The Epigraphia Carnatica Digitization Project
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1. Introduction to the Epigraphia Carnatica

1.a Benjamin Lewis Rice

B. L. Rice created the twelve volumes of the Epigraphia Carnatica from 1886 until 1905, transcribing and translating circa nine thousand inscriptions. The entire corpus is now composed of seventeen volumes, the last five being added between 1940-1950 by Narasimhacharya and H. M. Krishna. During the time in which Rice collected the inscriptions he also collaborated with the Archaeological Department of Mysore and worked on the editions of the *Gazetteers of Mysore* (three volumes).

Part of the Epigraphia Carnatica originated from a patient reconstruction of information collected centuries before with the aim to build the past annals of the country. The Mysore King Cikka Dēva Rājā, who ruled from 1672 to 1704, had lists and copies of the inscriptions throughout his country for the purpose of checking his endowments. Unfortunately, these documents went partially lost during the reign of Tipu Sultān. On the restoration of the Hindu Raj, Colonel Mackenzie took copies of as many as thousands inscriptions. At the end of the nineteenth century, the introduction of photography gave him the chance to write down the original inscriptions, amending the mistakes that were unwittingly propagated by unreliable copies of inscriptions and other records.

The work of Rice started in the 1879 with the translations of *Mysore Inscriptions*; this volume is divided in two parts: the inscriptions photographed by Dixon and those belonging to Rice's private collection. The publication of the Epigraphia Carnatica began in 1886 with the material collected previously; between the years 1890-1897 Rice started his exploration of Karnāṭaka transcribing all inscriptions district by district, along a systematic procedure. In 1905 the scholar wrote *History of Mysore and Coorg from Inscriptions* as a compendium based on the Epigraphia Carnatica. He also composed, beside the Epigraphia Carnatica, *Report of Mysore Census of 1881, Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts in Mysore and Coorg* and translated Pampa's *Bhārata*.

1.b Content of the corpus

Rice divided the inscriptions in three blocks:

1. List of the inscriptions in Roman script. This block contains also further information:

    a. The places where the inscriptions were found. The twelve volumes are based on field-work researches: villages, temples, archaeological excavations. Hence, the geographical location is part of the core of Rice's study; this is the reason why the scholar catalogued the inscriptions with the abbreviations of the name of the places. For example: Bl = Beluru, Ak = Arsikere, SB = Śravaṇa Belgoḷa.

    b. The type of inscriptions. The inscriptions were carved on copper plates or on stone and they served different functions. The *śilāśāsana*, for instance, are constituted by an unbroken expanse of writing surmounted by a few sculptured images. These slabs of stone are erected at the entrance or within the enclosure of temples. Another example are the *vīrakal,* trophies met within every part of the country. *Vīrakal* can be found in the middle of open fields or in the forest, sometimes singly or in a group by the wayside or in the centre of a village. They probably mark the place of the hero's last fight.

    c. The spot where the inscriptions were engraved within a building.

2. English translations of the inscriptions, containing information about the dating of the inscriptions.

3. Text of the inscriptions in the original script.

The aim of Rice in the Epigraphia Carnatica was to trace a "history of Karnāṭaka". For the scholar the importance of the inscriptions relied on the historical information they convey. The whole database of the Epigraphia Carnatica represents for us one of the main tools to reconstruct the chronology of the country and, at the same time, the chronology inside every single dynasty, as, e.g., the family tree.

The peculiarity of this important corpus is the heterogeneity of the elements that contains. Just to mention some examples, it is possible to find an account of a trade of the Māleyaḷa merchants who imported horses in ships by sea for the royal stables, as it is narrated in the preface of the 5° volume; in the same volume, there are many inscriptions about public and court events as well as reports about the memorials of public suicide at the death of the king.

The data in the inscriptions can be divided at least in 7 topics:

1. History of Karnāṭaka
2. Society (as e.g. trades, donation, public events)
3. Ritual
4. Constitution of Medieval dynasties
5. Royalty
6. Karnataka as "mirror of Kashmir"

2. An Open Source Project

The University Library of Tübingen has scanned all the volumes of the first edition of the Epigraphia Carnatica; although in 1973 a second revised edition was initiated by the Department of Kannaḍa at Mysore University, the previous edition is still more complete as it is shown here below. Dr. Cristina Bignami and Dr. Elena Mucciarelli have indexed the scans, thus making the complex content of this corpus more easily accessible to the public. This first cooperation has initiated the open access Databank "Tübingen Digital South Asia" (see G. Zeller in UB info 2013/02) to host the printed and handwritten sources from and about South Asia digitized by the Tübingen University Library http://idb.ub.uni-tuebingen.de/digitue/southasia/ .

Concordance of the different editions.

Volume	1 Ed	1 Rev.ed	2 Ed / Rev.ed	District
01		1914		**Coorg**
01		1972		**Coorg** (Kodagu)
02	1889			**Sravana Belgola**
02			1973	**Sravanabelagola**
03	1894			**Mysore** district
03			1974	**Mysore** district: Gundlupete, Nanjanagudu Heggadadevanakote
04	1898			**Mysore** district 2
04			1975	**Mysore** district: Chamarajanagara, Yalanduru Kollegala Hunasuru Piriyapattana

05,1	1902			**Hassan** district 1: "Comprising Hassan, Belur, Channarayapattana, Hole-Narsipur, Arkalgud, Manjavabad, Arsikere taluks"
05,2	1905			**Hassan** district 2: same taluks
05			1976	**Mysore** district: Krishnarajanagara, Mysore, T. Narasipura taluks
06	1901			**Kadur** district : Kadur, Chikmugalur, Mudgere, Koppa>Sringeri, Jagir, Tarikere
06			1977	**Mandya** district: Krsnarajapete Pandavapura, Srirangapattana
07	1902			**Shimoga** district 1 : Shimoga, Shikarpur, Honnali, Channagiri
07			1979	**Mandya** district: Nagamangala, Mandya, Madduru Malavalli
08		1970		**Shimoga** district ,supplementary inscriptions: "Epigraphia Carnatica Vols VII and VIII Supplementary inscription in the Shimoga district"
08			1984	**Hassan** district: Holenarasipura, Arakalalgudu, Hassan and Alur taluks

08,2	1904			**Shimoga** district 2 *along dynasties*
09	1905			**Bangalore** district : Bangalore, Nalamangala, Magadi, Dod-Ballapur, Devanhalli, Hoskote, Anekal, Kankanhalli, Channaptana
09			1990	**Hassan** district: Beluru, Sakaleshapura taluks

10	1905			**Kolar** district : Kolar, Mulbagal, Bowringpet, Malur, Sidlaghatta, Chik-Ballapur, Goribidnur, Bagepalli, Chinatamani, Srinivaspur
10			1997	**Hassan** district: Arsikere, Channarayapattana *vgl. 5,1/5,2, there also Arsikere, Channarayapattana*
11	1903			**Chitaldroog** district : Chitaldroog, Davangere, jagalur, Molakalmuru, Challakere, Hiriyur, Holalkere
11			1998	**Chikkamagaluru** district: Chikkamagaluru, Mudagere, Srngeri taluks
12	1904			**Tumkur** district: *along dynasties*
13,1	1934			General Index
14	1943			**Mysore** and Mandya, Supplementary inscriptions
15	1943			**Hassan** district, Supplementary inscriptions
16	1956			**Tumkur** district, Supplementary inscriptions
17	1965			**Kolar** district, Supplementary inscriptions

2.a Interdisciplinary

The study of the Epigraphia Carnatica entails different field of studies and scientific approaches:

A linguistic approach: as in many other cases in the Sub-continent, the languages and scripts of inscriptions are a mixture of vernaculars and Sanskrit; moreover we have to deal with different periods in the evolution of each language and script.

A philological approach: a philological revision of the inscriptions edited by Rice is still a desideratum.

A field-work approach: the materiality of the inscriptions calls for a documentation in loco of the objects. In this sense, the knowledge of the territories is necessary in order to follow Rice's mapping of the country.

An art-historical approach: the inscriptions engraved on the stone are located in the temples-facades, pillar, steles, or, as in the case of hero stones, both in villages and temples. The context where they were created is crucial for a full-fledged interpretation of these artefacts.

2.b Further developments

The digitization of this corpus will enable the addition of "thematic tracks" or "topics" to the online open source database. The creation of thematic fields of research has the advantage to simplify the consultation of the Epigraphia Carnatica. In this way scholars of various fields will be facilitated in using this source and encouraged to approach the culture of Karnataka from different perspectives. As such, the Epigraphia Carnatica represents a challenge for its interdisciplinary character.

From the artistic point of view, it will be interesting as further development of the digitization project, to create a photographic archive. The archive would then be linked through a web-based map to the places where the inscriptions are (temples or rock inscription like in the case of Śravaṇa Belgoḷa) when this is still possible. A first pilot project has been financed by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (ZUK 63): http://www.indologie-carnatica.uni-tuebingen.de/omeka/neatline/fullscreen/epigraphia-carnatica-map.

Moreover, the second edition of the Epigraphia Carnatica and *Gazetteers of Mysore* written by Rice, which contain supplementary information on the epigraphic sources represent other sources that await to be made available online.

Finally, it would be of great importance to create a larger project involving also scholars with special expertise, as e.g. epigraphists and TEI specialists in the frame of the Digital South Asia initiative.