

Cracow Indological Studies
vol. XVIII (2016)
10.12797/CIS.18.2016.18.10

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**The Implementation of the Pan-Indian Form on the Keralan Ground.
A. R. Rajaraja Varma's *Citranakṣatramālā****

SUMMARY: In the 19th century Keralan literature contrasts between the traditional approach and a modern way of writing, as well as the attempts to reconcile those two modes, were particularly visible. The group of Kodungallur (Kōṭuṅgallūr) poets acted against over-Sanskritization in Malayalam poetry, while in the nearby Travancore (Tiruvitāṅkūr) poets advocated Sanskrit and tried to emulate classical forms. A. R. Rajaraja Varma (1863–1918), being one of the leading figures of the Travancore progressive movement, combined traditional, modern and local forms and themes in his works. He mastered the usage of well-known elements of *kāvya* literature in the description of events of his time. One of the examples that joins all of these factors is *Citranakṣatramālā*, a short composition written by seventeen-year-old author in honour of his patron—Maharaja Visakham Tirunal (Viśākham Tirunāl Mahārāja) of Travancore. The analysis of selected passages of the work reveals Rajaraja Varma's ability to implement pan-Indian form on local ground successfully.

KEYWORDS: *Citranakṣatramālā*, *citrakāvya*, A. R. Rajaraja Varma, Kerala, Maharaja Visakham Tirunal.

The 19th century was a time of profound changes in India. British rule and the challenge to foreign supremacy, social, administrative and

* This paper is a part of the project *Sanskrit figurative poetry (citrakāvya) in theory and practice* (registration number 2014/13/N/HS2/03022) developed by the author and financed by the National Science Centre, Poland.

educational reforms or the development of vernacular languages are only a few factors which influenced the literature of that time. One of the areas where the contrast between the traditional approach and a modern way, as well as the attempts to reconcile those two modes were particularly visible was the Kerala state.

One of the interesting movements started in Kodungallur (Kōṭuṅgallūr), in the middle of the century in question. A group of poets acted against over-Sanskritization and the domination of classical (mostly Puranic) themes in Malayalam poetry. The movement, later known as Veṅmaṇiprasthānam or Veṅmaṇi movement,¹ tried to avoid Sanskritisms in diction and simplify the language. On the other hand, in nearby Travancore (known as Tiruvitāṅkūr in Malayalam), the tendency in literature was the opposite—they advocated Sanskrit and tried to emulate classical forms of poetry. As Das says:

The most conspicuous feature in the Indian poetry of this phase is a conflict between two models of poetry, at times between the traditional and the Western, and at times between the objective and the subjective, and also between the epic and the long narratives on the one hand and the lyric and the short poems on the other. (Das 2000: 162)

Nevertheless, the distinction was not clear. Although Travancore was a place where the tendency to use Sanskrit and forms known from *kāvya* poetry was still very strong, the progressive movement had its supporters there as well. It resulted in polarization in the literary community. Interestingly, both trends happened to have advocates and leading figures related to one family. The leader of the first group was Kerala Varma Valiya Koil Tampuran (Kēraḷavarṁma Valiya Kōiltampurān; 1845–1914), while the progressive movement was led by his nephew,

¹ The movement got its name from Veṅmaṇi Acchan Nampūtiri (1817–1890/91), one of its leading figures. It was characterized by incorporating Sanskrit elements only when necessary, overloading it with the erotic and humor and simplifying the form and the content of the text in order to make it more understandable to the common man. More about the Veṅmaṇi movement and its leading figures in: George 1968: 139–142.

A. R. Rajaraja Varma (A. R. Rājarājavarmma; 1863–1918).² The latter was a very versatile poet and contributed to the various branches of Sanskrit and Malayalam literature.³ In his works he combined traditional and modern forms and themes. Writing both in Sanskrit and Malayalam, he mastered the proportion between classical and local motives and the usage of well-known elements of *kāvya* literature in the description of the events of his time. One of the examples joining all of these factors is *Citranaṣṭramālā*, a short poetical composition written when the author was barely seventeen years old.

A. R. Rajaraja Varma was very well-educated. It is difficult to classify him only as a poet since it was one of many fields in which he was involved. Although he wrote in Sanskrit and Malayalam he was also English-educated. He knew Tamil as well and had a working knowledge of Telugu and Kannada (George 1972: 45). One of the indicators of his vast knowledge was the fact that he became Professor of Oriental Languages at Maharaja's College (the present University College) in Trivandrum (known also as Tiruvananthapuram). The thematic scope of his works reflects his widespread interests. Because of his contribution to the development of Malayalam literature and learning, as well as his works concerning grammar, he is known as Kēraḷa Pāṇini. The first edition of his famous *Kēraḷapāṇinīyam* was published in 1896. The work and its history show not only the level of the author's

² More information about the literary community in the 19th-century Kerala, its leading figures, trends and movements can be found in Uḷḷūr Paramēśvarayyar's *Kēraḷasāhityacaritram*, the history of Keralan literature or other sources in Malayalam language, such as Hari Śarma's *Raṅṭu Sāhitya Nāyakanmār* (*Two Leading Writers*) or *Kēraḷa Pāṇini* by P. Anantan Piḷḷa. Unfortunately, since the author of this article is not able to read Malayalam, selection of the secondary literature used for the purpose of this work had to be limited to English sources. References to interesting works on A. R. Rajaraja Varma, as well as basic information about the author and his work can be found in: George 1985.

³ A complete list of A. R. Rajaraja Varma's Sanskrit works can be found in: Easwaran Nampoothiry 1972: 86–88.

specialized knowledge but also his innovative style. The first edition was a short work, in traditional *sūtra-vṛtti* style. The second one, published in 1917, was strikingly different. As George says:

He rejected *in toto* the Sutras of the earlier edition and replaced them with convenient verses that do not require long interpretations; whenever an explanation is necessary he himself gives it. [...] From a mere logical and descriptive approach in the earlier version, he switched over to a historical and comparative approach, taking care not to sacrifice logic or descriptive analysis. (George 1972: 45)

It was not the only one innovation employed by A. R. Rajaraja Varma in the field of learning and teaching Malayalam. By means of his other work, *Sāhityasāhyam*, he popularized the English system of punctuation (George 1972: 22). He contributed also to the debate concerning the use of rhyme in Malayalam poetry, called *dvitīyākṣaraprāsa*. The discussion started in the late 19th century and A. R. Rajaraja Varma was one of the advocates of using rhyme, but in a modern way—not rhyming the second syllable like his uncle (Das 2000: 321). Being in favor of the novelties from the West, he became the leader of the progressive movement and one of the authors who laid the foundations of Malayalam literary criticism.

Nevertheless, A. R. Rajaraja Varma did not distance himself from the classical themes and means known from Sanskrit literature. He translated into Malayalam Kālidāsa's *Meghadūta*⁴ and created allegorical plays. Some of his works combined the traditional form with contemporary themes or motives known from western literature. It is enough to mention *Uddālakacarita*, a work in prose depicting the story of Shakespeare's Othello or *Āṅgalasāmrājya*, a *mahākāvya*, a historical epic describing the British period of Indian history. Not coincidentally George called Rajaraja Varma “an excellent example of a composite culture—a commingling of three traditions, Dravidian, Aryan and European” (George 1972: 163).

Although *Citranaṅgaśatramālā* was written in 1880, when the author was only seventeen-year-old, it already shows characteristics of

⁴ The work known as *Bhāṣāmeghadūtam* was published in 1895.

his later style. Nevertheless, the inspiration for the work, especially in terms of its form, is quite clear. *Nakṣatramālās* were relatively popular in the 19th century. Most of the leading poets of that period wrote compositions with this title. Among them, one can find Paramēśvaran of Vaikkam, Ravivarmma Kōiltampurān of Lakṣmīpuram palace in Changanasseri (Caṅṅanāśśēri) and A. R. Rajaraja Varma's uncle—Kerala Varma Valiya Koil Tampuran himself, who is the author of the *Nakṣatramālā* dedicated to Āyilyam Tirunāl Mahārāja (Kunjunni Raja 1980: 250–263). The last one of the aforesaid poets also wrote the work titled *Citraślokāvalī*, a short poem replete with verbal jugglery. Rajaraja Varma, who remained under the great influence of his uncle, decided to follow his steps and compose *nakṣatramālā*, a genre popular at that time, and to give it a personal stamp by enriching it with various complicated techniques of expression exploited by other poets, including Kerala Varma Valiya Koil Tampuran.

This mixture of forms, multiple layers of text and multitude of discussed topics is suggested already by the title of the work, which can be roughly translated as *The Garland of Picturesque Stars*. However, it is only one of possible translations of the title. *Mālā* means a garland, but also a line, a string of beads. Works of Sanskrit literature known by this name are usually written in honor of the gods and used for their worship. It is connected to the tradition of prayer beads as well. Strings of beads, also known as *mālās*, are used for keeping count while repeating a mantra, the name of a deity or words of prayer, similarly to the practice of rosary-based prayers. According to the tradition, *mālās* are made of eighteen, twenty-eight, fifty-four or one hundred and eight beads. A. R. Rajaraja Varma's work consists of twenty-seven stanzas. Moreover, the number of *ślokas* refers to lunar mansions (sections along the ecliptic)—asterisms or constellations through which the moon passes according to Indian astrology.⁵

⁵ Yampolsky 1950: 62. It can refer also to twenty-eight unequal divisions of the ecliptic. The number differs probably because of the possible

The term denoting asterism in Sanskrit is *nakṣatra*. It means also a star, constellation or pearl (Monier-Williams 2008: 524). The work is therefore *the garland/line of stars* or *the necklace of twenty-seven pearls*. In both cases the word *nakṣatra* refers to individual stanzas of the poem. The ambiguity hidden in the title is not coincidental. The first option brings to mind eulogies and hymns of praise known from Sanskrit literature, while the other underlines astrological references, which can be found in the text. It is not surprising in the light of the fact that A. R. Rajaraja Varma was also the author of works concerning astrology, such as *Śrirāmajātakam*.

Astrology has in India the status of science and its role and the influence on various spheres of life is tremendous. In Kerala it comprises three main branches: *jātakam* (nativity), *muhūrtam* (indication of the favorable moment) and *praśnam*—astrological inquiry into the future, resolution of questions (Tarabout 2016: 60). A natal horoscope and birth charts are especially important since they form the foundation of further astrological predictions. On the basis of a place, date and time of birth an astrologer captures the exact astronomical locations of stars and planets at the precise moment of an individual's birth. Calculations also take into account the lunar day and mansion, the rising zodiacal sign and subdivisions of the zodiac (Tarabout 2016: 62). Indication of the particular *nakṣatra* (lunar mansion) under which one is born, is added to the name of the person. The position of astrology in Kerala is significant. Even nowadays temple astrological consultations are organized, natal horoscopes are compulsory and *devapraśnam* (divine query) is an important part of the culture. A. R. Rajaraja Varma composed the work imbued with multiply astrological references in accordance with the form of the poem.

role of the system that could be indicating the position of the moon, which completes its way from one star back to the same star in twenty-seven to twenty-eight days. The number of twenty-seven stanzas is one of characteristics of already mentioned *nakṣatramālās*.

The first word of the *Citranakṣatramālā*'s title is ambiguous as well. *Citra* is something bright, various or excellent but also a picture, delineation. In the overall context the title could be translated as *The Garland of Bright Stars*. However, *citra* refers also to a special kind of Sanskrit poetry. *Citrakāvya*, pictorial or wonderful, astonishing poetry is a kind of literary composition in which manifold word-plays and a special arrangement of sounds play an important role. It pays attention not only to the meaning of the text but also to its words—particular syllables and their position in the text. Among the most complicated figures within *citrakāvya* one can find stanzas which can be re-written in the shape of well-known objects. *Citranakṣatramālā* obviously belongs to this genre of poetry since most of its twenty-seven *ślokas* contain poetical figures and word-plays known in Sanskrit poetics as *citras*.

There could be several reasons why the work was written by the author in the *citra* style. It is beyond the scope of the present article to trace the beginnings and development of visual literature in India. It is enough to say that the oldest preserved examples of pictorial stanzas can be found in Bhāravi's *Kirātārjunīya* (ca. 6th century). The tradition gained broader popularity probably around the 8th–9th century. Despite the fact that by many theoreticians it was considered to be *adhama*, an inferior kind of poetry,⁶ it became an important element of literary tradition. Texts containing *citra* figures can be divided into three categories: didactic literature and collections of literary games; narrative literature (the great example are visual stanzas

⁶ Not all of the Sanskrit theoreticians referred to *citra*. Among those who mentioned it in their works some of the authors described it (or forms known in other texts by the name of *citra*) as an *alamkāra*, an ornament of poetry (*inter alia* Daṇḍin, ca. 7th century), other as *kāvyaṅgī*, a kind of poetry (Ānandavardhana, ca. 9th century, or Appaya Dīkṣita who lived in 16th century), while only a few of them recognized *citra* as belonging to both classifications (Mammaṭa, Vidyādhara <both of them lived ca. the 11th century>). The main arguments in favor of calling it *adhama*, an inferior composition, are that it is bereft of *rasa*, appeals to the mind but not to the heart and that its formal aspects are much more important than the meaning carried by the text.

adorning selected chapters of *mahākāvya*s) and laudatory poetry.⁷ *Citranaḥṣatramālā* falls within the scope of the third type. Generally used in poetical compositions praising deities, visual stanzas hidden in a text were one more form of devotion and laudation. *Citras* not only made poems more vivid and multi-layered but also raised its level of difficulty. Poets used it as a tool underlining their admiration of gods and creating poetical pictures of offering made out of syllables and words (as in the example of lotus flower compositions). Rajaraja Varma's work is untypical because it is not devoted to a deity. The main figure of the work is Visakham Tirunal Maharaja (Viśākham Tirunāl Mahārāja), the ruler of Travancore, who was the patron of the young poet. The years of his reign (1880–1885) coincide with the time when A. R. Rajaraja Varma's early works were written. *Citranaḥṣatramālā* was written in 1880, at the beginning of Visakham Tirunal's reign. The young poet paid the highest tributes to Travancore's ruler and, as he notes in last verses of the work, he hoped that among many texts glorifying Maharaja his poem might also earn the king's appreciation (Subramanian 1995: Introduction).

Besides the obvious advantages of using *citra* figures in laudatory poem there could be also other reasons why Rajaraja Varma decided

⁷ The suggested division is based on a few major factors. Texts containing *citra* figures differ in terms of selection of forms, the level of its difficulty, artistic value and above all—by function. Didactic literature and collections of literary games fall within the first category. Although the collections of riddles are designed for entertainment, they are also a great tool for shaping and sharpening the mind. As multi-leveled exercises they engage different parts of the brain in the process of memorizing. Visual forms combined with other literary riddles create complex enigmas, serving both as an entertainment for intelligent people and some kind of workbook designed for the development of mental abilities. The didactic function was equally important in the case of works on the theory of literature containing examples of pictorial stanzas or description of rules concerning the creation of particular *citra* figures. In both cases, texts show the full range of possible formations, usually with a high degree of difficulty. Similarities between these two groups of texts determined classifying them within one category.

to create a visual composition. As a young poet trying to carve out his path in the history of Indian literature he used a literary form considered to be difficult to create (*duṣkara*). Composing *citrakāvya* allows one to show a full range of poetical skills. Furthermore, it was one more linkage between classical Sanskrit literature and local literary forms. Although *citrakāvya* is primarily found in Sanskrit, it occurs also in the vernacular languages of India, *inter alia* Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada, Gujarati and Hindi. Moreover, Kerala poets seemed to have a special liking for this type of literature. Word-plays were used by them as a method of training poetical and intellectual skills.⁸ It was also a useful tool in the process of learning Sanskrit, its grammar and diversity of forms. No wonder that a young poet decided to exploit all the advantages of a well-known and mastered literary tradition which was considered to be difficult, refined and extensively used in laudatory poetry.

In *Citranakṣatramālā*, Rajaraja Varma created stanzas in various *citra* forms, using the whole range of possibilities. Following the scheme of most of *citrakāvya* compositions he placed the most basic figures (such as *vargarahitas*—stanzas in which particular syllables are not used, or *ekākṣaras* and *dvyakṣaras*—stanzas exploiting only one or two syllables) at the beginning of the poem. The next stanzas contain various forms, including those based on double-language register, using both Prakrit and Sanskrit. *Bandhas*, visual stanzas hiding pictures of well-known objects, are placed in the second half of the poem. Rajaraja Varma composed *inter alia* verses in the shape of magic square (*sarvatobhadra*), drum (*muraja*), snake (*nāga*) and the lotus

⁸ Subramanian 1995: Preface. Even nowadays literary games based on the tradition of *avadhāna* (attentiveness, concentration), a kind of literary challenge checking a poet's skills and the ability to concentrate, seem to be the most popular in Central and South India. More about *avadhāna* tradition: Sudyka and Galewicz 2012. In Kerala a similar function is performed by the tradition of *akṣaraśloka*, a poetic entertainment developed in Malayalam. It is also a kind of literary game which became the basis of competitions. More about *akṣaraśloka*: Sudyka and Galewicz 2005.

flower (*padma*). Similarly to the most of *citra* texts, the wheel-shaped figure (*cakra*) is hidden at the end of the poem.⁹

Although *Citranakṣatramālā* was composed in Sanskrit, it was written in the Malayalam script. The poem was published only once, in 1995, as a part of Sri Ravi Varma Sanskrit Series. In this publication the text was written in *devanāgarī* characters. As we read in the introduction, “scribal errors are very rare. In certain pages the poet has done some corrections and additions” (Subramanian 1995: Introduction). Nevertheless, the published edition of the poem contains mistakes as a possible result of changing the script and wrong division of words. However, without the access to the original manuscript it is impossible to state whether those are the editor’s or author’s mistakes.

Citranakṣatramālā was enriched also by a short auto-commentary added to some of the stanzas and diagrams of visual forms hidden in the text.¹⁰ Rajaraja Varma’s composition follows, therefore, the classical form of Sanskrit *citrakāvya*s. It commences with an invocation addressed to Sarasvatī—*śrī sarasvatyai namaḥ*—and an indication of the title and author of the work.¹¹ The first stanza of the poem is directed to an unspecified person:

vadanalinam dhatse vāgdevatāvasathāyitam
surucir iva maṅgīśrīsamvītam bibharṣi bhujāntaram |
śiśuśaśi virārājati [em.; virārājat] phālo’pi bhāsitārān¹² ca
yad vahasi suṣamām tasmān mūrtitrayasya [em.; mūrtitriyasya] dharāpateḥ || CNM 1.

⁹ *Cakra* is a visual formation usually built of several stanzas placed at the end of the text. In *Citranakṣatramālā* the wheel can be found in the twenty-fifth stanza.

¹⁰ Unfortunately, the diagrams were not included into the published edition of the text. The only exception is *cakra*’s scheme which was presented at the end of the introduction in its original form (in Malayalam characters). The auto-commentary added to the text is not only selective but also very short. In some of the cases it is just as much enigmatic as the main text.

¹¹ *atha rājarājavarmanirmitā citranakṣatramālā prārabhyate |*

¹² *Bhāsitārām* is a very rare form of the suffix of comparison in its adverbial, feminine form (*tarām*), added to a personal form of verb (in this case

You support the mouth-lotus reaching the abode of the Goddess of Speech;
 Like Suruci you hold in your arms a jewel surrounded by the light—
 It gleams during the New Moon and you, the beam, shine forth.
 From what you carry originates splendor of the Lord of the World in Three Forms.¹³

This short stanza at the very beginning of the poem is *kavargarahita*—deprived of *ka-varga* syllables. In each line of the text we can find interesting connotations and references to mythology, astrology and local beliefs. Although from this short passage it is not clear to whom the text is directed, it is probably, like the rest of the poem, addressed to the poet's patron, Visakhā Tirunāl. Maharaja is therefore called "the supporter of the mouth-lotus reaching the abode of the Goddess of Speech (*vāgdevatā*)."¹³ As a patron, he contributes to the development of Sanskrit—the language of gods. He is also compared to Suruci, a character known from Puranic literature. Her story differs in various texts. She was one of Uttānapāda's wives, hoping for the enthronement of her son, Uttama. Because of her jealousy the second wife's son, Dhruva, was banished. The young boy became a committed devotee of Viṣṇu. He received a boon—for his devotion after his death he became liberated from the circle of birth and rebirth and placed in the sky as the North Pole Star (Spagnoli and Samanna 1999: 57–60). Other variants of the story claim that it was Dhruva's wish to become a part of the constellation so he could spend the eternity next to his father, who was identified with one of Ursa Minor's stars as well. Jealous Suruci tried to keep her husband only for herself and her son.

bhāsi—imperative form). Whitney calls it a "wholly barbarous combination, finding no warrant in the earlier and more genuine usage of the language" (Whitney 1896: 176). Although the form is very rare, it occurs in Rājaraḡa Varma's poem a few times.

¹³ All the emendations and translations quoted in the article are made by its author in the cooperation with Professor Lidia Sudyka, whom I would like to thank for help and suggestions. Emendations were made in reference to the published edition of the poem from 1995 (Sri Ravi Varma Sanskrit Series). The original manuscript in the Malayalam script has been unavailable for the author of this article.

Uttānapāda is the bright jewel she holds tight. According to the story, both father and son found their place in the sky as a part of the Ursa Minor constellation, which is most visible during the New Moon. The beam mentioned in Rajaraja Varma's text refers to the part of the Little Bear and underlines astrological references of the stanza.¹⁴

Although the story of Suruci and Dhruva comes from Puranic literature, it has also strong local connotations. This particular topic was very popular among South Indian storytellers. Along with other tales concerning single-minded devotion, it was a fixed element of *villupāṭṭu*'s traditional repertoire.¹⁵

The last foot of the stanza mentions the Lord of the World in Three Forms. The rulers of Vañci were primarily related to the Śrī Padmanābhavāmī Temple located in Tiruvanantapuram. According to the story regarding the consecration of the temple, the sage Vilvamaṅgalaṁ Svāmiyār followed a naughty boy who defiled the idol to the forest. The boy was Lord Viṣṇu himself and he merged into an Indian Butter Tree. The tree fell down and become the Ananta serpent. The sage saw the Lord in an extraordinarily large size. His divine body was in three parts: *tirumukham* (head), *tiruvudal* (navel) and *trippadam* (foot).¹⁶ According to another interpretation, the reference in the passage to the popular Vaiṣṇava myth of Dhruva and also to Visakham Tirunal's religious inclinations (the ruler was Viṣṇu's devotee) suggests that

¹⁴ Ursa Minor, also known as the Little Bear or Little Dipper, has many different names. In British tradition its partner—Ursa Major—is called the Plough. The beam is therefore its part—the ploughshare.

¹⁵ *Villupāṭṭu* (bow song) is a tradition of story-telling developed in the 15th century, popular especially in South Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Its name refers to a bow, a weapon, which is believed to be the first source of musical accompaniment for storyteller's voice (Varadpande 1992: 125).

¹⁶ <http://www.sreepadmanabhaswamytemple.org/lnh.htm>. The full story of the sage is told also by Princess Aśvati Tirunāl Gouri Lakṣmibhāyi in the work *Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple*. Nevertheless, it does not mention the threefold division of Lord Viṣṇu's body (Gouri Lakshmi Bayi 2000: 27–28).

the author might be referring to Pūrṇatrayīśa, the presiding deity of the Cochin State, whose temple is placed in Tripunithura (Ṭṛppūñittura), near Ernakulam (Eṛaṇākulaṁ)—a meeting place of three Vedas: Ṛgveda, Sāmaveda and Yajurveda (Vaidyanathan 1988: 210). Finally, *mūrtitrayasya* may refer also to Trimūrti—a triad of deities, typically Brahmā the creator, Viṣṇu the preserver, and Śiva the destroyer/transformer. The Trimūrti Temple complex is located on the western side of the Śrī Padmanābhasvāmī Temple in Tiruvantapuram. Inside this compound there are temples dedicated to Lord Śiva, Lord Viṣṇu and Lord Brahmā. Though initially these were under the control of the Śrī Padmanābhasvāmī Temple, later the temple complex became independent.

Regardless of the question of which interpretation is correct, the author of *Citranakṣatramālā* emphasizes Visakham Tirunal's relation with the deity. The Maharaja is believed to have shared the divine splendor of the Lord. This reference not only reveals some facts about the local religious connotations of the rulers of Travancore but also legitimizes the patron's power. Visakham Tirunal shares his glory with the Lord of the World.

Nevertheless, the Maharaja's name is not mentioned at the beginning of the poem. The first time it appears in the text is in its fourth stanza:

śrīviśākha viśāṁ īśa kuśalo' si bhṛśāṁ raṇe|
mārgaṇākṣepaṇakalāśravane' pi bibheṣy aho || CNM 4.

Glorious Viśakha! The Lord of the People! You are afraid, but oh, even then, in the fight sounding with buzzing cast arrows, you are excessively skillful!

The poet addresses Visakham Tirunal directly and refers to his best features. He describes him as a brave ruler who does not hesitate to take part in a fight. Still, he is a human being and he feels fear. Nevertheless, even “in the fight sounding with buzzing cast arrows” he does not step back. Despite fear he fights and shows his extraordinary military skills.

Rajaraja Varma gives more information about the patron in the following passage:

*vañcīndra vañcitaviśākharuce viśākha kṣoñśa te dayitayoḥ kila kīrtidhātr-
yoh [em.; kīrtidhātyroh] |
hārdaṁ girān na sarañāv iha vartate ho ādyā anugacchatitarām satataṁ
dviṭīyām || CNM 5.*

The Lord of Vañci! The Light of the One Born Under Flickering Viśākhā Constellation!¹⁷ Viśakha—Lord of the Earth!
Oh, indeed your love towards two beloveds—glory and land, does not arise here, in the road of fame.¹⁸ The first one always follows the second.

In this stanza the author refers to three important facts. First of all, the name of land of Vañci occurs in the text. It is repeated few times in the poem and leaves no doubt that the Kingdom of Travancore is the place in question.¹⁹ Furthermore, we find information about

¹⁷ The first part of the stanza, *vañcīndravañcitaviśākharuce* can be understood also as “the light of the one born under *viśākhā* constellation, under the flickering star of Indra moving to and fro.” According to Indian astrology, Indra is the deity staying in a close relation to this particular *nakṣatra* (Harness 2004: 63). Another interpretation allows one to translate it as “the light of the son of Skanda imposed upon the prince of Vañci.” All the possibilities are equal and this ambiguity was probably intended by the author. Using literary tools allowing multifold meaning in a text is one of the features of *citra* works. It helps to include the maximum of information in a short passage and build the structure of multiple layers, as in the concept of *mise en abîme*.

¹⁸ The meaning of this part is not very clear. Probably the author suggests that Vishakhā Tirunāl does not care for fame and he follows the road of love for the land and its people. The Maharaja gains glory not because it is the most important for him but because of his attitude towards people.

¹⁹ The first remark in *Citranakṣatramālā* helping to specify the place is present in the second stanza. The author recalls Five Beautiful Lands’ Sun of Welfare (*pañcarāmavasudhāsudhābhānu*). It relates probably to an administrative division. In early 19th century, during the reign of Rani Gauri Lakṣmibhāyi (1810–1815), in the result of the reform of judicial administration, the Travancore Kingdom was divided into five parts (Menon 2006: 339).

the name of the patron. As has been said before, according to the tradition, the name of a new-born baby was complemented by one more element, related to the date of birth and the asterism recognized in the sky at that particular moment. Maharaja Visakham Tirunal was born on 19th May 1837, fifteen days after the beginning of domination of *viśākhā* constellation in the sky.

The third element which the author points out in this stanza is Maharaja's devotion and love for the land. As he underlines, for the ruler it is even more important than the fame and glory. This particular quality of Visakham Tirunal has been mentioned a few times in the poem. His commitment to the land and people of Vañci has been underlined *inter alia* in the stanza located in the second half of the work:

*virottamsakṣitīśāyutamakuṭa ghaṭatpādavikṣobhitāre
suśroṇīśreṇīcitta avasathadamada mūrtiprayuktāva[em.; pa]²⁰ māda |
pādātākṣīṇapāṇīśadanada parahṛttāpatīvrārtisoma
śrīvañcikṣoṇipālo raṇaratasugunaśreṇīpura praroha || CNM 21.*

The one [adorned] with a king's diadem combined with a hero's garland, the one who makes enemies' legs tremble, [filled with] the number of thoughts concentrated on the goddess, giving punishment and abode, having the favour of being united with the idol, embodied passion,²¹ effecting exhaustion of not drooping hands of infantry, the nectar removing burning, excruciating pain of others, the protector of glorious land of Vañci, filled with the mass of extraordinary fondness for the fight. Arise!

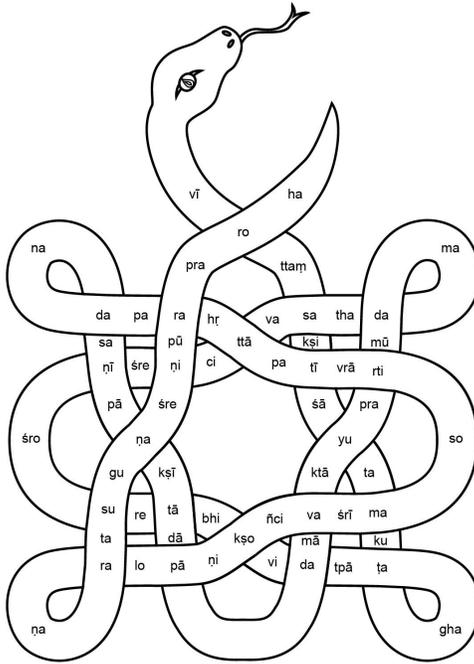
The stanza is not grammatically complex. It mostly consists of vocative forms, which is one of characteristics of the most complicated *citras*. The lack of more complex case-endings allows the matching of the text with its visual form's pattern. Previous examples of figurative stanzas

²⁰ Since the syllable occurs in the particular point of the text and according to the visual pattern it has to be repeated in another, it is clear that *va* is the correct sound in this position.

²¹ *Māda*, embodied passion, refers also to the fight and being intoxicated, engulfed by the battle frenzy.

given above were more diversified from the grammatical point of view because the only restriction was avoidance of particular syllables.²² The interpretation of the text is impeded by the fact that its edition gives the undivided stanza, written fully under one *mātra*. Also the very short auto-commentary does not dispel possible doubts.

The stanza is an example of one of the most complicated visual formations in Sanskrit poetry. The picture hidden in the text is *nāga*, the serpent:²³



²² The first, fourth and fifth stanzas belong to *vargarahitas*—those are *ka-*, *ta-* and *pa-vargarahitas*, stanzas deprived of *ka-varga*, *ta-varga* and *pa-varga* syllables.

²³ All the illustrations were made by Justyna Niedbała and Hermina Cielas.

Nāgabandha is extremely difficult to compose. The text of the stanza can be read tracing the serpent from the head to the tail. Since at every fold and intersection the letter is read a second time, the pattern requires from a poet the repetition of the same syllables at particular positions. The easiest to notice are the repetitions of the second syllable at the end of the stanza (syllables in bold) and syllables placed at four folds of the serpent (underlined syllables):

*vīrottamsakṣitīśāyutamakutaghatatpādavikṣobhitāre
 suśronīśreṇicittāvasathadamadammūrtiprayuktāvamāda |
 pādātākṣīṇapāñisadanadaparahr̥tīāpatīvr̥rtisoma
 śrīvañcikṣoṇipālo raṇaratasugunaśreṇipūra praroha || CNM 21.*

To make the creation of this difficult *bandha* easier Rajaraja Varma decided to compose it in the form of invocation addressed directly to the ruler, using mostly vocative forms. It is also a great example of a typical laudatory stanza, enumerating various epithets and qualities of the person described.

The next stanza of the text was composed in a similar way:

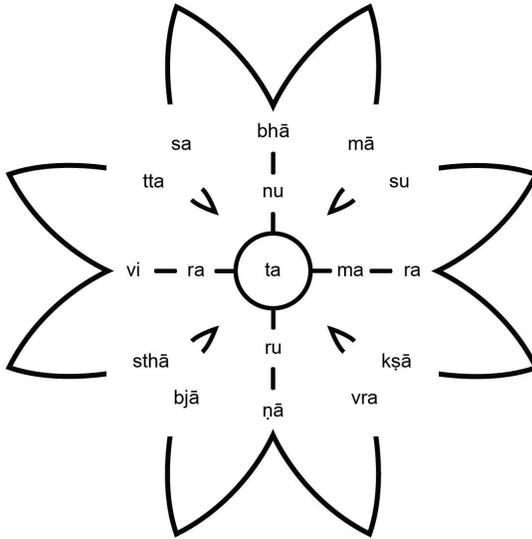
*tanubhāmāsuramatatamarakṣā[em.; ā]vraṇāruta |
 taruṇābjāsthā[em.; syā]viratataravitta sabhānuta || CNM 22.*

The guardian of the most honored divine/spiritual self-splendor, unbroken,
 Standing on a fresh lotus, continuously [bestowing] wealth, praised by
 the society/court!

Rajaraja Varma once again emphasizes the Maharaja's qualities and his propensity to giving away wealth. By calling him the one "standing on a fresh lotus" he refers to the image of Brahmā or Viṣṇu portrayed often as standing on a lotus flower. The choice of epithets used by the author allows the perception of the stanza as directed both to the ruler and to the deity. Without embedding in the overall context it is impossible to determine whether it addresses Lord Viṣṇu or Visakham Tirunal.²⁴

²⁴ This particular feature of the stanza brings the *śleṣa* figure to the mind. Nevertheless, the meaning of the text stays unchanged and is not influenced by using various language registers, etc.

This reference emphasizes the divine character of the Maharaja. The mention of the lotus flower is connected also to the form of a stanza which is an example of *padmabandha*, a poetical formation hiding the picture of a lotus flower:



This particular stanza can be rewritten in the shape of eight-petalled *padma*, the most common variation of the lotus flower composition in *citra* poetry.²⁵ As well as *nāgabandha* it belongs to more

²⁵ The same pattern was used *inter alia* by Ānandavardhana (ca. the 9th century) in the fourth stanza of *Devīśataka*. More information concerning the eight-petalled lotus flower pattern in: Cielas 2013.

complicated visual formations, which have to be composed according to strict requirements.²⁶ It is easy to notice the *anuprāsa* (alliteration) as the *ta* syllable repeats eight times. This is due to the fact that the uppermost letter, the so-called *mūrdhanya*, has to appear in particular places in each quarter of a stanza (syllables in bold). The same letter occupies the most important position in the text's visual form—it is placed in the floral receptacle. Also *chekānuprāsa* (clever alliteration) is caused by the formula which requires the repetition of groups of syllables. According to the scheme, one of the requirements of the eight-petalled lotus flower pattern in Sanskrit visual poetry is the repetition of the first three syllables of the opening quarter at the end of a stanza in the reverse order (underlined syllables):

tanubhāmāsurasamatatamarakṣāvraṇāruta |
taruṇābjāsthā viratatavitta sabhānuta || CNM 22.

Although the stanza composed by Rajaraja Varma is not grammatically complex and sophisticated it shows in a textbook manner all the relations between the particular components of *citrakāvya*. The author not only used in a laudatory poem a visual formation which perfectly matches the purpose but also created an example of the lotus flower pattern in which its sound, image and meaning intertwine and complement each other. *Padmabandhas*, probably one of the most common forms in *citra* poetry, are a very important element of laudatory poems, usually addressed to a deity. Poets have used lotus patterns as a poetical offering. It is a kind of prayer, a litany containing the lotus made of a poet's artistry. An offering of a certain flower, *puṣpa*, is an important element of adoration. Using *padmabandha* poets praise

²⁶ The oldest known example of the work presenting the rules concerning how to compose a pictorial stanza in Sanskrit is *Agnipurāṇa* (compiled probably ca. 8th–9th century). It instructs us how to create three types of *padmabandha* (named in various parts of the text *ambuja*, *saroruha*, *saroja* and *sarasīruha*)—with four, eight and sixteen petals, but gives no examples. Rajaraja Varma's composition falls within the second kind of a lotus flower pattern described in *Agnipurāṇa*.

the god or the person to whom their poem is addressed. In this case it can be Lord Viṣṇu, Lord Brahmā or Maharaja Visakham Tirunal. The form interacts then with the meaning of the text.

A. R. Rajaraja Varma concludes his work paying the highest regards to his uncle and teacher—Kerala Varma Valiya Koil Tampuran. He calls himself *bālakavi* (the young poet) and beloved nephew of the great scholar (*mahāpaṇḍitapriyabhāgineya*). In addition, he emphasizes once again his devotion to the ruler informing that “the work [called] The Garland of Glorious Viśakha, Lord of Vañci’s Stars has been finished”.²⁷

At the very end the date and place of the composition are given. The author informs us that *Citranakṣatramālā* was written in Aṅantapuram. Although there is a village in Tamil Nadu called Aṅantapuram, the remark refers to the so-called Aṅantapuram Palace at Harippāt, where Rajaraja Varma spent his childhood with his mother and uncle. The date given at the end of the work says “1056 Thulam 19”. Following the local tradition the poet dated his work according to the *Kollavarṣam*—the Malayalam calendar used by the people of Kerala. This sidereal solar calendar is directly connected to astrology and *nakṣatras*. It consists of twelve months. Each of them is named after the constellation rising in the orbit of the earth in a particular moment. *Citranakṣatramālā* was written on the 19th day of Tulām month, 1056. According to the Gregorian calendar it is 2nd November, 1880. The printed edition of the work wrongly claims that it was composed in 1881. The imprecision is probably a result of the incorrect conversion of the date.²⁸

Composing *Citranakṣatramālā*, young A. R. Rajaraja Varma took full advantage of his education in Sanskrit. He decided to compose a

²⁷ CNM, colophon: *śrīkeralavarmamahāpaṇḍitapriyabhāgineyasya rājarājavarmaṇo bālakaveḥ kṛtiś śrīviśākhavañciśanakṣatramālā samāptā ||*

²⁸ 1056 of the Malayalam calendar includes not only 1881 but also 1880 of the Gregorian calendar. This is due to the fact that both systems are not congruent and 1881 started on 19th Dhanu 1056—in the middle of the fifth month of the Malayalam calendar, while Tulām is its third month.

classical laudatory poem but applied eye-catching kind of poetical technique and form and mixed it with contemporary elements. Following the form of Sanskrit hymns of praise he created a work showing his admiration for the patron. The text, written in Sanskrit, for centuries playing the role of Indian *lingua franca*, brings to mind the great amount of works aimed at spreading the glory and legitimizing the power of the ruler across the subcontinent. Nevertheless, Rajaraja Varma refers also to the local culture. Although he writes in Sanskrit, he uses the Malayalam script. He praises the local ruler and hides subtle references to the regional tradition in the text. He mentions Visakhm Tirunal and the land of Vañci, creates metaphors exploiting topics very popular among South Indian storytellers, refers to local beliefs and imbues the work with multiple astrological references complying with the Keralan astrology. He chooses motives which are universal for India on the one hand, and typical for Kerala on the other. This clever combination makes *Citranakṣatramālā* versatile, possible to understand not only in Kerala, but at the same time closely related to the local culture. The usage of the pan-Indian form of *citrakāvya* plays a similar role.

The importance of patronage in Rajaraja Varma's works is underlined by the fact that *Citranakṣatramālā* is not his only composition dedicated to Maharaja Visakhm Tirunal. A few years later, in 1885, according to a similar scheme of using a classical form of literature for the description of contemporary events he wrote *Viśākhatulābhāraprabandha* (Bhaskaran 1985: 7). The work composed in a *campū* style, characterized by mixing prose and verse, depicts the Maharaja's *tulāpuruṣadāna*—the ceremony based on weighing the ruler against valuable things such as gold or precious stones and offering them to a deity.

A. R. Rajaraja Varma is an example of a poet who falls within the 19th-century trend aiming at the revival of Sanskrit literature. Nevertheless, in contrast to his uncle, Kerala Varma, he was also a great advocate of new tendencies in literature. For him Sanskrit and its classical forms were a tool—mastered, honored and

enabling his coming to the fore, joining the greatest poets of his time. *Citranaḡsatramālā* is an example of Rajaraja Varma's early style and his fight for showing his individuality, but at the same time, relating to normative texts and adhering to the rules provided by literary theorists.

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