

No. 33—NAGARJUNAKONDA PRAKRIT INSCRIPTION OF GAUTAMIPUTRA
VIJAYA SATAKARNI, YEAR 6

(1 Plate)

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The subjoined pillar-inscription was discovered on the 29th May 1962, at Nāgārjunakoṇḍa,¹ District Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, in the course of the removal of the antiquities from the submergence levels to the new Museum premises. The actual findspot is quite close to Site 126, and the ancient burning *ghāt*. In fact, the inscribed pillar was re-used at some late date as a balustrade of a *ghāt* on the Krishna, but the area as a whole being a narrow strip of land in between the river-bank and the Nāgārjunakoṇḍa hill, is not at present easily accessible, specially during floods. The record has been noticed in *Ancient India*, No. 16 (1962), p. 84, where the date of the regnal year has been incorrectly read as 8 instead of 6.

The green limestone pillar on which the inscription is engraved might have originally belonged to a pillared hall. Subsequently the pillar was re-used in the construction of the *ghāt* referred to above. The occurrence of a few very defaced letters in late Nāgarī characters on the other side of the same pillar is likely to suggest that this *ghāt* was in use, if not constructed—the latter, however, by no means an impossible proposition—in the late medieval times. It is worth noting that architecturally this pillar, with rectangular upper and lower portions, middle portion being octagonal, is similar in type to those of the Ikshvāku period. The inscription is engraved just below the octagonal part of the shaft which is devoid of any carving. The extant height of the pillar, including the undressed part, is 175 cm. the width and thickness being 30 cm. and 22.5 cm. respectively.

The inscription, consisting of four lines, covers a space of 30 cm. by 16 cm., the fourth line having only four letters. The epigraph is written in Brāhmī characters of about the third century A.D. and the language is Prakrit. Palaeographically the present record, despite a few noticeable differences, is not far removed in point of time from the records of the Ikshvākus from Nāgārjunakoṇḍa.² The strokes on the top as well as at the bottom are not very long drawn and the letters are somewhat broader in the present case.

An interesting feature of orthography is the use of the reduplicated consonant *ṇ* in the word *Satakannisa*.³ Such use of the double consonant is, however, not noticed in the inscriptions of Virapurushadatta.

The inscription opens with the adoration to the Best of Men (*aga-pogala*) i.e. Buddha. One of the Nāgārjunakoṇḍa inscriptions reads *aga-pogala* (Pali *agga-puggala*=Sanskrit *ugrya-puḍgala*) as an epithet of Buddha.⁴ After the adoration, the details of the date of the record are given as **Vaiśākhi-pūrṇimā of the fourth fortnight of the summer season during the sixth regnal year of the king Vijaya Śāta.arni**. The record ends immediately after the date portion without giving the purport or any other information. However, the passage about the

¹ Also spelt as Nāgārjunikoṇḍa. Macron over *e* and *o* has not been used in this article.

² Cf. above, Vol. XX, pp. 16-37.

³ The word *Satakanni* is spelt variously as *Sātakanni* (Khāravela's inscription, *ibid.*, p. 79, line 4), *Sadakaṇi* or *Sātakaṇi* (Nasik inscription of Gautamiputra, *ibid.*, Vol. VIII, pp. 71 and 73). [The form *Sātakaṇi* itself occurs in the Maḥavalli inscription of Chuṭu Śātakaṇi, cf. *Ep. Carn.*, Vol. VII, Sk. 263.—Ed.]

⁴ Above, Vol. XX, pp. 25-26.

adoration and the date portion would establish the Buddhist nature of the epigraph. For, the *Vaisākhi-pūrṇimā* is traditionally associated with the day of Buddha's birth and *nirvāṇa*.¹ It may, therefore, be suggested that the object of the inscription is to record the gift of the pillar containing the epigraph under study to a Buddhist establishment, which might have been situated close to the findspot of the inscription.

The present epigraph is **important** because, besides being the solitary *Sātavāhana* record from Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, it is the only inscription of Gautamīputra Vijaya-Śātakarṇi so far known. He may be identified with the Andhra king Vijaya of the Purāṇic list. His name is read as [Vija]ya Śātakarṇi in some of the coins from Tarhālā hoard.² Since the record is dated in the sixth regnal year of the king, it supports the testimony of the Purāṇas according to which he ruled for six years. According to the Purāṇas two more kings, viz. Chaṇḍasri and Pulomāvi of the *Sātavāhana* dynasty ruled after Vijaya: they are also known from inscriptions.³ D. C. Sircar suggests that at least the predecessors of Pulomāvi of Myakadoni inscription must have ruled over Andhradeśa.⁴ The present discovery of Vijaya-Śātakarṇi's inscription at Nāgārjunakoṇḍa proves that Andhradeśa formed part of his dominion. It is likely that the city of Vijayapurī, the ancient name of Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, was originally founded by this Vijaya Śātakarṇi who named it after himself and subsequently it became the capital of the Ikshvākus. The existence of a township at Nāgārjunakoṇḍa during the later *Sātavāhanas* is indicated by the discovery, at that place, of two hoards of coins exclusively belonging to the *Sātavāhana* kings, besides stray occurrences of the coins of Yajña Śātakarṇi, Pulomāvi, etc. as also by the presence of pre-Ikshvāku deposits at many a site in that area including the one below the Ikshvāku rampart. Hence Vijaya-Śātakarṇi seems to have founded this city which was named after him.⁵

TEXT*

- 1 [Na]mo bhagavato Agapogalasa [I*]
- 2 raṇo Gotamiputasa Siri-Vijaya-Sa-
- 3 takarṇisa sava 6 gi pa⁷ 4 diva Vesā-
- 4 [kha] puṇima [I]⁸

TRANSLATION

Adoration to the Lord, the Best of Beings (i.e. Buddha). (*The pillar is the gift made on*) the *Vaisākhi-pūrṇimā* day of the fourth fortnight of summer during the sixth regnal year of king Gautamīputra Vijaya-Śātakarṇi.

¹ The fourth fortnight clearly suggests that the year starts from the first fortnight (dark) of the month Chaitra and the *pūrṇimā* in the fourth fortnight is the characteristic of *pūrṇimānta* (Cf. above, Vol. I, p. 404).
² V. V. Mirashi, 'A large hoard of Satavahana coins', *Ind. Hist. Quart.*, Vol. XVI, p. 505; see also *JNSI*, Vol. II, pp. 83-94.

³ Kodavali inscription of Chaṇḍasati (*ZDMG*, Vol. LXII, p. 592; above, Vol. XVIII, pp. 316 ff. and Plate) and Myakadoni rock-inscription of Pulomāvi (above, Vol. XIV, p. 153).

⁴ *Successors of the Sātavāhanas*, p. 163. It is also said that the Myakadoni inscription suggests that the Andhra-deśa undoubtedly formed part of Pulomāvi's dominions. (Cf. *Comp. Hist. of India*, Vol. II, p. 324).

⁵ In view of this, D. C. Sircar's suggestion that the Ikshvāku capital was called Vijayapura probably for its foundation in the cyclic year Vijaya (above, Vol. XXXV, p. 2, note 4) does not hold good.

⁶ From the original and impressions.

⁷ This is the contraction of Prakrit *gimha-pakhe*, Sanskrit *grīshma-pakshe*.

⁸ The punctuation to denote the end of the record is indicated by two *visarga*-like dots.