A NOTE ON ATĪŚA DĪPANKARA, DHARMAKĪRTI
AND
THE GEOGRAPHICAL PERSONALITY OF SUVARNAĐĪPA

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In a recent paper published by Helmut Eimer in the Journal of the Asotic Society, Vol. XXVII, no. 4, on "Life and activities of Atīśa", the writer suggested (p.89) that Atīśa might have met Dharmakīrti in Bodh Gaya or some monastery and that the account of Atīśa's account in Suvarnaḍīpa 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

Atīśa's meeting with his future guru Dharmakīrti at Suvarnaḍīpa or 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 BiTS, I, pp. 8-9. Refers to the congregation of outstanding scholars of the Buddhist world at Vesāsiṣṭha, i.e. Bodh Gaya. At this congregation, the great Śākyamuni Mahā Saṅgha was present. According to the same tradition, Lamou-Qel-a-drung, the future teacher of Atīśa was also present there and he attached himself to the great Śākyamuni for sometime. He was given the title of Dharmakīrti by his guru. It is not easy to determine the date of this congregation. There are however two considerations which make it likely that Atīśa and Dharmakīrti might have met at Bodh Gaya or at some monastery. First Dharmakīrti 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, Rājagṛha, Nālandā and Vikramāditya. Second, Atīśa is also reported to have studied the Law at Nālandā, Rājagṛha, Vikramāditya, completing his studies at Māri Vihāra in Bodh Gaya. So it is not unlikely that Atīśa 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 Suvarṇapūrṇa is however much more important and complex than the points discussed above. Unfortunately all previous authors including the present writer have followed S. Levi in regard to the identity of Suvarṇapūrṇa in his famous article "Palæme, le Middées et la Bhākhathō" published in Etudes Asiatiques, t.11, 1925 pp. 1-55 and 431-2. Research during the last thirty years or so 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 geographica 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 Suvarṇapūrṇa and Suvarṇapūrṇa are two distinct geographical entities. Of these two, the former refers to lower Burma. I also pointed out in the same connexion that the geographical entity known as Suvarṇapūrṇa did not figure at all in any authentic text prior to the date of the Nālandā Charter of king Devapāla of the Pāla dynasty. Further research has led me to the conclusion that Sunetra was merely a segment of the much bigger geographical entity called Suvarṇapūrṇa. As the date of the Nālandā Charter and the significance of what is Suvarṇapūrṇa 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 rectification by authors dealing with the history of that part of the world. For this reason also the geographical personality of Suvarṇapūrṇa should be better defined.

The above mentioned Nālandā Charter (Sp. Ind. XVII, pp. 322-24) which mentions king Bālaputradeva 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 accusative 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. Sinor, in his Dynastic Accounts of the Pāla and Sena Epoch (in Bengali), 1982, pp. 12, 671ff., revised the regnal period of Devapāla as being from AD. 813-847, that of Bālaputradeva from C. 847 to 860 and that of Vighrapāla from 860-861. So the date of the Nālandā Charter should be AD. 845. Many scholars, notably J.G. de Casparis, have placed date of the Nālandā Charter in C. 850 AD. in one place (Proc. Ind. I, p.97) and between AD. 860 and 870 in another (Proc. 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 Nālandā Charter cannot therefore be later than AD. 847, when Devapāla died. If this is admitted, the chronology of the later Senānīra monarchs of Java, the account of civil war propounded by de Casparis and his theory about the flight of Bālaputradeva to Suvarṇapūrṇa will prove to be somewhat illusory.
or at least would demand a fresh assessment. Since the grandfather of Bīlaputradēva has been described in the Nālandī Charter as Yovabhumispītaka and Bīlaputradēva has been described in contrast to a Sukha (ṣāla) of the dynasty of the 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 Suvarṇapūrī. Fortunately for us, the Perso-Arabic travelogues for at least two centuries throw considerable light in the elucidation of his point. In the shorter text of the Ligor inscription found in Malay, dated AD 775, it was already stated of King Vīpu that the sāla name (person) is known by the appellation of the mahārāja because of the mention of his origin in the Saḷandra 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 Saḷandras, and later on of Śiviyāja. This vast empire figures in Arabic texts as Zība (variant Ṣāva, Ṣīva), and Ibn Khudalīdīhich, writing in AD 844–45, said that the ruler of Zība (var. Ṣāva) is king of the islands of the southern ocean and is called the mahārāja. As Ibn Khudalīdīhich and Bīlaputradēva were contemporaneous, and the latter was ruler of Suvarṇapūrī, it is obvious that Zība of the Arabic text could only refer to Suvarṇapūrī, but its headquarters were in Java, where Bīlaputradēva 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 Hasan in C. 916 AD. We read there: "Kāśībari is a part of the empire of Zībaq, which is situated in the South of India. Kaśībari and Zībaq are governed by one king." Now, Abu Zayd Hasan has stated that the city of Zībaq, whose circumference is 900 parasangs is ruled over by a king who is known by the name of Mahārāja. 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 rules is an island called Sribhaja whose circumference is 400 parasangs and the island Rami (Achin, north of Sumatra) . Also part of the possession of the mahārāja is the maritime state of Kaśī, which is situated half-way between China, and Arabia ... The authority of the mahārāja is felt in these islands." Here Sribhaja has been shown as a part of Zībaq. Ferrand thought that Zībaq referred to Sumatra, but Peller thought in the sense of Java-Sumatra. It seems to have been a bigger geographical entity, because a little later, Maṇḍiś who had visited both Zībaq and China, wrote in C. 956 AD: "About the kingdom of the mahārāja, king of the islands of Zībaq and other islands in the sea of China, among which are Kaśī and Sribhaja ... Voyaging in the mast rapid vessel, one cannot go round all these islands in two years." Zībaq is thus the metropolis country, exercising authority in various degrees over many parts of Sumatra, Java and smaller islands all about. This is explicitly stated another part of his text which reads: "Zībaq is the chief island of his kingdom and the seat of his empire."
Al-Biruni, the greatest scholar of his age, wrote about Swarapadhipa in the following terms (Sachev, Alberuni’s India, p. 210): “The eastern islands in this ocean, which are nearer to China than to India are the islands of Zabagca called by Hindus Swarapadhipa, 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 Swarapadi, which, he rightly placed in his classified list under “Is, as being in the north-east (asdinya)” of India. In this context, it should not be forgotten that Al-Biruni and Alfaa Dipakara were contemporaries. So, these MS-notions about Swarapadhipa receive better precision in the writing of Al-Biruni.

What all the relevant Arabic texts had not recorded specifically have been supplied by the Katha-narasaga (C. 1060 AD), in Hwangas, 97 I., where we read that Kalata (q) was the capital of Swarapadhipa. As the earliest reference to Kalata in comparison with the Kalat worship occurs in the Kalat inscription of Java, dated A.D. 778 and not long thereafter in the Sanskrit text called Aryamadhunikajakarya, dated C. 800 AD, this toponym could not have possibly been borrowed from the Bhaktasvam of Gopadhipa, usually believed to be the source of the Katha text referred to above and placed in a date not later than the fifth century AD. (S.N. Dasgupta and S.K. Datta, A History of Sanskrit Literature: classical period, P. 696 and H.B. Sankar in the Bijagrad 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 Swarapadhipa at Kalata (q). It is also for this reason that I did not disprove this information lightly, as it concerns a problem whose solution is not yet in sight.

When I visited Java in 1998, I had this problem in mind. The temple of Kalatam was a royal temple established by rake Pajangatan (king Indra) with the assistance of the Ghurids (successors) of the Salantra king (no. 1 in H.B. Sankar, Corpus of the Inscriptions of Java, Vol. 1). As this was a royal temple established by the royal predecessors, it stands to reason that the royal palaces, according to Indian religious conceptions, 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 J. de Casparis in his Prezant Indonesia II, pp. 244 ff., although I have reservations about the interpretation of the events.

The identification of the capital-city of Swarapadhipa, 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 Suwarnadipa. As the founders of the Srivijayan kingdom in Sumatra were Sailendras from the ghat, as I have tried to prove elsewhere (vide my article ‘Kings of Sri Salam and the foundation of the Sailendra dynasty in Indonesia’ in the Budiraj, 1985), there was nothing incongruous in their ruling over the idea of Suwarnadipa
from Kalasan, at least for a long time. It is indeed against human psychology to erect a 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 maharaja.
A new investigation is no doubt needed to clear up all issues involved in this context, but Ho-Ling seems to be no other than the central Javanese part of the Sailendra empire.

III

After the discussion made above, it will be easier for us to make up the account of Aśoka Dipākara and his guru who lived in the Srivijayan part of Suwarnadipa. There are some references which have been noted by Aloka Chatterji in her work Aśoka and Tibet in the Ashasamaya-cudāmasūtra-rāma prajñāparamitā upadeśa stotra vṛndabodhī Bāha niśāma śloka (A.C. l.c., p. 472). Colophon K makes it clear that it was composed by Rājya Dharmakṣiṇi of Suwarnadipa in the tenth regnal year of the Śrī Cudāmasūtrag petēnu of Suwarnadipa from a place called Malaya in Vijayānagar. As Čudāmaśīvarma’s successor Maharaja Yonaka Yavan ascended the throne of Srī Viṣṇa 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 Bodhinītara caṛyāsripratibhā (A.C. l.c., p. 484), it has been stated that it was expounded at the request of Kamaleśvar and Dipākara Śrīśūla, who were students of their guru Dhammapatī of Suwarnadipa. This guru is generally believed to be no other than Dharmakṣiṇi herself. 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 Suwarnadipa at the age 31, studied there for twelve years - this is rather a stereotyped duration assigned to studenthip in general, about which I am sceptical - in the place called Malaya-giri in Srivijaya.

The foundation of Srivijaya by the dispossessed scions of the Ikvyak dynasty took place sometime between AD 300 and 392 (vide my article in the Budiraj, 1985, pp. 323-38). The Malayalam-speaking people who lived in the foundation of Srivijaya and they themselves seem to

40-
have settled down at a place which came to be known as Malaya, after the name of their home-country on the Malabar coast of Southern India. It is usually identified with modern Lambi on the northern coast of Sumatra. A bigger influx organised by Śrīvijaya strengthened the demography of the place between AD. 571 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 I-tsing (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., Śrīvijaya 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 Candraśāngavarma-deva in the last quarter of the tenth century AD. The name of Malayu as Malaya seems to be justified, as it is a hilly terrain.

Atta came to Malaya in AD. 1012, when the previous king of Śrīvijaya had already died and after Manjusrijottappaṇavarmana had ascended the throne in AD 1008. No evidence is however available at present from the Indonesian side regarding the establishment of the Buddhist University at Malaya in the beginning of the eleventh century or Atta Dīpakāra's position there for advanced studies in Buddhism.

A critical study of the progress of researches on Śrīvijaya up to 1979 had been furnished by O.W. Walters in his "Studying Śrīvijaya", 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 same year has been furnished in the Pusat Penelitian Pustaka Duta, Penpenyelamatan Nasional, Jakarta, 1979; The latest authoritative discussion on Śrīvijaya and some other matters related to it is to be found in R. Wheatley, *Niagara and Commandery University of Chicago*, 1983.
DIPANKARA ATISA