
Ājīvikas, Maṇibhadra and Early History of Eastern Bengal: A New Copperplate Inscription of Vainyagupta and its Implications

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Abstract

A new copperplate inscription of Vainyagupta, to be presented in this article, is important as one of the rare sources that provide a glimpse of the later history of the Ājīvikas. It also tells us about their worship of Maṇibhadra, one of the eminent yakṣas, with interesting information on his iconography. Finally, it gives us some insights into the early history of Samataṭa, a subregion of Bengal on its eastern fringe, as it includes a copy of the grant of an earlier king named Nāthacandra. In this article, I will present an edition of the inscription and discuss some historical aspects revealed by it in connection with other sources.

Introduction

The inscription to be presented in this article is a decree on copperplate issued by Vainyagupta, dated year 184 Gupta Era (henceforward GE), currently kept by a private collector in Dhaka who wishes to remain anonymous. I was able to study the plate and take photographs on 26 July 2009, 31 July 2011 and 15 March 2013. I was also provided with another set of photographs taken by Gudrun Melzer on a separate occasion.

This inscription is important not only as a new grant of King Vainyagupta but also as one of the rare sources that provide a glimpse of the later history of the Ājīvikas, a religious group which once flourished in eastern India in competition with both Buddhists and Jains.¹ It also tells us about their worship of Maṇibhadra, one of the eminent yakṣas, with interesting information on his iconography. Finally, it gives us some insights into the early history of Samataṭa, a subregion of Bengal on its eastern fringe, as it includes a copy of the grant of Nāthacandra, an earlier king mentioned in no other sources. In this article, I will first provide readers some basic information on the inscription, the full text with notes and translation, and notes on its contents. Then I shall discuss some aspects of the history of the Ājīvikas, the yakṣa Maṇibhadra and eastern Bengal revealed by this new inscription in connection with other sources, and finally the interconnection of those aspects.

¹For the history, doctrine and practice of the group, see A. L. Basham, *History and Doctrines of the Ājīvikas: A Vanished Indian Religion* (London, 1951, reprint, Delhi, 2002), which is still the most comprehensive work to date. For a recent attempt to reinterpret its doctrine, see J. Bronkhorst, “Ājīvika Doctrine Reconsidered”, in *Essays in Jaina Philosophy and Religion*, (ed.) P. Balcerowicz (Delhi, 2003), pp.153–178. In this article I use the term “Ājīvika” to denote the group because it is accepted by a wide range of scholars, although the form actually used in the inscription is Ājīvaka, the same as found in the Pāli Buddhist texts.



Fig. 1 (Colour online) A New Copper Plate Inscription of Vainyagupta, year 184 GE, Obverse. The photograph taken by the author. Courtesy of the owner.



Fig. 2 (Colour online) A New Copper Plate Inscription of Vainyagupta, year 184 GE, Reverse. The photograph taken by the author. Courtesy of the owner.

The Copperplate inscription of Vainyagupta, year 184 GE

The inscription is engraved lengthways on both sides of a single copperplate, 25 lines on the obverse and 22 on the reverse (Figs 1 and 2). An oval-shaped seal is soldered to the left of the plate. The seal seems to contain an image of a couchant bull facing left with one or two lines of inscription below, separated by a single line. Both image and inscription on the seal have suffered heavily from corrosion and the latter is almost unreadable. The plate is 39.7 cm long with seal, 32 cm long without it and 21 cm wide. The seal is 13 cm long and 12.5 cm wide. The plate has sustained damage in some parts due to corrosion making some characters difficult to read. The damage is the severest at both lower corners where parts of

the plate have broken away and some characters have become totally obliterated. However, most of characters are still legible, especially with the aid of digital photographs.

This is the third plate of Vainyagupta so far discovered. The other two are 1) the Gunaighar plate dated year 188 GE, currently kept in the Bangladesh National Museum with accession number 2400,² and 2) the very corroded and almost illegible plate discovered from the site of Salban Vihara, Mainamati, first reported by Barrie M. Morrison³ and currently kept by the Department of Archaeology, Government of Bangladesh, with accession number BA/CP/5.2001. The provenance of the present plate is unknown, though its contents strongly suggest that the recorded incidents occurred in Samataṭa, a sub-region of Bengal corresponding to the present districts of Comilla and Chandpur in Chittagong division of Bangladesh, as will be discussed below.

The text of the inscription is written in Sanskrit, mostly correct but with non-Sanskritic terms especially among personal and place names, and grammatical mistakes in some parts. It is in prose except four admonishing verses (lines 6–9). The characters of the inscription can be categorised as an eastern variety of Late Northern Brāhmī script. Numerals denoting digits, decades and a hundred are used in the plate. Some of them, mostly those for decades and a hundred, are marked with a circle or similar symbols following them, as indicated in the rendering of the text below.

In terms of orthography, the gemination of consonants in conjunction with *r* is notable. Examples include *dharmma* (l. 14), *pūrvva* (l. 5), *yattrā* (l. 17), *puttra* (l. 24) and *kkrītaṃ* (l. 34). Such doubling of consonants also occurs without regularity in other phonetic contexts. Examples are: *ānuddhyātaḥ* (l. 1), *dharmmeṇṇa* (l. 4) and *saṃvvat* (l. 10). The use of *n* in conjunction with *ś*, instead of *ṃ* or *ṇ* as found in *kānsa* (ll. 43–45), is another notable feature. The rules of *sandhi* are not always observed, especially in the case of place names like *Ulagiuccālikā* (l. 22) and *Arīuccālī* (l. 26), and words without expected Visarga, or conversely with unexpected Visarga like *hakkavaḍḍikebhyah hastāt* (l. 31). Unlike other contemporary inscriptions of Bengal, *b* and *v* are expressed by different characters, though the substitution of the former by the latter is also observed in certain cases, such as *vali* (ll. 12–13) and *saṃvaddha* (ll. 41–42).

Text⁴

Obverse (Figure 1)

(1) svasti mahānauhastyaśvajayaskandhāvārāt krīpurāt paramabhaṭṭāarakapādānuddhyātaḥ
pañcādhikaraṇoparikamahāpratīhāramahārājaśrīvainyaguptaḥ kuśālī

²D. C. Bhattacharyya, “A newly discovered copperplate from Tippera [The Gunaighar Grant of Vainyagupta: The Year 188 Current (Gupta Era)]”, *Indian Historical Quarterly*, VI (1) (1930), pp. 45–60; D. C. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions Bearing on Indian History and Civilization, Vol. 1: From the Sixth Century B. C. to the Sixth Century A. D.* (2nd ed.) (Calcutta, 1965), pp. 340–345.

³B. M. Morrison, *Lalmai, a Cultural Center of Early Bengal: An Archaeological Report and Historical Analysis* (Seattle and London, 1974), p. 98.

⁴Read from three sets of digital photographs taken by me and another provided by Gudrun Melzer. Editorial conventions in presenting the text are as follows: (. . .): elements not present but added by the editor like line and verse numbers. [. . .]: *akṣaras* unclear but reconstructed on conjecture. —: *akṣaras* obliterated and not reconstructible. ∴: *virāma*. °: symbols marking numerals. ′: *avagraha*.

- (2) itastyāṃ bhaviṣyāṃ vā ānyāṃś ca tatpādotopajīvināḥ kuśalam āśaṃṣyānudarśayati viditaṃ bhavatām astu pūrvvarājabhir yyaḥ svapuṇyābhivṛddhaye akṣayanīvyā va-
- (3) [rṇin]ām ā[ś]ramiṇāṃ ca tāmraśāsana dattikāś tā mayā (°)pi mātāpittor ātmanāś ca puṇyābhivṛddhaye pūrvvamaṇḍalajayanāṭane bhagavataś caturmmukhamūrtter mma-
- (4) [ṇi]bhadrasyāyatana-m-ājīvakabhadantaśramaṇasamghāya sarvvātibhogenākṣayanīvīdharmmeṇṇa svatāmraśāsanaṅbhyanumoditā yuṣmābhir api svaśreyortthibhi-
- (5) r evam evānupālayitavyāḥ pūrvvarājadattidattatāmraśāsanaṅkaraś ca yathākṣaraiva mayā svatāmraśāsane likhitaḥ tad yūyam etaddānānumodane (°)smin madīyatā-
- (6) mraśāsane dṛṣṭvā sarvvataḥ pratipālanādi kariṣyatha iti anupā[la]naṃ prati ca bhagavatā parāśarātmajena vedavyāseṇa gītāḥ ślokaḥ (|) ṣaṣṭiṃ varṣasahasrāṇi
- (7) svargge modati bhūmidaḥ (|) ākṣeptā cānumantā ca tāny eva narake vaset· (|| 1) svadattāṃ paradattāṃ vā yo hareta vasundharāṃ (|) sa viṣṭhāyāṃ kṛmir bhūtvā piṭṛbhiḥ saha pacya-
- (8) te (|| 2) pūrvvadattāṃ dvijātibhyo yatnād rakṣa yudhiṣṭhira (|) mahīṃ mahimatāṃ śreṣṭha dānāc chreyo (°)nupālanāṃ (|| 3) yāniha dattāni purā narendrair ddānāni dharmmārtthayaśaska-
- (9) rāṇi (|) dharmmābhilāṣān nṛpagauravāc ca mayā (°)py anujñātaphalāni tāni (|| 4) varttamānaścaturāśītīśatasamvatsare caittramāśatrayodaśadivase dūta-
- (10) kāḥ kumārāmātyadharmmasvāmibhramararājyapālā likhitaṃ sandhivigrahādhikaraṇikarāmadāseṇa samvvat· 100 80 4 caittradi 10 3 mahā-
- (11) rājamahēśvaranāthacandraḥ bhaviṣyān itastyāṃ rājño (°)nyāṃś ca rājapādotopajīvināḥ kuśalam āha evaṅ cāha viditaṃ vo (°)stu yathā mayā svapu-
- (12) nyapyāyanāya jayanāṭane bhagavataś caturmmukhamūrtter mmaṇibhadrasya nāthametāyatanaṃ kārītan tasya bhagavataḥ s[uma]nogandhadhūpava-
- (13) licarusatrapravarttanāya tannivāsyājīvakabhadantaśamghasya ca tasyāyanasya khaṇḍaphuṭṭapratisa[m]skāraṇāṇāya kṣetra _ [ddha]grāmam evā-
- (14) hāradāsīdāsādisarvvātibhogenātiṣṣṭhā tad yuṣmābhir asmadgauravād dharmmavātsalyāc cākṣayanīvīdharmmeṇaiva śaśvatkālam anupālayita-
- (15) vyāś talle[kh]yā yattra pūrvvamaṇḍalajayanāṭane jakkanaśātyāṃ poyavādappapaḍakhāsikābhyāṃ hastākṛitaṃ kṣettradroṇavā[pā]
- (16) 40 ° mūlyāṃ dī 4 attraiva [dhar]mmadevavilālakantārakarmmāntikābhyāṃ hastāt kṛitaṃ kṣettradroṇa 10 5 mūlyāṃ dī 1 māśā 8 attraivomala-
- (17) vaṅgālotpalavaṅgālābhyāṃ kṛitakṣettradro 10 5 mūlyāṃ dī 1 mā 8 eṣāṃ sāksīṇā yattra heṣamakhallavāstavyasiddhagodama jayanā-
- (18) ṭanavāstavyaśrīvilālah attra vāstavya usalamanaśācāraś ca ṣollavillagrāmasya sīmā pūrvveṇa makhaḍapaṭṭi cāli dakṣiṇe[na] gu[lma]-
- (19) senikoṭṭaḥ paścimena jakkanaśāṭi uttareṇa gherapuḍāsaṃkoṭṭāś ceti pāyanāṭane paḍakhāśiyākāt kṛitaṃ kṣettradro 10 mūlyāṃ dī [1]
- (20) attra vanake (°)kkihoravāḍḍipaṭṭiyākahastāt kṛitaṃ droṇa 20 ° mūlyāṃ dī 2 sāksīṇo jakkanaśāṭivāstavyaughāgrāmānaśācāraguṇamāne _
- (21) tasmin· vāstavyamattenapalagālah vondorakarmmāntikaś ca attraiva bhivaravāḍḍisiddhavaṅgālena ca dānadattakakṣettradroṇa 30 ° attraiva pāyanāṭane [gh]idharā-

- (22) vaddasantakakṣettradroṇṇa 40 ° ulagiuccālikāyāṃ tasyaiva sivaravelasantakakṣetra dro 100 ° attraiva kopanikhedakāyāśākābhyāṃ krītaṃ kṣetra-
- (23) dro 20 ° mūlyam dī 2 attraiva vāstavyasākṣiṇau khedamanaśācāravaḍḍidaṇḍau attraiva jakkanaśātyāṃ ajarudranandiyākābhyāṃ krītaṃ kṣettradroṇa 30
- (24) [mū]lyam dī 3 attraivāmmadevatatputtrasiddhākābhyāṃ krītaṃ kṣettradro 20 ° mūlyam dī 2 attraiva pūdanikāputtra-usalākagrodākāpokkakebhyah krītaṃ [kṣe] ___
- (25) ___ lyam dī 4 sākṣiṇo (°)ttra vāstavyāḥ gomapoyadevaṅgālamalliyākāḥ peraññaśake virimainārimamipakavaḍḍidakṣi ___

Reverse (Figure 2)

- (26) ___ _radr[o]ṇa 40 ° mūlyam dī 4 sākṣiṇo (°)ttraiva vāstavyabhīmavilālah arīuccālivāstavyajaḍḍavaṅgāla iṭṭahānīś ca [kheṇṭavi]ll[e] vokkicandā ___
- (27) [santa]kakṣettradro 10 5 ° nagnapaṭṭoccalikāyāṃ jaḍḍolakarmmāntikāt krītaṃ kṣettradro 80 ° mūlyam dī 8 nāgapaṭṭoccalikāyāṃ ugeyāha[stāt k]r[ī]ta[kṣetra]-
- (28) [dro] 20 ° mūlyam dī 2 anayoḥ sākṣiṇas tannivāsiṇaḥ bhondoravilālah ceti maramallatuṣappe śrīmattena kaḍḍhaparamattenābhyarddhamānadattamaṃ kṣe-
- (29) ttradro 40 ° ūraṇḍoccalikāyāṃ siddhakeppaśreṣṭhihastāt krītaṃ kṣettradro 40 ° mūlyam dī 4 sākṣiṇo paṭṭimattena gothānavāstavyamūladevāka[va]-
- (30) ṅgālas tyugroccālikāvāstavyaghomaśākaikhada tyugroccālikāyāṃ jaḍḍolakarmmāntikakhedākahastābhyāṃ krītaṃ kṣettradro 60 ° mūlyam dī 6 attraiva yuṅgi-
- (31) punnakakāragadollavilālahakkavaḍḍikebhyah hastāt krītaṃ nāgolārikhāṭam āśritya kṣettradro 90 ° mūlyam dī 30 maramete jaḍḍolakarmmāntik[e]ndi[rama]-
- (32) naśācā[ra]hastāt krītam evāgārās catvārah mūlyam dī 10 8 eṣā sākṣiṇah heṣamakhallavāstavyanāgolakarmmāntiposagavilālah peratyugravā-
- (33) stavayadvādaśaṇḍika attraiva khaddatyugavāstavya-ambukarmmāntikakelāmeṭās ca khaddamattanoccalikāyāṃ goyolakarmmāntikavilālaputtrakhavatti-
- (34) mayīpaṭyāḷajannakebhyas caturvarggikakṣetraṃ kkrītaṃ dro 80 ° mūlyam dī 8 attra sākṣiṇah peragodamakotṭavāstavyadīmmitrajye[ṣṭhakadrapa]-
- (35) dhelagodamā udyā[tt]aśātyāṃ attra vāstavyadantakṣettradro 50 ° peravakātyāṃ bheḍavillagucchikoraṅgipaccālāgrahārottareṇānaleśva ___
- (36) nāgikāśrīyākapaṭyāḷābhyāṃ krītaṃ kṣettradro 100 ° mūlyam dī 20 ° sākṣiṇah bhāśīlaśāṭivāstavyakhāḍḍupolasoriyāka ma ___
- (37) śolavāstavyapradyumnanademakādīvamaśācārās ca paṭṭimattena godhānikāyāṃ ūraṇḍapūrvveṇa paṭṭivādappahastāt krītaṃ
- (38) kṣettradro 40 ° mūlyam dī 4 attra sākṣiṇah ūraṇḍavāstavyalaṅkānāthabhollabappaś ca vendāsyagrahāravāstavyapaccālakah
- (39) ketogapaṭṭoccalikāyāṃ nalāmātyakṣettrena vilālamēdiattapoyahastāt krītaṃ kṣettradro 60 ° mūlyam dī 6 attraiva ketoga-
- (40) paṭṭoccalikāyāṃ phalaśapaṭṭikṣettrapatṭinamagahastāt krītaṃ kṣettradro 40 ° mūlyam dī 4 attraiva bhīmārikṣettramanuvilālahastā-
- (41) t krītaṃ kṣettradro 100 ° mūlyam dī 10 ° teṣāṃ sākṣiṇah paṭṭinamaga khaddatyugravāstavyanāgolakarmmāntikāś ca vātaṅgāśaṃva-

- (42) ddhasvākagilerake sakedḍḍikoṭṭagucche saha v[ā]stukṣettreṇa droṇavāpās saptasātaṃ 10
7 ° attraiva vātagaṅgāyāṃ unnatasāre bhāṅḍāra-
- (43) śmaśānaparyyante kṣettradroṇavāpāḥ pañcaśataṃ 10 8 dakṣiṇamaṅḍale taralacaṅḍe
santakakṣettradro 100 20 ° kānsāsrapaṅḍāḥ 4
- (44) kānsagalantakāḥ 4 balibhājanatraya 3 tāmragalantaka 2 dantapīṭhikāḥ 8 dantaparyyankā
6 kalantaka 3 bṛhatkānsanadikā 10
- (45) śānaśilā 3 kānsataṣṭhakāḥ 40 ° kaṭorikāḥ 40 ° vāsi 5 chātrā 20 ° kuddālikāḥ 8 kuṭhārikāḥ
8 uñccha 4 nikhātanā 8 ° kara-
- (46) pattra 3 kaṭṭārikā 7 pūśanapaṭṭametastha[vādānta]karaviṣṭārantaḥ purapālaḥ likhitaṃ
mahāsāndhivigrahikakumārāmātyamādhavada-
- (47) ttānumatyā bappasvāminā saṃvvat· 90 1 ° pau[śa]di 10 8

Notes on the text

2. ānyāṃś: emend anyāṃś.
4. °dharmmeṇṇa: emend °dharmeṇa.
5. yathākṣaraiva: emend yathākṣaram eva.
8. mahimatām: emend mahīmatām.
9. varttamānaścaturāśīti°: emend varttamānacaturaśīti°.
- 12–13. °vali°: emend °bali°.
13. °āyanasya: emend °āyatanasya. °karaṅṇāya: emend °karaṅāya.
15. °le[kh]yā: the second *akṣara* is uncertain. *hastākṛitaṃ*: emend *hastāt kṛitaṃ*.
17. sāksīṇā: emend sāksīṇo
- 24–25. [kṣe] — — — — lyam: with reconstruction of the last two *akṣaras* of line 24 and the first two of line 25, which were broken away, it can be read *kṣettradro 40 mūlyam*.
28. °dattamaṃ: emend °dattaṃ.
32. eṣā: emend eṣām.
33. khaddatyuga°: emend khaddatyugra°.
- 41–42. °saṃvaddha°: emend °sambaddha°.

Translation

Welfare! From Krīpura, the victorious military camp with great ships, elephants and horses, *pañcādihikaraṅṇoparika mahāpratīhāra mahārāja* the illustrious Vainyagupta, in healthy state, being favoured by the feet of the supreme lord (*paramabhaṭṭāraka*), tells present,⁵ future and other dependants on his feet, after wishing for their health (ll. 1–2):

“It should be known to you. Those that were given to the ones belonging to *varṇas* and *āśramas* by previous kings for increase of their own merit, with *akṣayanūvī* (tenure), by copperplate grant, are also approved by me for increase of merit of my parents and myself, for the sake of the *saṃgha* of respectable

⁵The unfamiliar word *itastyā* can be interpreted as an adjective created by adding the suffix *-tya* to indeclinable *itas*, ‘here / now’, ‘in / from this world / time’. W. D. Whitney, *Sanskrit Grammar* (5th ed) (Leipzig, 1924, reprint, Delhi, 1962), p. 479, 1245 b–c. Its connotation of ‘present’ is clear from the context in which it is paired with *bhaviṣya*, ‘future’.

Ājīvika *śramaṇas* at the abode⁶ of the venerable Mañibhadra in four-faced image in Jayanāṭana of Pūrvamaṇḍala, with all the excessive enjoyments and with *akṣayanīvī* tenure, by my own copperplate grant. Thus they should be preserved by you who desire your own welfare. The excellent copperplate grant given as gift by a previous king was also engraved by me on my own copperplate grant, character by character. So after seeing (it) on this copperplate grant of mine in acceptance of this donation, you will thoroughly do protection and so on.” (ll. 2–6)

With regard to preservation, there are verses sung by the venerable Vedavyāsa, the son of Parāśara: “For sixty thousand years, the giver of land rejoices in heaven. The one who refuses it and the one who approves him would live in hell for the same duration (Verse 1)”. “(No matter if it was) given by himself or given by others, the one who appropriates the land will be boiled with his ancestors, after being born a worm in excrement (Verse 2)”. “Protect with effort what was previously given to *brāhmaṇas*, oh Yudhiṣṭhira! Oh best of kings! The preservation of land is superior to its donation (Verse 3)”. “The fruits of donations given here by previous kings, which make merit, profit and fame, are granted also by me because of desire for religious merit and respect for the (previous) kings (Verse 4)”. (ll. 6–9)

On the thirteenth day of the month Caitra, in the current year one hundred eighty-four. The messengers were *kumārāmātyas* Dharmasvāmin, Bhramara and Rājyapāla. It was engraved by *sandhivigrahādhikaraṇika* Rāmadāsa. Year 184, (month of) Caitra, day 13. (ll. 9–10)

(Citation of Nāthacandra’s grant henceforward)

Mahārāja maheśvara Nāthacandra said welfare and also said thus to future and present kings and other dependants on the feet of the king: (ll. 10–11)

“It should be known to you that the abode Nāthameṭa of the venerable Mañibhadra in four-faced image was constructed at Jayanāṭana by me for increase of my own merit. For the service of flower, fragrance, incense, oblation, milk rice and charitable feeding to this venerable one (i.e. Mañibhadra) and to the *saṅgha* of the respectable Ājīvakas residing in this (abode), for repairs of opened and broken parts of this abode, the land . . . a village were given away with all the excessive enjoyments such as food, female servants and male servants. So they should be preserved by you with *akṣayanīvī* tenure eternally, out of respect for us and love for religious merit.” Their descriptions (are as follows): (ll. 11–15)

(List of donated land plots)

(Occasion 1) In Jayanāṭana of Pūrvamaṇḍala, in Jakkanaśāṭi, 40 *droṇavāpas* of land purchased from the hand of Poyavādappa and Paḍakhāsika, price 4 *dī(nāras)* (Plot 1). At the same place 15 *droṇas* of land purchased from the hand of Dharmadevavilāla and Kantārakarmāntika, price 1 *dī(nāra)* 8 *māṣas* (Plot 2). At the same place 15 *dro(ṇas)* of land

⁶ *Āyatana* seemingly takes the nominative or accusative form in this place, and could be explained as following the expression *āyatanaṃ kārītan* below (l. 12). However, it can also be that the case ending *-m* here is a hiatus-bridger between *-a*, changed from the locative case ending *-e*, and *ā* following it. Accordingly, I translate the term as though it were in the locative form. For the cases of hiatus-bridger *-m-* in the other texts, see R. C. Hazra, *Studies in the Upapurāṇas*, Vol. II (Calcutta, 1963), pp. ix–x (*Devīpurāṇa*); A. Sanderson, “Remarks on the text of the Kubjikāmatatantra”, *Indo-Iranian Journal*, XLV (1) (2002), p. 10; G. Schopen, *Figments and Fragments of Mahāyāna Buddhism in India: More Collected Papers* (Honolulu, 2005), p. 329, note {4} 1; Y. Yokochi (ed., intro., annotated English synopsis), *The Skandapurāṇa Volume III Adhyāyas 34. 1–61, 53–69: The Vindhyavāsini Cycle* (Leiden, 2013), pp. 38–39. I especially thank Arlo Griffiths for pointing out this way of interpretation and informing me of the relevant references.

purchased from Umalavaṅgāla and Utpalavaṅgāla, price 1 *dī(nāra)* 8 *mā(śas)* (Plot 3). The witnesses of these (cases) are Siddhagodama residing in Heṣamakhalla, Śrīvilāla residing in Jayanāṭana and Usalamanāśācāra residing there. (ll. 15–18) The borders of Ṣollavillagrāma are Makhaḍapaṭṭī and an embankment to the east, the fort of Gulmaseni to the south, Jakkanaśāṭī to the west, and the group of forts (*saṃkotta*) of Gherapuḍā to the north. (ll. 18–19)

(Occasion 2) In Pāyanāṭana, 10 *dro(ṇas)* of land purchased from Paḍakhāsiyāka, price 1 *dī(nāra)* (Plot 4). There, in the forest, 20 *dronas* purchased from the hand of Akkihoravaḍḍi and Paṭṭiyāka, price 2 *dī(nāras)* (Plot 5). The witnesses are Oghāgrāmanaśācāra and Guṇamāne . . . residing in Jakkanaśāṭī, Mattenapalagāla and Vondorakarmāntika residing in this (village). (ll. 19–21)

(Occasion 3) At the same place 30 *dronas* of land given as gift by Bhivaravaḍḍi and Siddhavaṅgāla (Plot 6). At the same place in Pāyanāṭana, 40 *dronas* of land belonging to Ghidharāvadda (Plot 7). In Ulagiuccālikā, 100 *dro(ṇas)* of land belonging to Sivaravela, (also) of him (i.e. Ghidharāvadda) (Plot 8). At the same place 20 *dro(ṇas)* of land purchased from Kopanikheda and Kāyaśāka, price 2 *dī(nāras)* (Plot 9). The witnesses residing in the same place are Khedamanaśācāra and Vaḍḍidaṇḍa. (ll. 21–23)

(Occasion 4) At the same place in Jakkanaśāṭī, 30 *dronas* of land purchased from Ajarudra and Nandiyāka, price 3 *dī(nāras)* (Plot 10). At the same place 20 *dro(ṇas)* of land purchased from Ammadeva and his son Siddhāka, price 2 *dī(nāras)* (Plot 11). At the same place (40 *dronas*) of land purchased from Pūdanikā's sons Usalāka, Grodāka and Pokkaka, price 4 *dī(nāras)* (Plot 12). The witnesses are Gomapoya, Devavaṅgāla and Malliyāka residing there. (ll. 23–25)

(Occasion 5) In Peraññaśaka, 40 *dronas* (of land purchased from) Virimaināri, Mamipaka and Vaḍḍidaḍḍi . . . , price 4 *dī(nāras)* (Plot 13). The witnesses are Bhīmavilāla residing at the same place, Jaḍḍavaṅgāla and Itṭahāni residing in Arīuccāli. (ll. 25–26)

(Occasion 6) In Kheṇṭavilla, 15 *dro(ṇas)* of land belonging to Vokkicandā . . . (Plot 14). In Nagnapaṭṭoccalikā, 80 *dro(ṇas)* of land purchased from Jaḍḍolakarmāntika, price 8 *dī(nāras)* (Plot 15). In Nāgapapaṭṭoccalikā, 20 *dro(ṇas)* of land purchased from the hand of Ugeyā, price 2 *dī(nāras)* (Plot 16). The witnesses of both these (cases, i.e. Plots 15 and 16) are Paṭṭivaṅgāla and Bhondoravilāla residing in this (village). (ll. 26–28)

(Occasion 7) In Maramallatuṣappa, 40 *dro(ṇas)* of land separated and given by Śrīmatta (and) Kaḍḍhaparamatta (Plot 17). In Ūracaṇḍoccalikā, 40 *dro(ṇas)* of land purchased from the hand of Siddhakeppaśreṣṭhin, price 4 *dī(nāras)* (Plot 18). The witnesses are, with Paṭṭimatta, Mūladevākaṅgāla residing in Gothāna, Ghomaśāka and Ekhada residing in Tyugroccālikā. (ll. 28–30)

(Occasion 8) In Tyugroccālikā, 60 *dro(ṇas)* of land purchased from the two hands of Jaḍḍolakarmāntika and Khedāka, price 6 *dī(nāras)* (Plot 19). At the same place 90 *dro(ṇas)* of land purchased from Yuṅgipunnakakāra, Gadollavilāla and Hakkavaḍḍika, from (their) hand, after attaching (it) to Nāgolārikhāṭa, price 30 *dī(nāras)* (Plot 20). In Marameṭa, four houses purchased from the hand of Jaḍḍolakarmāntika and Indiramaśācāra, price 18 *dī(nāras)* (Plot 21). The witnesses of these (cases) are Nāgolakarmānti and Posagavilāla residing in Heṣamakhalla, Dvādaśaṇḍika residing in Peratyugra, Ambukarmāntika and Kelāmeṭa residing in the same place in Khaddatyugra. (ll. 30–33)

(Occasion 9) In Khaddamattanoccalikā, 80 *dro(ṅas)* of land of four divisions purchased from Goyolakarmāntikavilāla's sons Khavatti, Mayīpaṭyāla and Jannaka, price 8 *dī(nāras)* (Plot 22). Here the witnesses are Dīmmitrajeṣṭhaka and Drapadhelagodama residing in Peragodamakotta. (ll. 33–35)

(Occasion 10) In Udyātāsāṭi, 50 *dro(ṅas)* of land of Danta residing there (Plot 23). In Peravakāṭi, to the north of Uraṅgipaccālāgrahāra in a cluster with Bheḍavilla, 100 *dro(ṅas)* of land purchased from Analeśva . . . nāgika and Āśriyākapaṭyāla, price 20 *dī(nāras)* (Plot 24). The witnesses are Khādupolasoriyāka residing in Bhāśilāśāṭi, Pradyumna, Nademaka and Dīvamanaśācāra residing in Ma . . . śola, with Paṭṭimatta. (ll. 35–37)

(Occasion 11) In Godhānikā, to the east of Ūracaṅḍa, 40 *dro(ṅas)* of land purchased from the hand of Paṭṭivādappa, price 4 *dī(nāras)* (Plot 25). Here the witnesses are Lanḱānātha and Bhollabappa residing in Ūracaṅḍa, Paccālaka residing in Vendāsyagrahāra. (ll. 37–38)

(Occasion 12) In Ketogaṭṭoccalikā, with the land of Nalāmātya, 60 *dro(ṅas)* of land purchased from the hand of Vilālemeḍi and Attapoya, price 6 *dī(nāras)* (Plot 26). At the same place in Ketogaṭṭoccalikā, 40 *dro(ṅas)* of land purchased from the hand of Paṭṭinamaga of Phalaśapaṭṭikṣetra, price 4 *dī(nāras)* (Plot 27). At the same place, 100 *dro(ṅas)* of land purchased from the hand of Manuvilāla of Bhīmārikṣetra, price 10 *dī(nāras)* (Plot 28). The witnesses of these (cases) are Paṭṭinamaga, and Nāgolakarmāntika residing in Khaddatyugra. (ll. 39–41)

In Svākagileraka belonging to Vātagaṅgā, in a cluster with Sakeḍḍikoṭṭa, accompanied by the homestead land and (arable) land, seven hundred and 17 *dronāvāpas*. At the same place in Vātagaṅgā, in Unnatasāra bordered by a storehouse and cremation ground, the land five hundred and 18 *dronāvāpas*.⁷ In Dakṣiṇamaṅḍala, in Taralacaṅḍa, the land belonging to (the king?) 120 *dro(ṅas)* (Plot 29). (ll. 41–43)

(List of donated movables)

Brass cooking vessels 4. Brass water jars 4. Three vessels for offerings 3. Copper water jars 2. Ivory stools 8. Ivory palanquins 6. *Kalantakas* 3.⁸ Large brass trumpets 10.⁹ Whetstones 3. Brass *taṣṭhaka*s 40.¹⁰ Small cups 40. Adzes 5. Parasols 20. Small spades 8. Small axes 8. Gleaning (baskets?) 4. Digging (instruments?) 8. Saws 3. Small daggers 7. (ll. 43–46).

Vādāntaka Raviṣṭāranta, stationed at Pūśanapaṭṭameṭa, was *purapāla*. (It was) engraved by Bappasvāmin, with permission of *mahāsāndhivigrahika kumārāmātya* Mādhavadatta. Year 91, (month of) Pauṣa, day 18. (ll. 46–47)

Notes on contents

The grant of Vainyagupta, dated year 184 GE, approves the donations to the *saṅgha* of Ājīvikas made by Nāthacandra and supposedly contains the latter's grant, dated year 91 GE,

⁷It is remarkable that hundreds are expressed in words, while decades and digits are in numerals in this section.

⁸According to Monier-Williams, *kalantaka* = *kalandaka* means "a particular vessel used by Śramaṇas". M. Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Oxford, 1899, reprint, 2000), p. 260, col. 3.

⁹The term *nadikā*, "bellowing", can be interpreted as such in view of *kānsa* "of brass" prefixed to it.

¹⁰The reading *taṣṭhaka* is clear, though its meaning is not. If it is a misspelling for *taṣṭaka*, it can mean something hewn or pared. Its reference side by side with cups, especially in the same number, strongly suggests it is designating a utensil. Can it be a brass plate?

copied ‘character by character’ (*yathākṣara*) (l. 5). Accordingly, the inscription consists of the grants of Vainyagupta (ll. 1–10) and Nāthacandra (ll. 10–47).

The grant of Vainyagupta is issued from Krīpura, a military camp, the same issuing place as that of the Gunaighar plate (l. 1).¹¹ Mentioning the donations by previous kings to *varṇins* and *āśramins*, which seem to denote *brāhmaṇas* and ascetics respectively, the king approves the donations to the *saṃgha* of Ājīvika *śramaṇas* belonging to the abode (*āyatana*) of Mañibhadra at Jayanāṭana in Pūrvamaṇḍala (ll. 2–4). The reproduced grant of Nāthacandra reveals the contents of the donations approved by Vainyagupta. The former constructed a shrine called Nāthameṭāyatana for Mañibhadra in Jayanāṭana and donated land plots and so on for ritual services to the deity, for the *saṃgha* of Ājīvikas residing in this shrine and for its repairs (ll. 11–14). The donated property, namely 29 land plots and 19 kinds of movables, is listed in this earlier grant (ll. 15–46).

In both grants, the terms *akṣayanīvī* and *sarvātībhoga* are used to define the tenures of donation. *Akṣayanīvī* or *akṣayanīvīdharmā* is mentioned as a condition with which donations are made (l. 2), approved (l. 4) or to be preserved (l. 14). It literally means indestructible / perpetual (*akṣaya*) capital / principal (*nīvī*) and denotes the principle of donation according to which the original endowment was in no circumstances to be destroyed or diminished.¹² In case of monetary endowment, the donation with this tenure means that the donee can spend only interest from the endowed money for the specified purpose while keeping the original capital intact.¹³ Analogous with this, the land donation subject to this condition can be interpreted as one in which the donee is given the right to enjoy a land plot, namely the income from it, without the right of alienation.¹⁴ This interpretation suits the case of the land plots donated by the present grant. As for the movables donated in the present case, the *saṃgha* and its members seem to be entitled to use those items on condition of their maintenance, ideally in perpetuity.

Sarvātībhoga, literally “all the excessive enjoyments”, is also mentioned as a condition of donation (l. 14) and its approval (l. 4). The same term is also found in the inscription on a metal vase mentioning the reign of king Devātideva, datable to the early eighth century and pertaining to Harikela, the subregion assignable to the area around present Chittagong.¹⁵ It seems to denote the entitlement to all the incomes and privileges pertaining to donated tracts. This tenure at least includes the entitlement to food (*āhāra*), or rather to agrarian product meant for that, and the control over both female and male servants (*dāsī* / *dāsa*), as attested by the present inscription (ll. 13–14).

¹¹Sircar, *Select Inscriptions 1*, p. 341, l. 1.

¹²S. K. Maity, *Economic Life in Northern India in the Gupta Period (Cir. A. D. 300–550)* (2nd ed.) (Delhi, 1970), pp. 37–39.

¹³*Ibid.* For a discussion on this practice in relation to the establishment of Buddhist *vihāras* as both buildings and institutions, see G. Schopen, “Doing business for the Lord: Lending on interest and written loan contracts in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-Vinaya*”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, CXIV (2) (1994), pp. 527–554.

¹⁴C. Gupta, “‘Khila-kṣetras’ in Early Bengal Inscriptions”, in *Studies in Art and Archaeology of Bihar and Bengal: Dr. N. K. Bhattasali Centenary Volume*, (ed.) D. Mitra and G. Bhattacharya (Delhi, 1989), p. 273.

¹⁵G. Bhattacharya, “A preliminary report on the inscribed metal vase from the National Museum of Bangladesh”, in *Explorations in Art and Archaeology of South Asia: Essays Dedicated to N. G. Majumdar*, (ed.) D. Mitra (Calcutta, 1996), p. 243, ll. 8 and 13.

Among the donated land plots, 28 are located in the 16 settlements in Jayanāṭana, in this case a lower administrative unit, of Pūrvamaṇḍala (ll. 15–41).¹⁶ They are transferred on 12 occasions, for each of which witnesses (*sākṣin*) are mentioned with their names and residences.¹⁷ Each plot is minutely described with its location, the original owners from whom it was transferred, the form of transference, its size and price. In most cases, the location of a plot is simply indicated by the name of the settlement in locative form. In some cases, however, particular features within a settlement¹⁸ or landmarks lying in a particular direction to it¹⁹ are mentioned additionally. The border demarcations in the four cardinal directions are described only for a village named Ṣollavillagrāma which has no donated tracts within itself (ll. 18–19). It is strange, and the only possible explanation for this anomaly is that this settlement was especially important in some way and that Jakkanaśāṭi, a village where five plots (Plots 1–3, 6 and 10) are located, constitutes its western border.

The plots transferred are mostly stated to have been purchased (*krīta*) or donated as gifts (*dānadattaka*) from, or belonging to (*santaka*), the original owners. Compared with the first two forms, the import of the last one is not clear. It may connote a form of transference not incurring monetary payment or caused by voluntary donation, including confiscation from the original owners.

The size of all the plots is computed in a unit of land measurement called *droṇavāpa*, abbreviated as either *droṇa* or *dro*. In the land sale grants of contemporary North and South Bengal, units called *kulyavāpa*, *droṇavāpa* and *āḍhavāpa* are used for land measurement. One *kulyavāpa* is equal to 8 *droṇavāpas* and 1 *āḍhavāpa* is a quarter of the latter, according to the descriptions in the Paharpur plate.²⁰ Philologically, these units can be interpreted as denoting the area required for sowing a particular amount of seeds, namely, a *kulya*, a *droṇa* or an *āḍhaka*. However, the measurement seems to be made by a linear standard called *nala*, several of which are known from the inscriptions.²¹ The actual size of land denoted by these units is unclear and has been discussed by several scholars.²² The diversity of *nalas* also suggests different sizes indicated by the same unit in different localities. In the current situation, Sircar's guess, based on later lexicographers and authorities on *Dharmaśāstra* in Bengal, may be accepted as an approximation in the absence of concrete contemporary evidence. According to his calculation, 1 *kulyavāpa* equals 38 to 48 *bighas*, 1 *droṇavāpa* 4 1/2 to 6 *bighas* and 1 *āḍhavāpa* 1 1/8 to 1 1/2 *bighas*.²³

The size of each of the 28 plots in Jayanāṭana varies between 10 and 100 *droṇavāpas*. They measure 1,235 *droṇavāpas* in total. It is remarkable that *pāṭaka*, a unit of land measurement

¹⁶One of the plots (Plot 21) is not a land plot proper but four houses (*āgārās catvārah*). It is listed side by side with land plots in a similar format (ll. 31–32).

¹⁷The serial numbers of occasions and plots are indicated in the translation above.

¹⁸*vanake* (Plot 5, l. 20).

¹⁹*bhedavillaguchikorāṅgipaccālāgrahārottareṇa* (Plot 24, l. 35); *ūraçaṇḍapūrvveṇa* (Plot 25, l. 37).

²⁰Sircar, *Select Inscriptions* 1, p. 361, note 1.

²¹(*aṣṭakana*)*vakanalābhyām apaviñchya*, Dhanaidaha plate, *ibid.*, p. 288, l. 11; *darvvīkarmmahastenāṣṭakanavakanalābhyām apaviñchya*, Baigram plate, *ibid.*, p. 358, ll. 18–19, Nandapur plate, *ibid.*, p. 383, l. 14; *ṣaṭkanaḍair apaviñchya*, Paharpur plate, *ibid.*, p. 362, ll. 19–20; (*aṣṭakanavakanavakanalābhyām apaviñchya*, Damodarpur plate, year 163 GE, *ibid.*, p. 334, l. 10.

²²For a summary of the various opinions, see S. Dutta, *Land System in Northern India: C. AD 400–C. AD 700* (New Delhi, 1995), pp. 36–42.

²³D. C. Sircar, *Indian Epigraphy* (Delhi, 1965), pp. 413–414.

used in the Gunaighar plate and equal to 40 *dronāvāpas*,²⁴ is not used in the present grant despite the vast size of the entire donated tract.

In case of purchase, the price (*mūlya*) of land is calculated in currency units of *dī* and *māṣa*.²⁵ The former can easily be understood as an abbreviation for *dīnāra*, a unit of gold coins widely circulated under the Gupta regime. It is also mentioned in contemporary copperplate inscriptions of North Bengal.²⁶ *Māṣa* seems to be a lower denomination and the equation of 16 *māṣas* with 1 *dīnāra* is obtainable from the fact that 1 *dīnāra* and 8 *māṣas* are paid for 15 *dronāvāpas* of land plots, while it is 4 *dīnāras* for 40 *dronāvāpas* in the same locality (ll. 16–17). This proportional value is the same as the one between *dīnāra* and *rūpaka*, a unit of silver currency mentioned in the Baigram plate.²⁷ Thus *māṣa* seems to be a unit of silver currency with value equal to *rūpaka*.²⁸

In most cases, 10 *dronāvāpas* of land plot were purchased for 1 *dīnāra*. There are only two exceptions in which 1 *dīnāra* could buy only 3 or 5 *dronāvāpas* respectively (Plots 20 and 24). In these cases, the plots are described as attached to a *khāṭa* (l. 31) or adjacent to an *agrahāra* that makes a cluster with a *villa* (l. 35). *Khāṭa* and *villa* respectively denote channel and lake.²⁹ The connection with bodies of water seems to make them more valuable. By analogy with contemporary cases in North and South Bengal, where the price of a particular extent of land is fixed by custom,³⁰ the price in the present inscription also seems to be decided according to local norms.

The minute descriptions of donated plots are followed by references to two large tracts of land. They are: (a) 717 *dronāvāpas* in Svākagileraka belonging to Vātagaṅgā, making a cluster with Sakeḍḍikoṭṭa, with homestead land and arable land (ll. 41–42), and (b) 518 *dronāvāpas* of land in Vātagaṅgā, in Unnatasāra bordering a storehouse (*bhāṅḍāra*) and cremation ground (*śmasāna*) (ll. 42–43). The sum of both tracts, 1,235 *dronāvāpas*, equals the sum of all the 28 land plots listed in the previous section. This seems to mean that the land described in this section is actually the same as all the plots listed in the previous section combined. We find here the sum of land plots divided into two groups according to a different criterion. The division seems to be based on the location of land plots in relation to particular geographical features

²⁴Sircar, *Select Inscriptions* 1, p. 342, note 4.

²⁵The Gadhwā stone inscription of the year 98 GE has a similar expression, which Bhandarkar read as . . . *bhyaṅ dīnārāḥ dvādaśa* . . . D. R. Bhandarkar (rev.), B. Ch. Chhabra and G. S. Gai (eds), *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum Volume III (rev): Inscriptions of the Early Guptas* (New Delhi, 1981), p. 271, l. 7. On the attached plate XVII, the *aḥṣara* rendered as *bhyaṅ* can be read as *hyaṅ*, which probably constitutes the latter part of *mūhyaṅ*, in view of the present inscription. This possibility was suggested by Arlo Griffiths, to whom I am grateful.

²⁶B. D. Chattopadhyaya, “Currency in early Bengal”, *Journal of Indian History*, LV (3) (1977), p. 45.

²⁷Sircar, *Select Inscriptions* 1, p. 357, l. 6, also note 1.

²⁸It should be noted that *māṣa* with its abbreviation *mā* was used in Java a few centuries later as a denomination of currency in both silver and gold, with the same rate of 16 to 1 against the higher denomination of *tahil* / *suwaraṅga* / *dharāṅga*. J. Wissemann Christie, “Weight and values in the Javanese states of the ninth to thirteenth centuries A. D.”, in *Poids et mesures en Asie du Sud-Est: systèmes métrologiques et sociétés*, ed. P. Le Roux, B. Sellato and J. Ivanoff, pref. A. Testart (Paris, 2008), pp. 92–93. I thank Arlo Griffiths for informing me of this fact and providing the relevant reference.

²⁹For the meaning of *khāṭa*, see Bhattacharyya, “A newly discovered Copperplate”, p. 49. Concerning *villa* which corresponds to *bil* in Bengali, see D. C. Sircar, “The Kailan copper-plate inscription of King Śrīdharaṅga Rāta of Samataṭa”, *Indian Historical Quarterly*, XXIII (1947), p. 236.

³⁰*tridīnārikyaaku*[*hyavā*]*pavikraya*[*maryyā*]*da(yā)*, Damodarpur plate of the time of Budhagupta, no date, Sircar, *Select Inscriptions* 1, p. 338, ll. 12–13; *etatprākṛkiriyamānakamaryyādā caturdīnārikkyakulyavāpena*, Faridpur plate of the time of Dharmāditya, no date, *ibid.*, p. 368, ll. 13–14. °*kriyamānaka*°: emend °*kriyamānaka*°.

including a river, fort, storehouse and cremation ground. Vātagaṅgā, which originally seems to denote a river, later appears in the Mainamati plate of Viradharadeva as the name of a *viṣaya*.³¹ This is one of several features indicating that the recorded transactions and donated tracts fell within the subregion of Samataṭa. The last inference is supported by the names of villages or administrative units containing *nātana* as their component,³² which are also found in the other copperplate inscriptions from Samataṭa.³³

The 29th land plot sized 120 *droṇavāpas* is located in Taralacaṇḍa in Dakṣiṇamaṇḍala (l. 43). It is only prefixed by the word *santaka*, without any personal names. It may be the land belonging to the king himself, so that he did not need to mention the names of original owners.

The donated movables listed in the grant include vessels and utensils (brass cooking vessels, brass / copper water jars, three vessels for *bali*, *kalantakas*, brass *taṣṭhakas*, small cups), furniture (ivory stools), palanquins, musical instruments (brass trumpets), parasols and instruments of labour (whetstones, adzes, spades, axes, gleaning baskets, digging instruments, saws, daggers) (ll. 43–46). The utensils, furniture and palanquins seem to be meant for Ājīvika ascetics, while brass trumpets may be used for the religious practice of song and dance.³⁴ Instruments of labour, on the other hand, suggest their use in productive labour and household duties by some service groups, although their assignment to the use by ascetics cannot be ruled out.

The officials involved in the issue of grant of Vainyagupta are three *kumārāmātyas* acting as messengers (*dūtakas*) and a *sandhivigrahādhikaraṇika* who engraved the inscription (ll. 9–10). In the case of Nāthacandra's grant, *vādāntaka* (a term which seems to mean “ender of dispute”) Raviṣṭāranta posted at Pūśanapaṭṭameṭa is mentioned as *purapāla*, while Bappasvāmin engraved the inscription with the permission of *mahāsāndhivigrahika kumārāmātya* Mādhavadatta (ll. 46–47). In spite of its meaning “keeper of city”, *purapāla* in this case functioned instead as an executor or conveyer of royal order, equivalent to *dūtakas*.

Discussions

Ājīvikas in North India

The most important fact revealed by the present inscription is the presence of the Ājīvikas in North India as late as the early sixth century and their flourishing condition in its eastern

³¹S. C. Bhattacharyya, “Mainamati copper plate of Viradharadeva”, *Journal of Ancient Indian History*, XIV, 1–2 (1983–84), p. 26, l. 11.

³²Jayanāṭana (ll. 3, 12, 15) and Pāyanāṭana (ll. 19, 21).

³³Guptī- / Guptināṭana: Kailan plate of Śrīdhāraṇarāta, D. C. Sircar (ed.), *Select Inscriptions Bearing on Indian History and Civilization Vol.2: From the Sixth to the Eighteenth Century A. D.* (Delhi, 1983), p. 37, l. 4; Mainamati plate of Laḍahacandra (no. 1), *idem*, *Epigraphic Discoveries in East Pakistan* (Calcutta, 1973), p. 73, l. 42. Peranāṭana: Ashrafpur plate of Devakhaḍga, year 7, ll. 12–13, year 13, l. 6, my own readings from the impressions attached as Plate VII to *Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, I (1905) and Plate II to *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* for March, 1885. Cf. G. M. Laskar, “Ashrafpur copper-plate grants of Devakhaḍga”, *Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, I (6) (1904), p. 90, l. 12–p. 91, l. 13, p. 90, l. 6; Sircar, *Select Inscriptions* 2, p.42, l. 6; *idem*, “Copper-plate inscription of King Bhavaddeva of Devaparvata”, *Journal of the Asiatic Society, Letters*, XVII (2) (1951), p. 93, ll. 43–44, p. 94, l. 56; Mainamati plate of Laḍahacandra (no. 2), *idem*, *Epigraphic Discoveries*, p. 75, l. 8; Mainamati plate of Govindacandra, *ibid.*, p. 80, l. 35.

³⁴For possible inclusion of singing and dancing as a part of the religious practices of the Ājīvikas, see Basham, *History and Doctrines*, pp. 116–117.

periphery. The Ājīvikas formed one of the Śramaṇic orders in which members practised severe asceticism with the support of lay worshippers. They upheld particular doctrines characterised by fatalism.³⁵ Makkhali Gosāla, the founder of their religious order, is believed to have been a contemporary of the Buddha and Mahāvīra, who also established their own orders.³⁶ The Ājīvikas seem to have enjoyed a considerable following and patronage in eastern India in competition with the other two orders. The extensive patronage enjoyed by them is attested by the Barabar and Nagarjuni caves in Bihar which have inscriptions recording the donations of those caves to the Ājīvikas by the Mauryan kings Aśoka and Daśaratha.³⁷

The history of the Ājīvikas, however, then becomes unclear, especially in North India. The occasional references to them in the later Sanskrit texts show their presence as marginal groups indulging in obscure religious practices including worship of Piśācas.³⁸ They are sometimes confused with other kinds of ascetics like Vaiṣṇavas and Digambara Jains.³⁹ What is evident from those references is their condition of decline, in which small numbers of ascetics and lay worshippers still remained but were gradually inclined toward other ascetic orders and merged with them.⁴⁰ The present inscription changes this perception by proving not only their survival as an organised *saṃgha* but also their prosperity under royal patronage. This is the first evidence of such patronage since the Barabar and Nagarjuni cave inscriptions just mentioned.

Apart from their efflorescence with large landed property, the present inscription also gives us a glimpse of the religious practice of Ājīvikas in this period. The most interesting is their association with the shrine of Maṇibhadra. The inscription clearly says that the Ājīvika *saṃgha* resides in the shrine (l. 13). In view of the enormous landed properties and movables donated to it, the residential facility for the *saṃgha* and its managing organisation must have been a permanent one, although individual ascetics may have periodically moved to other places. The donation of instruments of labour also suggests a regular organisation including service groups as discussed above. It makes a stark contrast with the *Ājīviya-sabhā* where the early Ājīvikas under Makkhali Gosāla gathered, according to a later Jain text. This seems to have been an assembly hall used for their meetings and religious ceremonies, which also functioned as a rest house for ascetics.⁴¹ However, Makkhali Gosāla is said to have resided not there but in the workshops of his local supporters such as Hālāhalā, the potter woman in Sāvattī (Śrāvastī).⁴² This difference indicates the growth of the Ājīvika *saṃgha* into a more regular organisation with an established residential facility and administration, comparable with the development of contemporary Buddhist *vihāras*.

³⁵For their doctrine of *niyati*, see *ibid.*, pp. 224–239. See also Bronkhorst, “Ājīvika Doctrine”, for an attempt to reconcile this doctrine with their severe ascetic regimen.

³⁶Basham, *History and Doctrines*, pp. 34–78.

³⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 150–60.

³⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 162–165. *The Vāyupurāṇam* (Bombay, 1895, reprint, Delhi, 1983), 2.8.278–282.

³⁹Basham, *History and Doctrines*, pp. 168–181.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 185–186.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, pp. 115–116.

⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 53.

The last point is confirmed by the reasons for the donations mentioned in the grant of Nāthacandra included in the present inscription. The ritual services of flowers (*sumanas*), fragrance (*gandha*), incense (*dhūpa*), oblation (*balī*), milk rice (*caru*) and charitable feeding (*sattra*) for the deity and the repairs of broken and open parts of the facility (ll. 12–13) are also stipulated in the donations to the Buddhist and Jain orders and Brahmanical shrines recorded in the earlier and contemporary copperplate inscriptions of Bengal.⁴³ On the other hand, the provisions of clothing, food, bedding, seats and preparations for disease and medicine for the *saṃgha*, generally mentioned in the grants to the Buddhist order, are absent in the present record.⁴⁴ It may simply be a result of casual omission in copying the original grant, but might also reflect the different necessities for Ājīvika ascetics who remain naked and keep a simpler diet according to the references in Jain and Buddhist texts.⁴⁵ In spite of this difference, the similarity in terms of large-scale landed properties, residential establishments and ritual practices points to a convergence of the Ājīvikas as a religious order with the Buddhist *saṃgha*. It is also confirmed by the changed character of Maṇibhadra as an object of worship with regular ritual services, comparable with the Buddha and Bodhisattvas in the contemporary Buddhist *vihāras*.

Though the present inscription attests to the survival and growth of the Ājīvikas in North India, their history after this period is again shrouded in obscurity. In contrast, the history of their brethren in South India is known better from epigraphic and literary evidence and they seem to have flourished there for a longer period. The inscriptions widely distributed around the area from Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh in the north to former South Arcot district of Tamil Nadu in the south, then from Kolar district of Karnataka inward, belonging to the period from the fifth to fourteenth centuries, refer to the Ājīvikas especially in relation to the special tax imposed on them.⁴⁶ Tamil literary texts like the *Maṇimēkalai* and the *Nīlakēci* mention Ājīvika teachers as important doctrinal opponents for their Buddhist and Jain protagonists.⁴⁷ These references suggest that the Ājīvikas maintained their presence as a group with subsistence, on which their lay worshippers could be burdened with extra taxation, and doctrinal cohesion which necessitated serious engagement of their Buddhist and Jain competitors.

A reference in the *Nīlakēci*, on the other hand, hints at another possibility in the history of the southern Ājīvikas. Nīlakēci, the heroine of the poem, is said to have gone to the city of Kukkuṭa in Camataṅṭa (Samadaṅṭa) to visit the monastery of Pūraṇa the Ājīvika.

⁴³Baigram plate, year 128 GE (*gandha*, *dhūpa*, *dīpa* and *sumanas* for Govindasvāmin, repairs of his shrine), Sircar, *Select Inscriptions* 1, p. 357, ll. 7–8; Jagadishpur plate, year 128 GE (*balī*, *caru*, *sattra*, *gandha*, *dhūpa*, *taila* and repairs of the facilities at a *vihāra* and a shrine of the Sun), *idem*, *Epigraphic Discoveries*, p. 61, ll. 9–11; Paharpur plate, year 159 GE (*gandha*, *dhūpa*, *sumanas* and *dīpa* for Jain ascetics), Sircar, *Select Inscriptions* 1, p. 360, ll. 6–7, p. 361, ll. 12–13; Gunaighar plate, year 188 GE (*gandha*, *puṣpa*, *dīpa* and *dhūpa* for the Buddha, repairs of the *vihāra*), *ibid.*, p. 341, l. 5–6, p. 342, l. 7; Damodarpur plate, year 224 GE (repairs of the shrine of Śvetavarāhasvāmin, *balī*, *caru*, *sattra*, *gavya*, *dhūpa*, *puṣpa*, *madhuparka* and *dīpa*), *ibid.*, p. 348, ll. 8–9.

⁴⁴Cf. *cīvarapiṇḍapātāśayanāsanaglānapratyaya* (*glānapratyaya*) means a cloth kept for defraying the cost of medicine, according to Yijing. J. Takakusu (tr.) *A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practised in India and the Malay Archipelago (AD 671–695)* by I-tsing (Oxford, 1896, reprint, New Delhi, 1998), p. 55.

⁴⁵Basham, *History and Doctrines*, pp. 107–109, 118–122.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 187–196.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 196–201.

Basham considers Samadaṇḍa as a corruption of the two names Samataṭa and Daṇḍabhukti, both subregions of Bengal, indicating that the southern Ājīvikas looked upon Bengal as the original home of their faith.⁴⁸ Daṇḍabhukti, an administrative unit of early medieval Bengal covering the area around present East and West Medinipur districts of West Bengal and the Baleswar district of Orissa, is too far away from Samataṭa to be confused with the latter as one locality.⁴⁹ In view of the Ājīvika *saṃgha* mentioned in the present inscription, Camataṇṭa = Samadaṇḍa may rather be taken as a corruption of Samataṭa and accordingly, the reference in the *Nīlakēci* points to the possibility that a section of the Ājīvikas shifted from Samataṭa to the Tamil area in the later period. Still, this remains a mere speculation until confirmed by other evidence.

Maṇibhadra

The worship of Maṇibhadra with his shrine is another important fact gleaned from the present inscription (ll. 3–4, 12). Maṇibhadra is an eminent *yakṣa* known from various sources, beginning with Pāli Buddhist texts. He is described as either the chief of *yakṣas* or the topmost subordinate of Kubera in the *Mahābhārata*.⁵⁰ The Jain cosmology defines him and Pūrṇabhadra as chiefs (*indra*) of *yakṣas* or members of the 13 *devas* under Vaiśramaṇa, i.e. Kubera.⁵¹ Both are also listed as *yakṣa* brothers residing in a locality named Brahmavātī, which is mentioned side by side with Gandhāra and Takṣaśilā, in the *Mahāmāyūrī*.⁵² The last reference and the provenances of the known images of Maṇibhadra, Parkham near Mathura and Pawaya near Gwalior,⁵³ show that the worship of this *yakṣa* was not limited to eastern India, though it may have been more prevalent there.⁵⁴ His worship in eastern India in the early historical period, possibly contemporaneous with the lifetime of the Buddha, is attested by references in the *Samyuttanikāya* and the *Mahāniddeśa*. A *cetiya* named Maṇimālaka in Magadha is said to be his residence (*bhavana*) in the former, while the observers of a vow of Maṇibhadra (*maṇibhaddavattikā*) are mentioned with others including *puṇṇabhaddavattikā* in the latter.⁵⁵ The continued popularity of Maṇibhadra in both Bengal and Orissa at least until the sixth century is confirmed by the reference to the land plot belonging to Maṇibhadra in

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 201–202.

⁴⁹ For the location of Daṇḍabhukti, see A. Bhattacharyya, *Historical Geography of Ancient and Early Medieval Bengal* (Calcutta, 1977), pp. 81–82.

⁵⁰ F. Edgerton (ed.), *The Sabhāparvan: Being the Second Book of the Mahābhārata* (Poona, 1944), 2.10.14cd–18ab (one of Kubera's subordinates); V. S. Sukthankar (ed.), *The Āraṇyakaparvan (Part 1): Being the Third Book of the Mahābhārata* (Poona, 1942), 3.61.122–123 (Yakṣarāj), 3.140.6cd (Yakṣendra); R. N. Dandekar (ed.), *The Anuśāsanaparvan: Being the Thirteenth Book of the Mahābhārata* (Poona, 1966), 13.20.8–9ab, 16 (foremost among Kubera's subordinates, leading *rākṣasas*, *yakṣas* and *gandharvas*).

⁵¹ R. N. Misra, *Yakṣha Cult and Iconography* (New Delhi, 1981), p. 46; *Bhagavatsūtra* (Bombay, 1918), 3.7.168.

⁵² D. C. Sircar, *Mahāmāyūrī: List of Yakṣas* (From the *Journal of Ancient Indian History*, V, Parts 1–2, 1971–72) (Calcutta, 1972), p. 20. Cf. S. Lévi, "Le catalogue géographique des Yakṣas dans la Mahāmāyūrī", *Journal Asiatique*, V (1915), p. 38 (Māṇibhadra).

⁵³ Misra, *Yakṣha Cult*, pp. 83–84.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁵⁵ L. Feer (ed.), *The Samyutta-Nikāya of the Sutta-Piṭaka Part I* (Pali Text Society) (London, 1884, reprint, 1960), p. 208 (Maṇimālaka Cetiya); L. de la Vallée Poussin and E. J. Thomas (eds), *Mahāniddeśa, Parts I and II* (Pali Text Society Text Series Nos 76, 77) (London, 1916–17, reprint, 1978), p. 89 (*maṇibhaddavattikā*).

is no instruction for multiple faces.⁶⁵ On the other hand, the *Aparājītaprāchā*, a treatise on art and architecture datable to the period between the twelfth and the first half of the thirteenth century, mentions a *yakṣa* named Caturānana and prescribes four faces for Kubera in the chapter on Jain iconography.⁶⁶ The difference between those treatises suggests that the tradition of four-faced *yakṣa* images was preserved among the Jain sects in the later period. The present case points to the fact that such an iconographic tradition had been held by the Ājīvikas earlier and suggests the possibility that it was later adopted by the Jains, who had a close relation with them.

The shrine of Mañibhadra was constructed by King Nāthacandra and most probably named after him, as its name Nāthameta shows (ll. 11–12). On the other hand, the peculiar iconography of the *yakṣa* suggests that this was not Mañibhadra as generally worshiped in North India but a particular form of *yakṣa* especially upheld by the Ājīvika *saṃgha*. Both facts indicate royal initiative in patronising the Ājīvika *saṃgha* worshipping this Mañibhadra and in establishing their abode. The survival of Mañibhadra and the *saṃgha* at the same locality for more than 90 years, from their establishment in or before the year 91 GE to the approval of donations to the *saṃgha* in the year 184 GE and beyond, points to the local support they could muster in spite of the probable dynastic change inferable from names of the two kings.

Early history of Samataṭa

The present inscription also sheds light on the early history of Samataṭa. A king of Samataṭa is mentioned in the Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta as one of the peripheral kings (*pratyantarpati*) who acknowledged his suzerainty.⁶⁷ The continued presence of local kingship under the Guptas during the reign of Candragupta II is attested by the grant of *mahārāja maheśvara* Nāthacandra incorporated in the present plate, dated year 91, most probably in the Gupta Era (409–410 AD). The titles of *mahāsāndhivigrahika* and *kumārāmātya* held by Mādhavadatta, an official whose approval was given for engraving the grant, hint at an attempt by the early Samataṭa kings to introduce a bureaucratic apparatus modelled on the Gupta one,⁶⁸ to be developed further by the time of Vainyagupta. The appearance of Pūrva- and Dakṣiṇamaṇḍalas suggests the establishment of administrative divisions consisting of *maṇḍalas* of the four cardinal directions. The Uttaramaṇḍala mentioned in the Gunaighar plate confirms this.⁶⁹ These aspects attest to some level of state formation reached by the early fifth century.

Nothing can be known from the present grant on the political situation in the interval between the reigns of the two kings, covering 90 years or so. However, it does give us better

⁶⁵ P. Shah (ed.), *Viṣṇudharmottara-Purāṇa Third Khaṇḍa (Vol. 1: Text, Critical Notes etc.)* (2nd ed.) (Vadodara, 1994), 3.73.13 (Mañibhadra), 3.53.1–6 (Dhanada).

⁶⁶ P. A. Mankad (ed.), *Aparājītaprāchā of Bhuvanadeva* (Baroda, 1950), 221.46ab (Caturānana), 53cd (Kubera).

⁶⁷ Sircar, *Select Inscriptions* 1, p. 265, l. 22.

⁶⁸ Titles of *sāndhivigrahika* and *kumārāmātya* are held by Hariṣeṇa, the composer of Samudragupta's *praśasti* engraved as the Allahabad stone pillar inscription. *Ibid.*, p. 268, l. 32.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 342, l. 7.

information on Vainyagupta's rule and the changing character of his power. His status as a subordinate ruler under an overlord is clear from the phrase *paramabhaṭṭārakapādānudhyāta* attached to him (l. 1).⁷⁰ This phrase is commonly used in the inscriptions of subordinate rulers under the Guptas, including the kings of Valkhā and the early Maitraka kings.⁷¹ Vainyagupta's overlord must also have been the Gupta king, in view of the use of years only assignable to the Gupta Era in this grant and the Gunaighar plate. The titles *pañcādhikaraṇoparika*, *mahāpratīhāra* and *mahārāja* borne by him also conform to his subordinate status (l. 1). These facts also confirm that he is not identical with the Gupta king of the same name mentioned in a seal from Nalanda,⁷² though his use of the title *mahārāja*, not *mahārājādhirāja*, and the emblem of the Bull, not the Garuḍa of the Guptas, for his seal, would have already been sufficient to infer this.

In contrast to the present plate, the Gunaighar grant of Vainyagupta, dated year 188, does not contain any expression indicating his subordinate status, except the title *mahārāja* and dating in what must be the Gupta Era. The word *paramabhaṭṭāraka* in the phrase of subordination is replaced by Bhagavan–Mahādeva, with which the overall expression rather conveys his claim of acceptance by the god Śiva.⁷³ Vainyagupta seems to have attained a position verging on independence in the period of around four years between year 184 GE, Caitra 13 and year 188 GE, Pauṣa 24, the latter being the date of the Gunaighar plate. The enhancement of his power is also suggested by the presence of subordinate rulers wielding the title of *mahārāja* under him. *Mahārāja* Rudradatta, the applicant for donation, is called “servant of our feet” (*asmatpādadaśa*), while *mahārāja* Vijayasena acted as a messenger (*dūtaka*) of the royal order.⁷⁴ Suggestively, the titles held by the king in the earlier grant are now borne by Vijayasena, whose titles include *mahāpratīhāra*, *mahāpīlupati*, *pañcādhikaraṇoparika*, *pāṭṭyuparika*, *purapāloparika*, *mahārāja* and *mahāsāmanta*.⁷⁵

The descriptions of donated land plots, on the other hand, indicate the relatively high level of agrarian development and settlement formation. In Jayanāṭana of Pūrvamaṇḍala, a large tract comprising 28 land plots could be procured from 46 individual landholders scattered around 16 settlements mostly through purchase. However large it is, this tract must have been only a part of the entire cultivated area and 13 more settlements are mentioned as either residential villages of witnesses or neighbouring settlements. The size of each plot varies between 10 and 100 *droṇavāpas*, except for 120 *droṇavāpas* in the case of a plot in Dakṣiṇamaṇḍala which probably belonged to the king himself. These land plots were procured from single or multiple landholders. Needless to say, they need not have been all the properties held by landholders, who may also have possessed other land plots.

⁷⁰For the meaning of the term *pādānudhyāta* indicating acceptance by father or approval by an overlord, see C. Ferrier and J. Törzsök, “Meditating on the king's feet? Some remarks on the expression *pādānudhyāta*”, *Indo-Iranian Journal*, LI (2) (2008), pp. 93–113.

⁷¹*paramabhaṭṭārakapādānudhyāto mahārājabhulūṇḍaḥ*, K. V. Ramesh and S. P. Tewari (eds), *A Copper-Plate Hoard of the Gupta Period from Bagh, Madhya Pradesh* (New Delhi, 1990), p. 60, l. 1; *paramabhāgavataḥ paramabhaṭṭārakapādānudhyāto mahāsāmantamahārājadhruvasenaḥ*, S. Konow, “Five Valabhi Plates”, *Epigraphia Indica*, XI (1911–12, reprint, 1981), p. 113, ll. 12–14.

⁷²Bhandarkar et al., *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum Volume III (rev.)*, pp. 319–321.

⁷³*bhāgavanmahādevapādānudhyāto*, Sircar, *Select Inscriptions* 1, p. 342, l. 1.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, p. 341, l. 3 (Rudradatta), p. 343, ll. 15–16 (Vijayasena).

⁷⁵*Ibid.*

But the size of each plot tells us how much was alienable for different landholders and can be used as an indicator of their respective wealth. While two pairs of them, namely Dharmadevavilāla and Kantārakarmāntika of Plot 2 and Umalavaṅgāla and Utpalavaṅgāla of Plot 3, sold only 15 *droṇavāpas* each, Jaḍḍolakarmāntika of Plot 15 sold 80 *droṇavāpas* alone. The latter also sold 60 *droṇavāpas* of land and four houses with the other holders (Plots 19 and 21). Such difference in wealth among landholders confirms the ongoing process of agrarian development which would result in the concentration of landed properties in fewer hands.

The names of rural residents and their involvement with land plots inform us of their characters and social relations. The names suffixed with *karmāntika* (artisan) and *śreṣṭhin* (merchant) suggest inclusion of some professional groups in the circle of rural residents with substantial landholdings and respectability.⁷⁶ The names ending in *vilāla*, literally meaning “machine” or “cat”,⁷⁷ can also denote such a professional group.⁷⁸ As the case of Khavatti, the son of Goyolakarmāntikavilāla who held Plot 22 suggests, it is not a name of lineage or any genealogical relations. It is differentiated from *karmāntika* but can be borne with the latter at the same time. In view of its possible meaning “machine”, *vilāla* may denote an artisan who specialised in particular mechanical devices. The landholdings by professional groups are also confirmed by the cultivated lands (*kṣetra*) of Viṣṇuvarḍhaki (carpenter), Miduvilāla, Pakkavilāla and *vaidyas* (physicians) mentioned in the Gunaighar plate as border landmarks.⁷⁹

On the other hand, the name ending *vaṅgāla*, the same as the toponym denoting the coastal region of Southeast Bengal,⁸⁰ alludes to their origin as migrants from this area.⁸¹ Thus a diverse range of social groups resided in rural settlements and were involved in landholdings as well as related activities. Their horizontal social relations are expressed in their collective landholdings and activities as witnesses of land transactions. Some of the latter, in which residents of different villages acted as witnesses together, indicate the possibility of social relations beyond the limit of a single village.⁸²

The one remarkable thing is that land plots could be purchased with money. For their prices seem to have been fixed not by an exchange value but by custom, as discussed above, land was not a marketable commodity in this early period. However, this form of transference was only possible with the circulation of currency and acceptance of its value by rural residents. The discovery of gold coins of Samudragupta and Candragupta II from the site of Salban Vihara in Mainamati at least points to the possibility of the Gupta coins circulating in Samatata from the last quarter of the fourth century onward.⁸³ The occurrence of land sales shows acceptance of the Gupta currency and its use among the rural population

⁷⁶ *Karmāntika*, Plots 2, 15, 19, 21–22, witnesses of Occasions 2, 8, 12; *śreṣṭhin*, Plot 18.

⁷⁷ Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 985, col. 2.

⁷⁸ *Vilāla*, Plots 2, 20, 22, 28, witnesses of Occasions 1, 5–6, 8.

⁷⁹ Sircar, *Select Inscriptions 1*, p. 343, l. 19, p. 344, ll. 21–22.

⁸⁰ Bhattacharyya, *Historical Geography*, p. 63.

⁸¹ *Vaṅgāla*, Plots 3 and 6, witnesses of Occasions 4–7.

⁸² Occasions 1, 5, 7–8, 10–12.

⁸³ M. Harunur Rashid, *The Early History of South-East Bengal: In the Light of Archaeological Material* (Dhaka, 2008), pp. 91–92.

in Samataṭa, at least for special transactions like land sale for donation. It is comparable with the situation of contemporary North Bengal, where cases of individuals purchasing land plots for donation were prevalent.⁸⁴

The aspects discussed above point to the progress in both state formation and agrarian development accompanied by some form of currency system. The references to the locations of the donated tracts in relation to Vātagaṅgā and other geographical features connected to it, however, suggest the concentration of settlements and cultivated tracts in particular areas on the river. This is confirmed by the names of eight settlements ending with *uccāli* / *uccālikā*, “high embankment”,⁸⁵ which connote their location on river terraces or natural embankments. References to both lake (*villa*) and canal / channel (*khalla* / *khāṭa*) as a part of a village name or landmarks also point to the waterlogged environment of a riverine tract.⁸⁶ The border landmarks described in the Gunaighar plate attest to such an environmental context of the settlements in question.⁸⁷ On the other hand, the presence of large unreclaimed forest tracts and much room for further agrarian expansion in Samataṭa in this period can be assumed from the encroachment upon such tracts through the construction of Brahmanical shrines by local rulers recorded in the seventh-century grants in this subregion.⁸⁸ Those facts, together with the relatively large size of tracts donated in the two grants of Vainyagupta, suggest that agrarian expansion was centred on riverine tracts and that those tracts were put under intensive cultivation in the early period. The presence of possible migrants from Vaṅgāla may point to migration as one of driving forces behind these developments.

Conclusion: interconnection of three phenomena

The discussions above have clarified three phenomena witnessed in Samataṭa in the fifth and sixth centuries: the survival of the Ājīvikas and their growth as an organised religious order, the worship of a particular form of Maṇibhadra by the Ājīvikas and royal patronage of it, and the process of state formation and agrarian development centred on riverine tracts. Their interconnection can be understood in the following way.

The process of state formation and agrarian development constitutes the core of these phenomena. Though the form of political power in the earlier period cannot be known, a development towards a monarchical state may be assumed based on the reference to a peripheral king in the Allahabad inscription of Samudragupta. The introduction of the Gupta official titles and the establishment of administrative divisions show the development of a state apparatus. On the other hand, the growth of kingship necessitates a new authority which would legitimise an emerging political system. A new religious centre personally

⁸⁴For these cases, see T. Yamazaki, “Some aspects of land-sale inscriptions in fifth and sixth century Bengal”, *Acta Asiatica*, XLIII (1982), pp. 17–36.

⁸⁵Ulagiuccālikā (l. 22), Ariuccāli (l. 26), Nagnapaṭṭoccalikā, Nāgapaṭṭoccalikā (l. 27), Ūracaṇḍoccalikā (l. 29), Tyugrocālikā (l. 30), Khaddamattanoccalikā (l. 33), Ketogapaṭṭoccalikā (ll. 39–40)

⁸⁶Ṣollavillagrāma (l. 18), Kheṭṭavilla (l. 26), Heṣamakhalla (ll. 17, 32) (villages); Bheḍavilla (l. 35), Nāgolārikhāṭa (l. 31) (landmarks).

⁸⁷Sircar, *Select Inscriptions 1*, p. 343, l. 19–p. 345, l. 31.

⁸⁸Tipperah plate of Lokanātha, Sircar, *Select Inscriptions 2*, pp. 28–35; Kalapur plate of Maruṇḍanātha, K. K. Gupta (ed.), *Copper-Plates of Sylhet, vol.1 (7th-11th Century A. D.)* (Sylhet, 1967), pp. 68–80.

connected with the king and a religious order suitable for a new social context could be answers to this requirement. The establishment of the shrine of Nāthameṭa and patronage of the Ājīvikas by Nāthacandra can be interpreted as an attempt in this direction. The acquisition of land plots scattered around many villages and their donations to the Ājīvika *saṃgha* enabled the king to claim his control over a wide area on the one hand,⁸⁹ and to encroach upon landed properties of emerging landholding groups by procuring their land plots in the name of a pious deed, on the other hand. The survival of the *saṃgha* and the approval of donations to it by Vainyagupta after 90 years attest to both its entrenchment in the locality and its continued importance for the political power. A similar attempt was made by Rudradatta, a subordinate ruler, who established a *vihāra* of the Mahāyāna Buddhist *saṃgha* and asked the king for land donations to it, as recorded in the Gunaighar plate.⁹⁰

For religious institutions, the emerging monarchy in the periphery provided an opportunity to build up a mutually beneficial relation with the temporal power and to gain a stable material basis through its patronage. This must have been especially important for a religious order which was acquiring a character of regular organisation, including the Ājīvikas of the present case.

The worship of Maṇibhadra should be understood in this socio-political and religious context. As discussed above, Maṇibhadra with four faces seems to be a particular form in which the Ājīvikas worshipped this *yakṣa*. The growth of the Ājīvika *saṃgha* as a regular organisation seems to have accompanied the transformation of this deity, who held an important position in the Ājīvika doctrine, into an object of regular ritual services. His new iconography may have been invented in this process. On the other hand, Maṇibhadra was an eminent *yakṣa* known in different traditions and especially popular in eastern India, as discussed above. The survival of his shrine for more than 90 years in the present case attests to his acceptability for local residents in Samataṭa. The establishment of his shrine by Nāthacandra could be motivated by this “popular appeal”, though it may simply be the result of his patronage of the Ājīvikas.

These are just some suggestions on the possible interconnection of interesting phenomena in early Samataṭa gleaned from the present inscription and other sources. I look forward to further discoveries which may shed new light on the history of Bengal and necessitate reappraisal of the interpretations offered in this article.

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⁸⁹For such an interpretation of royal grants, see H. Kulke, “Some observations on the political functions of copper-plate grants in early medieval India”, in *Recht, Staat und Verwaltung im klassischen Indien* [The state, the law, and administration in classical India], (ed.) B. Kölver (Munich, 1997), pp. 237–243.

⁹⁰Sircar, *Select Inscriptions* 1, p. 341, ll. 3–5.

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