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Ratnaśrījñāna

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Measured by the crudest quantitative standards—miles travelled, size of readership, kinds of language-traditions influenced, numbers of translations and adaptations and borrowings—Daṇḍin's seventh-century *Kāvyaḍarsā* can safely be adjudged the most important work on literary theory and practice in Asian history, and, in world history, a close second to Aristotle's *Poetics*. Its impact on the literary histories of southern India, in particular Kannada, Sinhala, and Tamil in the period 800-1200, is common knowledge among scholars, so too its appropriation into Pali (in the *Subodhālaṅkāra*) during the later centuries of this same epoch, when Theravādin literati undertook a dramatic reordering of their aesthetic objectives according to Sanskrit principles. Less well-known is the influence the *Kāvyaḍarsā* exercised on Chinese in the formation of Recent Style Poetry in the high T'ang, and on Tibetan after the remarkable educational reforms initiated by Śākya Paṇḍita (1182-1251).¹ In view of these facts, any text pertaining to the history and interpretation of Daṇḍin's work will hold considerable scholarly interest. Foremost among such texts, of course, are commentaries on the *Kāvyaḍarsā* itself.

It is sobering to realize, however, that the number of published commentaries on the *Kāvyaḍarsā* stands in almost directly inverse proportion to the text's importance. Only four had found their way into print up to 1957 (of the two dozen or more pre-colonial commentaries that we know of). Three of these in fact were published together, in a now rare edition, by D.T. Tatacharya in 1936, and largely ignored since.² The editor believed that nothing was known about the authors of these commentaries except their names (and for the third, not even that). This may not in fact be the case.

The first of the commentaries is printed in Tatacharya's edition in the *Śrutānupālinī* composed by one Vādiṅghāla (or Vādighaṅkāla, or Vādighaṅghala).³ Neither the printed version of this commentary nor any of its additional manuscripts tell us anything about the identity of the author. In 1921, however, a tenth-century Gaṅga grant was published that may have bearing on this question. The record, which is dated Śaka 884 (A.D. 963), describes the gift of an *agrahāra*, as *śrutagurudakṣiṇā* or teacher's fee, to one Vādighaṅghala [sic] Bhaṭṭa, and contains a long *praśasti* describing the scholar. Included in the encomium is the following list of accomplishments:

niravadyasāhityavidyāvyaḅhyānanipuṅa -.....
sakalarājavidyāpratipādanapratibuddhabodhaprabodhitavallabharāja.....
tadātvāyatisughaṭamantrakramopadesānuṣṭhānavaśīkṛtākṅhiladigaṅgāna...
kṛṣṇarājadeva-

That is, Vādighaṅghala was an “expert in the exegesis of the science of literature” as well as a “political theorist who shaped the thinking of the Vallabha king, Kṛṣṇarāja, who, by following his systematic advice, sound both for the present and for the future, has been enabled to conquer the quarters.”⁴ The Kṛṣṇa in question here, whose deeds are described earlier in the grant and who crowned as his vassal king Vādighaṅghala’s actual patron, Gaṅga Mārasimha, is Kṛṣṇa III Rāṣṭrakūṭa (r. 939-67).

It seems to me probable that this scholar is to be identified with the author of the *Śrutānupālinī*. It may be objected that the Vādighaṅghala of the grant is a Jain. He is attributed in the inscription with *jineśvaracaraṇakamalārādhane ’bhīyogaḥ*, and in fact, it appears that this rather curious name is a sobriquet, “swiftest (*jaṅghāla*) among debaters,” that he acquired by his mastery of Jaina thought.⁵ The *Kāvyaḍarsā* commentary itself by contrast shows no sign of this religious affiliation, and actually begins with a salutation to Sarasvatī and mention of Bhahmā and Murāri. But as the *praśasti* shows, Vādighaṅghala was a recent convert to the faith—his grandfather is described as an orthodox Brahmin—just like many other tenth-century Jainas of Karnataka, most notably the great poet Pampa, a contemporary of Vādighaṅghala’s (his *Vikramārjunavijaya* was composed around 950). Such men often retained signs of their Brahmanical heritage, a feature that appears to have become institutionalized among the Jaina Brāhmaṇa community of Karnataka. The surname Bhaṭṭa in the grant may be taken as evidence of this.

As for the second commentary published by Tatacharya, that of Taruṇavācaspati, we now know that this was almost certainly composed at the Hoysala court in the mid-thirteenth century. For, one Keśava Bhaṭṭāraka identifies himself as the son of Taruṇavācaspati and tutor to King Vīra Rāmanātha (r. 1257-74), in the colophon of his own commentary on the *Kāvyaḍarsā*.⁶

In 1957, Anantalal Thakur and Upendra Jha placed students of Daṇḍin under a heavy debt when they edited from a single manuscript the remarkable commentary of “Master Śrījñāna from Sinhala” (*ācāryaratnaśrījñānasya simhalajanmanah*).⁷ The editors did a magnificent job in making sense of the often imperfect manuscript (though areas for improvement remain), and have provided an informed introduction to the questions concerning the author. Proceeding on the basis of the final verses of the commentary and the colophon, they suggest that it was composed under the patronage of “some Rāṣṭrakūṭa king named Tuṅga who most probably ruled under the overlordship of Emperor Rājyapāla of Gauḍa and Magadha,” but they have nothing more of substance to suggest.⁸

The work dates itself to the 23rd year of the reign of Rājyapāla. Thakur and Jha take this to be A.D. 931, though the reckoning of the succession of Pāla rulers is disputed, and a truer date may be 955.⁹ Ratnaśrī refers to his patron not just by name, *śrīmattuṅganarādhīpa*, but also as *sarvābhyunnatarāṣṭrakūṭatilaka* (“the forehead ornament of the universally ascendant Rāṣṭrakūṭas”) (p. 281). This is hardly the manner in which to describe a Rāṣṭrakūṭa family resident at Gayā and occupying the status of vassal of the Palas, as the editors believed, and this is to say nothing of the fact that we have no information from elsewhere corroborating the existence of such a family. On the face of it this is evidently a reference

to a king of the imperial Rāṣṭrakūṭas of Karnataka, and another document, of which the editors were unaware, makes this identification close to certain.

An inscription found at Bodh Gayā, “palaeographically assignable to circa 9th century,” and published more than a century ago was composed by the very man who wrote the *Kāvyādarśa* commentary, “Paṇḍit Ratnaśrījñāna, the Buddhist mendicant of the island Sinhala” (*siṃhaladvīpajanmanā paṇḍitaratnaśrījana* [read: *jñāna*] *bhikṣuṇā*, line 18).¹⁰ The inscription records the dedication of a repository for incense (? *gandhakūṭi*) on the part of the author’s patron—named, again Tuṅga—in the fifteenth year of his reign.

According to the inscription, this Tuṅga was second in descent from some one named Nanda (or perhaps Nanna). A number of epithets are given to Nanda in the inscription, one of which is particularly revealing: “*Maṇipuradurgadhavala*,” “Him of Pure White [Fame] of the fort of Manipura” (line 4). It is far likelier in terms of phonology that Manipura refers to Mānyapura—that is, Mānyakhēṭa (Malkhēḍ), the Rāṣṭrakūṭa capital in what is today’s eastern Karnataka—rather than Mainpuri, as suggested by Rajendralal Mitra, the original editor of the inscription. This identification becomes more probable when we recall that the founder of Mānyakhīṭa (or perhaps son of the founder), the great king Nṛpatuṅga Amoghavarṣa (814-80), alone among the Rāṣṭrakūṭas bore the *biruda* (*Atiśaya*) *dhavala*. Repeated references to him by this title are found in the inscriptions issued during his reign, and in the remarkable work on Kannada poetics produced at his court, the *Kavirājamārga*, itself an adaptation of the *Kāvyādarśa*.¹¹

Nanda is also called in the grant Mahībhadraka (?) and Guṇāvaloka, and whereas the first seems nowhere attested in connection with *Amoghavarṣa*, *-avalōka* is at least an epithet-suffix of the Kannadiga Rāṣṭrakūṭas (cf. *Khaḍgāvaloka* in the case of Dantidurga, and *Raṇāvaloka* of Stambha, son of Dhruva).¹² The title “Beholder of (Literary) Excellence” would make good sense in reference to the patron of the *Kavirājamārga*, whose knowledge of literature is praised throughout the text. The name Nanda or Nanna itself is not found in reference to Amoghavarṣa, either, though *Naṇṇa* (or *Naṇṇappa*) is not uncommon among the earlier Rāṣṭrakūṭas.¹³ What is especially significant, however, for the identification of Nanda with Amoghavarṣa is the fact that Ratnaśrī describes Nanda having become a renunciate at the end of his life:

yaś cānte tanum utsasarja vidhivad yogīva tīrthāśrayaḥ (line 4)

(At the end of his life he abandoned his body according to rule, like a yogin, residing in a holy place.)

This fits well with what we know about Amoghavarṣa from other works, especially the celebrated little “catechism” entitled the *Praśnottararatnamālikā*. Although this work has been variously attributed—most commonly to Śaṅkara, in a highly vedantized version—what I believe to be the oldest extant manuscript copy of it, a palm-leaf written in an Old Kannada script and preserved in the Oriental Research Institute, Mysore, ends with the following verse: