BHĀMAHA IN TIBET

Bhāmaha’s *Kāvyālaṃkāra*¹ is one of the earliest Indian works on Indian literary criticism (*ālamkāraśāstra*) and in all probability the oldest one that has been preserved *in toto*. The view that has found widespread acceptance ever since it was first proposed in the first decade of this century is that the *Kāvyālaṃkāra* is chronologically prior to Danḍin’s *Kāvyādarśa*.² This was also the opinion of the Sinhalese scholar Ratnasrījñāna (10th cent.), the earliest identified commentator of Danḍin, who unhesitatingly states Danḍin’s *opponens* in the first chapter of the *Kāvyādarśa* to have been Bhāmaha.³ Of these two oldest handbooks of poetic theory and literary criticism, it was only Danḍin’s text which penetrated into the Tibetan, and thence, into the Mongol literary awareness. A comprehensive account of its spread in Tibet and the phases of its transmission are given by me in a forthcoming study of the first chapter of this work in Tibet which is accompanied by a text-historical edition of the same, and will therefore not be dealt with here. Similarly, I shall also not discuss the significance of, and the roles played by, the individuals mentioned in this note; the same holds for their oeuvre.

The name of Bhāmaha and several of his propositions, notably those relating to the defining features of a *mahākāvyya* — similar to our epic — and of the various forms of prose, were introduced in Tibet through the medium of the RATNASRĪ. The first Tibetan scholar to have made extensive use of this text was the famous linguist and Sanskritist, Dpang Lo-tsā-ba Blo-gros brtan-pa (1276–1342), alias the third *Sthiramati*. Of the numerous writings that issued from his pen, only two have surfaced and have been published. One of these is his well-known but rare commentary on the *Kāvyādarśa* of which a cursive *dbu-med* manuscript was published in a miscellany of texts on the traditional Indo-Tibetan sciences.⁴ Later Tibetan commentators are quite explicit that Dpang Lo-tsā-ba did not shy away from summarizing the pertinent points made by the RATNASRĪ, although the use of this work is but rarely acknowledged by him. Thus, the GZHUNG-GSAL pp. 297, 307 are the only instances where, in his exegesis of the first chapter, Dpang Lo-tsā-ba makes an explicit mention of this work.⁵ His indebtedness to the RATNASRĪ is neither admitted in the introductory remarks to his commentary, nor is it mentioned in the concluding colophon, the usual places where Tibetan authors declare such bibliographical oddities.

The sixth and last phase of philological scholarship of the *Kāvyādarśa* in Tibet that was ushered in by Si-tu Paṇ-chen Chos-kyi ’byung-gnas (1700–1774) and

---

¹ LEONARD W. J. VAN DER KUIJP

² BHĀMAHA IN TIBET


his foremost student of poetics, Khams-sprul Bstan-dzin chos-kyi nyi-ma (1730–1779), witnessed a brief revival of the interest in the Sanskrit commentaries of Ratnasrijñana and of the more obscure Vāgīśvara[kīrti]. During the five centuries that separate this last phase from the activities of Dpang Lo-tsā-ba, the numerous Tibetan exegetes show themselves to have been on the whole astonishingly faithful transmitters of his remarks concerning Bhāmaha and his few references to the elusive Vāgīśvara[kīrti]. The reason for their reliance on his commentary was no doubt founded on Dpang Lo-tsā-ba’s indisputable mastery of Sanskrit, rendering his exegesis of Dāṇḍin which, apart from earlier annotations (mchan), was the first bona fide Tibetan commentary on this text, particularly authoritative and useful. To be sure, some textual emendations to his revision of the earlier Tibetan translation of the Kāvyādārśa were made by later scholars as were some further elaborations on the exegeses of Ratnasrijñana and Vāgīśvara[kīrti]. At times he is even severely taken to task,6 but on the whole everything points to their utmost regard for his scholarship and his remarks are often cited or paraphrased. That Dpang Lo-tsā-ba was, to say the least, inspired by the RATNASRĪ shall now be shown by way of comparing his remarks about Bhāmaha with those found in this text. At the same time, some comments will be made about the transmission of the Tibetan translation of the Kāvyādārśa in a sort of by-the-by fashion.

1. GZHUNG-GSAL p. 304:

snyan ngags (sic) mkhan bhā ma ha zhes bya ba ni rim pa de kho na ‘dod cing phyi ma ‘gog par byed do ///.
Translation: “The scholar of poetics (kavi) called Bhāmaha claiming only that sequence [in the development of a plot], rejects the latter.

RATNASRĪ p. 14:

(atra) bhāmahāh (pūrvakam eva) kramam icchati, āvitiyam tu dveṣti.
Translation: “[On this matter], Bhāmaha claims only the [first] sequence; on the other hand, he rejects the second one.”

Context: At issue here is the development of the plot of a mahākāvyya and, in particular, the textual position at which the main protagonist is to be introduced. Bhāmaha in his Kāvyālāṃkāra I: 22–23 is of the opinion that the hero of the narrative should be eulogized at the outset of the epic and that, being the hero, this position is not to be usurped by his enemies whom he is supposed to vanquish later on. The Kāvyādārśa I: 21 summarizes this point of view as follows:

gunatataḥ prāg upanyasya nāyakam tena vidvīṣām /
nirākaranam ity esa mārgaḥ prakṛtiśundarah //
thog mar ’dren pa yon tan gyis //