

Inscriptions from Udayagiri: locating domains of devotion, patronage and power in the eleventh century

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The large hill known as Udayagiri, not far from ancient Vidiśā in central India, is a crucial site for the history of the Gupta kings and for the artistic and cultural dispensation that was forged during their rule. A number of well-known inscriptions, incised in or beside the hill's cave-shrines, mention Candragupta II and members of his court.¹ Equally well-known are the monumental relief sculptures of Viṣṇu's incarnations and a number of other deities.² The amount of writing on this material over the last hundred years might give the impression that little of substance remains to be tackled, but such an impression is unwarranted. In the first place, Udayagiri has a long but unacknowledged history which goes back to at least the second century BCE. This is shown by archaeological traces, not yet properly investigated, as well as inscriptions and sculptural remains which pre-date the Gupta period. We may note, as an example, a large lion capital of the late second century BCE now in the collection of the Archaeological Museum at Gwalior.³ This and related material shows that the Gupta presence at Udayagiri represents a reworking of an ancient site. The intrusive character of this reworking is demonstrated by the way in which fifth-century caves and images cut directly through older shell-inscriptions.⁴ The scale of change in Gupta times is further indicated by the massive sculpture of Varāha in Cave 5, the single-most important image at Udayagiri. Although the modern road has altered the ground level to some extent, it is not difficult to see that the adjacent pond once came up to the edge of the hill and that water washed across the base of the image during the rainy season. In other words, the great Varāha once rose out of the water, exactly as the incarnation is visualised in *Matsya Purāṇa*, chapter 248.⁵ This demonstrates that the changes made in Gupta times were simply a random series of additions by pious donors. Rather, the new caves, sculptures and environmental features involved a significant modification to the immediate landscape and the dedication of the hill to gods who were being re-conceived in dynamic new ways. Extant scholarly writing ignores this and related aspects of the geographical setting. The myopia extends to the sculptures, which have been discussed as single items out of context,

and to the cave-shrines, which have been described individually rather than as parts of a larger architectural ensemble.⁶

Turning to Udayagiri after the Guptas, there is no history at all, at least to the extent that historians have not written it. The aim of the present article, therefore, is to publish five inscriptions which provide information about the hill in the centuries following the Gupta dynasty. As will be seen in the concluding remarks, these inscriptions provide a number of insights into the



1. Udayagiri, Cave 19. Entrance door, fifth century. Courtesy of the Department of Oriental Antiquities, British Museum.



2. Udayagiri, Cave 19. fifth century with eleventh-century inscriptions. Courtesy of the Department of Oriental Antiquities, British Museum.

वषेण्णु जीषुोभवि
 क कृ प्र ल म ति
 वीषु पा दो वि णं
 संवत् १०९३
 वं द्रु प्रे व की
 किं की श्री किं
 पश्चात् की कृ
 मादिएना ऊं॥

3. Udayagiri, Cave 19. Inscription number 1. Drawing by A. Searight. Courtesy of the Department of Oriental Antiquities, British Museum.

character of religious patronage in the time of the Paramāra kings. Placing the inscriptions in a regional context, also taken up in the concluding remarks, further shows that Udayagiri was a cult centre of considerable importance from at least the ninth century, a conclusion that is not immediately obvious from remains presently on site.

All the records discussed in this article are engraved on the pillars inside Cave 19 (Fig. 2). This cave, at the northern end of the hill, appears to have been excavated out of the hillside in the second quarter of the fifth century, probably in the time of Kumāragupta. The door of the cave (Fig. 1) is elaborately carved and there was a free-standing hall before the entrance.⁷ The records incised on the pillars record the renovation of the shrine and donations of land in its favour. One is dated Vikrama year 1093; the others probably belong to the same period.

1. INSCRIPTION DATED VIKRAMA YEAR 1093

This inscription is on the north face of the pillar on the left as one enters Cave 19.⁸ It is written in eight lines of *nagārī* and carries the date Vikrama year 1093 (circa CE 1036-37). The language is corrupt Sanskrit. The inscription was first noted by Cunningham who erroneously took it to be a pilgrim's record.⁹ It was subsequently published by Fleet in 1884 and later mentioned in the *Annual Report on Indian Epigraphy*.¹⁰ It does not seem to have drawn any further attention and is illustrated here for the first time (Fig. 3).

Text ¹¹

- (1) namo | śrījirṇṇodhāri
- (2) kanha praṇamati
- (3) vīṣṇupādaṁ nityaṁ |
- (4) saṁvat¹² 1093
- (5) candraguptena kī
- (6) rtanaṁ kīrtitaṁḥ |
- (7) paścāt vikra
- (8) mādityarājyaṁḥ |

Translation

Obeisance! Kanha, the glorious restorer of that which has decayed, bows forever to the feet of Viṣṇu. The year 1093 after the reign of Vikramāditya.¹³ The temple was made by Candragupta.

This inscription is of interest because it shows that six centuries after Candragupta there was a living tradition which associated him with Udayagiri and Vikramāditya.¹⁴ Candragupta's use of the epithet Vikramāditya is documented by gold coins, one of which has an extended legend reading: 'Having conquered the earth with good conduct, Vikramāditya conquered heaven' (Fig. 4).¹⁵ The epithet Vikramāditya indicates that Candragupta was drawing an analogy between his



4. Gold coin of Candragupta II. Department of Coins and Medals, British Museum (H. Nelson Wright Collection 1910. 4-3. 36).



5. Intaglio with devotees worshipping Viṣṇupada or Buddhapada, c. fourth century. Provenance unrecorded, probably ancient Gandhāra. Department of Oriental Antiquities, British Museum (1880. 3787).

own acts as king and Viṣṇu's *trivikrama*, the heroic three strides by which Viṣṇu redeemed the world from evil. The requisite link between *vikrama* and *āditya* is provided by the association of Viṣṇu's three steps with the position of the sun at dawn, midday and sunset. This use of Vaiṣṇava imagery as political allegory was much favoured by the Gupta monarchs, the most elaborate instance being the Udayagiri relief of Varāha to which reference has already been made.¹⁶ The present inscription becomes significant on this count for it specifies that Kanha 'bows forever to the feet of Viṣṇu (Viṣṇupada)'. That the god's feet were a common icon of worship from the early centuries of the current era is indicated by an intaglio now in the collection of the British Museum (Fig. 5). The most celebrated Viṣṇupada

temple is at Gayā in eastern India, but the present inscription shows that the Viṣṇupada were also worshipped at Udayagiri and that special emphasis was placed on this worship by Candragupta. The importance and antiquity of the cult in the vicinity is shown by the Heliodorous pillar inscription which mentions 'three steps to immortality' (*triniamutaṭpādanī*).¹⁷ Not far from the pillar is Caranātīrtha, a pilgrimage spot and bathing place on an island in the River Betwā (Fig. 6).¹⁸ The temples at Caranātīrtha date to the nineteenth century, but incorporated into the platform above the bathing steps there are pillar fragments of about the sixth century. There are additionally a number of carved Viṣṇupada, the oldest of which belonging to the Paramāra period.



6. Udayagiri and key ancient sites in the neighbourhood. Drawing by A. Searight. Courtesy of the Department of Oriental Antiquities, British Museum.

मन्दिप्राभाया
मपालडुमी
विवर्तव

मन्दिप्राभाया
साऊपुत्राडुमी
डुमीवीवर्तव

7. Udayagiri, Cave 19. Inscription number 2 (bottom) and 3 (top). Drawing by A. Searight. Courtesy of the Department of Oriental Antiquities, British Museum.

महासामन्तासो
मपलाभुमी
निवर्तना

महासामन्तासो
मपलाभुमी

8. Udayagiri, Cave 19. Inscription number 4 (bottom) and 5 (top). Drawing by A. Searight. Courtesy of the Department of Oriental Antiquities, British Museum.

2. UNDATED LAND RECORD OF SODHA

This inscription, like the previous example, is on a pillar inside Cave 19. It is noted by the Archaeological Survey of India in 1913-14 and subsequently listed in the *Annual Report on Indian Epigraphy* for 1957-58.¹⁹ It seems to be otherwise unpublished and is illustrated here for the first time in Fig. 7. The inscription is in three lines of *nāgarī* and the language is Sanskrit. The record may be assigned tentatively to the eleventh century in view of the palaeographic similarities to the inscription of 1093 just mentioned. Its purpose is to record the gift of some land to the temple, probably at the time of its renovation. I have not been able to trace the village of Maṇiyāraka.

Text

- (1) maṇiyārākagrāme
- (2) rājaputrasodhena
- (3) bhūmīnivartanaḥ²⁰

Translation

A plot (*nivartana*²¹) in the village of Maṇiyāraka [was given] by rājaputra Sodha.

3. UNDATED LAND RECORD OF SOMAPĀLA

This inscription is written directly above the land record just discussed. The history of its publication is the same.²² It is illustrated here for the first time in Fig. 7. The inscription is in three lines of *nāgarī*, more casually written than the land record of Sodha, and the language is corrupt Sanskrit. The meaning of the inscription is not clear by itself, but taken in conjunction with the previous inscription it can be understood as recording the gift of an additional plot of land to the temple, probably at the time of its renovation in the eleventh century.

Text

- (1) māhasāmaṃtasō
- (2) mapālabhūmī
- (3) nivartana

Translation

A plot (*nivartana*) [of] *mahāsāmaṃta* Somapāla.

4. UNDATED LAND RECORD

This is another inscription in Cave 19 recording a gift of land. It does not seem to have been previously noted and is illustrated here in Fig. 8. It is written in two lines of casual *nāgarī*, palaeographically similar to the inscriptions just discussed. The language is corrupt Sanskrit. The term *pālī* would seem to refer to part of the land belonging to a hamlet; more common forms are *pallī* and *pāllikā*.²³

Text

- (1) rājaputravāhilavā
- (2) hadena bhūmipālī

Translation

Village land (*pālī*) [was given] by rājaputra Vāhilavāhada.

5. RECORD OF DĀMODARAJAYADEVA

This inscription, like the previous examples, is on a pillar in Cave 19. The publication details are the same as inscription number 2 above. It is illustrated here for the first time in Fig. 8. The inscription is written in two lines

of *nāgarī*, and the language is Sanskrit. This has the appearance of a pilgrim record, but given its similarity to the neighbouring inscriptions could well be a cryptic or unfinished donative record. Palaeographically this inscription does not differ much from those just mentioned, but a more direct clue to the possible date is given by a record which mentions the name Damodara in connection with the construction of a memorial. That inscription is dated [Vikrama] year 1236.²⁴

Text

- (1) rajāputradāmodara
- (2) jayadevena

Translation

[Given?] by rajaputra Dāmodara Jayadeva

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Cave 19 inscriptions record donations of land by minor lords (*rājaputra*, *mahāsāmanta*) and for this reason are comparable to the Kālvan copper-plates which provide an account of the land (also measured in *nivarttana*) given by *sāmanta Śrī Amma* to a Jaina Tīrthaṅkara.²⁵ Unlike the Kālvan plates, however, the Udayagiri inscriptions make no mention of the ruling king. This restricted focus is remarkable considering that the activities date to the time of Bhoja, the most-celebrated monarch of the Paramāra dynasty.²⁶ This circumstance prompts a number of questions. Perhaps the most compelling concerns how Cave 19 and its donors are to be situated in the cultural and political landscape of the eleventh century. This landscape needs to be considered both literally and metaphorically, that is to say, in terms of religious topography and dynastic history. While the evidence from Cave 19 is rather meagre in itself, other data of an archaeological and epigraphic nature provides considerable information about the period in question. As will be seen in what follows, this information has a direct bearing on Udayagiri.

As our concern is to situate a shrine and its donors in the broadest sense, it is not out of place to begin with a brief consideration of Vidiśā. The river Vidiśā (now called the Bes) is one source from which we can trace the town's various old names: Vidiśā, Vaidiśā, Vedisa, Vedisanagara.²⁷ All these refer to the ancient city that flourished up to about the sixth century and which occupied a large triangular area of land between the rivers Betwā and Bes (Fig. 6). The names 'Bes' and 'Besnagar' are less convincingly derived from the ancient name of the river because we would anticipate the preservation of the letter 'd' in later forms. A satisfactory solution seems to be found in Pāli the *vessa*. The term Vessanagara ('Town of Merchants') goes back to at least

the third century BCE when Aśoka formed a liaison with Devī, the daughter of a leading merchant who lived there. That Devī was a *vaiśya* (Pāli *vessa*) is documented by literary references.²⁸ Devī continued to live in her native place after Aśoka became king and the name Vessanagara could have enjoyed currency from that time.²⁹ From Vessanagara, there is, of course, no difficulty getting to Besnagar. As to the actual history of the city, architectural fragments indicate that it was still a reasonably important place in the early fifth century. In later times the site was never completely abandoned, but after *circa* 600 most of the population seems to have shifted to the location of the present town. The reason for this move has not been explored but a clear indication of the change is provided by a massive stone lintel incorporated into one of the town's gates. This lintel formed the over-door of a substantial temple dating to the seventh century. A step-well in the Bījāmaṇḍal complex also belongs to this period.³⁰ Epigraphic evidence demonstrates that in post-Gupta times the new town was not called Vidiśā but rather Bhāillasvānipura or Bhāillasvāmidēvapura, the 'town of Bhāillasvāmi'.³¹ From this comes Bhilsa, the name in the vernacular from at least the eleventh century (it is recorded by al-Bīrūnī) and used until the Sanskrit form Vidiśā was revived after Independence. What emerges from this evidence for Udayagiri during the eleventh century is the following: the hill and its cave-shrines stood near to a city-site that was in significant decline; all but a portion of the population appears to have shifted several kilometres to Bhāillasvānipura, the settlement popularly known as Bhilsa until fairly recent times.

Bījāmaṇḍal and Bhojpur

The relative importance of Bhilsa vis à vis Udayagiri in post-Gupta times is indicated by the massive temple-ruin known as the Bījāmaṇḍal (Fig. 9). This is not dated but an inscription on one of the pillars belongs to the time of king Naravarman (c. 1093-1134). The inscription gives a short hymn in praise of the goddess Caccikā.³² The eulogy, together with sculptures recovered from the debris piled against the lower mouldings, indicate that the Bījāmaṇḍal was originally dedicated to this goddess and perhaps also to Śiva. The inscription does not mention the foundation of the temple and the way it has been engraved on a pillar seems to indicate that it was added to a pre-existing structure. But was the temple relatively new when the inscription was incised on the pillar? Or was the building erected earlier than the reign of Naravarman? If it is earlier, when is it to be placed? These are not simple questions to answer given the present state of the evidence and the degree to which it has been analysed. One site which potentially provides some answers is Bhojpur.³³ The Śiva temple there, much



9. Bhilsa, Bijāmaṇḍal. Detail of mouldings, probably eleventh century. Photograph courtesy of Adam Hardy.



10. Bhojpur, Śiva temple. Niche on the plinth with a figure of Īsanā, probably mid-eleventh century. Courtesy of the Department of Oriental Antiquities, British Museum.

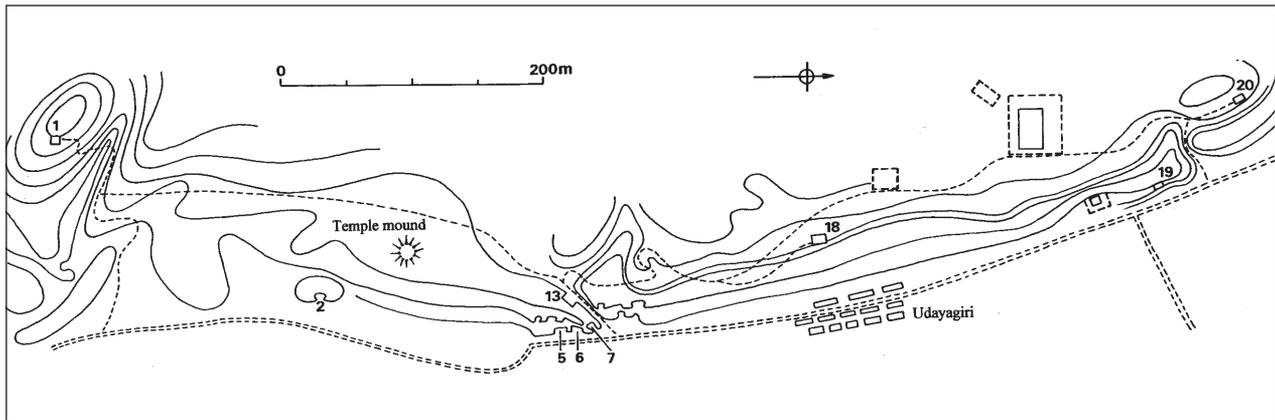
celebrated because it houses the largest *liṅga* in India, is not far from Bhilsa, standing as it does on the banks of the Betwā about forty kilometres upstream. Although a detailed comparative study would be needed to determine the matter scientifically, the huge base-mouldings at Bhojpur suggest that it is closely related to the Bijāmaṇḍal, the two monuments perhaps even sharing the same architects and masons. Surviving sculptures from the two sites also share a number of decorative and iconographic conventions (Fig. 10). Because it was never completed, the Bhojpur temple has no dedicatory inscription. The name of the locality, however, points to an association with king Bhoja (c. 1000-55). This link is corroborated by a colossal Jaina image with an inscription mentioning [*rājādhi*] *rājaparamēśvara* Bhojadeva.³⁴ The Jaina image is in a shrine not far from the Śiva temple and the location, if not the shrine's current fabric, belongs to Paramāra times. The implication is that there was considerable sculptural activity at Bhojpur when Bhoja was on the throne in the first half of the eleventh century.

This evidence is malleable and proves nothing with certainty. However, the scale of Bhojpur is telling within the wider context of north Indian temple

architecture. Parallels can be found at Khajurāho, Gwalior and other locations where buildings of analogous size were constructed in the eleventh century. The Sās Bahū temple at Gwalior is particularly well documented by a long inscription recording that it was founded by Mahīpāladeva, the Kacchāpaghāta king.³⁵ Not far from the Sās Bahū there are cave-shrines belonging to the Jaina faith. The analogy between Gwalior and Bhojpur (comparisons to other sites could easily be made) allows us to suggest that Bhojpur owes its origin to a royal patron, the most-likely candidate being Bhoja himself. If this is accepted, then architectural and sculptural parallels with the Bijāmaṇḍal indicate that it too is a royal building belonging to the first half of the eleventh century. Whether we accept this dating or not, the fact remains that the Bijāmaṇḍal was an urban temple of great size and importance. Its dedication to the goddess is perhaps a reflection of the long-standing importance of goddess worship in the region.³⁶

The Sun Temple

Aside from the goddess at Bijāmaṇḍal, the other local deity that enjoyed a wide following was the Sun god



11. Udayagiri, Schematic plan of the hill showing principal caves. Drawing by A. Searight. Courtesy of the Department of Oriental Antiquities, British Museum.

called That Bhāillasvāmi. That Bhāillasvāmi was a name of Sūrya is directly stated in an inscription which, while praising the achievements of the Candellas, gives the following solicitation: 'May the Sun named Bhāillasvāmi protect Kṛṣṇarāja, lord of the earth'.³⁷ To understand something of this god, a useful starting point is the word *bhāilla*.³⁸ In Prakrit dictionaries we find two different meanings. The first is 'ploughman', 'harvester' or 'farmer'.³⁹ If this is accepted, then the name of the god, taken as a *tatpuruṣa* compound, could be glossed 'Lord of Farmers'. Such a name might have arisen from the fact that the Sun temple was first established by farmers who, in the ordinary course of their agrarian activities, would have been concerned with the seasonal movement of the sun. The second dictionary definition of *bhāilla* is that it represents Sanskrit *bhāgin* and thus refers to one who enjoys a portion or share.⁴⁰ In epigraphic usage *bhāgin*, *bhāgika* and *bhāgahāra* are royal officers who seem to have been responsible for collecting the king's grain share.⁴¹ In this case, the name of the temple would be something like 'Lord of the Royal Collector' and possibly indicate that the shrine was founded and maintained by certain officers of state. Setting dictionaries aside, we can approach the problem grammatically and analyse the constituents *bhā* and *illa*. Prakrit grammarians teach that the suffix *-illa* stands in the sense of *-mat* and *-vat*.⁴² If we follow this, then *bhāilla* simply means *bhāsvat*, 'the luminous', i.e. the sun. In this case Bhāillasvāmi would be a *karmadhāraya* compound and be translatable as the 'Lord who is the Luminous One' or simply 'Sun Lord'. This explanation gains credence from a Khajurāho inscription which calls the temple *bhāsvat* and locates it on the banks of the Mālavanadī (i.e. Betwā).⁴³ While such testimony might seem to settle the matter in a definitive way, doubts linger because the Khajurāho inscription gives the impression of a Pundit's learned word-play rather than a sympathetic knowledge of the Bhāillasvāmi temple and its ancient lore. Adopting the model

developed by Hermann Kulke, we could see all the explanations given above as partially valid and integral to the historical process by which Bhāillasvāmi moved from being a sub-regional autochthonous deity to one of supra-regional importance.⁴⁴

Whatever and whenever its ultimate beginning, the importance of Bhāillasvāmi by the eleventh century is undeniable. A series of records show that this god was not only the leading deity in the region but enjoyed a high reputation throughout India. The temple's fame eventually drew the attention of the sultans of Delhi who attacked Bhilsa and pulled down the building in two campaigns, the first in 1234, the second in 1292.⁴⁵ The destruction was so thorough that the building's whereabouts were completely lost to memory. Inscriptions relating to the Sun god were first noted by D. C. Sircar who edited the records and discussed them on several occasions.⁴⁶ Despite these publications, the cultural and archaeological implications of the information they contain have not been fully assessed or assimilated. For the present purpose, two issues draw immediate attention: the original location of the Bhāillasvāmi and its status as a focal point of religious patronage.

The oldest surviving record of the Bhāillasvāmi is dated Vikrama year 935 (CE 878-79). This specifically describes the temple as Śrī Bhāillasvāmyāyatana.⁴⁷ The most important point about this inscription is that it documents the existence of the building in the time of the Pratihāra rulers and indicates that it was attracting significant donations in the reign of Mihira Bhoja (c. 836-85). That considerable building work was done on the Sun temple in Mihira Bhoja's time is shown by a large sculpture of Sūrya preserved in the Archaeological Museum at Vidishā. A superb work of considerable iconographic sophistication, this image was probably a key part of the Bhāillasvāmi and may have come from one of the building's cardinal niches.⁴⁸ The exact provenance of the sculpture is not recorded, a problem



12. Udayagiri, Serrated crown on the site of the Bhāillāsvāmi temple, probably eleventh century. Courtesy of the Department of Oriental Antiquities, British Museum.



13. Sūrya. Provenance unrecorded, probably twelfth century. Department of Oriental Antiquities, British Museum (Bridge Collection 1872. 7-1. 56).

that also applies to the relevant inscriptions (see appendix). Those from Paramāra times attest to the growing importance of the Sun temple in religious terms, but their recorded find-spots yield no helpful information about the original site of the building. If anything, the inscriptions and sculptures only show that the fabric of the Bhāillāsvāmi was thoroughly scattered after the building was destroyed in 1292. This is supported by the *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh* which tells us that the main image was taken away and thrown down before the gate of Badāun.⁴⁹

With little direct help to be had from the archaeological literature, we need to examine the Sanskrit inscriptions for topographical clues about the location of Bhāillāsvāmi. A crucial record for this purpose is one which seems to belong to the eleventh century. Unfortunately it yields no historical information and little connected sense in its present condition.⁵⁰ However D. C. Sircar was able to make out *ambaracūdāmaṇi*, 'the crest-jewel of the sky,' a poetic description of the sun, and also the word *vihāya*, open space or sky. Along with the opening invocation *om namaḥ sūryāya*, these words leave little doubt that this damaged record relates to the Sun temple. Critically for our concerns, the same inscription contains the word *udayagiri*, literally 'sun-rise mountain'. This appears to be a direct reference to Udayagiri and suggests that the temple of Bhāillāsvāmi once stood on the hill. The precise spot appears to be marked by a substantial mound on the central ridge (Fig. 11). The mound is covered with decayed brick and assorted stone fragments including an *āmalasāraka*, the serrated disc used to crown temples in north India (Fig. 12). Nearby, in a collection of images at an open-air shrine, there is a much broken torso of Sūrya dating to the eleventh century. On the banks of the Betwā, a few hundred metres distant, there is another mound with further pieces, including a battered relief with rearing horses. This formed the base of a Sūrya image similar in some respects to one that is now in the collection of the British Museum (Fig. 13).⁵¹

Further references to Udayagiri seem to appear in other inscriptions and support our suggestion that the Bhāillāsvāmi temple originally stood on the hill. The Pratīhāra inscription of 878-79 is particularly interesting in this respect for its purpose is to record donations in favour of Narāyaṇa and the divine Mothers at Bhāillāsvāmi. Why such donations should be made in connection with a Sun temple is not immediately apparent until we think of the rock-cut images of recumbent Viṣṇu and the mother goddesses at Udayagiri. These are located in Caves 6 and 13 immediately adjacent to the site we have proposed for the Bhāillāsvāmi temple (Fig. 11). References to these Gupta-period images seems to recur in Chittapa's eulogy to the Sun god.⁵² The poet Chittapa enjoyed the title

mahākavīcakravartī and was quoted by king Bhojadeva in his *Sarasvatīkaṅṭhābharāṇa*.⁵³ This seems to indicate that Chittapa was among the important poets who flourished at the Paramāra court in the eleventh century. Chittapa's poetic description of how the sun's splendour falls on the hood of Śeṣanāga seems to allude to some of the relief panels at Udayagiri. As an example we quote one verse in which the order of Chittapa's description follows features of the Varāha panel from bottom to top:⁵⁴

phaṇāmaṇiṣu śeṣasya muktāmaṇiṣu toyadheḥ |
tārāmaṇiṣu ca vyomnas tava rocir virocate || [8]

His rays illumine the crest-jewels on the hood of Śeṣa, the sparkling pearls in the sea and the adamantine stars in heaven.

Several points could be raised against the identification of Udayagiri as the site of Bhāillāsvāmi. There is, firstly, no *Māhātmya* associated with the hill and we would certainly expect something for a place that was once so famous. A possible answer to this problem is that *Māhātmya* texts often carry misleading names and geographical affiliations are only revealed coincidentally. The discovery of some kind of Udayagiri *Māhātmya* thus remains a possibility. A second problem is the absence of Udayagiri as a place name in Gupta-period inscriptions, an especially notable gap given the rich corpus in the region. While arguments from silence are inherently weak, I would propose that the name Udayagiri is relatively late and probably dates only to the time of the Paramāra ruler Udayāditya (c. 1070-93). This king was particularly active as an architectural patron at Udayapura, a town about 30 km north-east of Bhilsa, where a Varāha temple was built in addition to the Śiva temple called Udayeśvaradeva.⁵⁵ The eponymous renaming of Udayagiri would have been in keeping with Udayāditya's ambitious building programme and the cultural politics of his day. The renaming (if indeed this happened) suggests that Udayāditya was responsible for a campaign of refurbishment at the Bhāillāsvāmi. Some of the undated inscriptions mentioned above could be assigned to such a refurbishment, as could many of the broken fragments still lying at or near Udayagiri. The name of Udayagiri before Udayāditya's time is an open question, but the age of the Sun temple is not in doubt. Not only does the inscription of 878-79 demonstrate that it existed in Pratihāra times, but a recent study of early photographs shows that the early lion capital, now in Archaeological Museum, Gwalior, was found lying just a few metres from the Sun temple mound.⁵⁶

Udayagiri Cave 19

The foregoing information provides, albeit in a preliminary and somewhat contentious way, an epigraphical and archaeological context for the

inscriptions inside Cave 19. The individuals mentioned in our records were operating on the periphery of a sacred landscape populated by gods of great prestige and antiquity. The marginal nature of Cave 19 is shown, in the first place, by its location at the northern edge of Udayagiri hill, considerably removed from the mound we have identified as the site of Bhāillāsvāmi (Fig. 11). Secondly, Kanha, the man who 'restored' the cave, carries no title, a fact which suggests he had little standing in political terms. He did, however, bring an abandoned shrine back into religious use. Could he have been a wandering holy man who took up residence in the cave, reviving Vaiṣṇava worship there?⁵⁷ As to Somapāla, Sodha and Vāhilavāhada, the donors Kanha appears to have mobilised, each gave one *nivartana* of land, a small gift compared to contributions recorded in other inscriptions.⁵⁸ The monumental residue of these gifts is modest: a fragment with a standing figure in a niche is all that can be dated to the eleventh century (Fig. 14). Exactly how this was incorporated into Cave 19 is uncertain and underscores the changes that have taken place at the site since the thirteenth century.

The humble religious giving documented by the Udayagiri inscriptions has received little attention but it forms a crucial part of the historical record if we want to



14. Udayagiri, Cave 19. Carved architectural fragment, late eleventh century. Present whereabouts uncertain. After Central India, years 1908-14, old negative number 50.

assess the full range of power, property and patronage under Paramāra rule. The Cave 19 inscriptions, as already noted, do not define the relationship of our donors to royal authority. In this they are not unusual, a situation which has prompted much discussion about the social, economic and political constitution of India after the fifth century. The scholarly literature on this question is voluminous and filled with energetic debate. A synopsis of this literature would be out of place here but I would venture to make one observation which will probably be accepted by all who have contributed to the subject, namely that the various accounts we have of 'medieval society' have been construed using a rather limited corpus of epigraphical, archaeological and numismatic evidence. This evidence, such as it is, has been marshalled to produce radically different accounts of the post-Gupta world.⁵⁹ Because no account is entirely convincing, the central question that emerges is whether a viable assessment of this period is possible or, in the final analysis, ever will be.

Aside from a traditional call for more attention to unedited inscriptions and the collection of related data, I would suggest that a two-part investigation is needed to resolve this issue. The first step should involve a review of the scholarly literature. This would have the specific aim of clarifying the empirical predictions which each historical model makes or implies. Let me give an oversimplified example to illustrate the point. If we accept the Marxist proposition that some sort of 'feudal system' developed after the fifth century, we are more or less accepting that a non-monetary, village economy emerged with the decline of urban centres and inter-regional trade. These developments, if they did take place, should have left specific physical traces in the archaeological, historical, numismatic and artistic record. The 'segmental' and 'integrative' explanations of post-Gupta India rest on assumptions that differ from Marxist models but which nonetheless posit certain types of social, economic and agrarian organisation. These in turn should have left quantifiable and discoverable residues.

Armed with predictions generated by this sort of historiographic analysis, an interdisciplinary team would be in a position to begin a theoretically-informed campaign of fieldwork. While it is impossible to anticipate either investigative methods or results, it is probable that future research would include a village-by-village survey of temple fragments, inscriptions and associated archaeological material.⁶⁰ This would show the age and distribution of settlements and the ways in which temple architecture defined the cultural landscape of post-Gupta India. I would imagine that this type of work could be coupled with archaeo-botanical studies aimed at understanding changes in forest cover and cropping patterns. Finally, archaeological excavation at appropriate city-sites (perhaps Besnagar) might focus on

the degree to which cities declined or moved after the fifth century. These are just hints of the possibilities that lie ahead. Whatever the course of future research, these points reinforce the point with which I opened this essay, namely that much remains to be done, even at the most well-known sites.

NOTES

1. J. F. Fleet, *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings and their Successors*, Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, Volume 3 (Calcutta, 1888), numbers 3, 6 and 61; D. R. Bhandarkar et al, *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings*, Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, Volume 3, revised edition (New Delhi, 1981), numbers 7 and 11. The research presented in this article was supported by the British Museum and the Leverhulme Trust to whom many thanks are due. A research grant from the Leverhulme Trust in particular provided time away from my regular duties and allowed this article to be completed in a timely manner.
2. D. R. Patil, *The Monuments of the Udaygiri Hill* (Gwalior, 1948); Debala Mitra, 'Varāha Cave at Udayagiri - An Iconographic Study,' *Journal of the Asiatic Society* 5 (1963), pp. 99-103; J. C. Harle, *Gupta Sculpture* (Oxford, 1974), Figs. 8-17; Phyllis Granoff: 'Mahiṣāsūramardini An Analysis of the Myths,' *East and West* 29 (1979), pp. 51; J. G. Williams: *The Art of Gupta India: Empire and Province* (Princeton, 1982), Figs. 35-39. M. A. Dhaky, Krishna Deva, Michael Meister, eds. *Encyclopaedia of Indian Temple Architecture: North India, Foundations of North Indian Style* (New Delhi, 1988), Figs. 15-16 (hereinafter cited as EITA).
3. Illustrated in my *Buddhist Reliquaries from Ancient India* (London, 2000), Fig. 29.
4. See R. Salomon, 'New Śankhalipi (Shell Character) Inscriptions,' *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik* 11-12 (1986), pp. 109-152, more recently but substantially less helpful, R. K. Sharma, ed. *Studies in Shell Script* (Delhi, 1990). There seem to be no published illustrations of the images and niches cutting through the shell inscriptions.
5. Harle, *Gupta Sculpture*, Fig. 3 for a general view including the tank. The eroded stone at the base of the Varāha sculpture (Ibid., Fig. 12) shows where the water washed across the base of the carving. These important observations were made by Meera Dass who is preparing a careful study of the site and to whom I am grateful for sharing many insights.
6. These problems are found in the survey books of Harle and Williams already cited. Patil, *Monuments*, follows the tradition (established by Cunningham) of numbering the caves and thus considering them one by one. EITA sits firmly in this framework, with a clear line drawn between monument and non-monument. The approach has had predictable effects, via conservation policies, on the environment of the remains.
7. Harle, *Gupta Sculpture*, Fig. 7, EITA, Figs. 19-22; see however discussion below which shows hitherto unnoticed monumental additions in the Paramāra period.
8. For a general view of the pillar, see EITA, Fig. 21.
9. Cunningham, *Archaeological Survey of India Report* 10 (1880), p. 52 (hereinafter cited as ASIR).
10. J. F. Fleet, 'Sanskrit and Old-Canarese Inscriptions,' *Indian Antiquary* 13 (1884), p. 185, *Annual Report on Indian*

- Epigraphy* (1952-53) B, number 131 (hereinafter cited as ARE); ARE (1956-57) C, number 93.
11. From photographs and *in situ* examination, as are all the readings given in this article. I am grateful to Richard Salomon who offered suggestions, particularly with regard to inscription number 1.
 12. The reading is *saṃcatu*, but the *u* vowel on the last syllable is meant to be *halanta* (*virāma*).
 13. The syntax is peculiar; the phrase beginning *paścāt* would seem to be qualifying that the year in question belongs to the Vikrama era.
 14. On the later tradition there is much literature and controversy; see D. C. Sircar, *Ancient India and the Vikramāditya Tradition* (Delhi, 1969). The inscription published here is not discussed by Sircar in his volume.
 15. John Allan, *Catalogue of the Coins of the Gupta Dynasties and of Sasanka, King of Gauda* (London, 1914), pp. 34-5. *ksitim avajitya sucaritair divaṃ jayati vikramādityaḥ*.
 16. Frederick M. Asher, 'Historical and Political Allegory in Gupta Art,' in *Essays on Gupta Culture*, edited by Bardwell L. Smith (Delhi, 1983), pp. 53-66; also V. S. Agrawala, *Matsya Purāṇa - A Study* (Varanasi, 1963), *ibidem.*, 'Gupta-yuga meṃ madhyadeśa kā kalātmaka citraṇa,' *Nāgarī pracārini patrikā* 48 (VS 2000), pp. 43-48. Also see the essential article by Hans Bakker, 'The Footprints of the Lord' in *Devotion Divine: Bhakti Traditions from the Regions of India, Studies in Honour of Charlotte Vaudeville* (Groningen and Paris, 1991), pp. 20-37.
 17. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions*, 1: 89, for an improved edition, Richard Salomon, *Indian Epigraphy* (Oxford, 1998), p. 266.
 18. Cunningham, *ASIR* 10 (1880), p. 36 briefly mentions the *tīrtha* 'where two small hollows in the rock are believed to be the *charan*, or foot prints of Vishnu'.
 19. ASIAR WC (1913-14), number 2635; ARE (1957-58) C: 238B.
 20. The small mark at the end is either a *visarga* or diminutive *daṇḍa*.
 21. The term *nivartana* is a land measure the size of which varied according to the region and period; see Sircar, *Indian Epigraphy* (Delhi, 1965), pp. 409-10. The term is used in Parāmāra plates, see H. V. Trivedi, *Inscriptions of the Paramāras, Chandellas, Kachchapaghātas and Two Minor Dynasties*, Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, Volume 7, (Delhi, 1978-91), number 16 and 11 (where a village is described as having at least 100 *nivartana*). Trivedi's *Inscriptions* is hereinafter cited as Trivedi, CII 7.
 22. ASIAR WC (1913-14), number 2635; ARE (1957-58) C: 238B.
 23. This term appears, for example, in the twelfth century plates of Mahābhavagupta, see *Epigraphia Indica* 4 (1896-97), p. 258, line 8; further discussion in Sircar, *Indian Epigraphy*, p. 376 and *Indian Epigraphical Glossary* (Delhi, 1966) s.v. *pallī, pallikā*.
 24. Archaeological Department, Gwalior State, *Archaeological Report for VS 1993/AD 1936-37*, number 1. The slab was recovered from a wall of a house in Bhilsa.
 25. Trivedi, CII 7, number 16 (line 9).
 26. Because Udayagiri inscription 5 might be later, it is excluded from the present discussion. I am grateful to Daud Ali at the School of Oriental and African Studies for offering comments on the concluding section of this essay.
 27. D. C. Sircar, *Studies in the Geography of Ancient and Medieval India* (Delhi, 1971), pp. 264-65; B. C. Law, *Historical Geography of Ancient India* (Paris, 1954) p. 336.
 28. *Dpvs* 6: 16 *seṭṭhidhītā devināmā'ti*. Abbreviations of Buddhist texts follow my *Buddhist Reliquaries from Ancient India*, p. 10. The *Dpvs* and those texts cited in the following note are, of course, much later than the events they record; their composition was embedded in political and historical debates which complicate their representation of historical 'facts', see Jonathan Walters, 'Buddhist History', *Querying the Medieval* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 99-164, reviewed below in the present number of *South Asian Studies*.
 29. For Devī's residence in Vedisa, see *Mhvs* 13, pp. 7-12; *Dpvs* 12:15; *Thvs*, p. 192.
 30. To my knowledge the lintel and stepwell have not been published.
 31. Trivedi, CII 7, p. 149 and 207.
 32. For the Caccikā inscription, see Trivedi, CII 7, number 36.
 33. K. K. Chakravarty, *Bhojpur Temple: A Vision of Harmony* (Bhopal, 1991) for plans and some illustrations of sculpture.
 34. Trivedi, CII 7, number 17. Jaina images are illustrated in Chakravarty, *Bhojpur Temple*, *passim*.
 35. See Willis, *Inscriptions of Gopaksetra* (London, 1996), p. 6 and *ibidem.*, 'Architecture in Central India under the Kacchapaghāta Rulers', *South Asian Studies* 12 (1996), pp. 13-32.
 36. See, for example, Harle, *Gupta Sculpture*, Figs. 30-3.
 37. *bhāillasvāmināmā ravir avatu bhuvaḥ svāminam kṛṣṇarājam*, see Fitz-Edward Hall, 'Three Sanskrit Inscriptions,' *Journal of the Asiatic Society* 2 (1862), p. 111, note. The inscription was found by Hall 'within the fort... in the outer wall of a modern house'. This would seem to refer to the old walled town of Bhilsa. Kṛṣṇarāja in this record was a Candella prince who ruled the western territories of the dynasty in the *circa* late tenth century. See Trivedi, CII 7, p. 93 and 354. The location of this inscription has not been traced as far as I am aware.
 38. Trivedi, CII 7, p. 122, note 6, following the Prakrit grammarian Vararuci, suggests *bhā* and Prakrit *-illa* means 'one who possesses or is a storehouse of lustre'. Hall, 'Three Sanskrit Inscriptions', p. 112 suggests *bhā* and root *il*, to cast, thus the 'thrower of light' (but a note by Hall's editors cite Prakrit grammarians and the fact that Prakrit *-illa* stands for Sanskrit *-mat*). In these accounts no attempt is made to explain how this is to be interpreted in conjunction with the termination *-svāmi* (or *-īśvara*) which appears as the ending of the names of gods who are eponymously named. Sircar, 'Two Inscriptions', p. 214 feels that it is simply a personal name.
 39. *Pāia sadda mahāṇṇavo* (Varanasi, 1963), s.v.
 40. *Ibid.*, s.v.
 41. Sircar, *Indian Epigraphical Glossary*, s.v.
 42. R. Pischel, *Grammatik der Prakrit-Sprachen* (Strassburg, 1900), paragraph 595.
 43. Trivedi, CII 7, (verse 45), *malavanaditirasthitat bhasvatah*
 44. Hermann Kulke, *Kings and Cults, State Formation and Legitimation in India and Southeast Asia* (Delhi, 1993), pp. 4-7.
 45. See the important discussion in Richard M. Eaton, 'Temple Desecration and Indo-Muslim States', in *Essays on Islam and Indian History* (New Delhi, 2000), pp. 94-132. My colleague Dr D. Maclean informs me that that the translations of the relevant Indo-Islamic texts are very unreliable; this has not stopped writers from repeatedly citing old translations without reference to the original texts.
 46. Sircar, 'Two Inscriptions', pp. 210-19; *ibidem.*, 'Bhāyillasvāmin and Bhillamāladeva' in *Studies in the Religious Life of Ancient and Medieval India* (Delhi, 1971), pp. 115-32; *ibidem.*, 'Chittapa's Praśasti of the Sun-god Bhilsa', in *Studies in Yugapurāṇa and other Texts* (Delhi, 1974), pp.

107-13. The last two of these articles are near verbatim repetitions of what was first published in *Epigraphia Indica*; the 1971 publication introduces 'Bhāyillasvāmi' but I can find no authority for this spelling. Some of the inscriptions were subsequently re-edited in Trivedi, CII 7, see appendix to this article.

47. Sircar, 'Two Inscriptions', p. 214; also listed here as number 1 in the appendix.
48. Kirit Mankodi, 'An Image of Sūrya 'Bhāyillasvāmi' from Bhilsa', *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art* 10 (1978-79), pp. 41-47. For other monuments in Malwa dating to the last quarter of the ninth century see my *Temples of Gopakṣetra*, pp. 76-8; the Sūrya in Vidishā seems to be no later than circa 875. Before studying this question I had assumed that the Bijāmaṇḍal marked the site of Bhāyillasvāmi. I am particularly grateful to Dr Mankodi who first pointed out to me that the surviving images show this cannot have been the case.
49. Cited in Sircar, 'Two Inscriptions', p. 211.
50. Sircar, 'Two Inscriptions', p. 215 and number 4 in the appendix given here. Sircar had no doubt that this inscription and the others relating to the Sun god were embedded in the walls of the Bhāyillasvāmi. We share this view but are obliged to note that there is no direct evidence.
51. This sculpture was collected by Charles 'Hindoo' Stewart (d. 1828) who is known to have travelled in the Bhilsa area; for a brief account of Stuart see my 'Sculpture from India', in *A. W. Franks: Nineteenth Century Collecting and the British Museum*, edited by Marjorie Caygill and John Cherry (London, 1997), pp. 250-61.
52. Trivedi, CII 7, number 37. Also listed here in the appendix, number 5.
53. *Ibid.*, number 37 (introductory matter).
54. *Ibid.*, number 37. The Varāha panel faces east and is illuminated by the rising sun; the description could also apply to Cave 13. Illustrated in Williams, *Art of Gupta India*, Figs. 37, 39. Chittapa's text is full of double entendre which I pretend to translate only in a loose way. The importance of this text (and others) as raw material for understanding the visual culture of Indian images has been missed by art historians who are more concerned with their own descriptive vocabulary and categories of thought.
55. Trivedi, CII 7, number 19 (Udayeśvara), p. 24 (Varāha); for the architecture of the Śiva temple, Krishna Deva, 'Bhūmija Temples,' in *Studies in Indian Temple Architecture* (Poona, 1975), pp. 90-113.
56. Illustrated, as already noted above, in *Buddhist Reliquaries from Ancient India*, Fig. 29. Prints of the old photographs were procured by Meera Dass and during the course of fieldwork we were able to determine where the capital lay in the nineteenth century from a study of the background and rock formations. A co-authored article with illustrations is planned on these findings.
57. There is not a shred of evidence for this but it was suggested to me by a long inscription on the side of the cave door which indicates that the same thing happened again in later times. I have not had time to work this later record in detail.
58. For example Trivedi, CII 7, number 16.
59. For historiographic perspective on these questions, Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, *The Making of Early Medieval India* (Delhi, 1994) and Chattopadhyaya, *Aspects of Rural Settlements and Rural Society in Early Medieval India* (Calcutta, 1990). Chattopadhyaya advocates an 'integrative' model in opposition to the Marxist 'feudal' position; for the

'segmentary' model, Burton Stein, *Peasant, State and Society in Medieval South India* (Delhi, 1980).

60. EITA marks an important beginning in this but the art historical preoccupation with complete monuments and with style (which has influenced most studies of temple architecture to date) means that questions of distribution and geographical context in the wider landscape have not been properly addressed; see further my review of Packert-Atherton, *Sculpture of Early Medieval Rajasthan* (Leiden, 1997) in *South Asian Studies* 15 (1999).

APPENDIX

INSCRIPTIONS RELATING TO BHILSA AND THE BHĀILLASVĀMI TEMPLE

1. INSCRIPTION DATED V.S. 935
Records donations in favour of Narāyaṇa and the Mothers at Śrī Bhāyillasvāmyāyatana. Found at Mahalghaṭ, Bhilsa.
Bibliography:
D. C. Sircar, 'Two Inscriptions from Bhilsa', *Epigraphia Indica* 30 (1953-54), p. 214.
2. INSCRIPTION OF YAŚOVARMAN DATED V.S. 1011
Records the construction of a Viṣṇu temple by Yaśovarman and recounts his achievements and those of the Candella dynasty. Records also (in verse 45) that the Candella dominion reached up to Bhāsvat (i.e. Bhāyillasvāmi). Found at Khajurāho.
Bibliography:
H. V. Trivedi, *Inscriptions of the Paramāras, Chandellas, Kachchapaghātas and Two Minor Dynasties*, Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, Volume 7, (Delhi, 1978-91), number 98.
3. INSCRIPTION OF KṚṢṆARĀJA
Fragmentary inscription equating Bhāyillasvāmi with Ravi and recording that a minister of KṚṣṇarājā, a Candella lord, dwelt on the banks of the Vetravatī. Found in the wall of a house in Bhilsa.
Bibliography:
Fitz-Edward Hall, 'Three Sanskrit Inscriptions,' *Journal of the Asiatic Society* 2 (1862), p. 111, note.
4. INSCRIPTION MENTIONING THE SUN GOD
Heavily damaged inscription mentioning the Sun god and Udayagiri. Datable to the eleventh century. From Bhilsa but precise find-spot not recorded.
Bibliography:
D. C. Sircar, 'Two Inscriptions from Bhilsa', *Epigraphia Indica* 30 (1953-54), pp. 215-16.
5. INSCRIPTION WITH EULOGY TO THE SUN GOD
Records the merits of a distinguished person (perhaps a king) who is compared to the sun. Contains a eulogy to the sun by the poet Chittapa; composed at the order of *daṇḍanāyaka* Śrī Candra. Dateable to the eleventh century. From Bhilsa but precise find-spot not recorded.
Bibliography:
D. C. Sircar, 'Two Inscriptions from Bhilsa', *Epigraphia Indica* 30 (1953-54), p. 219; H. V. Trivedi, *Inscriptions of the Paramāras, Chandellas, Kachchapaghātas and Two Minor Dynasties*, Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, Volume 7, (Delhi, 1978-91), number 37.

6. COPPER-PLATE OF MADANAVARMAN DATED V.S. 1190
Records the donation land to a brāhmaṇa by the Candella king Madanavarman from his camp near Bhāilasvāmi. Found in Bandā distirict, Uttar Pradesh.
Bibliography:
H. V. Trivedi, *Inscriptions of the Paramāras, Chandellas, Kachchapaghātas and Two Minor Dynasties, Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, Volume 7, (Delhi, 1978-91), number 118.*
7. COPPER-PLATE OF HARIŚCANDRA DATED V.S. 1214
Records the division of the village of Dādarapadra into sixteen shares and its donation to nineteen brāhmaṇas by the Paramāra Mahākumāra Hariścandra. Mentions (in line 9) Bhāilasvāmidēvapura. Found in Bhopal.
Bibliography:
H. V. Trivedi, *Inscriptions of the Paramāras, Chandellas, Kachchapaghātas and Two Minor Dynasties, Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, Volume 7, (Delhi, 1978-91), number 44.*
8. INSCRIPTION OF TRAILOKYAVARMAN DATED V.S. 1216
Records the establishment of a temple of Murāri in the boar incarnation and other images together with a garden by Trailokyavarman, a Paramāra prince. Further records the imposition of certain taxes in the temple's favour and mentions the river Vetravatī. Found near the Jain temple, Bhilsa, in the door of a house.
Bibliography:
H. V. Trivedi, *Inscriptions of the Paramaras, Chandellas, Kachchapaghatas and Two Minor Dynasties, Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, Volume 7, (Delhi, 1978-91), number 42.*
9. INSCRIPTION OF JAYASIMHA DATED V.S. 1320.
Records the donation of a village named Dvormela (?) by Sānumatī (Bhānumatī?) in Bhāilasvāmidēvapura during the reign of Jayasimhadeva. From Bhilsa but exact provenance not recorded.
Bibliography:
H. V. Trivedi, *Inscriptions of the Paramāras, Chandellas, Kachchapaghātas and Two Minor Dynasties, Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, Volume 7, (Delhi, 1978-91), number 58.*