The Epigraphia Carnatica Digitization Project

Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen

Cristina Bignami - Elena Mucciarelli

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 nine thousand inscriptions. The entire corpus is now composed of 17 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 has worked on the editions of the *Gazetteers of Mysore* (three volumes).

Part of this corpus 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, the 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 Rice's private collection. The publication of the Epigraphia Carnatica began in the 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 the 1905 the scholar wrote *History of Mysore and Coorg from Inscriptions* as a compendium based on the Epigraphia Carnatica. He also wrote, beside the Epigraphia Carnatica, the *Report of Mysore Census of 1881*, the *Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts in Mysore and Coorg* and translated Pampa's *Bharata*.

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, as e.g. copper plates or stone inscriptions like the *śāsana,* that 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 a temple. Another example are the *vīrakal,* trophies met within

every part of the country, sometimes in the middle of open fields, sometimes in the forest, sometimes singly or in a group by the wayside or in the centre of a village, probably marking the scene of the hero's last fight.
c. The spot where the inscriptions were engraved.
2. English translations of the inscriptions
3. Text of the inscriptions arranged 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 abode in the historical information they convey. The whole data-base of the Epigraphia Carnatica represent 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 palace 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. History of dynasties and related family trees
3. Society (as e.g. trades, donation, public events)
4. Ritualistic
5. Elements of the constitution of Medieval dynasties
6. Royalty
7. Karnataka as "mirror of Kashmir"

2. An Open Source Project

The University Library of Tübingen has decided to scan 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. des. Elena Mucciarelli are now indexing the scans to make 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 digitised 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 in which inscriptions are made is a mixture of vernaculars and Sanskrit, moreover we have to deal with different periods in the evolution of each language.

A field-work approach: 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 the village and temples. The context where they were created plays a central role in their interpretation.

2.b Further developments

The digitization of this corpus will enable the addition of "thematic tracks" or "topics" to the online open source data-base. The creation of thematic fields of research has the advantage to simplify the consultation of the Epigraphia Carnatica and also to let scholars approaching the culture of Karnāṭaka from different prospectives to use this source which challenges interdisciplinary skills.

From the artistic point of view, it will be interesting as a further development of the digitization project, to create a photographic archive related to the places where the inscriptions lay (temples or rock inscription like in the case of Śravaṇa Belgoḷa) when this is still possible, and furthermore to add documentation of important celebrations and rites that happen in those temples.

Furthermore, it would be of great importance to create a larger project involving also scholars with special expertise, as e.g. epigraphist and TEI specialist in the frame of the Digital South Asia initiative, as well as to add at the 17 volumes of the Epigraphia Carnatica the second edition of the corpus and the volumes of the *Gazetteers of Mysore* written by Rice, which may contain supplementary information on the epigraphic sources.