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Imperial rulers and regional elites in early medieval central India (8th to 13th centuries)

Annette Schmiedchen

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The Routledge Handbook of the State in Premodern India

Edited by Hermann Kulke and Bhairabi Prasad Sahu

THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF THE STATE IN PREMODERN INDIA

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Cover image: King Narasimha with his wife at Konark, Odisha, India. Courtesy of Hermann Kulke.

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IMPERIAL RULERS AND REGIONAL ELITES IN EARLY MEDIEVAL CENTRAL INDIA (8TH TO 13TH CENTURIES)¹

*Annette Schmiedchen*²

Terminological introduction

From the 6th century onwards, the relationship between imperial and subordinate rulers was expressed by a specific trans-regional, almost pan-Indian Sanskrit vocabulary, which, in part, had been already developed during the Gupta period, i.e. in late antiquity. On the one hand, imperial titles like *mahārājādhirāja*, ‘overlord of great kings’, *parameśvara*, ‘supreme ruler’, and *paramabhaṭṭāraka*, ‘paramount sovereign’, were used (Sircar, 1966: 185; 235–237); at times, the term *cakravartin*, ‘world emperor’, was added to this title list (Monier-Williams, 1899: 381; Sircar, 1966: 65). On the other hand, subordination under such an imperial suzerain was expressed by the phrase *paramabhaṭṭāraka-pādānudhyāta*, ‘favoured by the feet of (i.e. the respected) paramount sovereign’ (Ferrier and Törzsök, 2008: 93–113), defining a king as a subordinate prince of an overlord.

A typical title of a subordinate ruler was *sāmanta*. This key term defined a characteristic structural phenomenon of the medieval period in India (Gopal, 1963: 21–37). The original meaning of *sāmanta* was ‘neighbour’; in antiquity, the word described neighbouring kings. However, since the 6th century, this expression was increasingly used with a narrower technical connotation, meaning ‘subdued regional prince who acknowledges the suzerainty of another king’; it is translated as ‘subordinate prince’, ‘feudatory’, or ‘vassal’ (Monier-Williams, 1899: 1205; Sircar, 1966: 289). In addition, more elaborate derivations of this term were used: *mahāsāmanta*, ‘great vassal’, and *sāmantādhipati*, ‘lord of vassals’, and also *mahāsāmantādhipati*, ‘lord of great vassals’ (Sircar, 1966: 187, 289), which indicate a large variety in the hierarchical relations as well as a ramified system of vassal and sub-vassal contacts. All these expressions were regularly employed in combination with the term *mahārāja*, literally ‘great king’ (Sircar, 1966: 185) (in contrast to the imperial *mahārājādhirāja*; see above). While *sāmanta* (or *mahāsāmanta*) was the most common expression, other designations for regional rulers are also attested, as e.g. *māṇḍalika* and further derivations from *maṇḍala*, ‘province’ (Monier-Williams, 1899: 806; Sircar, 1966: 195). Another phrase for vassals was *samadhigata-pañcamahāśabda*, ‘having obtained five great titles’. This expression referred to the fact that a vassal was permitted to use five titles, differing from region to

region (Sircar, 1966: 288).³ One title was *mahāpratīhāra*, ‘great chamberlain’, another one *mahādaṇḍanāyaka*, ‘great general’ (Monier-Williams, 1899: 797; Sircar, 1965: 341f.; Sircar, 1966: 175, 184). In order to bind the regional elites to the court, they were awarded high-ranking offices.

Sometimes we come across a mixture of imperial and subordinate titles, which shows that the demarcation line between the two categories was not always clear. And even those members of regional elites who used subordinate titles did not always mention their actual overlords. There are also frequent references to the matrimonial alliances between imperial and subordinate royal families, although the documents of a particular dynasty usually only contain information on the marriages of their princes, not of their princesses. Furthermore, if a new dynasty took over, the former vassals were sometimes taken over as well.

The institution of *sāmanta* contributed to the structural changes from ancient to medieval times. Vassals had to pay tributes and to deliver troupes to their suzerains. Reciprocally, *sāmantas* received privileges and elevated positions at the court. High-ranking royal officials seem to have demanded similar titles and rights. This was the beginning of a development which the historian Hermann Kulke has characterised as a ‘sāmantization’ of the whole administration (Kulke, 1996: 31). Whereas ancient Indian legal texts contain detailed lists on the payment of different royal officials (Kangle, 1972: 302–305), it can be assumed that in the early medieval period, subordinate rulers as well as high-ranking royal officials were repaid for their services through the allocation of tax income from villages and other landed property (Sharma, 2001: 24). Pre-10th-century sources, however, rarely mention secular fiefs; thus, the emergence of the *sāmanta* network remarkably pre-dates any attestation for service assignments to feudatories in India. This is one of the serious dilemmas which the proponents of the concept of an ‘Indian feudalism’ have had to face, who, following the European model, interpreted *sāmantas* as feudatories in the Western sense (Sharma, 1961; Yadava, 1966; Schmiedchen, 2014b). One cannot but agree with the criticism put forward by Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, who pointed out that “it has not been seriously examined as to how even the system of secular or service assignments to officials led to the emergence of a *sāmanta*-feudatory network. It has been conceded that the general chronology of the epigraphic evidence for service assignments postdates the genesis of feudal polity” (Chattopadhyaya, 1994: 194).

The rulers of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa dynasty as imperial overlords

The Rāṣṭrakūṭa empire

For this chapter, Central India in the period from the 8th to the 13th centuries has been chosen as an example. The most important royal dynasties of this region and period were the Rāṣṭrakūṭas (8th to 10th centuries) as well as the Śīlāhāras and Yādavas (10th to 13th centuries). The main historical sources are inscriptions: stone epigraphs and, even more significant, royal charters engraved on copper plates. They regularly contain genealogies of monarchs and subordinate kings and thus very interesting data on the activities of imperial rulers and regional elites.

The Middle Ages were characterised by short-lived regional empires in many parts of India; ruling dynasties were frequently dethroned by their former vassals, and regional princes often established new royal houses. In Central India, the early line of the Western Calukyas (6th to 8th centuries) was succeeded by the Rāṣṭrakūṭas, their former vassals in Maharashtra, in the middle of the 8th century. In the late 10th century, the Rāṣṭrakūṭa kings were defeated by the

later line of the Western Cālukyas.⁴ Whereas the Rāṣṭrakūṭas seem to have disappeared from the political scene, their Śīlāhāra vassals survived under the new Cālukya overlords.

A change from vassal status to the position of an independent ruler is attested for Rāṣṭrakūṭa Dantidurga, the first king of the imperial line, who ascended the throne in the 8th century. He was the first member of his dynasty known to have issued inscriptions. In his earliest extant copper-plate charter, dated Śaka 663 (741 A. D.), Dantidurga, his father, and his grandfather were labelled as vassals (*samadhigata-pañcamahāśabda mahāsāmāntādhipati*) (Dikshit, 1939/40: 29 f., lines 1–4, 7). Dantidurga, the son of a Calukya princess, failed to mention his overlord, but it can be assumed that the early Rāṣṭrakūṭas acknowledged the suzerainty of the Calukyas. The Calukyas had coined the title *prthivī-vallabha*, ‘favourite of the earth’, for themselves. Later, they also awarded their feudatories with this honorific epithet for military services, and Rāṣṭrakūṭa Dantidurga bore this title as well (Dikshit, 1939/40: 30, line 8; Mirashi, 1959: 188, line 2).⁵ In his last charter, dated Śaka 675 (753/54 A.D.), Dantidurga is described as someone “who achieved the supremacy of a great king (*rājādhirāja-parameśvaratā*), after having quickly defeated the Vallabha (i.e. the Calukya king) through his military power”.⁶ The subsequent use of imperial titles (*mahārājādhirāja parameśvara paramabhaṭṭāraka*) (Fleet, 1882: 112, lines 27–29)⁷ also indicates that Dantidurga regarded himself as a king with trans-regional ambitions.

Govinda III, who reigned from the late 8th to the beginning of the 9th century (Schmiedchen, 2014a: 466–473),⁸ was probably the most prominent ruler in the history of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa dynasty. He was able to extend the sphere of influence of his imperial line from northwestern Maharashtra to the whole region of present-day Maharashtra and to Karnataka in the South. His claim to supremacy was based on much stronger relations with subordinate kings, compared to the situation prevailing under his predecessors. One of the genealogical accounts used in Rāṣṭrakūṭa copper-plate charters reveals Govinda III’s strategic considerations regarding the relationship with his feudatories, describing in a rather prescriptive way how to handle disloyal vassals who had collaborated with the enemy: Govinda III

quickly fought his bad servants in battle and captured them, if they had left him, wearing the fetters of other rulers. [...] but if they ended their hostility, he released them, because he had a soft heart. [...] He again supported even those kings, although they had been his enemies.⁹ Subordinate

status was formally granted by the Rāṣṭrakūṭas, and feudatories were described as “decorated by the lordship of great vassals, obtained through the grace of [the Rāṣṭrakūṭa ruler]” (*°prasādapalabdhamahāsāmāntādhipatyālamkṛta°*) (Rice, 1905: 53, Nl. 61, plate 4b).¹⁰ There is at least indirect evidence that subordinate princes received villages and land by their overlords’ grace (*prasāda*)¹¹ and that they used these service assignments for religious endowments of their own.

The installation of collateral branches of the imperial house

Like other medieval Indian dynasties, the Rāṣṭrakūṭas tried to establish collateral branches in peripheral territories. Traditionally, regional elites were particularly strong in the South, and Kambha, an elder brother of Govinda III, was posted in Karnataka already under Dhruva, the father of Kambha and Govinda III, in the late 8th century (Schmiedchen, 2014a: 78, note 211). The vicerealty of Kambha posed a severe threat to the succession claims of his younger brother Govinda III. Kambha apparently had ambitions to ascend the Rāṣṭrakūṭa throne, all

the more as Govinda III's selection by their father Dhruva could be regarded as a violation of the rule of primogeniture.¹² It seems that Kambha led a coalition of South Indian feudatories against the new imperial Rāṣṭrakūṭa ruler, and that it took Govinda III several years to overcome the opposition of his brother. After his victory, Govinda III did not remove Kambha from his position as viceroy of southern Karnataka.¹³ However, the attempt to control the local elites in this region with a collateral Rāṣṭrakūṭa branch was not continued after the death of Kambha.¹⁴ Another, more fruitful endeavour to integrate the southern parts into the Rāṣṭrakūṭa empire was the foundation of a new capital in Mānyakheta (today Malkhed), thus moving the royal residence from northwestern Maharashtra further south, to the northeastern part of Karnataka, under Amoghavarṣa I, Govinda III's son, in the mid-9th century.¹⁵

In West Indian Gujarat, the Rāṣṭrakūṭa strategy of installing a collateral branch was more successful than the attempt in Karnataka. Indrarāja, a younger brother of Govinda III, was the first king of the so-called Rāṣṭrakūṭas of Lāṭa, i.e. southern Gujarat. This line, which had feudatory status, was highly important for the imperial Rāṣṭrakūṭa house, because its territory served as an effective buffer zone against the North Indian Gurjara-Pratihāra dynasty.¹⁶ Since the early 9th century, the Lāṭa princes helped to safeguard the northwest frontier of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa empire, considering themselves as a 'door bar' or 'stumbling block' (*argala*)¹⁷ against its hostile neighbours. Another passage in one of the inscriptions of this collateral branch reads:

And this [Indrarāja of Lāṭa], all alone, made the Gūrjara (sic!) ruler, who was proud and willing to fight, run away like a deer. After that, the alliance of the great Deccan vassals, whose possessions were confiscated by [king Govinda III], humbly asked [Indrarāja], full of fear and in a state of decay, for protection.¹⁸

Although one should not underestimate the role of the Lāṭa vassals, this description of their importance and trans-regional influence seems to be slightly exaggerated.

The Lāṭa Rāṣṭrakūṭas also claimed to have acted as kingmakers for Amoghavarṣa I (Altekar, 1931/32: 143, lines 40 f., stanza 39), the son of Govinda III, who ascended the imperial Rāṣṭrakūṭa throne when he was still a minor in the second decade of the 9th century. In the exceptionally long reign of Amoghavarṣa I – he must have ruled for more than 60 years¹⁹ – hostilities broke out between the main and the collateral branches. Amoghavarṣa I was victorious in this conflict, probably with the help of his vassals from South India. In the mid-9th century, he directly interfered into the affairs of Gujarat.²⁰ Later, Amoghavarṣa I established a line of Śilāhāra vassals in the neighbouring region of the Konkan coast in present-day northwestern Maharashtra,²¹ most probably with the intention to counterbalance the influence of his relatives in Gujarat.

Kṛṣṇa II of the imperial Rāṣṭrakūṭa dynasty, son of Amoghavarṣa I, who reigned from the late 9th to the early 10th century, apparently ended the rule of the Lāṭa branch, introducing an unrelated line of vassals,²² who acted far less independently than the collateral branch earlier. For some time, the imperial Rāṣṭrakūṭas even had an Arab feudatory at the Northern Konkan coast, which was, due to its flourishing maritime trade, a highly contested area (Schmiedchen, 2013a: 349f.). Kṛṣṇa II is said to have established Tājika²³ Madhumati (i.e. Muḥammad) as regional ruler in the border region between present-day Gujarat and Maharashtra. From a Sanskrit inscription issued by Tājika Madhumati in Śaka 848 (926/27 A. D.), it is known that he administered the Saṃyāna territory (Sanjan in southern Gujarat) also under Indra III, the grandson of Kṛṣṇa II (Sircar, 1957/58a: 45–55). King Kṛṣṇa II's marriage with a princess from the North Indian Kalacuri-Cedi dynasty was the first in a whole series of matrimonial alliances between the two

royal houses, which illustrate the continued endeavour of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas to make up for the difficult relation with the Gurjara-Pratihāra rulers in the North (Schmiedchen, 2014a: 108, figure 3).

There is some evidence in the imperial records of the second quarter of the 10th century that feudatories were involved in royal ceremonies and part of influential power constellations at the Rāṣṭrakūṭa court in Māyakhēṭa. Govinda IV, great-grand-son of Kṛṣṇa II, had twelve great vassals (*mahāsāmanta*) make “the binding of the royal turban (i.e. the ‘crown’)” of his queen (Mirashi, 1965/66: 271, lines 47 f.). And there are references to “the binding of the royal turban” of Amoghavarṣa III, Govinda IV’s successor to the imperial Rāṣṭrakūṭa throne, by vassals as well. It had been subordinate rulers who interfered during Govinda IV’s reign and brought, under the pretext of the king’s excessive interest in sensual pleasures, his uncle, Amoghavarṣa III, into power. Furthermore, it was claimed that the feudatories (and god Śiva) had urged Amoghavarṣa III to restore Rāṣṭrakūṭa rule.²⁴

Overlords and vassals: strategies of integration and distinction

For an assessment of the interaction between imperial rulers and regional elites, it is also essential to have a closer look at the character of the inscriptions which are the main sources for the history of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas. Official copper-plate charters in Sanskrit, the language of imperial rule, account for the majority of the relevant epigraphs from their empire. In terms of provenance, the ratio between extant copper-plate charters from Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Karnataka is roughly 4 : 2 : 1. In Gujarat, only copper plates, no stone inscriptions, are linked with the Rāṣṭrakūṭas. The number of stone epigraphs from this period found in Maharashtra is also very limited (Schmiedchen, 2014a: 455f., RāSt 7, ŚiNoSt 1–3, RāSt 28); it is somewhat higher only in northern Karnataka. Almost all copper plates from the three regions as well as the stone inscriptions from Maharashtra are in Sanskrit, whereas the stone epigraphs and a few copper-plate charters from Karnataka are composed in a mixture of Sanskrit and Kannaḍa or purely in Kannaḍa, the vernacular (Schmiedchen, 2014a: 464–482, RāUr 14, RāUr 24 f., RāUr 28, RāUr 32, RāUr 36, RāUr 66). In most copper plates, royal or official statements were recorded. Stone epigraphs, on the other hand, tended to have a more private character, which is also reflected in the choice of idiom. The copper plates from Maharashtra are evenly distributed over the entire period and mainly constitute documents of the imperial Rāṣṭrakūṭa line. The majority of the copper plates from Gujarat were issued by the collateral branch in Lāṭa, dating from the 9th century. Several copper-plate charters from Karnataka were also issued by feudatories of the imperial Rāṣṭrakūṭas.

The inscriptions illustrate the interplay between (old) regional customs and (new) imperial traditions. This cannot only be exemplified through the language(s), but also through the script(s) used in the respective charters. In the second half of the 8th century, the imperial Rāṣṭrakūṭas introduced a forerunner of the present-day Nāgarī alphabet in large parts of Maharashtra. This strategy of a standardised official writing policy seems to have been aimed at pushing back the influence of the regional scripts prevalent in Gujarat and Karnataka. The collateral branches, however, tended to foster local customs and traditions. At the beginning of the 9th century, the Lāṭa princes employed exclusively that alphabet which had been used by previous dynasties in the region. But already a decade later, proto-Nāgarī appeared in some documents of the collateral branch in Gujarat, and the regional writing style and the ‘new’ script existed side by side for some time. In the mid-9th century, proto-Nāgarī letters ousted the regional script from the chancelleries which produced copper-plate charters for Gujarat. The situation was different in Karnataka: all local copper plates, which mainly come from central and southern Karnataka, were written in proto-Kannaḍa script.

The genealogical accounts in the copper plates of the imperial Rāṣṭrakūṭas usually contain no evidence for their relations with particular subordinate rulers. Individual feudatories were only mentioned when they had played an active role for the grant recorded in the donative section. More often than not we get to know vassals by name solely if they had issued their own inscriptions. Medieval epigraphs of subordinate rulers normally start with the panegyric of their overlords and proceed with their own genealogical description. Thus, the far-reaching political decision to establish a collateral branch in Gujarat in the 9th century was exclusively recorded in inscriptions of the Lāṭa line, but not mentioned in the imperial charters. The same holds true for Kambha, the viceroy in Karnataka, and other subordinate rulers.

The extant corpus of imperial and non-imperial inscriptions from the empire shows the use of different metrical drafts for the genealogical accounts of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa dynasty.²⁵ Draft '1' was probably composed under king Dantidurga after his own independence. This draft²⁶ was continuously updated for Dantidurga's successors over a period of 50 years, from Śaka 675 (753 A. D.) to Śaka 725 (803 A. D.).²⁷ The Śaka year 726 marked a shift in Govinda III's reign. He had won a decisive victory over the alliance of several kings led by his elder brother Kambha, the viceroy of Karnataka. This military success of Govinda III also strengthened the imperial claim of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa dynasty in general.

The transformation was echoed by a change in the genealogical account. The new draft '2' is attested for the period from Śaka 727 (805 A. D.) to 734 (812 A. D.). It was in use till the death of Govinda III (Schmiedchen, 2014a: 468–475, RāUr 26–34, RāUr 36 f., RāUr 40, RāUr 46), and even his subdued brother Kambha employed it in Karnataka. A strong emphasis on the panegyric of Govinda III is discernible in this draft, connected with a move away from the balanced account of his predecessors, which had been typical for draft '1' (Schmiedchen, 2014a: 31).²⁸ In Kambha's own two charters using draft '2' (Rice, 1905: 53; Nayak, 1974: 357, lines 52 f.), the eleven stanzas praising Govinda III are followed by a brief description introducing his brother. It is expounded that Kambha, the elder brother (*jyeṣṭha*), "consented (*anumata*) to the orders (*anujñā*) of Śrī-Prabhūtarṣa (i.e. Govinda III), the overlord of kings (*rājādhirāja*) and the supreme ruler (*parameśvara*)", and that Kambha "enjoyed bowing down to the lotus-like feet of the supreme ruler".²⁹

However, neither Govinda III's imperial draft '2' nor any of the drafts of his successors were ever adopted by the Rāṣṭrakūṭa branch of Lāṭa in Gujarat. For the description of the main line these princes imported draft '1' from Maharashtra, after it had already come out of use there. They continued applying this draft throughout the 9th century, updating it regularly (Schmiedchen, 2014a: 471–479, RāUr 35, RāUr 41–45, RāUr 47–51, RāUr 54 f., RāUr 57 f.). The adherence to the traditional genealogical description can perhaps be explained as an attempt of the Lāṭa Rāṣṭrakūṭas to show their close bond with the common ancestors, who had employed this draft '1', and, at the same time, to keep a certain distance to their actual overlord(s). Later, the updated draft '1' was still used even in charters issued by the imperial Rāṣṭrakūṭas in Gujarat for some time. This shows, on the one hand, that the collateral branch in Gujarat acted more independently than Kambha in Karnataka, who followed his (younger) brother and overlord in using the new draft '2'. On the other hand, the regional practice to stick to the old draft '1' turned out to be so strong that it was also maintained by the imperial rulers in charters meant for Gujarat in a period when new drafts had already been introduced in Maharashtra and Karnataka for a long time (Schmiedchen, 2014a: 477–479, RāUr 52, RāUr 59). Interestingly, the only evidence for Kambha's role in the Karnataka confederacy against Govinda III is provided by a genealogical amendment to draft '1' made in Gujarat, referring to Kambha under the Sanskrit form of his name, i.e. 'Stambha' (Shastri, 1970/71b: 277, lines 51-66, stanzas 27f.).

The assertiveness of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa princes of the Gujarat line, who bore subordinate titles (*samadhigatāśeṣamahāśabda*, ‘having obtained all the great titles’; *mahāsāmantādhipati*) and called themselves ‘lords of Lāṭa’ (*lāṭeśvara*), is also reflected in their own genealogies. In these accords, it is stated that Indrarāja, founder of that collateral branch, was given the province of the Lāṭa king (*lāṭeśvaramaṇḍala*) by Govinda III. The son of Indrarāja, Karkarāja, is later described as the one who had installed Amoghavarṣa I, Govinda III’s son, on the throne of the imperial line. To this end, Karkarāja apparently had to fight other vassals who, like he himself, belonged to the Rāṣṭrakūṭa family:

He (i.e. Karkarāja), with the power of his own arm holding the blank sword, defeated the tributary, but conceited and highly rebellious Rāṣṭrakūṭas, who had seized [certain] territories according to their own wish and had joined a strong alliance, and [Karkarāja] quickly invested Amoghavarṣa into his position.³⁰

A few of the extant copper-plate charters from the Rāṣṭrakūṭa empire were issued by vassals who were not kin to them. Subordinate princes used semi-official, independent descriptions of their Rāṣṭrakūṭa overlords (Schmiedchen, 2014a: 26, note 9), as e.g. Tājika Madhumati in his charter dated Śaka year 848 (Sircar, 1957/58a). Whereas the imperial drafts composed from the 9th century onwards put particular emphasis on the ruling monarch and occasionally passed over some early predecessors, feudatories like Madhumati tended to give a more comprehensive depiction of their suzerains’ dynasty, which included as many ancestors of the incumbent as possible (Schmiedchen, 2014a: 56–59), indicating that the vassals owed allegiance to the entire Rāṣṭrakūṭa family and not only to the contemporary ruler.³¹

Religious endowments

Most references to the ramified system of vassalage and sub-vassalage, to the great variety of hierarchical relations, and to the interaction between imperial rulers and elites are provided by detailed descriptions of religious endowments. The recording of such grants was the prime object of almost all epigraphs engraved on copper plates and of a large number of stone inscriptions. The majority of medieval Indian copper-plate charters register the royal bestowal of revenues from villages and land on religious individuals and institutions. Granting tax income and other privileges in whole villages or plots of land to someone in order to support and maintain him was a transaction usually only the kings themselves were entitled to, but sometimes also their feudatories. In fact, there are attestations for a broad range of noble donors: from imperial rulers to other members of royal families, including vassals.

With their donations, medieval rulers responded to the specific interests of their wider courtly environs. Evidence from different parts of India hints at the fact that monarchs made grants after receiving a request from a subordinate prince and that, vice versa, feudatories acted with the explicit permission of their overlords. The intervention of the imperial and regional elites was more typical for grants in favour of temples and monasteries, which had been founded by high-ranking persons, than for endowments in favour of religious persons, i.e. individual Brahmins. The petition for a maintenance grant was not always expressed by the original founder of the institution meant to benefit from it; such initiatives are attested for other protagonists as well. The intentions or motives of people involved are not always explicitly mentioned. In royal endowment records, the act of approaching the king by subordinate princes is usually paraphrased as a ‘petition’. Religious grants by vassals were labelled in a different way, i.e. as endowments made with the ‘consent’ of the suzerain. However, these

short formulae only present the results of the interaction between rulers and members of elites. The epigraphs rarely describe what happened in preparation of the donative act. But it can be assumed that different claims had to be negotiated and balanced beforehand, and that members of the dynasty, regional rulers, royal officials, and village headmen were consulted during the process.

The corpus of copper-plate charters from the Rāṣṭrakūṭa empire shows that the majority of the endowment records were issued by the imperial rulers themselves. Whereas most of the royal title deeds do not contain any indication of the influence of third parties on the rulers to decide in favour of the particular grant, there are quite a number of cases where the Rāṣṭrakūṭa king declared to have acted on the request of another person, e.g. of a feudatory, or in fulfilment of the wishes of his queen or a prince, or for the religious merit (*punya*) of one of his relatives. To give a few examples: (1) In bestowing a village and four hamlets on a group of Brahmins in Maharashtra in the Śaka year 690 (768 A. D.), Rāṣṭrakūṭa king Kṛṣṇa I acted on the request of his son Govinda Prabhuṅga (*govindarājavijñāpanayā*) (Konow, 1915/16: 280, line 22), the prospective heir and later king Govinda II, wherefore the genealogical portion of the copper-plate charter contains three stanzas about this prince (Konow, 1915/16: 280, lines 16–21, stanzas 14–16). In the description of the grant, two other persons are also referred to as having supported the beneficiaries (Konow, 1915/16, 280: lines 26f.).³² Perhaps they had approached the prince, who then advocated their wish. (2) In Śaka 851 (929 A. D.), Rāṣṭrakūṭa Govinda IV conferred a village in Maharashtra to eight Brahmins on the occasion of the coronation ritual for his queen Bhāgiyavvā, a princess of Calukya pedigree (Mirashi, 1965/66: 270, lines 45f.). Twelve great vassals (*mahāsāmanta*) are said to have participated in the ceremony (Mirashi, 1965/66, 271, lines 47f.).³³ (3) In Śaka 862 (940 A. D.), Rāṣṭrakūṭa Kṛṣṇa III made an endowment for the religious merit of his younger brother Jagattuṅga, and it is reported that Kṛṣṇa III “loved Jagattuṅga more than his own life” (*mama prāṇebhyo pi priyatamasya kaniyaso bhrātuḥ śrīmajjagattumgadevasya punyayaśobhivṛddhaye*) (Bhandarkar, 1898/99: 195, lines 48 f.). The relationship of the two brothers is compared to that between the epic heroes Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa (Bhandarkar, 1898/99: 195, lines 49–51).³⁴ (4) In Śaka 735 (812 A. D.), Govinda III donated a village to the ascetic Arkakīrti for the maintenance of a Jaina temple in Karnataka after being requested by his provincial governor Cākirāja (*cākirājena vijñāpito*) (Lüders, 1896/97: 344, line 82),³⁵ who is described as a maternal uncle of the Cālukya prince named Vimalāditya, the head of a district in Cākirāja’s province. It is also explicitly stated that the grant was meant to remunerate the Jaina ascetic Arkakīrti for having warded off the evil influence of Saturn from prince Vimalāditya (*tasya vimalādityasya śanaīscarapīḍāpanodāya*) (Lüders, 1896/97: 344, line 81). (5) In Śaka 782 (860 A. D.), Rāṣṭrakūṭa Amoghavarṣa I gave a village and some land to the preceptor of a Jaina temple in Karnataka which had been built by his vassal Baṅkeya, who had also asked for this royal endowment (*tenaivambhūtena baṅkeyābhīdhānena maḍiṣṭabhṛtyena prārthitas [...] tadbaṅkeyanirmāpitajināyatana*) (Kielhorn, 1900/01: 31, lines 34f.). In a panegyric, which is of almost similar length as the genealogy of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa dynasty, Baṅkeya is described as a subordinate king who ‘enjoyed’ thirty thousand villages through the favour of his overlord (Kielhorn, 1900/01: 30, line 20, stanza 21). The last two examples indicate that the label ‘petition’ could also be used for those interactions between rulers and vassals where the actual transaction seems to have been carried out by the regional prince, not by his suzerain.³⁶

Amongst the 8th-century Rāṣṭrakūṭa copper-plate charters from Maharashtra, there are some which were not (formally) issued by the imperial rulers, but by other members of the dynasty, by a queen, a crown prince, a nephew, or a cousin of the monarch, and which recorded their bestowals of whole villages. Although the kinship relations are clearly

referred to in these endowment records, position and portfolio of those noble donors at court often remain indistinct: (1) In her grant dated Śaka 708 (786 A. D.), Śīlamahādevī, queen of Rāṣṭrakūṭa Dhruva, used the female imperial titles *parameśvarī*, ‘supreme ruler’, and *paramabhaṭṭārikā*, ‘paramount sovereign’ (Bhandarkar, 1933/34: 108, line 39), despite her not being a reigning queen. (2) In Śaka 692 (770 A. D.), two years after his father Kṛṣṇa I had made a grant on his behalf, Govinda II himself issued a deed. Proudly referring to his coronation as crown prince (*yuvarāja*) and his bearing the feudatory designation *samadhigata-pañcamahāśabda*, ‘having obtained the five great titles’ (Bhandarkar, 1900/01a: 210, lines 22–24), he made the donation after having been approached by a third person who may have belonged to the Rāṣṭrakūṭa family, too.³⁷ (3) In Śaka 701 (779 A. D.), after Govinda II had become the imperial ruler, his nephew Karkarāja made an endowment of a whole village and issued a copper-plate charter, where he also had himself labelled a *samadhigata-pañcamahāśabda* (Bhandarkar, 1905/06: 186, lines 28 f.). (4) In Śaka 715 (793/94 A. D.), a cousin of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa ruler Dhruva, who did not bear any title, made a grant, mentioning in the donative record that he acted with the king’s consent (Bhandarkar, 1907/08: 197, line 28).

All these copper-plate charters of family members of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa sovereigns have one feature in common: the genealogies of the dynasty are based on the official draft.³⁸ But the authors of these title deeds do not seem to have been the chief secretaries responsible for the records of the imperial rulers. In some inscriptions, the scribes explicitly state to have acted on the command of the issuer, e.g. the queen (*mahādevī*) or the nephew of the monarch (Bhandarkar, 1933/34: 109, lines 66 f.; Bhandarkar, 1905/06: 187, lines 48 f.). However, it is not clear if these clerks belonged to the royal chancellery at the Rāṣṭrakūṭa court or rather to a regional office. Whether the bestowal of whole villages by close relatives of the king meant that they held sway over these regions remains also uncertain, due to the insufficient density of the epigraphic material.³⁹

The situation changed with the installation of a viceroy from the Rāṣṭrakūṭa family in Karnataka in the late 8th century and with the establishment of a collateral Rāṣṭrakūṭa branch in Gujarat in the early 9th century. Kambha and Indrarāja, founder of the Lāṭa line, were brothers of the imperial ruler Govinda III, therefore belonging to the Rāṣṭrakūṭa dynasty; they had vassal status, exercising territorial control over regions in the south and northwest of the empire, respectively. Kambha as well as the successors of Indrarāja are known to have issued copper-plate charters recording their own or, sometimes, their sub-vassals’ endowments in Karnataka and Gujarat. They commissioned local clerks to record the details of the religious grants, who used different imperial drafts for the genealogical description of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa overlords. As already mentioned, Kambha had the new draft ‘2’ of Govinda III adopted at the beginning of the 9th century, also explicitly referring to his submission to his younger brother, the monarch. The Lāṭa Rāṣṭrakūṭas showed more independence vis-à-vis their overlords, sticking to the old draft ‘1’, which they had regularly updated for the contemporary suzerain. Following the prevalent custom in Gujarat, the Lāṭa princes also ‘signed’ their charters.⁴⁰

Regarding the interaction of different members of the elite, the endowments of the Karnataka viceroy and the Lāṭa princes followed the pattern of the imperial line: most of the title deeds were personally issued by these feudatories; they do not refer to any petition by third parties. However, Kambha acted on the request of a sub-vassal (Rice, 1905: 53) and of his son (*svapu traśrīśaṃkaragaṇavijñāpanena*) (Nayak, 1974: 357, line 58), and two of the grants in Gujarat were made by a sub-vassal and by the brother of one of the Lāṭa princes (Fleet, 1894/95: 55; Bhandarkar, 1900/01b). With one exception, the Rāṣṭrakūṭas of Lāṭa issued their charters without a formal approval of their overlords from the imperial branch.⁴¹

An impression of the complexity of the social fabric involved in religious grants can be obtained from one of Kambha's records dating from the beginning of the 9th century: the military leader Vijayarāja, who had obtained the 'lordship of great vassals' (*mahāsāmāntādhipatya*) through the grace of Kambha's father, the imperial Rāṣṭrakūṭa ruler Dhruva, erected a Jaina temple in Mānyapura. Another prince named Bappayya is described as having received religious instruction from the Jaina ascetic Prabhācandra. Bappayya's son approached Kambha, who was encamping at Mānyapura; finally the viceroy bestowed a village situated to the west of Mānyapura on the Jaina temple (Rice, 1905: 53).

An exceptional case and an interesting example for the interaction of different levels of local elites is represented by the endowment record of Tājika Madhumati Sugatipa. In Śaka 848, he granted a village and a piece of land in favour of a religious institution devoted to a local variety of the goddess Durgā. After a genealogy of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa overlords (Sircar, 1957/58a: 51f., lines 5–18, stanzas 5–15), a description of Madhumati follows (Sircar, 1957/58a: 52, lines 18–24, stanzas 16–20). This vassal of Rāṣṭrakūṭa Indra III administered the province of Saṃyāna, to the north of present-day Mumbai.⁴² The record also mentions a minister of Madhumati named Puvvaiya and the Brahmin Annaiya, who had founded the *maṭhikā* in Saṃyāna, as a liegeman of Indra III and as a friend of minister Puvvaiya (Sircar, 1957/58a: 52f., lines 24–26, stanzas 21f.). The subsequent prose passage on the actual endowment in favour of the *maṭhikā* informs that Madhumati acted on the request of Annaiya (Annamaiya), after having obtained the consent of Indra III, his overlord (Sircar, 1957/58a: 53, lines 27–35). With the approval of the tax collector of Saṃyāna, a clerk composed the text of the copper-plate charter by order of Tājika Madhumati Sugatipa, who, on his part, had received instructions from the contemporary Rāṣṭrakūṭa ruler Indra III (Sircar, 1957/58a: 54f., lines 58–63). From these details it can be deduced that the Arab vassal was sandwiched between different levels of the indigenous hierarchy. In order to grant revenues from villages on the territory he administered, he had to apply for the formal permission of his Rāṣṭrakūṭa overlord; moreover, he had to consult the officials who were responsible for tax collection. Besides, the Muslim Madhumati Sugatipa acted on the request of a local Brahmin who had good connections to the imperial court.

However, many endowment deeds only contain rather formulaic references to the imperial and regional administration. After the metric genealogies, the prose sections of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa copper-plate charters start with a list of the titles of the reigning king, followed by the statement that he was in a good state of health (*kuśalin*). Subsequently, it is recorded that the ruler formally addressed those of his officials and subjects who were concerned with, or affected by, the endowment he made. Such – often long – lists of officials were common in medieval copper-plate charters all over India; they have been interpreted by some historians as proof for the existence of clearly structured administrative hierarchies (e.g., Altekar, 1934: 173–188). There is, however, some doubt whether these inventories of categories actually reflect historical conditions. The epigraphically attested lists of bureaucratic groups seem to have been compiled from different sources, with the intention to comprehend all potentially relevant addressees, but not necessarily with the aim to meticulously register all categories of officials existing in the region at a given time. In the early period of Rāṣṭrakūṭa rule, a formula was developed, which apparently contained some hierarchical element. It enumerates officials on provincial, district, and village level, as well as the upper layer of society in rural areas. This list reads *rāṣṭrapati-viṣayapati-grāmakūṭa-mahattara*. *Rāṣṭra-pati* literally means 'head of a province', *viṣaya-pati*, 'head of a district', *grāmakūṭa*, 'village headman', and the term *mahattara* denoted members of the village elite, namely Brahmin notabilities.

The Rāṣṭrakūṭa rulers made religious endowments in the centre as well as at the fringes of the empire. It can be assumed that royal grants were also meant to set certain norms in the peripheries (Kulke, 1985). The fiscal authority of the ruler was probably only a theoretical one in these areas, and it must have often turned out to be difficult to implement tax regulations there. As the privileges of the donees in the villages granted were enumerated in every detail in the copper-plate charters, unitary standards could be set for the surrounding villages. For these benefices, fiscal claims and rights of the king were formulated and, at the same moment, conferred on religious beneficiaries who were or became local residents, and who, in addition to the secular authorisation through title deeds, possessed a sacred authority, too.

The religious patronage of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa rulers and princes was directed towards Brahmins, Hindu temples, Jaina institutions, and Buddhist monasteries. The majority of the grants of this royal line – as of almost all medieval Indian dynasties – were in favour of Brahmanical priests,⁴³ endowed either as individuals or in groups. Whereas the regional and local elites set priorities through the foundation of temples and monasteries, which were inevitably attached to certain places, the Rāṣṭrakūṭas, as rulers with imperial claims and aspirations, were responsible for the settling of Brahmins all over their empire. Through their endowments, they consciously contributed to the migration (Schmiedchen, 2013b) of representatives of socio-religious and intellectual elites, which was trans-regionally organised, and to the dissemination of particular textual traditions, which were orally transmitted from teacher to pupil. Under the Rāṣṭrakūṭas and many other medieval dynasties, Brahmins acted not only as religious specialists, but also as conveyors of elaborate legal traditions and structured social concepts. They proved to be highly capable of successfully adapting their theoretical models to the practical needs of their respective environments, providing an ideal backup for medieval kingship, notably in rural areas.

The Śīlāhāra and Yādava dynasties

In the second half of the 10th century, the Rāṣṭrakūṭas were defeated by the later Western Cālukyas. Unlike in Karnataka, the Cālukyas only exercised a nominal reign in Maharashtra. These regions were ruled by different Śīlāhāra lines and by the Yādava dynasty. From the 10th to the 12th/13th centuries, many areas of Central India saw an enormous strengthening of the regional elites. The earliest epigraphic attestations for the Śīlāhāras of North Konkan (as subordinates of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas) already date from the 9th century. These subordinates bore the titles *mahāsāmanta* and *koṅkaṇa-vallabha*, ‘favourite of the Konkan coast’, and were described as vassals who had ‘obtained the grace of him (i.e. of Rāṣṭrakūṭa Amoghavarṣa I)’ (*tatprasādāvāpta*) (e.g., Mirashi, 1977: 2, lines 1f.). In contrast to the Rāṣṭrakūṭa kings, the Śīlāhāras as well as the early Yādavas used titles which defined them as subordinate and regional rulers for a long period, as they had to acknowledge the supremacy of the later Western Cālukyas up to the middle of the 12th century. But the fact that they tried to avoid direct references to the Cālukya dynasty, time and again from the 11th century onwards, also indicates their endeavour to keep a certain verbal distance from their overlords.

Initially, it seems to have been very important for the Śīlāhāra lines at the Konkan coast to show, although rather vaguely, their affiliation with the Rāṣṭrakūṭas. Thus, even decades after the final decline of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas, their former Śīlāhāra vassals began their own inscriptions with a detailed genealogy of their previous overlords up to the defeat of their last king by the later Cālukyas (Mirashi, 1977: 38f., lines 3–20, stanzas 3–13). By referring to the dynastic history of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas and through the use of their introductory religious stanza, the Konkan Śīlāhāras most probably wanted to draw on Rāṣṭrakūṭa traditions and to keep a distance from the Cālukyas, who ruled in Karnataka at the time. However, the precise report

on the Cālukya victory could be interpreted as a retrospective attempt of the Śīlāhāras to gradually dissociate themselves from their former overlords. Since the second half of the 11th century, the Śīlāhāras had any allusion to the Rāṣṭrakūṭas as well as to the later Western Cālukyas removed from their current inscriptions. This could be taken as an indication for a new self-confidence of the Śīlāhāras. From the end of the 12th century onwards, the late Śīlāhāra princes of North Konkan used more elaborate titles as *mahārājādhirāja*, ‘overlord of great kings’ (Schmiedchen, 2014: 235, note 95), despite the fact that they were losing influence. In other cases, the switchover to imperial titles indicated an actual increase in power or in territorial expansion. Also in the late 12th century, after the final decline of the Cālukyas, the Yādavas started to apply a series of imperial titles (*samastabhuvanāśraya śrīprthivīvallabha mahārājādhirāja parameśvara paramabhaṭṭāraka śrīmatpratāpacakravartin*) (Schmiedchen, 2014a: 342, 346, 438),⁴⁴ borrowed from their former overlords.

Although the Śīlāhāras had never been able to rise to imperial status, we get to know from their inscriptions that they commanded their own sub-vassals. Besides, there is evidence from the 12th century that the Śīlāhāras of Kolhapur did not only make religious endowments, but also issued service assignments to local rulers (Mirashi, 1977: 214–221; Schmiedchen, 2014a: 257 f.; 496 f.). Sub-vassals, however, more often acted as donors than as donees (e.g., Schmiedchen, 2014a: 490, ŚiNoUr 11 and ŚiNoUr 13; 492, ŚiNoUr 17). All Śīlāhāra territories were at some time or another conquered by the Yādavas, with the result that the Śīlāhāras were apparently not entitled to administer their former territories anymore. Their long refusal to acknowledge Yādava supremacy might have contributed to the decision of this new imperial dynasty to substitute them by loyal princes. Under the Yādavas, there are epigraphic references to the activities of different sub-vassals and of several categories of local rulers as well, especially towards the end of their rule. Furthermore, out of the many inscriptions related to the late period of Yādava rule, only a relatively small number was personally issued by the kings of this royal house. This even applies to copper-plate charters, the typical epigraphic medium used by imperial rulers all over India in the medieval period. The number of copper plates issued by the vassals of the Yādavas was three times higher than the number of those issued by the Yādava kings themselves. Therefore, the inscriptions of subordinate princes provide more information on Yādava history than the records of the Yādava rulers themselves (Schmiedchen, 2014a: 339; 500–504, YāUr 8–14, YāUr 17 f.).

The subordinates of the Śīlāhāras and Yādavas often clearly expressed their loyalty towards their overlords, frequently modelling their genealogies and epithets on the panegyrics and titles of their overlords. It was also the local elites who initiated and promoted the use of the vernacular languages in epigraphs. Whereas Kannaḍa had served as the regional idiom in Karnataka since pre-Rāṣṭrakūṭa times, old Marāṭhī words and phrases used in Sanskrit inscriptions from Maharashtra were attested only after the 10th century. The use of Marāṭhī as a literary language spread and intensified from the 12th century onwards. At the beginning, this vernacular, written in proto-Nāgarī script, was almost exclusively found in private epigraphs. Later, it is also attested in semi-official records issued by vassals of the Śīlāhāras and Yādavas (Schmiedchen, 2014a: 17).

Whereas structural temples in Karnataka clearly predate the Rāṣṭrakūṭa period (Michell, 2014), a significant number of non-cave temples in Maharashtra is only traceable for the period up from the 11th century (Schmiedchen, 2014a: 201, 288). This was exactly the time when, under the Śīlāhāra and Yādava kings, the number of endowments of land in favour of Hindu gods and goddesses increased dramatically. Subordinate rulers fostered these developments more directly, influencing the regional religious policy to a far larger extent than the imperial rulers. The particular relationship between the local elites and regional deities is also

demonstrated by the frequent reference to vassals “having obtained their sovereignty as the boon of this or that goddess” (Sanderson, 2007: 289, note 185; Schmiedchen, 2014a: 258 f., 313, 323). Some of the subordinate rulers even dedicated their religious foundations explicitly to their overlords. Thus, Nimbadeva, a vassal of the Yādava kings, founded a Jaina temple in the first half of the 12th century, apparently naming it after his overlord Gaṇḍarāditya I (Mirashi, 1977: 237, line 1, stanza 1; Schmiedchen, 2014a: 259).

The activities of subordinate princes and also of ministers and of high-ranking officials – although not always clearly distinguishable from each other – are reflected in inscriptions from the 11th century onwards. This holds mainly true for North Konkan, where epigraphs provide evidence for the existence of a kind of government. While in Rāṣṭrakūṭa charters only officials responsible for the execution of the title deeds were mentioned by name at the end of the text, the Śīlāhāra records from North Konkan regularly list, directly after the titles of the ruling king, several senior office holders who, as is stated, bore governmental responsibility (Schmiedchen, 2014a: 236–246). These members of the highest administrative body seem to have often actively influenced the focus of the royal patronage policy.

Śiṅghaṇa II was the longest-reigning and most successful Yādava king. Under his rule in the first half of the 13th century, large parts of Maharashtra and north Karnataka were integrated into the empire. Even in the core area around Devagiri (Daulatabad) there is evidence for a developed network of vassalage. Śiṅghaṇa II was able to stabilise the kingdom through the efficient inclusion of the different layers of subordinate rulers and by balancing their diverse interests. One of Śiṅghaṇa II’s vassals was named Kholeśvara, and some of the military achievements were simultaneously attributed to him as well as to his overlord. This signifies the great importance of the subordinate rulers for military encounters in particular. Though the distinct attachment to local traditions is especially visible in the case of vassals, this does not mean that they necessarily showed a bond with only one region. Most vassals were recruited locally; only a few, like Kholeśvara, were ‘imported’ from other regions. He was not only famous for his military achievements, but also for his religious and charitable activities, as he founded Brahmanical settlements, temples, halls for the distribution of food, and wells for providing water. Kholeśvara directed his donative deeds towards two different regions: on the one hand, to Acalapura in northeast Maharashtra, where he hailed from; and on the other hand, to an area 300 km southwest of Acalapura, around the town of Āmbā or – Sanskritised – Āmrapura (today Ambajogai) in central Maharashtra, where he ruled (Shastri, 1972: 3–62; Schmiedchen, 2014a: 364–369, 389f.). This indicates that subordinate rulers got transferred to regions outside their own homeland.

Some of the vassals of the late Yādava (i.e. 12th/13th-century) kings were neither of noble origin nor had they any military background: they obviously originated from trader families (Schmiedchen, 2014a: 357–364, 372). Quite a number of successful medieval merchants did not only pursue their trading business, but were also highly active in the regional administration and assumed military commands.

But even more striking are the changes within the Brahmanical elite, also attested to in the Yādava epigraphs. Brahmins were not only active in the traditional fields of occupation prescribed by the normative texts, i.e. as priests, teachers of sacred lore, and counsellors at royal courts. Quite a number of them apparently obtained the status of military leaders and vassals from the 11th century onwards: (1) In Śaka 974 (1052 A. D.), Yādava king Bhillama III granted four villages to a Brahmin named Śrīdhara, labelling him as an army commander (*daṇḍanāyaka*). Interestingly enough, Śrīdhara is also described as originally hailing from Madhyadeśa, i.e. North India, and as having previously served under the Paramāra dynasty. The details of the charter suggest that Śrīdhara must have been lured away from

the region north of the Vindhya mountains to central Maharashtra, south of the Vindhyas, perhaps by offering him the assignment of four villages (Sankaranarayanan, 1967/68: 74-83; Schmiedchen, 2014a: 376 f., YāUr 3). (2) In Śaka 1145 (1223 A. D.), two Brahmin brothers, who served as army commanders (*daṇḍanāyaka*, *daṇḍādhiśa*) of Yādava Siṅghaṇa II, bestowed a village and several estates in favour of a Śiva temple and a Viṣṇu shrine in a locality in north Karnataka. This act is recorded in a Kannaḍa stone inscription (Fleet, 1876: 11-24; Schmiedchen, 2014a: 428 f., YāSt 23). (3) In Śaka 1172 (1251 A. D.), two Brahmin brothers issued a copper-plate charter, recording their joint grant in favour of a Śiva temple and a group of Brahmanical priests in south Maharashtra. The elder one of the two is described as an ‘ornament among the vassals (*māṇḍalika*) of the Yādavas’ (Khare, 1947/48: 208-216; Schmiedchen, 2014a: 406-408, YāUr 13). (4) Kholeśvara, the vassal of Siṅghaṇa II mentioned above, was of Brahmanical origin as well. This is known from four stone inscriptions found at Ambajogai in central Maharashtra, composed in Sanskrit, but also containing some passages in Marāṭhī (Shastri, 1972: 3-62; Schmiedchen, 2014a: 364-369, YāSt 25-27 and YāSt 32).⁴⁵ (5) In Śaka 1232 (1310 A. D.), king Rāmacandra issued the last known Yādava copper-plate charter, where it is recorded that he first granted four villages and nine hamlets in central Maharashtra to his vassal Puruṣaināyaka alias Puruṣottama, a Brahmin, for the latter’s project of founding a rent-free holding for Brahmanical priests. Ten days later, Puruṣaināyaka passed the villages and hamlets on to a group of 83 Brahmins, specifying some particular purposes for this endowment as well. Puruṣaināyaka united the individual villages, forming one large entity, the Brahmanical settlement (*agrahāra*) Puruṣottamapura, named after its founder, which is identical with Purshottampuri, the spot where the copper-plate charter was found (Mirashi, 1939/40: 199-225; Schmiedchen, 2014a: 417-419, YāUr 19).

The inscriptions referring to Kholeśvara and Puruṣaināyaka show that not only the paternal ancestry, but also the maternal parentage was incorporated in the genealogies of vassals of Brahmanical descent. For Kholeśvara, his last three male ancestors on each side were listed, in addition to his mother. The paternal side consisted of learned men; his mother’s side was strongly associated with the secular power (Schmiedchen, 2014a: 338, figure 14).⁴⁶ For Puruṣaināyaka, the last four male forebears on the paternal side and the last two on the maternal side were enumerated, in addition to his mother (Schmiedchen, 2014a: 385, figure 16).

Maternal lineages do not seem to have played an important role in the pedigrees of Brahmins following more traditional professions. This is illustrated by two early 13th-century stone inscriptions from northwest Maharashtra, which refer to the family of the famous 12th-century astrologer Bhāskara (Schmiedchen, 2014a: 385, figure 15). The first epigraph, dated Śaka 1128 (1207 A. D.), begins with a stanza on the sun, the moon, and the planets and with verses praising the astrologer and philosopher Bhāskara. These stanzas are followed by genealogies of the Yādavas and their Nikumbha vassals. Then, the names of nine members of Bhāskara’s family are given, who were learned Brahmins belonging to the Śāṅḍilyagotra and originally hailing from the territory of the North Indian Paramāra dynasty. At the end of the 12th century, Bhāskara’s son Lakṣmīdhara was apparently invited by the king of the Yādavas, migrating to their central Indian empire. The inscription reports that Caṅgadeva, son of Lakṣmīdhara and court astrologer of Yādava Siṅghaṇa II, had founded a college (*maṭha*) for teaching the astrological theories of his grandfather Bhāskara; moreover, the Nikumbha vassals had endowed the college with a village and with the right to certain customs duties (Kielhorn, 1892: 338-346; Schmiedchen, 2014a: 383-387, YāSt 12). The second epigraph, dated Śaka 1144 (1223 A. D.), records the foundation of a temple for a goddess by Anantadeva, Caṅgadeva’s second cousin and his successor as court astrologer of Yādava Siṅghaṇa II (Kielhorn, 1894/95: 110-113; Schmiedchen, 2014a: 387 f., YāUr 22).

In the early 14th century, the armies of Alā ad-Dīn Khalajī from Delhi finally defeated the Yādavas, putting their capital Devagiri (later Daulatabad) in northwest Maharashtra under their control. As the Yādavas seem to have been focussed on their conventional perspective of enmity and very much engaged in military encounters with a number of petty regional rulers, they apparently did not realise the upcoming danger in the North. The Yādavas had to rely on the ponderous contingents provided by their vassals, which were less effective than the better manoeuvrable military units of the Muslim forces. The fatal defeat of the Yādavas ended the traditional relationship between (Indian) imperial and subordinate rulers in Central India.

Notes

- 1 An earlier version of this article has been published in W. Drews (ed.), *Die Interaktion von Herrschern und Eliten in imperialen Ordnungen des Mittelalters*, Berlin: DeGruyter, 2018, pp. 147–169.
- 2 Some of 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>.
- 3 In the South, this phrase also referred to subordinate rulers, but probably had a slightly different connotation; see Sircar, 1965: 341f.
- 4 The connection between the early Calukyas and the later Cālukyas (different spelling!) is not clear.
- 5 However, the last copper-plate charter, which dates from Śaka 671 (749/50 A. D.), was not issued by Dantidurga himself, but by a local body referring to his reign.
- 6 Fleet, 1882: 112, lines 23–25, stanza 17: [...] / *yo vallabham sapadi [...] jītvā rājādhirāja-parameśvaratām upaiti* // (English translation by A. S.).
- 7 All his successors also used these imperial titles for themselves.
- 8 See RāUr 19–42. The density of copper-plate charters issued by him and his feudatories was particularly high.
- 9 Bhandarkar, 1925/26: 244, lines 13–15, stanza 17: *duṣṭāms tāvat svabhṛtyāṃ jhaṭiti vighaṭitān sth āpitānyeśapāsām yuddhe yuddhvā sa baddhvā [...]* / *muktivā sārdrāntarātmā vikṛtipariṇatau [...]* *vipakṣān api punar iva tām bhūbhṛto yo babhāra* // (English translation by A. S.).
- 10 This was the phrase used for a military leader serving under the Rāṣṭrakūṭas during the reign of Govinda III.
- 11 Rāṣṭrakūṭa Amoghavarṣa I, the son of Govinda III, had one of his feudatories described in the following way: “He, whose success is uninterrupted, enjoys the 30,000 villages around Vanavāsī, which he has received by my grace” (*matprasādena saṃlabdhavanavāsīpurassarān / grāmān triṃśatsahasrāṇi bhunakty aviratodayaḥ* //); cf. Kielhorn, 1900/01: 30, line 20, stanza 21 (English translation by A. S.). The label ‘spurious’ for this epigraph is not fully justified.
- 12 Dhruva had at least four sons, and Kambha was definitely elder than Govinda III; see Schmiedchen, 2014a: 78.
- 13 This is attested by a charter of Kambha issued as late as Śaka 730 (808/09 A. D.); see Schmiedchen, 2014a: 470. Kambha, however, did not use any subordinate titles for himself.
- 14 This appears even more striking as Kambha is known to have had at least one son, cf. Schmiedchen, 2014a: 470.
- 15 The first Rāṣṭrakūṭa charter issued from Mānyakheṭa dates from Śaka 772 (850 A. D.); cf. Shastri, 1970/71a: 155–162.
- 16 For the history of this dynasty, see Mishra, 1966. For the relation with the Rāṣṭrakūṭas, see Schmiedchen, 2014a: 86.
- 17 Salomon, 1998: 288, lines 39f., stanza 27: [...]°*gūṛjareśvaradigargalatām ca yasya / nītvā bhujam [...] svāmī [...] rājyaphalāni bhūṅkte* // “After having deployed his (i.e. the Lāṭa prince’s) arm as door bar towards the direction of the Gurjara (here: Gūṛjara) ruler [...], [his] lord (i.e. Govinda III) enjoys the fruits of kingship” (English translation by A. S.).
- 18 Salomon, 1998: 287 f., lines 33–35, stanza 24: *yenaikenacagūṛjareśvarapatir yoddhum samabhyudyataḥ śauryaprodhatakandharo mṛga iva kṣipram diśo grāhitaḥ / bhūtāsamhatadakṣiṇā pathamahāsāmantacakram yato rakṣām āpa viluṅṭyamānavibhavaṃ śrīvallabhenādarāt* // (English translation by A. S.).

- 19 A first epigraph referring to his rule dates from Śaka 738 (817 A. D.), a last one from Śaka 799 (877/78 A. D.).
- 20 Amoghavarṣa I's charter dating from Śaka 772 (850 A. D.) records a religious endowment which he personally made in Gujarat, on the territory of the Lāṭa Rāṣṭrakūṭas; see Shastri, 1970/71a.
- 21 Three 9th-century inscriptions from Kanheri refer to the reign of Rāṣṭrakūṭa Amoghavarṣa I and his Śilāhāra vassals; cf. Mirashi, 1977: 1–8.
- 22 The last charter of the Lāṭa Rāṣṭrakūṭas dates from Śaka 810 (888 A. D.); cf. Hultzsch, 1884: 65–69. The next charter from Gujarat dates from Śaka 832 (910 A. D.) and mentions a vassal who was not a Rāṣṭrakūṭa prince; cf. Hultzsch, 1892: 52–58.
- 23 For the expression *tājika* as a term for 'Arab', derived from the Middle Persian word *tāzīk*, see Pingree, 1981/82: 172–182.
- 24 All this is recorded in one of the charters of his son and successor Kṛṣṇa III; cf. Kundangar, 1934: 25 f., lines 25–30, stanzas 19–21.
- 25 At least eight different drafts can be distinguished; cf. Schmiedchen, 2014a: 26–39.
- 26 For the first attestation of this draft, cf. Fleet, 1882; Schmiedchen, 2014a: 461, RāUr 4.
- 27 For the updating, cf. Schmiedchen, 2014a, 461–467, RāUr 6–13, RāUr 15 f., RāUr 18–21, RāUr 23.
- 28 All the later drafts mainly served the panegyric of the current ruler.
- 29 English translation by A. S. As already mentioned, Kambha did not use any subordinate titles for himself.
- 30 Altekar, 1931/32: 43, lines 40 f., stanza 39: *svicchāgrhītaviṣayān dṛḍhasamghabhājah prodvṛttad rptatarasulkikarāṣṭrakūtān / utkhātakhaḍganijabāhubalena jītvā yo moghavarṣam acirāt svapade vyadhatta* // (English translation by A. S.).
- 31 For more examples of independent genealogical drafts, see Sircar, 1957/58b; Lüders, 1896/97.
- 32 The same term as for Govinda's request, i.e. *vijñāpanā*, is used here as well: *vāsiṣṭhasṛīkumāraviññāpanayā jaivantipāṇaiyaviññāpanayā ca*.
- 33 For endowments on the request or with the consent of a queen, see Schmiedchen, 2014a: 466, RāUr 21; 467, RāUr 24; 475, RāUr 46.
- 34 Stanza 29: "May this gift of land be wish-fulfilling for that Jagattuṅga, who surpassed Lakṣmaṇa through incomparably worshipping his elder brother" (English translation by A. S.).
- 35 Cākirāja was the governor in Gaṅgamaṇḍala, the (former) territory of the kings of the (Western) Gaṅga dynasty. Before Cākirāja, this province had been administered by the Rāṣṭrakūṭa viceroy Kambha. It is striking that none of the official Rāṣṭrakūṭa drafts has been used, although the title deed is said to have been issued by the imperial ruler: "it is quite original, and has not one line in common with any of the other Rāṣṭrakūṭa grants. [...] this may be accounted for by assuming that it was not issued from the office of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa king directly, but that, the sanction of the sovereign having been obtained, it was drawn by somebody in the service of the governor of the Kunuṅgil district or of the viceroy of the Gaṅga province in whose territory the granted village was situated" (Lüders, 1896/97: 334 f.).
- 36 Not only in Maharashtra and Karnataka, but also in other regions of medieval India, notably in Bihar and Bengal, this particular patronage pattern prevailed: Most of the monasteries and temples were founded by vassals and high-ranking officials, often under active participation of their wives and daughters; see Furuī, 2008, 71.
- 37 The names of the petitioner, his father, and grandfather sound like Rāṣṭrakūṭa names: *dhruvarājaputreṇa dantivarmaputreṇa māñāvalokaratnavarṣaśrīvijayādityenābhyarthito* (Bhandarkar, 1900/01a: 211, lines 26–28).
- 38 This was draft '1'; cf. Schmiedchen, 2014a: 29–32.
- 39 The endowments of queen Śīlamahādevī, prince Karkarāja, and prince Śaṅkaragaṇa come from Nandurbar, Nasik, and Aurangabad in northwestern Maharashtra, i.e. from the heartland of the early Rāṣṭrakūṭa empire.
- 40 An imitation of the royal signature has been engraved on the copper plates; cf. Schmiedchen, 2014a: 43.
- 41 For the approval of Karkarāja's grant by Amoghavarṣa I, see Bhattacharyya, 1933/34, 85, lines 78 f.
- 42 The administration of Saṃyāna had been handed over to him by Rāṣṭrakūṭa Kṛṣṇa II, the grandfather of Indra III; see Sircar, 1957/58a: 52, lines 19f., stanza 17.
- 43 Three quarters of the copper-plate charters issued by the Rāṣṭrakūṭas were in favour of Brahmanical grantees. Out of these, 70% patronised individual Brahmins, and 30% groups of different size. One quarter of the copper-plate charters issued by the Rāṣṭrakūṭas were granted in favour of Hindu temples, Jaina institutions, and Buddhist monasteries, with 50% of them being dedicated to temples

of Hindu gods and goddesses, and the other half in favour of Jaina and Buddhist monasteries; see Schmiedchen, 2014a: 158, 191, 201.

44 *Samastabhuvanāśraya* means 'shelter for all mankind'.

45 YāSt 32 was issued by Kholeśvara's daughter Lakṣmī after her father's and brother's death.

46 The maternal side was not mentioned in YāSt 32.

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