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Field trip in Odisha 2024: Metadata collection continues

BY AMANDINE WATTELIER-BRICOUT · 28/03/2024

This field trip took place during the first half of February and was the continuation of the one undertaken in 2023 (see [here](#)). Its main goal was to pursue the digital documentation and the gathering of metadata for corpora included in the DHARMA database, particularly the inscriptions issued by the Bhaumakara, Gaṅga and Somavaṃśin dynasties. To this end, the team visited several museum and archaeological sites. This year, the team consisted of four members: [Arlo Griffiths](#), [Annette Schmiedchen](#), [Amandine Wattelier-Bricout](#) and Hedwi Prihatmoko, who, trained by the visual data manager, [Adeline Levivier](#), was a valuable resource for the digital documentation.



Our team with Dr. Barik at Sambalpur University

Archaeological Museum Department of History and AIHCA, Utkal University, Bhubaneswar, Odisha

The Utkal University Museum preserves two copper plate inscriptions extremely important for understanding the history of the Somavamśin dynasty. The first one issued by a subordinate (Nuapatna plates of the time of Janamejaya, year 5) requires a palaeographic study to determine its attribution to one or another

Janamejaya. This study will be possible thanks to the digital documentation. The second set is the only surviving document issued by King Indraratha himself: it offers a genealogical account tracing the origins of the dynasty back to Śiva's orders. Another plate of great historical value can be also found there: the Arabala plate of Daṇḍimahādevī, year 183. Thanks to the mention of a feudatory with his titles, this plate allows us to better reconstruct the organization of the administrative system during the Bhaumakara time (Tripathy 2000 : 76).

Only open since March 2023, the museum does not yet have a catalog. Having documented the museum's entire collection of copper plates, the DHARMA team proposed to create a catalog using the metadata collected during the field mission. This catalog is currently being compiled and will be deposited on the HAL open archive to increase the visibility of this small but wonderful collection.

Dr. Anam Behera and the entire department staff gave us a very warm welcome. During our stay there, Annette Schmiedchen and Arlo Griffiths gave lectures to the students, which led to several interesting exchanges.



Photo: Lecture of A. Schmiechen at Utkal University, Bhubaneswar

Odisha State Museum, Bhubaneswar, Odisha

As last year, Bharati Pal, the curator of the Odisha State Museum, made every effort to facilitate our access to the copper plates preserved in the Museum's storeroom. Thanks to Dr. Bhagyalipi Malla's permission, we were able to photograph and take measurements of several copperplates. In addition to completing the metadata for the Somavamśin and Bhaumakara corpora, we have started documenting a few copper plates from the Eastern Gaṅga corpus. Some sets were particularly impressive, such as the Kendupatna grant of Narasiṃha II with its remarkable bull seal. Time constraints prevented us from photographing all the sets expected but we plan to visit the museum again to complete the documentation in progress.



Photo: Seal of the Kendupatna grant of Narasimha II, Odisha State Musuem

Khaṇḍagiri and Udayagiri Caves, Bhubaneswar, Odisha

We continued documenting the stone inscriptions at Khaṇḍagiri and Udayagiri in Bhubaneswar. We explored a part of the site that we had missed last year, locating one of the inscriptions dating from the Somavaṁśin dynasty: the Lalāṭendukesari cave inscription of the time of Mahābhavagupta Uddyotakeśarin, year 5. Unfortunately, the inscription has been badly damaged by corrosion and we are not sure that we will be able to get a better reading of it than the edition produced by (Banerji 1915).

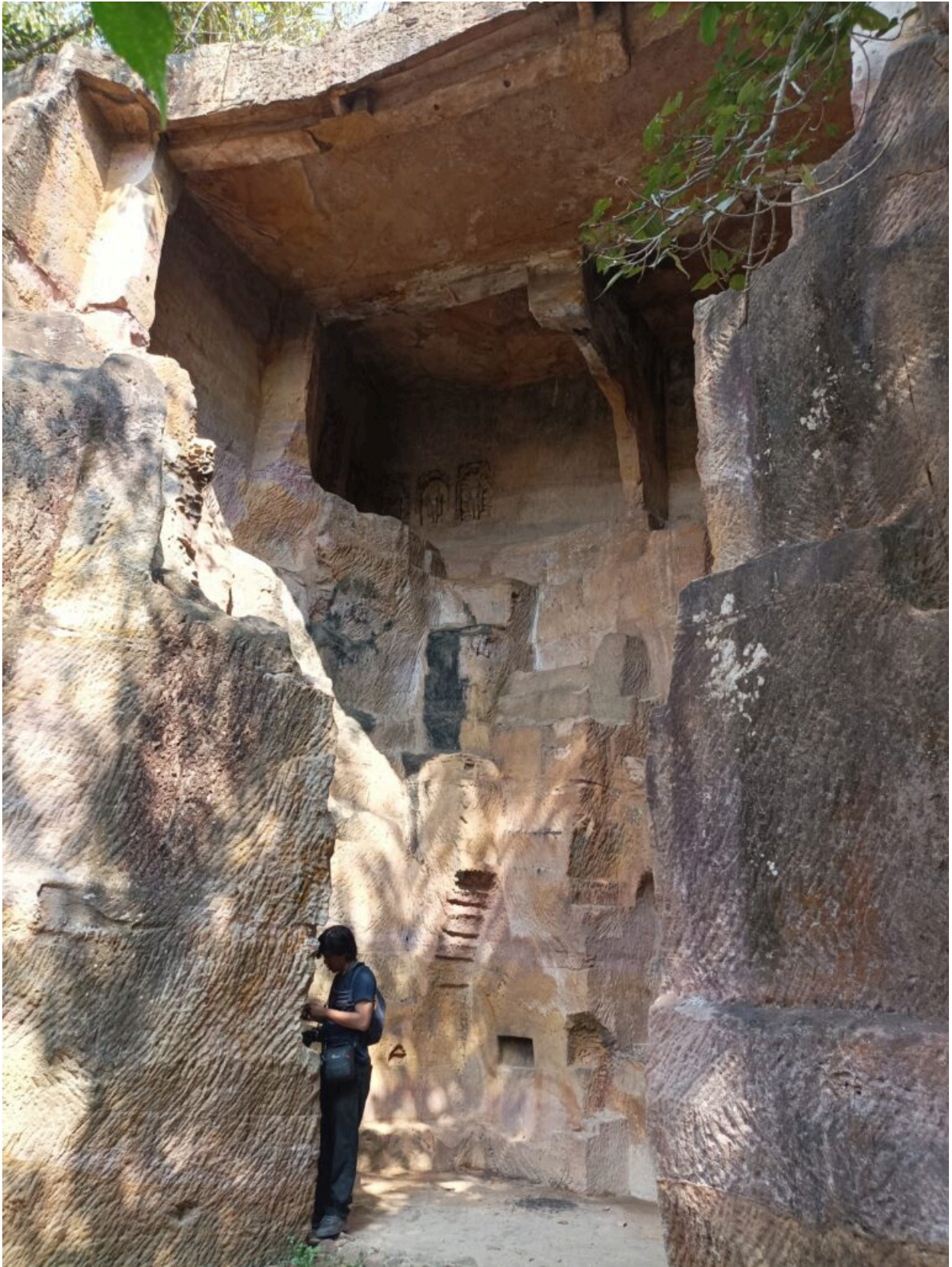


Photo: the Lalāṅdukesari cave in Khaṇḍagiri, Bhubaneswar

**Prof. N. K. Sahu Museum,
Sambalpur University,
Sambalpur, Odisha**

In this place, three Somavamśin sets and one Bhaumakara plate are preserved. All of them are noteworthy for the history of Odisha. For example, the Sambalpur University Museum copper plate of the time of Janamejaya mentions one autochthonous goddess linked to the cult of Jagannath by the name Khambeśvarī rather than by her Sanskrit appellation Stambheśvarī [note: another occurrence of this name is found in the Kamalpur plates of the time of Mahāśivagupta Karṇa, year 4 preserved in the Odisha State Museum which we have documented this year]. The Ruchida copperplate grant of the Somavamśin king Mahābhavagupta is also astonishing since its seal bears a bull emblem instead of the usual Gajalakṣmī and its attribution is still under debate (Acharya 2013). The attribution of the Baragaon plates can also be reassessed thanks to the documentation work carried out. The Bhaumakara plate preserved there was issued by Daṇḍimahādevī, certainly one of the most active donors of the Bhaumakara dynasty (Tripathy 2000: 96).



Photo: Ruchida copperplate grant of Somavamśin King Mahābhavagupta

Over two days, we were able to document the entire collection of copper plates on display in the museum, as well as a few stone inscriptions. We intend to share the metadata gathered with the museum staff in order to help update the existing catalog. Our stay at Sambalpur University was also an opportunity for fruitful exchanges with the scholars working there and with the archaeology students, who were very interested in our documentation methods.



Photo: Showcase with copper plates, Prof. N. K. Sahu Museum, Sambalpur

Buddhist Triangle of Odisha

Last year, we had documented one plate of the Ratnagiri set of Mahāśivagupta Karṇa, year 6 but we had no information about the place of preservation of the two other plates. This year, during our visit of the Buddhist Triangle (Lalitagiri, Udayagiri and Ratnagiri), we discovered that the two missing plates of the set are preserved in a showcase in the Ratnagiri Museum.



Photo: The two plates belonging to the Ratnagiri set of Mahāśivagupta Karṇa, Ratnagiri Museum

Asutosh Museum of Indian Art attached to the Kolkata University

The final stop on our field trip was the Asutosh Museum of Indian Art at Kolkata. As we had hoped, we found some sets belonging to the Somavamśin dynasty. Their arrangement in a closed show-case prevented us from gathering the necessary metadata.

That said, this field mission was extremely fruitful, with almost a hundred artefacts being photographed and documented including metadata (where possible). All this information will be accessible in the DHARMA project database currently under construction. Some of it will also be made available through the two catalogs that will

shortly be deposited on the HAL open archive. This fieldwork will be continued next year, in order to supplement the encoded inscriptions as far as possible with quality photos and metadata.

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