



SAPIENZA
UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA

Italian Institute of Oriental Studies

Ph.D. course in
Civilizations, Cultures and Societies of Asia and Africa
27th cycle

Hindu funerary stones.
A study of their iconography, function and variety
as from the context of South-Eastern Maharashtra



Ph.D. candidate
Letizia Trinco

Supervisor
Prof. Ciro Lo Muzio

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*La morte non è
nel non poter comunicare
ma nel non poter più essere compresi.*

[Death is not
about not being able to communicate,
it is rather about not being able to be understood anymore].

P.P. Pasolini, "Una disperata vitalità"

For Marcello, my father

and

For Teresa Schneider

Acknowledgments

Many people both in Italy and in India made this research possible.

To begin with, I am thankful to my home institution, the Italian Institute of Oriental Studies at Sapienza University of Rome, for granting me a three years Ph.D. scholarship, and to my supervisor, Prof. Ciro Lo Muzio, for his scientific suggestions and his friendly, tireless support during any stage of the research.

I am also grateful to Prof. Raffaele Torella and Prof. Bruno Lo Turco, who in different ways encouraged this work. I owe much to Ms. Antonella Fallerini, our department librarian, for her patience and efficiency in retrieving a number of irretrievable publications.

My bibliographical researches in Pune at the Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute took place under the auspices of the Chancellor, Dr. G.B. Deglurkar, and could be fruitful thanks to the precious help of officers and librarians, first and foremost Mr. Dalvi Datta.

Two other institutions kindly allowed me to access their libraries: the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, for which thing I thank Dr. Saroja Bhate, and the American Institute of Oriental Studies, where I could benefit from the generous cooperation of Mr. Anil Inamdar. I am grateful to Prof. Christian Novetzke for making this possible.

During my stay in Pune I also had the chance to attend a number of conferences and seminars held at the Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth, which were ultimately essential in manifold respects; therefore I am grateful to Dr. Manjiri Bhalerao, Dr. Saili Palande Datar and Dr. Ambarish Khare, the organizers of many of them, for always permitting me to join the audience.

I wish to express my gratitude also to Dr. A.P. Jamkhedkar, former Director of Archaeology and Museums, State of Maharashtra, for precious information pertaining to the objects of my fieldwork; and I am deeply grateful to Dr. Sanjay Patil, current Director of the same institution for granting me the access to the “Hero-stones museum” in Velapur. In this respect, I owe much also to the providential intermediation of one the officer of the Directorate in Mumbai, Mr. S. Hari, to Mr. N.S. Karchu, *pujārī* of the temple in Velapur who made my permission effective, and to Mr. Prakash, for having kindly assisted me during the time of my stay there, moreover bringing to my attention some further materials of interest.

As far as the materials I spotted in Pune are concerned, I am grateful to the officers of the Bharat Itihas Samshodak Mandal for allowing me to take pictures and measurements of those housed in the courtyard of the institute.

My fieldwork activity would not have ever been accomplished without two great travel and study companions, Dr. Rajashree Kshirsagar and Dr. Amol Bankar, whose support and deep knowledge of the areas I explored was essential to me. Their human and scholarly contribution nourished my research to a great extent. I thank Rajashree particularly for making me part of her family – hence I am grateful also to Gayatri and Vijay for welcoming me -, for sharing with me what she knew about the presence of

memorial stones in the area I was examining, and for her stoic resistance to the harshness of the “dry season” in Maharashtrian countryside. In the same way, I thank my friend Amol for sharing his considerable collection of data, for his erudite and thought-provoking hints – in the frame of this and future researches - and for generously including me in his study group, whom I had the pleasure to join in a number of archaeological surveys: among the others, I wish to thank Vibha Deepak Oke, Anita Agashe, Manisha Puranik, Parag Purandare (for his “Hanuman Jayanti”) and Kiran Kharade.

Of the many other people who – knowingly or not – positively influenced my research in Maharashtra, I would like to mention Dr. Vinaya Kshirsagar, and Dr. Kiran Kalamdani, whose help in a moment of technical difficulty was more decisive than he can imagine.

To the final redaction of this thesis contributed substantially my friend Alessandra Stefanelli: I owe to her the making of the maps, all the drawings - from the enhancement of the steles blank models I had created as operative tools for measurements, to the architectural reconstructions - the optimization of my pictures, the plates and cover layout.

A number of other friends supported me, each in his/her own peculiar way: among those in India I wish to thank Clinton and Freya, Priyanka and Rukshar with their parents, David, Sini and his family, Father Barnabe D’Souza, Father Solomon and all the Don Bosco institute in Andheri East, Mumbai.

Last but not least comes my family, my extended family: my parents Lidia and Marcello, my sister Irene and my aunt Carla for their unconditional support; my sister Gabriella, for Uendi e for sharing more than anyone else joys and pains of my work in progress; Fulvia for her unconditional everything since I know her; Minnie, Johnny, Ashu, Nitasha, Anusha, Desu, Samantha, Daniel and Gabri, and above all Teresa and Desmond Schneider, who opened the doors of their house to this stranger and gave her a home.

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Note on Transliteration

Sanskrit terms have been generally preferred to their counterparts in local vernaculars.

Diacritical marks have been employed on a selective basis. I have not used them for:

- geographical names (i.e. states, districts, cities, rivers, mountains, etc.)
- names of Indian languages or alphabets, and adjectives referring to Indian states (e.g. Marathi instead of Marāṭhi);
- names of tribes, castes (e.g. “Gavli” instead of “Gavḷī”)
- living people.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the present contribution is to throw light on a lesser explored facet of Hindu culture, that is to say the erection of funerary monuments.

The Hindu concern for death and afterlife is reflected in a highly elaborated set of rituals meant to guarantee to the deceased his correct transfer to the otherworldly dimension, but also to contain and ultimately dispel the pollution deriving to the living from the results of the most desecrating experience of human existence: death.

In India no less than in any other human society, death represents the break point *par excellence* in the life-long process of “construction” of the human being as such: death abruptly pulls the human existence out from the rule of Culture and leads it back to its origins, to the rule of Nature; death, in its essence, is an anti-poietic phenomenon,¹ threatening and temporarily frustrating the efforts pursued by the individual - and actually the whole society to whom he belongs - to exert a control over and domesticate the uncontrollability of natural facts.

Within the Hindu tradition, the transformation of the human being into a cultural entity occurs by means of sacraments, the *saṃskāras*,² which are performed from the earliest stages of the worldly existence – actually even preceding birth - and culminate into the so-called *antyeṣṭi*,³ the “last sacrifice,” the last ritual act connected to the earthly life of an individual to be performed at the time of his death, whose most apparent expression is the cremation of the body.⁴ Yet, the *antyeṣṭi* does not mark the end, since a wide range of other rituals are subsequently performed by the family of the deceased in order to accompany the departed soul from the liminal dimension of the immediate *post*

¹ Favole 2008: 35.

² Pandey 1969.

³ For a description of the phases of this sacrament, see Pandey 1969: 234-274; Filippi 2005.

⁴ Anthropological studies distinguish four basic attitudes of societies towards the treatment of the human remains after death, all aiming at exerting a sort of control over the most immediate and tangible consequence of death: the putrefaction of the corpse. Societies elaborated three basic strategies in this respect: occultation of the decomposition process, through burial rites; elusion, by means of cremation or forms of funerary cannibalism; acceleration, entailing the exposition of the corpse to weathering or animals; interruption of the decomposition process through the mummification of the corpse. The ritual most widespread in India encompass the most disruptive procedure. Favole 2008: 35.

mortem to the threshold of his otherworldly abode,⁵ the *pitrloka*, thus ensuring his transformation into an ancestor.

In the set of ritual actions connected to the Hindu domestication of death - a topic widely investigated by scholars - ⁶ the concern for the erection of funerary monuments seems to be virtually absent. Yet, archaeological and ethnographical investigations seem to tell a different story, and relate an actual proliferation of artefacts in the shape of either tombs or cenotaphs, which underestimation in the study of Hindu funerary customs can be certainly ascribed to their heterogeneity - hence to the difficulty of recognizing their funerary connotation - and to the objective paucity of references in written sources to the practices connected to their erection.

Living aside the research field pertaining to the treatment of the corpse,⁷ the present study focuses on a particular category of funerary monuments, namely those erected to celebrate - and ultimately worship - deceased who encountered out-of-ordinary deaths, those which in the still limited literature on the topic are commonly referred to as *hero-stones* and *satī-stones*.

Mostly neglected in the scholarly discourse, be it focused on philology, history of religion or archaeology, these materials, diffused by and large all over the Indian Subcontinent, can be actually evaluated as precious tools for a broader understanding of the Hindu culture, since by virtue of their iconographical and epigraphic apparatus they not only give account of the specific social, ecological and economic contexts which produced them, but also throw light on a series of beliefs in death and afterlife whose evaluation entails the necessity of an incursion into the anthropological field, to look closer at the inextricable continuum existing between Brahmanism and the so-called popular Hinduism.

The present research aims at offering a contribution to the subject - still affected by the lack of systematic fieldworks - moving from the analysis of formal features and

⁵ The belief in the existence of an ancestors' abode in the afterlife and the belief in the transmigration of the soul do coexist in Hindu religion without any apparent contradiction. For an overview on this issue, and the different traditions underlying these two afterlife conceptions, see Doniger O'Flaherty 1980.

⁶ Among the latest works see for instance Sayers 2013; Pellissero 2005; and again Filippi 2005.

⁷ A methodological distinction has to be introduced at this point: the practice favoured by a given society for the treatment of the human remains does not automatically qualify the attitude of the same society towards the creation or not of durable structures to perpetuate the memory of the deceased. The Indian context is paradigmatic in this respect, as the custom to disperse the post-cremation body remains does not exclude the existence of cenotaphs or other artefacts in honor of the deceased. In the context of the present research the focus will be kept on the material culture products, rather than on the remains treatment.

theoretical background of a selection of artefacts collected during two sessions of research in South-Eastern Maharashtra between 2013 and 2014.

Our evaluation of the materials, through which we hope to throw the basis for more in-depth researches in the same geographical area, providing at the same time with a methodological tool applicable to even less investigated regions of India, is organized in two sections. The first, a theoretical one, begins with a literary overview of the textual references concerning the issue of the funerary monuments *tout court* in Hinduism (chapter 1), and paves the way to what material culture studies could actually identify as reflections of those textual references, or as unexpected evidence (chapter 2).

The assessment of the iconographic characteristics of the materials (chapter 5 and 6), preceded by an outline of the ecological and religious background of the region analyzed (chapter 3), represents the core of this work, to which the second part is dedicated; here the attempt at defining all the epiphenomenal variations of forms and recipients we recorded pairs the quest for an interpretative frame on the ground of the common traits which still can be identified.

Particular attention has been dedicated to lexical issues, from which derives our proposal for a new consistent classification of the materials where we tried to overcome the interpretative inaccuracy deriving from the overlapping of two levels of analysis, that is to say the formal features of the artefact (stele, pillar, etc.), on one side, and the nature of its dedicatee (*satī*, hero, common ancestor, etc.), on the other, something frequently encountered in the few publications dedicated to the topic.

Our speculations are supported by a set of plates recording materials which are by and large still unpublished, being thus systematically recorded here for the first time.

HINDU FUNERARY MONUMENTS: WHAT TEXTS SAY

It will be seen that the disposal of the dead in ancient India was divided into four stages, viz. cremation, collecting of bones and depositing them underground in an urn, expiatory rites (called Śāntikarma) and the erection of a monument over the bones. The last was not necessarily done in every case.⁸

With these words P.V. Kane condenses the attitude of Vedic and Brahmanical normative texts in relation to the treatment of the corpse and its remains. Following a widespread pattern in Vedic prescriptions, the accomplishment of the four phases outlined by the Indian scholar does not indiscriminately apply to anyone, but only to those who had performed the *agnicayana* ritual, householders lacking of their Vedic fires and women being restricted from the last two steps, hence from the erection of a sepulchral monument.⁹

The discretionary nature of the final stage, its definition according to Sanskrit normative literature, and its possible reflections - or lack of reflections - in other literary sources will be outlined in the present section, the focus on these references being kept, when the case permits it, especially in the light of the very subject of the present research, that is to say memorials in the shape of stone slabs and pillars (see chapter 3.3, 4 and 5).

Details of the funerary monument are contained in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (XIII, 8, 1-4),¹⁰ where a basic recommendation underlies its erection: the rite may occur only long time after the person's death, only when any memory of the time, date, month and even year of his departure has fallen into oblivion.

The structure is basically a grave, for, as pointed out repeatedly in the texts quoted by Kane, it is raised over the burial spot of the post-cremation remains¹¹ collected in the

⁸ Kane 1953: 255.

⁹ *Ibid.*: 255.

¹⁰ For this and the following references we rely upon Kane 1953: 246-254 and the works by Patil 1982; Malamoud 1982; Pellisero 2005: 50-51.

¹¹ Kane 1953: 254, 255.

asthisamcayana ceremony; the area where it is raised is called *śmaśānāyatana*.¹² The construction has the shape of a mound and must be installed in a secluded place, where water flows from South to East, far away from pathways and open spaces, and not visible from the village. This mound should be separated from the earth level by means of a stone slab, and should be encircled by stones. It should be quadrangular, but the existence of circular mounds are acquainted as well by texts and ascribed to the Easterners' or *Asuras*' tradition.

The structure is called *loṣṭa-citti*, as for its construction layers of clods are employed (the expression meaning precisely "lying clods of earth"),¹³ or alternatively of baked bricks; some texts (*Rgveda* X, 18, 12-13) also associate to it pillars or posts, which are referred to as *sthūṇas*:¹⁴

O, Earth, have yourself up, do not crush it,
Be of easy approach and of easy resort to him and
O, Earth, cover him (*i.e.*, the dead person represented by the bones) first as a mother would cover her son with the fringe (of her garment).
Let the Earth heave itself up and remain firm,
Let the pillars in their thousands stand up supporting this house,
May these homes (*i.e.*, the clods of earth) drop his nourishment.
May they become here, for all days, the shelter for him (*i.e.*, the departed represented by the bones).

D.R. Patil, insisting on the wooden rather than stone nature of these vertical elements, comments on the passage as follows:¹⁵

The significance of the references to pillar or pillars as part of the sepulchral mound [...] is not very clear from the Vedic texts. Whether the pillars were mentioned in a poetic vocabulary for the house to shelter the mound or whether a pillar or pillars were erected is not clear; and the later Vedic *Sūtras* are also silent presumably because it was not a normal practice followed in later days.

Before introducing further reflections on the *sthūṇa*, something which is particularly relevant to us given its theoretical linkage with the steles and pillars analyzed in the present research, it is worth mentioning that the conclusive part of the

¹² Kane 1953: 253. The word derives from *śmaśāna*, which refers to either the cremation ground, where the body is destroyed, or to the place where the body remains are buried. For an in-depth analysis of the meanings of the term also in the light of its diachronic evolution, see Liberale 2005.

¹³ Patil 1982: 50.

¹⁴ The excerpt translation is taken from Patil 1982: 50. See also Kane 1953: 254.

¹⁵ Patil 1982: 51.

ritual for the erection is represented by the extraction of a clod from the mound which has to be installed on the ground halfway between the sepulchral place and the village; this intermediary stage is meant to symbolize the physical separation between the world of the living and that of the deceased, as the verses to be recited during the ceremony explicitly reveal (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* XIII, 8, 4, 4-12):¹⁶

Having fetched a clod from the boundary, he deposits it (midway) between (the grave and the village), with “This I put up as a bulwark for the living, lest another of them should go unto that thing; may they live for a hundred plentiful harvests, and shut out death from themselves by a mountain!”. He thus makes this a boundary between the Fathers and the living, so as not to commingle; and therefore, indeed, the living and the Fathers are not seen together here.

An echo of this barrier is found in *Rgveda* X, 18, 3-4, when a much earlier stage than that of the sepulchral ground erection is described, i.e. the leave of the relatives soon after the cremation is completed. In this context it is stated that the living on their way back must not turn or look back, they rather have to delete the traces of their steps and install a stone, symbol of an insuperable mountain, to divide them from the deceased and recite the following verses:¹⁷

Divided from the dead are these, the living: now be our calling on the Gods successful. We have gone forth for dancing and for laughter, to further times prolonging our existence.

Here I erect this rampart for the living; let none of these, none other, reach this limit. May they survive a hundred lengthened autumns, and may they bury Death beneath this mountain.

The two barriers, although belonging to two different ritual moments and differing in the constitutive material (clod the first, stone the second), share one and the same function, that is to say that of symbolic watershed between the worldly and the otherworldly spheres. As C. Malamoud extensively discusses, occurrences as such confirm that the funerary rituals as described in the normative foundations of Hinduism are not actually conceived to preserve the memory of the deceased, less than ever by means of a permanent monument:¹⁸

¹⁶ For the English translation I referred to Eggeling 1900. The passage corresponds to *Vājasaneyasaṃhita* 35, 15, and *Rgveda* X, 18, 4: see Malamoud 2007:107; Pellissero 2005: 51.

¹⁷ For this and the previous I refer to the translation by Griffith 1896: 428. See Patil 1982: 51 n. 15; Malamoud 2007: 97; Pellissero 2005: 51.

¹⁸ Malamoud 1982: 446.

[L]a suppression physique du cadaver s'accompagne de procédures qui aboutissent à l'abolition du souvenir de la personne du mort. Notons d'abord qu'après la dispersion des restes du défunt nul tombeau, bien sûr, mais aussi nul cénotaphe n'est mis en place qui pourrait prolonger son existence terrestre en lui réservant un morceau d'espace. [...]

Et dans cette culture qui affirme avec tant de netteté que la vie d'un homme est avant tout le somme de ses actes, il est remarquable que les cérémonies mortuaires ne comportent aucune récapitulation ni même aucune évocation de cette existence, maintenant qu'elle est achevée. [...]

Le reste est ici sans pertinence: les exploits ou les vertus de cet homme, les circonstances qui font qu'il s'agit de cette vie-là, et non d'une autre, rien de tout cela n'est énoncé dans quelque éloge funèbre, rien n'est consigné pour servir d'exemple ou de référence, rien n'est jugé mémorable, même lorsque le défunt est un personnage royal.

D.R. Patil shows to share the same idea when, after wondering whether “the wooden post or *sthūṇa*, erected within the *loṣṭa-citti* or sepulchral mound of Vedic texts, [bore] any link with the later stone memorials”, and whether ultimately “the stone replaced wood as it is a better and more durable material for the purpose[,]”¹⁹ he excludes any genetic connection between the two models recalling the prescription of erecting the Vedic mound long time after the departure, and concludes that “[a]s long as this concept held ground it was unlikely that stone was favoured for the *sthūṇa*, nor do the vedic or early Sanskrit texts signify *sthūṇa* as a memorial.”²⁰

No archaeological remains can currently confirm the shape of Vedic mounds, no more than the urgency of Vedic society for their erection (see chapter 2). As we will observe through other written sources and, most of all, through material artefacts, however, the picture sketched by C. Malamoud's is not applicable to Indian reality *tout court* – something that he himself clarifies when defining the scope of his statements.²¹

H. Bakker reports a series of references pertaining to the post-Vedic periods where a term seems to frequently recur with regards to monuments to dead: *eḍuka*, with

¹⁹ Patil 1982: 51.

²⁰ *Ibid.*: 52.

In the discussion of pillars and poles, it is worth noting that in the context of the *Atharvaveda Samhitā* the word *skambha*, pillar, recurs as one of the epithets of the Puruṣa [AS X, 7]. The word shares the same root of a number of terms used in Indian languages (see chapter 3.3.1) to refer to memorials to dead in the shape of pillars and steles. In the light of this, a connection between this particular aspect of the sacrificial being *par excellence*, the Puruṣa, and the words defining the historically attested memorial stones may be postulated. I am thankful to Prof. Y. Vassiliev (Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg, Russia) for kindly bringing to my attention this passage (for the English translation of which I relied upon Griffith 1895-1896) and for sharing his notes on the topic.

²¹ Malamoud 1982: 451 n. 1.

apparently connected variations *aiḍūka* and *eḷūka*.²² The word seems to be is apparently connected to the Buddhist milieu, where it indicates a “monument containing the ashes or bones of a dead person,”²³ but its diffusion outside the heterodox tradition is proved by some occurrence in texts like the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* (3, 84, 1-15), which in the scholar’s resume is described as follows:²⁴

A structure is built of three (receding) square platforms (*bhadrāpīṭha*), with steps on four sides. On the third platform a *liṅga* (*lingarūpa*) is erected, but one not decorated with lines (*rekḥā*, i.e. without the *brahmasūtra* and the *parśvasūtra*). In the middle of this *liṅga* an immovable square column (*yaṣṭi*) is fixed. On that thirteen *bhūmikās* are made. On top of this is an *āmalasāraka* and on that again a round column *yaṣṭi* is fixed. This column is decorated with a medallion (*candraka*). In between the *bhūmikās* and the *liṅga* (i.e. the square column?) the four *lokapālas* are situated. *Virūḍha*, *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*, *Viūpākṣa*, and *Kubera*, with lances (*śūla*), in their hands, wearing armour and ornaments. It is said that in this construction *Virūḍha* is Śakra, *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* is Yama, *Viūpākṣa* is Varuṇa and *Kubera* is Rājarāja. This *aiḍūka* is named ‘*Prajāhita*’; men who worship it obtain happiness and heaven after death.

A suggestion of the relative diffusion of this structure - Bakker argues – can be found in a passage of the *Mahābhārata* (3, 188), where the decadence of the *Kaliyuga* would get manifested precisely through the proliferation of sepulchral structures of this kind.²⁵

And this perverted world shall be upside down: at the dissolution of the yuga (people) will venerate charnel-houses (*eḍūkas*) and abandon the gods, (whereas) *śūdras* will not serve the brahmins. When the yuga expires, the earth shall no longer be decorated by temples, but marked by charnel-houses (*eḍūkas*): in the hermitages of the great seers, in the settlements of brahmins, in the dwelling of the gods, in hallowed places (*caitya*), and in abodes of the *Nāgas*. That is the sign that yuga has come to an end.

As a matter of fact, however, even in this case no archaeological remains confirm the actual existence of the element so far described, an attempt at finding correspondences having being thoroughly pursued by the same Dutch Indologist.²⁶

If we move to other sources, new elements enter our picture. A 4th - 5th centuries AD Sanskrit play attributed to Bhāsa, the *Pratimānāṭaka*,²⁷ for example, mentions a

²² Bakker 2007: 12-15, to which we refer the reader also for what concerns the three linguistic variations, which may convey the distinction between tomb and cenotaph.

²³ *Ibid.*: 14.

²⁴ *Ibid.*: 12.

²⁵ *Ibid.*: 15.

²⁶ *Ibid.*: 25-29; 35-42.

structure with a funerary connotation that has been variously defined – without its essence changing - as “royal sanctuary”, “ancestor shrine”, “ancestral chapel” according to the author. As far as our focus is concerned, we rely once again upon H. Bakker resume, although before him attention was drawn on the funerary dimension of the subject by G. Verardi, A. Grossato,²⁸ and by V. Dehejia²⁹ and P. Kaimal³⁰ for what concerns its implications in the discourse of portraiture in India.

The plot has the *Rāmāyaṇa* as a basis, and the passage of our interest is contained in the third act; Bharata, younger brother of Rama, is heading to Ayodhya after his exile. At a certain stage he³¹

pauses at a building, outside the city, tucked away amidst trees, on the walls of which sandal imprints of hands are found, of which the doors are decorated with floreal wreaths, and where he finds offerings (*bali*), evident from flowers and parched rice grains that are well arranged, and a floor strewn with sand. Little wonder that, when he also fails to see a *dhvaja* or other emblem of a god (*cinha*), Bharata is puzzled: could this be a ‘house of the gods’ (*devakula*)? Inside there are images, well made and true to life, which makes one believe that they are human beings. And this is prove to be. Bharata has come upon a statue gallery, *pratimāgrha*, in which images of the deceased kings of the Ikṣvāku race are set up; his uncertainty seems to indicate that it is an uncommon phenomenon. The keeper tells him that a brahmin should not salute or worship them as they do not represent gods (*daivata*), but kings (*kṣatriya*) who have passed away. When Bharata discovers an image of Daśaratha among them, he understands that his father has died.

The actual existence of structures matching a *pratimāgrha*, deputed to the commemoration and celebration of royal ancestors, will be discussed in the next chapter. In the context of the present literary overview, it has to be noted that Bakker is keen to consider the reference contained in the *Pratimānāṭaka* (dated, as we said, to the 4th – 5th centuries) as a reflection of a South Indian tradition. Moreover – he argues – “[t]he practice to install commemorative images of Śivabhaktas is prescribed in the relatively late South-Indian redaction of the *Ajitāgama* [...] which text tells us that this sort of images may be installed at holy places or in a Śiva temple where they should be worshipped.”³² This custom may have been inspired by the desire of achieving *sārūpya*,

²⁷ Kale 1930.

²⁸ Verardi, Grossato 1983: 230-232.

²⁹ Dehejia 1998: 41.

³⁰ Kaimal 1999: 71.

³¹ Bakker 2007: 16-17.

³² *Ibid.*: 17 n. 25, to which we refer the reader also for what concerns the sources.

a sort of formal identity with the Lord pursued by Śiva's devotees in the frame of the *bhakti* devotionism³³ (on the iconographic transposition of this attitude see here 5.3.2). Other secondary sources actually support this view: Nagaswamy refers in passing that³⁴

[t]he memorial [to the deceased] can be either in the form of a linga or in the form of a figure sculpture. If it is a linga it may face either eastern or western direction, but if it is a figure sculpture it should face south. A temple of the variety of *Sarvakāmaprada* or *Jayada* may be erected for the memorial. For erecting normal temples it is necessary to build a small miniature temple to perform the rites before erecting the main temple. Such miniature temples are called *bālālayas*. But for erecting memorial temples no *bālālayas* should be constructed.

Thus the category of memorial temples enters as a further piece of our puzzle, a type of worship place with which archaeologists seem to be more familiar than philologists. The South Indian tradition, as it can be inferred from the previous observations, represents a precious source of information with regards to this less known facet of Hindu religion, full of potentialities as far as the old-debated issue of the mutual influences between Indo-Aryan culture and Dravidian culture is concerned. With the *Āgamas* to which Nagaswamy refers, indeed, it seems that the pollution concern deriving from death, which in the Vedic references takes the shape of a physical barrier to separate the world of the living from that of the deceased, does not prevent from erecting temples acting as sepulchral monuments and worship places at once.³⁵

Nonetheless, there is evidence of the fact the practice should not have been unknown in Central or Northern India either. In 1968 an article published in Gujarati and Sanskrit by P.O. Sompura and M. Dhaky³⁶ was paving the way to a broader understanding of the memorial monuments phenomenon through the discussion of a manuscript dealing with technical prescriptions for the construction of *svargārohaṇa prāsādas* (funerary temples aiming at procuring religious merit to both the deceased and the person sponsoring the work) retrieved by the two authors. This article, which has

³³ According to the periodization proposed by K. Zvelebil, it is from the 7th century onwards that *bhakti* would have informed Tamil culture. See Zvelebil 1992: 16.

³⁴ Nagaswamy 1974: 103-104. Unfortunately the author does not provide with detailed bibliographical references, although it is clear from the context of the short essay that he is relying upon Agamic texts

³⁵ The study of the Agamic materials, which I did not have the chance to access in the frame of the present research, represents one of the possible lines of development of the subject.

³⁶ Sompura, Dhaky 1968.

been recently translated and published in English by N. Chanchani and D. Patel,³⁷ deals with the *Vāstuvidyā*, “a medieval Western Indian text of the Māru-Gurjara tradition of architecture and iconography. This text was lost until the late 1960s when Sompura and Dhaky attempted to reconstruct it”, explain the translators.³⁸ The fragments recovered by the two scholars were part of an original, now lost, *Siddhārthapṛcchā*.³⁹

The structure is supposed to be raised right on the buried chamber with the remains of the deceased,⁴⁰ which makes of it a tomb rather than a cenotaph. The text presents three models of temple, which are described in a dialogic frame by Viśvakarman. In the scope of our review, it will be sufficient reporting the first of them:⁴¹

I shall now explain how one can ascend to the highest by merely understanding the good and the bad. The son should praise deceased relatives such as the father, mother, brother and maternal grandfather. Prior to the construction of the Svargārohaṇa Prāsāda, however, a ceremony in which all astrological issues are raised and considered must be held. Then, divide the area into an eight-by-eight square. Set aside two parts for the corners and four parts for the central offset of the sanctum. An icon ought to be installed within the sanctum, and a metal platform should be built over the remains of the deceased. Make two portals: one facing east and the other west. A pillared hall should be built on the storey above the sanctum. Its offsets should have a railing motif and a screen. Then build a Northern Indian tower type superstructure above a platform resting on flat roof of this pillared hall. Thereafter, in front of the sanctum, on the ground floor make a bench to sit on and a pillared hall. This hall should be aligned to the central offset on the ground floor. In this hall there should be depictions of semi-divine beings in different emotions. The superstructure of this pillared hall should take the form of a complex pyramidal roof surmounted by a fluted member and should be decorated with depictions of earthly heroes, trees, lions, spiritual adepts, nature spirits, semi-divine beings and pale trunks of elephants. It would be fitting to follow the above mentioned instructions. Finally, the architect should remember not to modify the edifice in a way that would diminish its sanctity.

The last series of references alluding to the practice of erecting memorial structures in honor of deceased takes us once again to South India, and it is actually the most pertaining to our research: these sources, indeed, unambiguously give account of the typology of monuments we will analyze in detail in the next chapters, the so-called hero-stones.

³⁷ Sompura, Dhaky 2010 [1968]. I am thankful to Dr. A. Bankar for sharing this reference with me.

³⁸ Sompura, Dhaky 2010 [1968]: 84 n. 1.

³⁹ *Ibid.*: 81.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*: 81.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*: 83.

Ancient Tamil literature, in both its immense poetic corpus and the so-called grammar *Tolkāppiyam*,⁴² repeatedly refers to the existence of *naṭukals* (literally, “planted stones”) installed upon the fall of a hero to commemorate his deeds – usually dealing with cattle-stealing, as we learn from the inscriptions⁴³ and the iconography – and ultimately to worship him. G. L. Hart’s collection of themes of Tamil poetry and K. Rajan’s review of South Indian artefacts offer a number of excerpts containing allusions to these structures which qualify their social and religious dimension, if not with a realistic intent at least in a poetical perspective. On the ground of references contained in three different anthologies, *Puṇanāṇūru*, *Akanāṇūru* and *Aiṅkuṇūru*,⁴⁴ Hart summarizes the phenomenon as follows:⁴⁵

The spirit of the dead person was thought actually to reside in the stone, for again and again it is said that a man has become a memorial stone (Puṇ. 221, 264, 265). These stones were set up by roads, sometimes under pandals roofed with cloth (Puṇ. 260). Garlands were put on them (Puṇ. 264), and invariably they were decorated with peacock feathers (Puṇ. 232, 329; Ak. 35). The name and the deeds of the man memorialized were often inscribed in the stone (Ak. 131, 179; Aiṅ. 352). The spear and shield of the dead man were placed beside it, and, since Ak. 365 describes how elephants mistake one for a real soldier, it may have been made in the likeness of a dead man. The stone is always said to have a god in it: “To honor the god in the memorial stone, play the *tuṭi* drum, and give it a lamb sacrifice with rice and toddy” (Ak. 35).

About the ritual actions performed in the presence of the *naṭukal*, the scholar argues that⁴⁶

[t]he nature of the forces inhabiting the stones is suggested by the fact that a man was supposed to bathe and burn incense after worshipping a *naṭukal* (Puṇ. 329), and that one of those who worshipped the *naṭukal* was a player of the *tuti* drum, a man of low caste whose office was to help control dangerous forces, especially those surrounding death (Ak. 35).

⁴² The *Tolkāppiyam* is said to belong to the earliest stage of Tamil literature, whose periodization, coinciding with what is improperly called *Caṅkam* age (on the misuse of the term see 1968: 1-3), is largely debated. It is said to cover the pre-Pallava period, starting from about the 2nd century BC according to some (Zvelebil 1992); others ascribe it to a much later epoch, approximately the 8th – 9th centuries AD (Tieken 2003).

⁴³ For an up-to-date analysis of the epigraphic dimension of Tamil memorial stones, see Murugaiyan 2004.

⁴⁴ The first belongs to the corpus of *puṇam* works, that is to say poetic compositions focused on man’s actions in society, i.e. outside the family; the other two pertain instead to the *akam* category, including poems dealing with a more intimate sphere such as love. *Puṇam* and *akam* are the classical categories according to which Tamil poems are classified. See Ramanujan 1985: 231-296.

⁴⁵ Hart 1975: 25-26.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*: 42-43.

The erection of the *naṭukal* itself seems to be described with the tones of a codified religious ceremony⁴⁷ in the *Tolkāppiyam*, where six stages are enumerated:⁴⁸

- examining and choosing the hero stone (*kāṭci*);
- taking possession of the stone (*kalkōl*);
- ceremonially bathing the chosen stone (*nīrppaṭai*);
- erecting the stone in the proper place (*naṭutal*);
- constructing temple around the stone (*cīrttakū marapiṇ perumpaṭai*);
- praising and worshipping the hero stone (*vālttu*).

This passage would reflect the attitude towards certain categories of dead, at least as it is shown in the poetical conception of heroism theorized by the grammar. By virtue of his heroism, the hero undergoes a process of apotheosis, his memorial stone ultimately becoming a cult object; he is identified with the guardian deity of the village and of the community for whom he sacrificed his life.

For the sake of completeness, it is worth reporting a reading of these six phases as offered by K. Rajan, a supporter of the hypothesis of the historical continuity between megalithic culture and memorial stones age. His interpretation is based on the results of archaeological explorations of megalithic sites combined with the ethnographic records from communities where the erection of megaliths is a still alive tradition, from which he concludes that:

[K]atchi probably meant the lying in state for sometime, as is even now the practice, so that all the relatives and friends can assemble and do the ceremonial honour and wailing. *Kalkol*, likewise, probably meant the exposure of the body to the elements, as would be the case in excarnation; such pot-excarnation or partial burial is clearly indicated by the many megalithic monuments excavated and studied. *Kal*, according to the contemporary *Paripadal* (3.88) meant ‘the five elements’; the compound *kalkol* in that case meaning “allowing the elements to take possession” and do their work of in other words to become one with the elements – *iyarkai eydūtāl*. *Nirpadai* would then refer to the ceremonial washing or purification of the few picked bones left after exposure at a much later date for its ceremonial burial, and

⁴⁷ Kailasapathy 1968: 235; Vanamamalai 1975: 41-42; Rajan 2000: 30-32; Murugaiyan 2004: 569. Dr. E. Francis (CNRS, Centre d'étude de l'Inde et de l'Asie du Sud, Paris, France) is keen to soften this interpretation by stressing in a certain way the idealistic dimension of the *Tolkāppiyam*, which realistic intent must have been subordinated to the poetic rendering of the heroic theme. (Personal communication).

⁴⁸ *Tolkāppiyam*, *Poruḷatikāram* 63 (*Purattiṇaiyiyal* 4), 19-20. I referred to the edition by Sundramathy, Manuel 2010. I am thankful to Dr. E. Francis for providing me with this critical edition of the work.

nadukal, the erection of the stone (menhir) over it. This was to be followed by *perumpadaï*, the great offering, perhaps with heaps of cooked rice (*perum-coru* in other contexts) and other food, and by *valttutal*-praise or adoration, perhaps with song (and dance).

The problem with this interpretation lies first and foremost in its theoretical premises, which entail a genetic connection between two cultural phenomena without solid scientific basis being provided. The author, indeed, takes the different poetic descriptions of memorial stones contained in Tamil literature as historical documents, that is to say as witnesses of an evolutive process which would have entailed the transformation of Iron age megaliths into the memorial stones of the historic period. In doing so, he attributes a degree of stability to the chronology of both Tamil literature and material culture products which actually are far from having been safely dated.

Chronological concerns as such, as well as the awareness of the historical, cultural and religious peculiarity of each Indian region, lead us to be cautious, for instance, in assimilating the procedure for the stone erection and the devotional attitude so neatly described in Tamil texts to materials recovered elsewhere in the country.

HINDU FUNERARY MONUMENTS: WHAT ARCHAEOLOGY SHOWS

Disguised and intermingled with a multitude of cult objects and worship places, the abundance of Hindu funerary structures that archaeological and ethnographic investigations reveal conflicts with the opaque and incomplete picture provided by texts, despite any attempts at integrating sources from different milieus, such as Sanskrit and *Sangam* literature, be they normative, epigraphic or poetic.

Although for some of the structures we are going to illustrate below correspondences or echoes can be found in the textual references we reviewed in the previous chapter, still endures the impression of a fragmentary portray of the Hindu concern for the erection of *semata* or cenotaphs as from written sources, this fragmentation mainly deriving from the texts by and large skating over the actual proliferation of funerary memorials in their non-architectural variants.

Such a discontinuous picture appears even more striking in the light of the pervasive inclination of Hindu religion at regulating any minute aspect and circumstance of human existence, where death does not certainly occupies a marginal position, as the elaborate series of rituals related to the corpse treatment demonstrates (see Introduction).

A reflection of the ethnic, cultural and religious overlays informing Hinduism, funerary typologies can be sorted into two categories: architectural and non-architectural. While the first group basically includes temples, shrines, *chattrīs*, the second encompasses a class of materials that scholarly literature defines as “memorial stones”, i.e. *samādhis*,⁴⁹ steles, pillars, *ṇṇḍāvanas*, *thaḍes* / *theśas*, unhewn stones.

What follows is a typological review of the former group, an analysis of the latter - wherein the materials at the core of the present research are included, that is to say hero- and *satī*-stones - being illustrated in the next chapters.

A couple of methodological choices have to be stressed with regards to our classification: the present section will explore also some evidence which cannot be

⁴⁹ Actually *samadhīs* are recorded as well in the shape of small architectural structures. For the sake of simplicity we will assimilate this case to that of the shrines.

technically labelled as “architectural”, but which attribution to the class of memorial stones *stricto sensu* would be equally inconvenient, i.e. the megaliths. These elements should actually form a category on their own, for any funerary-monuments-oriented classification encompassing them results unsatisfactory due to the uncertainties of their chronology and cultural-religious affiliations. Beyond this, for the sake of completeness, mention to supposed burial mounds of Vedic period will be made, although, in the lack of material remains qualified as such, their attribution to the architectural series is no less arbitrary.

MEGALITHS – Megalithic structures are recorded in both Northern and Southern India, their concentration being particularly remarkable in today’s Kashmir, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. As A. Ghosh points out,⁵⁰ “[w]hat applies to megaliths of peninsular India does not necessarily apply to the megaliths of n. India and Pakistan, where they are not largely associated with an homogenous group of pottery nor metallic objects, modes of disposal of the dead and sepulchral monuments.” In turn, black-and-red ware and iron implements are frequently recorded in the other regions, two parameters which are often used as distinctive markers for the identification of a lithic memorial as a megalith.

In the vast majority of cases, they mark collective burials containing the remains of post-exposition or post-cremation practices, primary depositions being comparatively rarer. The spots of their erection range from cultivated fields to marginal areas often in the proximity of water reserves. As to their formal features, a basic distinction may be introduced between Northern and Southern specimens, never forgetting that “[i]n India we are not in the position to present anything like megalithic chronology even in loose chronological order, as has been done especially in Northern Europe [...]”.⁵¹ Following K.N. Dikshit classification,⁵² South Indian typologies can be defined as cists, dolmens, menhirs, with underground or half-underground and surface chambers; unique variants are recorded in Kerala, where monoliths with cap-like and “umbrella” coverings are widespread (*kudakallu* and *topikallu*).⁵³ Northern model encompass stone-circles, dolmens and menhirs.

⁵⁰ Ghosh 1989, 1: 115.

⁵¹ Dikshit 1969: 3.

⁵² *Ibid.*: 3-9. The scholar proposes a classification based on that contained in Krishnaswami 1949, introducing some modifications to it.

⁵³ For a recent reappraisal of Southern Indian megaliths, see Sudyka 2010.

Chronology of Indian megalithic cultures, for which a polygenetic origin is currently favored by scholars, with the overlapping of autochthonous and imported elements,⁵⁴ is largely based on ¹⁴C analysis and defines the peak of the phenomenon in a time span included between 600 BC and 100 AD.⁵⁵ As it will be noticed, this chronological frame overlaps with that currently ascribed to the stone slabs and pillars object of the present research (the earliest examples apparently dated to the 4th -3rd centuries BC, see 3.4), something which leads some scholars to see a genetic connection between the two phenomena in the shape of an evolutionary process, to which *Caṅkam* literature would bear witness.⁵⁶ Beyond the chronological instability characterizing each of the terms of this connection, however, it is worth highlighting that “[l]ittle attention has been paid to excavate habitation-sites, so as to know how the megalithic folk lived and what was the organization of the village [...]”⁵⁷

SUPPOSED TRACES OF VEDIC MOUNDS – The Vedic concern for the erection of memorials to dead, as we observed in the previous chapter, should theoretically result in the recovery of funerary mounds. Archaeological remains in this respect, however, are extremely volatile, so that one is led to wonder with R.L. Mishra:⁵⁸

If the practice of raising mounds or structures was preponderant, where did all of them go? Why there is no trace of them? Many places of ancient time have been excavated but except Loria-Nandangarh nowhere remains of these ancient structures have come to light. The Buddhist stupas have been unearthed from some places but no vedic stupa or mound have come to light so far (except Nandangarh and Loria).

It should be noted that the example quoted by the Indian archaeologist - the site of Lauriya-Nandangarh in Bihar, excavated at the beginning of the 20th century -⁵⁹ is ultimately proved to have no connections with Vedic mounds,⁶⁰ thus Vedic materials, as a matter of fact, keep on escaping from the archaeological investigation.

⁵⁴ Dikshit 1969: 6.

⁵⁵ Ghosh 1989, 1: 111. For an accurate periodization see McIntosh 1985.

⁵⁶ See for instance Rajan 2000: 25-30. On the issues concerning the chronology of Tamil literature, see our observations in chapter 1.

⁵⁷ Dikshit 1969: 11.

⁵⁸ Mishra 1991: 46.

⁵⁹ For references to the studies carried out between 1905 and Thirties we refer the reader to Bakker 2007: 18 n. 28-30.

⁶⁰ See Ghosh 1989, 1: 254, quot. in Bakker 2007: 18.

Inferences on the actual diffusion of mound structures even long after the end of the Vedic period were stressed by De Marco on the ground of iconographic details on Buddhist reliefs, but, once again, no confirmations derive from archaeology.⁶¹

As a general explanation to the lack of material data, scholars⁶² refer to the prevalence ultimately occurred of cremation over burial practices, which favors the dispersion of the body remains;⁶³ although this should have played a role, we believe that the corpse treatment choice might have exerted influence more on the lack of standardized and conventional forms of memorials, rather than in their existence *tout court*, if we consider the records we will analyze in the next chapter.

TEMPLES – Worship places to which an undeniable funerary connotation can be ascribed are known to the scholarly discourse. Their existence, together with the discovery of a text like the surviving chapter of the lost *Siddhārthapṛcchā* (see here 1.1), prove the vitality of the practice despite the scanty academic studies so far dedicated to them.

Regardless of the actual observations of the construction rules explicated in the above mentioned Sanskrit work, Cōḷa temples erected between the 10th and the 11th centuries match the definition of *svargārohaṇa prāsādas* (literally, “temples for ascending to heaven”, that is to say built to help the deceased in his/her afterlife journey)⁶⁴ contained in the same text. At least three examples as such, named in Tamil *paḷlipaṭai* (apparently from the verb *paḷlip-paṭuttu*, “to inter the remains of a venerated person”),⁶⁵ are known thanks to their dedicatory inscriptions: the Ādityeśvara temple built by emperor Parantakā I (907-955) in honor of his deceased father, Āditya I;⁶⁶ the Arijakeśvara temple erected in 1014 by emperor RājāRājā I “as a memorial over the mortal remains of his paternal grandfather, Arinijaya [:]”⁶⁷ the Panchāvana Mahādeveśvara Paḷlipaṭa built in 1019 by the son of Rājā Rājā I, Rājendra I, to commemorate his deceased wife.⁶⁸

⁶¹ De Marco 1987. The conclusions of this study with regards to the correspondence between iconographic conventions and reality in the funerary scope have been extensively analyzed by Bakker: 2007: 29

⁶² Tiwari 1979: 23-24; Bakker 2007: 16, 35.

⁶³ Which thing occurred around the “close of the epic” age. Tiwari 1979: 24 quot. in Bakker 2007: 16.

⁶⁴ Sompura, Dhaky 2010 [1968].

⁶⁵ Kaimal 1996: 57.

⁶⁶ Sompura, Dhaky 2010 [1968]: 82, to which we refer the reader for further bibliography; Huntington 1985: 512.

⁶⁷ Sompura, Dhaky 2010 [1968]: 82.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*: 82.

P. Kaimal's assessments on the first of our three examples are particularly relevant to us, as she explicitly establishes a similitude between the temple and the materials at the core of our research, the so-called memorial stones; hence it is worth reporting the whole passage:⁶⁹

Temples associated with burials would have defied the tradition of the *āgamas*, Sanskrit manuals on ritual and art that advocate cremation and expressively forbid building over a burial site. Temples commemorating the death of a mighty warrior king would seem to have more in common with the much older practice of honoring fallen warriors by erecting hero-stones where these men fell in battle. As a monument dedicated to a deceased warrior, the Ādityeśvara temple conforms to this sense of *pallippattai*. The temple's location also evokes the hero-stones tradition: as Āditya died at Toṇḍaimanād, the temple may mark the precise site of his death. This pallipattai was, at any rate, a monument to lineage and heroism in battle.

A precursor of these examples would be, according to some,⁷⁰ the Dharmarāja Ratha of Mamallapuram (still in Tamil Nadu), dated to the 7th century. The ground for this hypothesis is provided by the presence of a sculptural portrait of the king Māmalla I on the Southern side of the building, the cardinal point virtually corresponding to Lord Yama, the god presiding over death.

Even more ancient occurrences are represented by the 5th century AD temples on the Ramagiri hill in Ramtek (Maharashtra), which H. Bakker demonstrates through epigraphic studies and other inferences to be conceived as dynastic memorial shrines.⁷¹

The Kevala-Narasimha temple, the first immediately recognized as such, was erected in honor of the Vākāṭaka queen Prabhāvātīguptā by her daughter and son, in order “to bestow the merit ensuing from the construction of the temple on her in the hereafter.”⁷²

We are keen to suggest that many other temples inexplicably oriented to the South should be further investigated in the light of evidence as such. In the lack of proper archaeological excavations, however, the true nature of these structures remains ambiguous, in our opinion. Although Bakker rightly highlights the gain of *punya* (religious merit), and of course the dynastic celebration, as ultimate motivations

⁶⁹ Kaimal 1996: 57.

⁷⁰ Huntington 1982: 310.

⁷¹ Bakker 1992; see also Bakker 2007: 19-20.

⁷² Bakker 1992: 11.

underlying their erection⁷³ - hence the nature of cenotaphs - it should be noted that, regardless of any religious concern for pollution as argued by Kaimal,⁷⁴ at least one of the above mentioned Cōḷa temples seems to stand over the actual burial spot of the royal deceased, something which ultimately makes of it a tomb.

From the social point of view, one cannot fail to notice the strict association of these religious-funerary buildings with the high social status of the deceased, which does not surprise given the conspicuous economic investment demanded by the erection of a temple. The royal connotation of the dedicatee of the structure, however, does not appear anymore as an exclusive prerogative if we take into consideration the much later examples of sacred complexes erected to commemorate, and ultimately worship in their divine transfiguration (see 3.3.2), the women who performed a self-immolation ritual as a consequence of their husbands departure, i.e. the *satīs*. Indirect confirmation to the practice of erecting temples to honor them come from occasional references in academic publications;⁷⁵ the still tangible proofs, however, come from the region of Rajasthan. J. Fisch documents some examples of this kind (like the Satī temples in the villages of Govindpura and Maonda Kalan, Sikar district, Rajasthan)⁷⁶ dating to the early 20th century; the most outstanding occurrence is however the Rānī Satī Māta temple of Jhunjhunu, a pan-regional pilgrimage center founded in 1917 for celebrating Nārāyaṇī, a *satī* who lived in the 13th or in the 16th century according to the legend.⁷⁷ Interestingly, in these cases the economic charge for the temple construction is devoid of the elitarian connotation deriving from the royal patronage we observed in the ancient contexts, the funds being raised among the community of devotees through trusts.⁷⁸

SHRINES – This category is genetically linked to the former, but it seems to be devoid of the same celebrative (as for the kings) or devotional (as for the *satīs*) implications, being rather the reflection on the funerary sphere of a specific religious view, the

⁷³ “[M]emorial’ in the Indian context should be conceived of as a building which is constructed primarily with the aim of transferring merit of the deceased”. Bakker 1992: 12. This is perfectly consistent with the meaning of *svargārohaṇa prasada*.

⁷⁴ K.V. Raman, who equally acknowledges the burial connotation of these structures, claims that “[t]his custom was disapproved and discarded later on, as clearly attested by the inscription of Ramanathankoil.” Raman 1974: 21-24. It should be noted however the erection of *paḷḷippaṭai* is not recorded only among the Cōḷa: apparently also the Pāṇṭyas conformed to this tradition. Murugaiyan 2004: 569.

⁷⁵ See for instance Thakur 1963: 155 for a record from Bihar; Dandekar 2009: 173 for a Maharashtrian example (this *satī* temple, however, has been converted into a worship place to other deities).

⁷⁶ Fisch 2006: 506-509.

⁷⁷ For an in-depth analysis of the religious, political and economic context of this temple see Hardgrove 1999. See also Fisch 2006: 286-287.

⁷⁸ On this aspect see Hardgrove 1999.

bhakti-mārga. In this respect, we believe this category to be strictly associated also to the non-architectural memorials we will analyze in the next chapters.

Textual references to the practice of memorial shrines erection, as we observed in the previous chapter, are contained in the *Āgamas*.

Materials for the setting of this category come from both archaeological and ethnographic surveys. Given the paucity but at the same time the thought-provoking value of the references I could collect on this much neglected facet of Hindu devotionism, I believe it is not out of place to quote two passages which draw a good outline of the structures I am referring to - structures which, I would like to argue, may be still encountered in their modern counterparts by anyone happening to visit rural shrines in today's India.

A first assessment on the topic is offered by Sontheimer, who relates a Maharashtrian context:⁷⁹

The worship of Śiva in the Deccan has frequently led to a large number of small temples accumulating near a *tīrhta*, on the banks of a river which has become more than a *smaśān* or burial and burning ground. A good example is the second capital of the Cālukyas of Badami, Pattadakal. Here, besides the imposing, well-studied larger temples on the banks of the river Malprabha, we find dozens of smaller shrines and the base of the portico, with a *liṅgam* in the middle of it [...]. M.S. Mate has referred to a similar accumulation of *liṅgam* shrines in Aihole. They are situated at the secluded spots near the river as in Pattadakal and, for instance, at Tigowa in Madhya Pradesh. He concludes that they were monuments to commemorate individuals. Again they cluster around a larger temple like the Saṅgameśvar, Virupakṣa and Pāpanātha temple in Pattadakal. One need not to go into inscriptions, but can refer to living practice to illustrate the process. An important pastoral god in Maharashtra, for instance, the god Bābīr [...] recently acquired two formidable Śiva (*liṅgam*) shrines behind his temple. The main devotee of this god caused these shrines to be built for his deceased father and for himself. If sufficient wealth were available [...] one would soon see more such shrines erected by the devotees of this god for the sake of acquiring *punya* and to ensure commemoration after death or the commemoration of the already deceased, or to assure one's vicinity with Śiva after death.

The desire to be near Śiva in the form of the *liṅgam* during and after life, *śivabhakti*, must have been a strong force behind the building of the *liṅgam* shrines.

As the iconography of hero- and *satī*-stones will show, the proximity to the Lord in the otherworldly dimension by means of sculptural representation of a *śivaliṅga* – an ubiquitous presence on our materials (see chapter 6) – must have been an overriding

⁷⁹ Sontheimer 2004 [1976]: 124.

motif in the Medieval time no less than in the contemporary age, as Sontheimer's records reveal to us.

Consistently with the German scholar, R. Nagaswamy, in his review of Agamic references to the installation of memorial buildings (see above chapter 1), reports:⁸⁰

In the 8th regnal year of Kampavarman a certain Rjaditya erected a memorial to his deceased father, where he was laid to rest. The inscription reads "in the place where his father was laid to rest, Rajaditya erected an Isvarālaya and *Atītagrha* (E.I VII, p. 122-123)." It is evident that the temple was erected in *smasāna*, in the cemetery. In the temple itself there were two parts one the main temple dedicated to Siva and the *Atītagrha* probably a temple bearing a figure sculpture of the dead enshrined as a secondary temple. This is a very striking example of such memorial temples, mentioned in the epigraph. The images of the Bhaktas, including that of the Saivaite Nayanmars and Vaishnavaites Alvars installed in temples and worshipped is probably after this tradition. A number of lingas to be seen in the enclosures of the temples, like the great temple of Tanjore, were probably the edifices installed in memory of those who were once intimately connected with the temple.

The first part of the Tamil scholar's speculations leads us to a further category of funerary monuments effectively recorded by archaeology: the so-called sanctuaries.

ROYAL SANCTUARIES (ANCESTRAL SHRINES) – Judging from the ambiguity of the few examples ascribable to this category, buildings as such must have not enjoyed great diffusion at least in Northern India. Known from textual references as *pratimāgrhas*, they are "galleries where the effigies of kings were installed."⁸¹

This typology was discussed in the frame of funerary monuments by H. Bakker⁸² as well as by G. Verardi and A. Grossato in the context of Indian royal portraiture, by P. Kaimal and V. Dehejia,⁸³ who both quote as first and foremost example the site of Naneghat, a cave shrine in Maharashtra dating back to the 1st century BC. Here, the remains of a series of life-size sculptures once resting on the rear wall are visible; the identity of the personages, whose only feet are now preserved, is clarified by the survived inscriptions, which indicate each and every of them as members of the Sātavāhana dynasty. Since nothing suggests that these statues were worshipped - which thing would rather qualify the structure as a temple for the dynastic cult – and since it appears that each sculpture was set after the death of the individual it portrayed,

⁸⁰ Nagaswamy 1974: 104.

⁸¹ Bakker 2007: 21.

⁸² *Ibid.*: 21-23.

⁸³ For bibliographical references on the last three authors, see our chapter 1, n. 28, 29, 30.

Naneghat cave seems to match the description of ancestral shrine contained in the *Pratimānāṭaka* of Bhāsa (4th century AD) that we described in the previous chapter .

A second more controversial example is reported again by Verardi and Grossato,⁸⁴ and by Bakker:⁸⁵ the site of Mat, near Mathura (Uttar Pradesh), where a series of statues of Kuṣāna kings were once installed.⁸⁶ Inscriptions associated with them define the building itself as a *devakula* (literally “house of gods”), a word that has undergone different interpretations, its sense shifting from that of a place where to worship deified kings, to that of a place where the kings performed their worshipping rituals. The Central-Asian legacy of this sanctuary, which however seem to postdate the Naneghat cave, whatever its true nature was, seems however undeniable due to its typological resemblance with another Kuṣāna temple in the site of Surkh Kotal (Afghanistan).⁸⁷

CHATTRĪS – Particularly numerous in Rajasthan (Udaipur, Jodhpur, for instance), these open-sided pavilions with engraved columns and dome-shaped coverings were erected to commemorate illustrious ancestors such as *mahārājas* and queens. They could be either empty or house *pādukās*, *śivaliṅgas*, stele memorials to warriors and *satīs*. Although isolated elements might be found, they are often recorded in clusters in the outskirts of cities or villages, in correspondence of former cremation grounds.

Chattrīs typology appears quite late, at least much later than the pillar and steles typologies with which they are often associated; in Deccan, for instance, they are recorded only from the Marāṭhā period.⁸⁸ Such the influence of the Islamic architecture on them, that P.O. Sompura and M. Dhaky define the *chattrīs* as “Hindu versions of Muslim tombs”.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Verardi, Grossato 1983.

⁸⁵ Bakker 2007: 22-23.

⁸⁶ For an extensive study on this site see Vogel 1930, who first excavated it; and also Rosenfield 1967.

⁸⁷ On the site of Surkh Kotal see Schlumberger, La Berre, Fussman 1983.

⁸⁸ Sontheimer 1982b: 281; Khare 1982: 254.

⁸⁹ Sompura, Dhaky 2010 [1968]: 82-83.

HINDU MEMORIAL STONES

3.1 History and state of the research

Scholarly attention to the category of memorial stones in India is a relatively recent phenomenon, whose overall achievements keep on being rather limited, if compared to the amount of research potentialities connected to this wide and heterogeneous class of materials.

The first accounts of the existence of funerary stone artefacts date back to the colonial period, namely the second half of the 19th century, when the compilation of monumental compendiums aiming at throwing light on Indian culture and heritage was undertaken: *Imperial Gazetteers of India*, *Epigraphia Indica* and the regional homologue *Epigraphia Carnatica*, followed by other periodical publications sponsored by the Archaeological Survey of India, like *Indian Archaeology – A review*, occasionally record the presence of memorial stones (especially in the shape of the two most outstanding varieties: hero-stones and *satī*-stones) as collateral annotations added to accurate descriptions of temple premises or inscriptions. The value of these artefacts as emerging from encyclopedic publications as such seems to be directly proportional to the amount of historical, purely event-based, data contained in their epigraphic apparatus, if any; but an analytic approach aimed to clarify their art-historical, religious and even anthropological dimensions seems quite rare, despite the high concentration of these materials in certain regions of the Subcontinent was being revealed by archaeological surveys like those carried out by L.P. Tessitori in Rajasthan, for instance.⁹⁰

For a century or so, then, these artefacts keep on standing as timeless, mute, underestimated witnesses of India's historical past and modern transformations, the former made of rise and death of dynastic powers, the latter marked by introduction and

⁹⁰ Tessitori's records on this topic date back to the beginning of the 20th century and are the fruit of his collaboration with Sir J. Marshall and the Archaeological Survey of India. Available in the shape of photographic plates of *pāliyas* and *govardhanas*, these records are currently part of the unpublished section of his extensive production, today preserved in the so-called "Archivio Peano", a private collection held by his descendant in a village near the city of Udine (Italy). For references see Freschi 1999: 197-219.

progressive extension of intensive farming on one side, and urbanization on the other, with even notable alteration of the ecological contexts were they had been originally installed.

Few scholarly voices between the Forties and the Fifties of the last century drew the attention to these materials highlighting their peculiar historical context (ship-wars in Kathiawar)⁹¹ or their unique iconographical features (as a consequence of their geographical provenance: Sri Lanka).⁹² Around the Seventies, however, a new trend seems to begin.

A first monography dating back to 1973, “*Vetra ne Khamba. Memorials to the dead*”, by E. Fisch and H. Shah, explores the variations of forms and meanings of funerary slabs among tribal populations of Gujarat on the ground of the still living practices, thus inspiring the use of an ethnographic approach to the topic.

In the same period, a seminar held in one of those areas of the Indian peninsula where evidence of funerary memorials had appeared to be particularly abundant, i.e. Tamil Nadu, opened the path, although just on a regional base, to a first comprehensive revaluation of their importance. The fruit of what can be considered as the first academic confrontation on the topic consists of a publication edited by R. Nagaswamy, *Seminar on hero-stones*, dating to 1974, till today a reference point in spite of its limitations deriving from the not immediate accessibility to the numerous contributions in Tamil language for both Indian and non-Indian non-Tamil speakers, and from subsequent discoveries, which would have eventually modified some of the interpretative patterns exposed at that time.

In 1975 a joint seminar organized by the Department of History and Archaeology of Karnataka University (India) and the Südasien Institut of the University of Heidelberg (Germany) moved some steps forwards not only by discussing the memorial stones phenomenon in Indian culture with an interregional approach, but also by bringing it to the attention of the international indological discourse. This event, coordinated by S. Settar and G.-D. Sontheimer, produced the till today most known publication on the topic, *Memorial Stones, a study of their origin, significance and variety*, which appeared seven years later, in 1982. Unlike the preceding monograph and – we must add – what would have been the future ones, an unparalleled virtue of this work, as suggested by the title itself, is the focus on the non-architectural class of

⁹¹ Hornell 1942.

⁹² Parnavitana 1959.

funerary materials as a whole, that is to say not only on the most artistically refined forms (like hero- and *satī*-stones), but also on other typologies which, due to esthetically rough connotation and to undeniable difficulties at extrapolating historic data from them, had been always disregarded as “subsidiary”.

Conceived as an introductory work, but representing *de facto* a path-breaking contribution, the first of its kind combining the textual approach to data collection in an archaeological and anthropological perspective, *Memorial stones* opened up a series of theoretical and methodological issues which - as we will point out - at thirty years distance have been only fragmentarily treated and partially solved, such as “the origin of the actual forms of commemoration, the socio-economic background of such institutions as *satī* and the hero cult, or the proper use of ethnographic analogies in interpretation.”⁹³

In the same decade, between 1975 and 1985, some light on the religious beliefs and practices associated with these memorials was thrown by N. Vanamamalai⁹⁴ and J. Blackburn,⁹⁵ who focused on death and deification of specific categories of dead by exploiting textual references from Southern Indian literature.

From the archaeological and art-historical side, analysis of small groups of specimens selected on the ground of their provenance or location (pieces belonging to a museum collection, for example),⁹⁶ or on the ground of their peculiar formal features (bearing alleged Western influences, for instance),⁹⁷ occasionally appear in sectorial publications.

Sontheimer’s interest in artefacts connected to the funerary sphere, however, dates long back and prosecutes far beyond the publication of *Memorial stones*.⁹⁸ A consistent part of his research activity being connected to oral tradition, *bhakti* and local cults, namely those of pastoral regions of Western Deccan,⁹⁹ and on the interaction between different forces within Hinduism,¹⁰⁰ he always kept in great consideration various forms

⁹³ Erdosy 1985: 557.

⁹⁴ Vanamamalai 1975.

⁹⁵ Blackburn 1978 e 1985.

⁹⁶ See for instance Shetti 1986: 304-310.

⁹⁷ Harle 1970.

⁹⁸ To be noted that one of his most precious contribution to the study of memorial stones in Western Deccan was originally published in 1976 (then reprinted in 2004 in a commemorative volume, see n. 102).

For complete references we refer the reader to the final bibliography. Yet, a few indications will be provided here below as well.

⁹⁹ See for instance Sontheimer 1989a and 1989b [1976]; Sontheimer 1997 [1979].

¹⁰⁰ See Sontheimer 2005 [1989]: 305-324.

of material culture expressions, combining the textual approach deriving from his knowledge of Sanskrit and regional vernaculars like Marathi, to the fieldwork attitude proper of the ethnographer.¹⁰¹ As a result, his contribution to the topic ranges from books and articles to photographic records, which flood was unfortunately interrupted by his premature departure in 1992. Two comprehensive miscellaneous publications of the early Two-thousand¹⁰² and an online database of the pictures powered by the University of Heidelberg¹⁰³ allow today to access all his written and visual production, thus providing a solid ground for further researches in the same area and an example of applied-methodology *tout court*.

In the following years, occasional, although accurate, descriptions of materials from both the iconographic and functional point of view occur from specific archaeological contexts: the studies by A. Verghese¹⁰⁴ offer an extensive review of the phenomenon, with particular reference to the *satī* typologies – in a defined cultural, religious and political context such as that of the Vijayanagara empire.

A new monography on the subject appears then in 2000: *South Indian Memorial Stones* by S. Rajan, which assembled in a comparative perspective a considerable amount of first-hand records by the author himself as well as the results of other scholars' field activities across Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. A neat prevalence of heroic types of memorials in all their varieties is noticed in this work, something certainly due to the nature of the findings, rather than to a theoretical disregard towards the so-called "subsidiary" materials. This work confirms once again the data collection as an essential prerequisite to any further theoretical investigations.

In the latest years a certain number of reports highlighted the existence of memorials stones even outside the borders of those regions which have always appeared associated with this material culture phenomenon more than others, that is to say Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu; records from Orissa¹⁰⁵ or West Bengal,¹⁰⁶ for instance, could be evaluated as signals of an extension of the scholarly discourse beyond the geographical limits where it has been

¹⁰¹ Which he theoretically justifies for instance in Sontheimer 1974.

¹⁰² Feldhaus, Malik, Brückner: 1997; Brückner, Feldhaus, Malik: 2004; Malik, Feldhaus, Brückner: 2005.

¹⁰³ It contains his photographic records from 1958 and 1992. The database, named "EXC Sontheimer", is available at <http://heidicon.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/pool/exc_sontheimer>. A series of documentaries on Sontheimer explorations of tribal communities were also produced and published by one of his collaborators, H. Stegmüller (videotapes still available for consultation at the Südasiensinstitut of the University of Heidelberg).

¹⁰⁴ Verghese 1998: 83-88 and 2001.

¹⁰⁵ See for instance Routray 2004.

¹⁰⁶ Sengupta 1999: 77-98.

confined so far. At the same time, in-depth fieldwork researches across pockets of memorial stones well-known to locals, such as Sindh¹⁰⁷ and Karnataka,¹⁰⁸ while confirming the typological and iconographic features of the artefacts emerged from previous studies, investigate for the first time the role of the devotional cults associated with them.

An issue so far never explored systematically by any author pertains to the transformative process which these materials inevitably undergo through times, changes involving either their location and their function. Thought-provoking hints in these regards may unexpectedly come from specimens even far away from the Indian national borders, as a recent study by C. Pieruccini illustrates.¹⁰⁹ The scholar happens indeed to analyze a unique piece currently belonging to the collection of the Museu Arqueológico do Carmo in Lisbon (Portugal) which was subjected to a remarkable change of use, or, to say it better, change of “recipient”: originally born as a memorial to celebrate a Medieval Hindu hero, it was eventually converted into a tombstone for a Portuguese Christian conqueror of the 16th century stationed in Goa, as iconographic interpolations declare. Beyond stressing the importance of the iconographic analysis as a source for information, investigations on single, intriguing pieces like this lead one to wonder, for instance, whether more cases as such might ever be discovered *in situ* (even in churches, as far as this specific context is concerned) and confirms the need for broadening systematic fieldwork activities.

The overview just outlined draws a sketch of the present status of the research still affected by a basic limit, that is to say the lack of an overall understanding of the phenomenon at pan-Indian level, something not challenged by the fragmentation of the field researches – actually the only way to supply to the paucity of data in many areas still untouched by scientific explorations – as much by the fragmentation of intents and of interpretative patterns. It should not be forgotten, indeed, that memorial structures like those under examination in the present work are actually common to different religious and cultural traditions in India: beyond Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, and the tribal world as a whole used to express their beliefs on death and afterlife through material culture products like those under examination here. A deeper awareness of a

¹⁰⁷ The area has been extensively explored by Z.A. Kalhor. See for instance Kalhor 2010 and 2015. A monography by the same author (*An Illustrated History of Memorial Stones of Tharparkar, Sindh*) has been announced as forthcoming.

¹⁰⁸ Mahesh (unpublished).

¹⁰⁹ Pieruccini 2009: 103-116.

trans-religious and trans-cultural convergence as such may offer chances for fruitful comparisons, if conducted with the due methodological cautions.

3.2 Definition of the materials

In the Indian context the umbrella name “memorial stones” is customarily used to refer to a heterogeneous group of non-architectural funerary structures erected to commemorate and, to different degrees, to pay devotion to the deceased to whom the structure themselves are dedicated. As a matter of fact, the expression is applied to any memorial with the above mentioned characteristics regardless of the deceased’s religious affiliation, so that, for instance, Jaina funerary pillars celebrating the devotee’s voluntary termination of life are included in the present definition as well. Hence, a first methodological assessment has to be introduced: the forthcoming observations exclusively pertain to materials ascribable to the Hindu milieu.¹¹⁰

From a theoretical point of view, the expression “memorial stones” seems to exclude altogether those artefacts which are made out of wood, although widely recorded and resembling in shape and/or function their stone cognates, at times even coexisting in the same context with them.¹¹¹ This incongruence is actually more apparent than real, for it comes into existence only when we move within the scope of English language definitions: apart from a couple of cases (and their regional variants) where the designation of the artefact effectively denotes its stone making, Indian languages address these funerary structures usually with words alluding to their shape or their meaning for the society, rather than to their constitutive material, thus overcoming any sort of distinction base on the material.

Before moving to a more detailed linguistic review, which will be mostly related to materials shaped in the form of steles and pillars, a proposal for a classification of the different typologies of artefacts will be presented below; hence, a second methodological reappraisal is needed.

¹¹⁰ The study of non-Hindu memorial stones is at an even earlier stage. As far as the Jaina context is concerned, where the most outstanding materials share the same “religious-heroism” connotation of a number of Hindu findings, being the dead celebrated as a consequence of practice of self-mortification, see: Settar, Korisetar 1982; Settar 1989; and the interesting pamphlet by Tukol 1976. For an overview of the Buddhist milieu, we refer the reader to Schopen 1997 and DeCaroli 2004 (esp. pp. 98-100).

¹¹¹ See for instance Fischer, Shah 1973. The authors identify three different types of funerary artefacts in the area object of their fieldwork: wooden figures, wooden memorial slabs and memorial stones. But these denominations ultimately fade when we observe the words used by locals to refer to them.

Two different criteria of analysis can be taken into consideration with regards to Hindu memorial stones as a whole, from which two different categorizations derive: the type of deceased to whom the stone is dedicated, and the type of structure of the stone. On the ground of the first parameter, Hindu memorial stones can be divided into two macro-groups: ancestor memorials and heroic memorials, the latter being distinguished from the former for celebrating what are perceived by the living community as extraordinary deaths following the performance of extra-ordinary deeds. According to the second parameter – the synthesis between my personal observations and all the secondary sources I referred to on this issue – at least five different categories of lithic, non-architectural memorials can be identified, as we already pointed out in chapter 2: *samādhis*, pillars, steles, *vr̥ndāvanas*, *thaḍes/theśas*, unhewn stones. Some of these have a pan-Indian diffusion, while others appear to be, at the present state of knowledge, as local expressions, which inclusion in the present research is justified by their relevance to the topic due to function or macro-areal diffusion.¹¹²

The distinction between these two varieties of classification, that is to say between *nature*¹¹³ and *form*, is essential for a proper understanding of the Hindu funerary items, since the relation between the two is not exclusive and biunivocal, a theoretical matter not sharply defined by previous studies. For instance, *satīs* – one of the heroic typologies of deceased analyzed in the present research – may be variously celebrated through steles and *vr̥ndāvanas* (not to mention the two architectural options observed in the former chapter, i.e. temples and *chattrīs*); likewise, the stele type is not uniquely bound to the commemoration of heroic individuals, for in its simplest version it is a widespread variety of ancestor memorials too.

Let us now describe the above mentioned five categories taking into consideration both the nature and the shape of the memorial. Annotations on a third aspect, the

¹¹² As we will see, this is the case of the *vr̥ndāvanas*, for example, widespread *satī*-memorials in Maharashtra. Other non-architectural typologies occasionally recorded in literature but apparently connected to micro-regional contexts, if not to specific communities, have been excluded from this review, as subjects for future fieldworks and researches. This is the case, for instance, of funerary “receptacles” documented by G.-D. Sontheimer among Dhargar tribal communities of Deccan: “A curious phenomenon are the ‘clay tents’ about 50 to 80 cm high, which can be found in Maharashtra and elsewhere. They are, at least in Maharashtra, historically connected with some pastoral community and have been compared to tents (‘Jurten’) from inner Asia. Often stones are placed inside, representing the ancestors.” Sontheimer 2004 [1976]: 124. In addition to these, “[e]ven more numerous here [in Huljanti, a village in Solapur district] are shrines about thirty centimeters high, open in front, with a flat stone as a roof. These are the ‘memorial stones’ of poorer *bhaktas*. These shrines, each of which contains a simple stone, resemble miniature megalithic graves.” Sontheimer 1989b [1976]: 138-139.

¹¹³ By the word ‘nature’ we refer here to the dedicatee of the memorial; the word ‘function’, which might have been used for the same purpose will be rather employed to refer to the role of the structure as a cenotaph (pure memorial) or tomb (marking the burial spot of ashes/corpse).

function (cenotaph or tomb) will be given, together with general coordinates related to the places of retrieval of the artefacts, although a paragraph will be specifically dedicated to this issues.

SAMĀDHI (pl. 6)– This typology is usually reserved to figures reputed illustrious by virtue of their social rank or spiritual qualities, like royal ancestors or saints. Commonly encountered in India from North to South, the *samādhi* may ultimately become a place of cult and a pilgrimage spot, with devotees performing rituals as if in the presence of a divinity.

As D.H. Khare points out,¹¹⁴ “[t]here is no rule to the form of the *samādhi*. In its simplest form it is a cylindrical stone buried in the ground facing northeast or south east of the circumambulatory path of a Śiva temple [...]. Sometimes, only a square or rectangular stone with *Śivaliṅga* carved or placed on it is installed on the cremation spot”; however, direct observations reveal that in a number of cases *pādukās*¹¹⁵ are found in the place of the God’s aniconic representation. As a further integration to Khare, it should be noted that these memorials may actually mark the place where the dead is buried, rather than the location of his ashes, the reason for this to be seen in the fact that the prescribed corpse treatment for holy personages like *saṃnyāsins* consists precisely of burial instead of cremation.¹¹⁶ In either case, the *samādhi* basically acts as a tomb. Today they can be observed either in big cities and rural areas, within temple premises, in the proximity of rivers, under trees.

It should be noted that *samadhīs* may also display an architectural shape, for which reason we assimilate them to the shrines (see chapter).

STELE – By this English term we refer to vertical slabs carved on one side with an iconographic and/or epigraphic apparatus providing with information on the death circumstances of the dedicatee of the memorial.

A stele may be dedicated either to simple ancestors or to deceased whose death is perceived as heroic, the visual layout and size of the memorial varying according to this, with a bigger dimension, carvings and inscriptions as distinctive features of memorials of the second group. In South-Eastern Maharashtra, for instance, the figured area is articulated in one or more panels, the first solution being usually preferred for ancestors and *satīs*, the second for male heroes. When dedicated to ancestors, steles usually

¹¹⁴ Khare 1982: 254.

¹¹⁵ On the meaning of *pādukās* see chapter 5.3.2.

¹¹⁶ About this practice and its theoretical explanation see Kane 1953: 229-231, and also Malamoud 2007: 118-121. See also ethnographic accounts: Crooke 1896, 1: 183-185; Dubois 1906: 530-540.

display a comparatively much smaller size (30, 40 cm ca., whereas the heroic specimens medium height is around 100 cm), and bear the representation of the deceased alone or with his spouse, in a simple standing pose, or alternatively on horseback in imitation of the pastoral and warrior divine couple Khaṇḍobā and Mhāḷsā (pl. 7).¹¹⁷ Notably, however, elsewhere in Maharashtra, as well as in Northern India (Gujarat and Rajasthan)¹¹⁸ and in some areas of the Deccan (especially Tamil Nadu),¹¹⁹ it is actually the single-panelled arrangement of the iconography to be encountered on a regular base on male hero-stones, with the dedicatee represented in a martial attitude, armed, standing or on horseback. In any case, a set of aniconic motifs usually crowns the composition (sun and moon, *svatiskas*).

The presence of inscriptions, which may convey even detailed information on the deceased's identity and date of death, actually varies from region to region: a rule in Gujarat, where epigraphs occur in the lowest portion of the carved surface, right below the representation of the deceased, and in Karnataka, where they are usually carved on the panels frame, inscriptions appear almost completely absent in Maharashtra, something which leaves rather puzzled given the substantial assonance of iconographic motifs with the Kannada specimens.

These elements may be either found isolated, in groups or embedded within open-sided pavilions (*chattrīs*), allegedly marking the spot where the deceased fell or where his/her post-cremation remains are buried. At times collected in museums, they can be found mostly in rural areas, in temple premises, or scattered along village roads.

PILLAR – This type of vertical structure carved in the round, similar to the stele in terms of iconographic content, is no less subjected to regional variations. In Rajasthan, for instance, where they appears to be particularly associated with warrior heroes, pillars are provided with a polygonal-based shaft topped by a miniature reproduction of a shrine; this element is usually refined on the four sides by carvings representing a series of divinities, namely Kṛṣṇa Govardhanadhara, Gaṇeśa and Sūrya, and the deceased himself in the act of worshipping the *śivaliṅga*.¹²⁰ Elsewhere, square-based pillars display on each side a multi-panelled arrangement of the figured area as on some varieties of steles described above, and may be dedicated either to individuals who died

¹¹⁷ The manifold variations of multi-panelled steles, the focus of the present research, will be explored separately in chapter 5.

¹¹⁸ See examples in Doshi 1982.

¹¹⁹ See for instance photographic records in Rajan 2004.

¹²⁰ Agrawala 1982.

as a consequence of heroic deeds, like in Maharashtra (see chapter 5), or to religious personages, queens, kings, as well as to artisans, soldiers, *senāpatis*, like in Andhra Pradesh.¹²¹

Like the steles, tradition holds the place of their erection to coincide with the dead falling spot or his/her remains burial spot. Their current location corresponds to that of the steles described above.

VṚNDĀVANA (pl. 6) – This designation refers to a parallelepiped structure of usually 100-150 cm ca. in height, topped by a basin-shaped cavity containing a plant of *tulasī* (holy basil),¹²² commonly raised in honor of *satīs*.

Its erection as a memorial to dead seems to be peculiar to Maharashtra, where however non-funerary *vṛndāvanas* do exist as well with the function of simple cult objects like in all other regions of India. The original connotation of the *vṛndāvana*, indeed, is that of an auspicious element usually located inside temple premises or house courtyards, where it is worshipped on a daily basis by married women whose husbands are still alive. The reason for this devotional practice has to be found in the presence of the *tulasī* plant, a symbol of “chastity and modesty”¹²³ for its connection to the namesake divinity Tulasī, considered to be one of the forms of Lakṣmī and therefore honored as an epitome of the marriage bound and of loyalty to one’s own husband to the cost of life, no less than a *satī*. It is precisely this set of beliefs that might have led to the association between the cult paid to pious wives performing auto-immolation and *vṛndāvana*-type of structures, at least in Maharashtra.¹²⁴

A further suggestion in this respect – yet to be adequately explored – comes from a couple of lexical “coincidences”. In the Braj region, where the holy basil plant seems to grow particularly abundant, Tulasī is worshipped as Vṛndā Devī.¹²⁵ Notably, one of the holiest cities for Lord Kṛṣṇa’s devotees is the city of Vrindavan, in today’s Uttar Pradesh, the place where – tradition holds - the god would have spent much of his childhood. Known also as Brindaban, British colonial sources¹²⁶ explain the etymology of this toponym by the union of ‘*bṛndā*’, i.e. holy basil, and ‘*ban*’, i.e. wood. Beyond the linguistic issue – which should be object of a proper assessment – it is relevant to

¹²¹ See Sarkar 1974 and 1982; Murthy 1982; Huntington 1985: 182.

¹²² *Ocinum tenuiflorum* or *ocinum sanctum* according to the scientific taxonomy. Pfeleiderer 1916: 107-108.

¹²³ Pfeleiderer 1916: 107.

¹²⁴ Kulkarni 1996: 177.

¹²⁵ See Eck 2012: 272.

¹²⁶ *Imperial Gazetteer of India* 1908, 9: 17-18.

the scope of our study what reported by some contemporary authors: the city of Vrindavan would be apparently addressed at times as ‘city of widows’, where no less than “8-10,000 widows now spend their time chanting mantras to Lord Krishna [...]”.¹²⁷

As A.R. Kulkarni points out, the funerary connotation of a *vr̥ndāvana* is usually clarified by epigraphic references, otherwise absent.¹²⁸ It is precisely from inscriptions that records of *vr̥ndāvanas* erected to commemorate male personages of high social rank or extraordinary spiritual qualities came to be known.¹²⁹

These artefacts are commonly believed as *semata* of the deceased’s cremation spot, but cases are known of *vr̥ndāvanas* erected elsewhere,¹³⁰ thus revealing their function of cenotaphs. They might be retrieved indeed not only in the proximity of water reserve, but also within temple premises.

THAḌE / THEŚĀ (pl. 8) – The Marathi word *thaḍe* and its Gujarati counterpart *theśā* designate a category of simple-structured memorials allegedly erected in honor of ancestors, although exceptions commemorating some sorts of heroic death are recorded too (see below).

No more than one meter in height, these artefacts consists of stone blocks shaped as parallelepipeds or cubes variously crowned by flat or dome-like tops. Their sides may be alternatively rough-cut or polished and carved with geometrical motifs or anthropomorphic figures representing the deceased, usually in the presence of the spouse, at least in Maharashtra. It is the observation of a case as the last that must have led some authors to tentatively recognize these specimens as *satī* memorials.¹³¹ It should be noted, however, that the representation of a deceased couple is not a safe indicator of the actual execution of a rite of self-sacrifice such as that of the *satī*, in our opinion, unless the presence of inscriptions confirms it; in the same way, elsewhere, e.g. on one-panelled steles, the representation of a standing male figure devoid of any martial connotation cannot be indicative of the actual heroic death of the individual commemorated.¹³²

In this respect, the exception that proves the rule we just outlined comes from a unique piece we recorded in Baner, a suburb of Pune (Maharashtra): a *thaḍe* shaped as the vast majority of specimens of its kind, that is to say rough cut on three sides, surprisingly

¹²⁷ Jarman 2002: 2.

¹²⁸ Kulkarni 1996: 177.

¹²⁹ Khare 1982: 252.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*: 252.

¹³¹ See for instance Khare 1982: 251.

¹³² On this issue, that is to say on the correspondence between iconography and factual events, see: 5.3.2.

shows on the forth one the representation of a man fighting against a tiger, the violent circumstance where he lost his life (see pl. 8, fig. 1). Interestingly this episode, ascribable to what we will define below as “accidental heroism”, is a component of the iconographic repertoire of steles and pillars, the most outstanding and widespread varieties of memorials to exceptional individuals.

Direct observations show these materials to be located mostly in cultivated fields, hence their probable function of cenotaphs and apotropaic structures.

UNHEWN STONES (pl. 6) – As G.-D. Sontheimer points out with regards to this category, “[i]n wide sections of the population – leaving aside the brahmanical customs of immolation and ancestor worship – simple stones are planted for the dead, mostly in *smaśān* outside the village and often near a river.”¹³³

Memorials as such, not demanding any major anthropic modification of their rough state if not for the occasional covering with read lead, must have been - and actually still are, as we could observe during our fieldwork – the most affordable, and therefore most widespread solution for dead commemoration. That the economic factor must have played a role is indirectly confirmed by the German scholar’s further observations: “Often small shrines are erected over such stones [...]. These shrines often merge into small temples corresponding to the fame of the deceased and wealth of his relatives [...].”¹³⁴

Steles and pillars are comparatively the most investigated classes of materials, *thaḍes* / *theśas* and simple stones occupying, in turn, the opposite pole in the scholarly interest ranking.¹³⁵ R. Thapar¹³⁶ coined the expression “subsidiary memorial stones” to define memorials “not unrelated to the hero-stone” and “meant to appease the spirit of the dead”. Although she probably uses this definition only with reference to the stele types - her discourse being focused on the comparison between minor slabs as the product of certain communities and heterodox rites, and refined, monumental slabs, apparently more linked to a Brahmanical milieu –¹³⁷ we find it useful to broaden its application to the other, more neglected elements of the Hindu funerary sphere. As a matter of fact, this neglect must have been originated in the chance to extrapolate a

¹³³ Sontheimer 2004 [1976]: 123.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ S. Doshi, the author of a thorough study on Gujarati materials in the monography edited by S. Settar and S. Sontheimer (*Memorial Stones*), expresses a simple, rather strict evaluation of the *theśa*-typology of memorial: “It is a roughly hewn block of stone [...] and deserves no further consideration”. Doshi 1982: 171.

¹³⁶ Thapar 1981: 304.

¹³⁷ Thapar 1981: 304, 306, 313 n. 4.

bigger amount of historic data from materials provided with an iconographic and epigraphic apparatus, obviously not the case for *thaḍes* and simple stones. Yet, this at first reasonable methodological selection ultimately led to a certain underestimation and disinterest in the less refined materials, with consequent limitations of our understanding of their phenomenological dimension and of the Hindu traditions associated with dead cults as a whole.

Before turning to some issues specifically related to the artefacts examined in the present research, a few annotations will be given on two different matters: the nature of the cults performed before these structures, and the social dimension underlying their erection.

As to the first, information are occasionally provided by secondary sources (especially with reference to steles and pillars with iconographic apparatus), that we can confirm on the ground of our fieldwork: red lead, *kuṅkuma*, *sindūr*, gold and silver foil layers may be covering the surface of these artefacts; the execution of *pūjā* rituals is manifest when even flowers and vegetables are offered to the memorial. Cases are recorded of *saṃskāras* performed before such stones.¹³⁸

As far as the second issue is concerned, N. Kasturi conveniently synthesizes the uncountable cases recorded by South Indian inscriptions:¹³⁹

[The stones] were put up by near relatives, either brother, son, grandson, or widow, or by master, overlord or ruler, or by the villagers. Sira 60 indicates that the erection of the stone and the donation of a land had to receive the approval of the ruler.

With regards to the last point - his focus being still on the slab/pillar model in honor of heroes - Kasturi further clarifies:¹⁴⁰

The virgals also mention grants made to the family of the deceased, either in the form of land or hereditary village offices. Such land were called Kal-nad or Nettaru Kodagi, i.e., stone land or blood gift, and they were freed from all imposts. Very often the family was honoured by the grant of such coveted honours and privileged as the right to hold an umbrella or ride in a palanquin or upon a horse.

¹³⁸ Courtright 1994: 37-41. This and other cases mainly pertain to stones on honor of *satīs*.

¹³⁹ Kasturi 1940: 204.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*: 207.

Thus we learn from inscriptions that - outside the scope of memorials erected to celebrate high-rank personages -¹⁴¹ even strong socio-economic factors were entailed in the erection of funerary monuments, something which has probably to be looked at in the broader frame of the land-concession policy in vogue in Medieval India, with religious gifts, temples construction and granting of permissions for the erection of celebrative steles or pillars as connected strategies for agrarian and political expansion.¹⁴²

3.3 Celebrating heroism: hero- and *satī*-stones

The following discussion aims at inserting within a theoretical frame the class of materials at the core of the present research, that is to say stele- and pillar-shaped varieties of memorial stones dedicated to male and female individuals whose death is perceived as extraordinary by the community they belong to. While chapter 5 will look at these typologies throughout the lens of a given sample case, i.e. a collection of specimens from South-Eastern Maharashtra, in this section a series of aspects will be explored in a pan-Indian perspective.

3.3.1 Lexical issues

No less than “memorial stones”, other two expressions commonly encountered in literature need some reappraisal: “hero-stones” and “*satī*-stones”. Unlike the first, which is purely an English language operative coinage, the other two are actually calques of words in use in some Indian languages to refer to these specific types of memorials. But Indian nomenclature, in this respect as well as in many other cases, changes from region to region, thus “hero-stones” and “*satī*-stones” ultimately happen to smooth over a wide range of regional linguistic solutions adopted to refer to memorial stones in the shape of steles and pillars.

Some Western and Southern Deccan idioms reveal a series of etymologically related words from which English derived its “hero-stone”: *vīragal* in Marathi, *vīrakkal* in Tamil, *vīragallu* in Kannada, *vīrakallu* in Telugu. They result from the combination of the word for “stone” common to the Dravidian languages (*kal*) and the Indo-Aryan

¹⁴¹ Like the cases of the *chāyāstambhas* from Nagarjunakonda, to which we will refer again in the text; or the *satī*-stones of the courtly milieu of Vijayanagara, described in Verghese 1998: 83-88 and 2001.

¹⁴² On this issue see for instance Talbot 2001: 88-106 (espec. pp. 100-106).

word for “hero” (Skt. *vīra*, IE **uīh₂ro-*).¹⁴³ A further linguistic evidence alluding to the constitutive material of these artefacts comes from *Āṅkama* literature, where memorials to warriors are known as *naṭukal*, literally “the stone which has been erected”.¹⁴⁴

Yet, as previously mentioned, words employed in other Indian languages may rather give account of the formal features of the artefacts, like shape or iconographic content. This is the case of *chāyāstambha*, “shade-pillar”, used with reference to some specimens from Andhra Pradesh. Notably, *chāyāstambhas* offer further confirmation of the necessity to distinguish the nature of the memorial (to ancestors or to heroes) from the phenotype of the memorial. The term, indeed, designates not only funerary monuments commemorating heroic deaths,¹⁴⁵ but also pillars that “were mainly raised for elite people who attained a natural death”,¹⁴⁶ the most renowned being the 2nd-3rd centuries AD *chāyāstambhas* of Nagarjunakonda.¹⁴⁷ In the light of this, the application of the expression “hero-stones” to such a heterogeneous context appears to be rather unsatisfying.

Similarly, *khaṁbha* and its alternative forms *khaṁba*, *khaṁbhi* widespread in Northern and Central India,¹⁴⁸ at times in the compound *kīrtistambha*¹⁴⁹ (“the post of fame”),¹⁵⁰ reflect the pillar-shape of the memorial.

But these terms are not used exclusively: in Gujarat and Rajasthan, for instance, they may coexist with others like *pāliya* and *govardhana*. The first alludes to the nature of the deceased commemorated, with *pāliya* likely deriving from a Sanskrit form *pāla*, “protector”, hence the meaning of “memorial to the defender (of the community)”.¹⁵¹ *Govardhana*, in turn, explicitly refers to the iconographic repertoire of the pillar, named after the representation of Kṛṣṇa Govardhanadhara,¹⁵² thus conveying once again the concept of protection (cattle).

¹⁴³ Vassilkov 2011: 198-199.

¹⁴⁴ Sontheimer 1982a: 93, also for references to secondary sources in Tamil reporting some passages where the term occurs. See also Nagaswamy 1974.

¹⁴⁵ See example quoted in Murthy 1982: 209 and used by Rajan 2000: 102 as well.

¹⁴⁶ Rajan 2000: 105.

¹⁴⁷ The necessity for a methodological distinction between the two types of *chāyāstambhas* was already pointed out by Raman 1974: 21-22, who distinguishes between memorials to simple ancestors and memorials to heroes.

¹⁴⁸ As it appears from Sontheimer 1982a: 92; Shah 1982: 102; Doshi 1982: 166.

¹⁴⁹ *Stambha* has the same root of the terms previously mentioned.

¹⁵⁰ Vassilkov 2011: 199-200.

¹⁵¹ See Doshi 1982: 165, who presents also another etymological explanations, less convincing according to scholars like Y. Vassilkov (personal communication).

¹⁵² Agrawala 1982: 151.

As far as *satī*-stones are concerned, the main linguistic variations seem to come from the Dravidian area, where memorials erected to honor the pious wives who performed a self-immolation ritual are known, according to the region, as *satīkal*, *māstikal* or *māstikallu* (from *mahā-satī-kal*),¹⁵³ compounds whose formation is consistent with the model observed in regard to *vīrakkal* (see above).

3.3.2 Questing for a common ground: martial, religious and accidental heroism

Iconography and epigraphy on memorials in the shape of slabs and pillars addressed by the terms described above and not just dedicated to simple ancestors outline such a heterogeneous, fleeing range of death circumstances pertaining to both male and female individuals that any attempt at finding a comprehensive interpretative pattern inevitably trespasses the fields of archaeology, art history and philology, and leads to the realm of anthropology, as we will see.

From data provided by secondary sources¹⁵⁴ and records collected during the fieldwork activity related to the present research, death cases reported on the artefacts can be summed up as follows:

- people fell to protect their livestock from theft or in the attempt to retrieve it;
- people involved themselves in cattle raiding;
- people who died while defending their community or ruler from external attacks;
- people fell on the onslaught of a stronghold;
- people engaged in naval battles;
- people who died while defending women and children from aggression;
- people fell in a clash with a wild animal (tiger, bull, etc.) or who freed the village from the threat of a wild animal;
- people who died after a snake bite;
- people who committed religious suicide or self-mortification practices;
- *satīs*;
- women who died in pregnancy or childbirth;
- children;

¹⁵³ Rice 1909: 185.

¹⁵⁴ Many of these have been reported in 3.1. Others are mentioned across this dissertation.

- suicide victims.

As already mentioned (s.v. *stela* in the present chapter), a basic perception of extraordinariness lays behind the community or family choice to dedicate particularly refined materials to these deceased, something that, as our lexical review pointed out, has much to do with the concept of heroism. But to which kind of heroism do the deeds accomplished by all the individuals enlisted above conform?

A closer observation of this variegated assemblage seems to reveal a series of recurrent motifs that can be read, in our opinion, in the light of what we propose to define as three abstract categories:

- martial heroism, connected to any sort of contention episode, either defensive or offensive;
- religious heroism, coinciding with any self-sacrifice performance, including *satīs*' immolations;
- accidental heroism, basically encompassing all those circumstances which are not the fruit of an intentional act and/or that are immediately associated with an unexpected, untimely departure.

Although Vedic and Brahmanical Hinduism does not apparently show any remarkable concern for the erection of funerary monuments (see chapter 1), some of the notions it conveys betray a certain tendency to distinguish categories of deceased like warriors, *satīs* and people who gave proof of uncommon spiritual qualities from all the others; these three categories of individuals find correspondences – one cannot avoid to notice - with many of those appearing in our list of memorial stones dedicatees.

The pivotal role in this connection is played by the concept of sacrifice and its evolutions over time. From a historic-religious point of view, B.K. Smith points out:¹⁵⁵

By the time of the Bhagavad Gītā (ca. second century B.C.E. or later), a text that manifests a syncretistic and emerging Hindu orthodoxy, any number of traditional as well as heterogeneous and non-Vedic practices are synthesized into Hindu religious life by identifying them with *yajña* [...]. [W]ith the Gītā we also witness a new extension of the category of sacrifice. Isolating and generalizing the component of the ritual called *tyāga* (the giving up or renunciation of the offering), the Gītā teaches the doctrine of *karma-yoga* as sacrificially oriented everyday action whereby “all attachment and all fruits of action are renounced”. For, the text says, “This world is bound by the bonds of *karma* except where that action is done sacrificially.”

¹⁵⁵ Smith 1989: 212-213.

More specifically for the scope of our research,¹⁵⁶

In other texts more or less contemporaneous with the *Gītā* (as well as the *Gītā* itself), this conception of sacrifice is also used to redeem the function of kings and warriors whose professions otherwise contravene the newly emergent Hindu doctrine of *ahiṃsā*. [...] The *Mahābhārata* as a whole, as Alf Hiltebeitel among others has shown, presents war as a “sacrifice of battle” [...].

In analyzing this trend of Brahmanism of adapting and reshaping its foundation (i.e. *yajña*, the sacrifice) in the light of the new doctrines inspired to *ahiṃsā*, Smith marginally points out something particularly relevant to us:¹⁵⁷

A comparable example of this phenomenon – applying the category of “sacrifice” to a practice that might otherwise be judged abhorrent and in opposition to religious principles – is the custom of widow-burning or *satī*. See e.g. Śiva Purāṇa 2.2.7.4-6, where Sandhyā enters the sacrificial fire as an act of *satī*: “Her body itself became the *puroḍāśa* [the sacrificial cake] in that sacrifice.

Let us now review a bit closer the terms of the two associations just outlined (hero’s death and sacrifice, *satī*’s death and sacrifice) starting from the concept of warrior hero.¹⁵⁸

A study by P. Filliozat,¹⁵⁹ focused on the nature of the otherworldly dimension achieved by the hero after death, explores the relation between battle and sacrifice in the light of the *Mahābhārata*, enumerating a number of passages where the identity between the two contexts, and consequently between warrior and sacrificer - the sacrifice coinciding with the offering of one’s own body - is made explicit. One of the excerpts goes as follows:¹⁶⁰

After recalling that one obtains by sacrifices the similarity with Indra, Bhīṣma says that when a king fights with enemies, for the sake of brahmins, “giving his self to the sacrificial post” (*ātmā-naṃ yūpam utsrjya* i.e., losing his life in battle), then the battle is a sacrifice of innumerable *dakṣiṇas*, (i.e. a sacrifice of the highest order and source of infinite merit).

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*: 213-214.

¹⁵⁷ Smith 1989: 213 n. 46.

¹⁵⁸ For a general appraisal of the concept of hero, see two classical works: Dumezil 1974 [1969] and Hiltebeitel 1991a.

¹⁵⁹ Filliozat 1982. Further reflections on the topic, integrated by the analysis of South Indian literary sources are contained also in Filliozat 1991.

¹⁶⁰ Filliozat 1982: 4 referring to *Mahābhārata*, *Śāntiparva*, *adhyāya* 97, 10.

This similitude is extensively developed in several passages quoted by the author, one of them even pinpointing precise correspondences between the participants to the battlefield and elements used in the sacrificial ritual (the elephants are the *ṛtvijs*, the horses are the *adhvaryus* etc.). The conclusions deriving from these observations lead us closer to the focus of our study, that is to say the Hindu funerary concern towards some categories of individuals. Commenting on a passage of the epic where it is stated that “people do not desire to give food, or water, or to perform baths and rituals connected with impurity, for the killed hero”¹⁶¹, Filliozat points out:¹⁶²

No impurity is caused when death takes place on the battlefield, hence the relatives of the dead hero had to perform no rituals connected with impurity. The same idea occurs in *Manusmṛti*: “for one who is killed, without trespassing the code of *kṣatriyas*, with uplifted weapons in battle, a sacrifice is completed at the same time, and the impurity of death is cleansed” [*Manusmṛti*, 98]. Manu here uses the same analogy of battle and sacrifice. To fight in a battle is to perform a sacrifice. [...] The battle is considered as effective as a sacrifice, for happiness after-death. In the same way it is also considered effective as ritual, for the removal of death impurity.

Notably, the absence of death impurity is something deeply connected with the *saṃnyāsin*’s death. By virtue of the austerities and renounces - entailing also the renounce to his domestic fire - indeed, the ascetic is basically consumed in life by his inner heat (*tapas*), achieving a condition of purity which does not demand to be further perfected by any fire ritual such as the *antyeṣṭi*, i.e. the ultimate *saṃskāra* whose peak is in the cremation of the corpse, for he has basically performed his own funeral while still alive; hence it derives the custom to bury rather than burn the lifeless bodies of the renouncers, and the particular tendency to celebrate their holiness through the erection of *samādhi* memorials (see above).¹⁶³

The equation hero-*yogi* on the ground of the sacrifice they perform is brought to extreme levels by self-immolation practices even outside the battlefield. The chance to gain liberation through the *bhakti-mārga*, that is to say through an intimate and unmediated relationship with god, is at the origin of a series of practices of penance and self-inflicted mortifications which ultimately give proof of the exceptional spiritual qualities of the devotee performing them. These forms of “suicides in honor of or out of

¹⁶¹ *Mahābhārata*, *Śāntiparva*, *adhyāya* 98, 39 cit. in Filliozat 1982: 6.

¹⁶² Filliozat 1982: 6.

¹⁶³ Malamoud 1996: 47-48; Malamoud 2007: 120-121.

love for an idol”¹⁶⁴ are recorded by a number of sculptural artefacts¹⁶⁵ and secondary sources based on epigraphic studies which describe both motivational background and execution modalities of a custom which seems to have been particularly popular in Medieval Deccan.¹⁶⁶ Suicides might have been performed in response to a vow, as the price to the divinity for the accomplishment of desires like a war victory or a son, or alternatively upon the death of one’s own patron, or to appease some deity whose wrath was thought to be causing natural disasters. A particular case is that of criminals who chose to offer their life to god as an alternative to the state execution, something admitted by law and meant at regaining the lost honor.¹⁶⁷ These ritual suicides might have been performed by (self-)beheading (*kamala pūjā*),¹⁶⁸ or by throwing oneself under the wheels of a running temple cart, or by piercing one’s own body on a sharp spiked pillar/pedestal resembling a *triśūla*.

Forms of religious self-sacrifices such as these, together with few other exceptions, actually depict a different portrait of Hindu attitude towards suicide compared to what conveyed by the *Dharmaśāstras*, where the practice is generally condemned.¹⁶⁹ The last form of voluntary termination of life we will analyze by virtue of its material transposition in the form of memorial stones is precisely one of these institutionalized exceptions, that of the *satīs*.

Satī, that is to say a woman who opted – more or less willingly – for accompanying her deceased husband in the afterlife by immolating herself on his funeral pyre,¹⁷⁰ and widow (*vidhavā*) represent in Hindu society two radically opposite images of femininity, auspicious and venerable the first, inauspicious and wretched the second. Such a sharp polarization is rooted in the idea according to which the husband’s wealth is intimately connected with his wife’s “goodness”, that is to say with her observance of the *strī-dharma*, consisting of an unconditional devotion to her spouse through a tireless

¹⁶⁴ Filliozat 1991: 144.

¹⁶⁵ Beyond our memorial stones, even temple sculptures bear witness of these customs. See for instance Vogel 1931, who analyzes the representation of head-cutting devotees in the Draupadī temple in Mamallapuram.

¹⁶⁶ For a review, see Sircar 1971: 206-220; Filliozat 1991; Rice 1909: 185-188; Kasturi 1940: 205-

¹⁶⁷ Filliozat 1991: 144-145.

¹⁶⁸ Sontheimer 1982b: 263.

¹⁶⁹ For references on other specific cases beyond those we analyzed in the text, like *tyāg* rituals (consisting of mutilation and death as a sign of protest and mostly diffused in Gujarat), see for instance Weinberger-Thomas 1999: 60-65; on the Mahāprasthāna (the “great journey” towards death), see for instance Sircar 1971: 208. For a general overview of suicide in India through texts and archaeology see Thakur 1963.

¹⁷⁰ Alternative practices are recorded, for instance that of being buried alive. See Fisch 2006: 269-269, 275.

practice of the virtue of self-sacrifice. In other words, for the traditional Hindu wife “her single-pointed concentration and acts of austerity performed for her husband (*pati*) procure good merit (*puṇya*), which would ensure her husband’s prosperity and longevity.”¹⁷¹ In turn, the husband’s departure is looked first and foremost as his wife’s basic “karmic failure”,¹⁷² something that confers to the widow a permanent aura of misfortune. Thus, while she who makes the vow to become *satī* on her husband’s death is brought to the highest honors in the very last stage of her life, a source of pride to both her family and community by virtue of the piousness inherent to the self-sacrifice, she who survives to her spouse is condemned to a social death pending the biological one by means of harsh restrictions as a result of the irremediable ontological impurity that the community imputes to her.¹⁷³

Interestingly, the kinds of honors that the *satīmātā* (“mother-*satī*”, as she is named after death) is addressed have a devotional dimension, for they coincide with those attributed to a family goddess (*kuladevī*) or a village deity (*grāmadevatā*), with whom – not a chance - she is ultimately identified.¹⁷⁴ But that is not all. The pronouncement of the vow of self-immolation (what transforms the wife not in a widow, but in a *satīvrata* from that very moment until death), would endow her with special, extra-human powers, which may get manifested through blessings and courses kept in a particularly high regard by the community; in this context, it should not surprise either the fact that episodes of possession may be connected to her.¹⁷⁵

The *satī* ritual, then, represents not only the unique occasion of social redemption for a widow, but even the only chance *tout court* for a woman to access while still alive - although for the short time span between the vow and the execution - to a transcendental dimension from which she would be otherwise secluded,¹⁷⁶ this acquisition of spiritual merit bringing her figure close to that of a renouncer.¹⁷⁷ At the

¹⁷¹ Sharma 1988: 77.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*: 77.

¹⁷³ For an in-depth, psychogenetic explanation of this impurity, which origin has to be searched in the tireless attempt of many societies at exerting a control over the female sexuality, we refer the reader to Lo Turco (in press).

¹⁷⁴ In Maharashtra, cases of “absorption” like this are reported for example in Kosambi: 1962: 86-88.

About the divinization of the *satīs* see also Hardgrove 1999 and Harlan 1991.

¹⁷⁵ On this issue see Courtright 1994: 38; Harlan 1991: 66-68.

¹⁷⁶ Most of the *saṃskāras* are indeed reserved to male Hindus.

¹⁷⁷ Harlan 2002: 124; Weinberger-Thomas 1999: 82-83. As a further conformation to this similitude, the second author highlights how for both ascetics and *satīs* there is no offer of *piṇḍas* in the ancestor ritual: “[t]he *satī*, burned while still alive and purified and liberated through the offering of her bodily envelope, has no need of receiving either the surrogate body symbolized by the funerary rice-ball or, consequently, food to appease that body and ensure for it consistency and stability during the ritual year.”

same time, her gesture may be considered as the female counterpart of male heroism displayed on the battlefield,¹⁷⁸ a theoretical connection historically confirmed by the practice of *jauhar*, the mass suicide ritual performed by Rajput women on the storming of their town or fort;¹⁷⁹ yet, as J. Fisch argues, a sort of paradox underlies her acquisition of spiritual merits: “[t]he condition for the possibility of the woman’s heroism was the death of her husband, and with this her complete subordination to her husband was re-established.”¹⁸⁰

Once explicated the parallel between martial heroism and religious heroism deaths in the light of Brahmanical beliefs, for both share the privilege of elaborated funerary memorials, the question raises about how to consider all the other cases, those which do not fit in any of the these two categories and for which we coined the expression “accidental heroism”. What makes these deaths worth being commemorated through a stone? What do they ultimately have in common with the former two categories?

A common ground between the three groups we created starting from the iconographic/epigraphic content of the artefacts may be tentatively found, at first, in the fact that the deceased celebrated by stone words and images embody positive values for the community they belong to, they sacrifice their life to protect the order of the society, the *dharma*.¹⁸¹ This explanation, however, is not satisfying for all the cases we happened to encounter: while it works for cattle defenders, or people who chase wild animals out of the village, or religious suicide victims, in turn it does suit cattle robbers, people who died after a snake bite, or suicide victims not moved by apparent religious motifs.

A possible answer to our interrogatives, then, has to be searched, in our opinion, in the set of beliefs ascribable to popular religion,¹⁸² something which implies a short

¹⁷⁸ On the issue “hero gender” as whole see Harlan 2003. On the similitude *satī*-warrior, see again Harlan 2002: 124.

¹⁷⁹ Fisch 2006: 323-327.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*: 339.

¹⁸¹ Swayam 2004: 303.

¹⁸² By using this term we refer to C.J. Fuller’s definition, that is to say “the beliefs and practices that constitute the living, “practical” religion of ordinary Hindus. [...] Popular Hinduism can be distinguished from “textual Hinduism”, the “philosophical” religion set out and elaborated in the sacred texts that are the principal subject matter for Indologists, Sanskritists, historians of religion and other textual scholars. The sacred texts of Hinduism – and the concepts, ideas, and speculations contained in them – are often vitally important to popular religion, and the latter cannot be studied successfully unless textual scholarship is taken into account. [...] Nevertheless, themes central in the scriptures are not always central in ordinary people’s beliefs and practices, and textual scholars’ conclusions do not necessarily provide good guides to the working of the popular religion”. Fuller 1992: 5-6.

incursion into the realm of anthropological speculation dealing with the universally recorded fear for extra-human spirits, ghosts and so-called “bad dead”.

One of the features of popular Hinduism is, beyond the worship of gods and goddesses of the main pantheon, the cult of a wide range of supernatural beings moving in a liminal dimension between the world of the living and that of the dead: *bhūtas*, *piśācas*, *pretas* etc.¹⁸³ The devotional practices addressed to these extra-human entities are actually expressions of a tireless attempt at appeasing them, at containing the malevolent influence which might derive from their trespassing into the worldly sphere, something which is thought to become manifest on the occurrence of natural disasters, epidemics, single individuals’ insanity, infertility, episodes of possession.¹⁸⁴

What is most relevant to the scope of our study is that in a number of cases these extra-human beings are believed to have come into existence as a consequence of an *akāla mṛtyu*, an untimely death, an expression “covering all those bad, unnatural, out-of-order deaths that are premature due to accidents, diseases, snake-bites, suicides, or other fates”;¹⁸⁵ death circumstances as such supposedly prevent the individual from achieving each and every life stage, or the *saṃskāras*, and basically determine his/her separation from the living world with a strong residual dissatisfaction which claims for revenge or reconciliation. Thus, deification, together with exorcist practices when needed,¹⁸⁶ represents a stratagem to appease ghostly creatures, for, as C.J. Fuller points out, “by deifying it the harmful spirit’s power can be controlled and turned to protective advantage by human beings.”¹⁸⁷

It is clear that not all the deceased eventually undergo an apotheosis process, studies focused on deified heroes in popular ballads having detected three basic requirements to be satisfied: the death must be premature, violent (“either as an aggression or a sudden blow of nature”) and undeserved, in the sense that the deceased

The two are not opposed to each other, but rather live in a continuum, in a dialogic relationship. Sontheimer also contributes to this issue with his definition of five basic, intermingled components of Hinduism, one of which is precisely the “folk religion”. Sontheimer 2005 [1989]: 305-324.

¹⁸³ For a review of these extra-human beings across texts see Smith 2009: 474-525. See also Liberale 2005.

¹⁸⁴ For an ethnographic study of the different types of possessions in Maharashtra, where there is a peculiar linguistic distinction between “bad possession” and “good possession” according to the nature of the spirit involved and the of the consequences produces, see Stanley 1988.

¹⁸⁵ Knipe 1989: 124.

¹⁸⁶ On the relationship between exorcism and minor divinities on the ground of ethnographic case studies in Maharashtra, see for instance Stanley 1988.

¹⁸⁷ Fuller 1992: 228.

must be perceived by the community as a victim.¹⁸⁸ As S.H. Blackburn points out, “it is not moral consideration, but violence which transforms humans into deities”.¹⁸⁹

As far as warrior heroes are concerned, beside those ethicized by the Brahmanical filter in Sanskrit epic, i.e. the courtly hero stemming from the Puranic tradition that we described at the beginning of this paragraph, we find a number of folk heroes with a locally rooted identity, whose memory is conveyed by oral epic in regional vernaculars, on one side, and funerary stones providing with an iconographic transposition of those epic tales, on the other:¹⁹⁰ recitation of folk poems and erection of memorial monuments are, in other words, the two vehicles for the dead hero’s divinization in popular religion.

A similar pattern applies to *satīs*: although their violent death can be adequately explained in the light of the Brahmanical code, it should be noted that at the level of practical religion, in some rural contexts, their cult may not only coincide with that of the mother goddesses, as we already pointed out, but it can also be very close to that of specific female deities who preside over pregnancy, childbirth, children well-being, fertility and sexual sphere as a whole; at times their respective worship places in the form of shrines may be in proximity to each other or even coincide.¹⁹¹

Notably, the coming into existence of deities as such has to be ascribed to the apotheosis process of female figures who died in pregnancy or childbirth, whose spirits are thought to be vengeful and harmful due to the loss of the offspring.¹⁹² Funerary steles and pillars - as we observed since the beginning - are erected on their death no less than on *satīs*’, a “coincidence” to which a new light can actually be thrown if analyzed after D.M. Coccari’s annotations on the topic, based on her fieldwork in Benares: “The general attitude toward Satis is one of honor and reverence, and the goddesses are depicted with corresponding benevolence[;]”¹⁹³ “[a]lthough I think that this attitude represents a large body of opinion regarding Satis, it must be noted that I

¹⁸⁸ Blackburn 1985: 260.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*: 260.

¹⁹⁰ In both Northern and Southern India. See Blackburn 1978 for a review of Tamil tales, and Kothari 1989 for an account of epic materials in Rajasthan.

¹⁹¹ An unpublished Ph.D. study I happened to refer to while in Pune, for instance, records the case of a shrine in honor of a set of village deities known as *Satvāī* - who preside over female sexuality - inside a former temple dedicated to a 18th century *satī*. Dandekar 2009.

I ascribe to the same religious pattern a piece of evidence I myself recorded during my fieldwork. A *Hemāḍpanti* temple in disuse in the village of Velapur (Solapur district, Maharashtra) is the current location of a *satī*-stone. The piece is lodged in the empty *garbhagrha*. Although it is unclear whether the object is still worshipped (the stele shows old traces of *sindūr*), it should be noted that few steps away from this structure a modern small shrine dedicated to the cult of childbirth and newborns divinities stands.

¹⁹² Doshi 1982: 164.

¹⁹³ Coccari 1989: 253.

spoke mainly with men about this subject. The total benevolence of Sati is problematical: it would not surprise me to find an aura of ambivalence surrounding some of these figures, especially given the possibility of coercion.”¹⁹⁴

In a context as such, i.e. that of a “fluid distinction among deities, human beings, and personified malevolent ghostly spirits”, as synthesized by C.J. Fuller,¹⁹⁵ it is the set of beliefs in death and afterlife rooted in popular religion that ultimately offers - it appears to us - the key for understanding the erection of funerary memorials to the heterogeneous assortment of individuals we enlisted at the beginning of this section.

3.4 Chronological frame

Materials provided with inscriptions – ultimately coinciding with the slab/pillar typologies dedicated to heroic figures - allow us to locate the funerary stones phenomenon in India within a time span which allegedly goes from the 3rd-2nd centuries BC to the 19th century AD, or even to present, if we take into consideration the still living practices of memorials erection recorded among tribal communities in both Northern and Southern India.

The *terminus a quo* mainly relies on South Indian specimens, and it constantly undergoes a process of revision due to a never-ending series of new findings in rural areas as a consequence of the anthropic modification of the landscape (such as road constructions etc.). Until not long ago, indeed, one of the earliest pieces of so-called hero-stones was identified in an inscribed *chāyāstambha* from the site of Gangaperuru, in Andhra Pradesh, dated to the 3rd-4th centuries AD, and commemorating the fall of a villager who had tried to defend his cattle from a robbery.¹⁹⁶ Yet, new evidence from Tamil Nadu with epigraphy in Tamil-Brahmi script¹⁹⁷ would seem to authorize scholars to date the occurrence of hero-memorials to approximately five/six centuries back.

Within this time span, memorials dedicated to *satīs* occupy a precise position, the first known being the so-called Eran pillar, an inscribed specimen from Madhya Pradesh dedicated to both the self-immolated wife and her husband, dating 510 AD;¹⁹⁸ a further

¹⁹⁴ Coccari 1989: 267.

¹⁹⁵ Fuller 1992: 228.

¹⁹⁶ See Murthy 1982: 210-211 and Rajan 2000: 102.

¹⁹⁷ These findings keep on being reported on local newspaper on a regular base. See for instance <<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu-stone-commemorating-heroic-act-with-tamilbrahmi-inscription-found/article3662994.ece>>.

¹⁹⁸ Fleet 1888: 91-93; Bhandarkar 1981: 352-354.

confirmation to this *terminus post quem* comes from Maharashtra, with a remarkable piece provided with iconographic and epigraphic apparatus that, although not reporting any date, was ascribed to the 5th-6th centuries on paleographic grounds.¹⁹⁹

However, antiquity and popularity of the ritual, from which the chance to find monuments derives, are basically unsolved issues,²⁰⁰ the *terminus post quem* being theoretically established by law in 1829, the year when the practice was abolished; yet cases of self-immolations as such are known up to 1987, the erection of monuments to commemorate them – at least in the shape of temples, as we observed in chapter 2 – having prosecuted to the first decades of the 20th century in Rajasthan.

3.5 Memorial stones in context

Hindu funerary stones are recovered today in a variety of settings and conditions, which thing betrays the fluctuating attitude of the locals towards these materials and reflects their still marginal role in the heritage preservation discourse.

Specimens evaluated as particularly outstanding by virtue of their elaborated iconography or inscriptions may be found within local museum or as part of wide and nationally renowned collections, such as that of the “Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya” in Mumbai (the former “Prince of Wales Museum”), which is reported to have been in possession of pieces of interest since at least the first half of the past century.²⁰¹

When this is not the case – a comparatively rarer circumstance, in fact - they are found in the proximity of temple premises, either inside or outside the sacred area. Among all, this is the most common context of retrieval according to our experience. Here they encounter alternative destinies: they may be located nearby – or at least not too far from - other sculptures still objects of worship (such as Nandi, for instance); they may be reused as structural elements benefitting from a still considerable and privileged visibility from the worshipper’s perspective (with the function of pillars embedded in the *maṇḍapa* walls, for instance), or as components of minor outer parts of the temple complex; at last, they may be retrieved in a neglected state, abandoned together with other sculptural “waste materials”, such as dismissed statues of divinities. In either case, it seems to emerge the impression of a certain unawareness of the original function and

¹⁹⁹ *Epigraphia Indica*, 28: 129-133.

²⁰⁰ For a historical review we refer the reader to Fisch 2006.

²⁰¹ As proven by H. Cousens account, for instance. See Cousens 1931: 31.

purpose of these artefacts, something which is confirmed by the existence of contexts where several stone specimens are collected each lodged differently from the other, following the modalities we just described.

Interestingly enough, our fieldwork revealed a strict association of memorial stones – especially of the type slab and pillar - with specific religious complexes, records from temples dedicated to Śiva, to Bhairava and to Māruti being the most recurrent.

A considerable amount of memorial stones, however, can be observed in rural areas under trees or next to water reserves, or at the crossroads of hamlets, locations that more than any others must resemble the original ones, although the transformative process of landscape in course from at least one century might have not spared them either from a secondary reallocation.

The quest for the original placement of these artefacts remains basically unsolved in our opinion. On the ground of Tamil primary sources (see chapter 1), scholarly tradition uses to identify the spot of their erection with that where the deceased fell,²⁰² or where the sacrifice was performed, meaning by this in nearby a crematory grounds (as we noticed in the case of some architectural memorials like the *chattrīs*), or where the body remains of the deceased were buried. It should be noted, however, that systematic archaeological excavations have not ever been carried out; hence, the modern scholar may happen to face a puzzling and heterogeneous context not too dissimilar from that described over one century ago:²⁰³

The place [the village of Bhavsari (Bhojour) in Pune district] is remarkable for a number of large rude stones forming enclosures to the east, south, and west of the village, and numerous stone slabs bearing roughly carved figures of men fighting, cattle raids, dead men, and heavenly damsels. As far as they have been examined, none of these stones, whether found in mounds, lines, or walls, has any writing. The discovery of pieces of bones in one of the mounds supports the view that the circles and heaps of stones and the solitary standing stones are funeral monuments. [...] The absence of any signs of a mound, in many cases, and the absence of relics in several mounds, suggest that some of these monuments are cenotaphs raised to people whose bodies were buried or burnt in some other places.

²⁰² See for instance Kasturi 1940: 204; Vanamamalai 1975: 41.

²⁰³ *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, 8: 98-99. I am thankful to Prof. Y. Vassilkov for this passage.

A CASE STUDY: MAHARASHTRA

Some remarks on ecology and religion

The region known today as Maharashtra, an autonomous state within the Indian federal union since 1960, used to be included in ancient times in the so-called Dakṣiṇāpatha, one of the five major geographical areas in which the Indian Subcontinent could be divided according to the *Dharmasūtras* literature.²⁰⁴ It corresponded to the territories South of the Vindhya excluded the coastal area, thus basically encompassing all the Deccan included the Dravidian region.

The “Southern connection” of Maharashtra seems to be one of its distinctive features. Maharashtra is the southernmost region where an Indo-Aryan language is currently spoken,²⁰⁵ the institutionalized role of Marathi in political and religious issues actually dating back to the 12th century AD with the Yādava dynasty; yet the foundation of the state on linguistic grounds – the most recurrent case in India - does not entail the absence of other linguistic enclaves, like the Kannada’s for instance, whose permanence within the state borders parallels in turn the existence of Marathi speaking minorities in Karnataka.

Beside the linguistic continuity, a common historical background characterizes the Deccan area at least to some extent, for a number of Central Indian macro-regional potentates, regardless of the location of their respective centres of power and their different degree of resilience, could stretch their domain on today’s Maharashtra as much as on its bordering areas: Sātavāhanas (until 3rd century AD), Ābhīras (3rd century AD), Vākātakas (1st – 6th centuries AD), Kalacuris (5th – 6th centuries AD), Western Cālukyas (6th – 8th AD), Rāṣṭrakūṭas (8th – 10th AD), Śilāhāras (10th – 12th centuries AD), as well as of course the first promoters of the Marathi identity, the Yādavas (12th – 13th centuries AD) up to the Marāṭhās headed by Śivaji (17th century), not to mention the Islamic reigns which in the meantime had entered the Deccan.²⁰⁶

From the religious point of view, some of the most widespread cults in Maharashtra, that of god Khaṇḍobā, is demonstrated to have a pan-Deccan diffusion,

²⁰⁴ The other four regions were the Uttarāpatha, the Madhyadeśa or Āryāvarta, the Prāchyadeśa, and the Aparānta. See Thosar 2004: 4, to whom we refer the reader for further bibliographical indications.

²⁰⁵ Karve 1968: 1.

²⁰⁶ Feldhaus 2003: 8.

which thing betrays the actual identity between divinities apparently belonging to different milieus. G.-D. Sontheimer dedicated a great part of his scientific activity to prove that,²⁰⁷

[t]he same god is called Mailār in Karnataka and Mallappa in Andhra. We are fortunate in having early evidence of this god in the Caṅkam literature, where he is called Murukaṇ. Khaṇḍobā may actually be traced to a prototype of a god found all over Deccan from very early times. Literary research combined with field research show us that certain processes in the development of this god repeated themselves in different region in the Deccan.

The cult of Khaṇḍobā is in this respect similar to that of another pan-regional deity, Viṭhobā. The figures of these two gods are particularly relevant in the frame of our discourse, due to their strong connection with the pastoralist world; implications derive from this with respect to their origin, which is suspected to be searched, according to some, in the divinization of local heroes, a matter in turn genetically connected with the erection of memorial stones of the type analyzed in the following chapters. Before moving to this issue through the analysis of some of the features of god Viṭhobā, some basic remarks on Maharashtrian geography are needed.

The first and foremost feature of Maharashtrian geography is the mountain range of the Western Ghats (or Sahyadris), which defines two radically different ecological areas: the coastal region of the Konkan, a strip stretching to the South of Mumbai facing the Arabian Sea, and the Desh, the flat inland basically corresponding to the Deccan plateau. The latter is crossed by a series of rivers flowing from East to West, the most important of which being the Krishna, the Godavari and the Narmada. The Narmada - the northernmost - together with the mountain range of the Satpura and the Vindhyas - the second most prominent mountain range in the country - represents the natural barrier dividing South India from North India, making of Maharashtra the ultimate meeting place between the respective cultural and religious trends. Such a neat division is counterbalanced by a basic absence of natural barriers on the way to the South, a circumstance that A. Feldhaus summarizes as follows:²⁰⁸

Jungles and tribal areas mark not only this northern edge of Maharashtra, but the eastern edge as well. To the south of Maharashtra there is no such pronounced boundary, so that, in physical-geographical terms,

²⁰⁷ Sontheimer 1997 [1979]: 19.

²⁰⁸ Feldhaus 2003: 3.

Maharashtra blends nearly imperceptibly into the linguistically, culturally, and politically distinct states of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

These words echo I. Karve's "easy accessibility between Maharashtra and the Dravidian South[.]"²⁰⁹ Beyond the Konkan and Desh - where the city of Pune is located and which represents the very core of Marathi identity - other three geographical areas can be distinguished: the Marathwada, to the North-East of the Desh, the Khandesh, to the North of the Marathwada, and the Vidarbha, that is to say the Northeastern area of the state.

Natural distinctions such as those between Konkan and Desh unavoidably produce different forms of human adaptation to the environment, entailing different living patterns and different material culture reflections. In Maharashtra this dynamic typically coincides with the coexistence and interaction between sedentary communities on one side, and semi-nomadic groups on the other, the former settled in the nuclear agricultural areas marked by a more stable rainfall regime which progressively decreases eastwards, the latter dedicated to pastoral activities in the semi-arid belts of the country. As a matter of fact, due to the "rain shadow"²¹⁰ effect exerted by the Western Ghats over the Monsoon,²¹¹

[f]rom north to south, the eastern portion of the Nasik district, the whole of the Nagar [i.e. Ahmednagar] and Sholapur districts, eastern portions of the Poona, Satara and Kolhapur districts and parts of the Sangli district come into this region of insufficient rainfall. The soil in these districts is very fertile but they have famines every two or three years because of a lack of rain. From the earliest Marathi literature, migration of people westward during the famine years is mentioned. There is an early cycle of migration of certain communities from east to west.

The migration cycle which I. Karve refers to is that of the shepherd communities moving every year during the months of November and December from the eastern semi-arid regions of the Deccan plateau to Konkan. These pastoral groups are known as Dhangars.

²⁰⁹ Karve 1968: 3.

²¹⁰ Dandekar 1991: 304.

²¹¹ Karve 1968: 6-7. For a detail description of the seasonal factors and their historical repercussions, see Dandekar 1991: 303-309.

The Dhangars communities have been extensively analyzed by G.-D. Sontheimer,²¹² and, following an inner division that they themselves define, can be distinguished into three and half clans: the Hatkars or Killhari Dhangars, the Gavlis or Mhaske, the Khutekars, and the so-called half caste of the Khatiks, each occupying a different portion of the semi-arid lands outside the Konkan. Each of them, moreover, draws sustenance from slightly different activities, the main two branches, the Hatkars and the Gavlis, being engaged in sheep-keeping and the buffalo-and-sheep breeding respectively.²¹³

The observation of the Hatkar-Dhangars migration pattern is the most relevant to the scope of our research, since, according to some (see below), it shows a striking resemblance with the pilgrimage route followed twice a year by the devotees of Lord Viṭhobā, whose pan-regional worship centre is the temple of Pandharpur (Solapur district), a village located almost at the core of the semi-arid zone.

In the months of October-November, indeed, the Hatkar-Dhangars leave their camps located in the semi-arid zone, where they are settled for the whole time of the Monsoon season, and move to the Konkan following five possible routes throughout an uninterrupted journey of about fifteen/twenty days. The time span of their stay in Konkan corresponds to approximately seven/eight months, after which, upon the arrival of the rainy season, they head back to their settlements in the inlands in order to guarantee their herds the environment condition they need. During their stay in Konkan, in exchange for the sheep manure highly demanded by the farmers between November and May - when rainfalls are more scarce - the Dhangars obtain rice, which will be their sustenance in the winter season in the semi-arid zones, whereas they mainly live out of *rāgī* (a variety of millet) during the Monsoon time in Konkan.

Now, as A. Dandekar highlights,²¹⁴ the timing of the Dhangars movements coincide with the timing of the pilgrimages which every year, in the month of July and October lead hundreds of thousands of pilgrims to Pandharpur to honor Viṭhobā,²¹⁵ a god to whom in turn a strong pastoral tradition seems to be associated.

Originally born as a local deity, associated to Śiva and ultimately to Viṣṇu, or to Harihara – the combined form of Viṣṇu-Śiva - as a consequence of the sectarian trends

²¹² Sontheimer 1975.

²¹³ For the diachronic evolution of the Gavlis' living patterns, see also Dandekar 1991: 316-318.

²¹⁴ Dandekar 1991: 309-313, 318-319.

For the forthcoming description of the migration pattern we rely upon Sontheimer 1975 and Dandekar 1991.

²¹⁵ For a lively description of the pilgrimage, see Karve 1988.

in vogue in the Medieval time and of the particular form of *bhakti* followed by the god's devotees,²¹⁶ Viṭhobā is firstly recorded in written sources starting from the 12th century AD,²¹⁷ the period to which dates back also the annual pilgrimage to Pandharpur.²¹⁸ Yet the connections with the pastoral world outlined by scholars stretch further:²¹⁹ “[the] original worshippers of Viṭṭhal – the Gollas and the Kurubas of Andhra and Karnataka and the Gavḷīs and Dhangars of Maharashtra, especially Southern Maharashtra – are still called “Yādavas” in Andhra and Karnataka. We know them as pastoral tribes[,]”²²⁰ something which tallies with the fact that Viṭhobā, regardless of his assimilation to divinities of the main pantheon, still is considered at the level of the popular religion as brother of Birobā, the *kuladevatā* of the Hatkar-Dhangars,²²¹ and that is wife, Rukmiṇī, the spouse of Lord Kṛṣṇa known to the main pantheon, actually corresponds to the pastoral goddess Padubāī.²²² As D. Bhagavat summarizes,²²³

Viṭhobā of Paṇḍharī is a perfect instance of the unified culture of not only Karnataka and Maharashtra but also Andhra. Although these three regions differ in language, their culture is one. [...] This cultural unity blossomed in the pastoralist culture of the hilly rural areas of these three regions.

This leads us back to the starting point of our discourse, when we firstly mentioned another prominent figure of Maharashtrian pantheon beyond those of the mainstream Hinduism common to all over India, that is to say Khaṇḍobā, whose linkage to the pastoral world, although in a way which betrays a remarkable warlike connotation not equally developed in the case of Viṭhobā, is no less strong. Following, G.-D. Sontheimer, indeed:²²⁴

²¹⁶ Viṭhobā's devotees are known as Vārkarīs, a designation which however does not entail the membership to a specific caste, or the performance of exclusive initiation rites, or the display of particular religious symbols to prove the individual's devotion to the god. As G.A. Deleury points out, the Vārkarī “is simply a Hindu who has pledged himself to fulfill his religion as perfectly as he can, and to observe as faithfully as possible the customs of his ‘dharma’ and of his caste.” Deleury 1960: 4. That of the Vārkarīs in other words is a non-sectarian religious group.

This clarification is crucial for the understanding of the roots of the fleeing connections between Viṭhobā and gods of the main Hindu pantheon such as Śiva and Viṣṇu. Deleury explains in other passages of his monography dedicated to the cult of Viṭhobā that the coexistence of Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava connotations in this divine figure is justified by the fact that his devotees ultimately believe him to be a form of Parabrahma, that is to say God in his absolute and transcendent essence. Deleury 1960: 115, 126, 184.

²¹⁷ For a review of the textual sources for the study of this cult, see Dhare 2011 [1984]: 15-27.

²¹⁸ Dandekar 1991: 320

²¹⁹ For a complete review of this issue we refer the reader to the work of Dhare 2011 [1984]: 234-270.

²²⁰ Dhare 2011 [1984]: 237.

²²¹ Dandekar 1991: 320. See also Sontheimer 1989b [1976].

²²² Dandekar 1991: 319.

²²³ Bhagavat 1970: 37-38, quot. in Dhare 2011 [1984] : 235-236. *Non vidi*.

²²⁴ Sontheimer 1997 [1979]: 20.

One thing we can be sure of is that the origins of the god cannot be found in the rice area, in the cultivated “nuclear agricultural areas” (Stein 1963: 188) of the Deccan, which tend to be civilized “*kṣetra*”, with regular cultivation, peaceful, with a settled society, a rigid caste system and governed by concepts of law and order for which the Brāhmaṇical Dharmaśāstras ultimately were the guides.

The origins of this outlandish god have, in fact, to be sought at the door of this society – similarly to the Vedic Rudra, who was beyond the settlement. Like Bhairava, who has protective functions and is the *kotvāl* of Benares, and his terrible in some aspects, Khaṇḍobā has protective functions. The capacity of the Indian religious outlook would make Khaṇḍobā a god who protected the hermitage of the Brāhmins, the protective spirit of the realm or tow, and would claim that he was a deified hero (Dhere, 1961: 14, citing the 12th cent. Jaina *Samayaprarīkṣā*) – the distinction between a human being and a *dev* (deity) can disappear with the passing of time.

Sontheimer’s argumentations indirectly echo a hypothesis related to the very origin of the god Viṭhobā which ultimately represents the core of our focus on these two tribal divinities as an introduction to the religious environment of the materials we analyze in the present research: the hypothesis according to which Viṭhobā too might have been a hero-god originally worshipped in the shape of a hero-stone located in the proximity of what would have become his temple in Pandharpur.

This hypothesis has been firstly introduced by G.A. Deleury, although not fully supported,²²⁵ and then further explored by S.G. Tulpule²²⁶ on the ground of G.-D. Sontheimer’s retrieval, but criticized by G.B. Deglurkar.²²⁷

The *Līlācaritra*,²²⁸ an anthology in Old Marathi centered around the figure of Cakradhar, the founder of the Mahānubhāv,²²⁹ relates that Viṭhobā “was a mere robber who, together with two others, Nāmdev a fisherman, and Mhaya a gurava looted and murdered travelers and country people”, and in whose honor, after his death, a hero-stone (*bhaḍkhamba*) would have been ultimately raised his son and the cult would have been shaped starting from the worship of this memorial.²³⁰ The scholar actually doubts of the truthfulness of this tale, since he recognizes it must have been mainly inspired by the theological animosity between the two religious schools; nonetheless he still

²²⁵ Deleury 1960: 181-192.

²²⁶ Tulpule 1977-78: 1009-1015.

²²⁷ Deglurkar 113-117.

²²⁸ The text passage we refer to is reported in English translation in Dhere 2011 [1984]: 129, who extensively analysis the interpolation factors in all likelihood occurred in its redaction.

²²⁹ An heterodox sect whose diffusion was contemporary to the that of the non-sectarian Vārkarīs’ (12th century), but which promoted, in contrast to the latter, an unconditional devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa.

²³⁰ Deleury 1960: 181.

advocates a series of comparisons between the akimbo posture of the god on his traditional iconography and that of cattle-gods venerated among tribal communities like the Ahirs in West Bihar, whose features directly recall the representation of the deceased heroes on commemorative steles.

The idea conveyed by the Marathi text was subsequently revitalized in the light of the discovery of a hero-stone opposite the main entrance of temple of Pandharpur by G.-D. Sontheimer, which was assumed as a new foundation of the authenticity of the *Līlācaritra* passage by Tulpule.

In Deglurkar's view, however, this theory may be dismantled on the ground of three observations:²³¹ the unreliability of the *Līlācaritra* passage as a source for historical information, the presence of at least other two hero-stones in the proximity of the temple of Pandharpur, which mines any straightforward identification of the god's image with one of such specimens, and a series of iconographic incongruence between Viṭhobā's representations and that of the cattle-gods of the communities to whom Deleury was referring to. Although these convincing argumentations, however, the issue is still greatly debated,²³² and some authors, in the light of the high recurrence of hero-stones specimens in the core area of this cult, are actually seduced by this theory.²³³

Coming back to some historical data as a conclusion, it can be stated with Dandekar that "hero-stones that depict cattle-raids are a definite pointer to an economy that was predominantly pastoral" and "reflect the tension within it,"²³⁴ since no cattle-raids seem to be effectively depicted on those hero-stones retrieved outside the semi-arid zone.²³⁵

Thus the hero-stones, regardless of the possible genetic connection between their worshipping rituals and the rise of pan-regional divinities, can be at least evaluated as historical sources, visually reflecting to some extent the social and economic environment which produced them; this seems to be further stressed by the very existence of specimens representing other ecological milieus than those under examination here, such as the samples portraying battleships episode uncovered in the coastal areas of Maharashtra and of other Indian regions, for instance.²³⁶

²³¹ Deglurkar 1990: 114.

²³² See Dhere 2011 [1984]: 127-138.

²³³ Dandekar 1991: 318-320.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*: 321.

²³⁵ Sontheimer 1982b: 270-271.

²³⁶ Hornell 1942; Deloche 1987; Tripati 2006.

CATALOGUE OF THE MATERIALS

5.1 Selection criteria

The catalogue presented hereby includes one-hundred-ten specimens plus a series of wall carvings reproducing free-standing elements, all ascribable to two typologies of memorial stones which literature commonly refers to as hero-stones and *satī*-stones respectively (see chapter 3 for classification):

- multi-panelled steles or pillars dedicated to male heroes;
- multi- and single-panelled steles or pillars in honor of *satīs*.

We basically omitted all those materials which are not in the shape of steles or pillars (such as the *vṛndāvanas* for instance, still commemorating *satīs*) or which, although respecting this formal requisite, lack of clear signs unequivocally ascribing to the deceased a heroic death according to the definition of heroism we tried to outline in 3.3.2 (such as the one-panelled steles showing a male and female couple standing next to each other in a static position, for instance, that we are keen to classify more generically as “ancestors memorials”). The explicit celebration of a sacrifice through the iconography of the artefacts is therefore the first and foremost criterion for their incorporation in the catalogue, as a reflection of our interest in the concept of “heroism” from the theoretical point of view.

Such a guideline was indispensable for a primary selection of the amount of materials collected during our fieldwork, which exceeds by far the number of the samples ultimately analyzed. Out of thirty-one sites explored, twenty-five of them altogether revealed nearly three-hundred cases of structures variously related to the funerary sphere between fragments and whole pieces, including not only single- and multi-panelled steles or pillars, but also *thaḍes* and *vṛndāvanas*. A further selection of the materials was then necessary for the scope of the present work, and it was made according to a series of parameters which we are going to illustrate.

Not all materials recorded in one and the same village have been included in the present catalogue, as well as not each and every village where steles were retrieved has

provided any selected sample for our analysis. The following factors have been taken into consideration:

- **preservation status:** it was given priority to those specimens in which the state of conservation allowed an appreciable discernment of the subjects portrayed. As a general trend, moreover, we tended to privilege whole pieces to fragments; this, however, could not soar to an absolute rule due to a certain degree of ambiguity associated to the concept of “fragment” in this context. While a number of specimens show indeed the loss of a conspicuous segment of their original size, and do not display any special sign compared to other examples better preserved, a few so-called fragments coincide instead with the major portions of the artefacts, the “fragment” being nothing else than the exposed part of a stele partially embedded in the ground. Therefore, in the selection of fragmentary pieces, additional parameters had to be evaluated, such as the narrative content displayed in the iconography, location, etc.;
- **relevance of structure and iconographic apparatus:** the selected samples exemplify the most significant variations of patterns and motifs among those retrieved. By doing so, we tried not to obliterate the frequency percentage of each specific element, be it an iconographic device or a structural feature of the artefact (stele vs. pillar); in other words, the higher/lower recurrence of a certain trait in our catalogue reflects altogether its higher/lower occurrence in the data recorded during the fieldwork;
- **presence of epigraphic apparatus:** although apparently contradictory to the stated purpose of the present research, which consists in a reappraisal of the memorial stones iconography even in the lack of inscriptions, the occurrence of inscriptions has been evaluated as a parameter of inclusion precisely because of its episodic incidence in the context of Maharashtra so far explored;
- **location and distribution:** together with the structural and iconographic layout, the context of discovery represents a major issue in the study of these materials. The representativeness of their position compared to the surroundings (be it a temple, a public area in a village etc.) or to other specimens was pursued as a criterion for selection: all the context variants recorded during the fieldwork – however corresponding to a limited range – are exemplified in the catalogue.

Many samples have been found as isolated pieces; in this case their inclusion chiefly depends on formal features (according to the guidelines previously described), and/or on the meaningfulness of their physical relation with space and structures around. Yet, the most substantial number of steles was retrieved in small groups or clusters which size differs from case to case, from a minimum of three-four samples to even more than one-hundred pieces gathered in the same place; when not all the specimens of the same group could be included due to reasons of space,²³⁷ the selection was based on the representativeness of their iconographic features.

Notably, the study of the current location of the steles throws the base for investigations on a still unexplored issue pertaining the ancient Hindu memorial stones, that is to say the perception of these artefacts by the contemporary communities (see 3.5).

The structure of the catalogue combines the attention to the iconography of the steles with their geographical provenance, thus pursuing the identification of regional recurrent patterns, on one side, and their local renderings, on the other. As far as the first facet is concerned, namely the narrative repertoire, the materials have been sorted into three macro-groups corresponding to the three variants to which – following our interpretation - the steles and pillars can be virtually ascribed. Every section, in other words, reflects the three possible nuances of heroism epitomized by the dedicatees of these memorials as a consequence of their out-of-ordinary death (see 3.3.2); further subdivisions within macro-groups give account of the specific death circumstances as they appear on the materials under examination. The structure of the catalogue can be then summarized as follows:

1. **Martial heroism**, including:
 - cattle defense/raid;
 - fort assaults;
 - skirmish of unknown nature.
2. **Accidental heroism**, as in the clash between a human being and a wild animal.
3. **Religious heroism**, as in:
 - practices of self-mortification or devotional suicide;
 - *satī* rituals

²³⁷ Clusters like those in the villages of Nere, Velapur, Kikli would deserve separate catalogues, so conspicuous being the number of steles found there (see chapter 5.5).

Eighty, two, and twenty-eight specimens between slabs and pillars are respectively gathered in each macro-group, to which a series of wall carvings has to be added. The sequence of the materials is based on the place of retrieval.

5.2 Structures, sizes, materials

Regardless of the criteria so far outlined with relation to the assemblage of the materials within the catalogue, two basic variants of memorial stones can be described: the one-sided carved specimens and the multi-sided carved specimens.

The former class includes those which are to be named “steles” *stricto sensu*, that is to say slabs provided with an iconographic apparatus on the front side, while the two lateral faces and the back one are just rough-cut. The height of samples as such ranges from a minimum of 70 cm ca. to a maximum of 200 cm ca., the medium size (approximately 100/130 cm ca.) being the most widespread; their thickness, corresponding to the width of the lateral sides, goes from a minimum of 10 cm ca. and never exceeds the maximum limit of 20 cm. As to the proper width of the carved face, it measures between 30 and 70 cm ca., but it has to be noted that this dimension is subjected to fluctuations more than the others: the carved face, indeed, frequently tapers upwards (although at times downwards), so that its upper and lower sizes are often uneven.

To the latter class, instead, belong materials which should be more properly defined as “pillars”, due to the fact that they appear as stone blocks, approximately square-based, with reliefs on three or four sides. Normally all the carved faces display similar proportions, the distinction between front and lateral ones being consequently lost – equally lost is the concept of thickness, which ultimately corresponds to the width of each carved side; yet, at times one of the faces may bear prominent characteristics, like a larger size and a more elaborated iconography, eventually making the others appear as subsidiary (see for instance no. 110, pl. 123). In all likelihood, a precise functional meaning is often associated to this second type of stones, that is to say to commemorate more deceased male heroes on one and the same memorial,²³⁸ a reading suggested to some extent also by Sontheimer in his pioneering publication.²³⁹ A certain reiteration of

²³⁸ The commemoration of more *satīs* on the same memorial is still recorded but is represented by a different device, as we will see.

²³⁹ Sontheimer 1982b: 276. The late German scholar, however, is not keen to apply this interpretation to all trilaterally or quadrilaterally carved memorial stones: “An exception to this is the stone in the garden

the portrayed subjects on each of the carved faces of the pillars would confirm this hypothesis.²⁴⁰

It should be noted, however, that such a device is not just a prerogative of multi-sided memorials: a number of one-sided steles, indeed, show vertical subdivisions of the figured area where two replicas of the same episode are given side by side; in other words, some or all the sections of the narrative happen to be split into two mirroring halves, each provided with its own protagonist and personages interacting with him, each representing the deeds of one fallen heroes (e.g. no. 71, pl. 82 and no. 72, pl. 83). Sometimes the celebration of two heroes does not even use any vertical split of the scenes, the two deceased being simply represented side by side in the different stages (e.g. no. 74, pl. 87 and no. 75, pl. 88).

In the lack of inscriptions, it is not possible to establish whether the deceased commemorated on the same memorial, who supposedly perished in the same circumstance, shared any parental bond – hence the choice of a “family memorial” - or were just united by common provenance and heroic attitude.

Despite the evident structural distinction so far highlighted between the one-sided and the multi-sided memorials, the proportions of the carved panels and the iconographic program of the latter typology do not display any diversion from the standards of the former.

For what concerns the type of stone used for these funerary structures,²⁴¹ a high predominance of basalt - the black variety, in particular – is recorded registered, something which does not surprise given the geological asset of Maharashtra.²⁴² Few exceptions (such as tall hose recovered in the site cave temple in Rajapuri) are carved

of the Bhārat Itihās Samsodhak Maṇḍal in Poona, where the hero is depicted in larger size stretching over one side of the stone” (*Ibid.*).

We had the chance to analyze the particular specimen mentioned by Sontheimer, and we noticed its structure to resemble a few samples we retrieved in the site of Nere (e.g. no. 66, pl. 79). Even if one of the carved faces displays the representation of a warrior on a much larger scale compared to those we see on the other sides, however, we are still incline to evaluate these specimens as “collective hero-stones”: if not so, it would mean that the circumstances of the death of one and the same hero (skirmish/cattle raid) have multiple replicas on the pillar (i.e. one on each side), which thing seems at least uneconomic. Neither it seems plausible that the skirmishes or the cattle raids represented on each carved face stand as different episodes in the life of one and the same warrior, for on these samples death circumstances are regularly preceded by the representation of the hero’s corpse on the lowest panel, which reiteration would be even more hardly justified.

²⁴⁰ Our hypothesis of course does not match cases of multi-sided stones where the panels do not display reiteration of subjects, as exemplified once again by no. 110, pl. 123.

²⁴¹ The upcoming considerations derive from direct observation; technical analysis may add further confirmations.

²⁴² Newman 1984: 16.

out of laterite blocks, a rock formation particularly widespread in some areas of the Deccan with higher percentage of rain and humidity.²⁴³

5.3 Iconography: forms and interpretations

A persistent difficulty lurks in every attempt to frame the Hindu memorial stones phenomenon within fixed patterns like classifications and definitions, for a number of exceptions to the rule immediately raise, even at a micro-regional level such as that we are analyzing. Nonetheless, trying to point out major trends and recurrent patterns will be not an unfruitful effort as unexpected data may spring and ultimately contribute to a deeper understanding of these materials.

5.3.1 Layout

Two models basically inform the arrangement of the figured areas on the memorial stones included in our catalogue: the iconographic motifs may be either distributed in a series of horizontal panels or be disposed across the board without any apparent subdivision of the space, hence the definition we adopted of “multi-panelled” and “single-panelled” stones. According to our fieldwork experience, the first solution is common to both steles and pillars, the second being proper of steles only.

Both the layouts – even the second, which at first may induce to think of a higher degree of freedom – are highly codified, patterns and contents being rather standardized in either case. The impression of homogeneity springing from a regularity as such, however, is counterbalanced by the conclusions deriving from a closer analysis of the samples. The existence of a conventional iconographic syntax to which virtually all sculptors of the area under examination conform never culminates into the production of identical specimens; even when micro-regional trends are so clearly distinguished to the point that different pieces can be reasonably traced back to the same workshop, two identical samples have not ever been found in the span of our data collection activity: postures of the figures, details and position of the attributes, architecturally-shaped designs, although always belonging to a bounded repertoire, bear their own characteristics and punctually differ from sample to sample.

²⁴³ I am thankful to Dr. A. Bankar for helping me to identify this material. See again Newman 1984: 16.

At least to a certain extent, a correspondence can be established between the nature of the memorial stone (hero- or *satī*-), the orientation of the narrative style (pictorial or symbolic) and the way how this is distributed in the figured area (panels subdivision or not). In the area object of our research, the lack of encased scenes appears as a distinctive mark of memorials to *satīs*, while a proper repartition of the narrative into panels seems the solution regularly adopted for all the other steles, those reported in literature as hero-stones. This seems to match the tendency of the latter to narrate the story through an explicit rendering of actions and their consequences, that is to say through a sequence of episodes, whereas the iconography of the former shows a higher inclination to symbolism at the expense of the narrative flow. It has to be underlined, however, that correspondences as such can be looked at just as trends, for a number of exceptions are recorded. As far as memorials to *satīs* are concerned, for instance, any univocal association to the single-panelled layout definitely fails when we come to that syncretic type of memorial definable as *satī*-cum-hero stone, where the *satī* immolation is explicitly portrayed or symbolized together with her husband's sacrifice by means of a scene or a symbol inserted in a context ultimately shaped as that of a hero-stone (see no. 107, pl. 120; no. 108, pl. 121; and also no. 111, pl. 124). Moreover, even when only the *satī* is celebrated, without references to her husband's heroic death, specimens are recorded with an actual panels subdivision of the iconography (e.g. no. 102, pl. 115).

A specular phenomenon is documented on some hero-stones, where the common repartition in scenes seems to fade at times: the depiction of the deceased armed warrior alone may ultimately occupy even the vast majority of the figured area, like some cases of two-panelled steles demonstrate (e.g. no. 61, pl. 74). It should be noted, however, that the further variant consisting of single-panelled memorials with only the deceased portrayed across the board in a heroic attitude²⁴⁴ are not recorded in the area under examination.²⁴⁵

Yet, it is worth noting that one-panelled hero-stones as such are rather common in South India,²⁴⁶ and that they do exist in other regions of Maharashtra as well, as

²⁴⁴ By "heroic attitude" we refer to a dynamic, armed pose suggesting an offensive/defensive context. This specification is necessary in order not to overcome the fundamental distinction between hero-stones, even though one-panelled, and simple memorials to ancestors, which are often one-panelled but do not display features connected with offensive/defensive deeds performed by the deceased.

²⁴⁵ Apart from a dubious exception in the site of Rajapuri, where a man is represented while facing a tiger. This stele however is fragmentary and it may be suspected that it was originally part of a multi-panelled hero-stone.

²⁴⁶ For an overview, see for instance the samples in Rajan 2000.

Sontheimer informs us:²⁴⁷

The more we turn to the north-east from the southern districts of Maharashtra, e.g., to the Usmanabad Dt., and again in the Candrapur Dt., and to the east towards Andhra Pradesh, the number of multi-panelled stones as well as the number of panels of the stones decreases. Here we come across hero-stones which are not divided into panels. On the stone which is generally about one meter high the warrior is carved in action holding a shield, wielding a sword, a bow, a battle-axe, or a spear and, occasionally, the sun and the moon are shown.

By highlighting some difference in the stylistic elaboration between the carvings on the one-panelled stones and their multi-panelled cognates, and by remarking the absence of the *linga* worshipping scene on the top panel of the former, which in turn is a trademark of the latter, as our catalogue illustrates, the German scholar infers a probable affiliation of the one-panelled stones to the tribal milieu. Although Sontheimer's position in this respect would need to be corroborated by further investigations, it appears no less clearly how the study of the varieties of the memorial stones layout can offer thought-provoking hints on the ethnical background which produced them, and, collaterally, it may be even used as a parameter for an overall chronological assessment (see chapter 5.4).

5.3.2 Panels: their distribution and content

In dealing with contents and meaning of the iconographic repertoire illustrated in our catalogue, we introduce now a distinction between male hero-stones *tout court* on one side, and *satī*-stones on the other; such a methodological distinction will allow us to better highlight the peculiar features which, as a matter of fact, characterize each of these two categories.²⁴⁸

HERO-STONES

As already pointed out, all hero-stones under examination here feature a subdivision in panels, their number ranging between two and five. Two distinct issues

²⁴⁷ Sontheimer 1982b: 277.

²⁴⁸ This distinction does not contradict the classification we fostered so far according to which the materials can be grouped on the ground of their functional aspects, that is to say memorials celebrating martial heroism, memorials celebrating accidental heroism and memorials celebrating religious heroism. What we propose in the present paragraph, in other words, is just an operative distinction based on iconographic elements, and does not claim to be a theoretical distinction as the former.

raise from these considerations and need to be explored before describing our materials from other perspectives:

1. is there any connection between the number of panels and the specific types of hero-stones?
2. which is the narrative sequence of the panels?

Let us now consider them in order.

As far as the specimens in our catalogue are concerned, their overall preservation status and position actually prevent any study meant to identify steady connections between the number of panels and the stone typology (i.e. commemorating martial, accidental or religious heroism). This gap is determined by the fact that the original number of panelson many samples is simply not ascertainable being they fragmentary or partially embedded in the ground. Nonetheless, we believe a review of the data to be worth a try with the due methodological cautions.

To start, we need to stress that our evaluation of the comparative extent of each series of panels is based on approximately 2/3 of the materials useful for the purpose: out of eighty-eight hero-stones to be analyzed,²⁴⁹ once excluded those partially buried and the unascertainable fragments, sixty-five pieces are ultimately left for our statistic appraisal; for the sake of simplicity this count does exclude the multi-sided memorials (i.e. the pillars) too, their number being rather small and therefore of no impact on the final result.²⁵⁰ The first of the following tables offers a quantitative synopsis of the records, expressed then as a percentage in the second chart:

TYPE OF HEROISM	NUMBER OF PANELS ON THE FIGURED AREA			
	two	three	four	five
martial	5	25	27	—
accidental	1	1	—	—
religious	—	4	1	1
TOTAL AMOUNT*	65 hero-stones *excluded pillars (4), unascertainable fragments and half-buried pieces (19)			

²⁴⁹ Of one-hundred-ten pieces included in our catalogue, twenty-two are *satī*-stones (excluding from the count the wall carvings), which will be reviewed later on in this same chapter.

²⁵⁰ The three- and four-sided hero-stones in the shape of pillars included in our catalogue are five; they could not be inserted efficiently within this resume unless to “dissect” them and treat each of their faces as an independent memorial. The number of panels displayed on these specimens, however, ranges between two and four. For more details, see their respective files (from no. 76, pl. 89 to no. 80, pl. 93).

NUMBER OF STONES DIVIDED BY SUBJECT	FREQUENCY OF THE PANELS SUBDIVISION IN THE FIGURED AREA			
	Two panels	Three panels	Four panels	Five panels
martial heroism: 57	9%	44%	47%	—
accidental heroism: 2	50%	50%	—	—
religious heroism: 6	—	66%	17%	17%

Although based on a selection of the catalogued materials, these data may still reveal some tendencies. The first and foremost pertains to the neat predominance of the three- and four-panelled models. The three-panelled one, in particular, not only is ubiquitous, but it also shows the highest occurrence percentage in almost each category of memorials except one – that of martial heroism – where however it is tied to the four-panelled one. As for the extremes of the band, namely the two- and five-panelled layouts, they display a rather sporadic occurrence and can be labelled as exceptional in the context of our retrievals. Interestingly, their frequency percentage is high in association with the two less common categories of memorials – those portraying accidental and religious heroism; due to the remarkable paucity of our records in relation to them, however, it would be inappropriate to draft any interpretation of this phenomenon, whereas further retrievals may in future confirm or belie what emerged so far from our data.

All panels are defined by a plain or geometrically decorated frame (the second option being much less frequent) meant to separate them from each other and delimit their sides. Although the figured area is condensed on the body of the stone, its topmost section reveals an autonomous iconographic repertoire consisting of architecturally designed elements which more or less closely recall the superstructure of a temple or shrine. As far as the one-sided memorials (steles) are concerned, only two samples fall outside this rule: on one of them, in place of the most common stylized imitation of a building roofing, we observe a figurative scene that would be rather expected to be found on the body of the stele (i.e. the *śivaliṅga* worship: see no. 24, pl. 37); in the other case, the crowning section of the slab is occupied by the representation of an anthropomorphic bust (putatively identifiable with the deified image of the deceased or with a divinity: see no. 21, pl. 34). Multi-sided memorials (pillars) feature instead a

lesser compliance with this model, since in correspondence with the topmost section they bear abstract patterns if not an absolute lack of engravings.

The base of the stone, be it a stele or a pillar, is regularly devoid of images, unless elements from the adjacent panel trespass on it (e.g. no. 51, pl. 64; no. 72, pl. 85), something which occurs frequently on the listels between one panel and the other (see again no. 9, pl. 22 for instance).

The panels basically represent different stages of the hero's itinerary of ascension from the worldly level, where he dies giving evidence of his heroism by facing trials of different nature, to the otherworldly sphere, where he enjoys the paradisiacal abode in proximity to the god of whom he is devotee. As it appears from the quantitative analysis of the panels previously outlined, on a number of stones the narration takes a tripartite configuration: the lowest panel captures the circumstance where the hero loses his life, namely a human/animal combat or a suicide; the middle one depicts his ascension to heaven in the company of celestial damsels, the *apsarases*; the uppermost panel portrays him in the act of worshipping the *śivaliṅga* in the presence of at least one officiant. This tripartite configuration, however, is not strictly confined to three-panelled memorials: at times one of the episodes of the narration may be expanded to occupy more than one horizontal board, like some four-panelled stones prove with their warlike scenes distributed on the two lower sections (see for instance no. 48, pl. 61).

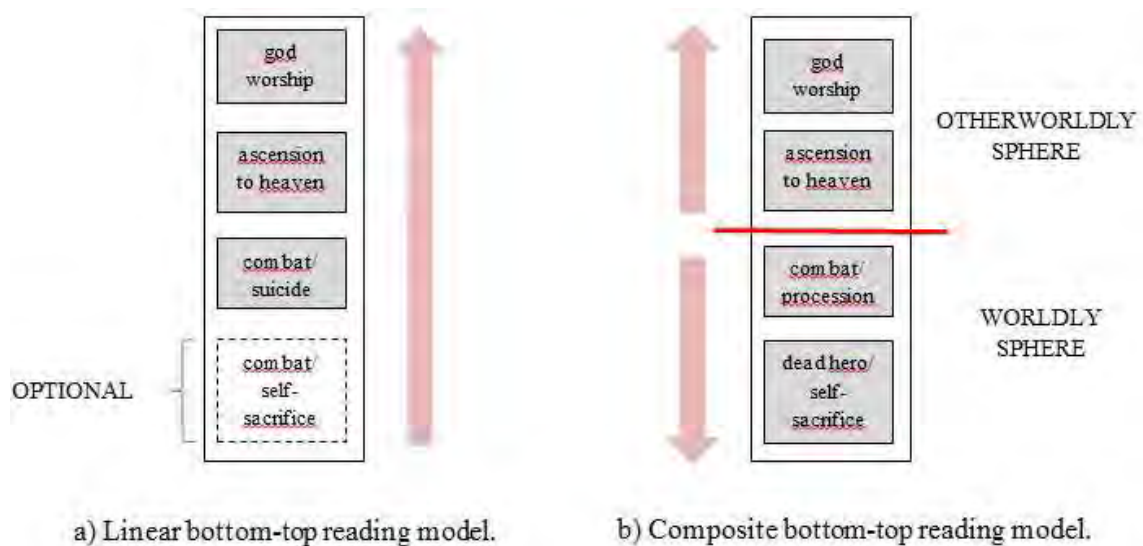
In a number of records the acknowledged "bottom-top" reading of the iconography – that we mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph as the common interpretative pattern – is fully satisfying, but its efficiency starts becoming weaker when we come to cases where the consecution made of violent episode/ascension to heaven/god worship is modified by integrations or omissions, or even when the three/four panels are arranged in a different sequence. In this regard, the main diversion is found on four-panelled stones related to martial heroism. On this type of memorials, indeed, it may happen that, beyond the three basic stages we described above, a further scene is given at the bottom of the figured area with the representation of the corpse of the hero (see for instance no. 9 pl. 22). In the light of records as such, the linear bottom-top reading reveals itself as inadequate, since the death of the hero, from the perspective of a mere chronological consecution, should *follow* the warlike episode which caused it rather than preceding it. A similar circumstance, *mutatis mutandis*, may occur on stones celebrating religious heroism, as an example among those we collected proves: no. 86, pl. 99 bears the representation of the hero's decapitation on the lowest panel, with the

one right above it displaying the procession scene which in all likelihood had accompanied him to his execution spot; once again, the chronological consecution according to the linear bottom-top reading apparently fails, for an event actually preceding the hero's death seems to be following it in the iconographic sequence.

In fact, cases like these are everything but sporadic in the context under examination and therefore can be hardly labelled as exceptions, neither can be reasonably evaluated as the fruit of the sculptors' free will, or as the result of a misinterpretation of an otherwise stable pattern. The number of four-panelled samples such as those we just explored actually induces to rethink of the more classical bottom-top reading model and invites to search for an alternative which might better take into account what in our opinion correspond to equally regular patterns. A sharpened version of the "linear bottom-top reading" will be therefore proposed below, an operative model which we define by similitude as "composite bottom-top reading" and which does not claim to be absolute²⁵¹ nor fully exhaustive, but which aims to explain those frequent cases not comfortably fitting in the linear bottom-top model.

According to our model, two vectors of the narration can be distinguished, corresponding to the two dimensions of the hero's deeds. A horizontal line splitting the four-panelled figured area into two halves should be imagined at first; starting from it, two reading orientations are traced, one proceeding top-bottom and the other moving bottom-top, to be respectively assigned to the lowest portion of the stele, i.e. the hero's action on the worldly level (violent episode-death), and to its uppermost section, dedicated to the hero's otherworldly progression in the afterlife (ascension to heaven - god worship). The figure below compares the two models; each of them, as we tried to point out, does not claim to be absolute, yet responds more efficiently to the contexts we analyzed where the other cannot be successfully applied:

²⁵¹ Further data may confirm it or allow to sharpen our interpretation in future, hence we consider it as provisory.



The value of the composite bottom-top reading model is a merely operative one: by introducing an adjustment to the linear model, it ultimately allows to relocate within a reasonably consistent narrative pattern what would otherwise appear as a puzzling chronological flaw of the timeline.

Yet, the elaboration of an all-encompassing interpretative model for the panel reading seems an unrealistic task at present. Even at a small scale level such as that of our case study, indeed, the nature of the exceptions does not allow to safely outline a pattern valid for all records. More data collection is needed in order to assess whether the episodic and still inexplicable modifications we observe on some of our records effectively bear an exceptional character or rather represent alternative but still acknowledged trends. The stones celebrating religious heroism, for instance, show lesser homogeneity if compared to the martial heroism cognates for what concerns the panels arrangement: out of five samples, indeed, two are somehow peculiar. One of them, a four panelled sample, can only be read through our “composite bottom-top reading model” (see the above mentioned no. 86, pl. 99), which thing, from a broader perspective, actually confirms the frequency of the two vectors narrative pattern; the other sample strikes for the representation of two violent scenes out of three, both theoretically at the origin of the hero’s death, that is to say the performance of a self-sacrifice vow on the lowest panel, and a fight scene on the middle one (no. 88, pl. 101). Whether this second specimen displays a codified iconographic solution within the repertoire of religious suicides memorials cannot be currently confirmed on the ground of our scanty retrievals.

The category of accidental heroism shows many uncommon features is uncommon features. Out of two samples collected, one displays a chronological sequence of the episodes which cannot be explained even by applying our composite bottom-top reading model, for the event leading to the hero's death, i.e. the clash against a wild animal, is portrayed on the middle panel, with the bottom one representing his ascension to heaven and the top one his devotion to Śiva (no. 81, pl. 94). The other sample, although showing a chronologically consistent progression of the events, consists of just two panels, a layout solution that we already observed to be rather infrequent in the context of our records. From a more genuinely iconographic perspective, it is worth noting that the two-panelled typology, regardless of the syntactic limitations deriving from the basic number of episodes, is not devoid of content variations: whereas the upper board always displays the religious affiliation of the hero through the *śivaliṅga* worship scene, the lower either represent the violent circumstance of the hero's death, or the hero alone standing in combat gear (e.g. no. 66, pl. 79).

As a consequence of these observations, it descends that any abstract model related to the panels sequence – the second interpretative issue we raised at the beginning of this paragraph – can only be defined in terms of general trends on which a number of so called exceptions, yet to be confirmed as such by further evidence . Not every attempt towards a theoretical appraisal of the panels is doomed to fail, however. The analysis so far carried out, indeed, allows us to recognize the existence of a fundamental dichotomy in the nature of the panels, that is to say the distinction between essential and optional panels on the ground of their content. In other words, it is possible to identify those episodes which are ubiquitously represented, thus coinciding with the bare bones of the iconography of the multi-panelled stones here under examination, and scenes which in turn, despite being acknowledged components of the repertoire, may be variously omitted.

The chart below highlights this distinction on the ground of all hero-stones included in our catalogue. A subdivision according to category was needed since martial and accidental heroism – although with due distinctions, like the warlike context on one side, and the animal combat on the other – actually share the same iconographic vocabulary, while memorials pertaining to religious heroism show content which are peculiar to their own category and cannot be assimilated to anything else displayed on martial and accidental heroism stones (first and foremost, the procession scene; the

decapitation scene, instead, representing the violent episode which causes the hero's death, could be easily compared to the warlike context and to the animal combat of the cognate categories). Each column simply enlists all the episodes recorded according to the memorial category; in other words, it does not reflect the iconography of any specific stone, but it is a synthesis of all the different episodes variously and alternatively represented on the specimens in our collection. In red we marked those scenes which are regularly encountered on each and every sample, while in black are those episodes which may either appear or have been overlooked by the sculptor. It derives that several combinations are documented. As far as martial heroism is concerned, for instance, we may find stones showing dead hero-man combat-*śivaliṅga* worship (thus omitting the ascension to heaven scene), together with specimens where the sequence man combat-ascension to heaven-*śivaliṅga* worship is displayed (the dead hero panel being bypassed). There might be then some religious heroism stones showing man combat-self-sacrifice-*śivaliṅga* worship (where the procession and the ascension to heaven scenes do miss), as well as memorials bearing procession – self-sacrifice - ascension to heaven-*śivaliṅga* worship (without any man combat episode being reported).

Notably, the cardinal number of the panel where each episode is carved - as it will be found in our catalogue (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) - has been willingly omitted because the content of the panels is not necessarily related to the place they occupy in the sequence; that is to say, the essential/optional nature of the episodes, a feature that we believe to be definable in absolute terms, overcomes the quest for their respective position, which in turn, as we demonstrated above, is an unstable issue despite the existence of some recurrent patterns.

	MARTIAL and ACCIDENTAL HEROISM (out of 59 specimens)	RELIGIOUS HEROISM (out of 6 specimens)
PANELS CONTENT (episodes)	dead hero	man combat
	Man/animal combat or hero in combat	procession
	gear	
	ascension to heaven	self-sacrifice
	śivaliṅga worship	ascension to heaven
		śivaliṅga worship

Data demonstrate that the bare bones of our hero-stones iconography basically consists of two episodes: the one where the dead more or less explicitly gives evidence of his heroism, and the one displaying his religious affiliation through the performance of a rite. It is worth noting that this pattern coincides with what we punctually encounter on two-panelled steles and on two-panelled sides of pillars (e.g. no. 82, pl. 95 and no. 66, pl. 79; probably no. 78, pl. 91 left side). Let us now analyze more in details these episodes under the iconographic and iconological perspective.

DEAD HERO – When represented, this scene always occurs on the lowest portion of the stone, no exceptions being so far recorded to this rule.

The corpse of the hero is captured either in profile view or as seen from above, on the ground (e.g. no. 11, pl. 24 and no. 28, pl. 41 respectively), or alternatively on the funeral pyre (no. 40, pl. 53). On this panel a series of information may be provided which hardly find space elsewhere in the figured area. The first and foremost pertains the cause of the skirmish where the hero loses his life: at times, indeed, he lies on the ground surrounded by a herd (consisting of head of cattle in all the specimens with retrieved), which thing undoubtedly frames his death within the context of a cattle raid and of a pastoral economy (like in no. 21, pl. 34. On this issue see chapter 4). When his corpse is not alone or encircled by the animals object of contention, he may be surrounded by *apsarases* who garland him (see again no. 40, pl. 53), or be together with his wife on a pyre, a signal explicitly suggesting that the *satī* ritual was performed as a consequence of his death (see no. 107, pl. 120).

MAN/ANIMAL COMBATOR HERO ALONE IN COMBAT GEAR– No stable position can be assigned to this scene.

On small and medium size stones it is always confined to one panel; as a rule, the hero is portrayed on the left edge and his foes on the right, the most widespread variant displaying the hero in the centre and his enemies standing all around him. Only one exception is recorded in this respect, the hero being depicted on the right edge of the board (no. 53, pl. 66).²⁵² On big size samples this scene may occupy even two panels, a prerogative not featured by any other episode among those we documented (e.g. no. 48, pl. 61).

All personages portrayed in this scene are armed, and may be either on foot or on horseback. According to the magnitude of the battle, more or less details and collateral personages appear, from those having no active roles in the fight, namely banner or parasol bearers (see no. 48, pl. 61), to extra-human figures like demons (no. 47, pl. 60). Both the cases we retrieved of heroes dying as a consequence of their encounter with a wild animal display a tiger combat.²⁵³

SELF-SACRIFICE – Like the man/animal combat, this scene has not fixed position in the sequence.

As far as the religious memorials on our catalogue are concerned, we define as self-sacrifice an act which might technically be executed by an individual at the hands of another individual, but which implies the voluntary termination of life by the side of the person who is killed. This act corresponds to a decapitation with sword (e.g. no. 85, pl. 98). The hero is beheaded in a contemplative pose, that is to say sitting with crossed legs and hands joint in front of the bust, at times flanked by a figure who collects his head on a plate (no. 86, pl. 99). The execution must have taken the shape of a collective ritual, as the occasional representation of a procession preceding and following it proves.

Another type of self-sacrifice recorded on our materials consists of a body piercing to death by the use of a pillar provided with a three-spiked top end on which the hero throws himself (no. 88, pl. 101).

PROCESSION – When represented, this episode may occur either below or above the one actually showing the hero's dead.

²⁵² On this sample the whole iconography actually shows a reverse layout.

²⁵³ No samples commemorating deaths following snake-bites were retrieved, although being a case widely documented in literature. See chapter 3.3.

A procession scene is expectedly associated with self-sacrifice rituals (no. 83, pl. 96), but occasionally also with memorials celebrating martial heroism, although the precise meaning in the latter case remains more opaque (see again no. 47, pl. 60). As to the former circumstance, instead, the context is clear: the hero is taken on an elephant back to the sacrifice spot, accompanied by a mahout and by his wife at times, with groups of musicians and other participants whose attributes may be accurately defined.

ASCENSION TO HEAVEN – This scene usually occurs on the middle-upper portion of the figured area, only once being recorded elsewhere, that is to say in coincidence with the lowest panel (no. 81, pl. 94).

The hero is standing, or alternatively sitting in a palanquin; in either case he is flanked left and right by celestial beings like *apsarases* and, although more rarely, *gandharvas* (see no. 40, pl. 53) as from literary descriptions.²⁵⁴

At times, the depiction of the hero's wife enriches this episode with a further character. One may tentatively read her presence in the otherworldly sphere as consequence of the performance of the *satī* ritual, something which at times is explicitly represented also on the lowest panel, as we already observed. It is worth introducing at this point a fundamental reflection pertaining to the overall representation of persons affiliated to the hero during his lifetime on one and the same memorial stone. We learn from ethnographical records in tribal areas that the meaning of other figures' presence beyond the deceased – wife included – not always has to be read as a proof of their collateral departure. The results of the fieldwork carried out by E. Fischer and H. Shah in Gujarat offer vast evidence that²⁵⁵

[...] The death of any person might be taken as reason for the installation of a memorial slab on which also other individuals – dead or still alive – may be represented, including the head of the family who is paying for the expenses and still alive. [...]

Interestingly, this causes no flaws in the ritual when the actual time for their funerary ceremonies comes:²⁵⁶

When a person died for whom a memorial slab had already been installed (or for which the figure has already been carved on such a slab), his *jiv-soul* is called and installed in this slab. [...] On one stone, the

²⁵⁴ Hara 2001; Rossi 2008; Pieruccini 2009.

²⁵⁵ Fischer, Shah 1973: 56.

²⁵⁶ Fischer, Shah 1973: 56.

dead person is represented sitting on a horse, while the other family members are seated in the cart. One of them is the wife of the deceased man. She was still alive when the *khambo* [i.e. the memorial stele] was erected. [...] after her death, the bhagat forms the jiv-soul in the memorial slab. There exists no separate *khatru*-stone [i.e. memorial] for her or for any of the family members depicted on the stone.

Although the stone slabs retrieved by the two authors do not celebrate heroic deaths but “are erected by wealthy persons to commemorate their existence”,²⁵⁷ yet we believe these observations to be no less relevant to our cases.

On Maharashtrian hero-stones the wife’s presence may be documented not only on the panel depicting the ascension to heaven of the deceased, but also on that showing the *śivaliṅga* worship. In the former context she may either be sitting next to her deceased husband on a palanquin (as again in no. 40, pl. 53), or be standing beside him, two variants which Sontheimer describes as a preliminary remark to the issue of the actual performance of *satī* rituals or not:²⁵⁸

The simple idea of *apsaras* carrying the hero towards heaven without a celestial vehicle or palanquin which was a sign of honour and at the same time allowed scope for the wife of the hero to be carved – seems to preclude the idea of *satī*. Yet at times we find the wife somewhat awkwardly and artificially placed besides the *apsaras* and then perched behind the hero worshipping with him the *liṅga* in the top panel [...]. Spread of the custom of *satī* accounts for the tendency to include the wife in the middle panel besides the *apsaras*, and to show the couple worshipping in the top panel.

Finally, the German author frames these reflections in the light of ethnographical records:²⁵⁹

However such depictions may not yet imply that *satī* was actually committed. On modern ancestors memorials (e.g., of the Dhangars of Maharashtra), the wife is also shown though she may be alive. But even if she remarries she will be united after death with her first husband with whom she was first united in marriage. Thus it would not be premature to show her on the ancestor stone at the death of her first husband.

The quest for the extent of realism conveyed by this specific motif raises a broader issue with relation to the hero-stones iconography and the hero-stones category as a whole. The relationship between the representation of actual events, on one side, and the

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁸ Sontheimer 1982b: 279-280.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

depiction of an idealized and desirable reality, on the other one, is still an unexplored issue indeed. If the same concept of heroism exerted a certain fascination among individuals from all castes, inspirational motifs for their heroic deeds being the rising in social and ritual rank on the worldly level and the everlasting glory on the otherworldly dimension, it would not be specious to postulate a certain degree of idealization with regards to the very nature of the deeds actually accomplished, the same idealization which ultimately may have been at the origin of the proliferation of these monuments.

GOD WORSHIP – This episode is regularly carved on the top panel of the figured area; the only exception in this respect can be observed on a sample where the worshipping ritual appears further above, that is to say on the uppermost section of the memorial, the place usually deputed to the imitation of covering architectures (the above mentioned no. 24, pl. 37).

In the centre of the composition always stands the *śivaliṅga*, frequently resting on Nandi's back (see for instance no. 23, pl. 36); on the left side we find the hero, depicted in a meditative pose and at times in the company of an attendant or with his wife, while on the right stands a *pujārī*, holding in his hands the tools to perform the rite.

As the “dead hero” scene may inform us about the causes of the hero's death, so this panel illustrates his devotional orientation, which always coincides with Śaivism in the case of our materials; for the sake of completeness, however, it is worth noting that alternative religious affiliations are known from stones retrieved in other regions of Maharashtra.²⁶⁰

Beyond giving account of the nature of the cult and of the rite performed to fulfill it - namely, the *pūjā* - this panel throws light on another aspect of religion expressed by the hero-stones iconography, i.e. the concept of paradise. By showing the hero worshipping the *śivaliṅga* in the otherworldly dimension, we believe these memorials convey a sharper image of afterlife than that commonly defined as *brahmaloka* or *sūryaloka* by the scholarly discourse related to the concept of heroism in Hindu culture.²⁶¹

The link between the very existence and proliferation of memorial stones as a whole and *bhakti* forms of devotion has already been pointed out elsewhere in the present research (see chapter 1, 2). The *śivaliṅga* worship episode, in our opinion, represents a further

²⁶⁰ A hero-stone representing the cult to the goddess Mahālakṣmī can be found in the Kholapur museum (Sontheimer 1982b: 271). As a matter of fact, however, the representation of gods other than Śiva is rare, the depiction of Viṣṇu or Devī occurring at times (Mate 1982: 80), as well as that of Gaṇeśa (Dr. A. Bankar's personal communication; see also no. 110, pl. 123 in our catalogue).

²⁶¹ See for instance Sontheimer 1982b: 273-274; Sontheimer 2004 [1976]: 125-126. For an overview of the concept of heroic afterlife according to texts both from Northern and Southern India, see Rossi 2008.

confirmation in this direction if evaluated in the light of the descriptions of the devotee's afterlife contained in the *bhakti* literature.²⁶² The *bhakta* is thought to prosecute his experience of God in the afterlife through a progression of four stages of beatitude which culminate into a complete merging with the supreme being; in other words the salvation, coinciding with the union with God, consists of a path where each stage corresponds to a different degree of closeness to Him: the first step is the *sālokya*, literally “being in the same world” as the deity; then follow the *sāmīpya*, “living in close proximity” to the Lord, the *sārūpya*, “having a form similar” to God”, and the *sāyujya*, “being united” with the Lord.²⁶³ The act of worshipping depicted on the materials under examination, then, seems to suggest a certain degree of otherness of the deceased in respect to the object of his worship, which thing would be consistent with the evaluation of the episode as a visual transposition of the afterlife dimension corresponding to the *sālokya*.

One of the first issues springing from the analysis of the minute details carved on the hero-stones pertains to the concept of portraiture. We wonder indeed whether any realistic physiognomic rendering of the subjects is entailed in the making of the carvings, and consequently whether and to which extent the images we observe can actually be defined as portraits, either of the deceased and of the personages around him. Although the preservation status of our materials seems not to allow deep investigations in this direction (just few samples, for instance, bear an appreciable conservation of the facial traits: see no. 18, pl. 31), it should be admitted that no strong signals can be detected in favour of a naturalistic reading of the figures. An apparent lack of likeness and realism seems to involve not only collateral figures like the hero's enemies or the celestial beings who accompany him – something after all expected, the presence of these personages being just functional to the hero's deeds – but to a certain extent the dedicatee of the stele himself. Before drawing any conclusion, however, it is worth considering this facet of iconography from a theoretical perspective; hence, a contribution to the old dated²⁶⁴ and still debated quest for the origin and spread of portraiture in India may come from our materials as well.

²⁶² See for instance *BhāgavataPurāṇa* 7.9.44 and 9.4.67.

²⁶³ See Dhavamony 1984: 423-424, to whom we refer for the English translation of the source mentioned in n. 262.

²⁶⁴ See for instance Coomaraswamy 1939.

Recent works such as those by V. Dehejia,²⁶⁵ P. Kaimal²⁶⁶ and V. Lefevre²⁶⁷ show that, far from being a phenomenon confined to the Mughal influence, which certainly contributed to a great extent to its flourishing, the attitude towards portraiture of individuals not only emerges far back in time,²⁶⁸ but it is abundantly found in association with structures deputed to the commemoration and even the divinization of glorious ancestors.²⁶⁹ Yet, in order to adequately evaluate the extent of the phenomenon, it is first necessary to reassess a terminological definition, dismantling the common preconception which links the very essence of portraiture uniquely to a rendering of the subjects inspired to truth and reality.²⁷⁰ Following Kaimal's argumentation,²⁷¹

At the heart of this resistance to seeing portraits in India has been the deeply and, until recently, widely held perception that portraits are mirrors, reflecting objectively the subject's precise appearance at a given moment. In this view [...] the subject's specificity emerges most convincingly through the peculiarities of the model, peculiarities especially in physiognomy [...]. Knowing that portraits represent actual people who once experience material existence on this earth, viewers may expect to learn from portraits what these people really looked like, what personalities they had, what they thought about the temples their portraits adorn and about the gods housed within. [...] But portraiture studies in the last decades reveal that South Asia was not unique in producing portraits that could disappoint expectations of portraits to reflect their subjects objectively. In many times and places, the act of making portraits has not been a process of simple mimesis. [...] Despite the truth they may seem to promise, portraits are just as deliberately constructed as any other kind of visual art. [...] Art must re-represent the subject in order to transform it into that other entity, the art object.

The question raises, then, of what may be an irrefutable and universal marker of portraiture once excluded the objective mirroring and physiognomic peculiarities. Referring to semiotics studies, the author concludes that "[t]he truthfulness and social contact that portraits promise are embedded in what these images invariably are: direct references to people who existed outside the art object. Portraits depends upon concrete reference to the world of experience",²⁷² that is to say upon the maker's intent to

²⁶⁵ Dehejia 1998.

²⁶⁶ Kaimal 1999 and 2000.

²⁶⁷ Lefevre 2011: 83-90.

²⁶⁸ While examining Tamil Nadu portrait occurrences between the 9th and the 10th centuries AD, Kaimal(1999: 73-74), for instance, traces back the regional tradition of portraiture precisely to the memorials stones, namely to the *chāyāstambhas* of Nagarjunakonda (3rd century AD).

²⁶⁹ The opportunity to gain *punya* (religious merit) by the erection of monuments to the deceased is particularly stressed by Lefevre 2011: 89. See also our 2 in the present research.

²⁷⁰ For an analysis of the issue outside India, see Brilliant 1991.

²⁷¹ Kaimal 1999: 61-62.

²⁷² Kaimal 1999: 64.

produce a portrait and no less on the viewer's understanding of that intent. A process as such is admittedly complicated in the context of cross-cultural studies, since "a portrait's function may be unrecognizable to a viewer familiar with different cultural codes".²⁷³

From her side Dehejia, who, despite reporting a conspicuous amount of examples, still tends to stress the ecstatic and not-realistic quality of pre-Mughal Indian portraits to the detriment of individual physiognomic likeness, ultimately agrees that "[p]ortraits have always existed in India, though the nomenclature may be misleading to the modern reader because these stone, metal, or painted portraits payed little attention to physical resemblance".²⁷⁴

In the light of these reflections, once established that the Indian hero-stones respond to the society's concrete need to commemorate and celebrate - at times to the apotheosis - particular individuals who actually existed, with the result that every stone has an intimate connection with the extra-ordinary life experience of its own dedicatee, we believe the depiction of the deceased may to fully match the concept of portrait so far revised.

The codification we observed with regards to the number of panels and the nature of the episodes is paralleled by an equal degree of standardization of the iconographic devices: a fix range of personages is represented together with the hero, all displaying a fix range of attire and attributes. No less codified are the aniconic motifs carved on the crowing section of the memorials. The following review aims at synthetizing elements which will be systematically exposed in each entry of our catalogue.²⁷⁵

In the frame of a general evaluation, hero-stones figures "compare very favourably with those on the narrative scenes on the pillar blocks. They are short, stout figures vigorous in action but quite indistinct as far as their facial features go".²⁷⁶ As far as their sexual connotation is concerned, female personages show a remarkable accentuation of hips and breast, in line with the common aesthetics of Indian sculpture.

Size always helps to establish one personage in each panel as the central figure of the scene and thus as the hero, being usually portrayed in a comparatively bigger scale. At times adorned with the holy thread of the twice-born, the *yajñopavīta*, his torso is

²⁷³ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁴ Dehejia 1998: 47.

²⁷⁵ Technical terms and definitions contained in this paragraph result from the pertaining entries in the following works related to classical Hindu iconography: Rao 1968; Banerjea 1985; Stutley 1985; Bunce 1997; Schleberger 1999.

²⁷⁶ Deshpande 1985: 77.

always bare, a feature common to all male and female figures portrayed. As a garment, male personages wear indeed just a lower piece, consisting of a sort of short skirt, the *dhotī*, which falls down to the knees or right above them; it may appear tightly adherent or open wide, and it is always provided with one large pleat waving over the legs and other more or less defined folds falling on the thighs (pl. 10). A slightly alternative interpretation of what we identify as a *dhotī* comes from J.K. Kamat and her study on the iconography of Medieval Karnataka, a region contiguous to Maharashtra from the geographical and cultural perspective. The author briefly mentions that according to a passage of the *Yaśastilaka* (a 10th century work throwing light on culture, politics and social life of early Medieval Deccan), “the soldiers of Karnāṭaka had their thick loin-cloth up to the knee-joints to serve like shorts [...]. Sculptures on hero-stones (*vīragals*) corroborate this description”.²⁷⁷

As an alternative to what we called *dhotī*, *pujārīs* may wear a *kaupīna*, the actual tied and simple loincloth (pl. 10, fig. 5). A waist band seems to be associated to the *dhotī*, which in the case of armed men often takes the shape of a proper belt with a sheathed dagger hanging on a side. Female figures’ clothing consists of a *sāṛī* – devoid of upper pieces – which may be either long down to the anklets or short to the knees height (pl. 10, fig. 1-3); a wide pleat rests over their legs as in the case of the males’ *dhotī*, and again tight-fitting folds on the thighs may be visible at times.

Both male and female personages are adorned with a series of jewels. Without exceptions, they all wear necklaces, from short one (*māla*) to long one reaching down the navel (*hāra*); bracelets regularly bind the wrists (*kaṅkaṇa*) and at times the arms, right above the biceps (*kēyūra*). Ear ornaments (*kuṇḍalas*), which are worn without exceptions by each and every figure, cannot be always identified in their specific varieties²⁷⁸ given the preservation status of the carvings; the most widespread type seems to be the circular and large one, either flat or slightly protruding, implying a remarkable dilatation of the ear lobes (*patraṅḍala*).

As for the hairstyle, it is worth reporting a short overview by S.R. Deshpande, who, in his work on Western Maharashtra sculpture during the Yādava period – notably, the same geographical area and chronological horizon as our materials – summarizes:²⁷⁹

²⁷⁷ Kamat 1980: 43 and fig. 81 (reported here as pl. 10, fig. 7).

²⁷⁸ See in particular Rao 1968: 24-25.

²⁷⁹ Deshpande 1985: 73.

The variations in coiffure are perhaps more apparent than real. Men used to wear long hair and consequently adopted the same fashion of dressing the hair as the females. In a few cases their hair fall loose on the shoulders. Otherwise hair are parted in the middle and are swept backwards from either side to end up in braids and buns. The latter are in a few instances so voluminous as to be of the same size as the head [...]. In a few cases the hair are knotted in a disc shape.

Cases of hair left loose are not recorded at all in our catalogue apart from examples offered by depictions of *pujārīs*, who may display long matted hair falling on their back especially when wearing the *kaupīna* in place of the *dhotī*, something collaterally suggesting their social role to be closer to that of the ascetic than to the priest. Elsewhere, as pointed out, the recurrent pattern for both males and females consists of hair buns, at times doubled, pulled to the back or to the side and kept intact by a string (*paṭṭa*) which is not always visible (pl. 9). Occasionally, some male personages seem to have their hair arranged in a *śikhā*, the still typical hair style of orthodox Hindus which consists of just a lock of hair left on the top of the head or on the back, the remaining part being shaved. Interestingly, J.K. Kamat, analyzing different shapes and sizes of head gears in the context of Karnataka, refers that “the soldiers used to wear a turban, with the hair-buns protruding behind”; although no clear confirmation to this statement can derive from our work, it should be noted that at times the occasional presence of a particularly marked headline seems to go in favour of a description as such.²⁸⁰ It is anyhow not possible to safely reconnect the typologies of head styles we observe on our material to specific models we encounter in primary sources dealing with this topic, nomenclature and typological borders between one model and the other being sometimes rather opaque and therefore even more hardly comparable to materials often affected by poor preservation status like ours.²⁸¹

The most common body posture for all personages is the standing one (*sthānaka*), in either its static or sinuous varieties; however, unequivocal associations between our examples and those four codified expressions (*bhaṅgas*) contained in the theory of iconography would appear too stilted.²⁸² An exception in this respect is given by a flexuous posture sometimes displayed by the *apsarases*, a pose revealing precise

²⁸⁰ Kamat 1980: 44.

²⁸¹ For a systematic and accurate review see Rao 1968: 26-32.

²⁸² For the different *sthānaka* positions according to texts see Banerjea 1956:264-268.

correspondence with the *pādasvastika*, where one leg is crossed over the other, which is steady on the ground, and rests on the toes.²⁸³

Similarly, the position of the lifeless hero lying on the ground or on the pyre would be only forcefully compared to the recumbent poses (*śayana*) defined in the texts.²⁸⁴ In turn, a few sitting postures (*āsanas*) and hand gestures (*mudrās*) seem more precisely reflecting some of the canons described in literature. The *padmāsana*, where the two legs are crossed and the feet rest on the opposite thighs,²⁸⁵ is the most recurrent. Typically associated to the hero and at times to the *pujārī* as well, this posture appears in the *śivaliṅga* worshipping episode, or in the panel capturing self-sacrifice. The *vīrāsana* pose is displayed at times as an alternative to this, and entails the left foot resting over the right thigh and the left thigh over the right foot. Either in the ascension to heaven scene, when sitting on a plinth or inside the palanquin, or in his paradisiac abode in proximity to the *śivaliṅga*, the hero may be portrayed in *ardhaparyāṅkāśana* (a synonym of *lalitāsana* according to some authors),²⁸⁶ a position implying that one leg is tucked and leans horizontally on the seat while the other leg dangles down with the foot resting on the ground.

As to the arm and hand gestures, the most recognizable and widespread codified pose is the *añjalimudrā*, in which the hands are brought close to the chest and joint together with fingers oriented upwards; it is regularly associated to the hero and other personages, if any, paying homage to the god. When depicted in self-sacrificial scenes, the hero is usually in *yogamudrā*, that is to say both his hands lay on the crossed-legs, the palm of the right hand placed in that of left hand.²⁸⁷ Another pose is at times displayed only by the *apsarases*, the *kaṭyavalambitahasta* (known also as *kaṭisaṁsthitahasta*),²⁸⁸ a so-called “pose at ease” which sees one arm resting down by the side of the body, slightly bent at the elbow, and the hand gently placed on the waist.

All figures bear attributes consistent with the role they perform in the narration. Weaponry pertain to the hero and his foes, and consist of round shields (*khēṭakas*), swords (*khaḍgas*), spears (*śaktis*), daggers (like the *kaṭṭara*, a typically South Asian

²⁸³ Stutley 1985: 104; Bunce 1997: 214.

²⁸⁴ Moreover, the category of recumbent poses of the sources seems to have very few concrete referents in sculpture. See Banerjea 1956: 274-277.

²⁸⁵ Definition according to Rao 1968: 18; Banerjea 1956: 270.

²⁸⁶ See Banerjea 1956: 272 and Stutley 1985: 11.

²⁸⁷ Rao 1968: 17.

²⁸⁸ Rao 1968: 16 and Banerjea 1956: 256.

push-dagger with H-shaped handgrip).²⁸⁹ Garlands, fly-whisks (*cāmaras*) and shawls feature instead in the *apsarases*' repertoire. The *pujārī*'s attributes always include tools for performing the ritual, namely a bell (*ghaṇṭā*), a water vessel (*kamaṇḍalu*), and an incense burner at times, although not safely identifiable on weathered carvings. With regards to the worshipping episode, it is worth noting some recurrent features of the cult object *par excellence*, the *śivaliṅga*. The aniconic form of the Lord to which the priest's ritual actions and the hero's devotion are addressed is not devoid of its female counterpart, thus it basically has the shape of a *yoni-liṅga*. It rests on a simple or multi-moulded plinth; alternatively it is shown on Nandi's back: in the latter case, when physically adjoining the *vāhana*'s body, being not just merely represented above it in midair (an iconographic solution to be likely read as a perspective device), we are in the presence of a codified combination known as Nandi-liṅga.²⁹⁰

Musical instruments are represented as well when the circumstance requires the presence of musicians, that is to say in the context of a procession or god worshipping: conch-shell (*śaṅkha*), oboe (*śahnāī*), two-headed drum (*ḍholak*) and tambourine (*muraja*) are recorded on our materials.

A series of collateral personages with their attributes may be actually proof of the high social rank of the hero. Flag bearers (*vaijayantikas*), family banner (*dhvaja*) bearers and parasol (*chattrī*) bearers suggest the deceased to be a sort of local ruler, i.e. a *śiledār*, a *daṇḍanāyaka*, whose royalty can be inferred by the presence of horses and elephants as well.²⁹¹

Before moving to the description of the aniconic elements carved on the hero-stones - the architectural designs - it is worth referring at last to a category of beings which in the frame of our materials can be evaluated more like *hapax legomena* rather than regular occurrences. This category consists of extra-human beings that we may generically define as *bhūtas*. Although extremely sporadic in the geographic context here under examination, their existence was in fact already highlighted by Sontheimer.²⁹² On our sample they appear as goblins, emaciated, skeletal figures whose

²⁸⁹ Interestingly, no arrows are recorded; Sontheimer encounters this type of weapons in the context of a fighting scene where the hero, depicted with royal connotation, is involved in a skirmish against four personages that the German author identifies as tribals on the ground of their hooked noses. Their weaponry precisely consists of bugles and bows. Sontheimer 1982b, p. 269.

²⁹⁰ Stutley 1985: 98.

²⁹¹ On *dhvajās* and their meaning see Sircair 1974: 46-48.

²⁹² For references see no. 47, pl. 60.

head is at times encircled within a halo, engaged in harmful deeds against the personage depicted beside them (namely the hero).

From the iconographic perspective, these otherworldly beings evoke figures like the *vetālas* lurking in the crematory grounds,²⁹³ threatening creatures occasionally carved also at the entrance of shrines with the role of doorkeepers in South Indian temples. Their features coincide with what religious tradition holds as Śiva's dancing and shrieking acolytes, ghostly beings populating cemeteries and cremation grounds with the Lord in his terrific form. Primary sources refer to them through a number of designations which seem to betray ontological distinctions among the different categories. However, although apparently differing in nature – something to be ascribed to the different process through which each group of beings came into existence – they all are unequivocally qualified by their association to the funerary sphere, and in particular to what anthropology defines as “bad death” (see chapter 3.3.2).

The uncertainty of iconographic comparisons, even when parallels are searched beyond the scanty records coming from the hero-stones, is somehow counterbalanced by the opportunity to explain their existence on our materials throughout written sources. Epic literature, for instance, offers occasional descriptions of terrific creatures lingering on the battlefield. A passage of the *Mahābhārata* may be taken as an example in this respect: Abhimanyu's fall has just occurred, and the battlefield, filled with lifeless bodies of warriors, turns into an even more terrific scenario populated by a multitude of extra-human creatures:²⁹⁴

The field of battle assumed a fierce and awful aspect in consequence of large number of steeds and riders all lying dead, with costly trappings and blankets of diverse kinds scattered about, and tongues and teeth and entrails and eyes of those creatures bulging out of their places. Men decked with costly coats of mail and ornaments and robes and weapons, deprived of life, lay with slain steeds and elephants and broken cars, on the bare ground, perfectly helpless, although deserving of costly beds and blankets. Dogs and jackals, and crow and cranes and other carnivorous birds, and wolves and hyenas, and ravens and other food-drinking creatures, all diverse tribes of *Rakshasas*, and large number of *Pisachas*, on the field of battle, tearing the skins of the corpse and drinking their fat, blood and marrow, began to eat their flesh. And they began to suck also the secretions of rotten corpses, while the *Rakshasas* laughed horribly and sang aloud, dragging dead bodies numbering thousands. An awful river, difficult to cross, like the Vaitarani itself, was caused there by foremost of warriors. Its waters were constituted by the blood (of

²⁹³ Liberale 2005: 4-5.

²⁹⁴ *Mahābhārata* VII, 48. I thank my colleague D. Pierdominici (Sapienza University of Rome) for kindly bringing to my attention this and the following passage. See also Liberale 2005 for further occurrences.

fallen creatures). Cars constituted the rafts (or, which to cross it), elephants formed its rocks, and the heads of human beings, its smaller stones. And it was miry with the flesh (of slain steeds and elephants and men). And diverse kinds of costly weapons constituted the garlands (floating on it or lying on its banks). And that terrible river flowed fiercely through the middle of the field of battle, wafting living creatures to the regions of the dead. And large numbers of *Pisachas*, of horrible and repulsive forms, rejoiced, drinking and eating in that stream. And dogs and jackals and carnivorous birds, all eating of the same food, and inspiring living creatures with terror, held their high carnival there.

Similar descriptions may be found in epigraphic sources: a copper-plate inscription from Kuram (a village nearby of Kanchipuram) dated to the 7th - 8th centuries AD bear records of one of the conflicts actually occurred between Pallavas and Cālukyas, and offers a vivid account of the battlefield scene:²⁹⁵

[It] was covered here and there with shattered banners and parasols, with fallen elephants and with dead and half-dead soldiers, who had done their duty, whose strong arms (*still*) raised the weapon, whose lips were bitten and whose eyes were deep-red with fury; in which a multitude of white *châmaras* was waving; in which tiaras, armlets, necklaces, bracelets and ear-rings, were broken, crushed and pulverized; in which the *Kûśmânḍas*, *Rakshasas* and *Pisachâs* were singing, intoxicated with drinking the liquor of blood; and which contained hundreds of headless trunks, that were vehemently dancing together in a fearful manner according to the beaten time [...].

As a matter of fact, both our sample and that recorded by Sontheimer seem to suggest that the depiction of demonic figures may occur when a series of devices particularly stress the royal connotation of the hero celebrated on the memorial. Whether it is a coincidental coexistence of iconographic motifs or rather the visual transposition of a political trend, that is to say the polarization of “divine kingship and symbolic ‘othering’ of the demonic outsider”²⁹⁶ which developed in Medieval India around the eleventh and twelfth centuries²⁹⁷ throughout a political re-reading of some narrative motifs contained in epic sources like the *Rāmāyaṇa* – as S. Pollock extensively illustrates -²⁹⁸ will be possibly clarified by further material records.

²⁹⁵ Hultzsch 1890: 154.

²⁹⁶ Lutgendorf 1994: 234.

²⁹⁷ Lutgendorf 1994: 234.

²⁹⁸ Pollock 1991: 15-54. Lutgendorf’s synthesis of Pollock’s work is particularly efficacious in the light of our iconological observations (Lutgendorf 1994: 234):

“Examining royal inscriptions such as one dated circa 1168, in which King Prithviraj II, actively engaged in skirmishes with ‘the mighty *Hammīra* (Turkic or Muslim) warrior’, suddenly beings (as no Hindu king had done before) not simply to compare himself with Ram but to claim to *be* Ram incarnate, battling for a

In the architectural pattern located on the crowing section of the hero-stones two order of elements can be distinguished: a structure shaped as a water pot, which may be stylized to different extents and at times provided with a short support, and the edge over which it rests, basically working as the uppermost frame of the figured area. The water vessel, *kalaśa*, always stands in the centre.

As far as the edge is concerned, five basic designs solutions are revealed by our materials (pl. 13):

- A. Flat.
- B. With two lobes on the extreme sides, the central section being flat.
- C. With three lobes, two on the sides and one in the centre. In this case the *kalaśa* may be resting:
 - 1) behind the central lobe;
 - 2) over the central lobe.
- D. With two lobes on the sides, the central section being convex. In this case the *kalaśa* rests on the top of the convexity.
- E. Either flat or with lobes, it displays a huge size convexity in the background. In this case, the *kalaśa* rests on the top of the convexity rather than on the edge itself.

In a number of examples this convexity is so much receding that it totally merges with the rear surface of the stele; elsewhere it stands in between the foreground (corresponding to the flat or lobed edge) and the rear surface.
- F. Shaped as a proper, miniature architectural structure, usually consisting of two tiers.

The different varieties of *kalaśas* observed on our materials derive from the combination of the following features (the labels we used in pl. 11 are indicated here in brackets):

1. BASE:
 - Missing (A);
 - simple rounded (B1);
 - with pearls (B2);
 - geometrically cut (B3).

threatened dharma, and texts such as the Sanskrit epic *Prthvirājaviṣṭaya* [...], that describes Turks and Pathans as the “demons” (*rākṣasa*) of the age, Pollock detects a pattern of the divinization of kings and the demonization of ‘others’ that capitalizes on ancient themes in the epic [...].”

2. BELLY:

- simple (A; B1; B2; B3);
- polished with a band crossing it (C1);
- grooved (C2).

3. HANDLES:

- missing (A; B1; B2; B3; C1; C2);
- ribbon-shaped (D).

At times, however, in place of the *kalaśa* an abstract design is carved (E).

Regardless of the extent of stylization, a clear correspondence can be detected between these elements and the superstructures of religious complexes, in imitation of which they must have been conceived. The Medieval temples of Maharashtra and Karnataka dating from the 11th to the 13th – 14th centuries, that is the period of the Yādava and Later Cālukya dynasties, offer the most fitting terms of comparison in this respect.²⁹⁹

Two further motifs flank at times the elements so far described, mostly when the upper edge of type E is represented: the sun and the moon. These celestial bodies are retrieved not only on memorial stones, but also on slabs and pillars recording edicts, grants, donations, the reason for their presence to be connected to the concept of eternity. As R. Thapar clarifies, “[s]o common was their usage to suggest indestructible time, that a phrase incorporating this idea, ‘as long as the sun and moon endure’ occurred repeatedly in inscriptions”.³⁰⁰

SATĪ-STONES

In dealing with steles dedicated to *satīs*, a first distinction has to be introduced, following A. Verghese’s definitions,³⁰¹ between simple *satī*-stones and *satī*-cum-hero-stones, the latter celebrating at one time the woman who immolated herself on the funeral pyre and her spouse who perished as a consequence of heroic deeds, the former typology being specifically focused just on the wife’s self-sacrifice. Sharpening the scholar’s definition on the ground of the nuances actually encountered on our materials, we will use the second formula for those samples whose iconography unequivocally gives account of two events: on one side, the actual performance of the *satī* ritual, by

²⁹⁹ See Cousens 1931; Deglurkar 1974; Foekema 2003; Hardy 1995 and 2007.

³⁰⁰ Thapar 2005: 243.

³⁰¹ Verghese 2001: 41.

means of either an explicit or a symbolic rendering of it, and, on the other side, the fulfillment of heroic deeds by her spouse. Such a remark is necessary in the context of our steles and pillars, for the execution of *satī* rituals seems at times just a matter of iconographic allusions, like when the hero's wife is portrayed in the panels related to his ascension to heaven or his afterlife abode; in these cases there are no strong elements to confirm, at least from the iconographic point of view,³⁰² that the widow effectively became a *satī*. Similarly, on a number of stones celebrating *satīs*, the iconography may not offer any reference to the actually heroic death of the husband even though portrayed side by side to his spouse; in this case the memorials are classified as simple *satī*-stones. In other words, a *satī*-cum-hero-stone unequivocally celebrates, by definition, a twofold paradigm of heroism, the one conveyed by the wife, a strictly religious one, and the one conveyed by the husband, which in the case of our materials is always martial.³⁰³

A remarkable prevalence of simple *satī*-stones over *satī*-cum-hero-stones is documented in our catalogue: out of twenty-two samples collected, eighteen belong to the first group, four to the second (no. 107, pl. 120; no. 108, pl. 121; no. 109, pl. 122; no. 110, pl. 123).

In terms of structure, an absolute predominance of the slab-model has to be noticed over the pillar-shaped type of memorial: only one example of the latter is recorded, to be assigned to the *satī*-cum-hero category (no. 110, pl. 123).

Finally, a correspondence can be established between the stone category and the number of panels displayed on it: while *satī*-cum-hero-stones currently show a multi-panelled distribution of the iconography – further evidence being needed to confirm this trend – the simple *satī*-stones report in turn a massive occurrence of the single-panelled pattern, just two exceptions being recorded in this respect (no. 102, pl. 115; no. 100, pl. 113).

The following chart offers a synopsis of the quantitative data so far presented:³⁰⁴

³⁰² To which extent iconography may reflect the actual occurrence of events, that is to say whether a wife really immolated herself to follow her husband's destiny as some steles would suggest, cannot be ascertained, the ethnographic records leading to thought-provoking conclusions in this respect: see Sontheimer 1982b: 279-280.

³⁰³ A further category of memorials exists where both husband and wife are represented side by side with no elements indicating heroic deaths for any of the two. These materials, classified as ancestors stones and falling outside the scope of our catalogue, are reviewed in chapter 3.

³⁰⁴ As methodological remark it has to be noted that we excluded the pillar from the percentage calculation as well as we did in the context of the hero-stones analysis (seen. 250). For the sake of completeness, it has to be pointed out that each of its faces shows a multi-panelled arrangement (up to five scenes) of the iconography, which thing further confirms the correspondence between the *satī*-cum-

TYPE OF STONE	NUMBER OF PANELS IN THE FIGURED AREA	
	single-panelled	multi-panelled
simple <i>satī</i> : 19	17 (89%)	2 (11%)
<i>satī</i> -cum-hero: 3	1 (33%)	2 (67%)
TOTAL AMOUNT: 22 stonesexcluded pillars (1)		

No further connections can be even tentatively suggested with regards to the precise number of episodes depicted, since out of four multi-panelled steles (two simple *satī*- and two *satī*-cum-hero-stones), two of them are actually fragmentary.

Single-panelled *satī*-stones usually display a basic pattern where a certain symbolic motif located in the centre has a primary role from the iconographic perspective, since it works as a watershed or a frame for the other elements portrayed, and also from the iconological point of view, as it is the codified signal for indicating the performance of a *satī* ritual. This motif consists of a pillar from which side an arm bent at the elbow at a right angle protrudes, with the forearm oriented upwards and the hand palm oriented to the observer, endowed with attributes like bracelets and lemon conveying precise meanings. The other components of the repertoire can be variously ascribed to the worldly and the otherworldly spheres; although their position in the scheme is rather changeable, a certain tendency to display the earthly dimension in the lower portion of the stone, with the afterlife dimension in the upper one as a consequence, can be pointed to (see for instance no. 102; pl. 115). Notably, the coexistence of both the ontological levels is not ubiquitous, since a number of specimens show the omission the former (see e.g. for instance no. 91, pl. 104; no. 92, pl. 105).

An interesting exception in the arrangement so far outlined is offered by a unique piece (no. 109; pl. 122) where the arm motif, lacking of the pillar, is placed in a marginal position - the top left corner of the figured area - with the entire board occupied by the deceased couple portrayed in imitation of the warrior god Khaṇḍobā

hero category (to which this pillar belongs, as stated in the text) and the multi-panelled pattern. All materials coming from the site of Lenyadri (no. 111, pl. 124) have been excluded as well on the ground of their unique structure (they are not independent stones, but wall carvings) and their poor preservation status, which does not favour any statistical evaluation.

and his wife Mhaḷsā. An iconographic choice as such is frequent in South-Eastern Maharashtra but it is usually retrieved in association to small-size steles to ancestors, where no elements clearly refer to *satī* or hero sacrifices, unless to see an allusion to the latter in the god-like pose of the deceased.³⁰⁵

Multi-panelled *satī*-stones show in turn an articulation of the narration through episodes on the model of proper hero-stones, whose patterns they follow in terms of distribution and content. In this case, a comparatively innovative element absent in the hero-stones is precisely embodied by the above mentioned arm-and-pillar motif, or simply the arm. It can be either integrated into one of the scenes (no. 110, pl. 123), or juxtaposed to the body of the stone itself, appearing as a protruding element of the structure ultimately outside the figured area *stricto sensu* (no. 108; pl. 121 and also no. 111, pl. 124). The lack of this symbol, universally qualifying a stone as a *satī* memorial, is recorded in only one instance, where the wife's immolation is pictorially represented by means of a burning pyre on which both she and her husband lay (no. 107, pl. 120).

From the stylistic point of view, *satī*-stones of either category reveal a certain tendency towards symbolism, that is to say to convey the story of the pious wife's self-immolation by combining elements which allude to her renunciation to the status of widowhood and the life-sacrifice deriving from it, the explicit representation of the ritual being comparatively rare, as we pointed out above. Such a tendency is reinforced by a stylized, static, almost hieratic, execution of figures and a minimal rendering of actions, the elements being often merely juxtaposed rather than integrated into a narrative continuum; this symbolism, however, may be partially tempered (as in no. 110, pl. 123) or even completely expunged (no. 107, pl. 120, no. 108; pl. 121) when the narrative arrangement more closely recalls that of other types of memorials, that is to say when it implies the development of episodes, as on hero-stones, and the imitation of god-like poses, as on ancestors plaques (no. 109, pl. 122).

This oscillation between naturalistic rendering and symbolic orientation of the contents would correspond, according to some, to different stages in the development of the iconography of these materials, and could consequently be used as a dating parameter (see 5.4).

As far as the single visual devices are concerned, the same degree of standardization encountered on the hero-stones repertoire characterizes the *satī* memorials. Unlike hero-stones, however, a lower number of personages and a much

³⁰⁵ For further comparisons see the images published by Sontheimer 1989b [1976] and our pl. 7 fig. 3.

lesser attention dedicated to their features can be noticed, few exceptions being recorded in this respect.

Excluded the *satī*-cum-hero stones specimens, only two ranges of circumstances entail the depiction of the *satī* as a whole figure: when she appears together with her spouse and when she is taken in procession to her funeral pyre, alone or with other personages. In the first case the couple is usually represented in front view, the identification of husband and wife being often challenged by the poor preservation status of the carvings. They usually sit next to each other crossed-legs, in a position which may alternatively correspond to the *padmāsana* or – we would argue – to the *baddhakoṇāsana* (i.e. legs resting on the ground, bent, with knees oriented outwards and feet soles touching each other); their hands position, when recognizable, corresponds to the *añjalimudrā* or the *yogamudrā*. Such a depiction does not have a fix collocation, as it may appear on the top side or in the central-lower portion of the figured area. Anyhow, it offers an image of the couple reunited in the afterlife, in a paradisiac abode which nature is suggested by the only presence of the *śivaliṅga* image, the depiction of Nandi and of a *pujārī* performing the rite being rather infrequent. Their eternal glory is symbolized by the sun and moon emblems, which appear on *satī*-stone with a much higher regularity than on hero-stones.

An alternative representation of the couple, yet coexisting with the one just described, and common to both simple *satī*- and *satī*-cum-hero stones specimens, sees them lying together on what is reasonably identifiable as the funeral pyre (no. 97, pl. 110; no. 106, pl. 119; no. 107, pl. 120), which is rendered in an extremely geometrical and stylized manner or in more naturalistic guise through details like wood twigs and flames.

At times, however, the couple is separated, the wife being represented on horseback (therefore supposedly in procession) in the upper portion, with the husband lying on the ground, portrayed as seen from above in the lower one (no. 89, pl. 102).

The procession scene is comparatively rare; the *satī* appears on horseback, with arm raised and stretched outwards, holding some attributes in her hands, and flanked by figures like attendants (no. 99, pl. 112) or priests engaged in the execution of the forthcoming ritual (no. 101, pl. 114). Interestingly, a series of enigmatic squared-like structures of different size and contiguous are often depicted in the last context, something which seems to be paralleled by another unidentifiable square structure even more stylized and associated to a pole which is found on another specimen (no. 110, pl.

123). Whether these depictions should be considered iconographic variants of the same element and whether this may be identified with some form of Vedic altar (especially on the ground of the presence of a pole)³⁰⁶ will be only clarified by further data and analysis.

Hairstyles, jewels and clothing of the figures so far outlined can be described to a lesser extent compared to their hero-stones homologues due to a higher degree of stylization; when detectable, however, these features seem to be consistent with the pattern previously analyzed.

As already pointed out, the representation of the *satī*'s body more often relies upon the use of symbols, the first and foremost - at times completely substituting any sort of naturalistic rendering of the deceased - is the arm-and-pillar motif, which we will now review through a deconstruction into its two components.

A trait common to *satī*-stones all over India, in the vast majority of cases sculptors privilege the representation of a right arm, the reason for this choice being probably rooted in purity concerns, according to some authors,³⁰⁷ or in the caste origin of the wife, according to others;³⁰⁸ as a matter of fact, left arms are just sporadically recorded in literature, something that our catalogue seems to confirm too, with only two specimens bearing this variant (no. 89, pl. 102; no. 109, pl. 122). A propitiatory meaning is ascribed by scholars to the arm-motif,³⁰⁹ an always predominant presence in the figured area if treated, like our specimens show, as an independent motif, that is to say untied from the rest of the deceased's body portrait.³¹⁰ More specifically, it is said to depict the blessing gesture that the *satī*, according to tradition, would have addressed to the community soon before ascending her funeral pyre;³¹¹ thus, by a stone replica, this gesture would be eternalized and constantly reiterated for the good of all devotees.³¹²

For a better iconological appraisal of the arm-motif recorded in our catalogue, it is worth introducing some information on a series of cognate funerary materials widespread in North-Western India and known as *thāpās* (literally, "handprints"). Perimeter walls of cities and entrance gate of royal palaces in Rajasthan bear a number

³⁰⁶ About poles and vedic altars see for instance Hildebrandt 1991b: 37; Biarreau 2004: 33-41, espec. fig. 1, p. 36.

³⁰⁷ Weinberger-Thomas 1999: 234 n.1

³⁰⁸ Sontheimer 2004 [1976]: 130.

³⁰⁹ Sontheimer 2004 [1976]: 130; Weinberger-Thomas 1999: 53-57.

³¹⁰ Elsewhere in India a number of materials portray the whole body of the *satī* in a naturalistic pose. In this case the right arm gesture reproduces the isolated motif we observed here. See for instance Verghese 2001: 42-43.

³¹¹ Thapar 1981: 304; Sontheimer 1982b: 278.

³¹² Verghese 2001: 41.

of carvings of hand palms which till today prove the devotional attitude of Hindu believers towards *satīs*. The origin and proliferation of these engravings, which visitors may easily spot in major centres like Jodhpur and Bikaner, has to be searched in one of the ritual steps that used to mark the pious wife's procession towards her funeral pyre. According to tradition, indeed, before definitely leaving the house, the *satī* used to color her hand palm with *sindūr* and leave visible imprints on the outer walls in sign of blessing.³¹³ The genetic link between the wall carvings commemorating this gesture and the *satī*-stones arm-motif is made explicit by the existence, although sporadic, of arm-motifs reduced to the simple representation of the hands.³¹⁴

Going back to the Deccan, the iconographic rendering of this act often finds an echo in the epigraphical apparatus: “[o]n numerous stele in Karnataka one finds references to women who, in such and such year and in such and such circumstance, ‘have given arm and hand’, an euphemism for these *satīs*’ death”.³¹⁵

While remarking the apotropaic connotation of this gesture, some authors³¹⁶ explicitly associate it to the *abhayamudrā*, the dispel-of-fear, reassurance and protection hand pose codified by texts and common to a number of Hindu, Buddhist and Jaina sculptures.³¹⁷ Two orders of reflections, however, lead us to express a certain caution over an assimilation of this type. The first deals with the considerable level of formalization of the contexts where the proper *abhayamudrā* is usually encountered: it is a component of the iconographic repertoire of divinities (or their attendants) of the “mainstream pantheon”, a formula we use here with reference to pan-Indian gods and goddesses in contraposition to local deities like those ultimately object of the present research. The plausibility of the transfer of such a highly conventional pose to an iconographic context like that of the *satīs*’ cult, the ultimate expression of a set of beliefs rooted in popular religion rather than in the mainstream Hinduism,³¹⁸ moreover throughout a visible process of deconstruction and stylization - the *abhayamudrā* gesture being regularly integrated in the figure's body in classical sculptures, which is

³¹³ Hands and feet have a particularly strong apotropaic value in Indian culture, proof being the still alive tradition to leave hand prints on house walls, or the devotion owed to venerable individuals' *pādukās* (“foot prints”, even in the shape of carvings). See for instance Weinberger-Thomas 1999: 256 n. 52. On this specific *satī* custom see Doshi 1982: 169 and Weinberger-Thomas 1999: 52.

³¹⁴ Examples as such are reported by Doshi 1982: 169.

³¹⁵ Weinberger-Thomas 1999: 53. See also Sontheimer 2004 [1976]: 130.

³¹⁶ Courtright 1994: 35; Verghese 2001: 41, 45;

³¹⁷ See for instance Banerjea 1956: 248-251.

³¹⁸ For a reappraisal of the various theories on the interaction between the so-called “Sanskritic” religion and other components, see Sontheimer 2005 [1989]: 307-310.

not always the case with *satī*-stones – in our opinion still requires to be properly demonstrated.

The identification of the arm-motif on *satīs* memorials with the canonic Indian *abhayamudrā* tout court is further questioned by the retrieval of similar hand gestures in funerary contexts outside the Indian subcontinent.³¹⁹ Studies on the iconographic variants of hand positions carved on Roman age funerary portraits in Palmyra, for instance, show a high occurrence of busts of personages having their right hand raised up with the palm oriented outward, a solution that, in the frame of the many other options still recorded in the area, is demonstrated to be strictly associated to deceased of female sex.³²⁰ The author of the study is keen to confirm, at least partially, the apotropaic function of this hand position,³²¹ from which thing descends a substantial assonance with our materials beyond the mere formal aspect. Far from inspiring any proposal of genetic connections, however, the existence of these records simply claims for a reappraisal of the hand palm gesture in a transcultural perspective focused on funerary studies, an approach that may help to better evaluate the validity of pre-existing nomenclatures.

The crude arm-motif is integrated by two series of attributes, bracelets and a citron, whose role is not so much aesthetic as it is functional, for each of them is meant to stress different aspects of the self-sacrifice performed by the *satī*.

Armlets and, more specifically, wristlets, which number varies from sample to sample, are emblems of the marriage bound; similarly, their removal symbolizes the status of widowhood. Tradition holds, indeed, that on the wedding day the bride wears a series of bangles which she will be authorized – actually obliged – to definitely dismiss only upon her husband's departure. Thus, the break of all bracelets, together with the renunciation to any other form of embellishment and restrictions of different nature, marks for a woman the passage from the status of wife to that of widow. The depiction of bangles on *satī*-stones does not contradict but rather confirms this tradition, since from both the social and ontological perspective the wife who chooses to follow her husband in the afterlife, by this preventing the even temporarily interruption of the marriage bond on the earthly dimension, does not actually ever enter the status of widowhood.

³¹⁹ I am grateful to prof. C. Lo Muzio (Sapienza University of Rome) for bringing to my attention this issue.

³²⁰ Heyn 2010: 636-637.

³²¹ Heyn 2010: 637 .

A citron (*mātulaṅga*)³²² is often represented in the center of the hand palm as a small size circular, protruding object. The reason for the presence of this fruit³²³ has to be traced back in the apotropaic value which Indian common lore and beliefs ascribe to it. Strongly associated to sacrificial contexts, for it may work as a substitute of the human victim,³²⁴ it is also found in all rituals meant for appeasing evil spirits and demons;³²⁵ as Weinberger-Thomas summarizes, “the lemon [citron: see n. 323] is commonly used in exorcism. It dispels evil, breaks spells, and protects the living from those ‘beings’ (*bhūtas*) who have been deprived of their funeral rites through violent death or other circumstances and who, for the same reason, are unable to reach the ‘world of ancestors’ [...]”.³²⁶ Interestingly, the citron is also one of the attributes which Western observers³²⁷ who assisted to *satī* sacrifices describe as part of the “dowry” the wife brings to her funeral pyre, with a mirror and a dagger as complementary elements.³²⁸

The second component of the arm-motif used with metonymic function in the place of the whole *satī*’s body is a pillar; its depiction is ubiquitous on our materials, but it may occasionally be absent, with the arm motif standing isolated, as specimens from other regions prove (Rajasthan, Gujarat, for instance). From the iconographic perspective, six variants are recorded in the context of our catalogue (pl. 12):

- A. polished round-based shaft with multi-moulded capital;
- B. polished round-based shaft with bell-like capital;
- C. polished round-based shaft with onion-like capital ;
- D. polished square-based shaft with coiled capital;
- E. square-based shaft tapering upwards with imitation of superimposed blocks and hump-like capital;

³²² *Citrus medica* according to the scientific taxonomy. Pfeleiderer 1916: 18-19.

³²³ Prof. L. Sudyka (Jagellonian University, Cracow, Poland), with whom I happened to have a thought-provoking conversation on the topic, stresses the importance to identify the fruit held by the *satīs* with this specific variety, rather than with what Western literature on the topic customarily defines as “lemon” or “lime” (for references see n. 325). Although belonging to the same botanic family, it is not the lemon (*Citrus medica lemonum*), nor the lime (*Citrus medica* var. *limetta* or var. *acida*), but actually the citron to be provided with the apotropaic properties we describe in the text - unlike the other two cognate fruits - and therefore to be used in sacrificial rituals in India.

³²⁴ Verghese 2001: 41; Thurston 1912: 212.

³²⁵ A number of folklorists and ethnographers report of exorcisms where the “lemon”/“lime” is used for ritual purposes in India: Thurston 1912; Whitehead 1988 [1921]; Knipe 1989: 130; Dwyer 2003: 76; Nabokov 2003: 165.

³²⁶ Weinberger-Thomas 1999: 68.

³²⁷ Reported for instance in Courtright 1994: 46; Weinberger-Thomas 1999: 72, 76.

³²⁸ These two attributes are not recorded on our materials, but pictorial records exist elsewhere in India: see for instance examples from Karnataka in Mahesh (unpublished): 12.

F. square-based shaft tapering upwards with grooves and lack of capital.

Apart from type E, which is shaped in close imitation of Yādava age temple pillars in *Hemāḍpanti* style,³²⁹ and type F, which bears a remarkable stylization degree, the others however show such a simplification of forms that it is not possible to ascribe them to any specific styles, a task which is in fact rather challenging – if ever possible at all - even in the case of actual temple pillars.³³⁰

From the iconological point of view, the meaning of the pillar is still rather opaque. Attempts have been made by scholars like R. Thapar³³¹ and P. Courtright³³² at connecting it to the Vedic *yūpa*, the pole to which the victim was bounded on the occasion of sacrificial rituals, an interpretation which conveniently stresses the essence of the act performed by the *satī* too; others like G.-D. Sontheimer³³³ would see in this iconographic motif a symbol of the solidity and stability of the marriage bound, a concept which, according to L. Harlan,³³⁴ would be further confirmed by the same shape of the memorial, the stele/pillar, and the ever-lasting material used for it, the stone.

Wide range analysis of pole-like artefacts, beyond the scope of our funerary stones class, ultimately emphasize their association to the sacrificial sphere. As M. Biarreau³³⁵ illustrates throughout her monumental work dedicated to a variety of post structures mainly retrieved in rural areas of Western and Southern Deccan, a mixture of devotional, apotropaic and sacrificial connotations is associated to the erection of stone poles, an heterogeneous and still widely obscure class of materials, mostly unrelated to the so-called Brahmanical Hinduism, which encompasses posts embodying village goddesses' guardians as well as impalement stakes and anthropomorphic poles of different nature, all connected, in a way or another, to blood sacrifices.

³²⁹ The so-called *Hemāḍpanti* is an architectural style flourished apparently under the input of Hemāḍpant (or Hemadrī), prime minister of Yādava rulers between the 13th and the 14th centuries. A debate surrounds the exact definition and chronology of this style, for which we refer the reader to Cousens 1931: 3-4 and Deglurkar 1974: 8-9. For the sake of the present research it is sufficient to remark the general heaviness of proportions and lack of wall sculptural apparatus generally attributed to it.

³³⁰ On this issue see for instance Hardy 2007: 148-149.

³³¹ Thapar 1981: 304.

³³² Courtright 1994: 35.

³³³ Sontheimer 1982b: 278.

³³⁴ Harlan 1991: 212.

³³⁵ Biarreau 2004.

5.4 Chronological issues

Attempts at defining the chronological frame of Maharashtrian hero- and *satī*-stones were only sporadically made, the classical studies on the artistic expressions of ancient Western Deccan being mostly confined to temple architecture and sculpture, with a basic neglect of those material culture products lacking of the same monumentality or devoid of inscriptions.³³⁶ An efficacious synthesis of the scholarly ultimate attitude towards this class of materials and their chronological horizons is contained in the observations by S.R. Deshpande, on the margin of a broader study on Maharashtrian sculpture:³³⁷

Sculptural art also found expression through memorial stones commonly known as ‘*vīra gala*’ or herostones. A large number of herostones have been discovered in Maharashtra. Due to the many similarities they possess with herostones in the neighbouring Karnatak which are dated, most of the pieces are generally assigned to the Yādava period or a century or two after that. The near-total absence of dated or inscribed herostones within Maharashtra itself prevents a student from placing them in a more chronological position.

As the author points out, funerary monuments of Karnataka effectively provide with an abundance of epigraphic data which are available to scholars in sectorial compendiums since the 19th century;³³⁸ but the paucity of publications specifically focused on these artefacts ultimately limits the chance for iconographic comparisons.³³⁹

Trying to overcome the interpretative vacuum caused by the lack of inscriptions, strong of his consistent data collection even outside the borders of modern Maharashtra, G.-D. Sontheimer offers some contributes to a more precise definition of the relative chronology of these materials moving from the style and arrangement of their iconographic apparatus.

Distribution of one-panelled and multi-panelled hero-stones in Maharashtra, for instance, is taken by the German scholar as a parameter. As we mentioned in our discussion over the hero-stones layout, the more one moves towards the North-Eastern

³³⁶ See for instance Cousens 1931; Deglurkar 1974.

³³⁷ Deshpande 1985: 76.

³³⁸ See for instance the volumes of *Epigraphia Carnatica* or *Epigraphia Indica*, containing systematic reports of inscribed materials from the various context explored, often including hero- and *satī*-stones.

³³⁹ Dr. V. Mahesh (MahajaSayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara, India) has been currently carrying out a Ph.D. research which results will contribute to supply to this issue. Former studies like those by K. Rajan (2000) also represented a significant step towards a macro-regional approach to the topic, but, in our opinion, the lack of visual supports limits the potentiality of the textual content.

and Eastern borders of the state, the more the number of multi-panelled stones seems to decrease in favour of single-panelled specimens; this might betray different influence trends from the neighbouring areas, with consequent chronological implications deriving right from those extra-Maharashtrian materials which in turn are safely dated.³⁴⁰

Multi-panelled hero-stones are known from the late Gupta period (the earliest being of the 6th cent. A.D.), at the Gwalior Fort (Gujarī Mahāl). We can perhaps assume that the custom of carving panels came from there to Maharashtra and Karnataka [...]. The earliest multi-panelled hero-stones in Maharashtra and Karnataka seem to be those at Paṭṭadakal and belong to the Rāṣṭrakūta period. The early Dravidian hero-stones are not divided into panels.

Nevertheless, an ultimate evolution - culminating in the Marāṭhā period - towards the one-panelled model is supposed by the author,³⁴¹ something which would match the dating we proposed for a unique specimen of *satī*-cum-hero-stone included in our catalogue (no. 109, pl. 122):

Probably, the last old-style multi-panelled *vīragals* in Maharashtra are of the 14th cent., as exemplified by the inscribed and dated hero-stone of Māṭhgāṇ (1317 A.D.). The *vīragals* seem to have eventually been replaced by the one-panelled *pāliya* from the North, which is rather an ancestor memorial than a hero memorial. To the horse and rider a representation of the wife of the rider is added, seated behind her husband on the horse. The representation is similar to that of Khaṇḍobā and Mhaḷṣā. Khaṇḍobā's dog is also shown at times.

With reference to *satī*-stones, the German scholar stresses that the wife's self-sacrificial ritual continued to be quite rare until the times of the Yādava rulers, when it "was still confined to royalty and gentry",³⁴² which theoretically reduces our chance to encounter materials ascribable to this period.

In terms of relative chronology, he considers the stylized arm-and-pillar motif carved on the figured area as a late evolution. From the original pillar/slab stone typology used to commemorate the *satī* and the hero by means of a naturalistic depiction, with the wife usually beside the hero-husband raising the right arm in sign of blessing, it would have developed an intermediary model with just the wife's arm

³⁴⁰ Sontheimer 1982b: 276.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*: 281.

³⁴² *Ibid.*: 279.

protruding sideways from the body of the hero-stone (as proven by the example of no. 108, pl. 121, and also by the wall carvings of no. 111, pl. 124. The arm would have been eventually reintegrated in the figured area with a preponderant role, and represented as emerging from a pillar (as the no. 110, pl. 123, which the author ascribes to the early Marāṭhā phase), until completely substituting any multi-panelled configuration to the point that just “arm, hand and pillar” would have been displayed.³⁴³

We believe that two series of iconographic repertoires are worth being analyzed in-depth in search for comparative elements useful for a more precise chronological assessment of our materials: on one side the architectural shapes of temples, especially for what concerns their covering superstructures, which – as we observed – represent the most direct reference point for the stele and pillars upper frames, and, on the other side, the narratives adorning the pillars *inside* the temples, where warlike episodes inspired to the classical epic are so often portrayed.

5.5 Fieldwork area: an overview

The one hundred eleven stones reviewed in our catalogue are variously distributed within twenty villages located in the districts of Pune, Solapur, Satara and Ahmednagar (pl. 2-5). The following information do not claim to be exhaustive from the historical and archaeological point of view - which however will be taken in due consideration - rather aim to catch sight of the contemporary context where the memorial stones under examination are inserted, with reference to their geographical position and their physical relation – if any - with noteworthy buildings nearby. Hints about the perception of these materials by the side of local devotees will be given as well, when records occurred. Villages are ordered according to the *tālukā* they belong to, from North to South. A different use of the steles compared to their original funerary connotation will be stressed when evident. For the sake of completeness, some of these data (i.e. name of the village, *tālukā* and district; relative position compared to other structures, namely temple, etc.) will be recalled in the short identification profile preceding the description of each sample presented in the catalogue. The materials mentioned in the following review include all the steles analyzed in the present work (references are given in brackets) as well as part of those materials excluded from the catalogue due to

³⁴³ Sontheimer 1982b: 278-280; Sontheimer 2004 [1976]: 130. His interpretation is proposed again by Kulkarni 1996: 179-180.

methodological reasons, here just recalled on the ground of their proximity to the former see 5.1).

PUNE DISTRICT

The site of **Lenyadri** (Junnar *tālukā*; GPS coordinates: lat. 19.242778, long. 73.885556) is located about 90 km North of Pune, on one of the hills encircling the town of Junnar, an area which is well-known to the archeologists due to the presence of a number of rock-cut Buddhist temples and *vihāras*, which inscriptions date from the 3rd century BC to the 3rd century AD.³⁴⁴ Archaeological excavations at Lenyadri (alternatively called Ganesha Lena) were conducted on the hill Sulaiman Pahar (known also as Ganesh Pahar), where nearly forty rock-cut Buddhist caves dating back to the period between the 1st and the 3rd centuries AD are recorded.³⁴⁵ Although originally a Buddhist site, the area is well-known to Hindu pilgrims as well: some centuries after its consecration as a meditation place and shelter for the Buddha's devotees, around the 8th-9th centuries according to some³⁴⁶ one of the compounds (namely Cave 7) was converted into a Gaṇeśa's major pilgrimage spot included in the *Aṣṭavināyaka* circuit.³⁴⁷ This led to the transformation of its inner asset, the cells of the front wall being ultimately merged to each other in order to host the *garbhagr̥ha*. For the scope of the present research, such a shift in use is particularly noteworthy. To the same time of the conversion of the former *vihāra* into a Hindu place of cult, indeed, would also date the carvings still visible on its inner walls: Western sources from the end of the 19th century describe them as *satī*-stones, in a number of nine, all located – it is reported – on the left side wall.³⁴⁸ The same sources also give account of a number of paintings which were realized in the modern period to adorn the entire hall. Due to the scanty preservation status of the

³⁴⁴ For the epigraphy of Junnar area see Burgess, Bhagwanlal 1881: 41-55, pl.18, 20-25. About Lenyadri in particular, *Ibid.*: 51-52. See also Fergusson, Burgess 1880: 248ff., 256, where basically it is reported the same content of the *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, 18, 3: 205ff. for the whole site.

Out of the three studies, only the *Gazetteer* records the presence of *satī*-stones.

³⁴⁵ See the ASI's website: <http://asi.nic.in/asi_monu_tktd_maha_junnarcaves.asp> [10/2015].

³⁴⁶ Mate 1962: 3. Even if the author does not provide with further indications to support this chronology, we argue that such a conversion must have occurred at a time when the cult of Gaṇeśa was already sufficiently widespread.

As regards to the chronology, A. Feldhaus states: "How old are the eight places [i.e. the eight Gaṇeśa centre of the *Aṣṭavināyaka* circuit] is not clear, nor is it clear when they were brought together as a set. All eight appear to have been preexisting holy places that became prominent in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. [...] Apart from this temple at Leṇyādri, only one of the *Aṣṭavināyaka* temples appears to predate the seventeenth century." Feldhaus 2003: 142.

For a historical overview of Ganesa cult in Maharashtra on the ground of texts (*Gaṇeśa* and *Mudgala Purāṇa*) see Preston 1980.

³⁴⁷ The so-called *Aṣṭavināyaka* is a religious pilgrimage circuit within Maharashtra and it includes eight temples dedicated to Gaṇeśa. They are located at Pali and Mahad (Raygad district), Lenyadri, Ojhar, Ranjangav, Theur, Siddhatek, Morgav (Pune district). Feldhaus 2003: 141-142.

³⁴⁸ *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, 18, 3: 209.

materials, however, the description provided by the sources does not perfectly match today's observations. As far as the paintings are concerned, indeed, nothing survives of the depictions of the episodes related to Devī, Kṛṣṇa, Nārāyaṇa and Śiva (on the left wall), nor of the many dedicated to Gaṇapati (front and right wall) or to Garūḍa, Kṛṣṇa and yogis (front wall). Only scattered traces of clay plaster, whitewash and pale colors remain nowadays, while in fact half hall appeared decorated until the last century.³⁴⁹

With respect to the nine *satī*-stones identified on the left side wall, it will be worth noting that already at the end of the 19th century their preservation status was recognized as insufficient to allow detailed assessments, to the point that only one of them was more extensively analyzed.

Nonetheless, on the ground of our observations *in situ*, we believe that the comparison between our records (no. 111, pl. 124) and the above mentioned sources can still add complementary information, hence providing the ground for some reappraisal.

The village of **Nere** (Mulshi *tālukā*, GPS coordinates: lat. 18.619406, long. 73.702726) is located in a fast growing suburb to the North-West of Pune, about 5 km from the neighboring settlement of Hinjawadi and consequently about 25 km from the centre of the district capital. The whole area is currently subjected to massive real estate expansion as a consequence of the establishment of a high-tech pole in Hinjawadi, to which an increasing number of workers regularly flock through the close-by thoroughfare Mumbai-Bangalore. The rural context hitherto characterizing the site is therefore ordained to be deeply transformed in future.

In the fields far away from the main roads, in a rather isolated spot, a Śiva temple hosts an impressive cluster of memorial steles. The thirteen samples we catalogued belong to a group of fifty-two variously distributed within the premises: while forty-nine of them are lined up along the South and West enclosure wall, three are given a prominent position, being set within two *aediculae* on the external wall of the vestibule which introduces to the *garbhagr̥ha*. A villager informs us that, apart from the three steles to which a particular devotional cult is bestowed, the other artefacts were formerly scattered all over the temple premises, and were allocated in their current position in the occasion of renovation works. All steles are embedded in the ground, at times to a great extent.

The surroundings of this religious structure are no less interesting in the light of our investigations. The area adjacent to the temple Southern wall reveals a platform made of

³⁴⁹ *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, 18, 3: 208.

concrete where five unhewn stones of different shapes (two of which remarkably oblong) covered with red lead are placed. Although the existence of a devotional practice associated to them is immediately confirmed by the presence of flower offerings, nature and antiquity of this cult cannot be safely ascertained, therefore even a funerary connotation – i.e. that of stones to the ancestors – should not be disregarded, especially on the ground of similar cases. (see 3.2).

Short-range surface recognitions further disclose the presence of five ancestor memorials in the shape of rather refined *ṭhades* on the other side of the road, in the field right opposite to the temple entrance.

The city of **Saswad** (Purandar *tālukā*; GPS coordinates: lat. 18.350556, long. 74.029722) is located about 25 km South of Pune on the left bank of the river Karha. It gained particular prominence during the 18th century, when it was elected residential town of the Peshwas, the administrative and ultimately political rulers of the Maratha empire. Although British records report the presence of a number of *satī*-stones in the surroundings of the Saṅgameśvara temple, a wide religious complex spreading over the confluence between the Karha and the Chambli,³⁵⁰ no artefacts as such could be found during our survey, with the exception of few scattered unhewn stones covered with minium. A memorial stele to a *satī* was yet recorded in the proximity of the Cāṅgāvateśvara temple, a structure erected in a bushy vegetation. Outside the Southern wall of the complex, before a slope which leads to a footpath through the contiguous uncultivated area, there are a couple of minor places of worship: here, a stele in honor of a *satī* leans against the external wall of the Māruti shrine.

Narayanpur (Purandar *tālukā*; GPS coordinates: lat. 18.350556, long. 74.029722) is about 60 km South-West of Pune and 8 km South-West of Saswad, in the area of Purandar Fort, a relevant site in the history of Maratha resistance against the Mughals. Known in the past as Pur,³⁵¹ this village is home to a temple popular among the devotees of god Dattā, as well as to other ancient religious complexes such as those in honor to Nārāyaṇeśvara and Kālabhairava, where annual fairs are held.³⁵² At short distance from Dattā temple, to the West, by the roadside, a modest Māruti shrine hosts two variants of *satī*-stones. One of them stands to the left of the god's *mūrti*, occupying

³⁵⁰ *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, 18, 3: 439-440.

³⁵¹ *The Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency* (18, 3: 424) mentions it on this name indeed.

³⁵² *Ibid.*

a privileged position in the perspective of devotional practices; the other is outside the worship precinct and faces the road.

The village of **Kumbharvalan** (Purandar *tālukā*; GPS coordinates: lat. 18.339828, long. 74.069541) is only 5 km far from Saswad, and approximately 30 km from Pune Southernmost outskirts. Two clusters of memorial steles could be found here. The first of them includes five samples standing in the premises of a small Śiva shrine built in a cultivated field. They are lined up along the external Eastern wall, on the two sides of the entrance. Answering our questions about the nature of these materials, a local devotee defines them as Lord Śiva's henchmen, showing as in this case they are still perceived as cult objects regardless of any funerary connotation survival.

This modest place of worship is at walking distance from the main road of the village, along which other shrines and structures are located. Interestingly, in the same courtyard of the elementary school an even smaller Śiva shrine captures the attention due to the presence of a group of stones resting on a square platform next to the entrance. They are covered with red lead, being unhewn or just rough-cut except for a couple of samples, which look like miniature steles with a human figure carved across the board of the front face, a woman and a man respectively; these two specimens undoubtedly are ancestors memorials, by this suggesting the funerary connotation of the other materials as well.

The second group of steles consists of eight samples highly weathered, mainly carved on the four sides, lying in the untamed field adjacent to another country shrine dedicated to Śiva on the outskirts of the village. In the surroundings, simple stones are found in clusters at short distance from each other; among them the presence of a medium size ancestor stele dedicated to a woman has to be noted. Two more Śiva shrines are located in the same area, displaying similar size and features but apparently devoid of materials connected to the funerary sphere.

The settlement of **Nazare Karhe Pathar** (Purandar *tālukā*; GPS coordinates: lat. 18.30338, long. 74.213723) is located along the banks of the Karha river, about 5 km North-East of Jejuri, the major pilgrimage center for the cult of Khaṇḍobā, and 55 km from Pune. Two sites here reveal the presence of memorial steles. The first record comes from a small modern Śiva shrine on the way to the bordering Nazare Supe: a hero-stone embedded in the ground stands next to a *nāga*-stone facing the entrance to the shrine itself. The second record pertains to a group of four memorials located on the other side of the road - and of the river as well – around the premises of a temple

dedicated to Nāgeśvara. Two of them are placed at the two sides of the Southern footpath which leads to the place of worship, while the other are placed closer to the steps to access it.

Four km East of Nazare Karhe Patar, still in proximity to the Karha river, is the village of **Pandeshwar** (Purandar *tālukā*; GPS coordinates: lat. 18.3057845, long. 74.2516794), less than 10 km far from Jejuri and 60 km from Pune. On the outskirts of the settlement, on the bank of the river, is the namesake temple of Pandeśvara, dedicated to Śiva. This wide religious complex, with an early Medieval nucleus and extensions in all likelihood dating back to the Maratha period, retains one memorial stone within its premises, and two more samples beside its external enclosure. The first is located close to a Nandi hall facing the sanctum, embedded in the ground, while the others stand by the two sides of a staircase on the extreme left edge of the Northern wall, thus being assigned a comparatively marginal position.

In the surroundings of the temple, to the North-East, scattered among houses and courtyards, a group of worship structures in disuse captures the attention. Between aniconic plinths and platforms at times supporting miniature *liṅgas* or *pādukās*, nearby the remains of a stone building, stands a hero stele flanked by a *nāga* stele and another fragment of carved stone by the side of a footpath.

Pangare (Purandar *tālukā*; GPS coordinates: lat. 18.263669, long. 74.05489) is a village located about 10 km South of Saswad and 40 km from Pune. Explorations allowed to record a funerary structure in the shape of a *ṭhade* dedicated to a couple (likely husband and wife), further supplied with two unhewn stones, within the premises of Śrī Niṣṇāi Devasthāna, and nine memorial steles in the sacred precinct of an ancient Śaṅkara shrine contiguous to the wide and recently renovated Śrī Sant Jñānobā Tukārām temple. Six of them are included in our catalogue. These materials are gathered in two spots: the first group includes six steles leaning on the abutments of the stone gateway which introduces to the sacred area; the second group consists of three samples, standing or lying close to the Northern enclosure wall.

The village of **Valha** (or Walhe; Purandar *tālukā*; GPS coordinates: lat. 18.1808194, long. 74.1533563) is about 27 km South of Jejuri and approximately 65 km from Pune. According to a local tradition, Valha would be the native place of Vālmīki, the legendary composer of the Rāmāyaṇa.³⁵³ From the survey across four religious complexes, a single yet highly valuable sample of hero-and-*satī* stone emerged. It is

³⁵³ *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, 18, 3: 454.

located along one of the roads of the villages, nearby the curve marked by the presence of a modern Māruti shrine, a bank, and the Southern exit of a wide Bhairavanātha temple.

Gulunce (Purandar *tālukā*; GPS coordinates: lat. 18.154334, long. 74.211445) is distant 20 km from Jejuri and about 100 km from Pune. Sontheimer remarks the strong pastoral identity of the village: pastoral deities are indeed still being worshipped here by a local nomadic community (the Hatkar-Dhangars, shepherds), despite the seasonal camp once existing (a settlement of the nomadic group of the Gavlis, buffalo breeders, ethnically related to the Hatkar-Dhangars) has been deserted as a consequence of the dramatic changes in the ecological conditions during the last hundred-fifty year, consisting of pasture deterioration and agriculture expansion.³⁵⁴ Eight steles could be recorded inside and outside the premises of a recently renovated Jyotirlinga temple: two leaning against an outer recess of the sanctum, four grouped beside the entrance to the complex, with the last two at few meters away from each other, either embedded in the ground or in the steps of the religious complex contiguous to the temple.

Loni Bhapkar (Baramati *tālukā*; GPS coordinates: lat. 18.15526, long. 74.4247) is a village located about 87 km South-East of Pune. It hosts a 14th century temple dedicated to Mallikārjuna, provided with a later tank (likely dating from the Peshwa governorship) surrounded by niches on the four sides. No memorial stones, however, are apparently registered in the area, the samples we recorded being gathered within or in proximity to other three holy structures. The first of them is the Śrī Svayambhudeva temple, the foundation of which would date back – according to a local informant - to four hundred years ago. Its current shape, however, is due to recent renovation works which incorporated within the walls on the sides of the *garbhagrha* two hero-stones formerly standing – says to us the same informant - in front of the entrance of the temple. Here the steles take on a decorative function as well.

The second area corresponds to the place where a large temple dedicated to Bhairavanātha is located. A road runs along its Northern wall, while fields surround it to the South and to the East. This large Medieval structure currently displays no proper memorial steles within its premises, apart from a fragment of a small size hero-stone set on a platform alongside stone heads of rams and humans. The particular significance of these elements has to be traced back to a series of practices connected to the cult of Khaṇḍobā, the warring god identified not surprisingly as one of the forms of Bhairava.

³⁵⁴ Sontheimer 1982b: 264. For an overview of the local pastoral communities see here chapter 4.

As Sontheimer explains, the custom of ram sacrifices in honor of Khaṇḍobā corresponds to a substitutive form of human sacrifices, which however devotees still perform in the shape of religious mortifications aiming to obtain the god's favour on earth and ultimately merge their soul with his.³⁵⁵ As a memorial connected to a self-sacrifice deed, the presence of a hero-stone next to these artefacts - should its original function being clear to the collector or not - is undoubtedly thought-provoking and worthy of further analysis. Outside this temple a number of smaller shrines and devotional/commemorative structures can be observed, showing different preservation degrees: it is here that we encounter other two notable memorial stones. A Māruti shrine located in the field adjacent to the Eastern wall of the Bhairavanātha religious complex supports a single freestanding hero-stone; on the other side of the road to the North, in the untamed meadow, stands a West-oriented pavilion hosting a *satī*-cum-hero-stone in a niche. The latter structure is in disuse, surrounded by shrubs, and just a closer observation allows to detect the presence of a niche.

The third group of hero-stones we catalogued leads to another Medieval complex, modest in size and devoid of decorations, dedicated to Someśvara. A road runs along its Southern side. The six steles we present here are part of a cluster of twenty-one, variously distributed at the two sides of the Nandi pavilion located in front of the entrance of the shrine. They stand either in the grassy area, or along the Southern stairway which connects the road level to the shrine platform.

Bawada (Indapur *tālukā*; GPS coordinates: lat. 17.958485, long. 75.002975) is a village located along the road connecting the regional pilgrimage centre of Pandharpur in Solapur district, home to Viṭhobā's major sanctuary, to the city of Indapur via Velapur and Akluj. It is therefore on the extreme South-Eastern edge of Pune district, closer to Pandharpur itself (about 55 km), rather than to Pune (about 160 km). A recently refurbished Māruti temple along the Akluj-Indapur road retains two refined examples of steles which lean on the external lateral sides of the holy space.

This area was extensively explored by Sontheimer, whose annotations are particularly precious for a better understanding of the context and its changes. It is worth reporting them fully before putting forward further considerations, even because

³⁵⁵ On ram sacrifices see Sontheimer 1982b: 272-273; and also Sontheimer 1989b [1976] : 214ff. for the English translation of the full myth underlying this custom.
On religious suicides and their meaning see 3.3.2.

they also pertain to another of the villages we included in our catalogue, namely Velapur (see below). Sontheimer's evaluations go then as follows:³⁵⁶

Two villages on the way to the North, Mhālūṅ and Bavḍā [Bawada], and the town of Āklūj on the way to Indāpūr may have had the function of securing this road [i.e. a road crossing a crucial geographical spot, where the city of Velapur is located]. In each of these places we find hitherto unnoticed stones which show the hero conquering a small fort which must have been to local fortified *vāḍā* [...]. In Bavḍā [Bawada], the local *vāḍā* has disappeared, whereas in Mhālūṅ and Āklūj the forts exist, and, in fact, hero-stones have been used for their walls. Bavḍā [Bawada], and especially Mhālūṅ, again, have "cattle-raid stones" in their sizeable collection: in Bavḍā [Bawada], three out of 21 hero-stones, and at Mhālūṅ, four out of 50 hero-stones are cattle-raid stones.

In other words, the presence of a certain variety of hero-stones, particularly those showing fort assaults, permit us to infer on the ancient political and economic configuration of the area even when its tangible expressions (such as fortified buildings, the *vāḍās*) are now lost (like in the case of Bawada).

It has to be noted that, because of given circumstances at the time of our visit in Bawada, we did not have the chance to verify the correspondence between Sontheimer's records (21 hero-stones) and the actual situation forty years after his observations. This aspect should not be overlooked: while in some cases the positional context of the stones may have not changed in recent times (like in the village of Kikli, see below),³⁵⁷ other cases show the occurrence of relevant transformations at some point in the last decades, with even the relocation of materials from one village to another (as for Mhalung and Velapur, see below). We currently do not know whether to ascribe to this phenomenon the incongruity we encountered between one of our records and Sontheimer's: while we report no. 72, pl. 85 as from the Eastern premises of Māruti temple in Bawada, the same stele appears in the German scholar's publication as from Phaltan, a village about 70 km distance.³⁵⁸

Deulgaon Raje (Daund *tālukā*; GPS coordinates: lat. 18.4439167, long. 74.6810274) is a settlement located about 10 km from the city of Daund, 90 km East of

³⁵⁶ Sontheimer 1982b: 268-269.

³⁵⁷ Even this relatively more stable positional context, however, does not necessarily reflect the original location of the steles. On this issue see chapter 3.5.

³⁵⁸ Sontheimer 1982b: 278 and fig. 28. The text, however, does not mention the location of the stele: the author analyzes this sample by virtue of its peculiar iconographic device, rather than for its ecological context, the location being thus quoted just in the figure caption. However, in the lack of further confirmations, and taking into account the considerable distance between the two villages, we are keen to interpret the ascription to the village of Phaltan as a misprint.

Pune. Nineteen memorials, fourteen of which included in our catalogue, have been retrieved here, grouped in three small clusters in proximity of temple premises. The early Medieval complex dedicated to Bhairavanātha houses three samples on the right of the entrance, side by side with stone elements like *pādukās*; close to this temple, other three specimens lean on the exterior walls of a small Māruti shrine. The biggest cluster, arranged in a row, is assembled within the precincts of the Siddheśvara temple, located on a hill mount at short distance from the other two worship places.

SOLAPUR DISTRICT

The village of **Velapur** (Malshiras *tālukā*; GPS coordinates: lat. 17.7911705, long. 75.0567341) is located about 30 km North-West of the pilgrimage center of Pandharpur and 58 km from Solapur, the district capital. This site retains the highest concentration of memorials steles so far encountered during our field explorations: almost one-hundred-thirty samples are indeed variously distributed in different spots of the village, both outdoors and indoors, inside temples or other structures formally deputed to host them; eighteen of these are included in our review.

Sontheimer gives account of a certain abundance of funerary materials in Velapur, and dedicates particular attention to their context; once again, it is worth reporting his notes in full:³⁵⁹

About sixty hero-stones, including fragments, form a remarkable assemblage [...]. Veļāpūr was situated at an old cross-roads between North and South, West and East. It reminds one of the passage in the *Malaipaṭukaṭām* [a poetic work in Tamil ascribed to the Sangam age], where it is said that at many cross-roads, where the enemies of the king live, inscribed stones can be seen which are reminders of the dead heroes and of the Maļavars (the robber tribe). It was probably a border town where many a battle must have been fought between the powers of the South and the North. Veļāpūr was probably attacked and defended by the *daṇḍanāyakas* of the border area.

Due to the geographical position Velapur and its surroundings somehow maintained their role of point of confluence, and consequently of clash, up to the time of the British *rāj*, when a decisive battle fought in the village of Ashte (about 100 km East of Velapur) led to the defeat of the Maratha army by the British, whose camp was precisely in Velapur. Reflection of a common history of the kind evoked by Sontheimer with respect to this village and other sites in the area (like Bawada, Malshiras, Khandali, just to recall the three we included in our catalogue) may be found – as we will see - in

³⁵⁹ Sontheimer 1982b: 268.

the fact that Velapur currently houses also a number of steles hailing from outside, namely from the bordering village of Mhalung.

Velapur is known to scholars for the presence of a number of Medieval religious structures such as the early 14th century temple still in use dedicated to Ardhanārī Nateśvara, provided with inscriptions which allow to safely determine its foundation.³⁶⁰ Out of eight temples we surveyed, four revealed the presence of a memorial stele, either within their premises or in their close surroundings.³⁶¹ An outstanding example of the first context is that of the so called “*Hemāḍpanti* temple on the tank”, a worship structure no longer in use located along the road which leads to the village from Pandharpur. The stele here stands in the *garbhagr̥ha*, but it is the nature of the deceased it commemorates combined with the proximity to another devotional structure to be remarked. Beyond a large water basin, indeed, in the same area of this temple is located a more recent shrine, still in use, dedicated to the cult of local female goddesses presiding over childbirth and newborns. The fact that the memorial housed in this *Hemāḍpanti* temple is a *satī*-stone may not be a mere coincidence, especially in the light of the by far wider number of memorial stones commemorating other sorts of male heroes from the same area; on the contrary, the choice of this location for a *satī*-stone may reflect some kind of connection between the *satī* herself and local tutelary deities, according to a paradigm frequent in popular Hinduism (see 3.3.2).

Neither the Bhairavanātha temple, a structure just across the street from the “*Hemāḍpanti* temple on the tank”, nor the dedicated to Malhārī Mhāḷśākānta (i.e. Khaṇḍobā), where however a *samādhi* with *pādukā* is found, reveal funerary memorials at present. Four outdoors samples are found instead close-by the Māruti temple, the Viśvakarmā temple, the Gaṇapati shrine and the Pārasnāth temple (known as Sarkarwada temple). The first, a late Medieval complex, is introduced by an arched gateway on which leans the memorial; as to the other two contexts, the steles are located nearby the entrance. The artefact retrieved on a corner of the premises of the last, which is actually a Jaina temple, consists of just a fragment.

The bulk of Velapur’s materials, however, lays in a shed located across the street from the Ardhanārī Nateśvara temple, where one-hundred-twenty-three funerary steles are

³⁶⁰ *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, 20: 504; Cousens 1931: 63-64.

³⁶¹ To my knowledge, the Medieval structures we will refer to are not extensively analyzed in any publication. English language descriptions of some of them (namely the “*Hemāḍpanti* temple on the tank”, the Māruti temple and the Sarkarwada temple) are provided by the website of the Archaeological Survey of India: <http://www.asimumbaicircle.com/m_solapur.html>.

collected together with few fragments of other religious sculptures. The interior can be accessed through the only door located on the major side and consists of three connecting rooms adjacent to one another; the artefacts lean all along the perimeter of the walls, which windows are positioned right below the roof level. Although occasionally referred to by locals as the “hero-stones museum”, the building is actually conceived as a sculptures depository, the keys being kept by the *pujārī* of the Ardhanārī Nateśvara temple, who opens it to visitors upon request.³⁶² The *pujārī* himself confirms that the structure was installed to serve as a storage and that dates back to 1969-1970. The new quarters of the officers of the Archaeological Survey of India – Mumbai Branch were inaugurated in 2007 just behind the sculpture-shed. A good number of the steles housed in this building are those reported by Sontheimer (see above) and even before by H. Cousens:³⁶³

Around the temple [one of the temples in Velapur that he noticed], set up in the ground, were about twenty well-carved *viragals* or hero-stones. One of these was sent to away in order to be placed in the Prince of Wales Museum in Bombay. There were seven in one line, and the rest were scattered about.

Although the exact location of these materials at the time of the two authors’ respective surveys is not clearly assessed, it appears that all of them were at some stage moved into the depository structure where they are still observable today; thus this place, according to our observations, currently houses the totality of Velapur’s memorial stones, apart from the five exceptions we recorded in different spots of the village, as previously pointed out.³⁶⁴ Interestingly, each and every piece within the depository is marked by a registration code consisting of an abbreviation of the village name and a sequential number (e.g. VLP 77), which in all likelihood was put on the occasion of the transfer.

Yet, Velapur’s sculpture-shed does not only accommodate materials from Velapur, but also from the neighboring village of Mhalung (about 12 km to North-East), which

³⁶² I am deeply thankful to the Maharashtra State Archaeology and Museums Directorate, in the person of its director Dr. S. Patil and its officer Dr. H. Sari, for granting me the access to this structure for the time of my research; I am equally grateful to Mr. N.S. Karchu, *pujārī* of the Ardhanārī Nateśvara temple in Velapur, and to his collaborator Mr. Prakash for assisting me during the days of my fieldwork.

³⁶³ Cousens 1931: 63.

³⁶⁴ It has to be noted that our observations do not actually coincide with what reported on the website of the Archeological Survey of India, where it is maintained that “There are 20 well carved viragals (hero stones) around the old temple” in Velapur: we believe this information to be relying on Cousens and therefore being not up-to-date. See <http://www.asimumbaicircle.com/m_solapur.html>s.v. “Old Temple and Viragals”.

Sontheimer quoted as a remarkable example of stones assemblage. Today, Mhalung's pieces represent some of the most refined samples inside the depository of Velapur; they amount to fifty-eight (out of the one-hundred-twenty-three kept in the structure) and can be recognized once again by the village abbreviation and a sequential number (e.g. MHL 57/87). According to some sources, however, many of Mhalung's materials are supposed to be still *in loco*.³⁶⁵

About 5 km North of Velapur and 60 North-West of Solapur, is the hamlet of **Khandali** (Malshiras *tālukā*; GPS coordinates: lat. 17.8335478, long. 75.045052), which offers an interesting example of a memorial relocation: under a tree along the Velapur-Akluj road, indeed, a hero-stone (file xx, plate xx) stands side by side with other votive objects, such as a lithography of Gaṇeṣa, statues of Nandi, *lingas* and other carved steles likely dismissed from temples.

Malshiras (Malshiras *tālukā*; GPS coordinates: lat. 17.863627, long. 74.911674) is 18 km distant from Velapur and 75 km from the district capital, located on the Pune-Pandharpur track via Phaltan. Sources speak of three religious structures of historical interest in the village: the Māruti temple, a pilgrimage spot for those going and coming back from Pandharpur;³⁶⁶ the Someśvara temple, inside the gate of the village, and the Mahābaleśvara temple, in a more peripheral position, nearby a stream. The last two, with their paradigmatic local Medieval architecture,³⁶⁷ revealed a few samples of memorials. Whereas in the former just fragments of small size hero-stones could be found within a courtyard storing dismissed stone sculptures, the latter retains a series of notable pieces in an outer recess of the *garbhagrha*. Here two *satī*-stones stand together with some *pādukā* and broken stone sculptures; next to this assemblage another noteworthy case of relocation of memorials: at least two hero-stones of large size serve as the sides of a reservoir in disuse.

³⁶⁵ Due to given circumstances the exploration of Mhalung was not possible at the time of our research. As far as this village is concerned, the website of the Archaeological Survey of India informs us that "[...] 75 documented sculptures are now shifted to the sculpture-shed at Velapur[...]. However, some loose sculptures are still lying in other temples of the village. Most of the sculptures are Hero-stones, generally with 3 compartments (vertically placed), occasionally with 4 compartments. However, there are some *sati*-memorial stones and some loose sculpture of deities datable to about the 13th -14th century A. D." <http://www.asimumbaicircle.com/m_solapur.html>s.v. "Mahadev stones" [10/2015].

The description provided by the website in this respect seems to be reliable, as it correctly accounts for the existence of the stone depository in Velapur (not recorded elsewhere, instead: see n. 365).

³⁶⁶ *Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency*, 20: 413-414. We could not ascertain the current status of the temple, nor the presence of memorials.

³⁶⁷ Cousens 1931, p. 63.

The town of **Mangalwedha** (Mangalwedha *tālukā*; GPS coordinates: 17.51095, long. 75.443786) is located on the Southernmost edge of the district, just 25 km from the border with Karnataka, 25 km from Pandharpur and 55 km from Solapur. As from the abundance of archaeological remains, the city had a primary role between the 9th and the 12th century, being alternatively capital or headquarter of the dynasties which ruled the region, namely the Cālukyas of Kalyani and the Later Kalacuris, and losing its political prominence with the advent of the Yādavas.³⁶⁸ Among its several religious complexes, the temple dedicated to Brahmā captures the attention due to the renowned paucity of worship places as such all over India.

From this town hails one of the most notable samples in our catalogue, which value derives not only from its refined form and content, but also from the fact that it currently stands out as a single unit. This stele, indeed, is located as an isolated element on a central crossroads, between a local assembly hall and a shrine to the pastoral god Mhasobā; interestingly, an informant tells us that a large number of funerary slabs used to be scattered in the town until the decision was taken to gather the majority of them within the premises of Solapur University.³⁶⁹

SATARA DISTRICT

In the frame of the present research we could explore the Satara district to a much lesser extent compared to that of Pune and Solapur; nonetheless the abundance of materials emerged during just two surveys motivates the need for future targeted researches in the area.

The village of **Kikli** (or Kikali; Wai *tālukā*; GPS coordinates: lat. 17.851329, long. 74.011459) is about 20 km South-East of the town of Wai, and about 25 North of the district capital. The landscape reflects its particular position on the border between “the richer rainfall area to the east of the Ghats and the dry pastoral area”, as Sontheimer conveniently summarizes.³⁷⁰ Today the area flourishes with sugar-cane intensive cultivation, with a massive processing plant located just on the outskirts of the village. On the group of hills just 2 km (7 km by road) East of Kikli are the 12th century Chandan-Vandan twin forts.

This settlement was already noticed by British observers, who highlight the

³⁶⁸ *Maharashtra State Gazetteers. Sholapur District. 1977.*

<http://solapur.gov.in/htmldocs/1977/home.html>s.v., Places, Mangalwedha.

³⁶⁹ We reserve the right to verify this information in the course of future researches.

³⁷⁰ Sontheimer 1982b: 270.

presence of four remarkable examples of Medieval temples.³⁷¹ Our historical and archaeological interest in this site is connected to the presence of over forty memorial steles scattered in different spots at the time of our visit: from temple premises and cross-paths, to drains by the road sides and courtyards, either as single units or gathered in clusters in the public square. The amount of materials and their distribution let us suppose that they must have been collected from the surrounding areas by the villagers. Thanks to local informers Sontheimer is able to trace the reallocation process of these artefacts in recent times, and gives an account of their today's position:³⁷²

About fifty remarkable hero-stones including fragments are scattered in this village. Some of them were submerged in the soil to support the side of a steep access to the remnants of an old "Hemāḍpant" temple which was re-erected nearby. One of the steps of the access to the former temple turned out to be a *vīragal*. The others were recently retrieved by the villagers and re-installed near the village square as they were in danger of being destroyed by the pressure of the access path. More *viragals* were used in house-building and may be retrieved from ruins.

Out of the six steles included in our catalogue, five belong to the cluster of memorials standing or lying in the public square around a platform with a banyan tree; the last sample is part of a group of two located at the foot of a staircase which leads to modern shrines dedicated to Tuḷajābhavānī and Mahādeva.

The hamlet of **Rajapuri** is located on the Ghats, about 15 km South-West of Wai and 50 North-West of Satara. It is very close to the pilgrimage centre of Mahabaleshwar and to the locally renowned, although rather isolated, health-resort of Panchgani, a village which climate favored major appreciation by Europeans since the XIX century.³⁷³ Rajapuri is home to five natural caves (to which human intervention conferred the current layout)³⁷⁴ visited by pilgrims due to the presence of a shrine in honor of Kārtikswāmi; a temple of Mallikārjuna is installed as well. Beyond the Kārtikswāmi worship cave, the main religious attraction is offered by a series of ponds which water is reputed to have miraculous properties; these reservoirs are located within the fifth cave, the Southernmost.³⁷⁵ As already referred in the British accounts, these caves house a number of carved stones of different nature: our observations confirm the majority of

³⁷¹ *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, 19: 484-485.

³⁷² Sontheimer 1982b: 270.

³⁷³ See for instance *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, 19: 533-534.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*:550.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

them to be hero- and *satī*-stones. The materials are distributed within each cave as follows:³⁷⁶

- cave I: seven memorials arranged in a semicircle along the walls (three *satī*-stones, two hero-stones and two unidentifiable pieces due to bad preservation status). Beside them, small size *śivalingas* and Nandis are stored;
- cave II: one memorial (*satī*-stone) beside Kārtikswāmi's *mūrti*;
- cave III: eleven memorials arranged in a semicircle along the walls (five multi-panelled hero-stones, four one-panelled ancestor-/hero-stones,³⁷⁷ two *satī*-stones);
- cave IV: Mallikārjuna's *mūrti*. A group of stones is located just outside the access to the cave; among them the fragment of a multi-panelled hero-stone and four one-panelled ancestor-/hero-stones.

Four more memorial steles are gathered around a tree of *Ficus racemosa* at the foot of the slope which leads to the caves; a sign affixed to the trunk defines it "Śrī Audumbar", suggesting this tree to be kept in high value, if not even rendered object of worship. The presence of hero-stones before it might not be then a mere coincidence responding to logistic issues.

AHMEDNAGAR DISTRICT

Only one survey was carried out into Ahmednagar district during the time span of the present research; nonetheless, the site explored revealed fruitful data in respect to both the formal aspects of the materials and their nowadays perception by the devotees.

The village of **Limpangaon** (Shrigonda *tālukā*; GPS coordinates: lat. 18.5749745, long. 74.6415071) is about 65 km from the district capital and 95 km from Pune. It shows a remarkable example of religious complex in *Hemādṛpanti* style³⁷⁸ dating back to the second half of the 13th century, as an inscription proves.³⁷⁹ The temple is dedicated to Siddheśvara, and within its premises thirteen memorial steles, seven of which included in our catalogue, have been retrieved. Beyond the exceptional features displayed by some samples (such as an inscription, a rather sporadic case for Maharashtrian memorial stones), it strikes the wide range of positions the thirteen specimens were assigned within the same context: while some stand in a rather privileged location together with other cult objects, inside the shrine (as in the case of

³⁷⁶ According to a religious precept, women's access to places of worship dedicated to Lord Kārttikeya is not allowed. Therefore I am deeply thankful to dr. A. Bankar for taking on my behalf the pictures on which is based the spatial reconstruction of the materials in the caves I offer in the text.

³⁷⁷ One of these four could actually be a fragment of a multi-panelled hero-stone.

³⁷⁸ Cousens 1931, p. 58.

³⁷⁹ *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, 17: 725-726.

the above mentioned stele with inscription) or alternatively in its close proximity, a number of them lays or stands on the enclosure wall side by side with a series of dismissed stone sculptures, apparently lacking of any particular attention. A sample was retrieved even in the uncultivated field contiguous to the temple premises, where waste materials ultimately gathered. This area must had undergone some sort of maintenance excavations not long before the time of our visit, as the overturned ground and the presence of unburied concrete pipes suggested; the stele, therefore, might have come to light as a consequence of the works.

Part II - Chapter 6

CATALOGUE

6.1 Preliminary remarks

The following notes pertain to our analytic description of the materials:

- measurements of all samples are indicated except for those of the specimens recovered in the sites of Rajapuri (Satara district) and Kikli (Satara district), since due to given circumstances it was not possible to record them; measurements are indicative, and subjective to approximations;
- where not differently specified in the text, materials are ascribed to the early Medieval period;
- a question mark in brackets beside the indication of the number of the panels is given for all cases where it is not possible to ascertain – although there might be good reasons to argue it – the original number of scenes displayed on the specimens, because they appear embedded in other structures, half buried, or damaged.

As to the iconographic details:

- unless differently specified in the text, the terms “above” and “below” employed to define the figures positions have to be intended according to the perspective codes of Hindu iconography, that is to say “behind” and “in front”;
- were the cross-legged position of the human figures is not clearly identifiable in a codified posture, as in the majority of cases in turn, we maintained the generic indication “cross-legged”, even though a more clear definition could be inferred on a comparative ground;
- we used the expression “three-quarter view” with a certain flexibility, a recurrent body posture being that encompassing legs in profile or actual three-quarter view, and bust in front view;
- we defined the female figures garments as *sārī* to distinguish them from the male counterparts, *dhotī*, despite the distinction between the seems to fade at times, especially in the absence of upper garments (which is the rule in both cases).

6.2 Description of the artefacts

MARTIAL HEROISM

Individual steles

No. 1, pl. 14, KUMBHARVALAN

Object: three-panelled hero-stone

Location: Kumbharvalan, Purandar *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; left side of the entrance to Śiva shrine

Cardinal orientation: facing East

Size: max height cm 81, max width cm 34, max thickness cm 24

Notes: tapering upwards; carvings highly damaged; stele base buried.

Panel 1: fight scene. On the left: standing hero, in front view with legs stretched apart and slightly bent; both the arms lifted at the shoulders height, the left one pushed close to the enemy's head (hand and possible attribute not clearly preserved), the right hand holding a weapon (probably a dagger). Hints of *dhōṭī* with front fold and earrings as to his attire. On the right: two standing male figures in similar attitude. Three-quarter left view, legs not preserved, the left arm bent at a right angle holding the shield, the right one raised upwards with a sword/club (not preserved in the case of the figure in the middle, but possibly trespassing on the frame above, as the case of his companion shows). No traces of dresses and ornaments are detectable, apart from some hints of earrings (warrior on the extreme right).

Panel 2: ascension to heaven. In the centre: standing hero with legs stretched apart and bent, suggesting some movement. No further details of his attire are visible, compared to the panel below. Two standing figures are beside him, whom he embraces by laying his arms around their shoulders. They are arguably *apsaras* (distinctive body features barely preserved), represented in a specular way: their hips bend towards the hero, one of their arms embraces him behind is back, while the other (that closer to the lateral frame) is bent while holding a *cāmara*. Traces of *sārī* (fold hanging on their legs) and earrings are preserved.

Panel 3: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: three-quarter right view hero in *padmāsana*, his hands in *añjalimudrā*. He sits on a cushion; earrings traces as to his attire. In the centre: Nandi crouched with paws bent, his body in three-quarter view (left side). Above him (i.e. behind), a *yonī-liṅga* on a circular pedestal, oriented to the left. On the right: standing (male) figure in left profile view; legs and left arm not preserved, his right arm being lifted at a right angle above the *Śivaliṅga*, holding an attribute (not preserved).

Frame: plain. Upper section: remains of an architectural-shaped trilobite structure.

No. 2, pl. 15, KUMBHARVALAN

Object: four-panelled hero-stone

Location: Kumbharvalan, Purandar *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; left side of the entrance to Śiva shrine

Cardinal orientation: facing East

Size: max height cm 98, max width cm 41, max thickness cm 15

Notes: tapering upwards; worn carvings; stele base is buried.

Panel 1: dead hero. Hero lying supine on the ground, his right arm resting along the side chest. Three head of cattle around his body, which horns trespass on the (disrupt) frame above.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: standing hero in three-quarter view (right side); his legs stretched apart and bent as in a movement forward; his right arm at a right angle holds a spear pointing at a horse (that is apparently pierced by it) and its rider. He wears *dhotī* and belt, with a sheathed dagger/short sword hanging on his right hip. Further details are not visible, except for his earrings and his hairstyle in a bun. On the right: two warriors in profile view (left side) mounting galloping horses, only the one in the foreground being fully represented. The identifiable harness of the equine is made of crown-piece, brow-band and cheek-piece as to the head, reins; its tail floating upwards. Warrior's left arm not clearly preserved, possibly bent inwards (towards the background of the scene) holding the reins; right arm bent and raised at the shoulder holding a spear that points at the hero. Details of his attire are not preserved, apart from elongated earlobe suggesting an earring. Behind him, on the background, the other warriors, whose head and parts of his horse (heads and paws) are given. He also holds a spear, trespassing on the above frame.

Panel 3: ascension to heaven. In the centre: hero in front view, his right leg bent backwards in midair, the body weight on the left one, bent as well but the foot firmly on the ground, as in a leap. He embraces the two figures beside him by laying his arms around their hips. He wears *dhotī* (fold falling between his legs), belt, anklet (left leg), necklace, and likely earrings; trace of bun hairstyle. On either side, two standing female figures (*apsarases*; the left one heavily damaged), in a specular attitude but for a detail. Their hips are bent towards the external side of the scene, both of them embracing the hero with one of their arms around his shoulders, the other arm (the one closer to the frame) is bent while holding an attribute: a *cāmara* in the case of the left *apsaras* (elbow directed backwards), a non-identifiable tool in the case of the right one, which seems to be hold on her hand-palm (elbow directed downwards). Their attire can be deduced just from the right *apsaras*: *sārī* (fold between her leg), belt, large earrings.

Panel 4: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero in *padmāsana*, his hands in *añjalimudrā*. His bun hairstyle and earrings are clearly visible here (no further details preserved). In the centre: Nandi crouched with paws bent, his body in right profile view, his head turned in front view. Above him (i.e. behind), a *yonilīṅga* on a circular based, double moulded pedestal oriented to the left. On the right: standing *pujārī* in front view; his left arm bent at a right angle holding a flask, his right arm lifted straight up at the *liṅga* height, holding a bell (his hand slightly trespassing on the above frame).

Frame: plain. Crowned by *akalaśa* with base and belly B1, handle D, on edge of type E.

No. 3, pl. 16, KUMBHARVALAN

Object: four-panelled hero-stone

Location: Kumbharvalan, Purandar *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; left side of the entrance to Śiva shrine

Cardinal orientation: facing East

Size: max height cm 143, max width cm 42, max thickness cm 23

Notes: tapering upwards; worn carvings.

Panel 1: dead hero. Hero lying prone on the ground in profile view (left side), facing downwards; his right arm along the side, the left one lifted and bent at a right angle trespassing on the base of the stele. Trace of his *dhotī* fold, his hair above the temples collected in a short tail/plait falling behind. On the background, three galloping horses next to one another in profile view (left side) each mounted by a male figure. The warrior (at least the middle and extreme right ones) hold the reins with their left hand and a spear/sword-like weapon with the right (trespassing on the thin frame above), the arm being bent and lifted almost at the shoulder height. Nothing of their attire and ornaments is preserved; of their horse harness crown-piece, breast collar, reins and the plum are preserved (on the extreme right horse). As to the extreme left horse rider, only his head is given.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: standing hero in front view, legs stretched apart and bent as in a movement forward; right arm raised up at the shoulder holding a sword (trespassing on the frame above), left arm bent along the side grabbing the upper inner edge of the shield. His *dhotī* fold is visible on the legs; on his right hip falls an element (a sheathed dagger/belt side?). Hints of earrings. On the right: two standing warriors in front side view and similar attitude: their legs bent, their right arm bent at the shoulder height, holding a sword above their heads which trespasses on the frame; their torso is hidden

behind the shields. Their hairstyle seems to resemble that of the hero in Panel 1, given also the absence of any bun.

Panel 3: ascension to heaven. In the centre: standing hero in front view, his legs bent, the hips bent to his right; he embraces the two figures who flank him by lying his arms around their shoulders. *Dhotī* fold among the legs and earrings are preserved as part of his attire. His hair look tied in a bun, here. Next to him on either side, a standing *apsaras*. Their hips bend towards the hero; one of their arms embraces him behind his back, the other (the one closer to the lateral frame) is bent along the side, while something hangs from their hands (a garland?). Their attire and ornaments are not visible anymore but for the *sārī* fold on the legs and the earrings; traces of elongated bun hairstyle.

Panel 4: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero in front view *padmāsana*, his hands in *añjalimudrā*. Traces of hip belt (a side of it falling on his right thigh) and earrings; bun hairstyle. In the centre: Nandi crouched with paws bent, his body in right profile view, his head turned in front view. Above him (i.e. behind), a *yoni-līṅga* on a circular based, double moulded pedestal in front view. On the right: *pujārī* in *padmāsana* in front view; his left arm bent at a right angle, holding in front of his chest a curve edged, oblong tool; his right arm bent and lifted up above the shoulder height, grabbing a not preserved attribute. He wears an arm bracelet, and seems to have long bear, all his hair being apparently pulled up.

Frame: plain. Crowned by a *kalaśa* with base, belly and handle A, on edge of type D.

No. 4, pl. 17, KUMBHARVALAN

Object: two-panelled (?) hero-stone

Location: Kumbharvalan, Purandar *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; right side of the entrance to Śiva shrine

Cardinal orientation: facing East

Size: max height cm 69, max width cm 39, max thickness cm 16

Notes: worn carvings; lowest section buried

Panel 1 (half buried): ascension to heaven. In the middle: hero in front view, his hips bent to his right; he embraces the two figures who flank him by lying his arms around their shoulders. He wears necklace and earrings; hairstyle in a bun. Next to him on either side, a standing *apsaras*. One of their arms embraces him behind his back; the left *apsaras* has her right arm bent along the side, her hand possibly holding a no longer preserved attribute. Despite few details are preserved of the right *apsaras*, both the female figures are apparently shown in specular attitude, attire and ornaments, wearing necklace and earring, with their hair tied in a bun.

Panel 2: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero in front view *padmāsana*, his hands in *añjalimudrā*. He wears *dhotī* (trace of its hem is given), necklace and earrings; his hair tied up in a bun. In the centre: Nandi crouched with paws bent, his body in right profile view, his head turned in front view. Above him (i.e. behind), a *yoni-līṅga* on a double moulded pedestal. On the right: *pujārī* in front view *padmāsana*; his left arm bent at a right angle in front of his chest, holding an oblong tool (a flask?); his right arm bent and lifted up above the shoulder height, holding with his fingertips turned upwards a small size, circular attribute (unidentifiable). He has long bear, his hair pulled up in a coiled bun.

Frame: plain. Crowned by a *kalaśa* with base, belly and handle A, on edge of type B.

No. 5, pl. 18, NAZARE KARHE PATHAR

Object: four-panelled (?) hero-stone

Location: Nazare Karhe Pathar, Purandar *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing beside a *nāga* stone; facing the entrance to Śiva shrine, behind Nandi

Cardinal orientation: facing South-West

Size: max height cm 80, max width cm 40, max thickness cm 20

Notes: lowest section buried; traces of whitewash.

Panel 1: almost completely buried. Only traces of five head of cattle (horns, trespassing on the frame above). The panel reasonably portrays the dead hero.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: standing hero, in front view with legs stretched apart and bent as in a leap forward (right leg apparently in midair, backwards). Both his arms are bent at a right angle oriented downwards while holding horizontally a spear that point to the enemies. His attire and ornaments are can be clearly distinguished: short *dhotī* (fold falling among his legs?), *yajñopavīta*, arm bracelets, large flat earrings, with hair tied in a bun. On the right: two standing warriors in three-quarter left view; legs slightly bent; torso and left arm hidden behind the shield, the right one lifted up straight, a sword being grabbed with the hand (trespassing on the frame above). Of their clothing, traces of *dhotī* is visible; they wear wrist bracelets and earrings, with a bun hairstyle.

Panel 3: ascension to heaven. In the centre: standing hero, in front view; legs stretched apart and bent as in a movement. With his arms he embraces the two female figures beside, by resting his right one around the nymph's shoulder, and his left around the other nymph's hip. Underneath the fold of his *dhotī* a sort of short flat element lays on the ground. He wears a three band belt, with ribbons/strips falling on his right hip. All the other clothing and ornaments details are consistent with those shown in the panel below. He is flanked by two *apsarases*, one on either side. They are portrayed in a specular attitude: in front view, one of their hips bent to the outer lateral side of the scene, one arm (that closer to the frame) bent at right angle holding a *cāmara* which trespasses on the frame itself. The other arm is shown in different positions: embracing the hero around his back (left side *apsaras*), or bent while holding a floating attribute (a shawl/a garland?) which seems to fall behind the hero, around his back (right side *apsaras*). Both the figures are richly dressed and adorned: short *sārī* with double rim and fold falling on their legs; belt; a long necklace hanging among their breasts, and a short necklace as well; large flat earrings. Their hair is tied up as in a coil.

Panel 4: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: front view hero in *padmāsana*, his hands in *añjalimudrā*. Of his attire just the *yajñopavīta* and the large earrings are preserved, his bun hairstyle being still recognizable as well. In the centre, from the bottom: Nandi crouched with paws bent, his body in a profile view (right side), his head turned in front. Above him (i.e. behind), a *yonī-liṅga* on a double-moulded pedestal, in side view. On the right: standing male figure (*ācārya*?) in front view; left leg slightly bent backwards; right arm straight, with a bell (?) in the hand; left arm raised and bent at a right angle holding a tool (flask?) above the *liṅga*. A thick wrist bracelet, large ear ornaments and a hair pulled up in a turban/large knot are visible.

Frame: plain. Topmost section missing; only remains of edge of type E.

No. 6, pl. 19, PANDESHWAR

Object: two-panelled (?) hero-stone

Location: Pandeshwar, Purandar *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; beside Nandi hall, premises of Paṇḍeśvar temple

Cardinal orientation: facing West

Size: max height cm 57, max width cm 36, max thickness cm 15

Notes: lowest section buried

Panel 1: Ascension to heaven. In the middle: standing hero in front view; hips protruding to the left side of the scene, with legs bent and stretched apart. His arms are lifted up to shoulder height embracing around their back the figures at his sides. Traces of *yajñopavīta* are visible, as well as of the belt, a strip of which falls on his right thigh. His large earrings and his knot hairstyle are clearly preserved. Two standing female figures (*apsarases*) flank him, one on each side. The right side maiden has her torso slightly leaning towards the left side, i.e. towards the hero, being he in turn closer to the left side *apsaras*. They both embrace the hero with one arm, holding a *cāmara* (the right one less clear) with the other, which is therefore slightly bent and raised. On both the *apsarases* traces of *sārī* with fold hanging on their legs, necklace and large earrings are noticeable, their hairstyle consisting of a double bun.

Panel 2: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero in three quarter right profile view, sitting crossed legs with hands in *añjalimudrā*. No details of his attire and ornaments are visible, except for his earrings and hair tied in a knot. In the centre: *yonī-liṅga* on a double-moulded pedestal.

Frame: plain; fillet between the two preserved panels not straight and not uniform in thickness. Crowned by *akalaśa* with base, belly and handle B1, on edge of type D.

No. 7, pl. 20, PANDESHWAR

Object: four-panelled hero-stone

Location: Pandeshwar, Purandar *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; flanking (on the left) a stone stairway in the premises of Paṇḍeśvar temple

Cardinal orientation: facing North

Size: max height cm 125, max width cm 43, max thickness cm 19

Notes: tapering upwards; uppermost panel irregular in size; stele lodged in a recess of the stairway

Panel 1: dead hero. Hero lying on the ground on his right side; both his arms are bent at a right angle, the left resting on his chest, the right lifted upwards leaning next to his head. No details are preserved of his attire and ornaments. Six (?) head of cattle around his body, next to one another. Four of them are in left profile view; the other two, recognizable only by the scanty traces of their muzzles, peek out between the first and the second bovine from the left. Their horns (only those belonging to the first one are clearly observable) trespass on the frame above.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: hero standing in three quarter right view. Legs stretched apart and flexed. Right arm bent at a right angle to hold a spear, which upper section is provided with a small size streamer trespassing on the lateral frame; left arm grabbing the shield in front. The still visible components of his attire include a *dhotī* (the fold hanging between his legs), a belt, an arm bracelet and ear ornaments. His hair knot must be tied behind, therefore not visible here. On the right: three warriors on horseback next to one another in left profile view. The three horses are reared up, only the one in the foreground being fully portrayed. Its harness is preserved just in the traces of reins. The warrior who rides it grabs the reins with his left hand, the arm bent at a right angle; the other arm is raised up straight wielding a short weapon (dagger?) above his head. Nothing can be identified of his attire and ornaments. Underneath the forelegs of the horse, a figure sits on the ground with knees bent upwards, in right profile view; the arms are not clearly preserved, but being no trace of them along the side, they supposedly are bent and raised up in the direction of the horse raider's foot (as in a self-protective gesture?). The poor preservation status of the carving does not allow to identify any attribute of this figure, but scanty hints of long hair might lead to identify it as a woman. Of the other two warriors only their heads are portrayed, along with one bent arm raised up to hold a spear (paralleling the frame above). As to the horse, beyond their forelegs and muzzles, a hint of nose-band can be noted.

Panel 3: ascension to heaven. In the centre: hero standing in front view, with legs stretched apart and bent to suggest some movement. His arms rest along the sides, the left hand apparently leaning on the knee. His attire is consistent with that displayed in the panel above, with belt and knot hairstyle clearly visible. He is flanked by four *apsarases*, two on each side. Each of the four maidens embraces the figure(s) next to her own, except for the first *apsaras* on the right who only embraces the hero, the other arm resting by the side, as necessarily do also the two nymphs standing on the edges of the scene. They all wear *sārī* and waist belt, as well as ear ornaments; their hairstyle is not preserved.

Panel 4: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting on a cushion in right profile view, his right leg resting on it likely bent inward, the left similarly flexed but raised upwards. His hands are in *añjalimudrā*, his torso perfectly turned to the front. His attire is not preserved if not for the hairstyle earrings; his hairstyle confirms what already observed in the panels below. In the centre: *yonī-liṅga* in side view on a pedestal composed of three blocks different in height and shape. On the right: *pujārī* standing in front view. Left arm bent at a right angle while holding some attribute (a bell?); right arm lifted to the shoulder height and bent, with the forearm oriented upwards while holding an oblong object above the *liṅga* (a flask?). His garments cannot be identified, apart for a strip being visible below his waist. His hair is tied in a wide knot above the head.

Frame: plain; fillet between the lower panels not clearly defined. Crowned by an irregular *kalaśa* (with hemispherical structure topped by a finial), on edge of type D.

No. 8, pl. 21, PANDESHWAR

Object: four-panelled hero-stone

Location: Pandeshwar, Purandar *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; village courtyard, between fragmentary stone relief and *nāga*-stone. Dismissed folk-cults structures in the surroundings

Cardinal orientation: facing West

Size: max height cm 96, max width cm 37, max thickness cm 12

Notes: remarkable preservation status of the stele, apart for Panel 1 half buried and worn; traces of *sindūr* and turmeric powder.

Panel 1: dead hero. Hero lying on the ground on his left side, in a rather static way. Naturalistic portrayal of the back (a line defines the vertebral column). Right arm resting on the side, left not given. In the background unidentifiable elements (head of cattle?). His attire consists of a *dhotī*. No further details are visible apart from a hint of knot hairstyle right above his nape.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: hero in front side view. Legs slightly flexed and stretched apart. Right arm bent at a right angle, the hand holding an unidentifiable short weapon (dagger?) pointing to the enemy. Left arm similarly bent and raised, the forearm oriented upwards with clenched fist (to hold some attribute or alternatively to soften the enemy's blow?). The only visible garment detail is the *dhotī* fold hanging between his legs, together with ear ornaments and hair tied in a knot. On the left: three standing warriors next to one another, in left profile view, their heads turned to the front. Only their left legs are preserved, their busts hidden behind the shields which overlap each other. Their right arms are raised straight up, wielding swords which trespass on the frame above. Traces of hair knots are visible on the first two warriors from the left.

Panel 3: ascension to heaven. In the centre: standing hero in front view, with legs slightly flexed and hips protruding towards the right side of the scene. His arms are raised to the shoulder height to embrace the female figures by his sides. His *dhotī* and its fold are neatly visible, as well as his necklace. Hints of ear ornaments are noticeable, while no details are available of his hairstyle. He is flanked by two *apsarases* on each side. All of them display identical attitude and features: standing in static front view, embracing each other and the hero. The two maidens on the edges of the scene likely have one arm bent to hold an undecipherable attribute (*cāmara*?). They wear a *sāṭī* with round rim and the fold falling on their legs, adorned with a necklace and earrings. Their hairstyle consists of a wide central knot.

Despite the five figures' feet are not preserved, the ground on which they stand is clearly visible, being represented in high relief.

Panel 4: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in three-quarter right view. His right leg is bent inward resting on the ground, the left flexed and raised upwards. His head is turned to the front and bent on a side, while his hands are in *añjalimudrā*. All his attire and ornaments are consistent with those of the lower panels, here a further short strip of the *dhotī* falling on his right hip. In the centre: Nandi in right profile view crouched with paws bent. Above him a *yoni-līṅga* in side view on a double-moulded pedestal. On the right: *pujārī* sitting in three-quarter left view. Left arm bent at a right angle, the hand holding an undecipherable tool; right arm bent and lifted, with the forearm oriented upwards while keeping in his hand an object oriented to the *līṅga*. His hair must be tied in a large and flat knot on the top of his head. No more details are available of his attire and ornaments.

Frame: plain and regular. Crowned by a *kalaśa* with base, belly and handle A, on edge of type D.

The most noteworthy feature of the stele is given in Panel 1 (although it is the lesser preserved), where a comparatively more rare orientation of the hero's body can be noticed: he has his back to the observer.

No. 9, pl. 22, PANGARE

Object: four-panelled hero-stone

Location: Pangare, Purandar *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; behind Nandi's pavilion, leaning against the entrance arch to Śaṅkara temple (adjoining Śrī Sant Jñānoba Tukārām temple)

Cardinal orientation: facing West

Size: max height cm 170, max width cm 46, max thickness cm 21

Panel 1: dead hero. Hero lying supine on the ground in right profile view; left leg bent and crossed over the right; right arm resting on his lap. Only hints of ear ornaments and bun hairstyle are visible. Above his body, a row of four garlands next to one another.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: standing hero in three-quarter right view. Legs stretched apart and bent suggesting moving forward, the hips remarkably protruding to the left side of the scene. His left arm frontally holds a shield to dodge the blows; the right is bent at a right angle and raised at shoulder height while wielding a sword (that trespasses on the frame above). The fold of the *dhotī*, the ear ornament and the bun hairstyle are scantily preserved. On the right: three warriors standing in specular position compared to the hero, with their busts and left arms hidden behind the shields. Also their swords trespass on the frame above. For what concerns their attire and ornaments, only their bun hairstyle is noticeable.

Panel 3: ascension to heaven. In the centre: standing hero in front view, hips to the left side of the scene, legs stretched apart and flexed. Left arm is bent and put close to his chest (holding some attribute?), right one oriented to the figure beside, as to embrace her. His *dhotī* fold among his legs is visible, as well as his ear ornaments. He is flanked by four female figures (*apsarases*), two on either side, each couple being specular to the other. The two *apsarases* closer to the hero are in *pādasvastika*. They embrace him by resting an arm around his shoulders, while they have the other arm bent at a right angle (holding some attribute?). The two *apsarases* standing on the edge of the scene have likewise one arm bent at a right angle, but they hold a *cāmara* with the other lifted up, the *cāmara* fluttering just behind the first two *apsarases* described. The two nymphs closer to the later frame are also represented in a comparatively smaller scale, indicating they must be standing slightly in the background. They all wear a *sārī* and ear ornaments; further details are not preserved.

Panel 4: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in profile view on a flat short support, crossed legs and hands in *añjalimudrā*. Nothing of his attire is visible but ear ornaments and bun hairstyle. In the centre: Nandi crouched on a flat and large pedestal with paws bent, his body in a profile view (right side), his head in front view. Above him (i.e. behind), a *yoni-līṅga* on a double-moulded pedestal, in side view. On the right: standing *pujārī* in three-quarter view (left side); right arm raised straight towards the *līṅga*, holding some attribute above it (water vessel/lamp?); left arm bent at a right angle holding a no longer preserved oblong attribute (bell?). He seems to have elongated ear lobes, long straight hair and beard.

Frame: richly decorated by a geometric pattern made of circles alternating diagonally placed squares, each of them being inscribed in turn within a square framework. Crowned by a *kalaśa* with base B1, belly and handle D, on edge of type D.

No. 10, pl. 23, PANGARE

Object: four-panelled hero-stone

Location: Pangare, Purandar *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; behind Nandi's pavilion, leaning against the entrance arch to Śaṅkara temple (adjoining Śrī Sant Jñānoba Tukārām temple)

Cardinal orientation: facing West

Size: max height cm 132, max width cm 36, max thickness cm 15

Panel 1: dead hero. Hero lying supine on the ground in three-quarter right view; left arm by the side, right one bent at a right angle resting beside the head. *Dhotī* fold, hint of wrist bracelet (right arm) and elongated ear lobe are preserved. Four head of cattle surround his body, their heads and horns trespassing on the irregular frame above; humps particularly evident.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: standing hero in three-quarter right view. Legs stretched apart and bent suggesting moving forward. The left arm frontally holds a shield to dodge the blows; the right is bent at a right angle and lifted up at shoulder height while wielding a sword (that trespasses on the frame above). He wears *dhotī* (the fold hanging among his legs), a belt with a sheathed dagger falling on his right thigh and necklace. Clear signs of elongated ear lobes. His hair is tied in a knot. On the right: two standing warriors in specular position to the hero (therefore their busts and left arms are not visible as hidden behind the shield). Their swords likewise trespass on the frame above. Their hairstyle apparently consists of a bundle of hair tied on top of the shaven head (*śikhā*) and falling on the back.

Panel 3: ascension to heaven. In the centre: standing hero in front view, hips to the left side of the scene, legs stretched apart and flexed. His arms are not visible, but they are likely embracing the two figures beside him. His attire and hairstyle are consistent with those seen in the panel below (just sheathed dagger on his thigh), enriched by a necklace. He is flanked by four female figures (*apsarases*) in three-quarter view oriented to the hero; they are two on either side, each couple being specular to the other. The two *apsarases* closer to the hero have their legs slightly bent and almost crossed to those of the hero. The two *apsarases* standing on the edge of the scene display a more static attitude. Due to the poor preservation status of the carvings their arms gesture are hardly decipherable, the clearest detail being the fly-whisk held by the two *apsarases* on the left side. They all wear *sārī* (the front fold being the only recognizable hint), earrings and supposedly wrist bracelet and torque (?), at least judging from the second *apsaras* from the left. They have a bun hairstyle.

Panel 4: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in three-quarter right view, his hands in *añjalimudrā*. His clothing and ornaments do not differ from those in the panels below (ribbons/limbs of the belt resting on his right thigh). In the centre: Nandi crouched with paws bent, his body in right profile view, his head turned to the front. Above him (i.e. behind), a *yonī-liṅga* on a multiple-moulded pedestal, in side view. On the right: *pūjārī* in three-quarter left view sitting on a cushion (?). Left leg bent inwards, resting on the seat; right leg raised (knee visible), the foot arguably leaning on the seat. Right arm bent at a right angle holding a bell, left arm bent likewise but lifted towards the *liṅga*. Given the bad preservation status of the carvings, it is not possible to determine which type of attribute he seems to be holding on the right hand palm oriented upwards. His hairstyle consists of pulled up matted hair.

Frame: plain. The fillet between the two lower panels is evanescent, to the extent that the heads of the cattle trespass on the panel above. Crowned by a *kalaśa* with base B1, belly and handle D, on edge of type E.

No. 11, pl. 24 PANGARE

Object: four-panelled hero-stone

Location: Pangare, Purandar *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing behind Nandi's pavilion, Śaṅkara temple (adjoining Śrī Sant Jñānabā Tukārām temple)

Cardinal orientation: facing West

Size: max height cm 120, max width cm 31, max thickness cm 24

Notes: carvings highly worn.

Panel 1: dead hero. Hero lying supine on the ground in right profile view; right arm resting under his head. Only hints of elongated ear lobes are preserved. Three head of cattle are on his body, two of which next to one another in left profile view; the third in the background (only its horns discernible).

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: standing hero in front view; legs bent and stretched apart; left arm non preserved, the right bent at a right angle and raised at shoulder height holding a sword horizontally behind his head. Traces of *dhotī*, necklace and large earrings. On the right: two standing warriors in front view, legs bent; right arm raised straight up (no weapons preserved), left arguably behind the shields which cover their busts as well. Trace of *dhotī* and bun hairstyle (particularly on the right edge warrior).

Panel 3: ascension to heaven. In the centre: standing hero in front view; hips to the left side of the scene, legs stretched apart and flexed; he embraces the figures beside him by resting his arms around their shoulders. His hair is tied in a knot. Two *apsarases* flank him, one on each side. Their arms position is not clearly visible: the left side nymph likely embraces the hero around his back, with her right arm being by the side. Near the right side *apsaras*, close to the frame, stands an oblong object (a fly-whisk?). The fragmentary element protruding between her right hip and breast cannot be identified. She has her head turned towards the hero, which thing makes her bun hairstyle more recognizable than in the case of the left side *apsaras*. Both the *apsarases* wear a long *sārī* with thick rim, and the fold falling on their legs, as well as large ear ornaments.

Panel 4: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting on a cushion in three-quarter right view, his hands in *añjalimudrā*. His clothing and ornaments cannot be determined, the only visible detail being the bun hairstyle. In the centre: Nandi crouched with paws bent, his body in right profile view, his head turned to the front. On his back stands a *yonī-liṅga* on a double-moulded pedestal, in side view. On the right:

standing *pujārī* in three-quarter left view. Right arm bent holding a tool rather big in size (a flask?) in front of his bust; left arm raised straight towards the *liṅga*, the hand palm oriented upwards, likely pouring something on the worship object. His attire cannot be determined, but he seems to have long hair. **Frame:** plain. Crowned by a *kalaśa* with base and belly B1, handle D, on edge of type D.

No. 12, pl. 25 PANGARE

Object: four-panelled hero-stone

Location: Pangare, Purandar *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; behind Nandi's pavilion, leaning against the entrance arch to Śaṅkara temple (adjoining Śrī Sant Jñānabā Tukārām temple)

Cardinal orientation: facing West

Size: max height cm 118, max width cm 36, max thickness cm 19

Notes: carvings highly worn, traces of plaster (?) on the surface

Panel 1: dead hero. Hero lying supine on the ground, portrayed as seen from above. Left leg bent and crossed over the right; left arm reclined by the side, the right resting under his head.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: standing hero in front view; legs bent and stretched apart. His left arm frontally holds a shield to dodge the blows; the right is bent at a right angle and raised almost at shoulder height wielding a small seized thick weapon (dagger?). He wears *dhotī* (traces of its hem visible) and necklace; as far as other ornaments are concerned, nothing else is preserved apart from his hair tied in a knot. On the right: two standing warriors in specular position to that of the hero. Their busts and left arms are therefore to be hidden behind their shields. They presumably hold a thick and short weapon with their right hand as well (as shown at least by the first of the two warriors, the second one's attribute being not clearly preserved), the arm lifted straight vertically. Details on their garments are not available.

Panel 3: ascension to heaven. In the centre: standing hero in front view, leg bent and hips to the right side of the scene. A series of unidentifiable elements placed between him and the figures who stand by his sides prevents from a safe assessment of his arms position (see below); we believe them to be lifted almost to shoulder height and embrace the two figures by the hero's sides around their back. He is flanked by three *apsaras*, one on the left, two on the right. The nymph on the left is portrayed in a rather static front position. It is not clear whether her arms (missing both the forearms?) had originally some connection with the elongated curved element protruding from the frame above and hanging between her head and the hero's. This element (which hides the *apsaras*' left shoulder and the hero's right arm, by this making difficult to determine their respective positions) might be fragmentary and have a prosecution exactly on the sections of the frame beside and above the *apsaras*. We tentatively suggest it to be a floating shawl. The two nymphs on the other side, in front view, show a different stance: *pādasvastika*. The *apsaras* closer to the hero might have her right arm raised up, grabbing an attribute with her hand. If we correctly read the scanty traces preserved, such an object might be in fact prosecute in the coiled element noticeable on the frame above, ultimately trespassing on the upper panel (on Nandi's paws). We likewise propose to identify it as a fluttering shawl. Between her and the hero, another unidentifiable element is portrayed (wrapped around the hero's left arm?). Not clear whether she is embraced around her hip by the *apsaras* on the extreme right edge, or whether she herself has her left arm in *katyavalambitamudrā*. For what concerns the four figures' garments and ornaments, the only decipherable item is the *sārī*, as well as the bun hairstyle of the *apsaras* on the extreme left edge.

Panel 4: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting on a narrow support in right profile view, his hands in *añjalimudrā*. Belt, elongated ear lobes and hair tied in a knot are the only elements preserved of his clothing and ornaments. In the centre: Nandi crouched with paws bent, his body in right profile view, his head turned to the front. On his back stands a *yoni-liṅga* on a double-moulded pedestal, in side view. On the right: standing figure (female ?) in left profile view. Right arm at a right angle, left arm bent and raised towards the *liṅga*. Both the hands hold unidentifiable objects. This figure wears a long *dhotī* (fold falling between the legs) and has the hair pulled up in a flat large knot.

Frame: plain. Crowned by a fragmentary *kalaśa* with base and belly A, on edge of type B.

This apparently conventional sample reveals some worth noting features which make its poor preservation status particularly unfortunate. Among them, it strikes the narrow proportion assigned to Panel 1 (cut precisely to fit only the hero's body), and the undeniably non-symmetric pattern of Panel 2, to which the presence of comparatively less common elements could be added.

No. 13, pl. 26, PANGARE

Object: four-panelled hero-stone

Location: Pangare, Purandar *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; Śaṅkara temple (adjoining Śrī Sant Jñānobā Tukārām temple)

Cardinal orientation: facing South

Size: max height cm 110, max width cm 33, max thickness cm 20

Notes: carvings highly worn; Panel 1 unfinished; tapering downwards.

Panel 1: Not finished. Hero lying on the ground on his right side. His left arm rests by the side, the right is under his head, bent at a right angle, the forearm oriented upwards with hand palm up. On the right, standing on his legs, the body of an animal in left profile view seems to be just outlined, his muzzle on the hero's wrist.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: standing hero in front view. Legs stretched apart and bent, arm flexed while to hold a pole/spear (?) pointing to the enemies. His head is bends towards the left side of the scene. It can be recognized the fold of his *dhotī* falling between his legs, his *yajñopavīta*, his right arm bracelet, his earrings and bun hairstyle as part of his attire and ornaments. On the right: two standing warriors in left profile view. Legs bent, bust hidden behind the shield. Right arm raised up straight grabbing a stout oblong weapon (?) above their heads. Only the bun hairstyle of the warrior on the right edge is preserved.

Panel 3: ascension to heaven. Hero kneeled on his left leg, the right being bent and places forward with the foot resting steadily on the ground. His arms are raised to shoulder height, embracing the two figures beside him around their shoulders. The garments and the ornaments visible in this panel are consistent with those displayed in the scene below (fold of the *dhotī*, ear ornaments and bun hairstyle), enriched by a necklace. He is flanked by two female figures (*apsarases*), one on each side, who must be kneeled as well. Their right arms are raised up straight holding an unidentifiable attribute above their heads. With the other arm the *apsaras* on the left side must be embracing the hero, while the *apsaras* on the right has it resting by the side (forearm missing).

Panel 4: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in three quarter right view with hands in *añjalimudrā*. No details are preserved as far as his clothing and ornamental attributes are concerned, apart from hints of earrings. In the centre: *yoni-līṅga* on a multiple-moulded pedestal. On the right: standing (?) *pujārī* in left profile view, his hips bent to the right side of the scene. He likely has his left arm bent and the right lifted up straight to the *līṅga*, each hand holding a tool which cannot be identified. No more features are visible of this figure.

Frame: plain. Crowned by a *kalāśa* with base B1, belly and handle D, on edge of type B.

Beyond the unfinished status of Panel 1, which thing informs us about the working method of the sculptor (notably even the lateral and the back surfaces are finished), it strikes the uncommon position of the figures in Panel 2, to be interpreted either as a free choice or as a device to cope with insufficient space.

No. 14, pl. 27, PANGARE

Object: three-panelled hero-stone

Location: Pangare, Purandar *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: laying on the ground; Śaṅkara temple (adjoining Śrī Sant Jñānobā Tukārām temple)

Cardinal orientation: ---

Size: max height cm 103, max width cm 31, max thickness cm 18

Notes: carvings highly worn

Panel 1: dead (?) hero. Hero in three-quarter right view, lying on the ground on his hip. Right leg lifted up straight, the calf leaning on a support located on the right bottom corner of the scene (merged with the

lateral frame). His left leg bent and crossing over the other. Left arm by the side with the hand resting on the bent left knee. His head leans on the right arm, bent at a right angle with forearm directed upwards. Trace of belt, no more details pertaining to his attire and ornaments being recognizable.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: standing hero in three-quarter right view; legs slightly flexed and stretched apart. Right arm bent at a right angle in front of his bust, pointing horizontally his dagger (?) to the enemy, with a reverse grip. Left arm non given. A trace of his *dhōṭī* fold is preserved, as well as of his ear ornaments. On the right: two standing warriors in left profile view, their legs flexed, their busts hidden behind the shields, their right arms lifted up at a right angle while wielding a sword (trespassing on the frame above). They display a hairstyle consisting of a high tiny knot.

Panel 3: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting on a thin cushion in three quarter right view with hands in *añjalimudrā*. Right leg bent inwards resting on the cushion; left leg bent upwards, the foot reasonably leaning on the cushion. In the centre: Nandi crouched with paws bent; body in right profile view, head turned to the front; hump clearly represented. Above him a *yonī-līṅga* on a pedestal. On the right: standing *pujārī* in left profile view; arm gestures, garments and ornaments cannot be assessed given the poor preservation status of the carvings.

Frame: plain. Crowned by a *kalaśa* with base and belly B1, likely handles D, on edge D.

A worth noting trait is the unusual pose of the hero in Panel 1; this posture must reflect a local trend, which indeed finds parallels in other steles from the same site; nonetheless the particularly dynamic position might lead to wonder whether the panel effectively represent a lifeless body.

No. 15, pl. 28, GULUNCE

Object: four-panelled hero-stone

Location: Gulunce, Purandar *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing in an outer recess of Śrī Jyotirlinga temple

Cardinal orientation: facing North

Size: max height cm 144, max width cm 38, max thickness cm 16

Notes: spots of blue, orange, yellow and white paint on the surface (same as on the temple outer walls).

Panel 1: dead hero. Hero lying supine on the ground, portrayed as seen from above (head to the left side of the scene), his right arm along the side (left one not visible). He wears a *dhōṭī* (its fold falling on his legs), earrings and anklets, his hair being tied in a wide bun. On a side of his head, opposite to the bun, two small vertical elements protrude, in a sort of “v” shape (possibly part of his headdress?). Five head of cattle on his body, three of which in the foreground, their full body represented in left profile view; two in the background, only their front view heads being shown.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: hero standing in front view. His legs are slightly stretched apart; both his arms hold a spear that points upwards to the enemies. Trace of *dhōṭī* fold among his legs. He wears large and flat ear ornaments and seems to have his hair tied in a bun (or a turban? judging from his relatively thick hairline). On the left: three warriors next to one another in three-quarter left view. Their bust and left arm are hidden behind the shields, their right arm being lifted up straight while wielding a short sword (trespassing on the frame above). Of their attire and ornaments only hints of *dhōṭī* are preserved, with earrings as far as the extreme right warrior is concerned.

Panel 3: ascension to heaven. In the centre: hero sitting in front view inside a palanquin. His right leg seems to be hanging down from the seat, the left slightly raised, with the foot apparently resting on the edge of the palanquin. A hint of the left arm shows it raised, as to touch the lateral support of the palanquin on that side; his right arm seems to be bent at a right angle, the hand grabbing an unidentifiable attribute. His large and flat ear ornaments are visible. The inner seat of the palanquin is in profile view, its seatback being recognizable on the left side. The palanquin is lifted by two *apsaras*, one on either side, represented in specular attitude: both are standing in *pādasvastika*; their head flexed laterally to the outer side of the scene. One of their arms (that closer to the frame) is along the side (forearm actually missing in the case of the right side *apsaras*), the other is likely holding the lateral supports of the palanquin. Belt and necklace are only visible on the left side *apsaras*. They both have a bun hairstyle.

Panel 4: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in three-quarter view with his right leg bent inwards and the left leg raised upwards (the foot arguably lying on the ground). Right arm bent at a right angle, the hand holding an apparently concave attribute (a water vessel?). His head is flexed to the lateral frame of the scene. Few details are preserved of his attire: a sheathed dagger falls on his right thigh, hints of an arm bracelet and earrings are visible. In the centre, from the bottom: Nandi crouched on a plinth with paws bent, his body in left side view (notably, oriented to the hero). Above its head (i.e. behind), a *yonilīṅga* on a double-moulded pedestal, in side view. On the right: *pujārī* sitting in *padmāsana* in three-quarter view (left side); left arm bent, the hand holding a bell; right arm raised at shoulder height and bent, hanging an unidentifiable tool above the *liṅga*. Nothing of his attire is preserved; his hair seems pulled up in a frontal central loop.

Frame: plain. Crowned by a *kalaśa* with base and belly B1, handles D, on edge of type B.

No. 16, pl. 29 GULUNCE

Object: four-panelled hero-stone

Location: Gulunce, Purandar *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing in an outer recess of Śrī Jyotirlinga temple

Cardinal orientation: facing North

Size: max height cm 139, max width cm 44, max thickness cm 20

Notes: spots of blue, orange, yellow and white paint on the surface (same as on the temple outer walls).

Panel 1: dead hero. Hero lying supine on the ground, in three-quarter right view, the left leg bent and crossed on the other. He has elongated earlobes and a bun hairstyle. Four head of cattle on his body. Two of them are in the foreground, represented in right profile view; their paws are bent, the forelegs being stretched apart from the hind legs, suggesting they are running away or even moving confusedly in a bunch, as the third head of cattle in the background (right corner) seems to confirm, given the fact that it is oriented to the opposite side compared to the others (right). Of the fourth bovine only the head and a paw are given, in the left corner, almost trampling the hero's head.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: hero standing in right profile view. His legs are stretched apart, his feet firmly on the ground. He wields the shield flat with his right hand, the arm being bent and oriented forward; his left arm is bent at a right angle and raised at shoulder height, pointing a weapon (dagger?) to the enemy's head. His *dhotī* is clearly visible, with single rim, as well as his large and flat ear ornaments and bun hairstyle. On the right: three warrior next to one another in left profile view. They all share the same attire, with their legs slightly bent forward, their busts and left arms covered by the shields, their right arms (only those of the first and second warrior being visible) raised up and wielding a no longer preserved weapon. Notably, the right arm of the warrior closer to the hero crosses his left arm, basically echoing his blow. They are adorned with earrings and their hair is tied up, the bun being visible only in the case of the last two warriors.

Panel 3: ascension to heaven. In the centre: standing hero in front side view. His hip is slightly bent to the left, where also his head is turned. His attire is consistent with that shown in the panel below. He is flanked by four standing *apsarases* in front view, two on each side. The five figures in the scene embrace each other by posing their arms around the other's shoulders. The *apsaras* next to the left frame of the panel has her right arm bent upwards, holding some attribute (no longer preserved) with the hand. Apart from the details just described, their attitude is specular: heads turned towards the hero, hips slightly bent to the outer sides of scene; they all wear a *sārī*, earrings and have a bun hairstyle.

Panel 4: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero in *padmāsana*, his hands in *añjalimudrā*. He sits on a cushion (?). Arm bracelet and large flat earrings are the only details preserved of his clothing and ornaments, his hairstyle showing no changes compared to the panels below. In the centre from the bottom: Nandi crouched, his body in right side view. On its back a massive *yonilīṅga* on a double-moulded pedestal. On the right: two standing male figures in three-quarter left view. The one closer to the *liṅga* has his right arm raised straight above it, holding a tool with the hand (water vessel?). His left arm is bent along the side, bringing close to the *liṅga* some ritual attribute (unidentifiable). He wears ear ornaments and has short hair. Next to him, an *pujārī* holds a flask/bell (?) with joint hands, his arms being

bent forward. He shows some remarkably different traits compared to the figure beside, i.e. long hair and beard.

Frame: plain. Crowned by three *kalaśas* with base B1, belly and handle C1, on edge of type B.

No. 17, pl. 30, GULUNCE

Object: two-panelled (?) hero-stone

Location: Gulunce, Purandar *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; repository of stones on right side of the entrance to Śrī Jyotirlinga *prasann*

Cardinal orientation: facing East

Size: max height cm 61, max width cm 40, max thickness cm 13

Notes: upper section missing; traces of pink coat on the surface.

Panel 1: dead hero. Hero portrayed supine on the ground as seen from above (head to the left side of the scene), his right arm along the side, the left one kept straight beside his head, adorned with a wrist bracelet. Close to his left hand an unidentifiable element, apparently half round in shape and concave. His *dhotī* is recognizable from a hint of the fold falling on his legs. His hair is tied in a knot; ear ornaments visible. Four head of cattle stand on his body next to one another in left profile view. The muzzle of the extreme left side bovine is bent over the object beside the hero's body.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: standing hero in front view. Legs slightly flexed and stretched apart; he has his arms bent at a right angle while holding a spear with both hands, pointing against his enemies' shields. His attire and ornaments are consistent with those shown in the panel below, enriched by a further detail, i.e. the belt. His head is partially cut off. On the right: three warriors standing close to one another in front view. Two of them hold a shield, behind which their busts (and reasonably their left arms) are hidden. The figure on the extreme right side grabs, instead, an arch with the left hand. They all wear *dhotī* (with fold on their legs) and belt. No further details of their attire and ornaments are preserved.

No. 18, pl. 31 GULUNCE

Object: fragmentary hero-stone

Location: Gulunce, Purandar *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; repository of stones on right side of the entrance to Śrī Jyotirlinga *prasann*

Cardinal orientation: facing East

Size: max height cm 77, max width cm 43, max thickness cm 16

Notes: lowest section likely buried; tapering upwards.

Panel 1: ascension to heaven. In the centre: standing hero in front view. Legs slightly bent and stretched apart; arms raised up to embrace around the shoulders the two figures beside him. He has protruding belly and mustaches. His head is gently turned to the right, as to look at the lady who flanks him. His attire and ornaments are neatly preserved: a short *dhotī* with simple rim, the fold hanging among his legs; long necklace and earrings; knot as a hairstyle. Two standing *apsaras* are next to him, one on each side. Both are in front view, the left side one in a more static position compared to the other, judging from the loose folds of her *sārī*. One of their arms is around the hero's back, embracing him, while the other is probably set to hold some attributes. Specifically, one *apsaras* (on the left) has her arm bent and raised, holding in her hand an object not clearly preserved and apparently hanging downwards (*cāmara*?). As to the other *apsaras*, her left arm is not clearly preserved, thus it is not possible to define whether the attribute (?) that appears at shoulder height, next to the her earring, has to be connected with her hand pose. Both wear a *sārī* (with rim, that is plain in the case of the left side *apsaras*; seemingly more decorated for the other, especially on the central fold) and a belt. Their ornaments are rich including a long necklace falling on their breasts, a collar (?), and a variety of elaborated large earrings. The left side *apsaras* shows some decorative elements (?) also on her forehead (two circular marks being visible). Their hair is tied in a large stacked coil.

Panel 2: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in three-quarter right view with hands in *añjalimudrā*. His clothing and ornaments are consistent with those displayed in the panel below (a hem of the *dhotī* falling on his right thigh), enriched by a further detail, i.e. wrist and arm bracelets. In the centre:

Nandi crouched with paws bent, his body in a profile view (right side), his head in front view; his hump is visible as well. Above him (i.e. behind), a *yoni-līṅga* on a double-moulded pedestal, in side view. A garland hangs on it. On the right: standing *pūjārī* in three-quarter view (left side); right arm raised straight towards the *līṅga*, pouring something on it (likely water); left arm bent at a right angle holding a no longer preserved oblong attribute (water vessel?), which hides his bust. He has elongated ear lobes, and long braided hair.

Frame: plain, Crowned by *akalaśa* with base, belly and handles C1, on edge of type D.

The excellent conservation status of the carvings – particularly of Panel 1 – allows to appreciate a number of details hardly noticeable elsewhere, including facial features such as full lips, big eyes and eyebrows. The elegance of the moves, together with some naturalistic renderings (the hero's protruding belly, for instance), make this stele an exquisite sample although only partially preserved.

No. 19, pl. 32, GULUNCE

Object: two-panelled (?) hero-stone

Location: Gulunce, Purandar *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; repository of stones on right side of the entrance to Śrī Jyotirlinga *prasann*

Cardinal orientation: facing South-East

Size: max height cm 77, max width cm 43, max thickness cm 18

Notes: lowest section missing; tapering upwards.

Panel 1: ascension to heaven. In the centre: standing hero in front view. Legs slightly bent and stretched apart; left arm raised to embrace around the back the female figure beside him, right arm not given. He shows a slightly protruding belly and defined pectorals. His facial features are well preserved: beyond eyes and eyebrows, his full lips and flat nose are particularly naturalistic. His head is gently turned to look at the female figure next to him on the left side of the scene. His clothing and ornaments are well defined as well: he wears *dhotī* (the fold hanging on his legs), belt and *yajñopavīta*; necklace and large earrings. A string keeps his hair tied in a knot. He is flanked by two *apsarases*, who also embrace him by resting their arm around his shoulder (something confirmed by the right *apsaras*, whereas the left side *apsaras'* arm is not visible); with the other arm (that closer to the lateral frame of the scene), bent at a right angle, they hold a *cāmara*. Their hips are bent to the outer side of the panel, while one of their legs is mildly flexed almost touching the hero's leg. Their heads are gently bent as to search for the hero's sight. Short *sārī* and a waist belt compose their clothing; as ornaments they wear a wrist bracelet, necklace and earrings. Their hairstyle includes a large bun, while the hairline is defined by a sort of band/plait (?).

Panel 2: Śivalīṅga worship. On the left: hero sitting crossed legs (?) on a sort of stool, in three-quarter right, view with hands in *añjalimudrā*. His clothing and ornaments are consistent with those displayed in the panel below (a hem of the *dhotī* falling on his right thigh). Wrist bracelets are visible in this panel. In the centre: *yoni-līṅga* on a double-moulded pedestal, in side view, portrayed as if suspended in midair. On the right: Nandi crouched with paws bent, his body in left profile view (notably his head towards the hero); his hump is clearly represented, as well as a garland (?) around his neck. Nandi's head is aligned with the *yoni-līṅga*, right below it. Next to the *līṅga* (i.e. in front of it), on Nandi's right side, stands an *pūjārī* in left profile view. His left arm is bent at a right angle, holding a bell; the right raised straight towards the *līṅga*, pouring something on it (likely water). Nothing is preserved of his attire or ornaments, except for a wrist bracelet. His hair is tied in a large knot.

Frame: plain. Crowned by *akalaśa* with base and belly B1, handles D, on edge of type B.

No. 20, pl. 33, GULUNCE

Object: two-panelled (?) hero-stone

Location: Gulunce, Purandar *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; opposite to Śrī Kṣetra Jyotirlinga Devasthān (beside a lay? building)

Cardinal orientation: facing West

Size: max height cm 59, max width cm 37, max thickness cm 14

Notes: lowest section buried; traces of yellow paint on the surface (same as on the building behind it).

Panel 1: mostly buried, only the upper section visible. Arguably, ascension scene. Two *apsarases* flank a palanquin, one on each side. Only their heads and – in the case of the right side figure – breasts can be observed. They hold a *cāmara* with one hand (that closer to the palanquin). Their bun hairstyle is the only decorative element noticeable. Inside the palanquin a head can be distinguished (most likely the hero's).

Panel 2: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in front view with crossed legs and hands in *añjalimudrā*. His large earrings and his bun hairstyle are visible. In the centre: Nandi in left profile view (notably, towards the hero) crouched with paws bent. Above his head a *yoni-liṅga* on a double-moulded pedestal, in side view. On the right: standing *pujārī* in three-quarter left view. His left arm is bent at a right angle, holding an unidentifiable attribute (putatively a bell); the presence of an object above the *liṅga* allow us to suppose he has his right arm lifted straight grabbing that attribute. He likely has long beard (judging from his elongated face shape), while his hair appear to be pulled up and tied in a large and flat turban (?) with a band/tuft of hair falling behind.

Frame: plain. Crowned by *akalaśa* of with base, belly and handles D, on edge of type E.

No. 21, pl. 34, LONI BHAPKAR

Object: four-panelled hero-stone

Location: Loni Bhapkar, Baramati *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; right side of the entrance to Māruti shrine, nearby Bhairava temple

Cardinal orientation: facing West

Size: max height cm 142, max width cm 42, max thickness cm 22

Notes: all surface coated with yellow paint (same as on the shrine outer walls); traces of *sindūr*.

Panel 1: dead hero. Hero lying supine on the ground in right profile view, his right arm resting on his chest. Three head of cattle in three-quarter left view around his body.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: standing hero, in front view with legs stretched apart and bent in a leap forward, the body weight on the left one; right arm bent at a right angle (hand not preserved). He wears a *dhotī* (its fold falling among his legs), belt, necklace and earrings, with hair tied in a bun. Apparent hint of mustaches. On the right: two enemies, partially hidden behind their shields. They display earrings and have their hair tied in a bun. Two swords protrude from this panel on the above frame, being held by the two figures' right hands (their left hands are reasonably holding the respective shields).

Panel 3: ascension to heaven. In the centre: standing hero, in front view; the legs are stretched apart and bent suggesting some movement, the body weight on the left one. None of his arms is visible, as possibly embracing the two female figures on his sides. Dress and hairstyle details seem consistent with those portrayed in the panel below. No further attributes of his are recognizable. He is flanked by two *apsarases*, one on either side. Both of them are specular. They are represented as standing in front view; one of their arms (that closer to the lateral frame) is along the side (hand not preserved), while the other is holding a *cāmara* raised behind the hero's head and trespassing on the above frame. Both the *apsarases* wear a *sārī*, belt (a two-strip belt in the case of the left *apsaras*), necklace and ear ornaments, with bun hairstyle.

Panel 4: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero in *padmāsana*, his hands in *añjalimudrā*. Just a two-strip belt is visible of his attire, while his hair-dress and ornaments do not differ from those of the two previous scenes. In the centre, from the bottom: Nandi crouched on a plinth with paws bent, his body in a profile view (right side), his head in front view. Above him (i.e. behind), a *yoni-liṅga* on a moulded pedestal, in side view. On the right: standing *pujārī* in three-quarter view (left side), left arm bent and raised towards the *liṅga* with a ritual object in his hand (bell/water vessel?). Apparent hint of long straight hair. On background: garland hanging from the ceiling above the figures.

Frame: plain. Upper edge of type D. Above it, a bust of an unidentifiable male figure stands. It is portrayed with both arms bent at a right angle (hands not preserved). Beside each arm, a further unclear element (arm/wing?). His hair is tied in a bun.

We are keen to identify the figure on the topmost section of the stele as a divine portray of the hero, a case apparently not frequent in Maharashtra, but still recorded in literature.³⁸⁰

No. 22, pl. 35, LONI BHAPKAR

Object: four-panelled hero-stone

Location: Loni Bhapkar, Baramati *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: embedded into the wall, left side of the *garbhagrha*, Śrī Svayambhudev *prasann*

Cardinal orientation: facing East

Size: max height cm 128, max width cm 35, max thickness cm 10

Notes: heavily worn carvings; surface coated with minium; flower offerings laid down on it. Later modifications must have occurred on its lateral and back sides to adapt the stele to its current location.

Panel 1: dead hero. Hero lying supine on the ground in left profile view. Three head of cattle on his body, in three-quarter right view.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: standing hero in three-quarter right view, his legs stretched apart and bent, his feet firmly on the ground. His right arm is bent at a right angle to hold a spear which points horizontally to the enemies; his left arm is bent and lifted up, grabbing a shield to parry his head against the blow. Apart from large earrings and bun hairstyle, no details of his attire are discernible available. On the right: two standing warriors in front view (?), their bust hidden behind the shield, only their legs and heads are given. Arms not preserved. Traces of earrings on the extreme right figure.

Panel 3: ascension to heaven. In the centre: standing figure (hero) in front view. Legs slightly stretched apart and bent, torso bending backwards, right arm along the side (possibly holding some attribute), left arm raised at shoulder height and oriented straight to the right (embracing the figure beside?). He is flanked by two female figures (*apsaras*), one on each side. From the scanty details it appears that the two celestial nymphs are represented in a specular attitude: one leg forward, the other bent and crossed behind (*pādasvastika*). Arms, clothing, ornaments and hairstyle not preserved.

Panel 4: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero in *padmāsana* in three-quarter right view, his hands in *añjalimudrā*. He seems to be sitting on a cushion. Traces of elongated earlobes suggest earrings as ornaments. In the centre: a *yonī-liṅga* on a simple pedestal, in side view. It rests on a tall unclear element (Nandi?). On the right: standing *pujārī* in left profile view. His left arm is bent at a right angle holding an attribute not clearly visible; the right one is not preserved but it must have been raised up to shoulder height and oriented forward, judging from the tool (bell/flask?) hanging above to the *liṅga*. No further details are preserved but for the hair, that seem to be straight and long.

Frame: plain. Crowned by *akalaśa* with base, belly and handle B3, on edge of type E (?).

No. 23, pl. 36, LONI BHAPKAR

Object: four-panelled hero-stone

Location: Loni Bhapkar, Baramati *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: embedded into the wall, right side of the *garbhagrha*, Śrī Svayambhudev *prasann*

Cardinal orientation: facing East

Size: max height cm 128, max width cm 37, max thickness cm 12

Notes: heavily worn carvings; surface coated with minium; flower offerings laid down on it. Later modifications must have occurred on its lateral and back sides to adapt the stele to its location.

Panel 1: dead hero. Hero lying supine on the ground in right profile view, the arms possibly resting on his chest. Three head of cattle on his body in three-quarter right profile view.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: standing hero in right profile view, legs stretched apart and bent, torso slightly flexed backwards. Right arm bent at a right angle to hold a spear which points horizontally to the enemies; left arm not preserved. He wears a *dhotī* (a fold of which falls among his legs) and a belt, with a sheathed dagger hanging upon his right thigh. He has bun hairstyle. On the right: three warriors next to one another in left side view, with legs stretched slightly apart and bent. Torso and left arm are hidden

³⁸⁰ See for instance Sontheimer 2004 [1976]: 136, fig. 2.

behind their large shields, while the right arm is raised straight above and grabs a weapon (a dagger, in the case of the first of the three) trespassing on the frame above. No further details of their attire and ornaments can be detected.

Panel 3: ascension to heaven. In the centre: standing hero in front view, legs slightly bent, his left wrist flexed towards the lateral edge of the scene, suggesting some movement. His arms are raised straight to the shoulder height, and must be embracing the figures beside him. His *dhotī* is visible, as well as his elongated earlobes suggesting ear ornaments. He is flanked by four female figures (*apsarases*), two on either side. Each couple is specular to the other one: they all are in three-quarter view turning to the hero, one of their arms is along the side (holding some attribute?); the other arm is not visible but must be embracing the hero from behind (in the case of the two *apsarases* closer to him), or could be raised straight above holding a *cāmara* (hints of the same attribute putatively above the heads of the two external *apsarases*). Large flat earrings are preserved on the two left side figures.

Panel 4: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero in *padmāsana* in right profile view, his hands in *añjalimudrā*. He seems to be sitting on a cushion and has elongated earlobes; no more details can be observed. In the centre: a *yoni-līṅga* on a simple pedestal resting in side view on Nandi's back. It rests on a tall non-decipherable element (Nandi?). On the right: standing *pujārī* in left profile view; his legs slightly bent, his left arm bent at a right angle holding an oblong ritual tool (flask?), the right similarly bent at a right angle, but raised at shoulder height and oriented upwards, while holding in his hand-palm a small size object (a lamp for performing the *ārti*?). No further details are preserved, but for the hair, that seem to be straight and long.

Frame: plain. Crowned by *akalaśa* with base, belly and handle B1, on edge of type E.

No. 24, pl. 37, LONI BHAPKAR

Object: three-panelled hero-stone

Location: Loni Bhapkar, Baramati *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; Someśvara temple premises, next to Nandi pavilion

Cardinal orientation: facing South

Size: max height cm 70, max width cm 33, max thickness cm 16

Notes: worn carvings; lowest section buried.

Panel 1: buried. Traces of cattle horns.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: hero standing in three-quarter right view, his left leg stepped forward. He holds a spear with both his hands, grabbing it oblique in front, pointing it to the enemy. He wears a *dhotī* and has his hair tied in a back bun. No further details are preserved. On the right: two warriors standing in three-quarter left view, their legs flexed and stretched apart, their bust hidden behind the shield, wielding a sword above their heads with the right arm raised up. No details can be seen of their attire and ornaments; traces of a bun hairstyle.

Panel 3: ascension to heaven. In the centre: hero standing in front view with legs stretched apart and slightly flexed. Both his arms are raised to shoulder height and stretched out to embrace the two maidens who flank him. He wears a long and wide garland; his large earrings and bun hairstyle can be seen. Two *apsarases* stand next to him, one on each side. Both of them are likely embracing him with one arm, while holding a *cāmara* (?) with the other one. The fold of their *sārī* is visible, as well as their hair bun.

Frame: plain and regular where recordable. Uppermost section portraying a scene of *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: figure sitting in right profile view, likely the hero. He is cross-legged with hands in *añjalimudrā*. Nothing is preserved of his attire and ornaments and hairstyle. In the centre: *yoni-līṅga* on a double-moulded pedestal. On the right: figure standing/kneeling (?) in left profile view, the *ācārya*. His bust is flexed backward; both his arms are bent at the elbow, the forearm oriented towards the *līṅga*, the left raised over the shoulder height. He holds some attributes in his hands (likely a bell in the left). His attire consists of a *dhotī* with fold falling between the legs. Above the *līṅga* a sort of round element (worn) that according to us might be inspired by a *kalaśa*.

In this specimen the *Śivaliṅga* worship is carved on the top section of the frame rather than on the uppermost panel, as one would expect. Interestingly enough, however, what would traditionally be

represented in this place – i.e. the *kalaśa* - is not completely removed: the sculptor pushes it further up, so that it is still present as a finial.

No. 25, pl. 38, LONI BHAPKAR

Object: three-panelled hero-stone

Location: Loni Bhapkar, Baramati *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; Someśvara temple premises, next to Nandi

Cardinal orientation: facing South

Size: max height cm 80, max width cm 40, max thickness cm 15

Notes: lowest section buried.

Panel 1: buried, only the top left corner being visible. Fight scene? On the left: warrior (the hero?) standing in front view holding a spear in his right hand, the arm raised almost to the shoulder height and stretched out; with his left he holds the reins of a horse (standing) in left profile view next to him. Part of the horse harness is unburied: beyond the reins, also the check rein and the breast collar. As to the hero's attire, the upper portion of his *yajñopavīta* is visible, together with hints of a necklace and earrings.

Panel 2: ascension to heaven. In the centre: hero standing in front view with legs slightly flexed, his hips bent towards the right. His arms are bent at the elbow, raised and stretched out to embrace the figures beside him around their back. He wears a *dhōṭī* and a belt; traces of elongated ear lobes suggest ear ornaments. His hair is arranged in a lateral bun. Two celestial maidens flank him, one on each side. They stand in front view, their hips slightly bent towards the outer sides of the scene. They embrace the hero in the same manner, meanwhile holding an attribute in the other hand (*cāmara*/garland?). The folds of their *sārī* are clearly visible; they are adorned with earrings and have their hair arranged in a side bun.

Panel 3: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in three-quarter right view on a stool. He has his right leg resting on the stool bent inward, while the left is crossed over it, the knee upwards and the foot resting on the seat. His hands are in *añjalimudrā*. His *dhōṭī* front fold, wrist and arm bracelets, anklets and earrings can be observed, as well as his bun hairstyle. In the centre: *liṅga* on an elaborated triple-moulded pedestal. On the right: *pujārī* standing in three-quarter left view. Both his arms are bent at a right angle, the forearms oriented towards the *liṅga*. He holds a water-pot in his right hand and another pot/bell (?) in his left. His full attire can be recognized: he wears a short *dhōṭī*, anklets, arm and wrist bracelets, earrings, and has long braided hair.

Frame: plain and regular. Crowned by *akalaśa* with base, belly and handles D, on edge of type A.

No. 26, pl. 39, LONI BHAPKAR

Object: three-panelled (?) hero-stone

Location: Loni Bhapkar, Baramati *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; Śiva shrine premises, next to Nandi

Cardinal orientation: facing West

Size: max height cm 95, max width cm 44, max thickness cm 15

Notes: lowest section buried.

Panel 1: buried, only the upper side being partially visible. Fight scene. On the left: figure standing in front view, likely the hero. With both his hands he holds a spear (?) horizontally at the belly height. He is adorned with earrings, wrist bracelets and a necklace; his hair seems coiled on the crown of the head. On the right: two warriors in three-quarter left view wield their swords (trespassing on the frame above) in their right hands, the arm being bent at the elbow and raised up.

Panel 2: ascension to heaven. In the centre: hero standing in front view with legs stretched apart and flexed, suggesting some movement. He embraces the figures beside him by resting his arms around their shoulders. His *dhōṭī* and belts are visible, as well as his earrings and lateral bun hairstyle. He is flanked by four *apsarases*, two on each side, all embracing each other in the same way as he does, the two on the edges holding a *cāmara* (trespassing on the frame) in their free hand. They stand in front view, displaying *sārī* and belts as garments, together with necklaces and earrings as ornaments. They hairstyle

must be consisting of a back bun or a braid, something however which cannot be determined from a front view.

Panel 3: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in three-quarter right view on a cushion. His right leg is bent inward and rests on it, the left being crossed over it and hanging down. His hands are in *añjalimudrā*. Just traces of his *dhōṭī* can be observed, while ornaments like arm bracelets and necklaces are well preserved, as well as his hairstyle, which consists of a side bun apparently enriched by a band on his headline. In the centre: Nandi crouched in right profile view, with paws bent. On his back rests a *liṅga* on a pedestal made of three architectural-shaped moulds. On the right: *pujārī* standing in front view, his left arm bent at the elbow resting by the side, with forearm oriented to the front; his right arm is similarly bent at the elbow but raised and stretched out, with the forearm oriented upwards. He holds some ritual told in both his hands (likely a bell in the left, the right one being undecipherable). He wears a *kaupīna*, with anklets, wrist and arm bracelets, thick round earrings as ornaments. He shows a beard and long braided hair.

Frame: plain. Crowned by *akalaśa* with base, belly and handles D, on edge of type F.

No. 27, pl. 40, LONI BHAPKAR

Object: two-panelled (?) hero-stone

Location: Loni Bhapkar, Baramati *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; Śiva shrine premises, next to Nandi

Cardinal orientation: facing South

Size: max height cm 59, max width cm 37, max thickness cm 13

Notes: lowest section buried.

Panel 1: ascension to heaven. In the centre: hero standing in front view with legs stretched apart and bent, his hips flexed towards the left side of the scene. His arms are by the sides, apparently holding the hands of the figures who flank him. A fold of his *dhōṭī* is visible on his right thigh, but no further details are preserved of his attire, while an arm bracelet, earrings and his lateral bun can be still observed. Next to him stand in front view two *apsarases*, one on each side. They hold a *cāmara* in their free hand. The right one shows clearer traces of her *sārī*, belt, wrist bracelets, necklace and earrings compared to the left side one. Both of them have their hair tied in a lateral bun.

Panel 2: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in right profile view, his bust being turned to the front. His hands are joint in front of his chest holding some unidentifiable attribute which falls on his legs. The piece of *dhōṭī* around his waist, his earrings and his hair arranged in a bun are visible. In the centre: *liṅga* on a triple-moulded pedestal; above it hangs a stylized garland. On the right: *pujārī* standing in three-quarter left view. His left leg is stepped forward, suggesting his movement towards the *liṅga*, to which also his arms, both bent at the elbow and raised, are oriented. He holds two ritual attributes in his hands, likely a flask in his right. He does not seem to wear a *dhōṭī*, since his legs are bare. Traces of wrist and arm bracelets are given instead, as well as of his earrings. He displays long plaited hair.

Frame: plain and regular. Crowned by *akalaśa* with base, belly and handles C1, on edge of type C.

No. 28, pl. 41, DEULGAON RAJE

Object: four-panelled hero-stone

Location: Deulgaon Raje, Daund *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; premises of Śrī Bhairavanāth *prasann*, next to other stones (hero-stones, *nāga*-stone and *pāduka*)

Cardinal orientation: facing North

Size: max height cm 117, max width cm 32, max thickness cm 14

Notes: tapering upwards; worn carvings; coated with pink paint (same as on temple walls).

Panel 1: dead hero. Hero lying supine on the ground, captured as seen from above. Right knee bent and raised, the leg apparently crossed over the other which rests straight on the ground. Both arms by the sides. His visible attire consists of *dhōṭī* and belt, wrist bracelets. Hair tied in a lateral knot. Three head of cattle on his body in left profile view, next to one another (therefore only the body of right side one is

fully portrayed). Their paws are bent, the forelegs being stretched apart from the hind legs, which suggests they are running. Their features include big horns (trespassing on the frame above), hump, tail (as shown by the right side bovine) and even neck collar.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: hero standing in front view, legs stretched apart and flexed suggesting his movement towards the enemies. Both his arms are bent and raised to hold a spear at chest height. Compared to the panel below, his attire further includes here anklet (left) and large flat earrings. On the right: : two warriors on horseback next to one another in left profile view (only the one in the foreground being fully represented). Both the horses are reared up; their harness is preserved in the nose-band and the reins, which the raider in the foreground holds with one hand, the other arm being bent and raised almost to the shoulder (likely grabbing some weapon). Trace of a belt can only be noticed, his hair being tied in a knot. As to the second warrior, just his head is visible, along with his (right?) arm lifted up straight wielding a spear which parallels (and partly trespasses) on the frame above.

Panel 3: ascension to heaven. In the centre: hero standing in front view, his legs bent and stretched apart in midair, as to indicate a leap. His arms are raised to embrace around their shoulders the figures beside him. Fragments of his *dhotī* are still visible, as well as of his ear ornaments and even necklace. His hairstyle is consistent with that observed in the other panels. Two figures in highly dynamic posture flank him in three-quarter view, one on each side. Despite their sex features are no more recognizable, they arguably are *apsaras*. Their legs are likewise stretched apart and bent, crossing behind those of the hero. One of their arms embraces him, the other resting by the side slightly away from the body (at least in the case of the right side *apsaras*, the other maiden's forearm being lost). The upper part of their *sārī* is preserved, along with wrist bracelets, necklace, traces of ear ornaments, and hairstyle consisting in a large knot in the centre of their head.

Panel 4: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in *pralambapadāsana* on a stool (?), in right profile view. Both his arms are bent and raised to shoulder height, the forearm oriented upwards while holding in the hand a ritual object which is directed to the *liṅga*. On his legs a further attribute rests, flat and large (a small size vessel or rather a component belonging to the same object?). The rim of his *dhotī* is perfectly preserved, as well as his necklace. His head is turned to the front, showing traces of ear ornaments and lateral hair knot. In the centre: Nandi resting on a short plinth. Above him (i.e. behind) a *yoni-liṅga* in side view on a double-moulded pedestal. On the right: standing *pujārī* in three-quarter left profile. His left arm is bent at a right angle, beside his chest (possibly holding some attribute); his right is raised up straight towards the *liṅga*, above which he holds a ritual tool (a little flask?). He wears a *kaupīna* and has long hair.

Frame: plain and regular. Crowned by *akalaśa* with base A, belly and handles C1, on edge of type B.

No. 29, pl. 42, DEULGAON RAJE

Object: three-panelled hero-stone

Location: Deulgaon Raje, Daund *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; premises of Śrī Bhairavanāth *prasann*, next to other stones (hero-stones, *nāga*-stone and *pāduka*)

Cardinal orientation: facing North

Size: max height cm 96, max width cm 30, max thickness cm 16

Notes: tapering upwards; worn carvings; coated with pink paint (same as on temple walls).

Panel 1: dead hero. Hero lying supine on the ground, portrayed as seen from above. His arms rest by the sides, the right slightly away from the body. At his feet an long straight element is represented, which cannot be identified given the poor preservation status (the sword he was possibly grabbing with his right hand?). No details of his attire are visible, but his elongated ear lobes and his hair tied in a knot. A set of garlands hangs above his corpse.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: hero standing in right profile view, his legs slightly flexed and stretched apart but steadily on the ground. With both his arms he horizontally holds a spear at chest height, pointing to the enemies. His attire and ornaments can be detected: *dhotī*, necklace, large earrings and back knot as a hairstyle. On the right: two standing warriors in three-quarter left view. Both of them are fully represented in the same attitude: their legs slightly flexed but in a rather static way; their right arm is

raised up straight wielding a sword which trespass on the frame above. Left arm and chest hidden behind the shield. The upper part of their *sārī* is visible, while no other details remain beyond their hairstyle, which consists of short hair and a knot tied on the top of the head. It is not possible to determine on what type of surface/object both the first enemies from the left and the hero himself (with his left foot) are stepping.

Panel 3: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: standing *pujārī* in three-quarter right view. His right arm is bent at a right angle in front of his chest, holding a ritual object (flask?), while the left arm is raised straight above the *liṅga* as to pour something on it (likely water). He wears a *kaupīna* and has elongated ear lobes indicating earrings as well as very long hair. In the centre: *yoni-liṅga* resting on a massive pyramidal-shaped pedestal in midair. On the right: hero sitting in left profile view (on a stool?), in midair. His arms are raised to shoulders height and bent with forearm oriented upwards (hands not clearly preserved). The fold of his *dhotī* is visible, as well as his elongated ear lobes and his knot hairstyle. Both the *yoni-liṅga* and the worshipper have likely to be intended as beyond the *ācārya*, their suspension in midair being an iconographical device to locate them in the background.

Frame: plain although rather irregular. Crowned by *akalaśa* with base, belly and handles A, on edge of type B.

We notice, on one side, the absence of the panel usually dedicated to the ascension to heaven, and, on the other side, the reverse position of *pujārī* and worshipper in the uppermost panel. This scene is dominated by a peculiar spatial arrangement, where the worshipping hero does not seem to have a predominant – although always passive in the performance of the ritual - role as elsewhere.

No. 30, pl. 43, DEULGAON RAJE

Object: four-panelled (?) hero-stone

Location: Deulgaon Raje, Daund *tāluka*, Pune district

Position: standing; beside the entrance to Māruti shrine (left side)

Cardinal orientation: facing West

Size: max height cm 1, max width cm 39, max thickness cm 10

Notes: lowest panel almost entirely buried; topmost section coated with minium.

Panel 1: only upper section uncovered. Dead hero. Hero lying supine on the ground in right profile view. Left leg bent at the knee and crossed over the other leg. Arms not preserved. Traces of *yajñopavīta* and *dhotī* fold on the legs. Although fragmentary, it appears that the figure leans against the frame above.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: standing hero in three-quarter right view. Legs stretched apart steadily on the ground, the left stepped forward and slightly flexed. His right hand is raised and holds a sword which crosses that wielded by the enemy. Left arm not visible. His attire consists of a *dhotī* with fold hanging between the legs and a thick rim. Large earrings are preserved as part of his ornament, while his hair is tied in a back knot. On the right: two standing warriors in three-quarter left view, with legs stretched apart. They both hold their shield in front with the left hand. The one in the centre is directly engaged in the fight with the hero, and grabs his sword with the right, while the warrior behind him has in his right hand a shorter weapon (dagger?) in reverse grip. They display the same attire and ornaments: *dhotī* and large flat earrings. Their hair is equally tied in a back knot.

Panel 3: ascension to heaven. In the centre: standing hero in three-quarter left view, his legs bent and stretched apart, the right backward in midair, suggesting a movement to the left of the scene reinforced by his hips protruding to the opposite side. His left arm rests by the side, the right likely embraces the figure who flanks him. His head is turned to the right of the panel, where other figures stand. His attire, ornaments and hairstyle are consistent with those displayed in the panel below, enriched by a further detail: the hints of sheathed sword hanging from the waist. Four *apsarases* are next to him, two on each side. The couple on the left is portrayed in the same dynamic posture as the hero's, their legs bent indicating a movement consistent with that of the protagonist. The fold between their legs suggests their both wear a *sārī*. The maiden closer to the hero seems to display a further detail: an oblong element leans on her right shoulder (and around her neck up to the left shoulder?) and hangs downwards (a shawl?). Her arms seem to be bent close and raised close to the chest. As to the *apsaras* on the edge, her right arm is

not preserved, while her left is bent and oriented to the maiden beside, as well as her head. The features of the two *apsaras* on the other side are less preserved. Nonetheless they apparently stand in a more static attitude, in left side view. Hints of earrings and hair tied in a knot are visible just on the left side couple.

Panel 4: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in right profile view on a cushion, on which his right leg rests, likely bent inward; the left apparently bent upwards (?). Hands in *añjalimudrā*. Hairstyle and ornaments consistent with those described below. In the centre: Nandi crouched in three-quarter right view (?). Above him *yonī-liṅga* on a double-moulded pedestal. On the right: standing *pujārī* in front view. Legs stretched apart. Left arm bent at a right angle beside his chest, holding an unidentifiable attribute; right arm similarly bent but raised over the *liṅga*, on which another ritual tool hangs. His attire is not preserved. He likely has long hair.

Frame: plain and regular. Crowned by *akalaśa* with base A, belly and handles D, on edge of type E (?).

No. 31, pl. 44, DEULGAON RAJE

Object: three-panelled hero-stone

Location: Deulgaon Raje, Daund *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; beside the entrance to Māruti shrine (right side)

Cardinal orientation: facing West

Size: max height cm 109, max width cm 38, max thickness cm 12

Panel 1: dead hero. Hero lying supine on the ground in three-quarter right view. Left leg bent at the knee and crossed over the other leg. Right arm resting by the side, left not preserved. No details of his attire nor of his ornaments can be observed. Short hair (knot not visible).

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: hero standing in three-quarter right view. Legs flexed and stretched apart, the left stepped forward in midair, suggesting a leap. Right arm bent at chest height, with forearm oriented upwards grabbing a spear which points horizontally to the enemy; the left holding a shield. As to his attire, a waist band with a lateral floating strip is visible (belt with dagger sheath/*dhotī* upper part?). His hair is tied in a back knot. On the right: two warriors standing in three-quarter left view. Legs slightly flexed and stretched apart. Their bust is hidden behind the shield. Their right arm is raised to shoulder height, the forearm oriented upwards to hold a weapon (spear?), not clearly decipherable in the background. The first warrior on the left similarly displays a sort of strip hanging from his waist on the left thigh (belt strip/sheathed dagger?). Traces of earrings as ornaments. Hair tied in a back knot.

Panel 3: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in three-quarter right view on a cushion; his right leg rests on it bent inward; the left is bent and raised upwards. Hands in *añjalimudrā*. Attire and hairstyle consistent with those described below; traces of ear ornaments. In the centre: *yonī-liṅga* on a double-moulded pedestal with thick basement. On the right: standing *pujārī* in three-quarter left view. Left arm bent at a right angle oriented forward, to the *liṅga*, holding an oblong attribute; right arm position undecipherable. He likely wears a *kaupīna* and has long hair.

Some unidentifiable element is represented in the background above the *liṅga*.

Frame: simple and regular. Crowned by *akalaśa* with base A, belly and handles D, on edge of type D.

No. 32, pl. 45, DEULGAON RAJE

Object: four-panelled hero-stone

Location: Deulgaon Raje, Daund *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; right side outer wall of Māruti shrine

Cardinal orientation: facing South

Size: max height cm 107, max width cm 39, max thickness cm 20

Notes: lowest panel almost entirely buried;³⁸¹ topmost section coated with minium.

³⁸¹ In some recent accounts shortly preceding this work, such as Bankar (unpublished): 104, the stela appears in its entirety in the same location, its Panel 1 being still uncovered and recordable. The pejorative trend affecting the preservation status of this sample, proven on a comparative base, draws the attention once more to the urgency for a project of evaluation and protection of these materials.

Panel 1: only upper edge preserved. Traces of four sets of horns, suggesting the representation of at least four head of cattle.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: standing hero in front view. Legs stretched apart, the left in midair suggesting a leap, the right firmly on the ground. Right arm bent at a right angle at the chest height pointing a sword to the enemy; left arm raised up straight in front, apparently grabbing the enemy by his hair. He wears a *dhotī* which lowest and upper rim, along with its fold, are neatly preserved; traces of the *yajñopavīta* and of large and flat ear ornaments are visible. His hair is tied in a vertical bun. On the left: standing warriors in left profile view. Legs slightly stretched apart. Their busts is covered by the shield as well as their left arm, while the right is lifted up straight grabbing horizontally a spear above their head. *Dhotī* and ear ornaments are preserved; the bun hairstyle of the right side warrior can be recognized (while the left side one's is what is supposedly grabbed by the hero).

Panel 3: ascension to heaven. In the centre: hero sitting in front view on a large seat provided with two sides (a sort of open palanquin?), with crossed legs (?) and hands (not actually preserved) likely joint together as suggested by the forearm position. His garments cannot be distinguished, unless to recognize as the *dhotī* fold the elongated element right below his wrists; his ornaments consist of arm bracelets and earrings, his hair being arranged in a lateral knot. Two female figures in front view flank him, one on each side, portrayed in specular attitude. They kneel apparently on both knees; one of their arms is oriented towards the hero, as bringing some attribute close to him. They wear a *sārī* (lowest rim visible) and are adorned with earrings. Their hair is arranged in a top bun.

The three figures rest on a thick pedestal, as large as the whole panel.

Panel 4: : *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in three-quarter right view on a cushion; his right leg rests on it, bent inwards, the left one is raised upwards. Hands in *añjalimudrā*. His attire, ornaments and hairstyle is consistent with that displayed below. In the centre: Nandi in right profile view; a *yonilīṅga* leans on his back. A wide garland hangs above it. On the right: *pujārī*(standing?) in three-quarter left view. His left arm is bent at a right angle, oriented to the *liṅga* as to bring something close to it. He has long hair. No further details are preserved of his attire.

Frame: all around decorated with a lozenge motif. Crowned by *akalaśa* with base, belly and handles D, on edge of type C.

The scene dedicated to the ascension to heaven captures the figures in a lesser common pose compared to other specimens.

No.33, pl. 46, DEULGAON RAJE

Object: two-panelled (?) hero-stone

Location: Deulgaon Raje, Daund *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: lying on the ground on the back side; premises of Siddheśvara temple

Cardinal orientation: --

Size: max height cm 76, max width cm 45, max thickness cm 24

Notes: only the two upper panels preserved; worn carvings; top section fragmentary and coated with minium.

Panel 1: bottom left half of the lower section missing. Ascension to heaven. In the centre: hero sitting crossed legs inside a palanquin, his hand joint in front of his chest (likely in *añjalimudrā*). Nothing is preserved of his attire and ornaments, only his hair tied in a knot being visible. He is surrounded by six *apsarases*, three on each side, in specular position. All of them are in three-quarter side view, turned towards the hero. Two maidens in the foreground flank the palanquin and gently sustain it with both their

The panel originally displayed the hero laying supine on the ground portrayed as seen from above, with left leg bent upwards and crossed over the right, both arms resting by the sides; *dhotī*as part of his attire and knot hairstyle visible. In the background, behind his body, four head of cattle in perfect front view, standing firmly next to one another.

hands. Beside each of them, another maiden stands still in the foreground, but closer to the frame of the panel. She holds a *cāmara* in her hand (which trespasses on the frame itself), this same arm resting by the side (the other not given). From the two *apsaras* on the right side we argue that they all must have had their legs slightly flexed. In the background, in the upper lateral corner of the scene, another *apsaras* holds a parasol with one arm, purposely raised towards the centre of the scene, the other being not visible as well as the remaining part of her body except for her bust and head. The figures' garments and ornamental apparatus is not preserved; they all have their hair tied in a wide top bun.

Panel 2: *Śivaliṅga* worship. In the centre: hero sitting on a short stool in front view. Legs not visible, hands in *añjalimudrā*. Traces of elongated ear lobes suggest he wear some ornaments. His hairstyle consists of a long tuft of hair falling back. On the left: two figures standing in three-quarter right view (hero's attendants). The one closer to the edge of the scene has the right arm bent and raised holding an unidentifiable attribute. Between him and the hero, another figure holds a parasol above the hero with the left hand, the right arm being likely by the side. The two display the same top bun hairstyle, their attire and ornaments being lost if not for scanty traces of earrings. On the right: *yoni-līṅga* on a double-moulded pedestal resting on a short stool. Next to it, in the bottom right corner of the panel, Nandi crouched in left profile view with paws bent. Behind the *yoni-līṅga* and Nandi three standing figures next to one another, likely *ācārya*. The one in the centre is in front view, has his left arm bent and raised (forearm and attribute not preserved), while the right arm is lifted up above the *līṅga* holding an undefinable tool. He wears earrings and has his hair tied up in a top knot (not hints of his garments). The two figures flanking him on each side help in performing the rite. The one on the left holds an oblong tool at chest height. He has long hair and earrings. The one on the edge of the scene is in left profile view. His attribute and garments are not preserved, but he seems to have long hair too.

Frame: plain, apart from a garland decoration on the fillet separating the uppermost panel from the top covering. Right over this fillet a further motif in high relief: a row of ovals. Squared and massive topmost section. Three human figures are engraved on it, preserved just in the lower part: they sit in front view with crossed legs, and seem to be holding something in their hands.

No. 34, pl. 47, DEULGAON RAJE

Object: two-panelled (?) hero-stone

Location: Deulgaon Raje, Daund *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing upside-down; premises of Siddheśvara temple

Cardinal orientation: facing West

Size: max height cm 61, max width cm 31, max thickness cm 14

Notes: only the two-panelled 1s preserved; top (i.e. lowest) section coated with minium.

Panel 1: dead hero. Hero lying supine on the ground, captured as seen from above. Left leg raised and crossed over the right; left arm by the side, right bent at a right angle resting on his belly. *Dhotī* rim and bun hairstyle are the only recognizable items of his attire and adornment. Three double-garlands in a row hang above him.

Panel 2: only its lowest section preserved. On the left: legs in three-quarter right view, flexed and stretched apart as in a leap, likely belonging to the hero. *Dhotī* fold between them. On the right: legs of two standing figures in left profile view, the hero's enemies.

The odd position of this stele rises the issue of how these materials are actually perceived and understood, a wide field of investigation by its own that urges to be approached by the ethnographic method.

No. 35, pl. 48, DEULGAON RAJE

Object: three-panelled (?) hero-stone

Location: Deulgaon Raje, Daund *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; premises of Siddheśvara temple

Cardinal orientation: facing West

Size: max height cm 92, max width cm 43, max thickness cm 21

Notes: worn carvings; upper section fragmentary and coated with minium.

Panel 1: dead hero. Hero lying supine on the ground in right profile view. Right arm resting on his belly. Traces of bun hairstyle. Four head of cattle next to one another in three-quarter right view trample on his body, their horns trespassing on the frame above.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: hero standing in three-quarter right view. Legs flexed and stretched apart, the right backward in midair, the left forward as in a leap. His right arm is bent at a right angle by his chest, holding a sword; his left keeps the shield in front of his head and bust to parry the blow. Traces of *dhotī* and earrings; bun hairstyle. On the right: warrior on horseback in left profile view. Horse galloping; scanty traces of saddle, belly band and reins visible. The warrior holds the reins with his left hand, while the right arm is raised straight up grabbing a spear above his head (trespassing on the frame) which points to the hero's shield.

Panel 3: scanty traces of four (?) standing figures.

Frame: decorated with a row of disks on the fillets separating the panels and with a row of lozenges on the sides. Above the uppermost fillet preserved, traces of a further panel.

No. 36, pl. 49, DEULGAON RAJE

Object: two-panelled (?) hero-stone

Location: Deulgaon Raje, Daund *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; premises of Siddheśvara temple

Cardinal orientation: facing West

Size: max height cm 72, max width cm 37, max thickness cm 22

Notes: tapering upwards; lower section missing; top section coated with minium.

Panel 1: bottom edge lost. Fight scene. On the left: hero riding a galloping in right profile view. Only traces of neck collar are visible as part of his harness. Hero bust turned in front. Both his arms are raised up straight and stretched apart, the right wielding a sword which trespasses on the frame above, the grabbing something above what supposedly is the head of the horse (reins?). Traces of *dhotī*, earrings and tall hairstyle are preserved. On the right: two standing warriors. Their busts are covered by the shield, their heads are turned in front. Two oblong elements are represented horizontally on the frame above them, being likely their spears (hands which grab them not visible though). Hints of earrings and of a tall hairstyle as well.

Panel 2: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in front view, his legs apparently in *baddhakoṇāsana*, his hands in *añjalimudrā*. His garments are not preserved; his ornamental apparatus consists of earrings; his hair is coiled in a large and tall top bun. In the centre: Nandi in left side view, crouched with paws bent, his muzzle turned to the front; his hump is visible. Over his head (i.e. behind) a *yoni-liṅga* on a flat pedestal. On the right: *pujārī* standing on front view. His left arm bent while holding an unidentifiable tool (bell?), his left stretched above the *liṅga* raising another attribute. His hair is tied in a lateral knot.

Frame: plain fillet between the panels; sides decorated by lozenges inscribed within a square. Crowned by *akalaśa* with base B2, belly and handles D, on edge of type A decorated with a row of disks inscribed within a square.

No. 37, pl. 50, DEULGAON RAJE

Object: three-panelled hero-stone

Location: Deulgaon Raje, Daund *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; premises of Siddheśvara temple

Cardinal orientation: facing West

Size: max height cm 72, max width cm 30, max thickness cm 16

Notes: worn carvings; top section coated with minium.

Panel 1: hero lying supine on the ground, captured as seen from above. No details of his attire and ornaments are preserved.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: hero standing in front view, his bust flexed backward under the pressure of the enemies; both his legs are bent, the left turned sideways ahead the right. With his right hand he points a sword (?) to the foe, the arm bent at a right angle near his bust; with his left hand he raises a shield in front of him. No more details are preserved beyond a top bun hairstyle, which string can be noticed. On the right: two warriors in three-quarter left view. Their bust and left arm is hidden behind the shields, while the right is lifted up straight grabbing a spear above their head. The only detail preserved is the top bun hairstyle.

Panel 3: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting crossed legs in front view, his hands in *añjalimudrā*. The hairstyle is consistent with that displayed in the other panels; no further details can be detected. On the right: *yoni-līṅga* in side view on a thick pedestal.

Frame: plain; irregular fillet between the panels. Crowned by *akalaśa* with base B1 (?), belly and handles D, on edge of type C.

No. 38, pl. 51, DEULGAON RAJE

Object: three-panelled hero-stone

Location: Deulgaon Raje, Daund *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; premises of Siddheśvara temple

Cardinal orientation: facing West

Size: max height cm 134, max width cm 36, max thickness cm 20

Notes: worn carvings; tapering upwards; top section coated with minium.

Panel 1: fight scene. On the left: hero standing in three-quarter right view. Legs slightly bent firmly on the ground. Right arm missing, although the forearm is still visible in front of his chest, holding a sword/dagger (?) which points to the enemy's chest; left arm raised straight ahead crossing the enemy's arm while parrying his blow. He wears a *dhōṭī* and is adorned with earrings and bun hairstyle with a string still visible. On the right: standing warrior in a perfectly specular posture compared to the hero's. His left arm parries the hero's blow at chest height, while his right is raised straight wielding a sword/dagger (?). The raised arms of the hero and his foe trespass on the frame above.

Panel 2: ascension to heaven. Hero standing in front view, his hips slightly bent to the left side of the scene. His arms are lifted up to embrace around the two figures who flank him around their shoulders. His attire is consistent with that of the panel below. Standing one of each side, the two *apsarases* likewise embrace him around his back, while holding an unidentifiable attribute with the other arm (trespassing on the lateral frame, likely a *cāmara*), bent at a right angle. As to their attire, traces of *sāṭī* are visible. Their hair is tied in a back bun.

Panel 3: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in right profile view with crossed legs and hands in *añjalimudrā*. Only hints of earrings and hair tied in a back knot are preserved. In the centre: *yoni-līṅga* in side view on a double-moulded pedestal. The *līṅga* is portrayed as encircled within what can be arguably identified as a garland. On the right: *pujārī* sitting in left profile view. Left arm bent by the side holding a bell, right arm raised over the *līṅga*, likely pouring something on it (water).

Frame: plain and regular. Crowned by *akalaśa* with base, belly and handle B2, on edge of type E.

No. 39, pl. 52, DEULGAON RAJE

Object: three-panelled hero-stone

Location: Deulgaon Raje, Daund *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; premises of Siddheśvara temple

Cardinal orientation: facing West

Size: max height cm 90, max width cm 32, max thickness cm 23

Notes: top section coated with minium.

Panel 1: dead hero. Hero lying supine on the ground in right profile. Arms resting on his belly. Traces of *dhōṭī* fold and earrings. Hair tied in a back knot. A row of four double-garlands hangs above him.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: hero standing in front view with legs stretched apart and bent suggesting a leap forward. His right arm is bent, grabbing a dagger (?) which points to the enemy. Left arm not

preserved entirely. His attire and ornaments do not show additional components compared to the panel below. On the right: three warriors next to one another in three-quarter left view, with legs flexed. They hold a shield (unusually represented sideways) with their left hand, while the right arm is raised up straight wielding spears and daggers (?) which trespass on the frame above. They likely have short hair, but no further details can be detected of their hairstyle nor of their attire and ornaments.

Panel 3: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in three-quarter right view. Right leg bent inward and resting on the ground, the other flexed as well but with knee oriented upwards. Hands in *añjalimudrā*. Nothing is visible of his attire and ornaments, apart from his back knot tied by a string. In the centre: *yoni-līṅga* in side view on a multi-moulded pedestal (its lowest section being Nandi otherwise). On the right: *pujārī* standing in three-quarter left view. Left arm bent by the side holding a bell, right arm raised up towards the *līṅga*; none of the attributes in his hands can be identified due to the bad conservation status of the carvings.

Frame: plain and regular. Crowned by *akalaśa* with base, belly and handle D, on edge of type D.

No. 40, pl. 53, BAWADA

Object: four-panelled hero-stone

Location: Bawada, Indapur *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; external Western side of Māruti temple

Cardinal orientation: facing West

Size: max height cm 162, max width cm 57, max thickness cm 16

Notes: all surface coated with orange paint (same as on the temple outer walls).

Panel 1: hero lying supine on a multilayer bed-like structure, possibly a funeral pyre; his right and left arms (of the left just a hint is given) along the sides. A trace of his *dhotī* preserved; he wears earrings and a bracelet on the right wrist; hair is tied in a bun. Beside him at the foot of the bed, a standing female figure (*apsaras*). Her bust slightly tilted to the left, her right hip leaning against the edge of the bed, the right arm raised up straight while holding a garland; her left arm is bent at a right angle, a vessel (?) being in her hand. Only her left leg is portrayed. She has wears a *sārī* (a fold falling on the leg), necklace and earrings, with a wide bun hairstyle. A coiled, unidentifiable element falls on the bed between the hero's leg and the *apsaras*' right hip (a shawl possibly belonging to the *apsaras*/a snake?). Above the two figures (to be intended as either behind them or literally flying) five *apsarases* next to one another in front view. Each carries a two row garland, wherein her own face is framed. Only their heads and breasts are visible (the abdomen can be distinguished as well in the first two *apsarases* on the left); hair tied in a bun.

Panel 2: fort assault. On the left: hero on horseback. Three-quarter right view; left arm raised at shoulder height and stretched forward, as to balance his right arm lifted and bent behind his head while holding a sword (trespassing on the frame above). Just the belt strip is visible of his attire; bun hairstyle and earrings. The horse, reared up, is in right profile view. Its visible harness includes: crown-piece, brow-band and cheek-piece as to the head; reins, breast collar, rein terret and belly band. Underneath the belly of the horse, a (male) figure lays as if just fallen from a horse: his head and torso touching the ground, the right arm bent close to the face, the left one slightly stretched as to soften the blow; his leg (only the left portrayed) in midair, bent at knee height. The figure shows hair tied in a bun and belt. In the centre: three warriors on horseback, represented one above the other (i.e. behind), in left profile view. The lowest of them rides a reared up horse, his left hand holding the reins, his right one lifted above his head holding a spear which points at the hero. Bun hairstyle and earrings. Hints of headpieces as to the horse harness. The other two warriors are represented in the same way, but a major lack of details has to be noted as regards the one in between (no visible weapons, dress and ornaments). A curving wall (bend on the left) divides these figures from those on the extreme right of the panel. The wall possibly defines a fortified enclosed structure. On the right: eight foot soldiers disposed in three rows, one above the other (i.e. behind) in front side view. They appear as milling around the wall. Those in the lowest row (three) are partially hidden behind their shields. No details are preserved in relation to their attire and ornaments, but for the bun hairstyle. In the middle row, two out of the three soldiers (whose bodies are completely hidden behind their shields and the heads of the warriors below them), hold a dagger with their right

arms, lifted straight vertically. No details are visible of the two warriors in the topmost row, apart from their heads and shields.

Following the Indian iconographic code, the hero on horseback is represented on a larger scale compared to all the other figures. A similar standard of proportions seems to be applied to the figure below the horse belly; on the ground of this, given also the absence of any spare horse to be attributed to this fallen rider, we identify him with the hero himself unhorsed by the enemies.

Panel 3: ascension to heaven. In the centre: male and female couple sitting on a short, square based podium. The hero (on the left) sits with left leg bent inwards and right leg lifted slightly upwards, on which his right arm rests. His left arm embraces the female figure from behind. She (on the right; arguably the hero's wife) has her right leg bent inwards, which rests upon the hero's left leg; her left leg is raised upwards, the foot lying on the podium. Her right arm embraces the hero around his back, while the left leans against the leg, possibly holding some attribute. Of the couple's attire, only the lady's belt is visible. On both left and right, the couple is flanked by a specular scene. In the corner, a standing female figure (*apsaras*) in three-quarter view holds a garland with a raised arm; the other arm (the one closer to the frame of the scene) is resting along the side (undoubtedly recognizable just in the case of the right corner *apsaras*). Both of them show a refined attire including *sāṭī* (the fold falling between the legs of the left *apsaras*), belt, earrings, bangle, broad pectoral-like necklace and hair tied in a twofold bun.

At the foot of the *apsaras*, two (female?) celestial beings, one on either side. Bodies lying almost horizontally by the podium, towards which they are stretched; their hands touch the bottom of the podium itself as to lift it up. At the knees height, their legs (only one is represented) are bent upwards, in midair. Both have their thighs resting on a cushion. Distinguished attire and ornament apparatus made of *dhotī* (with fold falling below their bodies), belt and anklets; their hair is tied in a tall topknot decorated with jewels (beads visible on the hair of the right side celestial being).

Panel 4: *Śivaliṅga* worship. In the centre: *yonī-līṅga* on a pedestal, oriented to the right. On the left: hero in front view, sitting in *padmāsana*, his hands in *añjalimudrā*; *yajñopavīta*, earrings and hair tied in a bun by a string are visible. On the extreme left: standing male figure in three-quarter view, right arm bent at a right angle, left arm raised up holding a garland. Bun hairstyle and earrings; *dhotī* fold and belt preserved. On the right: Nandi crouched with paws bent, in left profile view. On the extreme left: standing *pujārī* in three quarter view, left arm bent at a right angle holding a water vessel, right arm lifted up holding a bell. No further elements but the earrings are identifiable. Hints of long straight hair.

Frame: plain. Crowned by *akalaśa* with base, belly and handles C1, on edge of type F.

G.-D. Sontheimer³⁸² believed the figures represented in the lowest panel to be his wives, hence *satīs*. Yet in our opinion nothing suggests that these female figures are on the point of immolating themselves.

The warrior's spouse might be rather recognized in the woman sitting by his side in the ascension to heaven scene, given the fact that she shares with him the same sit, and that she is clearly distinguished by the other figures. Moreover, if those in the bottom scene were his wives, it would remain to explain the reason for their absence in the panel above.

We are keen to ascribe this specimen to the Western Cālukya period.

No. 41, pl. 54, KHANDALI

Object: three-panelled hero-stone

Location: Khandali, Malshiras *tālukā*, Solapur district

Position: standing; under a banyan tree (together with other cult icons and stones, faced by a Nandi sculpture) on the Akluj-Velapur road

Cardinal orientation: facing East

Size: max height cm 110, max width cm 46, max thickness cm 13

Notes: tapering upwards.

Panel 1: fight scene. On the left: hero standing in front view, his legs stretched apart and bent. Right arm raised and bent at a right angle, holding a sword that points horizontally at the enemy's shield; left arm

³⁸² Sontheimer 1982b: 280.

raised and stretched vertically grabbing the spear held by the enemy above his head. His attire consists of *dhotī* with long fold falling among his legs and belt; he apparently wears a collar and large, flat earrings; hair tied in a wide, tall bun, while a string/ring seems to cover his hairline. On the right: two standing warriors in front view and similar attitude: legs stretched apart and bent, right arm lifted straight up holding a spear, their torso and left arm hidden by the shield. They both wear a *dhotī* with a long fold hanging among their legs, and a belt; they have large earrings as ornaments and a bun as a hairstyle.

Panel 2: ascension to heaven. In the centre: standing hero in front view; his legs stretched apart, the right one bent backwards, in midair, the body weight on the left one, bent alike, the foot firmly on the ground. His arms embrace at the hips height the two figures flanking him. Only his *dhotī* (with a large fold) and earrings are visible of his attire, while his bun hairstyle is clearly held by a string. Two standing *apsaras* are next to him, one on either side. They mirror each other in terms of attitude, dress and ornaments: their hips bent towards the lateral outer part of the scene, one of their arms along the side, the other one embracing the hero behind his back; they wear *sāṛī* (drapery visible and fold falling on their legs) and belt, earrings and bun hairstyle.

Panel 3: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero in *padmāsana*, his hands in *añjalimudrā*. Belt strip visible, as well as earrings, bun hairstyle and the string/ring on his headline. In the centre: *yoni-līṅga* in side view on a double-moulded pedestal. On the right: standing male figure (*ācārya*) in front view; his left arm bent at a right angle, the right one lifted straight up; with both his hands he holds an oblong object of worship, likely a garland. No visible details of his attire. He seems to wear earrings and have his hair tied in a bun.

Frame: plain. Only the edge of type E is recordable.

No. 42, pl. 55, VELAPUR

Object: three-panelled hero-stone

Location: Velapur, Malshiras *tālukā*, Solapur district

Position: standing nearby the entrance to Śrī Viśvakarmā temple

Cardinal orientation: facing West

Size: max height cm 97, max width cm 49, max thickness cm 13

Panel 1: fight scene. On the left: standing hero in three-quarter view (right side). His legs stretched apart and bent as in a leap (the right one in midair, backwards; the body weight on the left one). His right arm bent along the side grabbing a spear that points at the enemy's shield, the left one raised up straight holding the shield. He wears a *dhotī* (its fold falling between his legs) with a two-band belt, *yajñopavīta*, arm bracelets, large flat earrings; his hairstyle may consist of a vertical folded knot with a ring/string on the hairline, or of a turban (?). On the right: two standing enemies in similar attitude and attire: both of them have their legs slightly bent, and wear a *dhotī* (its fold visible on the left side warrior, its drapery on the right side warrior) as well as a collar (?) and large flat earrings as ornaments, having the same bun hairstyle. They are distinguished by different weapons: the left side warrior has his right arm lifted up and holds a spear above his head (almost trespassing on the frame above) pointing at the hero, his torso partially hidden by the shield. The right side warrior has his left arm bent at a right angle and carries a bow with a nocked arrow; a strip of his *dhotī*/belt is visible behind his elbow.

Panel 2: ascension to heaven. In the centre: standing hero in front view; his legs stretched apart suggesting some movement; his arms embracing the two female figures beside him. His attire and ornaments are consistent with those shown in the panel below. Two *apsaras* stand next to him, one on either side. Their attitude, dress and ornaments are alike. Their hips bend towards the lateral outer part of the scene, one of their arms is along the side (the left *apsaras* holding putatively a flask), the other arm embracing the hero behind his back. They wear *sāṛī* (with a wide hem) and belt, both the elements being better preserved on the left side *apsaras*, with earrings and (collar?) as ornaments, and a bun hairstyle (which in the left side *apsaras* is arranged in a coil shape).

Panel 3: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero in *padmāsana*, his hands in *añjalimudrā*. Belt strip visible, as well as collar (?) long necklace, earrings, and turban-like hairstyle. In the centre: *yoni-līṅga* in side view on a multi-moulded pedestal. On the right: standing male figure (*pujārī*) in front view. His left arm lifted straight up above the *līṅga*, holding a ritual object (bowl?) in his hand palm oriented upwards. His

right arm is bent at a right angle (forearm and possible attribute not preserved). A fragment of his belt is visible, as well as his earrings, while no details remain of his hairstyle.

Frame: plain. Topmost section not preserved.

No. 43, pl. 56, VELAPUR

Object: four-panelled hero-stone

Location: Velapur, Malshiras *tālukā*, Solapur district

Position: standing nearby the entrance to Gaṇapati shrine (not in use)

Cardinal orientation: facing East

Size: max height cm 120, max width cm 38, max thickness cm 22

Notes: worn carvings; all surface coated with pink paint (same as on the shrine outer walls).

Panel 1: dead hero. Due to the bad conservation status, only his silhouette is detectable: he lays supine on the ground in right profile view, his right arm arguably along the side. A female figure (sitting/standing?) is portrayed in front view, just from the waist up, behind the hero's body. She has bear torso and seems to wear a long necklace falling between her breasts, and large flat earrings. Her hair is tied in a bun. Her left arm is stretched forward and rests on the hero's chest; the right one is bent at a right angle and lifted over the shoulder height, while the hand (not preserved) is reasonably grabbing an unidentifiable element (a branch?) which spreads above, occupying almost the full width of the upper edge of the scene and ultimately acting as a substitute of the frame. It seems to have a circular section and it is wavy (with a lower and an upper curve), apparently lacking of clear connections with any other components of the scene. In the background, on the right, an unidentifiable element, putatively an architectural structure (a fort?). Its upper and left edges are curving (almost outlining a semicircle); its right edge apparently merges with the lateral frame, while its straight base rests on the ground.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: hero on horseback. Three-quarter right view bust, both his arms bent at a right angle and raised up at the shoulder height, supporting an unidentifiable element right over his head (possibly trespassing on the frame above). Belt and *yajñopavīta* are the visible attributes of his attire, with earrings as ornaments. His hair must be short and tied, but no further details are given. The horse, reared up, is in right profile view. Its visible harness includes: crown-piece, brow-band and nose-band as to the head; reins and a strip of the saddle. Its tail trespasses on the left lateral frame. On the right: two standing warriors in front view, sharing the same attitude and equipment: legs slightly stretched apart, torso and left arm behind the shield, right arm raised up straight over their heads, holding horizontally a spear which points at the hero. As to their attire, the only given details are the earrings, their hair being short and possibly tied.

Panel 3: ascension to heaven. In the centre: standing hero, in front view; the legs are stretched apart and bent suggesting some movement. His arms embrace the two female figures beside him around their waist. Hairstyle and dress details seem consistent with those portrayed in the panel below, with two more elements visible here: the fold of the *dhotī* between his legs and two strips of the belt (?) floating on his hips. The two flanking *apsarases* (one on either side) are in a specular attitude: standing in front view, one of their arms (that closer to the lateral frame) is along the side (hand not preserved), while the other is not represented, as reasonably embracing the hero behind his back. Both of them wear a *sāṛī* (the fold hanging on their legs) and belt, long necklace (falling among their breasts) and earrings, with bun hairstyle.

Panel 4: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero in *padmāsana*, his hands in *añjalimudrā*. Belt strip visible, as well as earrings, and bun hairstyle. In the centre: *yoni-līṅga* on a double-moulded pedestal. On the right: standing male figure (*ācārya*) in three-quarter view; his right arm bent at a right angle, arguably holding an attribute not identifiable which seem to fall vertically from his hand downwards to the ground; his left arm lifted straight up above the *līṅga*, grabbing a ritual object (flask/bell). No details are preserved of his attire and ornaments except for the earrings. He has short hair.

Frame: plain. As already mentioned, the separation between the two bottom panels is provided by a device of the lowest figured scene. Crowned by *akalaśa* with base, belly and handles B1, on edge of type E.

No. 44, pl. 57, VELAPUR

Object: three-panelled hero-stone

Location: Velapur, Malshiras *tālukā*, Solapur district

Position: standing; premises of Māruti temple

Cardinal orientation: facing East

Size: max height cm 103, max width cm 43, max thickness cm 17

Notes: surface slightly convex in the lowest part; worn carvings; original right edge missing; tapering upwards.

Panel 1: fight scene. On the left: standing hero in right profile view. Legs stretched apart and bent, both the feet steadily on the ground. Left arm raised at the shoulder height, stretched forward while holding the shield; right arm bent and lifted up, grabbing a diagonal-oriented spear that points at the enemy's leg. He wears a short *dhotī*, a refined belt (wrist band not visible) which strings can be distinguished on the side, and earrings. His hairstyle consists of a bun. Behind him, on the extreme left side of the scene, three head of cattle in left side view, one above (i.e. behind) the other in progressively smaller scale from the bottom. Their snouts and forelegs slightly trespass on the lateral side of the stele, in the absence of any frame. On the right: standing warrior in left side view. Legs stretched apart and bent, the left one protruding backwards, in midair (foot not preserved). Left arm bent at a right angle along the side (forearm not preserved); right arm slightly raised up straight, holding a spear horizontally above his head. He wears a *dhotī*, a two strip belt with a sheath (?) falling on his left thigh. His hair is tied in a bun.

Panel 2: ascension to heaven. In the centre: standing hero in front view; he embraces the two female figures beside him by laying his arms around their shoulders. Both his attire and ornaments are consistent with the those shown in the panel below. Two standing *apsarases* flank him (one on either side), portrayed in a specular way: one of their arms (that closer to the lateral side of the scene) is bent and holds a *cāmara*, while the other is behind the hero's back, embracing him. They both wear a *sāṭī* recognizable from the fold falling on their legs, an elaborated belt, the bun hairstyle being the only other identifiable detail.

Panel 3: *Śivaliṅga* worship. In the centre: hero in *padmāsana*, his hands in *añjalimudrā*. He sits on a cushion (?). No details can be safely detected of his attire and ornaments, only the bun hairstyle being preserved. On the right: *yonī-liṅga* on a pedestal.

It strikes the absence of any figurative element on the left side of the scene.

Frame: plain between one panel and the other, lacking on the lefts side. Common parameters like consistency and symmetry allow us to suppose the absence of any frame also on the right side of the stele, which original edge cannot be observed as a consequence of a secondary chiseling. Upper edge of type E crowned by a spherical finial.

No. 45, pl. 58, VELAPUR

Object: three-panelled hero-stone [local record: VLP 67]

Location: Velapur, Malshiras *tālukā*, Solapur district

Position: standing inside stones repository

Cardinal orientation: ---

Size: max height cm 145, max width cm 83, max thickness cm 13

Notes: lowest section broken.

Panel 1: fight scene. On the left: in the background, a warrior on horseback and a riderless horse are in left profile view, one above the other. The horses are equipped with crown piece, cheek piece, nose band, reins and saddle (the last visible only on the horse with rider). The warrior has his bust bent forward, over the horse, a dynamic posture which suggests it is at a gallop; with his right arm he holds a waving flag which trespasses on the frame above. As to his attire and ornaments, only his belt is visible. The riderless horse has its forelegs bent and stretched forward, with the body mostly hidden behind the figure on the foreground; it is unclear whether it is galloping likewise to the left or it is lying on the ground after falling. In the foreground another warrior on horseback, in right profile view. The horse is reared up; its

full harness is visible (crown piece, cheek piece, nose band, reins and saddle). The rider's bust is turned to the front, with both the arms raised up straight and stretched out. He wields a sword in his right hand and a spear in his left. He wears a *dhotī* (only the waist hem being visible), with a necklace and earrings as ornaments, and a top bun as a hairstyle. Given the slight prominence shown by this figure over the others, in all probability we have to identify him as the hero (something which will be confirmed after comparing his attire with that of the hero in the panels above). Under the belly of his horse a man lies prone on the ground, the arms bent at the elbow under his bust. His hair is arranged in a bun on the crown of the head; hints of earrings are visible. On the right: in the background, a warrior on horseback in right profile view and a riderless horse, one above the other. Nose-band and reins are the only elements preserved as to the horses harness. The horse rider has his right arm raised up straight, holding a flag which trespasses on the frame. His bun hairstyle and earrings are visible. As in the case of the riderless horse on the left side of the scene, it is unclear if it is lying on the ground or is galloping. The unsaddled warrior in the centre of the scene was mounting one of the two spare horses so far encountered. Further on the right, two warriors on foot in three-quarter left view seem to walk against the warriors on horseback. They are armed with shields and spears, which they grab in their right hands above their head, the arms raised up straight. Hints of a *dhotī* can be observed on the first of the two, both displaying earrings as ornaments and hair arranged in a bun, although in a different style compared to that of their foes.

Panel 2: ascension to heaven. In the centre: hero standing front view. His right arm is bent, with the hand resting gently on his waist, while the left is delicately raised towards the waist of the lady at his side. His attire consists of a *dhotī* and a sheathed dagger leaning on his right thigh; wrist and arm bracelets, long necklace and earrings as ornaments. His hair is tied in a wide top bun. Two *apsarases* flank him, one on each side. They are in a perfectly specular attitude: standing in front view, their hips bent towards the outer edge of the scene, wearing a *dhotī* with a fold falling on their legs and richly adorned with wrist and arm bracelets, necklaces and earrings. Close to the hero they take lifted a *cāmara*, while their other arm rests by the side. Two *gajas*, reared up in profile view, stand at the edge of the scene; a pot lies on the ground between them and the *apsarases*. Raised behind the elephants, a wavy decorative motif with a pearl fringe outlines a sort of keel-shaped arc. This device acts as the upper frame of the panel. Its pinnacle is aligned with the hero below and with the *liṅga* above.

Panel 3: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in three-quarter right view on a pedestal, with cross-legged (the left over the right, which is bent inward and rests on the seat) and hands in *añjalimudrā*. His attire perfectly mirrors that displayed in the panels below. In the centre: *yonī-liṅga* on a triple-moulded pedestal. A garland frames it. On the right: *pujārī* sitting in front view on a pedestal. His legs are bent and rest on the seat, the knee pointing sideways. His bust slants towards the right side; his left arm rests on the leg, the right raised up, bent at the elbow with the forearm oriented upwards, grabbing an undefinable ritual tool in the hand. He wears a *kaupīna*, together with wrist and arm bracelets, a bead necklace and earrings. His hair is long and braided.

Two columns at the sides supporting a top beam-like element frame the scene.

Frame: a proper frame is missing in Panel 1; it consists of motifs echoing architectural designs in the upper two. Upper edge of type F with sun and moon symbols.

The presence of two elephants in the scene related to the hero's *post mortem* reinforces the royal symbolism that the flags brought about on the battlefield.

No. 46, pl. 59, VELAPUR

Object: four-panelled hero-stone [local record: VLP 56]

Location: Velapur, Malshiras *tālukā*, Solapur district

Position: standing inside stones repository

Cardinal orientation: ---

Size: max height cm 144, max width cm 63, max thickness cm 18

Panel 1: fight scene. In the centre: hero standing in three-quarter side view, with legs stretched apart and slightly bent. His right arm is bent at the elbow, the forearm oriented forward, grabbing in the hand a *kaṭṭāra*; the left is raised up, holding in the hand an unidentifiable small size object, likely a sort of

weapon. He wears a *dhotī*, the fold falling between his legs, and earrings as ornaments. His hairstyle consists of a coiled bun. He is surrounded by four enemies, two on each side. Each of them grabs a spear with both his hands, pointing it to the hero's belly (the two on the right) or to his back (the two on the left). They all are in front view, wearing a *dhotī*, adorned with earrings, the hair arranged in a bun.

Panel 2: procession (?) scene. On the left: four male figures stand in front view next to one another, the hips slightly bending towards the right, which suggest a certain dynamism (to the left side of the scene). Their left arms rest along the side, while the right are raised up straight. It is unclear whether they grab something in their hands; they more likely seem to be greeting the figure on the right. They wear a *dhotī* with thick upper hem and fold hanging between their legs, and are adorned apparently just with earrings, having a wide top bun as a hairstyle. On the right: male figure on horseback in three-quarter left view. Pieces of the horse harness are still visible despite the worn preservation status of this section of the panel: reins, saddle and neck band. The rider has his left arm bent at the elbow, resting by the side with forearm oriented upwards, and likely grabs the reins. The right arm is raised up, holding a parallelepiped-shaped object which cannot be better defined. The figure's attire consists of a *dhotī*, with a garland, a necklace and earrings as ornaments, beyond a bun hairstyle. Given his prominence compared to the other personages in the panel, he has to be identified as the hero in all probability.

Panel 3: ascension to heaven. In the centre: hero standing in front view. His left arm is gently raised sideways touching the waist of the lady who flanks him. His right is bent at the elbow, by the side, the hand resting on the sheathed dagger hanging from his belt. Beyond the *dhotī* and the earrings already observed in the panels below, he shows here the *yajñopavīta*, and two arm bracelets, without any change in his hairstyle instead. Next to him stand four *apsarases* in front view, two on each side. They are portrayed in a symmetric way: their hips slightly bend to the outer edge of the scene; one of their arms rests by the side; the other arm lifts a *cāmara* near the hero's head (in the case of the *apsarases* closer to him), or alternatively is kept downwards, touching the ground (in the case of those closer to the edge of the panel). They wear a *sāṭī* with a thick rim and fold falling on their legs, a belt, necklaces, wrist bracelets, earrings and shawls (the last shown by the two maidens on the right). Their hairstyle consists of a bun.

Panel 4: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting on a cushion in three-quarter right view, with crossed legs (the left over the right) and hands in *añjalimudrā*, the bust turned to the front. His attire and ornaments are consistent with those displayed in the panels below. In the centre: *yonī-līṅga* on a multi-moulded pedestal. On the right: *pujārī* standing in front view, the left arm bent at the elbow with the forearm oriented forward grabbing a bell (?) in the hand, the right hand holding a ritual tool (a water-pot/incense burner?) close to the *līṅga*. His attire cannot be properly defined; he has ear ornaments and hair tied in a top double bun.

Frame: plain and regular in the two lower panels. The side edges of the two upper panels are represented by pillars (worn on the right). Upper edge of type E crowned by a hump-like finial.

The scene portrayed in Panel 2 still needs to find a satisfactory interpretation, being possibly related to some local episode. The four personages on the left in all probability belong to the party of the hero, and may be paying homage to him, as we would expect in the context of a religious sacrifice (compare with no. 86, pl. 99 for instance). The narration must capture some moments prior to the skirmish where he encountered his death.

No. 47, pl. 60, VELAPUR

Object: four-panelled hero-stone [local record: 68?]

Location: Velapur, Malshiras *tālukā*, Solapur district

Position: lying on the ground inside stones repository

Cardinal orientation: ---

Size: max height cm 218, max width cm 96, max thickness cm 12

Notes: tapering upwards.

Panel 1: fight scene. In the centre: hero standing in three-quarter right view, his legs flexed and stretched apart, the left stepped forward, slightly in midair. His right arm is lifted by the side, the forearm missing;

the left is raised up, wielding a short sword against his enemies. He wears a *dhotī*, a fold of which hangs between his legs and a belt with sheath; a long necklace, an arm bracelet and large earrings adorn him, while his hair is tied in a top coiled bun. He is flanked on both sides by two types of figures: enemies and *bhūtas*. On the left, in the foreground: a horse stands in right profile view, in a static position; it is equipped with crown-piece, reins and saddle. Being the all the hero's enemies on foot, we argue it to be precisely the hero's mount. Behind it, in the background, two standing warriors in front view have their arms bent at the elbow while holding in front of their chests two spears which pierce the hero on his flank. Their attire is similar: *dhotī* with fold falling on their legs, with traces of a necklace and earrings as ornaments, their hair being arranged in a side bun. Between one of them and the hero, still in the background, a skeletal being stands in three-quarter right view. His body is partially covered by the warrior's spear and the hero himself, nonetheless his hips bent to left and his arms raised up are perfectly visible. His hand palms are open and oriented upwards, but it is unclear whether he is grabbing something in it. Despite his emaciated features, he wears large earrings. His head is encircled in a sort of halo. On the right, in the foreground: another skeletal figure is crouched on his knees in three-quarter left view. His left elbow rests on the ground, while he seizes the hero's left anklet with his hand; the right arm is raised up, stretched forward to the hero, whom he grabs by his flank, at the same height where he is pierced by the other handful of enemies. His ribs, his arms and legs bone structure are clearly visible. Like the *bhūta* on the other side, he displays large earrings and a halo encircling his head; a cloth around his waist with a fold falling back resembles a *kaupīna*. In the background, two standing enemies pierce the hero's flank with their spears held horizontally in front of their chests. Both of them are adorned with earrings and necklace, and have their hair arranged in a bun. The warrior on the right edge displays also a *dhotī* a fold of which falls between his legs stretched apart and flexed.

Panel 2: moments before the battle (?). On the left: a skeletal being (*bhūta*) stands in three-quarter right view, captured as in a leap forward. His left leg is stepped forward while the right is bent backwards, his calf in midair. The right arm is bent at the elbow and likely rests on the hip (holding some attribute?); the left is oriented forward, bent at the elbow, apparently bringing a cup (?) close to his mouth. His emaciated aspect is underlined by a highly defined bone structure; traces of earrings can be observed, while his hair seems to be tied in a ponytail on the crown of the head. Next to him is the hero (?), in front view *ardhaparyāṅkāśana* on a short stool, both his hands resting on the knees. He has his bust and head slightly bending towards the left side. His attire and ornaments are consistent with those displayed in the panel below. On the right: a sort of procession scene seems to be taking place. A figure in right profile view, the head turned to the front, stands in front of an elephant mounted by two figures, a high rank personage (the hero himself/his sovereign/a *daṇḍanāyaka*?) and his attendant. The male personage at the foot of the elephant has both his arms raised straight up towards the hero, exchanging an unidentifiable object with him (it is unclear whether he is receiving it from the hero or giving it to him). He wears a *dhotī*, which strips fall on his right thigh and the *yajñopavīta*, and is adorned with earrings; his hair is tied in a back bun. The elephant, in left profile view, is equipped with neck collars/garlands, reins, belly band and saddle. The "royal" figure is in the lead, in three-quarter left view as well as the personage who sits behind him. He holds the reins with his left hand, the right arm being raised to shoulder height and stretched forward to collect/give what he is exchanging with the male figure on foot. Only traces of his necklace and earrings can be seen, his hairstyle being consistent with that already observed. The personage behind him has his left arm resting on the leg, while the right is raised up holding a parasol above the hero. Nothing is preserved of his attire, his earrings and top bun hairstyle being visible instead.

Panel 3: ascension to heaven. In the centre: hero standing in front view. His right hand gently rests on his waist; his left is bent at the elbow, raised laterally towards the figure beside him, holding a garland (?) in the hand. His distinctive attire, ornaments and hairstyle are fully preserved: *dhotī* with sheathed sword, long necklace, arm bracelets, earrings and top coiled bun. A flower/fruit bunch (?) hangs over his head. Four figures in front view flank him: an *apsaras* and a *gandharva* on each side. The two couples are in perfect specular position. Closer to the hero stand the *apsarases*: each embraces the *gandharva* beside her with one arm, while the other is lifted up, waving a *cāmara*/garland (?) near the hero's head. Their attire consists of a long *sārī* with thick rim and waist band, its fold falling on the legs. Earrings, necklace, arm and wrist bracelets embellish them, while their hair is arranged in a side bun tied with a ribbon. On the edges, the *gandharvas* in *pādasvastika*. They embrace the *apsaras* beside them with one arm, the other

being resting backwards (right side *gandharva*) or bent at the elbow and raised up laterally, while holding an unidentifiable attribute (left side *gandharva*). The fold of their *dhotī* and its waist band are visible, as well as their large earrings and conical headgears. Behind them, at their legs height, a thin wavy motif starts and runs parallel to the panel frame. The ground on which the five figures stand is represented as an element independent from the frame below.

Two ribbed pillars mark the lateral edges of the scene. From their tops raises a thick wavy motif coiled at the two ends. It outlines a keel-shaped arc, which acts as the upper frame of the panel. Its pinnacle is aligned with the hero below, and coincides with the base of *liṅga* above.

Panel 4: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in three-quarter right view on a pedestal, with crossed legs and hands in *añjalimudrā*. The visible elements of his attire and ornaments do not differ from those displayed in the other panels. On the left edge, next to him, a pot. In the centre: yoni-liṅga on a double-moulded pedestal resting on the upper coiled pinnacle of the panel below. The *liṅga* is encircled within a garland. On the left: *pujārī* standing in front view, his legs flexed and stretched apart, suggesting he is moving towards the cult object. His left arm is bent at the elbow, holding an unidentifiable attribute in front of his chest; his right is raised straight towards the liṅga, grabbing another ritual tool. He likely wears a *kaupīna*, and is adorned with a long necklace and large earrings; his hair is long and braided. The scene is framed by two side pillars, with a horizontal beam connecting their two upper edges.

Frame: plain and regular in the two-panelled 1s. Upper edge of type E with the sun and moon symbols, crowned by a hump-like finial on a base with pearls (stylization of the B2 variety of *kalaśa*?).

We know from G.-D. Sontheimer (see chapter 5.3.5 here for references) that the provenance of this stele, together with several others today stored in the depository of Velapur, is the nearby village of Mhalung. This sample undoubtedly bears a number of notable features, the first and foremost being the presence of extra-human beings that Indian lore commonly associates to death and afterlife, and that for the sake of simplicity we address as *bhūtas*.

At the present state of knowledge, hero-stones representing figures as such are uncommon. While describing other steles from Velapur, Sontheimer enumerates one more example of the same nature,³⁸³ “One of the most impressive stones has been moved to the Prince of Wales Museum in Bombay, according to Cousens. It has four panels [...]. Even more interesting are the *bhūts*, or goblins, which hover around the battle-field. One of them has a Bhairava-like halo, a dagger and a *kapāla*, the other actually sucks the blood of a dying enemy”. Cousens does not actually provide with any image of this specific stele,³⁸⁴ while Sontheimer does it in a publication preceding the one where the above mentioned observations are reported.³⁸⁵ A few traits of this stele effectively resemble those of the specimen under examination here, namely the *bhūtas*’ attire and their aggressive attitude towards the figures involved in the battle. The most striking feature of our sample, however, is the presence of these extra-human beings even beyond the battlefield, that is to say on the Panel 2.

The interpretation of this scene remains uncertain. Five figures are depicted on it; comparing their features (garments and hairstyle) and relative degree of importance, we are keen to identify the hero with the personage sitting on the left side. His pose, the *ardhaparyāṅkāśana*, is a seated at a ease posture, a sort of victory and relaxed attitude theoretically suitable with the condition of heroes or deities who defeated their foes, and arguably proper of a post-conflict environment. Given the lack of opposite data, however, our scene likely takes place in the mundane sphere at some point prior to the hero’s deeds on the battlefield. The presence of a *bhūta* next to him might signify his imminent death. The figures on the right side of the composition seem to run a procession converging towards the hero. An exchange (of something related to the hero?) occurs between a retainer and a personage undoubtedly displaying high-rank connotations (his mount itself, the parasol, the attendant) which derive from his social status, should he be identified as a sovereign or a *daṇḍanāyaka*. Interestingly, this figure shares some features with the hero: beyond a recognized superiority (which the hero owes to his virtue), they both display the same particular hairstyle, a sort of coiled bun. Hence, the hypothesis that the panel portrays two different stages

³⁸³ Sontheimer 1982b: 269.

³⁸⁴ Cousens 1931: 33, pl. XCVII.

³⁸⁵ Sontheimer 2004 [1976]: 140, pl. IV fig. 1.

rather than a continuous narrative might be suggested as well, with the hero represented twice, i.e. as the sitting figure on the left, and as the elephant rider in the lead. No less obscure, however, it would be the overall interpretation of the panel even in this case.

No. 48, pl. 61, VELAPUR

Object: four-panelled hero-stone [local record: VLP 77]

Location: Velapur, Malshiras *tālukā*, Solapur district

Position: standing inside stones repository

Cardinal orientation: ---

Size: max height cm 185, max width cm 89, max thickness cm 11

Notes: tapering upwards.

Panel 1: fight scene. On the left: two warriors stand in three-quarter right view with legs slightly flexed. Their right arms are raised up straight, wielding a sword which trespasses on the frame; their left arms are bent at the elbow and raised to shoulder height with the forearm oriented upwards, holding a shield. Nothing can be detected as to their garments; their earrings are visible, and so their top bun hairstyle, tied with a string. In the centre: hero standing in three-quarter right view, his legs flexed and stretched apart, his bust slightly bent forwards, underlining the direction of his movement. He holds a sword in his right hand, pointing it to the enemy in front of him, while holding a shield with his left arm raised by the side. He wears *dhotī* and belt with a sheath falling on his right thigh. His ornaments consist of earrings, his hairstyle of a wide top bun. On the left: four warriors in three-quarter left view, lined up one behind the other. Their legs are flexed and stretched apart; their busts are hidden behind the shields together with their left arms, while their right are raised up, the hands grabbing some spears above their heads. No details of their garments are provided. Traces of earrings can be seen; their hair is tied in a top bun. The personages move on an uneven ground.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: a male figure stands in three-quarter right view on the edge of the scene, holding a parasol with both hands. His legs are flexed, the left stepped forward; he wears a *dhotī*, which upper band and fold are visible, and earrings as ornaments. His hair is tied in a wide top bun. The parasol is a royal insignia to be attributed to the figure next to him, the hero on horseback in right profile view. The steed is racing; its harness consists of plume, crown piece, cheek piece, nose band, three neck bands, reins and saddle. The hero has his torso turned to the front and wields two weapons: a sword in his right hand and a spear in his left, both his arms raised up. His attire and ornaments match with those displayed in the panel below, with the *yajñopavīta* as an additional element. On the right, in the background: warrior on horseback in right profile view. The horse is racing against the hero; it is equipped with crown piece, cheek piece, nose band, two neck bands, reins, saddle and breeching. The rider is holding the reins in his left hand, while a spear is in his right, above his head, pointing to the hero. Nothing can be detected of his garment; elongated ear lobes denoting earrings and bun hairstyle are visible, in turn. In the foreground a four-legged animal of medium size can be observed, its muzzle bent down (a jackal?); it is unclear whether a further animal (a horse head?) stands between this and the figure in the background previously analyzed. Further to the right, two more warriors on horseback run against the hero, one above the other (i.e. behind). The visible components of their harness are crown piece, nose band and reins. Both the warriors show the same attitude: they have the reins in their left hand and a weapon in the right, namely a spear and a sword respectively, which they wield above their heads. Traces of their *dhotīs* rim are visible; earrings and top bun hairstyle are preserved.

Similarly to the panel below, all characters move on an uneven ground.

Panel 3: ascension to heaven. In the centre: hero standing in front view, his hips slightly bent to the left, his right leg stepped backwards and sideways. His right arm is bent at the elbow, the hand resting over the dagger sheath by the side; the left arm is not fully preserved. He wears full attire and ornaments: a *dhotī* with thick rim, fold falling on his legs, and a belt with sheathed dagger, as seen; *yajñopavīta*, necklace, arm bracelets, and large earrings. His hair is arranged in a coiled top bun. A bunch of fruit/flower hangs over his head. Next to him stand six *apsarases*, three on each side. They all are in front view, portrayed in progressively decreasing scale (a prospective device) and in specular attitude, their hips bending towards the outer side of the scene. Those closer to the hero have one arm resting by the side, the other raising a

cāmara over the hero's head. The two maidens beside have both arms in the same position, although the nature of the attribute they lift up is unclear (a different type of *cāmara*?). As to the *apsarases* on the edges of the scene, one of their arms is hidden behind the nymph who flank them, while the other rests by the side, either straight or bent at a right angle. They all wear a *sārī* featuring a large rim and waist band, as well as the traditional fold falling on the legs, with long necklace and earrings as ornaments, and side bun hairstyle.

The figures stand over a sort of short mound.

Two ribbed pillars mark the lateral edges of the scene. From their tops raises a thick wavy motif coiled at the two ends. It outlines a keel-shaped arc, which acts as the upper frame of the panel. Its pinnacle is aligned with the hero below, and with the base of *liṅga* above.

Panel 4: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in three-quarter right view with crossed legs and hand in *añjalimudrā*. His full attire and ornaments are consistent with those displayed in the panels below. Next to him, close to the edge of the scene, an unidentifiable element. In the centre: *yonī-liṅga* on a triple-moulded pedestal. A garland hangs on it. On the left, in the foreground: Nandi in left profile view, crouched with paws bent; a garland/collar is visible around his neck. Behind him, an *pujārī* standing in three-quarter left view. He holds a bell in his left hand, the arm bent at the elbow and oriented forward, and an incense burner/water-pot in his right hand, the arm raised up, towards the *liṅga*. Nothing is visible of his attire and ornaments, while he clearly shows long hair.

Two ribbed pillars mark the lateral edges of the scene. Over them rests a beam on which the topmost section lies.

Frame: irregular and missing at times. Upper edge of type E crowned by a hump-like structure on a base with pearls.

The stele structure displays asymmetrical proportions.

As far as the iconography is concerned, it is worth noting that the battle scene occupies two levels, namely the two lower panels, with one and the same hero being clearly represented on each of them on foot and on horseback respectively. This pattern recurs quite frequently on the stones from Velapur and has been interpreted by Sontheimer as the representation of the hero's upwards progression in social rank. In describing a similar sample, the German scholar maintains that the two-pannelled battle scenes might be actually capturing two different conflicts, the horse and the *chatrī* on the upper one being introduced as the honors emblems that the hero acquired after becoming "a kind of *śiledār*, a *daṇḍanāyaka*",³⁸⁶ in other words a sort of local ruler.

However, in the lack of further confirmation, we believe to be no less plausible that two different stages of one and the same clash may be captured here, the upper one coming first in chronological order, with the hero defeating the enemies forces on horseback before being overpowered by the foot armies. The nature of the alleged animal represented on Panel 2 in the foreground remains obscure, its association with an otherworldly terrific creature, which still may be postulated, being not supported by further elements such as *bhūtas* or other demoniac creatures usually lingering on the battlefields and represented at times on hero-stones (seeno. 47, pl. 60).

No. 49, pl. 62, VELAPUR

Object: four-pannelled hero-stone [local record: VLP 75]

Location: Velapur, Malshiras *tālukā*, Solapur district

Position: standing inside stones repository

Cardinal orientation: ---

Size: max height cm 152, max width cm 75, max thickness cm 14

Notes: tapering upwards; topmost section likely broken.

³⁸⁶ Sontheimer 2004 [1976]: 128, and also Sontheimer 1982b: 269. The scholar refers here to a stele which summarizes several intriguing features: beyond a two-pannelled battle scene, it also displays blood-drinking demons, an iconographic motif that we encountered on another stele: see no. 47, pl. 60.

Panel 1: fight scene. On the left: male figure standing in three-quarter right view in a rather static attitude. His left arm rests by the side (forearm not fully preserved), while the right holds a parasol. The fold of his *dhotī* is visible, as well as his earrings and bun hairstyle. Next to him, the hero stands in three-quarter right view, his legs flexed and stretched apart, the left stepped forward. In his right hand he grabs a dagger in the reverse grip, pointing it forwards; the left arm is raised up, likely to parry his enemy's bow. He wears a *dhotī* with adherent drapery and fold falling on his legs, and a *yajñopavīta*. His ornaments include earrings, arm and wrist bracelets; his hair is tied in a coiled top bun. On the left: three warriors standing next to one another in three-quarter left view. They show similar attitude and features: legs bent and stretched apart, bust and left arm hidden behind the shield, right arm raised up straight holding a lance above their head. Their *dhotī* fold and waist band are neatly preserved, together with earrings as ornaments and bun hairstyle.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the right edge of the scene, partially trespassing on the side frame, stands a parasol bearer in front view. He carries the attribute with both hands. Nothing can be distinguished of his attire and ornaments, apart from hints of elongated ear lobes and bun hairstyle. Next to him, on the left, two warriors on horseback. Both the steeds are at a gallop in left profile view and are equipped with plum, crown piece, front band, nose band, two neck bands, reins, saddle and breeching. Both the warriors have their bust turned in three-quarter left view; they hold the reins in their left hand, while grabbing a spear in their right, above their head. Although the two figures display similar features, we are keen to identify the hero as the right side one, on the ground of details such as his proximity to the parasol (royal symbol), his comparatively larger proportions and his typical coiled bun hairstyle. The two horse raiders are preceded by a couple of foot warriors in three-quarter left view, sharing common attitude and attire. Both have their legs flexed and stretched apart, their bust covered by the shield, their right arm raised up wielding a dagger/sword and a short spear respectively. They wear *dhotīs* and ear ornaments, with a bun as a hairstyle.

Rather than converging towards the centre, as in the majority of samples so far analyzed, the panel narrative develops from right to left. All figures reasonably belong to the hero's faction and are represented in the act of chasing enemy forces who do not actually appear in the panel.

Panel 3: ascension to heaven. In the centre: hero standing in front view, his hips bending towards the left side of the scene. His right hand leans on the waist, while the left arm likely rests free by the side (forearm not clearly preserved). His attire, ornaments and hairstyle are consistent with those displayed in Panel 1, enriched by a belt with sheathed dagger hanging on his right thigh. Four figures in front view flank him: an *apsaras* and a male figure (likely a *gandharva*) on each side. The two *apsaras* stand next to the hero: their hips bend towards the edges of the scene; one of their arms rests by the side holding the *gandharva*'s hand, while the other is raised up waving a *cāmara* over the hero's head. Their garments consist of a *sārī* with large rim and fold falling on the legs; a large necklace and earrings adorn them, their hair being arranged in a bun. The *gandharvas* stand on the edges: as well as the *apsaras*es', their hips bend outwards; both their arms rest along the sides, either holding the maiden's hand or free, although it might be possible that the left side figure is holding some attribute (unidentifiable). They wear a *dhotī* with fold, long earrings and a conical headgear.

A ribbed pillar marks on each side the edge of the panel.

Panel 4: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in three-quarter right view with crossed legs and hands in *añjalimudrā*. His attire, ornaments and hairstyle coincides with those shown in Panel 1. In the centre: *yoni-līṅga* on a triple-moulded pedestal. On the right: *pujārī* standing in front view. His right arm is raised over the *līṅga* grabbing a ritual tool (incense burner/water-pot?), while the left is likely oriented forward holding a bell (not clearly preserved). Nothing can be distinguished of his attire and ornaments, his long braided hair being perfectly visible in turn.

At the edge of the scene stand two ribbed pillars; over them rests a wavy motif which outlines a keel-shaped arc and acting as the upper frame. Its pinnacle is aligned with the *līṅga*, with a fruit/flower bunch hanging above it.

Frame: plain and rather regular in the two lower panels; it progressively turns into an architectural-designed frame as one considers the upper scenes. The topmost section is missing, nonetheless traces of the sun and moon symbols can be observed beyond the wavy motif of the uppermost panel.

The double record of battle scenes on one stele is not an uncommon trait as far as the village of Velapur is concerned. It can be explained as a device to show two different stages in the hero's life: foot warrior below, local ruler above; or alternatively as two different stages within the same battle (see also no. 48, pl. 61).

No. 50, pl. 63, VELAPUR

Object: four-panelled hero-stone [local record: VLP 44]

Location: Velapur, Malshiras *tālukā*, Solapur district

Position: standing inside stones repository

Cardinal orientation: ---

Size: max height cm 160, max width cm 94, max thickness cm 14

Notes: tapering upwards; lower panels worn.

Panel 1: fight scene. On the left: three warriors horseback in right profile view next to one another. Nothing is preserved of the horses harness, apart from traces of reins. The raiders have their right arm raised up wielding a sword over their head. Hints of their earrings and top bun hairstyle can be observed, while no details are available as regards their garments. On the left: two figures of horseback in left profile view. Traces of reins, cheek piece and nose band are displayed by the horse in the lead, while also two neck bands and breeching are preserved on the other. The first of the two bears a wide banner. No details can be recognized of his attire and ornaments, the top un hairstyle being visible instead. The figure behind him can be reasonably identified as the hero on the ground of his comparatively larger proportions and of the fact that is preceded by the banner bearer. He holds the reins in his left, while right is raised up straight grabbing a spear. All figures move on an uneven ground.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: parasol bearer in three-quarter right view. His legs are flexed, the left stepped forward. Just a detail can be detected of his attire, namely the fold of the *dhotī* on his legs. In front of him, a figure that we may recognize as the hero: riding a horse at a gallop in right profile view, he has both his arms raised up and grabs in each hand a sword (?) over his head. His bust is turned to the front. Scanty details of his ornaments can be noticed: arm bracelets and earrings. His hair is arranged in a wide bun. The visible parts of horse harness consist here of reins and neck bands. Next to him, slightly in the background, another figure on horseback in right profile view. He grabs with both hands a long vertical attribute, which can be likely interpreted as a banner shaft rather than a weapon, although the drapery is not preserved. The horse harness is lost, if not for the reins. On the right: three warriors on horseback next to one another in three-quarter left profile view. Crown piece, nose band, cheek piece and reins can be still distinguished as the horse harness. The three raiders show the same attitude: they hold the reins in their left, while the right arm is lifted up wielding a sword above their head. Nothing is preserved of their garments and ornaments, the bun hairstyle being the only visible feature. All figures move on an uneven ground.

Panel 3: ascension to heaven. In the centre: hero standing in front view. Left arm bent at the elbow, the forearm turned upwards and oriented gently to the female figure beside, apparently offering something to her; right arm likely by the side (not fully preserved). He wears a *dhotī* with large rim and fold ganging over his legs, a belt with sheathed dagger and *yajñopavīta*. His ornaments consist of earrings and arm bracelets, while his hairstyle corresponds to a wide back bun. Four *apsarases* stand next to him in front view, two on each side. Those on the left have one of their arms raised up straight, holding a *cāmara* (?), while the other rests down along the side with a bunch of garlands in their hand. Those on the right have one arm similarly lifted up to wave a *cāmara* near the hero's head, with the other arm leans free by the side or is bent at the elbow and joins with the hero's hand (to hold it or collect something?). The celestial maidens share the same garments and ornaments: a long *sārī* with fold almost touching the ground, long necklace and earrings, the hair tied in a side bun.

Two pillars mark the scene edges, with a wavy motif resting over them. It outlines a keel-shaped arc and acts as the upper frame. Its pinnacle is aligned with the hero below and the *linga* above.

Panel 4: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in three-quarter right view with crossed legs and hands in *añjalimudrā*. His attire, ornaments and hairstyle are consistent with the details preserved on the panels below. Behind him, at the left edge of the scene stands a figure in three-quarter right view, whose

sex cannot be ascertained. He/she as both arms tucked into his/her chest, holding an attribute which rests on the right shoulder (garlands?). *Dhotī* and earrings are the visible elements of his/her attire and ornaments, together with a bun hairstyle. In the lack of further details, this personage may be tentatively identified as an attendant of the hero. In the centre: *yonī-liṅga* on a multiple-moulded pedestal. On the right: a male figure stands in three-quarter left view, performing a ceremony. He raises an oblong ritual object over the *liṅga* with his right hand; the left is bent at the elbow, oriented to the *liṅga* but resting by the side likely grabbing another ritual object. Next to him, in the foreground, Nandi crouched with paws bent; he displays neck garlands. At the right edge of the scene stands another *pujārī* in front view. Both his arms are oriented towards the *liṅga*, the right lifted up, the left resting by the side bent at the elbow. He holds a ritual attribute in each hand. Nothing is preserved of the two priests' attire and ornaments apart from their elongated ear lobes indicating earrings and their bun hairstyle. Two pillars mark the limits of the scene.

Frame: thin, irregular, and at times missing in the two lower panels. Upper edge of type D crowned by a spherical element.

The depiction of two fight scenes on one and the same stele takes here a further connotation. The lack of any defined listel to separate the two-panelled 1s seems to suggest at a first sight that we are in the presence of a continuous narrative. Observations, however, confirm that the hero is represented twice, once on each panel, introduced by royal symbols such as the banner and the parasol.

In other similar samples analyzed (no. 48, pl. 61 and no. 49, pl. 63), the hero's attitude differs according to the panel: he is represented on foot *or* on horseback. Some scholars conclude that the two scenes may depict two different battles wherein the progressive social evolution of the hero is displayed, from simple warrior to a sort of local ruler.³⁸⁷ This interpretation, however, does not perfectly suit the case of the stele under examination here, where the hero invariably appears on horseback accompanied by his royal emblems, and where the two panels, which show striking similarities, are arranged in a chiasmus. On the lowest we find indeed the hero and his acolytes depicted on the left, with the enemies arrayed on the right; the same pattern is carefully replicated on the panel above but in a reverse order, the hero and his entourage proceeding from the right against the enemy forces deployed on the left. Scarce details distinguish the two scenes, namely the hero's weapons (two swords on the upper panel rather than a spear as in the lower one), and the presence/lack of a parasol bearer beyond the banner bearer, who appears in both scenes. It remains difficult to ascertain whether the two panels actually portray two different episodes in the warlike career of the hero, or if one and the same battle is represented as from different perspectives.

No. 51, pl. 64, KIKLI

Object: three-panelled hero-stone

Location: Kikli, Wai *tālukā*, Satara district

Position: standing in a public square beside a banyan tree

Cardinal orientation: facing East

Size: n.a.

Notes: carving on the base; tapering upwards.

Panel 1: fight scene. On the left: hero on horseback. Horse in right profile view, reared up. Its harness consists of crown piece, cheek piece, nose band, reins and check reins (?). The hero has is bust turned to the front. He wields a sword with his right hand, the arm raised up straight, while grabbing the reins with the left. He wears a *dhotī* (upper band around the waist) and is adorned with wrist bracelets and earrings. His hair is tied in a back knot. A spear in midair seems to hit his head, but it cannot be ascribed specifically to any of the other figures in the scene, who still grab their respective weapons in the hands. On the right: two warriors on horseback, one above the other (i.e. behind). They are both represented in the same way. Their horses reared up, in left profile view; displaying crown piece, cheek piece, nose

³⁸⁷ Sontheimer 2004 [1976]: 128; Sontheimer 1982b: 269. For the proposal of an alternative interpretation, see here no. 49, pl. 62.

band, reins, check reins (?) and even saddle (on the foreground horse) as their harness. Both the raiders hold the reins with their left hand, while the right bears a spear above their heads, horizontally. The trace of their bun hairstyle is the only detail preserved of their attire and ornamental apparatus. Below the ground level on which the battle is taking place, i.e. on the rough-cut base of the stele, a dead horse is represented. It rests on his left side, portrayed as seen from above, as the perspective given on its legs suggest: the forelegs are visibly crouched, the hind legs stretched backward. His muzzle and reins lean on the ground.

Panel 2: ascension to heaven. In the centre: hero standing in three-quarter right view. Legs bent and stretched apart, the left stepped forward, the right backward. Both his arms are raised to the shoulder height and embrace the figures who flank him around their shoulders. He wears a *dhōṭī* which large fold falls between his legs and *yajñopavīta*. His ornament set consists of large flat earrings; his hair is arranged in a back bun, his headline being rather marked. The two *apsarases* next to him, one on each side, are represented in specular position. Both are standing in three-quarter view, turned towards the hero. One of their legs is bent, indicating their dynamic attitude, while the other is not given. They embrace the hero with one arm, the other holding a *cāmara* trespassing on the lateral frame (right edge *apsaras*' not preserved). They show a *sārī* with a wide fold hanging down, and a belt; earrings and a back bun hairstyle (with a marked headline as in the case of the hero). Facial features are notably well preserved on this panel.

Panel 3: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in three-quarter right view, with crossed legs and hands in *añjalimudrā*. His garments, ornaments and hairstyle are consistent with observed in the panels below. In the centre: *liṅga* on an architecturally refined pedestal. A garland rests over it. On the right: an *pujārīn* three-quarter left side view. Left arm bent at the elbow, resting by the side while holding a bell; right arm bent likewise, with the forearm oriented upwards, raised over the *liṅga*. He likely holds a flask in the right hand. His attire cannot be ascertained; he clearly displays earrings and very long hair.

Frame: plain and regular. Crowned by *akalaśa* with base, belly and handles B1 (?), on edge of type D.

The carving on the base makes of this specimen a rare example in the scope of the specimens we analyzed.

No. 52, pl. 65, KIKLI

Object: three-panelled hero-stone

Location: Kikli, Wai *tālukā*, Satara district

Position: standing in a public square beside a banyan tree

Cardinal orientation: facing East

Size: n.a.

Panel 1: fight scene. On the left: hero standing in three-quarter right view. Legs flexed and stretched apart, the left stepped forward, as well as his bust, protruding to the enemy. His right hand grabs *akaṭṭara* (a weapon clearly recognizable also in no. 88, pl. 101), the arm bent at a right angle. The left is raised to shoulder height, bent at the elbow with forearm oriented upwards; his hand seems to grasp the enemy's face, but more likely he holds him by his hair. He wears a *dhōṭī*, wide open as a result of his movements, with a thick rim. His ornament consists of earrings and arm bracelet (just scanty traces of it), while his hairstyle is given by a large back bun. On the right: warrior standing in three-quarter left view. His legs slightly flexed, his bust and left arm covered by the shield. His right arm is not preserved, but it was reasonably raised up straight to hold the spear which is represented horizontally above his head. No further details of him are visible apart from his top bun.

Panel 2: ascension to heaven. In the centre: hero sitting in front view with right leg resting on the ground, bent inward, while the left is bent at the knee, oriented upwards, with the foot leaning on the ground. Both his arms (scantly preserved) seem to be bent, the elbows resting on the thigh while the hands hold the arms of the maidens next to him. *Yajñopavīta* and necklace are further visible in this panel beyond the attributes already observed in the scene below. Two *apsarases* flank him, one on each side, portrayed in a specular way. They stand in front view, their hips bent to the external side of the panel, close to which they also hold a *cāmara* (trespassing on the frame), while the other arm is not clearly preserved but must

be embracing somehow the hero. They wear a *sārī* and possibly a belt, given the two bands around their waist, having large earrings as ornaments. Their hair is arranged in a lateral bun.

Panel 3: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in three-quarter right view, with crossed legs and hands in *añjalimudrā*. Both his attire and ornaments do not display any change compared to the other scenes, while his bun hairstyle shows here a strip on the headline and on the knot itself. In the centre: *yonī-līṅga* on a triple-moulded pedestal. On the right: an *pujārī* sitting in three-quarter left side view. His left arm is bent by the side, the forearm oriented forward while holding a ritual object; the left is not preserved, but some hints suggest it to be raised above the *līṅga*. His hair is coiled on the crown; he has a beard.

Frame: plain and regular. Crowned by a *kalāśa* with base, belly and handles D, on edge of type A (?).

No. 53, pl. 66, KIKLI

Object: three-panelled hero-stone

Location: Kikli, Wai *tālukā*, Satara district

Position: standing

Cardinal orientation: facing East

Size: n.a.

Notes: carving on the base; tapering upwards.

Panel 1: fight scene. On the left: two warriors standing in three-quarter right view, their right legs bent, the left not given. Their busts and right arms are hidden behind the shield, the left arms being not visible as well. They wear a *dhotī* and have large flat earrings as ornaments, with high back bun as a hairstyle. On the right: hero standing in three-quarter left side view. His legs are flexed, the right stepped forward, put sideways in front of the enemy; the left backward. His arm is bent at the elbow, the forearm forward grabbing a weapon which is now just fragmentary (probably a dagger); the right is in the same position, slightly raised towards the enemy's throat, to which he seems to be pointing some other weapon (or his clenched fist, at least). He wears a *dhotī* with a thick rim, open wide consistently with his movement. His earrings and bun hairstyle with string are clearly visible.

The facial features of all the figures are remarkably preserved.

Panel 2: ascension to heaven. In the centre: hero in three-quarter left side view, kneeling on the left leg, the right firmly stepped forward. His arms are raised laterally, embracing the maidens next to him around their back. His attire is consistent with that displayed in the panel below, apart from showing a further large piece of cloth resting on his right shoulder, falling on his belly and turning around his left underarm (*yajñopavīta*?). Beyond the other elements, he wears also a strip on his headline. Two *apsaras* flank him, one on each side. They stand in front view, their hips slightly bent towards the outer side of the scene. With one of their arms they embrace the hero, and keep the other by the side, bent at the elbow to hold an attribute: a *gadā* in the case of the right side *apsaras*, unidentifiable in the case of the left side one (right arm worn). Both wear a *sārī* (fold falling among the legs of the right side *apsaras*) with a thick rim, and a belt, with earrings and necklace as ornaments. Their hair is arranged in a top back bun.

Panel 3: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: an *pujārī* standing in three-quarter right side view. His legs are stretched apart suggesting his movement forward (i.e. towards the centre). His right arm is bent at the elbow and rests by the side, the forearm oriented forward; hand not preserved. Left arm raised straight above the *līṅga*, holding a big size ritual tool (vessel?). He wears a *kaupīna*, large protruding earrings, arm and wrist bracelets as ornaments. He has long thick hair. In the centre: *yonī-līṅga* on a triple moulded pedestal. It is unclear whether a further element hangs above the *līṅga*, beyond the object held by the *ācārya*. On the right: hero sitting in three-quarter left view, his right leg bent at the knee, which is raised upwards; his hands in *añjalimudrā*. His full attire is perfectly preserved: *dhotī*, belt, wrist and arm bracelets, earrings, with a black bun as a hairstyle. The two figures' facial features are neatly visible on this panel too, from their full lips to eyebrows.

Frame: plain and regular. Crowned by *akalāśa* with base, belly and handle B1, on edge of type E.

The most original feature of this stele lies in the reverse position assigned to each personage within the figured area compared to the pattern shown on the specimens we analyzed so far. In this respect, the cloth

leaning on the hero's shoulder in Panel 2 acquires particular relevance. By interpreting it as a *yajñopavīta*, indeed, one should take into due consideration that its position would be rather unconventional: the tradition wants it to cross over the left shoulder and turn around the right waist.

No. 54, pl. 67, RAJAPURI

Object: four-panelled hero-stone

Location: Rajapuri, Satara *tālukā*, Satara district

Position: standing in cave I, Śrī Kārtik Svāmī *mandirākaḍe* complex

Cardinal orientation: facing East

Size: n.a.

Panel 1: fight scene. On the left: hero standing in three quarter right view, with legs flexed and stretched apart. His right arm is raised, the forearm oriented upwards while wielding a sword which trespasses on the frame above. His left arm holds in front a shield. His attire and ornaments are particularly rich: a *dhotī*, with upper hem, bottom rim and fold clearly visible; a belt, with a sheath falling on his right thigh; *yajñopavīta*; anklets, waist and arm bracelets; necklace and likely earrings. He has a short haircut. Remarkably, even his sharp facial features is well preserved, to the point that it seems possible to distinguish a frown. On the right, in the foreground: two warriors in left profile view, kneeling. Their busts and arms are completely hidden behind the shields, which unusually show a disk decoration all around the edges and in the centre. Nothing is visible of the warrior's bodies, weapons and ornaments apart from their heads. They likely have a short haircut. Above them (i.e. in the background), two other warriors on horseback, in left profile view. Only the right horse is fully represented, his harness including nose-band, reins, breast collar and check reins (the first two being identifiable on the left horse as well). Both the riders have one arm raised up wielding a sword which trespasses on the frame above; the right side warrior holds the reins with the other hand (the left). No details of their garments and ornaments can be distinguished; their hair is apparently short.

The ground level of this scene is represented as independent from the bottom frame.

Panel 2: ascension to heaven. In the centre: hero sitting in front view inside an elaborated palanquin. He has crossed legs, his hands resting on the knees. Less details can be distinguished of his attire compared to those in the panel below, but all consistent with them (*dhotī* and beads necklace). An oblong element hangs from the palanquin ceiling on his right leg (?). The palanquin displays thick moulded columns and a crenellated roofing triangular in shape. A standing *apsaras* flanks him on each side. They are in specular position: both in front view, they support the palanquin with one hand (the other not clearly distinguishable). They wear a *sārī* (fold, upper band and rim well preserved), necklace and earrings; their hair must be tied back in a way which is not identifiable from the front side.

Panel 3: left side highly worn. *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left, in the foreground: traces of Nandi (?) crouched in right profile view with paws bent on a pedestal (?). Element in the background not decipherable. In the centre: *yoni-līṅga* on a double-moulded pedestal, apparently in midair. Hints of a garland above it. On the right: *pujārī*(?) sitting in three-quarter left view, with crossed legs and hands in *añjalimudrā* (?). Scanty traces of a necklace, earrings and long hairstyle may be noticed.

Frame: rather thick. Plain on the sides, while the horizontal fillets show traces of etchings. The fillet between the two upper panels is divided in two halves by a line: on the lower half a garland bend (?) can be seen. Topmost section slightly concave, its shape reproducing a niche with elliptical arc. Inside it a *kalaśa* is carved, with base, belly and handles D, on edge of type A.

No. 55, pl. 68, RAJAPURI

Object: two-panelled hero-stone

Location: Rajapuri, Satara *tālukā*, Satara district

Position: standing in cave I, Śrī Kārtik Svāmī *mandirākaḍe* complex

Cardinal orientation: facing East

Size: n.a.

Notes: the stele is broken in three parts, which have been replaced in the correct position

Panel 1: fight scene. On the left: hero standing in three-quarter right view. His legs are flexed and stretched apart, the right oriented backward almost in midair, the left stepped forward. His right arm is raised and bent, with the forearm oriented upwards to hold a sword (trespassing on the frame above); the left holds a shield. His attire and ornaments consist of *dhotī* (its upper band and fold between the legs are recognizable), *yajñopavīta*, anklets, wrist bracelets, necklace and earrings. He seems to have short hair, the hairline covered by a strip. On the right: two warriors in specular attitude compared to the hero: they stand in left profile view, their legs likewise bent and stretched apart, but firmly on the ground. Their busts and left arms are hidden by the shields, while the right is lifted up straight wielding a sword (similarly trespassing on the frame). They show a *dhotī*, anklets, wrist bracelets and earrings. They have their hair tied in a back knot.

Panel 2: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in front view on a well preserved stool, with legs in *baddhakoṇāsana* and hands in *añjalimudrā*. His attire and ornaments do not include the *yajñopavīta* here, but are enriched by arm bracelets. His hairstyle is consistent with that displayed in the panel below. In the centre: Nandi in left profile view, crouched with paws bent on a pedestal. Above his back a *liṅga* on a pedestal, on which a garland hangs. On the right: *pujārī* sitting on a stool in three-quarter left view, with legs crossed (?). His left arm is bent, the forearm oriented forward while holding a ritual object (vessel/bell?); his right is raised over the *liṅga* grabbing another attribute (vessel/bell?) in his hand. His garment is not preserved; he wears earrings, wrist and arm bracelets as ornaments. His hair is tied in a back bun and has a beard.

Frame: plain and regular. Crowned by a *kalaśa* with base, belly and handles B1 (?), on edge of type B with coil decoration on the left lobe.

No. 56, pl. 69, RAJAPURI

Object: four-panelled hero-stone

Location: Rajapuri, Satara *tālukā*, Satara district

Position: standing in cave III, Śrī Kārtik Svāmī *mandirākaḍe* complex

Cardinal orientation: facing East

Size: n.a.

Panel 1: dead hero. Hero lying supine on the ground, captured as seen from above. Right leg bent at the knee and crossed over the left. Arms by the sides. He wears a *dhotī*, with thick anklets, arm bracelets, necklace and earrings as ornaments. His hair is tied in a bun, the hairline marked by a strip.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: hero standing in three-quarter right view, with legs bent and stretched apart, slightly in midair to suggest a movement forward. Right arm bent and raised to shoulder height, the forearm oriented upwards wielding a sword; left arm holding a shield which shows a double row of disks as edge decoration. He wears a variety of *dhotī* (with fall hanging between his legs) and a belt; a floating double row of beads/disks encircles his thighs, probably the decorative motif of his garment rim. His ornament consists of thick anklets, wrist and arm bracelets, two necklaces, earrings, with a ring/strip around his forehead and a bun as to his hairstyle. Next to him, leaning against the left edge of the panel, stands a male (?) figure in right profile view. His right arm is bent at a right angle resting close to the chest, the left arm is not visible. Portrayed in a smaller scale, he looks up to the hero. He wears a long *dhotī*, as well as wrist bracelets and likely a necklace; no details can be seen of his hairstyle. This figure, who apparently does not display any hostile attitude towards the hero, may be considered perhaps as his attendant. On the right: two rows of enemies, one above the other (i.e. behind). To the lower belong two warriors standing in three-quarter left view, their legs stretched apart and bent suggesting a fast movement forward. Both grab a sword/dagger with their left arm raised and stretched out, while the left either holds a shield (in the case of the left side figure) or is not visible at all (right side figure). To the row above belong three warriors in three-quarter left view, whose legs are not given. Their busts and left hands are covered by the shields (decorated by a double row of disks, as the hero's one) while their right arms are lifted up holding swords and clubs (the latter by right side warrior). These five figures seem to share the same hairstyle, apparently having their hair tied thanks to a strings around their forehead (no buns visible probably due to prospective reasons). They similarly wear earrings and wrist bracelets; the

dhotī can be recognized only on the bottom right corner figure. All the weapons represented in this panel trespass on the lateral and above frames.

Panel 3: ascension to heaven. In the centre: hero sitting in front view inside a palanquin, with crossed legs and hands in *añjalimudrā*. His visible attire includes here the *yajñopavīta*, beyond necklace and earrings, while his hairstyle is consistent with that displayed in the panels below. The palanquin shows a refined structure, topped by a dome with finial, and is carried by a male figure bent down, almost kneeling under it; the structure rests on his head, his arms raised upwards with the hands grabbing on to the bottom edge. Next to the palanquin stand four *apsarases*, two on each side, in three-quarter view turned towards the centre of the scene. They all show the same attitude: one arm bent at the elbow, kept along the side, the other not visible; the two *apsarases* closer to the palanquin support it, while the remaining two might be holding some attribute (?). They all wear a *sārī*, and are bejeweled, the ornaments including anklets, bracelets, necklace and large earrings. Their hairstyle consists of a back knot.

Panel 4: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in three-quarter right view on a cushion, his right leg resting on it, bent inward, the left raised with the knee oriented upwards. Right arm bent at the elbow, resting in front as if in *añjalimudrā*, while the left is not clearly visible (maybe raised straight above the *liṅga*, in the background?). His attire does not show any detail inconsistent with those already observed. Next to him, standing beside the left edge of the panel, a male figure in three-quarter right view. Only his right arm is given, bent at the elbow, resting along the side. Traces of *dhotī*, necklace and earrings are preserved, with back bun hairstyle. As in Panel 1, he may be identified as the hero's attendant. In the centre: Nandi crouched with paws bent, in left side view. His neck is adorned with garlands. Above his head, the *liṅga* on a pedestal. On the right: an *pujārī* standing in three-quarter left view, his bust slightly flexed forward as to the presence of Nandi between himself and the *liṅga*. His left arm is bent at the elbow and rests along the side while holding a bell in the hand; the right is bent likewise, the forearm oriented upwards and pushed close to the *liṅga*, grabbing an unidentifiable attribute. He likely wears a *dhotī*, judging from the band around his waist, and displays elongated ear lobes, wrist and arm bracelets. His hair is arranged on the crown of his head in a short hairstyle.

Frame: regular except for the lowest fillet, curving. The lateral edges and the two upper fillets are decorated with a pattern in high relief consisting of a series of spheres inscribed within lozenges, with horizontal listels to separate each module from the other. Lowest fillet decorated with tangential triangles. Second lowest fillet devoid of decorations (weapons trespassing from the panel below). Crowned by a *kalaśa* with base and belly C2, handle D, on edge of type B.

No. 57, pl. 70, RAJAPURI

Object: four-panelled hero-stone

Location: Rajapuri, Satara *tālukā*, Satara district

Position: standing, under *Audumbar* tree (*Ficus racemosa*), nearby Śrī Kārtik Svāmī *mandirākaḍe* complex)

Cardinal orientation: facing North

Size: max height cm 76, max width cm 34, max thickness cm 15

Notes: highly worn.

Panel 1: highly worn. Fight scene? Four (?) figures alternatively in front or three-quarter view seem to wield their spears horizontally above their heads. The figure close to the left edge has both his arms raised up straight and stretched out. The right edge figure has one arm bent at the elbow, by the side. A fifth figure might be lying on the ground with legs in midair, right below the central figure.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: hero standing in three-quarter right view. His legs fragmentary, slightly flexed; both his arms are stretched forward holding a shield to parry the enemies' bow. Traces of necklace and bun hairstyle are scantily preserved. On the bottom left corner an oblong element seems to be standing next to him. In the centre: highly damaged figure in left profile view (?). He apparently holds a spear which points horizontally to the hero's head. No further details can be safely ascribed to this figure. On the right: warrior in three-quarter right view. His bust and left arm are hidden behind the shield, while his right arm is raised up wielding a spear. Traces of his bun hairstyle and earrings remain.

Panel 3: ascension to heaven. In the centre: hero sitting in front view inside a palanquin with crossed legs and hand in *añjalimudrā*. No details can be detected apart from his elongated ear lobes confirming he must be wearing some earrings, and a waist band suggesting a *dhotī*. The palanquin seems to have a refined covering. He is flanked on the two sides by four standing figures, reasonably the *apsarases*. They are shown in a three-quarter side view, turned towards the centre. The two closer to the palanquin likely support it with two (?) hands. Nothing is decipherable of their attire and ornaments.

Panel 4: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in three-quarter right view on a stool, cross-legged and hands joint in front of his chest (in *añjalimudrā*?). Traces of *dhotī* can be seen, as well as his torque and his back bun hairstyle. In the centre: Nandi (scantly preserved) in left profile view, crouched with paws bent on a large grooved pedestal. A *yonī-līṅga* in side view rests on his back on a flat base. On the right: *pujārī* standing in three-quarter right view. His right arm is bent at the elbow and rests by the side while grabbing an unidentifiable object; his left raised towards the *līṅga*, holding some ritual tool. He likely wears a *dhotī* (its waist band visible), and has his hair arranged on the crown of his head in a short hairstyle.

Frame: regular and plain on the bottom and side edges. Top edge thickens in the centre; a horizontal line splits it into two halves. Crowned by *akalaśa* with base, belly and handle D on edge of type A (?).

This stele seems to display an uncommon feature, i.e. the representation of two fight scenes, something suggested by Panel 1 - despite its very poor conservation status – through the presence of spears held horizontally in the upper section of the scene.

Such a type of iconographic choice is more frequently encountered on larger scale hero-stones (see our examples from Velapur).

No. 58, pl. 71, RAJAPURI

Object: two-panelled (?) hero-stone

Location: Rajapuri, Satara *tālukā*, Satara district

Position: standing, under *Audumbar* tree (*Ficus racemosa*), nearby Śrī Kārtik Svāmī *mandirākaḍe* complex)

Cardinal orientation: facing North

Size: max height cm 71, max width cm 37, max thickness cm 16

Notes: highly worn; only the two upper panels are preserved.

Panel 1: half buried. Ascension to heaven. In the centre: hero standing in front view. With his left arm he embraces the figure who flanks him around her shoulder, while the right is bent at the elbow and rests by the side. His attire and ornaments are well preserved: he wears a *dhotī* and likely a belt, necklace and large earrings. He shows a bun hairstyle, enriched by a string on his headline. Next to him four *apsarases* stand in front view, two on each side. They embrace each other around their shoulders. The maiden on the right edge of the scene has her left arm likely resting on her waist, probably echoed at the origin by the specular figure on the opposite edge, whose arm is not preserved. They all are richly adorned: large flat earrings, short and long necklaces, wrist bracelets (displayed just on the right edge figure). They wear a *sārī*, which upper thick band of cloth is clearly visible on their waist. Their hairstyle consists of a wide bun, with a string marking their headline. Interestingly enough, all the facial features of these figures are comparatively well preserved.

Panel 2: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in three-quarter right view on a stool, with crossed legs and hands in *añjalimudrā*. His rich set of ornaments is fully visible and consistent with that displayed in the panel below, enriched by an arm bracelet. In the centre: *yonī-līṅga* in side view on a architecturally refined pedestal. On the right: Nandi crouched in left profile view with bent paws. His left, who is located right beyond the protruding section of the *yonī*, is turned to the front. His neck and forehead are adorned with garlands. Next to him, standing on the right edge of the scene, an *pujārī* in left side view. Both his arms are stretched forward to the *līṅga*, grabbing a bell in the left hand and an undefinable tool in the right. He wears a *kaupīna*, and wrist bracelet and large flat earrings as ornaments. He shows a long beard as well as thick hair on the crown (right edge of the panel missing, but probably long hair at the origin). Above the *līṅga* hangs an elaborated floral decoration.

Frame: thick, regular and plain. Crowned by *akalaśa* with base, belly and handles D, on edge of type F.

No. 59, pl. 72, LIMPANGAON

Object: three-panelled hero-stone

Location: Limpangaon, Shrigonda *tālukā*, Ahmednagar district

Position: laying on the ground in a field adjoining Śrī Siddhdeśvar temple

Cardinal orientation: ---

Size: max height cm 97, max width cm 20, max thickness cm 15

Notes: tapering upwards; the stele was found covered with waste materials in a field where recent maintenance excavations had been conducted. No barriers separate the field from the temple premises.

Panel 1: the spatial arrangement of the panel is unexpected, the scene being represented as rotated by 45° to the left. Dead (?) hero. On the left (i.e. on the bottom): hero lying supine on the ground, in three-quarter right view. Both his legs are bent upwards. Right arm flexed at a right angle, the forearm oriented upwards while grabbing in the hand an unidentifiable weapon (?), thick and short. Left arm straight, raised backward as to protect himself. He seems to wear a *dhotī*, of which only the upper part is preserved (unless to consider it as a *kaupīna*, that would not find any parallel in the other panels); a necklace is the only piece of ornament preserved. His hair is tied in a bun. On the right (i.e. above): a figure on horseback in left profile view tramples on the hero's body. The rider leans over the horse and looks down, at the hero. His left arm holds the reins, while the right (not visible) must be grabbing the item portrayed near his head, a parasol/ a plough (?). Traces of his *dhotī* and arm bracelets are visible. His hairstyle consists of a back knot.

Panel 2: ascension to heaven. In the centre: hero standing in three-quarter right view. Legs flexed and stretched apart. Arms raised to embrace the two flanking figures around their back. He wears a *dhotī* (its fold falling between his legs), and a belt which annex part rests on his right thigh (sheathed dagger?). Hairstyle and ornaments reflect what observed in the panel below, to which traces of earrings should be added. The *apsarases* by his sides are in specular attitude, turned in three quarter-view towards the hero. They embrace him with one arm (over his shoulder, in the case of the left side maiden, around his back in the other), while the arm closer to the frame is bent, with the forearm oriented upwards likely holding a *cāmara* (not clearly preserved if not for its stick). They wear a *sārī* (with fold clearly recognizable); their ornaments are not preserved. Their bun hairstyle seems to be enriched by a hairline strip.

Panel 3: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in front view in *padmāsana*, with hands in *añjalimudrā*. Attire, ornaments and hairstyle match with what described above. In the centre: Nandi crouched with paws bent; his hump is visible, as well as an ornament around it and his neck (bell garland?). On his head a *yoni-līṅga* on a double-moulded pedestal. On the right: *pujārī* sitting in three-quarter left view in *padmāsana*. His left arm is bent at a right angle and holds a bell; the right is raised above to the *līṅga* holding an unidentifiable tool. His *dhotī* fold falls in front of his legs. He is adorned with a necklace and ear ornaments. His hair is arranged in a *śikhā*.

Frame: plain and regular. Crowned by *akalaśa* with base A, belly and handles D, on edge of type D.

No. 60, pl. 73, LIMPANGAON

Object: three-panelled hero-stone

Location: Limpangaon, Shrigonda *tālukā*, Ahmednagar district

Position: standing on the North wall surrounding Śrī Siddhdeśvar temple

Cardinal orientation: facing South

Size: max height cm 85, max width cm 45, max thickness cm 17

Notes: topmost section missing.

Panel 1: fight scene. In the centre, from the bottom: male figure (the hero) prone on the ground in three-quarter right view. Right leg bent, calf oriented upwards; left leg not given. Right arm likely by the side, while the left supports the torso forcefully lifted off the ground by another figure: the scene captures the moment soon before the hero's throat is cut at the hand of his enemy. Traces of *dhotī*, necklace and earrings can be noticed. His hair is tied in a top knot, grabbed by his foe. A warrior stands astride him in

three-quarter right view, the right leg slightly flexed, the left not given. His right arm is bent, holding a dagger (?) in front of his chest, above the hero's head, that meanwhile his left hand is grabbing and lifting up by the hair. The fold of his *dhotī* is seen falling between his leg and the hero's head. Elongated ear lobes are preserved, as well as his bun hairstyle. Next to the hero and his slaughterer, four other warriors stand, two on each side in three-quarter right view turned to the centre of the scene. Each couple is composed by figures sharing the same attitude. On the left: the two have their legs slightly flexed, while their arms are bent, holding a spear horizontally in front of their chest. Hints of *dhotī* and earrings are visible; as to the hairstyle, both the bun and the string which ties it are preserved. On the right: the two have are in a rather static posture; their torso and left arm is hidden behind the shield, while the right is raised straight upwards, grabbing a spear above their head (slightly trespassing on the frame). The same attire and ornaments described for the other figures can be inferred from the scanty traces, enriched by a wrist bracelet.

Panel 2: ascension to heaven. In the centre: hero standing in three-quarter right view, his legs bent and stretched apart suggesting a leap. His arms are raised to embrace the figures beside him around their shoulders. Details of his *dhotī* drapery, of his earrings and of his lateral knot hairstyle are remarkably preserved; scanty traces of a belt can be seen. Two *apsarases* flank him, one on either side. They are in a rather symmetric position: in front view, their legs slightly stretched apart and flexed. One of their arms embraces the hero behind his back, the other holds an attribute that can be recognized as a *cāmara* only in the case of the right side maiden, whereas the left side attribute is scarcely preserved. *Sārī* with a broad fold, belt, earrings and a wide lateral bun are represented.

Panel 3: top section missing. *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting with hands in *añjalimudrā*, the legs exact position being not identifiable. His bust is turned in front view. He is adorned with wrist and arm bracelets, necklace and earrings. His hairstyle is consistent with that displayed in the panels below. In the centre: *liṅga* on a multiple-moulded pedestal. On the right: *pujārī* standing in three-quarter left view. Left arm bent at a right angle holding a bell; right arm raised up towards the *liṅga*, with an unidentifiable attribute (fragmentary). He wears a *kaupīna* and ear ornaments, and has long hair.

No. 61, pl. 74, NERE

Object: two-panelled hero-stone

Location: Nere, Mulshi *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; Śiva temple, left aedicule

Cardinal orientation: facing East

Size: max height cm 125, max width cm 43, max thickness cm 11

Notes: coated with red lead; traces of oil.

Panel 1: portray of the hero. Hero standing in three-quarter right view. His legs are slightly bent and stretched apart, the left stepped forward. His left arm is bent at the elbow, holding a shield which covers his left flank; his right is likewise bent at the elbow, stretched out with forearm oriented upwards while wielding a sword. He likely wears a short *dhotī* and a belt; a piece of cloth hangs from his left shoulder, but it is unclear whether it corresponds to the *yajñopavīta*. A necklace and small size circular earrings adorn him. His hairstyle consists of a back bun. The figure is carved in high relief.

Panel 2: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting on a cushion (?) in three-quarter right view with crossed legs (the right bent inwards and resting on the cushion, the left crossed over and hanging down); hands in *añjalimudrā*. No details are visible of his attire and ornaments, apart from traces of bun hairstyle on the left. In the centre: Nandi crouched in right profile view, his head turned to the front. Above his back an unidentifiable structure (?) irregular in shape on which a *liṅga* with thick pedestal rests. On the right: *pujārī* standing in three-quarter left view, his left arm (scanty traces preserved) bent at a right angle along the side, holding some tool; his right one bent likewise but raised forward over the *liṅga*. No details can be detected of his attire nor of his ornaments, although hints of elongated ear lobes are given.

Frame: no proper frames are represented. The lower scene is devoid of any lateral edge. Crowned by *akalaśa* with base, belly and handles D, on edge of type F, which explicitly represents the covering of the shrine where the worship *śivaliṅga* scene of the panel below is set.

A local devotee referred to this stele by the name “Mahimba” and described it as one of the two guardian deities of the village (together with “Pahimba”, see no. 62, pl. 75).³⁸⁸

No. 62, pl. 75, NERE

Object: three-panelled hero-stone

Location: Nere, Mulshi *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; Śiva temple, right aedicule

Cardinal orientation: facing East

Size: max height cm 160, max width cm 48, max thickness cm 14

Notes: highly worn; coated with vermilion; traces of oil.

Panel 1: portray of the hero. Hero standing in three-quarter right view. Legs slightly flexed and stretched apart, the right almost in midair, the left firmly on the ground. With both the arms he holds a long *gadā* provided with a protruding element on the upper edge. No details can be deciphered of his attire, apart from a sheath falling on his right thigh. He wears ear ornaments and has his hair tied in a back bun. He rests on a corbel and is carved in high relief.

Panel 2: ascension/procession scene? In the centre: figure on horseback, in right profile view. Hints of crown piece and reins can be recognized as to the horse harness. The figure holds the reins with both the hands, apparently. No details can be detected instead to confirm the sex of the figure, who shows only traces of a belt, earrings and hair bun. At the two sides of the panel two other figures stand, one in front view (on the left) the other in three-quarter right view (on the right). The latter is undoubtedly identifiable as a woman.

Panel 3: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: a figure in three-quarter right view sitting cross-legged with hands in *añjalimudrā* (?). Only traces of hair bun are visible. Next to this figure another sitting personage, whose features are entirely lost. The two figures might putatively represent the hero (on the left) and his wife (on the right). In the centre: *yonī-liṅga* on a pedestal (?). On the right: *pujārī* sitting in three-quarter left view. Left arm bent at the elbow resting by the side; right arm raised up to the *liṅga*. No more details are available apart from his hair, apparently tied in a flat and large hairstyle.

Frame: Panel 1 is devoid of any lateral frame. Thin lintels between the panels are scantily preserved. Crowned by *akalaśa* with base, belly and handles D, on edge of type D.

A local devotee referred to this stele by the name “Pahimba”, describing it as one of the guardian deities of the village (together with “Mahimba”, see no. 61, pl. 74).

Due to the bad preservation status, a certain degree of uncertainty affects our evaluation of Panel 2, which would be usually deputed to represent the hero’s ascension to heaven in the company of some celestial maidens.

In the present specimen, on one side, the two personages on the edges of the figured area would stand in favour of such interpretation, as theoretically corresponding to the *apsarases*; it should be noted however that only one of them can be safely identified as a woman. On the other side, it will be noted that the central figure is portrayed in a rather unusual attitude if compared to the records so far analyzed. The horse, when outside of the battle scenes, indeed, seems to recur only as the vehicle of the hero or the *satī* during the procession which precedes their last sacrifice, when this corresponds to a self-inflicted death. In other words, the horse does not seem associated with the dead’s passage to the afterlife dimension, where a palanquin might be preferred in case. In the light of such considerations, this specimen could be looked at either as an original variation,³⁸⁹ or as an allusion to the *satī* ritual committed by the hero’s wife. The presence of two worshippers in the uppermost panel might be consistent with this.

³⁸⁸ Circumstances at that time did not allow us to evaluate the villager’s statement in the light of other testimonies. Given to this record the benefit of the doubt, we consider it anyway worth mentioning for the sake of completeness, the more so because of the particular prominence assigned to this specimen within the temple premises.

³⁸⁹ Not in absolute terms, for we cannot generalize, but rather in the frame of the materials presented in this study.

No. 63, pl. 76, NERE

Object: three-panelled hero-stone

Location: Nere, Mulshi *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; Śiva temple, right aedicule

Cardinal orientation: facing East

Size: max height cm 125, max width cm 45, max thickness cm 16

Notes: bottom section buried; highly worn; coated with vermillion; traces of oil

Panel 1: portray of the hero. Hero standing in three-quarter right view. His legs are flexed and stretched apart, the left stepped forward. His left arm holds a shield protecting his left flank; his right is bent at the elbow with the forearm oriented upwards, stretched out and raised over the shoulder height while wielding a sword above his head. He wears a *dhotī* (the fold falling on his legs) and the *yajñopavīta*. Nothing can be inferred about his ornaments and hairstyle. The hero's feet are buried together with the bottom section of the stele.

Panel 2: highly worn. Ascension to heaven? Traces of a figure in the centre, possibly in a round palanquin represented as if seen from above. Two figures beside it (?).

Panel 3: highly worn. *Śivaliṅga* worship? Traces of two figures sitting in profile view at the sides of an element in the centre (the *liṅga*). Garlands (?) seem to be hanging above them, carved on the upper frame.

Frame: judging from the present status of conservation, the stele seems to be devoid of any lintel between the panels. Crowned by *akalaśa* with base, belly and handles D, on edge of type D.

No. 64, pl. 77, NERE

Object: two-panelled hero-stone

Location: Nere, Mulshi *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; South enclosure of Śiva temple

Cardinal orientation: facing North

Size: max height cm 78, max width cm 27, max thickness cm 21

Panel 1: portray of the hero. Hero standing in three-quarter right view. Legs slightly flexed and stretched apart, the left stepped forward. Left arm bent at the elbow, holding a shield which covers his left flank; his right is bent at the elbow, raised to shoulder height and stretched out, the forearm oriented upwards while wielding a sword. He wears a *dhotī* with fold falling between his legs and a belt with sheath hanging on his right thigh. Wrists bracelets are the only preserved components of his ornament set. Traces of top bun hairstyle can be seen.

The hero is carved in high relief and stands on a corbel.

Panel 2: highly worn. *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: figure sitting in three-quarter right view, likely the hero. His right arm is bent at the elbow, resting by the side, the forearm oriented forward. Exact legs and arms position cannot be defined. In the centre: *yonī-liṅga* on a flat pedestal. It rests on a worn element which, on a comparative ground (see no. 68, 81), can be safely identified as the head of Nandi portrayed in front view. On the right: figure sitting in three-quarter left view, likely an *ācārya*. His left arm is specular to the hero's arm: it is bent at the elbow, resting by the side, the forearm oriented forward, likely holding a tool. His right arm is raised above the *liṅga*. No details are preserved in relation to the two figures' attire and ornaments.

Frame: Panel 1 is devoid of any lateral frame, otherwise plain and regular. Crowned by *akalaśa* with base, belly and handles A, on edge of type A.

No. 65, pl. 78, NERE

Object: two-panelled hero-stone

Location: Nere, Mulshi *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; South enclosure of Śiva temple

Cardinal orientation: facing North

Size: max height cm 96, max width cm 43, max thickness cm 19

Panel 1: portray of the hero. Hero standing in three-quarter right view. Legs flexed and stretched apart, the left steadily stepped forward, the right backward in midair. With both his hands he holds a lance oblique in front of his chest. A shield can be observed behind his left shoulder. He wears a *dhotī* open wide due to his legs position, with a fold falling between them, and a belt with a sheath hanging of his right thigh. His bun hairstyle is preserved.

The hero is carved in high relief and stands on a thick and large pedestal almost merging with the lateral frames.

Panel 2: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in three-quarter right view on a cushion, his bust turned to the front. He is cross-legged with hands in *añjalimudrā*. None of the details related to his attire and ornaments can be detected, the bun hairstyle being preserved instead. In the centre: Nandi crouched in right profile view with paws bent (highly worn). A *yoni-liṅga* rests on his back, on a pedestal. A garland hangs above it. On the right: *pujārī* standing in front view (?). His left arm is bent at the elbow, by the side; the left is not preserved, as well as his attire, ornaments and hairstyle.

Frame: regular and plain in all the three panels. Crowned by a *kalaśa* with base A, belly and handles D, on edge of type D.

No. 66, pl. 79, NERE

Object: two-panelled hero-stone

Location: Nere, Mulshi *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; South enclosure of Śiva temple

Cardinal orientation: facing North

Size: max height cm 92, max width cm 30, max thickness cm 17

Panel 1: portray of the hero. Hero standing in three-quarter right view. Legs slightly flexed and stretched apart. Bust bent forward. Left arm bent at a right angle by the side, holding a shield; right arm raised to the shoulder height, stretched out and bent with forearm oriented upwards while wielding a sword. He wears a *dhotī* with fold falling between his legs and a belt with sheath hanging on his right thigh. A wrists bracelets is visible, as well as ear ornaments and bun hairstyle.

The hero is carved in high relief and stands on a corbel.

Panel 2: highly worn. *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in three-quarter right view, with crossed legs. Hands joint in front of his chest. Nothing can be properly deciphered of his attire and ornaments. In the centre: Nandi in front view, presumably crouched. On his head rests a *yoni-liṅga* on a double-moulded pedestal. The *liṅga* is framed by a garland. On the right: *pujārī* standing in three-quarter left view. His left arm is at a right angle, oriented towards the *liṅga*; his right is not clearly preserved. No details are visible of his attire apart from traces of the *dhotī* fold between his legs, nor his ornaments and hairstyle can be safely ascertained.

Frame: Panel 1 is devoid of any lateral frame, the upper one being outlined just in the left half. Elsewhere plain and regular. Crowned by *akalaśa* with base, belly and handles A, on edge of type A.

No. 67, pl. 80, NERE

Object: three-panelled hero-stone

Location: Nere, Mulshi *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; South enclosure of Śiva temple

Cardinal orientation: facing East

Size: max height cm 113, max width cm 43, max thickness cm 18

Notes: highly worn.

Panel 1: portray of the hero. Hero standing in front view. His feet are buried together with the bottom edge of the panel. Legs slightly flexed and stretched apart. Both the arms are bent at the elbow and hold a lance/*gadā* in front of his chest. A shield is visible behind his left shoulder. He wears a *dhotī*, wide open to remark his legs position, with thick rim and fold falling between his legs. Traces of wrist bracelet and earrings are scanty preserved. His hair is arranged in a lateral bun.

Panel 2: ascension to heaven. In the centre: hero sitting in a round palanquin in front view, his legs crossed (?) and his hand in *añjalimudrā*. His attire and ornaments are not preserved, while his hair bun is. Two figures flank him, in three-quarter right view. The ground level on which they stand is represented as distinguished from the frame below them. The figure on the left has the right arm bent at the elbow, resting by the side, while the other arm is likely holding the upper edge of the palanquin; the figure on the right is doing the same with the right arm, while the other rests straight along the side. Given their position, the two may be identified as *apsarases*, although virtually no details can confirm their sex. Little remains of their *sāṛī* fold and earrings can be seen, as well as the lateral bun hairstyle of the left side figure.

Panel 3: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in three-quarter right view on a cushion. His legs crossed, his hands in *añjalimudrā*. The scanty details of his attire and ornaments do not show differences compared to the panels below. In the centre: Nandi crouched with paws bent in right profile view (scantly preserved). On his back rests a *yonī-liṅga* in side view. A garland hangs above it. On the right: figure standing in three-quarter left view, an *ācārya*. Both his arms are bent at the elbow, oriented forward. It is not clear whether he wears a *dhotī* or a *kaupīna*; his hair is coiled on the crown of the head.

Frame: Panel 1 is devoid of any lateral frame. Otherwise plain and regular. Crowned by a *kalaśa* with base, belly and handle D, on edge of type D.

No. 68, pl. 81, NERE

Object: three-panelled hero-stone

Location: Nere, Mulshi *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; South enclosure of Śiva temple

Cardinal orientation: facing North

Size: max height cm 137, max width cm 44, max thickness cm 15

Notes: tapering downwards.

Panel 1: dead hero. Hero lying supine on the ground, captured in three-quarter left view. Left arm resting on his chest, right not given. No details are preserved of his attire. He is adorned with earrings and has his hair arranged in a top knot. Behind him, two *apsarases* stand/kneel on the edge of the scene, one close to his feet, the other beside his head. The two are portrayed in specular position: in three-quarter view, turned to the centre. One of their arms is at a right angle in front of the chest, the other is raised up laterally: each of them holds with both the arms a large *cāmara* above the hero's body. They wear round earrings, their hair tied in a back bun; no details are available of their garments.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: hero standing in three-quarter right view, with legs bent and stretched apart. He wields a sword with his right arm bent at the elbow, the forearm oriented forward to the enemies; his left arm holds a shield. Trace of *dhotī* fold between his legs. His ornament and hairstyle do not differ from those in the panel below. On the right: two warriors in three-quarter left view, their legs stretched apart and flexed. Their bust is covered by the shield, as well as their left arm, while the right is raised up wielding a spear over their heads. Their hair is tied in a bun.

Panel 3: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting crossed-legs in three quarter right view on a stool/cushion (?), his bust turned to the front. His hands are in *añjalimudrā*. Nothing can be seen of his attire and ornaments, his hair being arranged in a back knot. In the centre: Nandi crouched on a pedestal (?) in left profile view, his head turned to the front. Above him a *yonī-liṅga* in side view on a pedestal. Above the *liṅga* a stylized garland symmetrically aligned with the upper frame lobe. On the right: *pujārī* standing in three-quarter left view, his legs slightly bent. He holds a bell (?) in his left hand, the arm bent at the elbow with forearm oriented towards the *liṅga*; the left arm is raised over the *liṅga*. His attire, ornaments and hairstyle cannot be properly ascertained.

Frame: regular and plain. Crowned by *akalaśa* with base A, belly and handles D, on edge of type C.

Collective steles

No. 69, pl. 82, LONI BHAPKAR

Object: three-panelled (?) hero-stone

Location: Loni Bhapkar, Baramati *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; Śiva shrine premises, next to Nandi

Cardinal orientation: facing South

Size: max height cm 54, max width cm 63, max thickness cm 17

Notes: lowest section buried; uppermost section missing.

Panel 1: buried, only the top right corner being preserved. It shows a warrior head and a dagger, suggesting it portrays a fight scene.

Panel 2: divided into two halves by a vertical band.

Left half: fragmentary. Ascension to heaven. In the centre: hero standing in front view with legs flexed and stretched apart, with hips bent to the left side of the scene. His arms are likely raised over the shoulder height to embrace the figures beside him. He wears a *dhotī*, being adorned with a necklace and earrings. His hair is tied in a knot. He is flanked by four *apsarases*, two on each side, in three-quarter view turned to the centre. They apparently embrace each other, the two closer to the hero resting one of their arms on his chest. Anklets, wrist bracelets and necklaces adorn them, with a bun as a hairstyle.

Right half: ascension to heaven. In the centre: hero standing in front view. His legs are flexed, to the extent that the right is kneeling backward, in a dynamic posture reinforced by the hips position (bent towards the left). His arms are lifted laterally and embrace the figure next to him around their shoulders. He shows a protruding belly. His attire and ornaments consist of a *dhotī*, anklets and necklace, with traces of earrings. He is flanked by two *apsarases*. One of their arms (that closer to the hero) is raised up straight, and the two hold together an oblong element horizontally, right above the hero's head. The other is bent at a right angle, stretched out, with forearm oriented upwards, some attributes being in their hands. The preserved components of their attire and ornaments include a *sārī*, belt, necklace and wrist bracelets, with a bun as a hairstyle.

Panel 3: divided into two halves by a vertical band.

Left half: fragmentary. *Śivaliṅga* worship. Traces of Nandi crouched in right profile view.

Right half: fragmentary. *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: legs of the hero (?) sitting in three-quarter right view on a double-moulded pedestal. Legs apparently in *pralambapadāsana* (?) and hands in *añjalimudrā*. His arm and wrist bracelets as well as his necklace are preserved. In the centre: traces of a *yonī-liṅga* on a double-moulded pedestal resting on Nandi's back. On the right: traces of figure sitting on a stool in three-quarter left-view (?).

Frame: apparently regular where still visible.

No. 70, pl. 83, BAWADA

Object: three-panelled hero-stone

Location: Bawada, Indapur *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; external Eastern side of Māruti temple

Cardinal orientation: facing East

Size: max height cm 120, max width cm 50, max thickness cm 19

Notes: all surface coated with orange paint (same as on the temple outer walls); traces of *sindūr*.

Panel 1: Divided into two halves by a vertical band.

Left half: fight scene. On the left: standing hero, in front view; legs stretched apart and bent in a leap forward; right arm at a right angle with hand not preserved, possibly holding some weapon. He wears a *dhotī*, earrings and perhaps *yajñopavīta* (?); his hair is tied in a bun. On the right: two standing warriors, their bodies hidden behind their shields (no further details preserved). Across the full width of the scene, a garland hangs from the top above the figures.

Right half: fight scene. The carving is highly damaged, but it is possible to analyze it in the light of the scene just described. On the left: standing hero in front view, with legs bent and stretched apart in a leap forward; right arm at a right angle. His dress, ornaments and hairstyle do not differ from those of the counterpart in the left half. On the right, only a shield and two legs are preserved.

On the frame separating this panel from the middle one, a garland.

Panel 2: Divided into two halves by a vertical band.

Left half: ascension to heaven. In the centre: standing hero in front view, both his arms possibly embracing the two female figures by his side. He displays a *dhotī*, earrings and bun hairstyle and is flanked by two *apsaras* (one on either side) whose posture, attire and attributes are specular. They are represented standing in front view, their hips bending towards the external lateral sides of the scene. Both of them have bare torso, ear ornaments and hair tied in a bun; the *sārī* (with a fold falling among the legs) and the belt are still visible only on the right side *apsaras*. One of their arms (that closer to the external side of the scene) is not preserved, while the other is arguably embracing the hero behind his back.

Right half: ascension to heaven. Carving highly damaged, reasonably reproducing the scene just described. Fragments of one female figure on the left and one on the right are preserved, with a male (?) figure in the centre. All the three are represented as standing. The full body of the left *apsaras* is preserved, showing trace of the belt on her hips.

A garland is on the bottom edge of the frame separating this panel from the upper one (few traces of it preserved on the right half).

Panel 3: *Śivaliṅga* worship. In the centre: *yonī-līṅga* on a pedestal, oriented to the right. It is flanked by two worshippers (heroes), one on either side. They are portrayed as specular: both are in *padmāsana*, their hands in *añjalimudrā*, turned in three-quarter view towards the *yonī-līṅga*. Flat large earrings and hair tied in a bun are preserved, the hair string being visible as well on the right hero. On the extreme right: traces of a standing figure (*ācārya*?). A double row garland hangs from the ceiling above the *yonī-līṅga*.

Frame: plain but for one device: on the bands dividing one panel from the other a fillet is carved horizontally to split the band itself into two halves. Crowned by *akalaśa* with base, belly and handles D, on edge of type F, which explicitly represents the covering of the shrine where the worship *śivaliṅga* scene of the panel below is set.

G.-D. Sontheimer allocates this stele in Phaltan rather than in Bawada, where we actually retrieved it. For a possible explanation to this incongruence, see here chapter 5.3.5 s.v. Bawada.

No. 71, pl. 84, VELAPUR

Object: three-panelled hero-stone [local record: VLP 07]

Location: Velapur, Malshiras *tālukā*, Solapur district

Position: standing inside stones repository

Cardinal orientation: ---

Size: max height cm 100, max width cm 46, max thickness cm 11

Notes: topmost section incomplete.

Panel 1: divided in two halves by a vertical listel.

Left half: hero standing in front view. Left leg bent and turned sideways. Right arm bent at the elbow, protruding outward with the hand gently resting on his waist; left arm resting by the side, the hand grabbing something (the hilt of a sheathed sword?). He wears a *dhotī*, with two folds (one floating on the left, the other hanging on his legs), and a belt; he has large flat earrings and a hairstyle consisting of a coiled bun tied by a band fluttering on the left.

Right side: hero standing in front view. Right leg bent and turned sideways. Both his arms rest by the sides, slightly bent at the elbow, possibly holding something in his left hand. He wears a *dhotī* a fold of which hangs on his legs, and earrings, his hair being arranged in a bun.

Panel 2: ascension to heaven. In the centre: hero standing in three-quarter side view, with legs stretched apart, the left stepped forward. His arms are raised to embrace the figures who flank him around their waists. He wears a *dhotī* consistent with that displayed by the figure in the lower left panel, a belt and the *yajñopavīta*, with arm bracelets and earrings as ornaments. His hair is tied in a coiled bun by a string

which ribbons float on the left. By his flanks two *apsarases* stand in symmetrical position, in front view. They embrace the hero with one arm, while the other rests gently by the side. Their rich attire consists of *sārī* with a thick rim, a fold ganging on their legs, and a belt; earrings, necklace, wrist and arm bracelets form their ornaments. Their hair is gracefully arranged in a coiled bun, with a string more clearly distinguishable on the left side maiden.

Panel 3: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in three-quarter right view with crossed legs (the left over the right), bust turned to the front and hands in *añjalimudrā*. Around his waist the upper hem of the *dhotī* is visible, as well as traces of his earrings and his full hairstyle. On the right: *yoni-līṅga* on a double-moulded pedestal.

Frame: plain and regular when preserved. Upper edge not preserved, apparently of type C.

On the ground of Panel 1 we argue that this stele is dedicated to two heroes. Nonetheless, in the two upper scenes only one deceased is portrayed; his attire more closely resembles that of the left side figure.

No. 72, pl. 85, VELAPUR

Object: three-panelled hero-stone [local record: MHL 73/86]

Location: Velapur, Malshiras *tālukā*, Solapur district

Position: standing inside stones repository

Cardinal orientation: ---

Size: max height cm 82, max width cm 55, max thickness cm 10

Notes: lowest section missing (?); highly worn carvings.

Panel 1: fight scene. On the left: hero standing in three-quarter right view, with legs stretched apart and bent as in a movement forward. He holds a bow with his left arm, oriented forwards, while his right arm is bent at the elbow, close to the shoulder, as after shooting an arrow. He wears a *dhotī* with thick rim and fold falling between his legs, a belt with a dagger sheath resting on his right thigh; wrist bracelets and earrings are his ornaments, with a bun as a hairstyle. Next to him, another hero stands in three-quarter right view, with all his body engaged in a leap forward: his legs bent and stretched apart, the right backward in midair, the left trampling on a corpse. He holds a spear in front of his chest with both his hands. Similarly to his companion, he wears a *dhotī* of the same style, with a pleat floating in midair behind him, a belt and a sheathed dagger. His ear ornaments and bun hairstyle are visible. Two dead warriors lay on the ground, as the two heads under the second hero's feet suggest. In the centre: two warriors on foot, standing in three-quarter left view, with legs bent. Both are armed with a shield which covers their bust and a sword/spear (?) in their right hand paralleling the frame above. Just traces of their earrings are preserved. On the right: two warriors on horseback. The horses are in left profile view; traces of head-pieces and reins can be seen as part of their original harness. The riders wield the same type of sword/spear (?) with their right hands, the left being holding the reins (as the horse rider in the foreground shows).

Below the scene, on a section of the stele corresponding to the base, two heads of cattle stand in right profile view.

Panel 2: divided in two halves by a vertical listel.

Left half: ascension to heaven. In the centre: hero standing in front view, with legs bent and stretched apart as in a leap forward. His arms are raised to embrace the two figures beside him around their shoulders. The preserved parts of his attire and ornaments are consistent with what observed in the panel below. Two *apsarases* stand by his flanks in front view, their hips slightly bent to the outer edge of the scene. The left side maiden is in *pādasvastika* and embraces the hero with her left arm, while holding a *cāmara*/garland (?) in her right hand, the arm bent at the elbow resting by the side. Her *sārī*, belt, earrings and wide bun hairstyle can be seen. The right side *apsaras* has her right arm raised straight, while the left leans along the side: in both the hands she grabs what likely is a long garland. Nothing is preserved of her attire and ornaments apart from hints of her earrings and her hair arranged in a wide bun. Right half: the scene reproduces what displayed in the adjoining half, with few minor differences: traces of a necklace are given on both the *apsarases*; the left side one is not in *pādasvastika*, while the maiden on the other side has her right (fragmentary) resting on the hero's left knee.

Panel 3: *Śivaliṅga* worship. In the centre: *yoni-līṅga* resting on a multi-moulded pedestal. Two hero sit by his sides in specular position: three-quarter right view turned to the *līṅga*, with legs crossed and hands in *añjalimudrā*. Scanty traces of *dhotī* and a wide back bun are the only featured preserved.

On the left edge of the panel, behind one of the two, stands a figure in three-quarter right view, whom we reasonably identify as the *pujārī* performing the rite. He likely holds something in his hands, brought in front of the chest. His attire consists of a *kaupīna*.

Frame: plain and regular when preserved. Top section missing.

The presence of carvings on the base of the stele is a rather unusual trait. To be noted that nothing is carved to the right of the cattle, where in turn the surface is rough-cut. The original size of the base had to be broader, thus the presence of further subjects carved on it cannot be excluded.

No. 73, pl. 86, KIKLI

Object: two-panelled (?) hero-stone

Location: Kikli, Wai *tālukā*, Satara district

Position: standing half buried in a public square beside a banyan tree

Cardinal orientation: facing East

Size: n.a.

Notes: only upper panels available.

Panel 1: Partially buried; divided into two halves by a vertical listel.

Left half: ascension to heaven. In the centre: hero in front view, likely standing. Both his arms are raised over the shoulder height to embrace the two figures who flank him around their shoulders. The band of the *dhotī* is visible around his waist; no further details of his attire and ornaments are visible, apart from traces of elongated ear lobes. Beside him stands one *apsaras* on each side, in front view, embracing him likewise with one arm, the other bent at a right angle holding a *cāmara* (trespassing on the side frame). Both the maidens show a bun hairstyle.

Right side: ascension to heaven. The scene perfectly reproduces what observed so far, the hero's legs being fully visible, the left one bent and raised upwards, suggesting a leap. His knot hairstyle can be distinguished here, as well as his earrings. The two flanking *apsaras* show posture, attire and attributes consistent with those described in relation to the left side.

Panel 2: Divided into two halves by a vertical listel.

Left half: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in three-quarter right view, right leg likely bent inward resting on the ground, knee of the left leg raised upwards. His hands are in *añjalimudrā*. The details of his garment, ornament and hairstyle do not display any variations compared to the other scene. In the centre: *yoni-līṅga* resting on a triple-moulded pedestal. On the right: *pujārī* standing in three-quarter left view, his legs slightly flexed and stretched apart. He holds a bell (?) in his left hand, the arm bent at the elbow and leaning by the side, while the right is raised straight over the *līṅga* grabbing another ritual tool. He apparently wears a *kaupīna*, and has long hair falling on his back.

Right half: bottom right corner damaged. *Śivaliṅga* worship. The scene faithfully replicates what just described, the double-moulded pedestal of the *yoni-līṅga* being the only exception.

Frame: plain and regular. Upper edge of type D.

No. 74, pl. 87, KIKLI

Object: four-panelled hero-stone

Location: Kikli, Wai *tālukā*, Satara district

Position: standing

Cardinal orientation: facing West

Size: n.a.

Panel 1: slain on the battlefield. Nine lifeless male figures are portrayed stacked on each other, alternatively prone or resting on a side. One of those in the centre, prone, with visible top knot hairstyle, has his left arm raised up.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: male figure (first hero) standing in three-quarter right view, his legs stretched apart as in a movement forward. His left arm is hidden behind the bow he carries with it; his left (scantly preserved) apparently bent at the elbow with the forearm oriented upwards by the side. He wears a *dhotī*, which lower rim and fold can be noticed. Something rests on his bust (necklace and *yajñopavīta*?). His earrings and bun hairstyle are visible. Next to him, almost in the centre: standing male figure (second hero) in three-quarter right view with legs flexed and stretched apart, bust protruding forward. Right arm bent at the elbow, resting by the side while holding a short weapon (dagger?) in front of his chest; left arm bent forward while holding a shield to parry his enemies' attack. He wears a *dhotī* open wide due to his movement, with rim and central fold fully recognizable, and a belt; arm bracelets, necklace and earrings as ornaments. His hair is arranged in a back knot. At his feet a male figure is portrayed in left profile view with legs lying prone on the ground apparently strengthless, his bust forcefully (?) lifted up close to the standing warrior's weapon. His head is not visible, so he might have been beheaded. His left arm is bent at the elbow, the forearm oriented forward, behind his enemy's left leg. He shows a belt/*dhotī* upper edge, arm bracelet and hair arranged in a top knot. On the left: two warriors on horseback, in three-quarter left view. Only the horse in the foreground is fully represented; both are reared up. The visible pieces of their harness include reins, check reins (?) and saddle. The riders hold the reins with their left hand, while the right wields their weapons, a spear (as to the one in the foreground) and a sword (between the two). The *yajñopavīta* is clearly visible on the hero in the background, while no details are preserved of his companion's attire. Both display arm bracelets, earrings and a top bun hairstyle.

Panel 3: ascension to heaven. In the centre: two male figures (the heroes) sit on a cushion in front view close to each other. They display a specular attitude: one of their legs rests on the cushion and is bent inward, while the other is bent upwards, the foot leaning on the cushion. Their bust slightly bend to the outer side of the scene. They hold each other by one arm, the other being not visible (broken, in the case of the left side hero; probably hidden behind an *apsaras*, for the right side hero). Both of them wear the same attire and jewels: a *dhotī* and a belt, the *yajñopavīta*, a necklace and large flat earrings. Their hair is arranged in a high back knot. Four *apsarases* stand on the edges of the scene, two on each side flanking one hero. They are in a specular position: their hips bend to the outer side and they all embrace each other. Two of them hold a *cāmara* (trespassing on the side frame), one a garland (next to the hero on the right). All are dressed with a *dhotī* and adorned with necklaces, earrings and likely a headline band, their hairstyle consisting of a high back bun.

Panel 4: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: two heroes sitting in three-quarter right view cross-legged with hands in *añjalimudrā*. Their attire and ornaments do not display variations compared to what appeared in the other panels. In the centre: *yonī-liṅga* on a double-moulded pedestal. A garland hangs above it. On the right: Nandi in left profile view, crouched with paws bent, his head turned to the front. Behind him an *pujārī* sitting (?) in three-quarter left view. He grabs an unidentifiable tool in his left hand, while his right forearm is oriented upwards and holds another ritual tool (water pot?) above the *liṅga*. An arm bracelet is the only detail preserved of his attire and ornaments. His hair is coiled in a loop on the crown of the head.

Frame: plain and regular. Crowned by a *kalaśas* with base, belly and handle B1, on edge of type D. The whole motif is replicated twice, by this confirming that the same stele is dedicated to two heroes.

Following the tradition, the two heroes are portrayed in a larger scale compared to their opponents, which thing helps to identify them as the dedicatees of the stele. Interestingly enough, however, in the fight scene the two display different proportions when compared to each other, the second from the left being portrayed in the largest scale. Such a difference progressively disappears as passing to the two upper panels.

No. 75, pl. 88, DEULGAON RAJE

Object: three-panelled hero-stone

Location: Deulgaon Raje, Daund *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; premises of Siddheśvara temple

Cardinal orientation: facing West

Size: max height cm 81, max width cm 37, max thickness cm 16

Notes: lowest section highly damaged; tapering upwards; top section coated with minium.

Panel 1: fight scene. Bottom left section missing. From the left: warrior standing in right profile view. His legs and arms posture is lost. Hints of earrings and bun hairstyle. Next to him, almost in the centre of the scene, warrior standing with legs stretched apart, the right firmly on the ground, the left stepped over the fallen figure below. His right arm is bent and raised to shoulder height wielding a sword/spear (?) with likely a protruding element next to the grip. Left arm equally bent but oriented forward, blowing the enemies with a large size attribute (unidentifiable). On the ground of their position, both the figures may be identified as heroes. At their feet, in the foreground, lays another warrior in left profile view. His legs are not preserved. His left arm supports the weight of his torso, which is flexed backward, and keeps it lifted off the ground. His right arm is bent, the forearm oriented upwards, holding in the hand a weapon (?) which seems to hit the left forearm of the hero. On the right side of the scene, two standing warriors in three-quarter left view. Their legs are flexed, their torso being hidden behind the shield. One of them has his right arm raised straight up grabbing a spear which points to the hero, while no details can be detected about the other's posture.

Panel 2: ascension to heaven. In the centre: two figures kneeling on their right leg, the left foot stepping forwards. Their hair is tied in a bun; traces of *dhotī* fold and earrings can be observed. This figure may be identified as the hero, the previous one as his wife on the ground of her relative position respect to his (in the lack of further details). Other two figures are represented, one on edge of the scene, likely *apsarases*. Each of them embraces the figure beside, and holds some unidentifiable attributes with the other hand (trespassing on the lateral frame). Details related to these figures' attire and ornaments are not preserved, their bun hairstyle being the only feature preserved.

Panel 3: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: two figures sitting crossed legs next to each other, their hand in *añjalimudrā*. Although it is not possible to characterize them on the ground of their sex due to the lack of details, we would identify them as the two deceased heroes. Both of them have their hair tied in a back bun and wear earrings. In the centre: *yonī-liṅga* in side view on a double-moulded pedestal. On the right: *pūjārī* sitting crossed legs in left profile view. Left arm bent by the side holding a not preserved attribute; right arm raised up towards the *liṅga*. His hairstyle consists of a top knot; no further details can be noticed.

Frame: plain and regular. Crowned by *akalaśa* with base, belly and handles B1, on edge of type A.

Pillars

No. 76, pl. 89, LONI BHAPKAR

Object: hero-stone carved on four sides

- South side → four panels (?)
- West side → four panels (?)
- North side → two panels (?)
- East side → three panels (?)

Location: Loni Bhapkar, Baramati *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing at the edge between the Śiva shrine premises and the road

Cardinal orientation: not ascertainable

Size: • South side → max height cm 110, max width cm 34

- West side → max height cm 106, max width cm 33
- North side → max height cm 97, max width cm 33
- East side → max height cm 47, max width cm 35

Notes: lowest section either buried or covered by stones on all the four sides.

SOUTH SIDE (three panels visible out of likely four):

Panel 1: not recordable.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: warrior on horseback. The horse (arguably in right profile view) and most of his rider's body are damaged. The animal was reared up. The warrior has his right arm raised up straight wielding a sword, which trespasses on the frame above. He wears earrings and has a bun hairstyle. On the right: two horse in left profile view, both reared up. Apparently only the one in the foreground is mounted by a warrior. He seems to have his left arm by the side holding the reins, and his right arm raised up with bent elbow, grabbing a spear. Nothing is preserved of his attire and ornaments. The horse in the background displays part of his harness: brow-band and nose band. At the foot of these personages, in the foreground, a warrior lies on his back in three-quarter right view, his head turned to the observer, his legs still in midair, his arms raised up and stretched out. The figure is portrayed as fallen from the horse, fallen likewise, that is represented on the right. The carving is damaged, but its saddle is visible.

Panel 3: highly worn. Ascension to heaven. In the centre: hero standing in front view, with legs stretched apart. His arms position cannot be detected. His earrings and his top bun are preserved. He is flanked on both sides by one *apsaras*, both standing symmetrically in three-quarter view turned to the centre. One of their arms (that closer to the hero) is raised straight in the background holding a *cāmara*, which floats above the hero's head. Nothing is preserved of their attire and ornaments apart from their earrings and bun hairstyle.

Panel 4: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in right profile view on a tall round stool. His legs are not fully preserved, nor are his hands. Of his physical features and attributes, only his back bun can be observed. In the centre: Nandi crouched on a pedestal. On his back rests a *liṅga* on a pedestal not better identifiable. On the right: *pujārī* standing in three-quarter left view, with his right arm raised straight over the *liṅga* and his left bent at the elbow, resting by the side. None of the attributes he holds in his hands is visible. He has long plaited hair.

Frame: plain and regular. Top section apparently devoid of decorative elements.

WEST SIDE (three panels visible out of likely four):

Panel 1: buried, only three pairs of cattle horns being visible.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: hero on horseback. Horse in right profile view, reared up. Its harness consists of reins, bit and saddle. The hero is in three-quarter right view. His right arm is bent at the elbow, raised to shoulder height and stretched out, wielding a sword. His left arm is raised straight, oriented forward to grab the enemy's wrist, while the reins cross his forearm. He wears a *dhotī*, wrist bracelets, a necklace, earrings. His hairstyle cannot be clearly identified. On the right: two warriors in three-quarter left view. It is unclear whether they are actually riding a horse (about to fall?), its muzzle tentatively corresponding to the (worn) element represented below the belly of the hero's horse. Their left arm is bent at a right angle and rests by the side. The right is raised up straight, to hold a couple of hooked spears, both trespassing on the frame (one oblique, the other horizontal). The left side warrior grabs this weapon by its lower edge; while doing so his waist is seized by the hero. Both the warriors wear a *dhotī* and a thick belt, and have wrist bracelets. No other details are visible.

Panel 3: ascension to heaven. In the centre: hero standing in front view with legs flexed and stretched apart, the left stepped steadily forward while the right is almost in midair, backward. His right arm rests by the side, while his left is not visible and may putatively be embracing the figure beside him. He is visible in his full attire and jewelry: *dhotī* with fold falling between his legs, belt, anklets, wrist and arm bracelets, necklace, earrings. Even his bun hairstyle can be noticed in the background. He is flanked on both sides by an *apsaras*. The two maidens are portrayed in a symmetric position: they stand in three-quarter view turned towards the centre; one of their arms is bent at a right angle and rests by the side (holding some small size attribute?) while the other is raised straight behind the hero's back: each of them waves a *cāmara* above the hero's head. Their attire and ornaments are specular: a *sārī* with a thick rim and waist band, wrist bracelets, necklace, earrings, with their hair tied in a back bun.

Panel 4: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in right profile view on a stool. His right leg rests on it, bent inward; of his left we can notice is knee up. His bust is turned to the front, with hands in *añjalimudrā*. His attire and ornaments do not show any changes compared to what displayed in the panels below. At his feet height, but likely in the background, one can observe the head of Nandi turned to the front, with part of his body and his forelegs bent as if in a crouched posture, in right profile view. In the centre: a *yonī-liṅga* in midair on a double-moulded pedestal. On the right: *pujārī* standing in three-quarter

left view, with legs bent and stretched apart suggesting his movement towards the *liṅga*. His left arm is bent at the elbow, the forearm forward, holding a bell (?) in the hand; the left is raised straight over the shoulder height, while something in his hand hangs above the *liṅga* (a water-pot?). His lower garment is unclear, since his legs seem bare. As to his jewels, a wrist bracelet, necklace and earrings are preserved. His hair is long.

Frame: plain and regular. Upper edge devoid of any decorative element.

NORTH SIDE (two panels visible out of likely four):

Panel 1: covered by stones. Traces of hero flanked by two ladies: the panel reasonably portrays his ascension to heaven.

Panel 2: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting on a cushion in three-quarter right profile view, with legs crossed and hands in *añjalimudrā*. Nothing is preserved of his attire and ornaments, apart from his earrings and bun hairstyle. In the centre: Nandi in right profile view, crouched. Above it, in midair, a *yoni-liṅga* on a short pedestal. On the right: *pujārī* standing in three-quarter left profile view, his left leg stepped forward indicating his movement to the cult object. His right arm is raised above the *liṅga*, while his left rests by the side bent at the elbow with the forearm oriented forward. He holds unidentifiable ritual tools in both his hands. A *kaupīṇa*, elongated ear lobes due to ear ornaments and a bun hairstyle are the only visible features of his attire.

Frame: plain and regular. Upper edge devoid of any decorative element.

EAST SIDE (three panels visible out of likely four):

Panel 1: not recordable. Traces of fight scene.

Panel 2: partially covered by stones. Ascension to heaven. In the centre: hero standing in front view, with legs flexed and stretched apart. Right arm straight, slightly raised laterally; left arm not recordable. His attire and ornaments consist of a *dhotī*, necklace and earrings. His hair is arranged in a bun on the crown of the head. He is flanked by two *apsaras*, one on each side; they seem to be portrayed in a symmetrical attitude, although not fully visible. The maiden on the left is better analyzable. She is in front view and has her right arm resting in front, holding the hero's hand, while the left is raised up behind him, grabbing a *cāmara* floating over his head (which trespass on the frame). Her attire is not visible as much as her jewels: she wears wrist bracelets, necklace and earrings, with a back bun as a hairstyle.

Panel 3: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in three-quarter right view on a round stool. His right leg rests on it bent inward, while the left is crossed over it, with knee up. His hands are likely in *añjalimudrā*. The folds of his *dhotī* are visible on his hip; similarly his torque, long earrings and back bun can be clearly seen. In the centre: *yoni-liṅga* in midair resting on a multiple-moulded pedestal (in fact its lowest section may be Nandi crouched on a short pedestal, in right profile view). On the right: *pujārī* standing in three-quarter left view; his legs posture shows he is moving towards the *liṅga*. His left arm is bent at the elbow and rests by the side, holding a bell; his right is raised up straight, with a water-pot in his hand which hangs over the *liṅga*. His legs seem bare, suggesting he does not wear a *dhotī*. He is adorned with a necklace and earrings and has long braided hair.

No. 77, pl. 90, NERE

Object: hero-stone carved on three sides at least (back side not recordable)

- front side → three panels
- left side → three panels
- right side → not recordable

Location: Nere, Mulshi *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; South enclosure of Śiva temple

Cardinal orientation: front side facing North

Size:

- front side → max height cm 115, max width cm 36
- left side → max height cm 113, max width cm 31
- right side → max height cm 110, max width cm 30

Notes: worn carvings on the left side; right side not properly recordable due to other stele adjoining it

FRONT SIDE (three panels visible out of three):

Panel 1: dead hero. Hero lying on his right flank with legs slightly flexed at the knee, right arm along the side, the left at a right angle resting on his chest. Nothing can be infreed of his garments and ornaments; traces of hair bun. Above him, four head of cattle. Only one of them is fully represented, the others being in the background. Their paws and muzzles suggest they are running away in opposite directions (one to the left, the other three towards the right). The one in the foreground displays a collar and at least one decorative band on his back.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: hero standing in three-quarter right view, with legs slightly flexed. With both his hands he holds a spear oblique, pointing it to the enemy, his arms being bent in front of his chest. He likely wears a *dhotī* (traces of fold between his legs); hints of earrings as to the ornaments and of a bun as to the hairstyle are preserved. In the centre: warrior kneeling on his right, the left leg stepped forward with the foot steadily on the ground. His bust is hidden behind the shield (hit by the hero's spear) together with the left arm, while the right is raised up wielding a sword above his head. On the right: warrior standing in three-quarter left view, his legs slightly flexed. Left arm along the side, right arm lifted straight grabbing the spear above. The warriors' hairstyle consists of a bun; no other details are preserved.

Panel 3: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting on a short stool in right profile view, cross-legged, with hands joint in front of his chest. His hair bun and his ear ornaments are the only details detectable. In the centre: Nandi crouched in three-quarter left view, with paws bent. On his head rests a yoni-*liṅga* on a triple-moulded pedestal. On the right: *pujārī* standing in three-quarter left view. His legs are flexed. His left arm is bent at a right angle, oriented forward, likely holding some attribute. His right is raised up straight over the *liṅga*. No details pertaining his garments, ornaments and hairstyle are visible.

Frame: regular and plain. Crowned by abstract element of type F on edge of type A.

LEFT SIDE (three panels visible out of likely three):

Panel 1: half buried. Portray of the hero. Hero standing (?) in front view, holding a spear in front of his chest with both the hands. No details are preserved of his attire and ornaments; his hair bun is visible on the left. The figure is carved in high relief.

Panel 2: fight scene. Due to the bad preservation status only two figures on the right side of the scene can be analyzed. Two warriors one above the other (i.e. behind) bend a bow in front of them with the arrow knocked. They are likely aiming at the hero, supposedly on the left side of the panel at the origin. The legs of the hero in the foreground indicate a rather dynamic posture, the left leg being stepped far ahead.

Panel 3: *Śivaliṅga* worship (?). Two figures (likely the hero and an *ācārya*) in profile view, turned to the centre of the scene, sit at the two sides of an element not preserved (arguably the *liṅga*).

Frame: plain and regular. Crowned by abstract element of type F on edge of type A.

RIGHT SIDE (three panels visible out of likely three):

Observations reveal that it consists of three panels. From the bottom: dead hero lying on the left flank, trampled by head of cattle; fight scene; *Śivaliṅga* worship. The frame seems to be regular. The uppermost section displays a decorative motif similar to that recorded on the front side.

Due the position no further investigations could be carried out.

No. 78, pl. 91, NERE

Object: hero-stone carved on four sides

- front side → three panels
- left side → two panels (?)
- right side → three panels
- back side → three panelled (?)

Location: Nere, Mulshi *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; South enclosure of Śiva temple

Cardinal orientation: front side facing North

Size: • front side → max height cm 101, max width cm 34

- left side → max height cm 61, max width cm 29
- right side → max height cm 97, max width cm 31
- back side → max height cm 87, max width cm 24

Notes: all the carvings highly worn; panels buried to a great extent; back side not properly recordable.

FRONT SIDE (three panels visible out of three):

Panel 1: mostly buried, only the top right corner preserved. Dead hero? Traces of at least two figures in front view bearing garlands, likely *apsarases*. Below them, hints of a lying body, arguably the deceased hero.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: hero standing in three-quarter right view. Legs flexed, the left stepped forward. Right arm apparently pushed forward holding some weapon (sword/spear?); left arm not preserved. Nothing remains of his attire; ear ornaments and bun hairstyle are still visible. On the right: two warriors standing in three-quarter left view. Legs flexed and stretched apart, the right of the first of them stepped forward and crossed to the hero's left leg. No details survive of their weapons, attire, ornaments and hairstyle, apart from hints of a bun on the right side warrior.

Panel 3: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting on a cushion in three-quarter right view. Right leg likely bent inwards, the left being raised with the knee oriented upwards. Hands joint in front of his bust. Traces of earrings and bun hairstyle can be observed. In the centre: Nandi standing on a short pedestal in right profile view with head turned to the front. Above him, in midair, *yoni-līṅga* (?) on a double-moulded (?) pedestal. On the right: *pujārī* standing in three-quarter left view. Right arm not clearly preserved; left arm raised straight over the *līṅga*. He likely has long hair; nothing can be distinguished of his attire and ornaments.

Frame: concave between the panels; plain and regular elsewhere. Crowned by an abstract element of type F, on edge of type A.

LEFT SIDE (two panels visible out of likely two):

Panel 1: mostly buried. Portrayal of the hero (?). Upper part of a standing hero, arguably occupying the whole figured area. Just his head and his sword (trespassing on the frame above) are preserved.

Panel 2: *Śivaliṅga* worship. Scanty traces of two figures (likely the hero and an *ācārya*) at the two sides of an unrecognizable central element (a *līṅga*).

Frame: the visible portions appear regular and plain. Crowned by abstract element of type F on edge of type A.

RIGHT SIDE (three panels visible out of three):

Panel 1: mostly buried. Dead hero (?). Traces of garlands.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: male figure standing in right profile view, with legs bent and stretched apart. Right arm straight, slightly raised forward, apparently touching the head of another personage. He holds a shield which his left, protecting the flank. Just traces of a *dhotī* and of bun hairstyle can be detected. In the centre: figure kneeling (?) in front view. His right arm seems bent at the elbow and stretched out, the forearm oriented downwards (holding some attribute?). Just scanty traces of his left arm are visible, apparently stretched out as well. On the right: figure standing in three-quarter left view. Right arm raised up wielding a shield, the left likely hidden behind a shield.

Panel 3: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in right profile view on a stool, likely with legs crossed and hands joint on front of his chest. Only a trace of hair bun survives of his original features. In the centre: traces of low relief in the lower section may indicate the former representation of Nandi, likely in right profile view. Above him, in midair, a *yoni-līṅga* on a short pedestal. On the right: *pujārī* standing in three-quarter right view. His right arm is straight, stretched forward, to the *līṅga*. His right is bent at the elbow, raised over the shoulder height with the forearm oriented upwards, grabbing an unidentifiable ritual object in his hand. Nothing of his features are preserved, except for his bun hairstyle.

Frame: concave between the panels; plain and regular elsewhere. Crowned by an abstract element of type F, on edge of type A.

BACK SIDE (two panels visible out of likely three):

Panel 1: mostly buried. Fight scene. Trace of a sword in the upper portion.

Panel 2: *Śivaliṅga* worship. Two figures sit in profile view at the two sides of a central *līṅga* on a pedestal, resting on Nandi in side view. The *pujārī* (on the right) has his right arm raised straight above the *līṅga*. His hair tied in a top bun is visible.

Frame: concave between the panels; the other visible sections plain and regular. Crowned by an abstract element of type F, on edge of type A.

Object: hero-stone carved on three sides (back side not recordable)

- front side → three panels
- left side → three panels
- right side → three panels

Location: Nere, Mulshi *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; South enclosure of Śiva temple

Cardinal orientation: front side facing North

Size: • front side → max height cm 96, max width cm 35

- left side → max height cm 96, max width cm 30
- right side → max height cm 90, max width cm 31

Notes: carvings highly worn; panels buried to a great extent; back side not properly recordable.

FRONT SIDE (three panels visible out of likely three):

Panel 1: half buried. Portray of a hero. Bust of a hero in front view, holding a bow with his left arm, stretched to the left side of the panel. Left arm not clearly preserved. Traces of a necklace are preserved. Hair arranged in a bun.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: figure standing in three-quarter right view, with legs slightly flexed. Arms not preserved, but might be holding a bow. Any further detail is lost, apart from his bun hairstyle. On the right: two warriors one above the other (i.e. behind). The one below has his legs widely stretched apart, which, together with his arms position, might suggest he is either drawing a bow with nocked arrow, or throwing a spear against the hero. His companion is portrayed above in the same attitude. The elements represented in the middle of the panel are likely to be connected with their weapon, but cannot be properly identified.

Panel 3: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in right profile view, on a stool/cushion (?), his crossed legs resting on it, his arms not preserved. Traces of his hair bun can be observed. In the centre: scanty remains of a *liṅga* in midair above Nandi (?). On the right: *pujārī* standing in left profile view, his bust bent forward, close to the *liṅga*. Both his arms seem to be stretched straight forward as well.

Frame: plain and regular. . Crowned by an abstract element of type F, on edge of type A.

LEFT SIDE (three panels visible out of likely three):

Panel 1: unreadable since buried.

Panel 2: dead hero. Hero lying on his left side on a backless throne (?). His right leg is crossed over the left. His left arm is bent at the elbow and raised to the head, the forearm oriented upwards to support it. Right arm resting on the chest. Above him a series of garland hangs.

Panel 3: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in left profile view on a stool, with crossed legs. Right arm resting likely on the legs; left not visible. In the centre: Nandi crouched in left profile view, with paws bent. Above him, a *yoni-liṅga* on a pedestal. On the right: *pujārī* standing in three-quarter left view, with legs slightly bent. He holds a bell in his left arm, the arm bent at the elbow, with forearm oriented towards the *liṅga*. Hints of the right arm suggest it is raised upwards. He wears a *dhotī*, judging from thenfold hanging between his legs. No further details are preserved.

Frame: plain and regular. Crowned by an abstract element of type F, on edge of type A.

RIGHT SIDE (three panels visible out of likely three):

Panel 1: undecipherable.

Panel 2: ascension to heaven. The visible portion shows the hero standing in the centre with legs flexed and hips bent to the right. He wears a *dhotī*, the fold falling on the legs. He has his arms, embracing the figures who flank him by resting his arms on their shoulders. Traces of earrings and bun hairstyle can be observed. On the left: an *apsaras* stands in three-quarter right view. She likely embraces the hero with her left arm, the right being by the side (hand not preserved). Her attire consists of a *dhotī*; hints of earrings and hair arranged in a bun.

Panel 3: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in right profile view on a stool, with legs crossed and hands likely joint in front of his chest. He has his hair tied in a back knot; any other feature of his attire and ornaments is lost. In the centre: scanty traces of Nandi's body, his muzzle turned to the front. A *liṅga* is likely represented in midair. On the right: figure not preserved.

Frame: plain and regular. Crowned by a *kalaśa* with base, belly and handle D, on edge of type A.

No. 80, pl. 93, NERE

Object: hero-stone carved on three sides at least (back and lateral sides not properly recordable)

- front side → two-panels
- left side → two-panels
- right side → two-panels

Location: Nere, Mulshi *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; South enclosure of Śiva temple

Cardinal orientation: front side facing North

Size: • front side → max height cm 57, max width cm 40
• left side → max height cm 70, max width cm 19
• right side → max height cm 75, max width cm 21

Notes: mostly buried; left and right size not properly recordable.

FRONT SIDE (two panels visible out of unknown number):

Panel 1: half buried. Fight scene. On the left: head of hero (likely standing) and upper part of bow. On the right: heads and busts of two warriors holding a spear above their heads.

Panel 2: dead hero. Hero lying on his right side on a backless throne (?). His right leg is crossed over the left. His right arm is bent at the elbow and raised to the head, the forearm oriented upwards to support it. Left arm resting on the chest. He has his hair arranged in a bun. Two *apsarases* stand in front view behind him, holding a *cāmara*. No other details are preserved.

Frame: plain. Traces of an abstract element on the crowning section, resting on edge of type A.

Despite its poor preservation status, this specimen displays an unconventional scene in the upper panel, i.e. the hero presumably dead and in the company of the *apsarases*, which is something usually confined to the lowest sections of the steles.

ACCIDENTAL HEROISM

No. 81, pl. 94, PANDESHWAR

Object: three-panelled hero-stone

Location: Pandeshwar, Purandar *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; flanking (on the right) a stone stairway in the premises of Paṇḍeśvar temple

Cardinal orientation: facing North

Size: max height cm 103, max width cm 33, max thickness cm 14

Notes: tapering upwards; lodged in a recess of the stairway; mortar on the back side; stele bottom section is buried, the original number of the panels being undefinable: only the upper three ones can be recorded.

Panel 1: ascension to heaven. In the middle: standing hero in front view; legs bent and stretched apart, in a rather static position. Arms raised up to embrace around their shoulder the figures at his sides. He wears a *dhotī* a fold of which hangs between his legs; traces of ear ornaments and short hairstyle with a back knot are visible. One standing *apsaras* on each side flanks him. Their attitude is specular: one of their legs (that closer to the outer side of the scene) is straight, while the other slightly flexed to the hero's side, as well as their bust. The left side *apsaras* shows one arm slightly bent, grabbing in her hand an oblong attribute hardly identifiable given the lack of both its edges (a long staffed *cāmara*?). The other arm is along the side, close to the hero, possibly leaning on her own knee. The attitude of the right side *apsaras* seems to be specular, despite the attribute she likely holds with her left (that must have trespassed on the currently worn lateral frame) is not clearly preserved. Both of them display large protruding earrings and hair tied in a knot.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: standing hero in front view; legs stretched apart, the left slightly flexed and stepping forward. Both his arms are bent and raised to the shoulder height, the forearms oriented upwards. He wields a sword above his head (trespassing on the frame) with the right hand, while with the left he grabs the ear of the wild animal opposite him. Beyond the *dhotī*, belt and (dagger?) sheath falling on his right hip are visible. His hairstyle is consistent with that displayed on the lower panel; the necklace is a further piece of ornament given here. On the right: three quarter left view tiger reared up, its forelegs leaning against the hero's torso. It features coiled tail, whiskers and big eyes.

Panel 3: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting on a cushion/seat (?) in three-quarter right profile view, his left leg crossed over the right, that is apparently resting straight. His hands in *añjalimudrā*. Hints of the belt and its lateral sheath are the only details preserved of his attire, along with his ear ornaments. His hairstyle is consistent with that observed in the previous two-panels. In the centre: *yonilīṅga* in side view on a thick pedestal. The cult object is likely resting on the back of Nandi, in left profile view, his head turned in front, while crouched with paws bent on a double-moulded pedestal (?). On the right: standing *pujārī* in three-quarter left view. Just his right arm is visible, bent at a right angle and oriented to the *liṅga*, holding an undecipherable attribute. His attire and possible ornaments cannot be detected, except for the earrings.

Frame: plain, but quite irregular on the sides; rather thick fillets dividing the panels. Crowned by *akalaśa* of with base, belly and handles D, on edge of type A.

The encounter with a wild animal as the hero's cause of death is the first remarkable trait of this stele. The original arrangement of its panels is also an outstanding feature, where the depiction of the hero's ascension to heaven occurs before the representation of the circumstance of his death. Being the bottom section of the stele unavailable, we can only speculate about the content of the eventual Panel 1 on a comparative basis, suggesting it might have captured the dead hero.

As far as the style is concerned, a certain spatial compression can be observed in the uppermost panel, where the right side figure seems to be flattening between the lateral frame and the object of worship, with the protruding section of the *yonī* in the foreground hiding completely the figure's neck. The rigid front view of the hero in the survived Panel 1, although a minute detail, has to be looked as an original device, given the widespread tendency to confer a certain extent of dynamism upon the hero by usually showing his hips bent to the side.

No. 82, pl. 95, RAJAPURI

Object: two-panelled hero-stone

Location: Rajapuri, Satara *tālukā*, Satara district

Position: standing in cave III, Śrī Kārtik Svāmī *mandirākaḍe* complex

Cardinal orientation: facing East

Size: n.a.

Notes: tapering upwards.

Panel 1: fight scene. On the left: hero standing in three-quarter right view, his legs bent and stretched apart, the right oriented backward in midair, the left stepped forward indicating a leap. His left arm is stretched straight ahead, grabbing a bow. The right is raised, bent at the elbow and oriented to the left (i.e. backward); no attribute is preserved. He wears a *dhotī* (two waist bands can be seen); earrings and short hair right above his forehead are visible. On the right: a wild animal (tiger?) reared up; its paws are lost, although traces of forelegs are still recognizable, while its long tail and muzzle features can be distinguished.

Panel 2: worship scene. On the left: a figure (the hero) sits (?) in three-quarter right view. The arms are bent and oriented forward while holding a garland. Earrings and arm bracelet are the only details preserved of his attire and ornaments. In the centre: Nandi in left side view, on a tall pedestal. While it is unclear whether he is standing or is crouched, his muzzle (slightly turned to the front), and his hump are clearly visible. On the right: a male figure stands in three-quarter left view, with arms raised straight upwards supporting a thick object with both the hands above his head. A garland (?) hangs over Nandi, and an element shaped as a miniature pot stands on its bend.

Frame: absent.

RELIGIOUS HEROISM

Suicides (self-mortification rituals)

No. 83, pl. 96, MANGALWEDHA

Object: five-panelled (?) hero-stone

Location: Mangalwedha, Mangalwedha *tālukā*, Solapur district

Position: standing between Lokmandal Sabhagraha and Mhasobā shrine

Cardinal orientation: facing West

Size: max height cm 154, max width cm 56, max thickness cm 21

Notes: lowest section missing; coated with red paint.

Panel 1: partially preserved, only the heads of four figures being identifiable on the upper left side.

Panel 2: procession scene. Three groups of personages can be distinguished. Roughly in the centre: an elephant in profile view strides towards the right side of the scene. Its head is adorned with a sort of covering; traces of a sitting drape, of a breast and a belly band are visible. It is mounted by four figures. The mahout is in the lead, likely holding an *aṅkuśa* in his right hand. A male figure follows, likely the hero, who rests his hands on the mahout's shoulders. Traces of *dhotī* fold can be seen on his waist and right thigh; he wears a necklace and earrings. As the mahout's, also his hair is tied in a tall bun on the crown of the head. Behind him two other figures sit, that we tentatively identify as the hero's family. Although no female features can be safely ascertained, the first of the two seems to show a comparatively more graceful and curvy profile, together with a slightly different hairstyle (two top buns?): some details that would stand in favour of the identification of this figure as the hero's wife. Her right arm rests gently by the side, while the left might be raised and rest on the hero's shoulder. Hints of a *sāṛī* on her waist and a necklace between her alleged breasts may be noticed; she also wears some earrings. A figure portrayed in a smaller scale brings up the rear, whom we believe to be the couple's son. His right arm is raised up, with the hand touching his hair arranged in a top bun, while the left is lightly raised forward.

Four figures walk behind the elephant, disposed in two rows, one above the other. They all stand in three-quarter right view. The two in the foreground have their legs slightly flexed and stretched apart, but bear different attributes: the one close to the edge of the scene has his hands joint on the chest to hold a sword (?) which blade rests on his right shoulder. His companion has his right arm bent by the side, the hand grabbing the bottom edge of a bunch of garlands (?) leaning down on his right shoulder (this element apparently recurs also in the uppermost panel, lower row of figures on the left). While the left raises up straight a *makaradhvaja*. Both wear a *dhotī* a fold of which falls between their legs, *yajñopavīta*, wrist bracelets, earrings and have their hair arranged in a top bun. Above them (i.e. behind), on the left, a figure holds a sword in his right hand, with the blade on his right shoulder similarly to the personage right below him. The figure beside allegedly contributes to lift up the banner held by the figure on the bottom, since he has his right arm bent at the elbow and apparently oriented to the banner pole. Their attire and ornaments similarly consist of *dhotī*, earrings and a tall top knot as to the hairstyle.

Nine figures on the right precede the elephant. They are disposed in two rows, one above the other. On the bottom, next to the trunk of the elephant, a *vaijayantika*, lifting up the flag with his right arm. He wears *dhotī*, *yajñopavīta* and earrings, having his hair arranged in a wide bun on the crown of his head. His legs are flexed and slightly stretched apart, with his hips slightly bent to the left, a posture which is common to other figures in the same row, to suggest their movement forward, even though they are portrayed in front view. Thus precede the *vaijayantika* two *ḍholak* players and two *muraja* players, the latter in three-quarter right view. They all are engaged in playing their instruments apart from the first musician, who has his right arm raised up as to hold something above his head. Above them (i.e. behind),

two series of personages stand. The two on the left are turned towards the elephant and seem to be throwing in the air something before its passage (probably held in the left hand of the second personage): they have their right arm raised with the hand palm up, while their left is bent at the elbow and rests by the side. Two oboe players turn their back to them, and seem to walk ahead while playing their instruments. All these figures show *dhotīs*, large earrings and a top knot tied by a thick string.

Panel 3: sacrifice and procession scene. In the centre: the hero sits in front view on a short pedestal, cross-legged with hands in *yogamudrā*. His full attire and set of ornaments are visible: the *dhotī* around his waist, the *yajñopavīta*, his wrist and arm bracelets. His head is fragmentary, which thing, given the good preservation of the carvings, may be interpreted as a device to underline the core event of the scene: the hero is beheaded by the figure who stands beside him in three quarter left view. This personage has his right arm raised up, wielding a sword that trespasses on the frame above; his left arm instead is bent at the elbow and rests by the side. Also his attire is clearly recognizable and consists of a *dhotī* with fold falling between his legs; earrings, wrist and arm bracelets form his ornaments, with the top bun as a hairstyle. Close to him, another figure is represented in a comparatively larger scale, turned to the opposite side of the beheading scene. He stands with legs stretched apart and bent, suggesting his movement forward (i.e. to the right), and carries on his crown the plate on which the hero's head rests (fully adorned with ear ornaments and knot hairstyle). He balances this load by holding it with both his hands. Of his attire and ornaments only *dhotī* and earrings can be seen. The hero, is sacrificer and this personage occupy the core are of the panel, from either the iconographical and the iconological perspective, although between the last two a further figure is represented, notably in a smaller scale. This personage stands in three-quarter right view, with legs stretched apart. The right arm is bent at the elbow. No sexual features can be safely determined, the only visible details being the *dhotī* and a hint of hair bun. This personage is but one of the procession taking the hero's head around, the others being portrayed on the right side of the panel. The group consists of at least ten figures, disposed on different levels, all captured as moving forward. The first, next to the head-bearer, supports the *makaradhvaja* with both his hands; before him stand four *ḍholak* players. All these personages show the same garments and ornaments seen in the panel below. Above them (i.e. behind) six oboe players and a dog (?).

By analyzing the left side of the panel we move back in space and in time at once: the stage soon before the hero's beheading seems to be captured here. Eleven figures are represented, all in three-quarter view to suggest they move to the right, disposed on three levels, and engaged in different activities. On the bottom, two of them carry a round palanquin (likely used to transport the hero at last) by placing its axes on their left shoulder, while their right arm is bent at the elbow and rests by the side. Their *dhotī*, earrings and bun hairstyle are visible. Underneath the palanquin a figure is kneeling on the right leg, the right arm bent at the elbow and raised up, as to support the palanquin. Out of the four personages behind it, three hold some attributes (which thing cannot be inferred for the fourth as he is almost entirely hidden by the hero); none of these objects is clearly identifiable apart from a sword. The figures in the uppermost row bring further objects, the parasol close to the hero's head being the only discernible. Notably, the parasol bearer turns his gaze away from the beheading.

Panel 4: ascension to heaven. In the centre: hero standing in front view, kneeling with his right leg, a dynamic position suggesting a leap. With his arms raised to the shoulders height he embraces the figures who flank him. His attire is fully preserved and confirms what observed in the panels below: *dhotī* (here open wide due to its movement), belt, *yajñopavīta*, large earrings, and a top bun tied by a thick string. Next to him ten *apsarases* stand, five on each side, in three-quarter side view turned towards the centre. They have a common attitude: legs slightly flexed, arms raised to embrace each other. Their garments and jewels consist of a *sāṭī* with multiple folds, necklaces and earrings, the hair being arranged in a top bun.

Panel 5: *Śivaliṅga* worship. In the centre: *yoni-līṅga* in side view on a double-moulded pedestal. On the left, the hero sits in three-quarter right view with crossed legs and hands in *añjalimudrā*. His full attire and ornaments are consistent with those already observed in the panels below. Various personages attend the ritual. To the group on the left belong five figures disposed on two levels, all portrayed as standing in three-quarter right view; they can be arguably identified as the hero's companions. Of the three in the lower row, the first and the last have similar features: their right arm is bent at the elbow, the hand holding an attribute placed on their right shoulder. We believe such an element (a bunch of garlands?) to be of the same nature as the one displayed in the procession scene, carried by the figure in the foreground

following the elephant. A minor detail marks the difference between the two figures portrayed in this panel: we can see the man in the lead grabbing a wavy object in the left hand, the arm resting by the side. As to the figure in the middle, it is unclear what kind of attribute he bears, if any. All the three, however, wear the same type of *dhotī*, with likely a belt and a dagger sheath for two of them; ear ornaments and bun hairstyle are visible as well. The two personages above (i.e. behind) bear different objects. That on the left carries a sort of bag across his right shoulder, with his right arm bent at the elbow and the forearm oriented forward, holding another attribute (undefinable). The figure standing next to him grabs an object which consists of a shaft and a thick spherical edge (a *gadā*?), the finial oriented upwards. Their attire and ornaments do not differ from those of the figures below.

A series of figures are then in charge for the performance of the ritual. On the right section of the panel different groups of personages are arranged in two rows. On the bottom, from left to right, five musicians: a *śaṅkha* player sitting on the ground in left profile view, with legs bent, the knees up; two *dholak* players standing in three-quarter left view; two *muraja* players standing respectively in profile and in three-quarter side view, both turned to the centre of the scene. Traces of their *dhotī* and hair bun are preserved. Three *ācāryas* are above them (i.e. behind), while a fourth stands on the other side of the *liṅga*, in the centre of the panel next to the hero. The group of three is rather homogeneous, displaying common physical features, such as beard and hair coiled on the top of the head for two of them, and the same attitude: in three-quarter left profile view, they probably rest on a bench which left edge can be seen underneath the *yoni*. Their attributes differ instead. Although they have their left arms bent at the elbow and oriented forward, each grabs his own ritual object: the first and second figure bear a bell, while the third may be holding a *kamaṇḍalu* or alternatively an incense burner. As to their right arms, while the last *pujārī* has it raised laterally and grasps a rod (?), the first has it in front of his chest, bent at the elbow with the forearm oriented upwards, holding a tool apparently provided with a long curved handle (*kamaṇḍalu*/incense burner?). The fourth *pujārī* is portrayed in a specular way compared to the others so far described, as he stands in three-quarter profile turned to the *liṅga*. His attributes consist of a bell that he grabs in his right hand in front of the chest, while an oblong object – likely a garland – hangs from his left hand, with the arm bent at the elbow, raised over the *yoni*. He has no beard, but his hair is coiled on the crown of the head. As in the case of the other three officiants, no details can be detected of his garments. In the background between him and the hero a thick wavy element can be observed which can be hardly connected with any other component of the scene.

Two figures in a comparatively smaller scale rest on the *yoni*, between the *liṅga* and the three *ācāryas*. Despite their location may be interpreted as a perspective device to represent them in the background (i.e. behind the *yoni-liṅga*), their function is unclear. One of the two sits (?) and has his right arm raised over the shoulder height grabbing some attribute (?), with the left arm in front of his chest holding a bell (?). The other personage seem to be kneeling, but no further details can be detected.

Frame: left section missing. Plain and regular. Crowned by a *kalaśa* with base, belly and handle C2 on edge of type E. On the right stands a *makara* in left profile view, showing the body of a boar, the legs of a feline, the head of a crocodile and the tail of a peacock. Notably, the *makara* motif already appeared twice on this stele (on the banners carried during the procession).

G.-D. Sontheimer dates this specimen to the 10th - 12th centuries.³⁹⁰

A number of iconographic details convey the royalty of the deceased celebrated on this specimen, the erection of a memorial stone being an apologetic practice to which corresponded his former prestige on the worldly stage that he had likely derived from his birth.

The royal symbolism embodied by the elephant and the parasol, in particular, is reinforced by the presence of a *dhvaja*, that is to say the banner having on the top the family emblem exposed during public events. This attribute, a prerogative of high rank families, appears twice on the stele: it is carried behind the elephant on which the hero and his family sit (panel 2), and precedes the hero's head in the procession soon after the fulfilment of the rite (panel 3).

On one side the presence of a *makara*³⁹¹ even on the top frame of the stele certainly echoes the family royal status, while on the other it may have an apotropaic value.

³⁹⁰ Sontheimer 1982b: 271.

Panel 1, unfortunately missing, would have acknowledged for the context which led the hero to perform this extreme ritual. In the lack of further references, we can only conclude that the hero's self-sacrifice is the result of a vow binding his own destiny to the outcome of a battle (precisely the type of event that the broken panel may have captured) or to some other attainments for the sake of his community.

No. 84, pl. 97, VELAPUR

Object: three-panelled hero-stone [local record: VLP 73]

Location: Velapur, Malshiras *tālukā*, Solapur district

Position: standing inside stones repository

Cardinal orientation: ---

Size: max height cm 133, max width cm 57, max thickness cm 17

Notes: tapering upwards.

Panel 1: sacrifice scene. On the left: beheaded hero standing in front view, with arms resting by the sides. His *yajñopavīta* and his wrist and arm bracelets are clearly visible, while no clear details are available of his lower garment, only a waist strip being given. On a plate on the left rests his head, still fully adorned with earrings, his hair arranged in a coiled bun. The plate is carried on the crown by a figure in front view, with legs bent, the right being stepped forward and turned sideways: judging from the legs posture of all the personages in the scene, we infer that they are walking on a sloping path. The head-bearer attire consists of a *dhotī*, with a pair of earrings as his ornaments. To the right of the hero's beheaded body stands the figure who executed the sacrifice: in three-quarter left view, he wields a sword in his right hand over the hero. He wears a *dhotī*, arm bracelets, earrings; his hair tied in a wide top bun. On the right: three warriors on horseback in three-quarter left view, next to one another, assist to the event. They all have their right arm raised up straight, holding a sword, with the left likely grabbing the reins (as shown by the raider in the foreground). Bun hairstyle and earrings are the only features recognizable. Their horses harness is partially visible: reins (as to the one in the foreground), brow-band, cheek and nose piece, with a double strip decorated with pearls around their necks.

Panel 2: ascension to heaven. In the centre: hero standing in front view, the hip slightly bent to the left. His arms are raised to embrace the two maidens by his sides around their back. Compared to the panel below, his lower garment is clearly represented here: a *dhotī*, with fold falling on his legs, and thick hem around the waist. The *apsarases* who flank him are in perfectly symmetric posture: in front view, their hips protruding towards the outer side of the scene, embracing the hero with one arm, while the other holds a *cāmara* oriented downwards and touching the ground. They are richly dressed: a *sārī* with double rim and central fold, arm bracelets, long necklace and earrings, with a side bun hairstyle. Two pillars mark the lateral edge of the scene. From their tops two types of motifs raise, one spreading inward, the other outward. The first consists of a wavy pattern which outlines a sort of keel-shaped arc; this device acts as the upper frame of the panel and its pinnacle is aligned with the hero below and with the *liṅga* above. The second is a pattern of concentric half-circles.

Panel 3: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in three-quarter right view on a pedestal/cushion (?), with legs crossed (the left over the right) and hands in *añjalimudrā*. His visible attire mainly includes some of the ornaments (arm bracelets) and the hairstyle already observed in the panels below. In the centre: *yoni-liṅga* on a double-moulded pedestal. A garland/oil lamp (?) hangs over it. On the right: *pujārī* standing in three-quarter left view, with a bell in his left hand, the arm bent at the elbow and resting by the side, and another ritual tool in his right hand, the arm raised over the *liṅga*. He wears a *kaupīna*, with earrings as ornaments.

Two pillars mark the lateral edge of the scene. From their tops two types of motif raise, one spreading inward, the other outward. The first consists of a wavy pattern which outlines a sort of keel-shaped arc;

³⁹¹The *makara* is an archaic and multifaceted symbol in India which material records range from the earliest Buddhist *stūpas* in the North to the late medieval Hindu temples in the South. For an excursus encompassing the symbolism of the *makara* see Darian 1976; in the arts: Vogel 1929-1930 and Viennot 1958.

this device acts as one of the upper frames of the panel. Its pinnacle merges with the top edge . The second is a pattern of geometric motif.

Frame: plain and regular in Panel 1, while it consists of motifs echoing architectural designs in the upper two. Edge of type E crowned by a hump-like finial.

No. 85, pl. 98, VELAPUR

Object: three-panelled hero-stone [local record: MHL 25(?)/87]

Location: Velapur, Malshiras *tālukā*, Solapur district

Position: standing inside stones repository

Cardinal orientation: ---

Size: max height cm 111, max width cm 38, max thickness cm 20

Notes: worn carvings; tapering upwards.

Panel 1: sacrifice scene. In the centre: the hero, just beheaded, sits in front view with legs crossed and hands in *añjalimudrā*. He wears a *dhotī*, with necklace, wrist and arm bracelets as ornaments. On the left: a figure stands in front view, his arms rest by the side slightly bent at the elbow. In his right hand he holds an attribute likely corresponding to the hero's head, taken by the hair. The figure wears earrings and has a lateral bun hairstyle; his physical appearance distinguish him from the other two personages in the panel: he looks gaunt and emaciated. On the right: A figure stands in front view, with legs stretched apart and bent. His left arm rests by the side, slightly bent at the elbow outward; his right wields the spear/dagger (?) over the hero's headless bust. He wears a *dhotī*, with the fold hanging between his legs, and earrings as ornaments, having his hair arranged in a side knot.

Panel 2: ascension to heaven. In the centre: hero standing in front view with legs stretched apart and slightly bent. His arms are raised to embrace the figures who flank him around their shoulders. His attire, ornaments and hairstyle are consistent with those displayed in the panel below. Next two him stand indeed two *apsarases*, one on each side, in front view, the hips bent to the outer side of the panel. They embrace the hero with one arm, while the other holds an unrecognizable attribute (likely a *cāmara*) which slightly trespasses on the lateral frame. The two maidens have common attire and ornaments: *sārī*, likely a belt, earrings and a necklace, with a side bun as a hairstyle.

Panel 3: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the right: hero sitting cross-legged in front view, with hands in *añjalimudrā*. His garments, jewels and hairstyle do not show any difference compared to the previous panels. On the right: *yonī-līṅga* on a double-moulded pedestal.

Frame: plain and regular. Crowned by *akalaśa* of with base, belly and handle A (?) on edge of type E.

Despite the lack of any procession scene, the hero's attitude in Panel 1 confirms we are dealing with a religious sacrifice rather than with an episode of murder by the hand of an enemy on the battlefield.

No. 86, pl. 99 VELAPUR

Object: four-panelled hero-stone [local record: VLP 55]

Location: Velapur, Malshiras *tālukā*, Solapur district

Position: standing inside stones repository

Cardinal orientation: ---

Size: max height cm 144, max width cm 61, max thickness cm 10

Notes: tapering upwards.

Panel 1: sacrifice scene. In the centre: beheaded hero sitting on a stool in front view, with legs in *baddhakoṇāsana* and hands joint in front of his chest (not preserved). Only his arm bracelets are visible as part of his attire. His head is on the right, resting on a plate, and is still adorned with earrings and a bun hairstyle. The plate is carried on the crown by a male figure standing in three-quarter left view. His arms are raised up and stretched out, the hands grabbing the side edges of the plate; from his legs position (left slightly bent and stepped forward, right backward and almost in midair) we can infer he is proceeding towards the right. On the left stands the personage who performed the beheading rite, in three-quarter right view, the legs bent and stretched apart as in a walk forward, the arms raised up straight and stretched

apart. He wields a sword in his right hand. No other details of his attire and ornaments are given beyond his *dhotī* and earrings. His hair is tied in a coiled bun. Next to him, on the left edge of the scene, stands a male figure in three quarter right view, his legs posture suggesting he is proceeding towards the right likewise. He holds a *tablā* above his head, turned sideways. Only his *dhotī* and earrings are visible.

Panel 2: procession scene. On the left: elephant striding towards the right side of the scene. Its harness consists of a head covering and a double belly band. Two male figures mount it: the mahout in the lead, holding an *aṅkuśa* in his hands; the hero behind him, with left arm resting by the side and right arm raised up, slightly bent at the elbow, as to greet the bystanders. Both the figures show scanty traces of a *dhotī*, with earrings as ornaments, and have their hair tied in a bun (although different in style). On the right: two figures standing next to each other in front view, the hips slightly bending to the left. Their right arm is by the side, while the left is raised up straight, in a greeting gesture. No sexual features allow to identify them as female personages, and consequently as *satī*; they more likely are male participants to the procession paying homage to the hero passing by. Their attire is similar: both dress a plain *dhotī*, wrist bracelets and earrings, their hair being arranged in a coiled bun.

Panel 3: ascension to heaven. In the centre: hero standing in front view. His right hand rests on his waist, the left is slightly raised to embrace the figure beside him around her back. He wears a *dhotī* with fold falling between his legs, with likely a belt; necklace and earrings adorn him. His hairstyle is consistent with that displayed in the panels below. He is flanked by four *apsarases*, two on each side. Those closer to the edge of the frame are in three-quarter view, turned to the centre. Their posture, attire and ornaments are specular. They seem to be walking towards the hero: one leg stepped forward, both the arms by the side aligned with the legs movements. Their *sārī* with fold, their ornaments (necklace and earrings) are visible, as well as their side bun. The other two maidens stand by the hero in front view, the hips protruding to the outer edge of the scene, one arm by the side, the other either embracing the hero (left side *apsaras*) or holding a *cāmara*/garland (?) above her own head. They display common features in terms of garments and jewels: *sārī* with thick rim ad front fold, long necklace and earrings, with their hair tied in a lateral knot.

A pillar frames the scene on each side. From its top a wavy motif rises and outlines a sort of kneel-shaped arc which acts as the upper frame of the scene; its bottom spiral-like offshoot rises instead towards the outer edge of the panel. The pinnacle of the kneel-shaped arch is aligned with the hero below and the *yoni-līṅga* above.

Panel 4: *Śivalīṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in three-quarter right view with legs crossed (the left over the right), the bust turned to the front, and hand in *añjalimudrā*. His attire, ornaments and hairstyle does not display any difference compared to what already observed. In the centre: *yoni-līṅga* on a double-moulded pedestal. On the right: *pujārī* standing in front view, with left arm bent at the elbow and oriented inward, resting by his chest while holding an unidentifiable tool, and the right raised up over the *līṅga* grabbing a water-pot. He wears a *kaupīṇa*; traces of arm bracelets and earrings can be seen.

Two pillars frame the scene on the two sides, with a beam over them acting as the top edge of the panel.

Frame: plain and regular in Panel 1. The frames pertaining to the two upper scenes are represented by architectural-shaped structures. Upper edge of type E with sun and moon symbols, crowned by a hump-like element on a flat base.

No. 87, pl. 100, VELAPUR

Object: four-panelled hero-stone [local record: VLP 08]

Location: Velapur, Malshiras *tālukā*, Solapur district

Position: standing inside stones repository

Cardinal orientation: ---

Size: max height cm 86, max width cm 45, max thickness cm 20

Notes: tapering upwards.

Panel 1: sacrifice scene. In the centre: beheaded hero sitting on a cushion in front view, with legs in *baddhakoṇāsana* and hands in *añjalimudrā*. His head is on the left, in midair. It displays earrings and a side bun. On the right: male figure in three-quarter left view with legs flexed and stretched apart, the right stepped forward. Both his arms are bent at the elbow, the left resting by the side, the right raised upwards.

grabbing the dagger through which the sacrifice has been fulfilled. Scanty traces of the *dhotī* fold can be seen on his legs, with earrings as ornaments. His hair is tied in a wide back knot.

Panel 2: ascension to heaven. In the middle: hero standing in front view, his arms raised at the sides to embrace the figures who flank him around their shoulders. His head is slightly turned to the right. He wears a *dhotī*, with pleat on the left and thick upper hem; large earrings adorn him. His hairstyle consists of a wide back bun tied by strings. Two *apsarases* stand in front view. They rest one of their arm around his back, and hold a *cāmara* with the other, by the side. Their *sārī* show horizontal pleats and a fold falling on the legs. Earrings and a wide bun hairstyle are the only other features preserved.

Uppermost panel: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero sitting in three-quarter right view, with crossed legs and hand in *añjalimudrā*. His attire and ornaments do not include any different elements compared to those displayed in the other panels. In the centre: *yonī-liṅga* on a double-moulded pedestal. On the right: *pujārī* standing in three-quarter left view. His left arm rests by the side, bent at the elbow, a bell grabbed in the hand, while the right is raised over the *liṅga* holding another tool (a water pot/incense burner?).

Frame: plain and regular. Crowned by *akalaśa* with base, belly and handles A, on edge of type A.

No. 88, pl. 101, KIKLI

Object: three-panelled (?) hero-stone

Location: Kikli, Wai *tālukā*, Satara district

Position: lying on the ground as part of a cluster of steles, partially covered; square in the village, beside a banyan tree

Cardinal orientation: facing West

Size: max height cm 111, max width cm 44, max thickness cm 17

Notes: top left section missing.

Panel 1: suicide scene. On the left: male figure standing in front view; legs stretched apart and bent as in a leap forward. Right arm at a right angle, holding a *kaṭṭāra* in his hand (the same weapon clearly visible in no. 52, pl. 65) which points to the right side of the scene; left arm raised and bent upwards, the hand not fully preserved, apparently holding a small size tool (ritual object such as citron/weapon?). He wears *dhotī* (fold falling among his legs), which is open wide according to his movement; belt decorated with beads; *yajñopavīta*; wrist and arm bracelets, large earrings; hair tied in a bun. On the right: free standing pillar with square based pedestal, shaft and capital; on the top, three spears recalling a *triśūla*.

Panel 2: fight scene. In the centre: hero with right leg kneeling, the left one moving forward, bent at the knee, the foot steady on the ground. Both his arms are in the same position as in the panel below, the right hand holding an attribute preserved just in the grip, the left one holding a thick, oval object in the palm; both the tools are arguably the same as in the panel below. His attire is consistent with that of the previous scene. A non-identifiable structure with a curved edge seems to be just underneath the hero's body. Two enemies flank him on either side in a specular attitude: turned in three-quarter view towards him, each of them holds a spear with both hands and pierce the hero's right hip (from behind) and left groin (from the front). They wear *sārī*, thick belt and large earrings, with hair tied in a knot.

Panel 3: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: right profile view of the hero in *padmāsana*, his hands in *añjalimudrā*. Traces of *dhotī*, belt and earrings remain of his attire. On the right: *Śivaliṅga* on a moulded pedestal.

Frame: plain. Top section not recordable.

Interestingly enough, this stele apparently portrays at one time two different death scenarios: a context of self-mortification practice on the bottom panel, a warlike context on the panel above, where the hero is visibly pierced by his enemies' spears. That the stone might be dedicated to two different heroes seems to be a hypothesis inconsistent with the presence of a single male figure in the uppermost panel beside the *śivaliṅga*, whereas we would reasonably expect to find two worshippers if this was the case. The attributes of the figure portrayed in each of the two scenes confirm him to be the same person. Thus, we tentatively suggest that the hero might have performed his self-immolation (Panel 1) as a consequence of a vow linked to the destiny of the conflict (Panel 2), the wounds he was inflicted being not the ultimate cause of his death.

Simple *satī*-stones

No. 89, pl. 102, SASWAD

Object: *satī*-stone

Location: Saswad, Saswad *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; external Southern wall of Māruti shrine nearby Cāṅgāvateśvara temple

Cardinal orientation: facing South

Size: max height cm 83, max width cm 50, max thickness cm 13

Notes: worn carvings; all surface coated with red paint (same as on the gate and some sections of the shrine).

Left, right and bottom edges of the stone cut straight; triangular top edge.

On the extreme left border of the figured area, a standing pillar (type D) tapered and curved edged at the top. Its shaft bears two carvings. The lowest one appears as a small size, square recess, which original purpose remains to be clarified. Above it, in the middle of the shaft, an anthropomorphic figure in front view, apparently sitting in *padmāsana*, with hands in *añjalimudrā*, whose sex and attire are undefinable. Nonetheless, we can supposedly identify this figure as the deceased husband of the widow who became *satī*. From the right edge of the pillar, at one third of its overall height, a left arm protrudes towards the right side of the figured area, bent at a right angle, the forearm directed upwards with hand palm to the observer. It is adorned with a wrist bracelet. The pillar-arm motif acts as a frame: on both the nether and the upper side of the arm, some more elements are represented. Below: anthropomorphic figure lying supine, captured as seen from above. No attire details are preserved. We believe this figure to be the deceased husband. Above: a horse rider. The horse is in profile view (left side) and has its right foreleg raised, suggesting a trotting gait; the ground level is not provided by some other component of the carving (such as the arm motif), rather it is given as a separate element (a rocky surface?). The rider's legs are consistent with the horse view (left side profile), while it is not clear whether his torso is portrayed alike or in front view. Right arm raised and bent upwards at a right angle, while the other is stretched straight towards the right side. Both the hands likely hold some attributes which are not identifiable anymore. No details are preserved of his attire. Despite the poor preservation status and the essentiality of the composition, we suggest on a comparative ground (see for instance no. 100, pl. 113) to identify this figure as the wife going in procession to her funeral pyre.

Above her on horseback, an stylized two-moulded element putatively recalls a *kalaśa*. It displays two holes in the centre (a later add?).

No. 90, pl. 103 GULUNCE

Object: *satī*-stone

Location: Gulunce, Purandar *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; repository of stones on right side of the entrance to Śrī Jyotirlinga *prasann*

Cardinal orientation: facing South-East

Size: max height cm 133, max width cm 61, max thickness cm 25

Notes: roughly cut, likely unfinished; tapering downwards.

Left and right edges of the stone cut straight; left lowest section missing; triangular top edge.

On the right border of the figured area stands a short stout pillar crowned by a hump-like element with a finial (type B). From its lowest left edge a right arm protrudes towards the left side of the figured area, bent at a right angle, the forearm directed upwards with hand palm to the observer. Two thin bracelets adorns its wrist. The arm is taller than the pillar, standing straight up almost to the top edge of the stele.

No further elements are portrayed, signs of chiseling being scattered on the whole surface though. This, together with the hint of a tiny rectangular-shaped area between the pillar and the forearm, would confirm that the carving of this piece is unfinished.

No. 91, pl. 104, GULUNCE

Object: *satī*-stone

Location: Gulunce, Purandar *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: embedded in the stairway leading to Śrī Kṣetra Jyotirlinga Devasthān (beside Śrī Jyotirlinga temple)

Cardinal orientation: facing East

Size: max height cm 71, max width cm 35, max thickness cm 11

Notes: a recess has been cut in the lowest step of the stairway in order to lodge the stele; worn carvings; traces of red coil on the surface.

Left, right and bottom edges of the slab cut straight; triangular top edge.

On the extreme left border of the figured area, a standing pillar with long shaft and likely hump-like finial (type B). From its lowest left edge a right arm protrudes towards the left side of the figured area (ultimately spreading all along its centre), bent at a right angle, the forearm directed upwards with hand palm to the observer. One thick bracelet adorns its wrist. The pillar-arm motif acts as a sort of frame: between the pillar and the forearm, a couple of human figures in front view (arguably the deceased husband and wife) apparently sits crossed legs (?); their arms are not preserved, if not for a fragment of the left figure's right arm (raised at shoulder height?). Given the bad preservation status of the carvings, their respective identities and attires cannot be deciphered.

Adjoining the topmost edge of the pillar, a horizontal fillet protrudes straight to the right of the figured area, thus separating the core area of the stele and its uppermost section.

Uppermost section: traces of two motifs are visible, arguably the sun and moon symbols. Above them, in the centre, an apparently circular-based, multiple-moulded element topped by a finial (a sort of receptacle resembling a *kalaśa* of the type displayed in no. 56 pl. 69).

Frame: it is given a thick plain frame, in high relief, on the left side; its upper section is missing, but it was arguably joint to the horizontal fillet protruding from the pillar. On the right side, the pillar itself acts as its counterpart. The features of the lateral edges of the uppermost section lead to suspect the formerly existence of a frame of the same kind.

No. 92, pl. 105, VELAPUR

Object: *satī*-stone

Location: Velapur, Malshiras *tālukā*, Solapur district

Position: standing in the *garbhagrha* niche of the “*Hemādpanti* temple on the tank” (not in use)

Cardinal orientation: facing East

Size: max height cm 77, max width cm 31, max thickness cm 17

Notes: traces of *sindūr* and turmeric powder.

Top and right edge cut straight; right and bottom edges curving; left edge partially broken.

On the extreme right edge of the figured area stands a pillar consisting of a slender polished shaft, collar and tall overturned bell-like capital (type C). The pillar size covers the three-quarter overall height of the stele. From the left edge of the shaft, a right arm protrudes towards the left side of the figured area, bent at a right angle, the forearm directed upwards with hand palm to the observer. It is adorned with three wrist bracelets.

Right above the pillar, a female figure in front view sits in *padmāsana* on a cushion, her hands in *añjalimudrā*, likely representing the *satī*. She has bear torso and oblong earlobes (earrings not clearly visible), and wears arm bracelets (more evident than on the right). Two tufts of hair (a sort of fringe) fall on her forehead sides. Beside, on her right, a male figure (the *satī*'s deceased husband) in front view sits in an identical legs, although without cushion; his arms are in *yogamudrā*. He has a rather prominent belly and short straight hair, with arm bracelets, necklace and earrings as ornaments.

To the right of the couple, at the same height, a *yoni-līṅga* on a double-moulded pedestal, in side view, which the dead wife and husband are likely worshipping. Right above it, in the left top corner of the stele, the symbols of sun and moon.

No. 93, pl. 106, VELAPUR

Object: two-panelled *satī*-stone [local record: MHL-66/87]

Location: Velapur, Malshiras *tālukā*, Solapur district

Position: standing inside stones repository

Cardinal orientation: --

Size: max height cm 88, max width cm 45, max thickness cm 25

Notes: top section missing

Panel 1: deceased husband and wives. Three figures sit in front view, with legs apparently in *baddhakoṇāsana*. Their arms rest by the sides, with the hands on the thighs. Nothing is preserved of their attire and ornaments to suggest their sex; however, on the ground of the content of the panel above we argue that the three personages represent the deceased husband with his two wives. All have their hair tied in a bun and wear earrings.

Panel 2: *satī*'s arms. From the right frame two right arms, one above the other, protrude towards the left side of the figured area, bent at a right angle, with the forearm oriented upwards and the hand palm to the observer. Each of them is adorned with two thick wrist bracelets. Their stretch to the uppermost edge preserved of the panel. Between one of the forearms and the right side frame, the symbols of the sun and moon are represented one above the other.

Frame: plain and regular.

No. 94, pl. 107, VELAPUR

Object: *satī*-stone [local record: MHL 57/88]

Location: Velapur, Malshiras *tālukā*, Solapur district

Position: standing inside stones repository

Cardinal orientation: --

Size: max height cm 97, max width cm 48, max thickness cm 13

Notes: worn carvings; traces of reddish brown pigment on the lowest section (ferrous soil from previous location?).

A stout pillar stands on the extreme right edge of the figured area (type F): it is made of three square blocks, the middle one being the narrowest, with top consists of hump-like finial. At about one third of its overall height, on the bottom, a right arm protrudes from the pillar towards the left side of the figured area, bent at a right angle, with the forearm oriented upwards and the hand palm to the observer. Two arm bracelets and three wrist bracelets embellish it. The pillar-arm motif acts as a sort of frame. Below the arm a figure on horseback is portrayed. The horse in left profile view, trotting. Scanty traces of its reins are preserved. The sex of its rider cannot be ascertained, but on a comparative ground we maintain that the personage represents the *satī* (see for instance no. 100, pl. 113) Her torso is oriented to the front, with her arms raised to the shoulder height and stretched out, likely holding some attribute which are no visible any longer.

Above the arm, between the forearm and the pillar, a couple sits in front view, with legs crossed and hands in *añjalimudrā*. They are the deceased husband and wife. Nothing is preserved of their attire and ornaments, although it is still possible to recognize the woman in the figure sitting on the right. She also displays traces of earrings.

On the top section of the stele the sun and moon motif are portrayed at the two sides of a *yonī-līṅga*.

No. 95, pl. 108, MALSHIRAS

Object: *satī*-stone

Location: Malshiras, Malshiras *tālukā*, Solapur district

Position: standing; stones repository in an outer recess of Mahābhaleśvar temple

Cardinal orientation: facing North

Size: max height cm 70, max width cm 51, max thickness cm 24

Notes: worn carvings; all surface coated with pink paint (same as on the outer walls of the temple).

Four squared edges stele.

On the extreme right edge of the figured area stands a stout pillar (type F) made of three square blocks different in size, the middle one being the shortest and the narrowest; the upper block is topped by a hump-like finial. The pillar covers the overall height of the stele. From the left edge of its lowest block, a right arm protrudes towards the left side of the figured area, bent at a right angle, the forearm oriented upwards with hand palm to the observer. It is adorned with two wrist bracelets. The pillar-arm motif acts as a sort of frame: between the pillar and the forearm, precisely in the middle of the figured area, a couple of anthropomorphic figures in front view (arguably the deceased husband and wife) sits in *padmāsana* on a cushion (?), their hands probably in *yogamudrā*. Given the bad preservation status of the carvings, their respective identities and attires cannot be deciphered, although hints of protruding belly and of breasts allow us to pinpoint the male figure on the left side and the female figure on the right. Both of them seem to have their hair tied up in a bun. Above them a *yoni-līṅga* on a plain pedestal. On the upper central edge of the composition, still between the arm-and-pillar compound motif, the sun and moon symbols.

No. 96, pl. 109, MALSHIRAS

Object: *satī*-stone

Location: Malshiras, Malshiras *tālukā*, Solapur district

Position: standing; stones repository in an outer recess of Mahābhaleśvar temple

Cardinal orientation: facing West

Size: max height cm 86, max width cm 60, max thickness cm 20

Irregular edges, the top one triangular.

On the extreme right border of the figured area stands a tall slender pillar made of a polished shaft, with a double-moulded capital (type A); it supports a sort of beam. From the left edge (at roughly one quarter of the overall height of the pillar) a right arm protrudes towards the left side of the figured area, bent at a right angle, the forearm directed upwards with hand palm to the observer (forearm and hand partially destroyed; probably two wrist bracelets were adorning it). Both the arm and the pillar sustain an architectural-shaped horizontal beam with two lobes (on the extreme left side and in the centre), topped by a *kalaśa*. Thus, the core of the figured area is outlined by the pillar, the bent arm and the beam. In the lowest section sits a couple (i.e. husband and wife, on the right and on the left respectively). Their hands are in *añjalimudrā*; the female figure seems to be sitting in *baddhakoṇāsana*, while the male in *padmāsana*. Both of them wear earrings and have their hair tied in a bun. Above, a straight horizontal element (hardly decipherable due to bad preservation) separates the couple from the *yoni-līṅga* (side view) located in the upper section. Between the *līṅga* and the beam, the sun and moon symbols.

No. 97, pl. 110, DEULGAON RAJE

Object: *satī*-stone

Location: Deulgaon Raje, Daund *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; premises of Siddheśvara temple

Cardinal orientation: facing West

Size: max height cm 89, max width cm 33, max thickness cm 16

Notes: irregular in shape; lowest right part missing; tapering upwards; three holes on the base, next to one another; top section covered with minium

Top and lateral edges straight (although worn); bottom edge triangular in shape.

The lowest section of the figured area is separated from either the base and the upper sections by a regular frame in high relief. From the right: a horse in left profile view (its saddle visible, its head trespassing on the frame above), a sitting couple, traces of a square structure captured as seen from above. The couple reasonably corresponds to the dead husband and wife, but due to the bad preservation status it is not possible to establish their respective identity. They sit in front view, with legs crossed and hands joint in front of their chest; the right side figure has a bun hairstyle. Although scarcely discernible, the structure on the extreme left edge might display some similitudes with the elements represented on other

satī-stones, which we tentatively identified as the enclosure of the funeral pyre (see for instance no. 100, pl. 113; no. 106, pl. 119).

In the core section on the figured area stands a tall slender pillar (type B), with plain shaft and hump-like topping. Slightly above its bottom edge, a protruding right arm bent at a right angle adjoins, forming a whole with it. Its forearm is oriented upwards, as tall as the pillar itself.; the hand palm is turned to the observer. A thick wrist bracelet adorns it. The arm rests on a short and large double-moulded pedestal (?) flanked on the right by a circular element (?). The arm-and-pillar motif acts as a frame to other representations. From the bottom: the spouses sitting in front view, likely on a cushion, with crossed legs and hands in *añjalimudrā*; they both show two majestic head gears, different in shape (further details undecipherable). Above them, the sun and the moon symbols.

The stele topmost section is flat.

Different features distinguish the depictions of the couple in the two different portions of the stele, i.e. larger scale and remarkable hair arrangement when in the core of the figured area, compared to their representation below. Two levels of reality might be therefore described by this mean. In the lowest narrative band, the wife's latest moments on the worldly stage, soon before her immolation on the pyre together with her (already) dead husband, with the horse as a symbol of the procession which took her to the place of her death, on the left edge (should our reading of it be confirmed). In the centre, the otherworldly level, their eternal abode.

No. 98, pl. 111, RAJAPURI

Object: *satī*-stone

Location: Rajapuri, Satara *tālukā*, Satara district

Position: standing in cave I, Śrī Kārtik Svāmī *mandirākaḍe* complex

Cardinal orientation: facing North

Size: n.a.

Notes: left side edge partially missing.

Square cut bottom and side edges. Upper edge curving.

The lowest section of the figured area shows a three-band decorative motif composed of geometric patterns. From the bottom: a row of tangential oval reels (?); a plain band; a row of triangles with a short segment top finial. All the edges and motifs are just etched, apart from the oval reels, which are in low relief. Above this band, a figured area in high relief. From the right side of the stele an arm bent at a right angle protrudes towards the left, the forearm oriented upwards with hand palm to the observer. It is adorned with at least two wrist bracelets; traces of an arm bracelet with triangular decorations can be noted as well. In the centre of the hand palm a small size circular attribute is represented, likely a *mātulaṅga*. This arm adjoins a square element on which a flower design is etched; the two seem actually to form a whole. This component, in turn, is contiguous to something that could be read either as a stout short pillar devoid of decorations, or alternatively as a thick section of the lateral frame.

Between the forearm and a thin right side frame, a couple sits in front view, with crossed legs and hands in *añjalimudrā*. They can be identified as the deceased couple, the wife sitting on the right side. They wear a *dhōṭī* and are adorned with earrings (as their elongated ear lobes suggest), necklace, wrist bracelets and anklets (the latter visible just on the husband). He seems to have a short hairstyle, while his spouse's hair is likely arranged in a taller design (worn). The two figures are inscribed within a stylized architectural-shaped structure. It has straight bottom and lateral sides, and triangular roofing with a lobe on the left edge (right undecipherable), crowned by a hump-like finial.

Traces remain of the frame which should have surrounded – at least partially - the area where both the arm and the spouses are carved: a vertical row of tangential pearls is visible next to the hand, on one side, and above the sitting deceased, on the other. These two rows ultimately merge with the horizontal top frame. It consists of a plain fillet with a lobe on the left side (right undecipherable), crowned in the centre by a hump-like element resting on a double-moulded support (wavy design on the lower section, while plain and flat the upper one). Next to the left side lobe, a worn element can be observed, putatively corresponding to the moon symbol.

Object: *satī*-stone

Location: Rajapuri, Satara *tālukā*, Satara district

Position: standing in cave I, Śrī Kārtik Svāmī *mandirākaḍe* complex

Cardinal orientation: facing East

Size: n.a.

Square cut bottom and lateral edges. Upper edge triangular in shape.

The figured area is roughly divided in three sections.

Lowest: in the centre, female figure on horseback, arguably the *satī*. Horse in right profile view; its reins and nose-band are preserved. The woman's bust is turned to the front. Her arms are raised to shoulder height and stretched out. In each hand she grabs an attribute which cannot be determined (although probably coinciding with those prescribed in this case., like lemon, or coconut). She wears a *sāṛī*; her embellishments include wrist bracelet, necklace falling between her breasts and earrings (as from her elongated ear lobes). Her hair is tied in a wide back bun. Two standing male figures flank her, on each side. They show a similar attitude: they stand in front view, with legs slightly flexed, and carry a load on their head. The left side figure has his arms bent at the elbow, raised and open wide, the forearm oriented upwards as to balance the weight of what he is transporting, which consists of a massive square block and a beam. The right side figure has his left raised up straight, the hand keeping the load steady on his head; his right arm is bent at the elbow, resting on the chest, the hand touching the shoulder as to hold something else he is carrying. Both of them must be wearing a *dhotī* (although only its hip band can be seen); their ornaments include wrist bracelets and arm bracelets (visible only on the right side figure). The three seem to proceed towards what is represented in low relief on the right edge of the scene: a structure made of three blocks one over the other. It is likely represented as seen from above or as if deconstructed into its component elements. The uppermost is square shaped in the same guise as the lowest, which however shows a central square hole too; the middle one displays an undefinable polygonal shape. The scene reasonably refers to the ritual procession the *satī* had to perform before ascending to her funeral pyre. If one might at first be tempted to associate somehow the right side structure to the pyre itself,³⁹² comparisons with similar depictions lead to think of a vedic altar, the lowest component closely resembling such a type of structure (see no. 101, pl. 114).

Above the burden carried by the left side hero, a short horizontal fillet (joint to the side frame) separates what observed until now from the middle section of the stele.

Middle section: from the right side of the stele an arm bent at a right angle protrudes towards the left, the forearm oriented upwards with hand palm to the observer. It is adorned with four wrist bracelets different in thickness and design, beyond an arm bracelet made of beads. In the centre of the hand palm a small size circular attribute is represented, a *mātulaṅga*. The arm adjoins a cubical element on which a diagonal cross is etched (maybe to be connected with the woman's upper garment, the *colī*?), which in turn is contiguous to the right side frame. Between the forearm the edge of the panel, the deceased husband (on the left) and wife (on the right) sit with crossed legs next to each other in front view, holding hands. The husband has his right arm resting on his chest, while his spouse has her left bent at elbow and oriented to the side. Traces of *dhotī*, wrist and arm bracelets and earrings are preserved. The husband has short hair, while the *satī* displays a top bun. The couple is inscribed within a rectangle. Above it, aligned with the hand of the arm-motif, another short horizontal fillet (joint to the side frame) separates these elements from the upper section of the stele.

Upper section: the fillet itself acts as the ground level to a worship scene. On the left: Nandi crouched in right side view with paws bent. In the centre: *liṅga* on a double-moulded pedestal. On the right: figure in left side view sitting in *pralambapadāsana* on a stool (although not visible its presence is argued by the legs posture). The left arm is bent, with the forearm towards the *liṅga* while the right is raised over it; none of the attributes is identifiable, nor it is the sex of the figure, although it reasonably correspond to a

³⁹² To be noted that in Central India the pyre takes the shape of a hut, with lateral poles and roofing, which was meant to collapse on the body of the *satī* as soon as set on fire. See Fisch 2006: 270.

priest, which thing consequently makes of it a male. Traces of anklets, wrist bracelets and earrings are preserved; his hairstyle consists if a top bun.

Above it, a large size ovoid element stands in midair; a ring (?) in the middle cuts it in two halves, the lower one (?) with two grooves. Ribbon motifs (?) on the two sides. On the left, the sun symbol as well. The stele frame is worn; traces of lozenges etched on the left side lead to suppose it was decorated.

No. 100, pl. 113, RAJAPURI

Object: three-panelled *satī*-stone

Location: Rajapuri, Satara *tālukā*, Satara district

Position: standing in cave I, Śrī Kārtik Svāmī *mandirākaḍe* complex

Cardinal orientation: facing East

Size: n.a.

Notes: worn carvings; top left section missing.

Panel 1: dead spouses (?). Human figure lying supine on the ground in right profile view. Right arm bent at the elbow, resting on the chest (holding some object?). No other details related to either posture or ornaments can be ascertained, apart from the short hair. Another human figure lies supine over this, likely a woman. Her legs are not preserved, but one of her arms is found to be raised straight upwards, as to touch the frame above.

The two figures, who arguably are the deceased husband and wife, seem to be inscribed within a rectangular-shaped area. The right side of the scene, at the foot of the couple, currently appears devoid of elements; it is unclear whether it reflects the loss of some carving or the original status of the scene (it will be noted that the portray of the deceased couple is not located in the centre of the panel).

Panel 2: composite scene. From the right edge of the panel (at roughly half its height) a right arm bent at the elbow protrudes to the left, the forearm oriented upwards, the palm hand to the observer. It is adorned with three arm bracelets and three wrist bracelets, and a *mātulaṅga* in the centre of the hand. The lateral element that the arm adjoins is a pillar (type E) which covers the whole height of the stele, acting as its right side frame. The arm in turn divides the panel into two halves. Below it, from the left: woman on horseback. The horse is in right profile view, trotting; its visible harness consists of nose-band, reins and saddle. The lady – arguably the *satī* – has her bust turned to the front, her arms slightly bent at the elbow and raised laterally. She holds two unidentifiable spherical shaped attributes in her hands. Her attire and ornaments include *dhotī* (the fold and the upper and visible), necklace and earrings, while her hairstyle is undefinable. Next to it, a human figure sits within a refined structure (building/palanquin?) with legs likely in *padmāsana* and hands in *añjalimudrā*. The sex of this figure cannot be safely determined; due to the context and its position in the panel, we propose to identify it with the wife herself, perhaps performing her *satī*-vow (?), or however captured in some moment still occurring in the worldly sphere, as the afterlife dimension would be given in the upper sections even in this case. Above the arm we find the couple sitting in front view, with legs in *padmāsana* and hands in *añjalimudrā*. They are inside a stylized structure with straight bottom and lateral edges and triangular top (suggesting a shrine/palanquin?).

Panel 3: highly worn. Worship scene. On the left: two figures sitting in *padmāsana* and hands in *añjalimudrā*. The one on the edge of the scene is damaged, its posture being deduced by analogy. Female features could be visible on the right side figure. The two should represent the devotee spouses. In the centre: *yoni-līṅga* on pedestal. Beside it, a worn section of the carving, probably displaying some more elements at the origin. On the right: *pujārī* sitting/kneeling (?) in three-quarter left view. His left arm is bent at the elbow, resting by the chest while likely holding some ritual attribute; his right seems likewise bent, the forearm oriented upwards.

No details of these figures' attire, ornaments and hairstyle can be determined.

Frame: irregular. Apart from Panel 1, the function of the right side frame is embodied by the pillar. The section of the fillet right above the hand palm is remarkably thinner to make room to it. Crowned by *akalaśa* with base, belly and handles A, on edge of type A (?).

No. 101, pl. 114, RAJAPURI

Object: incomplete *satī*-stone

Location: Rajapuri, Satara *tālukā*, Satara district

Position: standing in cave II, Śrī Kārtik Svāmī *mandirākaḍe* complex, beside Śrī Kārtik statue

Cardinal orientation: facing East

Size: n.a.

Notes: the stele is broken in three parts, which have been replaced in the correct position. Upper section missing.

Lateral and bottom edges straight.

In the centre of the lowest section stands a female figure on horseback, the *satī*. The horse stands firmly in left profile view, his visible harness consisting of nose-band and saddle. The woman's torso is turned to the front; her arms are raised over the shoulder height and stretched out, bearing some attributes in her hands. She wears a *sārī* and is adorned with anklets, wrist and arm bracelets, earrings and likely a necklace, her hair being arranged in a top bun. On the right, a male figure stands in front, his arms lifted up and stretched out with forearm oriented upwards. With his right hand he supports the *satī*'s left arm, while he holds another unidentifiable object in his left. A protruding belly can be observed. He wears a *kaupīna*. He seems to have shaved hair/ to be bald (?). No other details are visible apart from his ear ornaments. On the left side of the scene (that is to say, where the *satī* and the other figure seem to be directed) a man stands in front side view next to a structure consisting of three adjacent square sections. The lowest (as well as likely the uppermost) shows a further square hole in the centre, whereas the middle one shows in turn to be concave on the four sides with a central filling. The figure's head is turned towards it, his right hand hangs an undistinguishable ritual tool over it. The structure is likely related to a vedic altar (see for example no. 99, 112). His left arm (not fully preserved) is stretched out and raised over the shoulder height, holding a recipient (?). The hem around his belly indicates he wears a *dhotī*; earrings and wrist bracelets adorn him. His hair must be arranged in a top bun or turban.

The scene portrays some ritual stages preceding the *satī*'s ultimate self-sacrifice on the pyre. Above these figures, from the right edge of the stele a right arm protrudes towards the left, bent at a right angle with forearm oriented upwards. It displays arm and wrist bracelets, while a small size circular attribute is portrayed in the middle of the hand palm, a *mātulaṅga*. The arm adjoins a sort of rectangular element forming a whole with the lateral frame, otherwise rather thin.

Next to the forearm, a square-shaped structure with thick edges (the right merging with the frame of the stele) hosts two human figures sitting in front view next to each other. They sit cross-legged, their hands in *añjalimudrā*. They represent the deceased spouses, but their respective identity cannot be safely ascertained. Both of them display rich clothing: the legs of the left side figure (the wife?) are covered by a long garment with thick rim. The other one has instead bare legs, the anklets being visible in this way. On the thighs two pieces of cloth rest (belonging to a *dhotī/ sārī*?), the rim decorated with pendants; the left arm and shoulder as well are covered by this garment. As a general impression, both the figures seem to wear an upper cloth. Their hairstyle consists of slightly different vertical buns, both show elongated ear lobes suggesting ear ornaments.

The stele is devoid of the topmost section, which remaining part (bottom left corner) shows an unidentifiable element.

No. 102, pl. 115, RAJAPURI

Object: three-panelled *satī*-stone

Location: Rajapuri, Satara *tālukā*, Satara district

Position: standing in cave III, Śrī Kārtik Svāmī *mandirākaḍe* complex

Cardinal orientation: facing East

Size: n.a.

Notes: worn carvings; tapering upwards.

Panel 1: highly worn. Procession scene. In the centre: *satī* on horseback. Horse trotting, in left profile view. The woman's bust is turned to the front; her arms are raised over the shoulder height and stretched

out, holding some attributes in her hands. She flanked by two standing figures, one on each side, presumably males. They are portrayed in a specular attitude: in front view, with right arm raised up, bearing a thick object in the hand. Their left arm, as well as any other detail of the scene (including the bottom left corner), are not preserved.

Panel 2: composite scene. From the right frame of the stele a right arm protrudes towards the left, bent at a right angle with forearm oriented upwards (fingers damaged). It displays two wrist bracelets (one with beads, the other plain); traces of arm bracelets can be seen as well. A small size circular attribute is represented in the middle of the hand palm, a *mātulaṅga*. The arm adjoins a rectangular element which forms a whole with the lateral frame, otherwise rather thin.

Between the forearm and the right frame, a couple (the deceased spouses) sits in front view next on a rectangular-shaped stool with grooved sides. Their legs appear in *baddhakoṇāsana*, their arms in *añjalimudrā*. Scanty traces of breasts would allow to identify the right figure as the wife, whose earrings also seem more evident. Short strands of hair frame their faces.

Panel 3: left side damaged. *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: undecipherable traces of a human figure. In the centre: *yonī-līṅga* on a double-moulded pedestal. On the right: Nandi in left profile view crouched on a short pedestal with paws bent.

Frame: missing all along the left side, otherwise plain and regular. Crowned by *akalaśa* with base, belly and handle A (?), on edge of type A.

No. 103, pl. 116, RAJAPURI

Object: *satī*-stone

Location: Rajapuri, Satara *tālukā*, Satara district

Position: standing in cave III, Śrī Kārtik Svāmī *mandirākaḍe* complex

Cardinal orientation: facing East

Size: n.a.

Notes: highly worn carvings; tapering upwards.

All edges damaged.

The lowest section seems to portray a procession. On the left corner undefinable traces of a standing (?) human figure can be seen. Beside, a female figure on horseback in right profile view (arguably the *satī*). Her right arm is missing, the left being raised up and oriented forward holding some attribute. No further details are preserved apart from her hair, which seem to be short. Next to her, on the right, another figure standing in front view. It is not possible to determine whether it is a male or a female; the arms are not preserved but must have been raised and stretched out. On the right, a figure lies supine on an unidentifiable structure, portrayed as seen from above, both legs bent at the knee and flexed to the left. Right arm not clearly preserved. Left arm raised laterally. From the right edge of the stele a right arm protrudes towards the left, bent at a right angle with forearm oriented upwards (fingers damaged). Only an arm bracelet is clearly visible. The arm stretches from a cubical element which might have formed a whole with was occupying the lateral edge of the stele, either a frame or a proper pillar, of which just few centimetres are preserved today.

Between the forearm and the frame, the deceased husband (on the left) and wife (on the right) sitting in front view cross-legged with hands in *añjalimudrā*. Traces of a cloth band around their waist, earrings, necklace and hints of hair is preserved on both the figures, as well as their facial features, while all the other details are lost.

Uppermost section worn, hence not recordable.

No. 104, pl. 117, LIMPANGAON

Object: *satī*-stone

Location: Limpangaon, Shrigonda *tālukā*, Ahmednagar district

Position: laying on the ground on its right side; located on the North wall surrounding Śrī Siddhdeśvar temple

Cardinal orientation: facing South

Size: max height cm 70, max width cm 28, max thickness cm 14

Notes: carving highly worn; topmost section missing; the stele shows a remarkably tall base.

On the extreme right border of the figured area stands a slender pillar tapering upwards; its topmost section is not preserved. A left arm protrudes from its lowest part towards the left side of the figured area, bent at a right angle, the forearm directed upwards with hand palm to the observer. It is adorned with one (?) thick wrist bracelet. The arm is not merely juxtaposed to the pillar as an external component, but it is its own extension, i.e. they form a whole. The pillar-arm motif acts as a frame: between the forearm and the pillar all the carvings are located, the arm itself covering the lowest section of the figured area, with the stele base being just below it. In the heart of the panel it is portrayed a couple of anthropomorphic figures sitting in front view, the deceased spouses. They likely are in *padmāsana*, their hands joint in front of their chest (possibly in *añjalimudrā*). Giving the loose of any detail, it is not possible to determine the husband and wife's respective position. Above them, in order from bottom to top, a *yoni-līṅga* in side view and the sun (right) and moon (left) symbols.

The crowning section typology cannot be determined.

No. 105, pl. 118, LIMPANGAON

Object: *satī*-stone

Location: Limpangaon, Shrigonda *tālukā*, Ahmednagar district

Position: resting on a platform inside Śrī Siddhdeśvar temple

Cardinal orientation: facing West

Size: max height cm 137, max width cm 38, max thickness cm 14

Notes: inscribed; tapering upwards.

Squared cut bottom and sides edges. Upper edge curving.

On the extreme right side of the figured area stands a tall slender pillar made of three square blocks, topped by a hump-like finial. From the left edge of its middle block a right arm protrudes towards the left side, bent at a right angle, with forearm oriented upwards. The hand palm is to the observer; trace of a small size circular attribute can be seen in the centre of it, likely a *mātulaṅga*. Bracelets adorn the wrist. The pillar-arm motif acts as a watershed between the uppermost figured area and the lowest section of stele, where an inscription is carved. Right above the hand, next to the uppermost section of the pillar, two human figures (male on the left, female on the right) sit in front view on a pedestal, with crossed legs and hands in *añjalimudrā*. The ground level of the worship scene is represented by mean of a horizontal thin fillet in high relief. The two figures are identifiable as the deceased husband and wife. No details could be noticed as to their attire and ornaments, apart from their wide bun hairstyle. On the left, beside the spouses, a *yoni-līṅga* on a multi-moulded pedestal rests likely on Nandi, in left profile view, crouched with paws bent. Above them, the sun and moon symbols.

Below the arm, a high relief panel shows a six line Devanagari inscription in Marathi language. Although several attempts have been recently carried out to decipher it,³⁹³ its bad preservation status did not allow to disclose its content as yet.³⁹⁴

Two noteworthy pieces of information could be extracted from the text though. The first is its date, corresponding 1386 Śaka Era (1464 AD). The second pertains to the lexicon: in the last line of the inscription the word *karakhambā* is mentioned, literally meaning “hand pillar” (from *kara*, hand and *khāmbā*, pillar), a reference to the *satī*-memorial itself.

Given the paucity of inscribed memorial stones in the Maharashtra, this *satī*-stone is a valuable specimen.

³⁹³ Particularly by Dr. A. Bankar, whom I thank for sharing his achievements on this matter, including the tracing of the inscription attached in the plate.

³⁹⁴ The old *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, 17: 725-726 refers of the present *satī*-stone as follows: “Two slabs lie near the temple, one with a cobra and the other with an inscription which appears to be dated 1386 A.D. (*Saka* 1308) [sic!]”. Notably, in this text the nature of the stele is overlooked in favour of its inscriptions, an interest which however did not result in any translation.

No. 106, pl. 119, NARAYANPUR

Object: *satī*-stone

Location: Narayanpur, Purandhar *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; nearby the entrance to Māruti shrine

Cardinal orientation: facing East

Size: max height cm 78, max width cm 56, max thickness cm 22

Notes: lowest section of the stele missing; highly worn carvings; coated with red lead; flower offering.

Left and right edges of the stone cut straight; bottom edge missing; triangular top edge.

On the extreme right border of the figured area stands a tall slender pillar (type B) made of a polished shaft which tapers to the top; it is crowned by a hump-like element with a finial. From the left edge a right arm protrudes towards the left side of the figured area, bent at a right angle, the forearm directed upwards with hand palm presumably to the observer (just scanty traces of the hand are preserved). A thick bracelet adorns its wrist. Both the pillar and the arm are carved in high relief. Between the pillar and the forearm, in the centre of the stele, a figure on horseback is represented: on a comparative ground we suggest to identify it as the *satī* going in procession to her funeral pyre (see no. 100, pl. 113). The horse is in right profile view, the lady's torso in front view. Her arms are lifted straight and stretched apart at shoulder height, likely holding some attributes. Below the arm, on the broken bottom section of the stele, two anthropomorphic figures are represented lying supine one beside the other, captured as seen from above. They are inscribed within a square frame in high relief. The two might be the deceased couple within the enclosure of their funeral pyre (see no. 100, pl. 113; no. 97, pl. 110). No sexual features are correctly preserved. The left arm of the upper figure is bent at a right angle and raised almost at shoulder height, while the right arm seems to be raised straight and oriented towards the figure beside (whose right arm is lost together with the bottom section of the stele, while traces of the left apparently rest along the side).

Above the bent arm motif, on the left side of the upper section of the stele, traces of two figures sitting probably in *padmāsana* with hands in *añjalimudrā*. Both rest on a thick horizontal base in high relief (representing the ground/cushions?), which left edge merges with the lateral frame of the stone (partially preserved only in this topmost section). Beside the couple, on the right side, an unidentifiable element (*yoni-līṅga*?).

Satī-cum-hero-steles

No. 107, pl. 120, KUMBHARVALAN

Object: two-panelled (?) *satī*-cum-hero-stone

Location: Kumbharvalan, Purandar *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; external Eastern wall of Śiva shrine, right side Cardinal orientation: facing East

Size: max height cm 72, max width cm 40, max thickness cm 15

Notes: traces of yellow paint (probably same coat as on the shrine outer walls); stele devoid of the uppermost sections.

Panel 1: dead hero. Hero lying supine on a multilayer bed-like structure, the funeral pyre. His head resting on a cushion (?); his right arm along the side, bent elbow, forearm not preserved; his left arm lifted at a right angle close to the head. No visible traces of attire; bun hairstyle and earrings. Above him, (female) figure lying almost horizontally, prone; both legs bent downwards; right arm behind the hero's body, possibly embracing him, the left one lifted up almost vertically among the flames. On the background: flames raising upwards from the pyre, trespassing on the frame.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: standing hero in three-quarter right view; legs stretched apart and bent, both the feet firmly on the ground; left arm bent at a right angle holding the shield, right arm raised up behind the head and bent at the elbow, arguably holding a sword/dagger (forearm not preserved). He has his hair in a bun, and wears large earrings, *dhotī* (the fold hanging among his legs); a sort of band is

visible right above his navel, a side of it falling on his right hip, as a sheath of the short sword/dagger. On the right: two enemies, represented as standing in three-quarter left view. Legs stretched apart and bent with feet on the ground; busts and left arms hidden behind their shields; right arms lifted up and bent holding a sword/dagger which hilt is still visible, the blade trespassing on the frame above (not preserved).

Frame: plain.

No. 108, pl. 121, VALHA

Object: two-panelled (?) *satī*-cum-hero-stone

Location: Valha, Purandar *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing; at the corner between external Southern and Eastern walls of Dakṣiṇamukhī Māruti temple

Cardinal orientation: facing South

Size: max height cm 75, max width cm 42, max thickness cm 30

Notes: lowest section missing; highly worn carvings; roughly cut on the sides; surface coated with minium; *sindūr* on topmost section.

Panel 1: ascension to heaven. In the centre: standing hero in front side view; legs stretched apart and slightly bent; both arms raised apart straight over the shoulder height to embrace the two figures flanking him. Scanty traces of *yajñopavīta*, belt (?) and *dhotī* (fold among his legs). No further details preserved. Two (female?) figures stand next to him, one on either side, in three-quarter view turned to the centre of the scene. The left side woman has her right arm bent at a right angle, while the left forearm is missing, being putatively joint to the right arm as in the *añjalimudrā* position, or alternatively embracing the hero around his hip. She seems to have elongated earlobes and bun hairstyle. The female figure on the right is depicted in a specular way, her arms in *añjalimudrā*.

Giving the comparatively unusual hand posture for an *apsaras*, we suggest to identify at least the right side figure as the hero's wife.

Panel 2: *Śivaliṅga* worship. On the left: hero in three-quarter right view, apparently in *pralambapadāsana*, his hands in *añjalimudrā*. Just his hairstyle is decipherable, consisting of a bun. In the centre: In the centre, from the bottom: Nandi in right profile view, crouched with paws bent. He bears on his back a *yoni-līṅga* on thick pedestal, in side view. On the right: standing (male?) figure in left profile view, his left arm lifted up at a right angle, directed forward to the *līṅga*. No more details are preserved apart from his bun hairstyle.

Frame: plain and relatively thick. On the left outer side of it, aligned with the fillet separating the two recorded panels, a right arm protrudes from the stele, bent at a right angle, the forearm directed upwards with hand palm to the observer. It is adorned with a wrist bracelet. The overall height of this outer component is equivalent to that of the uppermost panel (inclusive of both its bottom and top frames). Crowned by a worn *kalaśa* on edge of type E.

The stele shows remarkably crude features. G.-D. Sontheimer believes this sample to represent a transition phase. Here the arm-and-pillar motif would have not yet gained an outstanding and explicit position within the figured area (as we shall see in many instances); nonetheless its appearance as an autonomous symbol, i.e. split apart from the body of any actual female figure represented as performing the *satī* ritual, would mark a later stage if compared to those steles where the arm raised and bent is the distinctive sign of the *satīs* beside their deceased spouse (see here chapter 5.3.4).

No. 109, pl. 122, LONI BHAPKAR

Object: *satī*-cum-hero-stone

Location: Loni Bhapkar, Baramati *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: lodged inside a pavilion niche, nearby Māruti shrine and Bhairava temple

Cardinal orientation: facing East

Size: max height cm 60, max width cm 52, max thickness n.a.

Lateral and bottom edges straight. Upper edge curving.

Dead couple on horseback. Trotting horse in right profile view. The following pieces of harness are visible: plume, nose-band, cheek piece, rein terret, martingale, belly band, and saddle. On the right: warrior in three-quarter right view. Right arm bent and raised near his chest, grabbing some oblong weapon; a thicker straight element peeks out from behind his right shoulder as well a thicker straight element peeks out from behind his right shoulder as well: it is not clear whether the two form a whole or rather are independent attributes (putatively a spear and a bow?). Left arm holding the reins. He wears a long lower garment (upper side ribbons and folds visible as well); a regular design pattern seems to cover his torso and shoulders, perhaps the trace of an upper garment (?). Arm bracelet, necklaces and earrings adorn him. He seems to wear a conical headgear. On the top right corner of the figured area, next to his head, an unidentifiable element is represented in the background (a bow?).

On the left: female figure (the warrior's wife) in three-quarter right view. Right arm raised to the left side of the scene, which bad preservation status prevents from understanding whether she holds something. Left arm non given. She wears a long, large lower garment showing several folds (arguably a *sārī*, which end could be what seems to be floating around her right arm after crossing on her bust on the left side). Her jewelry includes large earrings, necklace and *tikka*.

On the top left corner, beside her head, an arm bent at right angle is depicted, protruding from the left side of the stele towards the right, the forearm oriented upwards, the hand palm to the observer. It is adorned with a wrist bracelet. This motif shows an atypical feature here: the arm orientation allows to think of it as a left arm, while the hand palm clearly indicates a right hand (unless to postulate an uneasy hand rotation by 180°).

Although the size of the stele suits the pavilion niche dimension, in the absence of further data it is hard to establish whether the pavilion and the stele are coeval. Debris lay in the niche behind the stele. A keel-shaped arch frames the niche. Two *pādukā* stones lay misaligned at the foot of the niche. The funerary connotation we assign to this specimen is based on the comparison with similar ancestor memorial stones (see pl. 7), no less than on the presence of the typical *satī*-stone marker, i.e. the arm bent at a right angle.

The deceased couple's portrait undoubtedly echoes the widespread iconographic pattern in use for Lord Khaṇḍobā and his wife, although showing some variations such as the presence of the arm-motif on one side, and the absence of the dog on the other, an animal strictly associated with the god.

At a first sight the warrior's attire seems not fully complying with the standards observed on the memorial stones under examination so far. P.B.Wagoner³⁹⁵ convincingly demonstrated that the contacts between different milieus, such as those occurred between the Hindu and the Islamic culture at the time of Vijayagara empire, resulted in a series of influences that can be observed not only in architecture, but even in material culture items like clothes. Even though in our case it is not possible to ascertain the presence of elements of clear allogenic ascendancy (like those recognized by the author in the ceiling painting of a Vīrabhadra temple in the Andhra region, that is to say the *kabāyi* - a long tunic - and the *kullāyi* - a cap - of Arabian and Perso-Turkic origins respectively), we believe that further investigation on this matter might throw new light on the present case as well.

We are keen to date this specimen to the 14th – 15th centuries.³⁹⁶

³⁹⁵Wagoner 1996.

³⁹⁶For similar cases see Sontheimer 1982b: 281.

Satī-cum-hero pillars

No. 110, pl. 123, NARAYANPUR

Object: *satī*-cum-hero stone carved on three sides

- front side → five panels
- left side → four panels
- right side → three panels (?)

Location: Narayanpur, Purandhar *tālukā*, Pune district

Position: standing inside Māruti shrine, on the left side of the stone image of the god

Cardinal orientation: front side facing East

Size: • front side → max height cm 98, max width cm 39. Tapering upwards
• left side → max height cm 68, max width cm 31
• right side → max height cm 51, max width cm 34. Tapering upwards

Notes: worn carvings; flower and sugar offerings laid down on the front side.

The stele is embedded in a cement base. It is not infixed perpendicularly into the ground, rather it slightly bends backwards. Both this and its close proximity to the statue of Māruti prevent from properly recording and analyzing the two lateral panels, which appear partially buried.

In particular, on the left side, Panel 1 is fully covered by the support base, while on the right side only the two upper panels are visible (we believe this side to include two more panels below, on the ground of the overall height of the stele, and of the actual – although scanty - traces of the third panel).

FRONT SIDE (five panels visible out of five):

Coated with red lead.

Panel 1: death scene. Male figure lying on the ground on his left side (i.e. apparently supine as seen from above). His arms apparently rest on his chest. No further details of his attire and ornaments are preserved. In the background behind him, four female figures next to one another in front view. Only their heads (hints of bun hairstyle) and chests are visible, except for the woman on the extreme right side: traces of her legs survived, suggesting a sitting posture. Their right arm is bent at a right angle and lifted up to shoulder height with the palm presumably oriented to the observer (trespassing on the frame above); the left one similarly bent at a right angle, but oriented forward as to touch the dead man's body. In the right corner: an unidentifiable structure (apparently shaped as a parallelepiped) stands covering the full height of the panel.

Panel 2: procession scene. On the left: male figure on horseback. Horse in right profile view, his paws suggesting a trotting movement; no details preserved of his harness. The raider's chest is in front view; his arms are raised straight to shoulder height and stretched apart, his left hand holding a circular small size object, his right hand and attribute not preserved. Traces of bun hairstyle and earrings are visible. On the right: male figure in front view sitting crossed legs (*padmāsana*?) on a litter, his arms resting on the legs in a non-decipherable posture (*yogamudrā*?). The litter is carried by two standing male figures in front view, who hold it with both their hands. No details can be detected as far as their attire and ornaments are concerned.

Panel 3: worship scene (?). In the centre: on a pedestal stands a flatten square structure with central hole (as seen from above?), which function cannot be deciphered (a Vedic altar?). It is flanked on either side by four worshippers. On the left: two human figures sitting in front view with crossed legs (*padmāsana*?) and hands in *añjalimudrā*. Between them and the structure in the middle of the panel, a tall oblong element (a pole?) stands, apparently tapering downwards, its topmost section not clearly preserved. On the right: two more human figures sitting in the same posture. The sex of none of the four figures can be determined, nor their ornaments or clothing apart from the right side figures' hairstyle, which seems indicating a turban (?).

Panel 4: it is divided into two levels, a fight scene at the bottom and a double set of arm-and-pillar motif in the top side.³⁹⁷

Lower half: fight scene. On the left: figure on horseback. Three-quarter right view bust slightly bending backwards. Arms raised almost at shoulder height and stretched apart, the right towards the left edge of the panel, vertically grabbing with the hand a long sword; the left oriented forward, to the enemy (as to balance the movement of the right arm, or alternatively holding some no longer preserved attribute such as the reins). No details are visible of his clothing and ornaments. The horse is in right profile view, its paws steady on the ground, slightly bent; his harness is not preserved but for a hint of head plume. In the centre: standing figure; right arm along the side, but forearm and left arm not preserved). No further features are decipherable. On the right: figure on horseback, whose attitude is specular to that of the horse rider described above: three-quarter left view bust slightly bending backwards, on a horse in left side view (which harness is not visible). His arms display a different posture though: the left one seems bent at a right angle along the side (possibly holding the reins), the right is raised straight, oriented forward, to the enemy, while grabbing obliquely a long sword that likely trespasses on the motif of the section above. The sex of none of the three figures can be determined, even though obvious evaluations allow us to identify them as males.

Upper half: double arm-and-pillar motif. On the left: from the frame above, a plain oblong element protrudes straight downwards, a polished shaft pillar devoid of capital. From its left edge two arms protrude towards the left side of the figured area, bent at a right angle, the forearms directed upwards with hand palms to the observer. The arms are represented one above the other, the lowest comparatively in a larger scale. Traces of thick wrist and arm bracelets are visible. On the right: the same pattern is replicated, whereas the left side frame of the panel acts as the “pillar”.

Such an iconographic device clearly tells us of a *satī* ritual committed by four wives.

Panel 5: *Śivaliṅga* worship. Five figures sitting crossed legs (*padmāsana*?) with arms likely in *añjalimudrā* flank (two on the left side and three on the right) a *yoni-līṅga* located in the middle of the scene. All the figures are undoubtedly portrayed in front view, apart from – we would argue – the second from the left, who seems to be more likely in right profile view. Despite sex, clothing and ornaments of none of these five figures can be detected, we are keen to identify them as the deceased husband and his spouses: the four wives being precisely those sitting in the unvarying front side view, with him being in turn distinguished by his slightly different position and his conventional proximity to the *yoni-līṅga*.

Frame: plain and relatively thin. Crowned by *kalaśa* of type base-belly-handle A (?) on edge of type D (?). On the right of the *kalaśa*, the moon symbol, which originally must have been coexisted with the sun symbol on the left, today not clearly preserved.

LEFT SIDE (three panels visible out of four):

Traces of red coat on the whole surface.

Panel 1: Partially buried. Warrior on horseback. Bust in front view. Arms raised almost at shoulder height and stretched apart, the right backwards (i.e. towards the left edge of the panel), slightly bent while holding a sword which trespass on the frame above; the left is oriented straight forward (i.e. to the right edge of the panel, to either balance the other arm or to hold the reins). No features of his attire or ornaments are visible. The horse is in right profile view, its paws in the trotting posture. Parts of its harness can be detected, namely nose band and reins.

The figure is not placed in the centre of the panel, being slightly shifted to the right.

Panel 2: Warrior on horseback. Bust in front view. Right arm bent at a right angle, grabbing a spear; left arm slightly raised while holding the reins. Of his attire and ornaments, just traces of earrings can be observed. The horse shows the same features as in the panel below, with plume, nose band, reins, check-reins and breast collar being neatly visible.

Panel 3: Warrior on horseback. His posture echoes that of the hero in Panel 1, apart from the weapon he grabs, i.e. a spear in this case. Not even here one can determine his clothing and ornaments, if not for his remarkably elongated earlobes, indicating large earrings. As to the horse harness, beyond some

³⁹⁷ These two halves are not directly interrelated, as we will see. Notwithstanding, in the lack of any proper horizontal frame in between, we opted to evaluate them as part of the same panel.

components already founded in the panels below (plume, brow-band, cheek piece, nose band, reins), also the saddle is preserved.

Frame: plain and comparatively thin.

RIGHT SIDE PANEL (three panels visible out of three?):

Traces of red coat on the whole surface.

Panel 1: almost completely buried. Only part of a head in the centre can be clearly identified.

Panel 2: fight scene. On the left: warrior on horseback. Galloping horse portrayed in left side view; the rider's legs are consistent with the horse position, but his torso is fully turned backwards to face the enemy standing behind. The rider holds a sort of club with his right arm bent at a right angle, pointing it to the enemy. On the right: standing warrior in three-quarter left side view; his legs seem slightly bent and stretched apart; both his arms are raised almost to shoulder height, the right oriented backwards (i.e. to the extreme right side of the scene), holding a no longer preserved tool (its top edge suggesting a bow), the left oriented forward (i.e. to the enemy on the left side of the scene), holding a shield (?). No details concerning the two figures' attire and ornaments are decipherable.

Panel 3: image of Gaṇeśa partially preserved.³⁹⁸ His protruding belly, trunk (oriented to the right side of the scene) and putatively his left upper arm can be observed.

Frame: plain. On the top, it takes the shape of a lunette.

The overall interpretation of the stele is challenged by its current location and poor conservation status. For what concerns the front side, the most ascertainable narrative element is the death of a combatant and of his four wives who became *satīs*, as confirmed twice by the lowest and the topmost relieves. This is undoubtedly the pivotal circumstance. In turn, the events prior to the hero's death seem to develop in a peculiar sequence which can be only tentatively reconstructed, given the impossibility to pinpoint some distinctive components of the narration.

Panel 2 (procession scene) and Panel 3 (worship scene?) possibly represent a sequence of events occurring right before the tragic epilogue implicit in the fight scene of the second Panel 4, if we suppose a chronological arrangement of the narration. Moving from this, we would argue that Panel 2 and Panel 3 deal with some vow performed by the male protagonist of the stele before facing his death on the battle field (Panel 2), with his wives as devout witnesses of his upcoming destiny (Panel 3).

Not even the fight scene is devoid of some enigmatic aspect, though. On the ground of the conventional position assigned to the hero in the figured areas, we recognize him in the left side warrior on horseback (and consequently his foe in the right side horse rider), but the role of the standing figure in the centre remain unclear.

As far as the other two sides of the stele are concerned, it seems reasonable to consider them as complementary to the front side narration, in the lack of details favoring in turn their autonomy. In particular, the left side displays an iterative multiplication of warriors on horseback represented lonely across the board and echoing the hero's deeds, which thing led Sontheimer to identify them as some of the hero's companions.³⁹⁹ The presence of Gaṇeśa on the right side suggests to Sontheimer "that the hero must have been a devotee of that god, and was perhaps a Brahmin", but the analysis of the lower panels, which presence went unnoticed to all by the author,⁴⁰⁰ might in future broaden our understanding of the overall narration.

From the technical point of view, it is worth noting the prevalence of high relief carvings with reference to both the figured areas and the frames.

Following G.-D. Sontheimer, we date this specimen to the Marāṭhā period.⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁸ Sontheimer 1982b: 280.

³⁹⁹ Sontheimer 1982b: 280.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*: "On the right side of the stonethere is nothing but a crude Gaṇeśa [...]"

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*

Satī-cum-hero wall carvings

No. 111, pl. 124, LENYADRI

LEFT WALL

First group of elements, sector 3

It includes two *satī*-stones next to one another, which we will treat altogether since they share the same features.

Left side:

- five-panels
- max height cm 225, max width cm 77

Notes: traces of whitewash and red paint.

Right side:

- five-panels
- max height cm 225, max width cm 69

The content of the five-panels cannot be deciphered, only the lowest being tentatively recognized: it would portray the dead husband and the *satī* on their common funeral pyre. In favour of this interpretation some details stand that are more safely disclosed on another *satī*-stone on the same wall (sixth group, eight partition wall, see below). In particular, a series of horizontal lines right above the base of the stele would allude to the pyre, while the vertical lines still observable in the background would represent the burning flames. The posture of one of the two characters appears slightly clearer on the right side stele, where a sitting figure (the wife) seems to be portrayed, possibly holding on her lap the corpse of the spouse. Aligned with the second to last panel, a right arm bent at a right angle protrudes from the body of the stele towards the left side, the forearm oriented upwards, stretching to the lowest edge of the crowning section of the stele. Regardless of its preservation status, which in the case of the left stele is particularly poor, this device dispels any doubt related to the typology of these carvings. Interestingly enough, right below the arm, a slender and tapered element in the shape of a parallelepiped stands parallel to the stele, devoid of ornamental or narrative motifs. We tentatively suggest an affinity between this pillar and the rather common element with similar features (although often more elaborated) on a number of *satī*-stones. Echoing the model offered by the standing stones, these specimens are provided with a regular frame to outline the stele edges (scantly preserved) and its panels, as well as with an uppermost section reproducing a multi-layer architectural structure (better preserved on the left side stele) topped by a *kalaśa* (better preserved on the right side stele). A decorative motif made of a succession of steeple-shaped elements, ultimately acting as a crowning framework to the whole uppermost section, is an original feature.

In both the specimens, on the external side of the lateral frame, aligned with the border between the stele body and its uppermost section, two elements are carved, which are not part of the steeple motif above, nor are embellishments of the frame, despite they adjoin it: they are the symbols of the sun (on the left) and the moon (on the right). Their position outside the figurative area of the steles represents a further variation compared to the standing *satī*-stones.

Second group of elements, sector 4

It includes two *satī*-stones next to one another, which we will treat altogether since they share the same features.

Left side:

- five-panels
- max height cm 220, max width cm 53

Notes: traces of whitewash and red paint

Right side:

- five-panels
- max height cm 206, max width cm 52

The structure of these two steles parallels that of the samples described above.

Even in this case the worn carvings do not leave room to a proper understanding of the narration. Similarly to what already observed, aligned with the second to last panel, a right arm bent at a right angle protrudes from the body of the stele towards the left side, the forearm oriented upwards (just hints are preserved of that belonging to the right side stele). A regular frame defines the stele edges and the panels of the figured area (although scarcely preserved). The stele body is expectedly crowned by an architectural structure made of stylized superimposed tiers displaying minimal variations on the two samples (three tiers and *kalaśa* for the left stele; two tiers and *kalaśa* with tall finial for the right side).

The sun and moon motifs are preserved on the left side sample, aligned with the upper frame of the top panel. Notably their position is reversed if compared to the two samples above, the sun being on the left while the moon on the right.

Third group of elements, sector 5

Traces of paintings/low relief?

Red and dark color paint on a whitewashed backdrop outline a representation that is hardly decipherable. The examination at a distance would suggest the existence of a central motif designed as a parallelepiped curving at the top. On the left side, some more element, putatively parallel to the central one, might have been represented.

At present it is not possible to clarify whether the paintings were daubed on an originally carved design that now might have been coming back to the surface given the disruption of the motifs which had ultimately covered it.

Fourth group of elements, sector 6

It includes two niches next to one another.

Left side:

Niche: max height cm 70, max width cm 46

Inner element: max height 49 cm, max width 18, max thickness 4 cm

Right:

Niche: max height cm 70, max width cm 43

Two contiguous concave niches resembling each other in all respects: they display straight lateral and bottom edges, curving at the top. They host a high relief parallelepiped slightly sharpened at the top, its shape evoking a miniature *stambha*.

The function of these carvings is unclear; their connection with the typology of the memorials to the dead might be suggested.

Similar specimens, although on a much larger scale are found elsewhere in the hall (see back wall, third group, third partition).

Fifth group of elements, sector 7

It includes two (?) *satī*-stones.

Satī-stone 1

Max height 104 cm, max width 50.

The figured area of this stele is entirely lost, the number of original panels – if any – being undistinguishable. Only two horizontal lines survive in the lowest section, allegedly evoking the funeral pyre or some sort of seat.

On the extreme right edge stands a three-block slender pillar, as tall as the figured area itself, tapering upwards and crowned by a hump-like element. The pillar acts as the right lateral frame, whereas on the left side a rather thick frame is represented distinctively, merging with its topmost section, which in turn outlines a triangular shape. The lowest portion of the left edge is marked by a laceration.

On the ground of the current preservation status of this carving, its definition as a *satī*-stone is largely based on the presence of the pillar motif, from which a bent arm must have likely protruded towards the left side of the figured area, cutting it in two halves, as the different extent of the surface disruption seem to suggest.

Satī-stone 2 (?)

Max height 57 cm, max width 53 cm

Trace of carving (?) currently observable within a sort of circular area. The shape of the subject represented in the centre cannot be clarified. The wall surface above the upper edge is coated with red paint.

The nature of this remain is undecipherable at present.

Sixth group of elements, sector 8

It includes one *satī*-stone.

Max height 87 cm; max width 50 cm

This is the only sample provided with a description dating back to the time when the full painting apparatus of the hall was still in place, that is to say the end of the 19th century.⁴⁰²

⁴⁰²Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, 18, 3: 209.

It is in three panels. In the lowest panel the Sati is shown burning with her husband's body, supporting his right hand and leg on her lap. Flames rise from the pile. The middle panel shows the Sati going on horseback to the funeral pile. Her hands are raised over her head and she rides to her death apparently in high spirit. The topmost panel shows the woman worshipping Mahādev with her husband.

Contemporary observations still match the reported information, although a few details (such as those related to Panel 3) would have been hardly intelligible today.

A frame in high relief outlines the stele shape; its upper edge apparently shows two lobes at the extreme sides, and is topped by the remains of a half-circular structure with a finial.

On the left outer side, aligned with the centre of Panel 2, a right arm protrudes from the stele, bent at a right angle, the forearm directed upwards with hand palm to the observer. It is adorned with a wrist bracelet. The overall height of this outer component spreads up to the upper edge of the top panel.

FRONT WALL

First group of elements, sector 1

It includes two *satī*-stones (?)

Satī-stone 1 (?)

Max height cm 83, max width cm 49.

The shape of this engraving allows to classify it as a stele. It is not possible to safely determine the number of panels carved in the figured area, the current observable data suggesting them to be at least two. In favor of its identification as a *satī*-stone would be the red coated figure on horseback on the uppermost panel, the only actually preserved. The horse is in left profile view (trace of its breast collar is visible), while the figure's torso is in front view, the arms lifted at shoulder height and stretched apart, straight, holding some attributes. Such a depiction is not uncommon on *satī*-stones and refers to the woman's sumptuous procession towards her funeral pyre (see for instance no. 99, pl. 112); its location on the uppermost panel remains unusual though.

The scanty traces underneath seem to suggest the presence of a further human figure possibly on horseback.

The stele displays a thick frame in high relief which upper edge is topped by a triangular shaped coverage possibly crowned by a finial.

It is not clear whether the thickening of the left side frame is due to the original presence of a further component such as a protruding arm, or it has to be ascribed to the overall bas preservation status.

Satī-stone 2 (?)

Max height cm 84, max width cm 55.

Traces of red paint.

The overall features of this engraving allow to classify it as a stele. The figured area, supposedly composed of at least two-panelled, is entirely worn. It is unclear whether the left side of the composition was originally hosting some element comparable to the arm motif. Traces of a thick lateral and upper frame survive, the tapered topmost section being crowned by a finial flat and large element.

Second group of elements, sector 2

It includes one niche and one relief.

Niche

Max height cm 72, max width cm 32.

Covered with a black (smoky?) layer.

The scanty remains consist of a concave niche having straight lateral and bottom sides, curving at the top.

The bottom edge protrudes in a corbel.

The function of this carving is unclear.

Relief

Max height cm 62, max width cm 62

Traces of a carving composed of three (?) standing figures next to one another inscribed within a rectangular shaped structure. It is provided with a frame to outline the straight lateral and bottom edges,

and the slightly convex upper edge, which is topped by a small size hump-like element in the centre. The content and the function of this engraving cannot be safely assessed.

Third group of elements, sector 3

It includes four pilasters.

Traces of whitewash, red, black and blue paint.

I: max height cm 91, max width cm 26

II: max height cm 83, max width cm 19

III: max height cm 91, max width cm 27

IV: max height cm 91, max width cm 25

Four parallelepiped-shaped pilasters in high relief carved next to one another. They taper upwards and they are topped by an architectural-shaped finial (resembling a *kalāśa*).

Despite the significance of these carvings is not safely ascertainable, we believe their features to be similar to the smaller scale specimen found on the left wall (fourth group, sixth partition wall, see above).

Fourth group of elements, sector 4

The current preservation status does not allow any safe assessment of this section of the back wall, that we record here for the sake of completeness. The laceration of the surface permits to observe the thick layer of plaster covering the original wall, on which paintings were imposed in modern times, as pointed out in our preliminary remarks.

Our overall evaluation of the carving apparatus of the hall is basically unaltered compared to the 19th century observations, if not for some complementary notes.

As already mentioned, the sources reported the existence of nine *satī*-stones, all distributed along the left wall; no mention is made of the carvings likely ascribable to the same category but located on the back wall (the first two engravings). This lack of reference might be rooted in the last century observers' actual impossibility to notice these specimens (as well those beside them, on the same wall) being they still hidden underneath the thick plaster and paint layers, as our last picture shows.

As far as the nine *satī*-stones on the left wall are concerned, we ought to face on one side the current poor preservation status, and on the other the paucity of specific descriptions in the sources. The attempt to reconcile both these facets leads us to conclude that the 19th century account of nine necessarily included the twin miniature niches on the sixth partition wall, which thing would consequently authorize us to extend the function of memorials to the alike four carvings on the back wall. It further results from the records comparison that also one of the two left wall elements we found hard to decipher must have been labelled as *satī*-stones, namely the content of the fifth partition wall, or alternatively the right side carving on the seventh partition.

The importance of Lenyadri's samples, however, lays far beyond any numeric calculation. Their features might contribute indeed to the attempt to establish Southern Maharashtrian *satī*-stones within a consistent chronological pattern.

Four of Lenyadri's samples display the motif of the arm bent at a right angle protruding as an independent component from the stele body, something which we already encountered on the specimen from the village of Valha (no. 108, pl. 121), where the stele itself ultimately acts as a pillar. Nonetheless, Lenyadri accounts also for the case of a *satī*-stone where the pillar is integrated on the stele body, as a part of the figured area. Now, if we accept the 8th-9th century as the chronology for the conversion of Lenyadri's cave 7 into the current Hindu temple, a time span to which the *satī*-stones carvings have also been ascribed, then such a period would correspond in turn to what Sontheimer (see here chapter 5.3.4) calls the transition phase in the evolution of the arm-and-pillar motif, that is to say the passage from its basic absence to its representation across the board of a number of Maharashtrian stones, with the samples from Lenyadri and Valha standing as watersheds in this process.

Fifth group of elements, sector 5

It includes an unidentifiable recess.

CONCLUSION

The study of Hindu memorial stones represents a challenging research field whose achievements are proportional to the extent of cooperation and integration between different disciplines.

As artefacts provided with iconographical apparatus and/or inscriptions, indeed, they claim for the attention of epigraphists no less than of art-historians, the self-evidence connotation of this statement being more apparent than real as demonstrated by the basic lack of art-historical publications dedicated to the subject, and consequently by the omission of references to it in a number of classical handbooks on Indian art history.

As monuments connected to the funerary sphere, they would demand systematic archeological investigations aiming at revealing once for all the presence or the absence of human remains in their proximity, thus confirming the information of South Indian sources which basically describe them as *semata*, or rather qualifying them as cenotaphs. If on one side this task is challenged by the fact that a number of specimens were displaced from their original location in the course of history, being gathered into temples, reused for other purposes or simply lying abandoned somewhere else after the removal, on the other side a number of them is still located in rural areas and tribal belts where the modernization process has less affected the landscape and where, therefore, there could be some opportunities to spot evidence in their original context.

From the anthropological and religious perspective, the “tribal connection” of these artefacts - which in a number of communities are still erected to commemorate the deceased, as occasional ethnographic reports have been demonstrating for more than one century - represents a line of investigation which could contribute to the understanding of the historical interaction between mainstream Hinduism and other components such as folk religion and tribal religion. The urgency for the study of this interaction in the light of practices associated to the funerary sphere, indeed, may give account at one time not only of the spread of simple memorial stones, but also of the existence of temples overtly erected over *post mortem* body remains, as we observed.

In terms of social history, the diffusion of heroic steles and pillars conveying a certain martial model of heroism may betray the aspiration of non-*kṣatriya* classes to ascend in prestige, for the erection of a memorial often required the approval of the

local ruler who could even reward the family of the heroic deceased through land grants or tax exemption.

Yet, until systematic records of the variety of artefacts distributed in India from North to South will be pursued, our picture of the phenomenon will still remain opaque and disjointed, something to which contributes the present lack of systematic conservation and restoration projects aimed at preserving the materials already recorded.

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Plate 1

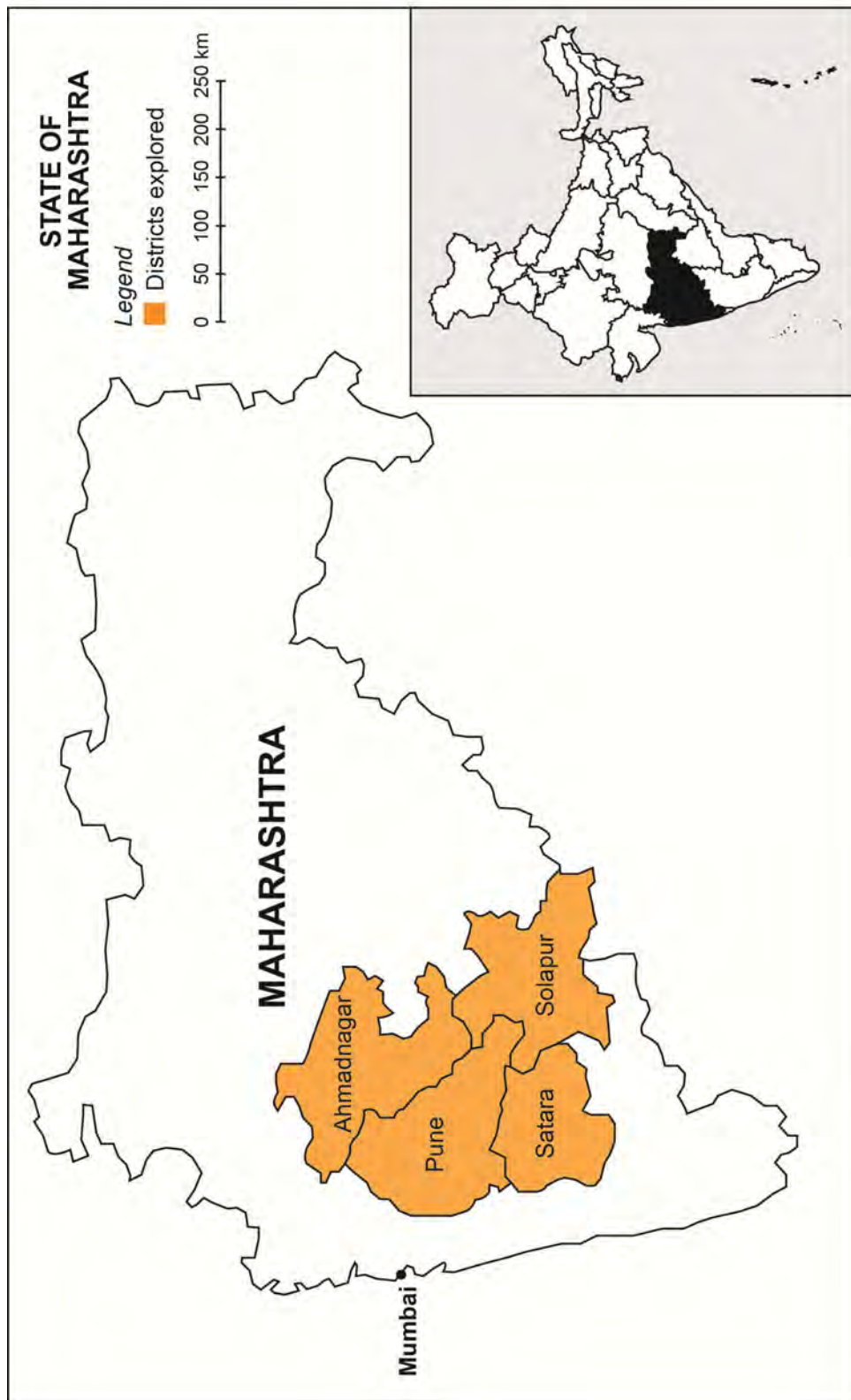


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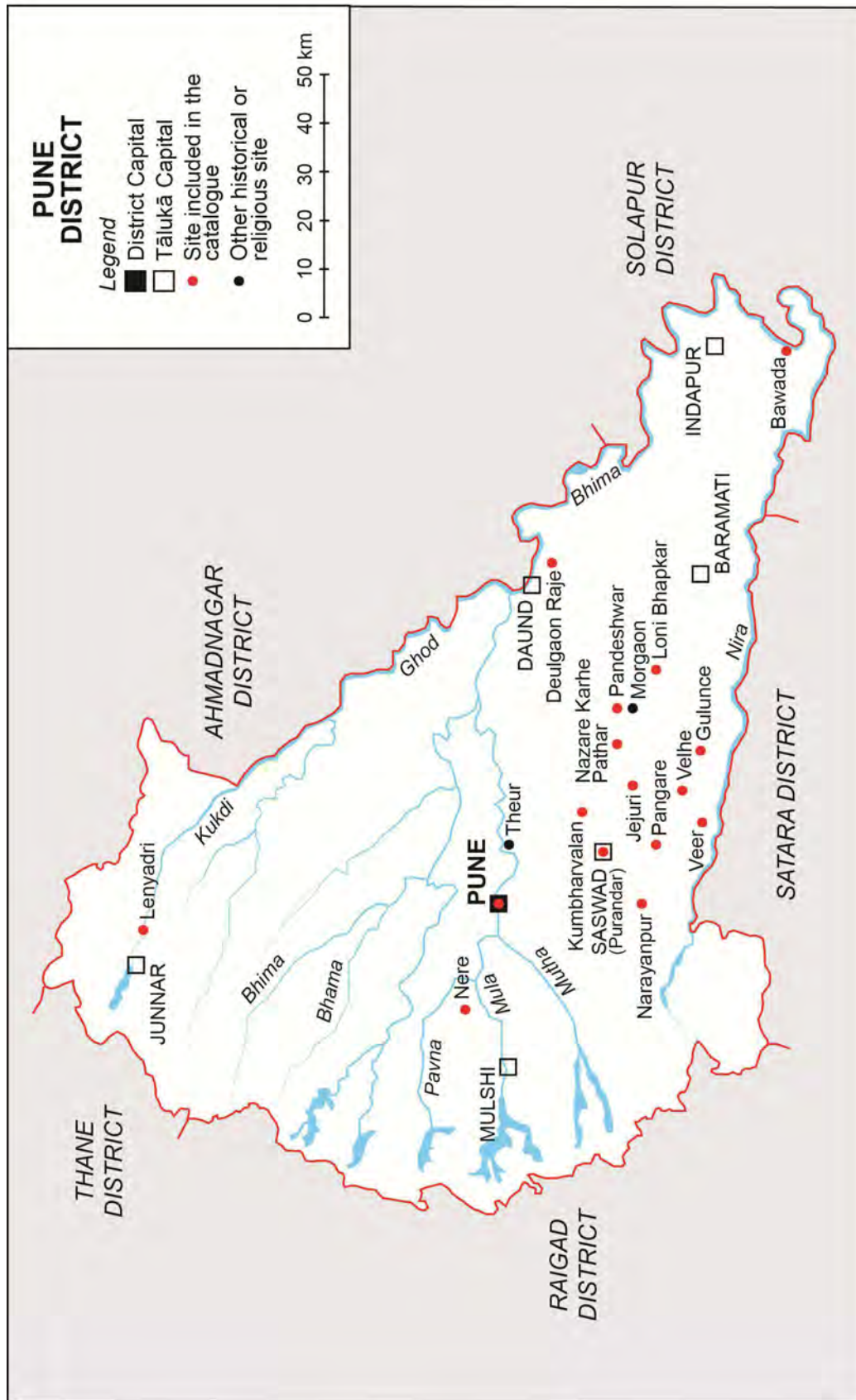


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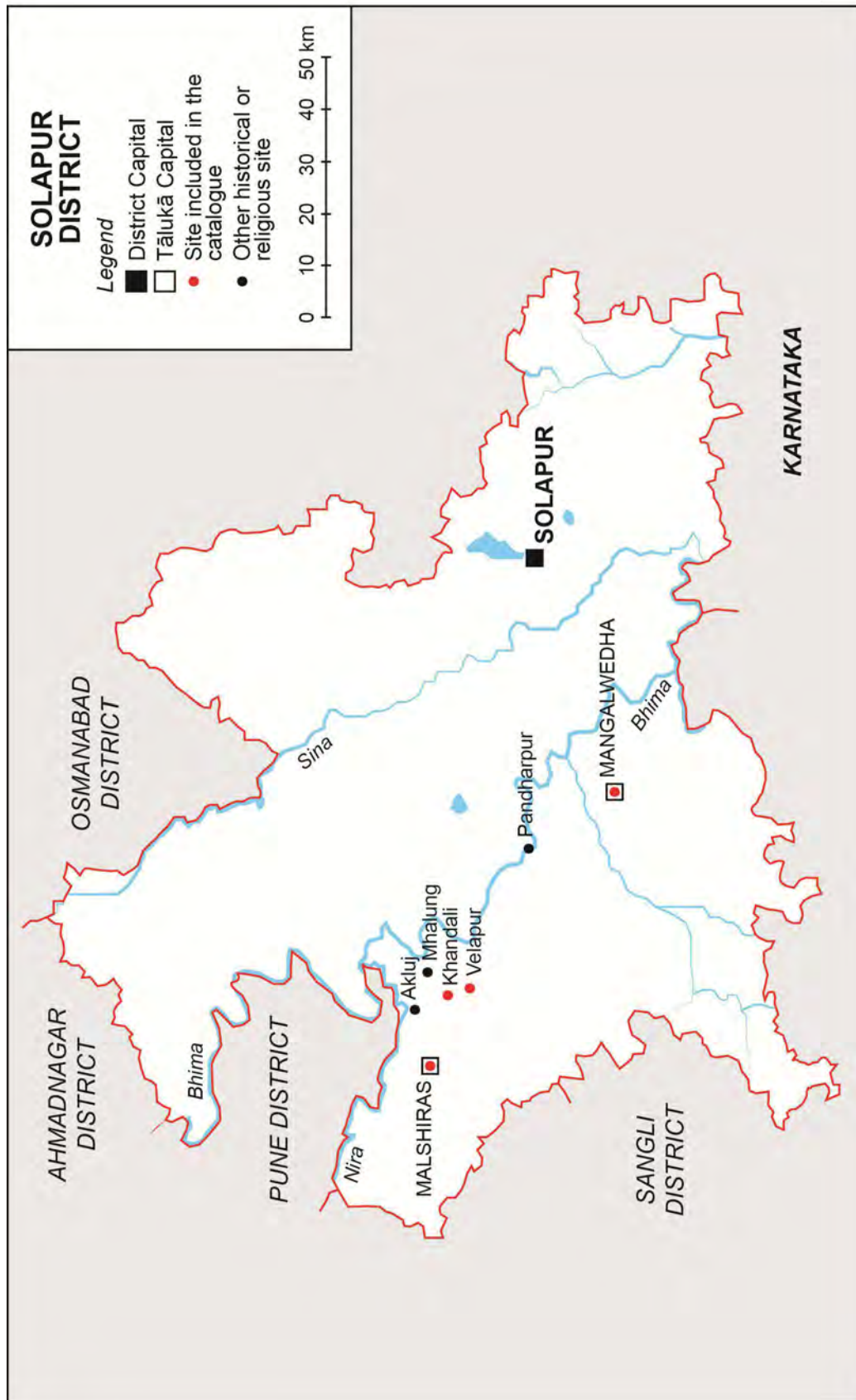


Plate 4

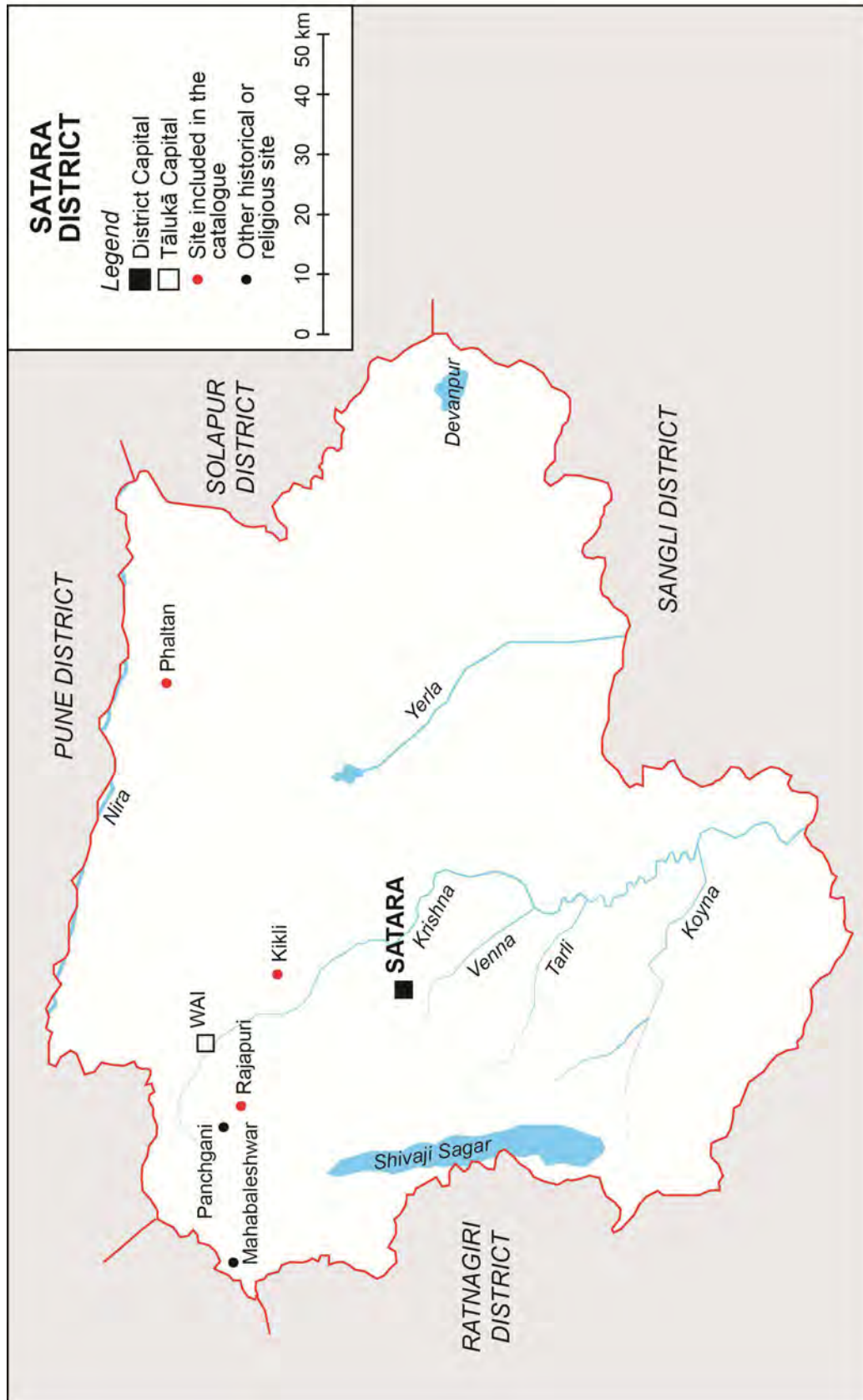


Plate 5

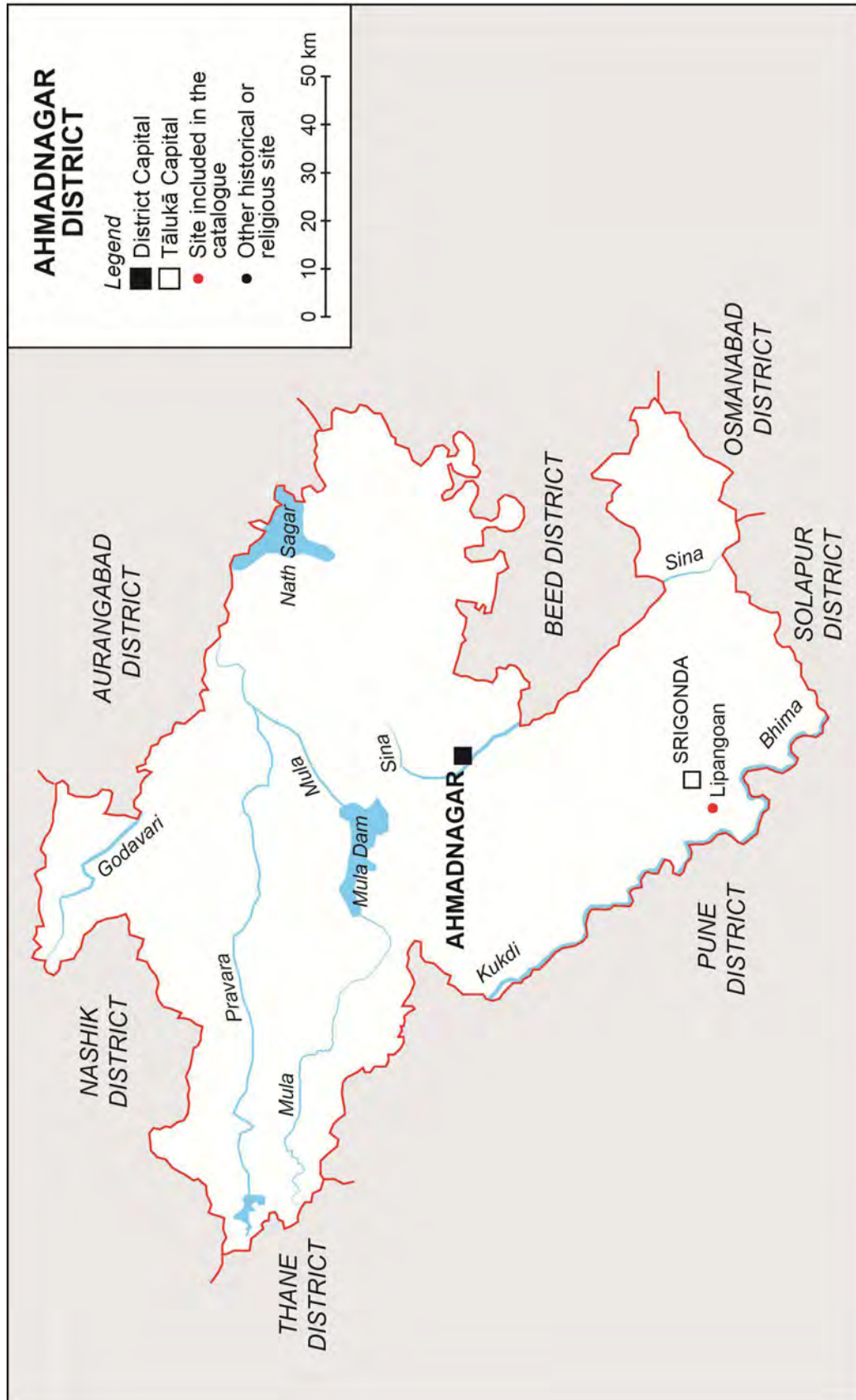




Fig. 1. *Samādhi* with *pādukā* at Khaṇḍobā temple. Velapur, Solapur district, Maharashtra.



Fig. 2. Architectural *samādhi* at Oṃkāreśvar temple. Pune, Pune district, Maharashtra.



Fig. 3. *Vṛndāvana* to illustrious *satī*, Ramābāi Peśva, who immolated herself on 18th December 1772. Theur, Pune district, Maharashtra. (Photo courtesy: Kiran Kharade).



Fig. 4. Unhewn stones to ancestors at Śiva shrine. Kumbharvalan, Pune district, Maharashtra.

Plate 7



Fig. 1 One-panelled ancestors stones at Khaṇḍobā temple.
Jejuri, Pune district, Maharashtra.



Fig. 2 One-panelled ancestors stones at Khaṇḍobā temple.
Jejuri, Pune district, Maharashtra.



Fig. 3
One-panelled ancestors stones
nearby Mhaskobā temple. The
deceased posture recalls the
iconography of the divine couple
Khaṇḍobā and Mhāḷsā. Veer, Pune
district, Maharashtra.



Fig. 4
Cluster of ancestors
stones and other cult
objects nearby
Mhaskobā temple.
Veer, Pune district,
Maharashtra.



Fig. 5
One-panelled
ancestor stones at
Śrī Kārtik Svāmī
temple. Rajapuri,
Satara district,
Maharashtra.
(Photo courtesy:
Amol Bankar).



Fig. 1
Thaḍe dedicated to individual who died in a clash with a wild animal (accidental heroism). Premises of Śiva cave temple. Baner, Pune district, Maharashtra.



Fig. 2
Thaḍe to ancestor. Premises of Śiva cave temple. Baner, Pune district, Maharashtra.



Fig. 3
Thaḍe to couple of ancestors. Nearby Śiva temple. Nere, Pune district, Maharashtra.



Fig. 4
Two *thaḍes* to ancestors nearby Śiva temple. Nere, Pune district, Maharashtra.



Fig. 5
Cluster of one-panelled memorial stones to heroes and simple ancestors; in the background, between them and the house wall, two *thaḍes*. Punewale, Pune district, Maharashtra.

Plate 9

(After Kamat 1980: 32)



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

Plate 10

(After Kamat 1980: 34, 43, 49)



Fig. 1

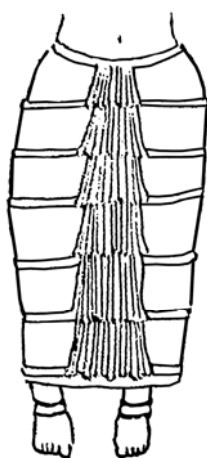


Fig. 2

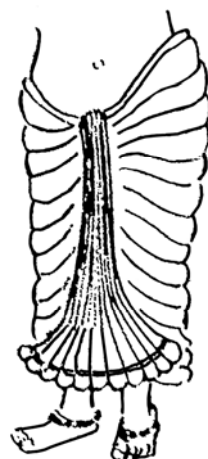


Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

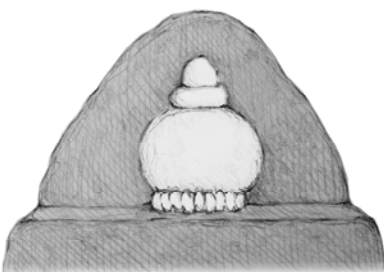
Plate 11



A



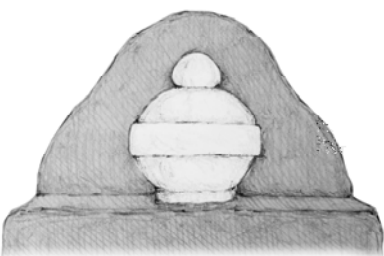
B1



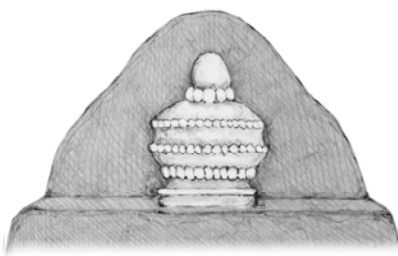
B2



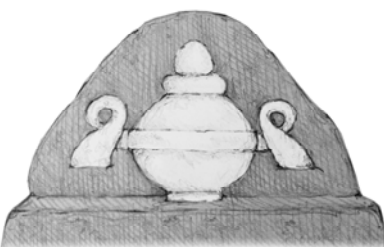
B3



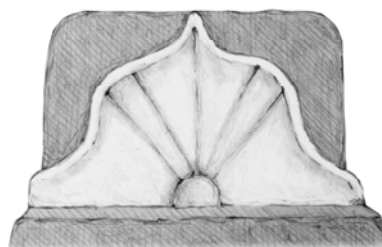
C1



C2

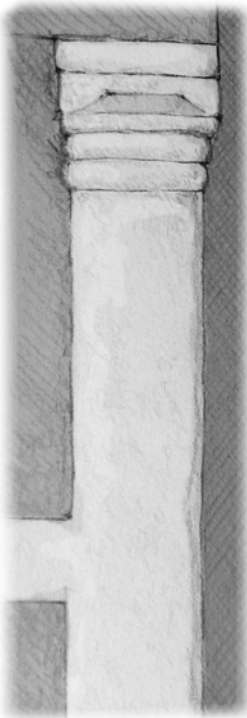


D

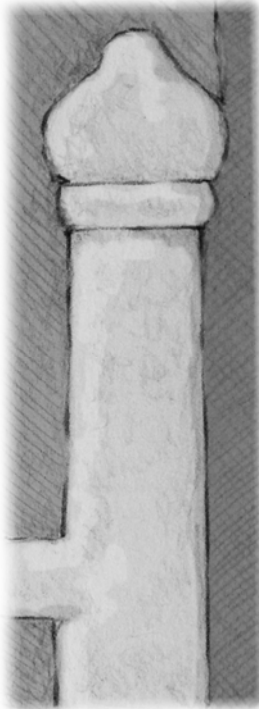


E

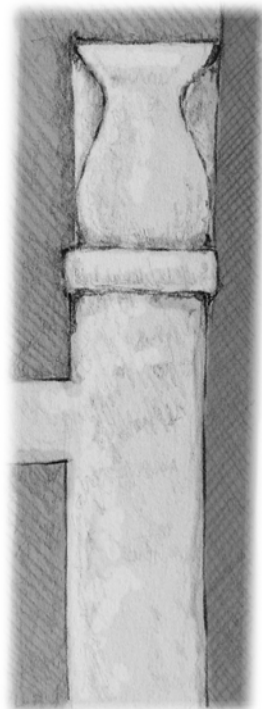
Plate 12



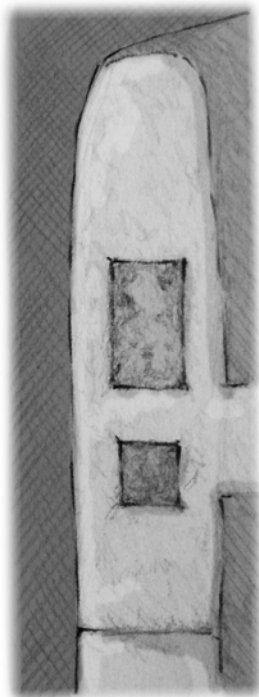
A



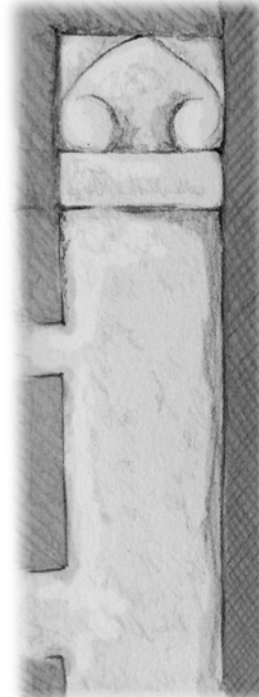
B



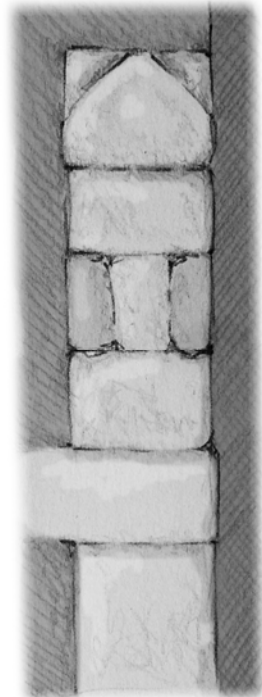
C



D

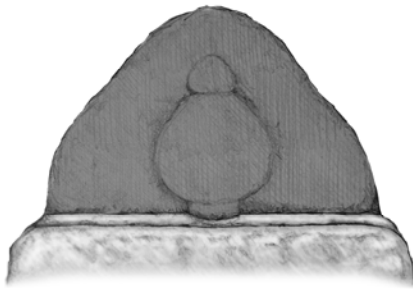


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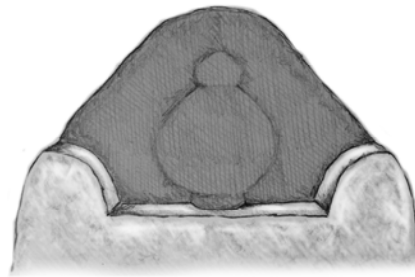


F

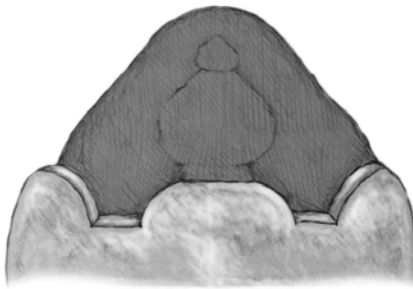
Plate 13



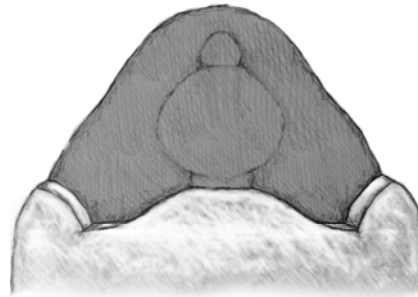
A



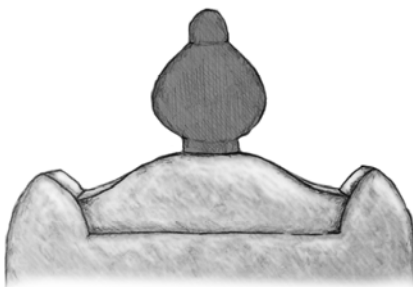
B



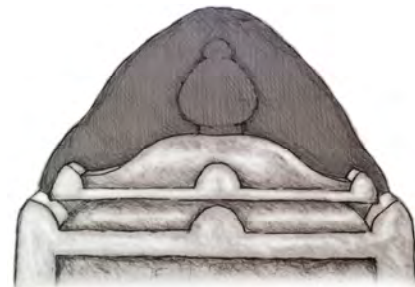
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D

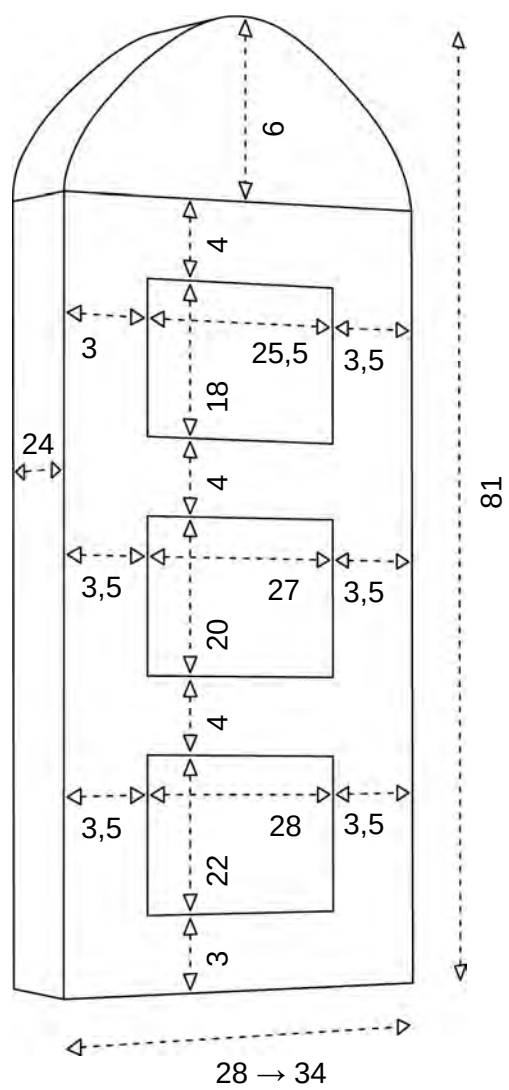


E



F

Plate 14, no. 1





Panel 1

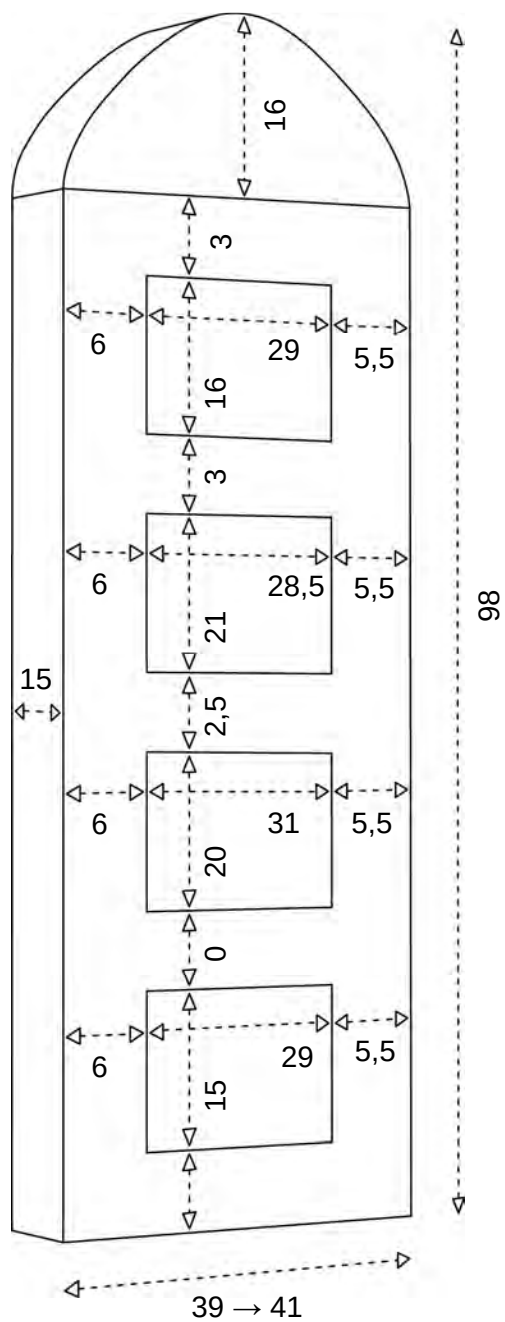


Panel 2



Panel 3

Plate 15, no. 2





Panel 1



Panel 2



Panel 3



Panel 4



Upper frame

A photograph of a tall, rectangular stone slab with a pointed top, featuring three horizontal panels of carved figures. The top panel shows three seated figures. The middle panel shows a group of figures, including a central figure with a large, ornate headdress. The bottom panel shows a group of figures, including a central figure with a large, ornate headdress. The slab is set against a light-colored wall.





Panel 1



Panel 2



Panel 3

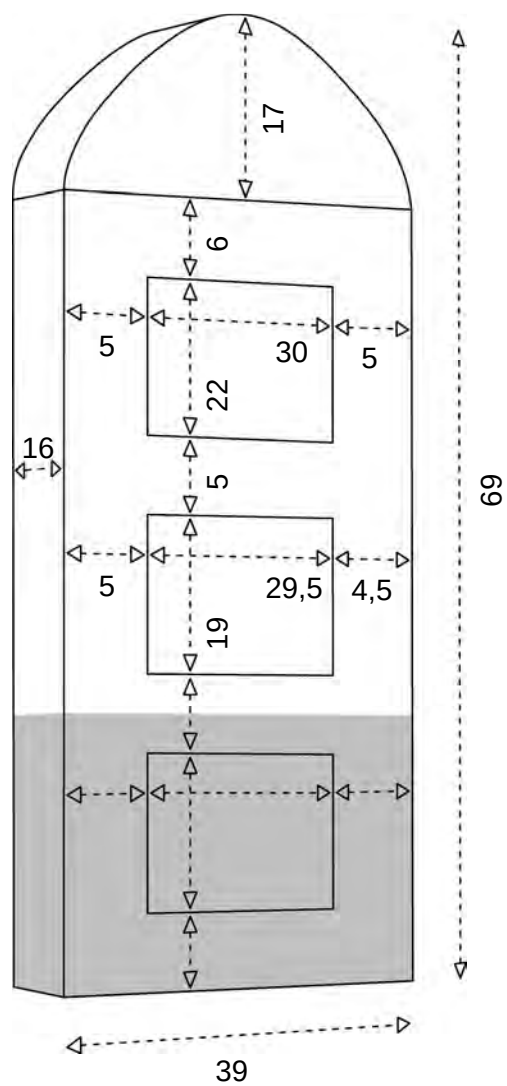


Panel 4



Upper frame

Plate 17, no. 4





Panel 1

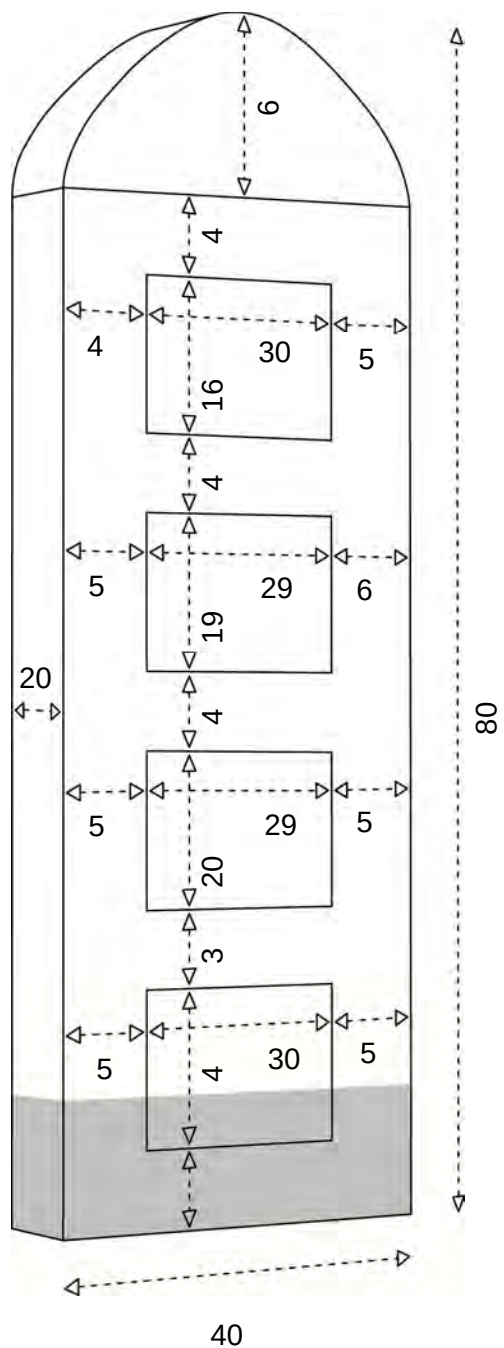


Panel 2



Upper frame

Plate 18, no. 5





Panel 1



Panel 2



Panel 3



Panel 4 and
upper frame

Plate 19, no. 6

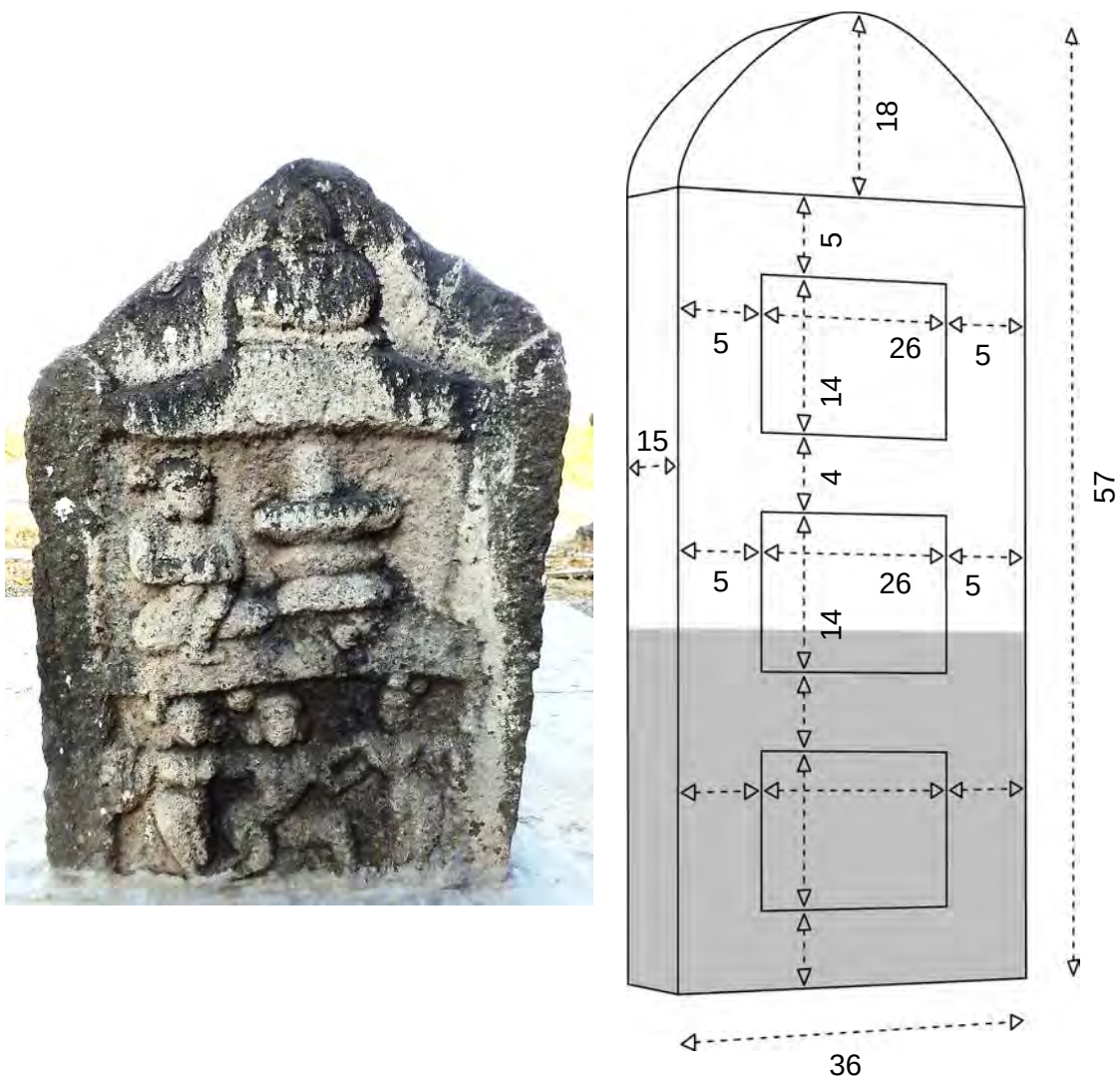
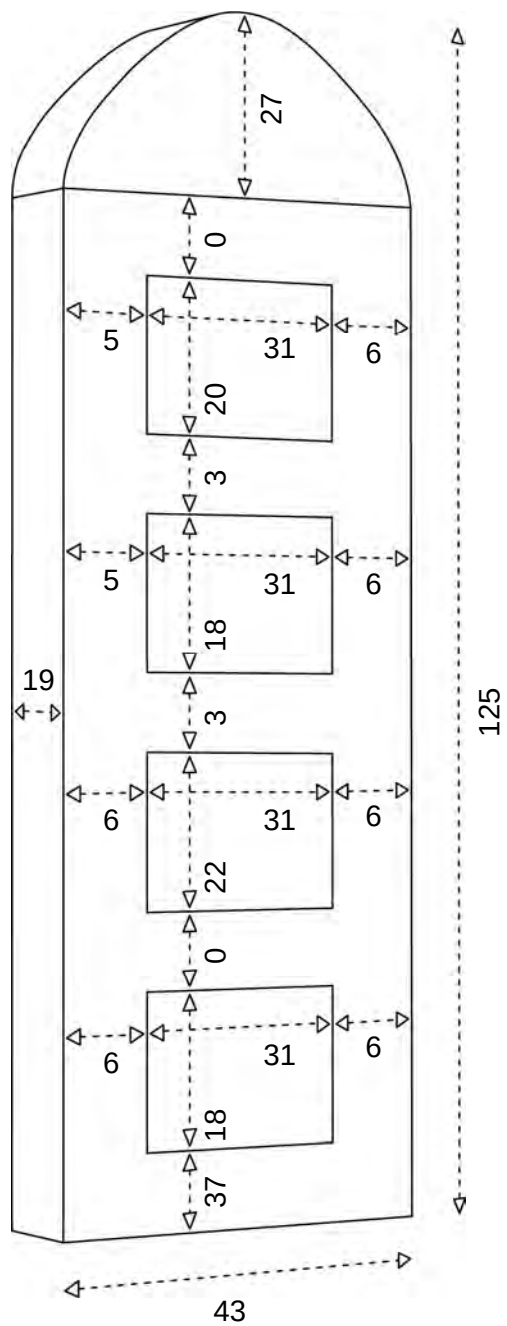


Plate 20, no. 7





Panel 1



Panel 2



Panel 3

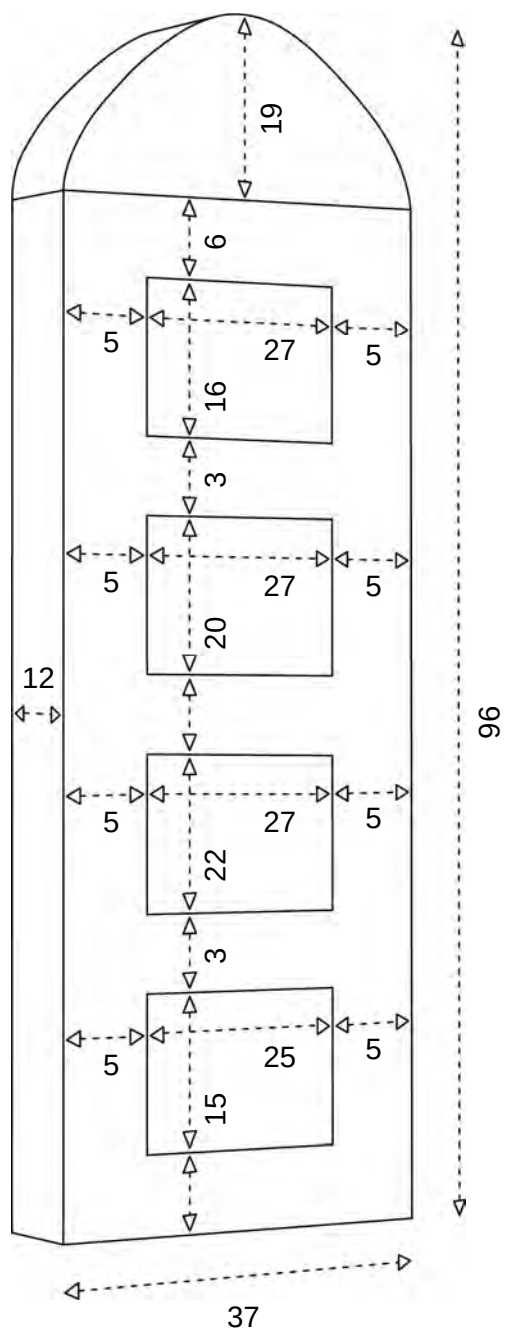


Panel 4



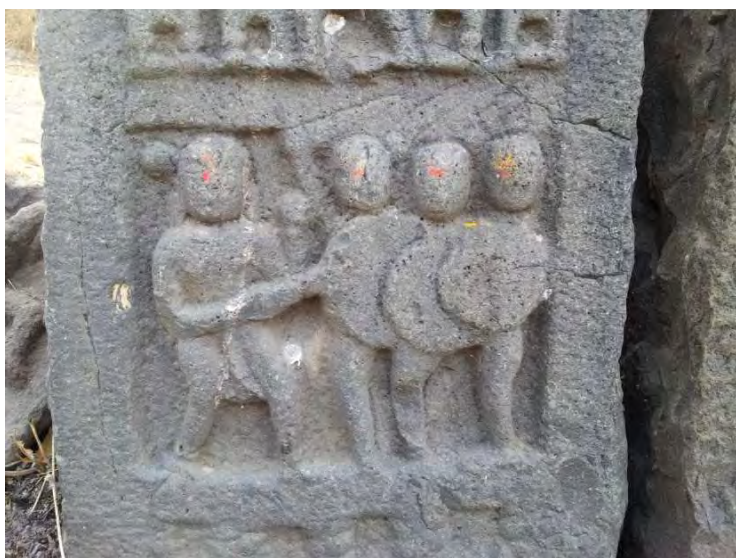
Upper frame

Plate 21, no. 8





Panel 1



Panel 2

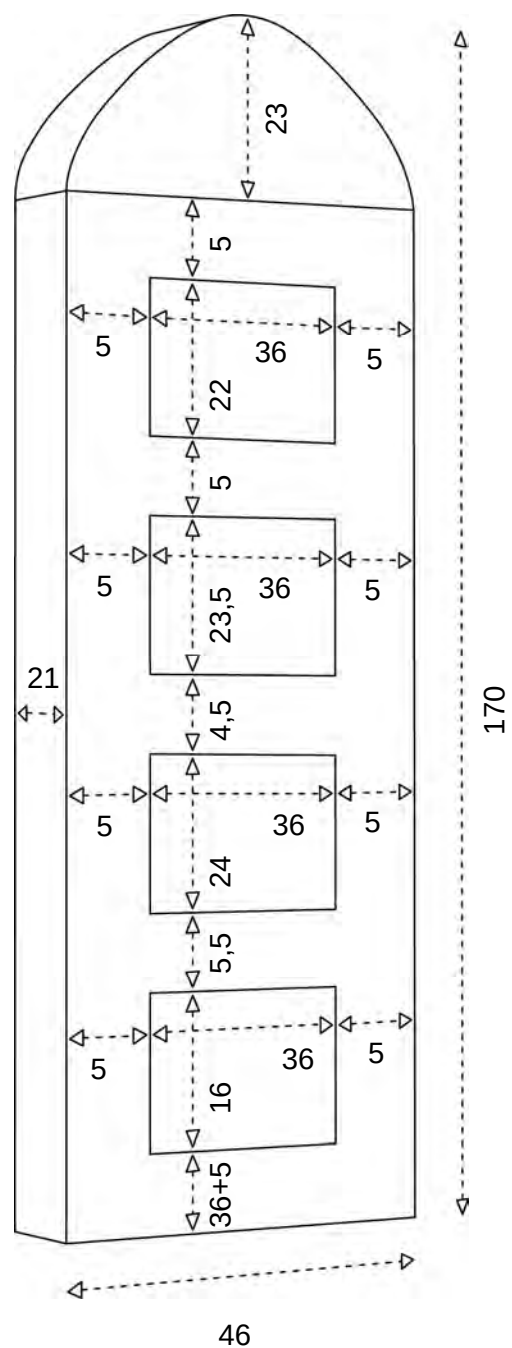


Panel 3



Panel 4 and
upper frame

Plate 22, no. 9





Panel 1



Panel 2



Panel 3

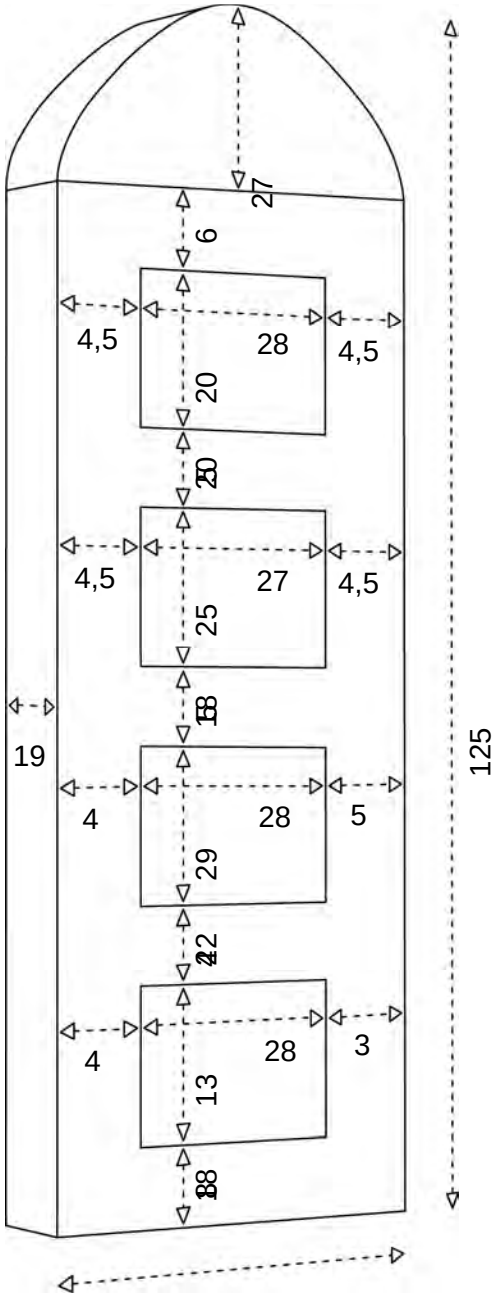


Panel 4



Upper frame

Plate 23, no. 10



43



Panel 1



Panel 2



Panel 3

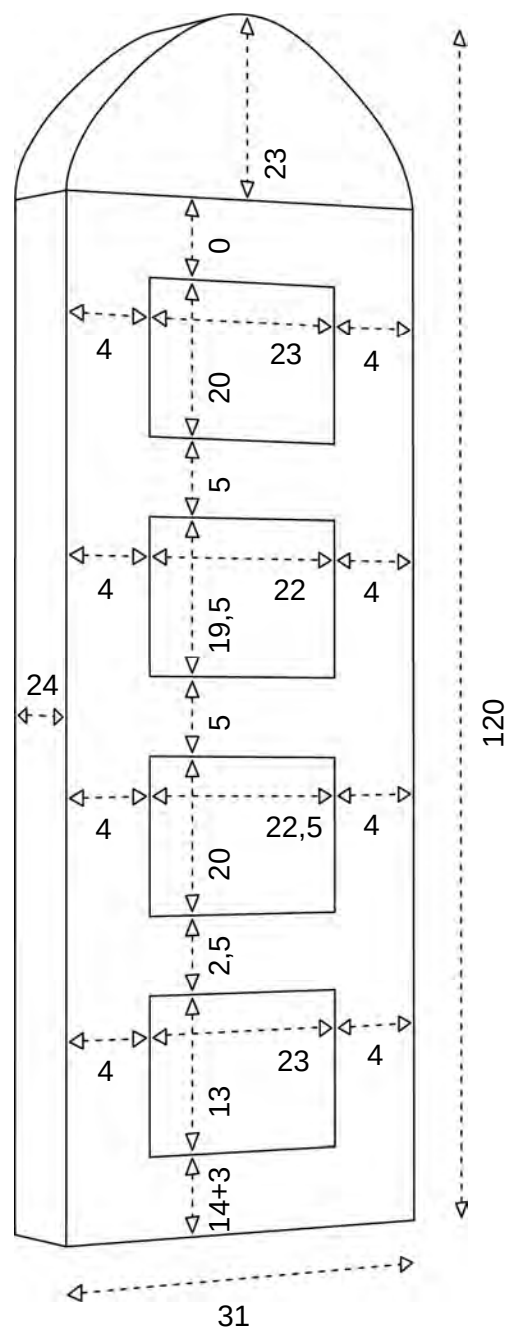


Panel 4



Upper frame

Plate 24, no. 11





Panel 1



Panel 2



Panel 3

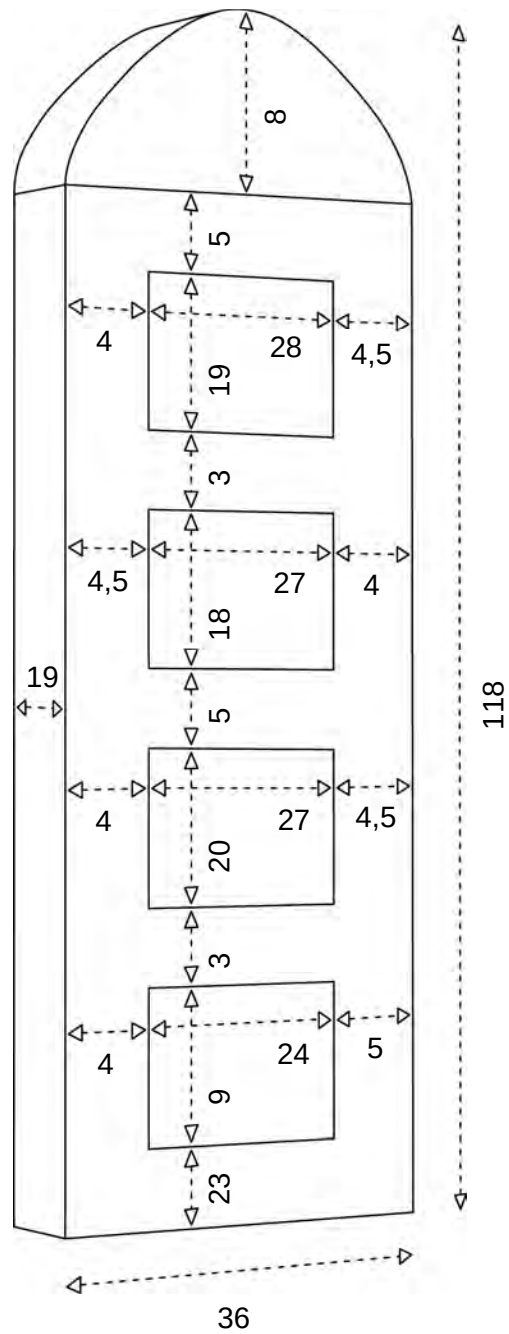


Panel 4



Upper frame

Plate 25, no. 12





Panel 1



Panel 2

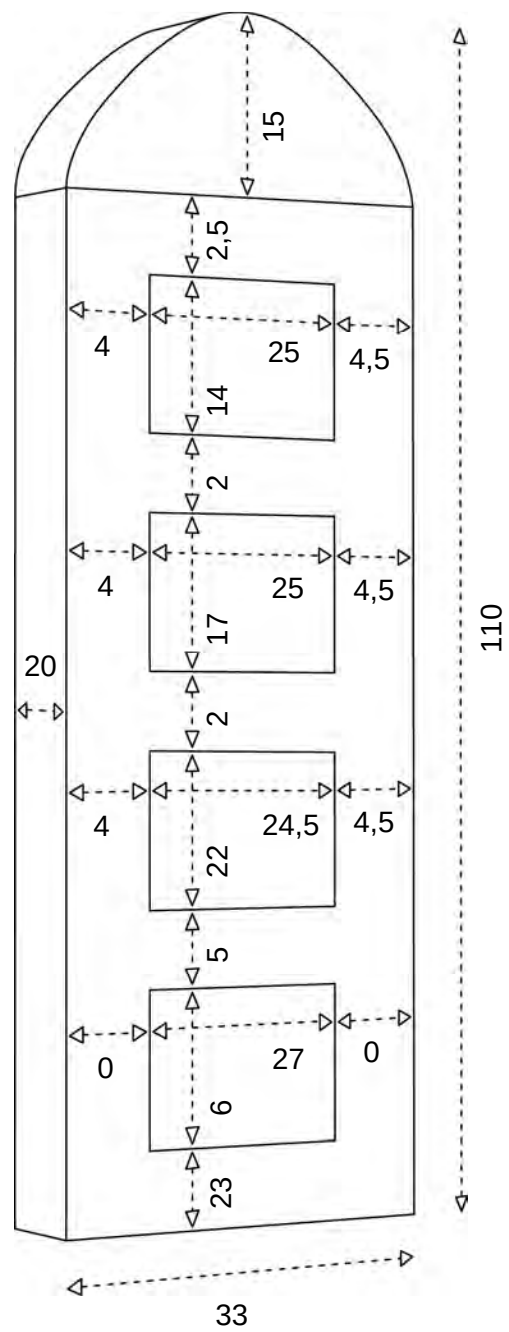


Panel 3



Panel 4 and
upper frame

A large, dark, rectangular stone slab with a pointed top, featuring intricate carvings of figures and symbols. The slab is set against a background of dry leaves and twigs. The carvings include a central panel with three figures, a panel above with a grid of symbols, and a panel below with two figures. The stone is weathered and has a rough texture.





Panel 1



Panel 2



Panel 3

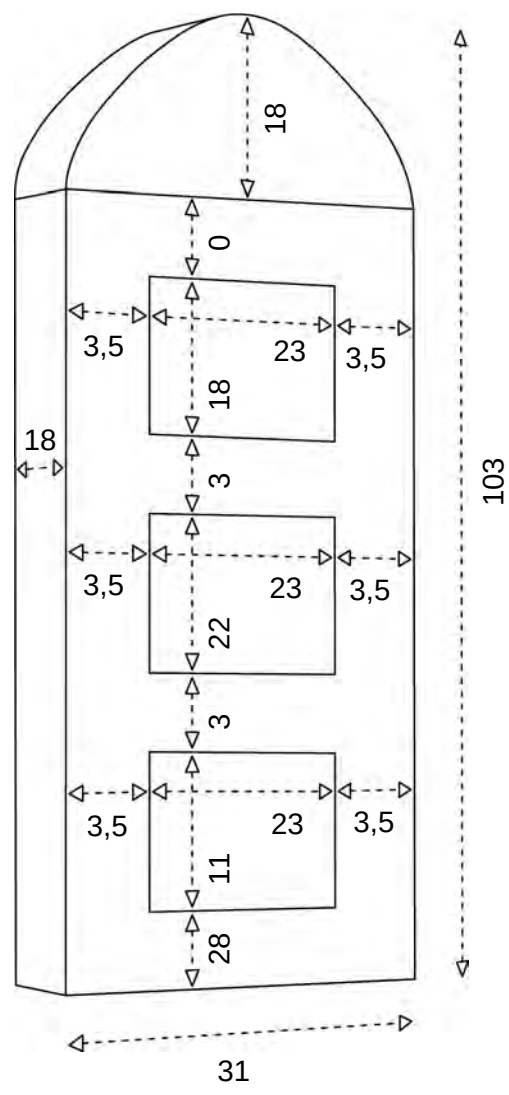


Panel 4



Upper frame

Plate 27, no. 14



Panel 1



Panel 2

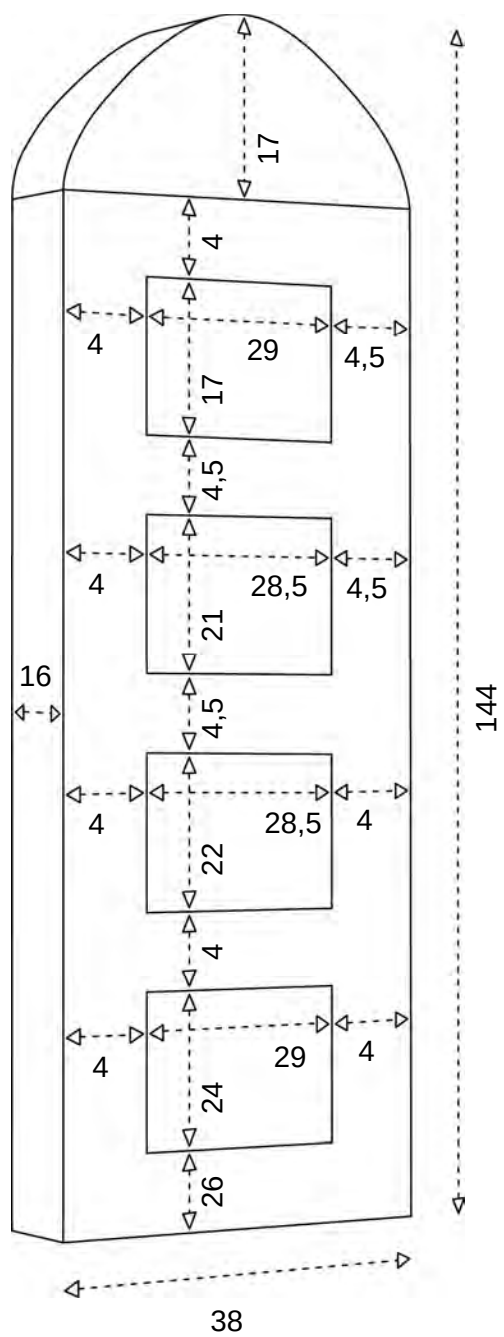


Panel 3



Upper frame

Plate 28, no. 15





Panel 1



Panel 2



Panel 3

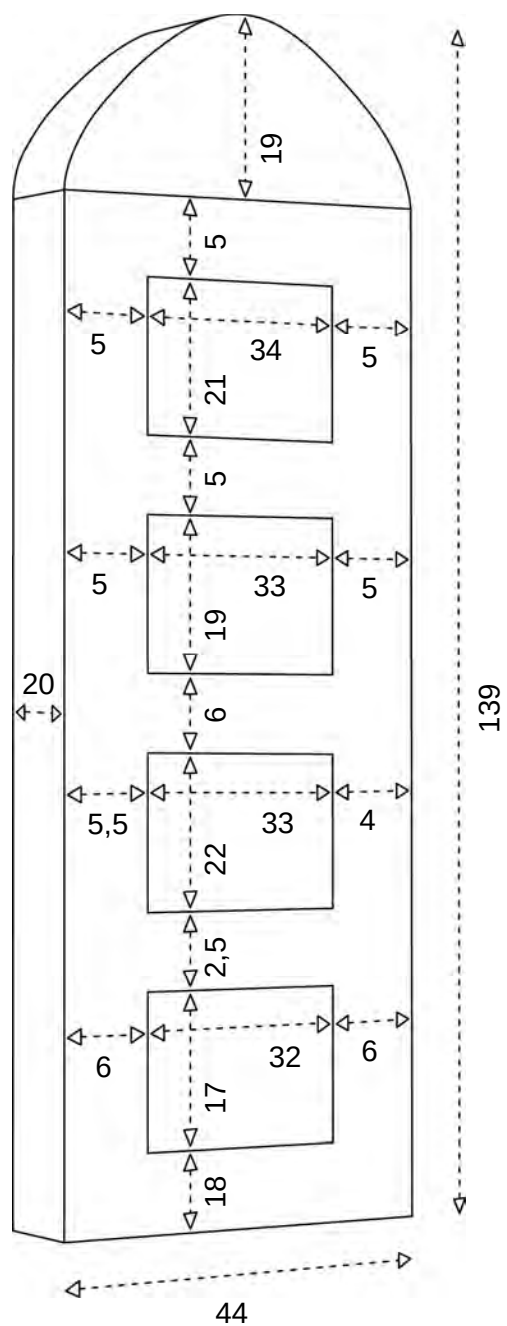


Panel 4



Upper frame

Plate 29, no. 16





Panel 1 and 2



Panel 3 and 4



Upper frame

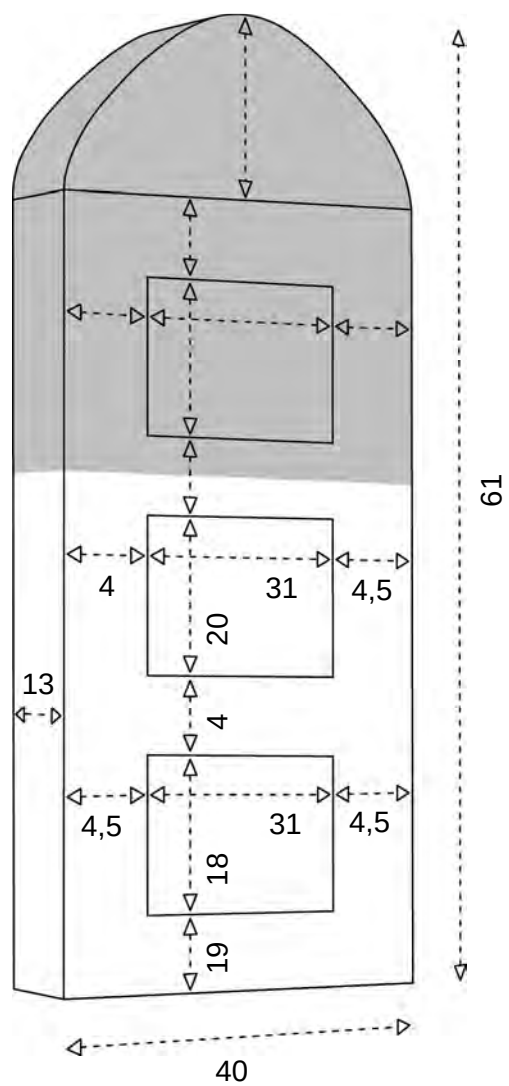
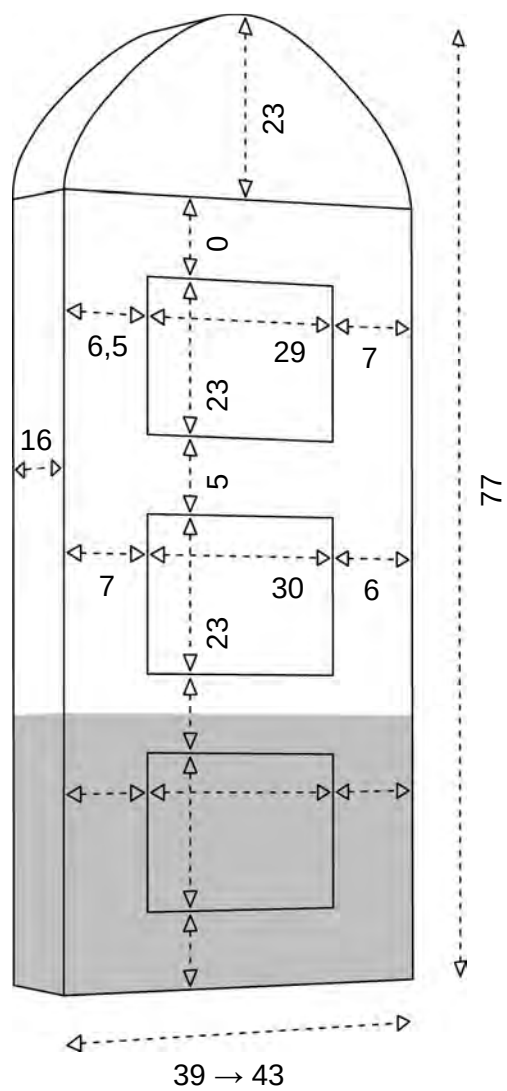


Plate 31, no. 18





Panel 1

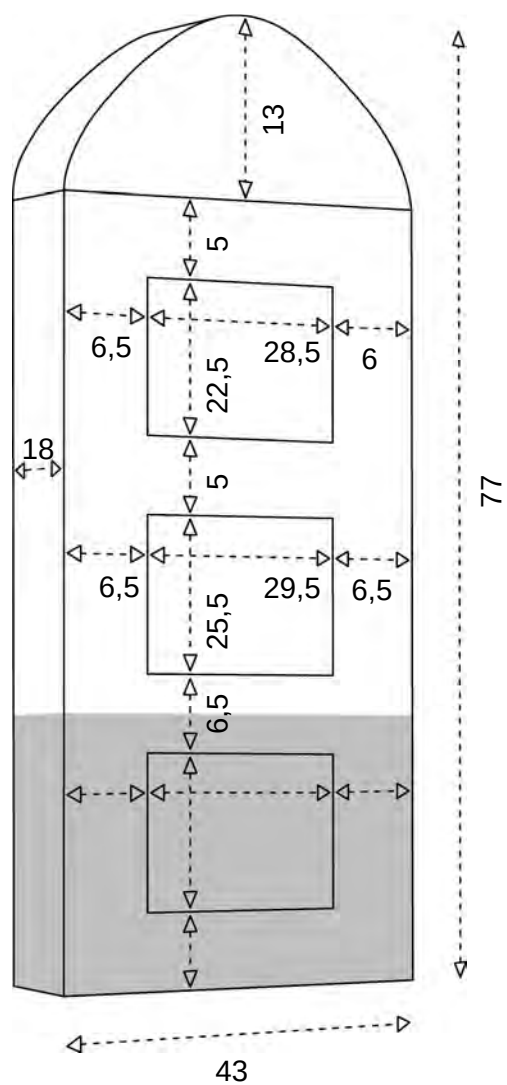


Panel 2



Upper frame

Plate 32, no. 19





Panel 1



Panel 2



Upper frame

Plate 33, no. 20

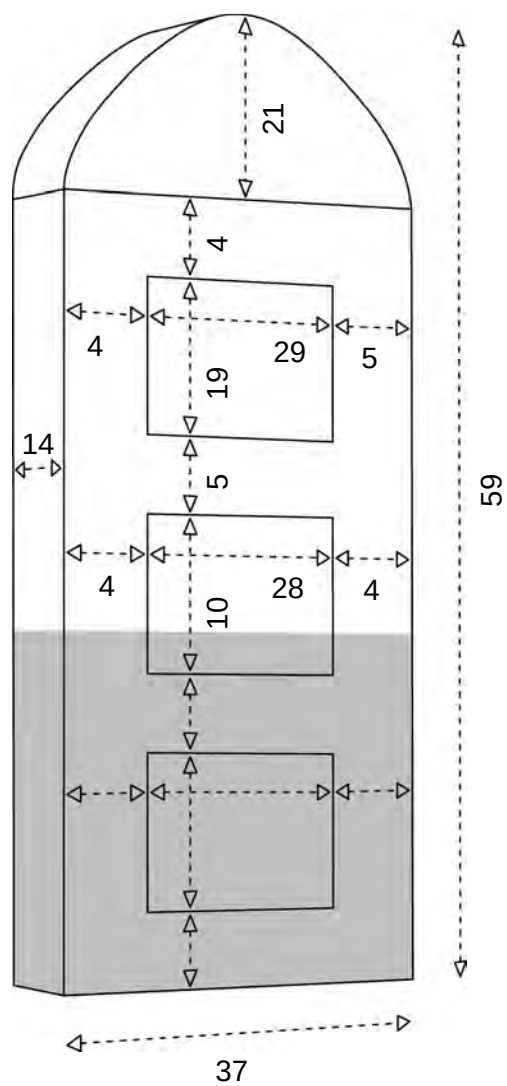
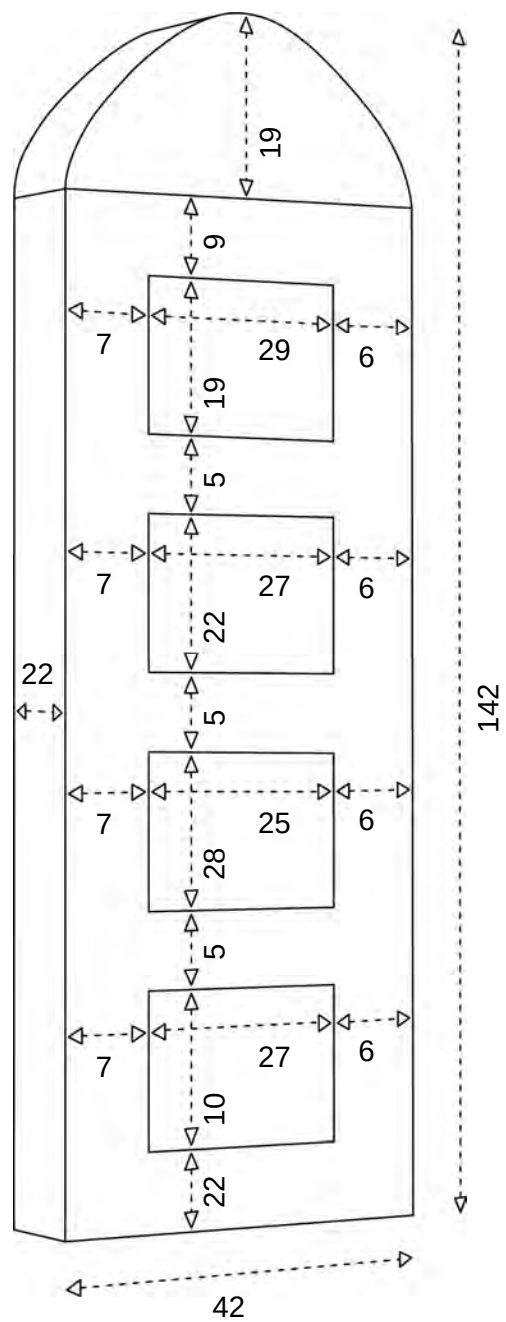


Plate 34, no. 21

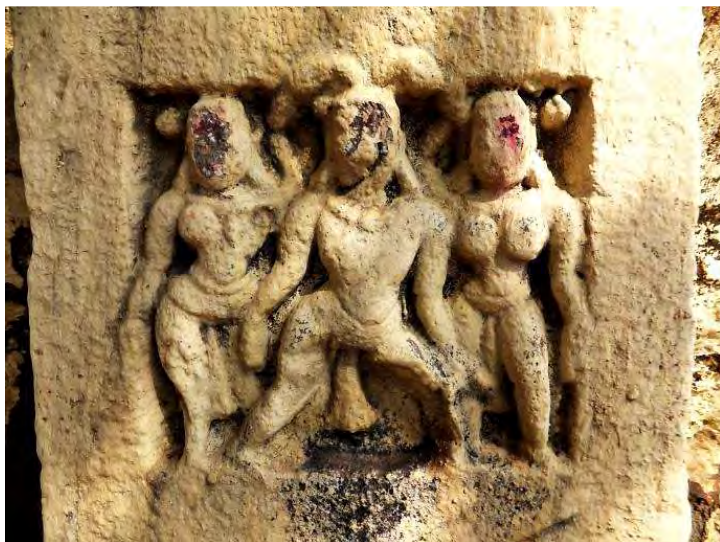




Panel 1



Panel 2



Panel 3

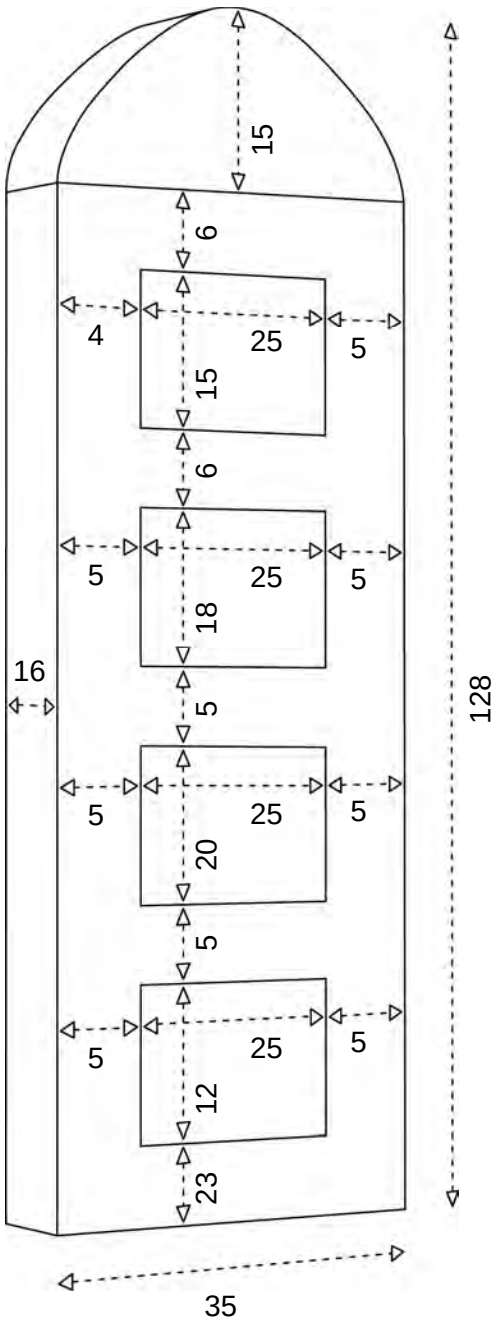


Panel 4



Upper frame

Plate 35, no. 22





Panel 1



Panel 2

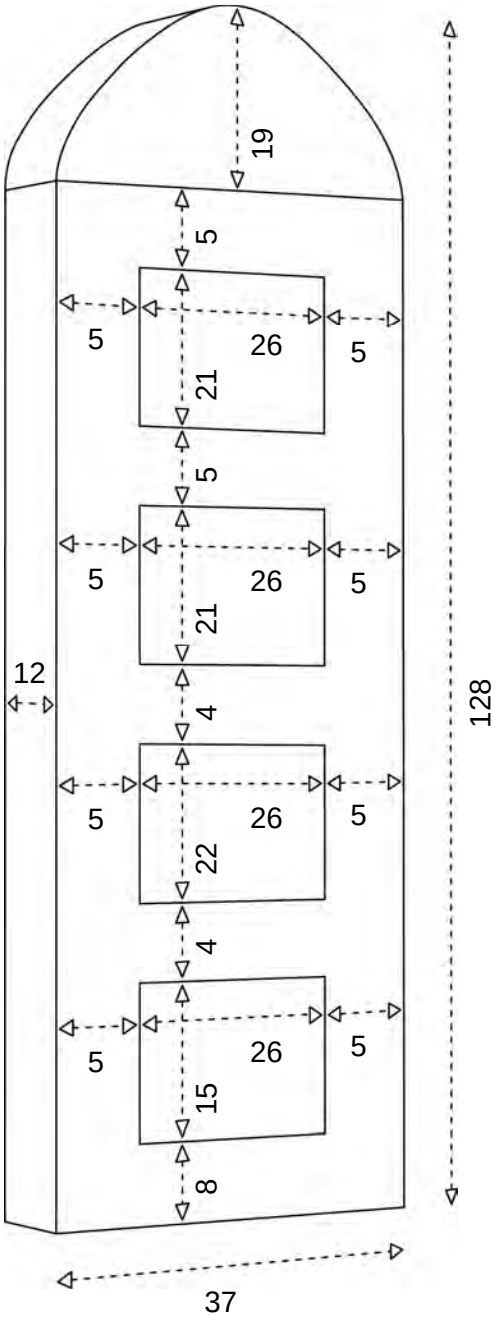


Panel 3



Panel 4 and
upper frame

Plate 36, no. 23





Panel 1



Panel 2

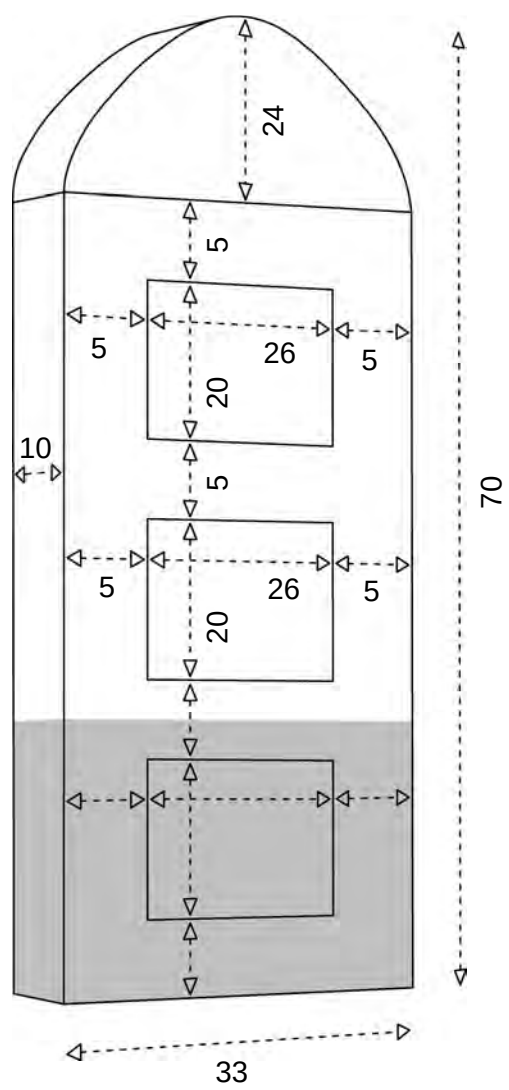


Panel 3



Panel 4 and
upper frame

Plate 37, no. 24





Panel 1

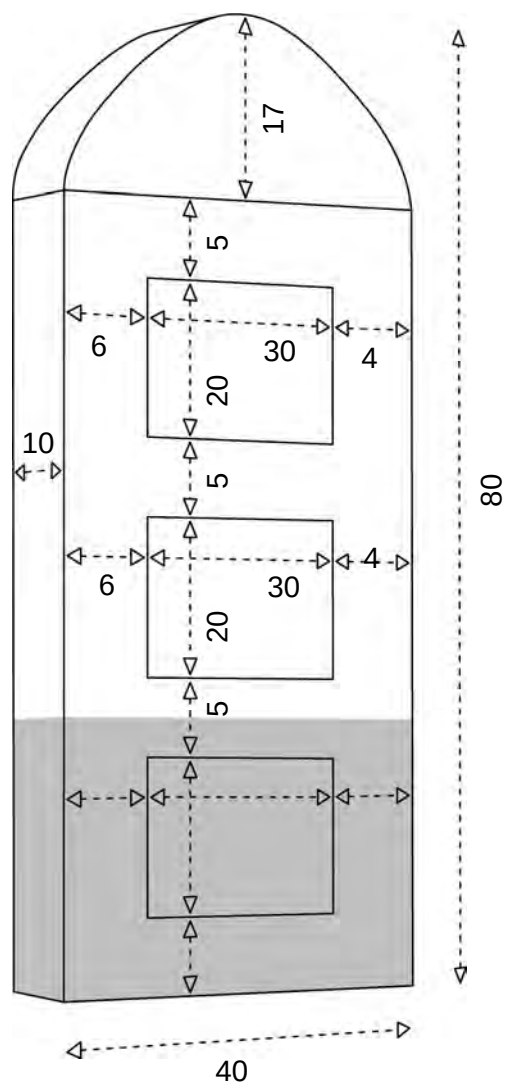


Panel 2



Upper frame

Plate 38, no. 25



Panel 1



Panel 2



Panel 3



Upper frame

Plate 39, no. 26

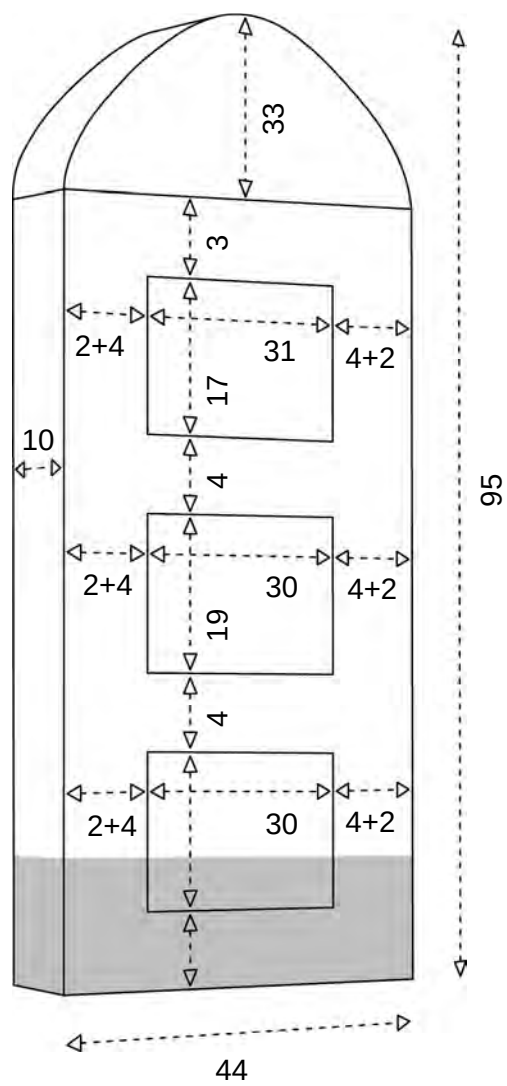


Plate 40, no. 27

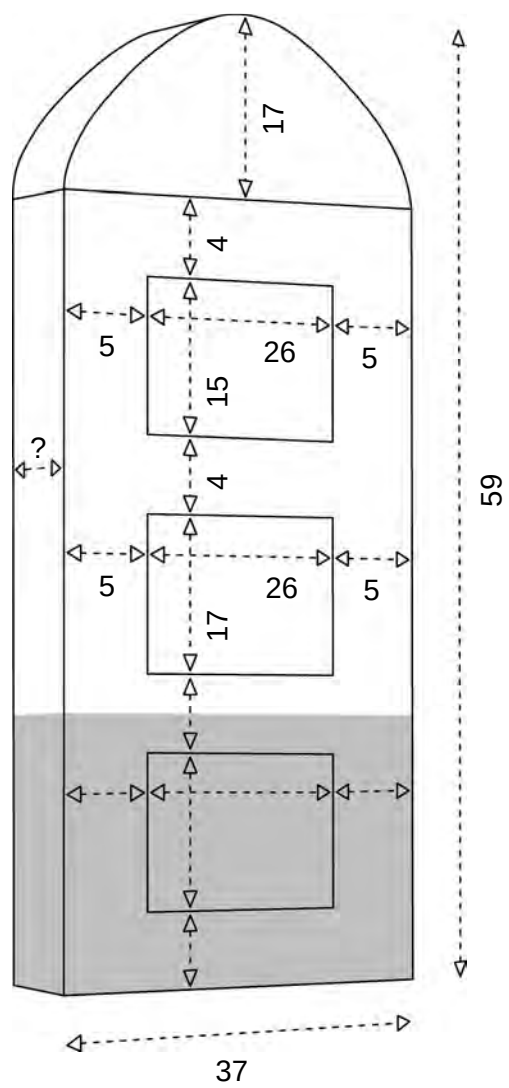
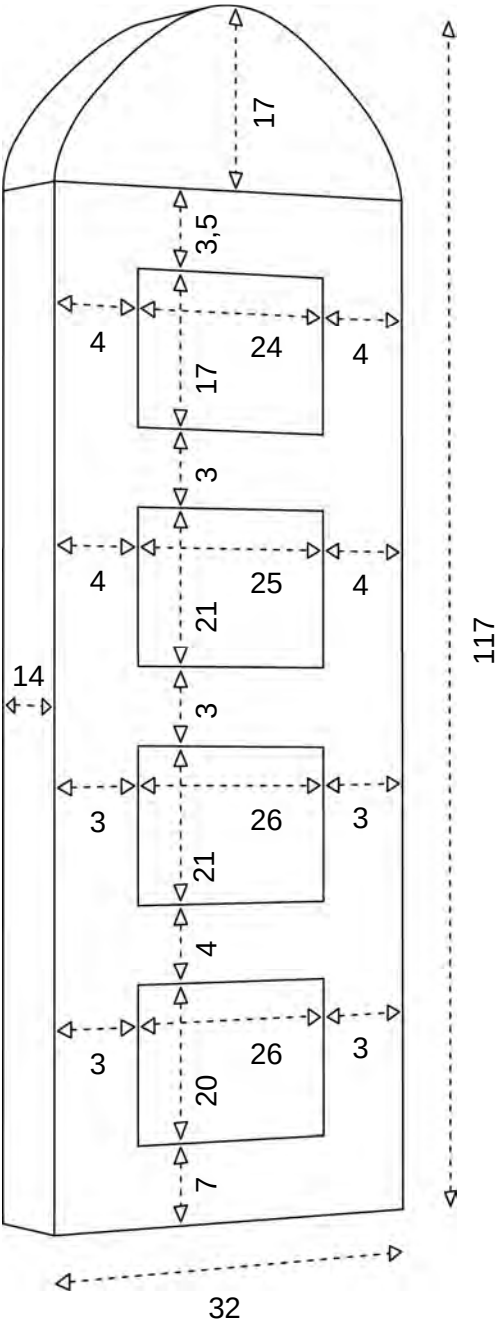


Plate 41, no. 28





Panel 1



Panel 2



Panel 3

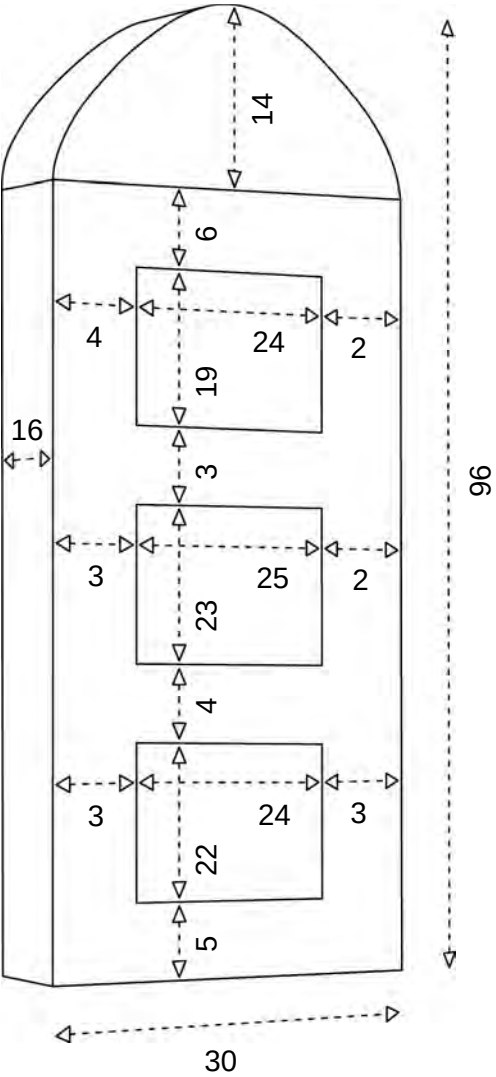


Panel 4



Upper frame

Plate 42, no. 29



Panel 1



Panel 2

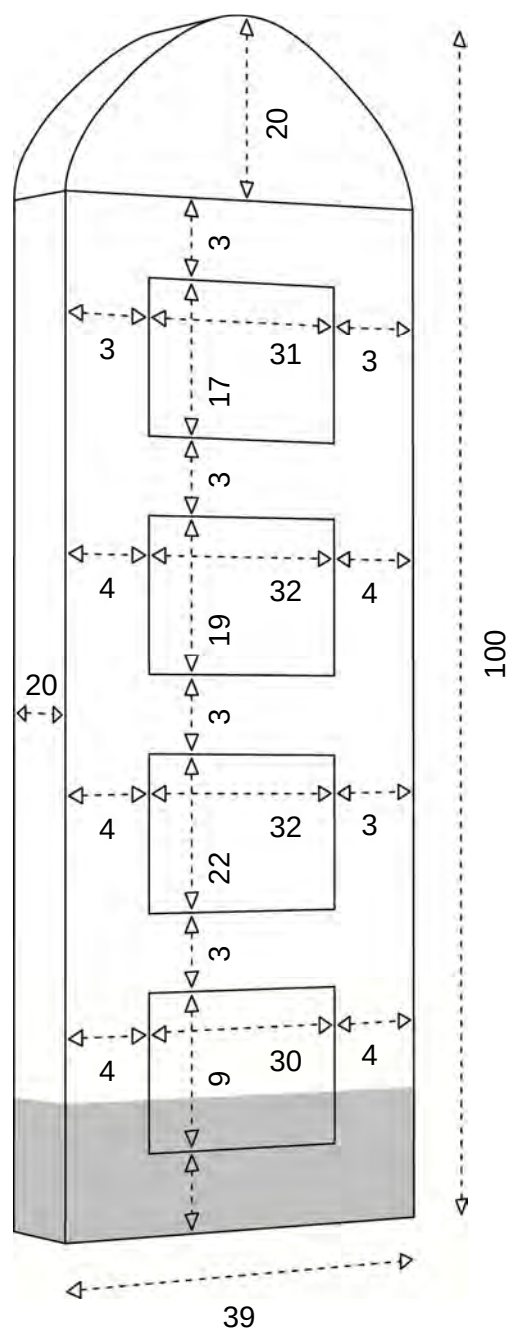


Panel 3



Upper frame

Plate 43, no. 30





Panel 1



Panel 2



Panel 3

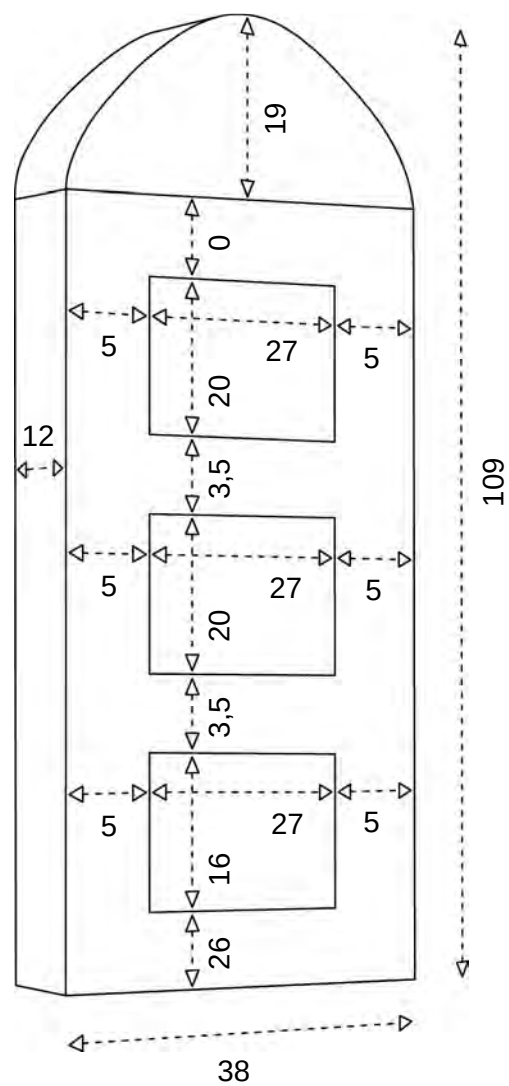


Panel 4



Upper frame

Plate 44, no. 31



Panel 1



Panel 2

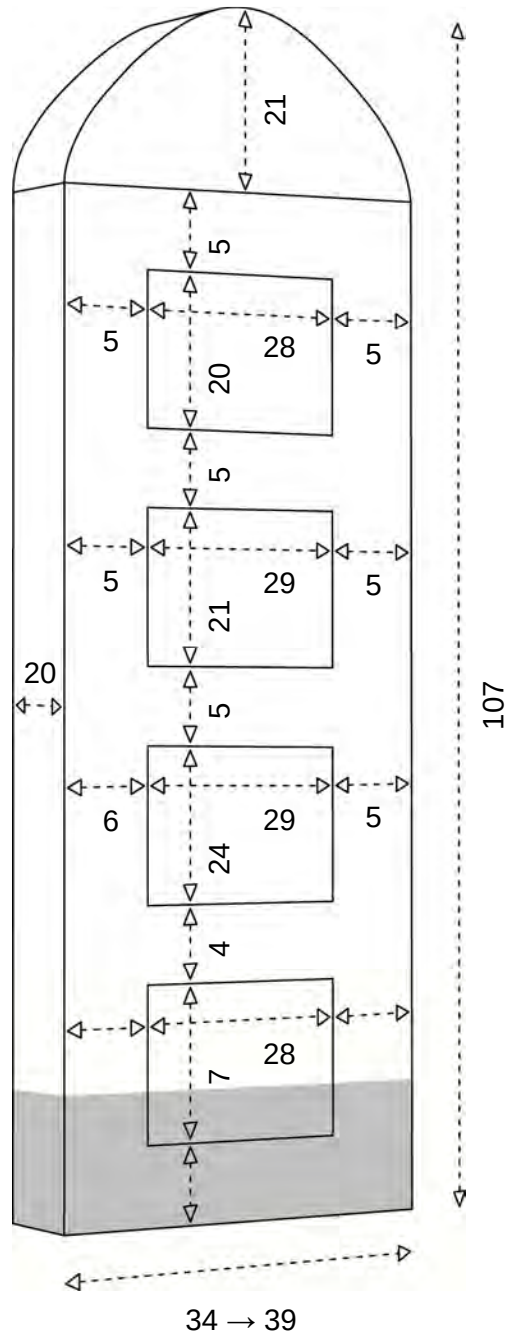


Panel 3



Upper frame

Plate 45, no. 32





Panel 1



Panel 2



Panel 3

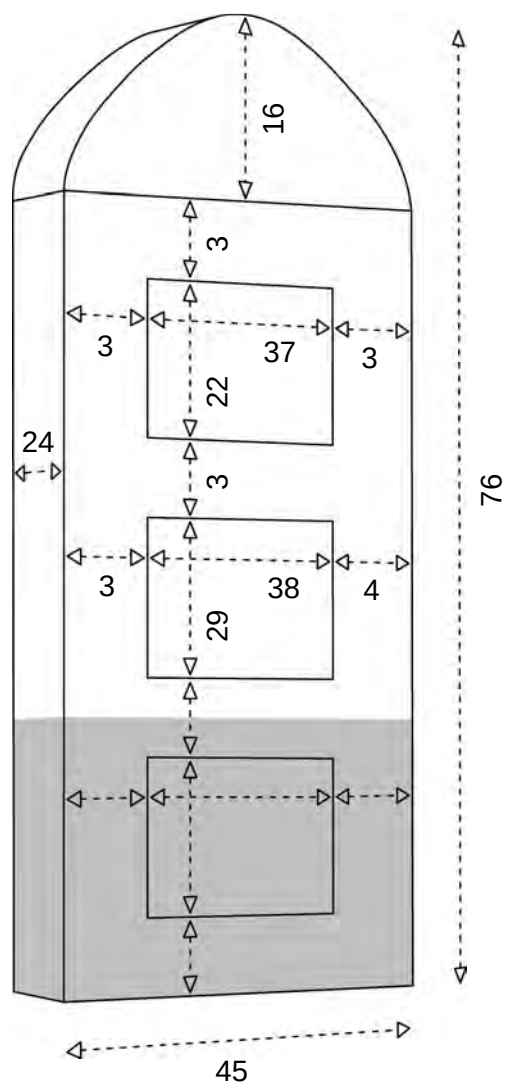


Panel 4



Upper frame

Plate 46, no. 33





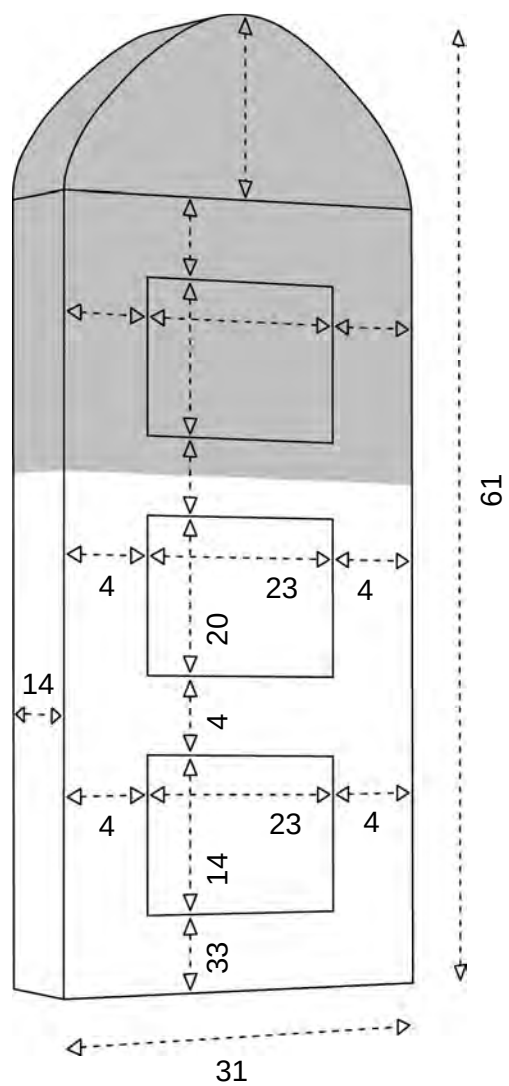
Panel 1

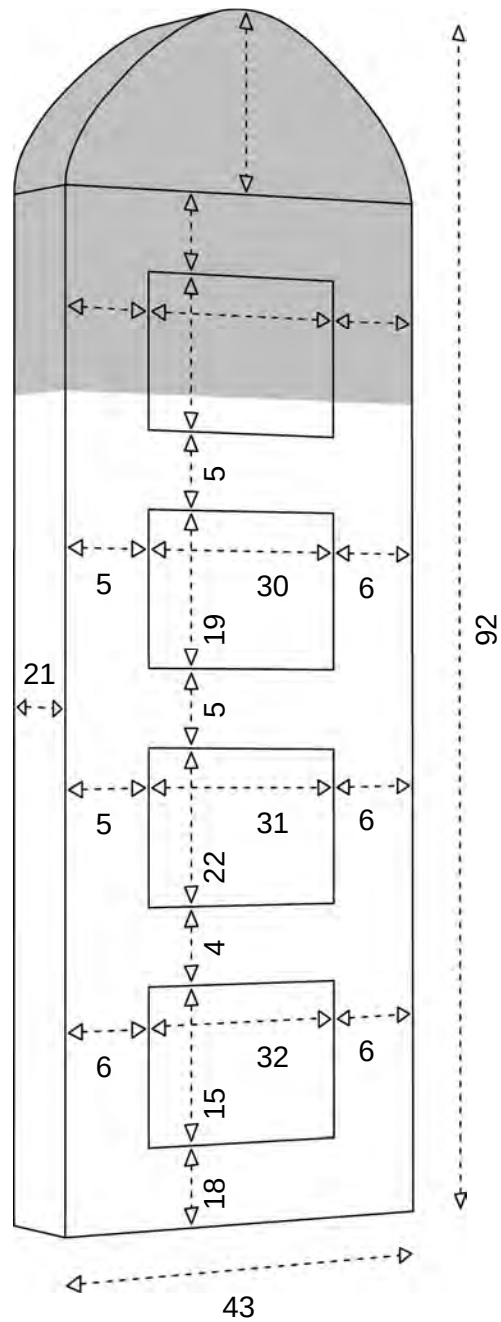


Panel 2



Upper frame







Panel 1

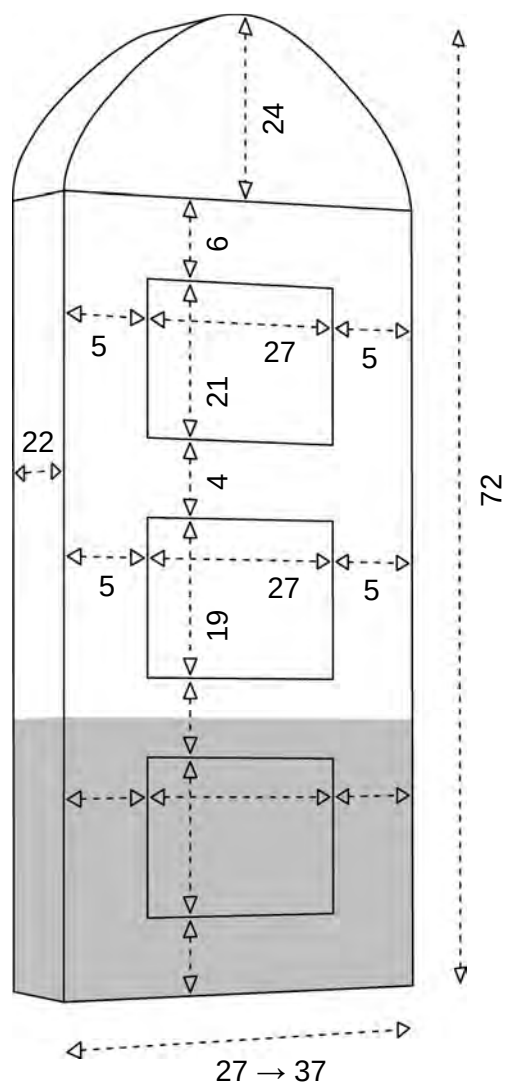


Panel 2



Panel 3

Plate 49, no. 36



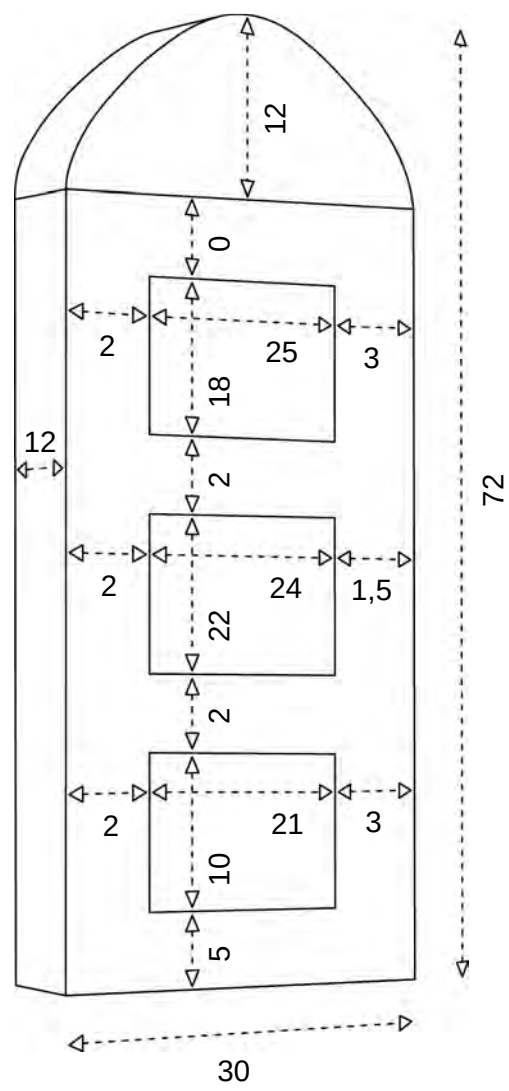
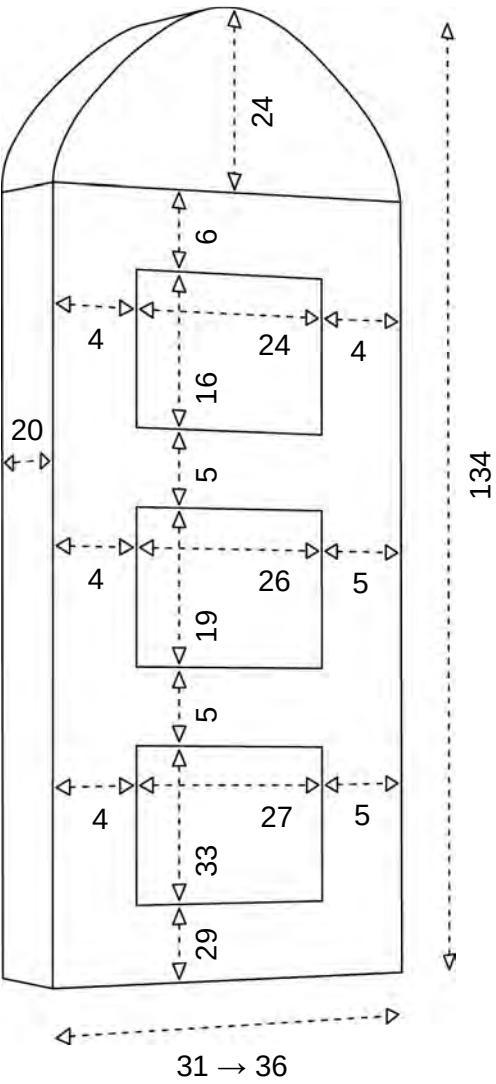


Plate 51, no. 38





Panel 1



Panel 2



Panel 3 and
upper frame



Panel 1

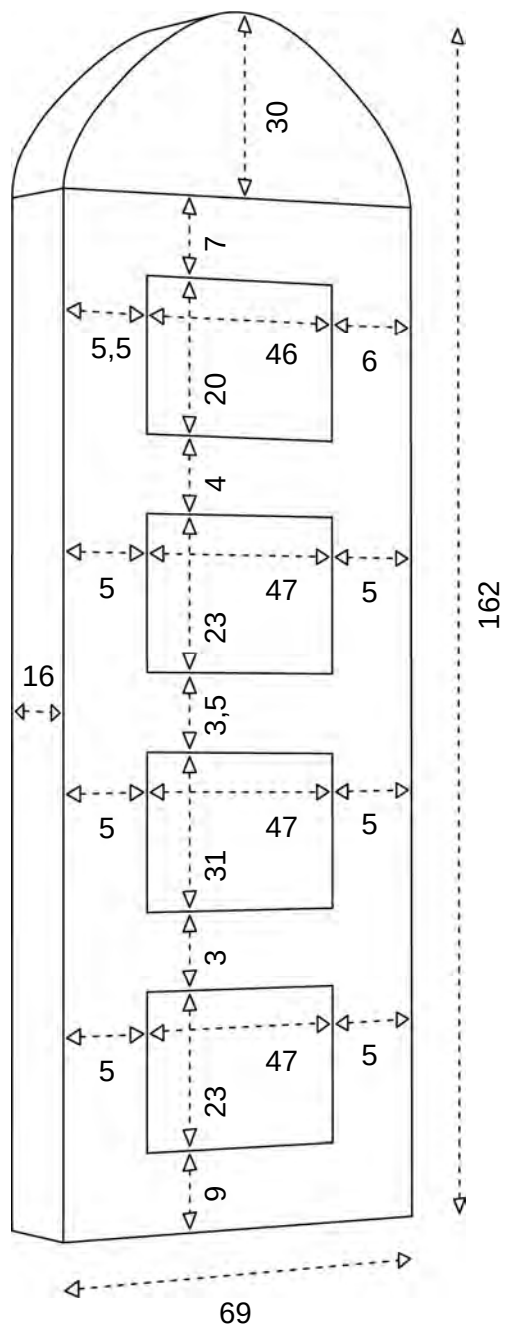


Panel 2



Panel 3 and
upper frame

Plate 53, no. 40





Panel 1



Panel 2



Panel 3

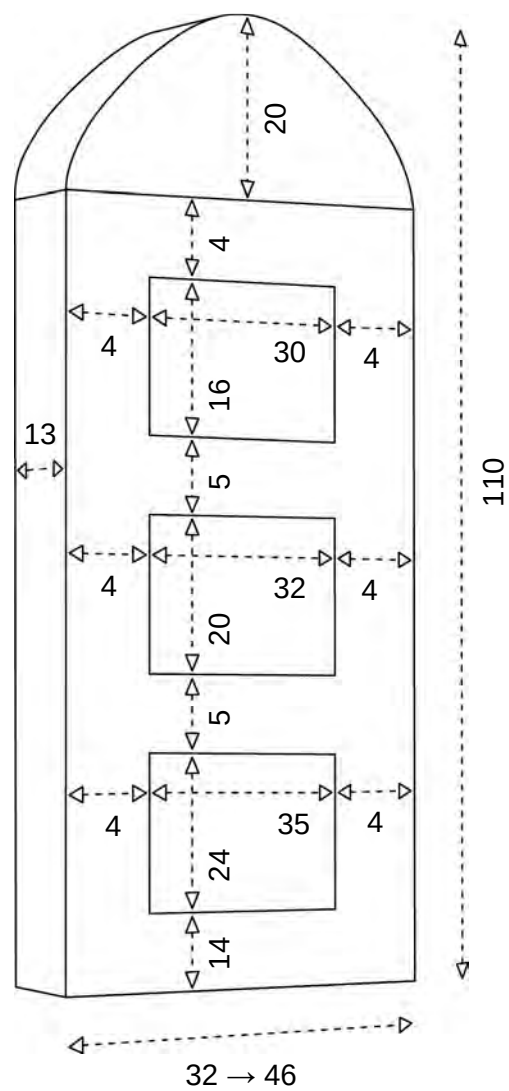


Panel 4



Upper frame

Plate 54, no. 41





Panel 1

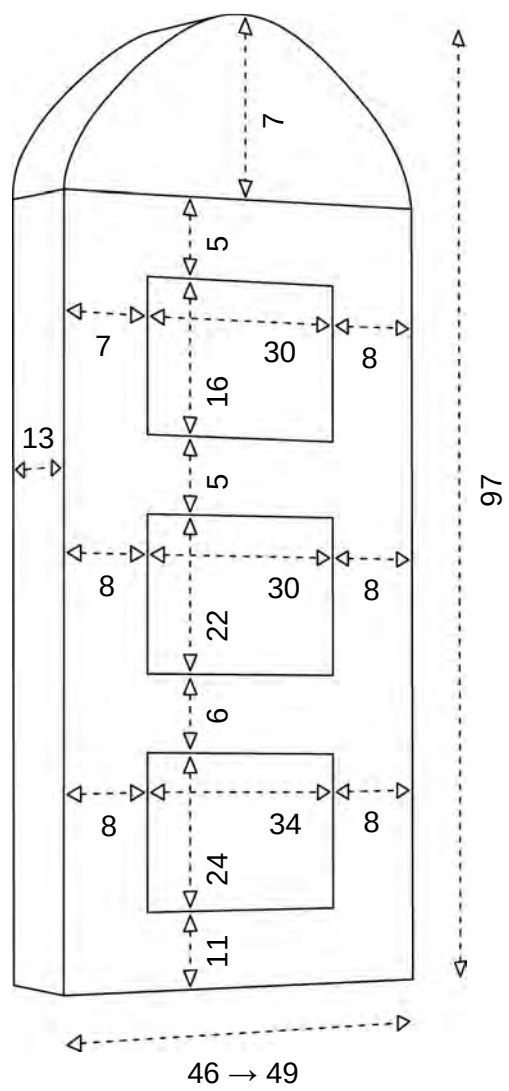


Panel 2



Panel 3 and
upper frame

Plate 55, no. 42





Panel 1

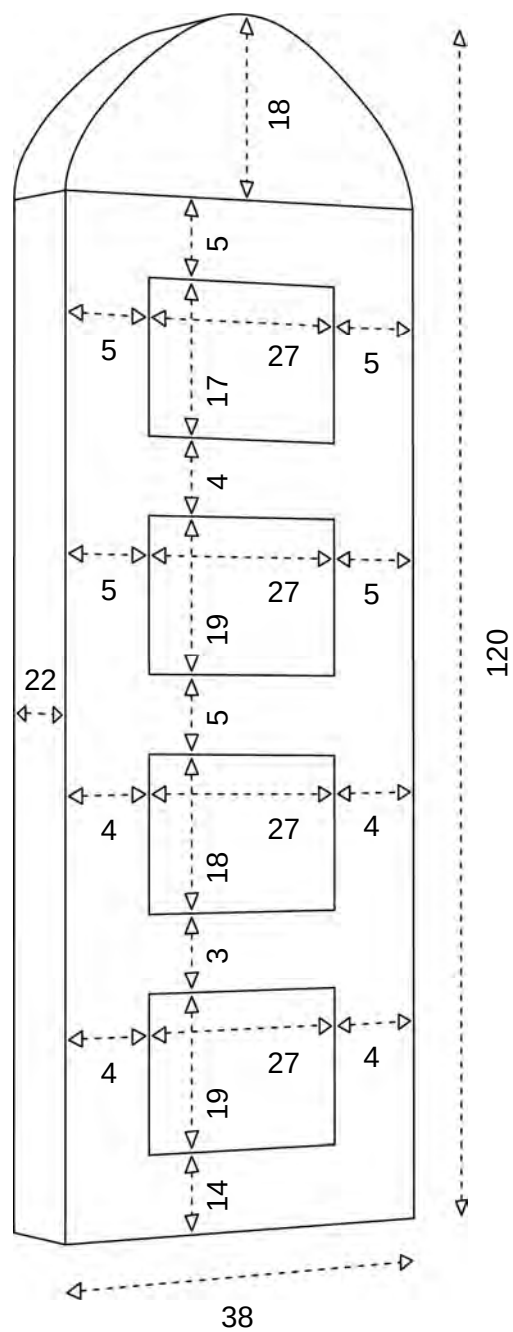


Panel 2



Panel 3

Plate 56, no. 43

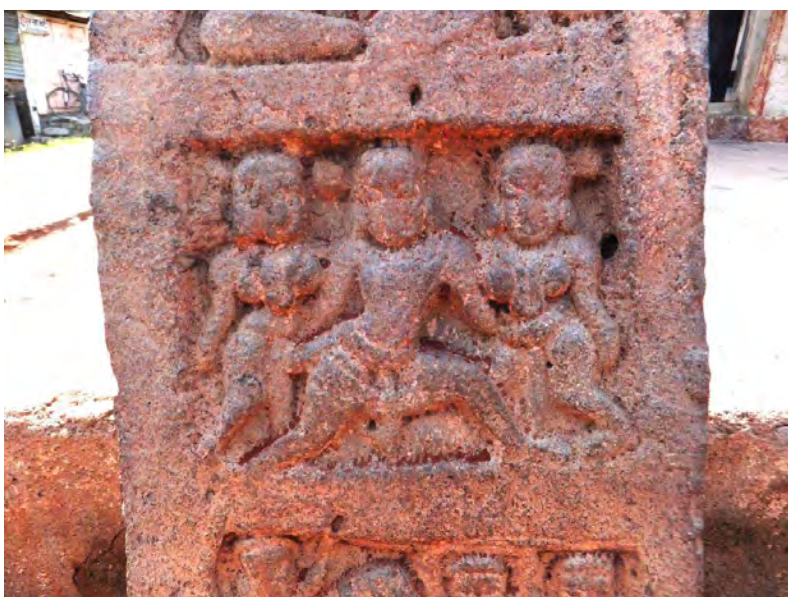




Panel 1



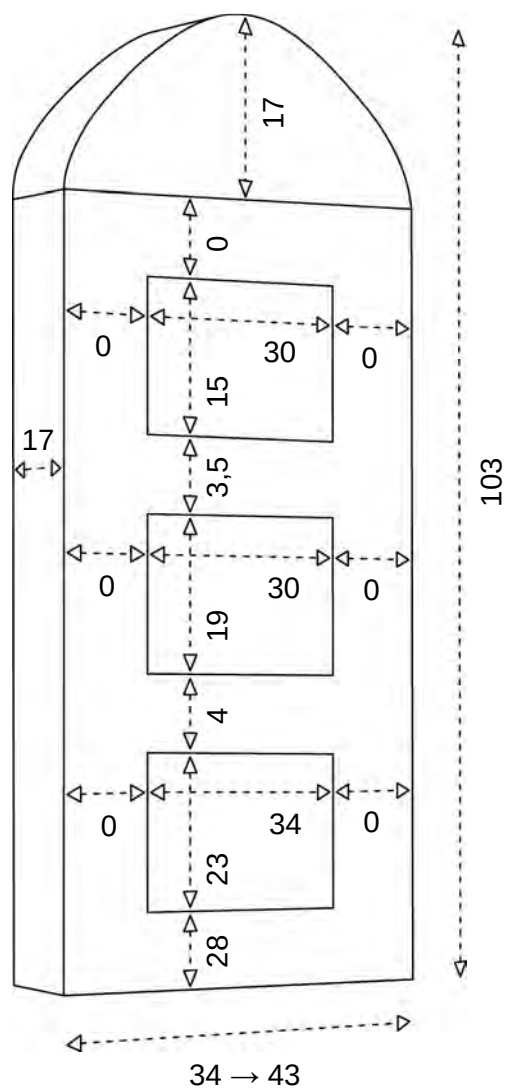
Panel 2



Panel 3



Panel 4 and
upper frame





Panel 1

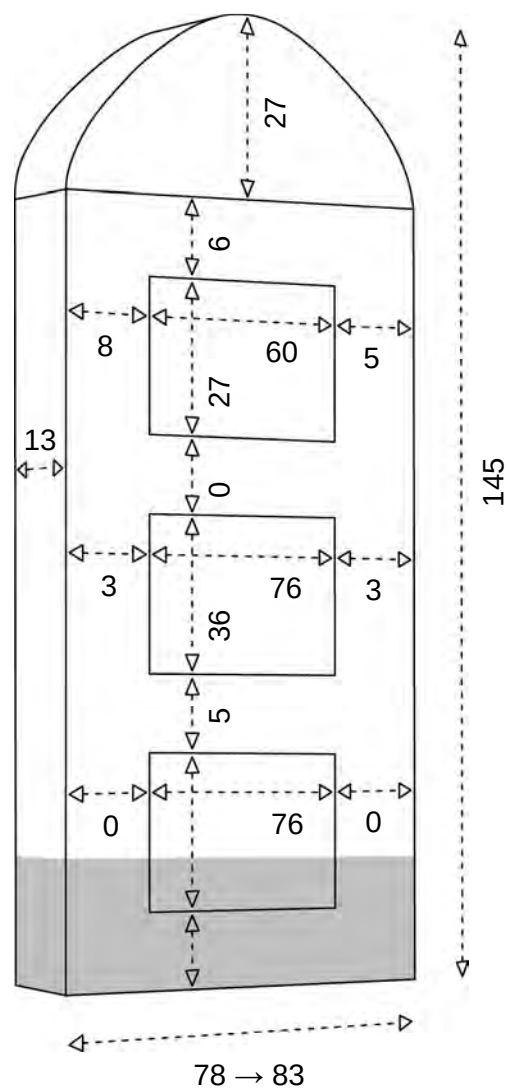


Panel 2



Panel 3 and
upper frame

Plate 58, no. 45





Panel 1

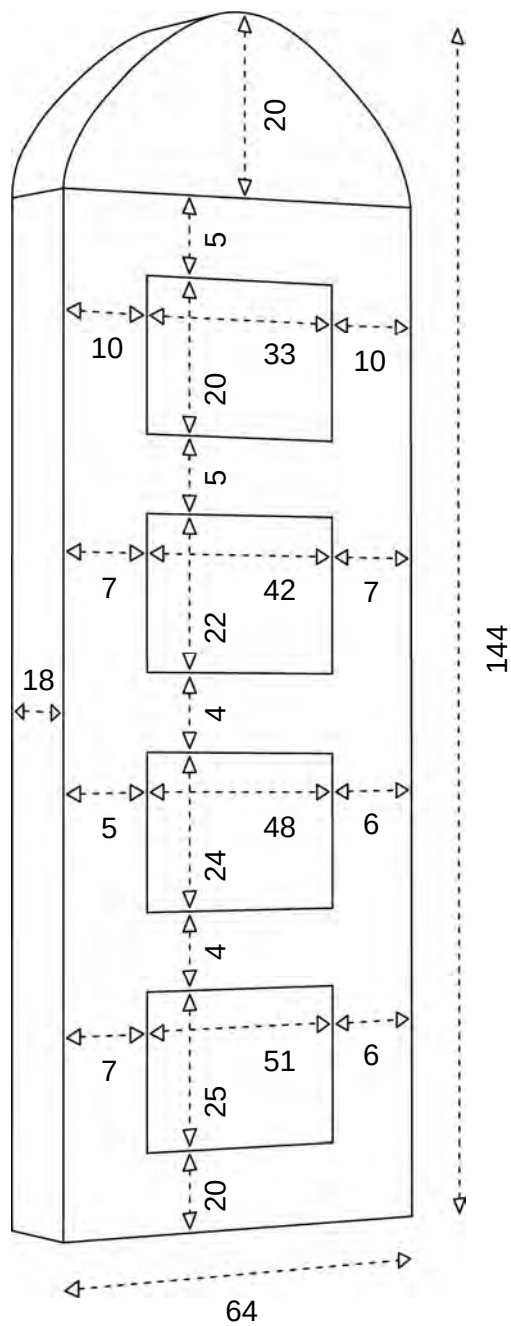


Panel 2 and 3



Upper frame

Plate 59, no. 46





Panel 1



Panel 2



Panel 3

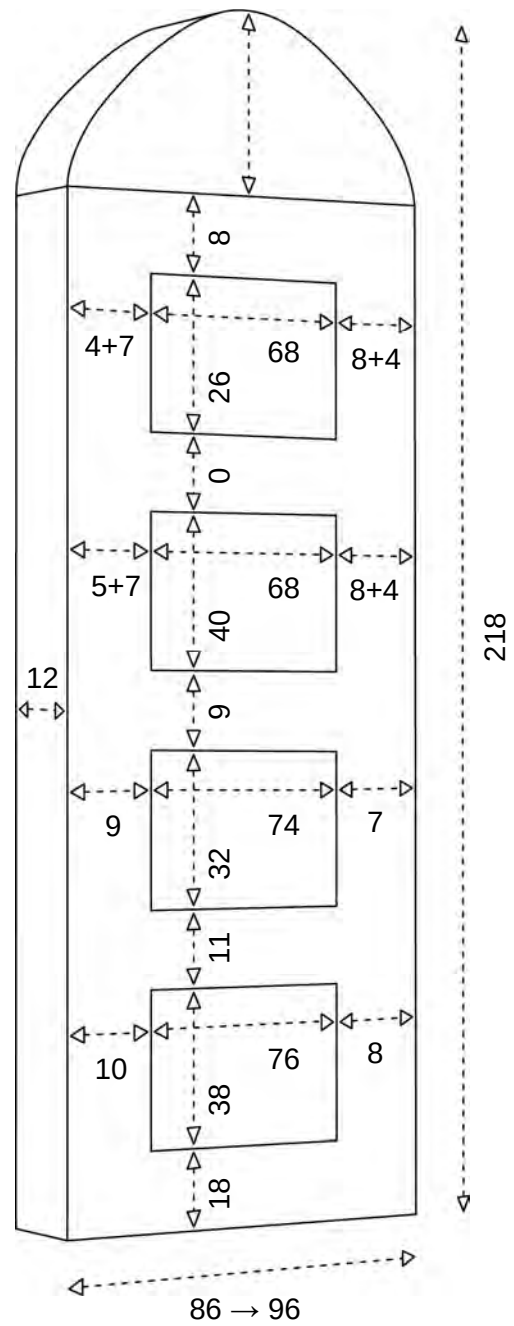


Panel 4



Upper frame

Plate 60, no. 47





Panel 1



Panel 2



Panel 3

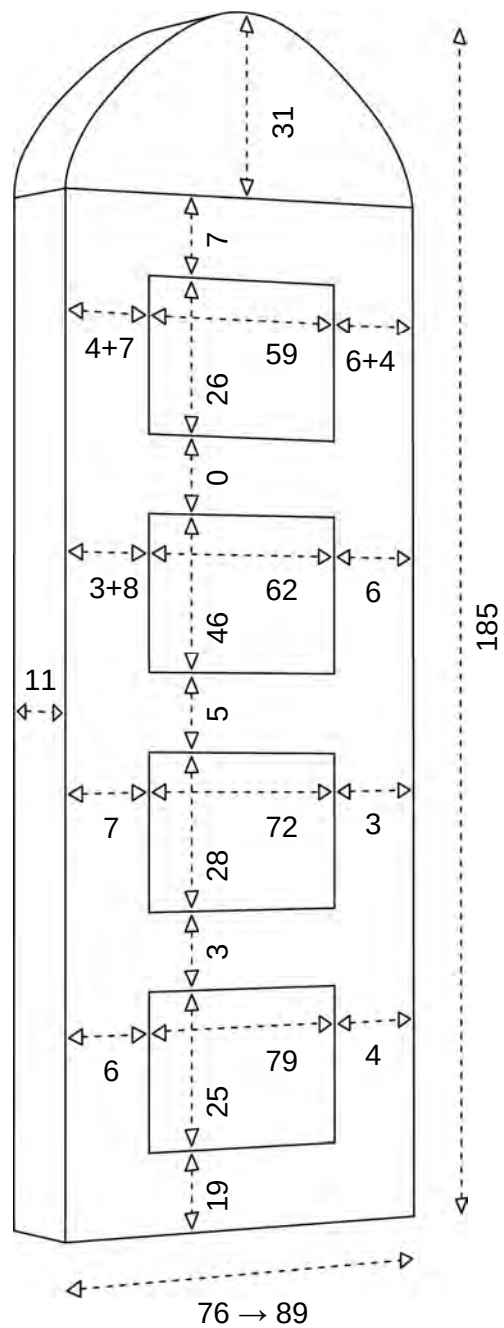


Panel 4



Upper frame

Plate 61, no. 48





Panel 1



Panel 2



Panel 3

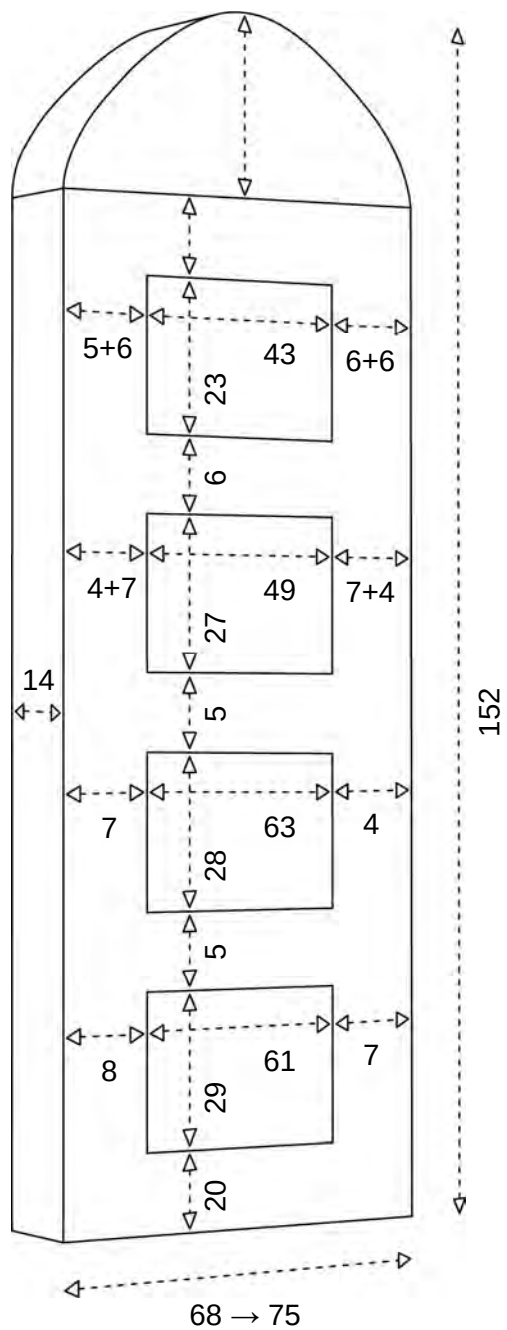


Panel 4



Upper frame

Plate 62, no. 49





Panel 1



Panel 2

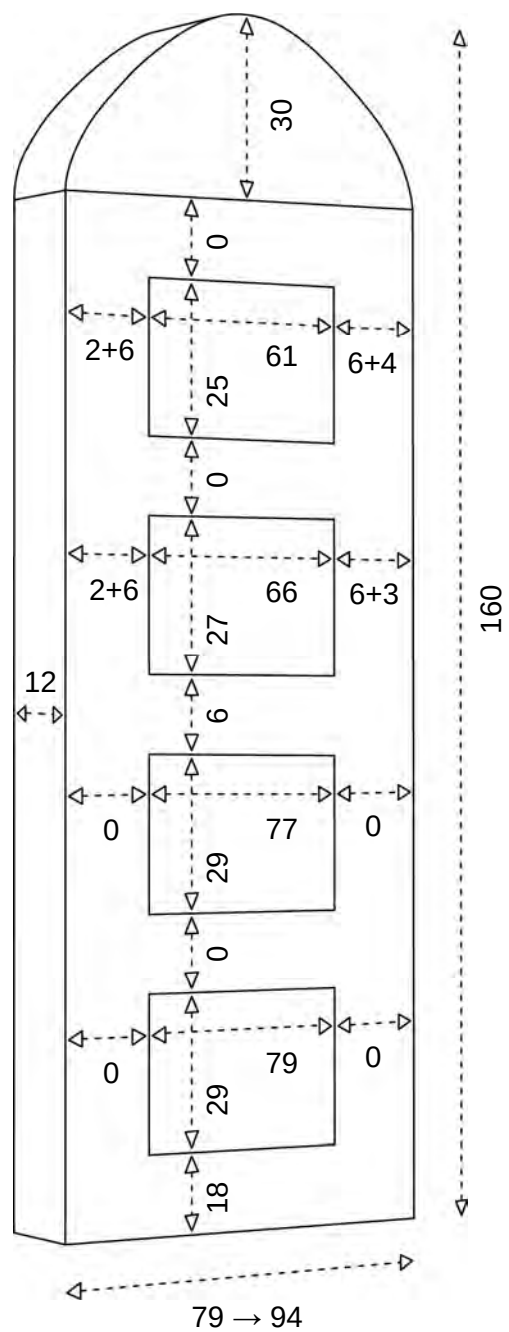


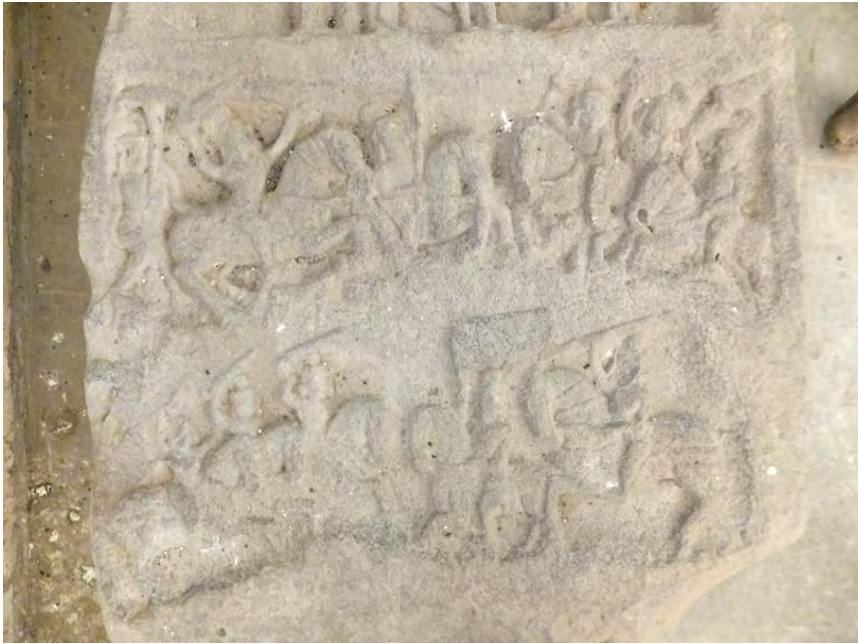
Panel 3



Panel 4

Plate 63, no. 50

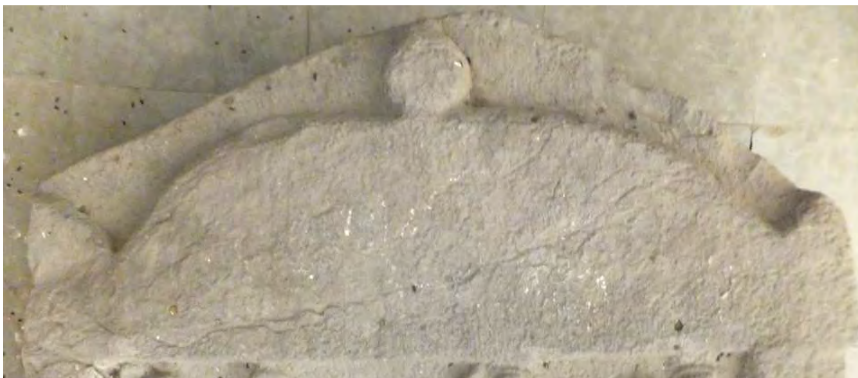




Panel 1 and 2



Panel 3 and 4



Upper frame

Plate 64, no. 51



Plate 65, no. 52



Plate 66, no. 53



Plate 67, no. 54



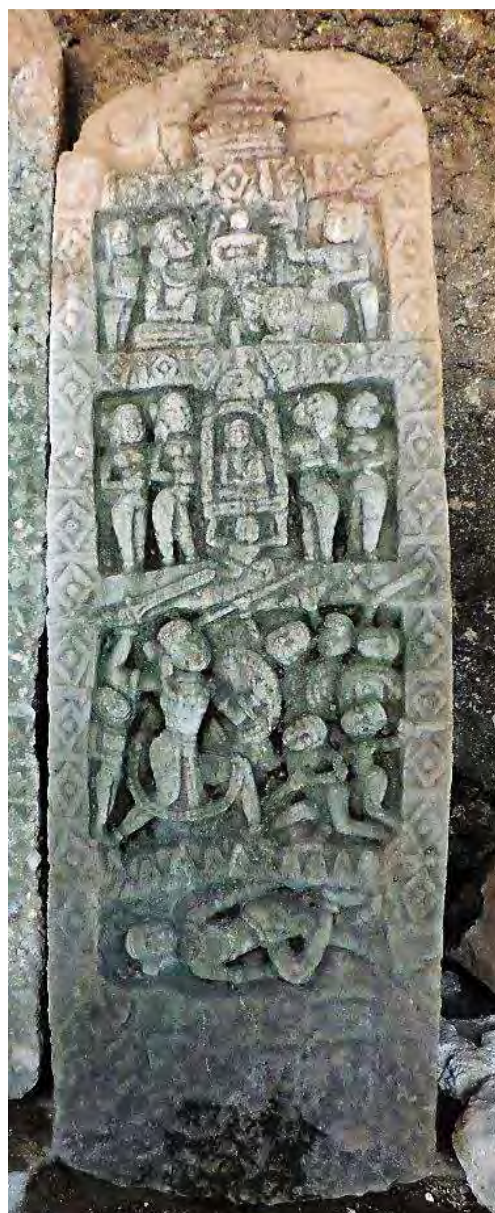
(Photo courtesy: Amol Bankar)

Plate 68, no. 55



(Photo courtesy: Amol Bankar)

Plate 69, no. 56



Panel 1



Panel 2



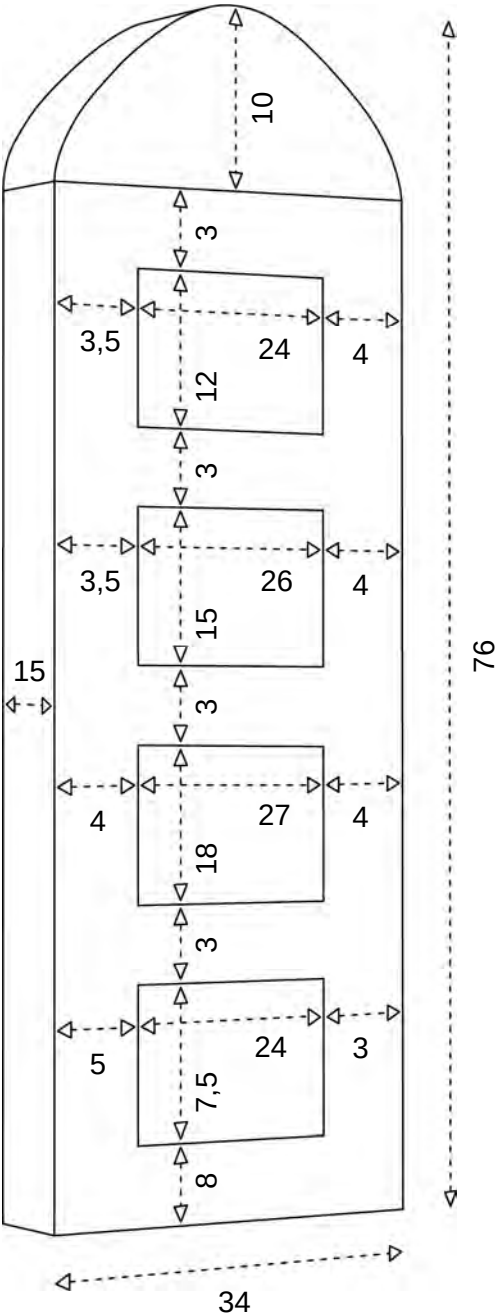
Panel 3

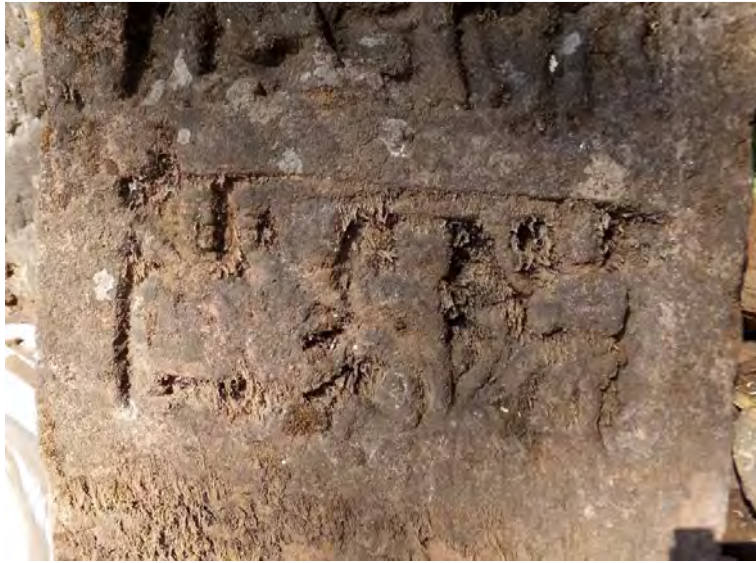


Panel 4 and
upper frame

(Photos courtesy: Amol Bankar)

Plate 70, no. 57





Panel 1



Panel 2

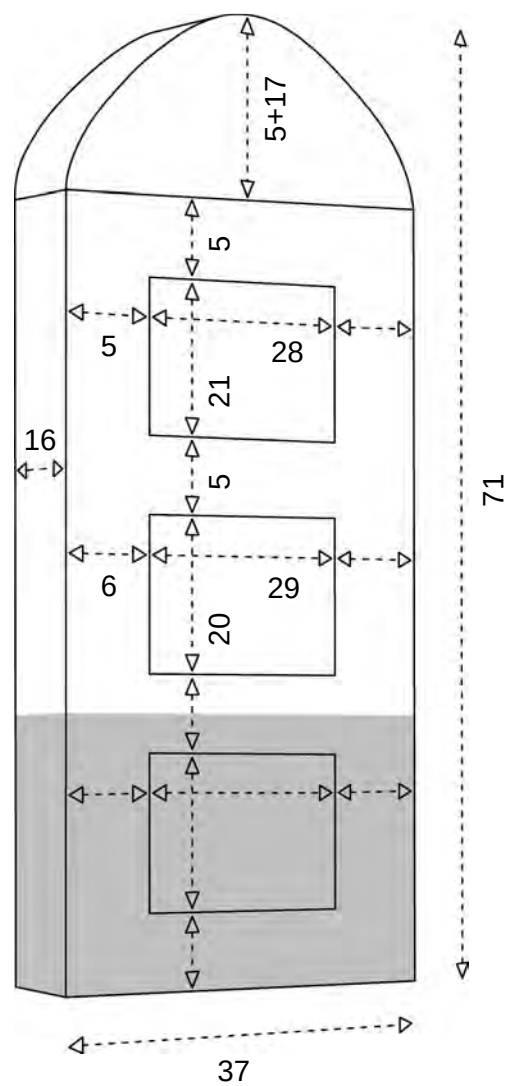


Panel 3



Panel 4 and
upper frame

Plate 71, no. 58





Panel 1

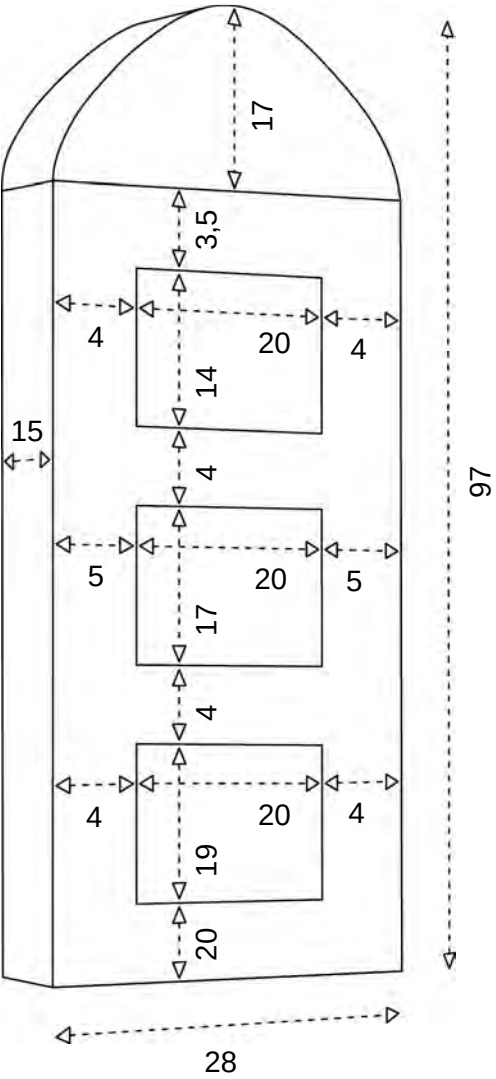


Panel 2



Upper frame

Plate 72, no. 59



Panel 1



Panel 2

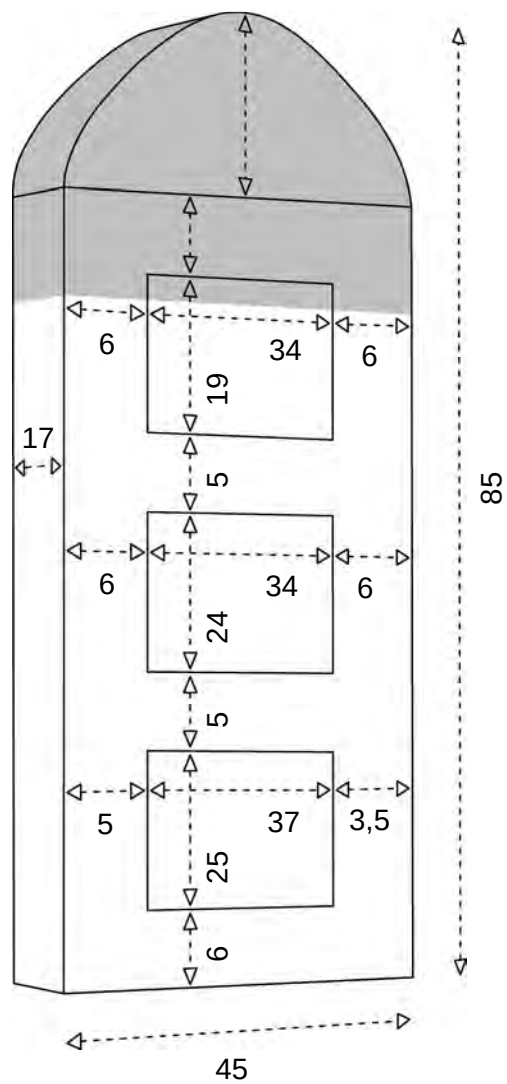


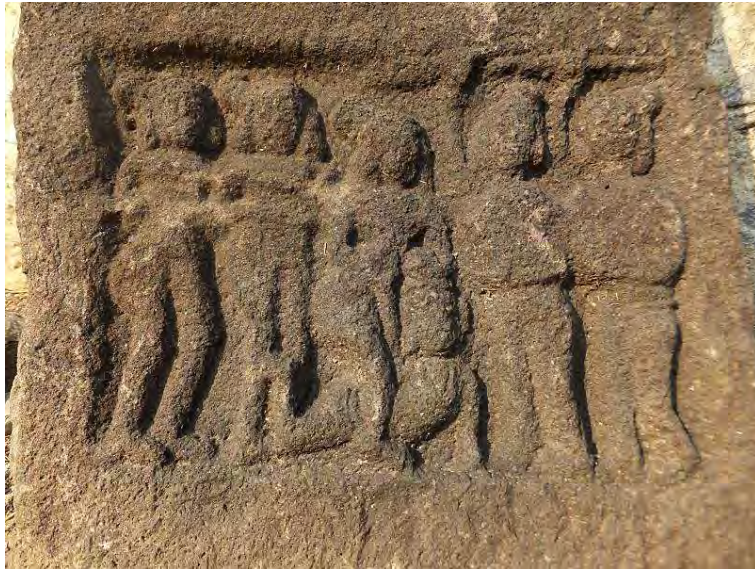
Panel 3



Upper frame

Plate 73, no. 60





Panel 1

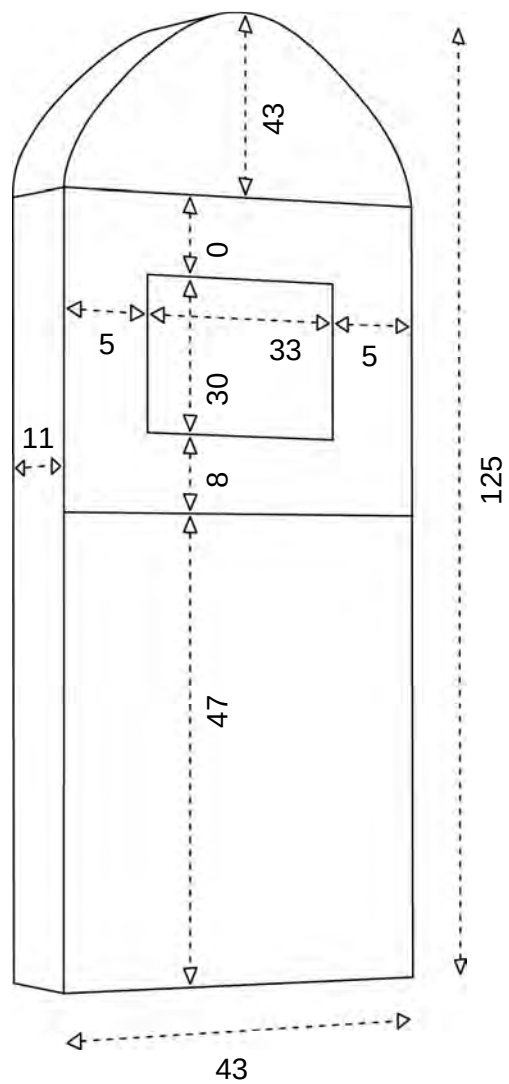


Panel 2



Panel 3

Plate 74, no. 61



A large, rectangular, reddish-brown terracotta plaque with a pointed top. It features a central relief of a seated figure, possibly a deity or royal figure, surrounded by smaller figures and decorative elements. The plaque is adorned with a garland of yellow and purple flowers.

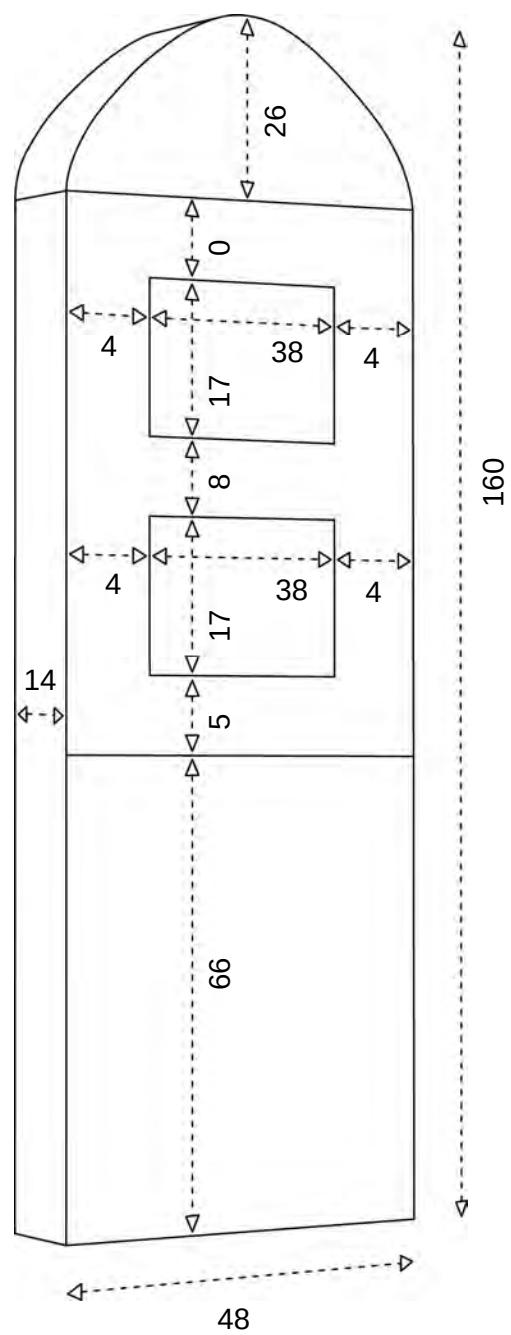


Plate 76, no. 63

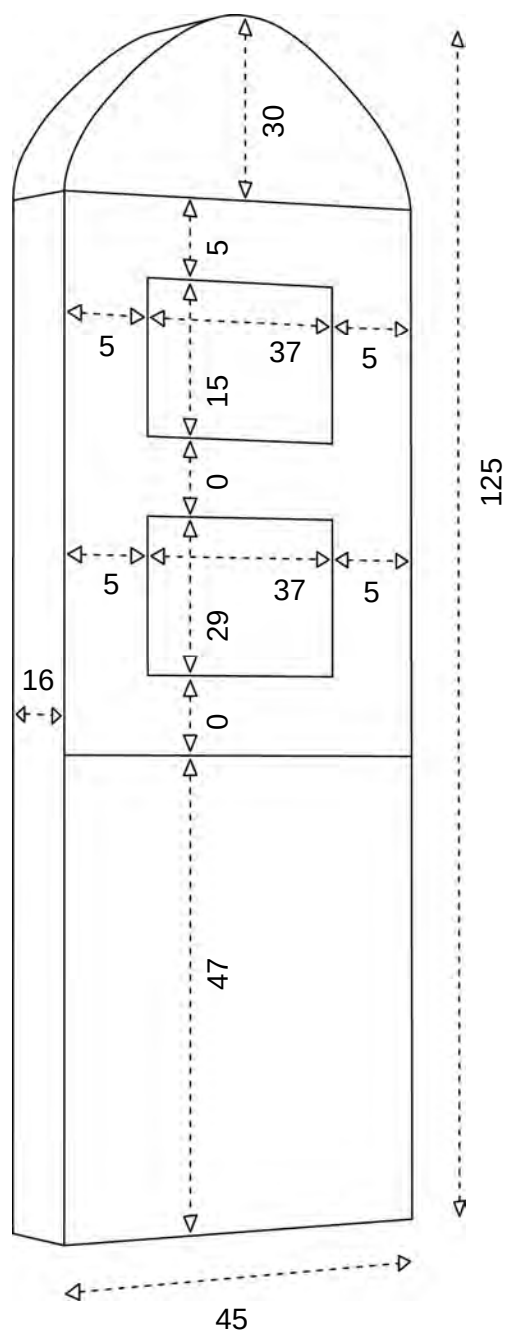


Plate 77, no. 64

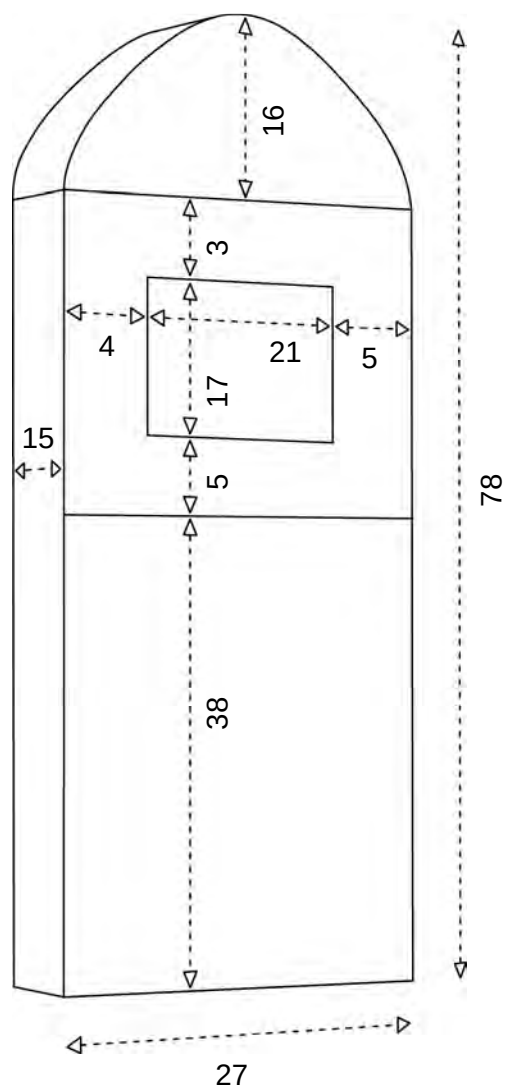


Plate 78, no. 65

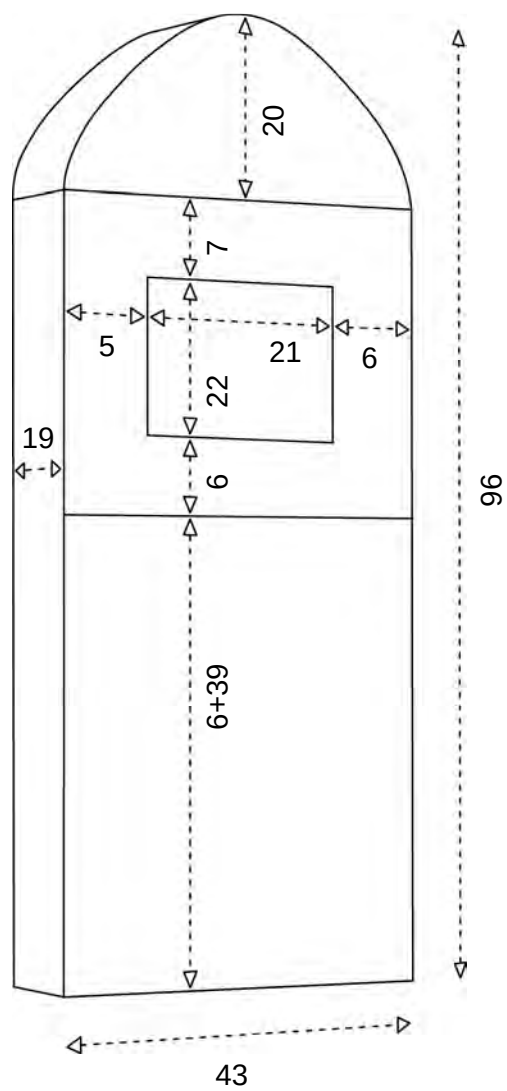


Plate 79, no. 66

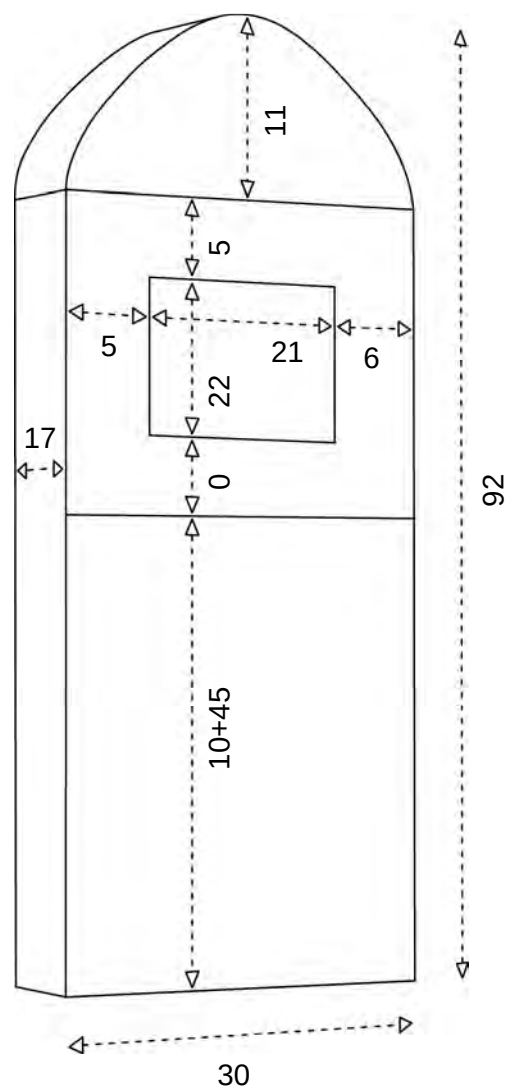


Plate 80, no. 67

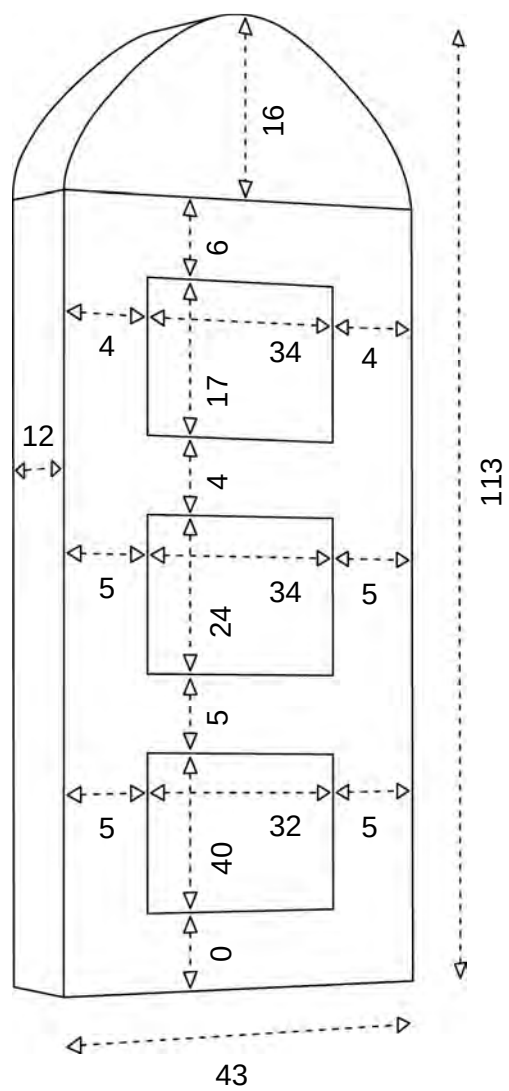
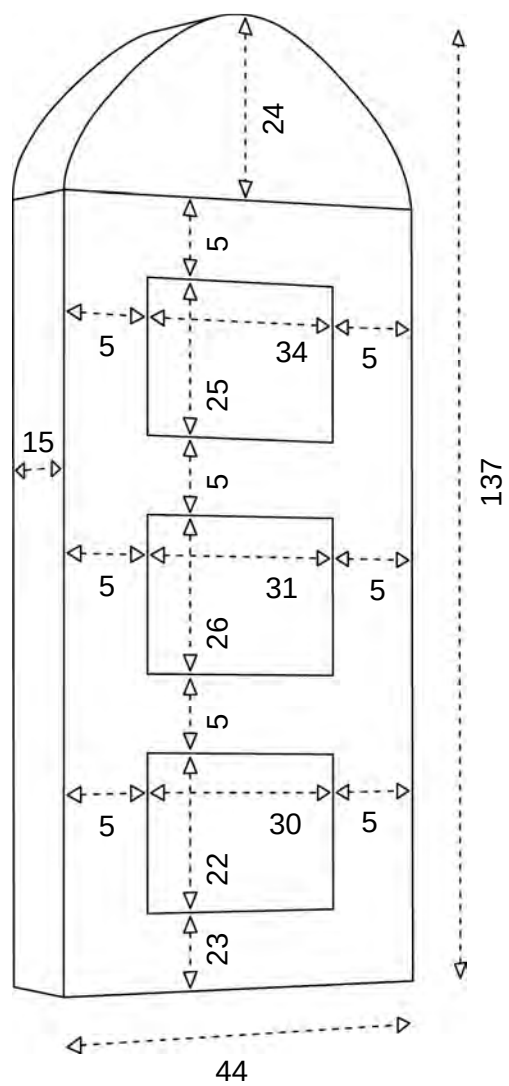


Plate 81, no. 68





Panel 1



Panel 2



Panel 3



Upper frame

Plate 82, no. 69

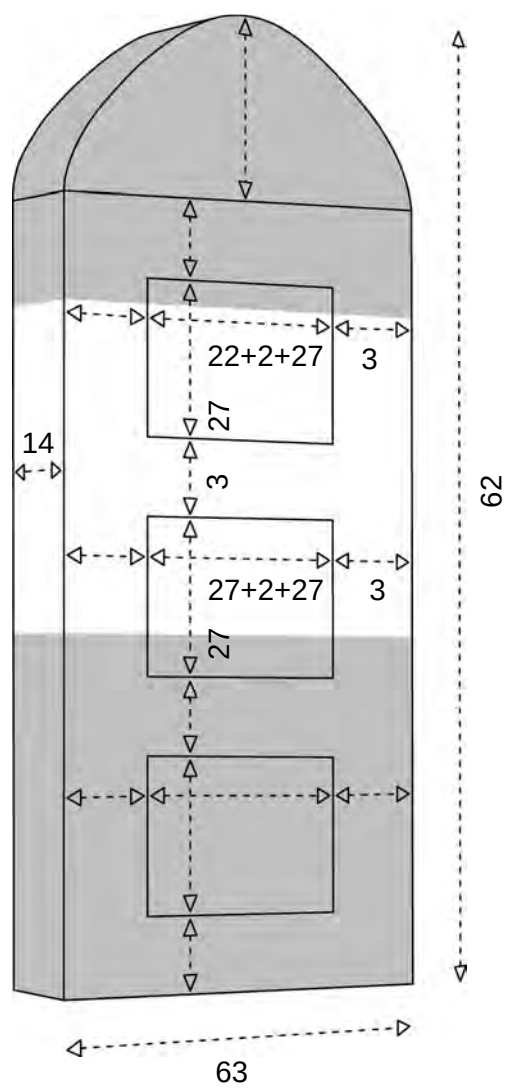
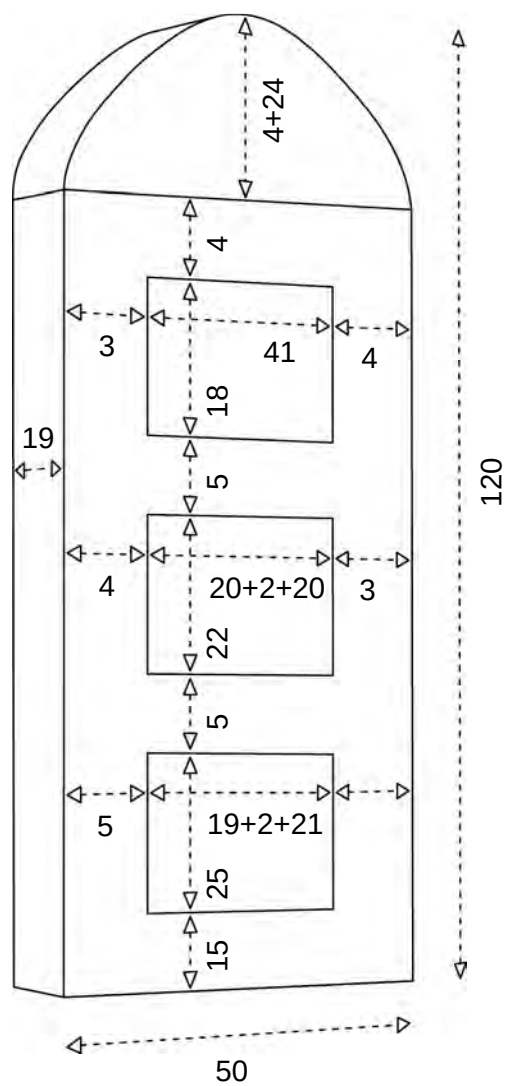


Plate 83, no. 70





Panels 1 and 2,
left side



Panels 1 and 2,
right side

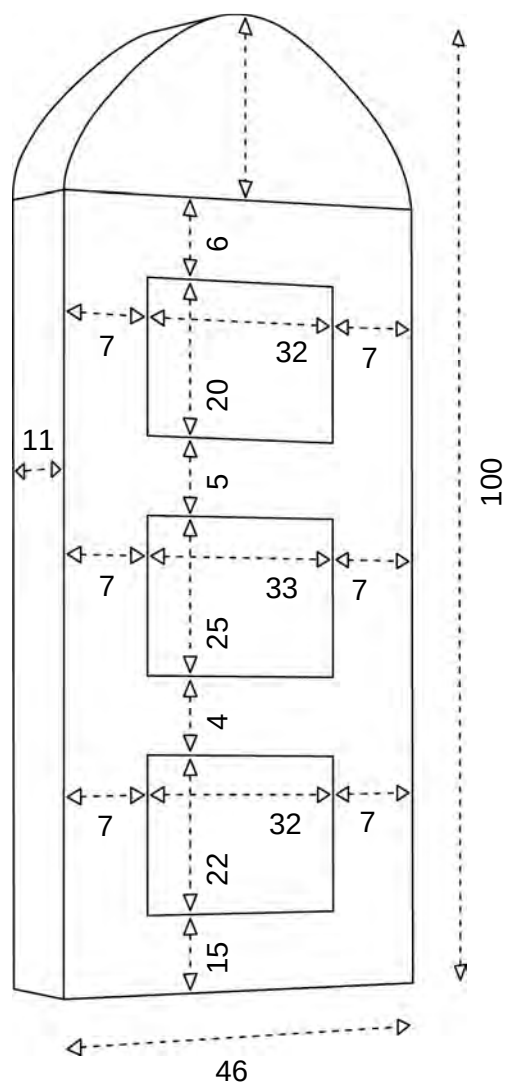


Panel 3



Upper frame

Plate 84, no. 71





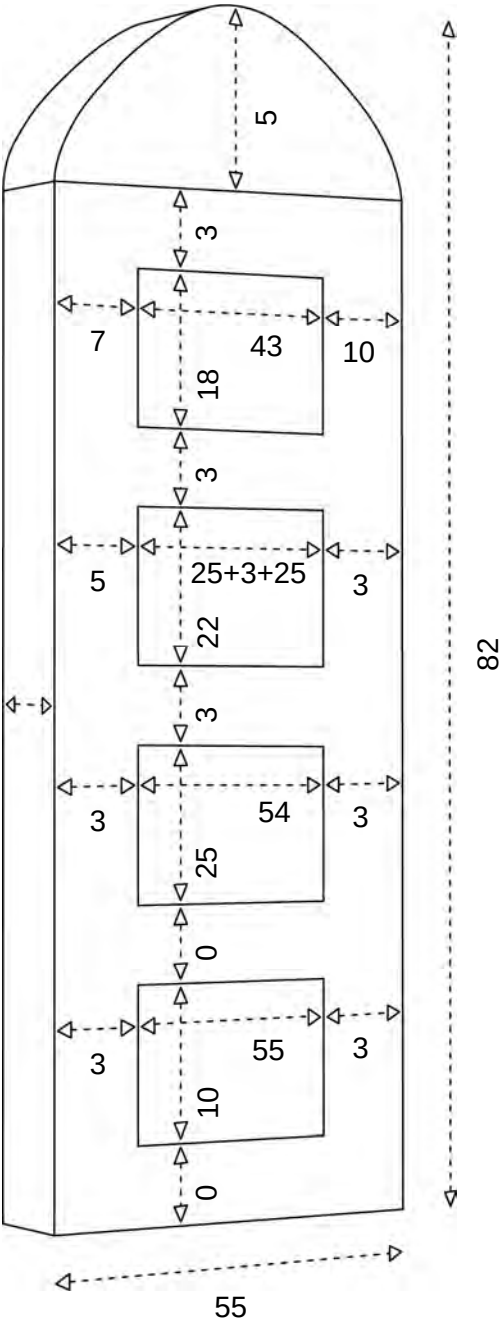
Panel 1

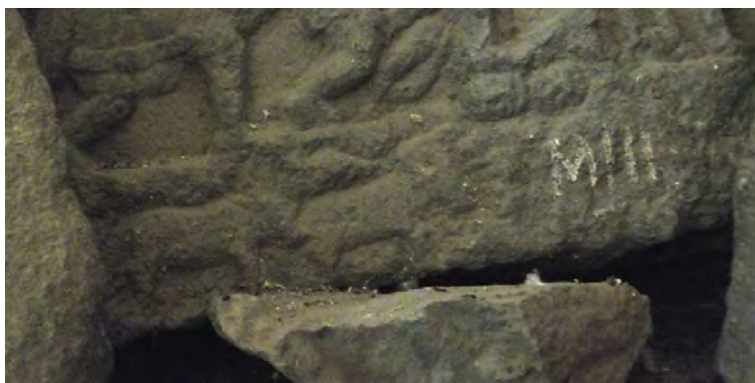


Panel 2



Panel 3 and
upper frame





Panel 1



Panel 2



Panel 3



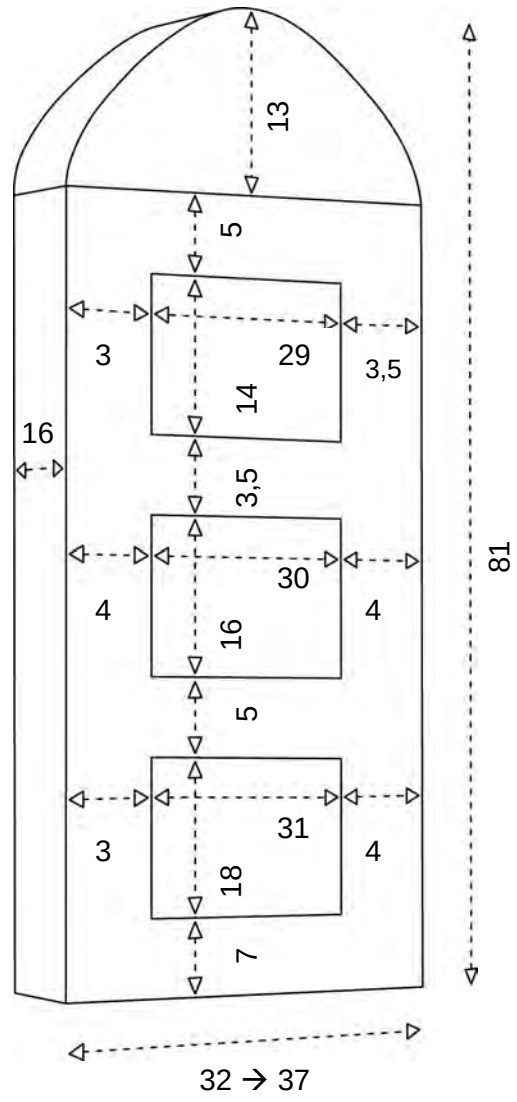
Panel 4

Plate 86, no. 73



Plate 87, no. 74







Panel 1



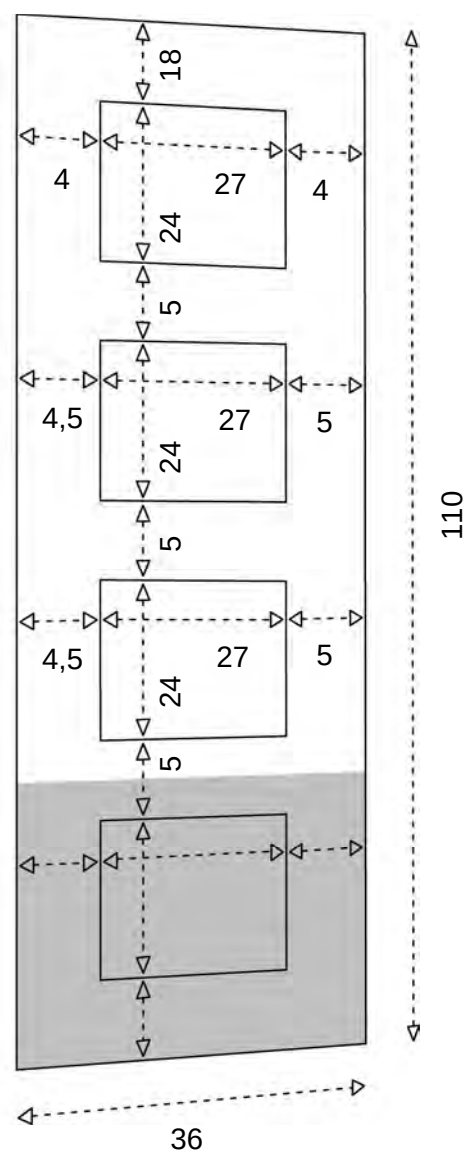
Panel 2



Panel 3 and
upper frame

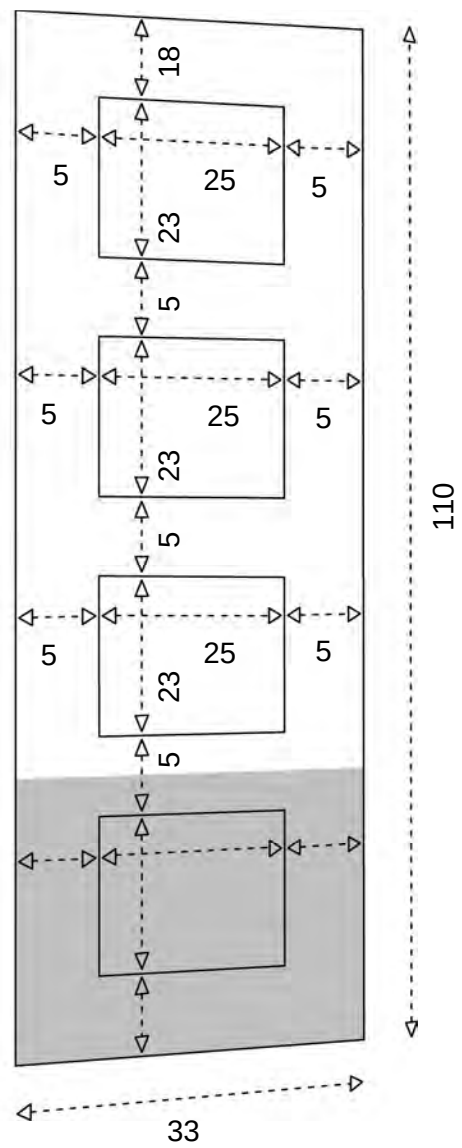


South side



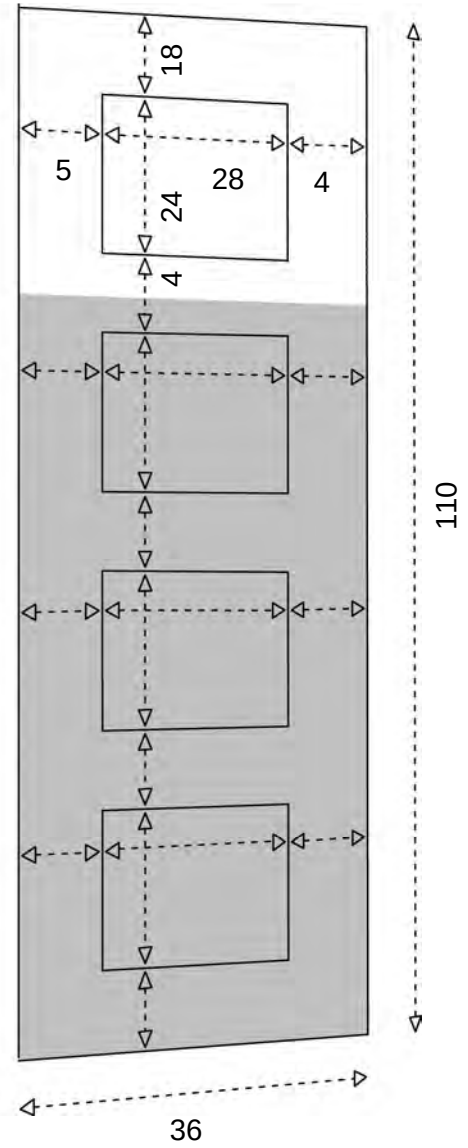


West side



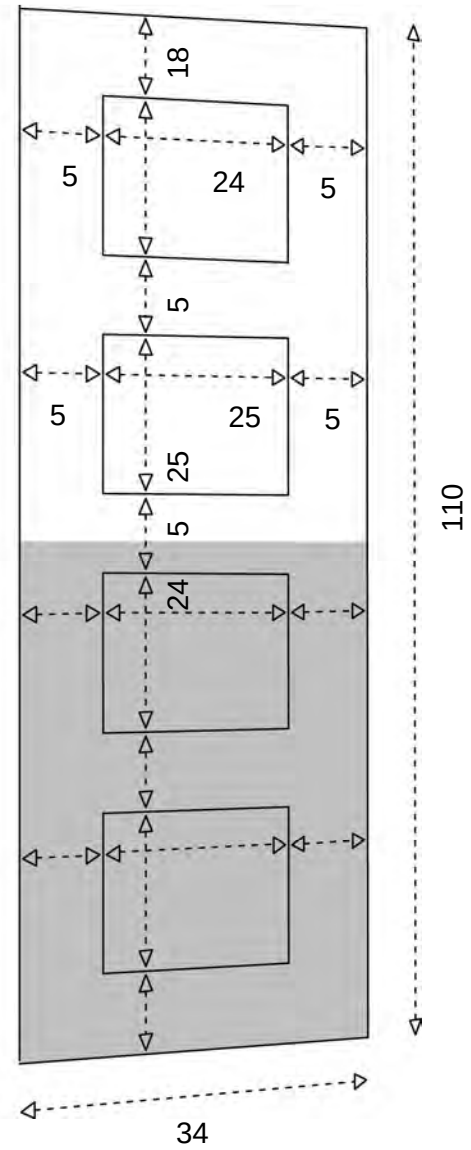


North side





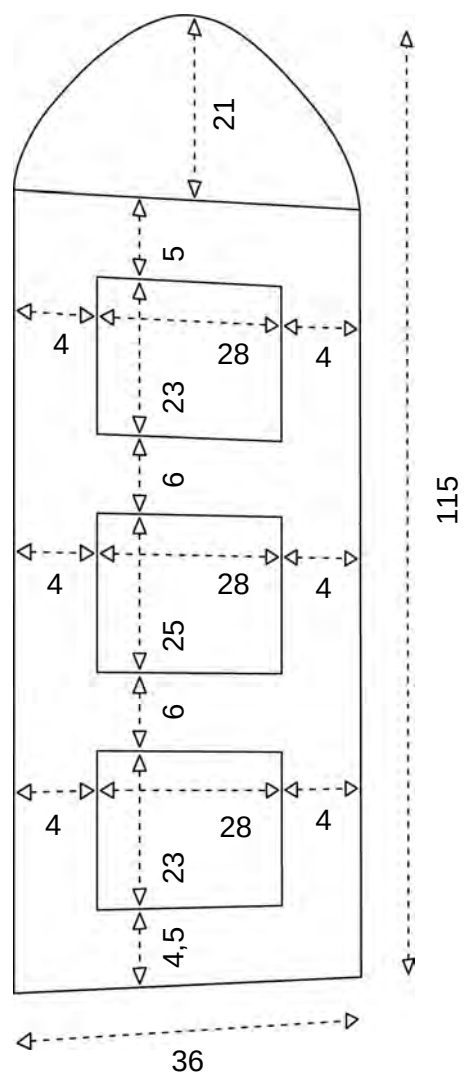
East side



General view

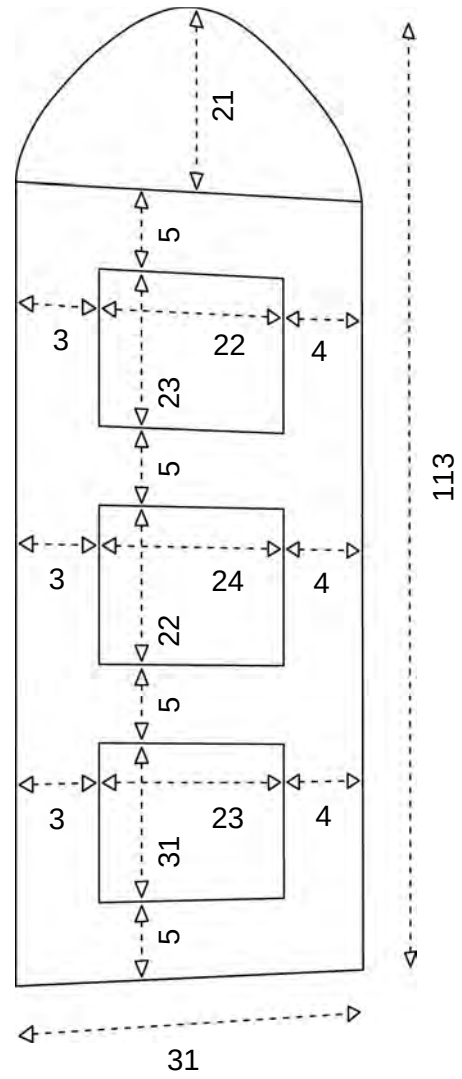


Front side



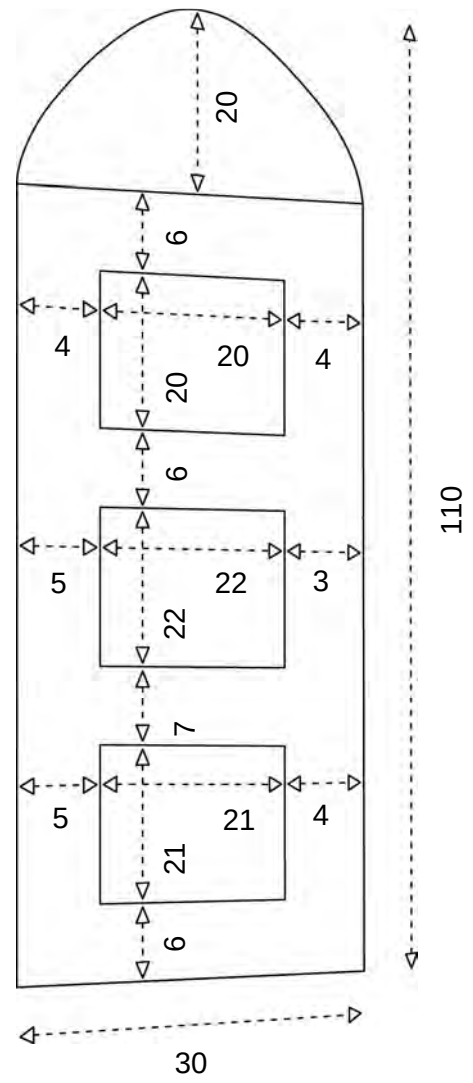


Left side



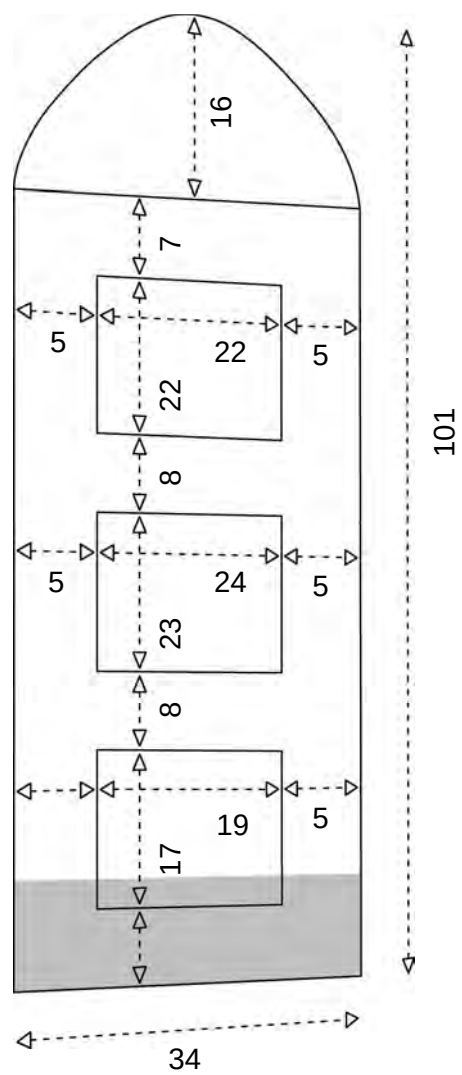


Right side



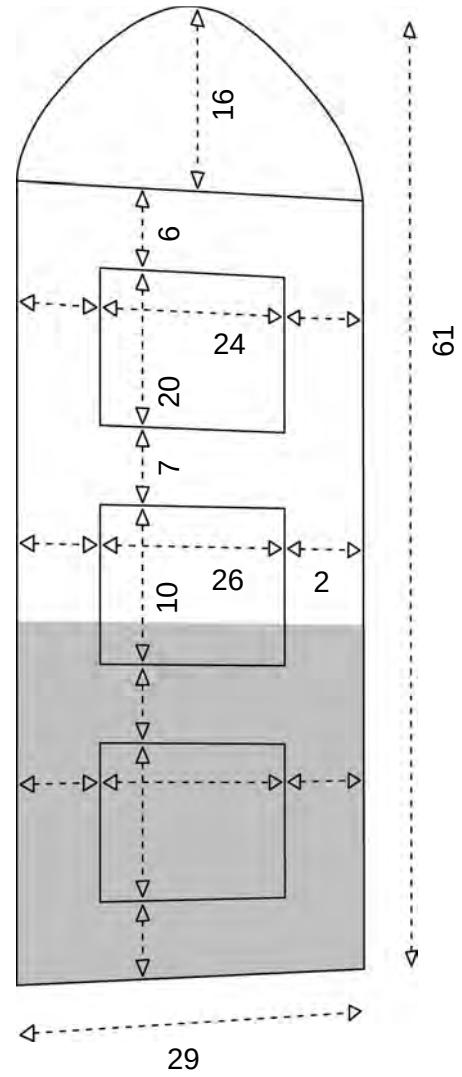


Front side



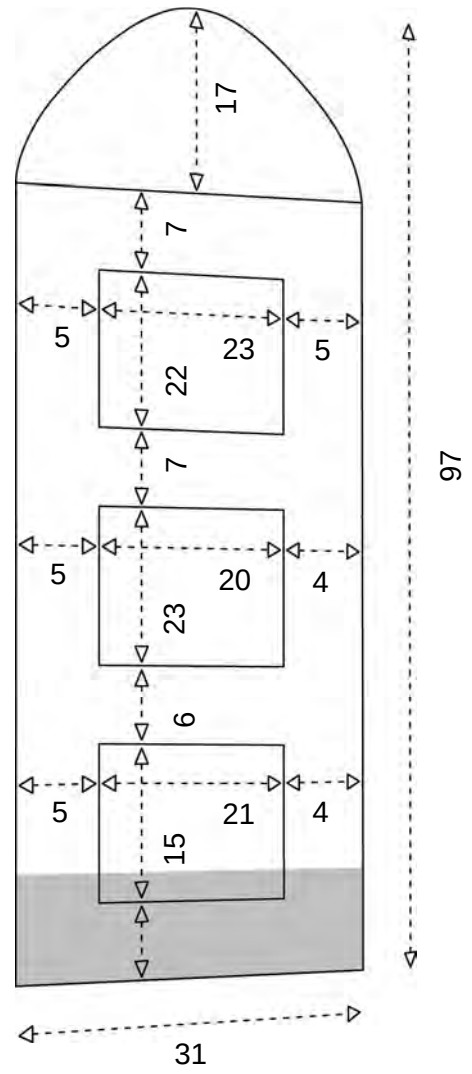


Left side





Right side





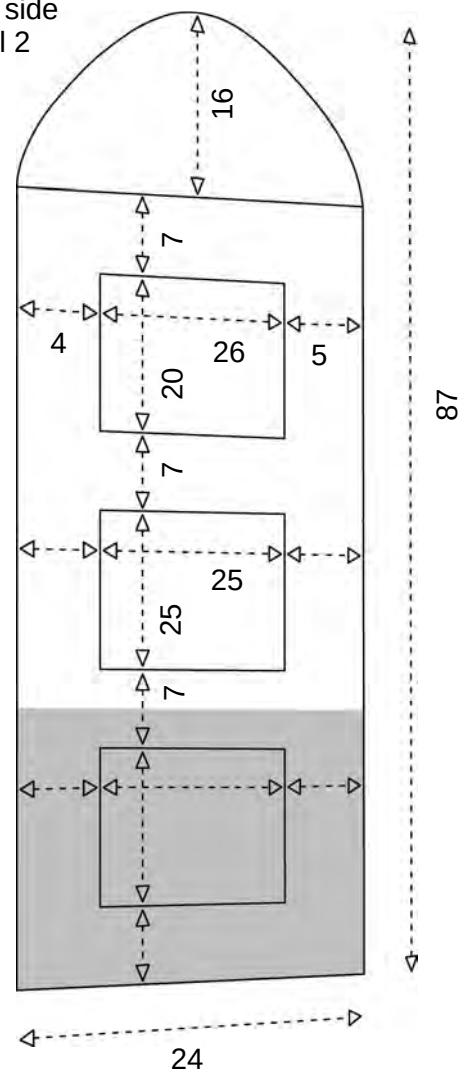
Back side
Panel 1



Back side
Panel 2

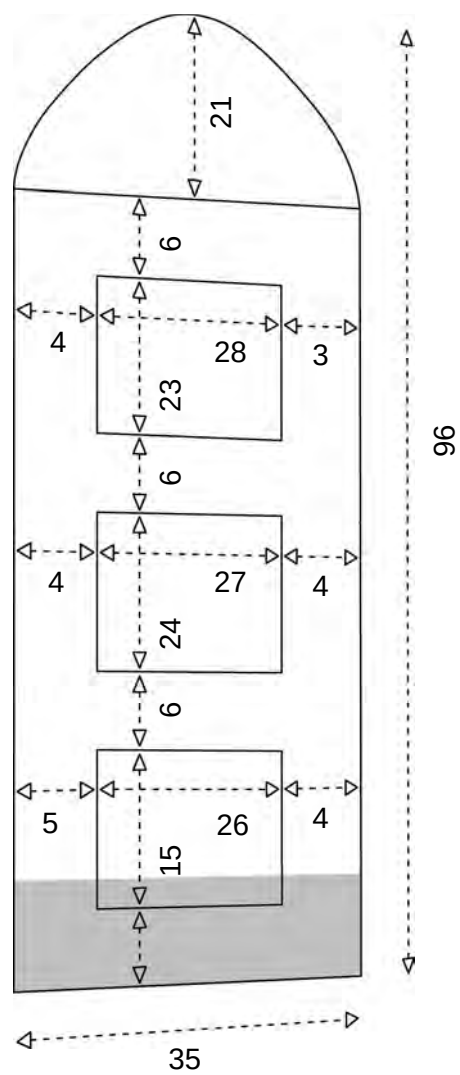


Back side
Upper frame



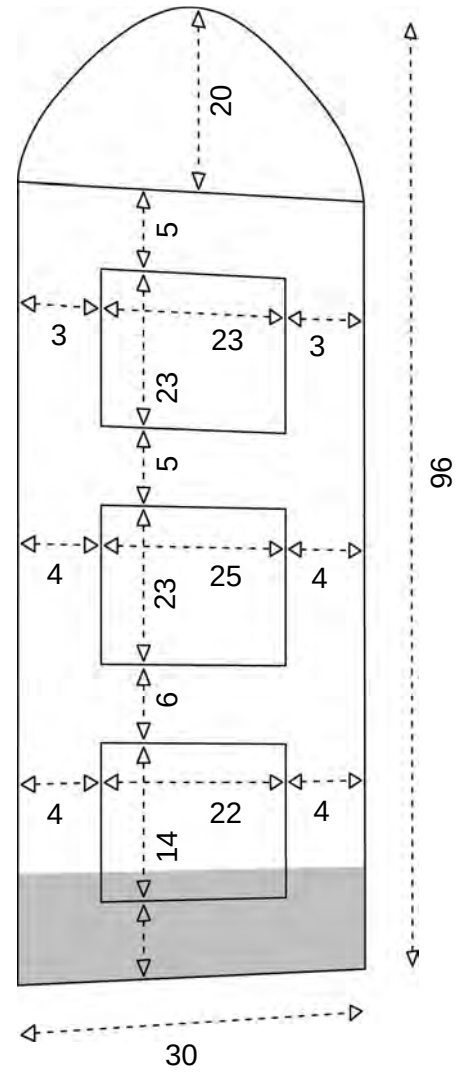


Front side



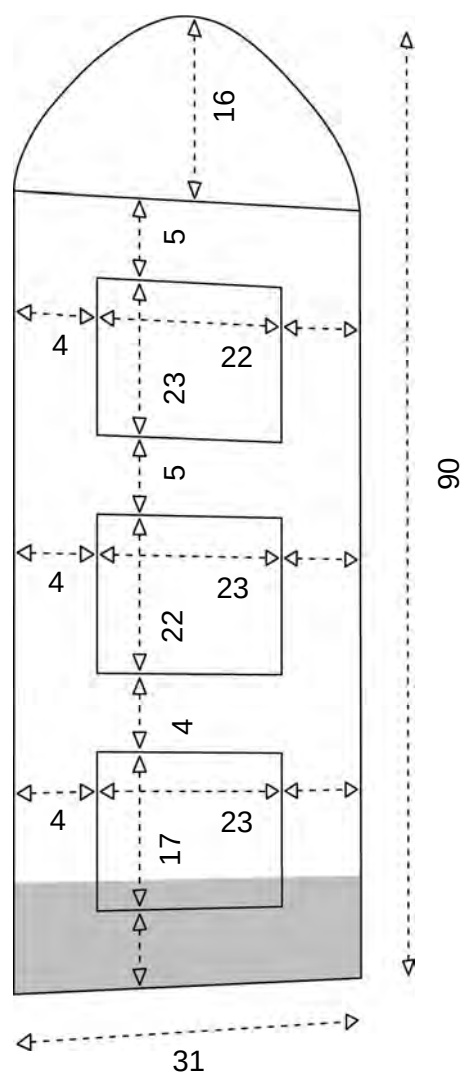


Left side





Right side





Front side

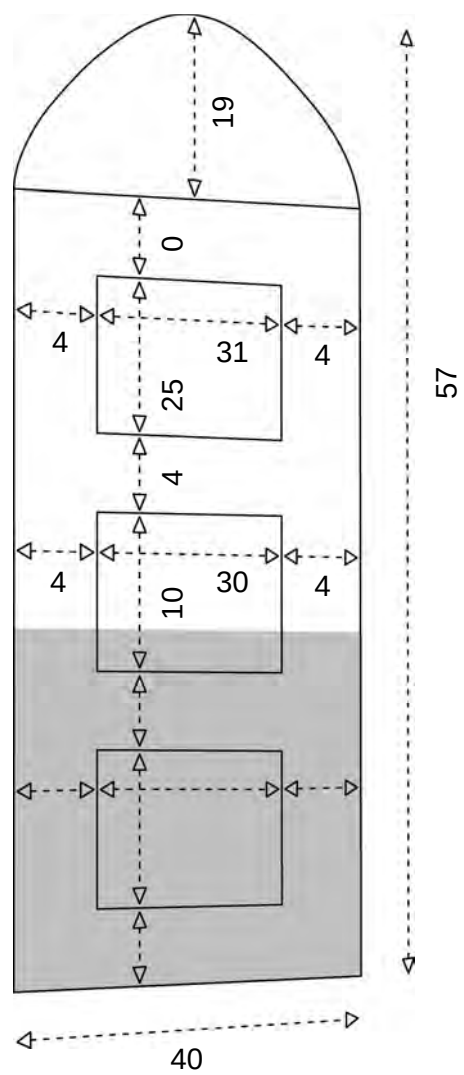
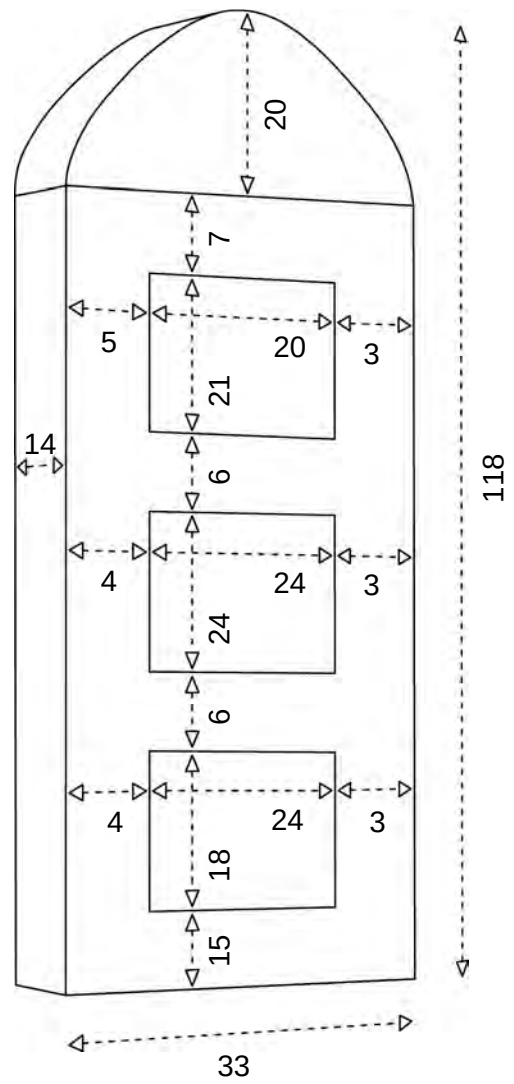


Plate 94, no.81





Panel 1



Panel 2



Panel 3



Upper frame

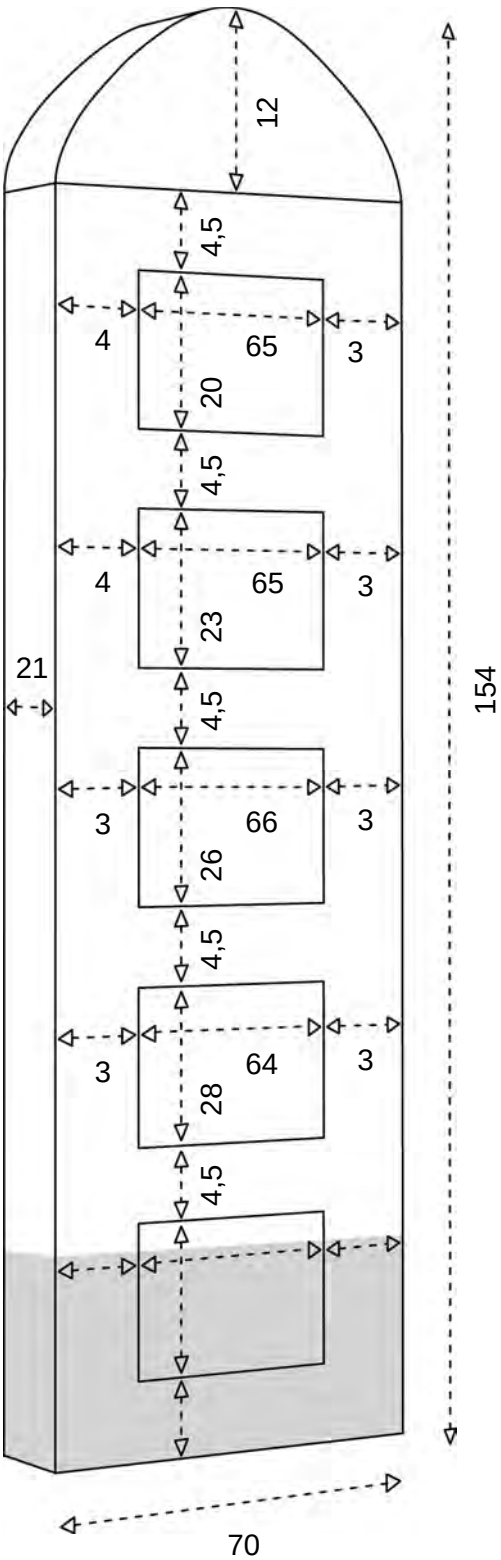


Profile view



(Photo courtesy: Amol Bankar)

Plate 96, no. 83





Panel 1



Panel 2



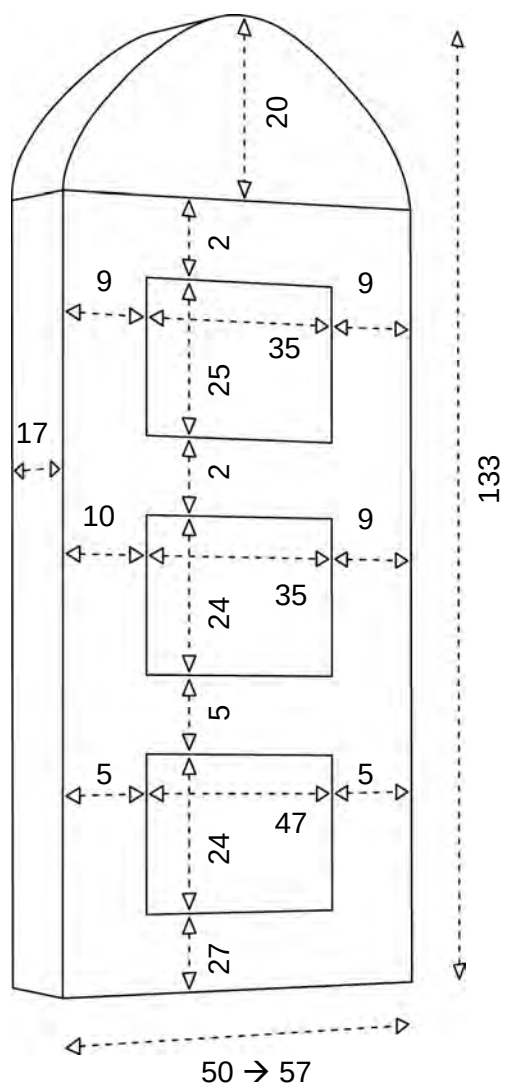
Panel 3



Panel 4



Upper frame



438



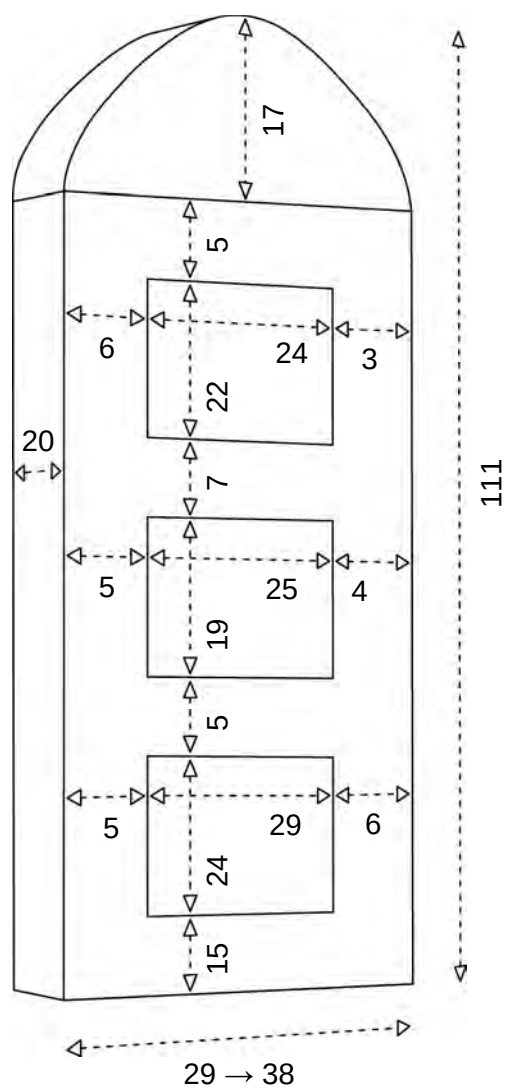
Panel 2



Panel 3



Upper frame



Panel 1



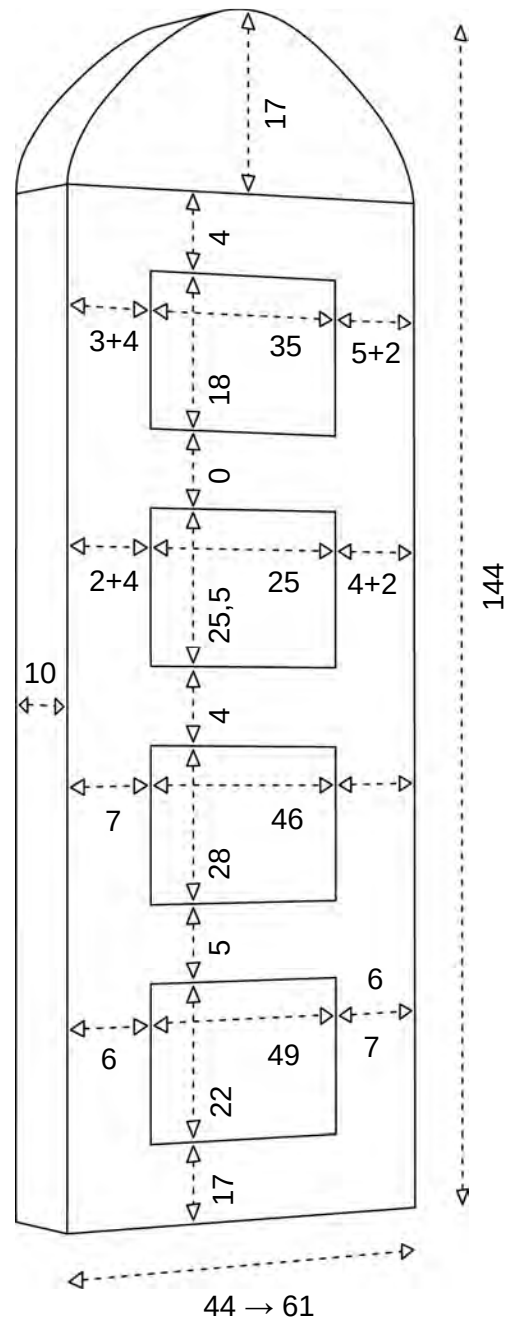
Panel 2



Panel 3



Upper frame





Panel 1



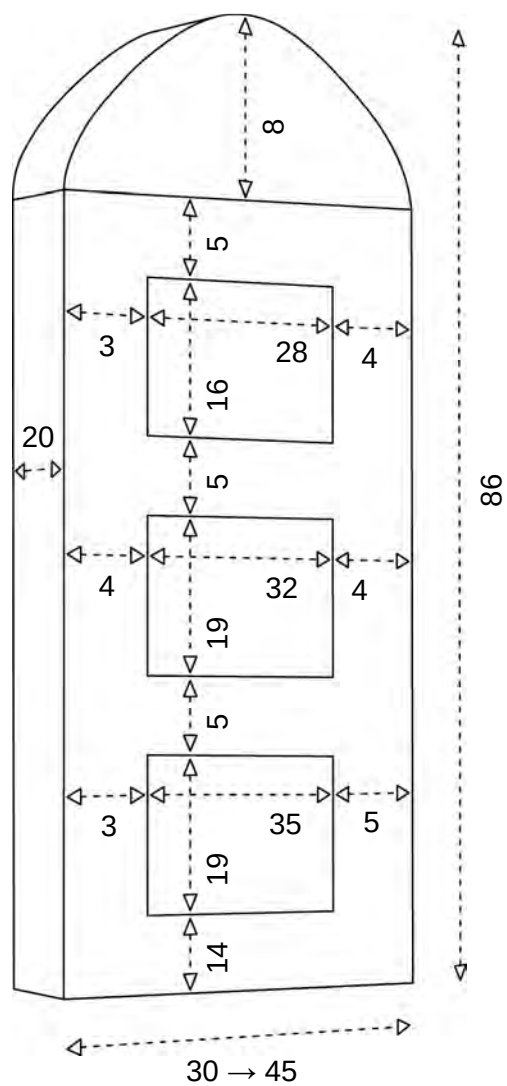
Panel 2



Panel 3 and 4



Upper frame





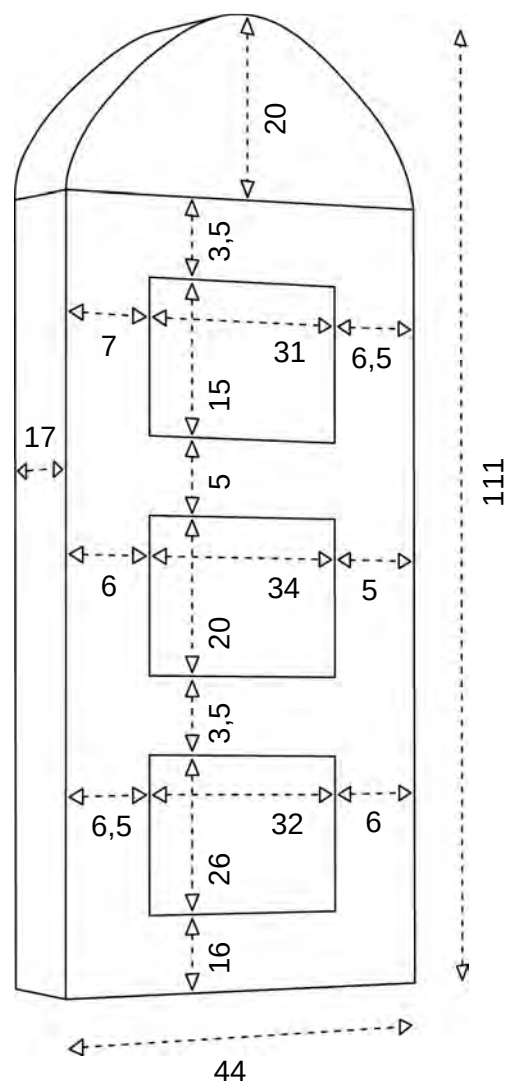
Panel 1



Panel 2



Panel 3 and
upper frame





Panel 1



Panel 2



Panel 3

Plate 102, no. 89

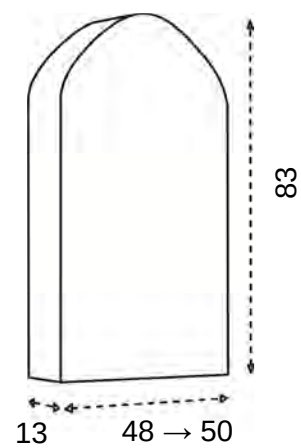


Plate 103, no. 90

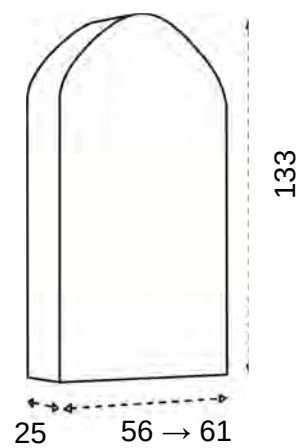


Plate 104, no. 91

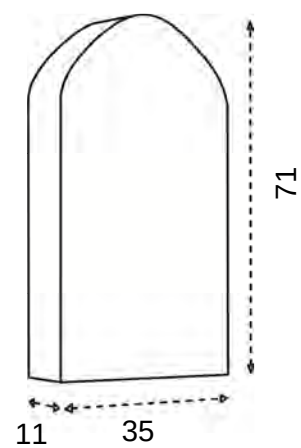


Plate 105, no. 92

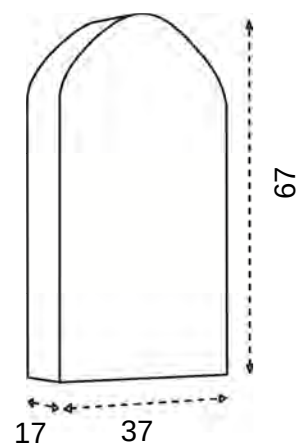


Plate 106, no. 93

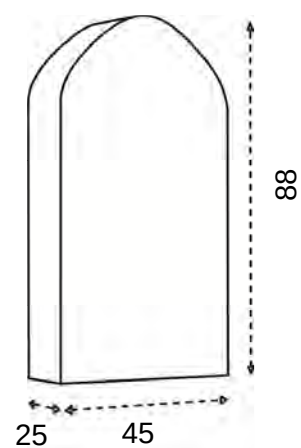


Plate 107, no. 94

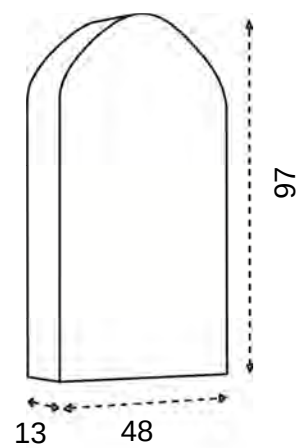


Plate 108, no. 95

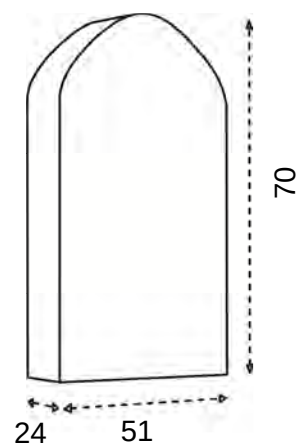


Plate 109, no. 96

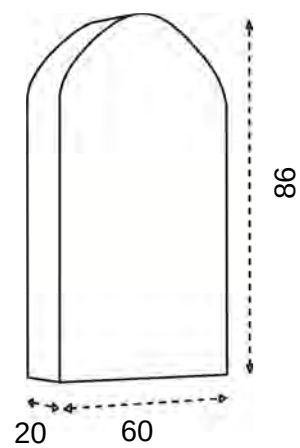


Plate 110, no. 97

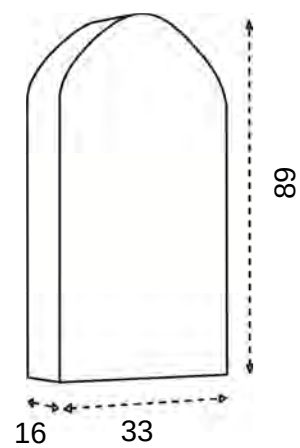


Plate 111, no. 98



(Photo courtesy: Amol Bankar)

Plate 112, no. 99



(Photo courtesy: Amol Bankar)

Plate 113, no. 100



(Photo courtesy: Amol Bankar)

Plate 114, no. 101



(Photo courtesy: Amol Bankar)

Plate 115, no. 102



(Photo courtesy: Amol Bankar)

Plate 116, no. 103



(Photo courtesy: Amol Bankar)

Plate 117, no. 104

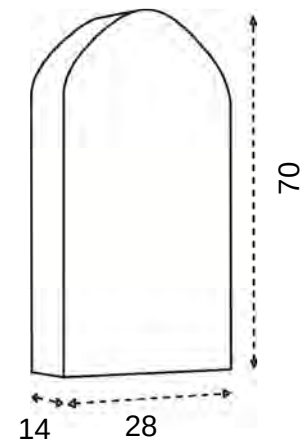
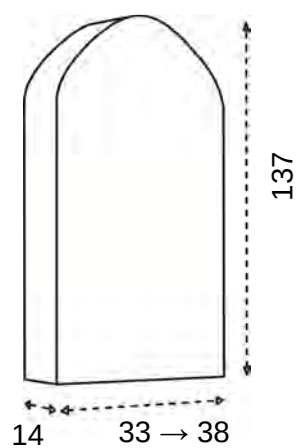


Plate 118, no. 105



Inscription



श्री सके १३८६

१० सोमी
सणी सती
 तेयचा
 करखंबा.....

Plate 119, no. 106

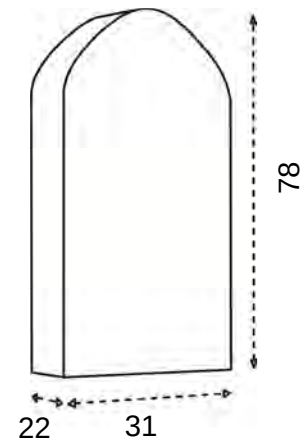


Plate 120, no. 107

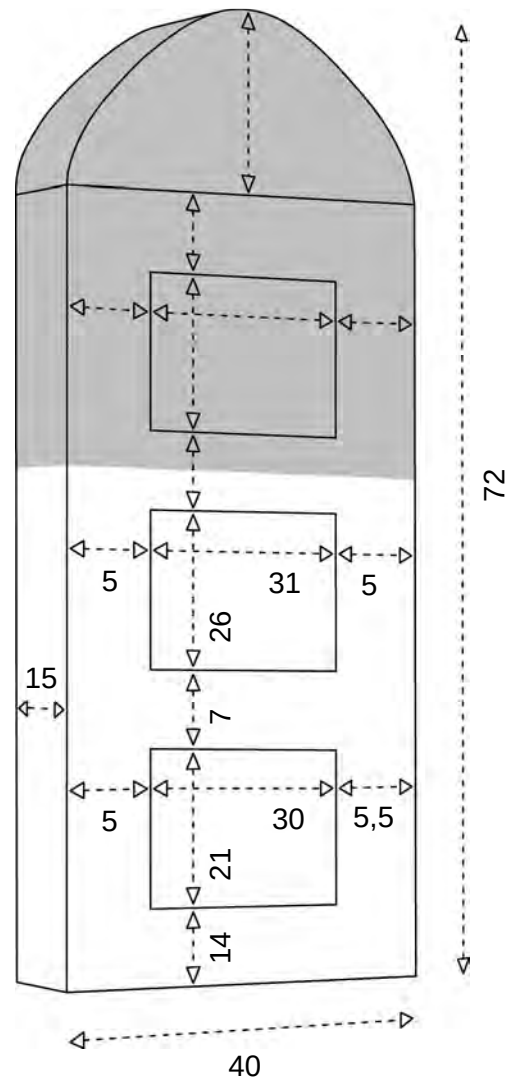
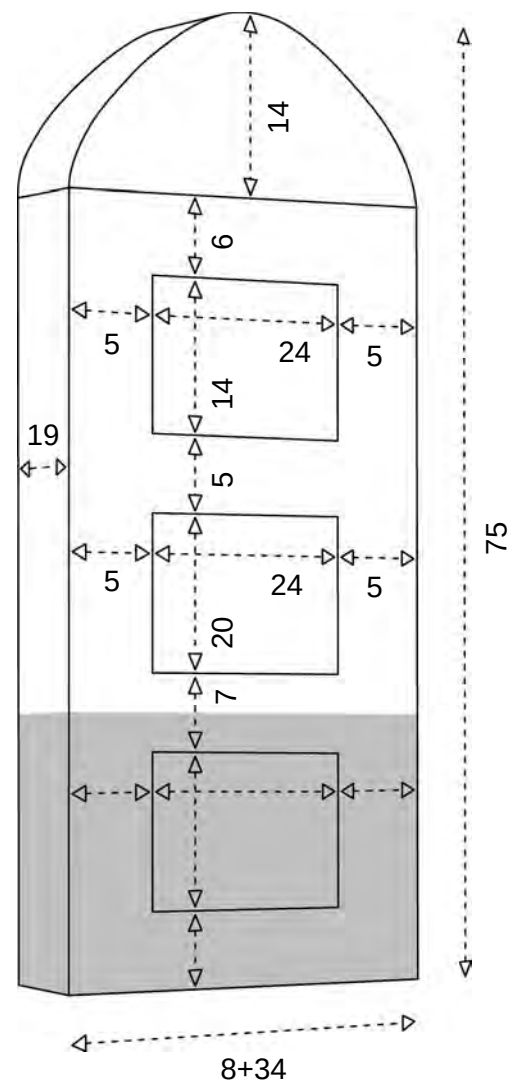


Plate 121, no. 108





Panel 1



Panel 2



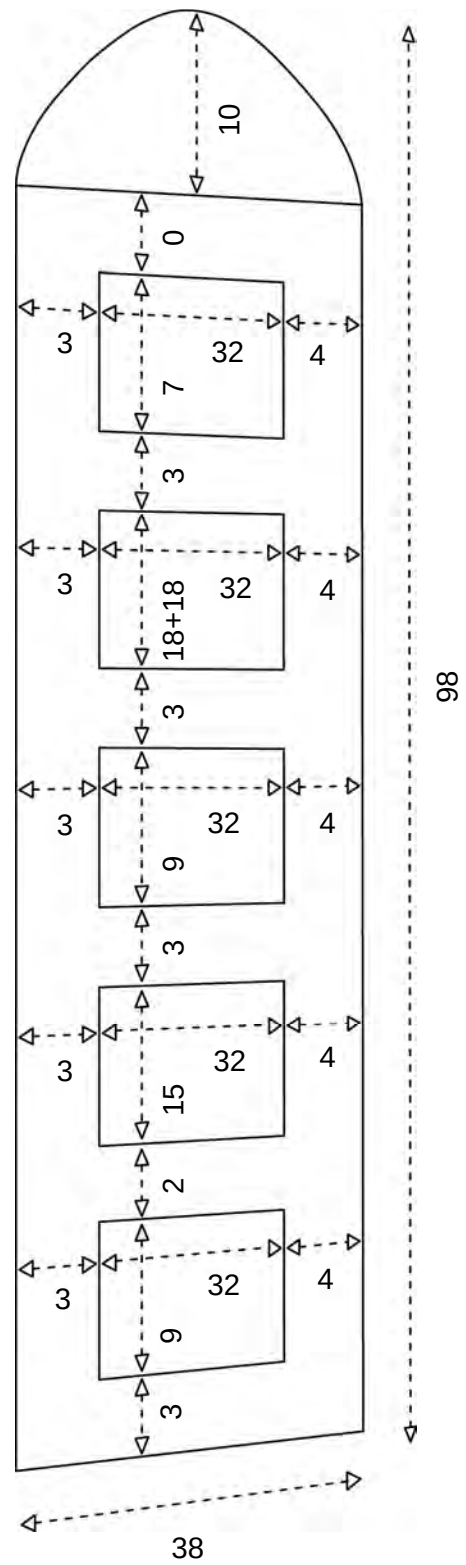
Upper frame

Plate 122, no. 109





Front side





Panel 1



Panel 2



Panel 3



Panel 4,
detail of the
lower part



Panel 4, detail
of the upper
part



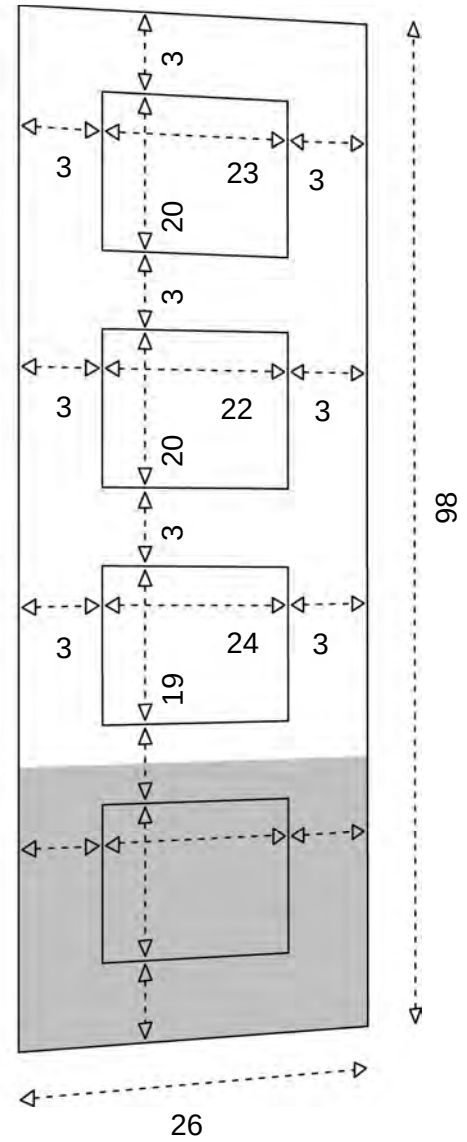
Panel 5 and
upper frame



Left side



Right side





General view of
the front side



General view of
the back side

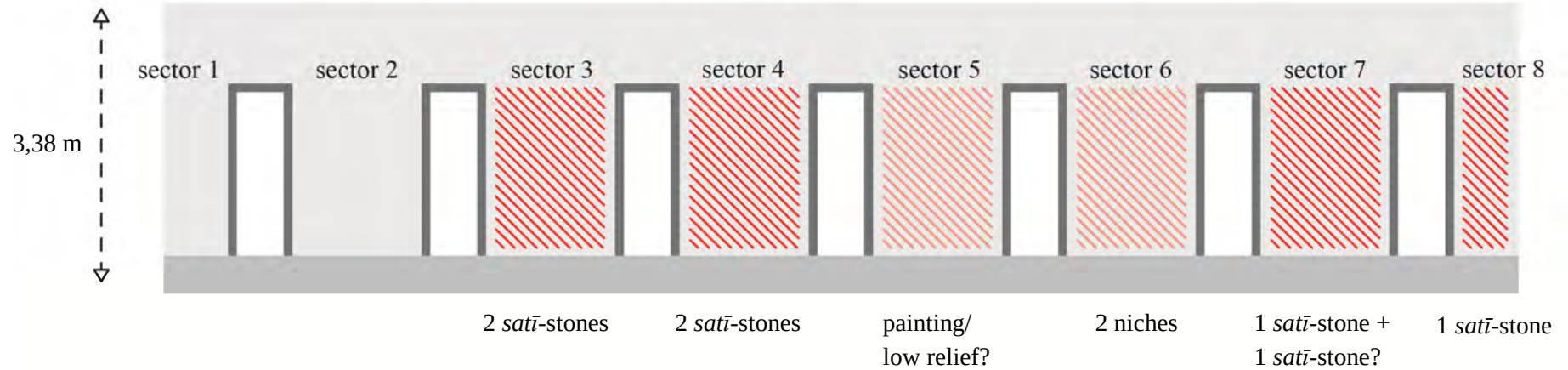


General view of cave VII (left wall, former cells)

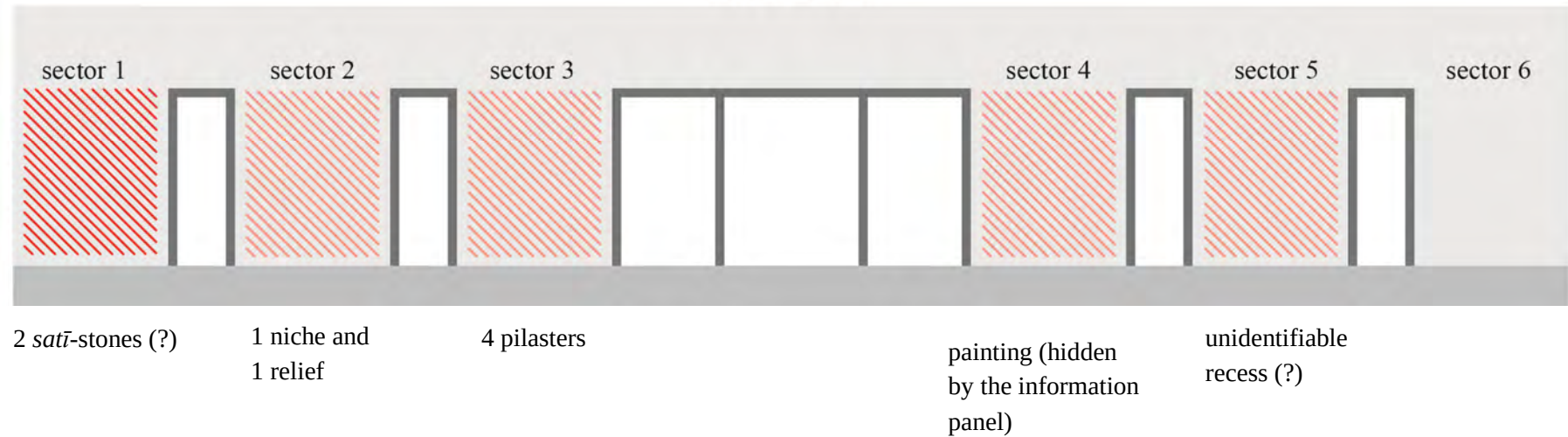


General view of cave VII (front wall, *garbhagṛha*)

Left wall

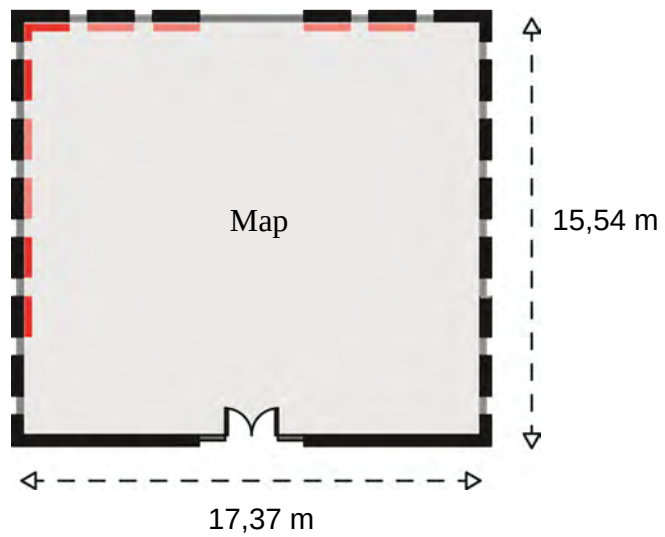


Front wall





General view of cave VII (entrance and right wall, former cells)



LEFT WALL

First group of elements, sector 3



Left side *satī*-stone



Right side *satī*-stone

Second group of elements, sector 4



Left and right side *satī*-stones

Third group of elements, sector 5



Painting/ low relief?

Fourth group of elements, sector 6



2 niches

Fifth group of elements, sector 7



Satī-stone



Satī-stone?

Sixth group of elements, sector 8



Satī-stone

FRONT WALL

First group of elements, sector 1



Satī-stone (?)



Right side *satī*-stone (?)

Second group of elements, sector 2



1 niche and 1 relief

Third group of elements, sector 3



4 pilasters

Fourth group of elements, sector 4



Painting (hidden by the information panel, here temporarily removed)

