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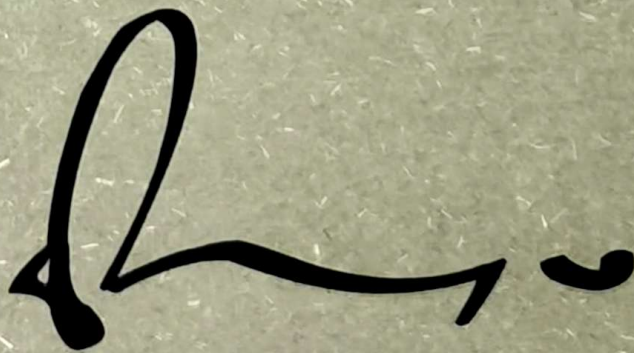
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The Historical Significance of Licchavi Inscriptions in a Cross-cultural Context: Past, Present, and Future Directions of Research¹

Diwakar Acharya and Nina Mirnig

ABSTRACT: In the wake of the political stabilization of the Trans-Himalayan region through the foundation of the Tubo Dynasty and the Tang Dynasty in the seventh century CE, political, economic and cultural relations between the Licchavi kingdom of Kathmandu Valley and economic and religious hubs in Inner and East Asia considerably increased. This article addresses the role of the Nepalese corpus of Licchavi-period Sanskrit inscriptions for historical reconstructions of Trans-Himalayan relationships in this period of growth. It provides a brief survey of the academic study of this corpus since its inception in

1 Some of the research undertaken and featured in this project takes place as part of the Austria Science Fund (FWF) project “Mapping Piety, Politics and Power in Early Medieval Nepal” (V-755) carried out at the Institute for the Cultural and Intellectual History of Asia of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, in collaboration with the Oriental Institute at Oxford University and Robin Coningham, UNESCO Chair on Archaeological Ethics and Practice in Cultural Heritage at the Department of Archaeology at Durham University. For the collection of some of the data and photographs used in this article we are grateful for the collaboration and assistance of the Department of Archaeology and National Archives in Kathmandu, with particular thanks to Kosh Prasad Acharya, Damodar Gautam, Saubhagya Pradhananga, and Shyamsundar Rajvamshi. Our sincere thanks also go to Luo Hong, who has not only prepared a Chinese translation of our text but in the course of this provided invaluable feedback and many suggestions for improvements to the article as well as to the translation and interpretation of the inscription in the appendix.

the 19th century, a typology of the inscriptions, as well as a brief overview of current research activities carried out by the authors and their collaboration partners. Furthermore, the article reviews important material and textual sources in Chinese and Tibetan that bear on the history of Nepal's relationship to its northern neighbors. The authors argue for the need to collaboratively review and tally these important multi-lingual sources and material evidences outside Kathmandu Valley with the Nepalese materials in order to develop a better understanding of the cultural and historical processes which accompanied the intensification of cultural relations along this corridor between South Asia and the Tibetan plateau and beyond during the early medieval period.

Introduction: The Significance of Licchavi Inscriptions for the Study of the Trans-Himalayan Region

From the early medieval period onwards Nepal, and in particular Kathmandu Valley, has been an important node in the Trans-Himalayan cultural and diplomatic networks that intensified along the existing trade routes. As such, this region holds a key role in the transmission and exchange of religious, cultural and artistic knowledge between the Indian subcontinent and both, the Tang dynasty and the Tubo dynasty starting with the mid-7th century CE. Due to lack of textual sources, the early history of Kathmandu Valley has to be deduced from later legends or historical reconstructions based on archaeological finds. However, from the third century CE onwards there is a significant body of Sanskrit inscriptions, which constitute the earliest extant historical writings in the Valley and form the basis of more concrete historical reconstructions during the period of increased exchange between the Nepalese kingdom and its southern and northern neighbours. Ranging from one-line inscriptions to royal charters of up to 73 lines, this body of over 200 stone inscriptions contains information about religious activities, political developments, as well as administrative and legal regulations according to which the kingdom was governed and organized between the fourth and the first half of the eighth centuries CE. Based on these sources, these centuries have been characterized as a culturally flourishing period, shaped by the influx of Indian culture as it was transmitted through the Sanskrit language, the expansion of urban centers, and increasing prosperity and economic activities through the increased usage of trade routes toward Tibet from the seventh century onwards.²

This cultural heyday and the introduction of Sanskrit culture to Kathmandu Valley is associated with the presence of the Licchavis in Nepal. Branches of their family ruled the kingdom from at least the third century CE onwards, which is also the reason why this period is commonly referred to as the Licchavi period in scholarship. The origins of this Licchavi family

² Levi 1905; Regmi 1960; Slusser 1982; Deeg 2016.

and the historical circumstances that have led to their presence in Nepal are as of yet obscure. However, it is likely that the Licchavis ruling Kathmandu Valley are related to the Licchavi clan from the time of the historical Buddha, when they resided in Vaishali (near present-day Patna, Bihar), and formed part of the Vṛjji/Vajji confederation of eight clans. From Pali sources we also know that the Licchavis had close ties with the Shakyas in the Terai, to whom the historical Buddha belonged, and that they were one of the eight clans who shared the Buddha's remains.³ The early Licchavis in Vaishali were conquered by the Magadha king in the fifth/fourth century BCE, after which their traces grow faint in the historical records. The family re-appears in the inscription record of the Gupta family. The Gupta king Chandragupta I (ascended 320 CE) married the Licchavi princess Kumāradevī and their son Samudragupta describes himself as the grandson of Licchavi descent on the mother's side (*licchavidauhitra*) in the Allahabad pillar inscription.⁴ Nevertheless, nothing further is known about the whereabouts and position of the Licchavis once reigning over Vaishali. It is only in Nepal that a branch of the Licchavi family re-appears in history as a strong and independent ruling power from the third century onwards. An inscribed royal statue of King Jayavarman dating to the third century⁵ may be the earliest extant epigraphic record of this branch.⁶ However, the first extant explicit reference to the Licchavi family in Nepal features in a donative inscription issued by King Mānadeva's daughter Vajayavatī, who is referred to in the inscription as born into the Licchavi family (DV 20).

From Mānadeva's reign onwards there is a large and dense record of inscriptions issued under the rule of the Licchavis up to the mid-8th century CE. Besides the epigraphic evidence, the cultural and economic achievements are reflected in a rich variety of surviving sculptures,⁷ archaeological remains,⁸ their own coinage,⁹ as well as a range of extant palm-leaf manuscripts

3 Strong 2004: 118.

4 Fleet 1960: no. 1; Slusser 1982: 21.

5 Castro & Garbini 1996; Garbini 2002.

6 This Jayavarman may, in fact, be the same king referred to in King Jayadeva's account of the Licchavi royal lineage in his eighth-century stele inscription located in Pashupatinath (DV 148). A King Jayadeva is mentioned therein as the 23rd king after King Supuṣpa and eleven kings prior in line to King Vṛṣadeva, who, in turn, is declared to be King Mānadeva's grandfather in the fifth-century pillar inscription (DV 2). There has been some debate on the reading and interpretation of the year number inscribed on Jayavarman's inscription, which has been read by Castro & Garbini (1996) as Saṃvat 207, and by Tamot and Alsop (1996) and other Nepali scholars as Saṃvat 107.

7 There are several studies dedicated to the topic of Nepalese Licchavi-period sculptures, see, e.g. Bangdel 1982, Pal 1974 and 1985, and the many article publications by Gautama Vajracharya.

8 See Verardi 1992, Khanal & Riccardi 2007, and more recent excavations and studies by a team of archaeologies under the direction of Robin Coningham and the Department of Archaeology, Government of Nepal (e.g. Coningham et al. 2016).

9 See Rhodes et al. 1989.

imported to or produced in Kathmandu Valley,¹⁰ all testimony to the fervent cultural, artistic and intellectual activities—especially in Buddhist, Hindu and Tantric communities. We are still only in the process of understanding the organizational structure of the Licchavi kingdom, which may have profited from strong connections to adjacent feudatories. It is yet to be determined how far the political and cultural reach of the Licchavi kingdom extended towards the borderland regions in the North and South, a topic which forms part of our current investigations.

Amongst others, one important but hitherto understudied aspect of Licchavi history concerns the nature of the Nepalese kingdom's foreign relations, in particular those to the dynasties of the Tang and Tubo. Existing textual sources suggest that with the rise of these dynasties in the seventh century CE, their respective relationships with the Nepalese kingdom grew closer. While it is likely that travel routes between Kathmandu Valley and the Tibetan plateau were already in existence prior to the seventh century, Chinese accounts show that earlier routes along the silk route and through the Kuṣāṇa empire in the North West were more frequented.¹¹ Only after the political stabilization in the Trans-Himalayan area due to the establishment of the Tubo and the Tang dynasty did diplomats, traders as well as pilgrims from these regions start to use the routes through Kathmandu Valley to reach the Indian subcontinent more frequently, resulting in growing trade and diplomatic relationships with Nepal.¹² It is much due to these processes that the Licchavi kingdom experienced a particularly prosperous period from the seventh century onwards and gained in status and prosperity within the region.¹³

Amongst the known Licchavi inscriptions, only one contains a concrete reference to interactions between the Nepalese and their northern neighbors, namely a royal charter issued by King Śivadeva II in the area of modern Lagan Tol, dated to Licchavi Saṃvat 119 (i.e. 694 CE). This charter records the King's donation of a village to a Śaivite temple called Śivadeveśvara, most likely named in his honour (DV 139). Amongst the legal arrangements involved in this transfer, the charter records that all administrative and judiciary rights of the village are transferred to a group of Śaiva Pāśupata teachers named Vaśapāśupatas, in order for them to manage and maintain the temple (DV 139, ll.5-9). For the benefit of the village, the King also asks for tradesmen to recruit five load-bearers from this village every year for the purpose of carrying mercantile goods to Tibet, the so-called *bhoṭṭaviṣṭi*, the "Tibet-hire" (DV 139, ll.15-17).

The majority of sources containing records relating to Nepalese foreign relations with its northern neighbors are preserved outside Nepal, namely in classical Chinese and classical

10 See, e.g., Petech 1984 and Harimoto 2011.

11 Deeg 2016: 8.

12 Deeg 2016: 9; Sen 2015.

13 Deeg 2016.

Tibetan text sources.¹⁴ For instance, in the Tang Annals it is recorded that King Narendradeva (r. 643–679) had received military support from the nascent kingdom of Songtsen Gampo in Tibet as he reclaimed the Licchavi after his exile. These text sources further claim that during Narendradeva's rule Nepal was a tributary to the Tubo kingdom a scenario which is hypothetically possible, but for which we lack any corroborating sources. Further references to China-Nepal relations in the Tang accounts are found in the context of the diplomatic missions of the Tang envoy Wang Xuance. It is reported that Wang Xuance led a campaign against the Indian king Harṣa's usurper, who had attacked the mission on their arrival in Magadha. According to the records, this military action which was carried out with support from the Nepalese king. It may, in fact, be the case that such a military alliance on this occasion had strengthened Narendradeva's position in regaining sovereignty in the Valley. Even though the Nepalese sources do not comment on these events, we can trace a shift of power in the inscriptions during this period, namely the disappearance of dominant ministers, who until Narendradeva's reign acted as de-facto rulers and may even have been involved in the political processes that led to the deposition of Narendradeva's father Udayadeva.¹⁵

Another famous link that has been claimed between Nepal and Tubo revolves around the story of King Songtsen Gampo marrying a Licchavi princess named Bhṛkuṭī, by legend described as King Aṃśuvarman's daughter, in about 641 CE. While this particular relationship with a daughter of Aṃśuvarman is chronologically impossible,¹⁶ it is likely that some kind of marital relationship between Tubo and Nepal had been initiated at the time.¹⁷ However, it has to be noted that these historical reconstructions are based on later Tibetan historical accounts from about the 12th/13th centuries, in which according to Tucci even the mention of Bhṛkuṭī and her ascribed role is not certain.¹⁸ Nevertheless, this connection has been celebrated and holds an important symbolic value, also because it is claimed that it was her who brought Buddhism to Tibet, in particular the Avalokiteśvara traditions. The historical circumstances that have led to these claims therefore deserve further scrutiny for reconstructing the role of the cultural and political connections between the Nepalese and the Tubo Kingdom in the transmission of Buddhism to Tibet.

As is evident from these examples, a closer comprehensive study correlating Nepalese inscriptions as well as material findings of this period with the Chinese and Tibetan sources is a *desideratum* to improve our understanding of Nepal's relationship to its northern and southern neighbors. Thus far, partly due to disciplinary and linguistic boundaries, little research has been

14 See, e.g., Levi 1905: 159, 165, Slusser 1982: 32-37, and Petech 1984: 24-30.

15 See, e.g., Mirnig 2013: 337.

16 Petech 1984: 24-5, Slusser 1982: 33.

17 See, e.g., Slusser 1982.

18 Tucci 1962.

dedicated to systematically bringing together these disparate sources on the basis of up-to-date academic standards and advancements in the field. This is somehow incongruous with the fact that Kathmandu Valley was a crucial point of transfer of religious and artistic knowledge as well as craftsmanship in and out of China during the reign of the Licchavis. It is hoped that such comprehensive studies may also enrich the scholarship on the Tang account and other historical documents in Chinese and Tibetan of this period.

Review of Scholarship

Due to their significance for the study of early Nepalese history, the corpus of Licchavi inscriptions has attracted much scholarly attention from early on resulting in a long scholarly tradition and numerous publications of editions. The first publication of Licchavi inscriptions already appeared in the last quarter of the 19th century in a collection of twenty three Nepalese inscriptions which was originally prepared in Gujrati by Bhagawanlal Indrajī and translated into English by G Bühler. It first appeared in 1880 as an article in the *Indian Antiquary* Vol. 9, but was reprinted as a monograph in 1885. The publication includes rubbings and cloth-copies of the inscriptions Indrajī had collected during his journey through the Kathmandu Valley in 1876. Amongst these, the first fifteen inscriptions belong to the Licchavi period. Soon C. Bendall included four further inscriptions in the appendix¹⁹ of his report on *A Journey of Literary and Archaeological Research in Nepal and Northern India during the Winter of 1884-1885* published in 1886. Twenty-two years later, the third volume of Sylvian Lévi's monumental historical study *Le Nepal* appeared in 1908, featuring 21 Licchavi-period inscriptions, of which only the first had previously been published in Indrajī's collection.

Lévi's publication drew a lot of attention to the field of early Nepalese history and it was soon thereafter that some Nepali scholars became attracted to the search and study of Licchavi inscriptions. Amongst these the historian-Sanskritists Baburam Acharya and Nayaraj Pant started to collaborate in 1938 on locating and studying Licchavi inscriptions, as well as collecting important historical data. However, they were only able to publish their findings after the fall of the aristocratic rule of the Rāṇas.²⁰ Initiated by their activities, the study of Sanskrit inscriptions and manuscript sources and their relevance for Nepalese history received much momentum throughout the 50ies and were formalised through the foundation of a Pāṭhaśālā by Nayaraj Pant in 1952 (VS 2009), with a focus on the study of Nepalese history, calendrical

19 Bendall 1886: 70-80.

20 During the rule of the Rāṇas every publication had to be sanctioned by the authorities. According to reports mentioned in Nayaraj Pant's obituary (1972: 142) of Baburam Acharya it appears that he used to send his articles to Darjeeling during this period. However, we are not able to locate any of these publications at the moment.

calculations, and Sanskrit grammar. It is this Pāṭhaśālā that produced major Nepalese scholars in the field of history and culture, such as Gautama Vajra Vajracharya, Mahes Raj Pant, Dinesh Raj Pant, Gyan Mani Nepal, Ramji Tevari, and Shankar Man Rajvamshi. The publication activities of Nayaraj Pant and his students first started with a series of pamphlets to correct factual errors in historical writings (*itihāsa saṁśodhana*), the first of which had appeared in 1952. They also published two other series of pamphlets with the aim to correct factual errors in respectively the fields of calendrical calculations (*pañcāṅga saṁśodhana*) and the application of classical Sanskrit grammar in literary works (*vyākaraṇa saṁśodhana*). During this period, another team of Nepalese scholars also independently began to work on historical documents in 1953, namely Pt. Buddhi Sagar Parajuli and Mahant Naraharinath, eventually also joining forces with Nayaraj Pant and his students for many years. Together, they published the Sanskrit journal *Samskṛta Sandeśa* in 1953 (VS 2010) and the Nepali journal *Itihāsa Prakāśa* in 1955 (VS 2012). Further, they established and ran Pāṭhaśālās and Gurukulas in Masangalli/Watu, Pashupati, Buddhanilakantha, and Lubhu (Patan), thereby training a new generation of Sanskritist historians.

Around the same time, outside of Nepal a team of Italian scholars started to work on the history of Nepal, including R. Gnoli, L. Petech and G. Tucci. As the fruit of their scholarly endeavours, in 1956 Gnoli published the collection of "*Nepalese Inscriptions in Gupta Characters*", which features Licchavi inscriptions previously published by Indraji and Bühler, Bendall, as well as Lévi, and further added 51 inscriptions he declared to have been thus far unpublished.²¹ Including the three inscriptions placed in the appendix, Gnoli published 92 inscriptions altogether. Two years after this, in 1958, Thomas O. Ballinger published five further Licchavi inscriptions in a paper that appeared in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*. However, as a Professor of Art Education his training and interest was focused on the study of Nepalese architecture and artifacts, so that he did not provide any editions, translations or studies of the inscriptions but published their photographs with notes on their date, location, condition in order to make them available to philologists and historians. It should be noted

21 However, the state of affairs appears complex: Gnoli gives credit for the discovery of all these new inscriptions to Kaisher Bahadur KC (then Secretary at the Ministry of Education in Nepal), who had collected rubbings of these inscriptions and sent them to Italy. Obviously, the Italian team was so grateful to Bahadur KC—perhaps remaining unaware of how he collected the material—that Gnoli dedicated his book to Bahadur KC accordingly praised him in his preface. However, a number of these inscriptions were already published by Nepalese scholars and Gnoli appears to have been aware at least of those published in 1953 (he records this information in footnote 4 to his preface); but despite these circumstances, he labels all 51 inscriptions as unpublished. In fact, it appears that KC had dishonestly collected at least some (or all) of these rubbings from the members of the team of Nepali historians led by the 'Historian Laureate' Baburam Acharya, Nayaraj Pant, and Naraharinath. Unfortunately, these developments caused a serious rift between Baburam Acharya, Naraharinath, and Nayaraj Pant so that consequently their cooperation came to an end (cf. N. Pant 1972: 146-147).

that the team of Italian scholars, as well as Ballinger, were only able to locate and collect photographs of these inscriptions with the assistance of Kaisher Bahadur KC and other Nepal government officers.

On New Year's Day of Vikrama Samvat 2018 (i. e. 1961 CE) Nayaraj Pant and his scholar students founded the scholarly organization Samśodhana Maṇḍala and initiated a regular Nepali language publication on inscriptions, published quarterly, called *Abhilekha Samgraha*, through which they published hitherto unpublished inscriptions from Nepal. This periodical continued for three consecutive years and was eventually replaced by the journal *Purnimā*, which still continues up to this day.²² Over the years, these scholars discovered and published a large number of new Licchavi inscriptions and produced shorter and longer studies on their content and historical significance and context. In the same period, a few scholars, which were not part of the Samśodhana Maṇḍala, namely Yogi Naraharinath, Mohad Prasad Khanal, and Hemaraj Shakya, also located and published a few inscriptions independently.²³ The large range of collective scholarly efforts on the topic eventually culminated in the important collection of all the then known Licchavi-period inscriptions—altogether 190 in number—by Dhanavajra Vajracharya in 1973. To this day this volume remains the most complete and most cited, and provides an enormous amount of significant commentary in Nepali. Almost simultaneously to Dhanavajra Vajracharya's volume in 1973 appeared another collection of the same set of inscriptions by Hariram Joshi.

Vajracharya's volume provided easy access to the content of the Licchavi-period inscriptions to Nepali readers and we find that many subsequent studies heavily relied on the editions, translations and analytical commentary provided therein. Two further volumes of almost the same collection of Licchavi inscriptions subsequently appeared. In 1983 Dilli Raman Regmi—a politician turned historian—published an edition, English translation, and a study of *Inscriptions of Ancient Nepal* in three separate volumes. The third volume also includes images of the rubbings of most of these inscriptions. This is thus far the only larger English language publication to provide English translations and studies of the majority of the then known Licchavi inscriptions and has thus far also been the first point of access to the study of Licchavi inscriptions for many scholars outside of Nepal, who may not be aware of the wealth of studies and editions stemming from the long local scholarly tradition. As Regmi²⁴ writes in the preface to the first volume of his book, he published 164 inscriptions, and has "left 23 inscriptions given by Dhanavajra but added a few new ones." Rather befuddling to the reader, he declares that "those omitted or adopted are not historically important." Of the 164 inscriptions he translated only 161, dropping three very short ones. In 1994, two

22 Cf. M. Pant 1993: 3.

23 Cf. D. Vajracharya 1973: ña.

24 Regmi 1983: I, xiii.

further scholars, namely T.P. Verma and A.K. Singh, published another volume on Licchavi inscriptions, which was published in India. With their volume the editors claim to have collected all the inscriptions included in the publications of Vajracharya, Joshi, and Regmi, and collated the readings of the various editors. They have offered a study of these inscriptions but no translations.

Since then, a number of inscriptions have been newly found and published, or re-edited with new studies of them. As the epigraphist of the Department of Archaeology, Shyam Sundar Rajvamshi commonly provided a formal report and offered a first reading of every inscription found in Nepal in the last decades. As for subsequent scholars involved in the study of Licchavi inscription, we find the following range of scholars. Gautama V. Vajracharya published Licchavi inscriptions from inscribed images kept in western museums. In the 90s, Diwakar Acharya focused on the religio-cultural components of Licchavi inscriptions and a number of contents previously not properly analysed or even misunderstood.²⁵ Others involved in the study and analysis of the old as well as newly found inscriptions are (in alphabetical order) Veni Madhav Dhakal, R. Garbini, Lallanji Gopal, Mohan Prasad Khanal, D.N. Lielukhine, Nina Mirnig, Gyanmani Nepal, J.C. Regmi, T. Riccardi, Hemaraj Shakya, P.S. Shakya, and Judit Torzsok. Recently, Prakash Darnal and Shyam Sundar Rajvamshi have been tasked by Saubhagya Pradhananga (National Archives, Government of Nepal) to carry out a post-earthquake survey of inscriptions in the Kathmandu Valley. In the course of these documentation activities Darnal and Rajvamshi also discovered new Licchavi inscriptions, which have been reported through the National Archives and the Department of Archaeology. In recent decades Mahes Raj Pant, together with his students, has renewed efforts to locate and edit new Licchavi inscriptions, offering detailed analyses of their content in several publications.

There have also been translations of some collected volumes: Gnoli's volume has been translated into Hindi by Agrawal in 1985 and Vajracharya's volume into Japanese by K. Saeki in 1999. Veni Madhav Dhakal has published a poetical and literal analysis of Licchavi inscription in Sanskrit (originally PhD thesis).

Current Research Activities

1. Documentation and Development of a Comprehensive Research Approach

While thus a considerable amount of work has already been done on the text of the inscriptions, less attention has previously been paid to their analysis and study as artifacts themselves and in their immediate physical context as an integral part of the Kathmandu Valley's ancient

²⁵ Acharya 1993, 1996, 1996a, 1997, 1998, 2003, 2005, 2008.



Fig. 1 Type 1. Pillar inscription in Changu Narayan, issued by Licchavi King Mānadeva in 464 CE.

landscape. Current collaborative research and publication activities, partly taking place under the umbrella of the project *Mapping Piety and Politics in Early Medieval Nepal* (Austrian Science Fund, FWF V-755), address this methodological desideratum and engage in developing a comprehensive approach to the study of the inscriptions, which also takes into account their materiality and immediate context. Thus, in a first step a comprehensive digital documentation of the Kathmandu Valley's *in situ* stone inscriptions is currently being undertaken, including GPS data, measurements, photos and photogrammetry recording in some cases. Based on this documentation, also a typology of inscriptions is drawn up, consisting of the following list.

Type 1. Pillars

Thus far four pillar inscriptions are known. Three of those have been issued by King Mānadeva. The first is the famous pillar inscription in Changu Narayan (DV 2, see Fig.1), which is considered as one of the most important historic inscriptions, narrating King Mānadeva's rise to power as a young king. Another small fragment of a pillar inscription issued by King Mānadeva has been found in the temple area of Pashupatinath and is dated to Licchavi Saṃvat 381 (i.e. 459 CE). The fourth surviving pillar inscription has been set up by Anuparama, father of the important royal minister Bhaumagupta, as a dedication in praise of Dvaipāyana; this long poem reveals much insight into the kind of literature and philosophical concepts prevalent in learned circles of Kathmandu Valley at the time (for an edition, translation and analysis see Acharya 2007).

Type 2. Stone Stele

This is the most common type of inscription found in Kathmandu Valley. Kings and ministers declared their edicts on such stone Stele inscriptions, which mostly appear to have been set up in prominent public places.



Fig. 2 Type 2. Stone stele inscription in Yangal Hiti, issued by the royal minister Viṣṇugupta in 640 CE.

Type 3. Structural Elements

Type 3a. Small Water Tanks (*jaladroni*)

These are small, elevated water reservoirs made of stone (Nepali *tutedhara*), which are commonly still found in Kathmandu Valley, but are nowadays not in use anymore. Commonly inscriptions were inscribed on their walls. See, e.g., DV 120 and 147.

Type 3b. Water Spouts

These are water spouts—usually decorated—, which function as the outlets of regulated water channels (see Fig.3). These outlets, which are still in use today, are usually located below ground level and accessible through steps. While there are many water spouts that have been dated to the Licchavi period on art-historical grounds, there are only a few which contain



Fig. 3 Water spout, Licchavi period (apart from the metal spout fixed by cement).

inscriptions. One of these inscribed water spouts dates to the fifth century CE.²⁶

Type 3c. Elements of Buildings

There are also few inscriptions that have been found as part of wall constructions. In most cases it is to be expected that these have been placed there simply as a result of reuse of old materials for new constructions. One exception is a recently discovered royal inscription in Pashupatinath, which may have originally been intended as part of a temple wall.²⁷

Type 4. Copper Plates

Even though the use of copper plates for inscriptions is documented in a royal edict on stone, only one copper plate dating to the (late) Licchavi period has been discovered recently after the 2015 Gorkha Earthquake (Pant 2022). A reason for this conspicuous absence of further copper plates may be reuse by melting in order to produce copper coins, sculptures and other artefacts.

Type 5. Pedestals

Type 5a. *śivaliṅgajalahari*

This type of inscription denotes the pedestal—now known as *yoni* or *jalahari*—into which the *śivaliṅga* is installed (see Fig.4). They are classed as a separate category to *pādapīṭhas*

²⁶ Acharya 2019: 4.

²⁷ Acharya & Mirnig 2023.



Fig. 4 Type 5a. Inscribed *śivaliṅga-jalahari* in Pashupatinath, issued by Licchavi princess Vijayadevī in 505 CE.

since they are worshipped together with the *śivaliṅga*, unlike structures of similar kinds attached to sculptures. There are fifteen inscriptions of this type located in three areas, namely Pashupatinath/Deopatan, Lazimpat and Buddhanilkantha. While two of the inscriptions are undated, thirteen have been established between 477–645 CE.²⁸ As such, they constitute the earliest set of dated *liṅga*-pedestals in South Asia. These inscriptions attest to early local Śaiva donative practices, including donations of land to the *śivaliṅga* shrines, and thereby also inform on the accumulation of land grants linked to the ancient Pashupatinath temple as well as the participation of merchants and women of high rank in these donative practices. Some structural elements that appear to have formed part of shrines housing these *śivaliṅgas* are still preserved on site.

Type 5b. *pādapīṭha*

This category denotes the pedestals, which are recorded to have served as a base for sculptures or pillars. There are two types of these: the first looks similar to the *śivaliṅga jalahari* pedestal that is found as the basis for the *śivaliṅga* (type 5a), featuring also a water exit. The second is a pedestal without water exit, but still clearly meant to directly support the image. The first type includes, for instance, an inscribed pedestal of 505 CE in Changu Narayan, which records that a certain Nirapekṣa established effigies of his deceased parents (DV 19), a pedestal recording the establishment of a stone pillar (DV 8), and a pedestal with a water spout dating to 489 CE

²⁸ Mirnig 2016.



Fig. 5 Inscribed *pādapīṭha* in Pashupatinath, commissioned by a Dhruvasaṅga in 533 CE.

recording the establishment and worship of the goddess Śarvaṅī (Acharya 1996, and Garbini 1997). Examples for the second type are the pedestal of the Chattracaṇḍeśvara image in Pashupatinath (DV 110) and the lotus pedestal for a Buddha image in Chabahil.²⁹

Type 5c. Built Platforms

This category covers several types of platforms supporting images and *śivaliṅgas*. There are two sub-types. The first is a single stone, intended to support the *jalahari* with the icon on top. These include the platform under the *śivaliṅga*, with an inscription recording the setting up of five *liṅga* shrines, including one named Bhadreśvara (Licchavi *saṃvat* 455, DV 34, see Fig.5), as well as the inscribed stone once supporting the Harihara image (DV 50). The second sub-type denote larger platforms built with several stone elements, where the inscriptions are located on the wall of these structures, such as the platform structure supporting the *śivaliṅga* identified as Anupameśvara (DV 38).

²⁹ See DV 1, and Acharya 2008.



Fig. 6 Inscribed Viṣṇuvikrānta image issued by Licchavi King Mānadeva in 467 CE, originally located in Lazimpat, now in the National Museum.



Fig. 7 Inscribed Licchavi-period caitya.

Type 5d. Image pedestal

Some inscriptions are located on an image pedestal that forms part of the same stone, thus being of particular importance for art history, for dating of certain stylistic and iconographical features.³⁰ Examples are the Jayavarman statue, the Viṣṇuvikrānta image at Tilagaṅga (DV 5, see Fig.6) as well as that of Vankālī, now enshrined in a small temple.³¹

Type 6. Caityas

There are only few surviving Buddhist votive chaityas, which still bear Licchavi-period inscriptions. One of them has been edited, translated and analyzed in detail by Acharya (see Fig.7),³² who points out how this inscription gives insights into the form of Mahāyāna practiced in Nepal in the late sixth century.

30 E.g. Pal 1974 and Slusser 1982.

31 G. Vajracharya 1973.

32 Acharya 2008.

Type 7. Metal image coverings (*kavaca*)

There is a single known so-called armour inscription (DV 76), inscribed on a golden cover of the main image of the Changu Narayan temple and commissioned by King Aṃśuvarman. However, it is kept as part of the temple's treasury and has not been accessible to the public.

Type 8. Rock

Rock inscriptions were located by members of the National Archives in 2021 (<https://old.risingnepaldaily.com/detour/first-rock-inscription-of-licchavi-era-found-in-nagarjun>).

2. Re-edition and Re-translation of Inscriptions

A second objective of the authors is the re-edition and translation of the inscriptions. While, as discussed above, an enormous body of scholarship—including many excellent translations and studies—have accumulated over the decades, recent improved photographic methods as well as advances in Indic epigraphic and cultural studies enable some important improvements to the text and interpretation. Due to the lack of other contemporaneous autochthonous Nepalese historical writings, many technical terms—especially in the realm of administration and the taxing system—have posed challenges for interpretation. However, through comparison with other Indic inscriptions, as well as a growing body of knowledge about the development of early Buddhism, Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism from new editions of old palm-leaf manuscripts—an improved interpretation and translation can be offered in many cases. Another aim is to more systematically document palaeographical features, which may aid the dating and contextualisation of undated inscriptions. In the past, misinterpretations of this kind have taken place and have led to larger misconstructions of history.³³ As part of the collaborative editing activities, also newly located inscriptions will be translated.

3. Development of a Comprehensive Research Approach

Equipped with reliable translations as well as a detailed comprehensive documentation of the inscriptions as objects in the field, the inscription data has to be evaluated also against other extant material evidences, such as from art-history or archaeology. While information from the inscription text has occasionally been utilized in art-historical and archaeological studies, no comprehensive attempt to more systematically bring together larger data-sets deriving from each of the disciplines have been carried out. Further, prior to current activities, the research of the inscriptions tended to be focused purely on the philological study, lacking the inclusion of more comprehensive approaches, which take into account the materiality and immediate context of the inscriptions. The only previous attempt to analyse the inscriptions in relation to

³³ See, e.g., Acharya 2007: 30ff for examples of such faulty historical reconstructions.

their location was undertaken by Tiwari,³⁴ who tried to use the evidence of the inscriptions to identify ancient settlement patterns based on their locations. First steps towards developing more cross-disciplinary approach have been taken in collaboration with Robin Coningham and his team (UNESCO Chair, Durham University), as well as with the Department of Archaeology. Some of the preliminary results have already been published in the Journal of the Department of Archaeology, entitled Ancient Nepal.³⁵ Further results from this ongoing research will be published in a proceedings volume of the British Academy-sponsored conference *Licchavi Heritage at the Crossroads: Multidisciplinary Approaches to History and Heritage in Nepal*, held at Oxford University 5 -6 September 2022.

Future Perspectives

While our research activities are progressing, the importance of multilingual and interdisciplinary expertise becomes ever more highlighted. Given the geographical location of the Nepalese kingdom as an important point of transfer between South and Inner and Eastern Asia, a comprehensive understanding of its history and role across the Trans-Himalayan cultural zone is only possible by taking into consideration multi-lingual text sources and by developing a better understanding of the material remains along trade routes and borderland regions. For instance, one of the earliest inscriptional testimonies to Nepal-China relations is located along the route leading from Tibet to Nepal, namely the so-called Monument of the Mission to India during the Tang Dynasty (大唐天竺使之铭), which was established by the general envoy Wang Xuance (王玄策) in 658 CE. This invaluable historical record was first discovered and reported by Huo Wei (霍巍) in 1990 and has since been subject of study. A recent academic event closely related to precisely this topic of Trans-Himalayan cultural exchange was convened by Huo Wei and Diwakar Acharya, entitled "Along the Route: A Workshop on the Inscriptions, Images, and Manuscripts Found in Nepal and Tibet", and held in Chengdu on January 5-6, 2018.³⁶

In order to build on these various finds and research activities and jointly explore these cultural links across disciplines and source languages, we propose to design a multi-lingual platform, which takes the earliest historical writings of the Licchavi-period as a starting point. Especially since important historical sources about Kathmandu Valley are in classical Chinese and Tibetan, for which much expertise is especially found in China and Japan, collaborative approaches for historical reconstructions are crucial for the study of Nepalese history and

34 Tiwari 2001.

35 See, e.g., Coningham et. al. 2016.

36 For a report of the workshop, see Xu 2019.

culture—and in turn for the study of Chinese and Tibetan materials — but difficult to achieve given the disciplinary and linguistic boundaries. By providing a platform featuring reliable scholarly translations in major Asian languages—including Chinese—we hope to facilitate such multilingual academic engagements. The first steps in this direction have been taken in collaboration with Luo Hong, who has translated a number of Buddhist and Śaiva Licchavi inscriptions into Chinese based on our new editions and interpretations. An example for these joint activities can be found in the appendix, a multi-lingual translation of a 7th-century dedicatory inscription, which was issued on the occasion of the foundation of a Harihara-sculpture in Pashupatinath.

As a next step it is a *desideratum* to further expand the platform in collaboration and integrate important Chinese and Tibetan sources for the study of Nepal during the early medieval period in order to allow for more comprehensive analyses of the materials. In addition to textual sources, we also recognize the importance of art-historical and archaeological evidence and aim to include such information where available.

Appendix: The Śaṅkaranārāyaṇa inscription in Pashupatinath

Location: Pashupatinath area

The inscription is still on site, located in the area outside of the west entrance of the Pashupati temple. Previously, a Licchavi-period Harihara image with a base was fixed on top of the square pedestal, on to which the text was inscribed. It appears that during some renovation works related to the re-design of the area in front of the west entrance in the 1990ies the image was stolen.

State of preservation: The general condition of the inscription is good. The top left corner and lines 6 and 7 are damaged on the right side. Some traces of cement are visible. Compared to earlier rubbings, increased damaged on the stone can be detected. Diwakar Acharya records that when the image was still fixed on top of the inscribed pedestal, the inscription used to be covered by worshipping substances such as oil and vermilion. It is therefore conceivable that some of the damage is linked to both, the worshipping activities, as well as to the cleaning of the inscription during the renovation activities in the 1990ies.

Previous editions: The first publication was published in *Saṃskṛtsaṃdeśa* 1.8. by B. Acharya and N. Pant. The inscription also appears in Gnoli's volume as No. 20, as well as in Dhanavajra

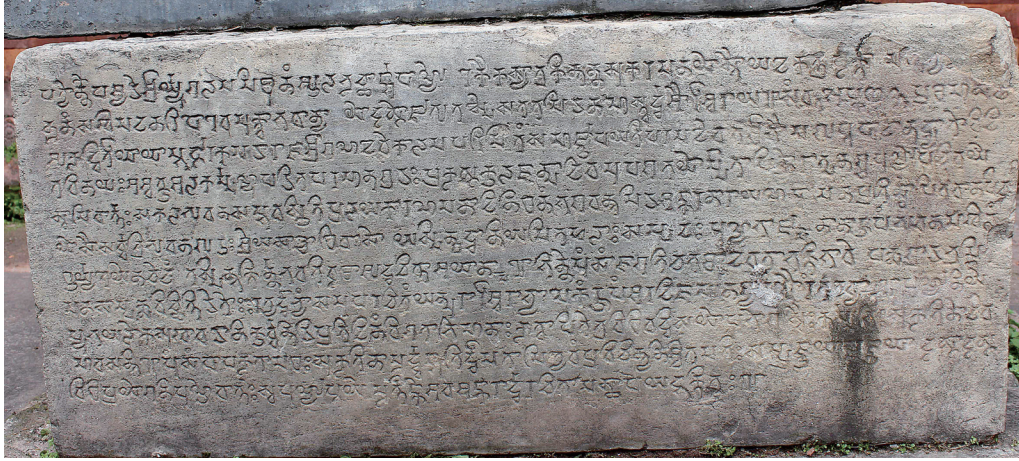


Fig. 8 Śaṅkaranārāyaṇa inscription in Pashupatinath.

Vajracharya's collection as No. 50.³⁷

Editorial convention:

Uncertain readings, in which part of the letters are still visible are given in round brackets (x).

Conjectured readings for passages that are damaged are given in square brackets [x].

Line numbers are provided in square brackets [N].

We silently supply *avagrahas* when there is a *sandhi* of o and a.

Half verses are marked in the inscription with an empty space of about one *akṣara* in size; in the edition this is marked with a single *daṇḍa*. The end of verses is marked with a double *daṇḍa*.

Sanskrit Text

[[*metre: śragdharā*]]

[1] patyor nnau paśya he śrīr yyugalam amithunaṃ śūlabhṛcchārīṅgapāṇyor
ekaikasyātra kin tan na sukaram anayos tau yad ekattra pṛktau³⁸ |

37 Vajracharya, D. 1973.

38 *pṛktau* is clearly visible in the rubbing but appears damaged in the recent photograph.

madbhi[t]ty[āl](ū)[ya]³⁹[2] nūnaṃ sakhi madanaripor evam uktvā bhavānyā
yo dṛṣṭo jātu tasmai satatam iha namo 'stv arddhaśaurīśvarāya ||

saṃvat 489⁴⁰ (i.e. 400 80 9) prathamā[śāḍha][3]śukladvitīyāyām bhaṭṭāarakamahārājaśrīgaṇadeve
kālam aparimitaṃ samājñāpayati paramadaivataśrībhaumaguptapādānuddhyāto vidi[4]
tavinayaḥ śaśvatkuśalakarmmany upahitaparamānugrahaḥ prakṛṣṭakulajanmā divam upagatayor
mmātāpi[tro]r ātmanaś ca puṇyopacitaye [5]svāmivārttaḥ sakalabhuvananasambhavasthitipralayakā
raṇam anādinidhanaṃ bhagavantam iha śaṅkaranārāyaṇas[v]ām[i]⁴¹ naṃ pratiṣṭhāpitavān api [ca]

[[metre: mandākrāntā]]

[6] yo 'sau sarvvatribhuvanaguruḥ śreyasāñ cādhivāso
yasmin baddhā niyamitaphalāḥ sampadaḥ puṇya⁴² bhājām |
nānārūpaṃ bhuvanam akhilaṃ [7] dhāryate yena cedaṃ
tasmin bhaktir nna bhavati vṛthā śuddhacittāśayānām ||

[[mandākrāntā]]

bhinne puṃsām jagati ca tathā deva⁴³ tābhaktibhāve
pakṣagrāhabhrami[ta]⁴⁴ [8]manasām pakṣavicchittihetoḥ
[i]ty arddhābhyām samuparacitaṃ yan murārīśvarābhyām
ekaṃ rūpaṃ śaradijaghanaśyāma⁴⁵ gauram tad avyāt ||

[[metre: vasantatilakā]]

puṇyāni ye [9] 'py ubhaya lokasukhāvahāni
kurvanti hi pratidinaṃ vigatābhimānāḥ
kṛtvāpi te 'tra vidhivad viṣayopabhogaṃ⁴⁶

39 This part of the line is very damaged and only partial letters are visible. Acharya & Pant read *madbhityā* and conjecture *tasya* thereafter, and Vajracharya reads *mūrtityā*-. Our proposed reading *madbhityālūya* is a conjecture based on the fact that on the bottom of the line a partial *ū* or *ṛ* is visible, and that the metre requires a short syllable after this. Another possibility would be to reconstruct *badbhityākṛtya*, though we favor this option less since this would require a further agent in the Sanskrit.

40 Acharya & Pant, as well as Gnoli read the year 489, Vajracharya reads 487.

41 The “i” is damaged in our photographs, but we should note that Vajracharya did not indicate that he had a problem reading this part of the *akṣara*.

42 Note that even though this is readable, some cement now partly covers the letters.

43 Note that the lower part of *va* is covered by cement.

44 The *akṣara* *ta* is damaged now but previous editors appear to have had no problem to read it, perhaps the damage occurred recently.

45 The letters *-āma* are partly covered with cement.

46 The letters are partly covered by cement.

svaiḥ karmabhiḥ sukṛtino diva[10]m āvasanti ||

[[metre: śārdūlavikrīḍita]]

pumsām pāpakṛtām adhaḥ sukṛtinām ūrddhvaṅ gatir ddhīmatām
ity evaṃ pravacintya niścitamatiḥ samprajñayāprajñayā
dṛṣṭādrṣṭa[11]vidhiprayoganipuṇo vārttaḥ svapuṇyāptaye
mūrttiṅ keśavaśaṅkarārddharacitām asthāpayad⁴⁷ bhaktitaḥ ||

Translation

"O Śrī [Lakṣmī], look at the pair of our Lords, the Bearer of the trident and Holder of the bow, united but not as husband and wife. What is it that is not easy to achieve for each of the two of them in this world due to which they have merged into one [person] after the Enemy of Love had certainly separated by way of splitting away from me."⁴⁸

May there be eternal obeisance to this Half-Viṣṇu-half-Śiva, at whom Bhavanī looked at after having spoken these words.

On the second day of the bright fortnight of the first Āṣāḍha month in *saṃvat* 489, while Bhaṭṭāraka Mahārāja Śrī Gaṇadeva is reigning for an unlimited time, Svāmivārta,⁴⁹ favored by the supreme devotee of deities Śrī Bhaumagupta, who knows proper conduct, has continuously invested the highest favor in good/meritorious deeds, [and] who is born into a distinguished family established here for the purpose of accumulating the merit for his deceased mother and father, as well as for himself, the venerable Śaṅkaranārāyaṇasvāmin, who is without beginning or end and [constitutes] the cause for the genesis, maintenance, and destruction of all worlds. Furthermore,

Devotion towards him – [i.e. Śaṅkaranārāyaṇa], who is the Guru of all the three worlds, the abode of blessings, in whom all kinds of prosperity in the form of regulated rewards [of deeds] are fixed for those who have merit, and who maintains this entire world in its various

47 asthāpayad] em., sthāpeyad Cod.

48 We imagine here that the composite image of Śiva and Śakti as Ardhanarīśvara was a well-known motive, so that the underlying idea of the poet could be that Parvatī remarks how Śiva has literally separated himself from her in order to join Viṣṇu.

49 It is difficult to be certain whether *svāmivārta* is intended as a personal name or some sort of title; both *svāmin* and *vārta* are used separately as titles in inscriptions. However, there is the possibility to interpret *vārta*, in the sense of professional/officer, derived from *vṛtti-*, or messenger, derived from *vārta-*, taking *svāmi-* to refer to the deity, so that Svāmivārta is either an “officer acting on behalf of the deity” or as the “messenger of the deity”. The latter interpretation would actually fit the general content of the inscription well, since the donor advocates a message of unity amongst the worshippers, even presenting such as message as the intention of the deity.

forms—is never fruitless for those of pure hearts and intentions.

May that single form protect [us], [which is] dark and white like a cloud in autumn, created from half of Viṣṇu and half of Śiva in order to remove this bias of those whose minds are confused because of clinging to one side, since the world of men is divided in respect to the nature of devotion to deities!

Those virtuous ones who indeed daily perform meritorious deeds that bring happiness in both worlds and are free of vanity, they reach heaven through their own actions after enjoying the objects of senses in this world according to the rules.

The course of men who do evil deeds is downwards [and that] of virtuous, wise men upwards. Having thus reflected upon this with intelligent mind, with resolved intention [this] Vārtta, skillful in practicing visible and invisible rites and methods (i.e. external and internal) established with devotion this image fashioned with half of Viṣṇu and half of Śiva for obtaining his own merit.

Abbreviations

- DV See D. Vajracharya, 1973.
VS Vikrama saṃvat.

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