

Chapter 4

The Pāla Copperplate Inscriptions and Their Engravers

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Introduction

The Pālas, the dynasty known as patrons of Buddhism in eastern India, ruled northern and western Bengal and eastern Bihar from the mid-eighth century to the mid-twelfth century. They were closely involved with the political history of early medieval North India, particularly as a competitor to both the Gurjara-Pratihāras and the Rāṣtrakūṭas.¹ The primary sources for reconstructing their history are inscriptions, particularly copperplate inscriptions issued as royal charters for religious agents to whom landholdings or villages were donated. The copperplate inscriptions of the Pālas have highly formulaic contents written in qualified Sanskrit, which are neatly engraved on thick and large sheets of copper. Engraving was executed by a group of people who specialised in this task, and the references in the inscriptions elucidate their social character. This study first describes the form, format, and contents of the Pāla copperplate inscriptions by presenting a typical Pāla grant as an example. Thereafter, it discusses the diachronic development of the Pāla grants and its relation with the changing character of their specialised engravers against the historical context.

1. The Pāla Copperplate Inscriptions: Forms, Formats, and Contents

Among the copperplate inscriptions of the Pāla kings, twenty-four have been edited and published to date, whereas seven more are yet to be deciphered.² Each inscription is engraved on a sheet of copper, to which a cast seal with an image of the wheel of law (*dhar-*

¹ For the updated political history of the Pālas, see Chowdhury [2018, 691–811].

² For a list of published plates and references, see Furui [2020, 260–263, ns. 41–45, 47–53, 62, 65–68, 70, 74–76, 82–83, and 85]. The seven unpublished plates are 1) a plate of Gopāla II kept at National Museum, New Delhi; 2) a plate of Rāyapāla held by the same museum; 3) a plate of Nārāyaṇapāla discovered at village Peyara in Rangpur district of Bangladesh; 4) a plate of Nayapāla discovered at village Naodoba in the same district; 5) a plate of Vighrapāla III currently under the police custody in Dhaka, Bangladesh; 6) a plate of Vighrapāla III held by a private collector; and 7) a plate of Rājyapāla in private collection notified in Sanyal et al. [2023].

macakra) flanked by deer on both sides and the legend mentioning the name of the king is soldered on the top. The size of plates varies. For example, the Jagajjibanpur plate of Mahendrapāla is 52.2 cm high, 37.1 cm wide, and 0.5 cm thick and weighs 11.1 kg with the seal [S. C. Bhattacharya 2007, 63]. All the plates, except an incomplete plate of Nayapāla [G. Bhattacharya 1996], are engraved breadthways on both sides.

The contents of the Pāla plates are arranged in a particular format, similar to contemporary royal charters (*rājaśāsana*). Sircar [1965, 126–127] provides the following classification of contents:

- a) Preamble: (1) invocation, (2) place of issue, (3) name of the donor with his titles and ancestry, and (4) address with respect to the grant
- b) Notification: (1) specification of the gift, (2) name of the donee, (3) occasion, (4) purpose of the grant, and (5) boundaries of the gift land
- c) Conclusion: (1) an exhortation with respect to the grant, (2) the names of the officials responsible for the preparation of the document, and (3) the date and authentication of the record

The Pāla plates mostly followed this format with some deviations. The contents of the Biyala plate of Mahīpāla I, dated year 35, assignable to the first quarter of the eleventh century, are provided here as an example of the Pāla plates of the mature phase.³

The preamble begins with the invocation comprising a symbol, a loop open to the left representing an auspicious word “success” (*siddham*), a word “welfare” (*svasti*), and a verse invoking the Buddha and King Gopāla I (ll. 1–5, v. 1). It is followed by the eulogy of the Pāla kings in eleven verses: Dharmapāla, the son of Gopāla I (ll. 5–7, v. 2); Vākpāla, Dharmapāla’s brother who served the latter as his general (ll. 7–9, v. 3); Jayapāla, his son who served Dharmapāla and his son Devapāla, the elder cousin, and made the latter the world ruler (ll. 9–10, v. 4); Vīgrahapāla I, his son (ll. 10–11, v. 5); Nārāyaṇapāla, his son who ascended the throne following the termination of the Dharmapāla’s line (ll. 11–13, v. 6)⁴; his son Rājyapāla (ll. 13–14, v. 7); Gopāla III, his son born to Bhāgyadevī, the daughter of Tuṅga, a king of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa lineage (ll. 14–17, vv. 8–9); Vīgrahapāla II, his son (ll. 17–18, v. 10); Mahīpāla I, his son (ll. 18–20, v. 11); and the conquest of four directions

³ This plate was once edited by the author [Furui 2010] and then thoroughly re-edited for the database of ERC-DHARMA Project. It is available as “Biyala Plate of Mahīpāla I, year 35” (INSBengalCharters00026), accessed July 23, 2024, <https://dharmalekha.info/texts/INSBengalCharters00026>. Numbers in brackets refer to lines and verses of this edition. Transcriptions of texts cited in this article follows the editorial convention of ERC-DHARMA Project, accessed July 23, 2024, <https://dharmalekha.info/editorial-conventions>.

⁴ The kings of Dharmapāla’s line after Devapāla, that is, Mahendrapāla and Śūrapāla I, the sons of Devapāla, and Gopāla II, the son of Śūrapāla I, are not mentioned in the copperplate inscriptions of the kings of collateral line beginning with Nārāyaṇapāla. Their reigns can be confirmed by the grants issued by themselves and inscriptions mentioning them [Chowdhury 2018, 730–742].

depicted by the roaming of the king's war elephants (ll. 20–21, v. 12). After the royal eulogy, the place of issue is provided with stereotypical descriptions of boats, elephants, cavalry, and foot soldiers gathering at a victorious military camp (*jayaskandhāvāra*) pitched there (ll. 21–25). On the Biyala plate, the place name engraved in around six characters was erased and kept blank, presumably to be filled out in the future (ll. 24–25). Then Mahīpāla I, the donor or rather the issuer of the royal grant, is mentioned with titles of “supreme master” (*parameśvara*), “supreme lord” (*paramabhaṭṭāraka*), and “the great king of kings” (*mahārājādhirāja*), as “a devout worshipper of Sugata (i.e. the Buddha)” and as accepted by his father *mahārājādhirāja* Rājyapāla (ll. 25–26).

The addressees, to whom the king “honours, announces, and orders” (l. 37), are all the related royal officials, of whom forty-five offices and titles are listed, and other dependents of the king, and residents accompanied by *brāhmaṇas* from *mahattamas*, *uttamas* and *kuṭumbins* to *medas*, *āndhras* and *caṇḍālas*, at the village Palāśavṇda belonging to Amalakī *maṇḍala* in Koṭīvarṣa *viṣaya* of Puṇḍravardhana *bhukti* (ll. 26–37). The village is standard of one thousand *purāṇas*, which denotes production calculated in a unit of silver currency [Furui 2010, 102–103], and accompanied by flatland (*tala*) belonging to itself. The characters following Palāśavṇda and its description are erased by hammering in the remaining part of the Line 28 and three lines following it. Around six characters at the beginning of Line 29 on the reverse are also erased in the same manner. This section could have contained names of several villages that were supposed to be donated. Their erasure appears to have been necessitated by the change in villages to be donated by this charter, and the erasure of the name of the place of issue could also be related to this modification of contents [Furui 2010, 99, 101].

The notification is presented as a direct speech of the king beginning with a sentence “it should be known to you” (ll. 37–38). The object of donation, “this village as written above,” that is, Palāśavṇda, as far as its own border, grass field and pasture, was given after making a royal grant, in the name of the Buddha, with privileges including a diverse range of resources (flatland, raised ground, mango and mahua trees, watering place, ditch and saline land), some level of judicial power (fine of ten offences, right to catch thieves), exemption from labour charges and entrance of mercenaries called *cāṭas* and *bhaṭas*, and contribution of revenue and other taxes, by the rule of land reclamation (i.e. as a revenue-free holding), as long as the moon, the sun, and the earth exist (i.e. for eternity) (ll. 38–41, 44). The purpose is stated to be to enhance the merit and fame of both the donor's parents and himself (l. 41). The donee, *bhaṭṭaputra* Grahadevaśarman, a *brāhmaṇa*, is mentioned with his *gotra* (Kapi) and *pravara* (Āṅgīrasa, Āmahīyava, and Aurukṣaya),⁵ the name of his teacher (“co-disciple of Manoratha”), Vedic school (Paippalāda *śākhā* of the

⁵ *Gotra* can be defined as an exogamous patrilineal kinship group based on a common ancestry, and *pravara* as a stereotyped list of names of sages (*ṛṣis*) who are believed to be the remote founders of the family [Brough 1953, 2].

Atharvaveda), other learning (“knowing the disciplines of hermeneutics, grammar, and epistemology”), origin (...smintā-maṇḍala), residence (Kamanāhāra), and the three generations of genealogy (“(the grandson of) ...da and the son of *bhaṭṭa* Lakṣmīdhara”) (ll. 41–44). The occasion of the grant is expressed as “after bathing in river Gaṅgā according to the rule on the day of the Sun’s entry to equinox (*viśuvat-saṁkrānti*)” (l. 44).

The exhortation forms the last section of the direct speech of the king. He requests all the addressees to consent to the donation, future kings to protect it and residing cultivators to obey the order of the donee and pay revenue and other contributions properly (ll. 44–47). The date is provided as year 35, presumably of the reign of the king, month Āṣāḍha (June/July), day 1 (l. 47). This is followed by seven benedictory and imprecatory verses commonly found in copperplate inscriptions (ll. 48–54, vv. 13–19). The last two verses provide names of the officials connected with the grant and its preparation: councillor (*mantrin*) Pṛthivīsiṁha was made a messenger (*dūta*) by King Mahīpāla I (ll. 54–55, v. 20), and artisan (*śilpin*) Dāmāditya, the son of Śūdradeva originating from Ghoṣalīgrāma,⁶ engraved the edict (ll. 55–56, v. 21). The authenticity of the plate is guaranteed by the decorated characters *ni*, which could be an abbreviation of *nibaddha*, “confirmed,” engraved on both ends of the first line of the obverse (l. 01), and a royal seal.⁷

The case presented above pertains to the mature phase, when the format of the Pāla plates was established. However, the plates of the earlier period reveal the process of formalisation through which this format developed in connection with the changing character of engravers, as discussed in the following sections.

2. The First Phase: Process of Standardisation and Diverse Engravers

The first Pāla king known for issuing his copperplate charter was Dharmapāla, who reigned during the last two decades of the eighth century and the first decade of the ninth century. Among the three copperplate inscriptions issued during his reign, the Nalanda plate could be the earliest in view of its simple content [Bhattacharyya 1935–1936, 291–292].⁸ Engraved on a rather small sheet of copper (27.4 cm high × 18.3 cm wide)⁹ topped by a usual *dharmacakra* seal, it lacks the royal eulogy and the elaborate description of military camp,

⁶ The name of this village, which appears in the grants of Mahīpāla I and Vigrahapāla III, has been read as Poṣalīgrāma by the previous editors including the author. However, the reading of the relevant section of the both published and unpublished plates strongly suggest Ghoṣalīgrāma as the correct name.

⁷ The seal originally attached to the plate is now lost but visible on the photographs provided by the Department of Archaeology, Government of Bangladesh, published in Furui [2010, 100].

⁸ The text encoded by Amandine Wattelier-Bricout based on Bhattacharyya’s edition is available on the database of DHARMA Project as “Nālandā cp., Dharmapāla unknown r. y.” (INSBengalCharters00095), accessed July 23, 2024, <https://dharmalekha.info/texts/INSBengalCharters00095>.

⁹ The author’s measurement of the original plate held at Indian Museum, Kolkata.

which are regular features of the Pāla plates including the two other plates of Dharmapāla to be described below. After the symbol for *siddham* and the word *svasti*, it begins with a simpler description of a military camp,¹⁰ followed by references to the issuer and addressees that are closer to the later standard form [Bhattacharyya 1935–1936, ll. 1.2–17]. The notification, which announces the donation of a village to a Buddhist establishment, contains regular elements of privileges, conditions, and purpose. However, damages to the plate have blurred some details, particularly those of the donee [Bhattacharyya 1935–1936, 291–292, ll. 1.17–24]. Severe damage to the reverse makes most elements in the conclusion, including the date, illegible. One element that remains recoverable is the fragmentary information on the people related to the preparation of the plate. The charter appears to have been written (*likhita*) by *mahākṣapaṭalika* Kuladatta, the son of Dharmadatta, and engraved (*utkīrṇa*) by a *sūtradhāra* whose name is illegible.¹¹ It indicates a division of labour between an official in charge of record keeping, who wrote characters presumably in ink, and a mason or other type of artisan who engraved them on a copper sheet.¹²

The Indian Museum plate, dated year 26 of the king's reign, has a peculiar form: it projects a *stūpa*-like silhouette with its seal which also has a peculiar shape [Furui 2011, 146]. However, its contents have some elements that would be regular in later plates. Following the invocation by a symbol for *siddham*, a loop opens to the right, the word *svasti* and a verse praising the Buddha (ll. 1–2),¹³ the king and his ancestors are introduced in a lengthy eulogy in 12 verses (ll. 2–24, vv. 2–13). The place of issue, a military camp pitched at Mudgagiri, is described with elaborate depictions of boats, elephants, cavalry, and foot soldiers gathering there, although *sa khalu*, words that usually initiate this section in later plates, are missing (ll. 24–27). The issuer, Dharmapāla, is mentioned in the standard form with all the titles and the reference to the acceptance by his father (ll. 27–29). The land plots to which addressees are related are described with their provenance, boundary markers, and size in some cases, but are mostly illegible because of corrosion of the plate (ll. 29–40). Addressees are provided in four categories, that is, 1) all the dependents on royal favour, 2) others belonging to *cāṭas* and *bhaṭas*, 3) *vyavahārins* of *viṣaya* with their office (*karaṇa*), and 4) cultivators with homage to *brāhmaṇas* (ll. 40–45).¹⁴

The notification, provided as a direct speech of the king, begins with “it should be

¹⁰ mahā-nau-hasty-aśva-ratha-patti-sampaty-upātta-jaya-śavdā(t kapilā?)-vāsakāt śrīmaj-jaya-skand-hāvārāt [Bhattacharyya 1935–1936, 291, ll. 1.1–2].

¹¹ [likhi]tam ida(m) śāsana(m) mahākṣapaṭali(ka) ... (ku)la(da)tte(na) dharmadatta-putreṇeti [Bhattacharyya 1935–1936, 292, ll. 2.6–7]. (u)tkīrṇa(m) s(ū)tradhāra... [Bhattacharyya 1935–1936, 292, l. 2.12].

¹² This process of preparation of copperplate and other inscriptions is discussed in Sircar [1965, 85–87]. For connotations of *mahākṣapaṭalika* and *sūtradhāra*, see Sircar [1966, 178, 329].

¹³ The line and verse numbers refer to those of the revised edition by the author on the database of DHARMA project, available as “Indian Museum Plate of Dharmapāla, year 26” (INSBengalCharters00099), accessed July 23, 2024, <https://dharmalekha.info/texts/INSBengalCharters00099>.

¹⁴ For details, see Furui [2020, 134, Table 5.1, a].

approved by you” (*matam astu bhavatān*) but is disrupted by the eulogy of the lineage of *mahāsāmanta* Bhadrāṇāga (ll. 46–55, vv. 14–18) and that of the messenger Śakradāsa (ll. 55–57, v. 19). Thereafter, the petition of Bhadrāṇāga, orally conveyed by the messenger, for donation of the aforementioned land plots to the Buddhist facilities established by himself and his wife is cited as his direct speech. Further, the petition contains the terms and conditions, and purposes of the donation (ll. 57–66). The king approves of it (ll. 66–67), and he requests all addressees to consent to the donation and residing cultivators to obey the order of the donee, and to pay revenue and other contributions properly (ll. 67–69). This is followed by three imprecatory and benedictory verses (ll. 69–73, vv. 20–22). There could be more verses, however, the corrosion of the following lines does not allow for any identification (ll. 73–75). The date, year 26 month Āṣāḍha day 2 possibly, is provided towards the end of the penultimate line (l. 75). The last line appears to contain the name of the engraver, which could be read Gaṇeśa, but is unascertainable because of corrosion (l. 76).

The Khalimpur plate, dated year 32, has a form close to that of the Nalanda plate of the same king, a rectangular copperplate topped by a *dharmacakra* seal, although the size is larger (41.6 cm high × 28.9 cm wide).¹⁵ However, the contents and formats are closer to those of the Indian Museum plate. The invocation and eulogy comprise the same set of a symbol for *siddham*, word *svasti* and verses identical to those on the latter plate (ll. 1–25, vv. 1–13).¹⁶ The place of issue, a military camp pitched at Pāṭaliputra, is also mentioned with elaborate descriptions of four armies, preceded by *sa khalu* in this case (ll. 25–29). The issuer is presented in the standard form (ll. 29–30), and the four villages in concern are described with border landmarks (ll. 30–43). The addressees related to these villages are listed in four categories (ll. 43–43).¹⁷

The notification, beginning with “it should be approved by you,” first mentions the petition of *mahāsāmantaḍhipati* Nārāyaṇavarman, a subordinate ruler, conveyed by messenger Tribhuvanapāla, the crown prince (*yuvarāja*) by citing it as the direct speech of the former: he explains the establishment of a shrine (*devakula*) and requests the king to donate the aforementioned four villages for worship and attendance to the deity Nannanārāyaṇa (ll. 49–52).¹⁸ Thereafter, the king donates the four villages with usual terms and conditions and requests all addressees to consent to and protect this donation, and the residing cultivators to obey the order of the donee and pay tributes properly (ll. 52–56). The quotation of

¹⁵ The size is converted from 1 foot 4 3/8 inches high and 11 3/8 inches wide mentioned in Kielhorn [1896–1897, 243].

¹⁶ The line and verse numbers refer to those of the edition by Amandine Wattelier-Bricout and Arlo Griffiths on the database of DHARMA project available as “Khalimpur Plate of Dharmapāla, year 32” (INSBengalCharters00088), accessed July 23, 2024, <https://dharmalekha.info/texts/INSBengalCharters00088>.

¹⁷ For details, see Furui [2020, 134, Table 5.1, b].

¹⁸ The author considers Nannanārāyaṇa as the name of the deity, following the reading by Sircar [1983, 68, l. 50].

the king's speech is followed by benedictory and imprecatory verses (ll. 56–60, vv. 14–18), and the date: year 32 month Mārga day 12 (ll. 60–61).

The last line, placed at the centre-bottom of the plate away from the previous one, contains a verse which states that this was engraved by Tātaṭa, furnished with merit (*guṇaśālin*), the grandson of Bhogaṭa and the son of Subhaṭa (l. 62, v. 19).¹⁹

As for Devapāla, the son and inheritor of Dharmapāla, who reigned during the first half of the ninth century, the two copperplate grants pertaining to Bihar are known to date. These are the Munger and Nalanda plates, dated years 33 and 35, respectively, of the king's reign. They have a regular form of the Pāla grants, that is, a thick rectangular sheet of copper (47.6 cm high × 35.2 cm wide and 76.3 cm high × 42.8 cm wide, respectively) engraved on both sides and topped by a *dharmacakra* seal.²⁰

The Munger plate, recording the donation of a village to a *brāhmaṇa*, begins with the usual set of invocation (a *siddham* symbol, *svasti* and a verse), which is in turn followed by the eulogy of the Pāla kings (ll. 1–24, vv. 1–15).²¹ The place of issue is provided with the stereotypical description beginning with *sa khalu*, and Devapāla, the issuer, is mentioned with his titles and the acceptance by his father Dharmapāla (ll. 24–29). The addressees related to the concerned village, to whom the king “orders” (*samājñāpatayī*), are listed in the two categories: 1) all the “dependents on my lotus-like feet” including forty-four offices and titles, and 2) residents accompanied by *brāhmaṇas* including both top and bottom rungs of society (ll. 30–37). The notification by the king, beginning with “it should be known to you” (*viditam astu bhavatām*), announces his act of donation in reference to the object of donation, terms and conditions, purpose, and the beneficiary *brāhmaṇa* (ll. 37–44). He requests that all protect this donation and residing cultivators obey the donee and make all tributes properly (ll. 44–46). This is followed by the date, year 33 month Mārga day 21 (l. 46), and benedictory and imprecatory verses (ll. 46–50, vv. 16–19). The last verse mentions the appointment of Rājyapāla, the crown prince, as a messenger (ll. 50–52, v. 20), although the name of the engraver is not provided.

The Nalanda plate records the donation of five villages for a Buddhist *vihāra* established at Nālandā by Bālaputradeva, the Śailendra king of Suvarṇadvīpa, on his petition. It has the invocation, eulogy, place of issue, and issuer in the same format and content as the Munger plate (ll. 1–26, vv. 1–15).²² The addressees related to the five villages are listed in

¹⁹ śrī-bhogaṭasya pautreṇa śrīmat-subhaṭa-sūnūnā| śrīmatā tātaṭenedaṁ Utkīrṇaṁ guṇaśālinā||

²⁰ The size of the Munger plate is converted from 18 3/4 inches high and 13 7/8 inches wide mentioned in Barnett [1925–1926, 304]. The size of the Nalanda plate is obtained from the website of Museums of India: National Portal & Digital Repository, “Nalanda copper plate grant,” accessed July 23, 2024, https://www.museumsofindia.gov.in/repository/record/nat_del-47-51-22228.

²¹ The line and verse numbers refer to those of the edition by Arlo Griffiths and the author on the database of DHARMA project, available as “Mongyr/Munger Plate of Devapāla, year 33” (INSBengalCharters00125), accessed July 23, 2024, <https://dharmalekha.info/texts/INSBengalCharters00125>.

²² The line and verse numbers refer to those of the edition by Arlo Griffiths and the author on the database of DHARMA project, available as “Nalanda Plate of Devapāla, year 35” (INSBengalChar-

two categories: royal dependents and residents (ll. 26–33). The notification begins with “it should be known to you” and mentions the objects, terms and conditions, and purpose of donation (ll. 33–37), but is disrupted by the petition of Bālaputradeva, which states his establishment of a *vihāra* at Nālandā (ll. 37–38). Then the aims of donation related to the Buddhist establishment of this *vihāra* are stated with ambiguity whether it is a part of the petition or the announcement by the king who donated the villages (ll. 38–40). This is followed by requests to all the addressees and residing cultivators (ll. 40–42), and the date: year 35 month Kārttika day 21 (l. 42). After the benedictory and imprecatory verses (ll. 43–50, vv. 16–21), two verses mention the fulfilment of the duty of the messenger by Balavarman, a subordinate ruler (ll. 50–51, vv. 22–23). The remaining verses describe the lineage of Bālaputradeva and his contributions to Nālandā, and wish for the continuance of this meritorious deed, without mentioning the engraver (ll. 52–66, vv. 24–34).

The Jagajjibanpur plate of Mahendrapāla, the son of Devapāla who ruled during the middle of the ninth century, has the standard form of the Pāla plate with relatively large size as aforementioned. It records the royal donation of a settlement or administrative unit for a Buddhist establishment petitioned by a military commander cum subordinate ruler. The invocation and eulogy are provided in the same format as Devapāla’s grants, although the verses are totally different from those of the latter (ll. 1–25, vv. 1–16).²³ The place of issue is mentioned with conventional descriptions of the four armies, as is the issuer with titles and acceptance by his father (ll. 25–30). Nandadīrghika *udraṅga*, the object of donation, is described with border demarcations, and the addressees related to it are listed in the four categories (ll. 30–39).²⁴ The notification, beginning with “it should be approved by you,” first mentions the petition by *mahāsenāpati* Vajradeva conveyed by a messenger with its quotation: he informs his establishment of a *vihāra* at Nandadīrghika *udraṅga* and requests the king to donate this *udraṅga* for the purposes connected with the Buddhist establishment at the *vihāra* (ll. 39–44). Thereafter, the king declares the donation of the *udraṅga* with usual terms and conditions (ll. 44–47). He also requests all addressees to approve the donation, residing cultivators to pay tributes properly, and future kings to protect the donation (ll. 47–50). The date is provided as year 7 month Vaiśākha day 2 (l. 50), and followed by benedictory and imprecatory verses (ll. 50–53, vv. 17–20). The next verse mentions Mahendrapāla’s appointment of Śūrapāla, his younger brother, as a messenger (ll. 53–54, v. 21). Verses eulogising the lineage of Vajradeva (ll. 54–70, vv. 22–33), and another wishing for continuity of this pious deed follow it (ll. 71–72, v. 34). The last line states that this edict was engraved by *sāmanta* Māhaṭa (l. 73).²⁵

ters00104), accessed July 23, 2024, <https://dharmalekha.info/texts/INSBengalCharters00104>.

²³ The line and verse numbers refer to those of the revised edition by the author on the database of DHARMA project, available as “Jagajjibanpur Plate of Mahendrapāla, year 7” (INSBengalCharters00073), accessed July 23, 2024, <https://dharmalekha.info/texts/INSBengalCharters00073>.

²⁴ For details, see Furui [2020, 134, Table 5.1, c].

²⁵ Utkīrṇam idaṁ śāsanam sāmanta-śrī-māhaṭena||.

The early Pāla grants reviewed above reveal the process of development through which the form and format were standardised. The form was fixed rather early: a shape of plate different from rectangular was attempted only during the reign of Dharmapāla. However, the format required more time for standardisation. Elements constituting the contents of a plate, including invocative and eulogistic verses and stereotypical descriptions of four armies gathering at the place of issue, which had been missing in the earliest Nalanda plate, became constant within the reign of Dharmapāla. However, the locations of some of the elements were not fixed in his reign. The date was allotted its regular position between the end of the king's speech and benedictory and imprecatory verses only in the reign of Devapāla. The eulogy of petitioner and a verse mentioning the messenger, which disrupted the notification in the Indian Museum plate, also acquired their fixed position in the Nalanda plate of Devapāla, next to benedictory and imprecatory verses, in reverse order. However, the last plate indicated ambiguity in differentiating the petition and the royal statement, which were well demarcated from each other in the Jagajjibanpur plate of Mahendrapāla.

This process of development accompanied the involvement of a diverse range of engravers. The first to note is the division of labour in the Nalanda plate of Dharmapāla, in which an official in charge of document wrote characters and an artisan engraved them. This role division is not found in any other Pāla plates edited to date, and only engravers are mentioned in them, if ever they record people involved with their preparation. This could mean that an engraver fulfilled both duties in these cases and that he held some level of literacy necessary for them. This possibility is supported by the relatively high status of engravers detected in some cases. Tātaṭa, the engraver of the Khalimpur plate, was so proud of his pedigree that he mentioned the names of his father and grandfather in a verse. Māhaṭa, the engraver of the Jagajjibanpur plate, held the title of *sāmanta*, indicating his position as a subordinate ruler. He could even be a brother of Māhaṭā, the queen consort of Devapāla and the mother of Mahendrapāla and Śūrapāla, who was the daughter of the Cāhamāna king Durlabharāja, if the similarity of their names has any implication (Jagajjibanpur plate, ll. 17–19, vv. 11–12).

Thus, the standardisation of the format of copperplate inscriptions could be a process instigated by the involvement of engravers with relatively high social status in their preparation. This process proceeds through the emergence of a social group that specialises in this duty.

3. The Second Phase: Engravers Originating from Samataṭa

The form and format of the Pāla grants, which had undergone the process of standardisation, underwent further development in this direction during the period stretching from the reign of Śūrapāla I in the third quarter of the ninth century to that of Gopāla III in the third

quarter of the tenth century.

The Mirzapur plate of Śūrapāla I records the donation of four villages petitioned by *mahādevī* Māhaṭā, the queen mother, through a messenger, for the deity Māhaṭeśvara established by her at Vārāṇasī and the assembly of Śaivācāryas.²⁶ The format mostly conforms to the standard format. The invocation comprises a symbol, *svasti*, and a verse which now praises the ruling king and the Buddha in double entendre (ll. 1–7, v. 1). The eulogy (ll. 7–45, vv. 2–24), place of issue (ll. 45–48), issuer (ll. 48–50), and addressees in two categories related to the four villages to whom the king “honours, announces, and orders” (ll. 50–57) are provided in the standard manner, with an extension of eulogy and verbs expressing the royal proclamation. The notification by the king, beginning with “it should be known to you” (l. 57), cites the request of Māhaṭā mentioning the donees, objects, purpose, and aims of donation in a well-demarcated manner (ll. 57–60), and states the royal donation with terms and conditions (ll. 60–63). Thereafter, the king asks all addressees to consent to the donation, future kings to protect it and residing cultivators to pay all tributes (ll. 60–64). The date, year 3 month Āśvina day 2 of bright fortnight (ll. 64–65), benedictory and imprecatory verses (ll. 65–69, vv. 25–30) and a verse stating the appointment of Balavarman as a messenger (l. 70, v. 31) follow it. A new element found in this plate, which would become a regular feature, is two characters *ni*, presumably an abbreviation of *nibaddha*, “confirmed,” engraved on the penultimate line (l. 71) with some distance from the previous line, immediately above the last line mentioning the engraver (l. 72). This denotes the confirmation of content by some officials, which was added to the process of preparing copperplate grants.

The Mohipur plate of Gopāla II, the son of Śūrapāla I, which records the donation of a village for a Buddhist *vihāra* established by a subordinate ruler on his petition, also conforms to the standard format.²⁷ The invocation of a symbol, *svasti*, and a verse praising the Buddha and king simultaneously (ll. 1–4, v. 1), is followed by a royal eulogy (ll. 4–34, vv. 2–21), place of issue (ll. 34–37), issuer (ll. 37–39), and addressees in two categories related to the concerned village (ll. 39–46). The notification by the king refers to the petition by *mahāsainyapati* Kokkāka conveyed through a messenger and quotes it verbatim: Kokkāka states his establishment of a *vihāra* and asks the king to donate the aforementioned village for purposes related to a Buddhist establishment there (ll. 46–51). The king states the donation with terms and conditions (ll. 51–55) and requests all addressees, kings, and resid-

²⁶ The author’s edition of the text revised on Sircar [1973] is available on the database of DHARMA project as “Mirzapur Plate of Śūrapāla I, year 3” (INSBengalCharters00107), accessed July 23, 2024, <https://dharmalekha.info/texts/INSBengalCharters00107>. Line and verse numbers in the following sentences are those of this edition.

²⁷ The inscription was once edited by the author [Furui 2008]. The revised edition is available on the database of DHARMA project as “Mohipur plate of Gopāla II, year 3” (INSBengalCharters00109), accessed July 23, 2024, <https://dharmalekha.info/texts/INSBengalCharters00109>. Line and verse numbers in the following section are those of this edition.

ing cultivators (ll. 55–57). The date, year 3 month Āṣāḍha day 29 (l. 57), imprecatory and benedictory verses (ll. 57–61, vv. 22–26) and a verse mentioning Vajravarmaṇ's appointment as a messenger (ll. 61–62, v. 27) follow it. Then verses eulogising the lineage of the petitioner and the *vihāra* established by him (ll. 62–75, vv. 28–41) are provided and followed by another verse mentioning the engraver (l. 76, v. 42). The character *ni* is engraved at the lower-right corner of the reverse, while another character could have been lost owing to the corrosion of the plate.

Both plates were engraved by the same person, Dakkadāsa. The Mirzapur plate mentions him and Vairocanadāsa, possibly his son, as engravers, with a title of *sāmanta* (Mirzapur plate, l. 72).²⁸ The Mohipur plate reveals more information about him. He is the son of Jayadāsa and “born to a good one belonging to Samataṭa” (Mohipur plate, l. 76, v. 42).²⁹ The last information indicates that he belonged to a family originating from Samataṭa, the eastern sub-region of Bengal [Furui 2020, 29–30]. During the eighth century, Samataṭa was ruled by the Early Deva kings, of whom several copperplate inscriptions were discovered from the site of Mainamati [Islam 2018, 596–601]. The grant of Bhavadeva dated year 2, the only one plate of the dynasty properly edited so far, shows similarity with the Pāla plates both in form and format: a single plate (28.26 cm high × 22.54 cm wide)³⁰ engraved on both sides, topped by a *dharmacakra* seal [Sircar 1951, 83], with contents comprising invocation, eulogy, place of issue, issuer, addressees, notification, request, benedictory and imprecatory verses, date, and engraver [Sircar 1951, 91–94]. As predecessors, the Early Deva plates may have provided a model for the standardisation of the Pāla plates. The plate of Bhavadeva was “written,” which may denote “engraved” in this case, by Brahmadāsa [Sircar 1951, 94, l. 64].³¹ Although his relation with the family of Dakkadāsa is unclear, the Dāsas of Samataṭa appear to have been a group engaged in the engraving of copperplate inscriptions, and their migration could have facilitated the transference of this tradition. As Dakkadāsa acted as an “engraver” (*khānikara*) of the Nimgachi stone inscription of Pāhila, a subordinate ruler of Devapāla in North Bengal,³² the migration of his family could at least go back to the reign of Devapāla, and they may have contributed to the standardisation observed in the plates of the king discussed earlier.

The two more plates of Gopāla II have been edited and published to date. The Suvarnakarikadanda plates have the same date, year 4 month Phālguna day 4, and record dona-

²⁸ Utkiṭṭam idam śāsanam sāmanta-dakkadāsa-vairocanadāsābhyām||

²⁹ śrīmatā dakkadāsena jayadāsasya sūnunā| Idam śāsanam utkīrṇam sat-sāmataṭa-janmanā||

³⁰ The size is converted from 11 1/8 inches high and 8 7/8 inches wide mentioned in Sircar [1951, 83].

³¹ likhitam brahmadāsena||

³² Utkīrṇam khānikara-dakkadāsena (l. 15). The revised edition of this inscription by the author and Arlo Griffiths is available on the database of DHARMA project as “Nimgachi Stone Slab of Pāhila” (INSBengalCharters00044), accessed July 23, 2024, <https://dharmalekha.info/texts/INSBengalCharters00044>.

tions of land plots to individual *brāhmaṇas*, father and son.³³ The first plate,³⁴ of which the seal is missing, follows the standard format for presenting invocation (ll. 1–5, v. 1), eulogy (ll. 5–19, vv. 2–8), place of issue (ll. 19–23), issuer (ll. 23–25), addressees (ll. 25–37), notification detailing the object, terms and conditions, purpose, and beneficiary of the donation (ll. 37–43), requests (ll. 43–45), date (l. 45), and benedictory and imprecatory verses (ll. 45–49, vv. 9–12), but stops short of providing anything further. The second plate,³⁵ properly soldered with *dharmacakra* seal, shares most content with the first plate, with differences in addressees, donated tracts, donees, and benedictory and imprecatory verses which are one verse less (ll. 1–47, vv. 1–11). It has an additional verse mentioning Vajrarvarman's appointment as a messenger (ll. 47–48, v. 12), and the others eulogising the lineage of the donee *brāhmaṇa* (ll. 48–55, vv. 13–18). Although it is not stated clearly, the first plate could have been left incomplete for some reason, most probably owing to the change of object and beneficiary of donation,³⁶ and the second was the complete plate issued properly. Although the reference to an engraver and the characters *ni* for confirmation are missing in these plates, their conformity to the standardised format is notable and the involvement of specialised group with their preparation is assumable.

After the reign of Gopāla II, the Pāla kingship shifted from the line of Dharmapāla to the collateral line of his brother Vākpāla, with the ascendance of Nārāyaṇapāla in the last quarter of the ninth century. The Dāsas from Samatāṭa continued their activities as engravers of the Pāla copperplate inscriptions beyond this shift.

The Bhagalpur plate of Nārāyaṇapāla records the donation of a village for a Śaiva temple established by the king.³⁷ Beginning with a symbol, *svasti* and a verse now invoking the Buddha and King Gopāla I (ll. 1–5, v. 1),³⁸ it presents eulogy (ll. 5–24, vv. 2–17), place of issue (ll. 24–28), issuer (ll. 28–29), addressees (ll. 29–38), notification narrating the purposes related with the temple, Śiva installed there and the assembly of Pāśupata *ācāryas*, the object, terms and conditions and purpose of donation (ll. 38–44), requests (ll. 44–47),

³³ Both plates were once edited by the author [Furui 2009]. Revised editions of each plate by the author are now available on the database of DHARMA project, as mentioned in the following notes.

³⁴ The line and verse numbers refer to those of the revised edition by the author on the database of DHARMA project, available as “Suvarṇakarikadanda Plate of Gopāla II, year 4 (no. 1)” (INSBengalCharters00111), accessed July 23, 2024, <https://dharmalekha.info/texts/INSBengalCharters00111>.

³⁵ The line and verse numbers refer to those of the revised edition by the author on the database of DHARMA project, available as “Suvarṇakarikadanda Plate of Gopāla II, year 4 (no. 2)” (INSBengalCharters00112), accessed July 23, 2024, <https://dharmalekha.info/texts/INSBengalCharters00112>.

³⁶ The first plate records donation of two portions (*aṇśa*) from Suvarṇakārikādanda and Bhūtabhadra to Līlākara (plate no. 1, ll. 26–28, 37, 40–43), and the second records donation of a portion from Suvarṇakārikādanda to Atthakara, his son (plate no. 2, ll. 25–26, 36, 39–41).

³⁷ The line and verse numbers refer to those of the revised edition by the author on the database of DHARMA project, available as “Bhagalpur Plate of Nārāyaṇapāla, year 17” (INSBengalCharters00091), accessed July 23, 2024, <https://dharmalekha.info/texts/INSBengalCharters00091>.

³⁸ The verse, which invoked the Buddha and Gopāla II, the reigning king, in the Mohipur plate, is turned to the one invoking the Buddha and Gopāla I, by a slight change of words in the second verse describing Dharmapāla: yo 'bhavad of the third *pada* was changed to 'smād abhūt, so that Dharmapāla's birth from “him,” that is, Gopāla in the first verse, becomes clear.

date, year 17 month Vaiśākha day 5 (l. 47), benedictory and imprecatory verses (ll. 47–52, vv. 18–22), verses mentioning the messenger Gurava (ll. 52–53, v. 23) and the engraver Maṅghadāsa (ll. 53–54, v. 24) according to the standard format. The character *ni* is engraved on the upper left and right margins of the obverse of the plate above the first line of the main inscription (l. 01).

The engraver Maṅghadāsa, the son of Śubhadāsa, is called “the good one originating from Samataṭa,”³⁹ the expression which is slightly different from the one in the Mohipur plate, but still reflects the origin of his family from Samataṭa. Vimaladāsa, the son of Maṅghadāsa, is mentioned as the engraver of the Jajilpara grant of Gopāla III, the grandson of Nārāyaṇapāla reigning in the third quarter of the tenth century, and described in the same manner (l. 46, v. 16).⁴⁰ The format of the last plate also conforms to the standard format, with all components presented in order, with corrections to some omissions (ll. 27, 35), and even characters *ni* are engraved at the upper left and right corners of the obverse above the first line (l. 01). Similarly the Bharat Kala Bhavan plate of Rājyapāla⁴¹ also conforms to it, except that instead of references to messenger and engraver, the confirmation of the additional grant of a village later in the same year, which also necessitated the addition of a line at the end of the obverse (l. 30) and conversion of some nouns and adjectives from singular to dual (ll. 40–43), is provided at the end (ll. 55–56).⁴²

Thus the Dāsas from Samataṭa served for a hundred years or so as hereditary engravers of the Pāla copperplate inscriptions, and their service appears to have contributed to the further standardisation of these inscriptions witnessed during the same period. Their monopoly of this function indicates a high degree of specialisation, which accompanies this standardisation. The Dāsas maintained their presence as a scribal group differentiated from the others by retaining their origin from Samataṭa as an indicator of their identity [Furui 2020, 167], a behaviour which matched their specialisation. Moreover, they held relatively high social status as indicated by the title *sāmanta* prefixed to Dakkadāsa and Vairocanadāsa. It attests to a tendency continuing from the previous period, that is, the involvement of a group with literacy accompanying its high social status in the standardisation of the Pāla grants.

The next period witnessed the emergence of a group with different characters en-

³⁹ śrīmatā maṅghadāsena śū?<u>bhadāsasya śś?<s>ūnunā| Idam śś?<ś>ā(54)śś?<s>anam ut-kīrṇam sat-samatāṭa-janmanā[[h]]

⁴⁰ śrīmad-vimaladāsena maṅghadāsasya sūnunā| Idam śāsanam utkīrṇam sat-samatāṭa-janmanā||. The revised edition by the author on the database of DHARMA project, available as “Jajilpara Plate of Gopāla III, year 6” (INSBengalCharters00074), accessed July 23, 2024, <https://dharmalekha.info/texts/INSBengalCharters00074>.

⁴¹ The line numbers refer to those of the revised edition by the author on the database of DHARMA project, available as “Bharat Kala Bhavan Plate of Rājyapāla, year 2” (INSBengalCharters00108), accessed July 23, 2024, <https://dharmalekha.info/texts/INSBengalCharters00108>.

⁴² <<marālikā-grāmasya eta(56)t-samvatsara-śrāvaṇa-dvāvimśa-divase| śāsana-paṭṭako nivaddha Iti||>

gaged in the same duty, in a different social context.

4. The Third Phase: *Ghoṣaḷigrāma* as the Centre of Engravers

For the period between the last quarter of the tenth century and the third quarter of the eleventh century, we have as many as eleven copperplate inscriptions of the Pālas discovered to date: four of Mahīpāla I, two of Nayapāla, and five of Vīgrahapāla III, of which three of the last two kings are unpublished. All the published plates reflect the high degree of standardisation with the format conforming to that of the Biyala plate described in the first section of this article, except a plate of Nayapāla which was left incomplete [G. Bhattacharya 1996], and the Bangaon plate of Vīgrahapāla III which has additional verses describing the lineages of Brahmanical settlements and donee *brāhmaṇas* [Sircar 1951–1952b, 57, ll. 49–51, vv. 24–25].⁴³

The high degree of standardisation of the Pāla grants accompanied the engagement of a particular group of artisans (*śilpin*) originating from a village named *Ghoṣaḷigrāma*. The Belwa plate of Mahīpāla I, dated year 2, was engraved by Puṣyāditya, the son of Candrāditya originating from this village.⁴⁴ Similarly, of the same king, the Rangpur plate, dated year 5, was engraved by Bharadeva, the son of Śūdradeva,⁴⁵ the Bangarh plate, dated year 9, by Mahīdhara, the son of Vikramāditya,⁴⁶ and the Biyala plate, dated year 35, by Dāmāditya, the other son of Śūdradeva as already mentioned above.⁴⁷ The unpublished Naodoba plate of Nayapāla, dated year 5, was also engraved by artisan Śvadhara-deva, the son of Vāmadeva from *Ghoṣaḷigrāma*.⁴⁸ Mānhrīdeva, the other son of Vāmadeva, engraved one of the unpublished grant of Vīgrahapāla III, dated year 13, held by a private collector.⁴⁹

⁴³ For the interpretation of a part of the verse 24 as the lineage of settlements, see Furui [2013, 235].

⁴⁴ *ghoṣaḷi-grāma-niryāta-candrādityasya* ṛṣ?<s>ūnunā| I(58)daṁ śāsanam utkīrṇaṁ {śrī}-puṣyādityena śilpinā|| (ll. 57–58, v. 21). The revised edition by the author on the database of DHARMA project, available as “Belwa Plate of Mahīpāla I, year 2” (INSBengalCharters00085), accessed July 23, 2024, <https://dharmalekha.info/texts/INSBengalCharters00085>.

⁴⁵ *ghoṣaḷi-grāma-niryāta-śūdradevasya-sūnunā*<|>Idaṁ śāsanam utkīrṇa(m) śrī-bharadeva-śilpinā|| (l. 56, v. 21). The revised edition by the author on the database of DHARMA project, available as “Rangpur Plate of Mahīpāla I, year 5” (INSBengalCharters00110), accessed July 23, 2024, <https://dharmalekha.info/texts/INSBengalCharters00110>.

⁴⁶ *ghoṣaḷi-grāma-niryāta-vikramāditya-ṛṣ?<s>nunā|* Idaṁ śāsanam utkīrṇaṁ śrī-mahīdhara-śilpinā|| (l. 62, v. 21). The revised edition by the author on the database of DHARMA project, available as “Bangarh Plate of Mahīpāla I, year 9” (INSBengalCharters00102), accessed July 23, 2024, <https://dharmalekha.info/texts/INSBengalCharters00102>.

⁴⁷ *(gh)ōṣa(lī)-grāma-niryāta-(ś)ūdradevasya sūnunā|* Idaṁ śāsanam utkīrṇaṁ śrī-dāmā(56)di(tya)-śilpinā|| (ll. 55–56, v. 21).

⁴⁸ *(krī)(64)-ghoṣaḷi-grāma-niryāta-vāmadevasya sūnunā|* Idaṁ śāsanam utkīrṇaṁ śrī-(śva)dharade(vena śi)lpin(e)ti|| (ll. 63–64, v. 22). The author’s reading from the digital photographs of the original plate provided by Swadhin Sen. The metre is disturbed by superfluous akṣaras including the first *krī*, possibly an engraving mistake for *śrī*.

⁴⁹ *ghoṣaḷi-grāma-niryāta-vāmadevasya sūnunā*<|>Idaṁ śāsa(57)nam utkīrṇaṁ śrī-mānhrīdevaśilpinā|| (ll. 56–57). The author’s reading from the photographs of the original plate taken by him.

The data presented above reveal the existence of the following families, whose members worked as the engravers of the Pāla grants:

- The mutual relations of these families are not clear, but the shared name endings of deva and āditya suggest a kinship relation among them. Their concentration in a particular village, Ghoṣālīgrāma, is noteworthy. Moreover, this village is mentioned as the place where a scribe (*lekḥaka*) Śrīdhāraka, who copied an illustrated manuscript of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitāsūtra* dated year 17 of Madanapāla's reign (1160 CE), now held by the Detroit Institute of Arts (27.586), resided, and where another manuscript of the *Maitreyavyākaraṇa* dated year 57 of Gopāla,⁵⁴ now held by the Asiatic Society (G.4806), was copied [Kim 2013, 234–235, 263–264]. From the style of pictures in the first manuscript and the discovery of the related image from Jaynagar near Lakhi Sarai, Jinah Kim suggests the location of Ghoṣālīgrāma within Magadha, possibly near Nalanda, and proposes its identification with Ghosrawan [Kim 2012, 212–213].⁵⁵

⁵⁵ As the previous reading of Poṣaḷīgrāma is corrected to Ghoṣaḷīgrāma, the identification of the village with Poṣaḷī *gāṇī* or modern Poshela in Bardhaman district of West Bengal, to which the au-

The concentration of artisan families specialised in engraving copperplate grants of the Pālas points to the establishment of Ghoṣalīgrāma as a centre of such artisans with special skills required for this occupation. The formation of centres which functioned as nodes of the activities of certain occupational groups was one element of social reorganisation witnessed during this period, that is, the construction of identities and networks of social groups based on common occupations and their consolidation towards *jātis* [Furui 2020, 166–169]. The growth of Ghoṣalīgrāma as a centre of scribal groups is attested by its scribes working as copiers of Buddhist manuscripts in the late twelfth century as aforementioned. Their consistent identification of themselves as artisans (*śilpin*) indicates their consolidation as a hereditary occupational group. However, it indicates the changed status of engravers of the Pāla grants: their duty did not entail the relatively high social status enjoyed by their predecessors. With the establishment of standardisation, the duty required them not the level of literacy necessary in the formative period, but the dedicated service of artisans inheriting specialised skills and knowledge.

The development of the Pāla copperplate inscriptions and the association of their engravers in it underwent further declension in the last phase of the Pāla rule.

5. The Last Phase: Tathāgatasara as the Sole Engraver

In the last quarter of the eleventh century, the Pāla rule was put in turmoil by the *Kaivarta* rebellion which occurred during the reign of Mahīpāla II, the son of Vigrahapāla III, and drove the Pālas out of North Bengal until Rāmapāla, the younger brother of Mahīpāla II, finally suppressed the rebellion and re-established the Pāla rule [Furui 2020, 169–174]. No copperplate inscriptions of the kings reigning in this period, even Rāmapāla whose reign lasted for fifty-three years or so, are known to date.⁵⁶

The Pāla plates reappeared when Gopāla IV, the son of Kumārapāla, Rāmapāla's son, issued a grant jointly with Madanapāla, his uncle acting as his regent, to donate a village to a *brāhmaṇa*. The Rajibpur plate of Gopāla IV and Madanapāla, dated year 2 of the former's reign and the latter's royal ministership respectively, is soldered with a seal bearing the name of the former [Furui 2015, 40–41].⁵⁷ The plate begins with the invocation comprising a symbol for *siddham* followed by words “Om, salutation to the Buddha” (oṃ namo vuddhāya) and *svasti*, and the regular verse invoking the Buddha and Gopāla I (ll.

thor also subscribed [Furui 2020, 168], has to be discarded.

⁵⁶ The reign of Rāmapāla is now fixed as 1078/79 to 1131 CE, owing to Shin'ichirō Hori's study of manuscripts dated in the reign of this king [Hori 2019].

⁵⁷ The line and verse numbers refer to those of the revised edition by the author on the database of DHARMA project, available as “Rajibpur Plate of Gopāla IV, year 2 and Madanapāla, year 2” (INS-BengalCharters00071), accessed July 23, 2024, <https://dharmalekha.info/texts/INSBengalCharters00071>.

1–3, v. 1). Thereafter, the eulogy of the Pāla kings from Dharmapāla to Gopāla IV is provided (ll. 3–31, vv. 2–19). The place of issue is mentioned with the conventional description of the four armies, with a slight change in words (ll. 31–35) [Furui 2015, 57], while the issuer Gopāla IV is described in a usual manner (ll. 35–37). Of the addressees related to the concerned village, royal officials, of whom forty-three titles and offices are listed, are presented in the standard form, whereas the lower section of rural residents is simplified to *caṇḍāla* only (ll. 37–44).⁵⁸ The notification announces the donation in reference to the object, terms and conditions, purpose, donee, occasion, and reason, of which the last is particularly stated to be the reward for the great gift of golden horse (*hemāśvamahādāna*) by Kumārapāla (ll. 44–52). Thereafter, the usual requests (ll. 52–54), date, year 2 month Kārttika day 20 (l. 54), and benedictory and imprecatory verses (ll. 54–61, vv. 20–27) follow. Of the remaining verses, the first eulogises Madanapāla (ll. 61–62, v. 28), the second states the appointment of *sāndhivigrahika* Bhīmadeva as a messenger by this royal minister (*bhūbhṛd-amātya*) (ll. 62–63, v. 29), and the last states that artisan (*śilpin*) Tathāgatasara engraved this copperplate in the second year of Madanapāla (l. 63, v. 30).⁵⁹ Three characters *ni* for confirmation are engraved on the left margin of the obverse vertically beside Lines 1, 2, and 3 and 4 respectively (l. 01).

The same set of people, *sāndhivigrahika* Bhīmadeva and *śilpin* Tathāgatasara, acted as messenger and engraver, respectively, for the two copperplate inscriptions issued solely by Madanapāla as the king. These plates follow the same format as the Rajibpur plate of year 2, with the redaction of elements necessitated by the regency. The Manahali plate, dated year 2,⁶⁰ presents the invocation (ll. 1–3, v. 1), eulogy of the Pāla kings (ll. 3–27, vv. 2–18), place of issue (ll. 27–31), issuer (ll. 31–32), addressees (ll. 32–39), notification (ll. 39–46), requests (ll. 46–48), date, year 8 month Caitra day of *karman* 15 by the movement of the moon (l. 49), and benedictory and imprecatory verses (ll. 49–56, vv. 19–26) in the same manner. Thereafter, the remaining verses mention the appointment of Bhīmadeva as a messenger (ll. 56–57, v. 27) and the engraving of the plate by Tathāgatasara in the eighth year of Madanapāla's reign (ll. 57–58)⁶¹ with proper modifications to the verses. Four characters *ni* for confirmation are engraved on the upper left margin of the obverse of the plate, horizontally, above the first line (l. 01). The Rajibpur plate, dated year 22,⁶² has the same

⁵⁸ prativāsino vrāhmaṇottarān mahattarottama-kuṭṭū?<u>mvi-purogama-caṇḍāla-paryantān·| (l. 43).

⁵⁹ śrīman-madanapālasya dvitīye parivatsare<|>tāmra-paṭṭam idaṁ śilpī tathāgatasaro 'likhat·||

⁶⁰ The line and verse numbers refer to those of the revised edition by the author on the database of DHARMA project, available as “Manahali Plate of Madanapāla, year 8” (INSBengalCharters00075), accessed July 23, 2024, <https://dharmalekha.info/texts/INSBengalCharters00075>.

⁶¹ rājye madanapālasya Aṣṭame (58)pariva;cch!<ts>are| tāmra-paṭṭam imaṁ śilpī tathāgatasaro 'khanat·||

⁶² The line and verse numbers refer to those of the revised edition by the author on the database of DHARMA project, available as “Rajibpur Plate of Madanapāla, year 22” (INSBengalCharters00072), accessed July 23, 2024, <https://dharmalekha.info/texts/INSBengalCharters00072>.

content in terms of the invocation (ll. 1–3, v. 1), eulogy (ll. 3–27, vv. 2–18), place of issue (ll. 27–31), and issuer (ll. 31–32). The addressees (ll. 32–41), notification (ll. 41–49), requests (ll. 49–51), and date, year 22 month Vaiśākha day of *karman* 16 (l. 51) are provided in the same format, with differences in details. After the same set of benedictory and imprecatory verses (ll. 51–58, vv. 19–26), a verse describes Madanapāla's donation of land tract to Maheśvara(rāta), the donee *brāhmaṇa* (ll. 58–59, v. 27). The last two verses mention the messenger and engraver with slight modifications. *Sāndhivigrahika* Bhīmadeva, the messenger, is described as “the ruby on the crest of *sāmantas* of the Gauḍa king,” indicating his position as the topmost subordinate ruler (ll. 59–60, v. 28), and the year 22 is provided as the time of Tathāgatasara's engraving (l. 60, v. 29).⁶³ Three characters *ni* are vertically engraved on the left margin of the obverse of the plate, beside Lines 2, 5, and 8 respectively (l. 01).

The three plates of Gopāla IV and Madanapāla present their contents in the format almost identical with the one established in the previous period, with the addition of new elements such as the extra words for invocation and the changed number and location of character *ni*, of which the latter may connote the increased number of officials involved in the process of confirmation. This conformity to the format attests to the strength of the established convention, which survived the turmoil of the *Kaivarta* rebellion. However, the style of engraving in monotonous bold lines, which differs from that of the plates of Mahīpāla I, Nayapāla, and Vigrahapāla III engraved in elegant thin sharp lines,⁶⁴ points to the skill and technique not transferred beyond the disruption. This phenomenon can be attributed to changes in the characteristics of the engravers.

We have no information regarding Tathāgatasara, the engraver of those three plates, except his occupation, artisan (*śilpin*), and name pointing to his Buddhist leaning. He acted as the sole engraver of the grants of Gopāla IV and Madanapāla, at least for twenty years. The difference in name endings and the lack of a reference to the village of origin suggest that Tathāgatasara did not belong to the artisan group originating from Ghoṣalīgrāma, who had been active as engravers in the previous period, although he was also an artisan. This disjunction explains the change in the engraving style.

The fact that Madanapāla did not employ engravers from Ghoṣalīgrāma for the copperplate inscriptions prepared by his command is remarkable, as this village continued to be the centre of scribes active in copying the Buddhist manuscripts even during the twelfth century as mentioned in the previous section. As discussed elsewhere, Madanapāla was in a difficult political situation confronting Gopāla IV, who continued to retain his power in some areas of North Bengal and Bihar after the possible usurpation of his throne by Madanapāla, his uncle, and the Senas, who were encroaching upon the Pāla territory in North

⁶³ rāje madanapālasya dvāviṃśe parivatsare<|>tāmra-paṭṭam imarī śilpī tathāgatasaro['likhat||]

⁶⁴ For the difference, compare photographs attached to Furui [2010; 2015].

Bengal [Furui 2015, 56–57]. Madanapāla's reign was acknowledged in eastern Bihar, as the five short inscriptions found in Monghyr and Patna districts [Furui 2015, 57] and a manuscript of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikāpraññāpāramitāsūtra* copied by Śrīdharaka at Ghoṣālīgrāma in the seventeenth regnal year of the king reveal [Kim 2012, 207]. However, his control could have been a precarious one, as the reign of Gopāla IV is acknowledged in a manuscript copied at Vikramaśīla *mahāvihāra* in present Monghyr district [Furui 2015, 57]. The weakened control rendered the service of specialised artisans difficult to access for Madanapāla, who accordingly had to be content with the service of a single artisan for a long period of two decades.

Concluding Remarks

The development of the Pāla copperplate inscriptions and its connection with their engravers can be summarised as follows. During the first phase in the first half of the ninth century, there were trials in both form and format, of which the former was fixed early, while the latter required more time for standardisation. Engravers of this early phase demonstrate some diversity, including the involvement of both writer and engraver dividing their labour, and scribes with relatively high social status which entailed some level of literacy necessary for the formative period.

The second phase from the third quarter of the ninth century to the third quarter of the tenth century witnessed further standardisation of format towards its establishment by the contribution of a particular group of scribes, the Dāsas who had migrated from Samatāṭa. They appear to have brought with them the tradition of royal copperplate grants developed under the Early Devas ruling Samatāṭa in the eighth century, which provided a model for the Pāla grants in the process of their standardisation. They had a relatively high social status, indicating that the trend continued from the previous phase.

The third phase from the last quarter of the tenth century to the third quarter of the eleventh century witnessed the establishment of the standard format of the Pāla plates. The engravers of these plates were artisans of several families mostly originating from Ghoṣālīgrāma, identifiable with present Ghosrawan. The concentration of scribes in this village points to the emergence of Ghoṣālīgrāma as a centre of scribal group, a trend conforming to the contemporary process of social reorganisation in which a group with common occupation grew towards a *jāti* through the formation of their identity, network, and centre as a node of their activity. On the one hand, their consistent self-representation as artisans attests to their consolidation as a hereditary occupational group. On the other hand, it suggests that the accomplishment of standardisation of copperplate grants made it unnecessary for engravers to have the level of literacy required in the previous period. Rather, the professional skills and knowledge inherited by artisans were required.

The last phase, in the middle of the twelfth century, witnessed the continuance of the established standard format of copperplate inscriptions with slight modifications, despite the turmoil brought about by the *Kaivarta* rebellion in the late eleventh century. However, the style of engraving indicates a disjuncture from the previous tradition, which appears to have been related to the change of engravers from a group of scribal artisans of *Ghoṣālīgrāma* to *Tathāgatasara*, the sole engraver. The termination of the service of the former and the dependence on the latter may have been necessitated by the diminishing control of *Madanapāla*, who could not secure the service of the former.

This study attempted to trace the development of the *Pāla* copperplate inscriptions in terms of their form, format, and contents, against the changing character of their engravers in historical contexts. This attempt was enabled by the peculiar characters of the corpus, that is, the royal monopoly in issuing grants and the exceptionally long duration for which they were issued, owing to the longevity of the dynasty close to 400 years. Both characters gave a consistency which allowed the diachronic analysis of the plates. The extent to which the same analysis can be made on other corpora of copperplate inscriptions depends on their character, which may require another approach as suitable for them. It is expected that the analysis and discussion presented in this study will give impetus to studies on copperplate grants in South Asia for further progress.

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