



HAL
open science

The Donor-Executor Dilemma: Notes on an Enigmatic Inscribed Sculpture from Bihar in the Indian Museum, Kolkata

Rajat Sanyal

► **To cite this version:**

Rajat Sanyal. The Donor-Executor Dilemma: Notes on an Enigmatic Inscribed Sculpture from Bihar in the Indian Museum, Kolkata. *Pratna Samiksha: a Journal of Archaeology*, 2020, 11, pp.205-218. halshs-03223210

HAL Id: halshs-03223210

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-03223210>

Submitted on 10 May 2021

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Pratna Samiksha

A Journal of Archaeology

New Series

Volume 11

2020



CENTRE FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDIES & TRAINING

EASTERN INDIA • KOLKATA

Pratna Samiksha, New Series

is an annual, peer reviewed, and international journal published by the Centre for Archaeological Studies & Training, Eastern India, Kolkata.

Editorial Address

Pratna Samiksha

Centre for Archaeological Studies & Training,
Eastern India, State Archaeological Museum
Old Building, First Floor, 1 Satyen Roy Road
Behala, Kolkata 700 034
email: castei5n@gmail.com

Editor

Sharmi Chakraborty

Founding Editor

Gautam Sengupta

Editorial Assistant

Mithu Karmakar

Editorial Advisory Board

Chairperson

Centre for Archaeological Studies
& Training, Eastern India, Kolkata

Member Secretary

Centre for Archaeological Studies
& Training, Eastern India, Kolkata

K. Paddayya

Professor Emeritus, Deccan College, Pune

B.D. Chattopadhyaya

Former Professor, Centre for Historical Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

Suchandra Ghosh

Professor, Department of Ancient Indian History &
Culture, University of Calcutta, Kolkata

The Director (*ex officio*)

Directorate of Archaeology and Museums
Government of West Bengal

The responsibility of the facts stated, opinions expressed and conclusions reached are entirely those of the author of the respective article. Centre for Archaeological Studies & Training, Eastern India does not accept any responsibility for them.

© 2020 Centre for Archaeological Studies & Training,
Eastern India

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

ISSN 2229 7979

Periodicity: Annual

Subscription (per volume): ₹1,000.00

Published by the Member Secretary for the
Centre for Archaeological Studies & Training,
Eastern India (*An Autonomous Institution of the
Government of West Bengal*)

State Archaeological Museum
Old Building, First Floor
1 Satyen Roy Road, Behala
Kolkata 700 034
castei5n@gmail.com

Typeset in Baskerville

by Mithu Karmakar
mithu.karma@gmail.com

Printed in India at Calcutta Art Studio
185/1 B.B. Ganguly Street, Kolkata 700 012
casprt@gmail.com

Contents

EXPLORATIONS

Recently Discovered Intertidal Archaeological Sites Along the Shoreline
of Bay of Bengal: East Medinipur District, West Bengal
Ahana Ghosh, Chandrima Shaha and Arshad Reza 1

Preliminary Report on Recently Discovered Archaeological Sites:
A Study on Kiul River Basin
Tanmoy Mondal 19

ART

Unspecific Mound, 'Stray' Sculptures and 'Missing' Habitation:
Revisiting an Artist's Choice at a Lost Temple Site in Bengal
Shubha Majumder 31

POTTERY

A Typo-chronological Study of Ceramics from Lalpahari, Lakhisarai, Bihar
Anil Kumar and Siddhartha Saha 41

EPIGRAPHY AND PALAEOGRAPHY

Work Pattern Analysis at a Major Rock Edict Site: Kalsi
Susmita Basu Majumdar, Soumya Ghosh and Shoumita Chatterjee 73

A New Copperplate Inscription: Grant of the Village Kumudavillikā
during the Reign of Śasāṅka, Year 8
Ryosuke Furui and Arlo Griffiths 99

The *Kara-Śāsanas* of Early Medieval Odisha
Subrata Kumar Acharya 115

ARCHITECTURE

The Temple at Paschim Jata (South 24-Parganas, West Bengal)
Sharmila Saha 135

Architecture of the Fārūqīs of Burhanpur: A Preliminary Study
Sutaṇa Sinha 157

NOTE

Mahadeo Temple at Zanzane Saswad, Phaltan Taluka, Satara District:
A Preliminary Study
Manjiri Bhalerao 189

An Imitated Gold Coin of Huviṣka Kuṣāṇa from Radhānagar, Odisha <i>Umakanta Mishra, Subrata Kumar Acharya and Atula Kūmar Pradhan</i>	199
The Donor-Executor Dilemma: Notes on an Enigmatic Inscribed Sculpture from Bihar in the Indian Museum, Kolkata <i>Rajat Sanyal</i>	205
A Short Note on a Forgotten Umā-Maheśvara Sculpture from Muṇḍeśvarī <i>Claudine Bautze-Picron</i>	219
A Cumulative Author Index to <i>Pratna Samiksha: A Journal of Archaeology</i> New Series 1–10 (2010–19) <i>Mithu Karmakar</i>	225

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

NOTE

The Donor-Executor Dilemma: Notes on an Enigmatic Inscribed Sculpture from Bihar in the Indian Museum, Kolkata

RAJAT SANYAL

Department of Archaeology, University of Calcutta

ABSTRACT: A hitherto unnoticed inscribed image of a standing male figure in the Indian Museum, Kolkata, was recently published by Shyamalkanti Chakravarti. I subsequently had occasion to examine the piece. It is a seventh century image of a standing male figure holding a sturdy staff (*daṇḍa*) horizontally at the level of the groin. The accompanying inscription designates it as a donation of a nobleman (*bhaṭṭāraka*) hailing from Telyāḍhaka (modern Telhara in Bihar) and further records that the installation of the image was performed by the son of an oil merchant (*tailika*). Both the iconography and the inscription of this sculpture throw challenges of art historical and epigraphic analyses. The note suggests that the identity of the sculpture remains a riddle, in spite of the possibility of the imagery of this class being associated with multifarious ritual and cultic traditions in different parts of the country. Further, the inscription provides a rather rare instance of a donation being installed/executed by a person other than the donor.

KEYWORDS: Stone sculpture, deity with staff in hand, dedicatory inscription, seventh century, Indian Museum, Bihar, Telhara, donor, executor.

The Proposal

This note owes its origin to another recently published note by Shyamalkanti Chakravarti on an interesting and rare inscribed stone sculpture, preserved in the reserve collection of the Indian Museum, Kolkata. The sculpture was found, according to Chakravarti, while the reserve collection was being rearranged. In the words of the author (Chakravarti 2015–16: 129):

Unfortunately, the face was mutilated but the dishevelled curly hair with heavy ear-studs was apparent. Bedecked with two sets of neck ornaments and decorative armllets the figure is seen standing firmly on its feet placed equidistance (*samapādashānaka*). The tunic of the icon shows on each leg wavy bands below the knees. The deity is depicted holding horizontally a long staff by two hands in akimbo. This might be a *daṇa* [*sic*] suggesting its probable identification as Daṇḍī, one of the two attending associates of Sūrya—normally placed on the left side of his master... . Interestingly, the figure is having a cotton belt

fashioned tightly below its navel, the end part of its one side show knotted frills. The close covering of divine figure has like his master the waist girdle (*rasana*), known as *yaviyanga* or *avyanga*...

This iconographic note is followed by a reading of the inscription, written in ‘Guptā [*sic*] Brāhmī’ according to the author, engraved on the backslab of the image. The reading of Chakravarti is as follows (Chakravarti 2015–16: 129):

*Tailyataka tat surya sangabaddha bhasurakasya
mvaṇparayano visnuṇṇutrasya kartru(m) tasyaditah*

Chakravarti translates the record as ‘[t]his image has been carved as the Tailyataka sun [god] by the son of Viṣṇu, a sincere devotee of Bhasuraka who was closely associated with the solar worship’. He concludes on the evidence of the image and the inscription that ‘the icon throws light on the existence of a solar deity whose no iconographic presentation is forthcoming’ (Chakravarti 2015–16: 130).

Needless to mention that Chakravarti has neither been close to a probable reading of the inscription nor could he realise the challenges that this iconographic programme and the accompanying epigraphic composition, fairly unique in the known corpus of images of early medieval eastern India, throw. He dated the piece almost correctly, however, on palaeographic and iconographic considerations, to the ‘6th-7th century CE’; he does not explain the grounds neither does he provide any reference for the dating (Chakravarti 2015–16: 130).

This note attempts at a re-examination of the image and its inscriptional content. The note is based on a fresh documentation of the sculpture preserved in the archaeology section of the Indian Museum, Kolkata.

The Image

Physical appearance (provisionally) suggests that the image is possibly made of either Chloritoid bearing Phyllite or Granite Gneiss—two most widely used raw materials in carving images in early medieval Bihar-Bengal,¹ measuring (35.5 × 22.5 × 12.3) cm. The provenance of the image remains unknown.

Carved out of a rectangular piece of stone in high relief, with its base kept almost undisturbed to act as the pedestal, the whole composition appears to be executed on a bluntly chiselled piece of mortar (Plate 1). At a cursory glance the robust and sturdy male figure seems to stand in *samapādasthānaka*, but a careful examination reveals that the right leg is slightly bent at the level of the knee to lend support to the voluminous spiral of the sash tied at the level of the groin almost in the form of a *yogapatṭa* with its knot to the right, just below the robust staff (*daṇḍa*) held horizontally by the two hands of the deity. The left palm supports the staff from below, but the details of the gesture shown by the right palm are unfortunately lost. We will have occasion to return to this style of posture with some more details later. While the face of the deity is badly mutilated, parts of the carefully depicted headdress, shaped in a stylised bun

with beautifully executed volume of stepped locks descending along the backslab, is clearly visible in a temporal view (Plate 2). The almost bare-bodied figure wears a piece of loincloth that covers only the lower two-third of his body. The drapery of the cloth is fashioned with three vertically equidistant sets of double-bands with the medial knot dangling in a coil down to the level of the knee between the two legs. On the whole, the artist has successfully rendered an element of rugged and somewhat overwhelming masculinity by drawing a smooth but sharply visible line of division at the level of the prominently carved navel.

The simplistic ornamentation of the figure is noteworthy. The deity wears two large ear-studs decorated in the shape of a full-blown lotus, but visible only on his left ear, the right one being completely broken. He wears a single-beaded neckless followed by a second neckless of which the decorative elements are badly weathered. The sacred thread descends from his left shoulder in the form of a bold but bluntly chiselled wavy line. Of the two armlets, the beaded decoration of the left is more conspicuous than that of the right. The anklets are prominently carved as unornamented strapping rings. A damaged (male?) figure showing *añjalimudrā* sits in kneeling posture to the left of the principal figure, on the pedestal. A miniature version of the apsidal backslab has been carefully hewn out of the main backslab to distinguish the location of this subsidiary figure. Unfortunately, all the details of this figure down to the level of the waist are lost. What remains are the faint traces of the drapery of the lower garment, fashioned in identical design to that of the main figure (Plate 3). We will shortly have grounds in identifying this miniature figure as the donor of the image.

The Inscription

The principal figure stands covering almost the entire height of the slab, leaving a narrow semi-circular strip over the head, occupied by the neatly engraved inscription (Plate 4). The inscription is written in grammatically incorrect





PLATE 2: Temporal view of the face showing details of the headdress and hairstyle (photo author) (Courtesy: Indian Museum, Kolkata)



PLATE 3: Details of the donor figure (photo author) (Courtesy: Indian Museum, Kolkata)



PLATE 4: Details of location of the inscription (photo author) (Courtesy: Indian Museum, Kolkata)

Sanskrit and what I prefer to designate as Early Siddhamāṭṛkā script of eastern India datable to the seventh/eighth century.²

Editorial convention and mark ups: Here I have followed the editorial methodology and convention defined under the ERC-sponsored DHARMA project (Balogh and Griffiths 2019). The mark ups used are (...): graphic elements of which the reading is tentative; [...]: graphic elements partly/wholly lost or wholly unreadable on the inscription but restorable on the basis of philological considerations; V: a vowel that forms an independent graphic element, i.e.

‘independent vowel’, of the type V (e.g. *A* is ‘independent vowel’ *a*, etc.).

Text (Plate 5)

𑀓 telyāḍhakavāstavyajāhaEṅgabhaṭṭārakasya
devadharmoyam tailikaviṣṇūputtrasya-
vu(dvū)ke[na] [p]rat[i]pāditaḥ ||

Emended text

𑀓 telyāḍhakavāstavyajāhaEṅgabhaṭṭārakasya
devadharmoyam tailikaviṣṇūputtra-
vu(dvū)ke[na] [p]rat[i]pāditaḥ ||

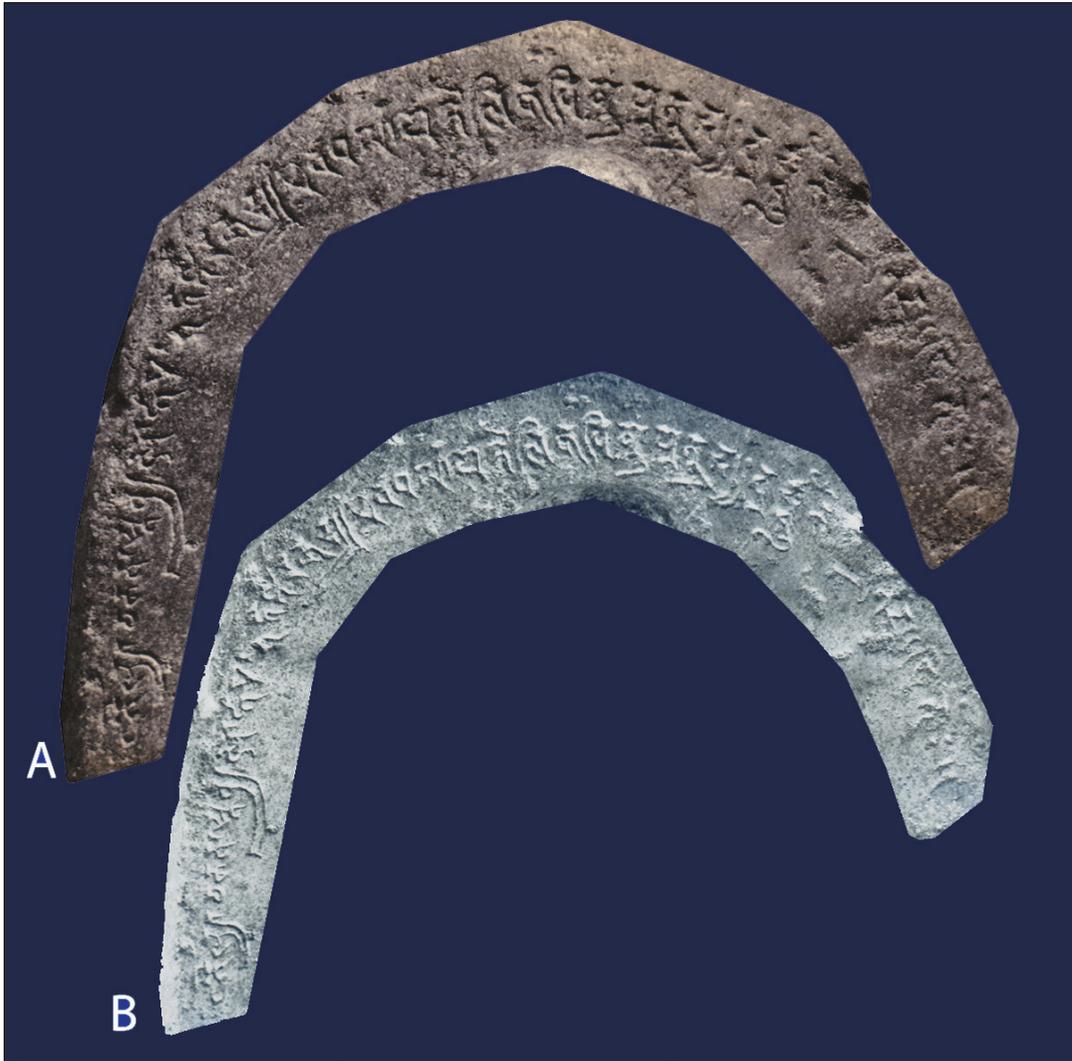


PLATE 5: Details of the (A) text of inscription and (B) its digitally inverted version (photo author) (Courtesy: Indian Museum, Kolkata)

TRANSLATION: Success [in symbol]! [This image is] the *deyadharmā* of the nobleman (*bhaṭṭāraka*) Jāhaeṅga, a resident (*vāstavya*) of Telyāḍhaka [and the act of the *deyadharmā* has been] executed (*pratipādita*) by Vudvūka, the son of the oil merchant (*tailika*) Viṣṇu.

NOTE TO THE TEXT: The translation attempted here remains tentative. Two points, as it stands now, are important to note. First, the second genitive case in the phrase *tailikaviṣṇūputrasya* has been emended as *tailikaviṣṇūputtra*, since a genitive has already qualified the previous phrase *jāhaeṅgabhaṭṭārakasya*, designating the name of the donor; only this emendation justifies the name of Vudvūka, the executor/installer of the image, being suffixed with the causative case (*vudvūkena*).³ Secondly, the readings of both the personal names remain as tentative as curious they are, but palaeographically unavoidable (cf. Plate 6).⁴

The Possibilities

It goes without saying that the style, iconography and the epigraphic content of this sculpture pose a number of intricate questions for which it is perhaps time not to draw on precise answers but to look for some possibilities that might throw some light on this problematic composition. The first question relates to its date. As already noted, Chakravarti has somehow dated the image rightly to the sixth/seventh century, but without buttressing his estimate with justifiable reasons. Quite in conformity with the practice of assertion of chronology based on inscriptional evidence, whenever such evidence accompanies art historical ‘subjects’, the inscription on the Indian Museum specimen would suggest a date in the seventh/eighth century. But one has to note that palaeographic dating provides only a ‘range’, compared to a critical stylistic analysis that leads to assigning a specific chronological ‘phase’ in a long chain of aesthetic tradition. This crucial question of art historical methodology has been recently addressed in the context of the well-known Bodhgaya lintel dated in the reign of the Pāla king Dharmapāla, taking the piece

as an illustration to underline the ‘difficulties in explaining the stylistic features in terms of epigraphic evidence’ (Sengupta 2015: 178). Therefore, an examination of the stylistic-iconographic features embedded in the image might be useful. The foremost characteristic that strikes one’s attention is the scheme of ornamentation of the principal figure. Here one finds that the execution of the jewellery in the formulaic set of ear-stud-necklace-armlet-anklet (*karṇakuṇḍala-kaṇṭhahāra-keyūra-nūṇpura*) has set in but is yet to reach the stereotyped stylised version of the same, seen on the Pāla sculptures from ninth century. Then, the headdress shaped in a bun of matted hair, stepping locks descending along the shoulders, the dangling sash shaped like a *yogapaṭṭa*, the medial lobe of the loincloth prominently shown between the legs, the conspicuous absence of the nimbus around the head of the deity and, finally, the whole figure set against an absolutely plain and undecorated backslab—are strong stylistic reference points of the transitional seventh century idiom. In terms of stylistic evolution of the sculptural repertoire of Bihar-Bengal in the late early historic and early medieval periods, seventh century marks a rather unique juncture. It is at this juncture that the stalk of craftsmanship is found dislodged from the essentially Gupta idioms of ‘plasticity and roundness’ of the fifth-sixth century on one hand but, on the other, still awaits the emergence of the ‘slenderness and stylisation’ of the Pāla-Sena idioms. The ‘heavy-set figural style’ and the formulaic iconographical programme reflected in the specimen under review, thus, suggests a chronology in the early/mid seventh century. The palaeographic traits run quite reasonably toeing this stylistic scheme. The aesthetic markers displayed by the image have numerous schematic parallels in the sculptural assemblages of seventh century over a fairly wide geographical terrain, from Benisagar to the east to Mundeshwari on extreme southwest (for detailed discussions with examples, Weiner 1962; Asher 1980).

The second question that also relates partly to the domain of stylistic analysis is where was this sculpture produced? Due to the



PLATE 6: Details of (A) name of the donor and the (B) name of the executor
(photo author) (Courtesy: Indian Museum, Kolkata)

unavailability of adequate metadata, its find-spot remains unknown. But the accompanying inscription provides a rather circumstantial hint to this riddle. The image was donated by a resident of Telyāḍhaka. Telyāḍhaka has long been identified with modern Telhara, a small village in the Hilsa subdivision of the Nalanda district, close to Ekangardih and ~29 km west of Nalanda (Leoshko 1988; Verma 2013; Sanyal 2018). The site further came to prominence after recent excavations yielded the remains of an extensive monastic establishment called the Prathamaśivapuramahāvihāra (Verma and Sanyal 2016). Artistic productions of the site have also been subjected to investigations by a number of scholars (Leoshko 1988; Bautze-Picron 2015; Biswas 2016). The second cue in the inscription pointing to its origin at Telhara is the reference to a *tailika* or oil merchant; the toponym Telyāḍhaka must have derived its name from the *tailikas* (i.e. modern *telis*) who still form the largest caste group of Telhara. It is difficult, however, to construe on the basis of the inscriptional references that the image hails from Telhara. The hypothetical validity of the assumption can also not be ruled out at the same time, given that the site and its neighbouring area consisting of the sites of Beswak and Dapthu had formed an epicentre of a local idiom, motivated by the idioms of Nalanda and Gaya/Bodhgaya (Biswas 2013; Biswas and Majumder 2014; Bautze-Picron 2015: 158). The lower limit of the so far published sculptural assemblage from Telhara is dated not before the early ninth/late eighth century. If the site of production of the present sculpture at Telhara is (even provisionally) accepted, is it indicative of a still earlier line of development that emerged as an essentially local idiom at Telhara, of course accommodating the iconographic-stylistic formulae of seventh-century eastern India in general, gradually extending its orbit from the ninth century? In any case, the idiom that influenced the stylistic representation of the Indian Museum specimen might well have drawn its inspiration from two probable sources, viz. the Nalanda-Rajgir region to its east or Gaya-Bodhgaya region further

east-northeast. One has to note here that these still remain possibilities and a more specific geographical ascription should await further intensive exploration in and around the site.

The third and possibly the most intriguing puzzle that surrounds this imagery pertains to the identity of the central deity. A male deity with a staff held horizontally with two hands was first intensively examined by Corinna Wessels-Mevissen, who provisionally identified this class of imagery with Daṇḍapāṇi or Daṇḍanāyaka. This identification is based primarily on mythological accounts referring to these names, in *Purāṇas* and one of the Epics, while elucidating the glory of the city of Vārāṇasī. Wessels-Mevissen cites a large number of examples of the imagery noticed at numerous sites across northern, eastern, and central sectors of the subcontinent, dating between the sixth-seventh and the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries. While these imageries have certain salient individual iconographic traits and obvious stylistic differences due to the vast geochronology they cover, an almost identical scheme of representation of a standing figure with a horizontally held *daṇḍa* unexceptionally characterise the form. A citation to her identification and concluding observation would be relevant here (Wessels-Mevissen 2001: 107–9).

An association between Daṇḍapāṇi and the directional guardians existed in the 6th-7th centuries ... but was lost later on. It is not clear whether Daṇḍapāṇi or Daṇḍanāyaka, as he may have been alternatively called, was allotted any particular direction, although in the *Vāmanapurāṇa* (32.22–23), “Daṇḍanāyaka” is mentioned for the south ... in a directional scheme ... it can be hypothesized that Daṇḍapāṇi or Daṇḍanāyaka was once a guardian of the south or the southwest in a configuration of minor deities encircling Viśvanātha, i.e. Śiva as Lord of the Universe, ultimately forming a part of this universal deity.

Taking cue from citations of Wessels-Mevissen, an introspect may be briefly attempted into the textual narratives on this divinity in two of the major *Purāṇas*. The section of the thirty-second chapter (32.22) of the *Vāmanapurāṇa* writes (Gupta 1967: 295):

prācī dig rakṣatām vajro dakṣiṇām
 daṇḍanāyakaḥ |
 pāśī praticīm rakṣatu lakṣamāmśuḥ pātu
 cotvarām ||

Gupta translates the passage as: ‘May Indra protect the eastern quarter, Daṇḍanāyaka the southern, Varuṇa the western, and Caṇḍra the northern...’.

Again, the thirty-second chapter of the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* of the *Skandapurāṇa* is titled *Daṇḍapāṇiprādurbhāva*. The whole chapter is dedicated to the eulogy of a Yakṣa named Harikeśa who, being blessed by Śiva, becomes the guardian deity of the city of Kāśī, i.e. Vārāṇasī. One of the passages (32.158) refer to his munificence as Daṇḍanāyaka who acts as the guardian and saviour of the city. The text reads (Nyayaratna 1879: 716):

tvaṁ grāmavāsaprada°eva me pure°a-
 dhyakṣastvamedhiha ca daṇḍnāyaka |
 duṣṭān samudghaṭāya kāśivairiṇāḥ
 kāśīm ourīm rakṣa sadā mudanvitaḥ ||

The passage may be translated as: ‘Daṇḍnāyaka! Be a resident and guardian of the Kāśīkṣetra and reside happily in the city by saving Kāśī from the unscrupulous enemy of the city.’

The other passage (32.162) designates him as Daṇḍapāṇi and grants him the status of Śiva’s close associate in his Viśveśvara form. This passage reads (Nyayaratna op. cit.: 717):

tvaṁ dakṣiṇasyām diśi daṇḍapāṇe
 sadaiva me netrasamakṣmatra |
 tvaṁ daṇḍayan prāṇabhṛto durīhān
 ihāsva nṛṇ svānabhayaṁ diśan vai ||

This may be translated as: ‘Daṇḍapāṇi! you are designated to be stationed to my south in front of my eyes and take the charge of punishing the unscrupulous animals [i.e. people] of Kāśī and looking after the [my] followers.’

Thus, Daṇḍanāyaka or Daṇḍapāṇi is unmistakably associated with Śiva. But, the term *daṇḍa* prefixed with both the names does not carry the physical sense of a ‘staff’/‘baton’/‘shaft’. The staff sculpted in the images of this deity, if

he is accepted to be Daṇḍapāṇi/Daṇḍanāyaka, has to be taken as a personification/embodiment of his identity as the ‘punisher’/‘chastiser’, as clearly suggested in the Puranic texts.

Apart from the examples cited by Wessels-Mevissen, Pratapaditya Pal brought to light an interesting metal miniature of sixth/seventh century from Kashmir, preserved in a private collection in New York. Notwithstanding its stylistic peculiarities, iconographically it represents a close parallel of the image under discussion. Pal tentatively identifies him with ‘Śiva as Lakuliśa’, primarily due to the horizontally held *daṇḍa* in his hands (Pal 1973: 742). R. Nagaswamy in a kind of review article on the name Daṇḍanāyaka supports that identification of Wessels-Mevissen and further argues on the evidence of *Liṅgapurāṇa* that this male Saivite divinity has to be identified in the context of south India with ‘Sasta-Dandanayaka’ (Nagaswamy 2001). A number of similar images have recently been reported from a site in northern Tamil Nadu.⁵ It may be noted here that a late medieval temple of Śiva at Nabadwip in the Nadia district of West Bengal is still well-known as the temple of Daṇḍapāṇi Śiva and the phallus worshipped there is still called Daṇḍapāṇi Śivaliṅga (Bhattacharya 1960: 87).

Considering that the Indian Museum specimen hails from a site in southern Bihar, here I shall draw upon two more evidences from eastern India: the first one is a set of ‘door guardians’, as Asher identifies them (Asher 1980: 41), from the site of Mundeshwari in the Kaimur district of southwestern Bihar (Plate 7). These images of course represent stylistic and chronological parallels of the Indian Museum image, but iconographical point of departure lies in the decisive emblem *daṇḍa* being placed horizontally. The second image, to which Corinna Wessels-Mevissen kindly drew my attention recently,⁶ deserves serious contemplation. This is a Khondolite sculpture set in a deeply carved apsidal niche, recently reported from an unspecified find-spot around the well-known Buddhist monastic site of Lalitgiri in Odisha (Plate 8). In the section on ‘Sculptures Recovered

from Adjoining Areas', the excavator of Lalitgiri reports this image as 'Naga-devata' with the following note on its iconography (Patnaik 2016: 357):

The khondalite image (Pl. CCLXXVI) is worked out in the shape of a niche, the deity standing in a slight flexion over a double petalled lotus shown holding a mace with his hands. He is adorned with an *antariya* tied by a girdle, a necklace, an *upavita*, and armlets with conical projection, bracelets of two lines, anklets with beaded line, *makara kundala* and a short *mukuta* with beaded lines. His hair is tied with the string in the shape of a bun shown on his head with fluttering ribbons, over which is found a five hooded snake canopy. The body is fleshy, dwarfish and crude in execution. It measures 0.97×1.03×0.25m.

Both iconographically and stylistically it bears striking resemblance to the image under study. The major points of difference are the comparatively elaborate ornamentation of the figure that stands in *ābhaṅga* and with a snake canopy (*nāgacchatra*) over his head. Further, the pedestal has here been shaped into a neatly carved double-petalled lotus (*viśvapadma*). These elements would suggest a date not earlier than the early decades of the ninth century.

The references and evidences cited above perhaps clearly demonstrate that this male figure bore a generic iconographic programme over a vast geography and chronology ranging over a millennium. In most of the cases the images of this deity are found in association with the gods of direction and are found in the niches of



PLATE 7: 'Door guardian' of the (A) south and (B) west doorways of the temple at Mundeshwari, Bihar (photo author)



PLATE 8: Male deity from the Lalitgiri area of Odisha holding staff in hand horizontally
(Courtesy: Archaeological Survey of India)

temple walls. Interestingly enough, the image under review is not part of any architectural composition. This was carved by its artist as an independent portable image to be enshrined as a principal deity. The kneeling donor figure depicted by the side of his feet clearly conveys the message that he held the status, as early as seventh century in some parts of Bihar, of a deity who was donated and venerated by the donor-devotee who engraved his name on the sculpture. Irrespective of the possibility of the deity being identified with Daṇḍanāyaka/Daṇḍapāṇi of the *Purāṇas*, his considerably high degree of cultic popularity is unquestionable.

I shall conclude my argument adding a brief note on probably the most significant component of this puzzling figure, the one-line inscription engraved over the head of the deity. As the section dealing with the inscription has shown, the image is a dedication (*deyadharmā*) of a nobleman named Jāhaeṅga. At a cursory glance, it appears to be one of the numerous dedicatory inscriptions composed in the widely used formula of donation. But the crucial difference in the present case lies in fact that here the inscription refers to a second individual, whose name I tentatively read as Vudvūka, the son of Viṣṇu, a (wealthy) oil merchant (*tailika*). There are several

instances in the donative records of eastern India where the act of donation is expressed by the phrase ‘*pratipāditaḥ*’, in most cases along with the more widely used ‘*deyadharmā*’ (for examples, Huntington 1984: 203–50). In all these instances, the act of ‘execution’/‘installation’ is accomplished by the donor himself. But, in the whole corpus of dedicatory inscriptions of early medieval Bihar-Bengal the only parallel of the present record, to my knowledge, comes from an inscribed metal image from Kurkihar where the acts of donation and execution are probably performed by two separate individuals. But unfortunately, the published reading of the badly damaged inscription does not allow one to be quite precise on that score (Gupta 1965: 123). The present inscription, however, clearly suggests that the act of donation by Jāhaeṅga was ‘executed’ (*pratipādita*) by another individual named Vudvūka. Now, the question is, what did the composer of this inscription intend to effectively mean by the ‘act of installation’? A dedication/donation by an individual aspiring to gain religious merit automatically implies that s/he takes charge of the financial liability of the image being prepared by the artist, by paying him the remuneration for his specialised creative skill. In all likelihood, the specific mention of the act of installation by Vudvūka was meant to convey the message that he, instead of Jāhaeṅga, had the privilege of the donation being executed

with his own financial support. Considering the fact that he belonged to the wealthy merchant community, this is a distinct possibility. It is relevant to note here that some more dedicatory inscriptions from Bihar recording donations by members of *tailika* families are known, though unfortunately the provenance of none of this is known. Among these three, the only datable image comes from the twenty-fifth ruling year of Devapāla, donated by the son of an oil-monger named Mūsekadāmūka (Bhattacharya 1997, 2000: 143). The two others are donations from Tihuka, son of Māhū and Puṣikā/Ṣaṣikā, wife of Leṅcana (Bautze-Picron 2015: 200, 226). The more complex question is, in whose favour did this combined act of installation-donation work? Was it a privilege for the son of a *tailika* to associate himself with the donation of a *bhaṭṭāraka* or was the situation reverse, where the *bhaṭṭāraka* aspired to claim prestige by employing a wealthy merchant as his ‘agent’ in his act of donation? An unambiguous answer is not in the vicinity, until more specimens of the same genre surface in the ever-increasing gamut of sources.

Thus, on the whole, this inscribed image has the potential to throw more challenges than we can handle at present. Only further research into these problems might lead to a better understanding of these apparently ‘label’ inscriptions and the ‘subjects’ on which they are engraved.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: Shubha Majumder first drew my attention to the published image and has been a constant source-bank throughout the making of this note. Corinna Wessels-Mevissen generously provided a number of very important references related to the puzzle of this iconography and offered several insightful suggestions. Discussions with Gautam Sengupta, R. Nagaswamy, Debarchana Sarkar and Sharmila Saha have been enriching. Arlo Griffiths and Subir Sarkar suggested refinements on an earlier reading of the inscription. The authorities and staff of the Indian Museum, particularly Satyakam Sen of the Archaeology section, provided all helps in documenting the image. Rik Chattopadhyay not only enthusiastically took charge of digitally editing some of the images but also offered a number of rare references. I am beholden to all of them. 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>.

NOTES

1. In the domain of art historical studies on South Asia's ancient and medieval pasts, researches focusing on the choice of material by the artist has gained specific focus in the last few decades. Some major works in the area are, Asher 1998; Chakraborty and Sengupta 1999; Sengupta and Chakraborty 2002; Chakraborty, Roy Moulik and Koley 2014.

2. In the existing scholarship on the proto-regional scripts of India, Siddhamāṭṛkā is used as an umbrella term standing for the eastern Indian scripts between the seventh and the late tenth-early eleventh centuries (Sircar 1971: 115–16; Sander 2007). A more careful examination of the extant primary sources is expected to reveal that the script went through a sharp line of evolution in this large span of time. Thus, the structure of the script available in the seventh-eighth century inscription may better be termed 'Early Siddhamāṭṛkā'.

3. A second possibility, though contextually difficult to justify, is that Jāhaeṅga, the donor, is himself the son of the oil merchant Viṣṇu, and the

former commissioned Vudvūka for the installation of the image.

4. For the name of the executor, Vuddhūka is also a possible reading. Curious non-Sanskritic names are quite common in the extant corpus of eastern Indian image inscriptions (for numerous examples, Huntington 1984: 203–50; Bautze-Picron 1998, 2015; Sanyal 2014a). In the present record, the executor Vudvūka's father is named Viṣṇu, the latter being a proper Sanskritic name. It may be noted that Vappaṭa, the father of the first Pāla ruler Gopāla I, was the son of Dayitaviṣṇu (for a recent discussion, Sanyal 2014b). Thus, such inconsistencies are not atypical in eastern India.

5. In a personal communication with R. Nagaswamy in July 2020, he informed me that these specimens have been recently published in a volume written, with extensive illustrations, in Tamil. Unfortunately, I have not yet been able to access this source.

6. Personal communication in November 2018.

REFERENCES

- Asher, Frederick M. (1980). *The Art of Eastern India 300–800*, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press (South Asia edn., Delhi: Oxford University Press).
- . (1998). 'Stone and the Production of the Images', *East and West* 58(3/4): 313–28.
- Balogh, Dániel and Arlo Griffiths (2019). 'Transliteration Guide for Members of the DHARMA Project', <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-02272407>.
- Bautze-Picron, Claudine (1998). *The Art of Eastern India in the Collection of the Museum für Indische Kunst*, Berlin (Stone and Terracotta Sculptures, Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag).
- . (2015). *The Forgotten Place: Stone Images from Kurkihar*, New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India.
- Bhattacharya Gouriswar (1997). 'A Dated Avalokiteśvara of the Devapāla Period', *Living Life in Accord with Dhamma: Papers in Honour of Professor Jean Boisselier on his Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Natasha Eilinberg, M.C. Subhadris Diskul and Robert L. Brown, pp. 83–90, Bangkok: Silpakorn University.
- . (2000). *Essays on Buddhist Hindu Jain Iconography and Epigraphy*, ed. Enamul Haque, pp. 139–46, Dhaka: International Centre for Study of Bengal Art.
- Bhattacharya, Hansanarayan (1960). *Hinduder Devdevi* (i.e. Hindu Gods and Goddesses, in Bengali), Calcutta: Firma K.L.M. Pvt. Ltd.
- Biswas, Pampa (2013). 'Buddhist Vestiges from Beswak, Nalanda District of Bihar: A Study of Its Archaeology, Art and Iconography', *Kosala (Journal of the Directorate of Culture and Archaeology, Government of Chhattisgarh)* 6: 67–76.
- . (2016). 'Explored Sculptural Heritage of Telhara, District Nalanda, Bihar: A Recent Visit', *Puravritta (Journal of the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of West Bengal)* 1: 167–82.
- Biswas, Pampa and Shubha Majumder (2014). 'Recent Archaeological Explorations in the Nālandā District of Bihar: Study on its Sculptural Heritage', *Pratnatattva (Journal of the Department of Archaeology, Jahangirnagar University)* 20(1): 37–48.
- Chakraborty, Sambhu, Maitry Roy Moulik and Tarun Koley (2014). 'Appendix 2: Rock Types

- and their Sources', *Vibrant Rock: Stone Sculptures in the State Archaeological Museum, West Bengal*, ed. Gautam Sengupta and Sharmila Saha, pp. 277–86, Calcutta: Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of West Bengal.
- Chakraborty, Sambhu and Gautam Sengupta (1999). 'Provenance of Chloritoid bearing Phyllite used in Sculptures of the Pāla-Sena Period', *Journal of Bengal Art* 5: 177–88.
- Chakravarti, Shyamalkanti (2015–16). 'A Note on an Inscribed Solar Icon of the Gupta Period', *Kalā: The Journal of Indian Art History Congress* 21: 129–30.
- Gupta, Anand Swarup (ed.) (1967). *Vāmanapurāṇa with English Translation*, Varanasi: All India Kashiraj Trust (1968 <https://ia801602.us.archive.org/25/items/in.ernet.dli.2015.313087/2015.313087.The-Vamana.pdf>).
- Gupta, Parameswari Lal (ed.) (1965). *Patna Museum Catalogue of Antiquities (Stone Sculptures, Metal Images, Terracottas and Minor Antiquities)*, Patna: Patna Museum.
- Huntington, Susan L. (1984). *The "Pāla-Sena" Schools of Sculpture*, Leiden: Brill.
- Leoshko, Janice (1988). 'Buddhist Images from Telhara, a Site in Eastern India', *South Asian Studies* 4: 89–97.
- Nagaswamy, R. (2001). 'Dandanayaka', *Tamil Arts (Electronic Journal of RN Tamil Arts Academy)* 3, <http://www.tamilartsacademy.com/journals/volume3/articles/article3.xml> (last accessed 15.7.2020).
- Nyayaratna, Ajitnath (ed. and tr.) (1879). *Maharshi Vedavyas Pranita Skandapurāṇa: Satika Kashikhanda (Skandapurāṇa of Maharṣi Vedavyāsa: The Annotated Kāśikhāṇḍā, in Bengali)*, Calcutta: Kalikrishna Mandal.
- Pal, Pratapaditya (1973). 'Bronzes of Kashmir: Their Sources and Influences', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 122: 727–49.
- Patnaik, Jeeban Kumar (2016). *Excavations at Lalitagiri (1985–91)*, New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India.
- Sander, Lore (2007). 'Confusion of Terms and Terms of Confusion in Indian Palaeography', *Expanding and Merging Horizons: Contributions to South Asian and Cross-Cultural Studies in Commemoration of Wilhelm Halbfass*, ed. Karin Preisendanz, pp. 121–139, Wien: Vöaw.
- Sanyal, Rajat (2014a). 'Appendix 1: Inscribed Sculptures', *Vibrant Rock: Stone Sculptures in the State Archaeological Museum, West Bengal*, ed. Gautam Sengupta and Sharmila Saha, pp. 253–76, Calcutta: Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of West Bengal.
- . (2014b). 'The Pala-Sena and Others', *History of Ancient India: Political History and Administration (c. AD 750–1300)* V, ed. Dilip K. Chakravarti and Makkhan Lal, pp. 165–213, New Delhi: Vivekananda International Foundation and Aryan Books International.
- . (2018). 'Nalanda', *History of Bangladesh: Early Bengal in Regional Perspectives (up to c.1200 CE), Volume 1 (Archaeology, Political History, Polity)*, ed. Abdul Momin Chowdhury and Ranabir Chakravarti, pp. 291–316, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh.
- Sengupta, Gautam and Sambhu Chakraborty (2002). 'Locale, Material and Monument: Begunia Group of Temples, Barakar West Bengal', *Archaeology of Eastern India: Recent Perspectives*, ed. Gautam Sengupta and Sheena Panja, pp. 389–418, Kolkata: Centre for Archaeological Studies & Training, Eastern India.
- Sengupta, Gautam (2015). 'Bodhgaya Lintel Bearing the Inscription of Dharmapala', *Studies in South Asian Heritage: Essays in Memory of M. Harunur Rashid*, ed. Mokammal Bhuiyan, pp. 175–9, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh.
- Sircar, D.C. (1971). 'Introduction to Indian Epigraphy and Palaeography', *Journal of Ancient Indian History* 1970–71 4(1–2): 72–136.
- Verma, Atul Kumar (2013). 'Telhara (Nalanda) Excavation: A Brief Report', *Dharohar* 3: 71–5.
- Verma, Atul Kumar and Rajat Sanyal (2016). 'Discovery of a Buddhist Monastery at Telhara', *Monthly Bulletin of the Asiatic Society* (September) 45/9: 10–12.
- Weiner, Sheila L. (1962). 'From Gupta to Pāla Sculpture', *Artibus Asiae* 25: 167–92.
- Wessels-Mevissen, Corinna (2001). *The Gods of the Directions in Ancient India: Origin and Early Development in Art and Literature (until c. 1000 A.D.)* Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag.