A New Interpretation of Rāmagiri Evidence

1 Trivikrama: Word and Statue*

Preamble
A long series of seminars at the Institute of Indian Studies of the University of Groningen came to its preliminary conclusion in 1993. In these seminars, in which Rob Adriaensen, Harunaga Isaacson and Hans Bakker took part, the newly discovered stone inscription in the Kevala–Narasimha Temple (KNT) on top of the Rāmagiri (Ramtek Hill) had been studied; this study resulted in the publication of the inscription with a translation and commentary (Bakker & Isaacson 1993; above, pp. 113 ff.).

The greater part of the inscription was illegible due to severe damage, but we were and are pretty confident that what was readable was read correctly. The main problem, namely that of the interpretation of the inscription, could only partly be solved. The large gaps in the legible text left ample scope for conjecture. A modest beginning was made by presenting conjectured syllables between angular brackets, and some conjectures, of which we were less certain, were given in the footnotes and annotation. Nevertheless it remained unresolved whether the inscription originally had contained the 34 verses edited or whether another 15 or 16 verses were missing due, to the fact that a right portion of the slab of unknown size had broken off and had been lost. Also the overall dedication of the inscription, which largely depends on the interpretation of its first verse, remained problematic.

When I was working on the history of the Vākaṭakas, I decided to reedit the inscription, that is to say, to carry on with conjectural interpretation. Some conjectures earlier carefully regulated to the footnotes were included in the text and some new conjectural readings were proposed. This second revised edition appeared as Appendix I: The Kevala–Narasimha Temple Inscription (second revised edition), in Bakker 1997, pp. 163–167. Another round of discussions followed. Isaacson, for one, pointed out that some of my new conjectures were

* The first version of this article was published as the first in a series of three under the title Trivikrama: Word and Statue. A new interpretation of Rāmagiri evidence (1). in: Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae. Volume 63.3 (2010), 241–247. I am much obliged to Harunaga Isaacson, who has been willing to discuss the evidence with me again and again, and whose valuable suggestions have helped to shape my thoughts as presented below.
less plausible,\(^1\) and of others I became myself gradually more doubtful.\(^2\) In sum, the final edition and interpretation of the *Kevala–Narasimha Temple Inscription* is still beyond our reach. In the present contribution I would like to address the central hermeneutic question: the overall dedication and assignment of the inscription.

**Maṅgalavāda: Kevala–Narasimha Temple (KNT) Inscription verse 1**

The first verse of the inscription is of the nature of a *maṅgala* or benediction and refers to the main deity to whom the pious works listed are dedicated. It was published in 1993 as follows:

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| metre: Puṣpitāgrā: | 2 × (12, 13) |
| ~ , ~ and ~ : metrical quantity of illegible syllables |
| ( ) reading uncertain |
| ( ) editorial addition |
| ◊ consonant part of syllable |
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[1993] 1 ⟨sa ja⟩(ya)ti sajalāmbudodarā~z,  
~ ~ mitī(p)rarsarājya – na – z |  
~ ~ (ma)khasamayaidhitāṅga – z,  
~ ~ ~ ~ bhayalo⟨la⟩drṣṭi(dr)⟨ṣṭa⟩ḥ  || 1 ||

The second edition in Bakker 1997 reads as follows (changes to the 1993 edition in bold face):

[1997] 1 ⟨sa ja⟩(ya)ti sajalāmbudodarā⟨bha⟩⟨s⟩,  
⟨su⟩(rasa)miti ◊ rarsarājya – na – z |  
⟨ba⟩(l)⟨i⟩(ma)khasamayaidhitāṅga⟨śo⟩⟨bho⟩,  
⟨ditijavadhū ◉⟩bhayalo⟨la⟩drṣṭi(dr)⟨ṣṭa⟩ḥ  || 1 ||

\(^1\) Yuko Yokochi coniecit

\(^2\) In the Vākāṭaka conference held in Groningen in June 2002 Isaacson pointed out that my conjectural reading of verse 5b: *pitur gr(hitā) (pra)ti(s)i(ddha)⟨sakteh⟩* cannot easily be reconciled with the tiny bits that we are able to read of this pāda. A conjectural reading: *pitur gr(hes. va) (pra)ti(s)i(ddha)⟨sakteh⟩* seems to do more justice to this, although one would rather expect a singular *grhe*; it invalidates a part of my historical reconstruction, according to which the ‘girl that grew up like a flame’ was taken from her parental home to grow up at the Gupta court (see Bakker 1997, 11). She was simply married off to Candragupta.

\(^2\) For instance, the conjecture in verse 2a which reads: ⟨rā⟩jar(s.)isa⟨mudraguptaḥ⟩, which would imply that the verses 2 and 3 are concerned with the father of Candragupta, who, however, does not play a role further on in the inscription. The inscription does not contain the official dynastic genealogy, as do the copperplate charters of Prabhāvati Guptā and her son Pravarasena. I now think it more likely that the verses 2 and 3 sing the praise of Candragupta who, as the late grandfather and father-in-law of the donor (the princess Atibhāvatī), is one of the main protagonists of the *praśasti*. 
The second edition built on the hypothesis advanced in the first edition, viz. that the deity of this verse is the Bhagavat, Viṣṇu, whose dark-blue colour resembles the rain cloud, but, more clearly than in the first edition, it makes explicit that at least one of the deeds referred to concerns the Vāmana avatāra, in which King Bali is outwitted by Trivikrama. Whether this caused the fear of the wife/wives of the demon in pāda d, or another one of Viṣṇu’s deeds, could not well be decided, as long as the meaning of pāda b remained opaque. After all, the inscription is found in a Narasimha temple and the wife of the dītiya Hiranyakaśipu could also possibly have been intended.³

I would now propose a reading of the remaining lacuna that would give this verse a significant coherence (changes to the 1997 edition in bold face):

\[
\begin{align*}
1 \quad &\langle sa ja\rangle (ya)ti sjalāmbudodarā\langle bha\rangle(s), \\
&\langle su\rangle (rasi)miti(p)rarsārājya\langle pā\rangle na\langle laujāḥ \rangle | \\
&\langle ba\rangle (l)\langle i\rangle (ma)khasmayaidhitāṅga(śo)\langle bho\rangle, \\
&\langle ditijavadhū\rangle bhayalo\langle la\rangle drṣṭi(ḍr)\langle śta\rangle h || 1 ||
\end{align*}
\]

The one whose colour resembles the depths of a water-laden rain-cloud and whose vigour is (like) a sacrificial fire drinking the clarified butter (poured) in streams within the divine assembly; the splendour of whose body is enlarged at the time of Bali’s sacrifice, and who is looked at by the wives of Diti’s son with gazes that tremble with fright, that one is victorious. (1)

The conjectured reading divides the verse clearly into two halves: the first hemistich regards Bhagavat Viṣṇu under some of his general aspects, his dark-blue colour symbolizing his bounty, just as the blue rain cloud is a boon of nature;⁴ his vigour and splendour is like a flash, just as fire blazes up when ghee is poured into it. The hemistich evokes the beautiful and powerful image of flashes/lightning against the background of dark monsoon clouds and connects Viṣṇu’s bounty with the (Vedic) sacrifice. The second half specifies one particular aspect of his, viz. his rescue of the world from the hands of the demon king, the son of Diti, Bali, by a powerful display of his cosmogonic dimension, the three strides, Trivikrama. From this hypothesis I infer that the piety listed in the inscription is integrally dedicated to Viṣṇu Trivikrama. The verse is consistent and cogently voices orthodox Bhagavatism.

The conjectured reading ājjyapa, ‘drinking clarified butter’, is well attested and may be illustrated by a passage in the Śatapathabrahmaṇa (translation Eggeling):

He then says 3), ‘Śvāhā Agnim!’ with reference to Agni’s butter-portion;—‘Śvāhā Agnim Pavamānam!’ if they determine upon (offering to) Agni, the blowing 4);

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³ Cf. Bakker & Isaacson 1993, 57; Bakker 1997, 30 n. 94.
⁴ Cf. VDhP III, Vol. 1, 3.44.10.
or ‘Svâhâ Agnim Indumantami!’ if they determine upon Agni, the drop-abounding
5)—‘Svâhâ Agnim!’—‘Svâhâ, the butter-drinking Agnis! May Agni graciously
accept of the butter!’—this is the offering-prayer he (the Hotri) pronounces. 5

In post-Vedic Sanskrit ājyapa is mostly used as a proper noun, but the slightly
archaic attributive usage of the word in the 5th century inscription may have
been intended as a show of orthodoxy. After all, the sacrificial myth at issue,
Viṣṇu’s three strides (Trivikrama), is a Rgveda one, and the Vāmana myth
is told in the same text (ŚBr 1.2.5; 1.9.3.8 ff.) that calls Agni ājyapa. The
reading ojas (if the conjecture is correct) also may recall the Rgveda myth:
yadā te [scil. Indra] viṣṇur ojasā trīni padā vīcakrame | (RV 8.12.27). The kavi
who composed the praśasti (referred to in vv. 33, 34) knew his śruti.

The above observations prompt us to speculate about the group of priests
(to which also the kavi may have belonged), which performed the various rit-
uals that accompanied the described activity and which may have (indirectly)
benefited from it. These pious acts were for the greater part performed for the
exclusive benefit (merit) of the (deceased) mother, whom, as we have argued,
is queen Prabhāvatī. 6 It would be natural that for this purpose the daughter
employed priests (not mentioned in the readable part of the Kevala–Narasīṁha
Temple Inscription), who had been closely connected to her mother; some of
those we know from Prabhāvatī’s last charter dated in the 20th regnal year
of her son Pravarasena II (c. AD 442), that is shortly before she died, when
the dowager queen was about seventy years old: they were brahmins belonging
to ‘the Kaśyapa gotra and the Mādhyandina śākhā of the Vājasaneyī saṁhitā
of the Yajurveda’, in other words, brahmins to whose sacred text corpus the
Śatapathabrāhmaṇa belonged. 7 It can therefore hardly be surprising if idiom
of this corpus would show up in the inscription, as our conjecture suggests.

The KNT Inscription verse 21

We now turn to a portion of the inscription that describes the deeds performed
for the sake of merit, which was the main object of the activity of the princess
(v. 19: manujendraputrī), verses 20 ff. Being not part of the praśasti, it is in
the simpler metre of the Śloka. In the second edition of 1997 verse 21 runs as
follows (changes to the edition of 1993 in bold face):

[1997] 11 prabhāvatisvāminā ca, lokāṇ(tha)m a(th)ā(la)(ye) |
puṇyam aksayam uddiśya, (mā)(tuh) = = (a)k(ā)raya(t) || 21 ||

5 The Śatapathabrāhmaṇa transl. by Julius Eggeling. ŚBr 2.2.3.20:
thā svāhāgīnim ity āha — āgnemay ājyabhāgam svāhāgīnim pavamānam iti yadi
pavamānāya dhriy erad svāhāgīnim indumantam iti yady agnaya indumate dhriy erad
svāhāgīnim svāhāgīnim ājyapān āsāgo āgnir ājyasya vetv iti yajati|
6 Bakker & Isaacson 1993, 66 ff. Bakker 1997, 29 f.
7 Miregāon Plates of Prabhāvati Guptā, Year 20, Shastri & Kawadkar 2001, 141, 147. Cf.
the Pāṇḍurṇā Plates of Pravarasena II, Year 29, above, p. 332.
The conjectures accepted in the revised text make the references to the temple (ālaya) of Prabhāvatīsvāmin and the beneficiary, viz. the mother (mātuh) explicit. I now propose to read śubham in the syllables 3 and 4 of the fourth pāda of verse 21. This is metrically correct—pāda 21a being a ra-vipulā and a ra-gaṇa (a cretic: - - ) is avoided in the positions 2 to 4 of the even pāda 21d—and it would give us the following text (changes to the 1997 edition (above, p. 124) in bold face):

11 prabhāvatīsvāmināṃ ca, lokanā(tha)m a(th)ā(la)(ye) |
puṇyam aksāyam uddīṣya, (mā)(tuḥ śubham a)k(ā)raya(t) || 21 ||

Then (the princess) commissioned the splendid ‘Master of Prabhāvatī’, (the image of the) Lord of the World, within the temple, for the sake of undecaying merit of (her) mother. (21)

The principal deed recorded in the inscription, the foundation of the temple (ālaya) itself, may have been duly mentioned as the first item in the list of pious acts; it may have been expressed in the illegible verse 20. The installed deity, represented by the image within this temple, is Viṣṇu Lokanātha, designated as Prabhāvatīsvāmin.

Because the inscription was found in a Narasimha sanctuary, we have hypothesized that the splendid Narasimha image in this temple (Plate 57) represents Prabhāvatīsvāmin.8 However, in both editions already some doubt had been expressed regarding this identification,9 and now, as we have reached a complete understanding of the first maṅgala verse, which unambiguously seems to refer to Trivikrama, not to Narasimha, this doubt has turned into a firm belief: originally the inscription did not belong to the Kevala–Narasimha Temple.

The discovery of the KNT Inscription

Let us re-examine the present condition of the stone inscription. The inscription was found ‘in the course of cleaning the walls of the Narsimha Temple at Ramtek . . . on the southern wall of the mandapa’ by the Central Museum, Nagpur, as reported in Indian Archaeology—A Review 1982–83, 137. The removing of the layers of plaster caused great damage to the inscription. The latter was engraved in two stone slaps, the lower one (containing lines 13 to 15) was broken in the middle. Altogether these three parts were walled up again during the restoration work by means of cement.10 The total height of the stone is about 50 cm, the breadth about 100 cm. The ragged right sides of

8 Bakker & Isaacson 1993, 69; Bakker 1997, 30, 141 f.
9 Bakker & Isaacson 1993, 57 (above, p. 128); Bakker 1997, 30 n. 94, 145.
10 Jamkhedkar 1992, p. 164 n. 18 notes: ‘The removal of the whitewash and the location of the inscription on the original blocks of stone showed that the wall was intact.’
both the upper and the lower slab indicate that some portion of the stone had earlier been broken off, a portion that was obviously not recovered during the restauration work and is to be considered as irretrievably lost.

In other words, when the inscription originally was inserted into the southern wall of the *māṇḍapa* of the Kevala–Narasimha Temple it was already incomplete.\(^{11}\) In an unknown state of the temple’s history, possibly the Bhonsle period (18th century), when the temple was being repaired or rebuilt, the remaining slabs of the stone inscription must have been brought to the Kevala–Narasimha Temple.\(^{12}\) The inscribed slabs of black stone thus came from elsewhere, possibly along with other building blocks of red sandstone, and their source may have been a similar, though ruined temple in the neighbourhood that was used as a quarry. Such a ruin does still exist on the Rāmagiri, viz. a 5th-century temple of which, apart from two *māṇḍapa* walls, little remains today. Only its image has miraculously survived the ages *in situ*, and, although it is heavily damaged, this statue conclusively proves that this ruin once was a Trivikrama Temple.\(^{13}\)

From the evidence presented we infer that this Trivikrama image (Plate 55) is the one that is named ‘Prabhāvatisvāmin’. The *Kevala–Narasimha Temple Inscription* may thus originally have belonged to this, now ruined, Trivikrama Temple on the Rāmagiri. Other arguments that substantiate this inference are presented below, pp. 365 ff. (Bakker 2013b).

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\(^{11}\) See Bakker & Isaacson 1993, 62; above, p. 135.
\(^{12}\) According to Jamkhedkar 1992, 159:

Raghuji (Bhonsle), after establishing himself in the Nagpur region, created an *agrahāra* and religious endowments for the maintenance of the monuments and worship there. At least at that time some repairs must have been executed.

In n. 15 (*ibid.*) this author writes:

> When Raghuji set out on his expedition of Deogarh, he had camped at Rāṃṭek. On seeing that the main temples are devoid of images, he made a vow that he would restore the images in their places if he was blessed with victory. In fact, he had got new images made at Jaipur, but ultimately consecrated old images (1753 A.D.) retrieved from the waters of the river Sur.

If this statement were true, it is not even certain that the Narasimha image originally belonged to the Kevala–Narasimha Temple. One wonders which and how reliable the sources are of Jamkhedkar’s above statement. The description of the temple after restoration and the first edition of the inscription were given in Jamkhedkar 1987b. In this publication (pp. 219, 222 f. nn. 17–19) Jamkhedkar describes the earlier ‘conservative repairs’ that were removed in the latest restoration. All this conveys the impression that the KNT temple has frequently been tampered with over the centuries.

\(^{13}\) See A.P. Jamkhedkar 1988, 85 f., Plates 103–09; Bakker 1997, 142–45, Plate XXXIV; above, Plate 55; below, Plates 64, 65.
A New Interpretation of Rāmagiri Evidence

2 The Gupta–Vākāṭaka Relationship*

Preamble

The 5th-century stone inscription preserved in the Kevala–Narasimha Temple (KNT) on top of the Rāmagiri (Ramtek) has been edited thrice: by A.P Jamkhedkar in 1987b, by Bakker & Isaacson in 1993, and by Bakker 1997.14 Its interpretation is hindered by the fact that only one third of the text is legible. Recently the present author has studied the inscription again and has proposed some new conjectural readings, which seem to clarify the overall dedication of the pious activity recorded in the inscription (Bakker 2010c; above, pp. 351 ff.).

According to this latest reconstruction, the pious activity recorded in the inscription seems to have been dedicated to Viṣṇu Trivikrama. Consequently, it has been argued that the inscription does not originally belong to the Kevala–Narasimha Temple in which it is presently found, but to the adjacent ruin of the Trivikrama Temple. The surviving Trivikrama image of this ruin may represent the Prabhāvatisvāmin, the commission of which by a princess (manujendraputrī) is recorded in the KNT inscription (v. 19, above, pp. 354 f.).

The Praśasti. KNT Inscription verses 2–19

In the present contribution I would like to reconsider the narratative structure of the praśasti part of the inscription, i.e. its verses 2 to 19, in order to obtain a better understanding of the royal pedigree that it proclaims. Because the right-hand portion of the slab of stone on which the inscription has been engraved is missing, it could not be determined with certainty what the original number of verses may have been. A conservative estimate assumes that the inscription comprised 34 verses, of which the praśasti part counted 19 (including the Maṅgalī verse). This estimate is based on the assumption that there were two Upajāti verses (88 syllables) to a line, each line beginning a new verse. The present slab measures c. 50 cm in height and 100 cm in width. The conservative estimate implies that the original stone must have covered a breadth of about 170 cm.

* The first version of this article was published in 2012 as the second in a series of three under the title The Gupta–Vākāṭaka Relationship. A new interpretation of Rāmagiri evidence (2). in: Religions of South Asia 5.1–2 (2011), 293–302.
14 Jamkhedkar 1987b; Bakker & Isaacson 1993; Bakker 1997, Appendix I, The Kevala–Narasipha Temple Inscription (second revised edition), pp. 163–167.
However, in our first edition we did not exclude the possibility that the inscription originally had 3 Upajāti verses to a line, which would make the breadth come to approximately 250 cm—very broad indeed (above, p. 116). The reason for this speculation was the contents of the inscription, since apparently much vital information, which we thought must have been in the original, was not found in the legible portion.\footnote{Bakker & Isaacson 1993, 48; above, p. 116.}

Rethinking the contents and structure of the prāṣasti, I now think that the conservative estimate leaves enough room for providing all information that is needed to make the story told in the inscription an intelligible and meaningful unity. The prāṣasti does not contain the standard genealogy as do the copperplate charters of the Vākāṭakas; instead it gives an unusually detailed historical account of the extraordinary life of its patroness, the princess (manujendraputrī) mentioned in v. 19, the last verse of the prāṣasti, after which the record of her pious deeds begins (vv. 20–34).

We take as our point of departure that the prāṣasti originally counted only one Puṣpitāgrā verse (1) and 18 Upajāti’s (2–19). For the Sanskrit text and translation see above, p. 122 ff. We may present its hard core, that is the legible information contained in the inscription, as follows (verses are grouped in pairs when the subject is surmised to be divided over two verses and we have too little information to distinguish between the individual verses).

| Verse Number | Subject |
|--------------|---------|
| 1            | Viṣṇu Trivikrama |
| 2, 3         | rājarsī, mighty king |
| 4            | girl who grows up like a flame in father’s house |
| 5            | birth of sons and youngest sister named Munḍā |
| 6            | |
| 7            | |
| 8            | |
| 9            | Candragupta ... sutā ... to śrī Rudrasena |
| 10           | |
| 11           | king ... gets son Ghaṭotkaca |
| 12           | |
| 13           | wedding of rājarāja ... with bhāgineyī |
| 14, 15       | praise of ... |
| 16           | |
| 17           | bhrāṭṛ brings ... home with force (balāṭ) |
| 18, 19       | manujendraputrī resolves on pious activity |

Our first conjecture is that Candragupta mentioned in v. 9 is introduced in
the verses 2 and 3. Either he, or possibly his father Samudragupta, is the one who is called rājarṣi in v. 2. This king Candragupta II gives his daughter named Muṇḍā to Rudrasena. Our second conjecture is that the king who in v. 11 is said to get the son Ghaṭotkaca is also Candragupta and that this son Ghaṭotkaca is the subject of v. 12 and is the same as the rājarāja who is said to marry his sister’s daughter, that is his niece (bhāgineyī) in v. 13.

These set of conjectures is based on a postulate, that is, a premise that we cannot deduce from the inscription itself, but that we need, in order to give coherent meaning to its diverse pieces of information. The postulate is that the inscription is concerned with the genealogical relationship of the Gupta and Vākāṭaka dynasties, neither of which is mentioned as such in the legible part of the inscription, and that this relationship underlies the contents of the illegible verses 4, 6, and 8. This relationship is known from other sources to be as follows.

![Gupta Vākāṭaka relationship as known before the KNT Inscription](image)

Candragupta II’s daughter Prabhāvatī Guptā is married to the Vākāṭaka king Rudrasena II. Ghaṭotkaca is known as the viceroy of Vidiśa during the reign of his senior half-brother Kumāragupta. We assume that this relationship underlies the illegible verses 8 and 10, that is to say that in v. 8 Rudrasena of the Vākāṭaka dynasty is introduced and that in v. 10 the birth of a son (or sons) and one daughter in the marriage of Candragupta’s sutā and Rudrasena (v. 9) is described. If this assumption is correct, it implies that the princess Muṇḍā given to Rudrasena is no one else than Prabhāvatī Guptā, of whom Muṇḍā may be the personal name (see below, p. 362).

On account of these premises we conclude that the niece (bhāgineyī) of verse 13 is a daughter of Prabhāvatī Guptā and Rudrasena, who married her maternal

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16 In my revised edition of this inscription (Bakker 1997, 163), I conjectured to read ‘samudraguptaḥ’ in pāda 1 of verse 2, but I now think this is less probable (above, n. 2 on p. 352). Candragupta II may be the only subject of the verses 2 and 3.
17 See the Tumain Inscription of Kumāragupta and Ghaṭotkacagupta, G.E. 116 (AD 435), in: Epigraphia Indica XXVI (1941–42), 118; CII III (1981), 276–79; Bakker 2006, pp. 172 ff., above, p. 309 ff.
uncle Ghaṭotkaca. The praise of this Ghaṭotkaca is probably sung in the verses 14–15. The inscription, if thus interpreted correctly, allows us to complete the Gupta–Vākāṭaka genealogical relationship.

For the above reasoning to be correct, it is necessary to assume that the illegible verse 6 describes the wedding of Candragupta and the Nāga princess Kuberanāgā, the parents of Prabhāvatī. The ‘father’s house’ of verse 5 then presupposes that the dynastic house of the Nāga king, father of Kuberanāgā, in which she ‘grew up like a flame’, is introduced in verse 4.

The above premises allow the inference that the ‘brother’ of verse 17 is the brother of the ‘niece’ that was married to Ghaṭotkaca, who must be the Vākāṭaka king Pravarasena II, who may have been introduced either in verse 10 or verse 16. This inference is based not only on the above premises but also on the assumption that the illegible verse 16 refers, in guarded terms maybe, to a conflict leading to the death of Ghaṭotkaca in verse 17, as the mentioning of Indra/Purandara suggests; this event turned the ‘niece’ into a widow. The fact that he brings his widowed sister home ‘with force’ (balāṭ, v. 17d) could be explained by assuming that Pravarasena II sided with Ghaṭotkaca against a common enemy. The manujendraputri of v. 19 refers to this widow, daughter of Rudrasena and Prabhāvatī, who had returned to her paternal home; from verse 24d we conjecture that her name was Atibhāvatī.¹⁸

Conjectured narrative structure of the KNT Inscription

The above argumentation can be summarized in the following schematic presentation of the contents of the prāśasti of the KNT Inscription. The postulated premises are given in small capitals, the conjectures derived from the legible text and based on these postulates are given in bold face.

¹⁸ See Bakker & Isaacson 1993, 67; above, p. 140.
Verse Number Subject

1 1 Viṣṇu Trivikrama
2, 3 2 rājarṣi, mighty king, Candragupta
4 1 Nāgas → father (of Kuberanāgā)
5 1 girl (Kuberanāgā) who grows up like a flame in father’s house
6 1 Wedding of Candragupta and Kuberanāgā
7 1 birth of sons and youngest sister named Munḍā
8 1 Vākāṭakas → Rudrasena
9 1 Candragupta gives sutā (Munḍā) to śrī Rudrasena
10 1 Birth of brother(s) and sister
11 1 King Candragupta gets son Ghaṭotkaca
12 1 Ghaṭotkaca
13 1 Wedding of rājarāja (Ghaṭotkaca) with bhūgineyī (manujendraputri)
14, 15 2 praise of Ghaṭotkaca
16 1 Deadly conflict of Ghaṭotkaca
17 1 bhrāṭ Pravarasena brings princess (manujendraputri) home with force (balāt)
18, 19 2 manujendraputri (Atibhāvatī) resolves on pious activity

It goes without saying that the above schematic interpretation of the inscription is a hypothesis. If, to conclude, this hypothesis is correct, there is no need to suppose that a third Upajāti verse is missing at the end of the lines. The reconstructed narrative structure would allow the conclusion that the praśasti counted 19 verses only.

The Daughter named Munḍā

A key assumption in the theory advanced above is the identity of the daughter named Munḍā and the dowager queen known from her own inscriptions as Prabhāvatī Guptā. This identity seems reinforced by independent evidence, viz. the Mundaḥal Plates of Vākāṭaka Rudrasena II, Year 5, which open as follows:

Success! Approved. By order of Lord Munḍasvāmin, God of gods, who holds the conch, discus and sword; after He had made the Nāga king stretch out on the waters of the ocean, He has entered a state of yogic sleep, while lying on the serpent coils of that (king) Ananta (the Infinite One)—a bundle of expanded hoods bending (over Him by way of canopy).19

To make sense of this opening statement, we take it that the presiding god Devadeva (Viṣṇu), on whose cakra Rudrasena’s rule is said to be based (above,

19 Based on Shastri & Gupta 1997, 155 ll. 1–2. For Sanskrit text and discussion see Bakker 2010d; above, n. 36 on p. 326.
p. 153, p. 326), is here designated ‘Munḍasvāmin’; and, in accordance with the practice of the age to prefix the names of the temple deities with the names of their founders, it follows that this deity had been installed by Munḍā (cf. above, n. 41 on p. 328).

Although this is obviously the primary meaning of the opening statement, some double-entendre seems to be implied, since Munḍasvāmin may be taken to mean ‘the husband of Munḍā’, that is king Rudrasena, who is the actual author of the inscription. And the Nāgarāja who supports him could be taken to mean a ruler of the Nāga House, the house in which his mother-in-law, Kuberanāga, ‘grew up like a flame’. From the Māṇḍhal Plates it thus seems to emerge that Rudrasena’s wife used her personal name Munḍā as long as her husband was alive. The dynastic name ‘Prabhāvatī Guptā’ was adopted when she, as a dowager queen, assumed the regency over her sons.²⁰

The Gupta–Vākāṭaka relationship

The matrimonial relations of the Gupta and Vākāṭaka dynasties can thus finally be presented as follows.

![Diagram of the Gupta–Vākāṭaka relationship](image)

**Figure 9**

The Gupta Vākāṭaka relationship

After we have thus established the contents of the Kevala–Narasimha Temple Inscription to the best of our ability, it is time to be astonished at the story it tells.

The narration of the KNT Inscription

First of all it needs to be noted that, despite the fact that the inscription is found in Vākāṭaka territory and celebrates foundations within the complex

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²⁰ Bakker & Isaacson 1993, 53; Bakker 1997, 16. The KNT inscription may hint at the dynastic name, when it compares in verse 7 the girl Munḍā with the light (prabhā) of the moon (candra): Prabhāvatī is ‘the one who possesses the lustre’, scil. of Candra, her father. For a discussion of this name (meaning ‘the bald one’) see above, n. 40 on p. 327. Is it coincidence that Munḍā’s younger brother is named the one who is ‘Bald-like-a-pot’ (Ghaṭotkaca)?
of Vākāṭaka state sanctuaries on the Rāmagiri, the document may be called ‘Gupta’ rather than ‘Vākāṭaka’. The prāśasti devotes ten verses (2–3, 6–7, 11–16) to the Gupta lineage against only three (8–9, 17) to the Vākāṭaka family members. Clearly the Gupta princess, née Vākāṭaka, remained loyal to her in-laws, also after she had returned to the Vākāṭaka kingdom. This emerges from the fact that, if our theory is correct, four or five verses deal with her deceased husband Ghatotkaca. And like her mother Prabhāvatī in her inscriptions, the princess Atibhāvatī does not waste words on the Vākāṭaka kings, mentioning her father Rudrasena only in passing and apparently omitting his ancestors. By contrast, however, she elaborates on her maternal lineage, the Nāgas in vv. 4 and 5, the birth of her mother in vv. 6 and 7, and her own birth and wedding in vv. 10 and 13.

Like her mother Queen Prabhāvatī, the princess took great pride in being a descendant of Candragupta II, her maternal Gupta grandfather, who also happened to become her father-in-law. That the princess followed in the footsteps of her celebrated mother Prabhāvatī is also evident from another important fact revealed by the inscription: women, queens and princesses, had obviously a direct say in state affairs and had access to the financial recourses of the state, which they could apply to their own works of charity. It is unthinkable that temples, images, and a water reservoir could have been financed out of the traditional strīdhana. To have permitted such a degree of freedom to the women of their family is entirely to the credit of the Vākāṭaka kings Rudrasena II and Pravarasena II. To this freedom we owe the magnificent monuments on the Rāmagiri.

Another astonishing fact revealed by the inscription is that marriages between uncle and niece (bhāgineyī) were, occasionally probably, permitted in the aristocracy, even under a brahmin king who boasted to have brought back to earth the Kṛtayuga, the golden age, in which the dharma was supposedly uncorrupted.21 Here we are not concerned with cross-cousin marriage that is known from the Dravidian South. This once-removed filiation served to consolidate political power and territory. In this respect the Gupta–Vākāṭaka matrimonial policy was not different from that practised within European royal courts.22

The genealogy constructed by matrimony thus served a Machiavellian scheming for power in 5th-century India. I have described this scheming elaborately in my Theatre of Broken Dreams (Bakker 2006; above, pp. 301 ff.).

At the end, the inscription reports an act of violence, the forceful removal of a widow from the house of her in-laws. This implies war between the Guptas and Vākāṭakas. Obviously the political objective of this non-dharmic union had grown stale when the Gupta–Vākāṭaka relationship deteriorated.

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21 See e.g. Pravarasena’s Jāmb Plates, in CII V, p. 12 lines 15–16.
22 Two European examples that spring to mind are found in the House of Habsburg: Charles II of Austria’s marriage to his niece Maria Anna of Bavaria (daughter of his sister Anna of Habsburg), and Phillip II of Spain’s (fourth) marriage to his niece Anna of Austria (daughter of his sister Maria of Spain).
death of Ghaṭotkaca probably happened in a conflict over the royal succession after Kumāragupta. Ghaṭotkaca, viceroy in Vidiśā under Kumāragupta, was prevented from succeeding his brother to the throne by the latter’s bastard son, Skandagupta. Evidently the Vākāṭaka king Pravarasena II took the side of his brother-in-law Ghaṭotkaca, and when this party lost the war of succession, he abducted his sister from the palaces of his enemy. The war may have started with Pravarasena’s crossing of the Narmadā in c. AD 445, and ended with the return of the widow to his capital Pravarapura/Nandivardhana. Skandagupta acceded to the Gupta throne in c. AD 455.

It cannot be excluded that yet another motive incited Pravarasena to this unprecedented act. His sister was given in marriage to her maternal uncle by Pravarasena’s mother Prabhāvatī during the latter’s regency. It could well be that the young prince Pravarasena had never been too happy about this breach of the dharma and the subordination to the Gupta dynasty that it entailed. By bringing her back to her place of birth, King Pravarasena may have strengthened his image of a righteous king. This image was boosted further by allowing his sister to spend great sums on meritorious activity, the most significant of which may have been the building of the Trivikrama Temple and the installation of the image of Prabhāvatīsvāmin in memory of their mother, Prabhāvatī Guptā.

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23 For more details see Bakker 2006.
24 In the Indore Plates dating from Pravarasena’s twenty-third regnal year, i.e. soon after Prabhāvatī’s death, it is reported that Pravarasena II pitched his army camp (vāsaka) in Tripūrī (modern Tewar) on the northern bank of the Narmadā River, i.e. in Gupta territory (Mirashi 1982a, 69, 72 l.1; Bakker 1997, 25; above, p. 314).
A New Interpretation of Rāmagiri Evidence

3 The Trivikrama Temple*

Preamble
This essay is the last of a series of three. In the first two sections it has been argued that the pious activity recorded in the Kevala–Narasimha Temple Inscription was actually dedicated to Viṣṇu Trivikrama, not to Narasimha, the deity installed in the Kevala–Narasimha Temple on top of the Rāmagiri (Ramtek) where the inscription has been found. From this and other circumstantial evidence it has been inferred that the KNT inscription does not originally belong to the Kevala–Narasimha Temple, but to the adjacent ruin of the Trivikrama Temple and that Prabhāватivāmin, the deity named in the inscription, actually refers to the Trivikrama image preserved in this ruin (above, p. 356). The KNT Inscription may have been placed in the Narasimha Temple together with other building blocks when this temple was reconstructed in the Bhonsle period (18th century). The ruins of the Trivikrama Temple in its vicinity may have served as a quarry. In the present study I will substantiate this inference by comparing the evidence of the inscription with the material remains of the Trivikrama Temple which are still in situ.

The Trivikrama Temple
As shown by the Google Earth satellite picture in Plate 63, both temples, the Kevala–Narasimha and the Trivikrama, are situated somewhat outside the main temple complex on the spur of the hill, which may be an indication of the relative late date of these two temples. This applies in particular to the Trivikrama Temple at the edge of the hill, c. 200 m northeast of the Varāha Temple (Plate 11), which marks the entrance to the spur of the hill.

Of the Trivikrama Temple only parts of the vestibule (mandapa) are still standing (Plate 64). The main temple idol has been miraculously preserved (Plate 65), although it is heavily damaged and seems to occupy still its original position, facing west like the Varāha and Narasimha images.

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* The first version of this article was published in 2013 as the third in a series of three under the title The Trivikrama Temple. A new interpretation of Rāmagiri evidence (3). in: South Asian Studies 29.2 (2013), 169–76.
25 For the first two see above, pp. 351 ff., and pp. 357 ff. (Bakker 2010c and 2012).
Plate 63
*View of the Vākāṭaka temples on the Rāmagiri*

Plate 64
*Ruins of the Trivikrama Temple, Rāmagiri (view to the east)*
The style and ornamentation of the walls and pillars of the vestibule have been described and illustrated by Jamkhedkar 1988. A stylistic comparison with the other 5th-century remains on the hill also indicates a relatively late date of this temple. In this respect it seems relevant to refer to Joanna Williams’ Vākāṭaka Art and the Gupta Mainstream, in which she observed the following:

The pillars [of the Trivikrama Temple] are similar and might be compared to examples from Nachna and Deogarh in the late fifth and early sixth centuries AD, although the resemblances are not very specific. The only peculiarity is a flat, anchor-shaped element below the lower vase, perhaps a simplified version of the palmette which often appears in this position. (Williams 1983, 225 f.)

This anchor-shaped element and its counterpart in Deogarh are illustrated in Plates 66 and 67.
The iconography of the Trivikrama image

The Trivikrama image is made of red sandstone and measures 178×119 cm. Mirashi was the first to give a description of this idol.

The god has a crown on his head, with a halo round his face. He wears the kuṇḍalas on his ears and a pearl-necklace with a large pendant round his neck. His vaijayanti garland is shown falling on both his legs. He wears an udarabandha. His lower garment, which is fastened at the waist with a girdle, hangs down in folds in front. His arms are now broken on both the sides, but their jewelled aṅgadas (armlets) can still be seen. His left foot is planted on the ground, while the right foot, which was raised to measure the sky, is now broken at the knee. (Mirashi 1963, lx)

The deity had eight arms, all sadly broken off, which makes it impossible to say anything directly about the attributes he must have carried. He wears the double muktāyajñopavīta, of which the six strings of pearls have been almost completely erased at the front side of the image, but are still clearly visible at the back. A significant feature of the Trivikrama image of the Rāmagiri is the ‘pleated’ śiraścakra that encircles his head, the origin of which James Harle (1987) has traced to the fan-shaped tufts at the end of the band holding the crown.
In the present context, the most significant part of the image—iconographically speaking—is the relief at the bottom of the striding Trivikrama. This relief is rather worn off, but enough remains to identify the depiction (Plates 68 and 69). Clear and relatively well-preserved is the figure of King Bali standing underneath the stretched right leg of Trivikrama (Plate 71). To the right of the Daitya king we see the outline of a smaller figure, which, I presume, represents his wife (Plate 70).
To Bali’s left, against the left leg on which Trivikrama stands, is the lower leg visible of a small figure (Plate 72).

The iconographic programme becomes clear if we compare it with the well-known lintel from Pawaya (Plate 73), which depicts Bali’s sacrifice and Viṣṇu Trivikrama. If we ignore the representation of the sacrifice itself along with its three priests and the two priestly helpers who welcome Vāmana by pouring water upon his hands, this lintel depicts from left to right: Bali’s wife (seated), king Bali (his left arm raised), the dwarfish figure of Vāmana, and the (eight-armed) cosmic god Trivikrama. In other words, the positioning of the protagonists of the myth in the Pawaya lintel conforms to the one in the Trivikrama image of the Rāmagiri. We therefore take the small lower leg standing in between Bali and Trivikrama as belonging to the latter god in his Vāmana form.
The pious works of Atibhāvatī

Although the relief is admittedly too worn to see the frightened eyes of the Daitya’s wife, the Rāmagiri Trivikrama sculpture conforms to the depiction of the myth in the dedicatory verse of the KNT Inscription when it says of Viṣṇu:

When the splendour of whose body is enlarged at the time of Bali’s sacrifice, and who is looked at by the wives of Diti’s son (i.e. Bali) with gazes that tremble with fright, that one is victorious. (above, p. 353)

This inscription, as we have discussed in Bakker 1997, 2006 and 2012 (above, pp. 301 ff., pp. 357 ff.), relates the life and pious deeds of Prabhāvatī Guptā’s daughter Atibhāvatī after the Eastern Vākāṭaka king Pravarasena II had brought home his widowed sister from Vidiśā. Atibhāvatī erected the Trivikrama Temple in commemoration of her deceased mother, naming the deity after her mother Prabhāvatisvāmin in order to transfer merit to her, as v. 21 of the inscription records:

Then (the princess) commissioned the splendid ‘Master of Prabhāvatī’, (the image of the) Lord of the World, within the temple, for the sake of undecaying merit of (her) mother.26

And after the building of this main temple and the installation of its main image, the princess commissioned other works. The most evident among them was the building of a flood-control dam, which yielded the water reservoir Sudarśana (v. 24):

She of extreme lustre (atibhāvatī) had a water reservoir Sudarśana made, along with the beautiful god (Sudarśana) in the village of Kadalivāṭaka.27

Kadalivāṭaka may be the modern hamlet Kelāpur, 2 km north of Rāma’s Hill and the artificial lake is, after the dam had been rebuilt in recent times, again (or still) there, known under the name of Khindsi Lake. The Trivikrama Temple towers high above this beautiful sight, Sudarśana (Plate 74).

Conclusion

Summarizing, it may be observed that the identification of Prabhāvatisvāmin with Viṣṇu Trivikrama and, consequently, the assignment of the Kevala–Narasimha Temple Inscription to the Trivikrama Temple are corroborated by:

1 The perfect match of the Maṅgala verse and the iconography of the Trivikrama image.
2 The location of the Trivikrama Temple, somewhat outside the main temple area, which links this temple closely to the other work of Atibhāvatī, the artificial Sudarśana Lake.
3 The relatively late date of the Trivikrama Temple and sculpture, which are stylistically the latest of all Vākāṭaka remains at Rāmagiri.

26 For the Sanskrit text see above, p. 124 and p. 354.
27 For the Sanskrit text see above, p. 124.
As has been argued, the activity of Atibhāvatī must have taken place between the death of her husband Ghaṭotkaca Gupta (c. AD 453–54) and that of her brother Pravarasena II (c. AD 456–57). Atibhāvatī’s example was copied, when power shifted from the Eastern to the Western Vākāṭaka kings following the death of Pravarasena II. An inscription found in Hisse-Borala near Wasim of Devasena, Vākāṭaka king in Vatsagulma, dated in the year 380 of the Śaka Era, i.e. AD 457–58, records ‘the construction of a water storage (saras) called Sudarśana by a noble named Svāmilladeva, for the welfare of all living beings’ (Bakker 1997, 32).

The building of the Trivikrama Temple and the installation of its deity Prabhāvatīsāmin took place before this and may thus be dated between AD 453 and 457. The Trivikrama sculpture (Plates 55 and 65) was made in those years, probably in the same workshop in which the images of the Pravareśvara Temple in Mansar (5 km to the west) were sculptured. The latter temple was the grand project of the princess’ brother, King Pravarasena II, and by this time the sculptors had exchanged the dark basalt stone, used in the earlier images of Varāha and Narasiṁha, for the red sandstone that gave the hill its other name, Sindūragiri.28

28 For the Sindūragirimaṁāˈhāmya see above, p. 338. For the Pravareśvara Temple in Mansar and its images see Bakker 2008, http://irs.ub.rug.nl/dbi/4cc5-085a0.