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Special Reference to the Kūrmavibhāga

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Introduction

The *Atharvaveda-Pariśiṣṭa* was published in 1909 and 1910 by Bolling and Negelein. Although they originally planned to present their work in three volumes,¹⁾ the one on lexicographical peculiarities and the one that would have provided translations were never published.

The text had attracted much attention from the great Indologists in the nineteenth century including A. Weber, M. Bloomfield, and W. Whitney. However, because Bolling and Negelein published the critical edition, announcing that they would continue working on the text, few Indologists since then got engaged in it. Only a few such as Kohlbrugge [1938] and Bosch [1978] remained interested. It is noteworthy that Bahulkar [1982] discussed the relation between the *Nakṣatralpa* of AVPar and the *Śāntikalpa*, and Modak [1993] offered a summary of the whole text.

In recent years, Peter Bisschop and Arlo Griffiths published translations of Chapters 36 (IJ 46, 2003) and 40 (SII 24, 2007). Moreover, Griffiths [2007] offered an edition of the Orissa version of the *Caranavyūha* comparing it with AVPar 49. As a result of their continuations, especially that of 2003 which offered a useful table summarizing the past studies on AVPar, the chapters which were still waiting for further studies turned out to be those which contain astrological and divinatory elements, such as Chapter 1 (*Nakṣatralpa*) and Chapters 50-57.

Since the *Nakṣatralpa* is still difficult to deal with, mainly due to corruption of the text, we began examining Chapters 50-57, while attempting to find clues to elucidate the *Nakṣatralpa*. We presented a portion of our study in the 14th World Sanskrit Conference held on September 1-5, 2009 in Kyoto.

1. Structure of the text

Chapter 50 of AVPar is not only the beginning of a group of eight chapters concerning astrology and divination, it is also the starting chapter of the second part of AVPar. The first part, namely, Chapters 1-49, concerns with rituals and ceremonies for the king. The second half of the text, i.e., Chapters 50-72, deals with omens. The omens are further divided into two categories: astrological (Chapters 50-57) and other divinatory omens in a wider sense (Chapters 58-72) where Chapters 66-67 deal with rituals to appease bad omens, Chapter 68 is on dreams, and the last Chapters 69-72 are on bad omens.

There are some key words which help find the relative date of the text from a historical viewpoint of Indian astronomy and astrology, namely, *nakṣatra*, *graha*, *rāhu* and *ketu*. As Yano has pointed out,²⁾ there were five stages of development for the meaning of the *grahas* besides the demons that possess children as described in medical texts. With this view in mind it becomes clear that there are several different chronological stages even within the eight consecutive chapters 50 to 57, and that Chapter 51 belongs to the latest stage of the compilation of the text because the seven *grahas* are enumerated in the order of weekdays. Interestingly, it is only in the following chapter (Chapter 52) that *graha* was used in the widest sense, even beyond the five classes proposed by Yano.

2. Astronomical elements in Chapters 50-57

The contents of Chapters 50-57, referring to astronomical elements, can be summarized as follows.

The main topic of Chapter 50 (Candraprātipadika) is on observations of the moon's horn: how the horn is raised to the north or south. This topic is also dealt in the later Sanskrit astronomical text like Brahmagupta's *Brāhmasphuṭasiddhānta* as *śrīgonnati*.

Chapter 51 (Grahayuddha) deals with the war between planets. The technical terms in this chapter are very close to those found in the *Brhatsaṃhitā* Chapter 17. For instance, the same words *yāyin* (the king on expedition) and *nāgara* (the king staying in the city) are used in BS 17.8. The terms for the four kinds of war are found in BS 17.2-3 although with slight variations. It should be noted that the word *graha* is used in its narrowest sense and that it is described in the order of weekday. This corresponds to the fifth stage in Yano's classification. Thus this chapter belongs to the period after Greek astrology was introduced in In-

dia, namely about A.D. 300. In this chapter *ketu* is not regarded as the tail of *rāhu*, but it is still the ninth *graha*, while in Chapters 52 and 53, *ketu* can be regarded as comets.

Chapter 52 (Grahasaṃgraha), the longest chapter among chapters 50-57, deals with *graha* in its widest sense. Certain *grahas* are the sons of a *graha*. The number of *grahas* summed up in this chapter is 991 which exactly agrees with the number given in BS 11.28. Varāhamihira counts one thousand *ketus* after adding nine which are in the intermediate directions. Also to be noted is that 101 *ketus* are counted just as in BS 11.5.

The *graha* in Chapter 53 (Rāhucāra) reflects its second stage of development. One should note that the word *svarbhānu* was used in this context as the eclipse demon. It occurs only in this chapter of AVPar.³⁾

Chapter 54 (Ketcūāra) consists of only 12 verses. All the verses seem to have been borrowed from the words of Bhārgava.

In Chapter 55 (Ṛtuketulakṣaṇa) *ketus* are classified according to the six seasons beginning with the Śrāvaṇa-Proṣṭhapada months, namely the rainy season. It is interesting to note that in the later Chapter 64, which is outside the present context, the beginning of the year is the cold season (*śiśira*).

In Chapter 56 (Kūrmavibhāga) the twenty-seven *nakṣatras* are divided into nine *trikas* (triads). In later astronomical texts *nakṣatras* are counted twenty-seven and the beginning is Aśvinī. However, in the chapter being examined, *nakṣatra* begins with Kṛttikā, as is the usual case with the older system of the *nakṣatras*. Chapter 56 will be further discussed in the next section from a different angle.

On the other hand, in the next chapter, i.e., Chapter 57 (Maṇḍalāni) the twenty-eight *nakṣatras* are divided into four *maṇḍalas* (groups) according to the presiding deity, Agni, Vāyu, Varuṇa and Indra.

3. AVPar 56 on Kūrmavibhāga

We propose an English translation of AVPar 56. The Sanskrit text is based on Bolling and Negelein's edition, and is very corrupt and difficult to restore according to the rules of prosody. Bolling and Negelein wrote that 'it seems probable that the text was composed in Āryā meter, but the attempt to restore it to this form is too doubtful for inclusion in this volume'.⁴⁾ Keith, in his review of Bolling and Negelein [1909-10], focused his attention to the problems with prosody and counted the number of irregular half verses of AVPar.

Unfortunately he did not elaborate on Chapter 56. What he referred to as chapter ‘56’ is in fact Chapter 57, and he eventually skipped Chapter 56.⁵⁾ The Bolling and Negelein’s words quoted above apply to the verses that enumerate geographical names. We found that the first verse is expressed in perfect śloka meter. Also in the last verse (10), the first three quarters conform to śloka meter, The second verse seems to be in a meter with four quarters of 15 syllables, although the last quarter is made of 19 syllables. We cannot explain the remaining verses.

Beside these prosodical problems, there are grammatical peculiarities. The syntactic structure of verses 2 to 10 are the same. In the first part of the verse the place names are enumerated. After that, for example, verse 3 runs:

‘If the head (of the tortoise) is damaged, it (the triad) will give damage (to these places)’.

Though all the verses end with ‘*abhigate* (or *hate*)’ *bhiganyāt*’, the enumerated place names are sometimes in nominative or accusative case, and sometimes singular compound, dual or plural.

3.1. Text and Translation

1. *kṛttikārohiṇīsaumyaṃ madhyaṃ kūrmasya nirdiśet /*
śeṣān rkṣavibhāge tu trikam prati vinirdiśet //

One should indicate that Kṛttikā, Rohiṇī, and Mṛgaśiras as the center of the tortoise. One should indicate the rest in the division of *nakṣatras* for each triad.

2. *sāketamithile mekalālayāv ahichattrā-nāgapuram kāśipāriyātrakurupāñcālāh/*
atha kosalakauśāmbūtīram pāṭaliputram kaliṅgapuraprthivimaṇḍalamadhye ’bhigate
’bhiganyāt //

Sāketa, Mithilā, Mekala, Alaya, Ahichattrā, Nāgapura, Kāśī, Pāriyātra, Kuru, Pāñcāla, as well as Kosala, Kauśāmbūtīra, Pāṭaliputra, Kaliṅgapura¹⁾ — If the central (triad of the tortoise representing) the area of the earth is damaged, it (the triad) will give damage (to these places).

3. *aṅgavaṅgakaliṅgamāgadhamahendragavasam ambaṣṭhāh /*
bhāgāḥ pūrvasamudrāḥ śirasy abhigate
’bhiganyāt //

Aṅga, Vaṅga, Kaliṅga, Māgadha, Mahendra, Gavasa, Ambaṣṭha and those parts which have the ocean in the east — If the head (of the tortoise) is damaged, it (the triad) will give damage (to these places).

4. *khaśabhadrā samataṭasamavardhamānavaidehā gāndhārāh /*
kosalatosalaveṇātaṭasajjapurā mādreyaṭāmaliptā dakṣiṇapūrve hate
’bhiganyāt //

Khaśa, Bhadrā, Samataṭa, Sama, Vardhamānaka, Vaideha, Gāndhāra, Kosala, Tosala, Veṇātaṭa, Sajjapura, Mādreya, Tāmaliptā — If the right-front side (of the tortoise) is damaged, it (the triad) will give damage (to these places).

5. *āvantyakā vidarbhā matsyā cakora-
bhīmarathā*²⁾ *yavanavalayakāntī*
siṃhalalaṅkāpurī caiva /
draviḍā barbaratīrā dakṣiṇapārśve hate
'bhīhanyāt //

6. *sahyagirivaijayantī*
kuṅkuṇanāsikyakarmanoyāmimahi /
narmadabhṛgukacchā dakṣiṇapaścād dhate
'bhīhanyāt //

7. *saurāṣṭrasindhusauvīramālavā*
rāmarāṣṭrakānvītān /
ānartagacchayanatān pucche 'bhīhate
'bhīhanyāt //

8. *sārasvatāms trīgartān matsyān*
nānvārabāhikān /
mathurāpuramgadeśān uttarabhāge hate
'bhīhanyāt //

9. *brahmāvartam śatadruhimavantam parvatam*
ca mainākam /
kāśmīram caiva tathā uttarapārśve hate
'bhīhanyāt //

10. *nepālakāmarūpam ca videhodumbaram tathā /*
tathāvantyaḥ kaikayaś ca uttarapūrve hate
'bhīhanyāt //

Āvantyaka, Vidarbha, Matsya, Cakora, Bhīmaratha, Yavana, Valaya, Kāntī, Siṃhala, Laṅkāpurī, Draviḍa, Barbaratīra — If the right-side (of the tortoise) is damaged, it (the triad) will give damage (to these places).

Sahyagiri, Vaijayantī, Kuṅkuṇa, Nāsikya, Karmanoyāmi, Mahi, Narmada, Bhṛgukaccha — If the right back (of the tortoise) is damaged, it (the triad) will give damage (to these places).

Saurāṣṭra, Sindhu, Sauvīra, Mālava, together with Rāmarāṣṭraka, Ānarta, Gaccha, and Yanata — If the tail (of the tortoise) is damaged, it (the triad) will give damage (to these places).

Sārasvata, Trīgarta, Matsya, Nānvāra, Bāhika, Mathurā, Puramgadeśa — If the left back³⁾ (of the tortoise) is damaged, it (the triad) will give damage (to these places).

Brahmāvarta, Śatadru, Himavat, Parvata, Maināka, Kāśmīra — If the left side (of the tortoise) is damaged, it (the triad) will give damage (to these places).

Nepāla, Kāmarūpa, Videha, Udumbara, Āvantya, and Kaikaya — If the left-front side (of the tortoise) is damaged, it (the triad) will give damage (to these places).

1) We read *kaliṅgapuram* as one name, because *kaliṅga* occurs in the next verse. We have separated *kaliṅgapura-* from *prthivī*^o. 2) Bolling & Negelein read *bhīma[gaṃ]rathā*. 3) The reading of the text *uttarabhāge* must be incorrect, because it means 'the left part'. The correct reading should be *uttarapaścāt*. Cf. *dakṣiṇapaścād* in 6.

3.2. Interpretation

The 56th chapter on the Kūrmavibhāga is one of the shorter chapters of AVPar. Because it is too short and without any additional explanation, we find some difficulties in understanding the purpose of this chapter. It describes the correspondence between the sky and the earth through a tortoise simile.⁶⁾ When a *nakṣatra* in the sky is damaged by some planets, as Varāhamihira says in BS,⁷⁾ the corresponding countries or people are damaged. In order to give this instruction, the figure of a tortoise was used. The description of the parts of the tortoise which correspond to the nine parts of the earth starts from verse 2 beginning with the central part and moving to the east, southeast, south, southwest, west, northwest,

north and northeast in the clockwise order (*pradakṣiṇā*).

There are some texts, especially among purāṇas, which contain similar ideas. Lewis divided these texts into two types: one that has a longer list and the other with a shorter list.⁸⁾ He referred to BS and the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* as those that contain the longer list, and AVPar, the *Garuḍapurāṇa* and the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* as those that have the shorter list. Kirfel [1920, 81ff.] compared the list of geographical names of BS with that of the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*.

We compared these geographical names arranged in the nine directions. We chose VDhUP as the representative of the shorter list, and the BS as that of the longer list.⁹⁾ Comparing these texts with AVPar, we found that only the four place names were commonly mentioned in these three texts: Kuru and Pāñcāla in the center, Māgadha in the east, and Himavat in the north. Other than these four places, we did not find any other place names that lie in the same direction as described in the list of AVPar and VDhUP, although both are classified as containing the shorter list.

On the other hand, we found a greater number of similarities between the list of BS and VdhUP, although they are classified in different types of the list. The similar names are four in the center: Pāñcāla, Kuru, Matsya, Śūrasena, seven in the east: Vṛṣadhvaja, Aṃjana, Panna, Suhma, Māgadha, Kāśī, Kośala, four in the southeast: Kaliṅga, Vaṅga, Aṅga, Vaidarbha, only one in the south: Karṇāṭaka, three in the southwest: Ambaṣṭha, Strīmukha, Ānanta, only one in the west: Mleccha, three in the northwest: Māṇḍavya, Tuṣāra, Mūlika, two in the north: Gāndhāra and Himavat, four in the northeast: Kaulūta, Brahma Putra, Abhisāra, Kāśmīra.¹⁰⁾

In summary, it is clear that although the geographical list of the Kūrmavibhāga in AVPar is classified as the shorter one, the nine directions are quite different not only from the texts of the longer list, but also from that of the shorter list. It is strange that although most of the place names in the Kūrmavibhāga of AVPar are those which are familiar to Indologists, only the allotment is quite different from the rest of the texts. In order to know the origin of this peculiar list of geographical names, we will need further investigations. This list might give some clues to the provenance of the text of AVPar.

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Notes:

- 1) Bolling & Negelein [1909], p. vii.
- 2) Yano [2003], p. 381.
- 3) This word is attested in *Ṛgveda* 5.40.5-6, 5.40.8-9, *Paippalāda-Samhitā* 20.37.4-5, *Mahābhārata* 3.284.38, 3.286.19, 3.291.23, 6.13.39, 6.97.34, 7.149.26, 7.150.45, 12.220.49, and *Rāmāyaṇa* 3.22.11. We have used e-texts of the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* digitalized by Prof. Muneo Tokunaga.
- 4) Bolling & Negelein [1910], p. 374.
- 5) Keith [1912], p. 765.
- 6) Especially in the later tantric texts, the image of the tortoise is developed as a yantra called ‘kūrmacakra’. See Ida [2006].
- 7) The Kūrmavibhāga of AVPar does not mention by what kind of beings the *nakṣatras* are damaged. In BS 14.32-33, however, it is clearly stated that they are ‘damaged by the planets’.
- 8) Lewis [1967] p. 85.
- 9) We chose VdhUP because the list of GP is very close to that of VDhUP, as Lewis already presented. As for the longer list, the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* seems to have borrowed the list from BS [Kirfel 1920, p. 81], although there is confusion in the west and northwest directions.
- 10) These place names follow VDhUP.

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VDhUP: *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*, ed. Venkatesvara, reprinted, Nag Publishers, Delhi, 1985.

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