So, here is another book on the timeless theme of “Inscriptions of [insert your preferred obscure dynasty here].” Almost all of the inscriptions gathered in this volume have been edited and published before, some more than a century and a quarter ago and many by such demigods of Indic epigraphy as John Faithfull Fleet, Dines Chandra Sircar and Vasudev Vishnu Mirashi. More recently, Aulikara inscriptions have been surveyed and discussed in articles such as one by Joanna Williams (1972, 50–52) on the art of Mandusaur, which focuses on nine inscriptions out of those known at the time; and Richard Salomon’s (1989) seminal treatise on epigraphic sources for Aulikara history, which discusses twenty-two inscriptions commissioned by Aulikaras, their possible affiliates, and Hūṇas. N. K. Ojha (2001) has even written a monograph on the Aulikaras and their inscriptions. Moreover, Hans Bakker has re-translated several of these inscriptions and discussed them with a fresh eye for a compendium of sources relevant to the study of Asian Huns, currently in preparation (Balogh forthcoming).

This being the case, is there really a point to the compilation of a book on Aulikara inscriptions? Needless to say, my own answer to my rhetorical question is of course a resounding “yes.” My personal fascination with the Aulikaras started while I was researching the textual and historical context of Viśākhadatta’s play the Mudrārākṣasa for my doctoral thesis (Balogh 2015). But subjective matters aside, I primarily see two – interconnected – sets of reasons why such a book can be a useful addition to the body of scholarship at the present time.

The first set has to do with what might be termed a paradigm shift in the study of Indian history and cultural history and the role of epigraphy on this stage. Major powers, such as the imperial Guptas and the Vākāṭakas in the Gupta period or Harṣavardhana shortly afterward, have been examined and re-examined from an endless number of angles: first with political history – rulers, dates, conquest and succession – as the primary focus; then, increasingly, with an interest in less tangible facts such as ideology, political structures and overarching cultural frameworks. With the rising trend of studies in fringes and plurality, and with a view of history as a dialogical process in which a large number of agents of varying complexity mutually determine themselves and one another, comes a shift in focus from superpowers to their lesser contemporaries. Dynasties in the Gupta penumbra, such as the rulers of Vālkhā, the Aulikaras and the Maitrakas, are being increasingly subjected to scrutiny thanks partly to this shift, and partly to the fact that ample inscriptional and material evidence of their doings remains for us to study productively. But when even the “maps and chaps” building blocks of historical research are equivocal – as is definitely the case with the Aulikaras – it is essential that further research, even (or especially) of highly abstract ideas, rest on as solid a foundation as can be obtained in order for us to be able to “tease out what we can from the admittedly slim corpus of material that survives” (Talbot 2001, 11). Such a foundation, in the present case, consists largely in the nitty-gritty epigraphy, and this brings us to the second set of my reasons for undertaking this book.

As noted above, some Aulikara inscriptions have been known for a long time and edited by great scholars. Further inscriptions have come to light time and again, and these subsequent discoveries clarified some aspects of the context of the earlier ones. Thus, the first Aulikara inscription known to scholarship was the Gangdhar inscription of Mayūrākṣaka (A4; usually referred to as an inscription of Viśvavarman), but nobody at the time was aware of it being an Aulikara inscription, or indeed of the existence of a family named Aulikara. Fleet learned of this inscription as early as 1883, but did not hasten to publish it. He did include an edition in his Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum volume III, and the text did receive considerable scholarly attention in the century-and-a-third since then, yet no-one in all this time has ventured to re-edit this voluminous and important epigraph. Other early discoveries received a larger share of immediate attention. In 1879, Arthur Sulivan chanced upon one of Yaśodharman’s victory pillars in Sondhni, and sent a copy of their inscription to Alexander Cunningham. The drawing reached Fleet in 1883, and the men he sent to the site in 1884 not only obtained good rubbings of both the intact and the broken pillar inscription (A11 and A12), but also discovered the inscription of the silk weavers (A6; often misleadingly called an inscription of Kumāragupta and Bandhuvārman) in the process. Peter Peterson only refrained from editing the latter out of respect for Fleet, who duly published his own editions of both these epigraphs in 1886 and re-published both in the Corpus two years later; after another two years Georg Bühler came out with another edition of the silk weaver inscription.1

1 See the Description of each inscription in Part II for details and bibliographic references; and in particular, page 87 for Peterson’s words about the silk weaver inscription.
The fourth early bird was the Mandsaur inscription of Nirdoṣa (A10, usually called an inscription of Yaśodharman or of Yaśodharman and Viṣṇuvardhana), which came to Fleet’s attention in 1885 and was published by him in 1886 (and then again in the Corpus). It was in this inscription that the name Aulikara was first read by modern eyes, but Fleet (or anyone else) did not know this was a proper name and believed it to be a word for the emblem of the dynasty.\(^2\)

Next, discovered in 1912, the Mandsaur inscription of the time of Naravarman (A1) provided the first genealogy of the Early Aulikaras spanning more than two generations; but only after the discovery of the Bihar Kotra stone inscription (A2) in 1938 did it become known that Aulikara (or Olikara) was a family name used in this dynasty. The realisation that the later ruler Yaśodharman must have been connected in some way to this Aulikara dynasty inevitably brought about a revision of the fifty-year-old hypothesis that *aulikara* was a common noun describing a family emblem.\(^4\) As for Yaśodharman himself, scholars continued to view him as an isolated entity, since nothing was known about his antecedents apart from the vague connection by name to the Early Aulikara rulers. The prevailing opinion about him became that “[h]e rose and fell like a meteor between A.D. 530 and 540” (Majumdar 1954, 40). Indeed, the term “meteoric” remained in vogue as a sort of *epitheton ornans* for Yaśodharman right until 1983.

In that year the Risthal inscription (A9) was unearthed, bringing with it a long genealogy of kings calling themselves Aulikara culminating in Prakāśadharman, who cannot have preceded Yaśodharman by long and was most probably his father.

While the necessity of revising some earlier hypotheses has usually been pointed out simultaneously with or shortly after the publication of each successive piece of the puzzle, the original editions remain unchanged. Even today, when scholars of religious studies, social history or economics – essentially, of any specialisation other than Aulikara history – wish to look up one of the long-known Aulikara inscriptions for their own research, it is the “vulgate” edition that they will pick off the shelf: most conveniently Fleet’s *Corpus* or Bhandarkar’s revised *Corpus*.\(^5\) In other words, they very often base their own research on a commentary and translation written over a century ago, and in many details outdated for several decades. Yet in order to be able to engage in “informed speculation” (Inden, Walters, and Ali 2000, 14) about the way texts articulate history and engage in discourse and polemics, we need not only to learn as much as possible about their historical and textual context but to have the groundwork in place about the texts themselves. Due to the relatively small size of the epigraphic corpus and the almost complete lack of a living tradition supplementing these texts, this is a particularly important point in the case of inscriptions.

Even accomplished Sanskritists who reach to a published edition and draw their own conclusions from the primary source rather than from the accompanying translation and introduction, may occasionally be misled by the occasional error in the original edition. Like Homer, even Fleet and Sircar nod every now and then. It is also sometimes the case that the great scholars of old did not have the facility to study an epigraph first-hand and had to rely on inked impressions. While a good rubbing can often reveal details of an inscription that are hard to discern in a gloomy museum storeroom (and even harder on a photograph taken in unfavourable light conditions), one can also distort reality, for instance by hiding the distinction between a carefully incised grapheme and a shallow scratch or crack on the surface. However, the nimbus surrounding the editors of these inscriptions is such that their readings are hardly ever questioned. While it is indeed extremely rare for Fleet or Sircar to print an erroneous reading pertaining to matters they deemed historically significant (such as kings and dates), they do sometimes err in or gloss over matters that were probably second-rate to them, but which may become points of focus for modern researchers.

A good case in point is verse 23 of the Gangdhar inscription (A4), which uses the word *tāntra* in connection to a temple of the mother goddesses (*mātṛ*).\(^6\) Fleet (CI13, 76) correctly prints *tāntrodbhūta* in his edition of the text and translates (ibid., 78) “rising from the magic rites of their religion” without any further comment. However, Sircar’s edition (1965b, 405) has *tantrodbhūta*. Sircar tends to note where he differs from previous editors but does not do so here, so this may be a typographic error in his book. Yet his footnote (ibid.) repeats the word *tantra*, translating it as “spell” and noting that the temple described in this stanza through sporadic comments and, lacking English translations, is not as widely accessible as the *Corpus* volumes.

---

\(^2\) See page 24 for further details.

\(^3\) Previously, the Gangdhar inscription had revealed that Viśvavarman was the son of Naravarman, while the inscription of the silk weavers showed that Bandhuvarman was Viśvavarman’s son.

\(^4\) See also page 24.

\(^5\) Sircar’s *Select Inscriptions* is of course also very widely consulted, but it improves upon Fleet’s readings and interpretations only

\(^6\) See page 61 for context and diverse interpretations.
“indicates the influence of the Tantra cult.” The spelling *tantra* is thus probably one of Sircar’s rare oversights; tā is quite clear in the inscription, though slightly ambiguous in Fleet’s rubbing. Subsequently, a fair number of authors discussed whether or not this epigraph may be considered evidence for the fifth-century presence of Tantrism as we know it, and most seem either to be unaware of or to ignore the fact that the inscribed spelling is *tāntrod-hūtā*. Regardless of one’s stance on Tantric religion in the fifth century, any discussion of this piece of epigraphic evidence should account for (or provide a reason for disregarding) the use of *tantra* where the prosodically equivalent word *tantra* could have been employed just as easily if that concept had been intended.

Another apt illustration, though one with an even smaller share of the elixir called historical significance, is the case of the elusive *nagāṇā* bush. This grew (apologies for the pun) out of the inscription of the silk weavers (A6), which uses *lavalīnaganaikāśākhe* at the end of a compound in line 18, and *naganaikapṛthuśākhe* in a similar position in line 22. Fleet reads *naganaika* in the first instance and *naganaika* in the second, emending it to *naganaika*. He analyses the compound into *nagāṇā-eka*, translating “the *lavalī*-trees and the solitary branches of the *nagāṇā*-bushes” and explaining *nagāṇā* as *Cardiospermum halicacabum* (CIJ3 p. 87 and note 4). Bühler’s edition (1890, 95, 96) prints *naganaika* in both loci and his translation follows Fleet’s interpretation. Sircar (1965b, 305, 306) follows Fleet to the letter, reading *n* and emending to *n* in the second instance.

K. M. Shembavnekar (1931, 146) observed that “the word *nagāṇa*” has caused a “great confusion of the dicapheres of epigraphs,” and that such a plant is “never mentioned by any of the Koṣas” and “unknown, not only to the poets but even to lexicographers.” Instead, he suggested that *gaṇa* here means *gaṇāṇa* (counting), and consequently *nagāṇa* means “countless.” Pandit Jagannath (J. Agrawal 1939) devoted an entire, if brief, paper to this issue, contending that Shembavnekar was quite mistaken in his assertion that the word is not known to lexicographers. In fact, says Jagannath, *nagāṇa* in the meaning *Cardiospermum halicacabum* is attested in H. H. Wilson’s *Dictionary in Sanskrit and English* and the PWG, both of which were first published before the silk weaver inscription was known and thus cannot have been influenced by Fleet’s translation of it; instead, they derive this meaning from the lexicon *Ratnamālā*. He also notes that “countless” makes little sense in combination with *eka*, “one” (which is a fair point that Fleet’s laboured “solitary” does not entirely mitigate); and that in the second instance there is no substantive that “countless” could qualify. In the revised *Corpus*, Bhandarkar correctly points out that the stone in fact has dental *n* in both loci, yet still emends both instances to retroflex *n* (CIJ3rev p. 326 and n. 11; p. 327 and n. 7). Aware of Shembavnekar and Jagannath, he revises Fleet’s translation in the first instance to “the solitary branches of myriads of the *lavalī* creepers” (ibid. 330 and n. 2), while retaining Fleet’s English rendering of the second instance (ibid. 332). It seems that the deeply-sunk rut continued to guide his interpretation even after he had corrected the reading, and he stuck to construing *nagāṇa-eka* even though this required repeated emendation. From the spelling *naganaika* it should be obvious that the string resolves into *naga-naika* without emendation: the text simply means “the many branches of the *lavalī* tree” and “the many expansive branches of trees.” Incidentally, this also eliminates Fleet’s forced “solitary branches,” which strike me as a bit of a self-contradiction. That *naga-naika* is the correct analysis is made all the clearer by the occurrence of *naga* in the sense of “tree” two other times in the same inscription (I3, *nagāvyā*: I5, *nagendrāi*) and *naika* in the sense of “many” one other time (I5, *naika-puspa*).

Hypotheses that go askew because of a minor oversight in their fundament teach an additional lesson: it never hurts to go back to basics. It is for this reason that I have compiled a new collection of all known inscriptions pertaining to the Aulikaras and their close associates. While I do believe that I have corrected many small mistakes in the readings of previously published inscriptions, I make no claim of surpassing Homer or Fleet. I may well have perpetuated some old errors and introduced new ones of my own. To mitigate the impact of these, I have striven to make my work as transparent as possible, so that scholars relying on my work may verify or falsify my readings and interpretations. I thus point out uncertain readings and discuss possible alternatives to my reading or interpretation. In addition, I present the text of each inscription on multiple levels. Farthest removed from the original is the English translation, the primary purpose of which is readability, relegating accuracy to a close second

---


8 Sometimes called the balloon vine in English, *Cardiospermum halicacabum* is in fact a creeper. For *lavalī*, see note 166 on page 107.

9 “[D]ie einzeln stehenden Zweige der *lavalī* und des *nagana*” and “die einzeln stehenden, breiten Zweige des *Nagana*” (Bühler 1890, 24, 26).

10 Shembavnekar had ulterior motives here. The idea that *gaṇa* can be equivalent to *gaṇāṇa* is in fact the point he was desperate to prove in order to support his interpretation of the phrase *mālava-gaṇa-sthitī* used in dates (q.v. page 7).
place. A “curated text” presents the inscription as an abstract textual entity independent of its physical manifestation, and a separate “diplomatic text” is included to furnish an accurate transcript of the text as inscribed, with a minimum of editorial intervention. Finally, wherever possible, I include both a reproduction of an old inked rubbing and a recent digital photograph, so that my claimed readings can be verified from the original. To facilitate this, high-resolution files of the inscription images featured in this book are available for download (open access) in the online repository Zenodo; see the List of Figures (page XV) for the DOI of each image.

This compilation makes up the second – larger and more important – part of this book. It is subdivided into three “chapters,” with the first one comprised of inscriptions in the usual sense of the word, the second of minor inscriptions such as graffiti, coin legends and seal inscriptions, and the third part containing information about and partial texts of unpublished inscriptions that may be relevant to the Aulikaras. Every chapter consists of sections for individual inscriptions, with subsections under each major inscription for the description of the inscribed object and the palaeography of the inscription, a running commentary, an edition of the text presented in a diplomatic and a curated version, an accompanying apparatus of textual notes, and an English translation. Minor inscriptions and unpublished inscriptions have fewer subsections, while some of the major inscriptions come with extra subsections that discuss a particular historical or textual problem pertaining to the inscription under scrutiny.

The first part of the book (after the preliminaries where I set out some conventions I follow in my approach and define some terms) presents a very brief survey of the historical context of Aulikara inscriptions. I do not attempt in this volume to rewrite the history of the Aulikaras. Even the little that we think we know of their doings may need to be revised in many details. At this moment, having completed a critical revision of their epigraphical testimony, I find the new questions to be much more numerous than the answers. At many points in the discussion of the inscriptions (or appended to them) I challenge established views and engage in speculation. Most of my alternative hypotheses require proof that may never be obtained and many may eventually turn out false. I hope that I shall have the opportunity to continue working on this intriguing part of history, and that other scholars who do likewise will find the present volume a useful companion to their research, primarily because of the carefully re-edited inscriptions collected here, but partly also because of the novel ideas proposed.

---

11 See the section on Editorial Conventions (page 3) for details of my approach to translation, curated text and diplomatic text.