

THE PROBLEM OF SANSKRIT EPIGRAPHY AND ITS SOLUTION

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‘Sanskrit epigraphy ceased to be a serious discipline the day it became an independent discipline, i. e. , a matter of palaeography and history,’ I have been saying, in various forms, over the years. I have been primarily concerned with the Sanskrit epigraphy of Cambodia – one of the most important in the ‘Indian world’. No serious attention has, however, been paid to these words in that field – too full of vested interests. Nor has any heed been given to the words pronounced, nearly 50 years ago, by George Cœdès, the greatest scholar in the field: ‘If it is true that the Sanskrit inscriptions (of Cambodia) have delivered the essential of their historical content, their substance has not been exhausted for that reason.¹ The result is that the ‘Sanskritist,’ with no sound knowledge of Sanskrit and with no knowledge of the Sanskrit culture that finds expression in these inscriptions, is not able to understand technical (e. g. , grammatical and philosophical) but important matters, nor even to understand properly historical information, even when these have been competently explained elsewhere – as eloquently illustrated by the recent manual of Cambodian epigraphy published by the prestigious École Française d’Extrême-Orient, under the auspices of the UNESCO.²

Incompetence in Sanskrit is present everywhere in this book (e. g. , in the analysis of the metres, pp. 23 ff.); but, in the context of this paper, I shall point out only a few cases.

In the Ta Prohm inscription of Jayavarman VII (1108 Śaka), st. V, Mr. Claude Jacques, under the guidance of his pandit in Pondicherry, correctly modifies the reading into *adhyātmadṛṣā nirīkṣyām* and translates accordingly; but he is still not able to understand why the translation given by George Cœdès was wrong and so gives vent to an absurd speculation.³ The fact is simple: Cœdès had his own reasons for reading *adhyātmadṛṣānirīkṣyām* (*adhyātmadṛṣā anirīkṣyām*) and translated accordingly, as is shown by his note on this stanza as well as by his note on the identical stanza in the Preah Khan inscription and his handling of another inscription in *Inscriptions du Cambodge* V, p. 283, st. I.⁴

¹ G. Cœdès, *L’avenir des études khmères* (Paris: Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, 1960), p. 5.

² Yoshiaki Ishizawa, Claude Jacques & Khin Sok, *Manuel d’épigraphie du Cambodge*, Vol. I, Paris 2007.

³ P. 93 and p. 109, n. 12, Cf. his note on the same stanza in the Preah Khan inscription of 1113 Śaka: C. Jacques, ‘La stèle de Praḥ Khan,’ *Preah Khan Conservation Project*, Report IV, Field Campaign I - Project Mobilization, Appendice C, World Monuments Fund, 1993, p. 2, n. 7.

⁴ For this and other matters see my paper to be published by the K. J. Somaiya Centre for Buddhist Studies. Mumbai.

In stanza VI of the Baksei Chamkrong inscription (10th century A. D.),⁵ the reading *bhavanakāśraṇam* (for *bhuvanakāraṇam*) may be ignored: it may be the result of some accident. But Mr. Jacques, while reproducing the correct translation given by George Cœdès, indulges in fantastic interpretations of details which were properly explained long ago.⁶

History (in a very narrow sense) is the only thing Mr. Jacques is interested in. But he falsifies history when, in a 7th-century inscription, he relates the *chandoga trisahasra* to the 3000 saints of Chidambaram in South India.⁷ The expression – attested in Indian literature and epigraphy – means an adept of the Sāmaveda (*chandoga*), versed in the 3 ‘sciences’ (*vidyā*) of this Veda divided into 1000 branches (*śākhā, vartman*)!⁸

Lastly, I take up st. XXIII of the Baksei Chamkrong inscription mentioned above, which contains the most sophisticated allusion to Grammar found in the Sanskrit epigraphy of Cambodia:

vṛddhiṃ guṇaṃ yo guṇavṛddhihīnāṃ
vikalpayām āsa nayan nayāḍhyaḥ/
yuktyānuśāstā prakṛtiṃ paṭiṣtho
mṛjiṃ vidhitsuva saṃkramajñāḥ //

George Cœdès was not able to understand this stanza.⁹ But the explanation was given, before Mr. Claude Jacques himself, some twenty-five years ago, at a conference held in Japan:

Saṃkrama ..., we know from Patañjali’s *Mahābhāṣya* on Kātyāyana’s *Vārttika* 10 on Pāṇini I,1,3 (*iko guṇavṛddhī*), is a technical term used by ancient non-Pāṇinian grammarians to designate the suffixes marked with *k* or *ṛ*, before which applies the prohibition of *guṇa* and *vṛddhi* (cf. Pāṇini I,1,5). These ‘other grammarians’ (*anye vaiyākaraṇāḥ*), Patañjali tells us, hold that there is optionally *vṛddhi* of the vowel of the root *mṛj* (cf. Pāṇini VII,2,114: *mṛjer vṛddhiḥ*) before the suffixes marked with *k* or *ṛ*, but *only* if they begin with a vowel. Thus are optionally formed, e. g., *parimṛjanti / parimārjanti, parimamṛjatuḥ/ parimamārjatuḥ*, but obligatorily *mṛṣṭaḥ, mṛṣṭavān*. Patañjali accepts this idea. And so do all the later Pāṇinīyas, following two different procedures: the one indicated by the author of the *Mahābhāṣya* himself, and the other initiated by Jinendrabuddhi in his *Nyāsa* on the *Kāśikā-vṛtti* on Pāṇini

⁵ P. 72 and Notes, p. 83.

⁶ K. Bhattacharya, *Les Religions brahmaniques dans l’ancien Cambodge* (Paris, 1961), p. 67 and n. 2.

⁷ P. 53, n. 6.

⁸ See K. Bhattacharya, ‘L’état actuel des travaux sur l’épigraphie sanskrite du Cambodge,’ *Studia Asiatica* IV (Mélanges offerts à Arion Roşu, Bucarest-Paris, 2004), p. 688.

⁹ *Journal Asiatique* 1909 (I), p. 498; *Inscriptions du Cambodge* IV (Paris, 1952), pp. 97-98.

I,1,5... Bhāmaha (*Kāvya-lakṣṇā* VI,31) refers to this theory, using the very term *saṅkrama*; but he recommends the *vṛddhi*:

*vṛddhipakṣaṃ prayuñjīta saṅkrame 'pi mṛj yathā /
mārjanty adhararāgaṃ te patanto bāṣpabindavaḥ//*

The author of the Bākṣēi Čaṅkrōṅ inscription does not make any such recommendation. On the contrary, by employing, for ‘made’, the verb *vikalpayām āsa*, he suggests, thanks to the *śleṣa*, - so it seems to me, - that the *vṛddhi* of the vowel of the root *mṛj* of which he is going to speak is ‘admitted as optional’. What he says, therefore, is this: The king, judiciously governing (*yuktyānuśāstā*), brought his subjects (*prakṛti*) to merit (*guṇa*) and prosperity (*vṛddhi*) but also deprived them of merit and prosperity (*vṛddhiṃ guṇaṃ yo guṇavṛddhihīnāṃ vikalpayām āsa nayan - prakṛtim*), that is, rewarded the good and punished the wicked, - just as the grammarian, teaching judiciously (*yuktyānuśāstā*), when he prescribes the operations relating to the base (*prakṛti*), viz. , the root *mṛj*, optionally applies the *vṛddhi* before a suffix marked with *k* or *ṛ* but beginning with a vowel (*mṛjiṃ vidhitsann iva saṅkramajñāḥ*).¹⁰

Such a technical matter, even when explained, was, of course, not to be understood by Mr. Claude Jacques. He therefore gives the following translation:

En gouvernant de manière juste ses sujets qui manquaient de mérite et de fortune, il créa (pour eux) mérite et prospérité, lui qui était riche de sagesse politique, très intelligent, comme s’il connaissait les passages difficiles et désirait les purifier [ou: il donna *guṇa* et *vṛddhi* à une racine qui manquait de *guṇa* et de *vṛddhi*, faisant une analyse grammaticale, connaissant les règles, enseignant convenablement, très intelligent, comme s’il connaissait le «resserrement» et désirait la correction]. [On pourrait comprendre aussi *mṛjiṃ vidhitsan*, «désirant (appliquer les règles) à (la racine) *mṛj*»].¹¹

I do not know if to any reader of this *Manuel* the meaning of this ‘translation’ will be clear, from ‘comme s’il connaissait’ onward.

There is a real problem here, and the solution is implicit in the problem itself: to be a Sanskrit epigraphist, one must first be a Sanskritist.

¹⁰ K. Bhattacharya, ‘The Present State of Research on the Sanskrit Epigraphy of Cambodia: Some Observations,’ *Indus Valley to Mekong Delta: Explorations in Epigraphy*, edited by Noboru Karashima (Madras, 1985), pp. 309-310; *Amṛtadhārā* (Professor R. N. Dandekar Felicitation Volume, edited by S. D. Joshi, Delhi, 1984), pp. 483-484.

¹¹ P. 76 and p. 85, n. 54.

