A NOTE ON ATĪṢA DĪPANKARA,
DHARMAKĪRTI
AND
THE GEOGRAPHICAL PERSONALITY OF
SUVARNADEVĪPA

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In a recent paper published by Helmut Eimer in the Journal of the Asiatic
Society, Vol. XXVII, no. 4, on “Life and activities of Atīṣa”, the writer
suggested (p.88) that Atīṣa might have met Dhammakīrti in Bodh Gaya or
some monastery and that the account of Atīṣa’s account in Suvarnadvīpa has
not yet been confirmed. The learned Director of the Sikkim Research
Institute of Tibetology having invited my comments to these two points, I
wish to discuss them below but in a larger context, so that I may also present
my current thinking in a somewhat newer orientation.

I

Atīṣa’s meeting with his future guru Dhammakīrti of Suvarnadvīpa at Bodh
Gaya or some monastery is apparently based upon a Tibetan tradition of
legendary character, one of which has been translated by S.C. Das in BRSA
i, pp. 8-9. It refers to the congregation of outstanding scholars of the Buddhist
world at Vesāsana, i.e. Bodh Gaya. At this congregation, the great Acārya
Mahā Śrī Rōma was present. According to the same tradition, Lama qSer-
dring-pa, the future teacher of Atīṣa was also present there and he attached
himself to the great Acārya for sometime. He was given the title of
Dhammakīrti by his guru. It is not easy to determine the date of this
congregation. There are however two considerations which make it likely
that Atīṣa and Dhammakīrti might have met at Bodh Gaya or at some
monastery. First Dhammakīrti is reported to have stayed in India for several
years to study the Law and during this time he might have visited the famous
sacred places of the Buddhist world like Bodh Gaya, Rājayā, Nālandā and
Vikramāditya. Second, Atīṣa is also reported to have studied the Law at
Nālandā, Rājayā, Vikramāditya, completing his studies at Mati Vihāra in
Bodh Gaya. So it is not unlikely that Atīṣa and his future guru might have met
each other in one of these centres of learning, but at present there is no
trustworthy document anywhere to authenticate this point, as far as my
information goes.
The question of the geographical identity of Suvarṇadvipa is however much more important and complex than the point discussed above. Unfortunately all previous authors including the present writer, have followed S. Levi in regard to the identity of Suvarṇadvipa in his famous article “Polémica, le Mèdesa e la Bhatakathā” published in *Etudes Asiatiques*, t. 11, 1925 pp. 55-55 and 431-432. Research during the last fifty years has convinced me that the paper had become obsolete in some major respects and was rather creating anomalies in the progress of research. I discussed these difficulties in a paper entitled: “A geographical introduction to South-East Asia: The Indian perspective,” which was published in the *Bijdragen (Eks) of the Royal Institute*, Leiden, the Netherlands, vol. 137 (1981) pp. 293-324. In that paper, I have shown that Suvarṇadvipa and Suvarṇadvipa are two distinct geographical entities. Of these two, the former refers to lower Burma. I also pointed out in the same connection that the geographical entity known as Suvarṇadvipa did not figure at all in any authentic text prior to the date of the Nālandīs Charter of king Devapāla. Further research has led me to the conclusion that Sunnetra was merely a segment of the much bigger geographical entity called Bālīpura. As the date of the Nālandīs Charter and the significance of what is Suvarṇadvipa have very often been confused, these have led to the distortion of the history of the Malay-Indonesian world also in some major respects. This distortion needs recalculation by authors dealing with the history of that part of the world. For this reason also the geographical personality of Suvarṇadvipa should be better defined.

The above mentioned Nālandīs Charter (Ep. Ind. XVII, pp. 322-324) which mentions king Bālīpura-deva as a contemporary of Devapāla, was issued on the 21st day of the Kārtika in the 35th or 39th regnal year of king Devapāla. The reading of the second numeral in the regnal year was uncertain, but it has probably to be read as regnal year 35. Due to the discovery of some new epigraphs, D.C. Sircar, in his *Dynamic Account of the Bāls and Solar Epoch* (in Bengali), 1982 pp. 12, 671, revised the regnal period of Devapāla as being from AD. 833-847, that of Bālīpura-deva from C. 847 to 860 end that of Vīgrahapāla from 860-861. So the date of the Nālandīs Charter should be AD. 845. Many scholars, notably J.G. de Casparis, have placed date of the Nālandīs Charter in C. 850 AD. in one place (Prox. Ind. I, p.97) and between AD. 860 and 870 in another (Prox. Ind. II, p. 297). The fixation of the latter date is absurd, as it unsettles the firm chronology of several dynasties of India. The date of the Nālandīs Charter cannot therefore be later than AD. 847, when Devapāla died. If this is admitted, the chronology of the later Senānadbhīya monarchs of Java, the account of civil war propounded by de Casparis and his theory about the flight of Bālīpura-deva to Suvarṇadvipa will prove to be somewhat illusory.
or at least would demand a fresh assessment. Since the grandfather of Bālapuṭradvēśa has been described in the Nālandī Charter as "Yoravāṃjikīśvara" and Bālapuṭradvēśa has been described in contradistinction as "Suva (rga-)dvīpādīpa-mahārāja" in Verse 37, a difference in status between the two kings has been deliberately thrown in.

Let us now look for contemporary records to define the Geographical Personality of Suvarṇapuḍāpī. Fortunately for us, the Perio-Arabic travellers for at least two centuries throw considerable light in the elucidation of his point. In the shorter text of the Ligor inscription found in Malayu and dated AD 775, it was already stated of King Vīpa "that the title name (person) is known by the appellation of Sit mahārāja because of the mention of his origin in the Sālavāra dynasty." As a matter of fact, for a very long time thereafter, the designation mahārāja was applied only to the rulers of the maritime empire of the Sālavāras, and later on, of Śiyāra. This vast empire figures in Arabic texts as Zībq (zībq, ẓībq), and Ibn Khudad dibi, writing in AD 844-46, said that the ruler of Zībq was king of the islands of the southern ocean and is called the mahārāja. As Ibn Khudad dibi and Bālapuṭradvēśa were contemporaneous, and the latter was ruler of Suvarṇapuḍāpī, it is obvious that Zībq of the Arabic text could only refer to Suvarṇapuḍāpī, but as headquarters were in Java where Bālapuṭradvēśa lived in AD 845. The position becomes clear from the statement of another author of a contemporary text (prior to AD 851), edited by Abu Zayd Hasen in C. 916 AD. We read there, "Kalibar formed part of the empire of Zībq, which is situated in the South of India. Kaśibar and Zībq are governed by one king." Now, Abu Zayd Hasen has stated that the city of Zībq, whose circumference is 900 parasangs is ruled over by a king who is known by the name of Maḥārāja. We read further: "the king is in addition, the Sovereign of a great number of islands that extend for 1000 parasangs and even more. Among the states over which he ruled is an island called Sībiga, whose circumference is 400 parasangs, and the island Rmī (Achini, north of Sumatra). Also part of the possession of the mahārāja is the maritime state of Kaśibar, which is situated half-way between China, and Arabia ..." The authority of the mahārāja is felt in these islands." Here Sībiga has been shown as a part of Zībq. Ferrand thought that Zībq referred to Sumatra, but Pelliot understood it in the sense of Java-Sumatra. It seems to have been a bigger geographical entity, because a little later Maṇḍa, who had visited both Zībq and China, wrote in C. 950 AD about "the kingdom of the mahārāja, king of the islands of Zībq and other isles in the sea of China, among which are Kaśibar and Sībiga ..." Voyaging in the most rapid vessel, one cannot go round all these islands in two years." Zībq is thus the metropolis country, exercising authority in various degrees over many ports of Sumatra, Malaya and smaller isles all about. This is explicitly stated in another part of his text which reads: "Zībq is the chief island of his kingdom and the seat of his empire."
Al-Biruni, the greatest scholar of his age, wrote about Sunvarpadipa in the following terms (Sachau, Alberuni’s India, i, p. 210): “The eastern islands in this ocean, which are nearer to China than to India are the islands of Zahoq, called by Hindus Sunvarpadipa, i.e. the gold islands.” The same idea is repeated in pt II, p. 106 of the same text, but he was particular in distinguishing it from Suvardhulum, which, he rightly placed in his classified list under “I. as being in the north-east (addnya)” of India. In this context, it should not be forgotten that Al-Biruni and Abba Dipika were contemporaries. So Théod. MS-notions about Sunvarpadipa receive better precision in the writing of Al-Biruni.

What all the relevant Arabic texts had not recorded specifically have been supplied by the Kafaṭsvarisgana (C. 1060 AD), in Javangga 54, Verses 97 ff, where we read that Kalasa (it was the capital of Sunvarpadipa). As the earliest reference to Kalasa in connection with the Sunvarpadipa, which is considered to be the source of the Kafaṭs varis text referred to above and placed in a date not later than the 12th century AD (S.N. Dugong and S.K. De, A History of Sanskrit Literature: classical period, p. 696 and H.B. Sarkar in the Bhajangita article referred to earlier). As the East-West trade route passed by the maritime belt of Western India, particularly the Cambay region, traders of this region must have disseminated the information about the capital of Sunvarpadipa at Kalasa (it). It is also for this reason that I did not dismiss this information lightly, as it concerns a problem whose solution is not yet in sight.

When I visited Java in 1958, I had this problem in mind. The temple of Kalasa was a royal temple established by rakes Pangan彬ten (king Indra) with the assistance of the Śrīnārī (a predecessor) of the Śrīnārī king (no. 1). H.B. Marriott, Corpus of the Inscriptions of Java, Vol. 11. As this was a royal temple established by the royal predecessors, it stands to reason that the royal palace, according to Indian religious conception, could not be far off, as the members of the royal house held obviously worshipped here, irrespective of the change of dynasties among collateral branches. That struggle for power took place in its neighbourhood in subsequent times have been sought to be delineated by I.Gane Carston in the Persia in Indonesia II, pp. 244 ff, although I have reservations about the interpretation of the event.

The identification of the capital city of Sunvarpadipa, having central authority over the loose segments of the confederation having their respective zonal quarters, is as yet an unsolved problem, but it cannot escape one’s attention that most of the durable archaeological treasures,
monumental and sculptural art are found only in the Southern half of central Java and not in any other part of Suvarnadvipa. As the founders of the Srivijayan kingdom in Sumatra were Srivijaya from the ghat, as I have tried to prove elsewhere (vide my article 'Kings of Sri Salim and the foundation of the Srivijaya dynasty in Indonesia' in the Biddraken, 1985), there was nothing incongruous in their ruling over the idea of Suvarnadvipa from Kalasan, at least for a long time. It is indeed against human psychology to erect saga in stone in places where their founders do not live. Military and strategic needs might have compelled them occasionally to live in zonal headquarters for sometime and, send missions thence to China, as classified dates on Ho-Ling and Srivijaya missions seem to attest, but this cannot be interpreted as the dismemberment of the empire of the mahārāja.

A new investigation is no doubt needed to clear up all the issues involved in this context, but Ho-Ling seems to be no other than the central Javanese part of the Srivijaya empire.

III

After the discussion made above, it will be easier for us to take up the account of Aśoka Dipākara and his guru who lived in the Srivijaya part of Suvarnadvipa. There are some references which have been noted by Alaka Chatterjee in her work Aśoka and Tibet in the Adbhutasamaya-lilā-kāraṇa pravṛtti-dhāraṇā-sūtra vyavahāra sūtra vyakhyātu bθaka dharma śloka (A.C. l.c., p. 478). Colophon K makes it clear that it was composed by Ramya Dharmakīrti of Suvarnadvipa in the tenth regnal year of Śrī Cudarapārivarman of Suvarnadvipa from a place called Malayagiri in Viśakhāpura. As Cudarapārivarman's successor Māraviyottuṭhapa Varmen ascended the throne of Śrī Viṣaya not later than AD 1008, the text in question could have been composed sometime before the death of the former. Here the geographical particulars are important. About the second text called Bodhisattva caryā-vṛti-prakāśha (A.C. l.c., p. 484), it has been stated that it was expounded at the request of Kamalakṣaṇa and Dīpākara Śrīśūkṣa, who were students of their guru Dharma-bīṣa of Suvarnadvipa. This guru is generally believed to be no other than Dharmakīrti himself. There are some other texts of similar nature, but they do not yield any new information. Taken together these and other Tibetan data seem to imply that Aśoka went to Suvarnadvipa at the age of 31, studied there for twelve years - this is rather a stereotyped duration assigned to studentship in general, about which I am sceptical - in the place called Malayagiri in Srivijaya.

The foundation of Srivijaya by the dispossessed scions of the Ikavikku dynasty took place sometime between AD 300 and 392. (vide my article in the Biddraken, 1985, pp. 323-38). The Malayalam-speaking people collaborated in the foundation of Srivijaya and they themselves seem to
have settled down at a place which came to be known as Maliyu, after the name of their home-country on the Malabar coast of Southern India. It is usually identified with modern Lamji on the northern coast of Sumatra. A bigger influx organised by Śrīvīśaya strengthened the demography of the place between AD 671 and 695. It gradually grew up in importance and its ruler sent a mission to China in 644 and again in 645.

In the days of Ta-king (AD 671), there were more than 1000 Buddhist priests in the 'settled city of Bhoja'. They were told, "study all the subjects that exist in the Madhyadesa (India) . . ." Pelliot thought that this Bhoja, i.e. Śrīvīśaya was located at Palembang a view I also share. It is very difficult to state why the Buddhist centre at Palembang declined and that at Malayu-Malayagiri prospered. Whatever be the reason, it saw its prosperity in the tenth century AD, at least in the reign of the Galendra King Gajendravarman-deva in the last quarter of the tenth century AD. The name of Malayagiri seems to be justified, as it is a hilly terrain.

Attae came to Malay in AD 1012, when the previous king of Śrīvīśaya had already died and after Māgānīyarottorpa-rāman had ascended the throne in AD 1008. No evidence is however available at present from the Indonesian side regarding the existence of the Buddhist University at Malay in the beginning of the eleventh century or Attae Dipankara's sojourn there for advanced studies in Buddhism.

A critical study of the progress of researches on Śrīvīśaya up to 1979 had been furnished by D W Waters in his "Studying Śrīvīśaya", published in the Journal of the Malay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, Vol. 52, pt. 2, 1979, while a Bibliography on the same topic up to the year has been furnished in the Pro Seminar Penelitian Śrīvīśaya, published by the Pusat Penelitian Pembangunan Desa, Penang, National, Jakarta, 1979. The latest authoritative discussion on Śrīvīśaya and some other matters related to it is to be found in P. Wheatley, Nilgiris and Commandery University of Chicago, 1983.