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Fragmentary inscription on a brick from Bhismanagar.

by
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Synopsis

(A brick found from Bhismanagar in the Lohit District bearing a fragmentary epigraph is preserved in the Central Museum of Arunachal Pradesh, Shillong. The inscription, though brief and damaged, throws some interesting light on the history of Arunachal. Archaeological remains of Arunachal are yet to be studied more carefully for the purpose of preparation of a well-documented history of the Union Territory. The present epigraph along with another from Tamreswari Temple near Paya may help in this regard with some definite information).

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An inscribed brick tile, measuring 15 cms in length and 12 cms in breadth, found at Bhismanagar, Lohit District, sometime about 1954¹ is now preserved in the Central Museum of Arunachal Pradesh at Shillong (Central Museum Accession No. 408).

The brick, which is partly damaged, contains animal figures in low relief on both sides within rectangles, outside which are inscribed a few words. The inscription is badly mutilated and the legend above the elephant figures on the reverse side is totally obliterated.

The epigraph is written in the Bengali-Assamese characters of the late 15th or early 16th Century A. D. The forms of the letters *ta* and *sa* are unlike modern Bengali-Assamese characters. And *ra* is also written with the sign for *va* without any dot outside or slanting stroke inside as in modern Bengali or Assamese *ra* which developed out of this older form in the late medieval period.

As compared with the Nilacala copper plates of king Madhavadeva of the early 15th Century² and the Tamreswari Temple Inscription of Muktagharmanarayana, 1364 Saka (1442 A. D.)³ the characters of our record are suggestive of a later date. Especially *ja* and *ta* of the present epigraph are more developed and closer to the modern Bengali-Assamese form.

On the other hand, the Rock Inscription of Nilacala Kamakhya Temple, 1487 Saka (i. e. 1566 A. D.) ⁴, helps to set the lower limit of our record. The slanting stroke inside *ra*, characteristic of later Assamese script is very clear in this inscription indicating that the later type had already made its appearance. *Ja* is similar to that of our record though in some cases faintly reminiscent of the earlier form. It helps in tracing the development of the letter from its type in the Madhava's Plate and Tamreswari Inscription to that of our record and Nilacala Rock Inscription of 1565.

The comparatively developed forms of *ja* and *ta* and the invariable use of the Assamese *ra* in the Rock Inscription of the Kamateswari Temple, Kamatapur, 1587 Saka (i. e. 1665 A. D.) ⁵ also confirm the dating of our record.

Thus the present epigraph was incised roughly between 1442 and 1565 A. D.

Now the legend above the figures on the obverse reads *Ja (pa) ta 'sri 'sri*. The letter between *ja* and *ta* is partially damaged and appears at present like *ga*. But a portion of the slanting straight line below the upper curve, still visible near the letter was perhaps *pa* and not *ga*. ⁶ The extant part of writing below the animals is *sri Laksmi*. The inscription below the animal motif on the reverse is - *Laksmi*, probably a part of some word like *Laksmi*. The object of the record is not very clear due to damage. The reading of the word before *sri* - *sri* may, however, furnish some clue in this regard. If it be *japata* it suits the context very well, as in that case the full expression will be something like *Japata sri sri Laksmi*, i. e., Chant the names of *Laksmi* and *Narayana* (the well known Vaisnava deities).

The mode of writing the legend evokes some interest. It is in the normal way above the figures and upside down below. Perhaps the writing continued around the animal motifs or at least from above to below the animals. Such a practice of writing divine names over and over again is quite popular in Indian custom.

Thus the brick appears to be a votive one having some Vaisnava connection. Vaisnavism, which spread in Assam at an early period ⁷ was gaining new force in the 15th-16th Centuries following the emergence of Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva. Even in the Sadiya-Bhismaknagar region legends and Puranic evidence suggest the influence of Vaisnavism. ⁸ This brick perhaps offers an epigraphic corroboration of that phenomenon.

Two animal figures on the obverse of the brick are combatant tigers or maneless lions. The reverse depicts two elephants facing each other. The elephant is well known in Assam sculptures. ⁹ Figures of lions and even maneless lions also occur frequently ¹⁰ although representations of tigers, too, are not totally unknown. ¹¹

Inscribed Brick Tile from Bhismanagar



(Obverse)



(Reverse)

Iconographic study of some Sculptures From Malinithan

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Synopsis

A few fine sculptures from Malinithan, carved in granite, include a *Surya* figure which shows all the features which are invariably present in the *Surya* reliefs of the Pala period. The elegant sculpture of dancing *Ganesa* is one of the finest representations of the deity discovered in north - eastern India. In the reliefs of *Kartikeya* and *Indra*, the gods are shown seated in *ardhaparyankasana* on their *vahanas*. The sculptures bear stylistic affinities with the sculptures of the Pala school of Bengal and Bihar and may be dated in the 11th century A. D.

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The sculptures found among the ruins of a temple discovered at Malinithan in the Siang District of Arunachal, include four fine granite figures of *Surya*, *Indra*, *Ganesha* and *Kartikeya*.

The head of the exquisitely carved *Surya* image is broken. The god stands in *sambhanga* posture holding in his two hands full - blossomed lotus flowers with stalks. He is shown with booted legs according to the accepted North Indian tradition. The god wears various ornaments including armlets and a waist girdle. The beaded strings and one *vajnopavita* (sacred thread) adorn his chest. The god and his consorts, *Mahasveta*, between his legs, and *Rajni* and *Niksubha* beside him with a *chamara* (Fly - whisk) in their hands, are worked out as standing on the lotuses. Besides his queens as principal attendants, the usual accessory figures of the staff - carrying *Dandi* on his left and the pen - and - inkpot - bearing *Kundi* on his right and the goddesses *Usha* and *Pratyusha* driving away darkness with bows and arrows are depicted here. The charioteer *Aruna* is shown driving the seven horses carved on the *saptaratha* pedestal. In the middle portion, the *gaja simba* motif is carved on either side. In the upper portion the *vidyadhar* figures, the halo around the head of the god and *kirtimukha* design on the top centre of the stela complete the elaborate composition. The *Surya* image shows all the features which are invariably present in the *Surya* reliefs of the Pala period.

It bears stylistic as well as iconographic affinities with the Surya image from Chapra, Bihar, ¹ dated in the 11th century A. D. (kept in the Rajshahi Museum) and on this basis the present image may be assigned to the same period. In this connection attention may also be drawn to the image of the god from Rajmahal Hills, Santal Parganas, Bihar ² (11th - 12th century A. D. now preserved in the Indian section of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London,) the Dhatr - Surva from Dinajpur ³ and a fine representation of the god from Davaka, ⁴ Nowgong District (assigned to c. 12th Century A. D) ⁵.

In the relief of Indra, ⁶ the god is shown seated on the elephant in *ardhaparyankasana*. It has two arms, the mutilated left hand apparently holding the *ankusa* (Goad) the upper part of which is broken, while the raised right hand carries an indistinct object. The head of the image is adorned with *kiritamukuta* while a number of necklaces and a *yajnopavita* adorn the chest. The god has the horizontally placed third eye on the forehead. Of the two attendants, one on the right side carries a *chamara* while that on the left holds what appears to be a pot. The *kirtimukha* design is carved on the top centre of the stela.

The elegant figure of dancing Ganesh is probably the finest representation of the deity discovered in north - eastern India. The pot-bellied god has four arms holding a *parasu* (Hatchet) and a rosary in the right hands and a lotus in the back left hand. The mutilated front left hand probably held a cup of sweet meat to which the forepart of his trunk, now partly broken, was applied. The movement and slow rhythm of dance is clearly suggested by the pose of the two legs of the god who is attended by musicians, a drummer on the right and a cymbal-player on the left. The head is adorned with a well arranged *jata*, the rows of chain ornaments enclosing the protruding temples. A number of beaded strings adorn the chest and a snake serves as his sacred thread. The ornaments including armlets, wristlets and anklets, and the design of the garments are simple and tastefully displayed. The figure of the mouse, the *vahan* of the deity, is carved on the *saptaratha* pedestal below while the *kirtimukha* design is carved on the top centre of the stela. We may compare this image and another dancing figure of the god from Khiching (Mayurbhanj) district, Orissa, with medieval Nrtya Ganapati images of Bengal. ⁷ The latter are iconographically more elaborate, but many of them lack the easy grace and beauty of the former.

In the Kartikeya relief the mode of depicting the deity may be regarded as unique. The god is shown seated on the peacock in the *ardhaparyankasana*. In his left hand he holds a cock, the right hand being broken. The god wears a number of ornaments tastefully displayed. The outspread tail of the peacock serves as his *prabhavali*. Below is shown a female attendant on either side, seated in the same posture as the main figure and holding a flywhisk. The upper part of the stela which included the head of the god and the *Kirtimukha* design above, is now broken.

The high technical accomplishment noticed in these granite sculptures ⁸ and their

stylistic affinities with the Eastern School of the Palas, clearly indicate the extension of the medieval East Indian art tradition to the foothills in the north - eastern region of our country.

Notes

1. A. K. Coomarswamy *History of Indian and Indonesian Art* New York, 1965, 114, fig. 227
2. V. A. Smith *A History of Fine Arts in India and Ceylon*, 1969, p. 98 fig. B
3. J. N. Banerjee, *The Development of Hindu Iconography*, 3rd ed. Pl. XLVII, fig. 3
4. The Image is preserved in the Assam State Museum, Gauhati.
- 5: Attention may also be drawn to a Surya image from Ajmer (kept in the Rajputana Museum), It was apparently brought from the eastern part of the country and belonged to the same, i. e. Eastern Indian, School.
6. Other representations of the god include the Indra images from Chatrakara temple at Gauhati, Pandu (also near Gauhati) and Moiramorathan in the village of Moiramora near Dibrugarh. See, my note on. 'Some Indra images from North-east India' *JAIH*, Vol. VIII ed. D. C. Sircar, Calcutta, 1975
7. J. N. Banerjee, *op. cit.*, pl. XV, fig. 2
8. *Ibid* p. 361
9. We have also found sandstone figures of Indra, Kartikeya and Ganesha which are crude versions of the fine granite images of the said deities. These appear to be of a later date than the images under discussion and may have been brought from outside and inserted in the niches of the outer walls of the temple.