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Ryosuke Furui

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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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Struggle Over Kannauj and Beyond: the Pālas, the Gurjara-Pratihāras, and the Rāṣṭrakūṭas

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1. Introduction

The political arena of North India between the late eighth and early ninth centuries was dominated by the confrontations of the Pālas, the Gurjara-Pratihāras, and the Rāṣṭrakūṭas in connection with the succession war over the throne of Kannauj. The kings of these dynasties fought each other, supporting either of the two contenders, and their deeds are depicted in the eulogies (*praśasti*) in the inscriptions of themselves, their descendants, and subordinates. As representations of the same events from different perspectives, these eulogies provide not only building blocks for the reconstruction of political history, but also clues to their perceptions of self and other, which would reveal their views on power relations involving all the parties. In the present article, I will compare the mutual representations of those three dynasties — especially what and how the eulogies tell, or not tell, about the kings and their opponents — and discuss the conceptualisations of kingship and political order shared or not shared by them.

Before the main discussion, I would like to present a flow of events reconstructed on the basis of fragmentary information from the inscriptions, with some uncertainty in chronology and timeline, as a background of my discussion.

1 I sincerely thank Annette Schmiedchen and Dániel Balogh, our editors, for their valuable suggestions for the reading, translation, and interpretation of some inscriptions. The research culminating in the present article has been supported by the JSPS Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (C) (19K01014), in addition to the ERC DHARMA Project (ERC N° 809994).

2. Reconstruction of events

The kingdom of Kannauj or Kānyakubja, the centre stage of events, was ruled by the Āyudhas in the eighth century. Indrāyudha and Cakrāyudha were the contenders for the throne. As Cakrāyudha is called a grandson (*napṭṛ*) of Yaśovarman in the *Mohipur plate of Gopāla II* (v. 5), the Āyudha kings seem to have ruled Kannauj as his descendants.

Indrāyudha first ascended to the throne, whereupon Cakrāyudha sought the help of Dharmapāla (r. c. 780–812),² the Pāla king of Bengal. Dharmapāla defeated Indrāyudha and installed Cakrāyudha as the king of Kannauj. Indrāyudha in his turn obtained the aid of Vatsarāja (r. c. 780–800), the Gurjara-Pratihāra king ruling western India, who defeated Dharmapāla and reinstalled Indrāyudha. Then Dhruva (r. c. 780–93), the Rāṣṭrakūṭa king ruling the Deccan and Gujarat, in conflict with the Gurjara-Pratihāras, attacked and defeated Vatsarāja. In the area between the Ganga and Yamuna, he also defeated Dharmapāla, who seems to have renewed his attempt to install Cakrāyudha on seeing the weakness of Vatsarāja.

The return of Dhruva to the Deccan, his own territory, provoked another action of Dharmapāla, who again defeated Indrāyudha and his allies and re-installed Cakrāyudha. Then Govinda III (r. c. 793–814), Dhruva's son, who had defeated Nāgabhaṭa II (r. c. 800–833), the son of Vatsarāja, interfered and defeated Dharmapāla. Dharmapāla and Cakrāyudha submitted to Govinda III, whose return to the Deccan incited Nāgabhaṭa II to attack Kannauj. Nāgabhaṭa II defeated Cakrāyudha, occupied Kannauj and invaded the Pāla territory as far as Munger. He shifted his capital to Kannauj, which would remain with the Gurjara-Pratihāras until their decline in the early eleventh century. The Gurjara-Pratihāra occupation of Kannauj concluded the struggle over the city, though the confrontations of the three powers continued for some more while.³

With this reconstruction of the flow of events, I will proceed to the analysis of eulogies in the inscriptions of each dynasty, which represent the same events in different ways.

2 The reigning periods and dates related to the Pāla kings given in this article are provisional ones based on my own calculation.

3 For an outline of the events, which needs some updates, see Sircar (1985, 11–16). For an updated description with input of new data, see Chowdhury (2018, 706–15).

3. The Pālas: focus on one event

The earliest presentation of the struggle over Kannauj in the Pāla inscriptions appears in the copperplate charters of Dharmapāla himself. His *Indian Museum plate* dated year 26 of his reign (c. 806) depicts an event in the struggle as follows:

The one who was duly praised by the kings of Bhojas, Matsyas with Madras, Kurus, Yadus, Yavanas, Avantis, Gandhāras and Kīras, bowing [to him] by bending [their] shaking crowns, and whose golden water pot of his own *abhiṣeka* was raised by the thrilled elders of Pañcāla, the illustrious Kānyakubja king (Cakrāyudha) was installed by him (Dharmapāla), with a mark [put] on [his] charmingly moving eyebrow.⁴

The verse is repeated as stanza 12 of the *Khalimpur plate of Dharmapāla, year 32* (c. 812). Focus on the one event, the coronation of Cakrāyudha as the king of Kānyakubja, is clear in this description. The exalted position of Cakrāyudha is emphasised by the admission of him as a ruler by the elders of Pañcāla (the area around Kānyakubja), who participated in his coronation, and by the submission of the kings of the diverse regions of North India. The presence of Dharmapāla is kept rather low-key, but his superior position is suggested by the simple fact that he installed Cakrāyudha as a king. The exaltation of the latter indirectly expresses the supremacy of the former.

Focus on this particular event continues in the inscriptions of the descendants of Dharmapāla. The *Jagajjibanpur plate of Mahendrapāla*, his grandson, dated year 7 (c. 854), describes the same event in the following manner:

After defeating these irrepressible enemies beginning with Indrarāja in battle, after destroying the lord of Sindhu country, by this king who appeared rapidly, by him, his own earth with Mahodaya (Kānyakubja) was given to Cakrāyudha, the petitioner possessing valour, as if [the three worlds were given] by Bali to the Vāmana stooping without duplicity, who was entitled to [three] steps.⁵

4 *Indian Museum plate of Dharmapāla, year 26, v. 12: bhojair matsyaiḥ sa-madraiḥ kuru-yaduyavanāvanti-gandhāra-kīrair bhūpair vyālola-mauli-praṇati-pariṇataiḥ sādhu saṅgīryamāṇaḥ| hṛṣyat-pañcāla-vṛddhodhṛta-kanakamaya-svābhiṣekoda-kumbho dattaḥ śrī-kanyakubjas salalita-calita-bhrū-latā-lakṣma yena||* The translations of all the verses cited in this article are my own, improved through valuable comments by Dániel Balogh and Annette Schmiedchen.

5 *Jagajjibanpur plate of Mahendrapāla, year 7, v. 4: durvvārām dviṣato vijitya samare tām indrarājādikān sindhūnām adhipam pramathya rabhasād unmilita-kṣmābhṛtā| dattā yena mahī mahodayavatī vikrānti-bhāje nijā nirvyājānati-vāmanāya valinā cakrāyudhāyārthine||*

The event in focus is the same, though the expression was changed to the bestowal of the earth with Kānyakubja. One motif added in this verse is the defeat of enemy kings, of whom Indrarāja or Indrāyudha, the contender for the throne of Kannauj, is clearly mentioned. In contrast, the presence of the Gurjara-Pratihāras, the main enemy of the Pālas, is obscured. The lord of Sindhu country could denote a Gurjara-Pratihāra king, but the indication of his territory as Sindhu, which was then controlled by the Arabs, makes this identification invalid. Another addition is the Trivikrama motif, in which Dharmapāla and Cakrāyudha are respectively compared to Bali and Vāmana. While it presents their mutual relation as a donor and a supplicant, the conclusion of the myth, namely that Viṣṇu as Vāmana stepped on Bali and banished him to the nether world, makes their power relation ambiguous.

The same event is represented in the *Mohipur plate of Gopāla II*, the nephew of Mahendrapāla, dated year 3 (c. 877):

By these villages beginning with Kuśasthala (Kānyakubja), Hari sought peace, and [because of these villages] the son of Gāndhārī (Duryodhana) abandoned his son, life, bowing brothers and names.⁶ After conquering [them], these villages were bestowed with a smile on the friend, the grandson of Yaśovarman (Cakrāyudha), by him (Dharmapāla), praiseworthy in war and voracious for enemies.⁷

This verse is also found in two other plates of the same king — the *Suvarnakarikadanda plate of Gopāla II, year 4 (no. 1)*, and the *Suvarnakarikadanda plate of Gopāla II, year 4 (no. 2)* — with a slight difference.⁸ The object of bestowal is changed to the villages including Kuśasthala, another name for Kānyakubja, for which a semi-historical episode from the *Mahābhārata*, the negotiation between Kṛṣṇa and Duryodhana, is provided. The appellation “the grandson of Yaśovarman” gives a clear identity to Cakrāyudha and his lineage.

6 Kuśasthala was one of the five villages (the others are Vṛkasthala, Māsandī, Vāraṇāvata and any village to be chosen by Duryodhana), of which the bestowal was stated by Yudhiṣṭhira as a condition for peace with the Kauravas in his message to be conveyed by Kṛṣṇa, who was despatched as envoy (*Mahābhārata* 5. 70. 15–16). As a result of the war which he could have avoided by conceding these villages to the Pāṇḍavas, Duryodhana lost his son Lakṣmaṇa Kumāra, his Kaurava brothers, and his reputation.

7 *Mohipur plate of Gopāla II, year 3, v. 5: yair grāmaiḥ sa-kuśasthala-prabhṛtibhiḥ sandhim yayāce harir gāndhāryās tanayo jahau sutam asūn bhrātṛṇ natān nāmakān| nirjityāhava-śālinā praṇayino naptur yaśovarmmaṇas te grāmā ripu-ghasmareṇa hasatā yena prasādi-kṛtāḥ||*

8 In these plates, *sutam* in the second *pāda* is presented as *sukham*, which functions as an adverb, ‘comfortably,’ for the verb ‘to abandon.’

After Gopāla II, the Pāla kingship shifted to the collateral line of Vākpāla, the younger brother of Dharmapāla. Dharmapāla continues to figure in the later Pāla grants, due to the importance of his relationship with his brother Vākpāla, who had served him as a military commander. The event related to Kannauj is also described in the *Bhagalpur plate of Nārāyaṇapāla, year 17* (c. 895):

After defeating the enemies beginning with Indrarāja, the acquired Goddess Fortune of Mahodaya (Kānyakubja) was given again by him, the strong one {Bali}, to the petitioner Cakrāyudha {the one holding a discus as his weapon (Viṣṇu)}, bent {becoming Vāmana} by bowing.⁹

The focus continues to be on the installation of Cakrāyudha by Dharmapāla. In this verse, the object of bestowal is abstracted to the personified royal fortune or kingship of Kānyakubja. The defeat of enemy kings beginning with Indrarāja and the comparison of Dharmapāla and Cakrāyudha to Bali and Vāmana — motifs added in the *Jagjibānpur plate of Mahendrapāla* — are repeated. Together with the choice of Mahodaya as a name denoting Kānyakubja, they suggest that the eulogy used in the latter plate was consulted in drafting the present one.¹⁰ This verse also appears in the *Bharat Kala Bhavan plate of Rājyapāla*, Nārāyaṇapāla's son, dated year 2 (c. 934), but it is not reproduced in the grants of the kings following him, though they continue to mention Dharmapāla.

The representation of the struggle over Kannauj in the Pāla grants is characterised by a single focus on one event, the installation of Cakrāyudha by Dharmapāla. While the event is embellished by associating it with mythical and epic motifs, the conflicts surrounding the event are barely depicted, except the defeat of Indrāyudha. The Pālas seem to have chosen their single moment of success as the theme, keeping their adversaries, and also their crushing defeats at the hands of the latter, out of sight.

9 *Bhagalpur plate of Nārāyaṇapāla, year 17, v. 3: jitvendra-rāja-prabhṛtīn arātīn upārjīṭā yena mahodaya-śrīḥ| dattā punaḥ sāvālinārthayitre cakrāyudhāyānati-vāmanāya||*

10 The consultation of eulogies used in the earlier charters is presumable from the adoption of the first two stanzas of the *Mohipur plate of Gopāla II, year 3*, to the first two stanzas of the *Bhagalpur plate of Nārāyaṇapāla, year 17*, with a slight modification. The Pāla chancellery seems to have kept drafts of eulogies used in the earlier royal charters. They were reproduced in the later grants and gave some consistency to the eulogies of the Pāla charters, especially the later ones.

4. The Gurjara-Pratihāras: valour and achievement

On the side of the Gurjara-Pratihāras, the earliest inscription mentioning the struggle over Kannauj is the *Stone inscription of Gallaka*, a subordinate ruler of Vatsarāja, dated ŚS 717 (795 CE). It contains the eulogy of the Gurjara-Pratihāra overlords, and one of the verses dedicated to Vatsarāja describes his victory over Dharmapāla in the following manner:

The royal fortune of the lord of Gauḍa, the master of the four oceans, which was like a village belle in battles and staying within a narrow space among an assembly of huge elephants, was obtained by him (Vatsarāja) who had unlimited forces, after killing a multitude of warriors in a combat, in his two arms hardened by blows of the string [attached to] the limbs of the bow whose tips made a sound destroying the pride of irresistible enemies.¹¹

The exaltation of the lord of Gauḍa, Dharmapāla, as the master of the four oceans heightens the status of Vatsarāja, the winner. On the other hand, an overtone of the military achievement and personal valour of Vatsarāja is recognisable in the expression.

A victory over Dharmapāla, along with the earlier victory over the Rāṣṭrakūṭa king depicted in the previous verse (5), is incorporated in the motif of the conquest of quarters (*digvijaya*), claiming universal lordship for Vatsarāja, in the next verse:

He (Vatsarāja) gained the kingship of the entire earth, after violently conquering the lord of Gauḍa, the king of kings who was the master of the southern region, and the Mlecchas and Kīras of the western and northern country.¹²

The eulogy of Vatsarāja is followed by that of Śrīvarmaka, a subordinate ruler, and his son Gallaka. Verses 17 to 19 depict Gallaka's contribution to the victory over the Pālas and the Rāṣṭrakūṭas:

11 *Stone inscription of Gallaka*, ŚS 717, v. 6: *durvvārārāti-garvvoddharaṇa-raṇa-raṇat-koṭi-kodaṇḍa-daṇḍa-jyā-ghāta-krūra-doṣṇor vikaṭa-kari-ghaṭā-saṅkaṭāntar-niviṣṭā| hatvājau yodha-vṛndān aparimīta-balenārjjitā rāja-lakṣmīḥ saṅgrāma-grāma-rāmā catur-udadhi-pater yena gauḍādhipasya||*.

12 *Stone inscription of Gallaka*, ŚS 717, v. 7: *gauḍa-nātham avajitya balād yo dakṣiṇāpatha-patiṃ ca nṛpeśam| mleccha-kīram aparottara-deśam sārvaabhauma-nṛpatitvam avāpa||*. In the third *pāda*, the original reading *aparottarandiśam* has been emended on the suggestion of Dániel Balogh, which makes the metre of this verse *svāgatā*, not an unidentified *mātrāsamaka* as proposed by Ramesh and Tewari (1975–76, 55).

In the war, there was the hero of Gauḍa, who had a sharp blade causing deadly wounds to enemies and burning splendour of the rays of the sun. After seeing the unharnessed elephants [of the Gauḍa hero] running away, the blade of his (Gallaka's) sword was like a laughter let loose {the unsheathed [sword] Aṭṭahāsa}.

He, a lion in the real sense, destroyed his enemies as if they were elephants, who had the wealth of haughtiness due to their beauty and the stream of tears of Vallabha broad and white at the front of the battle.

Out of regard, he (Gallaka) made illustrious Indrabhaṭa (Indrāyudha), the warrior, virtuous and knowing the truth of what should be done, all-pervasive in his own kingdom.¹³

Verses 17 and 18 claim his contribution to the victory over the strong Gauḍa hero Dharmapāla, and over Vallabha, a Rāṣṭrakūṭa king, with emphasis on his personal valour. Verse 19, in contrast, extends his contribution to the political domain, namely the re-installation of Indrāyudha, which could have been credited to Vatsarāja, his overlord.

A contribution to the victory over Dharmapāla is also claimed for Kakka II, a subordinate ruler of Nāgabhaṭa II, belonging to another Gurjara clan, in the *Jodhpur stone inscription of Bāuka*, his son, dated VS 894 (837 CE):

From him in turn was born the son Kakka (II) with great mind, united with fortune. By him was obtained fame in the battle with the Gauḍas at Mudgagiri.¹⁴

A concrete reference to Mudgagiri — present Munger — as the place of battle makes the claim credible, as his son and the composer of the eulogy intended.

One inscription of the Gurjara-Pratihāras themselves, the *Gwalior stone inscription of Bhoja I* (r. c. 836–885), describes the struggle over Kannauj in verses 9 and 10 eulogising Bhoja I's father Nāgabhaṭa II, while not mentioning any

13 *Stone inscription of Gallaka*, ŚS 717, vv. 17–19: *āsīd dviṣad-viśasana-kṣata-tikṣṇa-dhāro bhāsvat-karojvala-rucir yudhi gauḍa-vīraḥ| dṛṣṭvā vimukta-kariṇaḥ| prapalāyamānān muktāṭṭahāsa iva yasya kṛpāṇa-paṭṭaḥ|| mūrṭtyātimāna-dhanāḥ| samara-mukhoru-sita-vallabhāśru-dhārāḥ| yasya ripavo gajā iva naṣṭāḥ| paramārttha-kesariṇaḥ|| yaś cakāra nīje rājye sarvva-vyāpinam ādarāt| guṇinaṁ kārya-tattva-jñāṁ śrīmad-indrabhaṭaṁ bhaṭaṁ||*. The reading of verse 18 is uncertain and its metre, supposedly āryā, is broken. The estampage attached to the volume of *Epigraphia Indica* is not good enough to allow any improvement on the transcription by Ramesh and Tewari except correcting their reading of *-dhanāḥ* to *-dhanāḥ*. Accordingly, the translation presented here is provisional.

14 *Jodhpur stone inscription of Bāuka*, year 894 *Vikrama Era*, v. 24: *tato 'pi śrī-yutaḥ kakkāḥ puttro jāto mahā-matiḥ| yaśo mudgagirau lavdhaṁ yena gauḍai samāṁ rane||*.

achievement of Vatsarāja related to this struggle in the verses 6 and 7 dedicated to the latter:

After defeating Cakrāyudha {gaining the upper hand over Viṣṇu}, whose inferior character {dwarfish appearance} was made evident by his dependence on another {in taking refuge with an enemy}, he (Nāgabhaṭa II {Bali}) – the one wishing for the success of meritorious deeds founded on the three Vedas {craving the increase of benefits in the business of the three worlds}, who had a succession of taxes imposed (in a manner) fixed by the (proper) conduct of Kṣatriya estate {a collection of stories of Bali narrated (in a manner) connected with the rules of the condition of his power} – reigned with an attitude reverential to discipline {shone with a form humble because of modesty}.

Having subdued the master of Vaṅga, who was a terrible thick darkness consisting of the best elephants, a multitude of horses and a flock of vehicles of the irresistible enemy, he (Nāgabhaṭa II), came forth illuminating the three worlds on his own like the rising sun.¹⁵

Verse 9 emphasises his victory over Cakrāyudha, while referring to Dharmapāla indirectly as “another” on whom the former was dependent. Calling Dharmapāla the master of Vaṅga in verse 10 is rather a misnomer in view of the sub-regions under his control,¹⁶ but understandable as the cognition of outsiders. The emphasis on the greatness of Dharmapāla and his army in this verse accentuates the power of Nāgabhaṭa II who defeated him, while verse 9 extols his virtues by contrasting them with the lowly nature of Cakrāyudha.

The contribution to the victory over the Pālas is still mentioned in the later inscription of a subordinate ruler of the Gurjara-Pratihāras. In the *Chatsu stone inscription of Bālāditya* (r. c. 900–920), the Guhila king of Chatsu, Kṛṣṇarāja, Bālāditya’s great-great-grandfather, is credited with the victory over a Gauḍa king, presumably Dharmapāla.

Having previously made an oath, on the battlefield filled with a troop of excellent elephants, after defeating the warrior (*bhaṭa*), the king of Gauḍa, he

15 *Gwalior inscription of Bhoja I*, vv. 9–10: *ttrayy-āspadasya sukṛtasya samṛddhim icchur yaḥ kṣattra-dhāma-vidhi-vaddha-vali-pravandhaḥ| jītvā parāśraya-kṛta-sphuṭa-nīca-bhāvaṃ cakrāyudhaṃ vinaya-namra-vapur vvyarājat|| durvvāra-vairi-vara-vāraṇa-vāji-vāra-yānaughasamghaṭana-ghora-ghanāndhakāraṃ| nirjitya vaṅga-patim āvirabhūd vivasvān udyann iva ttri-jagad-eka-vikāsako yaḥ||*

16 For the location and character of Vaṅga, the southern sub-region of Bengal, see Furui (2020, 28–29).

(Kṛṣṇarāja) forcibly made the earth, seized in combat, an affectionate female servant of the two feet of his master (Nāgabhaṭa II). From him was born he, the king Śaṅkaragaṇa, who won many battles.¹⁷

In this expression too, the personal valour and military achievement of the protagonist loom large.

The eulogies of the Gurjara-Pratihāras tend to emphasise the valour and military achievement of the kings in the struggle over Kannauj. This may be due to the fact that most of them appear in the inscriptions of their subordinate rulers, who also claim their own contributions to the victories with emphasis on personal valour exhibited in the battlefields. This tendency is shared by the eulogy of the Gurjara-Pratihāra kings themselves in the Gwalior inscription, though it also tries to present Nāgabhaṭa II as a virtuous king superior to his opponents, Cakrāyudha and Dharmapāla.

5. The Rāṣṭrakūṭas: insignia and imperial vision

The earliest securely dated Rāṣṭrakūṭa inscription mentioning the struggle over Kannauj is the *Nesarikā grant of Govinda III, ŚS 727* (805 CE). Its verse 8, which is reproduced in all the charters of the same king and his brother Kambha, and the *Javakheda plates of Amoghavarṣa I* following the same *praśasti* template,¹⁸ extols the deed of Dhruva, the father of Govinda III, in the struggle as follows:

Speedily driving Vatsarāja, who was intoxicated by the royal fortune (*rājya-kamalā*) of Gauḍa appropriated easily, to the trackless centre of desert by his matchless army, he (Dhruva) took away from him not only a pair of umbrellas of the Gauḍa king, white like beams of the autumnal moon, but also at the same moment his fame standing at the end of the quarters of heaven.¹⁹

Dhruva's victory over Vatsarāja, who had defeated Dharmapāla, established his position superior to both. At the same time, it is remarkable that his superiority

17 *Chatsu stone inscription of Bālāditya*, v. 14: *pratijñāṃ prāk kṛtvodbhaṭa-kari-ghaṭā-saṅkata-raṇe bhaṭam jivā gauḍa-kṣitipam avaniṃ saṅgara-hṛtāṃ | valād dāsīm cakre prabhu-caraṇayor yaḥ praṇayinīm tato bhūpaḥ so 'bhūj jita-vahu-raṇaḥ śaṅkaragaṇaḥ ||*

18 For a list of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa inscriptions containing the same verse, labelled as stanza 8 of the genealogy '2' by Annette Schmiedchen, and the classified data of them, see Schmiedchen (2014, 33 Table 2, 468-471, 473, and 475, Nos 25-34, 40, and 46).

19 *Nesarikā grant of Govinda III, ŚS 727*, v. 8: *helā-svikṛta-gauḍa-rājya-kamalā-mattam praveśyācirāt durmmārgaṃ maru-madhyam aprativalair yo vatsarājaṃ valaiḥ | gauḍīyaṃ śarad-indu-pāda-dhavalam cchatra-dvayaṃ kevalam tasmān nāhṛta tad-yaśo 'pi kakubhām prāṃte sthitam tat-kaṣṇāt ||*

is expressed as his acquisition of two white umbrellas, the symbol of the kingship of Gauḍa.

The motif of the acquisition of royal insignia is repeated in a refined manner in verses 21 to 24 of the same charter, which eulogise Govinda III:

A fish from the lord of Pāṇḍya country, a bull from the master of the Pallavas, a tiger from the Cola, an elephant from the Gaṅga and a bow from the Kerala [king], a boar from the Andhra, Cālukya and Maurya [kings], a gentleman associated with a [door] panel (a doorkeeper) from the master of the Gūrjaras, a bull from the master of the Pallavas, the names (of each) from both the kings of Kosala and Avanti, and also from the Sīmhala [king], the renowned goddess Tārā from Dharma, the king of Vaṅgāla — thus having taken away these and other insignia of kings, Jagattuṅga {the one at the peak of the world} (Govinda III) bestowed the seal of Garuḍa on the entire world.²⁰

As many as thirteen kings, including the Pallava king mentioned twice, are listed as those from whom Govinda III took away their royal insignia. Among them, Dharmapāla, the Pāla king, receives a special treatment. He is explicitly mentioned by name, and his royal emblem, the Goddess Tārā, is described as “renowned,” though calling him the king of Vaṅgāla is a bit of misnomer, another case of the misconception of outsiders.²¹ Still, he is depicted as one of the kings over whom the Rāṣṭrakūṭa king wielded suzerainty represented by the Garuḍa seal. The same can be said of the Gurjara-Pratihāra king, presumably Nāgabhaṭa II, whose royal insignia were also taken away. Thus, the motif of royal insignia merges with the imperial vision, and both rivals in the struggle over Kannauj are incorporated in the order headed by the Rāṣṭrakūṭa king.

The motif of the acquisition of symbols of kingship is also worked out in the *Baroda plates of Karka II*, a ruler of the collateral Rāṣṭrakūṭa lineage of Gujarat serving Govinda III, dated ŚS 734 (812 CE), in describing the deed of Dhruva:

20 *Nesarikā grant of Govinda III*, ŚS 727, vv. 21–24: *pāṇḍya-deśādhipān matsyaṁ vṛṣabhaṁ pallaveśvarāc| colād vyāghraṁ gajaṁ gaṅgāc cāpa-yaṣṭim ca keralāt|| andhra-cālukya-mauryebhyo varāhaṁ gūryareśvarāt| phalaka-prativaddhāryaṁ vṛṣabhaṁ pallaveśvarāt|| kosalāvanti-nāthābhyāṁ sīmhālād api nāmakam| tāraṁ bhagavatīm khyātām dharmād vaṅgāla-bhūmipāt|| ittham etāny athānyāni cihnāny ādāya bhū-bhujām| garuḍāṅkaṁ jagattuṅgo vyadhatta sakalaṁ jagat||*. Annette Schmiechen (2014, 85) points out the fact that only the *Nesarikā grant* contains these stanzas.

21 For Vaṅgāla denoting the coastal area of southeastern Bengal constituting a part of Vaṅga, see Furui (2020, 29).

To him (Dhruva) was born the son, Govindarāja, a Puruṣa of fame. He (Dhruva), taking both Gaṅgā and Yamunā, beautiful with waves, from the enemies, at the same time acquired the lordship of the highest position in person as well as on the pretext of symbols, as if the quarters were pervaded by his roaming virtues whose profusion was not measurable by [his own] body.²²

Here, obtaining Gaṅgā and Yamunā, in images or as jars of their water,²³ is equated with the acquisition of the territory between the two rivers. Both symbolise universal kingship.

The deeds of Dhruva and Govinda III in the struggle over Kannauj are also described in the inscriptions of the time of Amoghavarṣa I (r. c. 814–878), the latter's son. The first case to mention is verse 5 of the *Nilgund stone inscription* eulogising Govinda III, dated year ŚS 788 (866 CE), which is also found in the *Sirur stone inscription* of the same year:

Having bound the Keralas, Mālavas and Gauḍas, along with the Gurjaras, those staying at the fort of Citrakūṭa mountain and the masters of Kāñcī, he (Govinda III) became a Nārāyaṇa of fame (Kīrtinārāyaṇa).²⁴

In this description, the Pālas are incorporated in the scheme of the conquest of the quarters as the rulers of the east, while the Keralas, Mālavas and the Pallavas of Kāñcī constitute the kings of other three directions. The Gurjara-Pratihāras are given a secondary treatment alongside the three kings, together with some anonymous kings staying at the Citrakūṭa fort, which may include the Guhilas subordinate to the Gurjara-Pratihāras.

The *Sanjan plates of Amoghavarṣa I*, dated ŚS 793 (871 CE), on the other hand, give descriptions with more specificity, depicting a deed of Dhruva in the following manner:

He (Dhruva) took away the white umbrellas, which were lotuses for the play of Lakṣmī, of the king of Gauḍa running away in the middle of the Gaṅgā and Yamunā.²⁵

22 *Baroda plates of Karka II*, ŚS 734, v. 17: *yo gaṅgā-yamune taraṅga-subhage gṛhṇan parebhyaḥ samarṇ| sākṣāc cihna-nibhena cottama-padaṁ tat prāptavān aiśvaraṁ| dehāsammīta-vaibhavair iva guṇair yyasya bhramadbhir ddiśo| vyāptās tasya babhūva kīrtti-puruṣo govinda-rājaḥ sutah||*

23 For the interpretation that Gaṅgā and Yamunā denote jars of their water, the acquisition of which symbolises universal sovereignty, see Inden (1990, 259).

24 *Nilgund stone inscription of the time of Amoghavarṣa I*, ŚS 788, v. 5: *keṛaḷa-māḷava-gauḍān sa-gurjarāṁś citrakūṭa-giri-durgga-sthān| baddhvā kāñcīśān atha sa kīrttinārāyaṇo jātaḥ||*

25 *Sanjan plates of Amoghavarṣa I*, ŚS 793, v. 14: *gaṅgā-yamunayor mmadhye rājño gauḍasya naśyataḥ| lakṣmī-līlāravindāni śveta-cchattraṇi yo harat||*

The motif of the acquisition of royal insignia reappears here with the addition of a specific incident, the defeat of Dharmapāla at the area between the two rivers.

The tendency towards specificity is also found in the verses describing the deeds of Govinda III, which refer to the names of the kings.

After snatching away the irremovable true fame of the two kings Nāgabhaṭa [II] and Candragupta in battles, then he (Govinda III), devoted to the acquisition of fame, uprooted kings deficient in fortitude on [their] own land and planted others in [their] position, like paddy seedlings.

The water of springs at the mountains of Himavat was drunk by [his] horses, and that of the Gaṅgā by [his] elephants. And the roar of its (Gaṅgā's) thundering in its ravine was doubled again by musical instruments (*tūrya*) accompanying [his ritual] immersion. Those Dharma and Cakrāyudha surrendered themselves to him (Govinda III), the great one. He was (like) Himavat, as he attained resemblance [to it] in terms of fame, so that he was [called] Nārāyaṇa of fame (Kīrtinārāyaṇa).²⁶

The defeat of Nāgabhaṭa II and Candragupta, the Pāṇḍuvamśin king of Dakṣiṇa Kosala, and the voluntary submission of Dharmapāla and Cakrāyudha are embedded in the lofty claim of uprooting and implanting kings, and conquest reaching the Himalayan Mountains.

The eulogies in the Rāṣṭrakūṭa inscriptions referring to the struggle over Kannauj show their peculiarity in a recurrent rhetoric of the acquisition of royal insignia equated with kingship. This rhetoric is combined with the specificity of the involved persons, locations, and events. Remarkably, both rhetoric and specificity are played out in reference to the imperial vision, in which the Rāṣṭrakūṭa kings reign over all the other kings on the earth, including the Pālas and the Gurjara-Pratihāras, the main adversaries in the struggle over Kannauj.

26 *Sanjan plates of Amoghavarṣa I, ŚS 793, vv. 22–23: sa nāgabhaṭa-candragupta-nṛpayor yaśo 'ryam raṇeṣv ahāryam apahārya dhairya-vikalān athonmūlayat| yaśorjjana-paro nṛpān sva-bhuvi śāli-sasyān iva punaḥ punar atiṣṭhipat sva-pada eva cānyān api|| himavat-parvata-nirjharāmvu turagaiḥ pītañ ca gāṃgañ gajair ddhvanitañ majjana-tūryakair dviguṇitañ bhūyo 'pi tat-kandare| svayam evopanatau ca yasya mahatas tau dharmā-cakrāyudhau himavān kīrtti-sarūpatām upagatas tat kīrtti-nārāyaṇaḥ||.*

6. Concluding remarks

In depicting the same events in the struggle over Kannauj, the eulogies in the inscriptions of the Pālas, the Gurjara-Pratihāras, and the Rāṣṭrakūṭas show differences in their emphases and perspectives. The Pāla eulogies are devoted to a single event, the coronation of Cakrāyudha by Dharmapāla, obscuring the presence of adversaries other than Indrāyudha. The Gurjara-Pratihāras emphasise the personal valour and military achievements of the kings and their subordinate rulers. In the eulogies of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa kings, the acquisition of the royal insignia of other kings, who are incorporated into their imperial order, looms large.

This difference, on the one hand, could come from the different degrees and forms of involvement in the struggle, and the outcomes from them. The Pālas, on the losing side despite being a main participant, have to concentrate on the one moment of their glory. The Gurjara-Pratihāras, another active participant and the ultimate winner, boast their victory achieved by valour. The Rāṣṭrakūṭas, for whom the struggle over Kannauj was just one of the military campaigns they fought in all the directions, locate their victories within the imperial vision.

On the other hand, the difference could be connected with the power structures reflected in the inscriptions. The Pālas, who kept their subordinate rulers under check, consistently narrate the single story of royal success in the grants they issued monopolistically. In case of the Gurjara-Pratihāras, both the kings and autonomous subordinate rulers under them present diverse moments of valour and achievement as shared memories in their respective inscriptions. The Rāṣṭrakūṭas, competing with other imperial contenders for supremacy, put more emphasis on the capture of royal insignia, which symbolically demonstrates their superiority over other kings in their own inscriptions.

All the participants, even the Pālas, shared a particular notion of power and order of their period, represented by concepts of *digvijaya* and universal kingship over all the others. How it could be, or could not be, substantiated in eulogies depended on the actuality of political events and power structures, as the depictions analysed above show.

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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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