

PALAEOGRAPHY, LANGUAGE AND ART OF HATHIGUMPHA INSCRIPTION

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The palaeography of the Nasik Cave Inscription of the time of Krisna, of the Nanaghat Cave Figure Label Inscription of the time of Satakarni ¹ and of the Nanaghat Cave Inscription of queen Nayanika⁴, wife of Satakarni¹, bear much resemblance with that of the Hathigumpha Inscription. Letters like Va, Pa, Da, Cha, are becoming triangular in all these inscriptions, and if in case of the Hathigumpha they develop a kind of sheif, that may be taken as a local variation. R.P. Chanda¹ has pointed out a few such cases of variation between the palaeography of the Nanaghat and Hathigumpha. But he also agrees with the fact that they might as well be recognised as contemporaneous local variations. D.C. Sircar² opines that palaeographically the Hathigumpha record is slightly later than the Nanaghat record and also that the letters of the Sanchi Inscription of Satakarni resemble the script of the Hathigumpha record. But he is inclined to suggest that “if this slight development is over-looked we may identify both these Satakarnis with Satakarni I. Earlier epigraphists like Buhler and Rapson did not fail to recognise the close similarity between the script of the Nanaghat and the Hathigumpha Inscriptions and Rapson making reference to Buhler states “Epigraphic considerations show that the Hathigumpha” Inscription of Kharavela and Nanaghat Inscription of Naganika, the queen of Satakarni, belonged to the same period as the Nasik Inscription of Krishna.”

Thus on palaeographical consideration also there is no difficulty in taking Satakarni as the contemporary of Kharavela.

The language and the literary style of the Hathigumpha Inscription further indicate that the record was composed sometimes during the post Sunga period. The language of Asoka’s edicts, as well as , that of the inscriptions of the Sungas is Magadhi Prakrit, but the language of Kharavela’s Inscription is akin to Pali, and this Pali trend in the epigraphic literature of Eastern India indicates a period later than the second century B.C. when old Magadhi was the official language. Barua¹ has pointed out a few instances of the development of Indian epigraphic language indicating “a march of the official language of India from a state of old Magadhi towards Sanskrit through a Pali stage reached in the language of Ananda’s Sanchi Gateway Inscription of Satakarni’s time and that of the old Brahmi Inscriptions” of Udayagiri and Khandagiri. The style of the Hathigumpha Inscription which represents an advanced form of versification and of rhythmic prose also inscription accompanied with rhythmic quality, elegant expression and well-balanced alleterations, reveal an important land-mark in the development of Indian literature. It is definitely an

advance on the plain and simple writing of the Asokan edicts and also of the inscriptions of the Sungas. The high attainment of this ornate Kavya style is noticed in the Satavahana records of the time of Gautamiputra Satakarni and Vasisthiputra Pulumavi² (second century A.D.). Thus the Inscription of Kharavela, so far as its style is concerned, indicates a new development and may be placed in between Maurya and Sunga records on the one hand, and the later Satavahana and the Western Ksatrapa records on the other. Barua suggests that the Inscriptions of Udayagiri and Khandagiri anticipate the Pali pose style of Milindapanha. Thus, both the language and the style corroborate the historical finds discussed above about dating the inscription in the later part of the first century B.C.

The Manchapuri caves in the Udayagiri may be placed very close to the time of Kharavela as the upper storey of it contains records stating that it was caused to be excavated by the Chief queen of Kharavela and in the lower storey similar records are also found revealing the fact that the main and the side blocks of it were the works of Maharaja Kudepa and Prince Vadukha, respectively, who were apparently the son and grandson of Kharavela.¹ The relief sculptures on the rock in between the two storeys have all been defaced but the sculptures engraved in the ground floor are in well preserved condition. The plastic treatment of these sculptures with their emotional appeal addressing the spectator in three quarter profile are considered by authoritative art-critics as considerably posterior to the sculptures of Bharhut. ² The sculptured gateway of Bharhut which contains the inscription of king Visadeva,³ the feudatory of the Sungas, is ascribed to the first quarter of the first century B.C.⁴, i.e. towards the end of the Sunga rule . So the relief art of the lower storey of the Manchapuri cave of the time of Kharavela's successors may be assigned to the last quarter of the same century. In this consideration the above discussion regarding the date of Kharavela sounds very reasonable.

In the light of this discussion the following dates for Kharavela are taken to be approximately correct.

Foundation of the Chedi rule in Kalinga	- Cir.73 B.C.
Birth of Kharavela	- Cir. 64 B.C.
His rule as the Crown Prince	- Cir. 9-40
His consecration as Maharaja	- Cir. 40 B.C.
The last known date of his career	- Cir. 27 B.C.

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