

*Nagarjunakonda*

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*Archaeological  
Survey  
of  
India*

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# NAGARJUNAKONDA



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# NAGARJUNAKONDA

## 1. GENERAL INFORMATION

**N**AGARJUNAKONDA (LAT. 16°31' N; LONG. 79°14' E), the valley of which is already known for its rich archaeological relics as well as for its tragic submergence under deep waters created by the construction of the Nagarjunasagar Dam across the Krishna 10 km. downstream, is situated in Palnad Taluk of the Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh. It is about 166 km. to the south-east of Hyderabad, the capital of Andhra Pradesh, and about 160 km. from Guntur, the District headquarters. The nearest railway-station, about 22 km. to the east of the valley, is Macherla, the terminus of the meter-gauge line from Vijayawada. Visitors coming either from Hyderabad or Guntur are to reach the Right Bank of the Nagarjunasagar Dam to have the connecting launch-service to the Nagarjunakonda hill; the Right Bank Colony is connected by regular bus-services with Macherla and Guntur. From Hyderabad one can reach the Left Bank by road (146 km.) and cross the river over to the Right Bank by launch.

The ruins of structures of ancient Nagarjunakonda are now represented mostly by the salvaged monuments reconstructed in the areas above the submergence-level. While the main concentration of such monuments, including the open-air replicas of the excavated remains

## 2. DISCOVERY AND SUBMERGENCE

**N**AGARJUNAKONDA OR NAGARJUNA'S HILL,<sup>1</sup> now transformed into an island, is situated on the **Right** Bank of the river Krishna. The valley, now completely submerged under water, also came to be known by the same name. The name 'Nagarjunakonda' is of medieval origin and is often conterminous with the hill-fort perched on the hill. In ancient times, as the inscriptions of the third-fourth centuries show, the valley was known by the name Vijayapurī;<sup>2</sup> the hypothetical association of Nāgārjuna, the celebrated Buddhist philosopher of the second century A.D., with the hill or the valley has not been established on the basis of either archaeological finds or inscrutable literary tradition.

Nāgarjunakonda was a secluded valley, about 23 square km. in area, completely shut in on three sides by surrounding hills, all of them being off-shoots of the Nallamalai Range ('Black Hill'), and on the fourth by the river Krishna. In the inscriptions of the Ikshvāku rulers Vijayapurī is mentioned always in relation to Śrīparvata (*Sirīpavate Vijayapure*), which appears to be the ancient name of the Nallamalai Range.

The rich archaeological wealth of the valley spread

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<sup>1</sup>*Koṇḍa* means 'hill' in Telugu.

<sup>2</sup>The colony that has grown around the Nagarjunasagar Dam has been named after it.

### 3. EARLY REMAINS

#### A. REMAINS OF THE STONE AGES

**T**HE EARLY STONE AGE PEOPLES LIVING IN THE valley some two hundred thousand years ago were food-gatherers living almost in a sub-human state of existence. Several such groups in those hoary days might have trekked the valley in their unending quest for food. They used crude stone tools like handaxes or points, cleavers, scrapers, etc., made out of quartzite pebbles; these artefacts belong typologically to a wider peninsular complex known to archaeologists as Madras handaxe industry. Such specimens of tools along with a large quantity of discards, none of them showing any sign of transportation from elsewhere, came to light in the excavation at Site 128; they were found resting on a pebble-bed overlying an ancient bank, possibly of the river Krishna.

The remains of the succeeding Middle Stone Age are represented by tools like blades, points or arrow-heads and scrapers, made either on quartzite or jaspery chert. These tools, collected from the surface, are comparatively smaller in size than those of the Early Stone Age, and the technique employed in their manufacture shows marked advancement over the earlier tradition. Yet their economy remained as that of hunters and food-gatherers.

In the next Age, the Late Stone Age, the

## 4. HISTORICAL MONUMENTS

### A. THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

**T**HE WRITTEN HISTORY USHERS IN THE TIME OF THE later Sātavāhanas whose archaeological vestiges are represented by coins belonging to Gautamīputra Sātakarṇi, Pulumāvi, Yajña Sātakarṇi, etc., and the inscription of Gautamīputra Vijaya Sātakarṇi, dated in his sixth regnal year (below, pp. 71-72). No relics ascribable to this period, the second and early third centuries A.D., has come to light save the limestone pillar over which the above-mentioned inscription is engraved and a deposit below the rampart of the citadel (below, p. 19). Yet the contents of the inscription may very well suggest the existence of a Buddhist establishment here, at least, a nucleus of it.

It is, however, certain that Nagarjunakonda did not assume any importance during the rule of the later Sātavāhanas when Dhānyakāṭaka or Dharanikota, near Amaravati, was the real epicentre of the Āndhra country. Nagarjunakonda came to limelight only when Vāśiṣṭhīputra Chāmtamūla, the founder of the Ikshvāku dynasty, snatched a portion of the kingdom of the tottering Sātavāhanas to establish his capital Vijayapurī or 'the city of victory' some time in the second quarter of the third century A.D. The names of four Ikshvāku rulers—Vāśiṣṭhīputra Chāmtamūla, Mātharīputra Virapurushadatta, Vāśiṣṭhīputra Ehuvala

## 5. THE MUSEUM

### A. SCOPE AND ARRANGEMENT

**T**HIS MUSEUM PRESENTS RELICS, DERIVED FROM excavation or otherwise, of all periods through which Nagarjunakonda passed. They are also representative of the prehistory, protohistory and history of the whole region.

The exhibits are arranged in three different galleries, besides the reception-room at the entrance and a hall containing models in the rear. In the former one may see, among other things, the plan of the Museum showing the arrangement of exhibits in the galleries.

### B. GALLERY 1

#### (i) *Contents*

Gallery 1 offers the choicest specimens in the collection, such as jewellery, beads, coins, relic-caskets and limestone sculptures including a colossal Buddha, *yakshas* or demi-gods, sculptured slabs called *āyaka-pāta* and a moon-stone or semi-circular door-step.

#### (ii) *Beads*

In show-case 1 beads belonging to the successive

## 6. RECONSTRUCTED MONUMENTS AND REPLICAS OF MONUMENTS

**A**S STATED ABOVE ( PP. 1, 5, 53 AND 54 ), A FEW monuments have been faithfully reconstructed out of ancient material on the Nagarjunakonda hill and on the east bank of the reservoir where the road from Macherla to what was the valley ends. Further, small-scale replicas of fourteen monuments are on view on the hill in two groups. These monuments and replicas are as follows:

### A. RECONSTRUCTED MONUMENTS

#### (i) *On the Nagarjunakonda hill*

Bathing Ghat, Site 34 ( described on p. 26 ); Megalith 1, Site 44 (p. 11); monastery, Site 4 (p. 34 ); apsidal shrine, Site 43 (p. 33 ); Mahā-stūpa and apsidal shrine, Site 1 (p. 32); tank supposedly for *aśvamedha*, Site 93 (p. 20 ); and *stūpa* with *svastika*-inset, Site 59 (p. 37 ).

#### (ii) *On the east bank of the reservoir*

Amphitheatre and so-called Hārītī temple, Site 17 (described on pp. 17 and 40); monasteries, Sites 3 and 32 A (p. 38); and temple, Site 56 (p. 29).

B. REPLICAS OF MONUMENTS

(i) *First group*

Section across the rampart, Cutting A (described on p. 19 ); *stūpa* with four-spoked base, Site 14 (p. 33); monastery, Site 106 (p. 36 ); monastery, Site 4 (p. 34 ); temple, Site 64 (p. 38); *stūpa* with ten-spoked base, Site 16 (p. 33 ); Kārttikeya temple, Site 82 (p. 27); and temple-complex, Site 78 (p. 28).

(ii) *Second group*

Sarvadeva temple, Site 99 (described on p. 27); Pushpabhadrasvāmin temple (p. 26); Burning Ghat (p. 26); section across the palaeolithic site, Site 128 (p. 6); tanks, supposedly for *āsvamedha*, Site 93 (p. 20); and tank, Site 122 (p. 27).

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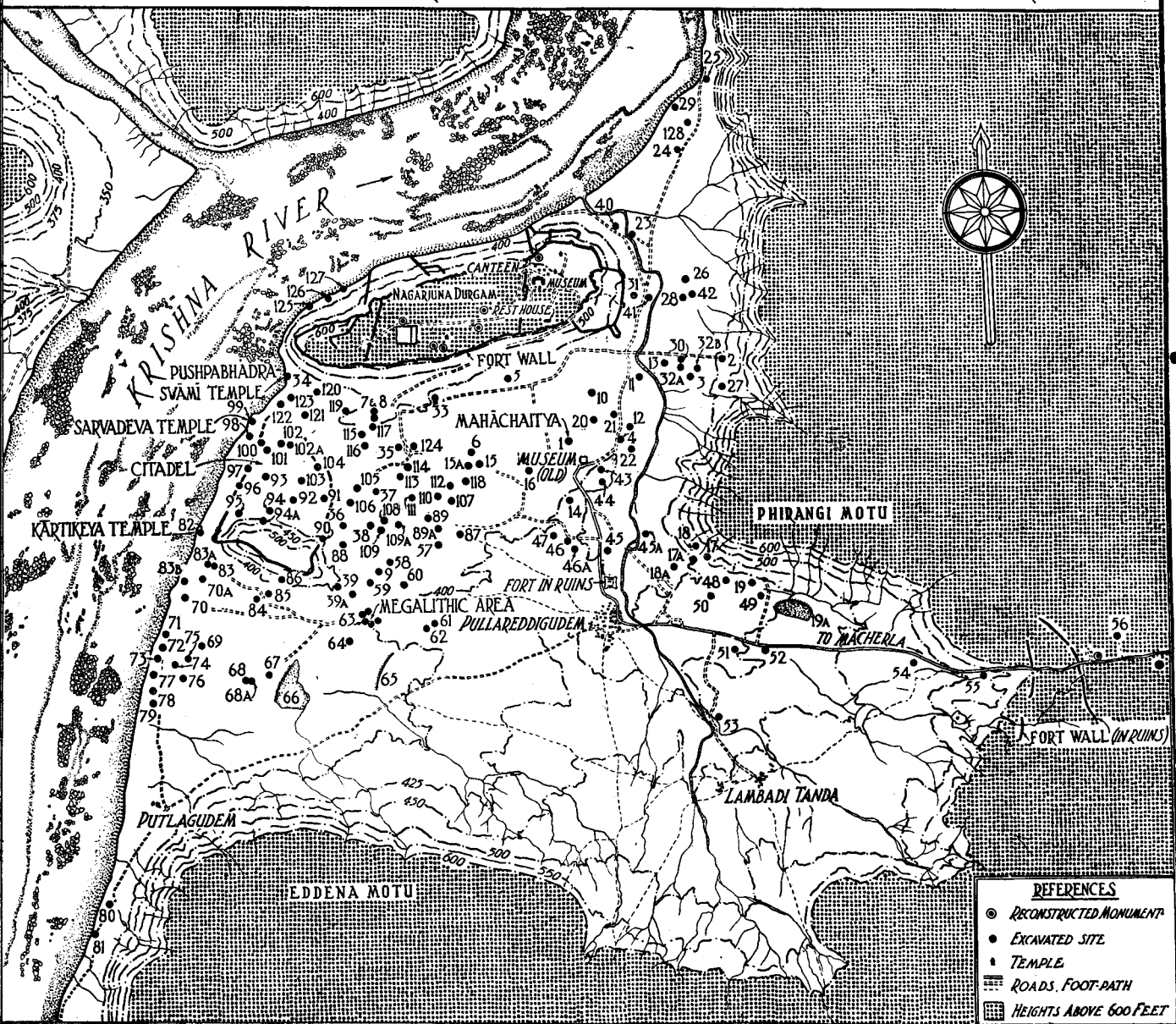
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# NAGARJUNAKONDA 1954-60

200 0 200 400 600 800 1000 1200 1400 METRES

200 0 200 400 600 800 1000 1200 1400 1600 YARDS



REFERENCES	
●	RECONSTRUCTED MONUMENT
●	EXCAVATED SITE
⦿	TEMPLE
—	ROADS, FOOT-PATH
▨	HEIGHTS ABOVE 600 FEET