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Maṭhas in Early Medieval Bengal: A Delineation from Two Inscriptions

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Abstract

The Brahmanical monastic institution called *maṭha* was an important element of the religious landscape of early medieval Bengal. Its history from the mid-sixth century onwards can be traced in fragmentary inscriptional references. The Paschimbhag copperplate inscription and the Bangarh stone slab inscription give exceptionally rich information on the organisation of the *maṭha* and activities around it. The *maṭhas* in both inscriptions were complexes established by royal patronage and functioned as centres of worship and learning. They do, however, show some differences closely related to their different locational and social contexts. The *maṭha* in the Paschimbhag plate functioned as the centre of a newly-settled *brāhmaṇa* community in a rural area, while that in the Bangarh inscription functioned as the semi-urban residence of a lineage of Śaiva ascetics connected with a wider monastic network. This difference had implications for the later histories of their respective constituencies.

Keywords

South Asia – Bengal – early medieval – epigraphy – monastic institution – Śaiva

Introduction

Maṭhas, Brahmanical monastic institutions which may have been established as a counterpart to Buddhist and Jain *vihāras*,¹ have been an important element of the religious landscape of South Asia since their emergence in

the early medieval period. Their presence in early medieval Bengal can be inferred from inscriptional evidence in this region and beyond.² Nevertheless, we have so far no ruins of *maṭhas* assignable to the early medieval period in Bengal, which would have given us a clue to their structure, in contrast to Central India, where the ruins of Śaiva *maṭhas* still remain and are studied thoroughly.³ Descriptions of *maṭhas* in the inscriptions, mostly prepared in connection with the foundation of these institutions or endowments to them by kings or other agents, are rather simple and stereotypical. There are, however, a few inscriptions which provide us with substantial information on the organisation of *maṭhas* and activities around them. In the present article, I will present two such inscriptions, namely, the Paschimbhag copperplate inscription of Śricandra and the Bangarh stone slab inscription of the time of Nayapāla, respectively datable to the first half of the tenth century and the second quarter of the eleventh century, and discuss the organisational character of *maṭhas* in early medieval Bengal and the religious and other activities surrounding them through the analysis of these inscriptions.

Before the main body of the discussion, I would like to present an overview of the inscriptional references to *maṭhas* in early medieval Bengal.

Epigraphic References to *Maṭhas* in Early Medieval Bengal: An Overview

So far, the earliest inscriptional reference to a *maṭha* in Bengal is found in the Jayarampur copperplate inscription of the time of Gopacandra dated year 1, assignable to the second half of the sixth century, pertaining to Daṇḍa *bhukti*, the area adjacent to present Odisha. In it, *mahāsāmanta mahārāja* Acyuta, a petitioner for the purchase and donation of a village, mentions deities, *brāhmaṇas*, *maṭhas*, *vihāras*, and dwellings, presumably of ascetics, as entities for which many good people had purchased and donated villages, land plots and homesteads in an administrative unit called Śvetavālikā *vithī*.⁴

1 For the evolution of Śaiva monasticism in relation to the development of Jain institutions in the Deccan and other regions, see Nandi 1973: 76–81.

2 Bhattacharyya 2004.

3 Sears 2014.

4 Jayarampur plate of the time of Gopacandra, year 1, ll. 13–16: *prārthitā* (14) *vayaṃ śrī-mahāsāmanta-mahārājācyutena yuṣmad-vithyām sādhubhir anekair ācandrārkkakālīna-tāmra-paṭṭa-paṭa-śāsana-sthityā satā-mūhyena* (15) *grāma-ṣṣetra-vāstūni yuṣmat(·) kṛtvā?kṛtvā deva-dvija-maṭha-vihārāvasathebhyo 'tisṛṣṭā?t?(n)y atisṛjyamānāni (ta)th(ai)va samyak prati(16)pālyamānāny eti?(nūti)*. For transcriptions of inscriptional texts, I

This sentence shows that *maṭhas* had been recognised as religious institutions comparable with Buddhist or Jain *vihāras* by that time.⁵

The presence of a *maṭha* and its landholdings in eastern Bengal in the following period is attested by the Uriswar plate of Śrīdhāraṇarāta, assignable to the second half of the seventh century, which mentions a land plot of Yogeśvara *maṭha* and a plot of donated land of the master (*īśvara*) of the same *maṭha* as boundary markers of the donated tracts.⁶ The “master” could denote the head of the institution, indicating some form of hierarchy or organisation among members of the *maṭha*.

Two copperplate inscriptions of eastern Bengal from the seventh century, close to the aforementioned plate of Śrīdhāraṇarāta both in place and time, record the foundation of *maṭhas* as abodes of deities, and the donation of land tracts for the deities and groups of *brāhmaṇas*. In the Tippera plate of Lokanātha, datable to the second half of the seventh century, *mahāsāmanta* Pradośaśarman, a subordinate ruler, announces his establishment of the deity Anantanāryaṇa in a forest tract after building an abode of the deity (*devāvasatha*),⁷ and asks Lokanātha, his overlord, to bestow this forest tract for the regular practice of offerings of eight flowers (*aṣṭapuṣpikā*), food (*balī*), milk rice (*caru*) and charitable feeding (*sattra*) for the deity, and to noble *brāhmaṇas* knowing the four Vedas who formed a community at the locality.⁸ Approving his petition, Lokanātha donates the tract for the deity and a large number of *brāhmaṇas* with their service providers,⁹ and states the

follow the editorial conventions of the DHARMA Project (ERC n°809994), available at <https://dharmalekha.info/editorial-conventions>, through the present article.

5 Some copperplate inscriptions of Bengal belonging to the fifth and sixth centuries mention Jain *vihāras*; Griffiths 2018: 45–50.

6 Uriswar plate of Śrīdhāraṇarāta, l. 27: *yogeśvara-maṭha-kṣette*; l. 26: *pūrvveṇa yogeśvara-maṭheśvara-tāmra-kṣett(r)a*. Cf. Islam 2012: 66.

7 Tippera plate of Lokanātha, ll. 21–22: *mahāsāmanta-pradośaśarmaṇā vijñāpitā vayaṃ su(vvu)ṅga-viśaye mṛga-mahiṣa-varāha-vyāghra-sarḷi?(ī)sṛpādibhir yatheccham anubhūyamāna-gr(ha?)-(22)sambhoga-gahana-gulma-latā-vitāne kṛtākṛtāvīruddhātāvī-bhū-khaṇḍ;o?(e) ma(yā?) devāvasatha{ṃ}ṇī kāravitvā bhagavān aviditānto (ṅ)nanta-nārāyaṇa(h) sthāpayita ...*; Sircar 1983: 31.

8 Tippera plate, ll. 24–26: (ṅ)nanta-nārāyaṇasya satatam aṣṭa-puṣpikā-vali-caru-satra-pravṛttaye tatra kṛta-sāmānyānāñ ca cātur-vidya-vrāhmaṇā(ryā)ṇām ... (25) [kṛtākṛ]tāvīruddhātāvī-bhū-khaṇḍa[h] tāmre 'bhilikhya mātā-pitror mama ca puṇya-pravṛ(ddhaye) sarvato bhogenā(gra)hāra ... (26) ... (loka?)nāthe;ṇ?(n)a ... pratipā(ditah?); Sircar 1983: 31.

9 For the names of 192 *brāhmaṇas* and six service providers, see Furui 2017: 213–215.

accomplishment of the manner of worship of the deity Anantanārāyaṇa at the *maṭha* belonging to him as one of the purposes of the endowment.¹⁰ The Kalapur plate of Maruṇḍanātha, pertaining to northeast Bengal in the seventh century, also refers to the establishment of a deity named Anantanārāyaṇa by the *brāhmaṇa* Jayasvāmin after building a *maṭha* on a donated land plot, and to his request for the donation of land for the practice of offerings of food and milk rice, and charitable feeding for the deity and to noble *brāhmaṇas* knowing the three Vedas, who formed a community at the locality.¹¹ Though the corrosion of the plate does not allow us to fully comprehend its contents, the donor, *sāmanta* Maruṇḍanātha or his son, seems to have donated “the land tract of water and forest” (*jalāṭavī-bhū-khaṇḍa*) to “the deity and *brāhmaṇas* of the *maṭha*” (*maṭha-deva-dvijebhyaḥ*).¹²

The services for the deity Anantanārāyaṇa listed in these two inscriptions are almost the same as those rendered to deities installed at their shrines (*devakula/āyatana*),¹³ indicating that the function of a *maṭha* was somewhat comparable with that of a shrine. This interpretation is strengthened by the synonymous use of *maṭha* and “abode of deity” (*devāvasatha*) in the Tippera plate of Lokanātha mentioned above. On the other hand, the land endowment to *brāhmaṇas*, who were to be settled in the forest tracts where a *maṭha* was established, suggests their newly-made association with the institution, with which they shared interest in the granted land tract. *Brāhmaṇas* belonging to *pañcamathā*,¹⁴ who were the recipients of a land donation together with the Buddhist *saṅgha* of the Dharmasabha *vihāra* in the Bangladesh National Museum metal vase inscription of Devātideva, assignable to the area around Chittagong in the early eighth century, could also be such *brāhmaṇas* associated with *maṭha* organisation(s). The Ashmolean Museum metal vase

10 Tippera plate, l. 32: *Etadīya-maṭhe bhagavato* (‘)nanta-nārāyaṇasya pūjā-vidhi-sampattaye; Sircar 1983: 32.

11 Kalapur plate of Maruṇḍanātha, obverse, ll. 18–19: *jayasvāminā vayam eva jñāpitā viṣaye samvaddha ... jalā ... śrūtandreṇā ... sthaliḥ khaṇḍa-dattaka-kṣetra-pāṭake mayā maṭhaṅ kārayitvā bha(19)gavān anantanārāyaṇa(ḥ) sthāpita-pādas (tatra kṛta)-sāmānyānāḥ ca traī-vidya-vrāhmaṇāryāṇām*; Gupta 1967: 70.

12 Kalapur plate, obverse, ll. 21, 23; Gupta 1967: 70.

13 Jagadishpur plate of the time of Kumāragupta I, year 128 Gupta Era, ll. 10–11: *bhagavatas sahasra-raśmeḥ kāritaka-devakule ca bali-caru-sa[ttra]-(11)pravartta; n?(n)āya*; Plate of Vainyagupta, year 184 Gupta Era, ll. 12–13: *jayanāṭane bhagavataś catur-mmukha-mūrter mmanibhadrasya nāthameṭāyatanam kāritan tasya bhagavataḥ s(uma)no-gandha-dhūpa-va(13)lī-caru-sattra-pravarttanāya*; Furui 2016: 660.

14 Bangladesh National Museum metal vase inscription of Devātideva, year 77, l. 10: *pañca-maṭhīya-brāhmaṇānām dattaḥ*. Whether *pañca-maṭha* denotes the proper name of a *maṭha* or five *maṭhas* cannot be ascertained from the context.

inscription of Attākaradeva pertaining to the same area, assignable to the early tenth century, on the other hand, mentions a *maṭhikā* as a facility where the Buddha was installed and worshipped, buttressing the observation that the function of a *maṭha* was close to that of a shrine,¹⁵ even among Buddhists in this particular case.

The reference to a *maṭha* in connection with ascetics is found in the Nimgachi stone slab inscription of Pāhila, a subordinate ruler of the Pāla king Devapāla, which belongs to the first half of the ninth century. The inscription records the donation of a *maṭha* by Pāhila to Vaiṣṇava mendicants (*pravrajita*) presumably for their residence.¹⁶ Another inscription of a Pāla subordinate ruler, on the other hand, mentions his foundation of *maṭhas*. The Bhaturiya stone slab inscription of Yaśodāsa, a subordinate of Rājyapāla, assignable to the mid-tenth century, records the establishment of a Śaiva temple complex (a Śiva *liṅga* installed at a temple surrounded by eight shrines) by Yaśodāsa, and the donation of the village Madhusrava to the deity by king Rājyapāla, with some amount of tax retained by the latter.¹⁷ The verses recording these donative acts are preceded by a eulogy of Yaśodāsa, in which he is credited with the construction of *maṭhas*, in addition to other meritorious deeds, including the establishment of shrines and other buildings, lakes/reservoirs and embankments, sacrifices and charitable feedings.¹⁸ Among the buildings established by him, *maṭhas* and shrines (*deva-geha*) are said to have been made of stones that were black like clouds.

15 Ashmolean Museum metal vase inscription of Attākaradeva, ll. 6–8: *tena prāpta-pañcamahāśavdena mahāpratihāra-śrī-sa(ha)devena mātā-pitror ātmanah sakalasya ca (7) satva-rāśer anuttarāyāḥ samyak-samvodher adhigamaika-hetoḥ punyasyābhivṛddhyai bhagavantam sakala-surāsurendra-vṛnda{m}-vandita{m}-caraṇāravinda-yugalām munindra-bhaṭṭārakam uddiśya maṭhikā kārītā| ta(8)syām sthāpitasya tathāgata-bhaṭṭārakasya yathā-vidhi pūjā-pravarttanāya.*

16 Nimgachi stone slab inscription of Pāhila, ll. 12–14, verse 11: *tenāsmīn kali-kā(13)lakalmaṣa-muṣā kīrtīm sthīrām taḥ?{n}vatā lakṣmī-nātha-samarppitācala-dhīyā tad-bhaktimadbhyaḥ sadā| sampaj-jīvita-yauvanāni capalāny ālocya dharmam (14) sthīram dattaḥ pravrajitebhya Eṣa vivudha-sthānānukārī maṭhaḥ||.*

17 Bhaturiya stone slab inscription of Yaśodāsa, ll. 14–17, verses 11–12: *Aṣṭābhiḥ suramandiraiḥ parivṛtam (15) prāsādam abhram-liham sampādyendu-marici-jāla-dhavalair lliptam sudhā-karddamaiḥ| tenāyam naya-śālīnā śuci-śīlā-vinyasta-liṅgākṛtir bhaktyā (16) dharma-parāyāṇena bhagavān āropitāś saṅkaraḥ|| Asmai yaśodāsa-niveśitāya śrī-rājyapālo vṛṣabha-dhvajāya| śatam purāṇān nikaram nīyamyā (17) madhusravam grāmam adāt kṣītīśaḥ||.*

18 Bhaturiya stone slab, ll. 12–14, verses 9–10: *toyādhārair amṛta-śīśirair ājya-dhārā-vinidrair agny-āgārair upahita-sudhair yajvanām mandiraiś ca| vidyā-sattrair ghana-śīti-śīlair deva-(13)gehair mmaṭhair vā naika-dvārā diśi diśi guṇair yasya jāgartti kīrtiḥ|| Ārāma-s(e)tu-maṭha-maṇḍapa-sattra-dāna-prāsāda-saṅkrama-jalāśaya-(14)sanniveśaiḥ| tair ebhir ātma-caritokti-padaih praśastair yaḥ svam praśasti-pṛthu-pīṭham ivākṛtorvīm||.*

The active involvement of the Pāla kings with the foundation of *maṭhas* is glimpsed from the Siyan stone slab inscription of the time of Nayapāla, datable to the second quarter of the eleventh century. The inscription seems to contain the eulogy of the Pāla kings mentioning their establishment of temples and other religious facilities in various places of Bengal and Bihar, though the full picture is unavailable due to the mutilated condition of the stone slab. The inscription still gives some fragmentary information which includes the following references to *maṭhas* founded by some Pāla kings or members of the royal household at unidentifiable locations: 1) a *maṭha* of two stories as a residence for an unknown category of people,¹⁹ 2) a *maṭha*, a lake, and a house of Śambhu (Śiva) called Varākeśvara,²⁰ 3) a *maṭha* for the residence of ascetics and a pond at the king's own city,²¹ and 4) a *maṭha* where one *cakravartin*, presumably a Pāla king, established Vaikuṅṭha (Viṣṇu) after constructing it.²²

The inscriptions reviewed above show that the characteristics of *maṭhas* differed in particular periods and areas. *Maṭhas* in eastern Bengal in the seventh and eighth centuries were hardly differentiated from shrines of Brahmanical and Buddhist deities in their function as venues of worship. They were also characterised by their association with newly-settled *brāhmaṇas*. On the other hand, *maṭhas* in the period from the ninth century onwards, mostly in northern and western Bengal, were residences of ascetics of both Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva affiliations, though they also retain their function as venues of worship.

While the above-mentioned inscriptional references enable us to discern the two characteristics of *maṭhas* in early medieval Bengal, they do not provide much information on the structure and organisation of *maṭhas*. The Paschimbhag plate of Śricandra and the Bangarh stone slab inscription of the time of Nayapāla are exceptions which give detailed information on these aspects of *maṭhas*. I now proceed to the analysis of these inscriptions.

Paschimbhag Plate of Śricandra: *Maṭha* Complex in a *Brahmāpura*

Śricandra, the issuer of the Paschimbhag copperplate inscription, was the fourth in the line of the Candras who started their career as subordinate rulers

- 19 Siyan stone slab inscription of the time of Nayapāla, l. 16, verse 24: ...-vāsāya maṭho divi-bhūmaḥ||; Sircar 1971: 53.
- 20 Siyan stone slab, ll. 19–20, verse 32: ... yayā maṭhañ ca sara(20)sīñ ca| dhāma varākeśvara Iti śambhor api śailam uttālam||; Sircar 1971: 53.
- 21 Siyan stone slab, l. 32, verse 59: maṭhañ ca tāpasa-sthityai nīje tu nagare saraḥ||; Sircar 1971: 55.
- 22 Siyan stone slab, l. 33, verse 61: ... (33) taran tac cakravartīha saḥ| kṛtvāmum maṭham etam atra nidadhe vaikuṅṭham asminn ayan devo raivata-bhūbhṛtīva rucire ...; Sircar 1971: 55.

in Rohitagiri and then in Candradvīpa under the kings of Harikela, the area around present-day Chittagong. During the reigns of Trailokyacandra and his son Śrīcandra, the Candras grew to become the sovereign rulers of the whole of eastern Bengal, except Harikela.²³ The Paschimbhag plate, dated year 5 of his reign and assignable to the first half of the tenth century, is so far the earliest of the copperplate charters of Śrīcandra, of which eight have been published in one way or another to date,²⁴ and the only one pertaining to Śrīhaṭṭa, the northeastern sub-region of Bengal.

The Paschimbhag plate records the royal donation of a large tract of land to nine *maṭhas* and 6,000 *brāhmaṇas*. It is issued from a military camp pitched at Vikramapura, the capital of the Candras, and is addressed to several groups of people, including officials and the local residents in the three *viṣayas* (districts) of Garalā, Pogāra and Candrapura, accompanied by the land called Avedikā, which belonged to Tāla *varga* of Śrīhaṭṭa *maṇḍala* in Pauṇḍravardhana *bhukti*.²⁵

The announcement by the king to the addressees is given as his statement in first person. It first says that the king made those three *viṣayas*, for which boundary markers for the four cardinal directions are given, into a *brahmāpura*, which seems to denote a special area assigned to *brāhmaṇas*, named Śrīcandrapura.²⁶ Then the *maṭhas* in Śrīcandrapura are mentioned with their personnel and purposes to which land plots of particular size, computed in a unit of *pāṭaka* equalling 10 *dronas*,²⁷ are allotted. The first is Brahmā and his *maṭha*, for which 81 people are listed and 120 *pāṭakas* of land are allotted in total. The details are given as follows:

- 1) 1 teacher (*upādhyāya*) of the *Candravyākhyāna*: 10 *pāṭakas*.
- 2) 10 pupils (*chātra*), for stipulated meals (*pālī*) and woollen clothes (*phuṭṭaka*): 10 *pāṭakas* (1 *pāṭaka* each).
- 3) 5 guest (*apūrva*) *brāhmaṇas*, to be provided food every day: 5 *pāṭakas* (1 *pāṭaka* each).

23 For the political history of the Candras, see Chowdhury 1967: 150–189. For an updated description, with the addition of rather untenable interpretations, see Islam 2018: 610–637.

24 For the list of these plates, see Furui 2020: 261–262, nos. 54–61. Apart from these, two more unpublished plates are known: one kept at the Bangladesh National Museum with Acc. No. 77. 1477 (Islam 2018: 611) and another held by a private collector (personal communication by late Gouriswar Bhattacharya).

25 Paschimbhag plate of Śrīcandra, year 5, ll. 25–34. For the list of addressees, see Furui 2020: 138, Table 5.2 a.

26 Paschimbhag plate, ll. 34–36: *viṣayān etāN pūrvveṇa vṛhat-kotṭāli sīmā| dakṣiṇena maṇi-nadī sīmā| paści(me)(35)na jujū-khātaka kāṣṭhaparṇṇī-khātaka vetraghaṭi-nadī sīmā| Uttareṇa kośyāra-nadī sīmā| Ity evaṃ catus-sīmā-paryantāN śrī-śrī(36)candrapurābhīdhānam vrahmāpuram parikalpya|*

27 A *pāṭaka* is said to be *daśa-dronika*; Paschimbhag plate, ll. 36–37, 54.

- 4) 1 *brāhmaṇa* executive who supervised this (arrangement): 1 *pāṭaka*.
- 5) 1 astrologer (*gaṇaka*): 1 *pāṭaka*.
- 6) 1 scribe (*kāyastha*): 2½ *pāṭakas*.
- 7) 4 garland-makers (*mālākāra*): ½ *pāṭaka* each (2 *pāṭakas*).
- 8) 2 oil-pressers (*tailika*): ½ *pāṭaka* each (1 *pāṭaka*).
- 9) 2 potters (*kumbhakāra*): ½ *pāṭaka* each (1 *pāṭaka*).
- 10) 5 *kāhala* players: ½ *pāṭaka* each (2½ *pāṭakas*).
- 11) 2 conch shell blowers (*śaṅkha-vādaka*): ½ *pāṭaka* each (1 *pāṭaka*).
- 12) 2 *dhakkā* drum players (*dhakkā-vāda*): ½ *pāṭaka* each (1 *pāṭaka*).
- 13) 8 kettle-drummers (*drāgaḍika*): ½ *pāṭaka* each (4 *pāṭakas*).
- 14) 22 workers and leatherworkers (*karmmakara-carmmakāra*): ½ *pāṭaka* each (11 *pāṭakas*).
- 15) 1 dancer (*naṭa*): 2 *pāṭakas*.
- 16) 2 carpenters (*sūtradhāra*): 2 *pāṭakas* each (4 *pāṭakas*).
- 17) 2 architects (*sthapati*): 2 *pāṭakas* each (4 *pāṭakas*).
- 18) 2 blacksmiths (*karmmakāra*): 2 *pāṭakas* each (4 *pāṭakas*).
- 19) 8 courtesans (*beṭikā*): ¾ *pāṭakas* each (6 *pāṭakas*).
- 20) Repairs (*navakarmma*): 47 *pāṭakas*.²⁸

Then two groups of four *maṭhas*, namely, the foreign (*deśāntarīya*) and Vaṅgāla *maṭhas* of Vaiśvānara (Agni), Yogeśvara, Jaimani (Jaimini) and Mahākāla, are mentioned with their personnel, purposes and land allotment, which amount to 170 people and 280 *pāṭakas* in total. The first detailed among them is:

- 1) 8 teachers of *Ṛg*, *Yajus*, *Sāma* and *Atharva* (*Vedas*) belonging to both groups of *maṭhas*: 10 *pāṭakas* each (80 *pāṭakas*).

Following them are the personnel and so on of each *maṭha*:

- 2) 5 pupils: 5 *pāṭakas* (1 *pāṭaka* each) / 40 heads: 40 *pāṭakas* in sum.
- 3) 1 garland maker: ½ *pāṭaka* / 8 heads: 4 *pāṭakas* in sum.
- 4) 1 barber (*nāpita*): ½ *pāṭaka* / 8 heads: 4 *pāṭakas* in sum.
- 5) 1 oil-presser: ½ *pāṭaka* / 8 heads: 4 *pāṭakas* in sum.

28 Paschimbhag plate, ll. 36–42: *vrahmaṇe| Etan-maṭha-prativaddha-candra-vyākhyānopādhyāyasya da(37)śa-dronika-daśa-pāṭakāḥ| daśa-cchātrāṇām pāliphuṭṭakārtham daśa-pāṭakāḥ Apūrvva-pañca-vrāhmaṇānām praty-aham bhaktan dātum pañca-pā(38)ṭakāḥ| Etad adhiṣṭhāya kārayitur vrāhmaṇasya pāṭakaḥ| gaṇakasya pāṭakaḥ| kāyasthasya sārddha-pāṭaka-dvayam| mālākāra-catusta(39)yasya| tailika-dvayasya| kumbhakāra-dvayasya| pañca-kāhalikānām| śaṅkha-vādaka-dvayasya| dhakkā-vāda-dvayasya| Aṣṭa-drāgaḍikā(40)nām| dvāviṅśati-karmmakara-carmmakārāṇāṃ ca| pratyekam| Arddha-pāṭakaḥ| naṭasya pāṭaka-dvayam| sūtradhāra-dvayasya| sthapati-dvayasya| karmmakā(41)ra-dvayasya ca| pratyekam pāṭaka-dvayam| Aṣṭa-veṭṭikānām pratyekam pādona-pāṭakaḥ| navakarmma-nimittāṃ ca sapta-catvāriṅśat-pāṭakāḥ| E(42)vam anena niyamena viṅśaty-adhika-pāṭaka-śataṃ|.*

- 6) 1 washerman (*rajaka*): $\frac{1}{2}$ *pāṭaka* / 8 heads: 4 *pāṭakas* in sum.
- 7) 8 workers and leatherworkers: $\frac{1}{2}$ *pāṭaka* each (4 *pāṭakas*) / 64 heads: 32 *pāṭakas* in sum.
- 8) 2 courtesans: $\frac{3}{4}$ *pāṭaka* each ($1\frac{1}{2}$ *pāṭakas*) / 16 heads: 12 *pāṭakas* in sum.
- 9) Repairs: 10 *pāṭakas* / 80 *pāṭakas* in sum.

Then personnel of each group of 4 *maṭhas* and land allotted to them are given as follows:

- 10) 1 *mahattara brāhmaṇa*: 2 *pāṭakas* / 2 heads: 4 *pāṭakas* in sum.
- 11) 1 manager (*vārika*): $1\frac{1}{2}$ *pāṭakas* / 2 heads: 3 *pāṭakas* in sum.
- 12) 1 scribe: $2\frac{1}{2}$ *pāṭakas* / 2 heads: 5 *pāṭakas* in sum.
- 13) 1 astrologer: 1 *pāṭaka* / 2 heads: 2 *pāṭakas* in sum.
- 14) 1 physician (*vaidya*): 3 *pāṭakas* / 2 heads: 6 *pāṭakas* in sum.²⁹

The remaining land is divided into equal portions among 6,000 *brāhmaṇas* of diverse *gotras* and *pravaras*, leaned in various schools of the four Vedas, of whom 37 are named.³⁰ And all the *viśayas*, or rather their land tracts organised as Śrīcandrapura, are given to the deities of the *maṭhas* and to the 6,000 *brāhmaṇas* with a usual set of privileges covering an extensive range of local resources and some level of judicial power, with the exception of an unspecified size of land belonging to the Three Jewels (a Buddhist establishment) and 52 *pāṭakas* of land attached to the boat landing of Indreśvara.³¹

The description of the *maṭhas* as presented above shows some aspects of their organisation. Noteworthy is first of all the superiority of the *maṭha* of Brahmā to the other *maṭhas*. It must have had a larger building that was to be maintained by the bigger size of land plots allotted to its repairs, 47 *pāṭakas* against 10 *pāṭakas* for each of the other *maṭhas*, close to five times as much. The larger space can also be presumed by the accommodation of ten pupils and five guest *brāhmaṇas* against five *pupils* each at the other *maṭhas*. The

29 Paschimbhag plate, ll. 42–47: *tathā deśāntarīya-maṭha-catuṣṭaye* | *vaṅgāla-maṭha-catuṣṭaye ca* | *vaiśvānara-yogeśvara-(43)jaimani-mahākālebhyaś ca* | *Eṣām ubhayeṣām maṭha-prativaddha-ṛg-yajus-sāmātharvopādhyāyānām aṣṭānām pratyekam daśa-pāṭakāḥ* | *pra(44)ti-maṭha-pañca-cchātrāṇām pañca-pāṭakāḥ* | *mālākāra-nāpita-tailika-rajakanānām* | *(A)ṣṭa-karmmakara-carmmakārāṇāṃ ca* | *pratyekam* | *Ardha-(45)pāṭakāḥ* | *veṭṭikā-dvayasya pratyekam pādona-pāṭakāḥ* | *prati-maṭhan navakarma-nimittāṇ ca daśa-pāṭakāḥ* | *prati-maṭha-catuṣṭaye ca* | *ma(46)hattara-vrāhmaṇasya* | *pāṭaka-dvayam* | *vārikasya sārddha-pāṭakāḥ kāyasthasya sārddha-pāṭaka-dvayam* | *gaṇakasya pāṭakāḥ* | *v{y}aidyasya pāṭa(47)ka-trayam* | *Evam anena niyamena* | *Aśīty-uttara-pāṭaka-śata-dvayam* |.

30 Paschimbhag plate, ll. 50–51: *ṣaḍ-vrāhmaṇa-sahasrebhyaś ca* | *nānā-gotra-pravarebhyaḥ* | *catus-carāṇa-nānā-śākhādhyāyibhyaḥ* (51) *sama-vibhāgena śeṣa-bhūmiḥ* |. For the names of the *brāhmaṇas* listed in the preceding section (ll. 47–50), see Furui 2020: 161, Table 5.4.

31 Paschimbhag plate, ll. 51–56.

number of personnel attached to the *maṭha*, 81, is also much larger than the 20 belonging to each of the eight *maṭhas*.³² As for the personnel common to all the *maṭhas*, their numbers in the *maṭha* of Brahmā surpass their numbers in any of the other *maṭhas* by a factor of two (pupils and oil-pressers), two and three quarters (workers and leatherworkers) or four (garland-makers and courtesans).

The personnel exclusive to the *maṭha* of Brahmā attests to its centrality in this *maṭha* complex. Apart from eight courtesans, this *maṭha* has four kinds of musicians and a dancer as performers, while the other *maṭhas* have only courtesans. The dancer seems to be charged with choreography and other directorial duties in view of the relatively large size of land allotted to him: the courtesans may perform dances under his guidance. His and the musicians' services are indispensable for the dedication of dance and music to the deities of all the *maṭhas*. The *maṭha* of Brahmā also has carpenters, architects, potters and blacksmiths, artisans in charge of the construction of buildings and production of special objects, both necessary for all the *maṭhas*. Thus, the personnel and their services indispensable for the other *maṭhas* point to the centrality of this *maṭha*.

The other *maṭhas* in turn have barbers and washermen among the service providers. Together with physicians attached to each group of the four *maṭhas*, they are charged with duties catering to bodily needs, which are not met by the personnel of the *maṭha* of Brahmā. The difference in personnel could have accrued from a division of roles between the last *maṭha* and others.

The allocation of management-related personnel also has implications for the administration of the *maṭhas*. The *maṭha* of Brahmā has its own astrologer and scribe, apart from a *brāhmaṇa* supervising the provisions for guest *brāhmaṇas*.³³ In contrast, the eight other *maṭhas* do not have such functionaries on their own, and the personnel fulfilling administrative duties, like *mahattara brāhmaṇa*, who seems to be a *brāhmaṇa* chief, *vārika* (manager), astrologer and scribe, are attached to each group of the four *maṭhas*. This means that a collective of the four *maṭhas*, not each *maṭha*, functions as a unit of administration, while the *maṭha* of Brahmā is managed on its own. As noted above, physicians are also attached to each group of *maṭhas*.

32 Apart from those 20, one of the 8 teachers of the Vedas may have also been attached to each *maṭha*.

33 Emending *adhiṣṭhāya* to *adhiṣṭhāna*, Sircar interprets the last as "the Brāhmaṇa who built the temple" (Sircar 1973: 32) or "the Brāhmaṇa who built (or supervised the building of) the temple" (Sircar 1967–68: 195). However, the land plot of 1 *pātaka* assigned to him is rather small for such an important position.

“Foreign” (*deśāntarīya*) and Vaṅgāla prefixed to the respective groups of *maṭhas* indicates the division based on the regional identities, presumably of the people who would be served by those *maṭhas* among the 6,000 *brāhmaṇas* settled in Śrīcandrapura. Vaṅgāla originally denoted the coastal area of southeastern Bengal co-extensive with Candradvīpa, the early stronghold of the Candras, and came to mean almost all the parts of eastern Bengal following the expansion of Candra territory.³⁴ The binary of *deśāntarīya* and Vaṅgāla strongly suggests that the latter connotes the whole territory of the Candras encompassing Śrīhaṭṭa, contrasting with “another country/region” (*deśāntara*). The division of the same set of *maṭhas* into these two groups may have accrued from rivalry between the *brāhmaṇas* from eastern Bengal and those from other areas,³⁵ which seems to be irreconcilable.

The description of the *maṭhas* also has implications for activities centred on them, which in turn suggest their functions. The most notable is the function of those *maṭhas* as centres of learning. Pupils, ten at the *maṭha* of Brahmā and five each at the eight other *maṭhas*, are accommodated with provisions of food and clothing. These pupils, fifty in total, are taught by a teacher specialised in grammar or lexicography of Sanskrit posted at the *maṭha* of Brahmā,³⁶ and teachers of the four Vedas assigned to the two *maṭha* groups. Five guest *brāhmaṇas* accommodated at the *maṭha* of Brahmā with daily provisions of food may also participate in the educational activities.

The *maṭhas* also functioned as venues for worshipping the deities installed at each of them. Materials required for offerings, including garlands, oil for lamps and earthenware, are produced by artisans belonging to the *maṭhas*. Services of dance and music to deities are performed by musicians, a dancer and courtesans, of whom those belonging to the *maṭha* of Brahmā fulfil the central roles, as discussed above. In addition, astrologers are present to suggest the proper time for rituals and other religious activities surrounding the *maṭhas*.

34 Furuī 2020: 29.

35 Sircar 1973: 33.

36 The *Candrayākhyāna* is cited in the commentary on the *Uṇādisūtras*, 3. 141 by Ujjvaladatta, who lived in the period earlier than the mid-thirteenth century (Aufrecht 1859: XIV, 91). Aufrecht listed Candra as one of the lexicographers consulted by Ujjvaladatta (Aufrecht 1859: xvii). D. C. Sircar interprets *candrayākhyāna* in this inscription as the *Cāndrayākaraṇa*, the grammar of Candragomin; Sircar 1967–68: 195. In the other edition of the plate, in which he misreads the relevant characters as *candrayākaraṇopādhyāyasya* (Sircar 1973: 67), Sircar refers to the tradition of Candragomin living in Candradvīpa, the original territory of the Candras (Sircar 1973: 33).

The two functions of the *maṭhas* delineated above point to their centrality for *brāhmaṇas* newly settled in Śrīcandrapura. As centres of learning, the *maṭhas* contribute to the supply of members of the *brāhmaṇa* community properly equipped with knowledge of Sanskrit and the Vedas. As venues of worship, the *maṭhas* provide *brāhmaṇas* and their families with both places and opportunities for gatherings and interaction. The choice of Brahmā as the main deity may reveal the intention of the founder of the *maṭhas*, presumably the king Śrīcandra, to make them the centre of the new Brahmanical settlement. The installation of Agni, symbolising sacrificial fire, and Jaimini, the founder of the Pūrvamīmāṃsā School, at the other *maṭhas* supports this possibility. On the other hand, the remaining deities of the *maṭhas*, Yogeśvara and Mahākāla, instead show an inclination towards the Śaiva faith. The inclusion of the last two deities may address the diverse orientations of migrant *brāhmaṇas*. The sectarian diversity is also shown in the other part of the grant. Towards the end of the document, a person named Vināyaka, born in Kāṭṭīgrāma, is mentioned as the one who settled the 6,000 *brāhmaṇas*.³⁷ He is called a Vaiṣṇava, attesting to the presence of Vaiṣṇavas in this locality.

The *maṭhas* functioning as centres of a newly-established Brahmanical settlement reminds us of the *maṭhas* of Anatanārāyaṇa in seventh-century eastern Bengal, which were established in the middle of forests settled by a group of *brāhmaṇas*, mostly as venues of worship. The *maṭhas* of Śrīcandrapura may have inherited this tradition with organisational refinement and functional development as their descriptions in the Paschimbhag plate show.

Bangarh Stone Slab Inscription: A Lineage of Śaiva Ascetics and Their *Maṭha*

The Bangarh stone slab inscription of the time of Nayapāla, assignable to the second quarter of the eleventh century, contains the eulogy (*praśasti*) of the Śaiva ascetic Mūrtiśiva, which Rūpaśiva, his co-disciple as well as friend, commissioned with his image.³⁸ The inscription was discovered from Shibbari, the area to the east of the site of Bangarh in the South Dinajpur district of West Bengal.³⁹ Images of a Śaiva ascetic and the goddess Carcikā were also recovered from the same area, suggesting its connection with a Śaiva institution together with the

37 Paschimbhag plate, l. 64, verse 22: *kāṭṭīgrāma-bhavo vaiṣṇavaḥ samāropayāṃ vabhūva kṛtī(|) śrīmāN vināyakākhyo viprāṇāṃ śa;d?(<ṭ)-sahasrāṇi|*.

38 Bangarh stone slab inscription of the time of Nayapāla, l. 31, verse 31.

39 Sircar 1973–74: 135.

name Shibbari denoting the house/palace of Śiva.⁴⁰ The inscribed slab must have been embedded in the wall of a building belonging to the Śaiva *maṭha* complex mentioned in the inscription.

Preceded by a preamble consisting of verses of invocation,⁴¹ the eulogy gives a genealogy of Śaiva ascetics beginning with Durvāsas, the mythical progenitor, to whose lineage was “born” the great *maṭha* of Golagī.⁴² Vidyāśiva was an ascetic from this *maṭha*, and his disciple Dharmāśiva established a lofty temple of Śiva at Vārāṇasī.⁴³

The history of the *maṭha* at Bangarh started with Indraśiva, the disciple of Dharmāśiva, to whom Mahīpāla I donated the *maṭha* with a lofty palace/temple.⁴⁴ Indraśiva is said to have performed the sixteen great gifts (*mahādāna*).⁴⁵ His disciple Sarvaśiva became the preceptor of king Nayapāla.⁴⁶

Sarvaśiva conferred the preceptorship of the Gauḍa king, Nayapāla, on Mūrtiśiva, his brother and disciple, and left for the forest.⁴⁷ Mūrtiśiva excavated oblong ponds to the cardinal and semi-cardinal directions and established a hundred gardens (*ārāma*).⁴⁸ His seat/abode (*āsaya*), namely the *maṭha*, and religious monuments (*kīrti*) established there are eulogised with poetic expression.⁴⁹ His fame is acclaimed in reference to his victory in scholarly discussions and performance of the donation of gold weighed against himself (*tulāpuruṣa*).⁵⁰ Mūrtiśiva constructed a *vaḍabhī* temple enshrining the goddess Bhavānī.⁵¹

40 Ghosh 2010: 136. The image could be that of Mūrtiśiva commissioned by Rūpaśiva, though a fragmentary inscription on a pedestal possibly detached from the image is not legible enough to establish its identity; Ghosh 2010: 137–138. Another inscribed image of a Śaiva ascetic, clearly labelled as Mūrtiśiva, was found at Dogachia in Nadia district of West Bengal, around 200 km to the south of Bangarh; Goswami 1996: 269–270. Debala Mitra, the editor of the volume in which Goswami’s article is published, gives a better interpretation of the carelessly engraved inscription in a note of the article; Goswami 1996: 274, note 18.

41 Bangarh stone slab, ll. 1–4, verses 1–4.

42 Bangarh stone slab, ll. 4–6, verses 5 (Durvāsas) and 6 (*maṭha* of Golagī).

43 Bangarh stone slab, ll. 6–8, verses 7 (Vidyāśiva) and 8 (Dharmāśiva).

44 Bangarh stone slab, ll. 8–9, verse 9.

45 Bangarh stone slab, ll. 10–11, verse 11.

46 Bangarh stone slab, ll. 11–12, verse 12.

47 Bangarh stone slab, ll. 13–14, verse 14.

48 Bangarh stone slab, ll. 16–18, verses 17 (oblong ponds) and 18 (gardens).

49 Bangarh stone slab, ll. 18–20, verses 19–20.

50 Bangarh stone slab, ll. 21–23, verses 22 (learning) and 23 (*tulāpuruṣa*). For the textual description of the ritual of *tulāpuruṣa* and the cases of its performance recorded in an extensive range of inscriptions, see Schmiedchen 2006.

51 Bangarh stone slab, ll. 24–25, verse 25.

The genealogy of the ascetics ends with Rūpaśiva, another disciple of Sarvaśiva and a friend of Mūrtiśiva.⁵² The last portion of the inscription mentions Rūpaśiva as the commissioner of the eulogy and image of Mūrtiśiva; Lakṣmīdhara, the son of Gaṇapati, as the organiser (*āyojaka*) of the construction of an edifice, presumably a monument in the *maṭha*; and Śrīkaṇṭha as the composer of the eulogy.⁵³ Following a stanza wishing the edifice of Mūrtiśambhu (Mūrtiśiva) to remain forever,⁵⁴ the last verse mentions another Lakṣmīdhara as the engraver of the eulogy.⁵⁵

The genealogy given in the inscription, especially the reference to the *maṭha* of Golaḡī identifiable with the present site of Gurgi in Rewa district of Madhya Pradesh,⁵⁶ suggests that the ascetics of the *maṭha* of Bangarh belonged to the lineage of Saiddhāntika Śaiva ascetics called the Mattamayūras. Originating from Gopakṣetra, the area around Gwalior, it expanded towards east in Central India, especially in Ḍāhaladeśa by the patronage of the Kalacuri kings of Tripurī.⁵⁷ In the process of its expansion, this ascetic lineage saw the development of their *maṭhas* from forest hermitages to semi-urban mansions and temple complexes well-connected with kingship.⁵⁸ This process of expansion and development was accompanied by the formation of a network connecting *maṭhas* within the Kalacuri territory and beyond.⁵⁹ The extension of this network through Vārāṇasī resulted in the emergence of the *maṭha* of Bangarh, as shown by the activities of Dharmāśiva and his disciple Indraśiva.⁶⁰

Corresponding to the developed form witnessed in Central India, the *maṭha* of Bangarh is depicted in the inscription as a complex centred on the main temple and furnished with diverse buildings and other facilities. The *maṭha* donated to Indraśiva is compared to Mount Kailāsa, glittering like Meru with a lofty palace/temple (*prāsāda*) and constructed beautifully with a mass of gold.⁶¹ With diverse shrines (*surālaya*) and oblong ponds (*dirghikā*), it

52 Bangarh stone slab, ll. 28–29, verse 28.

53 Bangarh stone slab, ll. 31–33, verses 31 (Rūpaśiva), 32 (Lakṣmīdhara) and 33 (Śrīkaṇṭha).

54 Bangarh stone slab, ll. 33–34, verse 34.

55 Bangarh stone slab, ll. 34–35, verse 35. He was the son of Śrīdhara and the grandson of Jivadhara.

56 Bangarh stone slab, l. 5, verse 6ab: *vaṁśe tasya vabhūva bhūṣaṇa-maṇir bhū-gola Evākhile golagyaś sa mahā-maṭhaḥ sughaṭitaḥ kailāsa Evāparaḥ*|. For the name of Golaḡī and its identification with Gurgi, see Sanderson 2009: 264, note 620.

57 Sears 2014: 28–34.

58 Sears 2014: 78–116, 131–185.

59 Sears 2014: 189–229.

60 Bangarh stone slab, ll. 7–9, verses 8–9.

61 Bangarh stone slab, ll. 8–9, verse 9: *śrīmān indraśivaḥ sphuṭam hari-hara-prāyām śivendrākṛtim vibhrad vaṁ(9)śa-vibhūṣaṇam samabhavac chiśyo (')sya puṇyātmanaḥ*|

resembled the world with the seven oceans and the eight mountain ranges.⁶² Such a depiction is rather conventional and the poet may have composed it even without visiting the actual site.⁶³ Still, it conveys the shared notion on what a *maṭha* was supposed to be. Mūrtiśiva excavated oblong ponds to the cardinal and semi-cardinal directions and established a hundred gardens (*ārāma*), presumably around the main temple of the *maṭha*.⁶⁴ His religious monuments (*kīrti*), which are compared to the continental mountain ranges and the oceans,⁶⁵ may also connote facilities constructed within the *maṭha* compound. He further constructed a *vaḍabhī* temple, which was decorated with a pot (*kalaśa*) on the top, banners and lamps.⁶⁶ These construction projects commissioned by Mūrtiśiva indicate the character of the *maṭha* as a complex expanded by a series of such undertakings. The description that his seat (*āśaya*), namely the *maṭha*, is not full, compared with the world which is filled with his fame, indicates the ongoing state of the projects.⁶⁷

Due to the character of the inscription as a eulogy of a Śaiva ascetic and his lineage, the activities around the *maṭha* depicted in it are mostly limited to those of the eminent members of the lineage. The most prominent element of their activities is the connection with kingship. The dependence of the *maṭha* and its ascetics on royal patronage is duly acknowledged in the donation by

yasmai kāñcana-puñja-mañju-racita-prāsāda-meru-sphurat-kailāsābha-maṭhan dadāv iha mahīpālo nṛpas tattva-vit||

62 Bangarh stone slab, ll. 9–10, verse 10: *yadi jala-dhayaḥ saptāpy ete tathāṣṭa-kulācalāḥ pra(10)ti-dīśam amī kāya-vyūhaṃ vidhāya milanty api| bhavati sadṛśair etan nānā-surālaya-dīrghikopamitir api cen manye devaḥ kaviś caturānanaḥ||*

63 Sears 2014: 55.

64 Bangarh stone slab, ll. 16–18, verses 17–18: *mlāya(17)(d-v)ismita-viśvakarmma-sa-śiraḥ-kampekṣitā nirmmitās citran dikṣu vidikṣu yena pṛthivi-hāra-śriyā dīrghikāḥ| yā dūrād avalokya vāridhi-milad-velā-bhramād bhāsvato vāhā vihvalayanty anū(18)(rddhva)m adhara-grīvā vahanto (')nv-aham|| yasyārāma-śatair bhāti pulakāñkura-danturā| bhūr iyan tāḍṛśāsīma-purāṇa-puruṣāgamat||*

65 Bangarh stone slab, ll. 19–20, verse 20: *bhavati bhavitā bhūto vā kiṃ kṣitau kvacid idṛśo vadata maruto yūyaṃ sākṣāt-kṛtākhīla-vastavaḥ| ya Iha vidadhe dhātṛ-(20)sparddhā-vivarddhita-kautukaḥ kula-giri-payo-rāśi-cchannaṃ jagan nija-kīrttibhīḥ||*

66 Bangarh stone slab, ll. 24–27, verses 25–26: *teneyaṃ hima-kāñcana(25)la-mahā-kautūhalāveśita-svīyārddhārdhha-vapuṣmatīva vaḍabhī puñyātmanā nirmmitā| yat-simha-pratīvimvam amvara-dhunī-toyeṣu manye 'dbhutaṃ dṛṣṭvā sañkucad-añghrir adya na jalāny airāvataḥ pāsyati|| yan-mau(26)lau kalaśena kiṃ sa bhagavān- bhānuḥ śiro-bhūṣaṇaṃ kiṃ citra-dhvaḥ-ḍamvaraiḥ sura-saril-lekhā(h) patākāvaliḥ| kin dīpa-prakareṇa ratna-vahala-jyotiṣmatīyaṃ sadā yat satyaṃ svayam udbhavanti vividhāḥ si(27)ddhāśrame sampadaḥ||*

67 Bangarh stone slab, ll. 18–19, verse 19: *mahīyasīyan na tathā mahī yathā tapasvinas tasya mahān ihāśayaḥ| ta(19)thā hi bhūmiḥ kila kīrttibhir bhṛtā (bhṛ)to na tasyāśaya Eṣa vīsmayaḥ||*

Mahīpāla I mentioned as the cause of the establishment of the *maṭha*.⁶⁸ The complementarity of their relation, on the other hand, is obvious in Sarvaśiva and Mūrtiśiva acting as the royal preceptors (*rājaguru*) of Nayapāla in succession.⁶⁹

The other activity of ascetics prominent in the inscription is generosity. While Sarvaśiva and Mūrtiśiva are vaguely praised for their munificence, which would shame or anger the Rohaṇa Mountain,⁷⁰ and also for donations,⁷¹ Indraśiva is credited with the sixteen great gifts (*mahādāna*) prescribed in the Purāṇas.⁷² Mūrtiśiva may also have performed the donation of gold weighed against himself (*tulāpuruṣa*), one of the so-called great gifts, as suggested in a stanza.⁷³ Their munificence and donative acts must have been supported by accumulated wealth, either personal or institutional, stored at the *maṭha*, though the inscription gives no information on its origin. The accumulated wealth enabled them to behave like their royal patrons,⁷⁴ as succinctly shown by the performance of the great gifts, which are prescribed for kings and royal aspirants, and would later be performed by the Pāla and Sena kings in Bengal.⁷⁵

68 Bangarh stone slab, ll. 8–9, verse 9.

69 Bangarh stone slab, ll. 11–12, verse 12: *rājñah śrī-nayapālasya gurus tattva-vi(12)dām varaḥ| śrīmān- sarvaśivas tasya śiṣyo (')bhūd bhūṣaṇam bhuvah||*; ll. 13–14, verse 14: *yenāvarjita-gauḍa-rāja-gurutā-lakṣmīn nija-bhrātari śrīman-mūrtiśive niveśya vipināvāsam sva(14)yam vañchatā| kṣīrodārṇṇava-manthanotthita-milal-lakṣmīm sva-śiṣye harāv āropyāharato viṣaṇ paśupater vṛttāntam udghāṭitam||*.

70 Bangarh stone slab inscription, ll. 12–13, verse 13: *yad-dānāmvu-sarit-pravāha-lahari-nīrvvāpitārthi-sphurad-dāridrya-jvalane milanty api janair ggauḥ kāma-dhṛg vāritā| prodhbhūtojjvala-ratna-(13)jāla-vahala-jyotiḥ-paṭācchādita-svāngo lajjitavat sa rohaṇa-girir mmanye (')dhunā sthāsyati||*; ll. 20–21, verse 21: *yasmāt pūrṇa-manorathe 'rthini phalair bhū-bhāga-lagnātmanah śākhābhīr vviśatīva tad-vali-grhaṁ kalpa-drumo vṛḍitah| nirlajja(21)s tu sa kopi-rohaṇa-girir yad-vañcito (')py arthinām sārthair artha-ḥṛtaika-gaurava-bharair aṅgair mmudhā varddhatē||*.

71 Bangarh stone slab, l. 15, verse 15cd: *bhrātā mūrtiśivaḥ sa mānya-mahim(ā) dānāmvu-sekair jjaḡat pūtam yaḥ kṛtavān nirasta-nikhila-kleśaṇ ca yaḥ sarvvataḥ||*.

72 Bangarh stone slab, ll. 10–11, verse 11: *pṛthvī-meru-sa-viśva-cakra-jaladhi-vrahmāṇḍa-kalpadruma-śrī-(11)nandiśvara-kāmadhenu-bhavana-grāmāṅś ca gāḥ parvatān-| yo (')dād bhadra-gḥaṭaṇ ca kalpa-latayā sārddhaṇ ca kalpa-drumaṇ hemāś;r?(v)ebhahiranya-garvbha-turaga-vyūhān-tulā-pūṣam-||*. For the sixteen *mahādānas* prescribed in the Purāṇas, see Kane 1974: 870–877. For the correspondence of the objects listed in this verse and those of *mahādāna*, see Sircar 1973–74: 139–141.

73 Bangarh stone slab, ll. 22–23, verse 23ab: *vidvadbhiḥ sa-svarṇṇakāra-nivahaiḥ kāmaṇ tulāropitā yat-kīrttir nna parikṣi(23)tā na hi samī-bhāvaṇ gatā kair api|*.

74 Sanderson 2009: 268.

75 For the inscriptional references to *mahādānas* by the Pāla and Sena kings, see Furui 2020: 202.

Ascetic practices and learning surely constituted a part of the activities around the *maṭha*, though the former is mentioned rather vaguely, as in Dharmasīva being called a storehouse of asceticism (*tapo-nidhi*),⁷⁶ or in Sarvasīva having incandescent asceticism (*dīpta-tapas*).⁷⁷ In contrast, the learning of the ascetics is described with specificity. Mūrtisīva acquired fame surpassing that of the teachers of Bhṛgu and Bhāskara by “drinking up”, namely defeating, Jains (*digambara*) and refuting the theory of the Kṛṣṇādvaita School.⁷⁸ Rūpaśiva is praised for his learning which uplifted the Śaiva doctrine in decline.⁷⁹ He travelled extensively and defeated other logicians in all the quarters, and this feat is compared to the world conquest (*āśā-vijaya*). Bhoja, presumably the famous Paramāra king, praised him for winning over many theorists versed in the six logics.⁸⁰ His inference, wisdom and skill of narration in discussions against heretic scholars (*pāṣaṇḍi-panḍita*) are also extolled.⁸¹ In these descriptions, the victory over logicians of the other schools in discussions through the skill of debate looms large. It suggests the character of the *maṭha* as a centre of learning where the training on debate constituted a part of its curriculum. On the other hand, the itinerary of Rūpaśiva, which could stretch as far as Dhārā in Malwa, the capital of Bhoja whom we may identify with his namesake mentioned in the inscription, shows the wide geographical range covered by the network constructed by the Mattamayūra Śaiva ascetics and their activities.

Though sidelined by the deeds of eminent ascetics, the other activities around the *maṭha* can also be glimpsed from the inscription. The temple of the goddess Bhavānī, which must be the main temple of the *maṭha* complex,

76 Bangarh stone slab, ll. 7–8, verse 8ab: *śiṣyo dharmmaśivas tapo-nidhir abhūt tasya vyadhād yo 'dbhutaṃ prāsādaṃ bhagavat-trilo(8)cana-guror vvarānasi-bhūṣaṇaṃ*||.

77 Bangarh stone slab, l. 28, verse 28ab: *śiṣyaḥ sarvasīvasya dīpta-tapasaḥ sarvvarthi-cintāmanir jīvo mūrtisīvasya yo (')para Iva prakhyāta-tīvra-vrataḥ*||.

78 Bangarh stone slab, ll. 21–22, verse 22: *śāśvat-pīta-digamvarā 'rtha-viraha-bhrāntiṃ tiras-kurvati kṛṣṇādvaita-kathān nirasya vahuṣo vṛddher abhāvaṃ (22) guṇe| Ācchādyaiḥ bhṛgu-prabhākara-gurūn-yat-kīrtitv ujjṛmbhīṇi yat-prajñeva visāriṇi sumanasān vṛndair mmudā gīyate*||.

79 Bangarh stone slab, ll. 28–29, verse 28cd: *śrīmān rūpaśivo vabhūva ya Idan devasya caṇḍi-guror mmagnan darśanam uddadhāra (29) dharaṇīm kriḍā-varāho yathā*||.

80 Bangarh stone slab, ll. 29–30, verse 29: *yenāśā-vijayodyatena jaladhi-śrīman-milan-mekhala-kṣmā-cakram (bhr)amatā na ke diśi diśi khyātā jīta vādinaḥ| yasyāsāv api bhōjadeva-nṛpatīḥ stauti sma dṛṣtvā(30)dbhutaṃ ṣaṭ-tarkka-priya-vādi-vṛnda-dalana-vyāpāra-lavdhaṃ yaśaḥ*||.

81 Bangarh stone slab, ll. 30–31, verse 30: *nānānumāna-(śa)ra-pūrṇa-tamori-tūnaḥ prajñā-dhanur dḍṛḍha-kathā-guṇa-karṇa-pūraḥ| pāṣaṇḍi-panḍita-mṛgeṣu gato niṣiddha-mārgānusārī-mṛga-hantr-(31)hara-śrīyaṃ yaḥ*||.

is said to have “a thousand playful nubile damsels.”⁸² They seem to have been courtesans who offered dance performances to the deity, and their presence hints at the regular worship of deities undertaken at temples and shrines within the *maṭha* complex. Apart from that, Lakṣmīdhara, a *brāhmaṇa*, is mentioned as an organiser (*āyojaka*) in charge of an edifice (*kīrti*), which seems to denote a monument in the *maṭha* to which the inscribed stone slab was attached.⁸³ It is remarkable that Lakṣmīdhara worked as the organiser of the construction of the monument at the order of Mūrtiśiva. We may detect here the power wielded by the ascetic, who was probably the head of the *maṭha*, being in charge for all the matters of the entire complex.

In spite of its limited scope as a eulogy, the Bangarh stone slab inscription still gives us some insights on the *maṭha* of the Mattamayūra Śaiva ascetics. It was a complex consisting of a main temple and other shrines where regular worship was offered, and which was embellished with oblong ponds and gardens. It was also a centre of learning, where ascetic teachers taught their pupils several disciplines which were not limited to the Śaiva doctrine. Its foundation depended on royal patronage, and perhaps so did its maintenance, though nothing is clearly said about the latter in the inscription. The relation with kingship was complementary, with the ascetics serving as royal preceptors. The *maṭha*, or rather its ascetics, accumulated enormous wealth with which they were able to fund construction projects and great donations with royal dignity. The origin of this wealth, and its management, is unclear from the inscription.

Concluding Remarks

Though belonging to different traditions, one being local and the other trans-local, the *maṭhas* depicted in the Paschimbhag copperplate inscription and the Bangarh stone slab inscription shared some characteristics. Both were highly developed *maṭha* complexes consisting of multiple buildings and other facilities, and functioned as centres of worship and learning. Both depended on royal patronage for their foundation, and possibly for their economic

82 Bangarh stone slab, ll. 27–28, verse 27: *hima-girim iva śubhraṃ ranyā-ratnāṃśu-jāla-pratiṅghalita-sakeli-prauḍha-rāmā-sahasram-| bhavanam idam avetyāsanna-śambhur bhavānyāḥ smaratu nija-vivāhāgāra-lakṣmīṅ cire(28)ṇa||*.

83 Bangarh stone slab, ll. 31–32, verse 32ab: *kīrttau vāṭaka-bhūsaṇaṃ gaṇapateḥ sūnuḥ sa lakṣmīdharaḥ śrīman-mūrtiśivāññayā ha(32)rīr abhūt sāksād ihāyojakaḥ|*.

base, to which the Paschimbhag plate gives a clear answer in the form of the endowment of land tracts. The Bangarh inscription provides no information on the economic base of the *maṭha*, though its affluence is duly expressed by the deeds of its ascetics. The maintenance of the *maṭhas* also required personnel and administrative organisation, for which the Paschimbhag plate contains detailed information and the Bangarh inscription only a little.

The difference between the two *maṭha* complexes, on the other hand, is detectable in the divergent character of the education in each institution. The *maṭha* of Śrīcandrapura offered Sanskrit and Vedic education to the accommodated disciples, who seem to have come from a community of newly-settled *brāhmaṇas*. The *maṭha* of Bangarh, conversely, taught the Śaiva doctrine and other disciplines, including debate, presumably to members, both already initiated and to be initiated, of the ascetic lineage. While the former contributed to the maintenance of the local community consisting of an enormous number of *brāhmaṇas*, the latter aimed at the continuation of the lineage of Śaiva ascetics with limited membership. This difference was closely connected with the different locational and social contexts in which both *maṭha* complexes lay. The *maṭha* of Śrīcandrapura was established in a new Brahmanical settlement in rural space and functioned as the centre of a *brāhmaṇa* settler community. The *maṭha* of Bangarh was located in a semi-urban area adjacent to the city of Koṭīvarṣa and accommodated a closely-knit circle of ascetics who were segregated from ordinary social interactions but connected with the wider Śaiva monastic network. Thus, the former had a local but open constituency, while the latter had a trans-local but closed constituency. In addition, the Śaiva sectarian background and the semi-urban location of the latter gave its ascetics an opportunity to form close ties with kingship as royal preceptors, which the rural *brāhmaṇas* of Śrīcandrapura could not aspire to.

The two inscriptions of early medieval Bengal analysed in the present study allow us to delineate the two different types of *maṭhas* with regard to their similarities and differences. Both disappeared with little trace, but their constituencies saw different trajectories in later history: no Brahmanical centres arose in the eastern part of Bengal,⁸⁴ while the lineage of the Mattamayūras and their *maṭhas* spread to western Bengal and the Andhra country.⁸⁵

84 Furui 2013: 236.

85 Bhattacharyya 2004.

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