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XXIII. *Observations on the Sculptures in the Cave Temples of Ellora.*—By
Captain ROBERT MELVILLE GRINDLAY, M.R.A.S.

Read January 16, 1830.

IN presenting to the Royal Asiatic Society the four accompanying representations of the Ellora Sculptures, in continuation of those which I had the honour of submitting last session, I have to regret that, from the very scanty and imperfect intelligence procurable on the spot, I am unable to attach to some of them any descriptive notice that would be at all satisfactory.

To those better acquainted with Hindu mythology I leave the task of assigning to each groupe and figure its appropriate legend: my principal object being to draw the attention of the Society to these interesting specimens of an art, which must have attained a much greater degree of perfection than has been generally believed to be the case in any period of the history of India.

Without presuming to ascribe to Hindu sculpture the classical purity and elegant proportions of the Grecian chisel, it may not be too much to assert that it displays considerable grandeur of design and intensesness of expression. The muscular powers being less developed in an Indian climate, the Hindu sculptor appears to have resorted to exaggeration to give that energy, which his imagination suggested, but of which he saw no living models; hence all the points of beauty in the human form are overcharged, and the limbs are multiplied to express various attributes and supernatural powers.

In the fine forms of northern and western Hindustan we often see an approximation to the Belvidere Apollo; but the muscular energy of the celebrated Torso, or the Farnesian Hercules, is rarely, if ever, to be met with in any part of India which I have visited.

The encouragement and protection which sculpture and painting have in all ages and countries received from religion, have also been, in some degree, the sources of many of the absurdities which those arts occasionally display: hence the many-armed and many-headed personages of the Hindu

Olympus, and the no less incongruous compositions of even the Augustan age of Italian art. Raphael, Michael Angelo, and Guido, did violence to their own taste and judgment, when, in obedience to the commands of their patrons, they represented miracles and legendary tales, which set nature and common sense alike at defiance.

A state of tranquillity and relative liberty appears at all times to have been favourable to the cultivation and perfection of arts and sciences. The acknowledged superiority of the sculpture in the cave temples of Ellora, and the obscurity which has hitherto enveloped the history of those stupendous and magnificent monuments of labour and ingenuity, may therefore equally afford a rational ground for ascribing to them a very remote antiquity; because, from their magnitude and extent, as well as from their elaborate perfection, they are more likely to have been the production of a powerful and refined people in a state of peace and prosperity, than a place of refuge of a proscribed and persecuted sect.

The architectural character of these excavations affords a powerful corroboration of this hypothesis; for they are evidently not the rude and early effort of a people emerging from a state of barbarism, but imitations of a style of building matured and refined by ages of practice and experience.

The superior execution observable in the remains of sculpture and architecture throughout India appears to be in proportion to their antiquity: the more rude, though not less stupendous excavations at Karli near Poonah, in the islands of Salsette and Elephanta, and in other parts of the coast, bear a similar relation to their respective distances from the seat of government, and, consequently, from the source of art and refinement which was to be found alone in the interior. In the plate No. 5, now presented to the Society, the upper compartment represents Maha Deva and his consort Parvati playing at *shatrinji* or chess, surrounded by their attendants; whilst a *dyte*, or evil spirit (of discord), is sitting by, exciting the divinities to a dispute which terminated in a fatal quarrel and separation. The inhabitants of the Hindu Olympus, alarmed at the terrible consequences of this feud, implored the intercession of Brahma, who called in the aid of Kama Deva the god of love.

This divinity, who is usually represented as a beautiful youth armed with a bow of sugar-cane, or flowers, with a string of bees, attempts to touch the heart of Maha Deva with one of his arrows tipped with a flower of a stimulant property: the enraged deity reduces the audacious boy to ashes, with a

glance from his central eye ; but the repentant wife having, under the disguise of a wood nymph, won the affections of her lord, is reunited to him : and Kama Deva, according to the fable, is restored, by transmigration, in the form of a son of Krishna.

In this plate the attitudes of the two deities are remarkable for their ease, correctly representing the Indian mode of sitting in the present day. The dice appear to be just thrown ; and the hands of the divinities are held up in the attitude of reproof and expostulation : whilst the demon of discord sits in a common attitude of old men, with an expression evidently exulting in the mischief he has occasioned.

The three female attendants behind Parvati are occupied in their respective offices of dressing her hair and fanning her, and one has the fragment of a chowrie, or bunch of feathers, to beat off the flies. The sturdy masculine figure of the mace-bearer is finely contrasted with the slender and graceful form of the young female attendant. Corresponding figures stand behind Maha Deva and complete the group, which displays considerable skill and harmony of composition, as well as individual beauty of form and grace of attitude.

The group below represents the Nunda, or Bull, sacred to Maha Deva, surrounded by a *gana*, or troop of grotesque characters, which appear to be the *gnomes* and *sprites* of Hindu poetical machinery, and are never failing accompaniments in all the ancient cave sculptures.* The variety and sportive character of their attitudes are as remarkable as the truth and spirit displayed in the form and action of the Bull which they surround.

No. 6 appears to be a marriage procession of the same elf-like beings, bearing some faint resemblance to that of Cupid and Psyche in the ancient Grecian sculptures.

No. 7 is supposed to represent the goddess Kali—under her several attributes of Maha, or the great, Bhadra, or the propitious, and Sivā as peculiarly the consort of Siva or Maha Deva. They are seated on a kind of throne, on which there are still the remains of something like a damask or flowered drapery ; their heads recline easily on cushions ; while their attitudes are as graceful as their forms are beautiful, though with the exception

* See Dr. Babington's account of the sculptures at Mahamalaipur, Vol. II, Part I. of the Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society.

before alluded to.* I must here repeat what I have already stated, that all the drawings were made on the spot, and this one in particular, with the most scrupulous attention to accuracy; and that, so far from magnifying, I fear I have not done justice to the singular grace and beauty of this striking group.

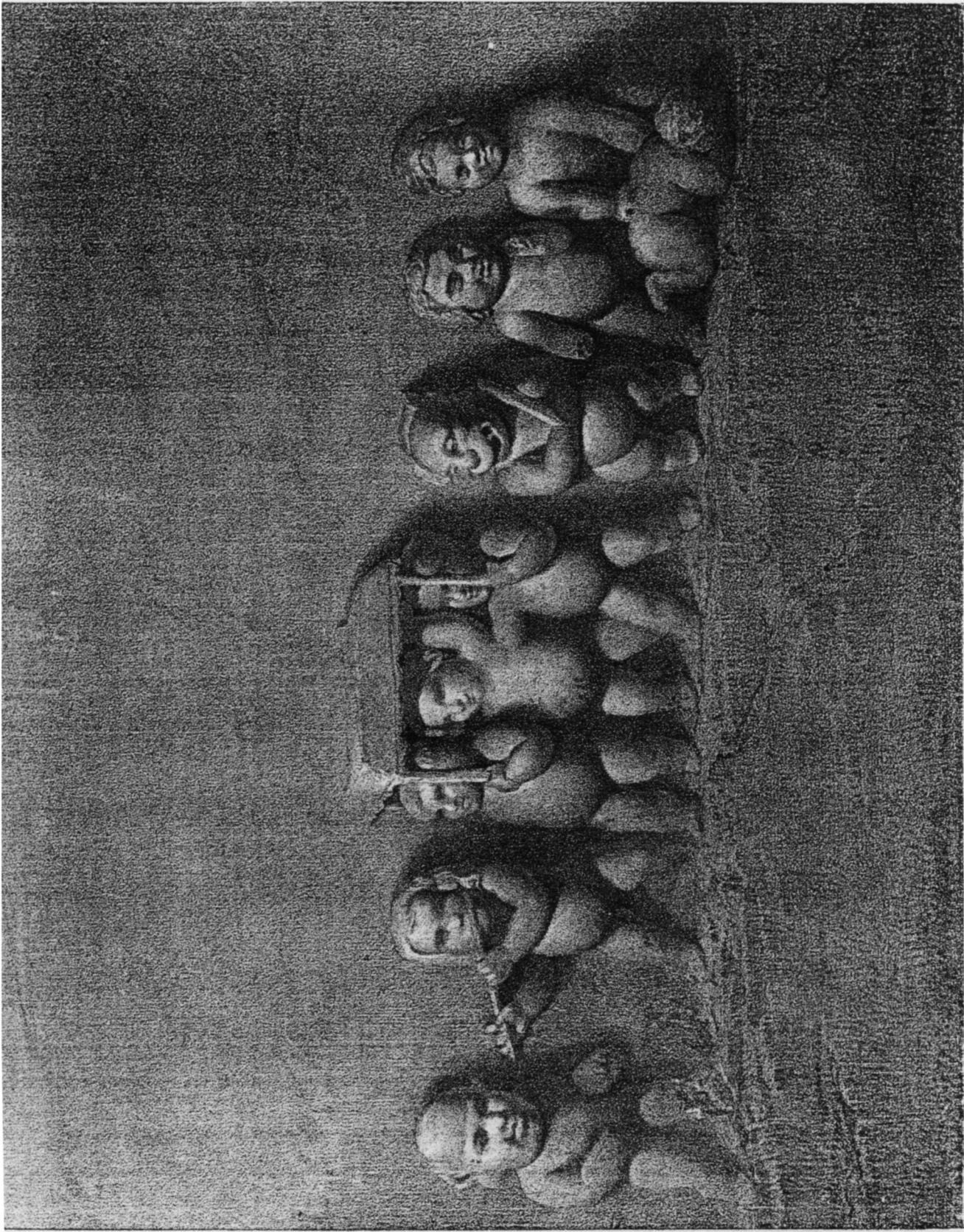
Of No. 8 I could procure no explanation whatever on the spot; nor have I succeeded in obtaining any satisfactory conjecture of its meaning.

The principal figure, which was much mutilated, appears to be drawing an inferior from the jaws of the *Makara*, a sea monster, surrounded by marine productions: and *Makara* being the Capricorn of the Hindu Zodiac, the group may possibly have some occult chronological signification, as Colonel Tod has suggested in his remarks upon my former communication on this subject.†

The architecture and sculptures of India present a wide and interesting field for research; and much valuable information on these subjects may be expected from the translation of the *Silpa Sástra*, which is said to contain the principles of them, and of other arts and sciences of the Hindus.

* Amongst the sculptures recently presented to the Royal Asiatic Society by Colonel Harriot, there are one or two fragments of very superior beauty, and approaching nearer to these sculptures at Ellora than any I have seen in England.

† Vol. II. Part I.



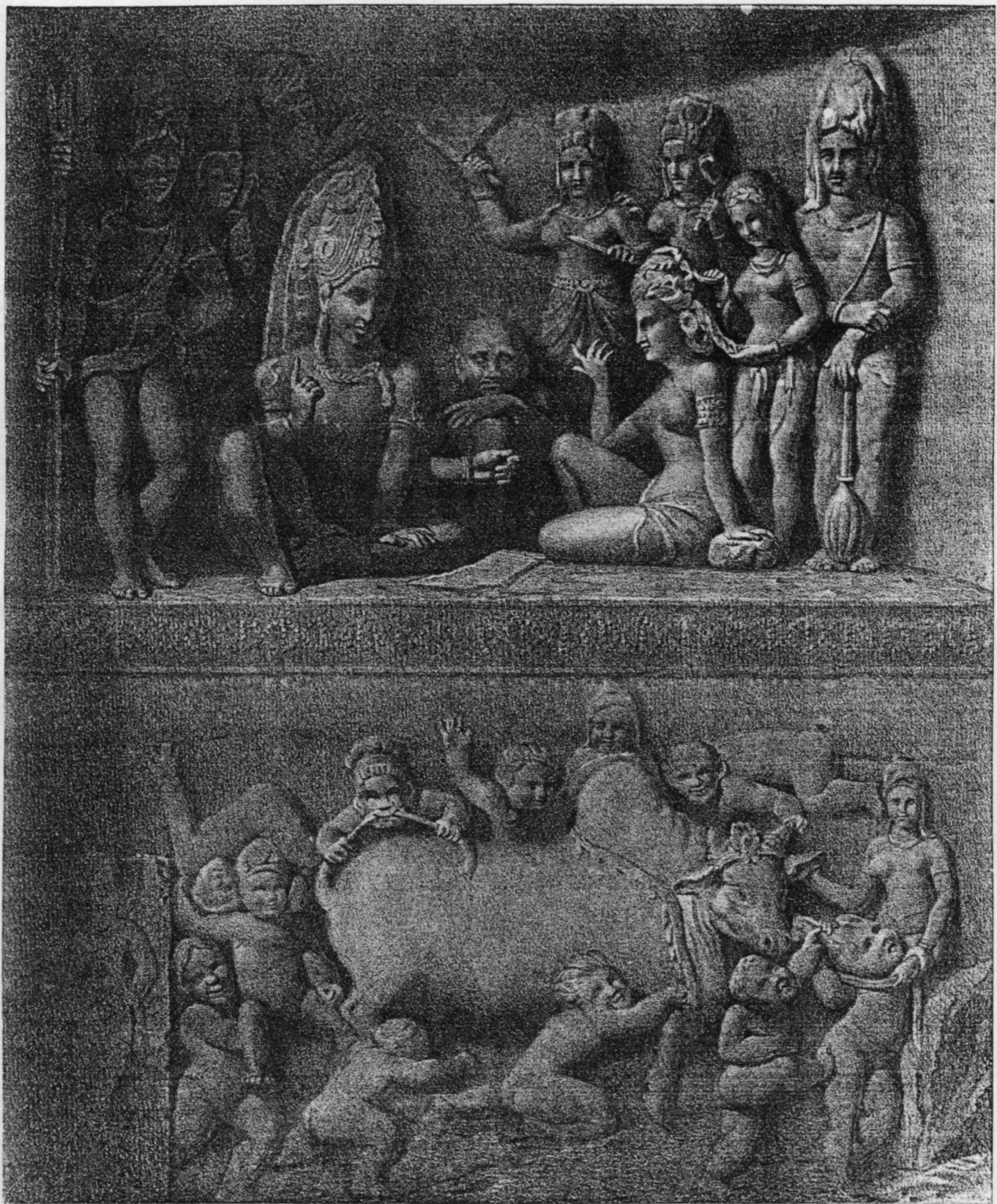
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PROCESSION OF GANA.

*Sculptured figures in one of the Cave Temples of Ellora.
Drawn by Capt. R. M. Brindley, 1813, for the Hon. the M^rs Stewart Mackenzie.*

Lithographed for the Royal Asiatic Society, by W. Dav. 77. Gate Str^t.

On Stone by I. Haghe

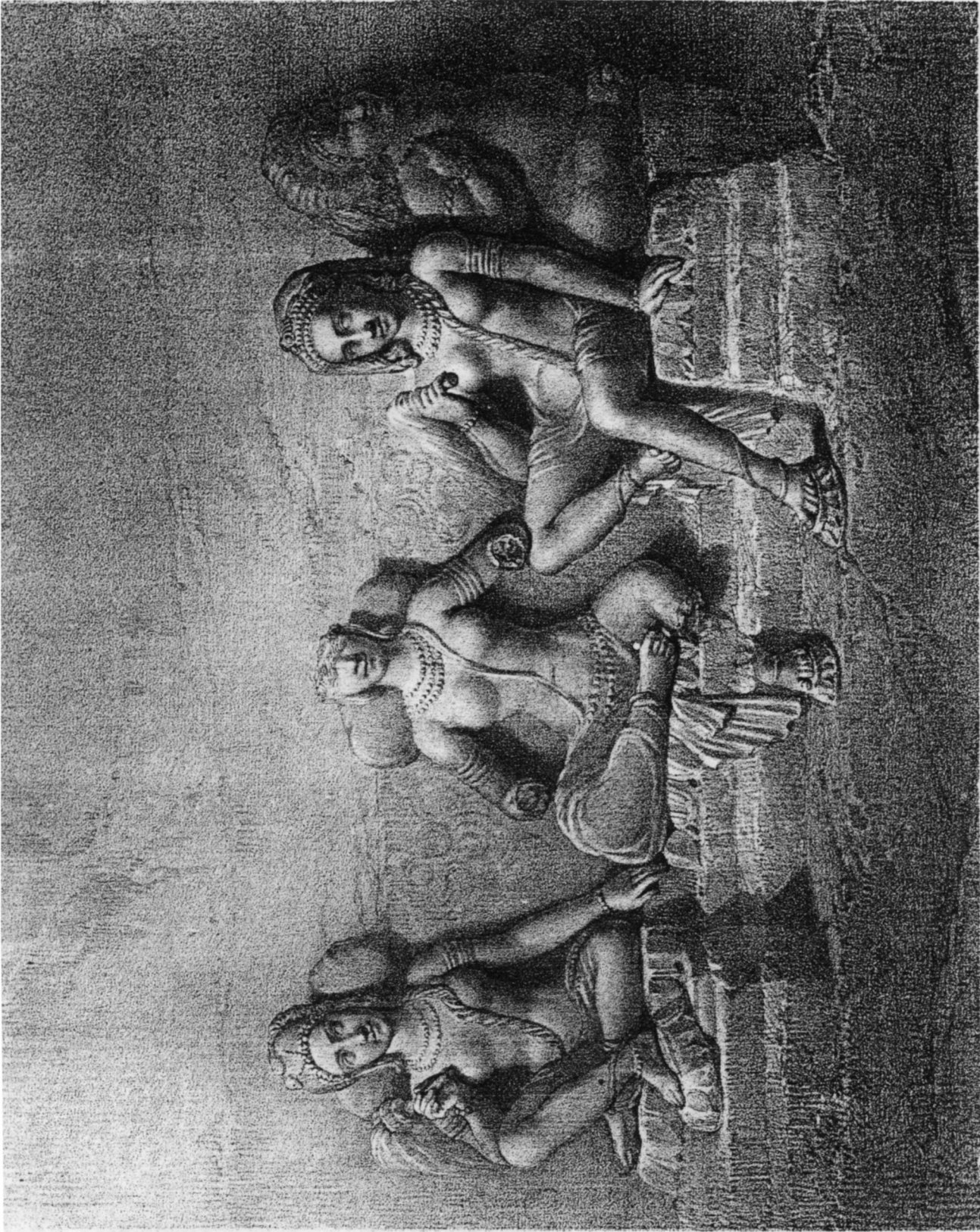


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on Stone by T. H. Hoyle

MAHADEO AND PARVATI, PLAYING AT THE GAME OF CHOSUR,
AND THE SACRED BULL ATTENDED BY GANA.

*Sculptured figures, in one of the Cave Temples of Ellora.
Drawn by Capt. Wm. Gindray for the Hon^{ble} M^{rs}. Stewart Mackenzie.
Lithographed for the Royal Asiatic Society by W. Day 17 (Gate 870)*



W. West. A. 17

MAHA KALI.

BHADRA KALI.

SHEOO KALI.

*Sculptured figures in one of the Cave Temples of Ellora.
Drawn by Capt. W. M. Rendall, 1819, for the Hon. G. H. Stewart, Mackenzie.*

Lithographed for the Royal Asiatic Society by W. Dent, 17, Abchurch Lane, 1847.

L. Hughes. Lithogr.



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L. Haghe lithog.

SCULPTURED FIGURES IN ONE OF THE CAVE TEMPLES OF ELLORA.

*Drawn by Capt^m R. M. Sindlay 1815 for the Hon^{ble} M^{rs} Stewart Mackenzie.
Lithographed for the Royal Asiatic Society, by W. Day 17 Gate Street.*