

## **The Art and Architecture of Kodandaramaswami Temple, Vontimitta of Kadapa District, Andhra Pradesh**

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### **Abstract**

Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh is known as the cradle for temple sculpture of medieval and late medieval periods. The author intended to study art and architecture of the most preserved temple for art and architecture named Kodandaramaswami temple is situated to the south west to the village Vontimitta of Siddavatham Taluk of Kadapa district in Andhra Pradesh. It is an outstanding example for art and architecture of Vijayanagara style. It is confined to discuss the art and architecture of the temple rather than the historicity which was discussed earlier. The temple, comprises good number of sculptures in form of composite column sculptures, carvings of high relief and bas reliefs of vaishnavite gods and goddesses in sandstone as the towers and pillars. The Gopura is one of the most the remarkable architectural form of the Vijayanagara times which owed its origin from later Chola temple architecture. Kalyana mandapa is one of the most important feature introduced by Vijayanagara architects. The continuous narration is perfectly utilized to present the tiny carvings on the adhisthana. The temple is adopted by Titumala Tirupati Devasthanam, and recognized by the Govt, of Andhra Pradesh on par with Bhadrachalam after the bifurcation of the state, celebrating Srirama Navami deliberately.

**KEYWORDS:** Sandhara devakosthas kapotabhadra pushpapotika  
ithyphallic kullayi

The famous Kodandaramaswami temple is situated to the south west to the village Vontimitta of Siddavatham Taluk of Kadapa district in Andhra Pradesh. It is an outstanding example for art and architecture of Vijayanagara style. It is confined to discuss the art and architecture of the temple rather than the historicity which was discussed earlier. In this temple, we find good number of sculptures in form of composite column sculptures, carvings of high relief and bas reliefs of vaishnavite gods and goddesses in sandstone as the towers and pillars at Ranga mandapa, pilasters of Maha mandapa, in the sanctum, Kalyana mandapa<sup>1</sup> and on vimanas, the freezes of sculptures on the towers and some were made in plaster on gopura and Vimana of the temple.

### **The Art and Architecture of the Temple:**

The temple facing east surrounded by prakaras pierced by gopura or entrance towers on the east, north and south. It has three gopuras as gateways. They are East, south and north prakara walls. A pillared cloister abutting the prakara outside the temple form southern to northern prakara and gopuras. The sandhara temple<sup>2</sup> consists an open ranga mandapa, mukha mandapa, antarala, garbhagriha. The pradakshinapada is provided in antarala, and garbhagriha parts.

The Gopura is one of the most remarkable architectural form of the Vijayanagara times which owed its origin from later Chola temple architecture as Vijayanagara architects adopted the architectural forms from Tamil country instead of the Hoysala and Kakatiya style, it was a sudden break in the style of temple architecture in the fourteenth century which will be reflected here also.

As usually the Vijayanagara style of this Gopuras stands on three sides of the prakara. The eastern side gopura is largest and impressive. according to architectural principles, the largest gopura would be considered as the main entrance. It is provided with an ordinary flight of steps. Panchatala (five storied) gopura has stone built aditala and sikhara is built of brick and stucco. The upapitha is built in kapotabhadra. The kapota is decorated with nasikas. Kapothabhandha type of adhisthana (basement) and vedi are short. The pada is relieved with type of brahmakanta type pilasters has kumbhapanjaras. The pilasters have pushpapotika capitals. All the gopuras on the north and south are akin to the east gopura. **(Fig. 1)**

The east gopura have five storied gopura displays a stone basement that elaborately, intricately sculpted. The Adhisthana is treated as an independent storey with a magnificently carved niches capped with salas. It is full of carvings and freezes of sculptures which included narrative bas reliefs rendered very meticulously. We may observe the minute details in carvings in high relief works on small panels in the friezes, these reflects the skills of the Vijayanagar sculptor. They are, the marriage scene of "Rama and Sita" and "Rama killing Vali" are prominent and other gods and demi gods related Ramayana theme. The relief of "Rama killing Vali" cannot be seen as one unit since the supporting Iron shaft arranged is covering the relief which was arranged merely to support the gopura.

**(fig. no 2)** In fig. 2, we notice the a beautiful carving in continuous narration of wedding ceremony of Rama and Sita. This is approximately one foot in height and two feet in length. The story could be read from right to left. It depicts three scenes in single panel without demarcations. In scene one, extreme right we may notice Lord Rama knotting the holy thread (mangalasutra) in the neck of Sita. The second scene Rama pouring sacred rice, a mixture of rice and turmeric powder (talambralu) on the head of Sita. And third scene, Janaka assisting his daughter Sita who stood on the stool as Sita is shorter than Rama, to pour sacred rice (talambralu) on the head of Rama in return. The brother of King Janaka, Kushadwaja was portrayed in the extreme right of the panel. The sculptor cleverly unfolded the drama through that Janaka is assisting his daughter while poring the talambralu by arranging stool to match the height of Rama. Another relief carved on the inside of the left side to eastern tower (gopura). It was inserted in a freeze. The two animals bull and elephant having common head. The spacial organization ability of the sculptor while carving is remarkably noticed here and infused the symbolism. **Fig. 3** When we close the right side ear with our hand, it appears like bull. When we hide the left side ear of the animal, a clear cut image of an elephant can be seen. Opposite to that, we may notice another prominent bas relief depicts Rama aiming arrow to kill Vali, behind by the tree while Vali and Sugriva were fighting. The posture of god Rama is quite interesting that his left foot seems resting on the Lakshmana's foot. The archeological assistant of the temple has tried to interpret his own version. But the being an artist, I should say for the technical reasons artist never left the empty space between the feet of Rama and Lakshmana, since the it is tiny gap of less than 5 mm length

approximately which is difficult to carve on sand stone but also to unfold the continuity of the narration.

The remaining towers (gopuras) at north and south are not much decorated and seems the carving left unfinished. But we may notice the Ganga –Yamuna sculptures of nearly four feet in height, carved on the door jambs of the all the three gopuras. **(fig .4)** Ganga sculpture carved on right side of the eastern door jamb, she was carved on standing posture on her vehicle crocodile (makara) and standing with the support of circular floral design raised for the mouth of crocodile( makara). According to Hindu iconographic text, makara is vahana of Ganga and tortoise is vehicle of Yamuna<sup>3</sup>. Where is Yamuna sculpture is damaged on its right part, a big and lengthy flake of the stone of door jamb is peeled off. According to iconographic texts, Yamuna should be represented on tortoise, but the same is also carved on crocodile. The Ganga-Yamuna sculptures on the North and South gopuras are also lost its details due to the temperament of the sandstone ravaged in the course of time. Authors like G.Kamlakar expressed these figure as salabhanjika stands at the base of door jamb which is treated with latapatra in circular motion<sup>4</sup>. But I consider it as Ganga -Yamuna sculptures as mentioned in the texts of Shilpasasthra and Manasara . The ranga mandapa has balustrades on the either sides of south and North of the temple on which is yali element is carved, constructed to the level of adhisthana. **(fig.5)**

The mandapas are characterized by the fundamental Vijayanagara gift of fantasy. The South Indian religious art is rich in pillar designs. During the Chola time it was not paid that much attention but in Vijayanagara architects excelled in pillar designs, became an object of beauty.

The Ranga mandapa is an open hall supported by six rows of pillars, consisting of total twenty eight pillars total number. It has a small extension or projection towards east and opposite to dwajastamba, balipitham, eastern gate, consisting a single row of four pillars. Of the six rows of ranga mandapa pillars, the outer most pillars consists (north and south ) six pillars. The immediate next rows(north and South) consist of five pillars from the central ankana of ranga mandapa.

The pillars are three types. Chitrakhanda type has three square parts of the shaft over a base altered with polygonal parts followed by lasuna, tadi, khumba, padma , phalaka, virakantha and pushpapotika. The second type is basically is same as above but with an addition of standing lady on a seated lion on the outer face of the shaft. The third type is an ordinary pillar with gaja simha vyali rider and this is employed in inner rows. All the pillars have evolved pushpapotika capitals. All the pillars are profusely carved with varying subjects related to vaishnavism. The carving of the outer row pillars on the south include the figures of Sridevi , Bhudevi, Vishnu, lady with vinjamara, dancing Balakrishna, fourhanded Vishnu in standing posture, yoga Narasimha, rishis, vatapathrasai, female dancers, garuda in anjali mudra, Kodandarama , Vaishnavi ,Govardhana Krishna, Hanuman and vyali figures etc. **(fig 5)** The carving on the northern outer of pillars consist of Kodandarama, Hanuman ,Balakrishna, Narasimha killing Hranyakasipu, seated Narasimha with his consort, Kurmavata Vishnu, garuda in anjali mudra, fourhanded Vishnu in standing position, Matsyavata Vishnu, Venugopala , Kaliyamardhana Krishna, devotees and dancers, vyalis pictures etc.

The second row of pillars of southern side has carvings of Balakrishna, four handed Vishnu in seated posture, seated Narasimha , Kodandarama, lakshmana in anjali mudra, Vishnu in standing posture, Kodandarama , Lakshmana in anjali mudra, four handed Vishnu in standing posture, garuda in anjali mudra , Yoga Narasimha, Ganesha in seated postures, vyalas, sages, lady musicians, geometric motifs and ratichitra etc. we find a sculpture form Ramayana.

The second row pillars of northern side consists of the carvings of bhittisthamba motif (the projected pillar on the wall portion of the temple) with Kumbhapanjara, Bhudevi, Narasimha in seated postures four handed Vishnu in standing posture, Balakrishna as Vatapathrasai lying on the banyan leaf , Kaliyamardina Krishna, lady with vinjamera, Kodandarama , Vishnu seated with his consorts, rishis, vyali , dancers etc. (fig 6). The inner rows of pillars having Balakrishna, Yoga Narasimha, Sridevi in thribhanga position, Hanuman, Vishnu in seated position with shankhu and chakra, vyalas and salabhanjika etc.

Four pillars of the inner rows forming the central ankana support the raised portion of the mandapas' architrave with huge brackets which are constructed by the interlocking system. The brackets have the carvings of bhraputras, vyala riders, horse riders etc. In some instances vyala figures are carved instead of bhraputras. The pushpapotika are highly drooping. The top portions of the brackets carry the latapatra and bhekihairava seems supporting the ceiling. The architrave has panel in the niche frames and carry the figures Gopalakrishna , Anantasayana Vishnu, Rama, Lakshmana and Sita sages and devotees. In the centre of the ceiling a lotus is surrounded by four concentric circles is inset.

The mythical and realistic animals attain the prominence in the sculptural decoration of mid sixteenth century. Where they served as most important points and central isles of porches, mandapas and corridors. (fig 7)The leaping animals define the entrances and peripherals of internal isles and halls. Sometimes they are doubled , frequently even trilled at corners. The most common of these mythical animals is known to us is Yali an ithyphallic beast with lion like body , mane, claws, and curling tail<sup>5</sup>. The head has protruding horns, bulging eyes, pointed teeth, a long elephant like snout, sometimes hangs down in long curl. There is another imaginative creature that adorns the temple columns is the ' Makara" a crocodile like head an open mouth spouting an aquatic foliation. The leaping horses are richly adorned as if are ready for war. All the animals are fiercely, vigorous in postures rearing up on their hind legs. Most of these are accompanied by diminutive warriors in the position of brandishing swords and appears riding into battle. There are called almost in three dimensions, partly free of the pier to which they are attached exuberant scroll work. Adorns the flanks of the animals while foliation hangs in the sculptured masses form the chest. The mounted yali with stalks of foliations issuing open mouths or elephant like snouts , and also appears in the makara with upturned positioned. They seems to leaning to invade the central space

The doorway of mukha mandapa is of Chatursakha variety. sakhas are carved with padmapatra, latha, stamba with kumbapanjara motifs. The stamba have figures of Ganga Yamuna over the shaft. At the base of the sakha, vaishnavite Dwarapalakas figures of Jaya Vijaya were carved. The doorway is flanked by the devakosthas<sup>6</sup>, which are empty.

The deep wall recesses here are flanked by Khumba panjaras. A large variety of vaishnavite themes are sculpted on to the blocks on the either sides of passage way entrances and elsewhere on the stone basement. The pilasters of the central passageway are treated with tires of architectural facades. The five storeyed tower capped by sala roof seems as it is renovated many times. The central projections at each level have additional pilastered niches flanking openings in the middle. It is mentioned that the temple at Tadipathri and Ramanuja temple at Hampi has the same rich carvings are exception of this period because their richly carved stone basements.

The mukha mandapa, antarala, girbhagriha are raise on an upapitha and adhithana. Its moldings consists of upana, jagathi, adhopadma, kumuda, kantha, galapada, urdhvapadma, kapota(projection beyond the principal beam to throw of water from the terrace) and vedika (railing basement). The moldings of Ranga mandapa consists upana, jagathi kampa, large padma with unturned petals, smaller padma and kampa, vritta kumuda with a median band, padma, galapada, kapota. The jagathi and large padma moldings are connected at intervals with nasikas. The kapota molding is decorated with nasikas.

The mukha mandapa is decorated with bhittisthambas and devakosthas (Niche on the temple walls or shrine motif). The Bhittisthambas are grouped into two and four punctuated the wall. Two shallow devakosthas each on south and north are inserted between the pilasters. On the east one devakostha flanks the doorway. All the devakosthas have salasikhara as pediments. The bhittisthamba has in the upper portion , tadi, padma, and phalaka. These are polygonal in section. Two armed pushpapotika tops the pilasters.

Mukha mandapa has four central pillars and bhittisthambas (cloister pillars) in corresponding position. These pillars are chitrakhanda variety of having base with three cubical parts alternating with polygonal parts. Bracket capitals are of pushpapotika variety. The cube portion of pillars are carved with figures of varying subjects. The north east pillars are carved with figures of Vishnu in seated postures, fourhanded Vishnu in standing posture, kaliyamardhnakrishna and vyali etc. the north –west pillars are carved with figures of vanaras,Devi, women devotees, , Kodandarama, Lakshmana, bhekihairava, Vishnu in standing posture. The south-west pillars consists Balakrishna , Vishnu in standing posture, Narasimha with his consort, Devi in seating position geometric and organic pattern design and cow etc. In side of mukha mandapa we may find two sub shrines having Hanuman and Vishnu images. the mukha mandapa lead into antarala through small vestibule in the center and either side of this passage leads to pradakshinapada. The doorway into girbhagriha is of chatursakha variety and carry a décor of padmapatra, bhittisthamba, kumba base. At the base of sakha vaishnavite Dwarapalakas figures Jaya and vijaya are carved. The ceiling of antarala and girbhagriha are plain. Girbhagriha consists the images of Rama, Sita and Lakshmana on a common pedestal in the centre. We also find some bas reliefs on the walls of antarala and Garbhagriha.

The wall portions of garbhagriha and antarala are decorated with devakosthas, bhittisthambas, and kumbhapanjaras. The antarala part has one devakosthas each on the southern and northern wall and garbhagriha has one devakosthas each on southern , western , northern sides. On the either sides of devakosthas , the bhittisthambas are carved. In between the bhittisthambas and devakosthas the bas reliefs are carved. The figure sculptures in side the devakosthas of antarala and

girbhagriha are as shown below. The brick built superstructure above the girbhagriha is two storeyed. The aditala has the short elements of kuta, panjara, and sala is highly abbreviated in the form. The second tala features the same elements but at panjara part the life size figures are introduced obscuring the panjaras recess. The sala has three stupis. These elements are almost co –terminus with phalaka. Atop the panjaras, life size figures stand out, planting their right leg on the sala and kuta portions respectively. Over the phalaka the seated garuda figure adorns the cardinal directions. Two figures are preserved now. An octagonal sikhara with stupa is a crowning element to this temple. The griva part of the sikhara has on the east the Kurmavatara of Vishnu. On the south the varahavatara, on the west Narasimhavatara and on the north the Kurmavatara are represented<sup>7</sup>.

The practice of placing portraits of donor or patron along with deities on a similar scale is a remarkable and innovative features of sixteenth century temple sculpture is profoundly seen in this temple. From the thirteenth century, in the Tamil country a simple five part column with three cubical blocks separated by two octagonal sections, increasing included a single or three colonettes to create a composite column. This Tamil column was adopted by the Vijayanagara architect and sculptors to create a composite column or pier with a yali or rearing horseman in the place of the one of the colonettes. It is firstly seen in the outer open mandapa at the Vittala temple at Vijayanagara dated 1554 A.D.<sup>8</sup>. It includes the column development that attained greatest extent further South in the Tamil country, a sculpted image of deity carved almost full in the round is attached to the column initially instead of yali or horseman in the later times these images are attached to the composite columns in the many corridors and in open mandapas. The earliest images of deities are around one meter high, gradually increase in the size with considerable artistic skills on the sand stone. From mid sixteenth century started to appear on these composite columns alongside the deities.

This temple is good example for this composite column which existed in the open mandapa at north east direction. It is located on large open prakaras with gopura on north, east, south sides. Though there is no foundation inscription, this temple is undoubtedly a new structure of mid sixteenth century. The architectural forms unfolds this. That two steles just over 1.5 meter high by the east gopura have inscriptions dated 1554 A.D. and 1558A.D. **Fig 8** This composite column form resembles the contemporary mandapa at Vittala temple as mentioned earlier. In the interior of this mandapa we find yali columns but the exterior figures are attached one to the pillars about 1 meter height. On the long sides the composite column have adorned with single goddess holding louts in her right hand. But the corner columns are carved with three figures. They are mostly Vishnu with his consorts on either side. The north east column is replaced with divine trio with male portrait about the half of the life size, postured in anjali mudra wearing kullayi as the head gear and Vadamali namam on his forehead. The flanking women figure to the either sides to the male are rather small in size. Location of these royal images seems unusual as they are located clearly in processional routes. Perhaps they may be consider to be greeting the devotees who take round the circumambulatory path around the mandapa. We may find two further examples of royal portrait figures as composite columns at Ahobilam and Somayapalem especially Rayalaseema in South western Andhrapradesh this kind of sculptural trend is existed. These royal figures are large, detailed, visual prominent.

Besides these we may find the great number of composite columns attached to figural sculptures, mostly four feet height. There are four male musicians and two women making offerings are attached to the columns lining the aisle, as the mandapa is entered from the east. Along side these are high relief portrait images of royalty, just under life size, depicted in great detail with framing arches. They seem to be placed to greet the passing deities and devotees along the processional aisle through this temple. May be these are portraits of the kings who patronized this temple. The contemporary decline in the prevalence of temple inscription may have had additional impact on the proliferation of the portraiture. The culture of sixteenth and seventeenth century southern India was not so much conservative preservation of its classical predecessors, but rather a distinct, creative and dynamic period that laid the foundations for so much of what seen in the southern India.

The another interesting architectural structure and innovation of Vijayanagara kings in the temple is kalyana-mandapa built in the south –west corner in the temple courtyard. It is also one of innovation of Vijayanagara architects. This mandapa has sixteen pillars in square format supported four rows and four columns. And consist an elevated form at the centre by four pillars. All the pillars are highly decorated and owed the typical Vijayanagar architectural order which owing the Hoysala impact. These are composite pillar of various parts of square, round, padma, octagonal faced bands are attached with a kind of internal locking system. Its structure resembles with one of the best preserved pillar in Madhavaraya temple at Gorantla, dated 1354<sup>9</sup>. Based on this, we can imagine that kalyana mandapa was built earlier than ranga mandapa. The cornice has the lower convexity and upper is concave position. The platform is of 2 feet 6 inches in height having four tiers. These four pillars somewhat heavy than the rest twelve in terms of dimensions. The Kumbhapanjara element is seen on all the four sides of the pillars of elevated dais in the kalyana mandapa. The panjara vimana motif is carved on the top edge of the plinth of the mandapa. The images of tandava Krishna, incarnations of Vishnu, vaishnavite saints, Hanuman, Kaliyamardhana where Balakrishna is standing on the snake not on the hood of the serpent, dwarf figure known as bhraputras are carved on the base of the mandapa as if they supporting the weight of the mandapa. The head gears of the gods like Rama and Vishnu are long and has reminiscence of “kullayi” of Krishnadevaraya’s conical cap which is typical feature of Vijayanagara style. We notice some alternations and additions to the temple continuously till the decline of Vijayanagara dynasty. There are two mandapas of pillared each in North east and north west in the court yard.

The brick built superstructure above the sanctum (girbhagriha) is two storied. The aditāla has short elements of kuta, panjara, an sala is highly abbreviated in form. Second tala has the same elements but at panjara, the life sized figures introduced. But obscuring the recession of panjaras. At top the panjara, the life sized figures stand out planting their right leg on the sala and kuta portions respectively. The seated Garuda sculpture could be found at the cardinal directions, two figures are now preserved. An octagonal sikhara with stupi is the crowing element. The griva part of the sikhara is adorned with the incarnation of Vishnu. On the east we find Kurmavātara of Vishnu. On the south the Varahavātara, at west Narasimhavātara, and on the north Kurmavātara are represented. The Vimana over the sanctum has some sculpture were made of plaster. Actually the multiplication of polychrome figures on the vimana and gopura in a dense and colorful imaginary that contrast the stone sculptures of monochrome. But sadly the fragile nature of plaster, the sculpture were

eroded by rain, air and sun. They almost lost some details such limbs, facial details both vimana and tower with empty devakosthas.

It can be clearly noticed that constructional activities continued till the end of Vijayanagar dynasty. It is said and supported by that the walls of north and south gopuras and the cloistered pilasters are suggestively given and not carved as we notice are plain which definitely leave the impression of unfinished task, and also outer walls of the sanctum were simply left as plain.

After the division of the state, Kodandaramasvami temple has become an icon, came into limelight with it's marvelous sculptural, architectural heritage and the temple of Rama has attained importance on par with Bhadrachalam temple but also nurtured with nature support of wonderful surrounded landscape and support from government of Andhra Pradesh and Tirumala Tirupathi Devasthanam has adopted this temple for further development. It very essential to mention the services of eminent scholar Dr. Katta Narasimhulu who has been diligently working a lot on this temple and brought citations about the temple, availed from khaifiyats of the Kadapa district has to be genuinely appreciated. He brought a special book on this temple which helped people to know much about the temple. It is pleasure to observe that the staff of temple including the security guards, and archaeological assistant Srinivasulu are very activity working and explaining about the Historiosity and sculptural wealth of the temple with dedication towards the development of temple. It is also noticed that the travelers whoever they maybe, passes over Vontimitta, irrespective of the state are inevitably turning their attention at the temple that lead them to visit the historical and legendry temple.

Images :



Fig.1 The East entrance tower of the Temple



Fig .2 The Narrative relief sculpture of Wedding of Rama and Sita

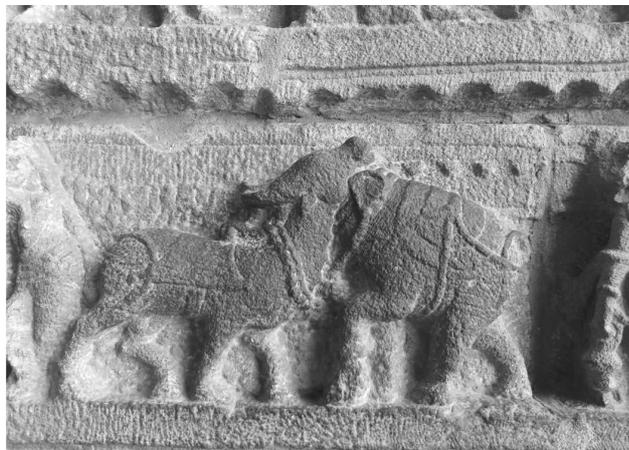


Fig. 3. Composite relief sculpture on the west to the eastern tower



Fig4. Ganga Sculpture on the jambs of the eastern gopura

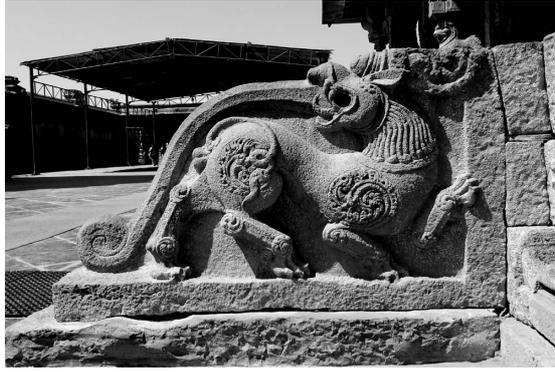


Fig. 5 Balustrade opposite to the south tower (gopura)



Fig.6 Bas relief of Kurmavatara (east face)  
on the pillar of Ranga mandapa



Fig.7 Decorative pillar with yali.



Fig.8 Composite pillared sculpture at the projection of Ranga madapa

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9. ibid, p175.
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