The Ancient names and Builder of the Padaviya and Naccaduva tanks

The Padaviya Tank, which has recently been restored, is one of the largest among the ancient irrigation reservoirs in Ceylon. Standing on the bund, close to the great breach before it was closed, there was a stone slab with an inscription which, in a Sanskrit and a Sinhalese stanza, has recorded that Parākramabāhu I caused it to be constructed. But, as is the case with other ancient irrigation works at which that monarch had set up similar inscriptions, e.g. the dam at Ālahaṟa, Parākramabāhu only restored this tank. For the Cūḷavaṇīsā includes Padivāpi in a list of ancient tanks which were breached in his time, and were restored by Parākramabāhu P. Neither the Cūḷavaṇīsā nor the Mahāvaṇīsā has any other reference to the tank under this name; but as it has been called an ancient tank by the chronicler who recorded the events of the reign of Parākramabāhu I, its original construction must have been several centuries earlier, and the name by which it was known in the twelfth century was not the same as its appellation in more ancient times. The Piṭāvali credits Saddhātiṣa (circa 137—119 B.C.) with the construction of Pādī and several other tanks; but the Mahāvaṇīsā, in its account of the reign of that monarch, makes no such mention. This statement of the Piṭāvali, therefore, may well be doubted, particularly as there is reason to conclude that irrigation works of such magnitude as the Padaviya were not undertaken at so early a date.

Below the embankment of the Padaviya Tank are to be seen the remains of an ancient city now called Moragoda, and on this site have been discovered a pillar-inscription of the reign of Kassapa IV (898—914), a date.

The correct reading thus is raṇḍanā diya-dara, given as doubtful. What Wickremasinghe has read as ra in raṇḍanā is really the ū stroke and the right half of the syllable vi; there is no support for the nasal before da in the estampage that he has reproduced. The correct reading thus is Danā-diya-adāra, which is the locative form of Danā-diya-dara. Moreover, the correct form of the name, with a slight difference, is preserved in the pillar-inscription of Udaya II (887—898) at Buddhannēhāla, seven miles to the north of Moragoda. The village of Nāmaru, with which this edict is concerned, is said to have been in the territorial unit called Danā-dakadara. Wickremasinghe gives the initial da of this name as doubtful, but what is visible of it in the estampage precludes it from being read as any other syllable. Wickremasinghe also reads da; but the stroke that he has taken as the virāma appears to be an extraneous one. Even if we adopt the reading da, it does not much affect the form of the name, for in this period a final or medial vowel was often elided. What is certain is that dakā or dak; is derived. What Wickremasinghe has read the name as Pa(dobil)maru and gives Pādīn also as a possible reading.

3. Cūḷavaṇīsā, Chapter LXXIX, vv. 31—38.
5. For an account of the remains at Moragoda, see Bell, Seventh Progress Report, pp. 41—43.
7. Wickremasinghe has read the name as Pādobilmaru and gives Pādīn also as a possible reading. The ñ sign over the d is reasonably certain in the estampage; what has been taken as the ñ—or the right side of the ñ stroke is extraneous.
9. Dakā is the Pāḷi or Prakrit form from which the Sinhalese dīpa is derived.
The word *dakadara* has been met with in other inscriptions of the ninth and tenth centuries, usually as the second member of a compound of which the first is the name of a tank. The unpublished pillar-inscription found at Gahává in the Nágamappa KóraJe\(^{10}\) refers to the village affected by the document as coming under Bálalú-dakadara. And Gahává is less than a mile from the main channel (yédé-ála) issuing from the Bálalú-váva. *Daka-dara*, therefore, must have denoted either the main channel from a tank, or the lands irrigated by a tank. The pillar-inscriptions found at Moragođha just below the embankment of the Padaviya, and at Buddhannéhála, seven miles north of it, both refer to villages in or on the Daná-dakadara. These two inscribed pillars do not appear to have been removed far from their original sites, and must have been set up in the vicinity of the villages which are mentioned in them, if not in the villages themselves. These two villages must have been situated in the area irrigated by the Padi-váva, the main channel issuing from which must have continued northwards for at least seven miles. Danádakadara, consequentiy, must be the old name of the main channel of the tank now called Padaviya and, on the analogy of Bálalú-dakadara, the conclusion is inevitable that, in the ninth century, the name of this tank was Daná-váva. And the only name of a tank found in the chronicle with which *Daná-váva* can be equated is *Dhana-vápi*, listed among the irrigation works of Moggallána II (carya 531–551)\(^{11}\). The long ā in Daná presupposes a form *Dhana*; the suffix -ka is often found added to proper names in documents of the early centuries of the Christian era, and the chronicles, more often than not, make use of the names without this suffix.

The only reference to Dhanavápi (Danáváva) in the *Cilavamśa*, as it has been translated, appears to go against the proposed identification of that tank with Padaviya. For Geiger’s rendering of the relevant passage reads: ‘He dammed up the Kadamba river among the mountains forming thereby the Pattápasana-vápi, Dhanavápi and Garitara tanks’\(^{12}\). Padaviya is in no way connected with the Kadamba river (Malvatu Oya), and a tank formed by the damming of that river cannot obviously be the same as the Padaviya. But the passage as it occurs in Geiger’s translation does not make much sense when examined along with the relevant geographical data and the methods adopted by the ancients in the construction of tanks. The Kadamba river neither rises in, nor flows through, mountainous country. And the passage quoted above appears to state that by damming the river at one spot three tanks were constructed. Where tanks have been built by the damming of streams, such obstruction of the natural flow of the water at one point normally results in one tank. These considerations should lead one, not to doubt the identification of Dhanavápi with Padaviya on the evidence supplied by the inscriptions, but to examine, in the light of that evidence, whether Geiger’s translation given above faithfully conveys the meaning which the chronicler intended to express. For this, the relevant portion of the Páli text is given below:

\[
\text{Bandhápési Kadambání ca nádiñ pabbata-majhàto} \\
Pattapásaná-vápiñ ca Dhanávápínr Garitárán \\
Ganbhápési, sa digbyuyhetu kannáma ti sádaro} \\
Likhápési ca sádhhammána vatthúyam ca kárayí.
\]

L. C. Wijesinha, Geiger’s predecessor in translating the *Cilavamśa* gives the following rendering: ‘He threw a dam across the Kadamba river, from the middle of the mountain, thinking that such works tended to long life. And from the great love that he bore to his subjects, he built the tanks Pattapásaña, Dhanavápi and Garitara. He also caused sacred books to be written and made offerings to the sacred objects’\(^{13}\). Sumaṅgalá and Batuvantudáve, in their translation of the chronicle into Sinhalese, interpret the passage in the same manner as Wijesinha\(^{14}\); in fact the latter’s English translation at this point, as elsewhere, leans heavily on the Sinhalese version. Wijesinha’s version that the damming of the Kadamba river was undertaken by the king due to a belief that such works tended to long life has been taken to mean that the sentence should end with a line. But there was no connection of irrigation with longevity according to ancient beliefs. What the king undertook expecting to live to a ripe old age was the multiplication of sacred books and the offerings to the sacred objects. Geiger has correctly taken the sentence dealing with the irrigation works as ending with *ganbhápési* in verse 62. But the native scholars who have translated the chronicle into Sinhalese and English, respectively, have been more faithful to the original Páli, in rendering the passage dealing with Moggallána II’s irrigation works as comprising two separate sentences, than the German professor has been in treating it as a single sentence. For *bandhápési*, of which the object is Kadambóní nádiñ and *ganbhápési*, having the other three proper names as objects, are both finite verbs. There is no word in the original to correspond to ‘thereby’ in Geiger’s
We have, therefore, to examine the wording of the relevant Pali passage and the mountains' as well as Wijesinha's 'from the middle of the mountain' consideration the phrase nadi, though the chronicle does not expressly state it to have been so. We have, therefore, to examine the wording of the relevant Pali passage to ascertain whether the throwing of a dam across the Kadamba-nadi by Moggallana II resulted in the formation of a tank; we first take into consideration the phrase pabhata-majjhato, of which Geiger's rendering 'among the mountains' as well as Wijesinha's 'from the middle of the mountain' are equally inapplicable to an irrigation work connected with that river.

The word pabhata (Skt. parvata) has been used in Pali and Sanskrit texts not only to denote a great mountain such as the Himalayas, but also an ordinary rock boulder. The cluster of boulders to the south of the Alahana-pariveça at Polonnaru is called Gopala-pabhata in the Cilavansa15. The word may also be used of any hill or eminence. Being the first member of a compound, pabhata may be treated as in the singular or in the plural number. Majjha (Skt. madhya), of which the usual meaning is 'middle,' may also denote 'interval,' 'interspace,' 'opening' or 'gap.' The word is used adverbially with the ablative termination -to; this is perhaps due to the author of the Cilavansa translating into Pali a word like mddin in the Sinhalese source that he utilised. Such a form, though having the instrumental-ablative termination, is locative in sense; compare, for example, an expression like etek tatiin in Sigiri Graffiti, No. 482. Majhato may, therefore, be translated as 'between.' Ganabhapesi is the causative third person singular in the past tense from the root corresponding to Skt. grahn, of which the primary meaning is 'to take' or 'seize,' but may acquire various shades of secondary meanings. Forms from this root have been used in the Cilavansa to indicate the construction of tanks; compare, for example, ganghitvā in chap. 38, v. 41 and gāhāyā in chap. 42, v. 8. Thus, the correct literal translation of the passage in the chronicle dealing with the irrigation works of Mahinda II would be: 'And (he) dammed the Kadamba-nadi between (two) rocks (or ridges). He also built the Pattapasāna tank, the Dhana tank and Garitara.'

The Sinhalese form of this name would be Pattapaha. Two fragmentary inscriptions of the ninth century, one found at a place named Ihalagama and the other at Māvatava, both in the Kalāgam Kūrale of the Anurādhapura District16, inform us that the respective villages to which immunities were granted by the edicts engraved on the pillars were in a territorial division called Pattapahan-bim. In the ninth and tenth centuries, districts were generally named after the most important villages or towns within their boundaries, and such villages or towns were invariably situated by the side of a large tank. The town or village and the tank generally bore the same name. The important tank closest to Māvatava and Ihalagama, therefore, must be the Pattapahan-vāva (Pattapāsāna-vāpi). Ihalagama is seven miles, and Māvatava four miles, from the Nāccadūva tank, a major irrigation work of ancient days. Consequently, we have to conclude that the modern Nāccadūva and the ancient Pattapahan (Pattapāsāna) are identical17. And this is what Parker says of the manner in which the Nāccadūva tank was built by the ancient Sinhalese engineers. A careful examination of the valley18 showed that at 34 miles below the dam19 in the river, two ridges projected into it, leaving a gap of only a mile between their ends. In order to increase the water supply it was then decided to raise an embankment across the valley at this spot, closing up this gap,


16. A.S.C. Annual Report for 1895, p. 9. Nos. 31 and 32 of the List of Inscriptions. I am indebted to Mr W. S. Karunaratne for checking the readings of these two inscriptions in the eye-copies in the Archaeological Department.

17. Parker is inclined to give credence to a tradition which credits Mahāvīra with the construction of the Nāccadūva tank (Ancient Ceylon, p. 406), R. L. Brohier (op. cit., pt. 2) in the diagram facing p. 16 states that the Nāccadūva tank was built in 866–901 A.D., with as much of assurance that it was restored in 1906 A.D., on the strength of evidence summed up in the text as follows: 'The name Ctr name of this tank has not been definitely identified. There is a tradition that it was built by Mahāsena (277–304 B.C.) and that this tank is the Mahātaragala of the Mahāvamsa, but in one or two instances it has been accepted by students of Sinhalese history that the works date from the time of King Sena II (866–901 A.D.). Nevertheless, conjecture—both in respect of the derivation of the name and the period in which it was constructed—will ever present an alluring quest.'

18. Of the Malvat Oya.

19. From which a channel led to the Nuvaravāva.
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and impounding the floods in the reservoir thus formed, which is now termed Nāccadūva.20.

It will thus be seen that the description in the chronicle of the manner in which the Kadambanadi (Malvatu Oya) was dammed in the reign of Moggallāna II agrees very well with the constructional details of the Nāccadūva Tank. The chronicler, or the sources which he utilised, must have made a particular mention of the river being dammed between two ridges as it was considered in ancient times to be a proof of the skill of those responsible for the selection of the site. Indeed, the selection of this site for the throwing of the dam across the river has greatly minimised the labour and expenses of constructing the tank, for such a large reservoir as the Nāccadūva has a bund not exceeding a mile in length, whereas some other reservoirs of comparable size have bunds twice or thrice that length.

Thus, though the chronicle does not expressly state that the throwing of a dam across the Kadambanadi had as its consequence the formation of the three tanks named in the passage quoted, it has been found that one of them, the Pattapāṇāvāpi, was formed as a result of that work. It might, therefore, be argued that the other two tanks named in the passage were also similarly formed. Against such an argument is the fact that this particular manner of throwing a dam has been noticed along the course of the Malvatu Oya only at this point; Nāccadūva Tank is the only major irrigation work for the building of which this river has been dammed. It is possible that there are small village tanks constructed by damming the river on its upper course; but such minor works are not likely to have been undertaken by kings. Of the irrigation reservoirs of Moggallāna II, therefore, it was the Pattapāṇāvāpi alone that was a result of the damming of the Kadambanadi. The lack of precision in the text of the Cīlavaniṣa at this point may be explained by assuming that, in the old Sinhalese source utilised by its author, there was a statement that the Patpahanvāva was constructed by the damming, in the manner above described, of the Malvatu Oya, followed by another recording the building of the other two tanks, and that the chronicler recorded the damming of the river in one statement and the building of all the three tanks in another.

Dhanavāpi could not thus have been connected with the Malvatu Oya, and its identification with the Padaviya Tank is not discredited by the reference to it in the Cīlavaniṣa. That reference furnishes evidence, when taken together with the inscriptions referred to above, that Moggallāna


THE PADAVIYA AND NĀCCADŪVA TANKS

II was the original builder of two stupendous tanks; the Padaviya and the Nāccadūva. Even if he was the builder of one only of these tanks, he deserves a place among those ancient rulers of the Island who, by their public works, ensured the prosperity of the land. The greatness of Moggallāna did not rest solely on his achievements as a tank-builder. His valour was proved in the single combat that he fought to wrest his patrimony which had been usurped by his younger brother. He was a poet as well, and encouraged learning. In the words of the chronicle, his feeling for his people was like that of a mother for a son of her own body. Now that the two great irrigation works of this monarch are once more functioning to make large areas of the Island productive, it is hoped that the people who benefit from them today will not allow his name to fall into oblivion.

S. PARANAVITANE