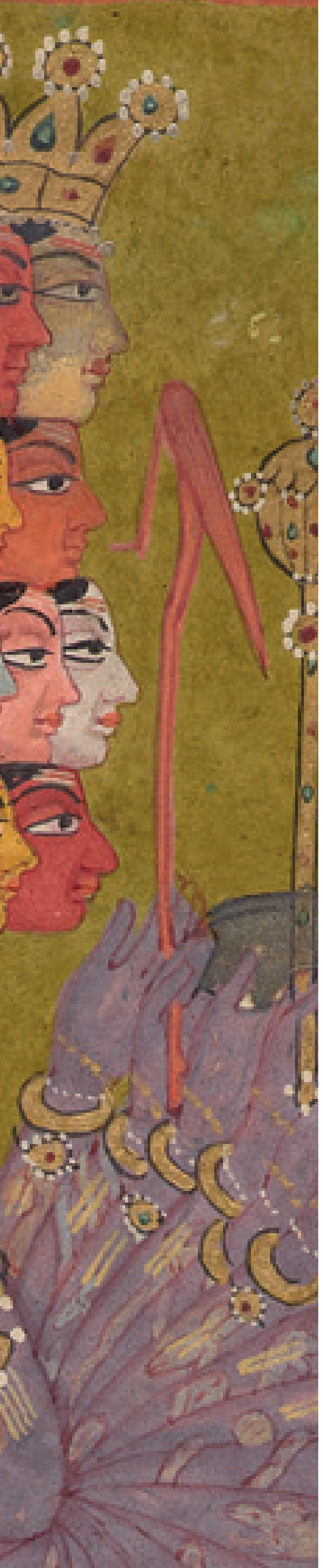




Part One

# The Path of Yoga



# Yoginis

## 3A–C

### Three Yoginis

India, Tamil Nadu, Kanchipuram or Kaveripakkam, ca. 900–975  
Mafic igneous stone,<sup>1</sup> height approx. 116 cm.

3A Arthur M. Sackler Gallery,  
Gift of Arthur M. Sackler, S1987.905

3B Detroit Institute of Arts,  
Founders Society Purchase, L.A. Young Fund, 57.88

3C Minneapolis Institute of Arts,  
The Christina N. and Swan J. Turnblad  
Memorial Fund, 60.21

## 3D

### Yogini

India, Uttar Pradesh, Kannauj,  
first half of the 11th century  
Sandstone, 86.4 × 43.8 × 24.8 cm  
San Antonio Museum of Art, purchased with the John  
and Karen McFarlin Fund and Asian Art Challenge  
Fund, 90.92

## 3E

### Saha

Folio 242r from *The Stars of the Sciences*  
(*Nujum al-'Ulum*)

India, Karnataka, Bijapur, dated 1570–71  
Opaque watercolor, gold, and ink on paper,  
25.8 × 16 cm (folio), 8.6 × 9.7 cm (painting)  
The Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library,  
Dublin, In 02 f.242a

## 3F

### Yogini with Mynah

India, Karnataka, Bijapur, ca. 1603–4  
Opaque watercolor and gold on paper;  
39.2 × 27.6 cm (folio with borders),  
19.3 × 11.6 cm (painting without borders)  
The Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library,  
Dublin, In 11A.31

3a Yogini

Like yoga or indeed any aspect of India's Hindu traditions, the identities of yoginis (female embodiments of yogic power) reveal continuous and multiple transformations over time and across sectarian, religious, lay, and geographic boundaries.

Hindu and Buddhist Tantras of the seventh to twelfth century blur the distinction between human and divine, identifying yoginis as both powerful goddesses and the mortal women who ritually became those deities.<sup>2</sup> These yoginis offered Tantric adepts the “fruits of yoga,” and the ability to “subjugate the three-fold (i.e., entire) universe.”<sup>3</sup> Hindu Kaulas were influential in defining them as potentially dangerous hordes of flying goddesses who could, when ritually placated, bestow upon mortals the powers to fly and transcend time and death.<sup>4</sup> Classed as Tantric because their primary goal was power (rather than spiritual liberation), Kaulas gave access to their radical teachings only to initiated disciples.<sup>5</sup> These adepts invited the fierce yoginis to enter circles—more specifically, yogini chakras and more broadly, yantras (“tool” in Sanskrit)—that they mentally or physically constructed, then propitiated them with liquor or animal flesh and blood.<sup>6</sup> For Kaulas, the detachment necessary to cross boundaries and integrate polarities, such as the social distinction between pure and impure, was a critical step in attaining a higher state of being.

By the late ninth century, Hatha yogis, orthodox Hindus, and monarchs began appropriating and domesticating Tantric yoginis. Kings seeking worldly control were among their most prominent devotees.<sup>7</sup> Across the Indian subcontinent, they constructed large stone yogini temples that were often prominently situated upon hills or close to orthodox temples.<sup>8</sup> Open to the sky, many were constructed on round plans akin to yogini chakras, with forty-two to 108 sculptures of yogini goddesses set into niches on their interior walls.<sup>9</sup> The

royally patronized temples mark the entry of the Tantric hordes into both visual culture and more conventional forms of Hindu worship.<sup>10</sup>

These life-size granite goddesses once graced a yogini temple near Kanchipuram, in Tamil Nadu (cats. 3a–c).<sup>11</sup> Each has four arms connoting divine status.<sup>12</sup> Combining auspicious and dangerous iconography, the gently smiling yoginis are full-breasted, slim-waisted, and lithe. Yet they also have unbound hair (a marker of female wrath), fangs, and skull cups for drinking liquor or blood. Of the three, the fiercest brandishes a club and shield, her brows are curved in anger, and cobras coil around her torso and upper arms; the headless corpse carved on the pedestal invokes the charnel grounds of Tantric ritual (cat. 3b). Long-beaked birds, vehicles that signal flight, are lightly incised on the bases of the two crowned yoginis (cats. 3a, 3c). Snake and crocodiles ornament the ears of the goddess wielding the harvesting implements of winnowing and broom; the yogini with tattoos on her face and shoulders carries a jar and wand that may indicate her healing ability.<sup>13</sup> Carved from a hard igneous rock and dated by style to the last quarter of the tenth century, they exhibit the elongated and relatively unadorned idiom of Chola dynasty stone sculptures (see cat. 1a).

A tenth-century yogini from Uttar Pradesh in north India has weapons and bared teeth as well as the voluptuous body and neatly coiled hair of a benign goddess (cat. 3d).<sup>14</sup> Seated with legs audaciously akimbo, she inserts two fingers into the corners of her open mouth to make a piercing noise. In the context of a royal temple, her sword, shield, and war-cry whistle would have resonated as martial and protective emblems. Flight was foremost among the powers sought by Tantric practitioners, and thus her owl vehicle identifies her as the archetypal yogini—a sky traveler (*khechari*).<sup>15</sup> Although her specific identity is unknown,





3b *Yogini*



c Yogini



3d Yogini





she is likely one of the yoginis whose names roughly translate as “she who makes a loud noise.”<sup>16</sup> The sculptor’s ability to balance—without fussiness—the yogini’s smooth limbs with the very precisely realized cuticles of her fingernails, individually carved little teeth, and crisply delineated owl feathers is masterful. He superbly exploited the softness and warm golden color of sandstone to convey the organic quality of plump flesh; pearl-studded ornaments curve around her body to further emphasize its rounded volumes. A rigorous yet rhythmic geometry—seen for example in the radiating movement outward from her bowl-like eyebrows to the circle of tightly curled hair and thick tubular halo—lends dynamism to the whole. Notable too are the sculpture’s volumes and shadows: the fully three-dimensional realization of the pearl-edged sash below her elbows allows us to sense the suppleness of her spine, while the calculated undercutting of her mouth makes it appear menacingly deep.

Although Hindu kings ceased to construct yogini temples after the twelfth century, Indian rulers of all religions sought the favor of yoginis so they would intercede in military affairs throughout the medieval period. For Indo-Islamic sultans seeking practical ways to consolidate power between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries, propitiating yoginis, along with astrology and other divinatory sciences, were common tactics.<sup>17</sup> From at least the fourteenth century onwards, yoginis were known within Islamic intellectual circles as immortal beings who could mediate events on Earth (see “Muslim Interpreters of Yoga” by Carl W. Ernst). In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, for example, yoginis were accessed by the Muslim rulers of Bijapur, a sultanate in the Deccan Plateau of central India (cats. 3e, 3f). Securing military victories was the stated goal of yogini propitiation for Sultan Ali ‘Adil Shah II (reigned 1557–79).<sup>18</sup> In chapter 6 of his *Stars of the Sciences* (*Nujum*

*al-‘ulum*), dated 1570–71), the sultan described 140 yoginis, an astounding number that exceeds all known Hindu lists.<sup>19</sup> Exemplifying the cultural heterogeneity of Bijapur and the sultan’s desire to edify his diverse courtiers, the text collectively identifies them as yoginis and individually retains their Indic names, *mudras* (gestures), attributes, and yantras (geometric diagrams), but integrates them into the already-established Islamic occult category of *ruhaniya* (earth spirits).

The *Stars of the Sciences* was arguably Bijapur’s most ambitious illustrated manuscript, and all 140 *ruhaniya* were depicted both anthropomorphically and geometrically as yantras.<sup>20</sup> Because Hindu astrological and yogini manuscripts were probably diagrammatic or unillustrated, the illustrations may constitute the first detailed set of paintings representing yoginis.<sup>21</sup> Following the sultan’s text, a court artist depicted the fourth *ruhaniya*, Saha, as a standing crowned woman carrying a water jug and stringed instrument (cat. 3e). Centered against a patterned ground of fluidly drawn foliage clusters, Saha is also copiously draped in gold and pearl ornaments. The adjacent yantra is highlighted on a red field with curling gold clouds. Its central square is inscribed “this chakra is named Saha,” and the gold cartouches name the cardinal directions. The manuscript’s uniquely comprehensive yogini group and its iconographically replete images reveal a transformation in yogini identity accomplished through the integration of Tantric, Islamic, and local beliefs about divination, the cosmos, and astrology.

Ibrahim ‘Adil Shah II (reigned 1579–1627), the nephew and successor of Ali ‘Adil Shah II, not only inherited his uncle’s splendid *Stars of the Sciences* but also commissioned paintings of yoginis for inclusion within albums.<sup>22</sup> Because the sultan and his courtiers knew of semidivine *ruhaniya*, they may have understood the painted yoginis as agents of otherworldly powers.<sup>23</sup> *Yogini with*



*Mynah* (cat. 3f) epitomizes the supernal intensity and finesse of Bijapur painting achieved at the court of Ibrahim 'Adil Shah II. Through formal means, its other-worldly affect suggests a being who provided supernatural assistance in worldly affairs. Its artist, "the Dublin painter," created the visionary image through daring manipulations of space, theatrical backlighting, and an improbable palette that plays modulated passages of salmon pink, smoky lavender, and dusky whites off brilliant orange, raspberry, and forest greens. Impossibly elongated, the yogini has the ash-covered skin and the dreadlock (*jata*) topknot of female ascetics associated with the deity Shiva and is laden with jewels like the immortal yoginis described in Persian translations of Tantric texts or illustrated on the pages of the *Stars of the Sciences*.<sup>24</sup> Surrounded by surreally surging hillocks and hugely blooming flowers, she stands quite still, almost spellbound, though her gold sashes furl and the delicate tendrils of hair around her tilted head quiver. Her cool bluish complexion heightens the effect of her heavy-lidded gaze, slight smile, and intimate communion with the mynah. Later Deccani and North Indian paintings of yoginis, such as cat. 18f, romanticize and even eroticize yoginis; early twentieth-century images (cats. 23b, 23c) reveal how yogini powers emerged on the global stage in exotic magic acts. DD

3f Yogini with Mynah





## Nath Siddhas

### 4A-C

Three folios from the *Nath Charit*

Bulaki

India, Rajasthan, Jodhpur, 1823 (Samvat 1880)

Opaque watercolor, gold, and tin alloy on paper,

47 × 123 cm

Merhargarh Museum Trust

4A *Three Aspects of the Absolute*

Folio 1 from the *Nath Charit*

RJS 2399<sup>1</sup>

4B *The Transmission of Teachings*

Folio 3 from the *Nath Charit*

RJS 2400

4C *The Transmission of Teachings*

Folio 4 from the *Nath Charit*

RJS 2401



These hypnotic images open the *Stories of the Nath*s (*Nath Charit*), a compendium of legends about the divinized masters of yoga known as *siddhas* (great perfected beings) within the Nath tradition. The Naths are closely associated with classical hatha yoga, which internalized the complex (and often transgressive) rituals of Tantra into the body of the practitioner.<sup>2</sup> Hatha yoga developed between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries by synthesizing two earlier yogic traditions: one that focused on physical techniques for retaining semen and another based on visualization techniques for raising energy (*kundalini*) through the subtle body (see cats. 11a–c).<sup>3</sup> Early Nath works on yoga rarely

reference deities, but over the centuries as the order organized, the Naths gradually became almost wholly oriented toward the Hindu god Shiva.

*Stories of the Nath*s was composed and illustrated in 1823 for Maharaja Man Singh of Jodhpur (reigned 1803–43), an ardent devotee of the *siddha* Jalandharnath and an unstinting patron of the Nath sectarian order.<sup>4</sup> Its cosmological cycle demonstrates a historical development in Nath identity and beliefs. To firmly situate *siddhas* as transcendent beings, the text adapts a Shaiva metaphysics: it re-identifies the limitless Absolute (*brahman*) as a divine Nath and his (i.e., the universe's) first emanations into matter and consciousness as *siddhas*.



Vertical rules divide the monumentally sized folios, each almost four feet in width, into segments representing the *siddhas* as successive emanations of being from a “self-effulgent [Nath] without beginning, limit, form or blemish.”<sup>5</sup> To meet the conceptual challenge of evoking the immaterial, Bulaki, a master artist in Man Singh’s atelier, began the creation sequence with an undifferentiated field of shimmering gold pigment (cat. 4a, left). The radical abstraction is an innovation of the Jodhpur workshop; although the formless Absolute is a conception central to many Hindu traditions, it had rarely entered the realm of the visual.<sup>6</sup>

Each saffron-clad *siddha* wears the horn necklace and triangular black

hat of Nath yogis; the most subtle and respected beings, like “Bliss-form Nath” and Jalandharnath seen in the center and right panels respectively of folio 1 (cat. 4a), also have halos and ashen-blue bodies.<sup>7</sup> Silvery waters flowing from Jalandharnath’s body constitute the next, more material, ground of creation, the cosmic ocean in (or perhaps on) which the Naths on folios 3 and 4 (cats. 4b, 4c) companionably converse. Virtually identical, they are depicted as teachers connected in a hierarchical chain of authoritative revelation.<sup>8</sup> In Indian philosophical systems, the greatest spiritual authorities are those who have directly perceived ultimate reality (*pratyaksha*), which is visually indicated here by the left

4a *Three Aspects of the Absolute*, folio 1



4b (above) *The Transmission of Teachings*, folio 3

4c (below) *The Transmission of Teachings*, folio 4

to right sequence of progressively more material (and hence lesser) emanations.<sup>9</sup> Several Naths touch their forefingers to their thumbs in a gesture of imparting knowledge (*vitarka mudra*); on the far right of folio 4, the deity Shiva joins two of his four hands in worshipful respect.

Bulaki exploited the mesmerizing affect of repetitive forms and gleaming surfaces to convey the transcendent divinity of the *siddhas*. Enigmatically hovering and effortlessly emerging, replicating, and regrouping on the highest cosmic plane, they galvanize what would

become a standard Nath conception of *siddhas* and demonstrate the role of the visual in shaping historical transformations. DD

## Jain Yoga: Nonviolence for Karmic Purification

### 5A

#### *Seated Jina Ajita*<sup>1</sup>

India, Tamil Nadu, 9th–10th century  
Bronze, 18.5 × 14.5 × 9.3 cm  
Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Gift of Arthur M. Sackler, S1987.16<sup>2</sup>

### 5B

#### *Jina*

India, Rajasthan, 10th–11th century  
Bronze with silver inlay, 61.5 × 49.5 × 36.8 cm  
The Cleveland Museum of Art, Severance and Greta Millikin Purchase Fund, 2001.88<sup>3</sup>

### 5C

#### *Standing Jina*

India, Tamil Nadu, 11th century  
Bronze, 73.7 × 69.2 × 17.5 cm  
Private Collection, LT16<sup>4</sup>

### 5D

#### *Jina*

India, Rajasthan, probably vicinity of Mount Abu, 1160 (Samvat 1217)  
Marble, 59.69 × 48.26 × 21.59  
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, The Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund, 2000.98<sup>5</sup>

### 5E

#### *Siddha Pratima Yantra*

Western India, dated 1333 (Samvat 1390)  
Bronze, 21.9 × 13.1 × 8.9 cm  
Freer Gallery of Art, F1997.33<sup>6</sup>

### 5F

#### *Jain Ascetic Walking*

India, Mughal dynasty, ca. 1600  
Opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper, 14.7 × 9.8 cm  
The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1967.244



5a *Seated Jina Ajita*

The Jain tradition arose more than 2,700 years ago on India's Gangetic Plain. Its earliest surviving text, the *Acharanga Sutra* (circa 300 BCE),<sup>7</sup> specifies that the path to spiritual liberation requires the careful practice of nonviolence. Jainism acknowledges twenty-four great teachers known as *tirthankaras* (forders of the karmic stream) or Jinas (victors). These great liberated souls successfully conquered the difficulties inherent in the cycle of rebirth and suffering (*samsara*), expelled all fettering karmas, and taught for many years before ascending to the eternal abode of perfect energy, consciousness, and bliss.

The cornerstone of Jain thought and practice can be found in the rela-

tionship between soul and karma. Karma in Jainism has physical qualities: it is material, sticky, and colorful. The most difficult karmas densely coat the soul, and hence prevent the soul from manifesting good qualities. Souls are found everywhere: in clumps of dirt, in gusts of wind, in the flames of a bonfire, in the lives of plants, in the bacteria on our skin, and, of course, in all living beings, including insects and humans. Each act of violence toward any one of these souls causes an influx of karma.<sup>8</sup> All souls are born repeatedly until they are reborn as humans who can, through daily meditation and twice-monthly fasting, release karmas, lending brightness and lightness to their visages. The Jains seek to



gradually shed all karmas, allowing ascent of the soul to a state of eternal, solitary blessedness and awareness, known as *moksha* or *kevala*.

Jainism has employed the word *yoga* for more than two millennia and has been in constant dialogue with yoga as a spiritual discipline.<sup>9</sup> In the early Jain tradition, from the time of the *Acharanga Sutra* until the sixth century CE, yoga referred to the process by which material karmas stick to and hence obscure the innate luminosity of the soul. According to Jain physiology, karma sets the body off balance, forming asymmetrical deposits in the connective tissues. Through the steady practice of meditation, one is able to expel these karmas and bring the body back into alignment.

5b Jina

5c Standing Jina



In the sixth century, the Jain scholar Haribhadra Virahanka began to use yoga in its more general sense of “spiritual practice.”<sup>10</sup> For nearly 1,400 years, Jains have composed many texts that discuss their religious practice in terms of yoga, such as the *Yogabindu* of Haribhadra Viranhaka, the *Yogadrstisamuccaya* of Haribhadra Yakiniputra (eighth century), and the *Yogashastra* of Hemacandra, which provided one of the earliest descriptions of *asana* and *pranayama* (eleventh century).<sup>11</sup>

From their earliest representation (circa 300 BCE),<sup>12</sup> Jinās have been depicted in meditation, because it is a state in which no violence can be committed. Seated Jinās always appear in the elegant and perfect accomplishment of *padmasana*, the most famous of all yoga postures (known as lotus) with each foot folded onto the opposite thigh. A small ninth-century bronze from Tamil Nadu, probably from a home shrine, represents Ajita, the second Jina, meditating within this posture of perfect stillness (cat. 5a). By reflecting upon this representation of deep repose, aspiring Jains are inspired to bring similar serenity into their own lives. Many Jains assume this or a similar position for at least forty-eight minutes per day, emulating the liberated ones and perhaps chanting praise about their accomplishments.

By disciplining oneself into this pose, in which one is of like measure on each side, karmas will be excreted. Thus sculpted Jinās are always completely symmetrical and harmoniously proportioned. Their bodies are constructed of idealized forms that further convey the commonality within meditative consciousness. The only way to distinguish the twenty-four great teachers from one another is through insignia sometimes found at the base of their thrones or through inscriptions.<sup>13</sup>

Inlaid with silver, a gleaming bronze Jina with an extraordinarily gentle smile radiates not only peace but also the





vibrant energy associated with sustained meditation practice (cat. 5b). The raised emblem on his chest, known as an *urna*, symbolizes love and compassion. His eyes are wide open, indicating the undying consciousness associated with the realized and purified soul.

In western India, where marble is plentiful, Jain temples are often totally constructed of the luminous white stone, evoking the all-important emphasis on purity. A radiant marble Jina (cat. 5d) bears the vestiges of years of daily worship with red and amber powders that are used in the eight-part ritual of Jain worship.<sup>14</sup> Because clothing of any type entails violence, both in its production and its usage, the Jina is completely naked. He sits on an elaborately decorated pillow that not only signifies the honor in which he was held, but also emphasizes through contrast how the body of a Jina, stripped of ornamentation and garments, articulates the power of nonpossession (*aparigraha*), the ability to flourish even after surrendering all attachments.<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps the earliest extant Jain sculpture is the 2,300-year-old torso from Lohanipur of a naked figure standing in the Kayotsagara pose, which involves manifesting the body upward and is critical for the expulsion of karmas.<sup>16</sup> Even today, Jains are as likely to meditate in the standing Kayotsagara pose as in the seated lotus pose. Epitomizing the perfection achieved by bronze casters in Tamil Nadu during the Chola dynasty, the perfectly smooth and unadorned body of the Jina standing in Kayotsagara (cat. 5c) evokes both the solitary, quiet nature of meditation and the radiant, accomplished state of total freedom (*kevala*). The elaborate aureole, evoking the realm of nature and karma, is distanced from his body, while it symmetrically radiates his energy outward. In this stance, the Jina and the practicing Jain herself embody the very form of the universe. According to Jain cosmology, the world takes the shape of the human

body. In the lower realms of the cosmic legs and feet, one can find the various hells. In the middle realm of the torso, one enters the realm of Jambudvipa, the continent that houses the elemental, microscopic, plant, and animal life forms. The realm above the shoulders contains various heavens. And above the head are realms of perfect freedom. Standing still, arms slightly away from the torso and the legs, Jains meditate on the ascent of the soul beyond the confines of the body. During this process, many fettering karmas disperse, cleansing the soul.

Evoking the true nature of a liberated *siddha*, a small bronze shrine (cat. 5e), slightly worn from repeated acts of ritual touching, conveys the presence of consciousness in a fascinating and uniquely Jain manner. Rather than showing the physicality of the body, this depiction of the adept or *siddha* represents his body as a negative space. The sheet of copper that frames the empty space of the body symbolizes the karmic materiality that gives shape and form to the body, while the empty space of the silhouette in Kayotsagara signals immersion in the ineffable space of pure consciousness. The cutout of the inverted crescent adds a lovely flourish, perhaps indicating that the realm of consciousness, normally depicted with the horns of the murene turned upward, has gracefully upended itself, descending into the full awareness of the enlightened *siddha*. The whisks on either side give homage to the great accomplishment of surmounting the difficulties of karma, providing the comfort of coolness. The abstract openings below the *siddha* suggest that moments of insight and freedom can occur, inspiring the aspirant with sparks of beauty. In its totality, this bronze shrine invites the meditator to allow the spaciousness of freedom to interlace with the world of materiality.

All Jains, lay or monastic, strive to cleanse their souls of the fettering karmas through adherence to five vows:

5e Siddha Pratima  
Yantra



5f Jain Ascetic  
Walking



nonviolence, truthfulness, not stealing, sexual propriety, and nonpossession. A sensitively observed image of a Jain monk wandering on foot (cat. 5f), which was painted around 1600, documents several of the ways that these goals were embodied and invites further speculation. Carrying his only possessions—a container in which to receive food freely given, a walking stick, and most likely a book—he is garbed in white, which symbolizes the purest form of karma.<sup>17</sup> His hair has been plucked short in order to reduce possible harm to the bacteria and insect life that can develop within it. The firmly drawn contours of his legs and the sense of feet firmly planted on the dark grassy foreground seem to convey the strength and determination of Jain monks (and nuns) who spend

most of their lives walking because any other form of locomotion might harm animals or insects.<sup>18</sup> In contrast, the monk's upper body is only imperceptibly outlined. His diaphanous shawl and wispy locks seem to meld into the misty landscape in a gentle manner that suggests the Jain monastic's vow to exist in the world with as little disturbance of it as possible. Walking is an important part of the Jain spiritual path and of Jain yoga itself, and this image conveys the movement, strength, and determination of Jain monks and nuns.<sup>19</sup>

In the modern era, the Jain and yoga vows of nonviolence and truthfulness found their most renowned expression in the life and work of Mahatma Gandhi. Though a Hindu, Gandhi drew deep inspiration from his Jain friend and teacher

Raichandbai. The Jain religious leader Acharya Tulsi also served as an advisor to Gandhi. Tulsi's successor, Acharya Mahapragya, developed a new form of Jain yoga meditation, *Preksha Dhyana*, that is taught worldwide.

The Jains have played a central role in the history and development of yoga. The study of Jainism continues to shed light on the intricacies of yoga karma theory and the many ways in which yoga can be practiced. By examining these images of wandering monks and Jina figures in seated and standing meditation positions, we are reminded of the insights and inspirations to be gained from this tradition, which is both ancient and very much alive. CKC

## Yoga and Tapas: The Buddhists and Ajivikas

### 6A

#### *Head of the Fasting Buddha*

Pakistan or Afghanistan (Gandhara),  
ca. 3rd–5th century  
Schist, 13.3 × 8.6 × 8.3 cm  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Samuel Eilenberg  
Collection, Gift of Samuel Eilenberg, 1987,  
1987.142.73

### 6B

#### *Fasting Buddha*

India, Kashmir, 8th century  
Ivory, 12.4 × 9.5 cm  
The Cleveland Museum of Art,  
Leonard C. Hanna, Jr. Fund, 1986.70<sup>1</sup>

### 6C

#### *Base for a Seated Buddha with Figures of Ascetics*

Pakistan or Afghanistan, ancient Gandhara,  
ca. 150–200 CE  
Gray schist, 38 × 36.2 cm  
The Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of  
Dr. Norman Zaworski, 1976.152

### 6D

#### *Tile with Impressed Figures of Emaciated Ascetics and Couples Behind Balconies*

India, Jammu and Kashmir, Harwan, ca. 5th century  
Terracotta, 40.6 × 33.6 × 4.1 cm  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Cynthia  
Hazen Polsky, 1987, 1987.424.26<sup>2</sup>

Identifying physical evidence for the early practice of yoga poses certain difficulties. The distinctive postures (*asanas*) that are well known in contemporary practice are, with rare exceptions, absent from the early sculptural corpus.<sup>3</sup> This absence is not surprising, given that the oldest textual sources on yoga emphasize inner processes of the mind rather than external actions.<sup>4</sup> Refined mental states are understandably difficult to convey through the visual arts.

Despite these challenges, one fruitful avenue for exploring the topic of yoga in early art might be found in the concept of *tapas*, or inner heat. As described in both yoga manuals and the late Vedic literary tradition, *tapas* is the byproduct of intense physical and mental austerities that manifests as a reserve of potent, purifying, spiritual energy, and as literal heat. One of the most frequently encountered techniques for producing *tapas*, and the purification it engenders, involves undertaking periods of fasting. As early as the *Rig Veda* (1700–1000 BCE), the concepts of heat and hunger were already associated, and the

*Shatapatha Brahmana* (700–500 BCE) tied these concepts to self-purification while making it explicit that the “practice of *tapas* ... is when one abstains from food.”<sup>5</sup>

Such descriptions call to mind a well-known, though rare, emaciated form of the Buddha.<sup>6</sup> Such images have been produced sporadically throughout the history of Buddhism, showing up among the widespread Tantric Buddhist traditions of the Himalayas as well as in East and Southeast Asian contexts. However, it was in Gandhara, which now encompasses parts of northern Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan, that the earliest examples were produced. The *Head of the Fasting Buddha* (cat. 6a) is typical of these early works.

Most scholars have connected these skeletal images with a six-year period of fasting that took place prior to Prince Siddhartha Gautama’s attainment of Buddhahood.<sup>7</sup> After abandoning his privileged life at court, Gautama adopted the life of an ascetic and endured years of intense self-mortification alongside a group of like-minded hermits. During this time he surpassed his teachers in rigor and self-discipline, taking the intense traditional practices to self-punishing extremes. The *Maha Saccaka Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikaya* provides a visceral description, stating that:

*because I ate so little, my protruding backbone became like a string of balls ...*

*My gaunt ribs became like the crazy rafters on a tumbled down shed.*<sup>8</sup>

The passage culminates with the hauntingly poetic image of Gautama reaching for his stomach and feeling his spine beneath the sagging skin.

A diminutive ivory created for personal worship in eighth-century Kashmir (cat. 6b), portrays this period of self-mortification and its eventual conclusion. In three superbly carved vignettes, the sculptor represents Gautama’s early



6a *Head of the Fasting Buddha*

6b *Fasting Buddha*







experimentation with austerities (center), his despair at their futility (left), and his decision to accept a food offering that restores his robust body and sets him on the final path towards omniscience (right).

After attaining his enlightenment, the Buddha made the decision to share his teachings, and among the first to convert were the hermits alongside whom he had practiced asceticism. This moment of conversion appears to be the subject of a late second-century pedestal fragment from Gandhara (cat. 6c).<sup>9</sup> Two gaunt ascetics with matted hair look upward to the Buddha and hold their hands to their mouths, most likely indicating their decision to accept sustenance. Shaped by both his time as prince and an ascetic, the Buddha's Middle Way was unique in seeking to balance the ideal of nonattachment with legitimate bodily needs such as food, medicine, and clothing. By depicting the hermits breaking their fasts, the artist presents a visual indication of their resolution to adopt the Buddha's moderate path.

Similarly emaciated renunciants appear on a fifth-century terracotta panel from Harwan (cat. 6d). Their bony forms make a striking contrast to the hardy, bejeweled householders depicted in the upper register. This panel was part of a series that covered the lower walls of an enigmatic temple in Kashmir. The unusual nature of these decorations has led scholars to suggest that they may be linked to an important ascetic group known as the Ajivikas.<sup>10</sup>

The Ajivikas emerged as an influential school of thought prior to the third century BCE. Their importance is attested by a handful of royal inscriptions dating to the Mauryan dynasty (third century BCE) including inscriptions at Nagarjuni, near Barabar, which name them as the recipients of at least three of the rock-cut caves sponsored by King Dasharatha.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, no texts written by the Ajivikas remain. What we know

about them comes exclusively through the words of their rivals and should, therefore, be read with some caution. For instance, the Jains and Buddhists both characterize the Ajivikas as strict fatalists as well as practitioners of exceptionally intense austerities. Contemporary scholarship has pointed out the possible contradiction inherent in accepting both these claims, since self-mortification makes little sense if it can have no impact on one's predetermined destiny.<sup>12</sup>

Although the Ajivikas eventually died out, Buddhism continued to thrive and develop into new forms, including Tantra. Tantric practitioners redefined the role of yoga and *tapas* within Buddhism, but still identified meditative processes as central to transcendence. Today, these late traditions survive mostly outside of India. RDC

6c Base for a Seated Buddha with Figures of Ascetics

6d Tile with Impressed Figures of Emaciated Ascetics and Couples Behind Balconies

## Austerities

### 7A

#### *Vishvamitra Practices His Austerities*

Folio 61a from the *Freer Ramayana*

Mushfiq

India, sub-imperial Mughal, 1597–1605

Opaque watercolor, gold, and ink on paper,  
26.5 × 15.6 cm

Freer Gallery of Art, Gift of Charles Lang Freer,  
F1907.271.61<sup>1</sup>

### 7B

#### *Two Ascetics*

India, Himachal Pradesh, Mandi, 1725–50

Opaque watercolor on paper;

15.5 × 22.5 cm (page), 13 × 18 cm (painting)

Museum Rietberg Zürich, Gift of Barbara and  
Eberhard Fischer

### 7C

#### *Shiva and Parvati on Mount Kailash*

India, Rajasthan, Mewar, Udaipur, late 18th century

Opaque watercolor, gold, and tin alloy on paper,  
28.7 × 20.5 cm

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia  
Felton Bequest, 1980, AS242-1980<sup>2</sup>

From as early as the fifth century BCE, *shramana* renunciators meditated and mortified their bodies to produce a purifying heat (*tapas*) that engendered spiritual knowledge and power.<sup>3</sup> Later, the *Yoga Sutras* (second to fourth century CE) listed austerities (*tapas*) among the observances (*niyama*) that perfect the body, expand consciousness, and yield supernatural powers (*siddhis*).

The Hindu epics and *Puranas* (second century BCE to tenth century CE) tell about great sages like Vishvamitra undertaking austerities and celibacy to force the gods to grant them boons. Vishvamitra's status was raised to that of a divine sage.<sup>4</sup> So boundless was the potency generated by austerities that the gods went to inordinate lengths to derail accomplished seers from their penances. For example, in the Hindu epic the *Ramayana*, the deity Indra persuades Rambha, a celestial beauty, to seduce Vishvamitra in order to dissipate the power he had accumulated over millennia. In a sixteenth-century illustration from a Persian translation of the Sanskrit epic, Vishvamitra sits, his legs bound by a *yogapatta* (yoga strap), enduring the heat from a circle of flames (cat. 7a). As the sage recites mantras, Rambha approaches from the painting's lower left corner.<sup>5</sup> Vishvamitra easily rejects the divinely orchestrated temptations of the lush springtime day and the celestial seductress, but in anger (his innate weakness) furiously curses Rambha. Because losing one's equanimity, like losing one's seed, destroys the fruits of *tapas*, Vishvamitra is compelled to undergo another thousand years of "unparalleled and virtually impossible austerities" to become the greatest of sages.<sup>6</sup>

Many, but by no means all, yogic regimes adopted austerities as methods for breaking bonds with society, perfecting the body, and acquiring omniscience or supernatural powers (*siddhis*). A roughly painted image of an ash-smearing and talon-nailed yogi engaging

in austerities (cat. 7b) was produced in Mandi, a small kingdom in the Himalayan foothills, during the reign of Raja Siddh Sen (1684–1727), a Tantric practitioner who identified himself with Shiva.<sup>7</sup> The yogi's nakedness, as well as his ash and red-sindur body markings (the *tripundara tilak* of three horizontal lines), indicate that he is a Shaiva Sannyasi. With his legs crossed, back exceedingly arched, and fingers extended in a ritual gesture (*mudra*), the Sannyasi is immobilized, his body molded into a form that both enables and expresses his transaction with higher worlds.<sup>8</sup>

A roughly contemporaneous painting from Mewar (present-day Rajasthan) features a similar depiction of a Sannyasi (cat. 7c). His back arched over a large bolster, he is attended by a young disciple (*chela*) bearing a peacock-feather whisk (center right). The bolsters and the presence of *chelas* (who took care of their gurus' every need) suggest that the senior ascetics are *akash-munis* (sky-sages) whose austerity is prolonged staring at the sky. The two images suggest that the austerity, which emerged no later than the eighth century, was a fairly widespread Sannyasi practice some thousand years later.<sup>9</sup> A veritable compendium of austerities, this painting depicts a band of Sannyasis enduring the rigors of immobilization and inversion. To localize the sacred, it layers the lakeside palaces of Mewar's capital city Udaipur onto the Himalayan abode of Shiva.

Though rough in its realization, the painting is an important document that records one way in which *asanas* increased in number over time: it depicts ancient austerities that, by the sixteenth century, were categorized as *asanas* within yogic treatises. In the yellow vale at the painting's center, an ascetic hangs upside down from a tree in *tapkar asana* (the heat-producer's posture), which was first described in the Pali canon as the bat penance.<sup>10</sup> The fire beneath the inverted ascetic's head is either the



7b Two Ascetics

7c Shiva and  
Parvati on Mount  
Kailash



artist's literalization of heat production or a textually unattested variant on the posture. The *akash-muni* Sannyasi (described above) is echoed to his left by the renunciant seated on a tiger skin, who appears to be a *patal-muni* immobilized in a perpetually downward gaze. This logic of doubling may explain the self-decapitation, an unattested yogic austerity, of a second inverted ascetic embedded within a sequence of interrelated events in the upper register.<sup>11</sup> The sequence, which repeats key characters to signal successive events, begins on the left with the origin story of Ganesh's elephant head. While the goddess Parvati bathed (here, in a yellow courtyard), Shiva mistakenly beheaded their son Ganesh, who is represented, crumpled and bleeding, in front of the palace and then again in its gateway, restored to life with an elephant head. To the left of the palace are Shiva and Parvati, riding the bull Nandi, and the yogi suspended above a *linga-yoni* (the aniconic form of the divine couple) adorned with flower offerings. A moment later, and even further to the left, his head lies among the flowers. This doubling, the paired

beheadings, linked by their witness Nandi, provide a mythic dimension to the ascetic's offering. DD



## Meditation

### 8A

#### *Yoga Narasimha, Vishnu in His Man-Lion Avatar*

India, Tamil Nadu, ca. 1250  
Bronze, 55.2 cm  
The Cleveland Museum of Art,  
Gift of Dr. Norman Zaworski, 1973.187<sup>1</sup>

### 8B

#### *Hanuman as Yogi*

India, Kerala, Cochin, early 19th century  
Teak wood and color, 37.6 x 37 x 9.5 cm  
Victoria and Albert Museum, London, IS.2564E-1883<sup>2</sup>

### 8C

#### *The Goddess Bhadrakali Worshipped by the Sage Chyavana*

From a Tantric Devi series  
India, Pahari Hills, ca. 1660–70  
Opaque watercolor and gold on paper, 21.3 x 23.1 cm  
Freer Gallery of Art, F1997.8<sup>3</sup>

Meditation as a means to transcend the suffering of existence seems to have emerged in northern India around the fifth century BCE. In the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali (second to fourth century CE), it is key to stilling the fluctuations of the mind, which obscure pure consciousness and higher awareness.<sup>4</sup> Patanjali identifies three phases of meditation: the concerted fixing of the mind (*dharana*); effortlessly centered concentration (*dhyana*); and the transformative realization that the seer and the seen are one (*samadhi*).<sup>5</sup> With variations, such as focusing the mind on a deity as revealed by Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*, meditation became a pillar of most later yoga traditions.

South Asian artists often represented great sages, enlightened beings, and deities in the act of meditation to convey their spiritual attainment. The most ubiquitous signifiers of meditation, visible in sculptures and paintings throughout this catalogue, are the symmetrical, motionless postures of sitting in *padmasana* or standing with upright spine and arms extended downward. Here, two sculpted images reveal how the iconography of the *yogapatta* (yoga strap) was employed to convey the specifically yogic personae of Hindu gods with multiple identities.<sup>6</sup> The practice of meditating on a deity receives explicit attention in the discussion of *The Goddess Bhadrakali Worshipped by the Sage Chyavana*.

In one of his salvific interventions to restore order on Earth, Vishnu manifested as the half-lion and half-man Narasimha to protect the young devotee Prahlada from his murderous demon-father. The *Bhagavata Purana*, a canonical sacred text, relates that Narasimha then taught Prahlada *bhakti* yoga, the path of worshipful devotion.<sup>7</sup> From the ninth century onwards, South Indian sculptures often depict Narasimha seated with a *yogapatta*.<sup>8</sup> The iconographic type conveys that the divine man-lion is meditating; it may also signify that he is teaching *bhakti* yoga.

Energy flows fluidly through a brilliantly realized bronze Narasimha (cat. 8a), which was created in Tamil Nadu during the Chola dynasty. From the stable base of crossed legs held tautly by a *yogapatta*, the god's tapered waist rises smoothly toward broad shoulders. The Leonine ruff encircling Narasimha's neck and the mane curling down his shoulders seamlessly connect the powerful conical mass of his crowned head to the long diagonal of his frontal arms relaxed in meditation. Narasimha's two rear hands bear the flaming chakra disc and conch (now missing) of Vishnu; the large prongs on the base were made to support a separately cast aureole (*mandorla*).

Hanuman, the beloved monkey general of the Hindu epic the *Ramayana*, is most widely worshiped as an exemplary devotee of Rama. The simian god is also recognized as a great yogi (*mahayogi*) with extraordinary powers of healing.<sup>9</sup> These identities are not incompatible. We find, for example, that the *mahayogi* Hanuman is a divine exemplar for the Vaishnava renunciators known as Ramanandis, whose path combines hatha yoga with ardent devotion (*bhakti*) to Vishnu and his incarnation Rama (see cats. 19a–b). Indeed, for Ramanandis, Hanuman is equally an incarnation of Shiva and Rama's paramount devotee.<sup>10</sup>

A vigorously carved teak relief (cat. 8b) represents Hanuman meditating with a *yogapatta* around his knees and his arms and eyes raised adoringly. Its sculptor effectively contrasted the god's sturdy limbs with the laser-sharp folds of swirling garments so that Hanuman's body appears to thrust forcefully forward and upward. Conveying Hanuman's nature as both powerful yogi and ardent devotee, the panel once adorned the ceiling of a temple hall in Kerala.<sup>11</sup>

With pulsating intensity, *The Goddess Bhadrakali Worshipped by the Sage Chyavana* (cat. 8c) depicts the gentle form that the fierce goddess

8a *Yoga Narasimha, Vishnu in His Man-Lion Avatar*







assumed in response to the meditation of the sage.<sup>12</sup> On its left, the bearded Chyavana holds a strand of prayer beads that suggests he is reciting mantras (sacred syllables) as he gazes fixedly at the shimmering golden-skinned goddess. Bhadrakali, her lotus-eye tinged in red, wears a crown adorned with emeralds cut from the iridescent wings of beetles and holds the attributes of the god Vishnu—lotus, conch shell, mace, and discus—in her four hennaed hands. She sits on a bloated corpse that invokes her cremation ground haunt (see cat. 16).

Created for a Tantric practitioner (*sadhaka*) in northwest India during the seventeenth century, the painting is one from a series representing manifestations of the great goddess (Devi).<sup>13</sup> A *dhyana* verse, a description of Bhadrakali that guides ritual visualization to invoke

her presence, is inscribed on the painting's verso in *Takri* script.<sup>14</sup> In its totality, the folio thus makes the goddess visible in three ways: to the practitioner who recites the verse while meditating upon her form; to the sage Chyavana (within the painting); and to those who view the image today. DD



8c The Goddess  
Bhadrakali  
Worshipped by the  
Sage Chyavana

## Asana

9

Ten folios from the *Bahr al-hayat* (*Ocean of Life*)

India, Uttar Pradesh, Allahabad, 1600–1604  
Opaque watercolor on paper, 22.7 × 13.9 cm (folio)  
The Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin<sup>1</sup>

9A

Virasana (Persian, *sahajasana*)

13.3 × 7.8 cm (painting)  
In 16.10a

9B

Garbhasana (Persian, *gharbasana*)

10.6 × 7.8 cm (painting)  
In 16.18a

9C

Nauli Kriya (Persian, *niyuli*)

Attributed to Govardhan  
9.5 × 8 cm (painting)  
In 16.19a

9D

Headstand (Persian, *akucchan*)

9.6 × 7.8 cm (painting)  
In 16.20a

9E

Untitled (Persian, *nashbad*)

13.5 × 7.6 cm (painting)  
In 16.21b

9F

Untitled (Persian, *sitali*)

12.6 × 7.8 cm (painting)  
In 16.22a

9G

Khechari Mudra (Persian, *khechari*)

10.6 × 8.5 cm (painting)  
In 16.24a

9H

Kumbhaka (Persian, *kunbhak*)

8 × 7.8 cm (painting)  
In 16.25a

9I

Sthamba (Persian, *thambasana*)

13.6 × 7.8 cm (painting)  
In 16.26b

9J

Untitled (Persian, *sunasana*)

11.5 × 7.7 cm (painting)  
In 16.27b

Note: The italicized words represent how the posture was rendered in the Persian text of the Chester Beatty Library *Bahr al-hayat*.

Yoga today is often identified with the practice of a broad range of bodily postures called *asanas*. This identification has been traced to the twentieth century, when new technologies of reproduction circulated both yoga systems and *asana* imagery across the globe.<sup>2</sup> However, the earliest known treatise to systematically illustrate yoga postures,<sup>3</sup> the *Bahr al-hayat* (*Ocean of Life*), dates to the turn of the seventeenth century. This essay examines the specific conditions for the production of this unprecedented treatise and considers its twenty-one *asanas*, which are almost all seated postures for meditation on various unconditioned forms of the absolute, within a broader historical trajectory of the development of *asanas*.

The Sanskrit word *asana* (“aa-suh-nuh”) is a noun meaning “seat” or “the act of sitting down” derived from the verbal root *ās*, which means “to sit” or “to remain as one is.” Until the end of the first millennium CE, when used in the context of yoga, *asana* referred to simple seated postures to be adopted for meditation. This is true for all formulations of yoga, including those of the classical tradition rooted in Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras* (circa 325–425 CE)<sup>4</sup> and those of the Tantric tradition, whose earliest extant *asana* teachings date to the sixth century.<sup>5</sup>

It is in the hatha method of yoga, which was codified in texts from the eleventh century onward, that the more complex, non-seated *asanas* that have become synonymous with yoga practice gain prominence. Two thirteenth-century texts, the earliest to teach *asana* as part of hatha techniques, proclaim that there are eighty-four *lakh* (8,400,000) *asanas*, but describe only two, both of which are seated postures.<sup>6</sup> The fifteenth-century *Light on Hatha* (*Hathapradipika*),<sup>7</sup> the best known Sanskrit text on hatha yoga and the first to be devoted solely to the subject, describes fifteen *asanas*, of which seven are non-seated positions

9g Khechari Mudra

for meditation. Some of its verses teach non-seated *asanas* found in earlier works. The peacock posture, *mayurasana*,<sup>8</sup> has the oldest heritage. Its description in the *Light on Hatha* is taken from a thirteenth- or fourteenth-century yoga manual composed in a Vaishnava milieu, i.e., among followers of the Hindu god Vishnu,<sup>9</sup> but can be traced back through other Vaishnava texts to one from approximately the ninth century.<sup>10</sup>

The *Light on Hatha*'s description of the cock posture, *kukkutasana*,<sup>11</sup> also can be traced to earlier Vaishnava works.<sup>12</sup> The practices of hatha yoga are often said to have originated among Tantric Shaivas, i.e., followers of Shiva, but these early references to non-seated *asanas* in Vaishnava works suggest different origins for at least some hatha yogic techniques; the absence of non-seated *asanas* in Shaiva works prior to the *Light on Hatha* further increases the likelihood of them having originated outside of Tantric milieus. In a circa thirteenth-century collection of teachings ascribed to the Kaula Tantric guru Matsyendra,<sup>13</sup> one of the first gurus of the Nath order of yogis, both the peacock and cock are included among the *asanas* of yoga, but they are seated positions quite different from the non-seated postures of the same name found in the Vaishnava tradition.

One of the *asanas* taught in the *Light on Hatha* is the corpse pose, *shavasana*, classed in an earlier work as one of the secret techniques of *laya* yoga, the visualization-based "yoga of dissolution" taught by Shiva.<sup>14</sup> This is an early example of a phenomenon that becomes more and more common, namely the classification as *asanas* of physical practices that did not originate as such. Thus some of the techniques called *mudras* taught in the earliest texts of hatha yoga, such as *mahamudra* (the great seal) and *viparitarani* (the inverter), become *asanas* in later works, with the latter, in which the body is inverted, becoming either *sarvangasana*,



چون طالبی خواهد که باین شغل مشغولی نماید باید که جلسه کربه آسن  
 پیش گیرد کربه آسن آنرا گویند که جنا بجه بجه در شکم ما در می باشد در باید  
 یای جیب بر پای است نهاده دوسرین بر دو پای داشته و سر

ووزانو برداشته و دو آرنج بر دو تنی گاه نهاده و دو دست  
 بر دو گوش کرده ناف را بر پشت رساند از ناف رقی که بید  
 آنرا از بطن میگویند عبارتند از آن است در حسی که کنند





9a Virasana



9d Headstand



9e Untitled



9f Untitled



خواهد که ذکر کنبهک کند با دبی که بر اعضا شده است از پورک بر  
 بام الدماغ بر دقوت نکند و اگر نه اعضا شکسته شوند چون بام الدماغ بر  
 چشم را و از دار و زباز اسبکم حفشتان نفس از راه بینی آسسته آسسته  
 بر آمدن دهد باز غسل بپورک را از سر آغاز کند چون درون کشند  
 گویند چون برون بر آرد کنبهک نامند چون بگذارد در یکجک خوانند

و کسب جاسن برای قوت بینی و رکھا کردن و بشت و مضم  
 طعام و خشک شدن نهان که بند بای نزن است این جلسه نکا ببرد  
 که پای راست با ساق بر آن چپ نهد و پای چپ با ساق بر آن راست  
 نهد نبرقی و دست یکی تا آکه عادت پذیر کرد و در آغاز مشکل است

9h Kumbhaka

و انگشتان پای است بر آرنج راست و انگشتان پا چپ  
 بر آرنج چپ نهاده ذکر گوید هر که درین مقام رسد صاحب طیر گردد  
 و ایز جمله رو جانان شود **مجموعه در معرفت**

در معرفت ایجاد آنگاه و انواع دم و مامیت آن و کیفیت جلتو

9j Untitled

the shoulder stand, or *shirasasana*, the headstand. Similarly, the ancient ascetic technique of suspending oneself upside down from a tree, the “bat-penance” dismissed by the Buddha,<sup>15</sup> resurfaces as “the ascetic’s *asana*” (*tapkar asana*) in an eighteenth-century Braj Bhasha yoga manual.<sup>16</sup> (The *tapkar asana* is illustrated in cats. 7c and 20c.) As part of this same process, gymnastic exercises from a variety of traditions, both Indian and foreign, have been included under the *asana* rubric over the course of the twentieth century.<sup>17</sup>

The purpose of the earliest seated *asanas* was to provide a steady and comfortable position for meditation.<sup>18</sup> In the *Light on Hatha* and later texts, *asana*’s primary purpose is to make the body supple and strong.<sup>19</sup> This is in keeping with the generally positive attitude toward the body evinced by such works, but the practice of difficult physical postures has also long been associated with ascetic cultivators of *tapas*—power from austerity. In India’s greatest epic, the *Mahabharata* (200 BCE–300 CE), the same ascetics who practice yoga often also cultivate *tapas*, with the techniques of the latter taking the form of various self-mortifications, including the holding of difficult postures, such as inversions,<sup>20</sup> for long periods. These physical techniques are ascribed to yoga-practicing ascetics in a wide variety of subsequent texts, in particular the Puranas, and they also occur regularly in foreign descriptions of the practices of Indian ascetics, from that of Alexander’s companion Onesicritus<sup>21</sup> to medieval travelers’ tales<sup>22</sup> to early modern reports.<sup>23</sup> It is likely to be from such older ascetic traditions that non-seated *asanas* first became part of yoga practice.<sup>24</sup>

With *asana* becoming the repository of all yogic techniques that involve physical postures, the compilers of texts on yoga started to describe them in large numbers. The seventeenth-century Sanskrit *String of Jewels of Hatha*

(*Hatharatnavali*) is the earliest text to name eighty-four *asanas*, the number that came to represent their totality, or to be written in Sanskrit, the classical language of Hindu text learning.<sup>25</sup> A contemporaneous or perhaps slightly earlier text, the *Wish-Fulfilling Gem of Yoga (Yogachintamani)*, describes thirty-five *asanas* in its published edition. A manuscript of the same text dated 1660 lists 110 *asanas* and describes fifty-five. It is unlikely that any of these texts were illustrated. The Persian *Bahr al-hayat*, which not only describes but also depicts twenty-one yogis performing seated as well as more complex *asanas*, is one of several texts on yogic subjects commissioned by Prince Salim, the future Mughal Emperor Jahangir (reigned 1605–27). Multiple cross-cultural encounters shaped the production of the illustrated manuscript. The text itself was composed around 1550 in Gujarat by the prominent Sufi Shaykh Muhammad Ghawth Gwaliyari (died 1563). His purpose was to teach his disciples hatha practices compatible with Sufi goals of spiritual transformation.<sup>26</sup> Ghawth based his Persian treatise on an earlier Arabic translation of passages from a variety of Sanskrit texts, clarifying its ambiguities and increasing the number of *asanas* from six to twenty-one.<sup>27</sup> The Sufi must have consulted with living yogis, perhaps Nathis, because none of the *asanas* in the *Bahr al-hayat* are taught in any earlier Hindu text, and their descriptions are much more detailed than those found in the *Wish-Fulfilling Gem of Yoga* manuscript.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, such detailed teachings on *asana* are not found in any Hindu texts, whose terse descriptions invariably require the elucidation of a teacher.

By 1600, some fifty years after its composition, Ghawth’s treatise could have come to Prince Salim’s attention through a number of avenues: its prominence among Sufis, the prestige of its author, or—because Ghawth was a confidant of the first two Mughal emperors<sup>29</sup>—

through a copy already in the imperial library. A more significant question is why Salim chose to have the treatise recopied, illustrated, and bound. Born in 1569, Salim was raised in the ecumenical, intellectual milieu fostered by his father, Akbar (reigned 1556–1605), for whom the *Yoga Sutras*, the *Yoga Vasishtha*, and other Hindu texts had been translated or summarized. Salim’s establishment of a satellite court at Allahabad between 1600 and 1605 perhaps intensified the prince’s interest in yogic traditions. Allahabad was the Mughal name given to Prayag, an ancient city located at the sacred confluence of the Ganges and Yamuna Rivers. For yogis, it was (and remains) a gathering place of consummate importance.

Indeed, the illustrations attest direct contact between local yogis and the artists of Salim’s atelier. Lightly colored in translucent washes, they retain the directness of drawings made from living models. And although Mughal painters often copied motifs and figures from other Mughal or European artworks, many of the *Bahr al-hayat* folios represent intricate postures that have no precedent in earlier images.

In folio 19a, Govardhan, the artist responsible for the manuscript’s most accomplished images, depicted a seated yogi performing the Nauli *kriya* (or process) of isolating and revolving the stomach muscles like someone swiftly “weaving a garment” (cat. 9c). Before accompanying Salim to Allahabad, Govardhan had developed in Akbar’s imperial workshop a markedly naturalistic style through the study of European prints—a training that resurfaces in the adept’s frontal face, pensive expression, and softly tousled hair and beard, which were almost certainly based on a Christ figure. A small passage of shading, the roughly vertical oblong darkening on the left side of the yogi’s belly, suggests that Govardhan attempted to convey abdominal motion. Although subtle, it does not



appear in any of the artist's other images of bare-chested yogis.

A folio representing *garbhasana*, in which the body is folded into a fetal (Sanskrit, *garbha*) posture, more emphatically reveals direct observation (cat. 9b). Remarkable in its lucidity, the complex posture meticulously corresponds with the Persian text, which stipulates placing "the left foot on the right foot, holding the buttocks on both feet, holding the head evenly between the two knees, placing both elbows under the ribs, putting the hands over the ears, [and] bringing the navel toward the spine."<sup>30</sup> The artist, moreover, acutely observed and darkened the contours of the yogi's left knee, imparting volume to the leg, and clearly articulating its location in front of the more thinly outlined left hand and partially obscured torso.

Additional evidence for direct encounter lies in those illustrations that deviate significantly from the text. A folio (cat. 9g) depicts a yogi with his hands on his thighs in what appears to be *virasana*, but Ghawth describes a meditation in which the shins are crossed and the hands are clasped.<sup>31</sup> It appears that the yogi model substituted a practice he knew for one that was unfamiliar.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Ghawth generically identified his informants as yogis or meditators. But Salim's painters depicted eleven of the twenty-one yogis with attributes of the Nath sectarian order. Their horn whistles, cloth fillets, and canine companions demonstrate both the Mughal fascination with the appearance of the real and a marked Nath presence in Allahabad.

The illustrated *Bahr al-hayat* thus bears the traces of two encounters with yogis, the first in Gujarat circa 1550 and the second in Allahabad, 1602–4. Both were complex acts of translation across sectarian and courtly as well as textual, oral, and visual traditions. In this regard, we might note that Salim's *Bahr al-hayat*, with its plainly composed half-page illustrations on unpolished paper, is far

simpler than many contemporaneous Allahabad manuscripts. For example, the lavishly illustrated philosophical narrative the *Yoga Vasista* (cat. 13) features richly colored and full-page paintings with multiple figures in complex landscapes. Based on Mughal manuscript hierarchies firmly established by 1600, art historians might surmise that the relative expediency of the *Bahr*'s production is evidence of Salim's preference for a text that explicates Vedanta philosophy over that of a practical treatise.<sup>33</sup> It may be more productive, however, to consider the manuscript's utilitarian design as evidence of its classification within the scientific genre.<sup>34</sup> Each illustrated folio contains a concise and faithfully descriptive image bordered, at top and bottom, by a portion of Ghawth's didactic text. The adjacency of text and image suggests that the purpose of the commission—its translation of somatic practices from the realm of the esoteric and sectarian into the arena of the visual and courtly—was to elucidate and edify.

Two later copies of the illustrated *Bahr al-hayat* manuscript were produced. But although long lists of complex *asanas* were common in texts on yoga from the seventeenth century onward, the next significant development in visualizing them was not until the early nineteenth century. This period saw the painting of eighty-four *siddhas* or adepts in different *asanas* on the walls of the Mahamandir temple in Jodhpur and the creation of illustrated manuscripts of the *Jogapradipika* (a Braj Bhasha reinterpretation of the *Light on Hatha* that teaches eighty-four *asanas*) and *Sritattvanidhi* (a Sanskrit work from Mysore that teaches 122 *asanas*).

Over the course of the twentieth century, as yoga came increasingly to be identified with *asana*, the notion of a group of eighty-four or more complex *asanas* became widely accepted. Twentieth-century yoga manuals accordingly teach—and include illustrations of—large numbers of *asanas*. Perhaps

the most influential of all, B. K. S. Iyengar's *Light on Yoga* describes more than 200 postures. Most are intended to bring physical benefits, although links are maintained to the esoteric aims of the practices from which some of these *asanas* developed. In this respect they are more in the tradition of the difficult postures of *tapas*-practicing yogis than those of the *Bahr al-hayat* and Tantric and classical formulations of yoga, whose *asanas* provide a foundation for contemplative practices. JM and DD