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PALAEOGRAPHIC NOTES

I

Some Medieval Accounts on Decipherment

In his *Bhāratiya Prācīna Lipimālā*, Gaurishankar Hirachand Ojha observes that by the fourteenth century, Indians lost the ability to read the ancient Brāhmī and also other related scripts that had been employed up to the sixth century, but that they could decipher with some effort scripts from the seventh century onwards.¹ In the following pages, I wish to discuss a few references to the decipherment of old scripts in medieval times and re-examine the evidence that formed the basis for Ojha's statement.

In a recent contribution,² V. Venkatachalam attempts to read an allusion to the decipherment of the Brāhmī script in the following verse:

शान्त्यै वोऽस्तु कपालदाम जगतां पत्युर्यदीयां लिपि
क्वापि क्वापि गणाः पठन्ति पदशो नातिप्रसिद्धाक्षराम् ।
विश्वं स्रक्ष्यति वक्ष्यति क्षितिमपामीशिष्यतेऽशिष्यते
नागै रागिषु रंस्यतेऽत्स्यति जगन्निर्वक्ष्यति चामिति ॥

This verse has been cited in Bhoja's *Sarasvatikaṅṭhābharaṇa*³ and also in his *Śṛṅgāraṃjari*;⁴ Jalhana's *Sūktimuktāvalī* attributes it to Bhoja's court poet Cittapa. Venkatachalam sees in this verse a veiled reference to teams (*gaṇāḥ*) of scholars at Bhoja's court, striving hard to read the obsolete Brāhmī script (*nātiprasiddhākṣarām lipim*) and managing to decipher a word here and there (*kvāpi kvāpi paduṣaḥ paṭhanti*). It is quite probable that scholars at the court of the Paramāra king Bhoja (ca. 1005-1055) or elsewhere were inquisitive enough to attempt to read old

Abbreviation used—EI=*Epigraphia Indica*.

1. *Bhāratiya Prācīna Lipimālā*, (Delhi 1894) reprint: Delhi 1959, p. 37.
2. V. Venkatachalam, "Interesting Light from Bhoja for the Practice of Deciphering old obsolete Scripts by Epigraphists in medieval India" in: *Summaries of Papers*, AIOC 32nd Session, Ahmedabad 1985, A-5, pp. 269-70.
3. *Sarasvatikaṅṭhābharaṇa*, ed. Anundoram Borooah, Calcutta, London 1884, p. 256.
4. *Maharaja Bhojaraja's Śṛṅgara Prakasa*, ed. G. R. Josyar, First Eight Chapters, Mysore 1955, p. 249; see also V. Raghavan, *Bhoja's Śṛṅgaraprakāśa*, Madras 1963, pp. 176-177.

scripts, but there is no positive evidence that anyone had succeeded in deciphering the Aśokan Brahmi until the last century.

Be that as it may, there are other references to the decipherment of inscriptions in medieval times. One of them is again related to Bhoja and has the added merit of containing a vivid description of the technique of making clay replicas of stone epigraphs

Merutuṅga, in his *Prabandhacintāmaṇi* (completed in 1304), describes the following incident in Bhoja's court:⁵

While Dhanapāla was delighting the king by... perfect literary utterances, a certain merchant... entered the hall of audience, and... showed [him] some laudatory stanzas on a tablet of wax. When the king asked where they were obtained, he said as follows: "My ship suddenly stopped in mid-ocean, and when the sailors began to sound the sea, they saw submerged in it a temple of Śiva,... and perceiving that there were letters on a certain wall, they applied a tablet of wax to it (*madanapaṭṭikām tatra pra-sthāpya*), in order to find out what they were, and here is the tablet with letters that came of it." When the king heard that, he applied a tablet of clay to the wax tablet (*tadupari mṛṇmayīm paṭṭikām niyojya*), and had the reversed letters that had appeared on it (*tatra patitān viparītān varṇān*) read by pandits.⁶

The inscription ended in a half stanza. As is usual with the stories connected with Bhoja, the king wished to know the missing half. Several poets tried their hand at filling the gap (*samasyāpūrṭi*) but their efforts did not please the king. Then Dhanapāla was requested to complete the stanza, and the continuation he suggested harmonised so well with the first half that the king was delighted. Upon Dhanapāla's entreaties, the king despatched the merchant once again to the submerged temple and six months later he returned with a wax impression of the missing half which fully agreed with Dhanapāla's composition.

It is immaterial whether this incident really took place in the court of Dhārā in the first half of the eleventh century. It is obvious that Merutuṅga's purpose in relating this story was only to depict Dhanapāla's poetic skill and his extraordinary empathy that enabled him not just to fill in the missing half but fill it in such a way that it completely agreed with the original.

5. *Prabandhacintāmaṇi of Merutuṅgācārya*, ed. Jinavijaya Muni, Santiniketan 1933, pp. 40-41.

6. Tawney's tr., slightly modified and with Sanskrit technical terms added in parenthesis. Cf. C. H. Tawney, *The Prabandhacintāmaṇi or Wishingstone of Narrative*, Calcutta 1890, pp. 58-60.

What is pertinent for us is the vivid description of taking wax impressions from stone epigraphs and, since the wax impressions will show letters in a mirror image only, reversing them laterally once again to the original position by making another impression on clay. Presumably moist clay was applied to the wax impression and, when the clay had become quite dry, it was detached from the wax tablet. Thus one got an exact clay replica of the stone inscription. The fact that Merutuṅga dwells upon this process in such detail, although this is not germane to his main purpose, would suggest that it was a well-known practice at least at the beginning of the fourteenth century, if not earlier. Moreover, taking wax impressions from an epigraph becomes then necessary when the script is an unfamiliar one or when it is difficult to read. Then one makes a wax impression and takes it to an expert for deciphering. Otherwise, one could have simply copied it.

Technically, of course, the process is not novel to Merutuṅga's times. The Indus Valley seals anticipate the principle of lateral inversion of letters and symbols on a clay or wax impression. Wax impressions or moulds for casting metal images were described as early as the *Carakasāṃhitā*.⁷ However, the use of wax impressions for the decipherment and study of inscriptions seems to have been described in Merutuṅga's text only. The passage deserves attention also because it is one of the few in Sanskrit that describe technical processes.

Merutuṅga's narrative shows that the decipherment of inscriptions and making their replicas in clay was a common feature at the beginning of the fourteenth century. Even earlier, it may be recalled, Kāfhaṇa had utilised epigraphic material in writing his monumental chronicle of Kashmir (1148-50).⁸ He may have been unique in using such data in writing a continuous history, but others have also read and made use of inscriptions. For instance, the author of the Kumbhalgarh inscription, dated Monday, 3 November 1460, states that he consulted several inscriptions while compiling the succession list of kings.⁹ After all,

7. Cf. P. K. Gode, "Use of Wax Moulds for Casting Metal Images mentioned in the Carakasāṃhitā and the Texts on Architecture" in: *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, X Session, Bombay 1947*, pp. 65-74.

8. *Rājatarāṅgiṇī* I.15; see also D. C. Sircar, *Indian Epigraphy*, Delhi 1965, p. 16.

9. अतः श्रीराजवंशोऽत्र प्रव्यक्तः प्रोच्यतेऽधुना ।

चिरन्तनप्रशस्तीनामनेकानामवेक्षणात् ॥

Cf. Akshaya Keerty Vyas, "First and Third Slabs of Kumbhalgarh Inscription, V.S. 1517," *EI*, XXIV (1938-39), pp. 304-328, esp. p. 324.

ancient manuals on polity prescribe that royal scribes should be well versed in several scripts and languages.

When one keeps this background in mind, one is rather intrigued by a statement made by the fourteenth century historian Shams Siraz Afif, which will be discussed presently. Around 1367, i.e. some sixty years after Merutuṅga wrote, Firuz Shah Tughluq (1351-88) got an Aśokan pillar transported from the Siwalik hills to Delhi and had it set up in his citadel. Genuinely interested as he was in antiquities, he wished to have the writing on the pillar deciphered. In his *Tarikh-i Firūz Shāhi*, Afif describes the events thus: "On the base of the pillar there were engraved several lines in Hindvī characters. Many Brahmins and Jaina monks were invited to read them, but none was able to decipher them."¹⁰ It is this statement that formed the basis for Ojha's observation cited at the beginning of this paper.

The Aśokan pillar in question carried seven inscriptions of the Buddhist monarch in Brāhmī characters and below them also a later inscription of the Cāhamāna king Vighararāja IV, also known as Visaladeva (1151-67). This second inscription contains three records, two of which are dated *Sam. 1220 Vaiśākha śudi 15 Thursday* (corresponding to 9 April or 7 May 1164). Its script is early Nāgarī¹¹ When Afif speaks of "several lines in Hindvī characters" "on the *base* of the pillar," he is referring, without doubt, to this later inscription of Vighararāja and not to Aśoka's edicts. For the early Nāgarī characters in Vighararāja's inscription would be recognizable to Firuz's Muslim courtiers as Hindvī characters whereas the Aśokan Brāhmī could not have been so described by them.

Now the intriguing part of Afif's statement is that no Hindu or Jaina scholar could read the script of Vighararāja's inscription which was barely 200 years old at that time and which was not substantially different from the Nāgarī used in the fourteenth century Delhi, even though, as we have seen, reading old documents or inscriptions was not an unfamiliar activity to them.

Moreover, this was one of the first inscriptions to be deciphered in modern times. In the wake of the interest in antiquities generated by the founding of the Asiatic Society at Calcutta in 1784, Pandit Radha

10. Athar Abbas Rizvi, *Tughlak kālīna Bhārata*, Vol. 2, Aligarh 1957, p. 128.

11. For the text of this inscription, see D. C. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions bearing on Indian History and Civilization*, vol. II, Delhi 1983, pp. 409-411.

kanta Sarma read it in 1785, that is, when the modern discipline of Indian palaeography was hardly born. Ojha himself admits that this inscription could be deciphered easily.¹²

Nor can it be said that Hindus and Jains were hostile to the Sultan and therefore did not wish to cooperate with him. I have shown elsewhere that several Jains were employed at the court of the Khaljis in the early decades of the fourteenth century and that one of them, Ṭhakkura Pherū, could decipher legends on hundreds of coin-types from the previous centuries.¹³ Alauddin Khalji had even a Hindu treasurer (*bhūpa-dhanādhikārin*), Mahāṭhakkura Sādharāṇa, whose inscription at Ladnu praises Alauddin's military conquests in chaste Sanskrit.¹⁴

Firuz Shah himself patronised the Jaina monk Mahendra Sūri who wrote the *Yantrarāja*¹⁵ on the construction and use of the astrolabe in 1370, on the basis of some Arabic or Persian text that has not been identified so far. Again several Sanskrit works on astronomy and astrology were translated into Persian under the aegis of Firuz Shah. Notable among them is Varāhamihira's *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* together with Utpala's commentary under the title *Tarjamah i Bārāhi* by Abdul Aziz ibn Shams.¹⁶ All this translation work would have certainly involved a high degree of intellectual cooperation between Muslim scholars on the one hand and Hindu and Jaina scholars on the other.

12. Ojha, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

13. See my *Ṭhakkura Pherū's Rāyaṇaparikkhā*, Allgarh 1984, pp. 4, 11-13; and the forthcoming "Ṭhakkura Pherū and the Popularisation of Science in India in the fourteenth Century."

14. *ĒI*, XII (1913-14), pp. 17-27: "Ladnu Inscription of Sādharāṇa of Vikrama Saṃvat 1373."

15. Mahendra Sūri's pupil Malayendu Sūri concludes his commentary on the *Yantrarāja* thus:

श्री पीरोजशकेन्द्रसर्वगणकैः पृष्टो महेन्द्रप्रभु-
जितः सूरिवरस्तदीयचरणाम्भोजैकभृङ्गद्युता ।
सूरिश्रीमलयेन्दुना विरचितेऽस्मिन्यन्त्रराजागम-
व्याख्याने प्रविचारणादिकथनाध्यायोऽगमत्पञ्चमः ॥

Cf. *Yantranāja*, ed. Krishnashankar Keshavram Raikva, Bombay 1936, p. 81.

16. Cf. David Pingree, *Census of the Exact Sciences in Sanskrit*, A-2, Philadelphia 1971, p. 13; see also A.B.M. Habibullah "Medieval Indo-Persian Literature relating to Hindu Science and Philosophy 1000-1800 A.D.," *Indian Historical Quarterly* XIV (1938), pp. 167-181; R. C. Jauhari, "Learning and Literature during the Reign of Firuz Shah Tughluq (1351-88)," *Islam*, C 41 (1967), pp. 241-46; S. L. Katre, "Sultan Firuz Shah Tughluq, Royal Patron of a contemporary Sanskrit Work," *Journal of Indian History*, 45 (1967), pp. 357-367.

There is one more reason to disbelieve Aff's statement that nobody was able to decipher Vighararāja's inscription. Śārngadhara includes two verses from this inscription in his *Śārngadharapaddhati* with the remark

एतौ नृपतिपाषाणयज्ञयूपप्रशस्तेः ॥¹⁷

"These two [verses] are from the king's *praśasti* [inscribed] on the stone sacrificial post," or "... from the *praśasti* inscribed on the king's stone sacrificial post." This remark is interesting in several respects. Śārngadhara completed his *Śārngadharapaddhati* in 1363, that is, shortly before the pillar was removed from the Siwalik hills. The remark shows that Śārngadhara must have copied the two verses directly from the pillar when it was still at the Siwalik hills and that he was able to decipher Vighararāja's inscription in or around the year 1363. The description of the pillar as a sacrificial post (*yajñayūpa*) shows that Śārngadhara (and also Vighararāja) could not read Brāhmī and did not know that the pillar was set up by Aśoka who was opposed to sacrifices. In brief, when Firuz wished to have the writing on the Aśokan pillar deciphered in 1367, his consultants could not read Brāhmī but they were certainly capable of reading the Nāgarī in Vighararāja's inscription, nor were they unwilling to cooperate either.

The only possible explanation why they did not lies in the contents of Vighararāja's inscription and not in its script. For the two verses which Śārngadhara thought worthy of including in his collection proclaim that "King Viśala, the lord of Śakambhari, is victorious in this world, for he made the Āryāvarta once again the real abode of the Āryans by destroying the Muslims," and go on to exhort his descendants to continue the conquests.¹⁸ Probably nobody dared to translate this

17. H. T. Colebrooke, "Translation of one of the Inscriptions on the Pillar at Delhi, called Lat of Firuz Shah," *Miscellaneous Essays*, vol II, London 1837, pp. 232-237, esp. p. 237.

18. आ विन्ध्यादा हिमाद्रैर्विरचितविजयस्तीर्थयात्राप्रसङ्गा-
 दुद्भीवेषु प्रहर्ता नृपतिषु विनमत्कन्धरेषु प्रसन्नः ।
 आर्यावर्तं यथार्थं पुनरपि कृतवान् म्लेच्छविच्छेदनाभि-
 देवः शाकम्भरीन्द्रो जगति विजयते वीसलक्षोणिपालः ॥
 ब्रूते सम्प्रति चाहमानतिलकः शाकम्भरीभूपतिः
 श्रीमद्विग्रहराज एष विजयी सन्तानजानात्मनः ।
 आस्माभिः करदं व्यधायि हिमवद्विन्ध्यान्तरालं भुवः
 शेषस्वीकरणाय मास्तु भवतामुद्योगशून्यं मनः ॥

to the Sultan. Therefore, the consultants diplomatically expressed their inability to read the entire inscription.

Leaving aside this instance of, what I would think, feigned inability, deciphering old inscriptions enjoyed such high prestige, at least among the Jains, that it was considered a divine gift. Jinarāja Sūri who became the sixtythird pontiff of the Kharatara sect in 1618 is described-- in inscriptions as well as *Pattāvalis*— as the one “who by the grace of the goddess Ambikā deciphered (*vācīta*) the writing on an ancient image discovered at Ghaṃghānīpura.”¹⁹

II

‘Lapidary’ Kavyas

Another version of the story of decipherment occurs in the *Bhojaprabandha* of Ballāla (ca. 16/17th c.) with the title *silalipipāṭhe bhojakavidvayasamvādaḥ*.²⁰ Here some fishermen discover an inscribed stone in the Narmadā and haul it to the court of Bhoja, where it is deciphered by the application of lac.²¹ One would have thought that all that the stone needed was a thorough scrubbing. Unlike beeswax, molten lac will adhere so firmly to the stone that no impression can be taken out of it, nor will it be possible to apply molten lac just to the incised parts of the stone in order to make the letters more legible. It is apparent that Ballāla, who borrowed the story from the *Prabandhacintāmaṇi*, was solely interested in the *samasyāpūrti* part—that too by

19. Cf. G. Buehler, “The Jaina Inscriptions from Śatruṃjaya,” EI, II (1894), pp. 34-86. Inscription no. XVII (p. 62) reads:

श्रीअम्बिकावरधारक-तद्वलवाचित-घंघाणीपुरप्रकटित-चिरन्तनप्रतिमाप्रशस्ति-

No. XIX (P. 63):

श्रीअम्बिकावरप्रवाचित-घंघाणीपुरप्रकटित-चिरन्तनप्रतिमाप्रशस्तिवर्णान्तर-

A contracted form appears in no. XVIII (p. 62):

समुपलब्धश्रीअम्बिकावर-

An anonymous *Śripattāvalivācāna* (Berlin Ms. Or. fol. 729, reproduced in Weber’s Catalogue, vol. II, pt. III, p. 1053) reads:

अम्बिकाप्रदत्तवरधारकाः तद्वलप्रकटित-घंघाणीपुरस्थित-चिरन्तनप्रतिमाप्रशस्ति-
वर्णान्तराः ।

On Jinarāja Sūri, see Johannes Klett, “Extracts from the historical Records of the Jains,” *Indian Antiquary*, XI (1882), pp. 245-256, esp. p. 250.

20. *Bhojaprabandha*, ed. Āsubodha Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Nityabodha Vidyāratna, Calcutta 1923, pp. 253-56; see also Louis H. Gray, tr. *The Narrative of Bhoja*, New Haven 1950, pp. 87-88.

21. जनुपरीक्षयाक्षाराणि परिज्ञाय पठतु । ...जनुशोधनेन कालिदासः पठति ।

Kālidāsa—and did not understand the technical details of the original version and muddled them up.

There is, however, one merit in this version. Seeing the inscribed stone, Bhoja recalls that in ancient times Hanumān had inscribed his own *Ramāyaṇa* on stone. According to other legends, Hanumān inscribed the *Hanumannāṣaka* or *Mahanāṣaka* on stones but Vālmiki caused them to be thrown into the sea, fearing that Hanumān's work will overshadow his own composition. The implication of these late legends is that Hanumān, being a dweller on mountains and rocks, chose the nearest medium available and, being divine, he could carry his composition on rocks wherever he liked, unlike common mortals who had to use palm leaves or birch bark. But there are several instances of stone being used as the medium for full length poems, plays and even for scientific treatises of permanent value, and not only for royal *praśastis*, land grants and the like which have a temporal character. It will be interesting to survey such "lapidary" texts and to seek the reasons for the choice of such an unwieldy medium.

Bhoja is connected with this activity as well—not just in legends but in reality. In his famous Hall of Learning, variously called Śaradā-devīśadmaṇ, Bhāratibhavana or Bhojaśālā, which has been converted into a mosque in later times and is known today as Kamāl Maula Masjid, several inscribed slabs were discovered in 1903. One of them contains two Prakrit poems each consisting of 109 verses.²² The first poem ends with the colophon

इति महाराजाधिराजपरमेश्वरश्रीभोजदेवविरचितम् अवनिकूर्मशतकम् ।

The second poem which begins immediately thereafter in the same line does not have a colophon mentioning the title of the poem or the name of the author, but concludes with the following verse:

कुलगिरिणो भूमिहरा सयला वि ह्व लहुइया इहं जेण ।

तेण सयं निम्मविअं एअं सिरिभोजराएण ॥

By whom the principal mountains and [in fact] all the mountains here [on the earth] were made to look small, by this illustrious king Bhoja this century has been caused to be composed.²³

22. R. Pischel, "Two Prakrit Poems at Dhār," EI, VIII (1905-06), pp. 241-260.

23. Pischel himself renders this verse (*ibid.*, p. 242) as "...by this king Bhoja has this *śataka* been composed." But according to Pischel's own *Grammar of the Prakrit Languages*, tr. Subhadra Jha, Delhi 1981, paragraph 553, *nimmaviyaṃ* should be causative. The first poem is *viraiyaṃ* (v.107) or *viracitam* (colophon) and the second, in contrast, *nimmaviyaṃ* (*nirmāpitam*).

We do not know whom Bhoja commissioned to compose this second poem, but it is a clear imitation of the first and has the same theme, namely the praise of Viṣṇu who in the shape of the Tortoise bore the burden of the earth on his back and of Bhoja who affords some rest to the Tortoise by taking over the burden himself. Both the poems contain a tedious repetition of the same idea, and have no real poetic value, as Pischel who edited them rightly remarks.

It is ironical that Bhoja, the discerning critic who authored monumental texts on literary criticism like the *Sarasvatikaṇṭhābharāṇa* and the *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa*, should perpetuate his name on stone through these mediocre compositions. But then these poems show Bhoja's fondness for versification in Prakrit—his *Śṛṅgāramañjarīkathā* concludes with four Prakrit verses. They demonstrate further that the innumerable legends that grew around Bhoja's name have a core of truth in them. The legends say that he gave *akṣaralakṣas* (one lakh of coins for each letter of the alphabet) when he liked a poem. We do not know what the anonymous eulogiser who composed these two Prakrit poems (or at least the second) received from Bhoja, but the monarch was flattered enough to have the poems inscribed on stone and set them up in his Hall of Learning.

Bhoja's successors embellished this hall further with more original compositions. Naravarman (ca. 1094-1133) designed two ingenious grammatical charts.²⁴ The first, which he styles *varṇa-nāga-kṛpāṅikā*, contains a snake coiled up in the shape of a scimitar, and on its body and in the squares formed by the coils are written the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet and the nominal and verbal terminations. The second chart consists of two intertwining snakes, their coils forming a grid of 180 squares, in which are written the verbal terminations for *parasmaipada* and *ātmanepada* in each of the ten tenses and moods.

Naravarman apparently got at least three sets of these charts engraved on stone slabs and installed one in the Hall of Learning at Dhāra, the second in the Mahākāla temple at Ujjain and a third in a temple at Un, now known as Chaubāra Derā No. 1.²⁵ It is not known if both the charts were originally inscribed on single slabs; at Dhāra and Ujjain they appear on separate fragments and at Un only the first chart

24. K. N. Sastri, "Three Paramara Inscriptions from Malwa," EI, XXXI (1955-56), pp. 25-30.

25. Cf. M.D. Khare, "Un—an important Centre of Paramāra Art and Architecture" in: R. K. Sharma, ed., *Art of the Paramāras of Mālwa*, Delhi 1970, p. 48.

was found. The Ujjain fragment with the alphabet chart contains other matter as well: the fourteen *Māheśvarasūtras* of Pāṇini and the last eight verses (79-87) of a long poem; these verses suggest that Naravarman had designed this chart in honour of his father Udayāditya.²⁶

Arjunavarman (ca. 1210-1218), another Paramāra ruler, himself a poet and commentator on the *Amaruśataka*, caused a play to be incised on two stone slabs and set them up in the Hall of Learning²⁷ This is a *nāṭikā* entitled *Pārijātamañjarī* or *Vijayaśrī* composed by Madana Bālasarasvatī and commemorates Arjunādeva's victory over Jayasiṃha Caulukya. The first verse of the inscription announces that this play is being written with difficulty on two stone slabs. So far only the first slab is discovered and thus the first two of the four acts. From the prologue we learn that the play was first performed in the Śaradādevī-sadman, i.e. in the very hall where the inscribed slabs were set up.

We do not know if other compositions were also set up in a like manner in this hall, but the three discovered so far exhibit fine calligraphy, attesting to the fact that for several generations the Paramāra court boasted of skilled calligraphers.²⁸

There is another hall of learning which contains compositions similarly written on stone. This is the Sarasvatīmandira erected by Vighraharāja IV at Ajmer (now known as Āḍhāi-din-kā-jhompḍā Masjid).²⁹ Two plays have been discovered here along with several *devastutis*, fragments of *kāvyas* etc., all written on stone. The first play, *Harakeli* by Vighraharāja deals with Arjuna's penance and his fight with Śiva in 5 acts, but only one act called *Krauñcavijaya* survives in an inscription dated 22

26. उदयादित्यदेवस्य वर्णनागकृपाणिका ।
कवीनां च नृपाणां च वेषो वक्षसि रोपितः ॥ ८५ ॥

Naravarman had the title *sukavibandhu* and is said to be the author of a *praśasti* recorded in a stone inscription found at Nagpur, cf. D. C. Sircar, *op.cit.*, II, 391-401.

27. E. Hultsch, "Dhār Praśasti of Arjunavarman: Pārijātamañjarī of Madana," EI, VIII (1905-06), pp. 96-122. Hultsch published an edition of this play separately from Leipzig in 1906.

28. See also the beautifully engraved copper plate grant of Yaśovarman, dated *Samvat* 1192, *Māgha badi* 3, reproduced in: H. T. Colebrooke, *Miscellaneous Essays*, II, between pp. 310-311.

29. Cf. Dasharatha Sharma, *Early Chauhān Dynasties*, (Delhi 1959) second revised edition: Delhi 1975, pp. 71-72.

November 1153.³⁰ The second play is Someśvara's *Lalitavigharāja*, the hero of which is predictably Vigharāja himself. This too survives only in fragments.³¹

Another poet with royal connections, Nṛsiṃha, the preceptor of Pratāparudra of the Kākattīya line (1296-1323) filled the open rocks around Warangal with his poetic effusions: one poem in 62 verses dealing with the marriage of a Siddha couple,³² some 37 verses (in which no labial was employed) presumably from the beginning of his *Kākattīya-carita* and several other shorter pieces. Pratāparudra himself was a poet and like various other kings he too wrote a commentary on the *Amaruśataka*. Poets like Vidyānātha, Rudrabhaṭṭa and others adorned his court. But it is remarkable that Nṛsiṃha alone seems to have enjoyed the privilege of having his compositions broadcast from the rock surface.

Perhaps more important and older than these examples is an inscription on a hill near Pudukottai in Tamilnadu, which contains the earliest examples of musical notations.³³ It is written in the characters of the seventh century. The music appears to be set for *Vīṇā*, and there are notations for seven *rāgas*. According to the colophon, this treatise was composed by some king who was the pupil of Rudrācārya.

This list is, of course, only illustrative,³⁴ to show that the reason why all these texts were incised on stone was primarily royal authorship or royal eulogy. That in almost all cases, no other manuscript copies were found demonstrates further that stone was, after all, not an effective medium for propagating texts.

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30. The text is reproduced in F. Kielhorn, *Bruchstuecke indischer Schauspiele in Inschriften zu Ajmere*, Berlin 1901; "Sanskrit Plays, partly preserved in inscriptions at Ajmere," *Indian Antiquary*, XX (1891), pp. 201-212.
31. The text is reproduced in Roman by Kielhorn, *Nachrichten von der (kgI) Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Goettingen*, 1893, pp. 552-70.
32. The text was published under the title [*Siddhodvāha*] of *Nṛsiṃha*, ed. P.V. Parabrahma Sastri, Hyderabad 1968 (Andhra Pradesh Government Epigraphy Series, No. 2). See the introduction, pp. 1-4, for other texts of Nṛsiṃha, which were incised on rocks.
33. P. R. Bhandarkar, "Kudimiyamalai Inscription on Music," *EI*, XII (1913-14), pp. 226-237.
34. For other texts of this nature, see Ojha, *op.cit.*, p. 150, n. 6; P. P. Subrahmanya Sastri, "Halayudhasotra from the Amaresvara Temple," *EI*, XXV (1939-40), pp. 173-182; N. P. Chakravarti, "A Note on the Halayudhasotra in the Amaresvara Temple," *ibid.*, pp. 183-185.

III Sampuṭa

In my *Writing Material in Ancient India*,³⁵ I discussed, inter alia, the meaning of the word *sampuṭa*, listed among the items of the poet's paraphernalia by Rājasekhara,³⁶ and also occurring elsewhere,³⁷ and attempted to show that in all the occurrences the traditional meaning 'casket' given by the *Amarakoṣa* 2.6.139 (*samudgakoḥ sampuṭakah*) or the others given by the modern lexicographers (bowl, bowl-like semispherical space etc.) do not fit, that the word denotes an object for writing upon; more precisely, a set of wooden writing tablets that are joined together on one side by means of rings so that the tablets can be opened and shut like the leaves of a modern book, and that the *sampuṭa* is the wooden version of the well-known sets of copper plates used for engraving land grants and so on. In this note, I wish to adduce further evidence in support of my view.

1. In his commentary on the *Yājñavalkyasmṛti*, Aparārka, who ruled Konkan from ca. 1100 to 1140, quotes the following stanzas from the *Nandipurāna*, in connection with the *vidyādāna* (i.e. gift of learning):

येऽपि पत्रमषीपात्रलेखनीसंपुटादिकम् ।
दद्मः शास्त्राभियुक्ताय तेऽपि विद्याप्रदायिनः ॥
यान्ति लोकाञ्छुभान्मर्त्याः पुण्यश्लोका महाधियः ।
इति विद्याप्रदानस्य महाभाग्यं प्रकीर्तितम् ॥³⁸

Those who gift [palm] leaves, inkpot, pen, *sampuṭa* and the like to a scholar of the *śāstras* are also bestowers of learning (i.e. will reap the same merit as those who impart learning).....³⁹

35. *Aligarh Journal of Oriental Studies*, II (1985), pp. 175-196; also issued separately in the *Aligarh Oriental Series*, No. 5, Viveka Publications, Aligarh 1985.

36. *Kāvyamīmāṃsā*, Baroda 1934, p. 50.

37. Asahāya's commentary on *Nārada-smṛti* II, 18 c1, see *Nārada-smṛti* ed. J. Jolly, Calcutta 1885, p. 30; *Bṛhatsaṁhitāśloka-saṁgraha* XIX, 71, 107; *Kuṣṭhanimata*, vv. 607-608; *Kathāsarisāgara* 1.6.39.

38. Quoted by P. K. Gode, "Some Purāṇic Extracts quoted by Aparārka (c. A. D. 1125) and their bearing on the History of Indian Paleography and Education" in: *Studies in Indian Literary History*, vol. III, Poona 1956, p. 225.

Aparārka's contemporary, Bhaṭṭa Lakṣmīdhara, also quotes them in his *Kṛtyakalpataru*, *Dānokāṇḍa*, ed. K. V. Rangaswami Aiyangar, Baroda 1941 (GOS XCII), p. 222. with minor variations in reading.

39. Gode explains the passage as follows: "Equally great is the merit of presenting writing materials like *patra* (leaves), *maṣīpātra* (inkpot), *lekhani* (pen) and *sampuṭa* (box for keeping writing materials) etc. ...The writing outfit consisted of a box

The *Nandipurāṇa* which is no more extant is assigned to the sixth or seventh century A. D. by R. C. Hazra.⁴⁰ However, the passage by itself does not help in determining the exact meaning of *sampuṭa*; here it can be an object to write upon or a bag or box for the writing materials.

2. There is another equally ambiguous passage that cannot be dated exactly. In the *Lokaprakāśa* attributed to the Kashmirian polymath Kṣemendra Vyāsadaśa (11th century), but to which additions have been made up to the 17th century, we find the hemistich

यस्य संपुटिका नास्ति पिता यस्य न पण्डितः ।⁴¹

The other half is not available but the context has apparently to do with the scribes and writing. Hence, it may be assumed that the *samputikā* here is related to writing. The next testimony, however, makes it clear that it is an object to write upon.

3 In the *Kharatara-gaccha-pañṭāvalī*, compiled in ca. 1250 by Jinapalopādhyāya at Delhi, there is an interesting account of a debate between Jinapāla's own preceptor Jinapati Sūri, the pontiff of the Kharatara sect from 1165 to 1221 and one Pradyumnācārya at Āśāpallī. The debate began with this exchange:

Then His Holiness noticed chalk and *sampūṭaka* with the latter and asked: "For what purpose did you bring the piece of chalk?" Pradyumnācārya replied: "While speaking in Sanskrit, if an incorrect word slips out, in order to correct it." His Holiness said: "If one cannot derive a word orally, what right does one have to speak Sanskrit? Throw it away. Now, why did you bring the *samputī*?" Pradyumnācārya replied: "In order to write down the incorrect words that are likely to slip out [of your tongue]." His Holiness exploded [in laughter] and said: "How can one, who is not capable of retaining incorrect words in one's mind, hope to win in debates? Therefore, throw away the *samputī* also" With these taunts, the chalk and the *samputikā* were removed from there.⁴²

We have three forms of the word here: *samputī*, *samputikā* and *sampūṭaka* (unless this is a misprint for *samputikā*), and this is clearly something

with ink, inkstand, and pens, as also blank leaves (*patramaṣipātralekhantsam-puṣādīkam*) as expressly stated in the *Nandipurāṇa* extract quoted by Aparārka."
Op. cit., pp. 225-226.

40. R. C. Hazra, *Studies in the Upapurāṇas*, vol. II, Calcutta 1963, pp. 474-488, esp. 479.

41. *Lokaprakāśa* of Kṣemendra, ed. Jagaddhar Zadoo Shastri, Srinagar 1943, p. 79; see also his *Narmamālā* I, 110, in the *Minor works of Kṣemendra*, ed. E. V. V. Raghavacarya and D. G. Padhye, Hyderabad 1961, p. 317, for *samputī*.

42. *Kharatara-gaccha-pañṭāvalī*, ed. Jinavijaya Muni, Bombay 1956, p. 41.

to write upon (*lekhanārtham*). What its shape is like is demonstrated unambiguously in the next occurrence.

4. In his *Gaṇitakaumudī* (completed on 10 November 1356) Nārāyaṇa Paṇḍita teaches several methods of constructing magic squares (*bhadrayantra*). One of the methods is called *samputāvidhi*, in which at first two preliminary squares are written one beside the other and then the second one superimposed on the first in such a way that the right hand side margin of the second falls on the left hand side margin of the first and the left hand side margin of the second on the right hand side margin of the first—in other words, as if closing the leaves of a book. One obtains a magic square by adding the figures in the superimposed squares.

समगर्भे द्वे कार्ये छादकसंज्ञं तयोर्भवेदेकम् ॥ 24 ॥

छाद्याभिधानमन्यत् करसंपुटवच्च संपुटो ज्ञेयः । 25ab ।

भद्राणामिह संपुटविधिरुक्तो नृहरितनयेन ॥ 26cd ॥⁴³

We are not concerned here with the mathematical aspect of the process. But the fact that this is called the *samputa* process and the comparison with *karasamputa* (i.e. joining the palms together so that the little finger of one palm touches the little finger of the other and the thumb of the one touches the thumb of the other) demonstrate clearly that *samputa* implies joining of two symmetrical halves and that, when applied to writing material, it can only mean a double or folding writing board.⁴⁴

5. It is gratifying that at least one modern writer has recognised this meaning of the word *samputa*. The Lunsadi Inscription of Śiladitya II was engraved on the inner side of two copper plates which are joined by two rings passing through holes in the lower side of the first and the

43. *The Gaṇitakaumudī*, ed. Padmakara Dvivedī, part II, Benares 1942, pp. 363-365.

44. Schuyler Camman, "Islamic and Indian Magic Squares," *History of Religions*, VIII (1969), No. 3, pp. 181-209; No. 4, pp. 271-299, who discusses this process, is the first to draw the analogy of the closing of a book, but he sees in the *samputa* a term for sexual intercourse and in the magic square thus built the symbol of a union between the active and passive elements in the universe (No. 4, p. 286). It is true that *samputa* is also the name of a coital posture and that the magic squares have mystic significance that transcends the mere mathematical interest, but it is more likely that Nārāyaṇa had the double writing board in mind. Had he been thinking of sexual symbolism, he would not have lost the chance of expressly stating it.

upper side of the second.⁴⁵ The editor of the *Prācīna-lekhamālā*, where the text of this inscription is reproduced, refers to this set of two copper plates as *saṃputita tāmapatra*:

अस्याः प्रशस्तेराधारभूतं संपुटितं ताम्रपत्रम्.....⁴⁶

6. Owing to the perishable nature of wood⁴⁷ of which these *saṃputas* were made, old specimens are not likely to be found. But analogous pieces can be seen in the museums of Europe.⁴⁸ The European writing tablets were made mostly of beechwood, but also of maple, lime, chestnut, and poplar. The tablets have raised rims—like several Indian copper plates—and the depression within the rims was filled with a layer of wax that was hardened by the admixture of charcoal, tallow and linseed oil and coloured black, brown or green. Letters were incised on this wax layer with a stylus, the blunt end of which was used for effacing the writing when it was no more necessary.

The tablets were bound into 'books' with parchment, or with straps or wire. Occasionally, more complicated modes of binding were employed. These 'books' were used for writing private communications, revenue records, court proceedings, or commercial transactions. There are several well-preserved specimens with the writing still intact. An interesting example is the wax-tablet-book of Göttingen which consists of 7 tablets measuring $33.9 \times 16.7 \times 0.8$ cm and contains the municipal records for the period 1330 to 1345. The available examples show that each tablet was 0.7 to 1 cm thick and the sizes ranged from 49×18 cm to 14.25×10.24 cm. The number of tablets in each 'book' also varies. A specimen at Copenhagen consists of 14 tablets and the whole book is 14 cm thick.

These specifications may not exactly correspond to Indian circumstances—the number and the size of the tablets in a *saṃputa* may have

45. See EI, IV, pp. 74-81.

46. *Prācīna-lekhamālā*, part 2 (?), ed. Bhavadatta Śāstri and rev. Durgāprasāda Kedāranātha, Kāvya-mālā, Bombay 1903, p. 34, n. 1.

47. It is not known what type of timber was used in making these. However, the *Saptaparnī* tree received its botanical name *Alstonia scholaris* R. Br., since its timber was employed in preparing the writing boards.

48. The following account is based on an excellent, illustrated article by Antje-kathrin Grassmann, "Wachstafel und Griffel" in: *Aus dem Alltag der mittelalterlichen Stadt* (Heft des Focke Museums 62), Bremen 1982, pp. 211-218, obtained through the courtesy of Dr U. Klingmueller-Ahting, Bremen.

been variable as in the case of the copper plates—but these will give us an approximate idea of what the *samputa* would have looked like, and in so far these are valuable; for unless some chance discovery unearths a well-preserved *samputa* or a graphic representation of it in sculpture or painting, this object which Rajaśekhara must have had in his study is irretrievably lost.

It should be noted that the testimonia cited by me reach up to the middle of the 14th century, by which time the plentiful availability of paper (at least in northern India) made the *samputa* obsolete.⁴⁹

49. Regarding the bibliography cited in my above-mentioned article, Professor Dr. Wilhelm Rau, Marburg, has kindly drawn my attention to W. Kirfel, "Textueberlieferung und Textkritik in der indischen Philologie," reprinted in; Robert Birwé, ed. *Willibald Kirfel: Kleine Schriften*, Wiesbaden 1976, pp. 382-392. To this may be added A. F. R. Hoernle, "An epigraphic Note on Palme-leaf, Paper and Birch-bark," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. 69 (1901), p. 93 ff.; G. R. Kaye, *The Bakhshālī Manuscript: A Study in Medieval Mathematics*, parts I & II, Calcutta 1927, pp. 4-10; P. K. Gode, "Authorship and Antiquity of a Stanza with paleographic Imagery in the Text of the Mahimnastotra," *Studies in Indian Literary History*, vol. III, Poona 1956, pp. 147-152; Jeremiah P. Losty, *The Art of the Book in India*, (Catalogue of an Exhibition as Part of the Festival of India 1982), The British Library, London 1982, Introduction, pp. 5-17.

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