

LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

“ON THE EARLIEST INSCRIPTIONAL RECORDS OF INDIAN SOLAR ECLIPSES”: A RESPONSE

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In her Letter to the Editors of this journal [Shylaja \(2024\)](#), has expressed reservations about the inferences drawn in my paper, titled “Kurtakoti Grant: the earliest Indian record of a total solar eclipse” that appeared in the June 2024 issue of *JAAH* ([Kapoor, 2024](#)).

My paper explored the so-called Kurtākoti copper-plates about a grant of land purportedly made in the seventh century by the Western Chālukyan King Vikramāditya I on the occasion of a solar eclipse, which was mentioned in the inscription as total ([Fleet 1878](#); [Naik 1948](#)).

Observing that the language and orthography are quite inaccurate and judging from the Canarese characters in the inscription and that no eclipse had occurred around the given date Śaka 532, [Fleet \(1878\)](#) concluded that the grant could be from the ninth to the tenth century and a case of forgery.

Acknowledging that, but considering that reference to a total solar eclipse in an Indian record is very rare, I regarded the occasion invoked in the Kurtakoti Grant as non-trivial. So, I tried to see if the circumstances as mentioned in the inscription could lead anywhere.

Below, I address the main points raised by [Shylaja \(2024\)](#) relating to my paper.

- (1) I need to look into the copper-plate grants referred to.
- (2) The eclipse part of the transcription, as in [Fleet \(1878: 218, 220\)](#) and [Naik \(1948: 74\)](#), and cited in [Kapoor \(2024\)](#), is reproduced below:

Viditam=astu sô(vô) smābhi(bhiḥ) ba-
trimś-ōttara-pancha-śatēshu
Sa(śa)ka-varshēshv=ā(a)titēshu
Vijaya-rājya-
samba(mva)chcha(tsa)ra-
shōsha(ḍa)śa-varshē
pravartamāna(nē) Kisuvola—
mahānagara(rē) vikhyāta(tē) sthitvā
tasya Vaiśākha-Jē(jyai)shṭhā(shṭha)-
māsa-madhyam-
a(ā)ma(mā)vāsyā(syā)-Bhāskara-
dinē Rohiṇya Rī(Rohiṇy-Rī)kshē
madhy-āhna-kālē Vikra[mā]dityasya
ātmā cha ātma-viṇīte nāma mahā-

dēvi(va)tayōḥ(yō)r=obhayōr=Vvṛisha
bha-rāśau tasmin Vṛishabha-rāśau
sūrya-grā(ga)haṇa(nē)
sarvvamā(grā)si(sī)-bhūtē
gavās(gāvas)=cha nara(rā)ś=cha na
charanti ...

An English translation is:

When five centuries and thirty-two years of the Saka era had expired, on Sunday, the mid-day of the New-Moon between the months of Vaisakha (April–May) and Jyaishta (May–June), under the constellation Rohiṇi and the Great Bear, when the Sun was in the sign of the Bull, and at the time of the total eclipse of the Sun, Vikramaditya I, in the sixteenth year of his reign, while residing at the city of Kisuvola, [bestowed upon Ravisarman of the sect called Basari-samgha and the Agastya gotra, the son of Jaysarman who was the son of Madhavasarman, the village of Kurutākunte which was in the Belvola country and in the centre of the seven villages of ...

A total solar eclipse is an extremely rare astronomical event in any one locality and becomes the subject of anecdotes and legends that trickle down the generations. During the period 601–1100 CE, there were three total eclipses visible (weather permitting) over Kurtākoti, on 23 July 613 CE, 21 April 627 CE and 25 June 754 CE, and also an annular eclipse on 13 July 660 CE. None of these fits the chronology around King Vikramāditya I to whom the Grant was attributed. However, if we replace him by his father, Pulikesī II, as the donor, and take the given date Śaka 532 (610–611 CE) for the date of the Pulikesī II's ascension, things fall into place. His sixteenth regnal year would then be 627 CE, the year of the total eclipse.

[Fleet \(1878: 218–220\)](#) dissected the words and the syllables, the Canarese characters and the language as well as cross-checking the dates in the Grant with other early Western Chālukyan inscriptions. In his Footnote 10, he observed:

The literal reading in the text is *sarvva-*

māsi(sī)-bhūtē, 'lasting for a whole month'! This, of course, is only a mistake for *sarvvagrāsi-bhūtē*, 'swallowing or engulfing all', which is the usual expression for a total eclipse. (Fleet, 1878: 218).

Fleet (1878: 218) thus preferred this particular word to mean a total eclipse. Shylaja (2024) contends that it be read as *sarvvamāsi(sī)*. But why would someone trying hard to perfect a claim misword the phrase to mean the eclipse lasted for a whole month? Further, if the date-line is "... any number between 530 and 540 ..." as suggested, then none of the seventh century total eclipses seen over Kurtākoti fits if the year of its occurrence is the sixteenth regnal year of a Chālukyan king. Read this way, the Grant is bogus.

So the Kurtākoti Grant is a flawed document as it contains errors relating to Western Chāluk-

yan history, and the calendrical details of the eclipse. Nevertheless, it purports to claim a hold, or reassert a right, over certain property granted by a seventh-century Chālukyan king on the occasion of a solar eclipse. According to the Grant there was an eclipse, and it was total. The key to the identity of the eclipse is the detail provided in the Grant. Between 601 and 1100 CE there was only one solar eclipse over Kurtākoti, and this was on 21 April 627 CE. Furthermore, it was a *Vaisākha Kṛṣṇapakṣa* eclipse, a total eclipse, happening at noon, in the sixteenth regnal year from the given date Śaka 532, with the Sun in *Vṛṣhabha rāshi* (the zodiac Taurus), just as described in the inscription. However, this eclipse occurred during King Pulikeśī II's reign. Whether there is merit in the claims in the Grant remains a moot point, but the fact is that it describes an actual event.

References

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