Rāma's Hill*

Transgression and Atonement on a Hill in the South and the Inadequacy of Substitutes

PREAMBLE

Coming from a part of the world where there are neither holy places nor mountains, it may seem strange that my professional career has been marked by the research of these two phenomena. Curiosity to discover unknown fields, no doubt, lies at the base of every scholarly endeavour, but in my case there may have been a more compelling factor, namely the fascination for the cultural and religious world of India. Studying the religious heritage of the Subcontinent means that one cannot miss the holy places: they are simply ubiquitous, and many of them are mountains.¹

The symbolism of holy mountains in the Hindu tradition has been well covered by Laura Giuliano in her contribution to the proceedings of the conference on *Religioni e Sacri Monti*. As she points out, the idea of the holy mountain is interchangeable with concepts such as, for instance, 'the world pillar' (il pilastro del mondo or *axis mundi*) and 'the world tree' (l'albero cosmico).² This symbolism is not limited to mountains as such, as Giuliano demonstrates, but underlies the very idea of the Hindu temple and its architecture.

Rather than repeating what has been competently put forward, I would like to concentrate here on a single holy mountain, the Rāmāgiri or Rāma's Hill, right in the heart of India, in the region known as Vidarbha (47 km north of Nagpur in eastern Maharashtra). As we will see, the nexus of ideas pointed out by Giuliano will gain relevance, when we fix our attention on the significance that this hill had, and still has for the pilgrim who visits it today. This pilgrim will, no doubt, think of the classical Sanskrit epic, which has contributed so much to the Indian culture through the ages, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and its main hero, Rāma, son of Daśaratha, king of Ayodhyā.

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1 Cf. Bakker 2010b, where I deal with the mountain: Rohitāgiri.

2 Giuliano 2006, 177.

THE ŚAIVALA MOUNTAIN OF THE RĀMĀYAṆA

In the seventh and last book of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, after Rāma had been crowned king in Ayodhyā and a period of golden rule, referred to as the Rāmarājya, had been ushered in, a nasty incident occurred, which could have been meant to remind the reader of the *Rāmāyaṇa* of the fact that the golden age was nearing its end. Bad behaviour, which would become endemic in our own Kali Age, was already occasionally practised in the Dvāparayuga and forbodings thereof appeared in the Tretāyuga, thus posing a threat to the universal happiness that characterized Rāma's rule.

A brahmin arrived at the palace gate in Ayodhyā and loudly bewailed the fate of his only son, who had died before having come of age. As the brahmin himself was absolutely blameless, this stroke of misfortune must have been caused by some other mean creature who had abused the *dharma* (Rām. 7.64). The possible cause of this tragic event was revealed to Rāma by his counsellor, the seer Nārada. Could it be that somewhere in his realm a *śūdra* might have had the nerve to practise asceticism, thereby setting a trend that was only permissible in the Kaliyuga (Rām. 7.65)? The righteous king ordered the preservation of the boy's body by having it laid in oil, a method that worked so well in the case of his own father, and called for his celestial chariot, the Puṣpaka. The following reconnaissance flight affirmed that the *dharma* reigned supreme in the west, north and east of his kingdom, but in the south, the region associated with death, on the slope of the Śaivala mountain, which the *Rāmāyaṇa* situated to the south of the Vindhya,³ at the border of a lake,⁴ something questionable seemed to be going on.⁵

An ascetic was hanging upside down, a form of severe *tapas* that was evidently not customary in the golden age of the Tretāyuga, since those entitled to practise austerities did not need such extreme mortifications to attain their aims. The Puṣpaka landed and Rāma questioned the hanging man, asking whether he was by any chance a *śūdra*. The honest ascetic frankly admitted his humble descent, saying that he had been taken to this severe asceticism by the wish to reach the status of a god. While he was still speaking with his head hanging down—'know that I am a *śūdra*, O Rāma, named Śambūka'⁶—the righteous king drew his sword and chopped off his head (Rām. 7.67.3–4). Rāma was praised by the gods for having prevented a *śūdra* from reaching heaven and a rain of celestial flowers fell down at the spot.⁷ Pleased that the

3 See below, n. 8 on p. 337.

4 Śaivala is the name of a water plant. Meulenbeld 1974, 604 mentions 12 identifications of this plant, the major ones are *Vallisneria spiralis* Linn. and *Blyxa octandra* Planch.

5 Rām. 7.66.12–13. The commentaries *ad* 7.66.12 identify the Śaivala as a *giri* in the vicinity of the Vindhya.

6 Rām. 7.67.3cd: *śūdraṃ māṃ viddhi kākutstha śambūkaṃ nāma nāmataḥ*.

7 Rām. 7 App. I, No. 11.

danger of having to accept a *śūdra* in their midst had been warded off, the gods granted that the dead brahmin boy was restored to life on Rāma's request.

Thereupon Rāma accepted the invitation of the gods to visit the hermitage of Agastya, which, as the text suggests, was thought to be somewhere in the neighbourhood, south of the Vindhya mountains.⁸ It was his second visit to the *āśrama*; previously, during the period of exile, Rāma had been there in the company of his wife Sītā and younger brother; Agastya had then pointed out their way to Pañcavaṭī (Rām. 3.12.13).

In earlier publications I have repeatedly tried to demonstrate the futility of the attempts by the Archaeological Survey of India to plot the epic geography of the *Rāmāyaṇa* on the historical map of South Asia.⁹ The problem is comparable to tracing the itinerary of Ulysses in the Mediterranean basin. Though much has been written since to prove that I was wrong, especially with regard to the location of Ayodhyā and Rāma's Birthplace (Rāmājanmabhūmi) in connection with the dispute over the Babri Masjid (Plate 4),¹⁰ I have not come across valid arguments that have made me give up my view.

In my opinion, therefore, the question is not where exactly the hill was on which Śambūka was beheaded, or where this hermitage of Agastya was, but the scholar should ask where and when traditions emerged that identified specific topographic sites with localities of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Or to put it differently, when and where did sacred places emerge that derived their fame and holiness from their believed connection with places mentioned in the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

In the case of Agastya's *āśrama* Dey in his *Geographical Dictionary* (s.v.) enumerates eight such traditions and in the case of the Śaivala mountain this author refers to 'Rāmāgiri or Rāmtek mountain' (Plate 51), 47 km north of Nagpur, the evidence for which we shall discuss.

THE RĀMAGIRI

We possess a testimony from the 13th century, not yet known to Dey, which records a local tradition that associates a particular site on Ramtek Hill with this episode of Śambūka's penance. The *Ramtek Stone Inscription of the Time*

8 Rām. 3.10.80-84; Rām. 7.67.5 (1127*). The region between the Vindhya and the Śaivala had become deserted after the fall of King Daṇḍa, youngest of the hundred sons of Ikṣvāku, and had become known as Daṇḍakāraṇya (Rām. 7.72.17-18; cf. Rām. 7.70.16-17). In this region the king of Vidarbha, Śveta, is said to have practised asceticism (Rām. 7.70.2-3). The hermitage of Agastya is said to have been in the centre of this wilderness situated at a lake, and here Agastya's meeting with the former king of Vidarbha, Śveta, took place (Rām. 7.68.1-7). The *āśrama* of Agastya, the *Rāmāyaṇa* suggests, replaced the hermitage known as Janasthāna, which was earlier deserted at the end of Daṇḍa's reign (Rām. 7.72.17-18).

9 Bakker 1986; Bakker 1986b.

10 See the *Bibliographie zum Konflikt um Ayodhya und seinem Umfeld*, Brandtner 1994.

of *Rāmacandra* found in the Lakṣmaṇa Temple (Plates 12 and 53) on top of this hill tells us in verse 86:

HERE the *śūdra* saint (*muni*) Śambuka had reached the abode of Murāri after having been killed by the sword Candrahāsā which was wielded by Rāmacandra; and on this eminent mountain he became well-known as Dhūmrākṣa, the ‘smoke-eyed one’.¹¹

The sanctuary of Dhūmrākṣa is still pointed out today (Plate 52).

Plate 51
The Rāmagiri

Plate 52
The Dhūmrēśvara Temple

The same *tīrtha* is also described in a (late) text called *Sindūragirimāhātmya* (13.9–16, 48–52, 14.1–65).¹² In this *Māhātmya* the *śūdra* is described as a *bhūmipālaka* (*op. cit.* 13.10) and an explanation is given for his name

¹¹ Bakker 1989b, 493; above, p. 102. The inscription, as far as legible, does not mention the name Śaivala.

¹² For this text, of which a longer recension also seems to have existed, see Bakker 1990b, 76; above, n. 28 on p. 90. Mirashi and Kulkarni (1939–40) refer to this longer recension in EI XXV, 11 n. 7:

The larger *Sindūragirimāhātmya* mentions Mahāśaivala as a name of the hill at Rāmṭek in addition to the two names noticed above, and explains it as being due to Śiva bringing the Śaivas to the hill. According to the colophon the *Māhātmya* has been taken from the *Kaumārakhaṇḍa* of the *Padmapurāṇa*; but the portion dealing with Śambuka's story seems to have been copied *verbatim* from the *Rāmāyaṇa* of

dhūmrākṣa, which says that while hanging above a firepit (*kuṇḍa*) he was throwing therein leaves of bilva, drinking the smoke through his eyes (*op. cit.* 13.13). Rāma, after cutting off his head, allowed him to stay on the mountain in the form of a *liṅga* known as *dhūmrapaśiva* (*op. cit.* 14.53). Today this *liṅga* is referred to as Dhūmrēśvara.

Plate 53

The Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa Temples on Rāma's Hill

Evidently the Rāmagiri tradition as reported in the Yādava inscription identified the *śūdra* who was beheaded by Rāma with a local deity Dhūmrākṣa.¹³ We note also that this tradition had mitigated the most cynical part of the *Rāmāyaṇa* legend by allowing Śambuka/Śambūka at least to reach heaven, the abode of Murāri, i.e. Viṣṇu.¹⁴ The same Yādava inscription testifies to Agastya's association with the hill, though the exact relation remains obscure

Vālmīki. We have not been able to trace the *Kaumārakhaṇḍa* in the printed edition of the Purāṇa. Yet, this description lends support to our inference that Śaivala was one of the old names of the hill at Rāmṭēk.

13 This name is also known from the epics, namely as that of a courtier of Rāvaṇa. MBh 3.270.5; Rām. 5.5.21.

14 The *Sindūragirimāhātmya* 14.5–8 further mitigates Rāma's role, since the beheading of the *śūdra* is said to have taken place only after the latter had attacked and slain (*hata*) Hanumat, who had accompanied Rāma.

due to the fact that damage has made parts of the inscription illegible.¹⁵ Finally the epigraph records the tradition that the mountain had been ‘touched by the lotus-feet of the illustrious Rāma’ (v. 83), due to which it is called ‘Rāma’s Hill’.¹⁶ As we shall argue below, this local tradition that connected the hill with events in the life of the hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa* probably existed already at the beginning of the 5th century.

The epigraphical evidence

Two 5th-century Vākāṭaka inscriptions refer explicitly to a ‘Rāmagiri’ and a sanctuary thereon.¹⁷ That this epigraphical ‘Rāmagiri’ is the hill a few kilometers to the north of the Vākāṭaka capital Nandivardhana, i.e. the present-day Ramtek, the same hill on which the mentioned Yādava inscription is found, is now generally accepted by all historians dealing with the history of the Vākāṭakas.¹⁸ In one of these 5th-century inscriptions the Vākāṭaka queen Prabhāvatī Guptā gives some additional information regarding the nature of the sanctuary on top of the hill, when she declares that her charters were issued from the ‘soles of the feet (*pādamūla*) of Bhagavat, the Lord of Rāmagiri’,¹⁹ which echoes an earlier charter by her in which it is said that the grant had first been offered to the ‘soles of the feet of the Lord’.²⁰

These epigraphs agree with a tradition that seems to underly the famous verses in Kālidāsa’s *Meghadūta*, the ‘Cloud Messenger’, written in the first half of the 5th century AD, in which a Rāmagiri is said to be the place of exile of a Yakṣa who used a cloud as postillion d’amour to bring a message to his beloved, whom he had left behind in the northern Himālaya mountains.

A YAKṢA, who had neglected his duties, had lost his powers by his master’s curse—
heavy to bear, since he had to live separated from his beloved for one year; he took
up his abode in the hermitages on the Rāmagiri, where the trees (spread) a gentle
shade and where the waters were hallowed by the bathing of Janaka’s daughter.
[...]

AFTER having embraced that lofty hill, you, (O cloud), should take leave of your
dear friend, who, on his slopes, is marked by Raghupati’s footprints, venerated by
mankind; every time when you and he meet, the shedding of warm (tear)drops
born of long separation betrays his affection.²¹

15 Bakker 1989b, 482, 488 (vv. 44–46, 110; above, p. 98). The *Sindūragirimāhātmya* (9.35) also refers to the *āśrama* of Agastya (Kumbhaja).

16 Bakker 1989b, 485; above, p. 101 (v. 85): *rāmasya girāv iha*.

17 The *Riddhapur Plates of Prabhāvatiguptā* (CII V, 35 f.) and *The Mandhal Plates of Prthivīśeṇa II, Year 2* (EI XLI, 169). See Bakker 1997, 21, 24.

18 CII V, 7; Bakker 1997, *passim*. The *Sindūragirimāhātmya* 13.8 situates the city (*pura*) of Nandivardhana to the south of Rāmagiri: *gīrer dakṣiṇapārśve*.

19 *rāmagirisvāmināḥ pādamūlāt*, CII V, 35.

20 *bhagavatpādamūle nivedya*, CII V, 7. For the meaning of *pādamūla* see above, n. 52 on p. 330.

21 *Meghadūta* vv. 1 and 9 in Hultzsich’ edition (with comm. of Vallabhadeva).

After an examination of the itinerary of the cloud as described by Kālidāsa, the great Maharashtrian scholar, V.V. Mirashi, identified the Rāmagiri of the *Meghadūta* with Ramtek Hill. He argued that the route that was followed by the cloud corresponds closely with the geography of Middle India and this left, in his view, only one possibility open.²² The coherence of Mirashi's arguments and the apparent consistency of the evidence give his conclusions a great plausibility.

From the combined evidence of the Vākāṭaka inscriptions on the one hand, and Kālidāsa's poetic description on the other, we may deduce the following hypotheses regarding the situation on this hill in the first half of the 5th century:

- 1 The Lord of Rāmagiri was Bhagavat, i.e. Viṣṇu, known as Rāmagirisvāmin.
- 2 The hill was associated with the perigrinations of Raghupati, i.e. Rāma, the hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and for that reason was called 'Rāma's Hill'.
- 3 The hill may have contained a tank or pond named Sītakuṇḍa or Jānakītīrtha.²³
- 4 The hill may have contained a sanctuary where Viṣṇu-Rāma's footprints (*pada*) were worshipped.

Viṣṇupada

Since the time Mirashi advanced his theory, many new Vākāṭaka artefacts have come to light.

Plate 54
Footprint tablet, Nagardhan (c. 12×12×4 cm)

²² Mirashi 1964a, 138.

²³ This tank may have been referred to in the Yādava inscription under the name of Rāmatīrtha (see above, p. 92).

I have selected two of them for discussion here.²⁴

A tablet containing a pair of footprints was reportedly found in the Nagar-dhan area, i.e. at the foot of Rāma's Hill (Plate 54).²⁵ On account of the style compared to other findings of the same site, the tablet is probably to be dated to the Vākāṭaka period (5th century). The iconography of the tablet merits a closer examination.

In addition to the pair of footprints, it contains the Vaiṣṇava symbols of the conch (*śaṅkha*) and club (*gadā*). From this we conclude with certainty that we are concerned with an icon representing the footprints of Viṣṇu (Viṣṇupada).

An investigation into the early evidence of Viṣṇupada shrines has established that such shrines were preferably situated on hill- or mountaintops. And this makes sense, since it may have its origin in the idea that the three cosmic strides of Viṣṇu Trivikrama were taken along the *axis mundi*, represented either by the primordial hill of Vedic cosmogony or by the sacrificial post or *yūpa* in Vedic ritual. To this effect the Dutch scholar F.B.J Kuiper has observed:

Plate 55
Viṣṇu Trivikrama, Rāmagiri

From a purely mythological point of view Viṣṇu, who by his position in the center must also in Vedic belief have been immediately associated with the cosmic pillar (*skambhā*), must have ascended along the pillar at the beginning of the year and descended in the second half of it. [...] There is clear evidence of Viṣṇu's connection with the mountains: he is 'dwelling' or 'standing' on the mountain(s) and 'regent of the mountains'. [...] he stands on the summit of the mountain (*Ṛgveda* 1.155.1). [...] Later art represents him standing on Mount Mandara, and arising from it as the cosmic pillar. In the middle of the seventh century A.D. an artist at Māmalapuram portrayed the god, while taking his three strides, as being the supporting pillar of the universe. (Kuiper 1983, 49)

The idea of Viṣṇu Trivikrama leaving a footprint behind on earth was eventually extended to Viṣṇu in general and to his human incarnations in particular.

²⁴ I have earlier dealt with these findings separately in more detail in Bakker 1991, 1993b, 1997.

²⁵ Cf. Bakker 1991, Plate facing p. 19. Bakker 1997, 136 f., Plate XXXI B.

Rāmagiri appears to be an example as may be inferred from the evidence presented here. The Vākāṭakas' familiarity with this cosmogonical nature of Viṣṇu is proven by a 5th-century Trivikrama image of this god which still stands on top of the hill (Plate 55).

Returning to the iconography of the tablet, we observe that in between the two footprints an enigmatic symbol is engraved. It consists of a vertical axis to which horizontal strokes, slightly turning upwards, are attached on both sides, rounded off in the apex. In earlier publications I have suggested that this may represent a (cosmic) tree. Although the tree would fit perfectly in the symbolism described above, this view should now be given up in favour of an interpretation that sees in the object a *cakra* in upright position, thus completing the Vaiṣṇava iconography of conch, club and wheel. Viṣṇu's footprint, referring to his three strides to separate heaven and earth along the cosmic pillar (*skambha*) fits his 'connection with the mountains', as observed by Kuiper. The symbolism of the footprint tablet would thus be complete, if we could assume that the tablet found at the foot of the hill reflects, in miniature format, a shrine that once crowned the hill.

This hypothesis helps us to understand the significance of the squares within which the footprints are enclosed: they may mirror the ground plan of the open-air shrine that once crowned Rāma's Hill, the *rāmagīrisvāmīnaḥ pādāmūlam* sanctuary, in which Prabhāvatī Guptā worshipped and from where she issued her charters: a square enclosure giving access to a square platform on which an altar containing the footprints of the Lord was installed, squared in by a low railing or wall.²⁶ The tradition that connected the hill with a visit of Rāma naturally saw in it the footprints of Raghupati.

The above reasoning rests on the assumption that smaller replicas were made of the images which were enshrined in the temples on top of Rāma's Hill in the 5th century. Replicas that may have served personal devotional purposes. They may have been for sale in the local bazars, as they generally still are today, and they may have been purchased by the pilgrim to put in his satchel for carrying home as a sacred memento. For this assumption we possess further evidence.

Narasimha

Among the most prominent remains of the fifth century are the two Narasimha temples on top of the hill. In one of these temples a Vākāṭaka inscription has been discovered which says that the image of Prabhāvatīsvāmin had been installed by the daughter in memory of and for the transfer of merit to her deceased mother, the dowager queen Prabhāvatī Guptā. It is uncertain whether the Narasimha image in the temple where the inscription was found actually corresponds with the named Prabhāvatīsvāmin, since the inscription may have originally belonged to another temple on the hill, for instance the

26 For the evidence of footprint shrines in the Gupta/Vākāṭaka period see Bakker 1991.

one of Trivikrama. The discussion of this possibility will be postponed; it will be investigated in Bakker 2010c, 2012, 2013b (see below, pp. 351 ff., pp. 357 ff., pp. 365 ff.). For the sake of our present argument we concentrate on the Narasiṃha image.

This image (Plate 57) is very similar to a slightly earlier specimen which we find in the adjacent temple (Plate 58) and of which we have conjectured that it was installed by Prabhāvatī herself for her deceased husband Rudrasena II.²⁷ The temple is still known as Rudra–Narasiṃha. Both these temples and their impressive images thus testify to the grandeur of the Vākāṭaka royal family and its god: Bhagavat Viṣṇu. In front of them, the fifth-century pilgrim must have stood in awe, as we still do today. What is more natural than the wish to carry it home in portable format?

At the foot of the hill, in the same area where the Viṣṇupada icon has been found, about nine small Narasiṃha images have come to light and of these we can be certain that they are miniatures of the two large Narasiṃha images preserved in the temples on top of the hill (Plate 56). The devout practice of making and distributing replicas of the main images on the Rāmagiri in the 5th century thus seems to be proven beyond reasonable doubt.

Plate 56
Miniature Narasiṃha, Nagardhan
(c. 21×23 cm)

²⁷ Bakker 1997, 22; cf. above p. 144.

Plate 57
Narasimha in the Kevala-Narasimha Temple, Rāmagiri
 (c. 200 × 204 × 102 cm)

Plate 58
Narasimha in the Rudra-Narasimha Temple, Rāmagiri
 (c. 198 × 198 × 62 cm)

THE PILGRIM'S SATCHEL

Coming to the end of our study, we are now in the position to address that aspect of the phenomenon of pilgrimage that has been chosen by the organizers, A. Barbero & S. Piano, as theme of the conference.

Once they return to their home countries, pilgrims make great efforts to reproduce, either wholly or in part, the buildings and environment that they have seen. [...]

Can this phenomenon of imitation, we may ask, be demonstrated by means of samples taken from the classical Indian heritage, that is, for instance, from the material that we have surveyed? The footprint tablet is less suited to this aim, on account of its rather general nature. The Narasiṃha icon, on the other hand, may be a better index. The iconography of this type of Man-lion icon is unique enough to serve as a marker, and the Rāmagiri one is apparently the first specimen of this type. Soon, that is from the sixth century onwards, a new iconography of this *avatāra* of Viṣṇu became fashionable all over India, one in which the demon Hiraṇyakaśipu is lying across the knees of the Man-lion, his belly ripped open by the lion's claws (Plates 18 and 59).

Plate 59

Narasiṃha slaying the demon Hiraṇyakaśipu
Rājīvalocana Temple, Rajim (7th–8th cent.)

Moreover, the Vākāṭaka culture and its religious and artistic achievements rapidly sunk into oblivion after the fall of this dynasty by the end of the 5th century, and we hardly have any evidence that Rāma's Hill retained more than local significance, until it re-emerged as a regional centre of pilgrimage in the 12th and 13th centuries, in the wake of the rise of the cult of Rāma as the supreme form of God (above, pp.161 ff.) It is in that period, we presume, that the old 5th-century footprint shrine was replaced by the large temples of Rāma and Lakṣmana, which still stand today on the promontory of the hill. For imitations of the Narasiṃha icon we therefore have to look for 5th or 6th century specimens in the area covered by the Vākāṭaka kingdom and its neighbours (Figure 6).

Figure 6
Map of Vidarbha and surrounding countries

I know of three specimens belonging to the early 6th-century that are clear imitations of the Rāmagiri icon. They are found in regions that have been in close contact with the Vākāṭaka kingdom. The first one (Plate 60) is carved in the rock at Sindursi near Bahuriband (Madhya Pradesh), c. 20 km west from Sleemanabad on highway No. 7, which connected and still connects Vidarbha with the Gangetic plain.

The other two have been found in Garh-Dhanora (c. 140 km south of Raipur) in the Bastar District of neighbouring Chhattisgarh,²⁸ an archaeological site identified with the ancient capital Puṣkarī of the Nalas, whose expanding kingdom contributed to the collapse of the Vākāṭaka kingdom at the end of the

28 Nigam 2004, 151 f.

5th century (Plate 61).²⁹ In Chhattisgarh this type of Narasimha icon lived on still a little longer as is shown by a 7th-century specimen from Sirpur that has very recently been found (Plate 62).

Plate 60
Narasimha carved in the rock at Sindursi

Plate 61
The two Narasimha images from Garh-Dhanora (5th–6th cent.)

²⁹ Bakker 1997, 52–57.

Plate 62
Narasimha image, Sirpur (7th cent.)

Especially the Sindursi image, which is found without much sacral context, may have been carved in the rock as a sort of, in the words of Barbero and Piano, ‘substitute model that evoked and reminded visitors of the distant place of worship’, viz. the Rāmagiri in Vidarbha.

CONCLUSION

We briefly return to Kālidāsa’s *Cloud Messenger*. We shall never know whether the poet, when he introduced the anonymous Yakṣa living in exile on the Rāmagiri, was thinking of a local deity on Ramtek Hill, a predecessor of the one

whom the 13th-century Yādava inscription called ‘Smoke Eye’, Dhūmrākṣa, and who, in that inscription, was identified with the *śūdra* Śambūka of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. A feature that these two have in common, Kālidāsa’s *yakṣa* and the deity Dhūmrākṣa/Śambūka, is that both were punished for a transgression of the law (*dharma*). However, what the poet knew very well, and what seems to have a special relevance in our age of virtual reality, was that ‘substitutes’ can never replace the real thing. This he expressed beautifully in a verse that the Yakṣa gave to the Cloud to convey to his beloved:

WHENEVER I draw your picture on a rock in natural colours and wish to throw myself at your feet, you who are wounded by love, time and again my eyes become misted with a flood of tears: cruel fate prevents our meeting even there.³⁰

30 *Meghadūta* 102:

*tvām ālikhya praṇayakupitām dhāturāgaiḥ śilāyām,
 ātmānaṃ te caraṇapatitaṃ yāvad icchāmi kartum |
 asrais tāvan muhur upacitair dṛṣṭir ālipyate me,
 krūras tasminn api na sahate saṃgamaṃ nau kṛtāntaḥ || 102 ||*