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## A New Copperplate Inscription: Grant of the Village Kumudavillikā during the Reign of Śaśāṅka, Year 8

Ryosuke Furui, Arlo Griffiths

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## Editor's Note

We are presenting the eleventh volume of the new series of *Pratna Samiksha: A Journal of Archaeology*. This volume contains articles on many subdisciplines of archaeology. The note section at the end contains short essays on important topics. While some of the writings exhibit the prospect of archaeology, some offer new data, there are a few articles that present a fresh look at known subjects. All in all, this edition of the journal reflects the trend of thoughts and actions current in archaeology.

This edition contains an index of articles published in the journal during 2010–19. I thank Dr Rajat Sanyal for his help in this matter and many other concerns of this journal. A special word of thanks is also due to Sri Subir Sarkar for his suggestion of preparing an index.

We have lost two members of the Advisory Board this year. Professor Krishna Bose had been a source of encouragement. She was also the Chairperson of the Centre for Archaeological Studies & Training, Eastern India. Mr Pratip Kumar Mitra has been with our institution from its inception and always forwarded ideas for the betterment of the journal. Their presence is missed.

*Kolkata*  
*9 October 2020*

SHARMI CHAKRABORTY

A New Copperplate Inscription:  
Grant of the Village Kumudavillikā during  
the Reign of Śaśānka, Year 8

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UMR 5189 Histoire et Sources des Mondes Antiques (Lyon)

**ABSTRACT:** This article presents the fifth copperplate inscription explicitly mentioning Śaśānka, who was king of Gauḍa in the first quarter of the seventh century CE. Formulated in Sanskrit prose, this document belongs to the class of land-sale grants, and concerns the purchase and donation of a village called Kumudavillikā in year 8 of Śaśānka's reign. Among points of interest are the occurrence of the otherwise unknown term *naumahattara* and the use of the *kāṛṣāpaṇa* as a currency unit.

**KEYWORDS:** Śaśānka, Bengal, early medieval period, Sanskrit, copperplate inscription, land-sale grants, *karṣāpaṇa*.

## Introduction

Śaśānka, king of Gauḍa (r. c. from 602–3 to 620),<sup>2</sup> is one of the most prominent figures in the early history of northeastern South Asia. He ruled a wide area of eastern Bihar and Bengal in the early seventh century and as arch-enemy of Harṣavardhana had significant impact on larger scale political events (Devahuti 1998: 37–53, 83–6; Bakker 2014: 88–93). Śaśānka's deeds and rule are known from literary, numismatic and inscriptional sources.

Of the first category, the most important is Bāṇa's *Harṣacarita*, which mentions him as the king of Gauḍa who treacherously killed Rājyavardhana II, Harṣa's elder brother, and against whom Harṣa raised an army of conquest (Kane 1965: 43–52). The second source in importance is the testimony of the Chinese Buddhist monk Xuanzang recorded in his account compiled by Bianji and his biography written by Huili and Yancong. Both mention Śaśānka by name as the king of Karṇasuvārṇa who murdered Rājyavardhana (Li 1995: 72;

1996: 141–2) and persecuted Buddhism (Li 1995: 141; 1996: 192, 226–7, 246, 249).<sup>3</sup> To these sources may be added the 53rd chapter, entitled *Rājavyākaraṇa*, datable to the late eighth century, of the anonymous scripture *Mañjuśrīyamūlakalpa*.<sup>4</sup> This text refers to him by the name of Soma, a synonym of the name Śaśānka which means 'moon', and includes a description of his rule reaching to Vārāṇasī and beyond, his oppression of Buddhism, his rivalry with Rājyavardhana and Harṣavardhana resulting in the latter's conquest of Puṇḍranagara, his progressive confinement to his own territory, and ultimately his death by a disease of the mouth (*mukharoga*) after a reign that apparently lasted more than 17 years (Gaṇapati Śāstrī 1925: 634–5; Jayaswal 1934: 49–51, text 53–5).<sup>5</sup>

Śaśānka issued a series of gold coins, which show Śiva sitting or reclining on his bull and Lakṣmi seated on the lotus as motifs of obverse and reverse respectively. Coins of Śaśānka circulated in the western/northern and eastern subregions of Bengal (Mukherjee 1993: 10–13),

though this distribution may not necessarily prove the extension of his rule to eastern Bengal.

As for the inscriptions, four copperplate inscriptions explicitly mentioning Śaśāṅka are so far known, as well as a seal matrix. The latter, ‘cut in the rock at the hill-fort of Rôhtâsgaḍh or Rôhitâsgaḍh’ (Fleet 1888: 283), bears the legend *mahāsāmanta śaśāṅkadeva*. If it is a genuine piece of evidence concerning our king Śaśāṅka, this seal may date from his earlier career as a subordinate ruler in Bihar (Fleet 1888: 284). In contrast, all the copperplate inscriptions were issued during his reign as a sovereign ruler, although none of them are royal edicts. Rather, they are documents issued by one or the other local office (*adhikaraṇa*) or by a subordinate ruler. The Panchrol plate, which presents the sovereign as a devout Śaiva (*paramamāheśvara*), was issued by the office of the *viṣaya* called Ekatāraka<sup>6</sup> and records the sale of a plot of land for donation to a brahmin, petitioned by a close associate of the king (*antaraṅga*) (Furui 2011: 121–4). Of the two Antla plates issued by the office of Tāvira,<sup>7</sup> the one dated to the eighth year of Śaśāṅka’s reign records the sale of land plots with a view to their donation to a brahmin, for which *mahāpratihāra* Śubhakīrti, a subordinate ruler governing Daṇḍabhukti, applied to the office (Majumdar 1945: 9), while the other, dated to the 19th year, unilaterally informs of the donation of a village to a brahmin by *mahāsāmanta* Somadatta, a subordinate ruler of both Daṇḍabhukti and Utkaladeśa (Majumdar 1945: 7–8). All these plates pertain to the areas within the present district of West Medinipur and attest to Śaśāṅka’s control over this area.<sup>8</sup> The Ganjam plates of Mādharāja, dated to year 300 of the Gupta era (619 CE), on the other hand, constitute a royal grant of this Śailodbhava king who acknowledged the suzerainty of Śaśāṅka by mentioning his reign (Hultzsch 1900–1: 144). It proves the inclusion of the coastal area of southern Odisha within the sphere of influence of Śaśāṅka, and provides an absolute date falling within his reign. All these copperplate inscriptions refer to Śaśāṅka with the title of *mahārājādhirāja* and express the idea of his rule over the earth wearing the four oceans

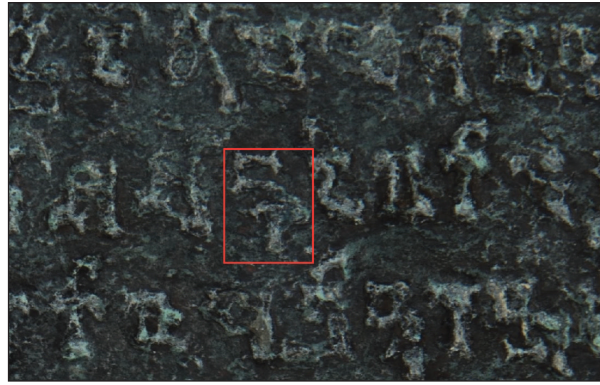
as her girdle. The present inscription is a new addition to this series of copperplate inscriptions.

### Physical Description

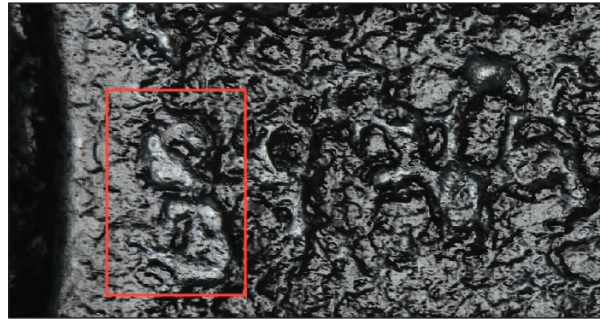
The plate in question is held in a private collection in Delhi. No information is available about its provenance, which may have been in India as well as in Bangladesh.<sup>9</sup> The plate bears text on both of its faces and on its seal. The plate measures 18.4 cm in width without seal (23.3 cm with seal); 13–13.5 cm in height. The outer diameter of the seal is about 6 cm. Although we have had occasion to inspect the plate directly, we have failed to record information on the thickness of the plate or of the seal. An estimate of about 0.2 cm in thickness seems reasonable for the former, as does an estimate of about 0.5 cm for the latter. As for the seal, which displays the common Gajalakṣmī device,<sup>10</sup> it has clear knobs on its top and on its back, and there is a possible trace of the former presence of a secondary seal.

Although the plate as a whole is intact, its outer surface—where the text is engraved—has suffered much more deterioration, and deterioration apparently of a different kind, than we see in most Bengal copperplates of the first millennium CE. It may be said that this is one of the least easily legible copperplate inscriptions that we have ever dealt with. The script, hardly anywhere nicely preserved in this inscription, is the form of Late Northeastern Brāhmī typical for inscriptions issued in Bengal during the reign of Śaśāṅka.<sup>11</sup> However, one exceptional aspect of the script observed on our plate is its repeated use of the *upadhmaniya* and *jihvāmūliya* signs, that we have not found so far in other inscriptions of early Bengal. Alas, the plate’s poor state of physical preservation does not allow us to be entirely sure of the precise shapes of the signs in this scribe’s hand, but the traces that remain are compatible with some of the shapes shown in Singh 1991, plate 178. We would not, out of context, have been able to distinguish *jihvāmūliya* from *ṅ*, and yet the *akṣaras* that we read *hku* (twice in line 8, once in line 11) show an upper part clearly distinct from the shape of *ṅ* in *śaśāṅka* (line 6). See Plate 1.

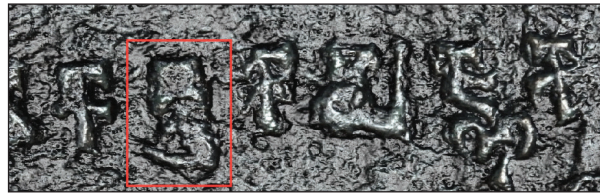




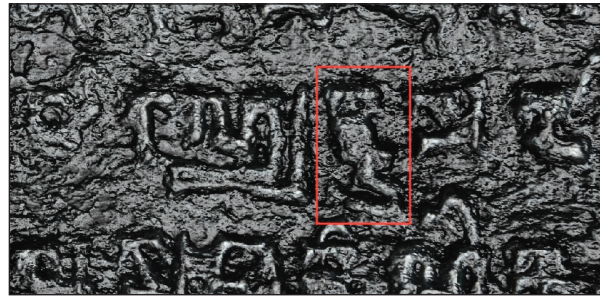
(a)



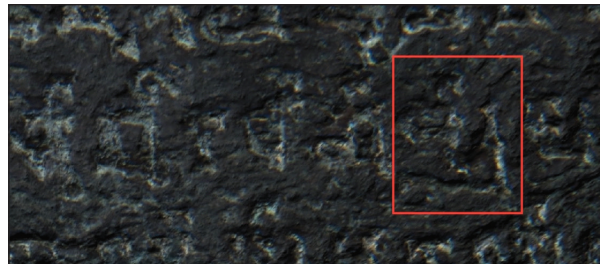
(b)



(c)



(d)



(e)

PLATE 1: The shapes of the ligatures *ñk*, *ḥk* (with *jihvāmūliya*) and *ḥp* (with *upadhmanīya*) in (a) line 6 *śaśāñkadevarāja*, (b) line 8 *ḥkuṭumbino*, (c) line 8 *kaḥkukayaj(ñ)uka*, (d) line 11 *dhāraṇyaḥkumada* and (e) line 3 *bhāgīrathīyāḥprakpa*. Extracts from RTI by James Miles (2017)

## Edition

*Editorial methodology and conventions*

As we have explained on a previous occasion in this journal (Griffiths 2018: 24), arriving at a nearly complete decipherment of such very badly preserved copperplate inscriptions, making it possible to translate the text, would probably not have been possible were it not for a number of favourable factors: (i) the strongly formulaic and repetitive nature of such records, which were drawn up largely in prose, making it possible to restore many lacunae on the basis of intra-textual comparison; (ii) the fact that there are contemporary documents from the same region (as listed above), making it possible to rely on inter-textual comparison in an effort to guess at the words of the inscription in damaged passages and more generally to determine what its words were intended to mean; and (iii) the fact that we were able to study this inscription first through autopsy and subsequently on the basis of very-high-resolution Reflectance Transformation Imaging (RTI),<sup>12</sup> making it possible to visualise the plate and its seal on our computers and bring out parts of *akṣaras* that would have remained invisible with more conventional means of reproduction.

In our edition, we now follow a slightly modified set of transliteration rules compared to our previous publications in this journal. The rules we follow are those defined by the ERC-sponsored DHARMA project (Balogh and Griffiths 2019) which require *ṛ* instead of *r* (for vocalic r) and *m̄* instead of *m* (for *anusvāra*), *ḥ* for *upadhmanīya*, *ḥ* for *jihvāmūliya*, representation of elision of vowel *a* in *abhinīhita sandhi* with ' even though no *avagraha* is ever written, as well as the conventions V and C explained below.

- (...) graphic elements whose reading is uncertain  
 [...] graphic elements wholly lost or wholly unreadable on the plate but restorable on the basis of philological considerations  
 ⟨...⟩ expected graphic elements omitted by the engraver

- + one *akṣara* lost due to breaking off of a piece of the support  
 ? one illegible *akṣara*  
 V a vowel that forms an *akṣara*, i.e. 'independent vowel', of the type V (e.g. *A* is 'independent vowel' *a*, etc.)  
 C a consonant C stripped of its inherent vowel by other means than an explicit *virāma* sign (e.g. by reducing the size of the *akṣara* or otherwise differentiating its shape from the normal *akṣara* with inherent vowel)

## Seal Legend (Plate 2)

The seal legend seems to read:

ku(mā)rāmātyādhikaraṇasya

But it must be noted that our restitution of the almost entirely illegible *akṣara mā* implies that this *akṣara* would have occupied an unusual amount of space. If our reading is correct, then it may be noteworthy that precisely the same combination of device and legend is also observed in the clay sealing from Basarh at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (AC1993.239.7), referenced in Griffiths (2015: 35, n. 24) and on the seal of the Tipperah plate of Lokanātha (Basak 1919–20: 302).

## Obverse (Plate 3)

- (1) (sva)st[i] ? va ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ra ? kra ?  
 vi ? ? (bhāvibhi)(ḥ) śaṅkha-cintāmaṇi-muktakāgara(ṇai)-  
 (2) (ś ca)turbhir mmahodadhibhi(ḥ) mekhalayā  
 Ivāvṛtāyā(m̄) himavad-vindhya-kailās(ai)(ḥ) ṛḥbhir mmahā-śikharai(ḥ)  
 śobhi(tāyām̄) janma-jarā-  
 (3) maraṇa-bhaya-śoka-saṃsārārtt(i)-  
 harāyā bhāgīrathīyāḥ prāk-paścānusarppi(ṇī)bhi(ḥ) sarvvato  
 nimn(e)-gābhiś copaśobhi-  
 (4) tāyām̄ vasundharāyā(m̄) sāgra-varṣa-  
 śata-pravarddhamāna-kalyāṇa-  
 maṅgalāyūṣmatas samara-śata-sahasra-  
 vija-



PLATE 2: The seal. Photograph by James Miles (2017)

- (5) y(i)no brāhmaṇa-kṣatra-viṭ-sūdrādīnām  
pañcānām varṇṇāśramāṇāmn niyamana-  
hetor amara-patir iva svayaṁ-pratiṣṭhi-  
(6) tasya mahārājādhirāja-śrī-śasāṅka-  
deva-rājasyāṣṭamai 'bde jyaiṣṭhe  
pūrṇṇamāsyām puṇye tithau muhūrte  
cāsmi-  
(7) n divasa-pāsa-sāmbatsare  
rādhāputrāntaraṅga-nāgabhaṭagominā  
sādhikaraṇopetā me(ḍḍa)khātādhivāsina-  
(8) ḥ kuṭumbino mahāpradhāna-  
rāmaprabh(u)-mahāmahattara-  
virahadeva-kaḥkuka-yaj(ñ)uka-vappuka-  
vicitra-Udaya-  
(9) da(mbha)-guṇadāsa-varggapālo(ṣṭh)-  
itādyābhīhitā bhavatām prītyā kiñ cic  
chreyam anuṣṭhātum icchāmīty ebhir  
abhihita  
(10) Evaṁ kriyatām iti tato 'nena  
nau-mahattara-bhogapatika-  
vidagdhānumodanāya Eṣāmm  
ādhivāsīnām sa-karaṇo-  
(11) petānā(m) sakāśāt khilāvadhāraṇyaḥ  
kumadavillikā nāma grāmo 'śitibhi(ḥ)  
kāṛṣāpaṇai(ḥ) krītvā yathārahena  
vastrānna-  
(12) pānaiś cāpyāyitvā yogeśvara-  
pramukha-kāṇvika-śākha-nānā-  
gotra-tapa-svādhyāyopetebhyo  
vrāhmaṇāryyebhya(ḥ) yatra śrī-  
(13) (yo)geśvara-bharadvāja-sagotras  
surabhisvāmi-kātyāyana-sagotro  
dāmayaśasvāmi-gotrāyaśasvāmi-rājña-  
(14) [ya]śasvāmi(na)ś ca maudgalya-sagotro  
mmādhavasvāmi-dhana(ñja)ya-sagotro  
līlasvāmi-bharadvāja-sagotro rudrasvāmi-  
(15) + + ? nasagotro bhogayaśasvāmi-  
vidagdhasvāmi-budhasvāmi(na)ś cety  
ebh(y)as tāmraśāsanīkṛ(tya) datt(o) sīmā  
tas(y)a
- Reverse (Plate 4)
- (16) [pūrvve](ṇa suktra)varddhāṛṣaka



PLATE 3: The plate: obverse. Photograph by James Miles (2017)



PLATE 4: The plate: reverse. Photograph by James Miles (2017)

- dakṣiṇena ? ? ? ? ? paścimena  
(gomayakha)ṇḍaḥ Uttareṇa  
(śākrārṣā)vakratāyā
- (17) [tās] (ca) pāñca-varṣaIkā Ity ābhis sīmābhir  
viñśati-k(ā)rṣāpaṇya-bh(o)gādā(na)m  
upa(lavdha)n tattra na kena (cc)it  
svalp(āpy ā)vādhā
- (18) (bhāvya) kāraṇam
- I. vahubhir vasudhā dattā rājābhis  
sagarādibhi  
yasya yasya yadā bhūm(i)s tasya tasya tadā  
phalaṁ
- II. (19) ṣaṣṭ(i)-varṣa-sahasrāṇi svargge modati  
bhūmi-da  
Ākṣeptā cānumantā ca tāny eva narake  
vaseT
- III. sva-dattām para(20)-dattām vāpi yo hareta  
vasundharām  
sva-piṣṭhāyā kṛmir bhūtvā piṭṛbhiḥ saha  
pacyate

## Notes on readings

- 1–2. *-muktakāgara(ṇais)*: the *ga* seems clear, but we need to emend *-muktakābharaṇais*.
2. *-bhir mmahodadhibhi(h) mekhalayā*. Absence of doubling of the *m* in *me* (as opposed to the doubling of *m* in *mma*) leads us to supply *h* rather than *r*.
3. *bhāgīrathiyā(h)*: emend *bhāgīrathyāh*. The assumption of an *akṣara hprā*, with the *upadhmānīya* sign which is not otherwise attested in the epigraphy of Bengal, admittedly lends a tentative character to our choice of reading and interpretation. However, there are two cases of *hpā* in the Ganjam plates dated to the reign of Śaśāṅka, from southern Odisha (Hultzsch 1900–1: 143, ll. 5 and 17).
3. *nimn(e)-gābhiś*: the unexpected *e-mātrā* is faint but apparently undeniable. One must either accept *nimne-ga* as an otherwise unattested *aluk-samāsa*, or treat the locative case ending as a mere error and emend *nimna-gābhiś*.
6. *-rājasyāṣṭamai*: emend *-rājasyāṣṭame*.
7. *divasa-pāsa-sāmbatsare*: emend *divasa-māsa-samvatsare*.
8. *-yaj(ñ)uka-*: compared, on the one hand, with the *jña* at the end of l. 13 (as well as with cases of *jña* in other inscriptions of this period) and, on the other hand, with the *mṇā* in l. 5, the subscript consonant here can easily be read as *ṇ*, although the shape of the right loop is more compatible with *ñ*. Since *ñ* must have been intended, we assume that we are merely dealing with a *ñ* of slightly imperfect execution.
9. *-pālo(ṣṭh)itādyābhikhitā*: emend *-pāloṣṭhitādyā Abhikhitā*. The reading *ṣṭh* is quite uncertain, and *Uṣṭhita* does not seem to be a plausible name, but we are unable to propose any more satisfactory reading.
9. *chreyam anuṣṭhātum*: grammatical mistake for *chreyo 'nuṣṭhātum*.
10. *Eṣāmm ādhivāsinaṁ*: emend *Eṣām adhvāsinaṁ*.
11. *khilāvadhāraṇyaḥ kumadavillikā*: we propose to emend *khilāvadhāraṇīyaḥ kumudavillikā*. Note the omission of *-u-* in the second syllable of the name Kumudavillikā.
11. *yathārahena*: emend *yathārhenā*.
14. *maudgalya-sagotro*: emend *maudgalya-sagotrā*.
17. *pāñca-varṣaIkā*: the intended word is *pāñca-varṣayikā*, but *pāñca-varṣikā* would have been better.
18. *na kena (cc)it svalp(āpy ā)vādhā (bhāvya) kāraṇam vahubhir ...*: it seems the engraver has written *ccit* rather than the expected *cit*. For similar phraseology, from the Licchavi corpus, closely related to Śaśāṅka in time and place, we may cite the Ādi-Nārāyaṇa Temple Inscription of Thankot (Regmi 1983, vol. I, no. 20, ll. 20–1, 25–7): *na kena cid asmat-pādoḥajivinaṁ svalpāpy ābādhā kartavyā ... ye 'py āgāmino rājāno 'smad-vañśyā bhaviṣyanti te 'py enām asmad-dattām bhūmim anumoditum arhanti yatkāraṇam bahubhir vvasudhā ...*; and the Luñjhya (Patan Palace) Inscription (Regmi 1983, vol. I, no. 116, ll. 12–13): *alpāpi bādhā na kāryā*. Cf. also *na kena cid vādhā*

*kāraṇīyā* in the Soro plate of Bhānu, year 5 (Majumdar 1935–6: 203, l. 12). In view of these and numerous other parallels, the gerundive *bhāvīyā* is surprising in our context. But it is impossible to read either *kāry(y)ā* or *kart(t)avyā*, whereas *bhāvīyā* seems a permissible reading. Regarding *kāraṇam*, the use of this term to introduce the traditional admonitory stanzas is also found in the Asiatic Society grant of Bhavadeva, year 2 (Sircar 1951: 94, l. 61). 18–20. Emended text of the three admonitory stanzas:

I. bahubhir vasudhā dattā rājabhiḥ  
sagarādibhiḥ  
yasya yasya yadā bhūmis tasya tasya tadā  
phalam

II. ṣaṣṭivarṣasahasrāṇi svarge modati  
bhūmidāḥ  
ākṣeptā cānumantā ca tāny eva narake  
vaset

III. svadattām paradattām vāpi yo hareta  
vasundharām  
svaviṣṭhāyām krimir bhūtvā piṭṛbhiḥ saha  
pacyate

In III, the syllable *pi* is not grammatically incorrect but needs to be deleted to obtain regular meter.

## Translation

### Seal

[Seal] of the office of the princely advisor.

### Plate

(1–6) Hail! On the full-moon-day in the month of Jyaiṣṭha, during an auspicious *tithi* and *muhūrta*, in the eighth year of the king Śrī Śasāṅkadeva, overlord of great kings (*mahārājādhirāja*), victor in a hundred thousand battles, endowed with beauty (*kalyāṇa*), auspiciousness (*maṅgala*) and longevity (*āyus*) that prosper during a full hundred years, who was, like the king of the gods (i.e. Indra), self-installed as cause of the taming of the five classes and life-stages of the Brahmins, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas, Śūdras, and so on, on the

earth that is surrounded, as it were, by a girdle [formed] by the four great oceans, whose decorations are conches, wish-jewels and pearls, that are ... (*most of line 1 illegible*); [on the earth] that is beautified by the three great peaks, [namely] the Himavat, the Vindhya and Kailāsa, and additionally beautified by the rivers spreading out everywhere to the east and west of the Bhāgīrathī (i.e. the Ganges), which removes the suffering of reincarnation [that consists in] birth, aging, death, fear and sorrow.

(6–10) On this day, in this month and year, the *antaraṅga*<sup>13</sup> [called] Nāgabhaṭagomin, son of Rādihā, addressed the *kuṭumbins* residing in Meḍḍakhāta,<sup>14</sup> together with the office (of the princely advisor),<sup>15</sup> [namely] the *mahāpradhāna* Rāmaprabhu, the *mahāmahattaras* Virahadeva, Kaṣkuka, Yajñuka, Vappuka, Vicitra, Udayadambha, Guṇadāsa, Vargapāla, Uṣṭhita, etc.: ‘By your kindness, I wish to carry out some meritorious work (*śreyas*).’<sup>16</sup> He was addressed by them: ‘Please do as said!’

(10–15) Therefore, with a view to the assent from the *nau-mahattara* [and] *bhogapatika* [named] Vidagdha, he purchased from these residents, together with the office,<sup>17</sup> the village, which needed to be ascertained as waste [land], called Kumudavillikā,<sup>18</sup> for eighty *kārṣāpaṇas*, and, after duly gratifying them with garments, food and beverages, gave it to the noble Brahmins of the Kāṇva School, of various *gotras*, steeped in ascetic practice and study, led by Yogeśvara, that is: Śrī Yogeśvara, of the Bharadvājagotra; Surabhivāmin, of the Kātyāyanagotra; Dāmayaśasvāmin, Gotrayaśasvāmin, and Rājñayaśyasvāmin of the Maudgalyagotra; Mādhavasvāmin of the Dhanañjayagotra; Lilasvāmin of the Bharadvājagotra; Rudrasvāmin of the ... gotra; Bhogayaśasvāmin, Vidaghasvāmin and Budhasvāmin<sup>19</sup>—[he gave it] to them by way of edict in copper.

(15–18) Its boundary to the east is Suktravarddhārṣaka, to the south ..., to the west Gomayakhaṇḍa, to the north Śākrārṣāvakraṭāyā. And [based on the finding] that they are quinquennial, with these boundaries a revenue entitlement worth twenty

*kārṣāpaṇas* was obtained. No one should make even a small encroachment upon it.

(18–20) The reason is:

- I. By numerous [kings], land has been given; and by many it has been protected. Whoever holds land at a given moment, to him does the fruit then belong.
- II. The giver of land revels sixty thousand years in heaven; the one who challenges [a donation] as well as the one who approves [of the challenge] will reside as many [years] in hell.
- III. The one who would steal land given by himself or another becomes a worm in his own excrement and is cooked with his ancestors.

### Contents and Historical Implications of the Inscription

The contents of the inscription make clear that it belongs to the class of land-sale grants, which record sales of land plots, or villages in some cases, to individuals who intend to donate them for some religious purpose.<sup>20</sup> The present grant was issued by the office (*adhikaraṇa*) of a *kumārāmātya*, the official title by which most of the administrators at the district level are commonly designated in the early inscriptions of Bengal. The limited information obtainable from the plate does not allow us to ascertain the location of the recorded incident whether in terms of geographical coordinates or in terms of administrative units, except that it was within the territory of Śaśāṅka, and probably in Bengal, because it is from this region that we have most other known cases of early medieval land-sale grants. The use of the *kārṣāpaṇa* as a currency unit may suggest some area in north Bengal, as it is so far found only in two copperplates related to this subregion in the period between the fifth and sixth centuries (Griffiths 2018: 50). On the other hand, the time of the incident is clearly stated to be on the full-moon day of the month Jyaiṣṭha in the eighth year of Śaśāṅka's reign (ll. 6–7). The reign of the king is presented with

a fairly extensive eulogy in prose (ll. 1–6). He is mentioned with the title of *mahārājādhirāja*, which denotes his status as a sovereign ruler (l. 6). On the other hand, epithets indicating his religious inclinations and devotion to a specific deity, like *paramadaivata* and *paramamāheśvara* found in the Panchrol plate (Furui 2011: 121, ll. 4–5), are missing in the present grant.

The recorded incident and procedure can be summarised as follows. On the aforementioned date, Nāgabhaṭagomin, the son of Rādhā and a close associate (*antaraṅga*) of the king, approached the *kuṭumbins* (on this term, see below) residing in Meḍḍakhāta—namely one *mahāpradhāna*, nine *mahāmahattaras* and others—accompanied by the *adhikaraṇa* (ll. 7–9). He conveyed to them his wish to carry out a certain meritorious deed with their favour, and they approved it (ll. 9–10). Then Nāgabhaṭagomin purchased from the residents accompanied by the *adhikaraṇa*, namely the aforementioned *kuṭumbins*, a village named Kumudavillikā (unless the actual spelling *kumada*—seen on the plate is not an error) for the price of 80 *kārṣāpaṇas*, with approval of the *naumahattara-bhogapatika* Vidagdha, on condition that its *khila* (waste or fallow) status be confirmed (ll. 10–11). Nāgabhaṭagomin donated the village to eleven named brahmins of the Kāṇva school, headed by Yogeśvara, belonging to diverse *gotras* and endowed with ascetic practice and learning, after providing them with garments, food and drink, and making it a tract donated by copperplate grant, which most scholars would assume means that it was to become tax-exempt, although, as we will explain, it may not have this precise implication here (ll. 11–15). Next, the border landmarks in the four cardinal directions are indicated, and said to be quinquennial or five-yearly (ll. 15–17). By these borders, a *bhogādāna* worth 20 *kārṣāpaṇas* was obtained, presumably by *bhogapatika* Vidagdha (l. 17). The description of borders as quinquennial reminds us of a clause in the *Nāradaśmṛti* which affirms that land kept fallow for five years reverts to the legal status of jungle, and of another in the *Arthaśāstra* which says that the ownership of a dike would expire if it remains unused for five years.<sup>21</sup> We



therefore infer that these boundary markers being called quinquennial indicates their having been abandoned for at least five years, which in turn sufficed to confirm the status of the village itself as waste or fallow. The *bhogādāna* seems to denote an annual income from the village, to which Vidagdha was entitled as holder of revenue entitlement (*bhogapatika*). Its acquisition by Vidagdha, who could have held the village as his *bhoga*, as will be suggested below, would then denote his recovery of this privilege. The relatively low value of income, 20 *kārṣāpaṇas*, may be due to the status of the village as waste to be reclaimed by the resettlement of brahmins through the present grant.

Although we are unfortunately unable to propose a plausible reading of its initial part, it is clear that the eulogy of Śaśāṅka presented in the present inscription is not identical with any of the eulogies found in the other plates issued under the same king, while it does globally conform to them in contents. Stating Śaśāṅka's rule over the earth with description of the latter as wearing the four oceans as her girdle is common to all the other plates (Furui 2011: 121, ll. 3–5; Hultsch 1900–1: 144, ll. 1–3; Majumdar 1945: 7, l. 3; 9, l. 3), while the motif of Ganges water cleansing sins is shared with the two Antla plates (Majumdar 1945: 7, ll. 2–3; 9, ll. 2–3). Both the present inscription and the Panchrol plate mention the four *varṇas* and *āśramas* (Furui 2011: 121, l. 2), but the present one has a more elaborate expression with the unusual idea that the *varṇas* would number 'five' (l. 5). Though both present elaborate depictions of the earth, the rhetoric deployed in both cases is different (Furui 2011: 121, ll. 1–4), and the present plate also has a description of the oceans themselves (ll. 1–2). It is distinguished further from the other plates by the descriptions of the character and deeds of Śaśāṅka (ll. 4–6). These differences in eulogy may be explained as resulting from different agencies being responsible for the drafting of the plates. Whatever be the case, the scenario must have been markedly different from the centralised production process typical for later royal grants of Bengal where we observe a high

level of uniformity presumably due to a single agency taking charge of drafting royal edicts. On the other hand, the commonality in rhetoric observed between the several documents issued during Śaśāṅka's reign does point to a system of communication through which a particular notion of kingship was broadcast.

Among the rhetorical elements of the eulogy, most of which are stereotypical, one is noteworthy as possibly reflecting a politically significant historical fact: Śaśāṅka is claimed to be self-installed like Indra (ll. 5–6). This may allude to his acquisition of sovereignty not by inheritance but through another process. If one is to imagine an event that previous generations of scholars would have termed 'usurpation', then the king from whom or from whose descendant he would have usurped the position may have been Jayanāga, a sovereign ruler of Karṇasavarṇa known from his own royal grant and gold coins (Barnett 1925–6: 63, ll. 1–2; Devahuti 1998: 40–5; Mukherjee 1993: 14–15, 42).

The case recorded in the plate generally conforms to the pattern observed in the land-sale grants of Bengal issued in the period between the mid-sixth and the early seventh century. Local magnates with titles like *mahattara* and *pradhāna*, associated with the *adhikaraṇa*, were approached by a representative of a superordinate layer of political power and decided on his application for purchase of land in order to donate it to religious agents like brahmins (Furui 2020: 90–1, 99). However, there are some elements which make the present case different from the others. They are the object of sale/donation, the donees and the procedure. The *antaraṅga* Nāgabhaṭagomin purchased a village called Kumudavillikā, which was to be confirmed as being *khila*. The confirmation was made through the assessment of boundaries, which were found to have been abandoned for more than five years, as explained above. The condition of the village as waste is also indicated by the low price with which it was purchased. 80 *kārṣāpaṇas* seems a very modest price to pay for a village, compared with the 400 *paṇas*, which would have been equivalent to 25 *kārṣāpaṇas* (Sircar 1966: 228), paid for a single

plot of 200 *droṇavāpas* in the Panchrol plate (Furui 2011: 121). The donees of this village, on the other hand, were eleven brahmins. The object and recipients of donation suggest the following scenario leading to the issue of the present grant: the village Kumudavillikā had been abandoned for some reason and its land had been kept fallow. Nāgabhaṭagomin purchased the village to settle the brahmin beneficiaries. The gift of garments, food and drink, which looks like a simple conferral of honour, could rather be a special provision for them to settle the abandoned village and reclaim fallow land.

This scenario would then explain a peculiarity of the procedure adopted in this case, namely the approval sought from *naumahattara-bhogapatika* Vidagdha. Of the titles held by Vidagdha, *bhogapatika* suggests that he was entitled to *bhoga*, that is revenue, for some service. The title *naumahattara*, of unclear connotation and encountered in no other inscription known to us, indicates his position as a landed magnate connected with boats. He may have been a local notable holding many boats and serving the king in this capacity. It can be conjectured that the revenue from Kumudavillikā constituted his *bhoga* or part of it, so that his approval was necessary for the sale of the village. From his perspective, the prospect of the resettlement of the abandoned village and the reclamation of fallow land following it could have been sufficient motivation for approving the sale. He regained his *bhoga*, although it would yield no more than the moderate amount of 20 *kārṣāpaṇas* per annum.

The appearance of *kuṭumbins* as receivers of the petition is the other peculiarity of the present case. The *kuṭumbins*, a term denoting either ‘peasant householders’ (Furui 2020: 56–7) or ‘landholders’ (Griffiths 2018: 52, n. 11), were a majority group in the rural society of Puṇḍravardhana under the Gupta provincial administration in the fifth and sixth centuries. Their dominant section, with *mahattaras* as the upper layer, wielded hegemony in rural society, especially as constituents of rural *adhikaraṇas* which decided on applications for sale of land

(Furui 2020: 48–50). In the following period, the ascendancy of *mahattaras* as landed magnates excluded *kuṭumbins* from the process of decision making (Furui 2020: 91–2). In the present case, all the named members constituting *kuṭumbins* were prefixed with *mahāpradhāna* and *mahāmahattara*, indicating their position as landed magnates. Thus the case also attests to the ascendancy of landed magnates, to whom the term *kuṭumbin* is applied just as a category. Still, the invocation of the term as a category is significant, and it could be a remnant of a process through which ascending *mahattaras* differentiated themselves from other *kuṭumbins* and monopolised the authority shared with the latter. The free disposal of *khila* land, which was possibly a remnant of communal control (Furui 2020: 55) and applied to an abandoned village in the present case, could be one constituent of such authority.

The last point to be discussed is the appearance of the *kārṣāpaṇa* as a currency unit. The *kārṣāpaṇa* is found to be used as a currency unit in two copperplate inscriptions from north Bengal. In the second Raktamālā grant, which was issued under the Gupta rule sometime in the fifth or sixth century, the price of one *kulyavāpa* of land is said to be 100 *kārṣāpaṇas*, while the actual payment for a land plot of the same size was made with 200 *rūpakas* (Griffiths 2018: 25, ll. 3–5, 8–9). On the other hand, the Mastakaśvabhra grant of the time of Pradyumnabandhu, assignable to the late sixth or the early seventh century, mentions tax calculated to be 45 *kārṣāpaṇas*, for which actual payment was made in cowrie shells amounting to one thousand *cūrṇikās* (Griffiths 2015: 30, ll. 12–14). In these cases, the *kārṣāpaṇa* was used as a unit of computation, but actual payment was made with other means, either silver currency of different value or cowrie shells. If we take the description in the plate literally, the present case could constitute evidence for an actual payment in *kārṣāpaṇa*, though the identification of actual specimens of contemporary coins with this unit has not yet been established. At least we can be sure of the use of *kārṣāpaṇa* as a unit of currency in the period from the fifth century to the early seventh. It makes a remarkable contrast with the

other evidence on the currency system of Bengal in the fifth and sixth centuries, in which the gold *dīnāra* and the silver *rūpaka/māṣa* with exchange rate of 1/16 were prevalent. The use of *kārṣāpaṇas* under Pradyumnabandhu and Śaśānka, both sovereign rulers after the disintegration of Gupta overlordship, indicates the shift of the currency system from *dīnāra-rūpaka/māṣa* to *kārṣāpaṇa*. The conjuncture of both systems in the second Raktamālā grant suggests that northern Bengal went through a transitional period. From the

mid-ninth century onwards, north Bengal then saw a currency system based on the *purāṇa*, a unit of silver currency, and other lower units with which production of land or village was estimated under Pāla rule (Furui 2020: 146). The use of *kārṣāpaṇa* in the three cases including the present one points to a phase in the currency history of Bengal, during which the system based on gold and silver coins was replaced by another based on a notional unit of silver and imported cowrie shells (Furui 2019: 166–9).

## NOTES

1. The research for this article has been undertaken as part of the project DHARMA ‘The Domestication of “Hindu” Asceticism and the Religious Making of South and Southeast Asia’, funded by the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement no 809994). See <https://dharma.hypotheses.org>.

2. We quote here the estimate for a 17-year-long reign given by Devahuti 1998: 52. But see below, note 5.

3. For the translations of the corresponding parts, see Beal 1884 (I): 210, (II): 42, 90–1, 118, 121–2; Beal 1911: 83, 171.

4. On the title actually given to this text, which is generally called the *Mañjuśrīmulakalpa*, in the fundamental manuscript, see Delhey 2012; on the dating of the *Rājavyākaraṇa*, see Sanderson 2009: 129, n. 300.

5. The textual passage in the *Mañjuśrīyamulakalpa* (53.673–4) is not very clear: ... *sārdhaṃ saptamaṃ tathā || varṣāṃ daśa saptam ca māsam ekaṃ tathāparam | divasāṃ saptamaṣṭau ca ...*. While Devahuti, as quoted above, based her estimate of the length of Śaśānka’s reign on this passage, it must be noted that this evidence is contradicted by the Antla plate (see just below) and its regnal year 19. We disagree with the idea, first formulated by B.P. Sinha (1954: 237) on the basis of a weak palaeographic argument, that Majumdar’s reading of number sign 9 was a mistake for 3, which led Devahuti (1998: 50, n. 5) to assume the Antla plate in question dates to regnal year 13. The number sign read, we believe correctly, as 9 by Majumdar has a shape sufficiently comparable to the cases of 9 read in several Gupta-period plates from north Bengal

(see table in Griffiths 2018: 18–22, and especially the figures on p. 34) and to the examples of shapes of the number 9 given by Singh 1991, pl. 177.

6. This is how we now interpret the name of the *viśaya*, which was interpreted as Ekatākaka in Furui 2011.

7. See Sanyal 2010: 123–4. For the location of Tāvira, also mentioned in a recently published Gupta-period grant, see Griffiths 2018: 43–4.

8. Apart from them, the two copperplate inscriptions of *mahābalādhikṛta antarāṅga mahāsāndhivigrahika* Somadatta, who could be identical with *sāmanta mahārāja* Somadatta of the Antla plate dated to a year 19, and the other of *mahāpratīhāra mahārāja* Bhānudatta, all found near Soro in Baleswar district, Odisha, mention a *paramabhaṭṭāraka* as their overlord (Majumdar 1935–6: 202, B ll. 1–2, 8–9, C l. 1, 203, C l. 8, D l. 8). The Kanas and Baleswar grants of the second ruler also contain similar references to a *paramabhaṭṭāraka* (Mitra 1935: 622, l. 11; Sircar 1949–50: 334, ll. 1–2, 8–9). This *paramabhaṭṭāraka* could be Śaśānka and the dates mentioned in these plates could be in his regnal years (Devahuti 1998: 50–1).

9. See Griffiths 2018 for the case of a plate observed at an antique shop in Dhaka before ending up in the same private collection in Delhi.

10. On this device in Bengal epigraphy, see Griffiths (2015: 18, 28 with n. 24) and Griffiths and Noman Nasir (2016: 39).

11. For a script table showing the closely comparable *akṣara* sets of two inscriptions originating from the periphery of Gauḍa at or around Śaśānka’s time, see Griffiths et al. 2017: 102–3.

12. On this technique, besides the references furnished in Griffiths 2018: 51, n. 8, we may now

refer to Miles et al. 2018 for a demonstration of its application to inscriptions of first-millennium Burma.

13. Sircar (1966):

*Antaraṅga* (IE 8-3; BL), explained as ‘a privy councillor or a physician’, though the same person is known to be called *Rāja-vaidya* (i.e. the royal physician) and *Antaraṅga*; probably a private secretary; but mentioned along with *Vaiśvāsika* (EI 3); regarded by some as a class of royal servants very intimate with the king, probably the same as *Abhyantara* (HD). Cf. Ep. Ind., Vol. XI, p. 286; Vol. XII, p. 99.

14. On other toponyms ending in *-khāta(ka)*, see Griffiths 2015: 20 (Raktamālā grant I, l. 20: *khuddālakhātaka*, with discussion on p. 26) and 30 (Mastakaśvabhra grant, l. 17: *o(ptr)akh(ā)ta*).

15. The compound *sa-adhikaraṇa-upeta* is redundant.

16. According to *Amarakośa* 1.4.300 (*syad dharmam astriyām punyaśreyasī sukṛtān vṛṣah*), *śreyas* is a synonym of *dharmā*.

17. The redundant compound *sa-karaṇa-upeta* is synonymous with *sa-adhikaraṇa-upeta* seen above. The use of *karaṇa* for *adhikaraṇa* is also found in the Antla plate (Majumdar 1945: 1 [seals], 8 [l. 9], 9 [l. 7]).

18. For another toponym ending in *-villikā*, see Śṛṅgāṭakavillikā in the Mastakaśvabhra grant of the reign of Pradyumnabandu (Griffiths 2015: 30, l. 17).

19. The *gotra* of the last three beneficiaries is not specified.

20. For the outline of these documents, see Yamazaki 1982.

21. *Pañcavarṣāvāsannaṁ tu syāt kṣetram aṭavīsamam, Nāradaśmṛti* 112.23cd, ed. Lariviere 1989 (the whole stanza is quoted with Lariviere’s translation in Griffiths 2018: 51); *pañcavarṣoparatakarmanāḥ setubandhasya svāmyam luḥyeta, anyatrāpadbhayah, Arthaśāstra* 3.9.32, ed. Kangle 1969. Olivelle (2013: 198) translates the *Arthaśāstra* rule as follows: ‘When a dike is left unused for five years, ownership to it ceases, unless during time of adversity’.

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