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Sculptures as the Trademark of Sovereignty in the Hoysaḷa Kingdom*

SUMMARY: Among the various sculptures created by Hoysaḷa artists between the 12th and 13th centuries emerges a curious iconographic couple: a man wearing a long robe and an unusual headdress, accompanied by a woman, completely naked, with sandals on her feet, surrounded by snakes. Both these figures have a stick. The recurrence of this subject in many temples and the important position in the register of sculptures suggest that this iconography was already codified in the early 12th century, that is during the rise of the dynasty. The focus of my study is to analyze the development of these representations in correlation with the religious and political context: at the beginning the two iconographies were sculpted together, while in the course of time they began to be carved separately.

This new exploration adds to the iconographic analysis and the study of the epigraphic sources and it aims at relating the artistic production with the construction and legitimation of the dynasty. Controversial interpretations of the meaning of these representations open up a lively debate about local cults in medieval Karnataka and the versatile royalty of the Hoysaḷa dynasty.

KEYWORDS: Hoysaḷa, Kālāmukha, Karnataka, royal legitimation.

1. Introduction

This study focuses on the iconographic development of two subjects that seem to have played an important role in the Hoysaḷa sculptural

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production, in Southern Karnataka. The sculptures show a female figure adorned with snakes and holding a stick and a male subject wearing a long robe, a headdress and holding a cane. In various productions of these iconographies, the constant features are the club, the circular object (probably a *cakra*), and the serpents for the male figure and the cane and the snakes for the female figure. Sometimes there is also a bowl, probably a *kapāla* (a cup made from a human skull associated with the bloody sacrifice); other times the bowl is a vessel containing vegetables and a snake (probably connected with the fertility ritual and invocation).

Owing to the peculiarity of these representations, we could assume that there was an artistic production specific to the Hoysāḷa dynasty during the reign of Viṣṇuvardhana (1112–1142), which was possibly related to the regional cultural and religious background. Following further analysis and iconographic comparisons with other areas of nearby kingdoms, one may draw an analogy in Maharashtra during the Cāḷukya dynasty (see Foekema 2003: 276) and later in Tamil Nadu with the male figure of Caṭṭainātar (L'Harnault 1998). Vellupilai (Vellupilai 2013: 377) assumes its appearance in Tamil Nadu at the end of the 16th century in the temple of Cīkālī in the form of Bhairava divinity.

The aim of the present analysis is the correlation between the two iconographies and the political and religious substrate of the Hoysāḷa dynasty. As a matter of fact, a remarkable change is noted during the period of time in which they are represented. During the reign of Viṣṇuvardhana the figures under discussion are shown one next to another and the size of the female figure is bigger than that of the male one (Fig. 1); from the reign of Narasiṃha onwards the two figures are separated and the male subject is represented as a divine subject, and of the same size as the female one (Fig. 2).

The methods applied for this research are a historic methodology as well as an iconographic and iconological analysis (see Panofsky 1955) of these artifacts following the years of the Hoysāḷa dynasty. Special attention has been paid to the study of the sacred geographical areas where inscriptions and sculptures of these niche panels have been

found. We could assume a strong relation between the presence of these anthropomorphic figures and the Kālāmukha religious movement, to which they are connected in two distinct and precise areas of the kingdom: the royal pivotal center (Haḷēbīḍ and Bēlūr) and the area of Arasikere.

The study of these peculiar iconographies was addressed by Del Bonta (Del Bonta 1981), L'Hernault (L'Hernault 1998), Ladrech and Loizeau (Ladrech and Loizeau 2008). Bignami (Bignami 2015) focused on the study of the male subjects connected to the legend of the dynasty foundation and the likely Śaiva cults of Vaggayas of Devaraguḍḍa (Sontheimer 1997). This research aims at supporting artistic data with epigraphic data, which sheds light on the religious context during the Hoysala kingdom.

2. Description of the iconographic subjects

The analyzed sculptures portray a man and a woman; in each of them we notice some peculiarities: the woman is naked and the man, on the contrary, is wearing a long robe, which in some artifacts appears very heavy (see Kikkēri and Bēlūr).

The feminine subject is portrayed surrounded by snakes; her arms are lifted, showing the reptile clearly above her head. We notice three distinct variants in the way the arms are represented:

- Holding some objects (a stick, a bowl, snakes.)
- Lifted toward the sky while showing a snake above her head.
- An arm is at her waist level and around an object while the other arm is above the head; the forefinger of the lifted hand lies on the head and touches the thumb forming a sort of circle.

The last variable, which is present in many temples, attracted our attention, as it seems to be connected to a specific *mudrā*. According to Ladrech and Loizeau (Ladrech and Loizeau 2008: 15) this gesture is interpreted as *cinmudrā*. We assume that it could be related to a teaching gesture.

In agreement with Anna Tosato,¹ the interpretation of the position of the arms, legs and hands leads us to identify this posture as *arāla hasta*: This is represented with the forefinger curved to touch the thumb. The figures generally hold it on top of the head.

It should be made clear that the lady-with-snakes is not a dancing figure, except for one example in the Cennakeśava temple at Arakere. Nevertheless, she displays movements and postures that are certainly informed with the language of dance. The present paper attempts to see to which extent dance was used by the sculptors to convey the meaning of the lady-with-snakes' iconography.

According to traditional dance sources there are few *karaṇas* that combine a *recita* movement of the arms with a reference to serpents whether in the *karaṇa* name or in its "serpentine" nature. All the above *karaṇas* describe a class of movements where the limbs are thrown out in all directions and the feet are staggering. This is the type of movements that the *Nāṭyaśāstra* recommends when representing intoxication (NS, XII. 121–122). According to Anna Tosato the *arāla hasta*'s main usage on stage is to represent: "drinking poison, nectar or sharp acid". This last suggestion leads me to take in consideration one object in the hand of the female sculpture in Koravaṅgala (Fig. 3): a cup used for filtering liquids. This object reminds the cups from Rajasthan used to filter opium. We do not know what was the exact use of this object but we can suggest that it could have been associated with religious ritual.

2.1. Description of female iconography

The feminine subject is always sculpted in the standing position, however, the legs are portrayed in three different variants:

- *Ābhaṅga*: the body weight is put mainly on one leg; the knees are somewhat bent and the body is leaning slightly on one side.
- *Padasvastika*: one leg is bent whereas the other crosses over and touches the ground with the tips of the toes.

¹ I would like to thank Anna Tosato for her help and her suggestions. This aspect of the analysis will develop into a future article.

- One leg is bent while the other is lifted: this is the only example in which we notice that the posture of the female body is in a dancing position (see the temple of Cennakeśava in Arakere).

Before analyzing this female iconography, it is important to explore other research and interpretations that preceded this study. Del Bonta (Del Bonta 1981) identifies this artifact as *Brahmahatyā*, “a personification of the sin of killing Brahmana” and underlines the connection between the female sculpture and the *Bhaivara* god. This interpretation was confuted by Ladrech and Loizeau (Ladrech and Loizeau 2008) in four points: firstly, the woman with snakes is more frequently associated with the man with the long dress than *Bhairava*; secondly, the connection seems stronger between the female with snakes and the goddess—as we can see in the *Mahādevī* temple at *Dodḍagaḍḍavalli*. Finally, the *Bhairava* of *Hoysala* images, although accompanied by a variety of followers, never acquires our snake woman in his entourage. Last but not least, it seems difficult to imagine a figure incarnating *brahmanicide*, the worst crime found in orthodox Indian tradition, to be so popular in temple sculpture and shown, moreover, to the scale of the gods on the walls of the temples.

I agree with the analysis of the two scholars and I add my point of view: in his article Del Bonta suggests that the woman with a snake could be a female companion, a sexual partner, of *Kāpālīka*’s ascetic. She could symbolically have served as a personification of *Brahmahatyā*, therefore, a living symbol of the great vow of the *Kāpālīkas*. If, on the one hand, *L’Hernault* (*L’Hernault* 1998) rejects the interpretation of Del Bonta concerning the personification of the feminine object as *Brahmahatyā*, on the other one, she accepts the possibility that she could be a sexual partner of the ascetic, i.e. the masculine subject portrayed with the long dress. The scholar underlines the fact that in *Kāpālīkas*’ sect, a branch of *Kālāmukha-Pāśupatas*, sexual rites existed, and they had had a very important influence since the 10th century throughout the Deccan. The *Kāpālīka* boasted further supernatural powers and advocated sexual union to know supreme bliss, the same as the union of *Śiva* with his *Śakti-Pārvatī*. However, this last

interpretation does not seem to consider the iconographic evolution of the two figures under discussion. Since the first Hoysaḷa representation, the woman with the snakes had always been portrayed with a greater degree of respect compared to the masculine subject (see the temple of Mahādevī in Doḍḍagaḍḍavalli, Cennakeśava in Bēlūr and Hoysaḷeśvara in Haḷēbīḍ). From a symbolic point of view, the bigger size entails a difference in importance of the two representations and this is confirmed by the position in which the male object is portrayed i.e. in an act of devotion. This interpretation leads us to excluding the assumption that she could be a sexual partner as the way she is portrayed highlights the disparity of the two subjects but also the power of the female sculpture, which is, in my view, almost divine. On the contrary, the way the masculine artifact is portrayed in this initial phase would suggest that he seems to belong to an earthly/human world.

Del Bonta supports his interpretation with an iconographic comparison between the Hoysaḷa sculptures and the Kākatīya's of the temple of Rāmappa at Pālempet.² In this temple, situated in what is nowadays the state of Telangana, twelve statues, 1.5 meters high, are positioned around the main entrance. They are bracket figures of female representation. Among them there is a nude statue adorned by snakes, which seems very similar, from an iconographic point of view, to the Hoysaḷa sculptures. The scholar asserts: "At Pālempet Brahmahatyā is also found independently as a large bracket figure at one of the entrances of the temples" (Del Bonta 1981: 121). I do not find this reading of Del Bonta very convincing but, in any case, his research opens a wide spectrum of questions regarding the analysis of this iconography. The first question relates to their position whereas the second one concerns the references to other contemporary dynasties: Which is the meaning of their collocation in the sacred building? Did those statues have the same implication also for the dynasties of Kākatīya or of Cāḷukya?

² The temple is dated 1213 (Del Bonta 1981:121).

In the temple of Rāmappa in Telangana, the woman with snakes is a bracket figure surrounded by eleven others portraying the following subjects: two huntresses (one of them is showing her foot to her attendant to have a thorn removed), one Śālabhañjikā, a female subject on the point of hitting a monkey that unlaced her dress revealing her naked body, dancers and musicians.

In the same position there are thirty-nine Madanikās of Hoysaḷa productions in the holy site of Cennakeśava in Bēlūr. However, there is a difference between these two groups of female sculptures: in the temple of Bēlūr, there are the same iconographic “topos” with the addition of the two images of Kālī (not present in Rāmappa).

The Cennakeśava temple at Bēlūr includes forty-two large stelae (thirty-nine female subjects and three masculine ones) commonly named Madanikās that represent a feminine image sculpted inside an arboreal frame on a base shaped like a lotus flower. The layout of these stelae is the model repeated in all of the 245 artefacts, in large and small size (Bignami 2012), which are placed along the outer balustrade of the temple and inside of it, in front of the entrance of the *garbhagr̥ha*.

Among the portrayed subjects are present: Śālabhañjikā, a feminine subject with snakes, a feminine subject depicted in the act of fastening an anklet/earring, a huntress, a feminine subject with child, dancers, musicians, great goddesses (Kālī).

In the northern areas of Karnataka, in some temples that have been erected during the Cāḷukya dynasty, we notice some iconographic similarities: in the temple of Sarasvatī at Gadag,³ there are female subjects with snakes sculpted in the balustrade surrounding the *mandapa* together with other female subjects showing the same iconography of Rāmappa and Bēlūr, i.e. the figure with snakes, huntresses, Śālabhañjikā, dancers and musicians, etc.

The same topic can be found in the temple of Mahādeva in Jalsingi, in the temple of Nīlakaṇṭheśvara in Nilanga⁴ and in the Jagadambāmātā

³ Later Cāḷukyan, 12th century (Hardy 1995: 327).

⁴ See Foekema 2003: 64–65 (Kalyāṇa region, 12th century).

temple in Tahakari. In all those temples, the sculptures are located on the external walls and in Jalsingi and Nilanga they are sculpted in large dimensions. It is important to highlight that only in the Hoysala temples and in one case of Cālukya ones, the Nilakaṅṭheśvara temple in Nilanga (see Foekema 2003: 276), we can find the figures under discussion whereas in previously quoted temples there are just the female subjects with snakes.

The position of these artifacts, whether they are “bracket figures” located at the entrance of the temple and of the *garbhagr̥ha*, or on the external walls of the temples, seems to have a common function i.e. protecting the holy temple space.

That raises the question of who the female subject with the snake represents. Is she an isolated representation or does she belong to a group of feminine subjects such as the Apsaras, Yoginīs or Yakṣinīs?

According to Ladrech and Loizeau, the female figure with snakes in the Hoysala temples could be identified with a Yoginī. The authors suggest that this iconography, together with the masculine one, is strongly related to yoga. For scholars such identification would fit quite well with the ascetic nature, nudity, and the appearance both human and divine. The Yoginīs are fearsome deities, witches, amateurs of human sacrifices, often associated with Bhairava, and this cultural aspect leads the researchers to this interpretation.

When we approach the world of the Yoginīs, it needs to be considered that the word Yoginī contains many meanings and interpretations. As asserted by Keul, the Yoginī is: “A class of tantric goddesses, a designation for the Great Goddess, intermediary being/demigoddesses, ghosts, witches, female ascetics, tantric practitioners, woman consecrated to the deity” (Keul 2016: 12).

In order to answer that question we have used an iconographic and comparative method referring to the comprehensive research of Dehejia and Keul (Dehejia 2000, Keul 2015).

According to the Dehejia, the entire phenomenon of Yoginī worship, and the construction of the temples dedicated to this group of goddesses, has its roots outside the fold of the orthodox Brahmanical

tradition, in particular within the simple village cults, and is connected to the *grāmadevatās*, the local village goddesses (Dehejia 2000: 1–2).

It should be assumed that the temples we are going to analyze are not dedicated to the cult of Yoginī and therefore our analysis will be based on the iconographic study of the woman with snakes: these artifacts in the examples of Cālukya, Kākatīya and in the temple of Cennakeśava in Bēlūr, of Hoysaḷa production, are part of what could be defined as a “female sculptural group”.

Following this comparative study, the iconographic analogies can be noticed only in the temple of Hirapur, dated A. D. 900 (Dehejia 2000: 100), in the current state of Orissa. Most of the Yoginīs, in this sacred building, have two arms and are related to the “feminine sculptural group” previously mentioned: there is a huntress, a female subject adjusting her anklet, two female subjects with snakes, and another one surrounded by luxuriant foliage that seems to remind the Śālabhañjikā iconography.

Comparing the objects of my analysis with those studied by Dehejia in her research, some differences can be promptly noticed: the most obvious one is that there is no correlation between the theriomorphic representations of the Yoginī temples and the works analyzed by me. It can be noticed that in all the sacred structures analyzed by that author the presence of females with animals’ heads are prevailing. In my study the only animal represented is the snake and there are no theriomorphic representations (neither in the 245 stelae of Bēlūr). **Another element against a possible interpretation of my artifacts as Yoginīs is that those are grouped rigorously in numbers of sixty-four or eight-one.** In the temples I have analyzed the female subjects vary from twelve to thirty-nine to 245.

Without excluding completely the possible interpretation of these artifacts as Yoginīs, as has been previously pointed out that several interpretations related to their varied aspects can fall into this category,⁵ the most suitable one is the wording “Yoginī and Yakṣinīs”.

⁵ See Dehejia (2000: 11–38): Yoginī as an adept in Yoga, Yoginī as partner in Cakra-pūjā, Yoginī as sorceress, Yoginī of Astrology, Yoginī of

As we read in Dehejia:

Kaula texts suggest indirectly that there is an underlying connection between the Yoginī and the Yakṣinīs, who are associated with trees and fertility. [...] Further indirect evidence on the connection between Yoginī and Yakṣinīs comes from the treatment in Hindu tantras of the Jain goddess Padmāvati, a tantric deity whose worship was carried out to acquire a variety of magical abilities. [...] Interestingly, even without looking into Kaula texts, Coomaraswamy believed that the sixty-four Yoginīs must originally have been Yakṣinīs. (Dehejia 2000: 36)

I suggest that it is a possible interpretation since the stelae of the temple of Cennakeśava in Bēlūr, to which some of the artifacts analyzed here belong, were previously investigated by me in two papers: “Re-use in the art fields: the iconography of Yakṣī” (Bignami 2014) and “Nymphes or Goddesses?” (Bignami 2012). In these articles the point of view was to look at the stelae with female subjects, including the one with the snakes, as a whole: a unique artistic project with an intrinsic aim. In this study, on the other hand, the perspective is opposite as the focus is on the analysis of a unique iconography i.e. the feminine subject with snakes and the man with a long dress linked to her.

We notice that comparing to the “feminine sculptural group”, the woman with the male attendant, in Hoysaḷa artifacts, emerges with distinctive features: in the temple of Cennakeśava in Bēlūr, the stelae that portray them are the only ones, except for those who have Viṣṇu, Śiva and Kālī, that are accompanied by a figure in the act of veneration. This leads me to suppose that, within that group, the sculpture has a different, divine meaning, which is strongly related to the dynastic history of the Hoysaḷas.

A possible explanation could derive from the foundation myth. In 1117, the king Viṣṇuvardhana created the “Legend of Saḷa” which narrated that the first king of the line, Saḷa, while venerating the goddess of Śaśakapura, asked her for a land that he could reign over.

the Internal Cakras, Yoginī of the Śrī Cakra, Yoginī as the Great Goddess, Yoginī as Acolytes of the Great Goddess: the Mātṛkā, Yoginī as Patron Goddess of the Kaula, Yoginī and Yakṣinīs.

The medium to fulfill his request was an ascetic (*muni*), a guardian of the holy place, holding a stick. After showing his courage and strength in a fight against a tiger near the veneration place, the hero was able to gain his kingdom.

When, for the increase of the wealth of that king Sala's kingdom, a certain Jaina-bratisa by his mantras was bringing the goddess Padmāvati of Śaśakapura into subjection, a tiger sprang forth upon them to break the spell, when the *yogīśvara*, holding out the handle of his curved stick, said "poy sala" (hit him, Saḷa): on which he fearlessly smote it; from that the Yadu kings had the name Poysaḷa and the flag of a tiger waving on a rod. Because the boon of that Yakṣī was in the spring (*vasanta*) time, from the name of the season the king worshipped her as the goddess Vāsantikā.⁶

In this example taken from the inscription EC V B1 124 in Bastihalli, Haḷēbīd, it is clear that the goddess of Śaśakapura is a Yakṣī and that she will be celebrated as a *kuladevatā*, with the name of Vāsantikā.

So far, the Hoysala sources mentioning the goddess consist of the several inscriptions related to the foundation myth of the dynasty throughout the whole timeframe up till the last king, Vira Ballāla III, and the work of the poet Janna, *Yaśodharacarite*, composed at the court of Ballāla II. It is interesting to notice, however, that the goddess is also present at Ahobilam, in the current state of Andhra Pradesh, as a local goddess and she is portrayed in the play of *Vāsantikāpariṇayam*.⁷

We know that the Yakṣīs had been venerated in the divine form since ancient times,⁸ and when portrayed together forming a "feminine sculptured group" they do not lose their individuality as we can notice for example in the site of Bharhut.⁹

According to Lévi, the territorial presence of places of worship for Yakṣī is strongly linked "with local memories" (Lévi 1915: 119) and,

⁶ Translation by Elena Mucciarelli.

⁷ See Ewa Dębicka-Borek, "When the God Meets a Tribal Girl: Nara-siṃha's Second Marriage in the Light of the *Vāsantikāpariṇayam*."

⁸ See Coomaraswamy 1927, Lévi 1915, Quintanilla 2007.

⁹ See *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, Vol. XIII, 1957.

in Sutherland's terms, it is there "to display [...] local sovereignty" (Sutherland 1991: 167). This iconography seem to deliver the same message of fertility and abundance, taking upon themselves the role of tutelary deities of a collective memory such as that of a village, but also of a family memory such as that of a noble clan.¹⁰

The Yakṣīs of Bharhut¹¹ are the most explanatory examples of this particular religious context. In fact, the artefacts of the *vedīkā* of Bharhut¹² have engraved inscriptions where they are called *devatā*.¹³ This can be seen as confirmation that the Yakṣī is a deity with its proper worship (see Quintanilla 2007). As asserted by De Caroli (De Caroli 2004) and Lévi (Lévi 1915), the role of the Yakṣī is closely related to that of the tutelary deity and the *genius loci*, so in these terms it exemplifies their position at the entrances of the holy places.

Also in the artifacts of the Hoysala temples, the feminine subjects as a whole remind of the manifestation of the great goddess and of her symbolism: protection, fertility, seduction. I would like to highlight that the Yakṣī with the snake, venerated by the man with the long dress, represents a specific divinity with a cult of her own. In my view, her

¹⁰ The best-known example is the tutelary Yakṣa of the Śākya clan in the *stūpa* of Amaravati, which is represented in an anthropomorphic form but with its features clearly linked to the vegetation theme, which is still clearly present, see Sutherland 1991.

¹¹ Misra 1981: fig. 45–46–47.

¹² Cūlakokā Yakṣī, Candrā Yakṣī, Sudassanā Yakṣī, of which Cūlakokā Yakṣī is indicated as *devatā* Yakṣī. Although we do not find the word "devatā" in the other two engravings, it seems evident that the figures are worshipped deities, like Cūlakokā Yakṣī; this deduction hails from the fact that they have a name like all the other tutelary deities of the village, despite the fact that their name does not appear in the Buddhist lists.

¹³ "There are three 'women and tree motifs' attached to the pillars of the stone-railing, one inscribed as Cūlakokā Devatā, standing on an elephant, the second inscribed as Candā Yakṣī, standing on the fish-tailed sheep, the third, whose inscription only mentions the name of the donor, stands on the horse". *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, Vol. XIII, 1957: 91.

representation could be related to the foundation myth of the dynasty and therefore, to the Yakṣī taking the name of Vāsantikā, venerated in the forest of Śāśakapura by a *yogīśvara* that is holding a stick.¹⁴

In the analysis of the figure under discussion I have noticed an important feature: in the artifacts located at the entry of the temple or *garbhagrha* or along the external walls, the feminine subject, together with a worshipper wearing a long dress, is portrayed naked and with snakes; in two works kept in the museums of Śimoga and Haḷēbīḍ, on the contrary, the feminine figure accompanied by worshippers with *añjalimudrā* and long dress is the representation of the goddess Durgā. According to Mallebrein (Mallebrein 1999: 139):

The Durgā myth serve as a paradigm for the integration of indigenous folk and tribal goddesses and the parochialization of the “great” tradition. In this process, local deities merge with great deities, and the great gods and goddesses split up into countless small manifestations and became localized forms. [...] Incorporated into local cults, the Durgā myth gains regional touches and reveals the goddess’s more human image.

The study of Mallebrein (Mallebrein 1999), as well as the Hoysaḷa artifacts and inscriptions, lead me to study the iconography of the feminine subject with snake as a *grāmadevatā* / Yakṣī, protector of the village of Śāśakapura and of the dynastic line. Her representation could be related to the local form of the divinity Yakṣī and could rise to the orthodox and brahmanic form of Durgā, supreme goddess of the Hindu pantheon (see Srinivasan 1997). In this case, it came to light that the regional and the cosmopolitan aspects go hand in hand, as declared by Mallebrein (Mallebrein 1999: 141): “The tribal and Hinduistic forms of religion do not create monolithic blocks. On the contrary, there are manifold transitions between these two spheres.”

¹⁴ I would like to assert that the interpretation of this iconography as Yakṣī that rises to the tutelary dynastic deity is an analysis limited to the cultural study of the Hoysaḷas. It is not the interest of this paper to analyze the meaning that it assumes for other dynasties previously mentioned, as for example for the Cāḷukyas or Kākatīyas.

Let us now focus on the objects that distinguish these figures i.e. the stick and the bowl. Among the objects the feminine figure is holding, there is a bowl, which in some cases is represented empty and in others is full with luxuriant vegetation and snakes.

The last object of our analysis is the stick that the goddess is holding. It is the object that the two figures have in common representing the *trait-d'union* of the two figures under discussion interacting with each other. It was mentioned as a typical element of the male subject for the first time in Bēlūr in 1117 by the Hoysaḷa foundation legend.

2.2. The description of the male iconography

The male subject is portrayed in three positions:

- *Ābhaṅga*: standing position with the body weighting mainly on one leg;
- *Yogāsana*: seated, with crossed legs, in a yogic position;
- Standing in *añjalimudrā*: standing with the hands at the chest level, in an act of devotion;
- The male figure is holding several objects: a stick, a circular object, *cakra* or a *kapāla*, and some snakes.

The male iconography next to the female one was initially portrayed in small sizes. However, starting from the second half of the 12th century it was portrayed in bigger sizes with male attendants wearing a long robe. There is also another variant in which the male subject is portrayed next to a frightening goddess (Kālī) in a gesture of self-immolation (he is about to cut his head with a sword).

According to previous studies, he is an ascetic belonging to a specific religious group (L'Hernault 1998, Ladrech and Loizeau 2008). Del Bonta (Del Bonta 1981), on the other hand, relates him to Śiva. According to L'Hernault 1998 the asceticism of the masculine figure is strongly related to the Kāpālikas' sexual rites and the feminine subject represents his partner.

Ladrech and Loizeau (Ladrech and Loizeau 2008) assume he is a member of a religious order, maybe a deified *guru*. They exclude that

he could belong to the group of Kāpila (as suggested by Del Bonta), as the *kapāla* is not a constant feature. They suggest he could belong to the religious group of Mahāpāśupatas; the scholars also highlight that the male figure is related to bloody rituals and appears as a worshipper of the feminine subject with snakes and of the terrifying form of the goddess, Kālī.

My interpretation of this iconographic subject is more similar to that of Ladrech and Loizeau, even though from the epigraphic data (see the chapter “Inscriptions”) it emerges that he might have belonged to the religious group of Kālāmukha, closely related to the Hoysaḷa’s kings (see “Evolution of the iconographies: From the Local to the Cosmopolitan”).

In this research the stick is correlated to the founding legend and to the sacred personage of Lakulīśa (see “Evolution of the iconographies: From the Local to the Cosmopolitan”). The correlation between the male figure and the cruel *devī*, in particular with the bloody sacrifice, leads me to interpret the *kapāla* as a symbol of the man’s worship of the goddess.

The circular object is nowadays debated: Guy interpreted it as a tool of an architect (Guy 2007: 76); Ladrech and Loizeaut attributed this object to the weapon of the god (Ladrech and Loizeaut 2008: 14). I am inclined to read the presence of the *cakra* as a magic device correlated to the fabulous ascetic power of the male subject as reported in the inscriptions which narrated the Hoysaḷa legend¹⁵ and then, in the evolution of the male iconography, with the incredible ability of the teachers mentioned in the inscriptions associated with Lakulīśa.

Another change in him is the long robe: in the first iconographic phase the dress is like a heavy coat, whereas in the second phase it looks transparent. It could mean that in the beginning the ascetic subject maintains the local correlation with the wildness, while in its iconographic evolution the transformation should be related to the different environment where he acts: no longer the forest but the royal court.

¹⁵ EC V: Ak 71; EC VIII: Sb 28; EC XI: Dg 25; RICE 1983: 30; 213–4; 232-3; 275; 322; 324 etc.

The analyzed subjects are sculpted in the Hoysaḷa temples dedicated to Viṣṇu and Śiva; there is also another example in the Jain sacred building of Pārśvanātha *basadi* in Haḷēbīḍ (Karsdof 2013: 321).

According to these data, we can assume that during the Hoysaḷa dynasty, there was a great freedom of cult and, on the other hand, we can surmise that there was also a strong relation between these iconographies and the king as their presence is strong and they are repeated several times in the royal temples.

3. List of the temples where the “peculiar iconographies” appeared

Temples erected during the reign of Viṣṇuvardhana (1104–1141)¹⁶

Doḍḍagaḍḍavaḷḷi, the Mahādevī temple

Bēlūr, the Cennakeśava temple

Haḷēbīḍ, the Hoysaḷeśvara temple

Haḷēbīḍ, the Pārśvanātha *basadi*

Temples erected during the reign of Narasiṃha I (1141–1173)

Haḷēbīḍ, the Hoysaḷeśvara temple

Kikkēri, the Brahmeśvara temple

Kikkēri, the Janārdhana temple

Koravaṅgala, the Govindeśvara temple

Temples erected during the reign of Ballāḷa II (1173–1220)

Koravaṅgala, the Būceśvara temple

Amṛtapura, the Amṛteśvara temple

Haḷēbīḍ, the Kēdārēśvara temple

¹⁶ For the dating of the reigns of Hoysaḷa’s kings I refer to Cohelo 1950.

Haḷēbīd, the Vīrabhadra temple

Mosāle, the Nageśvara-Cennakeśava temple complex

Bēlūr, the Mule Siṅgeśvara temple or Bēlūr, the Pataleśvara temple

Bēlūr, the Andal temple

Temples erected during the reign of Narasiṃha II (1220–1235)

Hāranhaḷḷi, the Keśava and Someśvara temple

Hirenarallu, the Mallikārjuna temple

Basral/Basaralu, the Mallikārjuna temple

Arakere, the Keśava temple

Temples erected during the reign of Someśvara (1235–1256)

Nuggihaḷḷi, the Lakṣmī Narasiṃha

Jāgavaḷ, the Lakṣmī Narasiṃha

Aralaguppe, the Cennakeśava temple

Govindahaḷḷi, the Pañcaliṅgeśvara

Hosahoḷalu, the Lakṣmī Narāyaṇa

4. The road map of iconographies

4.1. First vestiges: The reign of Viṣṇuvardhana (1107–1142): Doḍḍagaḍḍavaḷḷi and Bēlūr

Viṣṇuvardhana was the first Hoysaḷa king to enlarge the borders of the kingdom. During the years of his reign, the capital was Bēlūr, a place where the power of the king was celebrated with the royal temple of Cennakeśava. It was consecrated in 1117 and dedicated to the bloody victory of the Hoysaḷa army against the Cōḷa dynasty.

The first iconographic appearance of the figure under discussion is in the temple of Mahādevī in Doḍḍagaḍḍavaḷḷi. The temple

was consecrated in 1113 (EC V: Hn 149) and is situated twenty-three kilometres from Bēlūr. The building, which was erected on the shore of a water basin, is commonly known as the Mahādevī temple and is dedicated to Mahākālī, Mahālakṣmī and Bhūtanātha (EC V: Hn 139), as we can gather from the inscriptions. In front of the cell of Kālī, on the right and on the left of the portal, there are stelae portraying a big sized goddess with stick and snakes in company with male subjects. The latter are in smaller dimensions and are wearing long robes, which are open in the front, showing covered pubic areas. They are also holding a stick.

Let us analyze in more detail the male subjects of the stelae situated in front of the goddess's cell. On the artifact situated on the right there are four figures and three of them are time-worn (Fig. 1). At the far left there is a man, who is wearing a long robe and is holding a stick; next to him there is a gaunt male subject who is lifting his hand toward the feminine figure as a sign of devotion. At the far right, a man portrayed in a yogic position is sculpted next to another figure who is holding an unidentifiable object (maybe a *kapāla*?) and is offering it to the feminine figure as a gift. At the center of the composition, the female representation is completely naked (with the exception of her sandals and ornaments).

On the walls that are situated in front of the cell, there are big skeletal figures (*dvārapālika*) holding a head and a sword (Fig. 4), which reminds us of the bloody rituals offered to the goddess.

By analyzing these artifacts, we could assume that the representation of the goddess situated next to the cell of Kālī, surrounded by snakes and completely naked, is the regional manifestation of the terrible goddess. This first assumption seems to be confirmed by the presence of the very same subjects in the temple of Cennakeśava in Bēlūr.

The royal temple, that was built by order of Viṣṇuvardhana and was dedicated to god Keśava, is famous for its thirty-nine stelae of female subjects called Madanikās-Madanikai and situated on the external walls of the temple and in the indoor space, *navaraṅga*. The female figure under discussion is repeatedly sculpted along the external walls of the temple in 245 small stelae (see Bignami 2012). Among these,

twelve represent the iconography of the goddess with snakes and a stick together with men portrayed in smaller dimensions and dressed with long robes and holding a cane. In the different sculptures, the men are portrayed in smaller sizes compared to the goddess and are always in an act of devotion (Fig. 5) or they are seated next to her in a yogic position. Among these, a different element is a naked goddess adorned with snakes, wearing a tiara on her head and holding a sword in her right hand, and a *kapāla* in her left hand. A male figure is sculpted next to her wearing a long robe in an *añjalimudrā*. This artifact seems to confirm the assumption that the regional goddess is interpreted as a manifestation of Kālī. The sculptures situated on the southern side of the temple that portray the human sacrifices offered to the goddess further validate this idea. Among these sculptures we can notice the self-immolation of the male figure wearing a long robe in front of Kālī (Fig. 6).

As confirmed by studies carried out in the last decades (Kinsley 1988, Mallebrein 1999, Simmons 2015, Sontheimer 1997), the local goddesses or *grāmadevatās* are officiated as bloody sacrifices. What distinguishes them is the specificity of the place they belong to: a village in which they are celebrated in both their kind and cruel appearance for the protection of the community. This research led to the analysis of the Hoysaḷa foundation legend through the study of the inscriptions dating back to the period between 1004 and 1245, during the reign of Vinayāditya and Ballāḷa II. From the epigraphic data, it is clear that the goddess celebrated by the Hoysaḷa kings as protector of the dynasty (*kuladevatā*), is Vāsantikā. The goddess is related to the village of Śāśakapura, place of origin of the dynasty (EC V: B1 112). The idea that this divinity is a *grāmadevatā* is supported by the several inscriptions regarding the dynasty foundation legend¹⁷ and by the fact that during the reign of Ballāḷa I (1101–1108),

¹⁷ The legend is repeated in many inscriptions. The first dates back to 1117 and has been attributed to Viṣṇuvarhana: inscription number 146 of the Beḷūr stone edict (Rice 1983: 260–62); after which many others followed, some written by the same emperor and others by other members of the Hoysaḷa

when Bēlūr is elected to be capital, the king repeatedly went on a pilgrimage to Śāśakapura to pay homage to Vāsantikā (EC V: BI 199). Epigraphic sources indicate that Vāsantikā was the *kuladevatā* of the Hoysaḷa family until 1004; the Goddess acquired more importance from 1117 onwards, because she was included in the foundation legend of the dynasty.

According to the dynasty legend, Vāsantikā is venerated by a muni, whose epithets vary depending on the inscriptions (*muni*, *siddha*, *ṛṣi*, *yogīndra*) and whose typical feature is the stick, which is also called in several ways but is always present. According to Rice the stick had to be: “the solid bamboo rod (called *daṇḍa*) of an ascetic [...]” (Rice 1902: X).¹⁸ The presence of an ascetic with a stick, who was an adept of the worship of Vāsantikā, in the Hoysaḷa foundation legend, seems to support my interpretation: the male subject is strongly correlated with the creation of the Hoysaḷa royalty and with the family goddess. Vāsantikā, as all *grāmadevatās*, embodies both benevolent and malevolent characteristics: on the one hand, she is the one who gives fertility, on the other, she is the one who punishes, and that manifests in her most terrifying form. On the artefacts that we analyse we find both these elements, starting from the name Vāsantikā, evoking abundance and fertility, coming up to her performances with snakes, *kapāla* and sword that bring out her darker and terrible side (as we see in her representation as Durgā and Kālī).

It has been confirmed by the inscriptions and also by the several temples erected by order of king Vinayāditya that Śāśakapura, the current Aṅgaḍi, (Rice 1902: XI), was the original birthplace of the Hoysaḷa

dynasty (EC V: Ak 71; EC VIII: Sb 28; EC XI: Dg 25; Rice 1983: 30, 213–14, 232–33, 275, 322, 324, etc.). For the evolution of the foundation legend of the Hoysaḷas see Elena Mucciarelli “Talking Stones: Royal Inscriptions in Medieval Karnataka”.

¹⁸ The examination of the inscriptions shows a programmatic connection: “the name Poysaḷa was acquired by the Yadu kings, together with the boon of the Goddess and the tiger and cane as their crest. The tiger crest and the cane being their banner [...]” (EC V: AK 71).

dynasty. At the edge of the village, there is a temple of Vāsantikā, a modern building just behind a small sanctuary at whose center there is a *nāga* stela. The snakes appear on the head and around the body of Vāsantikā as well as of the other *māṭṛkās* surrounding her in the chapel. The element that correlates the modern representation of Vāsantikā of Aṅgaḍi and the female subject analyzed before are the several snakes around the goddess and the *māṭṛkās* and the bowl held in their hands. Starting with the point that the comparison between modern artifacts and medieval ones is quite difficult, I would like to underline the protective role of the goddess that emerges from them. The most likely scenario is that in the past the sacred area, located outside the village, was shaped by trees and a stone of snakes, just as we see them now in front of the modern building.

4.2. Narasiṃha (1141–1173) and Ballāḷa II (1173–1220): Haḷēbīḍ, the other capital of the Hoysaḷa kingdom

The village of Haḷēbīḍ, in the southwestern Indian state of Karnataka, was once a city called Dōrasamudra and the capital of the Hoysaḷa dynasty from the mid-11th to mid-14th centuries (Derrett 1953: 72, EC V: BI 74). Although the site is home to more than twenty temples and temple ruins, as well as the fragmentary remains of a fort wall and palace compound, the place name “Haḷēbīḍ” today is nearly synonymous with a single monument: the lavishly sculptural Hoysaḷeśvara temple.

Narasiṃha I gave a substantial boost to the sculptures of the Hoysaḷeśvara temple and so did Ballāḷa II. Vīra Ballāḷa (or Ballāḷa II) was the king who gained the dynastic independence and the years of his reign are considered “the golden age” of the Hoysaḷa period. His aim was to turn the city into a place of pilgrimage. As a matter of fact, he enlarged the Jain site of Bastihaḷli and, according to Kasdorf (Kasdorf 2013: 162–3), transformed it into a replica of Śravaṇa Beḷgoḷa. He also built some important religious buildings, such as the temple of Kedāreśvara. According to Kasdorf (Kasdorf 2013: 193–6), this sacred building is strictly related to the royal palace because of its geographic position and the royal rituals that were celebrated here.

As the matter of fact, this place was built as a royal *tīrtha* and a replica of the temple of Kēdārēśvara in Baḷḷigāve,¹⁹ the center of the Kālāmukha religious order.

As stated by Karsdorf:

The Kālāmukhas had a strong presence in Dōrasamudra, as the inscriptional record of Haḷēbīḍ attests, and they were prominent throughout Karṇāṭaka between the 11th and 13th centuries. Considering the importance of this Śaiva order within the Hoysaḷa capital and throughout the Hoysaḷa kingdom, it is possible that the city's principal monastery [refer to Kēdārēśvara temple]—as the term *hiriya-maṭha*, “large-” or “senior-monastery,” connotes—would have been affiliated with it. As I will argue [...] Ballāḷa II seems to have been particularly interested in cultivating relationships with powerful Kālāmukha institutions, and there is likely to have been a Kālāmukha presence at the Kēdārēśvara temple itself. (Kasdorf 2013: 208)

The strong presence of the Kālāmukhas in Haḷēbīḍ and the several representations of these peculiar iconographies (the goddess and the man with a long robe and a stick) found here could have an important relation.

The sculptural representations of these subjects located in the temple of Hoysaḷeśvara are many and very diverse. The main reason could be explained by the fact that this temple was erected during the reign of Viṣṇuvarḍhana in 1121 (EC V: B1 147) and was constantly modified in the following years during the reigns of Narasiṃha and Ballāḷa II. Within this research, Hoysaḷeśvara is a unique example as it contains a wide iconographic programme of subjects, which were examined in their different times of construction and carving. Here we find sculptures of the local goddess with her followers, male subjects wearing a long robe in front of the terrible goddess (Fig. 7) and finally the goddess and the male figure represented both in big sizes (Fig. 8). This last phase of this iconographic representation appeared for the first time during the reign of Narasiṃha.

The temples of Janārdana and Brahmeśvara in Kikkēri, built during the sovereignty of that king, confirm this assumption. In the temple of

¹⁹ See Rice EC V: xxxviii and Coelho 1950: 302.

Brahmeśvara, on the southern perimeter wall, are carved a man with a long robe (Fig. 14), on his left Kṛṣṇa Govinda, and on his right, in a shrine, there is enclosed the representation of Śiva Naṭarāja. On the northern side of the temple the female subject with snakes is represented on the right side of a Śālabhañjikā, and on her left side we find the sculpture of Vārāhī, the manifestation of Viṣṇu.

During the years of Ballāḷa II, the temple of Kedāreśvara (EC V: Bl 115) was built in the capital of the kingdom, Haḷēbīḍ, by the will of the king. It is assumed that royal cults were celebrated here and that it was a *maṭha* of Kālāmukhas. The choice of the king to create a replica of the temple of Baḷligāve (a place recognized by the Kālāmukha religious power) in the pivotal center of his reign leads me to assume that an important religious and political change took place within the dynasty. In this building the sculptural representations of the figure under discussion are at the height of their splendor. The new element in these artifacts is that they are separated and that the male subject is also in company of followers, who are portrayed in an act of devotion, which I consider as the divination of the male subject (Fig. 10).

In this building the collocation of the subjects is found both on the balustrade surrounding the *navaraṅga* and on the outer walls of the temple. Along the outer walls, the two figures are shown separated but not at a great distance from each other: in the long sculptural register on the north-west side, there is the goddess with snakes, next to her the couple Śiva and Pārvatī, and advancing in *pradakṣiṇa*, a female figure, the man with the long robe in *añjalimudrā*, a Śālabhañjikā and Viṣṇu. On the northern side of the building they are represented in this order: the woman with snakes, Śiva, Śālabhañjikā, Yakṣī, and Viṣṇu. As other divinities, the local goddess and the male subjects are also repeated several times in small sizes along niche panels situated at the base of the temple and, in big sizes, in the sculptures on the external walls. On the basis of these data, I assume that the visibility of these artifacts went hand in hand with the stability of the dynasty reached by Ballāḷa II.

4.3. Ballāḷa II (1173–1220): Mosāle and Koravaṅgala, Arasiḱere

The area of Arasiḱere²⁰ and the surrounding zones are rich in inscriptions and temples. As mentioned before, I have assumed that in the area there was a second Kālāmukha nerve center of the Hoysaḷa dynasty. As for the analysis of the goddess and the male subject with a long robe and a stick, we find their presence in the temples of Cennakeśava in Mosāle and in the temple of Būceśvara in Koravaṅgala.

The temple of Būceśvara was built in 1173 (EC V: Hn 71), the year of the coronation of Ballāḷa II, as stated in the inscription carved on the stela which is situated to the entrance of the temple. In the same inscription we can read that the rituals devoted to the god Būceśvara were celebrated by the Kālāmukha order (particularly by Vāmaśakti-Paṇḍita of Dorasamudra).

All the subjects are sculptured in the north and northwest walls of the temple in the following order starting from the east: Śiva and Pārvatī, a Yakṣī with symbols of fertility, Kṛṣṇa raising the Govardhana Hill, Garuḍa, Rudra/Śiva, the man with the long robe, the goddess with the snakes, Rāvaṇa lifting Kailāsa (Fig. 11). On the northwest wall there are: a couple of *nāga* and *nāginī*, Kṛṣṇa playing with *gopīs*, Kṛṣṇa and snakes, Viṣṇu and the goddess with snakes and a cup.

At Mosāle there are two temples, Nāgeśvara and Cennakeśava, erected around the same years, i.e. at the beginning of the thirteenth century (Foekema 1996). The figures under discussion are carved in the temple of Cennakeśava and not in that of Nāgeśvara. In the temple of Cennakeśava, on the southern exterior walls, the goddess with snakes is carved beside the man with the coat (Fig. 12) and both are accompanied by attendants in a small size. To the left of the male subject are represented Garuḍa and Kṛṣṇa raising the Govandhara Hill; to the right of the female subject are sculpted a Śālabaḥṅjikā and Viṣṇu.

In the temple of Mosāle, the images are only two but they are both sculpted in a large size and separated one from the other.

²⁰ During the reign of Ballāḷa II the Arasiḱere area was an outpost for territorial expansion towards the territories of the Cāḷukyas.

4.4. Narasiṃha II (1220–1235) and Someśvara (1235–1256): Beyond the centers of the royal power

During the reigns of Narasiṃha and Someśvara, who ruled throughout the 13th century, the iconography of the figures under discussion were represented as a replica of the images of Ballāḷa II kingdom: the goddess and the male subject are always sculpted separately and in big size, located in the divine pantheon. The temple of Mallikārjuna in Hirenallaru is particularly striking as the male and female iconographies are not only repeated on the external walls of the temple but also on the superstructure of the holy building (Fig. 13).

On the northern outer walls of the temple are carved Śiva into a special aedicule, to his left the man with the long robe that is held in a branch of a tree, accompanied by an attendant and a Śālabhāṅjikā at the right hand of the god. On the opposite side of the temple we can see the same composition: in the center are carved Narasiṃha into a special aedicule, to his left the female subject with snakes and to his right a Yakṣī.

Dating back to 1234 (EC V: Ak 82), the temple of Cennakeśava in Arakere is the only example in which the goddess is in a dancing position.

4.5. Museums: The ASI in Haḷēbīḍ and the District museum in Śimoga

The male subject appears on the stela with the goddess sculptured in the form of Bhairava as well as in the form of Maḥiṣāsūramardinī. In a sculpture kept at the ASI Museum of Haḷēbīḍ, the follower of the goddess, in the form of Bhairavī, is located on a small pedestal at her right and is followed by other figures. He is seated in a yogic position, his legs are held by a *yoga-patta* while his hands are joined in *añjalimudrā*.

The artifact displayed at the District museum of Śimoga, coming from Kalkere and dating back to the 12th century (Bhatsoori 1995: 33–34),²¹ portrays Maḥiṣāsūramardinī, one of the most terrific aspects of the *devī*. At the feet of the goddess there is a man wearing a long robe, his hands

²¹ The size of the stele is 128x65x28 cm; the material of the stele is chloritic schist stone as of the all artifacts of Hoysaḷa's temples.

are lifted in *añjalimudrā*, in sign of devotion. This is a very interesting element as it corroborates the correlation between the goddess and her follower thus confirming that the Durgā myth serves as a paradigm for the integration of regional goddesses of the “great” tradition.

5. Evolution of the iconographies: From the regionalism to the cosmopolitan

5.1. The first phase

We shall now focus on the analysis of the different phases of sculptures under discussion. The first representations date back to 1113 and are situated in the temple of Mahādevī in Doḍḍagaḍḍavaḷḷi (Fig. 1): two stelae are located in front of the Kālī cell while the other two are in front of the Śiva Bhūtanātha cell. In the first example their followers are wearing a long robe and holding a stick, in the act of honoring them, surround the female subjects. Alternatively, they are sculpted next to them in a yogic position. As previously assumed, the female subject is a manifestation of the *devī* and in this case, she is represented in the form of a regional goddess. This assumption finds validation in the temple of Cennakeśava in Bēlūr, consecrated in 1117, where there are twelve small steles in which the goddess is portrayed naked and adorned with snakes and holding a stick together with male subjects wearing a long robe (Fig. 5). In the same temple, a narrative niche panels evoke the act of self-sacrifice of the male subject in front of the goddess in her terrific form, Kālī (Fig. 6). The same artistic subject is present along the external walls of the temple of Hoysaḷeśvara in Haḷēbīḍ, consecrated in 1121. This peculiar narration shows the relation between the two figures—the correlation between the goddess and her follower belonging to a religious order devoted to her cult, celebrated with bloody rituals. The artifacts found in the museum of Haḷēbīḍ and Śimoga seem to corroborate this assumption as they show the follower at the feet of the goddess Kālī and Durgā. According to the iconographic analysis, besides the long robe, the stick is the typical object of the male figure associated with the goddess. This element leads to assume that these

sculptures are the representation of the manifestation of Vāsantikā, *kuladevatā* of the Hoysaḷa dynasty, and of the figure related to the religious order devoted to her, as we find them described in the inscriptions of the foundation legend. At this point we should ask which religious order the follower belongs to. This question becomes especially important as from Narasiṃha onwards we notice an evolution of the iconographic subjects. The male figure/*muni* acquires autonomy thus becoming a divine subject himself who is honored by the figures portrayed in small sizes at his feet (Fig. 10). From this moment onwards, the sculptural artifacts that portray them are located in the divine pantheon of the temples, created individually and separated one from the other and in the same size of the gods. As discussed previously, there not seems to be a clear rule for the placement of these artifacts in the Hoysaḷa sacred buildings: sometimes they are carved on the northern walls and sometimes on the southern ones; sometimes they are neighbors (as in the example of Mosāle) sometimes they are sculpted in diametrically opposed walls (as Hirenallaru). The important information that emerges from this study is that the artifacts are shown in the same size as the deities and, more interesting, are always carved beside them (Fig. 8, 9, 10, 11).

In the much-debated male iconography we can quote Laderch and Loizeau (Laderch and Loizeau 2008: 18):

L'icôgraphie du personnage masculin nous amène à penser qu'il s'agit d'un ascète, ainsi que l'avait déjà suggéré Françoise L'Hernault. Le fait qu'il soit dédoublé sur certaines images pourrait indiquer que l'on a affaire à un membre d'un ordre religieux, peut-être même à un guru divinisé car certains indices signalent une figure semi divine ou divine (comme les serpents qu'il porte en boucles d'oreilles à Kikkēri ou tout simplement la place qu'il occupe parmi les divinités sur les murs des temples). Nous ne pensons pas pouvoir y reconnaître un Kāpālika, car il n'a pas systématiquement le *kapāla* pour attribut. [...] Pourrait-il s'agir alors d'un Bhairava, catégorie d'ascètes décrits dans la littérature tamoule comme vêtus d'une veste ou d'une chemise noire, suivant l'enseignement des *yāmalatantra* et vénérant la déesse en lui faisant offrande de leurs têtes ? Ou encore d'un représentant des Mahāpāsūpata, que le Vāmanapurāna (xli, 16) présente comme des porteurs de trident (ou pique) et de disque (*cakrasūladhara*) et

comme adorant Bhairava sans le distinguer de Viṣṇu? Les Mahāpāsūpata sont parfois assimilés aux Kālāmukha, ordre qui eut une grande influence, au Karnataka en particulier, entre les XI et XII siècles. Nous constatons en tout cas que le personnage masculin est associé à des rites sanglants et apparaît en tant que dévot de la figure féminine au serpent et de déesses telles que Kālī-Bhairavī, Mahiṣāsūramardinī et la divinité viṣṇuite de Nuggihalli.

My assumption, supported by the several inscriptions found during the Hoysaḷa reign (see paragraph “Inscriptions”) is that the male representation belongs to the Kālāmukha order. Among the first epigraphic records of Kālāmukhas in the reign of Hoysaḷa we have EC V: Bl 117 at Kanakatte, dating back to 1136. Here the master Iśanaśakti-panḍita is mentioned as reference figure of *maṭha* of this important Kālāmukhas religious center:

Distinguished for yama (and the other usual ascetic virtues) was Iśanaśakti-panḍita dēva. Celebrated was his *maṭha*, and while he lived, famous in the world were the Kālāmukhar, and in that Parvvata-vali (or line) praised was Iśanaśakti-bratīndram.

According to Lorenzen (Lorenzen 1971: 225–26):

The inscriptions show that the Kālāmukhas were divided into at least two different *pariṣads* (“councils”): the Śakti-pariṣad and the Siṃha-pariṣad. The Śakti-pariṣad was further divided into at least two separate [...] (“traditions”): the Parvatāvali and the Bhujaṅgāvali, both of whose monastic centers were mostly located in northwestern Karnataka and adjoining districts.

In the important *maṭha* of Kaṇikaṭṭe, we read another name of *panḍita* appearing in the inscriptions (EC V: Ak 41, dating back to 1130), Kriyāśakti (the name which can also be found in later inscriptions of 1162 in EC V: Bl 176 and of 1191 in EC V: Kd 157). According to Lorenzen (Lorenzen 1971: 107) “the names Jñānaśakti and Kriyāśakti, which are frequently adopted by Kālāmukhas ascetics, are also technical terms for various mystic powers in Pāśūpatas texts”. The close correlation between Pāśūpatas and Kālāmukhas leads us to make a cultural and religious comparison with the Cālukya dynasty, which had reigned centuries before in Deccan and Northern Karnataka.

It is during the years of this dynasty that the *maṭhas of Kālāmukhas*, in the temple of Kedāreśvara in Baḷḷigāve, was built, which the Hoysaḷa also contributed to the funding of later on.

The studies of Radcliffe Bolon (Radcliffe Bolon 1997) highlight that the Cālukya of Badami had a local goddess as the dynastic *kuladevatā*, who was worshipped by the religious order of Pāśupatas. The scholar focused on the iconography and cult of the fertility goddess, who belonged to the huge container of Lajjā Gaurī,²² during the time of the reign of this dynasty. According to her, every Cālukyan site, except Badami and Pattadakal, has at least one major image of the goddess Lajjā Gaurī. She affirms that several of these temple sites are known to have been Pāśupata in dedication, where Lajjā Gaurī is carved in situ (Radcliffe Bolon 1997: 25).

In her research, Radcliffe Bolon focuses on the peculiar choice made during the years of Vinayāditya (681–96 A.D.) to introduce the cult of this *grāmadevatā* in the big Hindu pantheon in the temple of Kedāreśvara in Baḷḷigāve, officiated by the Kālāmukha order. According to the scholar:

The only hint of possible motivation of the renewal in this region of then ancient tradition of Lajjā Gaurī image is still worshiped by the Early Chaḷukyas is given by a stone inscription discovered at Balligamve, where an eight-century Lajjā Gaurī image is still worshiped by the side of the Kedāreśvara temple, recording that Early Chaḷukya King Vinayāditya imposed a tax on sonless couples (Bolon 1997: 32). [...] [This politico-religious motivation for readopting of this fertility goddess into the Hindu temple] may be evidence of a strategy in operation: the king, needing soldiers, may have found it necessary to provide his great temples with images of the popular village fertility deity Lajjā Gaurī image is still worshiped. (Radcliffe Bolon 1997: 69)

²² I am aware that when it comes to the discussion of “Lajjā Gaurī”, it must be noted that this name does not exist for a ‘uniform’ goddess and that we are relying purely on visual-iconographic material, which is vastly varied and which has just been subsumed under the auxiliary term “Lajjā Gaurī” in order to be able to tackle it.

The correlation between the fertility goddess²³ worshipped by the Cālukya and the religious order of Pāśupata/Kālāmukha seems to represent a cultural origin of what would happen centuries after the Hoysaḷa dynasty between the goddess Vāsantikā and the Kālāmukha religious order. However, in the Cālukya iconography, next to the goddess we do not find any portraits of her followers belonging to the religious cult devoted to her. We can only notice inscriptions that highlight their relationship. The reason why the Hoysaḷa chose to portray them, on the contrary, could be related to the foundation legend and to the intrinsic meaning of dynastic legitimation.

5.2. The second phase

After the first phase, in which the Kālāmukha follower is portrayed in small size next to the goddess, we now focus on the second phase of iconographic and religious transformation. With Narasiṃha, the Kālāmukha follower is sculpted individually and he acquires a divine status. By comparing artistic and epigraphic data, we notice that during the years of this king, and of his son Ballāḷa II, the inscriptions show that the mentioned *paṇḍita* belonged to the religious movement of Lakulas.²⁴

According to Lorenzen (Lorenzen 1971: 107) and Mishra (Mishra 1999: 136), many Kālāmukha teachers are identified with Lakulīśa and some inscriptions attest to the importance of Lakulīśa to the Kālāmukhas and, consequently, to the close relation between Kālāmukha and Pāśupatas. Following this statement, I assume that

²³ Kadambi (Kadambi 2011: 3) suggests that the Cālukyas incorporated local religious elements, included the goddess Lajjā Gaurī, in their worship and in doing so gained popular legitimacy to rule for an extended period of time.

²⁴ As highlighted by Choubey (Choubey 1997: 104), Flood (Flood 2000: 157) and Lorenzen (Lorenzen 1976: 25), the Kālāmukhas belong to the family of Lakulīśvara. The Hoysaḷa inscriptions of the kings Narasiṃha and Ballāḷa II with the names of the *paṇḍitas* relating them to the movement of the Lakulas are: EC V: Ak17, EC V: Ak 62, EC V: Hn 69, Lorenzen 1976: 139.

the sculptural representations of the male subject with a long robe and a stick, and surrounded by the small and similarly dressed figures and situated in big size in the divine pantheon (Fig. 11), represent the divinization of the teachers, probably the same ones mentioned in the inscriptions, in the form of Lakulīśa. From an iconographic comparison (Choubey 1997), as noted by Laderch and Loizeau (Laderch and Loizeau 2008: 18), certain details, such as the snakes adorning the ears of the subjects, seem to be an exact copy of those seen in the artifacts portraying Lakulīśa (see the temple of Brahmeśvara in Kikkēri—Fig. 14—and the statue of Lakulīśa from Deccan and kept in the Hermitage Museum).

According to Choubey, among the elements that distinguish the sculptural portrayal of Lakulīśa, there are the stick, the snakes, the beads (rosary) and a headdress that the author defines “*uṣṇīśa* as head-dress” (Choubey 1997: 117). From my iconographic analysis, it is clear that the stick has always been present since the early artifacts. The beads and the *uṣṇīśa* headdress started to appear during the reign of Ballāḷa II.²⁵

Why did this transformation take place?

The answer could be related to the religious change that took place during those years (namely during the reigns of Narasiṃha and Ballāḷa II)²⁶ and to the importance acquired by the figures of the Kālāmukha order in relation to the king. Alternatively, another possible explanation could be the dynastic reinforcement that took place during the reign of Ballāḷa II, and that clearly shows the correlation between the king and the trans-regional substrate.²⁷

²⁵ The *uṣṇīśa* headdress is present in an artifact of the temple of Keśava in Hāranhalli, while the beads appear on the arm of the male subject in the temple of Pataleśvara in Bēlūr.

²⁶ Basava lived during those years; he was responsible for a remarkable religious reform that led to the Śaiva movement of the Vīraśaiva (see Ishwaran 1983 and 1992).

²⁷ During the creation of the regional reign of Karnataka (among which are the Hoysāḷas), the religious substrate was mainly formed by

The male iconography represented with the club and the long coat traversed the boundaries of Karnataka and landed to Tamil Nadu in the form of Caṭṭainātar in the 16th century (Vellupilai 2013: 377).²⁸ This form of Śiva, hosted in the temple of Cīkāli was associated (by Ladrech 2002 and Vellupai 2013) with Lakulīsa, considered by some to be an *avatāra* of Śiva and regarded as a divine *guru* by Śaivites such as Pāśupatas and Kālāmukhas.²⁹ This information proposed by the last studies led me to analyze the evolution of this iconography as a process of transformation and coexistence of regional and cosmopolitan features.

6. Inscriptions³⁰

From the epigraphic studies I carried out, it is clear that the prevailing religious order during the dynasty of Hoysaḷas was the Kālāmukhas. According to Kasdorf (Kasdorf 2013: 208), during the reign of Ballāḷa II, Kālāmukhas seemed to be in close relation with the king.

the movements of Kālāmukhas and Pāśupatas. Apart from the inscriptions, we have knowledge of the close relation between the Cālūkyas and Pāśupatas as well as of the Kālāmukhas' support to the Kadamba dynasty.

²⁸ For this research see Vellupai 2003.

²⁹ “A rather unusual iconographic type in Indian sculpture, met with in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, shows the god Bhairava furnished with a big club held downwards. This attribute is more specifically associated with another form of Śiva, Lakulīsa, considered by some to be an *avatāra* of Śiva and regarded as a divine *guru* by Śaivites like Pāśupatas and Kālāmukhas. In Andhra Pradesh, where we find the earliest known images of Bhairava with the club, we can notice some iconographic confusion between Bhairava and Lakulīsa. In Tamil Nadu—where we hardly meet any Lakulīsa sculpture—, images of this club-handed Bhairava were carved from the Cola period onwards. A new iconographic form, called Caṭṭainātar, was then conceived in the Tamil land. Holding the club in one hand and displaying the teaching gesture with the other, it shows Bhairava as a god who, at one and the same time, punishes and teaches, who—just as Lakulīsa who holds his club to preach the Śaivite faith—is the guardian of *śivadharmā* and the divine *guru* showing men the path to salvation” (Ladrech 2002: 185).

³⁰ All the inscriptions hereby mentioned are carved in the Kannaḍa language. This data underlines once again the importance of the regional

As a matter of fact, the inscriptions confirm the presence of this religious order during the reign of Viṣṇuvardhana already, showing the names of the *paṇḍitas* and their patrilineal genealogy. The inscriptions that will be mentioned have been selected on the geographic data; as highlighted in the chapter “Road map of iconographies”, the royal power centers are the two capitals, Bēlūr and Haḷēbīḍ, and the area of Arasīkere and Kaṇikaṭṭe, as an outpost for territorial expansion towards the territories of the Cāḷukyas. The temporal segment of this selection is based on the years of Viṣṇuvardhana’s, Narasiṃha’s and Ballāḷa’s II reigns, i.e. the years of transformation of the artifacts examined.³¹

The first record, dating back to 1130 (EC V: Ak 41), is situated in Kaṇikaṭṭe, in the current district of Arasīkere. This first settlement of the Kālāmukhas was large. The center was probably Kaṇikaṭṭe, *maṭha* of the religious order, which spread to the surrounding areas during the reign of Ballāḷa II,³² and continued to do so during the reigns of Narasiṃha II³³ and Someśvara.³⁴ Kaṇikaṭṭe has various historic temples. The sacred area has a long history, as several inscriptions belonging to the period from the 10th to 12th century CE mention them (EC V: Ak 40–55). A local chieftain named Singarasa constructed a temple of Siṃhanātheśvara during 1130 CE and donated lands to a Kālāmukha priest to maintain it. From the inscriptions found in this area, one could assume that it was a very important place

elements during the sovereignty of the Hoysaḷas. See the article „Talking Stones: Royal Inscriptions in Medieval Karnataka” of Elena Mucciarelli in the same Volume. With my colleague, Dr. Mucciarelli, I started a joint research in 2011 and I would like to thank her for her suggestions and for her help and expertise in Old Kannada language.

³¹ During the years of the reign of Viṣṇuvardhana I have found three inscriptions dated 1130, 1136, 1139; during the reign of Narasiṃha I selected five inscriptions dated 1139, 1152, 1158, 1162, 1173; during the reign of Ballāḷa II I counted five inscriptions dated: 1173, 1177, 1183, 1185, 1189.

³² See the temple of Būcesvara in Koravaṅgala.

³³ See the temple of Keśava in Harnahalli and Arakere.

³⁴ See the temple of Lakṣmī Narasiṃha in Jāgavaḷ.

for the Kālāmukha order, which in 1227 included 120 priests devoted to the cult of god Jagateśvara (EC V: Ak 50) and which paid particular attention to the welcoming ascetics and food offerings. The epigraphic material is particularly interesting as it shows the importance acquired by this sacred area through the building of the temples and the related cult that was officiated by the Kālāmukhas.

Among the epigraphic records, there are four inscriptions with the names of the *paṇḍitas* belonging to this religious order and their genealogy. The first inscription, carved during the reign of Viṣṇuvardhana in 1130 (EC V: Ak 41), mentions Kriyāśakti; the second one was carved during the reign of Narasiṃha in 1152 and mentions Śivaśakti (EC V: Ak 52) and Jagateśvara *paṇḍita* in 1158 (EC V: Ak 42), and finally during the reign of Ballāḷa II in 1189 (EC V: Ak 48) Kalyāṇaśakti is mentioned. In these inscriptions it is possible to find *ācāryas* from the community of the Parvatāvali line of the Kālāmukha order, that held positions of power at a number of temples within Karnataka between the 11th and 13th centuries, many of which were located on the northern frontiers of the Hoysaḷa kingdom.

The same process happened in Haḷēbīḍ; here we find inscriptions from the reign of Viṣṇuvardhana to that of Ballāḷa II; they mention the names of *paṇḍitas* belonging to the order and praise them for their superior capabilities.

The first inscription dates back to 1136 (EC V: Bl 117), during the reign of Viṣṇuvardhana; the other two inscriptions were produced in 1173, during the reign of Narasiṃha (EC V: Bl 114; 118), and finally we have the EC V: Bl 119, dating back to 1185.

As already mentioned, during the 12th century Haḷēbīḍ was a great Kālāmukha religious center thanks to the support of Ballāḷa II and to the construction of the temple of Kedāreśvara, that was built in response to its earlier counterpart at Baḷḷigāve³⁵

³⁵ Baḷḷigāve had been a Kālāmukha center since the Cālukya dynasty of Badami. In this area, the Hoysaḷa inscriptions date back to 1162 (EC VII: Sk 102) and to 1193 (EC VII: Sk 105); they were carved during the reign of

(see the introduction of Rice EC V: xxxviii and Coelho 1950: 302). This choice highlights the religious phenomenon of the spatial transposition of divine forms and sacred buildings. It also shows the strategies of the local patrons in the creation of “replicas” (see Eck 1981 and Eck 2012). Specifically, not only did the choice of Ballāḷa II create a *roadmap* put in place in the celebrations of pilgrimages of the holy places dedicated to Kedāreśvara (see Lazzaretti 2010), it was directly connected to the important Himalayan *tīrtha* of Kedārnāth. This process, defined by Eck as “the geographical equivalent of sanskritization” (Eck 1981: 336), shows the need of referring to more familiar realities. In this perspective, the local transpositions would use the reference to recognized realities for authentication and to spread their reputation; in terms of royal status and power, this mechanism is synonymous with legitimation. We can claim that here things come full circle. At the height of his power, Vīra Ballāḷa on the one hand related with the transregional tradition by funding the temple dedicated to Kedāreśvara and, on the other one, he supported the religious order connected to the regional substrate of his origins.

The comparison of the epigraphic and artistic data would seem to confirm that the two areas of influence of the Kālāmukhas were the taluk of Araṣīkere (including Kanakatte) and the taluk of Bēlūr (including Haḷēbīḍ and Doḍḍagaḍḍavalli). The importance of these areas should be considered from the point of view of the iconographic and cultural evolution of this religious order. My assumption is that the first two settlements of the Kālāmukhas in the Hoysaḷa reign were Haḷēbīḍ (Bēlūr taluk) and Kaṇikaṭṭe (Araṣīkere taluk). The first one represented the royal power, together with Bēlūr (which was the capital during the reign of Viṣṇuvarḍhana), and the heart of the Hoysaḷa

Narasimha and Ballāḷa II. This information leads me to suppose that starting from Narasimha a religious and cultural change took place. It was related to the strong support of this religious order and to Ballāḷa II decision of building a replica of the temple of Kedāreśvara in the Hoysaḷa capital, right next to the royal palace.

dynasty. It is a limited area of a few kilometers with many temples, whose patrons were Viṣṇuvardhana (the Cennakeśava temple at Bēlūr), Narasiṃha (the temple of Hoysaleśvara in Haḷēbīḍ was finished thanks to him), and Ballāḷa II (the Kedāreśvara temple at Haḷēbīḍ).

The sculptural panel situated on the right and left sides of the main entrance of the Cennakeśava temple seems to validate this assumption. As a matter of fact, the *darbar* (Fig. 15) is represented here. At its center the king is holding a sword and is surrounded by the queen, soldiers, people that are paying homage to him and by priests. The priests are seated and are wearing long robes and a headdress, an iconographic copy of the previously analyzed subjects. The inclusion of this order in the public representation of the royal court may suggest a strong relationship between the king and the Kālāmukha priests. The epigraphic confirmation of this assumption is the use of the term *rājaguru* associated with the names of the Kālāmukha *paṇḍitas*. This epithet, connected to the names of the *paṇḍitas*, originated during the reign of Narasiṃha³⁶ and would carry on during the reign of Ballāḷa II³⁷ until Someśvara I.³⁸ In the EC VII: Sk 102 inscription we can read “washing the feet of *rājaguru* Vamaśakti dēva” or in the EC V: Ak 108 inscription “[...] in the presence of Rudraśakti the *rājaguru* of Dōrasamudra [Haḷēbīḍ]”. In other cases, such as in the EC V: Ar 81 inscription we read that the *rājaguru* had a considerable importance because he was the leader of many *maṭhas*. As claimed by Krishna Kumari, who analyzed the figure of *rājaguru* through the inscriptions dating back to the Kākāṭīya dynasty and created during the same years of the Hoysaḷa kingdom:

At the times, the kings were initiated into the worship of śaivite gods by their teachers, who gave them ‘śiva dīksha’. These śaivite teachers assumed the status as *rāja-guru* (royal preceptors) during the Kākāṭīya rule in Andhra and were responsible not only for developing their particular religious faiths and creeds, but also for various social and economic activities

³⁶ EC VII: Sk 102.

³⁷ EC V: Ar 81; EC VIII: Sk 105; EC VI: Kd 154.

³⁸ EC V: Ak 8, 11, 12, 13; EC VI: Kd 157.

in the country. The role of the *rāja-guru* in the economic redistribution of the temple resources, in the establishment of *maṭhas*, rest-house, institution of public utility and their religious leaning can be reconstructed through the evidence of the temple inscriptions. (Krishna Kumari 1990: 75)

These studies confirm the assumption that the Kālāmukhas' order had a key role in the royal court and, consequently, in the management of power and in the dynastic legitimacy.

7. Conclusions

The iconographic evolution of these artifacts leads me to address the artistic analysis on the focus of the social, religious and cultural context. These iconographies were created during the years of Viṣṇuvarḍhana, namely the period of dynastic expansion. This king, starting from year 1117, chose to implement a dynastic legitimacy process, which entailed the invention of the Hoysaḷa foundation legend as well as the use of temples and sculptures to celebrate the autochthonous origins of the family that were inserted in the pan-Indian context. We noted that the tutelary deity of the Hoysaḷa kings, Vāsantikā, and the *muni* with a long robe underwent different transformations; most importantly they were inserted in the Hindu divine pantheon. The interesting changing of the male subject reveals the reshape of religious base of the kingdom and the relative link between the kings and the chiefs of the Kālāmukhas' order.

In their long evolution, the described subjects never lose their main features: the goddess is always naked and the *muni* wears a long robe and holds a stick. Their peculiar traits, easily recognizable, most probably emanated a clear message: these artifacts were the will of the kings to manifest their regional origin, their religious choices and the development of their legitimation process. The analysis of this historical segment reveals how this coexistence mechanism of the relationship between cosmopolitan and regional intentions and forms is an intersection of different cultural traditions, religious and social functions that continually interlace one with another.

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