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Maitrakas

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In North India, the period from the sixth to the eighth centuries, i.e., the interval between the decline of the Imperial Gupta Dynasty (*see* GUPTAS) and the emergence of the medieval regional powers, saw an immense rise of the peripheral zones (*see* SUBORDINATE RULERS OF THE GUPTAS). One of the royal lines gaining strength in the west was that of the Maitrakas, who ruled from their capital Valabhī over Surāṣṭra, i.e., the Kathiawar Peninsula in Gujarat, from the late fifth century. The early Maitrakas had to acknowledge the suzerainty of some overlords, probably the AULIKARAS (Shastri 1990; Goyal 2006: 109 ff.). In the first half of the seventh century, during the rule of the North Indian king HARṢAVARDHANA of Kānyakubja (modern KANAUJ), four Maitraka kings reigned consecutively in Surāṣṭra. One of them, Kharagraha I, seems to have launched military campaigns toward Ujjayinī in 616 CE (Shastri 2000: 427). The Gurjaras, who ruled in Lāṭa, i.e., southern Gujarat, claimed that they had granted protection to the king of Valabhī against Harṣavardhana (Mirashi 1955: 85). From the report of the Chinese pilgrim XUAN-ZANG, who visited Valabhī around 640 CE, it can be deduced that Maitraka Dhruvasena II was married to a daughter of Harṣavardhana (Li 1996: 302).

As for many parts of premodern India, the most reliable sources for the reconstruction of Maitraka sociopolitical history are epigraphic records. In the case of this dynasty, these inscriptions were almost exclusively Sanskrit copper-plate charters (*see* COPPER PLATE GRANTS) recording royal endowments of land in favor of religious donees, and, at the same time, containing panegyric descriptions (*praśasti*) of the royal family. More than 120 such title deeds are known, and thus the Maitraka inscriptions constitute one of the most dense extant Indian epigraphic corpora

(Schmiedchen 2018: 35). The documents issued by these kings date from the beginning of the sixth century ((Valabhī) year 183 (502 CE)) to the second half of the eighth century ((Valabhī) year 447 (766 CE)) (*see* ANCIENT INDIAN ERAS).

The first standardized genealogical account was introduced under Maitraka Dhruvasena I in the early sixth century and was continuously updated for succeeding kings. It begins with assigning these rulers “to the Maitrakas, whose antagonists were forcibly prostrated.” A description of the founder of this dynasty, named Bhaṭakka, and of his three sons, Dharasena I, Droṇasimha, and Dhruvasena I, follows. Bhaṭakka and Dharasena I are called *senāpati*, “military leader”; Droṇasimha is characterized as *mahārāja*, “king,” and Dhruvasena I bore the title of “a great vassal king (*mahāsāmanta-mahārāja*) favored by the respected paramount sovereign” (Konow 1911: 104 ff.). Besides evidence for repeated collateral succession, the genealogies of the Maitrakas contain mainly conventional, metaphorical praise of ideal kingship, with the obvious goal of demonstrating that the rulers fulfilled the requirements of perfect kings.

The most striking change in the genealogical account took place during the rule of Śīlāditya I at the beginning of the seventh century. A newly appointed official rewrote the description of the early ancestors inasmuch as he still mentioned Bhaṭakka, the founder of the family, now under his Sanskritized name “Bhaṭārka,” but skipped over his four sons (Kielhorn 1885: 327–30). Bhaṭārka is not called “military leader” anymore, but just labeled with the religious epithet *paramamāheśvara*, “highly devoted to [god] Śiva.” It is (his grandson) Guhasena whom the genealogy introduces next, without describing the exact relationship. Entirely new is the detailed praise of Śīlāditya I, the contemporary ruler himself. The changes in the genealogy pose the question as to whether this amendment was purely motivated by an attempt to shorten the ever-growing text, or

Pedigree of the Maitrakas of Valabhi

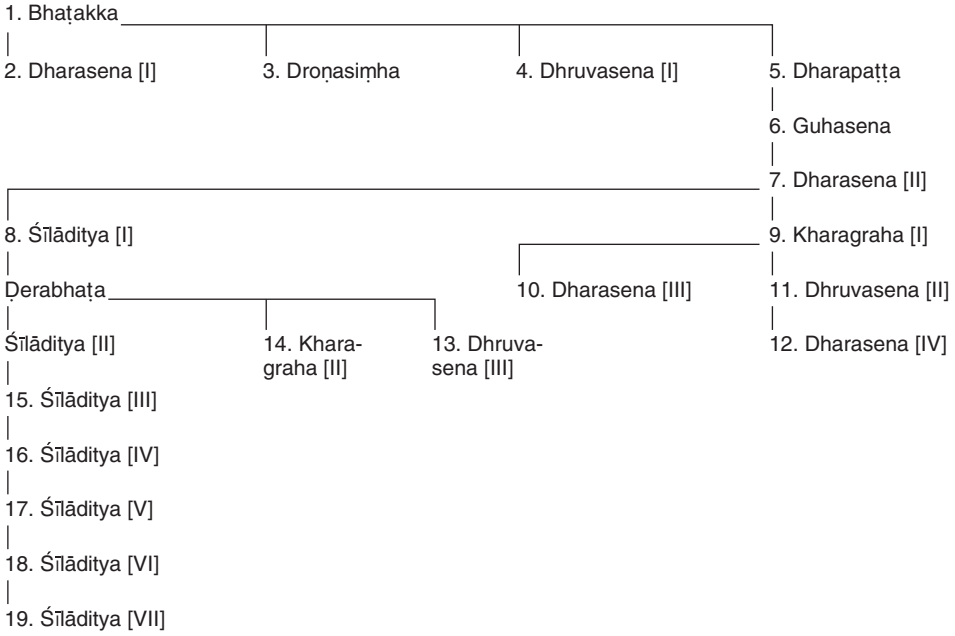


Figure 1 Pedigree of the Maitrakas.

whether it indicates a break in the line of succession. A combination of several reasons might be the case: it is possible Guhasena was not the legitimate heir, or his succession had been disputed. He was the first son to succeed his father as king after half a century of younger brothers following their elder ones onto the throne. Perhaps the alteration of the genealogy also aimed at some sort of homogenization of the presentation of the dynastic tradition. With the exception of the founder of the dynasty, Śīlāditya I ordered the omission of all those predecessors who had been “modest” military leaders (*senāpati*) or who had acknowledged the supremacy of a paramount sovereign. Śīlāditya I, himself labeled as “highly devoted to Śiva,” had only those rulers who had been Śaivas as well mentioned.

It is also striking that no historical events are reflected in the newly redacted *praśasti*. From other sources, epigraphic and non-epigraphic,

it is known that during Maitraka Śīlāditya I's rule, King Harṣavardhana of Kānyakubja (606–47 CE) and Cālukya Pulakeśin II (609–42 CE) (see CĀLUKYAS OF BĀDĀMI) came to power, and that the Kaṭaccuri king Buddharāja must have invaded northern Gujarat (Mirashi 1955: 54; Schmiedchen 1997: 45 ff.). The epigraphic data also testify indirectly that the Kaṭaccuris, Gurjaras, and Maitrakas vied with each other in promoting the same Brahmanical groups (Schmiedchen 2013).

From the middle of the seventh century onward, the naming conventions of the Maitrakas illustrate their anxiety to homogenize even the royal names for the sake of dynastic continuity. From the reign of Śīlāditya III onward, all the Maitraka kings bore the name “Śīlāditya” in their official records, apparently as a kind of coronation name. From this time onward, there is no evidence for collateral succession anymore. All later Maitraka

kings used imperial titles (*paramabhaṭṭāraka mahārājādhirāja*) and called themselves as well as their ancestors Śaivas (Schmiedchen 2018: 37). Even before the attempts at homogenization under Śilāditya I, the religious epithets of the Maitraka rulers showed a clear preference for *paramamāheśvara*. Sixteen out of nineteen Maitraka kings were exclusively labeled as “highly devoted to Śiva.” Only in relation to some of the early members of the dynasty had other religious affiliations been recorded: Dhruvasena I was “highly devoted to Viṣṇu” (*paramabhāgavata*); Dharapaṭṭa, his younger brother, was a “devout worshipper of the sun-god” (*paramādityabhakta*); and the latter’s son, Guhasena, was an “excellent [Buddhist] lay follower” (*paramopāsaka*), according to the latest of his known records (Schmiedchen 1993, 2010–11).

The Maitraka endowments, however, reveal a patronage pattern that predominantly favored Brahmins (with no apparent institutional Śaiva or Vaiṣṇava affiliation) and Buddhist monasteries (for monks and nuns). The kings of this dynasty only made very few endowments for Hindu temples (see *DEVADĀNA*). Despite the role Gujarat played in the medieval history of Jainism, no Maitraka grants in favor of Jaina institutions have been discovered so far.

The majority of the Maitraka charters, i.e., 70 percent of the known corpus, record endowments in favor of Brahmins, mostly as individual donees (see *BRAHMADEYA/AGRAHĀRA*). Their Vedic affiliations have been recorded for most donees. Half of the more than one hundred Brahmins were Yajurvedins, almost 30 percent Sāmavedins, some 20 percent Ṛgvedins, and only six of the recipients were Atharvavedins (see *VEDIC PERIOD, POLITICAL HISTORY*). The largest numbers of Brahmins lived in the capital Valabhī. But Brahmins also resided in Siṃhapura (Sihor), Hastakavapra (Hathab), and Kheṭaka (Kheda). Others had already been living in or near the villages where they later received endowments. From the late sixth century onward, it is frequently recorded that the Brahmin recipients of grants

had migrated (°*vinirgata*) from other places, mostly within Surāṣṭra, but also from southern Gujarat, the western part of present-day Madhya Pradesh, or even from northern Bengal (Schmiedchen 2015).

Approximately one quarter of the Maitraka charters record endowments in favor of Buddhist institutions. The concentration of donations to Buddhist monasteries (*vihāra*) based in and around Valabhī was apparently higher than that of endowments in favor of Brahmins there. The Chinese pilgrim Yijing (see *YIJING*), who visited Eastern India in the second half of the seventh century, reports that Nālandā and Valabhī were the two major centers of Buddhist learning at this time (Takakusu 1896: 177). But despite the abundance of epigraphic attestations and literary references, hardly any archaeological remains of monastic structures have been excavated in or around Valabhī. The most famous monastic establishment in Valabhī was the Ḍuḍḍāvihāra, a monastery founded by and named after the niece of Maitraka Dhruvasena I. This institution was called *mahāvihāra*, “great monastery,” or *vihāramaṇḍala*, “monastic complex.” Six other, economically independent structures seem to have belonged to this Ḍuḍḍā complex. Although the majority of the monasteries were those for monks, it is quite remarkable that there are also references to apparently economically independent nunneries in the capital. Out of sixteen Buddhist institutions referred to in the Maitraka corpus, only one – a monastery established by Śilāditya I – definitely had a royal founder. The other institutions were built by noble ladies, high-ranking officials, learned monks, traders, and private individuals. However, the kings made all the attested endowments for the upkeep of these institutions. Whereas each foundation by a learned monk was a monastery for monks, and while noble ladies also seem to have mainly founded *vihāras* for monks, two of the three known nunneries were erected by non-ordained male patrons. XUANZANG did not mention

the existence of *vihāras* for nuns, but gave the numbers of monasteries and monks in Falapi (Valabhī) as one hundred and as six thousand, respectively. The names of specific branches or schools (*nikāya*) of early Buddhism are not attested in the Maitraka records. The charters of Guhasena, however, refer to the conventional number of eighteen *nikāyas* in a general way. On the other hand, there is direct evidence for Mahāyāna influence: chief secretary Skandabhaṭa [II], who worked under the rulers Dhruvasena II and Dharasena IV, founded several Mahāyāna institutions in the kingdom (Schmiedchen 1993).

In contrast to the majority of the Brahmanical grants, most of the Buddhist donations consisted of endowments of whole villages, and not of individual plots of land. In a few cases, more than a single village was bestowed with one charter; and sometimes the very same village was donated where the monastery itself had been erected. It is quite striking that the Maitraka kings of the eighth century did not make endowments in favor of Buddhist monasteries anymore. In most parts of India, the same trend can be observed and, inversely, Brahmins (and later also increasingly Hindu temples) were favored on a larger scale. One reason for this development might have been that Buddhist monastic communities showed comparatively little interest in village life, their traditional basis of support in India having always been the towns and cities rather than the countryside. Brahmins, on the other hand, seem to have fulfilled the expectations of the Maitraka kings in shaping the rural landscape much better, with quite a number of them being personally active in agricultural activities, particularly if they received individual plots of land, rather than whole villages.

SEE ALSO: Aulikaras; *Brahmadeya/agrahāra*; Cāḷukyas of Bādāmi; Copper plate grants; *Devadāna*; Harṣavardhana; Subordinate rulers of the Guptas.

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