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# The Position of Tīvaradeva in the Light of Panegyric Passages in Inscriptions of Dakṣiṇa Kosala

Natasja Bosma

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Self-Representation  
and Presentation of Others  
in Indic Epigraphical Writing

Edited by  
Dániel Balogh and Annette Schmiedchen

Asien- und Afrika-Studien 63  
der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

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# The Position of Tīvaradeva in the Light of Panegyric Passages in Inscriptions of Dakṣiṇa Kosala

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## 1. Introduction

One of the regions where the royal sponsoring of religion became increasingly widespread during the sixth and seventh centuries was Dakṣiṇa Kosala. In the aftermath of the Gupta-Vākāṭaka hegemony, a period of political reorganisation and shifting boundaries, the Dakṣiṇa Kosala region developed into a stable and flourishing kingdom under the rule of two successive royal houses, namely, the kings of Śarabhapura and the Pāṇḍava kings of Śrīpura (modern Sirpur). The distribution of archaeological sites and the provenances of inscriptions indicate that the core of the kingdom consisted of the areas north and south of the Seonath river (see Figure 1), which corresponds to the heart of modern Chhattisgarh. In an earlier publication (Bosma 2018, 7–49), I suggested that the Kosala kingdom may originally have been confined to the area south of the Seonath river, whereas the area north of the river corresponded to the kingdom of Mekalā, running up to the Maikal range of hills along the northwestern border of Chhattisgarh. The kings of Śarabhapura likely hailed from the southern part of this Mekalā, but they extended their influence across river to Kosala during the reign of Sudevarāja, as was emphasised by the shift of their royal headquarters to Sirpur (the extended kingdom being “Dakṣiṇa Kosala”). The Pāṇḍava kings likely hailed from the northern part of Mekalā, where they may have been feudatories of the kings of Śarabhapura. They gained a foothold in Dakṣiṇa Kosala when *sāmanta* Indrabala was stationed as Sudevarāja’s chief minister (*sarvādhikārādhikṛta*) in Sirpur. Soon after, the Pāṇḍavas took over the region and established their dominion.

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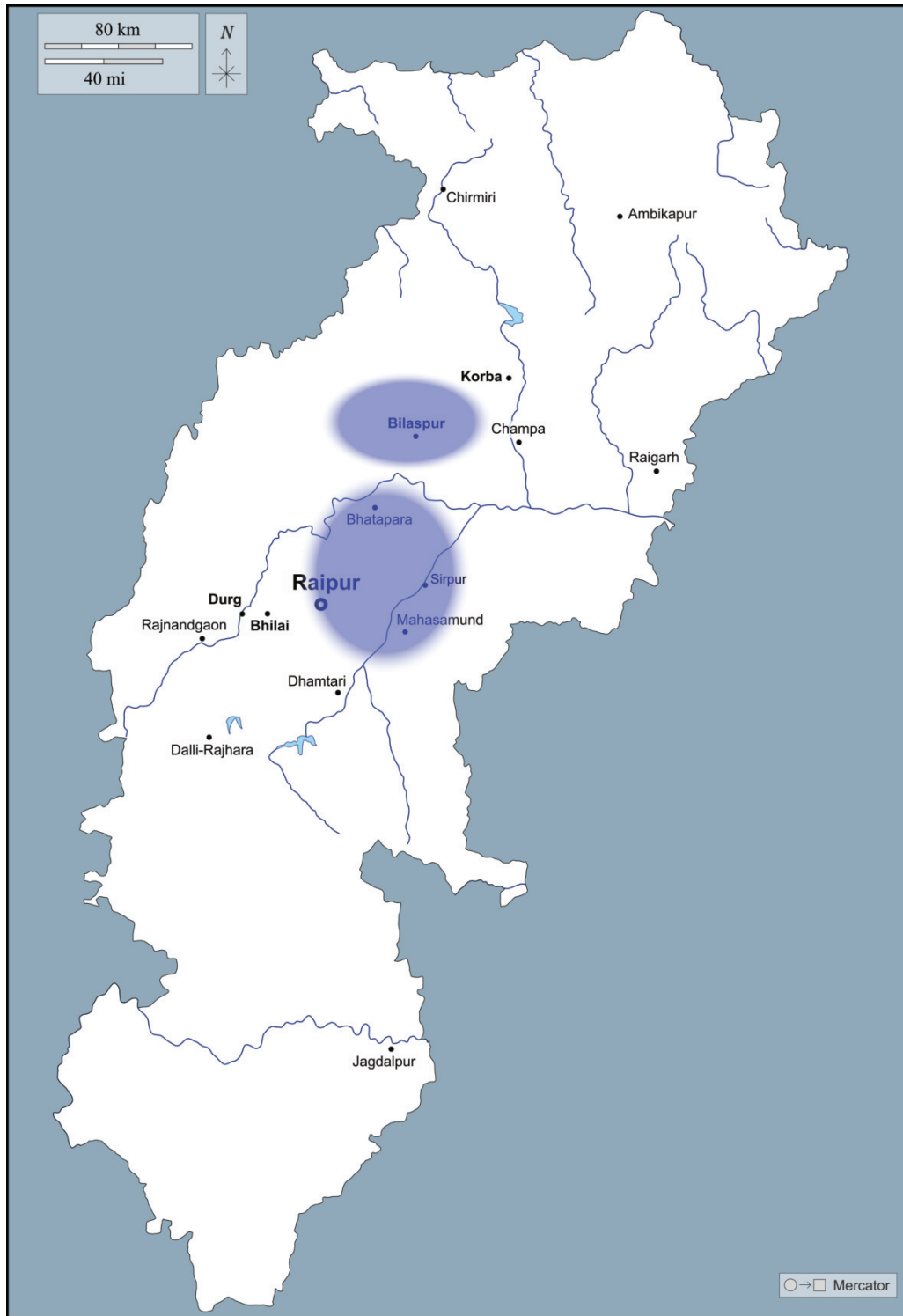


Figure 1. The kingdom of Dakṣiṇa Kosala

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Most of what is known about the Pāṇḍava kings comes from the inscriptions of the last known king of the dynasty: Śivagupta Bālārjuna (r. c. 590–650). The length and prosperity of this king's reign likely facilitated developments in the religious history, art, and architecture of the region, which makes him an important historical figure. From the inscriptions of Śivagupta we know that the Pāṇḍava kings traced their pedigree back to the legendary progenitor Udayana, king of Vatsa. He also commemorates Indrabala, the Pāṇḍava king who first took control over the region by means of a coup d'état and was, therefore, an important historical predecessor. Another Pāṇḍava king who appears to have been important for the prestige and strength of the kingdom, was Tīvaradeva. He is not mentioned by Śivagupta and he issued only four known charters himself, but the panegyric passages in these inscriptions are very extensive compared to those of the other kings from Dakṣiṇa Kosala. He is portrayed with long strings of epithets, composed by the court poets, and this raises the question as to whether he was indeed an important figure in the dynasty's history, or whether he needed to propagate himself in this way to strengthen his position. The present article examines this question by analysing the panegyric passages in the copperplate charters of the kings of Śarabhapura and the Pāṇḍava kings, against the background of their political history.

## 2. Panegyric passages in the corpus of Dakṣiṇa Kosala

The extant corpus of copperplate charters that were issued by the kings of Śarabhapura and the Pāṇḍava kings of Mekalā and Sirpur comprises a total of 47 inscriptions: 42 complete charters and 5 stray plates. The text of a complete charter is written on three sheets of copper, of which the middle sheet is inscribed on both sides. The two outer sheets are often used on the inside only (with the exception of some longer inscriptions, for practical reasons), in order to protect the engraved characters from wear. For the same reason, the outer edges of the sheets of copper are usually thickened, so that the surfaces of the plates do not rub together. The ends of the ring that joins the plates together are soldered on a seal of the ruling king, to give the grant authority and to prevent the removing or adding of plates (see Figure 2).

The inscriptions in this corpus can be ascribed to ten different kings, who are represented in lavender in the genealogies of the two royal houses that are depicted in Figure 3. Their (presumed) succession is indicated by the numbers before their names. No extant copperplate charters were preserved from the kings represented in green, but their names are either known from the

occasional stone inscription or mentioned as a predecessor in the introductions of the issuing kings. The dashed borders of some of the green boxes in Figure 3 indicate that there is uncertainty about the precise relationship of the king in question with his predecessors or successors. For example, in the case of Prasannamātra of Śarabhapura we know that he was the father of Jayarāja and Durgarāja, but the relationship between him and Narendra remains unclear because the latter two kings do not refer to Narendra as their grandfather and there are no known inscriptions of Prasannamātra himself.



*Figure 2. The Kurud plates of Narendra. Photograph by the author, 2009. Courtesy of the Mahant Ghasidas Memorial Museum, Raipur.*

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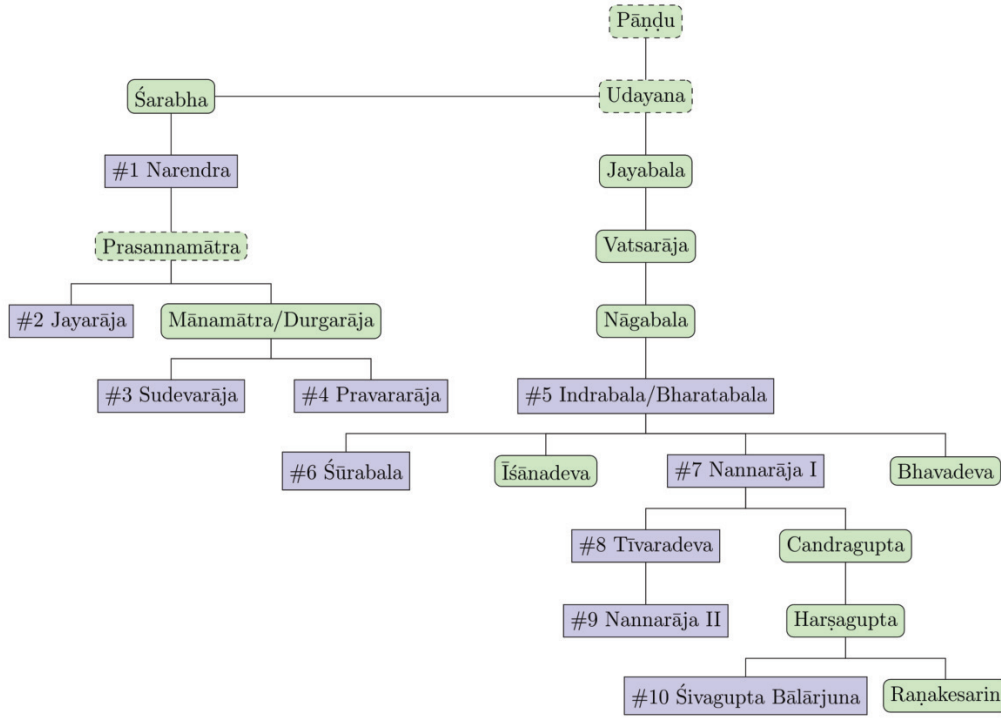


Figure 3. The kings of Dakṣiṇa Kosala (6th to 7th centuries)

Panegyric passages in the preambles of copperplate charters introduce and portray the issuing king, but they may also refer to relevant “others” along the way (such as references to overlords and subordinates, or descriptions of adversaries or intra-dynastic rivals). They cannot be considered as actual reflections of historical events because legendary and factual history were combined to make an inspirational narrative, in which court poets used their talents to extol the virtues and military achievements of the sponsoring kings. Nevertheless, impression management requires a grain of truth to be effective. Hence, Daud Ali (2000, 184) refers to these introductions as “living narratives” and they can be valuable in our knowledge of local history and the political profile of a region. In the introductions of the copperplate charters that were issued by the kings of Śarabhapura and the Pāṇḍava kings, the portrayal of “others” is largely limited to incidental references to the father and predecessor of the issuing king, whereas the portrayal of the kings themselves varies from short and simple to rather extensive.

The kings of Śarabhapura are known from 17 inscriptions, one of which is a stray plate that cannot be linked to any of the issuing kings because it is the middle plate of a set. The pedigree of these kings can only be established from

the short metrical verses on the seals that authorise the grants, because there are no references to predecessors in the overall template used across kings — the exception being the two charters issued by Sudevarāja from his new capital of Sirpur, in which he is introduced as “the son of the illustrious great Durgarāja.”<sup>1</sup> The seals are helpful because several of the legends contain a phrase that identifies the issuing king as a son of his father, thus disclosing the family relations.<sup>2</sup> In terms of panegyric, Narendra is portrayed in very basic terms, just stating his great devotion to Viṣṇu (*parama-bhāgavata*) and his parents’ favour to him (*mātā-pitr-pādānudhyāta*). The same unpretentious wording is used in Jayarāja’s *Amgura plates*, but starting with the charters from his fifth regnal year, his generosity and qualities as a conqueror were added to the formulaic standard in eloquent words: “His feet are washed by the sprinkling water that is the brilliance of the crest-jewels of his feudatories who have been brought into submission by his prowess. He made the women of his enemies tear out their parted hair, and he was a giver of riches, land, and cattle.”<sup>3</sup> The kings of Śarabhapura who followed Jayarāja on the throne all seem to have used this same formula to introduce themselves.

Among the Pāṇḍava kings there is much more variation in the way they are introduced in the preambles of their charters. Their family history can be partially drawn from 30 copperplate inscriptions in the corpus of Dakṣiṇa Kosala, and several stone inscriptions have also been important for establishing their pedigree.<sup>4</sup> It is fitting that the earliest Pāṇḍava record should be the one of Indrabala, the king who likely gained the throne by means of a coup d’état and,

- 
- 1 These charters are the *Dhamatari plates* and the *Kauvatal plates* of Sudevarāja, both using the phrase *śrī-mahā-durgarāja-putra-śrī-mahā-sudevarājah*.
  - 2 Narendra is referred to as the son of Śarabha (*śarabhāt prāpta-janmanah*) in the legend on the seals of his *Pīparḍulā plates* and *Kurud plates*. Jayarāja is described as the ‘heart’ of Prasanna (*prasanna-hṛdayasya*) in his *Amgura plates* and *Āraṅg plates*, and as the son of Prasanna (*prasanna-tanaya*) in his *Malhār plates*. The seals of Sudevarāja’s *Nahna plates* and *Āraṅg plates* identify Sudevarāja as the son of Mānamātra, and the latter as the son of Prasanna (*prasannārṇava-sambhūta-mānamātrendu-janmanah*). This implies that Mānamātra was an alias of Durgarāja. Pravararāja is also described as a son of Mānamātra on his seals (*mānamātra-sutasya*).
  - 3 *vikramopanata-sāmanta-makuṭa-cūḍāmaṇi-prabhā-prasekāmbubhir dhauta-pāda-yugalo, ripu-vilāsini-simantoddharaṇa-hetur ... vasu-vasudhā-go-pradaḥ*.
  - 4 In particular, the *Kharod stone inscription of Īśānadeva*, the *Āraṅg stone inscription of Bhavadeva*, and the *Sirpur (Lakṣmaṇa temple) stone inscription of Vāsaṭā*, wife of Harṣagupta and mother of king Śivagupta. For a more detailed account on the history of the Pāṇḍava kings with references to these stone inscriptions, see Bosma (2018).

therefore, perhaps the most important figure in the dynasty's history. He was still acting as the chief minister of Sudevarāja when he issued his charter from Maṇḍaka, which may be the reason why he does not refer to his Pāṇḍava background. In the introduction of his charter, he is characterised with the same formulaic phrases as Narendra, but these are accompanied by two metrical verses. The first one alludes to a father who was powerful like Indra, splendid like the moon, and solid like a mountain, whereas the second verse celebrates Indrabala:

To him was born a son, whose impact is as clear as that of a troop of elephants; who has a handsome appearance; who always bestows gifts duly; who is strong and unpredictable in battle; whose fame has extended in all directions; and by whom the illustrious Lakṣmī (i.e. prosperity) is carried away after forcibly conquering the enemy troops. That illustrious king, an abode of (the goddess of) Fortune, who takes pleasure in worship, was Indrarāja!<sup>5</sup>

All that is known about the early generations of Pāṇḍava kings (up to Indrabala) comes from the charters of Śūrabala. Alternating passages of verse and prose not only eulogise this king's parents (both father and mother), but also the three generations before them. His own introduction is limited to a single verse, praising him under the alias of Udīrṇavaira:

He who overcame {stepped on} all regions with his pair of feet having the splendour of a full-blown lotus flower and touched by the heads of many feudatory chiefs laid low because of the threefold powers with which he was endowed: that illustrious king Udīrṇavaira was born, whose numerous good qualities are unparalleled and whose birth is celebrated by people highly [with the words]: “Famous is the auspicious Lunar Lineage!”<sup>6</sup>

Both Indrabala and Śūrabala issued their grants in the Pāṇḍava homeland of Mekalā, whereas Nannarāja I and his successors issued theirs from Sirpur, the former headquarters of the kings of Śarabhapura. This different setting is reflected in the style and script of their records, as the copperplate charters of these later Pāṇḍava kings were engraved by the same scribal community that

5 *Malga plates*, v. 2: *jātas tasyātmajo 'pi prakāṣa-gaja-ghaṭā-ghaṭṭanaś cāru-mūrttir nityam dātābhimānī raṇa-capala-paṭur bhrānta-paryanta-kīrtiḥ| nirjityārāti-pakṣam prasabham apahṛtā yena lakṣmī viśālā sa śrīmān śrī-niketaḥ prati-mati-ruciraḥ indrarājo narendrah||*

6 *Malhār plates*, v. 7: *yo 'sau saṃpūrṇa-śakti-traya-vinipatitāneka-sāmanta-mūrdha-prodghṛṣṭot-phulla-padma-dyuti-calana-yugākrānta-dik-cakravālah| saumyaḥ somasya vaṃśaḥ prabhava iti janaiḥ kīrtyate yasya coccaiḥ sa śrīmān saṃbābhūvāpratima-guṇa-gaṇodīrṇavairo narendrah||*



had served both Sudevarāja and Pravaraarāja and, therefore, followed the same template as the kings of Śarabhapura.<sup>7</sup> One big difference, however, is the variation in how they are portrayed themselves: Nannarāja I is the first Pāṇḍava king who is characterised with a rather extensive string of epithets (15 in total) that praise his power and fame, great skills and knowledge, as well as his kindness and purity.<sup>8</sup> Even more impressive and suggestive of “historical importance” is the introduction of his son Tīvaradeva, with a total of 25 epithets as well as a preceding verse:

Victorious is the illustrious Tīvaradeva, who is the ornament of the three worlds (heaven, earth, lower world); an auspicious buttress for the palace of the (Pāṇḍava) kings; and foremost of those who perform meritorious deeds! [Tīvaradeva] who illuminates the neighbouring regions with his mirror-like toenails, which are polished by the tips of the diadems of the many feudatory kings who salute him, being permitted the (privilege of the) five great titles; whose fingers bluntly seize the good Fortune of adversary kings by the locks of her hair in public; by whom the battlefields are adorned with heaps of pearls, thoroughly smeared with thick blood oozing from the domed foreheads of the elephants of his enemies, struck down by the hard strokes of his sharp sword; who is a submarine fire to the salt water of his enemies swelling with the desire of acquiring a multitude of various gems; who does not cause distress by (levying heavy) taxes, just like the rising moon {does not cause distress by its rays}; who demonstrates a wealth of many most excellent treasures, just like the ocean of milk {demonstrates a wealth of many most excellent jewels}; who is competent in uprooting evil, just like Garutmat {is competent in destroying serpents}; who ruins the black collyrium [applied to] the eyes and the floral saffron designs on the tender cheeks of the [widowed] wives of his defeated enemies; whose mind is focused solely on the protection and establishment of virtuous behaviour; moreover, who is worshipped by people on account of his tirelessness in [performing] religious austerities in previous [births]; who is not easily satisfied in [acquiring] fame; who is trustworthy in keeping secrets; whose mind is very pure; whose eyes are bright; and whose body is adorned with youth; who, though being a commander {a Swami}, does not (indulge in) excessive talking; who, though desirous of conquering land {being an unreformed addict}, is excessively liberal (in the granting of land); who, though fierce to the family of his adversaries

7 The charters of Indrabala and Śūrabala were engraved in nail-headed characters, whereas box-headed characters were used for the charters issued by the kings of Śarabhapura and the later Pāṇḍava kings. For an analysis of the lineage of goldsmiths responsible for engraving the charters issued from Sirpur, see Ali and Zhang (2022).

8 *Philadelphia Museum of Art plates of Nannarāja I*, ll. 1–13.

(i.e. like the sun), is gentle in appearance (i.e. like the moon); who, though adorned with majesty {ashes}, is not harsh in disposition; furthermore, who is insatiable in generating religious merit, [but] not in accumulating wealth; who is devoid of anger, [but] not of power; who is longing for fame, [but] not for appropriating the fame of others; who is skilful in eloquent speech, [but] not in consorting with promiscuous women; who has consumed the lineage of his adversaries completely, as a heap of cotton, with the fire of his splendour; who illuminates the horizons with his massive fame as bright white as the rocky mountain of snow (i.e. Himālaya); who is loved by his subjects; [...] who has obtained sovereignty over the whole of Kosala; who reduced all misfortune in the world with his meritorious acts; who has removed all thorns (i.e. annoying enemies) with the needle of his wisdom; who is entirely devoted to Viṣṇu; and who is favoured by his father and mother [...]<sup>9</sup>

This is clearly a genuine panegyric, the most extensive one in the corpus. The idea that Tīvaradeva may have lived up to these claims is suggested in the *Aḍbhār plates* issued by his son and successor Nannarāja II. The introduction of this charter is all about the greatness of Tīvara, who is said to have expanded the kingdom beyond the boundaries of Kosala, whereas Nannarāja II himself is characterised only as “wholly intent on following the example of [his father’s] deeds” (*caritānukaraṇa-parāyaṇaḥ*).

Perhaps most noticeable is the contrast between Tīvaradeva’s extensive panegyric and the self-portrayal of Śivagupta Bālārjuna (r. c. 590–650), who was the last-known king of the Pāṇḍava dynasty and whose reign lasted for almost sixty years. Two thirds of all extant Pāṇḍava charters were issued by him and, judging from the contents of his inscriptions, he was a great patron of religion. Also, given the length of his reign, he must have been successful, powerful, prosperous, and the like. Thus, there certainly appears to have been enough reason to praise and eulogise him, but compared to Tīvaradeva, he is portrayed in modest terms, with only a few epithets stressing his discipline, virtue, valour, intelligence, and strength. The contrast between the introductions of both kings has raised the question as to what made the poets in Tīvaradeva’s court compose such an elaborate panegyric: was he indeed an important figure in the dynasty’s history, or did he need to propagate himself in this way to strengthen his position and establish himself as a king?

9 This introduction is found in all four of Tīvaradeva’s copperplate inscriptions (the *Boṇḍā plates*, the *Rājim plates*, the *Sirpur plates*, and the *Baloda plates*); see the electronic editions for the Sanskrit text.

### 3. Statistical analysis

To examine the varying lengths of the panegyric passages in the copperplate charters of the kings of Śarabhapura and the Pāṇḍava kings more closely and to analyse whether they may follow a pattern, a visual representation was made to display their flow (Figure 4). For this purpose, the relevant portions of text were converted to numerical values. For each record, both the number of lines dedicated to the self-portrayal of the issuing king and the total number of lines of the inscription were determined. Then, the number of lines dedicated to self-portrayal relative to the total number of lines (hereafter: *L*) was calculated, to account for the possibility that a more elaborate inscription may also have a longer panegyric passage.

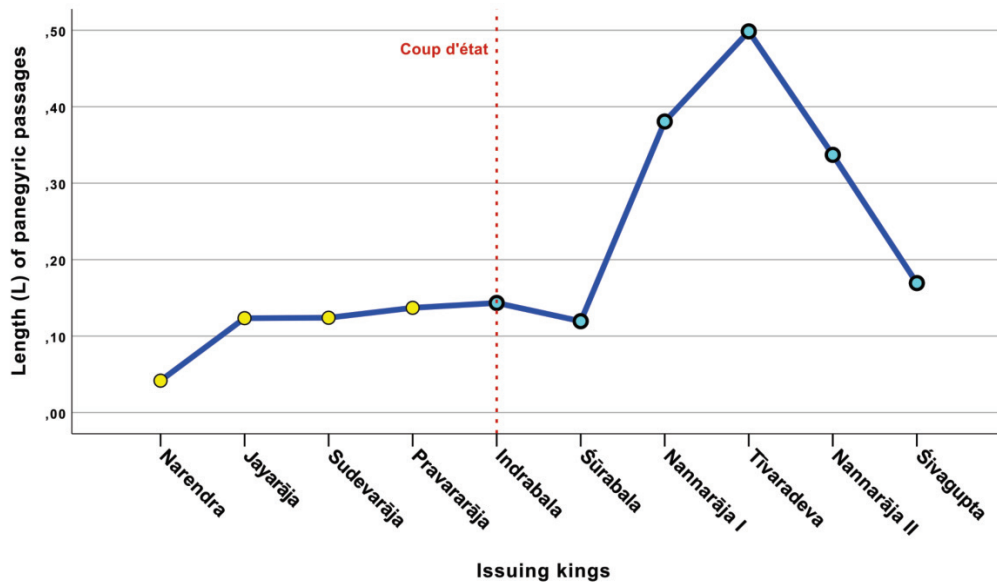


Figure 4. Visual representation of the lengths of panegyric passages in the Dakṣiṇa Kosala corpus

To give an example, the *Kurud plates* of Narendra depicted in Figure 2 above consist of 21 lines of text: five lines engraved on the verso side of the first plate, five on either side of the second plate, and six on the recto side of the third plate. The introduction of the king — *parama-bhāgavato mātā-pitṛ-pādānuddhyātaḥ śrī-mahārāja-narendraḥ*, “the illustrious Mahārāja Narendra, who is supremely devoted to Viṣṇu and is favoured by his father and mother” — takes up slightly more than one line on the first plate, marked with a blue outline in Figure 5. A value of 1.1 lines has been assigned to this self-portrayal, so the calculated value

of  $L$  was 0.05. Out of the corpus of 47 records, two were left out because they are stray plates that do not contain an introduction to an issuing king or other grantor. Most of these were complete charters, but in the case of a missing plate, an informed guess was made about the total number of lines of the inscription based on comparison with other records of the same king.



Figure 5. Example of collected data. Photograph by the author, 2009. Courtesy of the Mahant Ghasidas Memorial Museum, Raipur.

The visual representation in Figure 4 contains a marker for the average length of the panegyric passages of each issuing king (yellow for the kings of Śārabhapura and aqua for the Pāṇḍava kings). The line that runs through these markers confirms and displays the unique length of Tīvaradeva's self-portrayal among this group of kings and the great contrast between Tīvaradeva and Śīvagupta regarding the length of their panegyric passage. However, it also shows that Tīvaradeva's extensive eulogy does not appear out of the blue. If we follow the line, it makes a first jump upwards from Narendra to Jayarāja. Then, after a relatively stable trend and a minor drop from Indrabala to Śūrabala, the line makes a big jump from the latter to Nannarāja I, after which it reaches a peak at Tīvaradeva's marker. The timing of these three increases in the length of the self-portrayal relative to the preceding king(s) will now be given a closer look.

Aiming to experiment with statistical methods from the social sciences, the collected data were further analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics software (Version 25). It is common in statistical studies to formulate two complemen-

tary hypotheses: the null hypothesis, which is the statement that one attempts to disprove, and the alternative hypothesis, which is an opposing statement that can be accepted if there is sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis (Moore, McCabe, and Craig 2021, 350–51). In the current experiment, the guiding hypotheses are that the panegyric passages in the inscriptions of the ten issuing kings are all equal in length (null hypothesis), or that at least one king stands out (alternative hypothesis). To test the null hypothesis, the One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and the Kruskal-Wallis test were considered. These are both statistical tests that can be used to compare three or more “groups” and to discover whether any of these groups are different from each other to a statistically significant degree. The difference between them is that the first one is a so-called parametric test, whereas the second one is nonparametric. The main advantage of parametric tests over nonparametric tests is that they are more powerful and precise, which means that they have a higher chance of finding a true difference (or effect) if it exists. However, parametric tests are also restricted by a number of assumptions about the pool from which the data is gathered and the conditions under which that happened. Most of these assumptions cannot possibly apply to the data of the present article. Hence, performing an ANOVA would be pointless because the results would be invalid. As a nonparametric and more flexible alternative, the Kruskal-Wallis test fits the data better (Kruskal-Wallis 1952, 123–28).

In the present context, the ten issuing kings constitute the “groups” that are compared, and the focus of their comparison is the length of the panegyric passage within each group (i.e. in the inscriptions that are available for each king). If we could assume that the variability in this length follows a similar distribution curve for each king, the Kruskal-Wallis test could have been used to compare the median values (midpoints). This is not the case, however, which means that we can only approach a precise comparison by ranking the data. The Kruskal-Wallis test is also called the “*H*-test” because its test statistic is a variable denoted by *H*. However, since this is a rather complicated statistic, the results of the test are usually simplified into a value of chi-square (specified by the degrees of freedom and the significance of the test). In the current experiment, the result was  $\chi^2(9) = 39.825, p < 0.001$ . This basically indicates that the probability of finding the observed data (i.e. the described differences in panegyric passages between the kings) is less than one in a thousand under the null hypothesis. Typically, a significance level of 0.05 is chosen as a threshold to determine statistical significance (Agresti 2018, 162), which means that the evidence of the result is strong enough to reject the null hypothesis: we can accept that at least one king stands out.

The Kruskal-Wallis  $H$  test is an omnibus test, which means that it can be used to determine if there are statistical differences between the groups within the comparison, but it cannot point out where that significant difference lies. To narrow this down, post-hoc testing is needed to identify exactly which groups differ from each other (i.e. which king stands out). Pairwise comparisons can be made with the nonparametric Mann-Whitney  $U$  test (Agresti 2018, 213–16). It is beyond the scope of the experiment to present the details of forty-five pairwise comparisons here, but to name a few: the self-portrayal of Jayarāja is significantly longer than that of Narendra ( $U = 0, p = 0.03$ ), but there is no significant difference in the length of panegyric passages between Jayarāja and Sudevarāja ( $U = 9, p = 0.35$ ). Also, Tīvaradeva’s self-portrayal does not differ significantly from that of Nannarāja I ( $U = 0, p = 0.16$ ), but it certainly is significantly longer than that of Śivagupta ( $U = 0, p = 0.002$ ).

Obviously, all of these results should be interpreted with caution. For one thing, the methods are used outside their ordinary context and some of the issuing kings have less than five inscriptions, which makes the approximation of  $H$  with chi-square less accurate. The case could also be made that a repeated measures analysis (the Friedman test) should have been used because the panegyric passages in the inscriptions of the ten kings cannot be considered as “independent observations.” After all, the design of a king’s inscription builds on that of his predecessors. On the other hand, it could also be argued that the inscriptions of the kings are no sample of collected data that is used to draw conclusions about a broader population. Notwithstanding the limitations, the main point of this experiment was to try out something new and to promote the idea that borrowing analytical methods from other fields may bring new insights.

#### 4. Discussion

The visual representation in Figure 4 and the analysis of the copperplate characters lead back to the question at the heart of this study, namely: what may have brought about the elaborate introduction of Tīvaradeva? Along the same line, similar questions may be asked about the increase in length of the introductions of Jayarāja and Nannarāja I compared to those of their predecessors. Why are the qualities of these three kings highlighted and not those of, say, Śivagupta? An answer may be found in the political history of the region and the contemporary arrangements of power; when collated together, the reigns of Jayarāja,

Nannarāja I, and Tīvaradeva seem to have coincided with some major shifts in the political landscape of Dakṣiṇa Kosala.

In the case of Jayarāja, he may very well have been the first king of Śarabhapura who issued copperplate charters as a fully independent ruler. In any case, there are good reasons to suppose that Narendra was not ruling independently yet. The aforementioned *Kurud plates* report on Narendra's grant of the village of Keśavaka to a Brāhmaṇa named Śaṅkhasvāmin. The full religious merit of this donation is to be conveyed to someone referred to as 'the paramount sovereign' (*parama-bhaṭṭāraka-pāda*). The grant was actually a reconfirmation of the latter's original grant of the village to Śaṅkhasvāmin's father Bhāśrutasvāmin, which had been written on palm leaves and was destroyed by a fire in the house of the donee. In the inscription it is also told that the paramount sovereign made his original grant when he was taking a bath in the river Gaṅgā.<sup>10</sup> Since the Guptas used and popularised the term *parama-bhaṭṭāraka* as an imperial title, and one of their headquarters was Pāṭaliputra on the river Gaṅgā, it is likely that the paramount sovereign of Narendra's *Kurud plates* was a Gupta king. Also, the respectful way in which the *parama-bhaṭṭāraka* is referred to in the charter suggests that Narendra may have been loyal to him (Sircar 1955–56). The exact relationship between Narendra and Prasanna cannot be determined with certainty because there are no inscriptions of the latter, but he did issue some re-poussé coins that were minted in imitation of coins that can arguably be ascribed to the Gupta emperors Kumāragupta I and Skandagupta (Bosma 2018, 15–19). Jayarāja was the first king of Śarabhapura with the word *mahā-* prefixed to his name, 'the Great Jayarāja,' suggesting an increase of royal authority and political prestige. This, together with the first use of some eulogising epithets in his introduction, can be interpreted as an indication of independent sovereignty and his consolidation of the kingdom.

The situation of Nannarāja I bears a clear similarity to that of Jayarāja in the sense that he was also the first person in his family who established independent control over the Dakṣiṇa Kosala region. As mentioned above, Indrabala was acting as Sudevarāja's chief minister in Sirpur after the kings of Śarabhapura expanded their kingdom towards the south and founded their second capital. His own *Malga plates* were issued while he was still holding this office. It is clear that he was in an ideal position to bring about the coup d'état of the Pāṇḍavas, and given the reign of his progeny, he succeeded. There is, however, no evidence that he ever ascended the conquered throne himself to rule from Sirpur. The same goes for Śūrabala, who is only known from the charters he issued in

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<sup>10</sup> *Kurud plates of Narendra*, ll. 4–11.

Mekalā. Nannarāja I issued his charter from Śrīpṛthivīpura, which is likely to be an unattested variant of Śrīpura (i.e. modern Sirpur). This makes him the first Pāṇḍava ruler who can be attested to have ruled from Sirpur and, thus, to have settled in the capital of the former overlords. The comparatively long string of epithets that make up his introduction may be seen as a reflection of his rising success and the establishment of Pāṇḍava hegemony.

Tīvaradeva appears to have been a venturesome king, someone who moved beyond local boundaries. In his own copperplate charters, he is praised for having obtained sovereignty over the whole of Kosala, but in the inscription of his son and successor Nannarāja II he is lauded for having ruled in Utkala (i.e. the coastal districts of Odisha) and other surrounding countries as well.<sup>11</sup> Any claim on Utkala would have been contested by the Gauḍas ruling north of that region, but Tīvaradeva may have received help from the Maukhari emperor Īśānavarman. The latter controlled Magadha in the second quarter of the sixth century and was in an excellent position to facilitate Tīvara's march into Utkala by putting pressure on the Gauḍas from the west. In return, Tīvaradeva may have supported Īśānavarman in his campaign against the king of Andhra (Bosma 2018, 33–34; Bakker 2014, 53–62). The likelihood of an alliance between both kings can only be deduced from the geographical and political circumstances at the time, but finds support in the later marriage of Tīvaradeva's nephew Harṣagupta with Īśānavarman's granddaughter Vāsaṭā. The implication that can be drawn here is that Tīvaradeva expanded the Pāṇḍava kingdom beyond Dakṣiṇa Kosala alone, which would make him the victorious king that he is portrayed to be in his charters.

Śivagupta Bālārjuna was by far the longest-reigning king in the history of Dakṣiṇa Kosala. During the nearly sixty years of his reign, the country seems to have been devoid of any political instability. Time and money could be invested in religious and cultural activities, such as large-scale temple construction and the provision of charity. The archaeological remains that date back to his time and the many inscriptions that record his donations are a clear indication of this (Bosma 2013). The length and impact of his reign do not, however, correspond to the length of his self-portrayal in the preamble of his charters. Apparently, peace and prosperity are no breeding ground for legends, whereas war and strife are. The pattern of the means plot made three kings stand out in terms of the length of their introduction, and a closer examination of the political history

11 The phrase *prāpta-sakala-kosalādhipatyah* is used in Tīvaradeva's own charters, while the text *sva-bhuja-parākramopārjita-sakala-kosalotkalādi-maṇḍalādhipatya-māhātmyasya śrī-mahāśiva-tīvararājasya* appears in the *Aḍbhār plates of Nannarāja II*, ll. 5–7.



of Dakṣiṇa Kosala has revealed that each of their reigns can typically be associated with the act of either establishing or extending control. Hence, each of them acted in a conflictual context that was characterised by victory and defeat, the very elements that feature prominently in panegyrics. Thus, the analysis of panegyric passages in the copperplate charters of the kings of Śārabhapura and the Pāṇḍava kings of Dakṣiṇa Kosala has offered some insight into what may have inspired their composition.

### Primary sources

See page xvi about references to primary sources in general, and page xvii about DHARMA digital editions with a corpus ID and a number.

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