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Indo-Nepalese Epigraphy II
The Patan Inscription of Year 411 (= AD 489),
an Example of the 'Compartment' Type

1. The Inscription

In 1995, during excavation for drains in the Svataţol quarter of Patan, a jalahari, missing its votive image, was found by chance (a jalahari is a sort of rectangular stone infundibulum to collect the oblations made to the Śiva lingam or another divine image). This example bears a perfectly preserved four-line inscription, cut, as often, on one of the long sides, which recalls the installation and dedication of the statue. In general, it recalls a well-known typology attested in the Kathmandu Valley. Thanks to the interest of the Archaeological Department of HMG of Nepal and the Italian Archaeological Mission in Nepal organised by Istituto Italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente, Rome, the following year I obtained some good photographs of both the inscription and the rubbing (pls. I-II). The perfect state of preservation of the inscription, as well as the perfect legibility of the photographs, have made possible the reading, translation and palaeo-epigraphical analysis of the inscription without the need of further checking. Regarding the translation, particular thanks are due to Professor Raniero Gnoli for his authoritative suggestions.

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1 It has been first reported by T.N. Mishra (1997: no. 15), whose partial and incorrect translation is not given here.

2 The reader is referred to Indraji and Bühler (1880: no. 2); Lévi (1905-8: II, 111); Gnoli (1956: 7, 9, 11, 13, 24); Vajracharya (1973: 31, 39, 41, 50, 55, 62, 65, 82, 153, 155, 175); Joshi (1973: 15, 24, 30, 37, 40, 48, 54, 60, 118, 120, 131); Regmi (1983: III/ 20, 22, 25, 26, 34, 36, 73, 80); Vajracharya et al. (1967: 329); Tevari et al. (1963: 20).

3 I would like to thank in particular Giovanni Verardi, Director of the Italian Archaeological Mission to Nepal, and A.A. Di Castro, who provided me with the pictures.
2. Text of the Inscription

The four lines of the text are arranged according to a subdivision into three compartments, well differentiated visually, which correspond to the three parts of the text: (1) the date, on four lines, is inscribed in one compartment to the right, with one blank space before the text; (2) the first part of text, in verse, on two lines, has a space in the middle, corresponding to the caesura of the pāda; (3) the part in prose, running without break entirely on the two lines following.

We shall see this same typology of text in another example, from Harigaon (today in the National Museum of Kathmandu), dating 61 years later (see Vajracharya (1973: 179-81; Joshi 1973: 140-43; Regmi 1983: III, 76).

Metre: śārdūlavikrīḍita

1. tatrājñāpayati prabhau guṇanidhau Śrī Mānadeve nrpe
   Śarvāṇīṃ varadāṃ anuttamaguṇāṃ sarvābhivandyakkramām (||)
2. saśvat punyavivṛddhaye ‘tra vidhivat samśṭhāpayāmāsa sā
   bhaktyā Śilavatī prasannahṛdayā bhimābhīmāṇi priyā (||)
3. bhagavattayai devyai samyak kāraṇaṣṭādhi kriyā pravartananārttham
   viṣayapati mahāpratihāra Bhimaguptasya bhāryayā Śilavatī
dattāṃ vo tavāhanapaścimapradeśe dasottaraśatam bhūmi 100 10
   trimśat prasthikāyā pīṇḍakam māṇy aṣṭapaṇcasad iti 50 8 ||
1a. saṃvat 400 10 1
2a. jyaiṣṭha māse
3a. śukla pakṣe
4a. tithau trayodāśyām

3. Translation

‘In the reign of the glorious sovereign,4 treasure of virtue and lord Mānadeva, Śilavatī, friend of them who respect Bhima, there placed, according to the law, with devotion5 and with satisfied mind (the image of) Śarvāṇī, munificent goddess, of supreme virtue whose behaviour is praised by all, for the perpetual increase of merit.

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4 Literally, ‘commanding’ or ‘ordering’; the verb ājñā in the causative denotes rather the action of letting know, ordering, bringing an order to someone’s knowledge.

5 This use of the instrumental case of the term bhakti in dedicatory inscriptions can be explained by the formula pūjęsv anurāgah, used by Mallinātha in the commentary to the Meghadūta and the Raghuvamśa (Hara 1964: 131).
Śilavatī, wife of governor and great chancellor Bhīmagupta, has given you 110 bhūmi of land in the region to the west of Bhavahana with the rent⁶ (corresponding) to 58 māni(kā) because of the 30 prastha,⁷ for the fulfilment of all the rites (foreseen) for the venerable goddess, beginning from the kāranapūjā, etc.

In the year 411, in the thirteenth lunar station of the bright fortnight of the month of Jaiṣṭha’.

4. Palaeographic Characteristics

The palaeography of the text is precisely that of late fifth-century AD Nepalese epigraphic style. The dating of the text, as well as its excellent state of preservation, allows us to establish that it is the contemporary of the other inscriptions which the same Mānadeva had cut, as can be seen from the palaeography manuals published by Nepalese scholars (Rajavamsi 1964: 90-91; 1974: pls. 5-8; Shakya 1973: 8-12; Regmi 1990: 73-75, pl. 4.1-3). In particular, examining single graphemes, we can place the inscription in the earliest phase of the period called ‘early Licchavi’ (purvalicchavi), according to the chronology traditionally used by Nepalese scholars (Rajavamsi 1974: 71).

Revealing in this sense are the forms of the graphemes ja and la (l. 3), which appear to fit perfectly with the contemporary examples proposed by Dani (1964: 137-39, pl. 11a-b/7-8) as ‘a first category of Nepalese Brahmi variety’. Differently, however, from what the eminent palaeographer states (‘The cerebral sha is not used in Nepal until the middle of the seventh century AD … actually the form of sa serves the purpose of both’, 139), in our text it is possible to recognise the clear difference between the two sibilants (l. 2a, for example), visible in the rendering of the loop in the lower left: rounded in the case of the cerebral ￼; clearly triangular in case of the dental ￼.

The grapheme ha (l. 3) merits separate discussion. It here shows a more accentuated curvature of the lower stroke with respect to the standard exemplar, making it close to that type called by Dani ‘hooked variety of ha’ (ibid.: 289).

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⁶ The term pindaka indicates ‘payments in kind’ as we find in the Pāla edicts (cf. Kielhorn 1894-95: 254, n. 7), usually associated with kara, or ‘customary taxes’.

⁷ On this weight unit, see Garbini (1994: 409-10, n. 6) to which should be added the seventh-century specimen from Bengal (Banerji 1907-8), as well as the mention, this time identical to our example, of the term prasthaka made on a tenth-century example from northern Rajasthan (Kielhorn 1894-95: 266, l. 11).
5. The Goddess Šārvāṇī

After an exaltation of the goddess Šārvāṇī, the distich recalls the setting up of her image by Śilavatī. Šārvāṇī is the consort of the god Śarva, an epithet of Śiva (cf. Bahadur 1822-58: 33-34; Böhtlingk 1839: 215; Sivadatta 1929: 16; Oka 1981: 9), which specifically represents one of his eight forms (aśtamūrti) under which he is worshipped by the sect of the Pāṣupata (Pathak 1960: 17), and is therefore considered a particular aspect of the goddess Parvatī/Durgā.

She sometimes even coincides with Parvatī: in the Matsyapurāṇam 180, 22 (iti viññāpito devaṁ śārvanīyā paramēśvarah; cf. Matsyapurāṇam 1981: 390) her name appears as a true synonym of this,8 while the nearly identical length of both names allows them to be used interchangeably in verse as a metrical exercise (Lienhard 1984: 20). At other times she is associated with the aspect of Durgā: her name would in fact appear in the list of sixteen names given to the goddess in the Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa (Bhattasali 1929: 203).

Her name appears rarely in inscriptions: it is attested in an example of praśasti (Bühler 1892) from Himachal Pradesh and dated by palaeography to the eighth to ninth centuries AD, whose sixteenth stanza runs ‘śārvāṇimānam tvad bhaktā yāntī sarvātiśāyinam | prasida mātas sāṃsārāc chīghram eva vi-mocaya ||’, which is translated ‘Sarvani, thy devotees reach a dwelling that surpasses all others; be gracious, mother, quickly free us from the circle of births’ (ibid.: 110); another inscription (Kielhorn 1896-97) slightly later, ninth century AD, from the Bengali region, simply mentions it as a term of comparison (‘As Rohinī is the beloved of the Moon ..., Šārvāṇi of Śiva ...’ [ibid.: 251]); finally, a, for us, decidedly more significant example from the eastern Bengal region (Bhandarkar 1929-30: 221, no. 1589) recalls the gold sheet with which the votive image of the goddess is covered: ‘... śrī prabhāvatī sa(s)arvāvāni pratimām bhaktīyā hemalīptām akārayat’ (ll. 2-3), ‘Prabhāvatī, ... out of reverence for Šārvvāṇi, covered her image with gold’ (Bhattasali 1923-24: 357-59), from which we deduce clearly that the image of the goddess pre-existed the inscription.

From the epigraphic attestations gathered so far, it is reasonable to suppose that the cult and the image of this goddess enjoyed a certain popularity between the fifth and eighth centuries AD in the north-eastern Indian part of the subcontinent. The only iconography of the goddess known to us is a statuette (h. ca. 60 cm), now unfortunately lost, but photographed and described (Saraswati 1975: 155; Bhattasali 1929: pl. 70; Banerji 1933: pl. 1c). To it belongs the last mentioned inscription: ‘The image is cast in low relief. The technique is rather crude, and the pose rigid. The goddess has eight arms,

8 As evinced from the variant of the same passage present in the manuscript dated Śaka 1775; see Matsyapurāṇam (1981: 390, n. 13).
holding on the proper left, from bottom upwards, the thunderbolt, the bell, the bow and the shield; and on the proper right, from bottom upwards, the conch-shell, the goad, the sword and the wheel. Two maids are on her two sides, holding fly-whisks. She stands on a lotus-seat on the back of a couchant lion, with a rather well-executed head’ (Bhattasali 1923-24: 357). We note how the attributes of the image correspond to those of Durgā in chapter XI of the Śrīradātilakatantra, dating to the tenth century AD (Bhattasali 1929: 204-5).

6. Epigraphic Notes

As for the text of the inscription, the epithet used to describe the sovereign Mānadeva, guṇanidhau, corresponds to prachuragunananidher (‘the receptacle of many good qualities’) cut in line 6 of the pillar inscription at Kahaum, in Uttar Pradesh (Chhabra and Gai 1981: 305-8), dating to AD 461 under Skandagupta. The goddess’s epithet sarvābhihivandyakramāṁ is found in epigraphy in a twelfth-century inscription from Madhya Pradesh (Kielhorn 1894-95: samasta janabhivandyā saundarya (ibid.: 12, l. 17), i.e. ‘whose beauty was justly celebrated by all men’ (ibid.: 16, v. 20). The expression pra-sannahrdayā also recurs in the pillar inscription of Changu Narayana (III, l. 28; cf. Gnoli 1956: 4; Vajracharya 1973: 13: Joshi 1973: 8; Regmi 1983: I, 5; Riccardi 1989: 620; Verma and Singh 1994: 6). Regmi translates it ‘with a serene heart’ (1983: II, 4), and Riccardi ‘with a happy heart’ (1989: 618).

The term viśayapati, literally ‘commandant of the viśaya’, epithet of Bhimagupta, is a title which recurs in many contemporary Indian inscriptions: we find a viśayapati in Bengal, who in the fifth century AD, thus at the time of our inscription, acquired and gave a field to a Brahman to compensate him for the rites performed by the latter to his benefit (Majumdar 1935-36; Morrison 1970: 130); on a copper plate of the year 25 of Harṣa (AD 631) from Madhuban, Uttar Pradesh (Kielhorn 1902-3), the term appears inserted (l. 9) in a list of court dignitaries, after mahāsāmanta, mahārāja, kumārāmāya, uparika and before the bhaṭa cāta (‘regular and irregular soldiers’; ibid.: 159), since, in that context, the viśaya was an administrative unit above the grāma and below the bhūktī. In the later Pāla inscriptions, the term seems to refer to the same type of authority, mentioned before the grāmapati, but always after the mahāsāmanta and a series of officials not encountered previously (cf. Sircar 1951-52: 5, n. 1; 7-8, II. 32-38); in the inscriptions of the Maitrakas of Valabhi (in the Kathiawar; cf. Sircar 1963-64) we find this title ‘concerned with the gift land’ (ibid.: 271): (l. 54) ... kṣiti dānaṁ ca param puṇyam ... (l. 55) ... sarvān eva yathā sambhardhyamānakān (l. 56) rāṣṭrapati viśayapati grāmā- kūṭāyukta niyuktādhihikāramahattarādīn ... (ibid.: 279); in Orissa in the ninth century we find a very similar sequence of officials, as we see, for example, in the plates of Degaon (Shastri 1995: 348): (l. 23) ... mahāsāmantarājanaka
rāja- (l. 24) putrān visayapatin grāmabhujodhikārinah … (ibid.: 350), while already in the twelfth century AD the same term will recur in a list of dignitaries whose titles have changed by this time (cf. Mazumdar 1913-14: 240, pl. 100, ll. 1-2).

We find the other epithet of Bhimagupa, or mahāpratihāra (‘officer in charge of the palace-gate’), mentioned in Bengal already in the sixth century AD as person ‘who apparently was the officer entrusted with the provincial seal’ (Morrison 1970: 139), while in the later Pāla inscriptions he appears in a long list of court dignitaries, just after the mahāsenāpati and just before the mahākārtākṛtika (see Sircar 1951-52: 5, n. 1). In the cases however in which the edict is addressed to a group of villages, his place in the list of dignitaries is occupied by the viṣayapati (Kielhorn 1896-97: 249, l. 44).

The objective of the largesse mentioned in the inscription is to permit ‘the fulfilment of all the rites (foreseen) in honour of the venerable goddess, beginning from the kāranapūjā, etc’. In this connection, it is necessary here to recall that the Valley of Kathmandu has given us five other inscriptions that bear this formula:

(1) jalahari dated year 413 at Pasupatinath (cf. Indraj and Bühler 1880: 166; Gnoli 1956: 11; Vajracharya 1973: 62; Joshi 1973: 48; Regmi 1983: I, 12; Verma and Singh 1994: 19);
(2) jaladroni dated 452 from Patan (cf. Vajracharya 1973: 138; Joshi 1973: 100; Regmi 1983: I, 25; Verma and Singh 1994: 42);

In the example from Patan (4) there is also a list summarising the various ritual acts that this adoration involves: pradhāna snapana gandha puspā dhīpa pradīpa varśavardhana vaṃśākālāvādṛta japakādikā kāranapūjā kartavyā.

According to Regmi (1983: III, 26-27), ‘Kāranapūjā in general is a worship offered to a deity … The Kāranapūjā is done only in the case of Viṣṇu and Śiva … We have seen that in literal sense the Kāranapūjā is nothing but an oblation in honour of a deity who is taken as the cause of the universe’. Although, generally speaking, we agree with the hypothesis of the Nepalese scholar, it seems to us that the example in question better delineates the multiple nature of this ritual, extending the range of divinities benefited and honoured by its performance, which now comes to include not only Viṣṇu and Śiva, but also the mother goddess, in her aspect of Parvatī or Durgā.

In another example, also from Pasupatinath and dated to the year 462 (see Gnoli 1956: 23; Vajracharya 1973: 170; Joshi 1973: 128; Regmi 1983: I, 33;
Verma and Singh 1994: 58), we find a passage very similar to the preceding, still pertaining to the rituals that must be performed in honour of the divinity to which is dedicated an image: ‘abhyaṅga snapanāreccana gandhadhūpa bali nivedanādi pravarttanārtham’, therefore for the purpose of performing the uction, the ablation, the act of devotion, the burning of the incense, the offerings, etc.’. We find a similar formulary also disseminated in the inscriptions of northern India, as for example indicates the eleventh-century inscription from Pandukesvar: ‘gandha puṣpa dhūpa dūpopalepana bali carunṛtya geya vādyā sattrādi pravarttanāya’ (Sircar 1955-56: 281, ll. 19-20).

In the final part of the inscription, there is a precise description of the rent (pindaka) instituted for the performance of the rites previously described. The technical expression used here (daśottarasatam bhūmi 100 10 triṃśat prasthi-kayā pindakam mānya aṣṭapāṇcasad iti 50 8) represents the second example in Nepalese epigraphy thus far attested. In other Nepalese examples, donations of territories quantified in bhūmi with a produced expressed in māni (kā) are often found, but these two measurements almost never recur in relation to the prastha, which is found in only one other inscription.

7. ‘Compartments’ Typology: the Harigaon Example

As we have already mentioned above, the inscription found at Patan also presents a characteristic layout of the text. The same compositional criterion can be traced in other examples from the Valley. The most important of these is the inscription on a water conduit (jaladroni), again rectangular, from Harigaon, acquired by the National Museum thanks to the interest taken by Kaisar Bahadur (Vajracharya 1973: 179; Joshi 1973: 140; Regmi 1983: 1, 35; Verma and Singh 1994: 62).

The text, carved on the long side of the conduit, must have been originally of five lines, even if today only the first four are preserved. In this case too, the part in verse (which uses the same metre as the preceding example) is characterised by the spacing indicating the caesurae, while the date, it too

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9 The inscription on the pedestal of a statue of Śākyamuni from Chapatol, Patan, recites in the last line: abhiṁi saṣṭi 60 pindamānyā satṛṇīṣa 30 6 gṛhaprastha saṣṭhasatāya ». See Vajracharya (1973: 382); Joshi (1973: 113); Regmi (1983: 1, 88); Verma and Singh (1994: 152).

10 For the example from Deopatan of the year 402, see Gnoli (1956: 13); Vajracharya (1973: 55); Joshi (1973: 40); Regmi (1983: 1, 10); Verma and Singh (1994: 12). Example from Tebahal of the year 402, see Lévi (1905-8: III, 22); Gnoli (1956: 10); Vajracharya (1973: 59); Joshi (1973: 43); Regmi (1983: 1, 12); Verma and Singh (1994: 11). Example from Pasupatinath of the year 413, see Indraji and Bühler (1880: 168); Gnoli (1956: 11); Vajracharya (1973: 62); Joshi (1973: 48); Regmi (1983: 1, 12); Verma and Singh (1994: 15). Example from Balambu of the year 454, see Gnoli (1956: 22); Vajracharya (1973: 145); Joshi (1973: 107); Regmi (1983: 1, 31); Verma and Singh (1994: 50).
separated by a space, runs on five lines of the right side. From the extension of
the date it can be deduced that the final missing portion of the text (probably
in prose) consists at least of one line, given that we know no example that in
the compartment reserved for the date presents a number of lines greater than
those used in the text compartment.

Metre: śārūlavikṛiḍita

1. śrīmān prabhuś ca na ca lokaviruddhakāri rūpānvitaś ca na ca
   rūpamadam bibharttì (||)
2. sampannapauruṣabalaśca bahuksamaś ca dātā ca nāma na ca
dānavikatthanaś ca (||)
3. tenaivamādi guṇarāśi samanvitena śrīmānadeva nṛpater dduhitus
   sutena (||)
4. susvāduṣṭala viśuddhajalābhirāmā kīṛṭtiḥ kṛte yam iha bhāraviṇā
   na[vīnā] (||)
5. ...

1a. saṃvat
2a. 400 70 2
3a. phālguṇa
4a. śukladi[va]
5a. 10 2

The translation, which differs from that given by Dilli R. Regmi, is as
follows:

‘He is potent and glorious, but not enemy of the people, of pleasing as-
pect but not morbidly vain; he possesses strength, vigour and patience, is gen-
erous but certainly not haughty in giving.\(^{11}\)

The grandson of the glorious sovereign Mānadeva, Bhāravi, son of his
daughter, adorned with these and other qualities, has conceded the grace\(^{12}\) of
this (spring), beautiful for the sweetness, freshness and purity of its water ...

In the year 472, on the twelfth day of the bright fortnight of the month
Phalguna’.

From this brief analysis, we can establish a significant resemblance in
composition between the two inscriptions, visible both in the subdivision of

\(^{11}\) The expression here distinctly recalls the example of the year 386 from Changu, l. 22 of the
second face: «kartaṇa naiva vikatthanah smitakathah pūrṇavābhābhiṣi sada». 

\(^{12}\) The term kīṛṭh, usually translated as ‘fame’, ‘glory’, seems in this case to have the secondary
meaning of ‘object of glory’, ‘favour’ and ‘grace’, as synonym of prasāda.
the text in compartments and in the nature of the text. The principal difference between the two inscriptions consists rather in the object on which they are cut – the one a votive statue, the other a water conduit. In our opinion, the compositional elements previously described à propos of the two inscriptions are sufficient to establish a true typology which we can call ‘in compartments’. In future studies we will seek to trace this typology in the overall picture of the epigraphy of the Valley of Kathmandu between the fourth and the eighth centuries AD.

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Patan. The inscribed jitalhari (Photo A.A. Di Castro).
Negative reproduction of the rubbing of the inscription.