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A Note on an Inscribed Seal from Perak

By

Prof. K. A. Nilakanta Sastri.

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A NOTE ON AN INSCRIBED SEAL FROM PERAK.

By Professor K. A. NILAKANTA SASTRI.

In the Journal of the Federated Malay States Museums Vol. XV part 3 (1932), Mr. Ivor H. N. Evans, Ethnographer, F.M.S. Museums, reported the discovery of an inscribed Cornelian seal which he described as follows: 'It is a small seal of red Cornelian of good colour and somewhat translucent, chamfered at the edges on the face and there engraved with an inscription running the length of the seal in the middle. The dimensions of the piece are 1.4 cms. \times 1 cm. \times .4 cm. The back is a flat.' The inscription reads *Sri Visnuvarmmasya* and the script is clearly of the class to which the earliest Sanskrit inscriptions of Campa, Borneo and W. Java belong. The letters are 'box-headed', and remarkably like those in the inscriptions of Bhadravarman of Campa. This script is usually called Pallava script after Vogel's well-known paper on the Yupa inscriptions of King Mulavarman. In spite of Professor R. C. Majumdar's attempt to fix a northern or central Indian origin for the early Campa script*, I think the case is still strong for our continuing to use the designation brought into vogue by Vogel's careful examination of the whole question.¹

But while calling the script Pallava, we should be on our guard against postulating any direct connection, particularly of a political nature, between the areas where the script was in vogue and the line of South Indian rulers after whom the script is named. Mr. Evans writes: "Dr. Callenfels remarks, in answer to a letter of mine in which I had pointed out that this name was borne by several Pallava kings, 'It is not necessary that the Visnuvarman is a Pallava king. All kings and nobles in that time liked to have names ending in Varma, *i.e.* the kings of Indo-China, Borneo, Java and Sri-Vijaya. I think, however, that the *Sri* certainly points to a king or a prince.' I had wondered, too, whether it might not be the ring of some commoner bearing an inscription with a talismanic significance". There is no one among the known kings of South India or the Malay Archipelago and Indo-China with the name Visnu-Varma. And the faulty grammatical form of the name, Visnuvarmmasya in the place of Visnuvarmmanah, may be taken to support the last surmise of Mr. Evans, that it is the seal of a commoner, possibly a merchant. There is no lack of evidence to show that the artisans and traders of ancient times often affected the Sanskrit idiom and were not very mindful of classical grammar in the dialect they employed. One wonders why Mr. Evans suggests a talismanic significance for the inscription on the stone? Is it because of the *Sri* at the commencement? But *Sri* is at once an honorific prefix and a symbol of prosperity and is generally employed as a prefix to personal names. I am inclined to suggest that the ring which bore this incised Cornelian was just the signet ring of a merchant called Visnuvarmma. The

¹BEFEO XXXII. pp. 135 ff.

best opinion regarding the age of the seal puts it nearer the sixth century A.D. than the fourth, though the earlier date is not an impossibility.¹

I have had occasion elsewhere to draw attention to other evidence on trade relations between South India and the opposite coast of the Bay of Bengal.² But such relations were by no means the monopoly of South India, and it may be doubted if a South Indian merchant would have used a signet engraved in these characters as we have so far not come across another instance of this kind. It is perhaps worth noting in this connection that among some ancient gems and seals noticed by Cunningham in 1841, we find a Chaceldonic agate from Ujjain inscribed in characters very similar to those of our seal.³ The inscription was read by Prinsep as *Sri Vati-Khuddasya*, Seal of Sri Vati-Khudd. That reading is open to doubt at more than one point; I am inclined to read *Sri Va(tikhu)ndasya*. But the forms of the letters *Sri*, *Va*, and *sya* bear the closest possible resemblances to those of the same letters in our seal. Visnuvarmma then, if as we suppose he was a merchant, might have come from Central India, or he might have been one of the Colonists belonging to the Hindu settlement of Kuala Selinsing in Perak whose long history from about 600 A.D., if not earlier, is attested by the remains brought to light by Mr. Evans.

¹JFMS *ibid* pp. 90.

²JOR. VI. pp. 299.

³JASB 1841. *plete opp.* pp. 148. No. 19.