



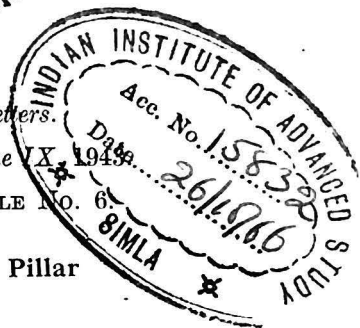
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The king Candra of the Meharauli Iron Pillar Inscription.

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We learn from the Inscription on the Iron Pillar at Meharauli, near Kutb Minar, Delhi, that it was set up, as the standard of Viṣṇu, on the hill called Viṣṇupada, by a king having the name of Candra (*Candrāhvena*).¹ The most important problem raised by this record is the identity of this king Candra, and various theories have been advanced about it. He has been identified with kings Candragupta I² and Candragupta II³ of the Imperial Gupta dynasty and also with king Candrarvarman⁴ of the Susunia Rock Inscription. None of these has, however, met with general acceptance.⁵

The record tells us that king Candra fought battles in Vaṅga and conquered the Vāhlikas after having crossed in warfare the seven faces (*mukhāni*) of the river Sindhu.⁶ These are the

¹ Fleet—*Gupta Inscriptions*, No. 32, pp. 139ff.

² This view, originally propounded by Dr. R. G. Basak (*Ind. Ant.*, 1919, pp. 98-101; *History of North-Eastern India*, pp. 13ff), has been endorsed by Prof. S. K. Aiyangar (*Journ. Ind. Hist.*, Vol. VI, Supplement).

³ Originally held by V. A. Smith (*J.R.A.S.*, 1897, pp. 1ff. *Early Hist. of India*—1st and 2nd Editions) but later given up (*ibid*, 3rd Ed., p. 290, f.n.1). Reiterated by G. P. Mehta, K. P. Jayaswal (*J.B.O.R.S.*, Vol. XVIII, pp. 31-33) and Dr. D. C. Sircar (*J.R.A.S.B.L.*, Vol. V, pp. 413-15).

⁴ *Ep. Ind.*, Vol. XII, p. 318.

⁵ The defects of the different views have been pointed out by Dr. H. C. Seth who has proposed to identify Candra with the Maurya king Candragupta (*Journ. Ind. Hist.*, Vol. XVI, pp. 117ff). This view has not been seriously taken by any scholar and I have, therefore, left it out of discussion. Dr. H. C. Raychaudhuri has suggested that king Candrarāsa, mentioned in the Purāṇas, 'may have been the Candra of the Meharauli Inscription' (*Pol. Hist. Anc. Ind.*, 4th Ed., p. 449, f.n. 1) but we do not know anything of this king.

⁶ I have assumed in this paper that Vāhlika denotes Bactria, as was generally agreed upon until suggestions were made to locate it (and also the Viṣṇupada hill) in the region, on the borders of Kashmir, through which flows the northernmost part of the Beas (*Ind. Cult.*, Vol. I, pp. 515-519; III, 511-13). This identification rests mainly upon a passage in Rāmāyaṇa which, however, also mentions that the country was reached after crossing the Ikshumatī river. If this means the Oxus river the country is to be located in Bactria. The Viṣṇupada hill has also been located near Hardwar (*Ann. Bh. Or. Res. Ins.*, Vol. VIII, pp. 172ff) and identified with the Siwalik range (*J.B.O.R.S.*, Vol. XX, pp. 97-100). It is not necessary, for our present purpose, to discuss the identification either of Viṣṇupada hill or of the Vāhlika country, as the arguments advanced for the identification of king Candra would apply equally whether the Vāhlika country is in Kashmir or in Bactria. It must be pointed out, however, that Viṣṇupada hill is not necessarily to be located in the

only positive facts known about him, and are at present the only clues for his proper identification. Now, of the three kings with whom he has been identified, Candrarvarman ruled in Rādhā, which is very near Vaṅga, and the kingdom of Candragupta II almost certainly included Vaṅga. Although, therefore, we have no actual evidence of any of them having fought a battle in Vaṅga, it is at least probable enough; but the same cannot be said of Candragupta I. As regards Vāhlika or Bactria, the known facts about the gradual expansion of the Gupta Empire make it highly improbable that Candragupta II ever extended his conquests so far, and almost impossible that Candragupta I did so. As regards Candrarvarman, there is nothing to show that his kingdom extended beyond Western Bengal, and even assuming that he belonged to the family which ruled over Malwa, and had its capital at Puṣkarāṇa near Ajmere, as MM. H. P. Sastri held,¹ there is nothing to support the view that he carried his arms to Vāhlika. None of the three proposed identifications is, therefore, acceptable as they fail to satisfy the most important test, viz. the conquest of Vāhlika.

The only ruling family in India whose kingdom is known to have included Vāhlika or Bactria, is the Kuṣāṇa. The reason why no one has proposed to identify king Candra with a member of this family is that none of them was known so far to have borne the name or title Candra. But in a recent article² Mr. H. W. Bailey has given a short extract from a Khotanese manuscript which definitely proves, what was already suspected by S. Lèvi and F. W. Thomas, that the famous Kuṣāṇ Emperor Kaniska had the epithet Candra. This manuscript clearly says: 'in the kingdom of Bāhlaka, there was a king Candra-Kaniska by name'; and again: 'at that time in the kingdom of Bāhlaka, in Tokharistan, there arose in the family

Vāhlika country. Mr. Jayaswal, e.g. locates Viṣṇupada hill near Hardwar and identifies the Vāhlikas with the Bactrians (*J.B.O.R.S.*, Vol. XVIII, pp. 32-33). The expression *Sindhora-sapta mukhāni*, used in the Meharauli Ins., can only mean the seven faces or feeders of the Indus (and not the mouths as we understand it in English) and most probably denotes, as pointed out by Jayaswal, the five rivers of the Punjab, with the Kabul and the Kunar rivers meeting the Indus (*J.B.O.R.S.*, Vol. XVIII, p. 32). In any case the significance of the statement that Candra crossed in warfare the seven faces of the river Sindhu must not be overlooked. It proves that, irrespective of the question where the Vāhlikas are located, king Candra's dominions included territories outside India proper, beyond the Indus river.

If we place the Vāhlikas in the Punjab or Kashmir, the king Candra, who had to cross the seven faces of the river Sindhu, in order to conquer them, must have been originally the ruler of a region which lay outside India proper, and as such his identification with Candragupta I, Candragupta II and Candrarvarman immediately falls to the ground and that with Kaniska, advocated in this paper, becomes more probable than ever.

¹ *Ep. Ind.*, Vol. XII, pp. 317-18.

² *J.R.A.S.*, 1942, pp. 14ff.

of Imperial rulers, a brave, meritorious, intelligent king of Jambudvīpa, by name Candra-Kaṇiṣka'.¹ The details given about this king leave no doubt of his identity with the famous Kuṣān Emperor Kaṇiṣka.

Now, if we bear in mind the extent of the military conquests of king Candra of the Meharauli Inscription from Vāhlika to Vaṅga, we have to admit that his identification with Candra-Kaṇiṣka stands on far better grounds than those that may be urged in favour of any of the three kings named above, or for the matter of that, of any other known Indian ruler bearing the name Candra. For he certainly ruled over Bactria which none else did. As regards Vaṅga, we have, it is true, no definite information that Kaṇiṣka carried his victorious arms so far, but the known facts make it very likely. We know that in the 3rd year of his reign Benares was ruled over by his satraps. 'Tradition affirms that he attacked the king residing at Pātali-putra and carried off from that city a Buddhist saint named Āśvaghosha'. There are good reasons for the belief that Kaṇiṣka and Āśvaghosha were contemporaries, and this lends some support to the above tradition.² Further, Kuṣān coins have been found both in Bengal and Orissa, and gold coins of Kaṇiṣka have been unearthed at Tamluk and Mahāsthāngarh, the sites of ancient Tāmrālipti and Puṇḍravardhana.³ Although, therefore, we may not definitely assert that the Kuṣāns held sway in Bengal, a military campaign of Kaṇiṣka in Vaṅga is not certainly very unlikely. In any case it is not, perhaps, more improbable than that of the other three kings, who have been identified with Candra.

Having thus demonstrated that according to the data furnished by the Meharauli Pillar Inscription, the identification of king Candra, mentioned in that record, with Kaṇiṣka, is more likely than any other so far proposed, we may proceed to discuss whether there can be any legitimate objection to this identification on other grounds.

The first difficulty is palaeographical. The alphabet of the Meharauli record is usually referred to the early Gupta period and this militates against the identification of king Candra with Kaṇiṣka. This difficulty is, however, more apparent than real. For in the first place, we do not know for certain whether the record is coeval with the king it mentions or a posthumous one of a memorial character.⁴ In the latter case

¹ *J.R.A.S.*, 1942, p. 19.

² V. A. Smith—*Early Hist. Ind.*, 3rd Ed., p. 260. *J.R.A.S.*, 1913, p. 646. R. D. Banerji—*Imperial Guptas*, p. 2.

³ Rapson—*Indian Coins*, pp. 13-14; *Proc. A.S.B.*, 1882, p. 113; *Ann. Pep. Arch. Surv. India*, 1930-34, Part II, p. 256.

⁴ Fleet regarded the record as posthumous (*Gupta Inscriptions*, p. 140). Dr. D. R. Bhandarkar, however, holds that king Candra was alive when the eulogy was engraved (*Ind. Cult.*, Vol. III, p. 511) and the same view is held by Dasaratha Sarma (*Ind. Cult.*, Vol. V, pp. 206-8). Fleet's

the alphabet of the record may be of a later type than that of the king it mentions. The somewhat bald reference to a king named Candra without additional epithet, may no doubt be due to the exigencies of metre, but is fully in keeping with a posthumous memorial, recorded long after the king has ceased to reign. Secondly, it has been already suggested by some scholars that the record is somewhat earlier than the Guptas. Thus, referring to the Susunia Inscription, which he considers to be 'written in early Gupta characters', Mr. Dikshit remarks that 'the characters cannot be considered to be so early as the Meharauli Pillar Inscription of Candra'.¹ Thirdly, recent discoveries have made us familiar with a new type of Kuṣāṇ alphabet which shows a close affinity with the eastern variety of Gupta alphabet such e.g. as is used in Allahabad Pillar Inscription, the striking resemblance of which with the Meharauli record was noticed by Fleet.² Indeed, it is now recognised by many scholars that the so-called eastern variety of the Gupta alphabet really originated during the Kuṣāṇ period, and that no hard and fast distinction exists between the Kuṣāṇ and the Gupta script.³ If any one compares the Mathura Pedestal Inscription of Kaniṣka, dated year 14,⁴ with Meharauli record, it would be difficult to reject off-hand the ascription of the latter to the age of Kaniṣka or shortly after it. Such difference, as may be noted, may be due to local characteristics. We do not know for certain whether the Iron Pillar was in Delhi when the record was engraved. It has been argued, with some degree of plausibility, that the hill Viṣṇupada, where the pillar was originally set up, is to be looked for in the border of Kashmir or Hardwar.⁵ Making allowances of this distance from the findspots of the known Kuṣāṇ inscriptions, the monumental character of the alphabet, and the 'stiffness resulting from engraving in so hard a substance as the iron of this column,'⁶ the alphabet of the Meharauli Pillar Inscription cannot be definitely regarded as posterior to the Kuṣāṇ period. It is needless for the present purpose to raise the vexed problem of Kaniṣka's date, but it is well to remember that the question is not finally decided as yet, and he may be much closer in point of time to the Imperial Guptas than is generally supposed.

The language of the inscription, strictly interpreted, would imply that Kaniṣka started from a base in India, and proceeding

view is, however, endorsed by Jayaswal (*J.B.O.R.S.*, Vol. XVIII, p. 31). Dr. D. C. Sircar refutes the views of Dr. Bhandarkar and holds that the record is posthumous (*Select Inscriptions*, p. 277, f.n. 1).

¹ *Ann. Rep. Arch. Surv.*, 1927-28, p. 188.

² Fleet—*Gupta Inscriptions*, p. 140.

³ For detailed discussion on this question, cf. *Ind. Cult.*, Vol. IV, pp. 335ff.

⁴ *Ep. Ind.*, Vol. XIX, pp. 96-97.

⁵ See f.n. 6, p. 179 above.

⁶ Fleet—*Gupta Inscriptions*, p. 140.

west crossed the seven mouths of the Indus and conquered Vāhlika. This does not exactly fit in with our present conception about the career of Kaniṣka, who is assumed to have inherited the vast empire of Wema Kadphises on both sides of the Hindu Kush. We must remember, however, that we really know so little of the relationship between Kaniṣka and Wema Kadphises, and the means by which he secured the empire of the latter, that Dr. Fleet and other scholars contended for a long time that he was not connected with the latter at all, and further that his dominions were confined to India.¹ In view of this uncertainty we cannot dismiss the identification of Candra with Kaniṣka on the ground that the former had to conquer Vāhlika by sending a military expedition from India. This difficulty, of course, does not arise if we locate the Vāhlikas in the Punjab or Kashmir.²

The fact that Kaniṣka was a renowned Buddhist is not incompatible with his rôle as a Vaiṣṇava devotee who erected a flagstaff in honour of god Viṣṇu. For, apart from the general spirit of toleration and eclecticism common in those days, the coins of Kaniṣka bear the figures of so many gods and goddesses both Indian and non-Indian, that his reverence for, and even devotion to, god Viṣṇu cannot be regarded as unusual. As Dr. Thomas³ remarked long ago 'Kaniṣka patronised a number of the religions flourishing within and without his empire'.

On the whole there cannot be any valid objection to the identification of king Candra of the Meharauli Pillar Inscription with Kaniṣka, the great Kuṣān emperor who had the Indian epithet or name Candra. This identification does not, of course, rest on evidence which may be regarded as conclusive. But this hypothesis seems to be better than the others which till now hold the ground. The crucial point in the identification of king Candra is the rather unusual fact of his rule over Vāhlika. Kaniṣka is the only Indian ruler, so far known, who bore the name Candra and ruled over Vāhlika, and while the probability of his carrying on a military campaign in Vaṅga is almost as great as that of either Candragupta I, Candragupta II, or Candravarman, the idea that any of these extended his rule over Vāhlika beyond the Indus is highly improbable, if not altogether impossible. Hence the proposed identification must be regarded as better than any other, yet proposed, and this is all that is claimed in the present discourse.

¹ *J.R.A.S.*, 1913, pp. 927ff.

³ *J.R.A.S.*, 1913, p. 646.

² See f.n. 6, p. 179 above.

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