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Scribbling in Newar on the Margins of a Sanskrit Manuscript: Cambridge, University Library, MS Add.2832

Abstract: This Nepalese manuscript of a Sanskrit treatise on horse-medicine, with a Newar colophon, provides an example of the interaction between Sanskrit as a learned, universalising language and the regional vernaculars spoken by those who embraced and disseminated Sanskrit literary culture throughout the South Asian world.

The manuscript Cambridge, University Library, MS Add.2832[1] is a fourteenth-century copy of the *Aśvavaidyaka* of Jayadatta,[2] a Sanskrit treatise on horse-medicine (*aśva* = horse, *vaidyaka* = medicine), produced in Nepal. On the verso of the last folio there is a short note in medieval Newar (also known as Nepal Bhasa, Newah Bhaye or Newari), a language of the Tibeto-Burman family still spoken in the Kathmandu valley in central Nepal. The note, which I discuss in greater detail below, has no evident connection with the content of the manuscript. Nevertheless, even this snippet of text provides an interesting illustration of the complex interplay between Sanskrit, the cosmopolitan language of South Asia, and Newar, one of the vernaculars or regional languages that became literate and (to differing extents) literary languages at various times in the course of almost two thousand years, roughly between the late first millennium BCE and the early modern period.[3]

1 The whole manuscript can be accessed on the Cambridge Digital Library at the following link: <https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-ADD-02832/> (accessed on 18 Febr. 2021).

2 Jayadatta, who in the initial verses calls himself the son of Vijayadatta, is believed to have flourished in the early second millennium CE, since he quotes Śālihotra, the author of the *Aśvāyurveda*, a renowned treatise on horses, generally dated around 1000 CE (see Meulenbeld 2000, 565–566).

3 For the distinction between 'cosmopolitan language' and 'vernacular' in the context of premodern South Asia (though the classification may well usefully apply to other regions and epochs too), see Pollock 1996 and Pollock 2006.

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1 Physical description of the manuscript

The manuscript consists of 96 folios made of palm leaves, approximately 4.5 cm high and 28 cm wide, held between dark wooden covers produced at a later date but of local manufacture (see Fig. 1). The manuscript is complete and in quite good condition. Most folios appear to be palimpsests, as is evident from fol. 95^{v}, which was erased but left blank. The right edge of some folios is worm-eaten, and a few folios are smudged.

The text is written in black ink in the Nepālākṣara script (also called Newari or Bhujmoli in secondary literature), used in the Kathmandu valley. Its evolution can be traced from around the mid-first millennium CE through inscriptions and manuscripts. The form found in MS Add.2832 is the 'hooked' variant of the script, so called because of the small hook-like sign appearing on top of most letters, which is purely ornamental. This was virtually ubiquitous around the time the manuscript was copied, whereas it is not found in earlier and later forms of the script.

As is common in the case of many South Asian palm-leaf manuscripts, the leaves show a string hole, slightly to the left of the centre, placed roughly in the middle of a 2 cm-wide blank square space, framed above and below by the top and bottom lines of the text. The written area, which is approximately 3 cm high and 24.5 cm wide, is comprised of 5 lines per page, and on average each line has 54 *akṣara*s ('graphemes') per line. The ends of sections are marked by a double vertical stroke known as *daṇḍa* ('stick, rod'), which was the only punctuation sign in Indic scripts, followed by a space (often containing a little circle in the middle) and another double *daṇḍa*.

The manuscript bears a double foliation: one in Nepālākṣara letter numerals on the mid-left margin of the verso, from 1 to 95; the other in Nepālākṣāra numerals on the mid-right margin of the verso, also from 1 to 95. The last folio is not numbered but, as I will explain below, there are good reasons to believe it belongs to the original bundle.

On the front cover, a modern hand-written label in Roman script bears the words 'Jayadatta's Açvavaidyaka' in small characters in pencil, at the top, and underneath 'see Bibl.Ind'; further below, 'Rasayan Kulp year 444 Nepalese (Present Nepalese year 1006) Complete', in large characters in brownish ink. The number '444' is crossed with a pencil stroke; the number '484' is written in pencil above, while the date 'A.D. 1364' appears underneath.

2 The main text

The *Aśvavaidyaka* was most probably composed in the early second millennium CE. It is also known with alternative synonymous titles (something not at all uncommon in medieval India) such as *Aśvāyurveda* or *Aśvacikitsā*. Veterinary was considered a branch of medicine and followed the same theoretical principles as Āyurveda proper. The two domains that were most developed and gave rise to conspicuous production of scientific literature are those of horse and elephant medicine, these being the two domestic animals that were most closely associated with kingship both symbolically, as emblems of royal power and prestige, and practically, because of their military use in battles and expeditions. It is not surprising, then, that in the colophons of other copies of this work the author of the treatise, a certain Jayadatta, of whom virtually nothing is known, is often said to be a *mahāsāmānta*, a grand feudatory prince. On the other hand, the colophon of this copy calls him a *mahāśānta*, a 'great ascetic', but given the subject matter, this seems far less likely and may be a simple *lapsus calami* where the syllable *mā* in *sāmānta* has been dropped, especially considering that in medieval Nepal the three Sanskrit sibilants *ś*, *ṣ*, and *s* are frequently confused (most probably under the influence of Newar phonology).

The colophon of the manuscript, on fol. 95^{r}, l. 4–5 (see Fig. 2), gives the date of the copy of the *Aśvavaidyaka*, but unlike other Nepalese colophons it does not provide any further information such as the circumstances of the copying, the name of the scribe, or the recipient or commissioner of the work:

> *samāptā*[4] *cedam aśvāryurvedaśāstraṃ*[5] | ○ *kṛtir iya*[6]
> *mahāśāntaśīijayadattasya*[7] || * || ꠸ *samvat*[8] 484 *māghakṛṣṇe* [*tra*]*yo* ||○||
> *dasyāṃ śravaṇanakṣatre bṛhaspativāsare likhitam idaṃ pustakaṃ* |
>
> 'And this treatise on horse medicine is completed. This is the work of the great ascetic Jayadatta. This book was copied in the year 484,[9] on Bṛhaspati day[10] the thirteenth day of the dark fortnight[11] of Māgha,[12] under the asterism of Śravaṇa.'[13]

4 For *samāptaṃ*.

5 For *aśvāyurvedaśāstraṃ*.

6 For *iyaṃ* (this is probably simply a misspelling due to oversight).

7 Probably for *mahāsamānta-śrī-jayadattasya*.

8 The sign at the beginning of the line, before the word *samvat*, reproduces an auspicious symbol frequently found in medieval Nepalese manuscripts.

While the manuscript is generally quite correct, the few lines of the colophon contain a few mistakes and misspellings. The most serious is the lack of gender agreement between the past participle *samāptā* ('completed', in the feminine) and the compound *aśvāyurvedaśāstraṃ*, which is neuter. Interestingly, in South Asian manuscripts these flaws tend in fact to occur more frequently at the edges of the main text, in paratexts such as glosses, rubrics and colophons.

3 The Newar text

There is one more folio in MS Add.2832, which contains various texts and two more dates, both of them later than the one found in the colophon of the *Aśvavaidyaka*. The fact that Indic manuscripts are frequently comprised of loose leaves makes the insertion of heterogeneous materials an easy and not infrequent occurrence, just like the random loss of one or more leaves from any place in the text. What is worse, this may have happened at any stage in the history of the manuscript – in ancient times, or on the occasion of its purchase, or even after its acquisition by Cambridge University Library. However, some clues allow us to surmise with reasonable certainty that fol. 96 belongs to the original manuscript. Firstly, the leaf looks like all the other folios in texture and colour. Secondly, most or all the leaves, including the final one, look like palimpsests. This is particularly evident in the case of the penultimate folio: fol. 95^{r} contains the end of the treatise and the colophon. When the scribe realised he would not need the other side to complete his assignment, he wrote the folio number on the recto – thus breaking the North Indian convention of marking the foliation on the verso – because he knew the verso would remain blank. However, he had already prepared the verso by erasing whatever text it had previously contained.

9 The era is the Nepāli Samvat, which began on 20 October 879 CE. Therefore, the date in the colophon corresponds to a day in early February 1364. The Cambridge manuscript is the oldest known dated copy of this work (see Meulenbeld 2000, 566).

10 The term *vāsara* (or *vāra*) indicates a solar day; *bṛhaspati-vāsara* is Thursday.

11 The Nepāli calendar is a lunisolar calendar of the *amānta* kind, in which months start and end with a new moon (*amā*). Thus, the first half, the bright half (*śuklapakṣa*), is the waxing moon, while the second half, the dark fortnight (*kṛṣṇapakṣa*), is the waning moon.

12 The lunar month Māgha corresponds to the solar months January/February.

13 A *nakṣatra* is a 'lunar mansion', namely the twenty-seventh part of a sidereal month, each of which corresponds to one of twenty-seven lunar constellations traditionally associated with a presiding deity.

It seems likely, then, that the original bundle of leaves consisted of 96 folios, but 95 proved enough to copy the whole *Aśvavaidyaka*. The passage in Newar is found on fol. 96^{v}, l. 1 to the right of the string hole (see Fig. 3). It is is written in a form of the Nepālākṣara script that is not dissimilar from that of the main text:[14]

(l. 1) ꠰ ŚREYO 'STU || SAMVAT 561 JAIṢṬAŚUKLA[15] TRIYODASYĀ TITHO ŚRĪ *amakhā ṭvāla* śrī *amakhā*</damage>

(l. 2) *ccheṃ amakhā bhārosa hastādāra gun* DAMMA ŚIVAKĀ DVAYA DĀMĀDVIKA[16] PAÑCA *plākṣata*[17] *pla* 5 DA

(l. 3) MMA 2 TASA VARṢA[18] PRATI KALANTRA[19] *pla* PRATI DAMMA 2 *mvadvava* SĀLAPĀṬA 3 *sāyesa dāma jurom*

(l. 4) *thva* DĀMMA *yā dhāṃ ni*.

Here is a tentative translation of the passage:

> May there be happiness. On the 13th day of the bright fortnight of the [month of] Jyaiṣṭha [= May/June] of 561[20] [of the Nepāli Era = 1441 CE] Sir such and such, of such and such respectable house, in the such and such respectable ward, has received the sum of five *pala*s and two *dām*s of the *damma-śivakā* [a currency unit], in figures 5 *pala*s 2 *dammas*, as a loan, to be repaid to the creditor at an annual interest rate of 2 *dammas* for [each] *pala* or alternatively of 3, {...?} to be added to that money [i.e. the original amount]. {...?}"

The content is not entirely clear (especially the final part), but it looks like the draft of a loan agreement, something one might have jotted down before writing up the actual document recording the deed. This is clearly suggested by the use

14 In the transliteration all the Sanskrit loanwords (called *tatsama*, literally 'same as that', in Sanskrit) appear in small capitals, while those clearly adapted from Sanskrit (*tadbhāva*, literally 'originating from that') are italicised and underlined. Newar terms and those of uncertain origin are in italics but not underlined.

15 For *jyaiṣṭhaśukla*.

16 For *dāmādhika*.

17 Probably for *plāṅkata*, a string consisting of the words *pla*, from Sanskrit *pala* (the name of a coin), and *aṅkata*, Sanskrit *aṅkataḥ*, 'in numbers', from *aṅka* 'number, numeral', followed by the secondary suffix *taḥ*, which here has the value of a modal ablative. Note that the merging of the two /a/ vowels into a long /ā/ is a common Sanskrit sandhi.

18 For *varṣaṃ*.

19 For *kalāntara*.

20 The reading 6 for the second figure is uncertain. The appearance of the script rather points to an earlier date.

of the word *amakhā*, a Newar adaptation of the Sanskrit demonstrative *amuka* ('so and so', 'such and such'). Far from being the only borrowing from Sanskrit, *amakhā* is found side by side with several loanwords in which often only the Sanskrit case endings are missing. Among these are the auspicious formula *śreyo 'stu*; terms of the calendar (e.g. *samvat* 'year', *tithi* 'lunar day',[21] etc.); names of coins *damma*, *pala* (rendered as *pla*), *śivakā*; numbers (*pañca* 'five', *dvaya* 'two'); some of the technical commercial vocabulary (*hastādāra* 'loan by hand'; *kalāntara* 'interest rate'; *varṣaṃ prati* 'per year'); the honorific appellative *śrī*, etc. But many other words are of Newar stock (*ṭvāla*[22] 'ward', *ccheṃ* 'house', *thva* 'this', etc.), and the syntax and grammar are definitely Newar. And it is worth noting that a typical Nepalese title such as *bhāro*[23] (followed by the Newar genitive/locative marker *-sa*), translated above as 'Sir', of uncertain origin, is frequently found in the Sanskrit colophons of Nepalese manuscripts, usually in the form *bhāroka*, in which the pleonastic suffix *ka*, ending as it does in a short /a/, makes it easily declinable.[24]

4 The other texts on fol. 96

At the bottom of fol. 96^{v}, under the Newar passage, a devotional invocation in a different hand is found, followed by the same auspicious formula seen above, accompanied by yet another date:

> *namo nāṭeśvarāya śreyo 'stu~~ḥ~~* || *samvat* 510 *yo*
>
> Homage to the Lord of Dance [i.e. Śiva], may there be prosperity. Year 510.

The sign for the *visarga*, /ḥ/,[25] which appears erroneously after the imperative form *astu* ('may there be'), is crossed out with a zigzag. The year corresponds to 1390 CE. Except the invocation to Śiva, the same formula is found on the front

21 The form *titho* used here is certainly an adaptation of the Sanskrit locative *tithau* usually found in dates.

22 An alternative spelling for *ṭol*/*ṭola*.

23 Petech (1984, 88) translates *bhāro* with 'nobleman', but according to Kölver and Śākya (1985, 91), it is 'a very common title, apparently of Vaiśyas', namely the class (*varṇa*) of traders and farmers.

24 Conversely, in Sanskrit there are only two stems ending in /o/ (*go* 'cow' and *dyo* 'sky'), and their declensions are quite irregular.

25 Phonetically, the *visarga* is a voiceless aspiration following the preceding vowel. It mostly occurs as a substitute for /s/ as a result of sandhi.

leaf, fol. 1^{r}, where the spelling mistake is not corrected. However, the hand on fol. 1^{r} is different and appears to be somewhat older than that of the formula on fol. 96^{v}. The most plausible explanation seems to be that the date on the front leaf, added twenty-six years after the copying of the *Aśvavaidyaka*, was then copied for unknown reasons under the passage in Newar after this was written (that is, after 1441 CE), with the addition of the invocation to Śiva Nāṭeśvara (or Nāṭarāja, a common epithet of the god), but correcting the spelling mistake found on the front cover. This is further proof that fol. 96 is indeed part of the original bundle.

On the recto of fol. 96 (see Fig. 4), we find a seemingly random selection of verses, written in a different hand from that of the main work, but in a form of the Nepalese script that is very similar palaeographically, and appears to be roughly contemporary. The verses are taken from two well-known works, the *Vikramacarita*, a collection of stories (*carita*) on the exploits of the eponymous king Vikrama told by the statuettes decorating his throne, and the *Subhāṣitaratnakoṣa*, a popular anthology of compositions of various poets. It is impossible to decide whether these verses were copied at the same time as the *Aśvavaidyaka* and for what purpose, if any.

The verso of fol. 96, where the Newar text is found, also shows another text to the left of the string hole, in a definitely later and more angular hand. This is a set of verses in praise of Vāgīśvara, the 'Lord of Speech', an epithet of Mañjuśrī, a popular *bodhisattva* in Buddhist mythology.

5 The interaction of Sanskrit and Newar in Cambridge, University Library, MS Add.2832

The two languages represented here, Sanskrit and Newar, had co-existed in the Kathmandu valley for a long time, well before the manuscript of the *Aśvavaidyaka* was copied, occupying different spheres of the same sociocultural space. The history of their interaction goes back to the first millennium CE. Sanskrit is attested in inscriptions of the Licchavi dynasty starting from the fifth century CE, while Newar appears only sporadically before the end of the first millennium, especially in personal names, toponyms, and, interestingly, in the terminology of taxation.[26] Later on, it is initially used for the technical portions of an inscription, such as land measurements, details of donations to temples,

26 See Malla 1982, 6–7.

etc. The main portion of the inscription, which traditionally contains a eulogy in verse of the person issuing it – the king or some other wealthy, powerful, and influential figure – is almost exclusively in Sanskrit until the fifteenth century. This is a pattern that is regularly observed throughout South Asia from about the second century CE: the epigraphic language of political rhetorical discourse is Sanskrit, usually of a sophisticated and florid variety, while the local vernacular, if it appears at all, is confined to the practical and legal aspects of the recorded events. In other words, for most of the early medieval period one generally finds either monolingual inscriptions in Sanskrit or bilingual inscriptions with a sharp division of labour, as it were, between Sanskrit and the vernacular.

With reference to Nepal, the oldest known document written in Newar is a manuscript from the Buddhist monastery of Ukū Bāhāḥ (also known by the Sanskrit name Rudravarṇa Mahāvihāra) in Patan, one of the important urban centres of the valley, dated Nepāli Samvat 235, corresponding to 1114 CE. The manuscript records the agreement on the sharing of income and crops 'among the tenant-farmers tilling the monastery's land and the members of the monastic order',[27] and belongs to an archive of legal and commercial documents dating from the tenth century onwards preserved in the monastery, many of which were published in Kölver and Śākya 1985. As they note, in these bilingual documents '[g]eneral principles, the framework, the formula are stated in Sanskrit, while the particulars of the case are given in the vernacular', Newar.[28] Many of the highly standardised formulas employed in these documents closely resemble the one found in Add.2832. They show that by the early second millennium CE Newar had become a literate language commonly used in private documents for pragmatic purposes (such as accountancy, administration, and private law), and for that purpose had developed a specialised lexicon with numerous loanwords from Sanskrit and other Indo-Aryan languages of North India. A few centuries later, a Newar literary culture began to emerge at the court of King Jayasthitirājamalla (r. 1382–1395), who consolidated his power after a couple of centuries of domestic strife, precisely around the time when the manuscript of the *Aśvavaidyaka* was copied.

The picture I have very briefly outlined of the interaction between the two languages seems to be well illustrated by the Cambridge manuscript. All of it, except the last folio, is devoted to a treatise belonging to one of the most ancient scholastic traditions of 'high' Sanskritic culture, namely Āyurveda. Overall, the copy of the *Aśvavaidyaka* is remarkably correct, showing that the person who

27 See Malla 1990, 16.
28 Kölver and Śākya 1985, 27.

transcribed it, whether a professional scribe or a veterinarian who made a copy for his personal use, had a good mastery of Sanskrit. Not many years later, judging from the appearance of the script, the person who was then in possession of the treatise used the spare leaf at the back to write the Sanskrit verses on the recto. It was almost another eighty years (if the date of Nepāli Samvat 561 is reliable) before the loan agreement template in Newar was added. We do not know whether in the meantime the manuscript had stayed in the possession of the same family (the practice of medicine was commonly cultivated by lineages of physicians and transmitted from father to son), but the juxtaposition of the two texts in the same bundle suggests that the Sanskrit treatise contained in the manuscript was still being consulted when the loan formula was inscribed. This points to the existence in medieval Nepal of a milieu of educated Newar speakers who could read Sanskrit, which alternated with their mother tongue in various areas of daily life.

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Fig. 1: Cambridge, University Library, MS Add.2832, front wooden cover; reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

Fig. 2: Cambridge, University Library, MS Add.2832, fol. 95^{r} with colophon; reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

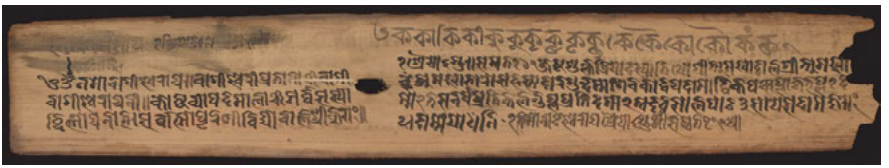

Fig. 3: Cambridge, University Library, MS Add.2832, fol. 96^{v} with Newar passage; reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

Fig. 4: Cambridge, University Library, MS Add.2832, fol. 96^{r} with Sanskrit verses; reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.