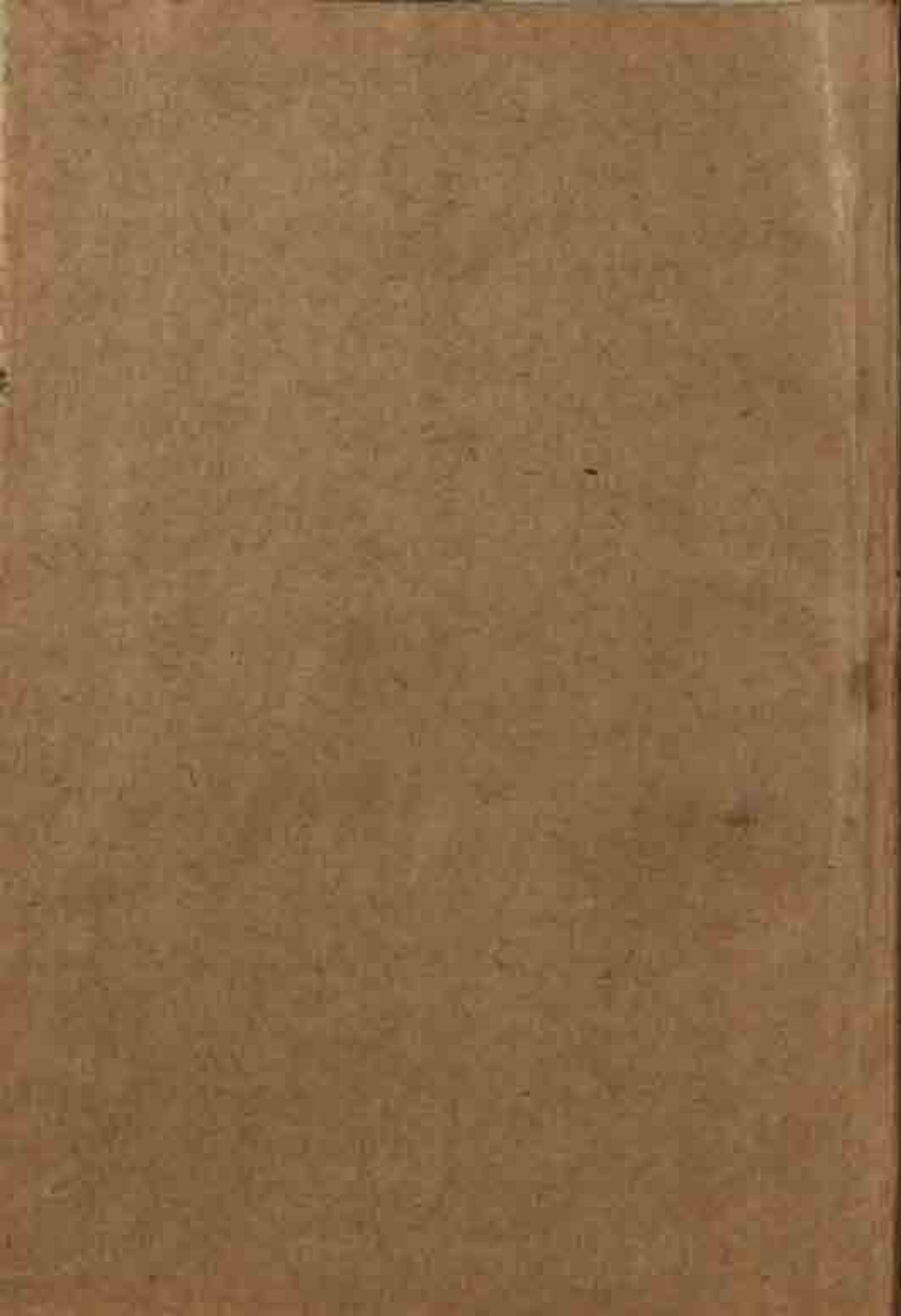












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