



RESEARCH ARTICLE

A CONJECTURAL RESTORATION OF THE YEAR 86 EPIGRAPH OF MAHĀRĀJA BHADRAMAGHA

*Jappen Oberoi

Research Scholar (JRF), Dept. of Ancient Indian History, Culture and Archaeology,
Panjab University, Chandigarh, India

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ABSTRACT

An altered and a more plausible reading from the ones proposed before of the badly mutilated and immensely problematic year 86 inscription of the reign of Mahārāja Bhadramagha is attempted in this present paper.

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INTRODUCTION

In the cold weather of 1921-22 a stone slab bearing a mutilated inscription was secured from the village of Hasanabad close to the ancient remains of Kosam by Daya Ram Sahni.^[1] The language of the inscription is the usual mixed dialect of Sanskrit and Prakrit found in the epigraphical records of the Magha dynasty.^[2] The characters of the inscription belong to the Brāhmī alphabet of the later Kushāṇa period. In this transitional Brāhmī an interesting mix of Kushāṇa and Gupta alphabets of the eastern variety can be seen.^[3] The task of decipherment was effectuated by its discoverer and his readings along with a facsimile appeared in *Epigraphia Indica* Vol. XVIII, p. 160.^[4] DC Sircar altered some readings and published it along with annotations in his *Select Inscriptions*, Vol I, p. 163.^[5] Sten Konow^[6], while editing the year 87 inscription of the reign of Bhadramagha for the twenty third volume of *Epigraphia Indica*, suggested that the two epigraphs were practically identical and restored many defaced aksharas of the year 86 inscription by comparing it with the year 87 epigraph. Many alterations suggested by him are unacceptable.^[7] The present inscription is badly damaged and only a conjectural restoration is possible. It is extremely difficult to discern where one line ends and where the following line begins.

*Corresponding author: Jappen Oberoi,

Research Scholar (JRF), Dept. of Ancient Indian History, Culture and Archaeology, Panjab University, Chandigarh, India.

The inscription is dated in the year 86, the corresponding year in the Gregorian calendar being 164 AD.^[8]

Text

- 1 [Siddham] Mahārājasya śrī Bhadrama^[9]
- 2 [ghasya savatsare^[10]] 80 (+) 6^[11] varsha paksha 3 divasa 5
- 3 [etāyaṃ puruvāyaṃ pallānakāra]sya Śaparasya putrehi Mādgālī
- 4 [putrehi Śānikāya Saṇḍhakena cha bhaga]vatyā āryāyā devadāra^[12]
- 5 [sthāpitā] * Puṇyaṃ vardhatu ||*^[13]

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XVIII, pp. 158-160.
2. Sten Konow cogently stated that the transitional character of the language employed in the Kosam inscriptions reveals the tendency of progressive Sanskritisation without altogether eliminating Prakrit. (as cited in Jagannath and J.N. Banerjea, 'The Rise and Fall of the Kushāṇa Power' in *A Comprehensive history of India*, Vol. II, ed. by K.A.N. Sastri, Orient Longmans Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1957, p. 260, fn. 3).
3. While the signs used for representing the medial vowels- *ā* and *e* by horizontal side strokes, *i* by a curve to left on top of the consonant; *ga* and *śa* with rounded tops; *ja*, *pa* and *va* with flat angular forms are typical of Kushāṇa writing,

- the characters for *bha*, *sa* and *ma* show an advanced form from the ones found in most Kushāna documents. We find the characteristic *ha* of the eastern variety of Gupta Brāhmī.
4. DR Sahni's (*Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XVIII, p. 160) reading of the Text:
 - 1 .. Mahārājasya śrī Bhadram[ēghasya]
 - 2 [Samvatsa]rē 80 8 varsha paksha 3 divasa 5
 - 3sya Samarasya(?) puttra Him[i]ṅgana
 - 4ayayādāvādāra.
 5. DC Sircar's (*Select Inscriptions*, Vol. 1, University of Calcutta, Calcutta, 1942, p. 163) reading of the Text:
 - 1 [Svasti] Mahārājasya śrī Bhadrama[ghasya]
 - 2 [Samvatsarē] 80 (+*) 6 varshā-paksha 3 divasa 5
 - 3 * * * kasya Sama(pa)rasya puttra-Hemāṅgana
 - 4 * * * * [dattā] ayayā devadāra.
 6. *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXIII, pp. 245-248.
 7. What was read by DR Sahni as 8 was amended by Sten Konow to the letter *da* (*Ibid.*, p. 247). Sten Konow also rejected the possibility of the second line showing the numeral 80 read by DR Sahni and read it as *tē* (*Ibid.*). Furthermore, the epigraph deciphered by DR Sahni is not exactly identical with the inscription dealt by Sten Konow (*Ibid.*, p. 247). Unlike the year 86 epigraph, the purpose of the year 87 inscription deciphered by Sten Konow was to set up two slabs intended to form a seat for an image of Devī (*Ibid.*, p. 246). Furthermore, we do not concur with Konow's assertion that the slab (containing the inscription deciphered by DR Sahni) was discarded because the engraver had made some serious mistakes in copying the draft (*Ibid.*, p. 247).
 8. We have inscriptions dated from the year 51 (*Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXXI, pp. 177) to 139 (JF Fleet, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, III, 1888, pp. 266-267) of the Magha dynasty. The controversy here is apropos the attribution of these dates to a known samvat. A Cunningham, (*Archaeological Survey of India Reports*, Vol. I, Superintendent of Government Printing, Calcutta, 1885, pp. 119-120) while discussing the date of the Ginja inscription of year 52 of Maharaja Bhimasena, referred the date to either to the era of the Seleukidae (which he thought to have been used by the Kushānas) or of the Guptas. "In the former case", he writes, "it must be taken as the year 452 of the era, the hundreds being omitted, and would correspond with 140 AD while in the latter case it would correspond with the year 166 + 52=AD 221" (according to Cunningham's reckoning of the Gupta era). He noted that while the characters of the inscription were of the earliest Gupta forms, the opening was worded in the well-known style of all the shorter Indo-Scythian inscriptions because of which he felt constrained to assign the record to the earlier period. Fleet (*Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, III, 1888, p. 266) while publishing a Kosam Inscription of Bhimavarman of year 139 referred the year to the Gupta era and took Bhimavarman to be a feudatory of King Skandagupta. DR Sahni (*Op.cit.*), who read 88 in the inscription under discussion, referred the era to that of the Guptas and placed the record in 407 AD. KP Jayaswal (*History of India, 150 A.D. to 350 A.D.*, Motilal Banarsi Dass, Lahore, 1933, pp. 108-109), taking the Maghas as feudatories of the Vākātakas and the Kalachuri-Chedi era of 248 AD marking the foundation of the Vākātika power, posited that the Maghas used the samvat of their overlords. DR Bhandarkar (*A List of Inscriptions of Northern India*, p. 173, note 3), NG Majumdar (*Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXIV, p. 147) and Krishna Deva (*Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXIV, p. 256) designated the Kalachuri-Chedi era of AD 248-49 to be the samvat employed by the Maghas in their records. A Ghosh (*Indian Culture*, Vol. 1, No. 4, p. 716) had suggested that the possibility of some local era, connected with the dynasty, being used in the Magha inscriptions cannot be overlooked. AS Altekar (AS Altekar & RC Majumdar, eds., *The Vākātika-Gupta Age*, Motilal Banarsi Dass, Banaras, 1954, p. 38, note 2) rejected the likelihood of the Kalachuri-Chedi or Gupta era being used by the Maghas to date their inscriptions. He pointed out that the Kalachuri era was never employed in the region under Magha hegemony. "The most fatal objection", he writes, "against referring the dates to the Chedi or the Gupta era is the contemporaneity of some of these rulers with the Imperial Guptas, which it renders inevitable" (*Ibid.*). It is almost unlikely that the Guptas would have allowed a feudatory family ruling in the heart of their dominions to mint coins and issue inscriptions without mentioning their overlords (B Lahiri, *Indigenous States of Northern India; c.200BC to 320AD*, University of Calcutta, Calcutta, 1974, p. 129). The omission of any reference to Gupta sovereignty, observe JN Banerjea and Jagannath (Jagannath and JN Banerjea, "The Rise and Fall of the Kushāna Power" in *A Comprehensive history of India*, Vol. II, ed. by K.A.N. Sastri, Orient Longmans Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1957, p. 260, note 3), in the Magha inscriptions shows that they were not Gupta feudatories. They cogently remark that as the Maghas were originally the subordinates of the Kushānas, it is only natural that they should adopt the era used by their overlords. Furthermore, the Kanishka era must have been well known in Kausambi region for three inscriptions of the years 2 (*Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXIV, pp. 210-212), 5 (GR Sharma, *Kushāna Studies*, University of Allahabad, Allahabad, 1968, p. 44) and 6 (*Ibid.*) of Kanishka's reckoning have been found from Kosam. Thus we can assign the inscription under discussion, like all Magha records, to the Kanishka/Śaka era of 78 AD. It must be pointed out that many scholars like NP Chakravarti (*Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXXI, pp. 173-176), VV Mirashi (*Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXVI, pp. 304), AS Altekar (*Op.cit.*), DC Sircar (*Op.cit.*, note 1), Bela Lahiri (*Indigenous States of Northern India, c.200BC to 320AD*, University of Calcutta, Calcutta, 1974, pp. 129-130), Jagannath (Jagannath and JN Banerjea, "The Rise and Fall of the Kushāna Power" in *A Comprehensive history of India*, Vol. II, ed. by K.A.N. Sastri, Orient Longmans Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1957, p. 260, note 3), JN Banerjea (*Ibid.*), A Agrawal ("Inscriptions, c.200BC-AD750", in *History of Ancient India Vol. IV: Political History and Administration, c.200BC-Ad750*, ed. by D.K. Chakrabarti & M Lal, Vivekananda International Foundation in assc. with Aryan Books International, New Delhi, 2014, p. 333), AM Sastri (*Early history of the Deccan: Problems and Perspectives*, Sundeep Prakashan, Delhi, 1987, p. 142) refer the dates of Magha epigraphs to the era of 78 AD. Thusly, referring the dates of the Magha records to the era of 78 AD, the epigraph under discussion can be placed in 164 AD.
 9. DR Sahni (*Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XVIII, p. 160) and Sten Konow (*Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXIII, p. 247) take the name of the reigning king to be Bhadramegha. The year 81 inscription of the same king puts it beyond doubt that the name of the monarch was Bhadramagha (*Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXIV, p. 256).

10. The Magha records often state the year of the inscriptions in words as well as numbers, so the possibility of the word 'shadaṣite' appearing before the numeral 80 cannot be ignored. Since only numbers have been used to give the fortnight and day, it seems plausible that the word for 86 was also omitted in this epigraph.
11. DR Sahni read the date as 88 (*Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XVIII, p. 160). It was corrected to 86 by KP Jayaswal (*History of India, 150 A.D. to 350 A.D.*, Motilal Banarsi Dass, Lahore, 1933, p. 230, note 3) and the same was followed by DC Sircar (*Select Inscriptions*, Vol. 1, University of Calcutta, Calcutta, 1942, p. 163).
12. DR Sahni (*Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XVIII, p. 160) noticed traces of aksharas which had survived in the rest of the defaced surface of the slab. The epigraph must have continued after 'devadāra', probably, running into the fifth line. The epigraph is an interesting addition in the antiquity of temples in ancient India.
