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Talking Stones: Royal Inscriptions in Medieval Karṇāṭaka*

SUMMARY: The specific motivation of the medieval Hoysaḷa king Viṣṇuvardhana for a program of inscriptions that included both local and trans-regional elements was the necessity to present his lineage as a strong dynasty comparable to that of his forerunners. On the top of it, he chose a particularly shiny stone, the sandstone: this element of unicity in his program might be understood in relation to the necessity of the king to differentiate himself from other lineages and to make his presence on the territory quite noticeable. If the epigraphic sources—together with the temples, the sacred areas, and the literary courtly production—are to be considered as forms of media of communication, even of "mass-media", we must read them in the space where they are located, as part of a broader cultural and political process.

KEYWORDS: Karṇāṭaka, Hoysaḷa, inscription, medieval, Kannaḍa, foundation legend, legitimation.

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1. Theoretical premises

The title of the article, dealing with the legitimation[1] strategies of the Hoysaḷa dynasty in Karṇāṭaka, does not refer to the patent fact that the stone of the inscriptions is an important source of information about the past, but rather to the stone itself as a multifunctional medium: the following pages represent an attempt to read the documentation about a complex, unstable and fluid period of the medieval history of South India by means of textual analysis as well as a historical approach that takes into consideration the materiality of the sources.

In the first place, "medium" is a problematic term: it has a heterogeneous history that stretches from natural science to Theosophy, and it has been interpreted with widely different approaches, such as aesthetic, linguistic and functional ones.[2] Moreover, the idea of media of communication has mainly been thought of from the vantage point of image and image-construction[3] rather than text. By contrast, Mersch's[4] negative definition of "medium" as a historically and culturally context-bound concept gives the word an extensive radiance that reaches out to image as well as text. Within this last perspective the epigraphic sources could

[1] On royal legitimation, see, among others, Erkens 2002. As to the debated and problematic concept of legitimation, I am aware of the critiques raised by Pollock 2006 and Ali 2004 (I have to thank one of the peer reviewers for pointing out the article of Frese 2010 on the topic). I use the term "legitimation" to indicate the conscious necessity of a kingdom to get consolidation and to be acknowledged; I consider the approaches of Kulke and Shulman effective working models to better understand the early medieval period through the examination of the sources.

[2] For an overview of its genealogy and its stratifications, see Mersch 2013.

[3] See the milestone contributions on "new media" regarding our perception of reality in: Sontag 1977 and Baudrillard 1981, and Belting 2001 on medium as the embodiment of the image, as "Trägermedium"; nevertheless, image-production was already being used extensively in pre-modern periods as a political and social medium of communication.

[4] Nothing is a medium in a substantial and historically stable sense, but everything can be used and analyzed as a medium, see Mersch 2013.

be considered as a medium and as part of broader cultural and political processes.[5] Hence, in order to fully comprehend the texts composed by the scribes, we must read them in the space where the kings installed them. In addition to this, if we zoom out, we might include also the temples, the sacred areas, and look at all these elements together with the literary courtly production as forms of media of communication, even of "mass-media". For this reason, in this article I will try not just to read the texts that are engraved in the royal inscriptions, but also take into account where they were placed within the sacred areas, and in which part of the kingdom they were situated.

A phase of transformation is most revealing of the dynamics between power and media, and the "early" medieval period in the area that is today Karṇāṭaka, especially between the 11th and 14th centuries, was indeed characterized by the emergence of chiefdoms and little kingdoms[6] that would later on develop into bigger domains and eventually into great empires such as the Vijayanagara empire. In particular, between the 10th and the 12th centuries the different lineages that ruled the territory were in constant conflict—or better, there was a constant potentiality for conflicts.[7] Likewise, the little kingdoms in medieval South India were characterized by a territorial segmentation and a political development "from below".[8] In this context, the socio-political

[5] In this article, I will examine a very specific case in early medieval South India, but the role of inscriptions as expressive medium is not restricted to this geographic area or this specific historical period (suffice to think of the medieval period in Europe or of the Greek-Roman empire, see, among many others, Liddel-Low 2013 on the different usages of inscriptions in Greek and Latin literature).

[6] For a full-fledged study on the phenomenon of the little Kingdoms in medieval period and also later on, see Kulke 1993 and Dirks 1979. See also Kulke 1995.

[7] Apart from a few good works on single dynasties, a very overall view on the medieval period is to be found in Nilakanta Sastri 1975 and in Kulke and Rothermund 2010.

[8] The studies of Stein (Stein 1977 and Stein 1980) on medieval pyramidally segmented societies and on the state formation concerned the Pallava (555 CE–869

landscape was composed of different "nuclear areas of sub-regional power" (Kulke 1993: 2): Stein[9] pointed them out as one of the features in the formation of the little kingdoms that were constantly dealing with the problems derived from these nuclear areas. In order to achieve legitimation within this unstable situation, rulers undertook many strategic policies such as the royal patronage of pilgrimage areas (*tīrtha*), the systematic and large-scale settlements of Brahmins, and the construction of new "imperial temples" within the core region of the kingdom.[10] Moreover, the king needed to constantly re-establish his power by including different parts of society.[11] He could, in this sense, be described as a successful adventurer, controlled by the family members, the high officers and the feudatory rulers, the guilds and the territorial assemblies. In fact, when we speak of the king, we shall not understand him as an individual, but rather as an institution[12] subject to different forces: sovereignty could consequently be understood as a medium itself in which a synthesis between the different components of the society is constantly attempted.[13] The architecture and the sculptures of the temples as well as the texts of the inscriptions and

CE ca.) and especially the Cōḻa empire (950 CE–1100 CE ca.), but the dynamics underlined by the author are present in the whole area that Stein calls the Cōḻa macro-region, of whose the south of Karṇāṭaka, especially the Gaṅgavāḍi (Stein 1980: 316–321), was a part; it constituted a peripheral zone that shared the basic characters of a segmentary peasant society in constant negotiation with the other inhabitants, in particular the "warriors" from the hills (see Stein 1980: 77 for a reference to the Hoysaḷas in this regard).

9 Stein 1984.

10 See Kulke 1993: 1–16. And in particular, on religious patronage see Schmiedchen 2014.

11 See Shulman 1985 and, in particular, Ali 2004 on the role of the court.

12 For the conceptualization of the king as a function and the complex analysis of his representation, cf. Kantorowicz 1957, Dirks 1987.

13 This new approach is at the basis of a wider research project "The Kings and the Media" developed together with Dr. Bignami and the e-Science centre of the University of Tübingen.

the compositions of the courtly poets were the main channels the kings had at their disposal to display such a synthesis—to provide a "body" to their elusive power.

Contemporary to the formation of the little kingdoms, we see the emergence of another important feature in the cultural development of South India, that is the use of vernaculars as literary and political languages.[14] This turn in the perception of *mārga* and *dēśika* is strictly connected with a change in the public perspective, as the *janapada-bhāṣā* becomes, beside *saṃskṛta*, the medium of expression of some of the newly formed kingdoms. An explanatory case is the inscription EC XIV Tn 191 of 1117 CE in Taḷakād, the capital of the Gaṅga dynasty. The text, that runs along the basement stones of the Kīrtinārāyaṇa temple, celebrates the Hoysaḷa king Viṣṇuvardhana, who had conquered Taḷakād and defeated the Gaṅgas' overlord, the Tamil dynasty of the Cōḻas. This inscription is in Tamil and Sanskrit, whereas another inscription,[15] by the same king, Viṣṇuvardhana, and from the same year, but located in the capital of his kingdom, Bēlūr, is in Kannaḍa and Sanskrit; in other words, different languages are used in different areas, addressing different kind of audiences.

The first attestation of Kannaḍa is the inscription found in Halmiḍi, a village near Bēlūr from 500 CE ca. From that period onwards the percentage of inscriptions in epigraphic Kannaḍa[16] (or in Kannaḍa mixed with Sanskrit) rose constantly, but the real shift took place with the Rāṣṭrakūṭa rulers (8th–10th cent. ca.), under whose patronage the first extant Kannaḍa text on poetry and grammar, the *Kavirājamārga*[17] (875 CE), was composed. At the court of one of

[14] See Pollock 1998 and Pollock 2006.

[15] EC V Bl 58.

[16] On the differences between epigraphic Kannaḍa and Old Kannaḍa, the first attested literary form of Kannaḍa remained, see, among others, Ramachandra and Rai 2015 and Narasiṃhācārya 1940.

[17] The *Kāvirājamarga* was long attributed to the king Nṛpatuṅga Amōghavarṣa himself, the patron of the actual author, Śrīvijaya. It is striking

their vassals, a Cāḷukya ruler, lived Pampa, the author of the first Kannaḍa epic, the *Vikramārjuna Vijaya* (950 CE ca.). This tendency fully developed during the Hoysaḷa and Cāḷukya dynasties (10th–14th cent. ca.): the adoption of the vernacular language first in the public narrative of inscriptions and afterwards in the literary works represented a moment of self-identification that marked a sharp departure from the hierarchical order represented by Sanskrit (see Nagaraj 2003), and constituted the first step of the cultural negotiation that created a flourishing literature (see Narasiṃhācārya 1940) between the 10th and 13th centuries in Karṇāṭaka. Let me be clear: the vernacular gained more space in the inscriptions and in the literary texts, in some cases displacing Sanskrit, in other cases engaging in a sort of mutual influence, but Sanskrit never disappeared and many of the authors we know of wrote in both languages. Cosmopolitan and local elements are always present in the cultural developments of Indian societies and the melding of the two can account for many historical phenomena. In this sense, Vernacularization and Sanskritization shall be seen as two sides of a homogenous and constant almost amorous play, where trans-regional and regional elements do not simply represent two different strata of the society, neither can they be simply attributed to distinct and conflicting forces.

Finally, as Shulman (Shulman 1985: 15) skillfully wrote: "In South India kingship is less a fact than a concern, a congealed longing always in danger of dissolving back into despair". Sovereignty had to offer a synthesis of different cults, traditions, and languages in order to maintain its own power within a very fragile balance. At the same time the king had to consolidate his own position by creating in the mind of his subjects the idea of a strong kingdom partially defined by its territorial borders and partially outlined by the boundaries of the royal imagination.

2. The Hoysaḷas: The voice of the sandstone

The intention of the rulers to effectively communicate with the people is manifested, among others, by the peculiar way of engraving stones

that the oldest literary compositions in Kannaḍa, Tamil as well as Malayāḷam that remain are all grammatical/rhetorical treatise.

in order to create a more readable product, as, for example, in the choice of a particularly shining stone, like the sandstone that we see in the Hoysaḷas temples. The Hoysaḷa dynasty[18] (1000–1343 CE ca.) was centered in the south of Karṇāṭaka. Coming from the area of the modern village of Angadi (old Śaśakapura) on the feet of the Western Ghat, it established its center in the territory of Bēlūr and Haḷēbīḍ, in the Hassan district, in the area of Gaṅgavāḍi.

Taking into account the emergence of this kingdom, it is the reign of Viṣṇuvardhana (ruled 1113–1143 CE ca.) that represents an important turning point in the discursive self-representation of power. This *rājan* never achieved the independence from his Cāḷukyas over-lords,[19] and yet he fought to enlarge his territory toward the northern districts dominated by the Western Cāḷukyas,[20] and to take over the lack of power in the south created by the defeat of the Gaṅgas,[21] who had been displaced by Rājarāja Cōḻa in 991 CE.[22] As a result, he created the basis for an autonomous kingdom (see Bignami 2016) and laid the foundation of his own dynasty. In the light of this, the paper will concentrate especially on Viṣṇuvardhana period.[23] In fact, one of the aspects of this medieval king that is worth examining is his way

[18] On the Hoysaḷa dynasty, see Derret 1957.

[19] The Western Cāḷukyas, or Cāḷukyas of Kalyani, ruled from ca. 970 CE to 1180 CE.

[20] In the years between 1136 CE and 1142 CE he managed to reach as far as Baṅkāpura, but he was soon pushed back by the Cāḷukya king Jakadēmalla II (see Coehlo 1950: 92; according to Nilakanta Sastri (Nilakanta Sastri 2015: 179) Viṣṇuvardhana stationed in Baṅkāpura in 1149).

[21] The Gaṅgas were peasant chiefs that emerged in the 4th century and controlled the territory of the Gaṅgavāḍi until the 9th–10th century.

[22] In 1116 CE Viṣṇuvardhana defeated the Cōḻa governor in Taḷakād. See Nilakanta Sastri 2015: 174–175, and 192 ff. in the period between 12th and 13th century.

[23] The brief mention of Ballāḷa II, the nephew of Viṣṇuvardhana is meant to hint at the further evolution of the dynasty once it becomes more stable, but it is not studied further in this paper.

to overcome the specific instability of his kingdom and to sustain his effort to acquire independence: he consciously used both artistic and literary productions. More precisely, the royal discourse attempted to establish a new and distinct image of the ruling dynasty through the usage of an individual "brand" in order to differentiate itself from other lineages: the Hoysaḷas' "brand" was the carved sandstone deployed as multifunctional medium.

The first function of the "carved sandstone" is the one we see in the temples, and indeed a distinguishing feature of the Hoysaḷa dynasty's art and architecture is the prolific building activity[24] and iconographic choices (see Evans 1997 and Bignami in this volume). Moreover, the type of stone used in the Hoysaḷa architecture is soft stone that makes possible to carve the walls of the temples elaborately.[25] On the other hand, it is on "carved sandstone" that we read most of the epigraphic documentation: together with the sculptures, the Hoysaḷas developed a unique taste for complex and long inscriptions that filled many of the walls outside and inside the temples, the basements of the sculptures and the pillars, thus transforming the sacred areas into a scripted space[26] for the devotees and the subjects to read. In this sense, we might speak of a mass-media, as mentioned in the Premises. In fact, under the rule of Viṣṇuvardhana, a high number[27] of inscriptions, and especially long ones, were made, but there is no record of a court poet.[28]

[24] See Settar 1992 for an overall analysis of the thousands of records and monuments produced during the 350 years of the Hoysaḷa rule: he has identified 1.521 temples and about 958 centers.

[25] The uniqueness of Hoysaḷa art has been pointed out to me by Dr. Cristina Bignami during our work together and the many field trips we undertook in the last five years.

[26] On the idea of "scripted space" see Klein 2004.

[27] I counted around 230 inscriptions variously distributed in the territory (see below).

[28] Under the reign of Viṣṇuvardhana there were active poets and scholars, such as, Nāgavarma II, author of important grammatical works, and the poet Nāgacandra or "Abhinava Pampa", the second Pampa, author

The apex of the Hoysaḷa kingdom is represented by Viṣṇuvardhana's nephew, Ballāḷa II (ruled 1173–1220 CE), who became an independent king. Ballāḷa II strongly supported literary production and had at his court one of the finest representatives of classical Kannaḍa literature, the poet Janna, who is said to have also composed two inscriptions,[29] a feature that was not common among court poets in this period. At the same time, he adopted different types of iconography and followed his grandfather in architectural magnificence and in the use of sandstone. The old and vexed question "how do kings express their power" got a new answer by the medieval Hoysaḷas dynasty that opted for carved sandstone—be it that of the inscriptions or the finely carved material of the sculptures—as their main media of expression making it into their specific marque.

The choice to make the stone a distinctive mark of the dynasty was combined with and reinforced by the adoption of the local Kannaḍa language as the medium for his inscriptions. In fact, if we examine the epigraphic material at our disposal, the mastery of the composers and scribes is indeed remarkable. Looking at the texts themselves as well as at their length and at the literary proficiency that the composers show, we would suggest that they were much more than just a "report" or an edict to inform about the king's decisions. In the course of Indian history inscriptions were often, almost always, more than just a report, but if we consider the other elements that combined under the realm of Viṣṇuvardhana, namely the absence of strong courtly literature, the choice of a specific type of stone, the sandstone, together with the magnificence of the temples, we might well read these inscriptions as the *principal* voice that the king chose for himself. From the data collected in the eighteen volumes of the *Epigraphia Carnatica*, the inscriptions under Viṣṇuvardhana are concentrated around

of the so-called *Pampa Rāmāyaṇa*—a Jaina version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (See Rice 1921 and Narasimhacharya 1972).

[29] The inscription at Cannarāya Paṭṭana in 1190 CE and the one in Tarīkere that dates to 1197 CE.

the years 1116–1117 CE, 1120 CE, 1137–1142 CE marking important victories of the king against respectively the Cōḻas, the Gaṅgas, and the Cāḷukyas dynasties. They are distributed as follows:

Centre of the kingdom:

86 inscriptions in vols. V and XV—taluks*:* Bēlūr, Hassan, Cannarayapatna and the taluk of Arsikere, that was on the border with the Gaṅgavāḍi.

18 inscriptions in vol. II—taluk Śravaṇa Beḷgoḷa

North, on the border with the Cāḷukya kingdom:

32 inscriptions in vol. VI—taluks: Cikkamagaluru, Tarikere, Kadur.

8 inscriptions in vol. VII (northerner than the taluks in vol VI)—taluks*:* Śimoga, Śikārpur, Cannagiri, Sorab.

South, in the Gaṅgavāḍi:

49 inscriptions in vols. III, IV and XIV—taluks Kṛṣṇarājpēṭ, Cāmarājnagar, Nagamaṅgala, Yeḍatore, Huṇsur, Yeḷandūr, Maḷavaḷḷi, Maṇḍya, Nañjanguḍ, Mysore, Seringapatana, Tirumakūḍal-Narsīpūr.

East, towards the reign of the Cōḻas:

8 inscriptions in vol. IX—taluks: Bangalore, Doḍ-Ballāpur, Hoskote, Anekal, Māgadi, Devanhaḷḷi, Nelamangala.

3 inscriptions in vols. X and XII—taluks: Kōlār, Mālūr, Cik-Ballāpur.

16 inscriptions in vol. XII and XVI—taluks: Tiptur, Gubbi, Kunigal, Ciknāyakanhaḷḷi.

If we proceed inductively and dwell on the royal edicts, such as those found in the *śilāśāsana*, and especially in the *praśasti* parts, we might outline a few elements that the king or his "messengers" embedded in these texts. First, the celebration of royal rituals that are connected with the old Vedic religion and parallel land donations in the effort

of the king to establish an alliance with powerful religious groups; together with the use of widespread poetical images, these themes trace back to a trans-regional tendency. Secondly, the family goddess[30] and the *topos* of the animal, portrayed in the royal emblem, that have a constitutive function in the foundation legend, are associated with a local tendency.

The ten inscriptions examined in the article have been selected taking into consideration two parameters:

1) Content

Inscriptions that are representative cases in the display of the two tendencies mentioned above, as for instance, EC VI Cm 161 pointing to the co-existence of the different religious communities, EC V Ak 110 accounting for the connection with the religious groups, or Hn 116 presenting the king and the queen in a very conventional way, relating to a trans-regional poetical set. Of particular interest for the development of the foundation legend are EC V Bl 58 and EC V Bl 124, the first testimony and the integral account of the legend; Bl V Ak 71 and EC VI Tk 45 represent the successive and full-fledged version.

2) Location

Most of these inscriptions, in addition to their relevant content, are located in significant religious and political centres: EC XV Bl 255, EC V Bl 71, EC V Bl, EC V Bl 9, EC V Bl 58 are all in Bēlūr, one of the two capitals of the Hoysaḷas dynasty, and though Bl 9 and Bl 255 occupied a particular prominent spot, all the others were also accessible, except for the copper plates Bl 71 (see below). EC V Bl 124 is inscribed on the outer wall of a very prominent temple, the Pārśvanātha *basadi* in Haḷēbiḍ/Bastihaḷḷi, that is part of Haḷēbīḍ, the other Hoysaḷas capital.

[30] On the goddess Vāsantikā and the fight with a tiger, see the article of Bignami in this volume on Vāsantikā as *grāmadevatā*.

> Kellangere, Arsikere and Amṛtapura were all strategical centers in the Hoysaḷas' attempt to extend their dominion at the expenses of the Cāḷukyas in the north (EC VI Tk 45 in Amṛtapura) or of the Cōḻas in the Gaṅgavāḍi (EC V Ak 110 in Kellangere and EC V Ak 71 in Arsikere).

In the following paragraphs, I will first analyze how the aforementioned elements, represented in a wide range of epigraphical sources, are interpreted and expressed in the Hoysaḷas' sandstone; I hope to show that both tendencies, the trans-regional and the local, are never really separated one from the other, but rather combined together to conjure up the image of a strong and powerful kingdom, where there was actually a constant fight to keep the territory safe from external attacks and raids. Secondly, I will look in particular at the formation of the foundation legend and I will propose a possible analysis of how and where the various components got together: if the sandstone was the hallmark of the Hoysaḷas, it might well be that a different space was given to each element according to the relevant media. In fact, any object can be considered as a sign that transports and evokes a readable signified meaning, yet a different type of signs, as literary and artistic production, belongs to a structurally different kinds of "language". If every idiom encodes meanings in a unique way, and in this sense, modify the message itself,[31] to what extent did the peculiar character of each media differently shape the foundation legend?

3. Trans-regional elements

3.1. The Brahmanical community

In the effort to obtain the support of different strata of the society, to represent the different "souls" of the kingdom, the *rājan*—be it a *rajādhirāja* or a *samanta*—had to be like a prism and be able to mirror all the facets of its territories. One of these facets—and

[31] See Gombrich (Gombrich 1999: 50) on the specificity of each media, with a special focus on "image" and the visual media.

quite a powerful one—is that of the religious and ritual community of the Brahmins. The performance of rituals, especially the Vedic rituals, were one of the trans-regional devices used by the king Viṣṇuvardhana to assert his connection with the Brahmanical community and also to show his power.[32]

The inscription EC VI Cm 161 mentioning a *tulāpuruṣa*[33] done by the king in favor of his ministers is a good example of this strategy; it is dated 1137 CE as Viṣṇuvardhana launched the final assault at the Cāḷukya kingdom. Moreover, it is worth looking at as it entails the complexity of the religious milieux: it was found on a pillar in the *basadi* of the Brahmeśvara temple, in the village of Sindigere, on the route to the north of the kingdom, and although it is a Jaina *śāsana*, it makes a clear reference to the Vedic rituals. In this period, we still have a strong presence of the Jaina religion together with Vaiṣṇavism, and until the so-called *vacana* movement initiated by Basavaṇṇa, it seems that the temple-based religions had established a shared social monopoly;[34] the *vaidika* and *śramaṇa* were complementary groups that constituted the "tension-ridden" core of the political and cultural communities.[35] In this sense, a Jaina *śāsana* can mention an old Brahmanical royal ritual and appeal to that community also.

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[32] Schmiedchen (Schmiedchen 2006: 147–140) stated that while in the 10th–11th century there is an increase in data on the *tulāpuruṣa* ritual, in the 12th–13th century the sources attested a concentration on just a few kings: this development might indicate the transition from local chiefs to king or semi-independent rulers.

[33] On the ritual of *tulāpuruṣa*, one of the sixteen *mahādāna*s (*Matsya-purāṇa* 274–289), that consists in the weighing of the king against gold and its distribution among the Brahmins, see Schmiedchen 2006.

[34] This will strongly change around the second half of the 12th century with the Vīraśaiva movement.

[35] The continuous balance of power between the two groups is well exemplified by the syncretism of Viṣṇuvardhana himself, who converted from Jainism to Vaiṣṇavism, possibly in order to facilitate ritual legitimization for his imperial ambitions, see Kamath 1980: 125. Moreover, according to Stein

(ll. 25–35) […] *śrīmanmahāpradhānaṃ hiriyabhaṃḍārimaṟiyānedaṃ ḍanāynakaruṃ śrīmanmahāpradhānaṃ daṃḍanāyakaṃ bharatamayyagalu sakavarṣaṃ 1060 neya piṃgala saṃvatsarad puṣyasu 10 ādivārad uttarāyaṇasaṃkrāntiyalu tuḷāpuruṣamahādānadalu taṃma neleyuru siṃdaṃgeṟeya basadige śrīviṣṇuvarddhanahoysaḷadevara kayyalu dhārāpūrvvakaṃ haḍedu biṭṭa savagōnahaḷḷiya sīmāsaṃmaṃdham eṃt eṃdaḍe*

The great minister, senior treasurer, Maṟiyāne *daṇḍanāyaka*,[36] and the great minister, the *daṇḍanāyaka* Bharatamayya, on the Piṅgala year 1060 of the Śaka era, in the 10th day and Uttarāyaṇa Saṃkranti,[37] as part of the great donations such as the *tulāpuruṣa*,[38] received[39] from the hands of Viṣṇuvardhana Hoysaḷa Deva Savagōnahaḷḷi, and granted it for the *basadi* of Sindaṅgeṟe, their dwelling place. Description of the boundaries[40] follows.

The performance of Vedic rituals,[41] or at least the statement of having done one, is already found, among other dynasties, also in the inscriptions

(Stein 1980: 80–81) there was a correlation between Jainism and non-peasant warrior groups to whom the Hoysaḷas originally belong. Yet, the Hoysaḷas in order to set their power among the peasants supported the Brahmanical institutions, as can be seen in this very inscription.

[36] A military and political title: leader of the army, a general or a viceroy; cf. Sircar 1966: 80–81: "Daṇḍanāyaka (IE 8-3; El 30; CII 4; BL), probably a translation of Greek Strategos; a general; a leader of forces, an army officer; a military commander; […]".

[37] A festival day; *saṃkrānti*, indicates one of the main passages of the sun or a planet from one sign or position in the heavens into another, in this case it is the passage to the northern course.

[38] *tuḷāpuruṣamahādānadalu*: denominative infinite indicating the ritual of the great gifts, among which is also the *tulāpuruṣa*.

[39] *dhārāpūrvvakam haḍedu*: they received the land in a widespread ritualistic way: through the pouring of water and milk from the hands of the donor to the one of the receivers' (*dhārā-pūrvvakam*).

[40] Read *sīmāsaṃbaṃdha* for *sīmāsaṃmaṃdham*.

[41] As to the reference to Vedic rituals, in EC V Bl 124 (1133 CE) Viṣṇuvardhana is said to be Indra performing *tulāpuruṣa*, *hiraṇyagarbha* and *aśvaratha* (ll. 26–27 *hiraṇyagarbbhatuḷāpuruṣāśvaratha-viśvacakrakalpavṛkṣapramukha-*

of the Kadambas,[42] that ruled the area of Banavāsi between the 4th and the 7th centuries, and were, together with the Gaṅgas in the east part of south Karṇāṭaka, the forerunners of the Hoysaḷas. As we will see again later with the Cāḷukyas, Viṣṇuvardhana tried to create a parallelism/reference with his predecessors. Another bond with the priestly community was established through the grant of villages to the Brahmins, these villages were called *agrahāra*.[43] The necessity of the king to gain some new pieces of land to give in exchange for political support created a recursive mechanism that has been effectively described by Shulman as two phases: the first "normal" one that includes the redistribution of resources (*śrī*), as land or immunities, and a second one that is propelled by the temporary nature of the first and represents the predatory phase of war expeditions. The king becomes a sort of "circus manager" who has to periodically gather people to support him (see Shulman 1985: 33–40).

The inscription EC XV Bl 255, composed between 1117–1120 CE ca., that can be seen at the base of a Madanikā in the south-eastern pillar of the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* in the royal temple of Cennakēśava, depicts

makhaśatamakhaṃ); similarly, in EC V Ak 144 (1137 CE) Viṣṇuvardhana is said to have made a *tulāpuruṣa* (l. 35 *śrīmad viṣṇuvarddhanadēvana tōlapuruṣamahādānadalu*).

[42] See, for instance, EC V Bl 121, EC V Hn 45 and EC V Bl 245. I mention the Kadambas as forerunners of the Hoysaḷa, but Vedic rituals are attributed to many dynasties, e.g., Sātavāhanas, Pallavas, Cōḻas (though the latter to a lesser degree) and they were a central feature of the ritually incorporative kingship (on incorporative kingship see Hocart 1970, on Vedic royal rituals see Gonda 1966 and Heestermann 1957).

[43] On the term *agrahāra* (as rent-free village), see Sircar 1966: 10–11. The presence of Brahmins in South India is already testified from the 6th–8th century CE and together with the peasant groups they constituted the core of the agrarian system. We find attestations of Brahmanical village settlements and rituals accounts also in *sandeśa kāvya* (I owe this information to Sivan Goren, a scholar of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, who has worked on *sandeśa kāvya* in South India).

Bēlūr itself, one of the two capitals of the reign, as an *agrahāra*:

> *svasti śrīmatu kuntaḷadēśada mahā agrahāra bēhūra tribhuvanamala-devara māṇikai*
>
> Hail! Prosperity! The jewel of the king Tribhuvanamalla (Viṣṇuvardhana)[44] of the great *agrahāra* settlement of Bēhūra (Bēlūr) in the Kuntaḷa country.

I chose this inscription because it is located in a very significant place: at the base of one of the most peculiar creations of Hoysaḷa art, the Madanikās: these sculptures of female figures are present all over the temple and they represent a symbol of Hoysaḷa art;[45] in this sense, we find here in one and the same space and in a very prominent position the sandstone used both with sculptural and epigraphic functions. Below is a typical land donation (EC V Bl 71):

> (ll. 249–258) […] *āsthānakka rājyābhivṛddhiga śrīvijayanārāyaṇadēvara divyasaṃnidhānadalu japahutahōmaṃgaḷaṃ māḍuvallige nūṟippattubhaṭṭa-rugaḷige sarvanamasyavāgi dānaṃ māḍida bhūmi hiriyamuguḷi cikanahaḷḷi sa-hita | ippattoṃdubhaṭṭarugaḷige beṇṇeyūru | aṟeyahaḷḷi keḷeyabeyahaḷḷi sahita | śrīvaiṣṇavaru mūvatteraḍakkaṃ tagarenāḍa niṭṭūru || nārāyaṇāya namaḥ ||*
>
> [Śrī Viṣṇuvardhana Poysaḷa Deva] for the prosperity of the royal court and the kingdom, donated the following lands as *sarvanamasya*:[46] to 120 Bhaṭṭas, who perform the prayers (*japa*), the oblations (*huta*), and the offerings (*hōma*) at the divine presence of the god Śri Vijaya Nārāyaṇa, the land of Hiriya-Muguḷi with Cikanahaḷḷi; to 21 Bhaṭṭas the land of Beṇṇeyūru and Aṟeyahaḷḷi with Keḷeyabeyahaḷḷi; to 32 Śrīvaiṣṇava[47] the land of Niṭṭūru in the Tagare region. Honor to Nārāyaṇa.

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[44] In the translation, the round brackets furnish supplementary information or the relevant term in the original text. The square brackets are used to add a syntactically necessary element.

[45] On the Madanikās see Del Bonta 1981 and Bignami 2012.

[46] *sarvanamasya*: a rent-free tenure (Sircar 1966: 211).

[47] Already in the 8th century the Hindu groups were mainly composed of *bhakta*s, whose religions, well routed in devotionalism (like the Śrīvaiṣṇava), were congenial for the Brahmins' leader as an ideological counter to Jainism and Buddhism.

It is worth noticing that is not rare to find a big land donation recorded on copper plates (*tāmraśāsana*), as this one, engraved on five copper plates and kept in the Cennakēśava temple, in Bēlūr. This inscription, dated to 1117 CE, contains almost all the same details as in the stone inscription EC V Bl 58, that will be analyzed later in connection with the foundation legend.[48] This type of record was not a public narrative, as the *śilāśāsana*, but rather an official record of the transaction, and they were not so as accessible as the stone inscriptions. This fact corroborates the idea that in order to strengthen the bond with the religious communities the concrete donation of land was not enough, and it also had to be publicized.

As a final example in this paragraph, an inscription where the statement of a connection between the king and the Brahmanical community, is brought forward in a very poetical way through a full-fledged story embedded in the territory on a stone near the Kallēśvara temple, in Kellangere (EC V Ak 110), an important religious and economic centre (see Patel 2001: 91) very near Arsikere, a strategic passage towards the north:

> (ll. 6–20) || *svasti śrīman mahāmaṃḍaleśvaraṃ tribhuvanamalla taḷakādu koṃgu naṃgali noḷambavadi banavāse hānuṃgallu goṃḍa bhujabalavīragaṃga viṣṇūvarddhanahoysaḷadevaru dōrasamu dradalu nelevīḍāgi sukhasaṃkathāvinōdadiṃ rājyaṃ geyyuttam ire || svasti yamaniyamasvādhyāyadhyānadhāraṇamaunānuṣṭhānajapasamādhiśīlaguṇasampanna ruṃyajanayājana adhyayana adhyāpanadānapratigraha-śaṭkarmmaniyataruṃ rugyajussāmātharvvaṇaṣadaṃga-vaṃdivṛṃdadāridrāndhakārasaṃharaṇapariṇatamārttaṇḍaruṃ muṃjiyajñōpavītabaddharuṃ hēmakarṇṇakuṃḍalaruṃ kṣatriyavaiśyaśūdratrayalalāṭapādaghaṭitaruṃ ādisamarttharuṃ balivaṃśakētugaḷuṃ śaraṇāgata jaḷanidhigaḷuṃ teṃkanayyāvaḷey enisi negaḷda śrīmadagrahāraṃ harihara puravāda kellaṃgeṟeya mahājanaṃgaḷa mahimōnnatiy ad eṃt eṃdaḍe || paḍedudu suprasiddha janamēdeyadatti koḍaṅganūre nōrppaḍe kaḍurayyam appud idakaṃ migil appudan ūran īven eṃdoḍan oḍagoṃḍu baṃdu vineyaṃgaḷin aggada viṣṇubhūbhujaṃ kuḍe paḍed illi kellageṟe sōbhisatirpparu viprar ellaruṃ || ballidaru toḍarddaḍ ārggaṃ mellidar iṣṭatvad eḍege śāstrōkutiyiṃd allade nuḍiyaru nuḍivaḍe* […]

[48] On the connection between the two inscriptions see *Epigraphia Carnatica* IX: C–CI and p. 124 for the dating of the engraving; it is worth noticing that the seal of Bl 71 bears the figure of a tiger.

Hail! The prosperous lord of the world, the hero of the three worlds, Taḷakād, Koṅgu,[49] Naṅgali, the Noḷamba (people of the north), Banavāse and Hānuṅgallu, the conqueror with strong arms of the Gaṅgas, was reigning while enjoying pleasant conversation in his palace in Dorasamudra (Haḷēbīḍ).

Hail! The Brahmins[50] of the city Kellaṅgere, the auspicious *agrahāram* of Harihara,[51] famous as the southern Ayavaḷe,[52] are perfectly acquainted with the great and special vows (restrictions), the recitation of the Veda, the meditation, the concentration, the practice of silence, the murmuring of prayers, the *samādhi*, the good disposition; they are devoted to the six-duties (*ṣaṭ-karrma*), that are the sacrifice, the sacrifice for the others, the study [of the Veda], the instruction, the donation and the receiving of gifts; they are extraordinary suns dispersing the darkness[53] of the flock who sings[54] the Ṛg, the Yajus and the Atharvaṇa and their six divisions; they are restrained by the sacred thread;[55] they have golden earrings on the ears[56] and all the three groups, the Kṣatriya, the Vaiśya and the Śūdra, touched their feet with the forehead, they are extremely capable, flag of the lineage of Bali,[57] oceans for those who come for protection. How to describe their greatness?

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[49] Koṅgu: Tamil Nadu according to H. Krishnamurty (personal communication); the Cera country, especially Coimbatur according to Kittel (Kittel 1894).

[50] *mahājanaṅgaḷa*: technical term for a guild of Brahmins (also for merchants).

[51] City of Śiva and Viṣṇu, Hariharapura.

[52] Ayavaḷe or Aihole: one of the big cities under the Cāḷukyas during the 5th–8th centuries, with a strong business community (*paradar*) and learned Brahmins.

[53] The darkness is here a symbol for ignorance, and it can be understood as that of the bard or as the cause of the poverty of the people.

[54] *vandi* could be both "well versed" and "bard". I thank one of the anonymous peer-reviewers for suggesting the interpretation I adopted.

[55] Having performed the *muñjiyajñōpavīta.*

[56] *hema karṇa kuṇḍala*: this is not usually part of the stylized description of Brahmins. In the 10th century in Lakkundi there were Śivāradhakas in an *agrahāra*. Later on, we find the Śiva Brahamins connected with Basavanna and the Vīraśaiva movement.

[57] They conquered the Bali *vaṃśa* by their virtue: this is a reference to the Viṣṇu *avatāra* of Vāmana, a Brahmin with all the signs mentioned

> At the sight of the village of Koḍaṅganūr obtained as a gift from the famous Janamajeya,[58] when the great king Viṣṇu said "I will give you a village that is even more abundant and rich than this one", the Brahmins all came with humbleness, he gave [it to them] and they, having obtained here Kellaṅgere, were all shining. They are learned men, when they are joined [with others], they are cordial to all; in the moment of the *iṣṭārtha* ritual[59] they will not speak any other words if not quoting from the *śāstra* .[60]

In this inscription dated to 1142 CE, the power of the king is symbolized by his capacity to draw the prestigious group of the highly learned Brahmins from the city of Koḍaṅganūr in the northern taluk of Muddebihal (Bijapur district) to the south, where the Hoysaḷas were ruling, to a city, Kellangere, that is, in turn, compared to the famous Ayavaḷe (Aihole), a rich and prosperous merchant city in the north of Karṇāṭaka. This reference to the powerful and well known city of the Cāḷukya dynasty is another attempt to present the kingdom as a rich and stable one by relating it to the merchant city of their overlords. In addition to this, in the course of the text, there are clear references to the priestly community, as for example the mention of Vāmana, the *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, who is a Brahmin, although this is a Śaiva inscription.

3.2. The King as a Marvelous Being

Another important trace of the trans-regional or cosmopolitan attitude of Viṣṇuvardhana is represented by the imageries used in connection with him: the description of the king as a marvelous and divine being

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before: *upavīta*, umbrella and golden earrings.

[58] The text of the inscription both in Rice and in the revised edition (*Epigraphia Carnatica* X: 193) has *janamēdeya*. Rice and the revised edition read Janamējaya, the famous king of the *Mahābhārata* epics; H. M. Nagaraja Rao, who contributed to the revised edition, has rised some doubts on the usage of epic material in a Śaiva inscription (personal communication).

[59] Read *iṣṭārthavād* for *iṣṭatvad*. Specific sacrifice for a specific desire.

[60] Read *śāstrōktiyiṃd* for *śāstrōkutiyiṃd*.

as well as that of the ruler as *savant*[61] or as the incarnation of all possible good qualities—beauty, intelligence, purity, strength—to their maximum extent,[62] trace back to the Sanskrit *kāvya* tradition, but are displayed through a wise mixture of Kannaḍa and Sanskrit.

In this section I have chosen some examples of a very widespread eulogistic technique. In EC V Bl 9 (1129[63] CE) is the *śāsana* itself that is compared to the root of the *dharma*, and the language used in this part is, as is common in the initial invocatory part,[64] Sanskrit. It is located in a very prominent place: near the fresh-water well to the east in the enclosure of the Saumyanāyaki temple, in the sacred area of Bēlūr.

> (ll. 3–4) [...] *jayatu jayatu śaśvat śāsanaṃ jainam ētat saphaḷavipula-dharmmaśrīlatābaddhamūḷaṃ*[65]
>
> Victory to the eternal Jaina teaching that is the root to which is attached the holy creeper of dharma which is broad and fruitful.

On the other side, in EC V Hn 116, a few years later, in 1122–3 CE, on a stone south of the Dharmeśvara temple, in the village of Grāma (or Śānti Grāma), the language is Old Kannaḍa, more precisely,

[61] See Pollock 2006: 166–173. As to Viṣṇuvardhana, it is said that he can teach the rules of grammar (*śabdavidyā*).

[62] He is so handsome that he can seduce Hara (EC V Bl 58 l.39: *calvanē haranaṃ mōhisalārppaneṃtuvadhikam*), and he is so pure that just by beholding him one becomes free of sin (as, e.g., in EC V Bl 58, EC V Hn 116).

[63] The inscription is quite damaged; according to Rice (EC V Bl 9) the date is not certain "about 1120"; the revised edition (*Epigraphia Carnatica* IX: 105) from the available details gives the date as 1129 CE.

[64] Cf. Schmiedchen 2014: 19–24.

[65] *saphaḷa*[…]*mūḷaṃ*: in the Sanskrit form of the words there is a liquid; here, as well as in other occurrences, the retroflex liquid is due to the phonetic assimilation and the rendition in Kannaḍa script (cf., e.g. *śārdūla* vs *śārdūḷa*).

epigraphic Kannaḍa,[66] mixing Dravidian and Sanskrit elements, and presenting the wide-spread classical image of the king as the Kalpavṛkṣa; it might be worth noticing that Grāma was a site especially connected with the queen Śāntalā Dēvi:

> (ll. 30–31) […] *soṃpuvettu puruṣabratadiṃ daḷam ēṟi bhāgyamaṃ jarigaḷan āntu raṃjisuva śāntaladēviya rūpukalpavallariy aḍardattu viṣṇunṟpan emba samunnatakalpavṛkṣamaṃ* ||
>
> The beauty of Śāntalā Dēvi, obtained through her devotion to the husband[67] like a *kalpa* creeper, colored and full of flowers, has climbed the Kalpavṛkṣa (the tree of desires) called Viṣṇuvardhana.

Some lines later, in the same inscription, we find the *topos* of the divine king containing in his body (*mey*) all the *avatāra*s of Viṣṇu:

> (ll. 20–22) […] *padadōḷ kūrmmasvarūpaṃ nayanayugadoḷu matsyarūpaṃ ghanagrivadōḷ ādikrōḍarūpaṃ naḍuvinōḷu nṛsiṃhatvam ātmaprabhāvāspadadōḷ rāmāśrayatvaṃ mativikasanadōḷu bauddharūpāgi gujjāgade kalkitvakke mey tārada hariy enipaṃ viṣṇu viṣṇukṣitīśa* || […]
>
> In the feet he has the true form of the turtle, in the eyes the form of the fish, in the breast and the throat the form of the primeval boar, in the waist he is Narasiṃha self, in the expanse of his own splendor he is the refuge of Rāma, in the blossoming of the mind he is like Buddha, he didn't become a dwarf, he didn't give his body to Kalki; Viṣṇu, the lord of the earth, he is really Viṣṇu, called Hari.

This tendency to depict the king as an extraordinary being is not only common to Sanskrit courtly poetry, but also to courtly poetry in Kannaḍa. We find the same drive already in the 10th-century *campū* (the *Vikramārjuna Vijaya*) by the *ādikāvya* of Kannaḍa poetry, Pampa, who uses an amazing variety of images to praise his king and patron, Arikesari II of Vemulavāḍa, a vassal of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa king Kṛṣṇa II.

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[66] On different layers of the Kannaḍa language see footnote 16.

[67] *puruṣabratadiṃ* (instr.) for *puruṣavrata* is the first duty of a woman as wife.

In verse 1.68 (*śārdūla* meter) we can see a very good instance, where he describes the king Gaṅgēya:

> *śālaprāṃśu viśālalōlanayanaṃ prōdyadvyaṣaskaṃdhan u*
> *nmīlatpaṃkajavaktran āyata samagrōrasthaḷaṃ dīrghabā*
> *hālambaṃ bhujavīryavikramayutaṃ gaṃgātmajanmaṃ jaya*
> *śrīlōlaṃ jamadagnīramamuniyoḷ kaltam dhanurvidyeyam*
>
> The son of Gaṅgā, who was tall as a *śāla* tree, with rolling and spacious eyes, with shoulders like a roaring bull, with a face like a lotus that has opened up; with an extensive and full chest, with arms hanging down to his knee, he was eager for the glory of victory and he learned the science of archery from the sage Rāma, the son of Jamadagni.

As already said, together with the effort of the king to promote a link with the Brahmanical group, this practice is part of a set of communicative strategies commonly shared by many rulers in medieval South India. In EC VI Cm 160[68] on the stone of the Brāhmēśvara temple in the *basadi* of Sindigere Viṣṇuvardhana is described as follows:

> (ll. 25–26) […] *vāsaṃtikādēvīlabdhavaraprasādaṃ*| *pratidinaniratanir-upama-hiraṇyagarbbhatuḷāpuruṣādikratusahasrasantarppitapitṛdēvaguru dvijasamājaṃ* | […]
>
> [Viṣṇuvardhana] who has obtained the boon from the goddess Vāsantikā, the daily bestower of gifts, by the performance of unequalled *hiraṇyagarbha, tulāpuruṣa* and a thousand sacrifices having satisfied his ancestors, the gods, the *guru*s, and the Brahmins […][69]

The celebration of royal rituals is listed here right after the second aspect mentioned at the beginning, the foundation legend, that encapsulates the local features of the Hoysaḷas' public discourse.

[68] Although in Rice 1983: 331 the inscription is dated to 1138 CE, the date is not certain, as the only date mentioned Saka 967 and Saka 1025 correspond respectively to 1048 CE and 1103 CE, but there are references to a later period, and the final part of the inscription is built into the ground (see Rice, EC VI Cm 160).

[69] The translation is borrowed from Rice (Rice 1983: 331) with slight modifications.

4. Local elements: The foundation legend

Among the various elements that shape the royal discourse, what is of great significance for the present analysis is the trajectory of the foundation legend that first appeared under Viṣṇuvardhana, and especially how it developed. The story of how the Hoysaḷa dynasty obtained the land to rule and the legitimization to be rulers appears in many forms,[70] and it was also retained in the later courtly poetry. A very condensed and already crystallized version is to be found in one of the first verses of the *Yaśōdharacarite*, a Jaina text composed in 1209 CE by the famous Kannaḍa poet Janna at the court of Ballāḷa II, the nephew of Viṣṇuvardhana*:*

> 1.9 *saḷaneṃba yādavaṃ po*
> *ysaḷanādaṃ śaśakapurada vāsaṃtikeyoḷ*
> *muḷidu puli pāytuduṃ poy*
> *saḷa eṃdoḍe gurugaḷittu kuṃcada seḷeyaṃ*
>
> The famous Saḷa Yadava became Poysaḷa, in the [forest of] Vāsantikā in Śaśakapura; the tiger (*puli*) ferociously jumped towards him while the sage gave him a curved stick with the words "Beat Saḷa".

The inscription EC V Ak 71 from 1173 CE furnishes one of the most complete account that dates to the first period of the king Ballāḷa II, written in Old Kannaḍa on the stone west of the *basadi* in Arsikere, a main centre of the Hoysaḷa dynasty in their conquest of the Gaṅgavāḍi:

> (l. 6–11) *anavadyaṃ maṃtravidyāpariṇatan abhayaṃ divyayōgīṃdran orbbaṃ tanag ātaṃ namnan āgal saḷaṉripan avanaṃ nōḍi saṃrājyamaṃ mālpen enuttaṃ mōhadiṃdaṃ śaśakapurada vāsaṃtikādēviyaṃ puṇyanidhānaṃ yuktapūjāparikaravidhiyaṃ niścaḷaṃ sādhipaṃnaṃ* ||
>
> *adan ettaṃ vighnamaṃ māḍuva bage mige śārddūḷan ākāradiṃ pāyvudum āgaḷ yōgi nīṃ poy saḷay ene subhaṭaṃ niścaḷaṃ bettadiṃ poyvudum āytāpoysaḷāṃkaṃ yadunṟiparoḷe dēviprasādōdbhavaśrīviditaṃ śārddūladoḷ kūḍida seḷe piriduṃ cihnam aṃdiṃdam ittal* ||

[70] See, for instance, EC XIV Tn 191, of 1117 CE, EC V Bl 9, of 1120 CE, Bl 117, composed in 1136 CE, and Bl 142, dated to 1121 CE.

> When the king Saḷa was saluting a certain holy *yōgīndra*, who was faultless, refined in the knowledge of *mantra*s and without fear, the sage looked at him and thinking with fondness 'I will give him an empire', performed a suitable worship to subdue the goddess Vāsantikā of Śaśakapura; when she sprang forth in the form of a tiger (*śārddūḷa*) strongly aiming at breaking [the spell], the *yogi* exclaimed 'You hit, Saḷa' (*nīm poy saḷa*), and the great warrior, unshaken, smote it with a cane; thereafter "Poysaḷa" as an epithet was acquired by the Yadu kings, represented by the auspicious boon from the goddess, together with the tiger and the cane as their mark.[71]

An Old Kannaḍa inscription composed in a later period (1196 CE), again under Ballāḷa II, elaborates further on the tiger (EC VI Tk 45), and it was found on a stone in the Amṛtēśvara temple in Amṛtapura, at the border with the dissolving Cāḷukya kingdom:

> (ll. 14–16) *saḷan eṃbaṃ śaśakaprasiddhapuradoḷ vāsaṃtikādēviyaṃ taḷed ārādhisuvāgaḷ uttaraḷanētraṃ ghōravaktraṃ viśṛṅkhaḷagātraṃ puli pāye kaṃḍu munināthaṃ kuṃcamaṃ koṭṭu poy saḷay eṃdaṃ baḷik āytu poysaḷavesar ttāṃ yādavōrvvīsaroḷu* ||
>
> When that Saḷa was worshipping the goddess Vāsantikā in the famous city of Śaśakapura, a tiger (*puli*) with rolling eyes, a terrific snout and immense[72] body, leaped forth; seeing it, the great *muni* gave him his whisk,[73] saying "Hit, Saḷa! (*poy saḷa*)"; afterwards[74] the name of those Yadava kings became Poysaḷa.[75]

This account of the heroic deeds of Saḷa, the founder of the Hoysaḷa dynasty, entails local items such as the connection to nature (the tiger, *puli* in Janna and in the inscription EC VI Tk 45, *śārddūḷa* in EC V Ak 71) that

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[71] The translation is adopted with some changes from that of Rice, see EC V Ak 71.

[72] *viśṛṅkhaḷa-gātraṃ* lit. "with the limbs unchained", it may also indicate unrestrained movements of the body.

[73] *kuñca* is a brush, a whisk, but also a kind of fan, a bent stick (*kuñc*—to bend, to curve).

[74] Read *baḷika* for *baḷik*(*a*).

[75] Slightly revised translation from Rice, see EC VI Tk 45.

are typical of many royal lineages.[76] In addition, here there is the presence of Vāsantikā, the tutelary goddess (*kuladevatā*) of the family.[77] Actually this part is always quite short and it is rarely elaborated upon in the inscriptions. Mostly the story is told in a few lines with fixed expressions,[78] in particular with the syntagma that is already used by the Kadambas kings (11th century): *varalabdhaprasāda*.[79] It may appear as a stylistic lumpiness, but if we consider the role of the Kadambas as predecessor of the Hoysaḷas, this formulaic repetition is to be understood as a conscious choice to connect to a previous mighty lineage, as we have seen in the case of the Cāḷukyas in EC V Ak 110.

The first time that the foundation legend appears on the carved stones is in 1117 CE: EC V Bl 58 is a very important inscription because it is connected with the installation of the gods Vijaya Nārāyaṇa, Cennakēśava and Lakṣmī Nārāyaṇa in the sacred area of Bēlūr after a decisive military victory by Viṣṇuvardhana against the Cōḻas governor in the Gaṅgas territory. This inscription is situated on the inner wall of the treasury room of the Cennakēśava temple, a place that had a special and somehow peculiar status. Indeed, in this case we have a distinctive indication that inscriptions were an integral part of the royal discourse together with the construction of temples, as the royal *tīrtha* of Bēlūr, in order to create the image of a mighty and powerful king.[80]

The very long inscription Bl 58, both in Sanskrit and in Kannaḍa, portrays first the life of Vinayāditya (ruled 1047–1098 CE), Ereyaṅga (ruled 1063–1100 CE), and Ballāḷa I (ruled 1102–1108 CE ca.), the predecessors of Viṣṇuvardhana. When it comes to this last king,

[76] See, for instance, the Kadambas, who, according to EC VIII Sk 176, took their name (and their qualities) from a Kadamba tree that was blossoming near their house; for a more detailed description of the foundation legend see also Kamath 1980: 31–32, Gopal and Tharanatha 1996: 17–18, 85.

[77] As mentioned before, see the article of Bignami in this volume on the role of Vāsantikā as a village goddess (*grāmadevatā*).

[78] As in EC V Bl 9 (l. 10) *vāsantikādēvīlabdhavaraprasādanuṃ*.

[79] Cf. EC V Hn 45, of 1025 CE, and EC V Mj 18, of 1095 CE.

[80] On the importance of Bēlūr as royal *tīrtha*, see Bignami 2015.

it first enumerates his conquests, including a full account of his fight against the Cōḻa king called Rājēndra (possibly referring to Kulōttuṅga who ruled between 1070–1122 CE ca.). A long list of all the kings he defeated,displayed with a metaphoric and elaborate language, concludes with the definition of the boundaries.[81] At the end there is a description of the qualities of the king's wife, Śāntalā Devī. In this inscription the foundation legend is already in its abbreviated form, but it has some telling differences from its most common version. Vāsantikā is here represented as the one who grants the land to the champion of the Hoysaḷa dynasty, but this decisive action is not mentioned in the same segment of the inscription that accounts for the rise of the dynasty. The elements that compose the foundation legend as we find it in the inscription of 1117 are separated and do not compose the same story as later attestations do. First, we find a brief account of the fight of Saḷa with the tiger:[82]

> (ll. 2–3) *khyatēṣu tēṣu nṛpatiḥ kathitaḥ kadācit* |
> *kaścid vanē munivarēṇa saḷaḥ karāḷaṃ* |
> *śārddūḷakaṃ pratihi poysaḷa ity ato' bhūt* |
> *tasyābhidhā munivaco 'pi camūralakṣma* ||
>
> Among those famous ones, the king Saḷa was once told by an excellent sage in a forest "Hit the terrible tiger, Poysaḷa" this is what he said. His appellation came from the words of the sage and so also the sign with the tiger (*camūra*).

Yet, the gift of the land by the goddess is not connected with this account of the story: it is merely mentioned in a later passage enumerating many titles, among which it is said: *vāsantikādēvīlabdhavarapra*

[81] The king had to create a public narrative that stated the boundaries of his conquests, and he did it not only through the architectural activity but also in the inscriptions describing the places conquered by him, the boundaries of his realm.

[82] The exact same words are used in the Sankrit-Tamil inscription also dated to 1117 CE, found on the basement stones of the Kīrtinārāyaṇa temple of Taḷakād, the capital of the Gaṅga dynasty (EC XIV TN 191).

sādanuṃ (EC V Bl 58 ll. 41–42) "and the boon obtained from the goddess Vāsantikā". It is only some years later, in 1133, that we get a complete account of the legend where all the elements are present: EC V Bl 124, on the outer wall of the Pārśvanātha *basadi*, is situated at Haḷēbiḍ/Bastihaḷḷi near the other capital of the Hoysaḷas dynasty after Bēlūr; according to Kasdorf 2013,[83] Bastihaḷḷi is a replica of Śravaṇa Beḷgoḷa:

(ll. 9–13) *āsaḷaṇṛpatiya rājyaśrīsaṃvarddhanaman eyde māḍuva bageyiṃ vāsava-vaṃditajinapūjāsahitaṃ sakaḷamaṃtravidyākuṣaḷam* ||

mudadiṃ jaina bratīśaṃ śaśakapurada padmāvatī dēviyaṃ maṃtradin ādaṃ sādhisal vikriyeyoḷe puli mēl pāye yōgīśvaraṃ kuṃcadakāviṃd āṃt adaṃ poy saḷa enal abhayaṃ poyvuduṃ poysaḷāṃkaṃ yadubhūpargg ādud aṃdind esedudu seḷeyiṃ lōḷaśārddūḷacihnaṃ ||

āsaṃdayakṣīvaradoḷ vasaṃtaṃ lēsāge tātkālikanāmadiṃdaṃ vāsaṃtikādēvatey eṃdu pūjāvyāsaṃgavaṃ māḍidan āṇṛpāḷaṃ ||

A Jaina ascetic who was engaged in worshipping the Jina praised by Indra, and who was expert[84] of the whole *mantra*s' knowledge, wished to increase the wealth of the king Saḷa's kingdom. He was bringing with his *mantra*s the goddess Padmāvatī of Śaśakapura into subjection, and a tiger (*puli*) sprang forth upon them [to break the spell], when the *yogīśvara*, with the handle of his curved stick, said "Hit, Saḷa (*poy saḷa*)"*;* on which he fearlessly smote it; from that time the Yadu kings had the epithet "Poysaḷa" and the swinging flag of a tiger on a rod. Because the boon of that *yakṣi* was in the spring (*vasanta*) time, from the name of the season the king worshipped her as the goddess Vāsantikā.[85]

[83] In particular, the author demonstrates a tight relation to the Pārśvanātha *basadi*: "Although the Dōrasamudra Pārśvanātha is not a strict copy of its predecessor at Śravaṇa Beḷgoḷa, the shared details between the two—height, lotus pedestal, and the finished treatment of the back, along with the identity of the jina—suggest for the image at the capital a deliberate reference to the image seen at the pilgrimage site" (Kasdorf 2013: 187). I got the possibility to read this comprehensive and in-depth work through Dr. Sarah Pierce Taylor, whom I thank.

[84] Read *kuśala* for *kuṣaḷa*.

[85] Revised translation from Rice, see EC V Bl 124.

Let us consider now the final part of the last inscription, EC V Bl 124: "Because the boon of that *yakṣi* was in the spring (*vasanta*) time, from the name of the season the king worshipped her as the goddess Vāsantikā." What is worth noticing in this slightly different variant of the legend is that the goddess is correlated to fertility (through the epithet "Yakṣi") and to the tiger. The same goddess in the inscription of 1117 CE, Bl 58, is not at all connected to the tiger, while in Bl 124, of 1133 CE, and in Ak 71, of 1173 CE, she is explicitly connected to the spring, and given the Sanskrit name Vāsantikā. The dialogic interaction and negotiation between the vernacular and the Sanskritic culture is expressed in the overlapping of local deity form (the tiger) and Vāsantikā, the goddess of the spring. This second local aspect, the female goddess, has also found its expression in the royal architecture, indeed the female sculptures of the 245 big and small Madanikās that are sculpted in the royal temple of Cennakēśava in Bēlūr are correlated with the goddess.[86] In summary, the foundation legend, created by the king Viṣṇuvardhana, appears for the first time in 1117 at Bēlūr, and here the cosmopolitan and the local aspects are both present, but they are still separated and will only later on be merged in a unified legend.

The local elements were strongly present also in the stones of the sacred building, as we have already seen in the female divine figure portrayed by the Madanikā; accordingly, the sculpture of the emblem of the dynasty represents the fight of the first king, Saḷa, in the same way that is described in many inscriptions, but the tiger is transformed here into a lion; the different appearance of the animal could be interpreted as "a symbol of the victory of the Hoysaḷas over the Kadambas in the time of Vishṇuvardhana" (cf. Heras 1929: 165–166) since the lion was the emblem of the Kadambas dynasty. On the other side, according to Filliozat (Filliozat 2009: 230) these sculptures did not originate from the Hoysaḷas' foundation legend but rather inspired it. If the hypothesis of Filliozat is correct, and we keep in mind that, as we have

[86] On the interpretation of the Madanikās see Bignami 2012.

said, the different elements of the myth are not part of the same story in the first epigraphic attestation of the legend (Bl 58), it might well be possible that the legend was first "composed" in the stone, and it entailed only the fight with the lion. In Doḍḍagadavaḷḷi, erected in 1113 CE, we find already the royal emblem: a sculpture on the roof of the temple representing the fight of the hero with an animal that could be a kind of tiger, or better a lion, but in the relevant inscription (EC V Hn 149) there is no mention of the legend and of the goddess Vāsantikā. This may indicate that while in the inscriptions the trans-regional element gained more space, the local elements were more decisively displayed in the visual media represented by the templar art and architecture. The local basis, represented by the Kannaḍa language and the stone itself, is made to contain and perfectly express the contents and imageries that draw from a cosmopolitan source, but with different proportions.

5. Conclusions

As I hope to have shown, there is a pattern in the royal Hoysaḷas' discourse: the description of the king as a marvelous and divine being, the performance of Vedic rituals, as well as a certain connection established with the religious (Brahmanical and Jaina) communities. These elements are, on one side, linked to an older tradition and to a cosmopolitan tendency, but on the other side, they are also associated with the foundation legend that entails strong local elements, such as the family tutelary goddess and the fight with the tiger. All these themes are expressed through a skillful mixture of the trans-regional Sanskrit and the local Kannaḍa, a mixture in which the regional language is prevalent. Later on, during the Vijayanagara period, the opposite will be the case, and Sanskrit and Kannaḍa switched roles. If we consider the mutual relationship between the cosmopolitan and the local, we might well see not really a paradigm of alternation but a rather different paradigm: these two are like two streams of the same wider river, and they have been in a permanent dialogue; the local goddess that is a constant figure in the templar iconographic choice of

the Hoysaḷas rulers is merged with the trans-regional image of fertility and spring, and is born again as Vāsantikā in the foundation legend illustrated in the inscriptions. All these ingredients that were deployed also by other dynasties are portrayed in the sandstone that is used as the preferred media and represents the uniqueness of the Hoysaḷas' self-presentation mode.

To sum up, the specific motivation of Viṣṇuvardhana for a program of inscriptions that included both local and trans-regional elements was the necessity to present his lineage as a strong dynasty comparable to that of the Cāḷukyas, the Kadambas and the Gaṅgas. On the top of it, the choice of sandstone, the element of uniqueness in the program, was meant, in my opinion, to make his presence on the territory quite noticeable. The inscriptions spread from the centre towards the south and south east, where Viṣṇuvardhana could take hold of part of the Gaṅgavāḍi, and not so much to the north, in the area controlled by the Cāḷukyas. Yet, in some decisive places, such as Amṛtapura and Kadur, we find important inscriptions establishing the presence of Viṣṇuvardhana in the area. Moreover, other inscriptions account for the capacity of the king to drag Brahmins from the northern area controlled by the Cāḷukyas to the south, where was the centre of his power. Within this perspective, we could understand the peculiar choice of the Hoysaḷas kings who selected the shining sandstone as the material for their extremely elaborated and fully decorated temples. These magnificent constructions together with the eloquence of the narrative committed to the stones should conjure an image of an invincible and mighty king who is able to control all the external and internal disruptive forces.[87]

[87] These are just preliminary results of an ongoing study. This analysis is meant to be a basis for a further and extensive examination of the relation between kings and media along the historical development of political structures in medieval South India.

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