

A Note on the Panākāḍuva Copper-Plate Charter of Vijayabāhu I

This important charter, the oldest copper-plate charter so far discovered in Sri Lanka, has been edited and published in the *Epigraphia Zeylanica*, Vol. V,¹ pp. 1-27, with an introduction, critical notes and translation by S. Paranavitana. The charter embodies an order delivered by King Vijayabāhu I of Polonnaruva (circa A.D. 1055-1110) granting certain privileges to one Sitnaru-bim Budalnā, who had protected Vijayabāhu in his tender years, his father and other members of the royal family, when they had to seek refuge in the forest as a consequence of the disorders brought about by the Cola invasion of Sri Lanka.

In spite of the wealth of scholarship Paranavitana has brought to bear on his study of this document in all its aspects, two errors of considerable consequence have crept into it giving rise to some far-reaching conclusions. In one instance he has made an error in the decipherment of a word in the charter and in the other his mis-interpretation of a phrase has resulted in his failure to understand the procedure that was followed when the charter was granted to Budalnā.

The word which Paranavitana has failed to decipher correctly occurs on plate A in the last line. He has read this word as *yahaḷa* appearing in the following context as deciphered by him: "...*Sirisangabo Vijayabāhu rajapāvahanse... tamā sovuru āpā māyā yuvaraja ā rajagaṇā pramukhayen sihavikum yahaḷa yuvaḷatin ukahā...*"² Paranavitana's translation of this passage reads as follows: "...His Majesty King Sirisangabo Vijayabāhu... in the presence of the royal assembly including his brothers—the heir presumptive, the heir apparent and the *yuvarāja*—and others, he of lion like prowess lifted up the yoke in both hands..."

This translation, it will be clearly seen, is open to two objections. First, Paranavitana has translated the word *pramukhayen* as "in the presence" of as if the word had been *pramukhayehi*, whereas it should be translated as "from the presence of"³. Secondly, though Paranavitana has taken the word *sihavikum* as being in apposition to the words *Sirisangabo Vijayabāhu rajapāvahanse*, such a use of an apposition far removed from the noun it refers to is inconsistent with Sinhalese usage, except in verse. The word *sihavikum* here has certainly to be taken in an adjectival sense qualifying the next word which has been read by Paranavitana as *yahaḷa*⁴ to which he has given the meanings: "yoke," "iron mace". But here the word *sihavikum* can hardly qualify either the

1. Printed at the Government Press, Ceylon, 1966.

2. In the passages quoted some changes have been made in the separation of words for the sake of consistency.

3. Though the word 'presence' is retained here the word 'forefront' appears to suit the context better.

4. Paranavitana states in a footnote that the word *sihavikum* is not an attribute of *yahaḷa*, as it appears to be. See *Epigraphia Zeylanica*, Vol. V, p. 24, footnote 2.

word “yoke” or the word “iron mace.” It would, therefore, appear that he has been constrained to interpret the two words *pramukhayen* and *sihavikum* as he has done, because of his failure to decipher correctly the letters which he has read as *yahaḷa*. On the basis of his reading Paranavitana has attempted to give what appears to be far-fetched derivations of this word and also to explain it in terms of a theory that he had advanced earlier that the representation of a yoke was considered the symbol of justice and administrative responsibility in Sri Lanka in ancient times.⁵

The word in question, however, is certainly *yahaḷu*. The letter that Paranavitana has read as *la* at the relevant point in the last line of plate A⁶ has a distinct loop at the bottom, which makes it *lu*, in contrast to the letter *la* which occurs in the same plate in the word *yuvāla* in the same line and the word *kaḷa* in the phrase *pāmili kaḷa* in the second line. The letter *lu* in the word which I take as *yahaḷu* may be compared with the letter *lu* appearing in the same plate in the word *demelabaḷamulu* and the word *muḷulakdiv* in line 4. The distinctive loop of the letter *lu* can be seen also in other instances of the letter appearing on the plates of the charter.⁷

When the word *yahaḷu* is substituted for the word *yahaḷa* as read by Paranavitana, the inconsistencies that appear in his translation can be eliminated to produce quite a straightforward translation of the passage in question. Thus the passage in question may be translated as follows: “...His Majesty King Sirisangabo Vijayabāhu...from the forefront of the royal assembly including his brothers—the heir presumptive, the heir apparent and the *yuvarāja*—and others, having drawn⁸ close to him with both hands his friend possessed of a lion’s prowess....”

The phrase that Paranavitana has misinterpreted refers to the order given by the King that a charter be issued to his friend, Budalnā. The relevant portion of the charter reads as follows: “...*me vāvasthā apa siya kūtakulehi Okāvas rajaparapurū puvatnā tāk sāsana koḷa denneyi Kilingu Nāvini Tārā Deṭu megam Nāvini Tundā Deṭu dakvā vadāḷeyin...*” Paranavitana has taken this passage to mean that it was Tārā Deṭu and Tundā Deṭu who had brought to the notice of the King the need to issue a charter to Budalnā, the words *Kilingu Nāvini Tārā Deṭu megam Nāvini Tundā Deṭu dakvā vadāḷeyin* being translated as “(the matter) having been presented by Kilingu Nāvini Tārā Deṭu and Nāvini Tundā Deṭu of this (selfsame) race.” Here obviously Paranavitana has taken the two persons named above as the agent of the verb *dakvā-vadāḷeyin*. It would be against Sinhalese usage to take *dakvā* and *vadāḷeyin* separately and assign *dakvā* to the two officers Tārā Deṭu and Tundā Deṭu and *vadāḷeyin* to the King. But the word *vadāḷeyin* from the past participle passive of the verb *vadāranavā*, conclusively proves that the agent of *dakvā-vadāḷeyin* is none other than the King because according to

5. *Epigraphia Zeylanica*, Vol. V, p. 3, footnote 3.

6. *Epigraphia Zeylanica*, Vol. V, Plate I, where the estampages of the plates of the Charter are reproduced. In the estampages of the plates reproduced in the accompanying plate the distinction between the *la* and *lu* is quite clear.

7. The letter *la* occurs as follows: A3, A4, A5, A6, B (I) 1, B (I) 2, B (I) 3, B (I) 5, B (I) 6, B (II) 1, B (II) 3, B (II) 6, C1, C5, C6, C7. The letter *lu* occurs as follows: A1, A6, B (I) 1, B (I) 4, B (II) 7, C1.

8. In the context it is perhaps better to translate *ukahā* as ‘having drawn close to’ rather than as ‘having lifted up’.

Sinhalese usage the verb *vadāranavā* is associated with an active past participle only when the agent is the Buddha, the King or any other personage of similar importance.⁹ The agent of the compound verb *dakvā-vadāleyin*, therefore, is *Sirisangabo rajapāvahanse* and the passage quoted above should be translated as "...as (His Majesty King Sirisangabo) pointed at Kilingu Nāvini Tārā Deṭu and Nāvini Tundā Deṭu of this (self-same) race commanding that this order be embodied in a charter to last as long as the royal lineage of Okāvas of our Kṣatriya family endures...."

Further proof of the correctness of the explanation given above, if such proof were needed, is provided by the inscription of Gajabāhu II (A.D. 1132-1153) from Laggala Pallesiya Pattuva where the same procedure is followed. The relevant section of the inscription reads "...*pamuṇu denneyi Kilingu Nāvini Kasabalnāvan dakvā Gajabāhu rajapāvahanse vadāleyin....*"¹⁰ where it is quite clear that the agent of *dakvā* and *vadāleyin* is *Gajabāhu rajapāvahanse*. It has to be pointed out, however, that following the faulty translation of this passage provided by Codrington who was the first to edit and publish this record, C. E. Godakumbura, revising it in the *Epigraphia Zeylanica*, Volume V, has perpetrated the same error as has been committed by Paranavitana, ignoring even the significance of the words *Gajabāhu rajapāvahanse* interposed between the verbs *dakvā* and *vadāleyin*.¹¹

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9. Other examples of this type of compound are: *ḍi-vadāranavā*, to give, *desū-vadāranavā*, to speak, to preach. The verb *vadāranavā* can also be used independently.

10. *Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. XXVI, No. 71, pp. 53-60.

11. *Epigraphia Zeylanica*, Vol. V, p. 399.

