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G. Bhattacharya

## A Unique Narrative Stone Panel Illustrating Revanta

The Hindus were not very careful to select a prominent deity with good moral for their daily worship, the sun-god (Sūrya) is a good example of that. He was the father of many children, legal or illegal. It is well-known to the epic-readers that virgin Kuntī, future mother of the five Pāṇḍava brothers, begot a son with Sūrya, namely Karṇa<sup>1</sup>. Sūrya was father nevertheless, of several other children, four sons, viz., the two Manus, (present and the future), Śani and Yama, and the two daughters, Yamunā and Tapatī, from his wives, Saṃjñā and Chāyā, both of whom are no doubt identical. But the most fascinating and fanciful story is connected with the birth of his three other sons, viz., the twin, Nāsatyā and Dasra (well-known as Aśvinī-kumāras), and Revanta, born of the parents assuming the form of a stallion and a mare<sup>2</sup>.

We are concerned here with the story of Revanta, but we like to refer, and which we think quite relevant also, to the strange incident why the sun-god Sūrya and his wife Saṃjñā, daughter of Viśvakarman, assumed the form of a stallion and a mare respectively, to beget children. This fascinating and fanciful story has been narrated in the various *Purāṇas*, important amongst them are the following *Purāṇas*, viz., *Mārkaṇḍeya-*, *Kālikā-* and *Bhaviṣya-purāṇa*, of which the *Bhaviṣya-* and *Kālikā-purāṇa* are of a much later date. The *Bhaviṣya-purāṇa* narrates mainly the worship and various anecdotes connected with the solar deity. The *Brahma-purāṇa*, ch. 6, no doubt, narrates the story of birth of the Aśvinī-kumāras, but is silent about Revanta, a fact which proves a later introduction and completely foreign nature of this solar deity<sup>3</sup>.

The most relevant undoubtedly, is the *Mārkaṇḍeya-purāṇa* which in cantos LXXVII and LXXVIII describes the birth of Sūrya's children from his two wives, Saṃjñā and Chāyā. Chāyā no doubt, is the shadow-form of Saṃjñā who had left her husband being unable to bear his heat and went to the Northern Kurus changing herself into a mare. We quote the birth-story of the three children from Sūrya as a stallion and Saṃjñā as a mare narrated in canto CVIII from Parjiter's translation (p. 575, lines 7–12):

*Concentrating his thoughts he beheld his wife in the form of a mare, unassailable by all created beings by reason of her austerities and self-repression. And going to the Northern Kurus, the Sun became a horse and approached her. And she, beholding him approaching, because of her fear of a strange male, went face to face with him, being intent on guarding her rear. And thereupon they joined their noses, when they both met there, and his glory passed from the Sun's two nostrils into the mare. Two gods were begotten there, the two Aśvins, who are the two best physicians, namely Nāsatyā and Dasra, the sons who issued forth from the mare's mouth; these two are indeed the sons of Mārtaṇḍa while he bore a horse's form. And at the termination of the flow of his semen was born Revanta, holding a sword and bow, clad in armour, riding on horseback, and carrying arrows and a quiver.*

And page 576, lines 20–23:

*The two Aśvins were made the gods' physicians by their high-souled father. And Revanta was appointed to the lordship over the Guhyakas; and even thus spoke the adorable god then who is acknowledged by the world, – Thou shalt indeed be worthy of worship by the entire world, my child; and mortals, who shall call thee to mind amid the terrors of forests and other lonely places, of great conflagrations, of enemies and robbers, shall be delivered out of great calamity. Comfort, intelligence, happiness, kingship, perfect health, fame, exalted position – these, when worshipped and well-satisfied, thou shalt bestow on men.*

<sup>1</sup> For the story of the birth of Karṇa, son of Kuntī, by the sun-god, see *Mahābhārata, sabhā-parvan*, ch. 110.

<sup>2</sup> The story of Sūrya as a stallion and Chāyā as a mare is given in the *Mārkaṇḍeya-purāṇa*, *Kālikā-purāṇa*, etc. Also consult the index volume of the *Purāṇas* by Stietencron 1992.

<sup>3</sup> The origin of the name of Revanta is confused like that of Skanda; the origin of both the names has been vaguely explained from semen (*retas*).



The *Bhaviṣya-purāṇa*, *Brahma-parvan*, *adhyāya* 79, also describes the story of Sūrya's family in detail. The *Kālikā-purāṇa*, which no doubt, is an eastern Indian production, narrates the same story in ch. 85, but calls Samjñā as Sureṇu, Sūrya's first consort, who took the form of a mare and became the mother of the two Aśvins, the divine physicians, who are represented as human beings with horse's head. She gave birth also to Revanta, the hunter god clad in shining white armour, riding a white horse and holding whip and sword<sup>4</sup>.

But it is quite interesting to point out that already in the early iconographic text, *Byhatsamhitā* (6<sup>th</sup> century), ch. 58, it is stated that Revanta should be engaged in a sport of hunting on the horseback with other attendants (v. 56b), *revanto 'śvārūḍho mygayā-kriḍādi-parivārah*//<sup>5</sup>. The *Viṣṇudharmottara*, ch. 67, describes the sun-god (Ravi) accompanied by his four wives, Rājñī, Rikṣubhā (or Nikṣubhā), Chāyā, Suvarcalā (or Suvarcasā), and four sons, Revanta, Yama and the two Manus (vv. 9–10). Strangely no mention is made of Śani. And again in ch. 70, v. 5a, it is said that Revanta should be shown as an equestrian like that of the sun-god, *prṣṭhe 'śve sūryavat-kāryo revantaś ca tathā prabhuh*//<sup>6</sup>. Sharma (1975, 28) refers to the verses of the *Prabhāsa-khaṇḍa* of the *Skandapurāṇa* (ch. 164, vv. 1–4) where Lord Śiva emphasizes the worship of Revanta and relates to his consort Umā that after performing certain *pūjā*, etc., one must have a dedicated glance (*darśana*) of the *rājyabhattāraka* Revanta seated on horseback, as by doing so one will be free from all the evils and attain religious merit. Very significant is the term *rājyabhattāraka* here<sup>7</sup>.

But most interesting is the description in the *Kālikā-purāṇa* where on occasions the kings are directed to perform the obligatory religious rites, one of them being the worship of a horse for seven days with flowers, clothings, etc., and then build a huge *torāṇa* and a sacrificial pavilion (*yajña-maṇḍapa*) with an altar (*vedi*) inside. The king should worship the guardian deities (*dikpālas*), the planetary deities (*navagrahas*), Viṣṇu and such other universal deities (*viśva-devas*). See *Kālikā-purāṇa*, ch. 85. This is a very significant passage which lays importance on the performance of the rite called *nirājanā* by the king in the month of Āśvina when a horse (*aśva*) should be the central object of worship. And in that connection the son of the sun-god, Revanta (called Rebhanta or Remanta here) should be worshipped near the *torāṇa* on the seventh day. The *Kālikā-purāṇa* is an important text as regards the worship of Revanta<sup>8</sup>. Verses 47–48 of the same chapter give a vivid description of Revanta, son of the sun-god, two-armed, bright with a coat of mail (*kavaca*), shining with a white cloth, his hair tied with a cloth, holding a whip in the left hand and a sword in the right, (and) seated on a white horse (*sita-saindhava*)<sup>9</sup>. Revanta (here Remanta) should be

worshipped in an image or in a pot according to the principles of worship of the sun-god at the gate<sup>10</sup>.

Although Revanta is mentioned in an early text like the *Byhatsamhitā* no image of the deity has been found prior to the early medieval period, i. e. 7<sup>th</sup> century AD<sup>11</sup>. In the earlier images the deity is shown either alone riding a horse or accompanied by attendants, but in the later images he is shown with two other equestrian figures, which is the central image of this essay, being accompanied by hunters, musicians and other divinities, such as Lakṣmī, Gaṇeśa, the Mother-goddesses and the Planetary deities, mainly depicting a successful hunting scene. Generally he is shown holding a drinking cup, which is surprisingly not mentioned in any of the textual descriptions. The horse or horses gallop or trot facing proper left or proper right, there is presumably no special significance to it.

The worship of Revanta was spread all over the Indian sub-continent from Gujarat to Bengal (West Bengal and Bangladesh), but it was unknown in South India<sup>12</sup>. Banerji (1933, 123) says, "In the Eastern School, a class of images, hitherto iden-

<sup>4</sup> Sharma (1975, 28) and Haque (1992, 196) refer to the description of the *Kālikā-purāṇa*.

<sup>5</sup> Haque (1992, 195) quotes the chapter as 57. Both Sharma (1975, 29) and Haque quote the *Byhatsamhitā* passage with mistakes.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted both by Sharma (1975, 28) and Haque (1992, 195), but both make some mistakes in the passage.

<sup>7</sup> That Revanta was an important equestrian deity comparable to a general of a ruler is attested by the fact that he is referred to in several epigraphic passages from the medieval period of India, mostly North India. All these epigraphs however, date in the 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. The earliest of the inscriptions may be the Śilāhāra grant of 1058 AD which compares Mārasīmaha with Revanta. But of all the epigraphs, the Akaltara inscription of the Kalacuri king Ratnadeva (II) refers to the construction of a temple of Revanta at Vikarṇapur (modern Kotgad, M.P.) in the Kalacuri Saṁvat 893 (i. e. 1141–42 AD); see Sharma 1975, 35ff.

<sup>8</sup> Bhattasali has drawn our attention to this relevant text in connection with the worship of Revanta in Bengal; see Bhattasali 1929, 175f., quoting ch. 80 of the *Kālikā-Purāṇa*.

<sup>9</sup> *Kālikā-Purāṇa*, ch. 85, vv. 47–48.

<sup>10</sup> *Kālikā-Purāṇa*, ch. 85, v. 49: *evam vidhan tu remantaṁ pratimāyām ghaṭe 'pi vā sūryya-pūjā-vidhānena pūjayet toraṇ-āntare*!

<sup>11</sup> Sharma was wrong in dating a few images to the Gupta period; see Sharma 1975, figs. 2–5. Revanta is a post-Gupta deity.

<sup>12</sup> Sharma, however, illustrates (1975, fig. 46) a four-armed equestrian figure with a consort, an 18<sup>th</sup> century Maratha painting from Tanjore, Tamil Nadu, now in the National Museum, New Delhi, identifying the figure as "Revanta with his consort Ratnāvati", which is quite doubtful. The stone Revanta images are always two-armed. There is, however, a running dog below the horse.



tified as Kalkin, the tenth incarnation of Viṣṇu, have been proved in the majority of cases to be the images of Revanta, the son of the Sun. In images of Revanta we find dogs in a hunting scene on the pedestal. There are four such images in the Indian Museum (Nos. 5621, 3775, 3776, 3777), one in the Rajshahi Museum (No. F(c)1/258), one in the Sārnāth Museum and at least one such image has been discovered at Nālandā (see pl. LXVe)."

Bhattachali (1929, pl. LXII-a) illustrates a badly damaged Revanta image from Badkamta (Tippera Dist., Bangladesh), now in the Bangladesh National Museum (no. 3. A. iii b/1). Bhattachali (1929, 175f.) refers to the elaborate details of the worship of Revanta given in the "Kālikā-Purāna, ch. 80":

"The worship of Revanta described there appears to be the concluding worship in the rite of *Nirājanā*, the performance of which was incumbent on every king. This *Nirājanā* rite was performed after the worship of the goddess Durgā in the autumn and lasted for seven days. It was a kind of military and religious ceremony performed by kings or generals of armies in the month of *Āśvina*, preparatory to a campaign. It was a general purification, by means of sacred *mantras*, of the king's priests, his ministers and all the various component parts of an army, together with the arms and implements of war. It was also accompanied by a kind of triumphant march, parade and mock-fight"<sup>13</sup>.

E. Haque (1992, 196) says, "We have noticed nine images of Revanta from Bengal, of which two are from East Bengal and the rest from North and West Bengal. We could not gather full descriptions of three. The remaining six images basically agree among themselves. The equestrian deity is invariably two-armed and always surrounded by attendants one of whom holds a parasol over the head of the god. Contrary to the Indian Museum image from Bihar which faces to the proper right, all the Bengal images face to the proper left."

M. Rahman (1998) illustrates two stone images of Revanta, one from Ghatnagar, Porsha, Naogaon (Rajshahi), c. 11<sup>th</sup> century (VRM 726, pl. 249; also illustrated by Haque) and the other from Sonapur, Itahar, West Dinajpur, India (VRM 1531, pl. 250).

Earlier scholars confused the Revanta image with that of Kalkin, the future *avātara* of Viṣṇu. It was P. B. B. Bidyabinoda who removed the confusion and finalised the identification (see Bidyabinoda 1909, 391f., pl. XXX). Although several short articles appeared on Revanta, it was B. N. Sharma who published in 1975 a short but important book on Revanta giving exhaustive references of literature and illustrations. He had published an elaborate article before (Sharma 1973). In our essay we have, however, given references from Sharma's book. Sharma published 27 figures in his essay, while his book illustrates 46 figures<sup>14</sup>.

Broadly speaking Revanta images are to be classified into two main groups:

- A. The equestrian deity is shown alone.
- B. The equestrian deity is shown with two other equestrian figures.

In group A the equestrian deity is also shown followed by several attendants and animals to depict a boar-hunting scene, and similarly in group B the three equestrian figures are accompanied by several other figures. Excepting a few bronze images, most of the Revanta images are of stone. In this article we illustrate and discuss a few images only, our central image for discussion is no doubt the beautiful and early stone image belonging to group B, now in a private collection in London.

Fig. 1 (A 1):

Perhaps, so far known, the earliest image of Revanta is from the Pachar Hill, Gaya Dist., Bihar, now in the Patna Museum (Acc. no. 10648, measurement 23-1/4 × 15-1/4"). The image is well-known and has been published by various scholars. It is a post-Gupta image and is to be dated in the 7<sup>th</sup> century (see Asher 1980, 45, pl. 66). Although the stone relief is corroded, one does not fail to appreciate this lovely image. The youthful deity is shown riding a trotting horse facing proper left, holding a cup of wine (*caṣaka*) in the right hand and the reins of the horse in the left hand. He wears high boots and carries a short dagger in his waist-band. An attendant holds an umbrella over his head and another one some indistinct object. Quite remarkable is the Gupta hair style of the deity, perhaps there is a cap above it.

Sharma (1975, 45) refers to the *pañcāyatana* type of the Harihara temple at Osia, Jodhpur Dist.,

<sup>13</sup> We have already quoted the passage above. Bhattachali's "Kālikā-purāna, ch. 80" is our ch. 85. Bhattachali must have consulted a different edition of the *Kālikā-purāna*.

<sup>14</sup> B. N. Sharma was bold enough to suggest doubtfully the highly artistic and unique figure of a young horse-rider from the Sun Temple at Konarak, Orissa, belonging to the Eastern Gaṅga period (13<sup>th</sup> century) as Revanta; see Sharma 1975, fig. 41. The two arms of the deity are badly damaged, and the deity is not shown in a hunting situation. Boner/Sarma/Das (1972, pl. 45 a-b) identify the image as Haridaśva and cite a *dhyāna* of the deity in the Appendix XXa (Boner/Sarma/Das 1972, 235), but he is called there Prabhākara holding lotuses in his hands and "riding a horse of large body speeds on his way". Debala Mitra, on the other hand, described the huge image (3.58 m high and 1.73 m wide) as Bhāskara, lavishly bejewelled and wearing a high crown and a *tilaka*, quoting the description from the *Agni-purāna*, ch. 51: *athav āśva-samārūdhah kārya ekas tu bhāskarah* (see Mitra 1976, 78). Also compare the *Kālikā-purāna*, ch. 85, v. 68, where the king pleads to the horse (*āśva*) saying: as you carry faithfully Rebhanta and Bhāskara, similarly you carry me for victory (*yena satyen rebhantaṃ yena satyena bhāskaram/vahase tena satyena vijayāya vahasva mām//*). We hesitate to accept Sharma's identification.





Fig. 1. (A 1): Revanta from Pachar Hill, Gaya District, Bihar, 23-3/4" x 15-1/4", now Patna Museum (Acc. No. 10648), c. 7<sup>th</sup> century. After Sharma 1975, fig. 5.

Rajasthan, where on the southern face of a subsidiary shrine built for Sūrya, an exquisite image of Revanta has been carved out. Perhaps Revanta is carved along with his brother Śani in this sun-temple at Osia as Pandey has informed us (Pandey 1969, 135). He refers to several stone images of Revanta from different parts of Northern, Central and Eastern India (Pandey 1969, 134ff.). Of the numerous images of Revanta hardly we encounter one bearing the name of the deity. Sharma (1975, fig. 36) illustrates a stone image of Revanta, most probably from Bihar, now in the Allahabad Museum (no. 975, height 105 cm) which records only the name of the donor, Abhika. The pedestal inscription reads: *śrīmad abhikasya*<sup>15</sup>. But the inscribed late image of Revanta in yellow stone from Bhati, Jaisalmer, Rajasthan, now in the National Museum, New Delhi (no. 65.149, height 45 cm) records the date of the image as *samvat* 1682 (i. e. 1625 AD) and the name of the deity as Revata (i. e. Revanta). The image was perhaps installed by the ruler himself, Rāula Kalyānadāsa (see Sharma 1975, fig. 43). For the text of the three line inscription, see Sharma (1975, 60f.).

It appears that perhaps from the time of the Gurjara-Pratihāra rulers of Kanauj, i. e. say from

the 8<sup>th</sup> century onwards, Revanta is not shown riding alone but accompanied by two other equestrian male figures. We illustrate and describe below the stone panels with three equestrian figures.

Fig. 2 (B 1a):

Two years back while I was staying in London with Dr. A. Lahiri, who has a small collection of Indian art objects and modern paintings, I was very much interested to see a pretty large, reddish stone sculptured panel depicting three equestrian male figures. He knew already that one of them is Revanta, but did not know the identity of the others. The stone panel measures 136 x 76 cm. As I was interested to publish this sculpture Dr. Lahiri was very pleased and sent me a few photographs. In this relief-panel the horses trot towards proper right. The central figure, which is no doubt Revanta, is damaged, his horse also. With his left hand Revanta holds the reins of his horse, and perhaps the wine cup in the right hand (damaged). A fellow is shown on top holding a large jar perhaps of wine. At the back another fellow holds the royal umbrella, also damaged. There is a dog below the horse. But who are the other equestrian companions of Revanta? The figure riding to his front is bearded and wears a peculiar cap, and perhaps boots now lost. Most probably he holds a pen and instead of an ink-pot, a manuscript. We may identify him with Piṅgala. The equestrian figure at Revanta's back wears the similar cap and high boots and holds a large staff (*daṇḍa*) and the reins in the left hand. He is no doubt Daṇḍin or Daṇḍanāyaka. But the question arises why Piṅgala and Daṇḍanāyaka who accompany the Sun-god, father of Revanta, will accompany him also? We come to that question later.

Fig. 3 (B 1b):

At the extreme proper right side stands a two-armed figure holding in each hand a full-blown lotus (right one damaged) wearing a tall crown (*kirīṭa*) and boots. No doubt he is the sun-god, Sūrya, standing on an ornamental pedestal and not on a chariot. Below the Sun-god perhaps a four-armed, controversial (winged?) female figure is shown riding a lion. Perhaps she holds a stab, a pot and a manuscript. I am unable to identify her<sup>16</sup>.

Fig. 4 (B 1c):

On top of the panel, proper right seven seated Grahās are shown, starting with Sūrya and ending with Śani, and then the large head of Rāhu. Ketu is missing in this group, a fact which points to the earlier date of the panel.

<sup>15</sup> Here *visarga* with two *daṇḍas* have been used as a punctuation mark.

<sup>16</sup> During my lecture at the conference C. Bautze-Picron suggested that the figure may be of Durgā.





Fig. 2. (B 1a): Reddish sandstone relief depicting Piṅgala, Revanta and Daṇḍa or Daṇḍanāyaka, exact find-spot not known but near the bank of the Ganges in Uttar Pradesh, 136 × 76 cm, now Avijit Lahiri Collection, London, 8<sup>th</sup> century. Photo courtesy: A. Lahiri.



Fig. 3. (B 1b): Detail of fig. 2. Photo courtesy: A. Lahiri.



Fig. 4. (B 1c): Detail of fig. 2. Photo courtesy: A. Lahiri.





Fig. 5. (B 2): Fragmentary buff sandstone relief depicting Daṇḍanāyaka (Revanta and Piṅgala are missing), find-spot not known, Central India, 58 cm. After Sotheby's London, 24 Nov. 1986, lot 153. Photo courtesy: G. Mevissen.

On top of the panel (see fig. 2), on the proper left, five seated figures are shown: four-armed Gaṇeśa, two-armed and pot-bellied Kubera, Abhiṣeka-Lakṣmī (the so-called Gaja-Lakṣmī), a pot-bellied, two-armed male deity holding a cup, and a two-armed female deity playing *vinā*. I am unable to identify the latter two figures also. The scene depicted is a hunting scene with trees, flying *haṃsas*, musicians and other attending figures. About the origin of the relief sculpture the owner told me that it was found in Uttar Pradesh near the bank of the Gaṅgā. He wishes to put the date a bit earlier, but to me it appears to be a Pratihāra piece of the 8<sup>th</sup> century.

Some time back G. Mevissen drew my attention to two stone panels from the Sales catalogues of Sotheby's London and New York, of which one is badly damaged, but the other is almost complete; both are supposed to have originated in Central India. In both the panels, the horses are shown trotting to proper left. We describe first the badly damaged one.

Fig. 5 (B 2):  
The fragmentary piece (Sotheby's London 24 Nov. 1986, lot 153) has been described as (p. 78), "A Central Indian buff Sandstone Fragment depicting a Horse and Rider, circa 10<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> Century, the

rider's right foot resting on the back of a boar, holding a sword in his right hand; two busts, a female figure and two birds above, 58 cm (23 in.) mounted." This fragment poses a problem. It is a part of a large stone panel most probably illustrating three equestrian figures. Perhaps the equestrian figure represents Daṇḍa or Daṇḍanāyaka, and not Revanta, holding a sword in the right hand and the reins of the horse in the left hand. The two other equestrian figures, Revanta and Piṅgala following him, are possibly missing. Below the right foot of Daṇḍa there is a boar, and a woman holding a jar stands at the back of the horse. On top the large head of Rāhu with the *añjali-mudrā* is shown, and close to him the pot-bellied (half snake) figure of Ketu (identification by G. Mevissen) followed by two ducks. The stone relief should be dated in c. 11<sup>th</sup> century.

Fig. 6 (B 3):

The complete panel appeared in the Sale catalogue of Sotheby's London (22/23 Oct. 1992, lot 376). It is described as, "A Buff Sandstone Relief Depicting Three Horsemen, Central India, 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century, riding in procession from left to right, trampling on small animals underfoot, one holding a sword, another a cup, several attendants behind, a row of seated devotees above and below, 107 by 53 cm, 42 by 21 in, mounted. The style of the horses would appear to be closely related to those in reliefs on the Lakshmana temple at Khajuraho, see Deva, Plates 15ff." In this complete panel Piṅgala is at the front holding perhaps an ink-pot and a pen, followed by Revanta in the middle holding a drinking cup in the right hand and the reins of the horse with the left hand, and Daṇḍa or Daṇḍanāyaka at the rear holding a sword with the right hand and the reins of the horse with the left hand. There are several figures in between the three equestrian figures. A female figure holds an umbrella above the head of Revanta and another figure holds perhaps a wine-jar close to Revanta's horse. The figure at the rear of Piṅgala's horse perhaps holds something on his shoulder (damaged), of the two other figures close to Piṅgala, one holds a sword in his raised right hand and the other blows a conch. Of the two other figures close to Daṇḍanāyaka, one holds some indistinct object, and the other at the corner holds a dead boar over his shoulders. This motif is repeated in several reliefs. Dogs and boars are also shown below the legs of the horses. On the upper level the nine planetary deities (*navagrahas*) are shown at the proper right, and Lakṣmī being bathed by two elephants in the middle, followed by the eight mother-goddesses (*aṣṭa-mātykās*). Below at the bottom several musicians and a duck are illustrated. The relief-panel should be dated in the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> Both the pieces, B 2 and B 3 (figs. 5 and 6) must have originated in the same area, because in both the cases



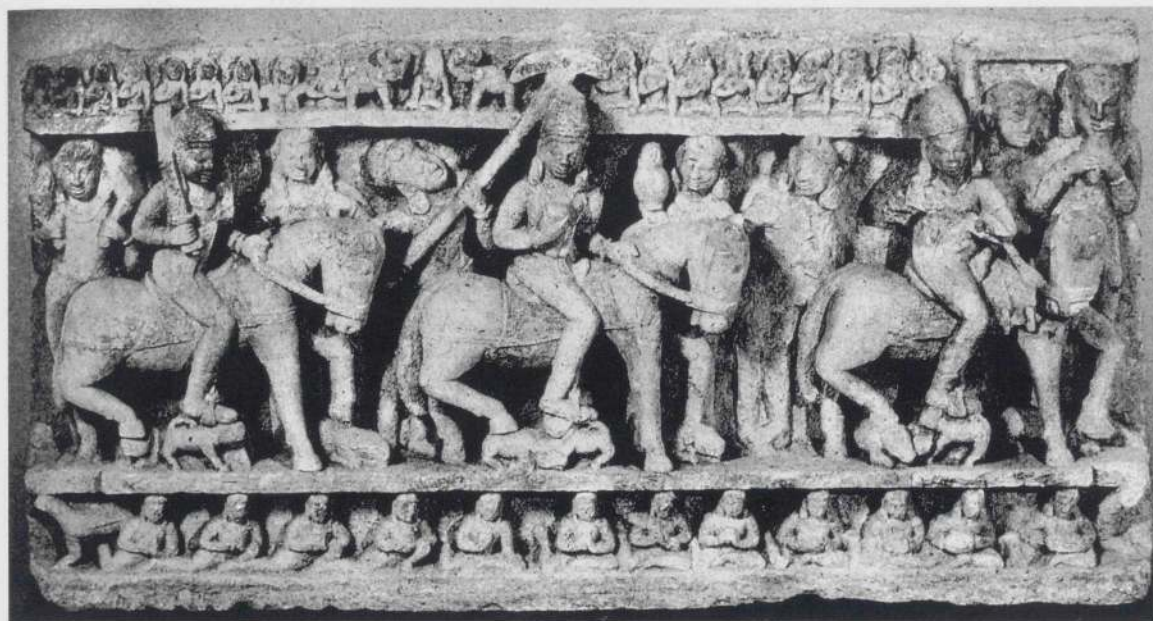
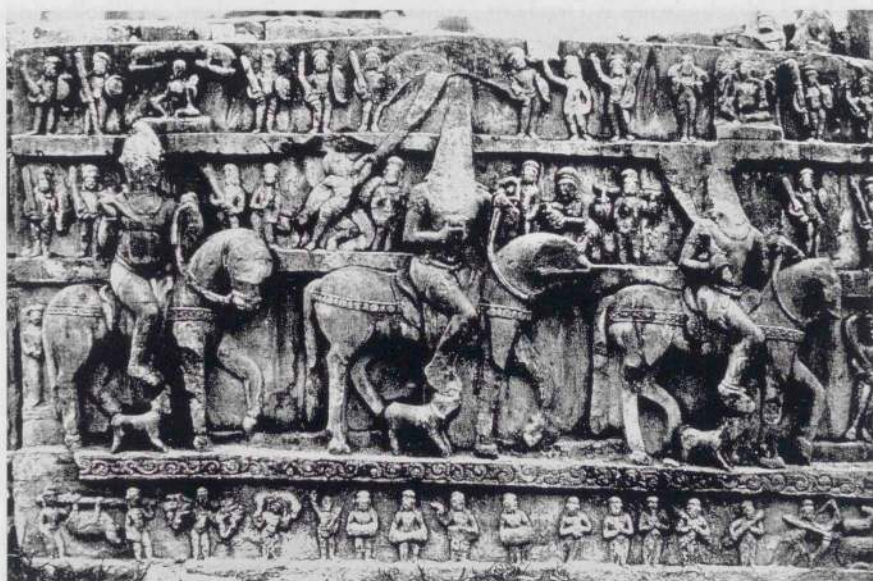


Fig. 6. (B 3): Buff sandstone relief depicting Daṇḍanāyaka, Revanta and Piṅgala, find-spot not known, Central India, 107 × 53 cm. After Sotheby's London, 22/23 Oct. 1992, lot 376. Photo courtesy: G. Mevissen.

Fig. 7. (B 4a): Black basalt relief depicting Piṅgala, Revanta (head damaged) and Daṇḍanāyaka (both heads damaged) from Ashokdam-Rajaona in Lakhi Sarai, Bihar, 88 × 150 cm, 10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> century. Photo courtesy: C. Bautze-Picron.



I was under the impression that in Eastern India Revanta was shown always alone and never with the companions of Piṅgala and Daṇḍanāyaka. But I am thankful to C. Bautze-Picron for drawing my attention to two stone panels from Bihar, both of which depict the three horse-riders. In these eastern Indian relief panels the horses face to proper left and not to proper right.

Fig. 7 (B 4a):  
This large stone panel measuring 88 × 150 cm hails from a place called Ashokdam-Rajaona in Lakhi

Sarai and is to be dated in the 10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> century AD. This is an excellent panel although the heads of the three horse-riders have been badly chopped off. Below each caparisoned trotting horse there is a barking dog. The central male figure holding a drinking cup in his right hand and the reins of the horse in the left hand, is no doubt Revanta. A

Daṇḍa or Daṇḍanāyaka holds a sword. – For another (smaller) relief panel showing the three horse-riders, see Sotheby's New York, 19 Sept. 1996, lot 350.





Fig. 8. (B 4b): Detail of fig. 7. Photo courtesy: C. Bautze-Picron.



Fig. 9. (B 4c): Detail of fig. 7. Photo courtesy: C. Bautze-Picron.

corpulent male chap holds a royal umbrella (badly damaged) over his head, and a gracefully bent down female figure pours wine in his cup, a nearby standing male figure carries two large jars, most probably filled with wine. The horse-rider in the front holds perhaps a *daṇḍa*, damaged, or a sword in his right hand, and the reins of the horse in the left hand. No doubt, he is Daṇḍa or Daṇḍanāyaka. Both the figures are slim. The third figure, however, is a bit plump, and as his face is badly damaged we may only presume that he had a beard. He holds a pen (stylo) in his right hand, and perhaps a manuscript in the left hand. He is no doubt Piṅgala. All the three figures wear high-boots showing their association with the Sun-god Sūrya.

Fig. 8 (B 4b); 9 (B 4c):

Above in the first cavity of the panel, Fig. 8 (B 4b), Abhiṣeka-Lakṣmī (the so-called Gaja-Lakṣmī) is shown at the proper right, and at the proper left, fig. 9 (B 4c), the seated four-armed Gaṇeśa, along with standing attending soldiers; one fellow carries a booty, viz. a pig, on his shoulder. As the top portion of the panel is destroyed we are not sure about the presence of other figures there. In the second cavity also the hunter-assistants, wine-jar carriers are shown. In the fourth cavity which is a very dramatic one, hunters are shown carrying dead animals, one announcing the victory of hunting, musicians playing different music instruments, and at the extreme corner a hunter is shown chasing deer with a bow and arrow.

The other panel, measuring 65 × 40 cm and badly damaged, is to be found at Pawapuri, the well-known place of Jainism. In this panel not illustrated here also the three equestrian figures are shown.

The presence of Lakṣmī and Gaṇeśa here (figs. 7–9) and the planetary deities and mother goddesses in the other panels discussed above, no doubt suggests success and good luck in the hunting

excursion of Revanta, but we have to find out the reason why Piṅgala and Daṇḍa or Daṇḍanāyaka accompany Revanta, because they are the companions of the Sun-god, and as such they are illustrated with him too. While describing an unusual stone panel either from Uttar Pradesh or Madhya Pradesh, now in the Norton Simon Museum at Pasadena, and belonging to the 11<sup>th</sup> century, Pal (2003, pl. 85) comments (p. 126), “The leading horseman is identified as Revanta because an attendant holds a parasol over his head. No such symbol of authority is provided for the other two riders, who are identified by B. N. Sharma (1975, p. 45) as Danda or Dandi and Pingala, the two constant companions of Surya . . . , but without any textual evidence. Sharma (1975, 28) quotes a passage from the *Vishnudharmottarapurana*, which clearly states that Revanta should be portrayed with his two half-brothers, the two Manus, on his two sides.”<sup>18</sup> We have described this panel as unusual because in the group of three equestrians Revanta is always shown in the middle. Pal (2003, 127) also remarks “Interestingly, unlike most reliefs where Revanta is in the middle, here he leads the group.” Pal describes further, “All three grasp the reigns (!) with the left hand. With the right hand Revanta holds a cup, which is replenished by a maidservant above. The second rider’s attribute is not recognizable, but the third figure clearly has a long sword or staff.” The second

<sup>18</sup> Sharma (1975, 66, note 1) quotes an irrelevant passage from the *Bhaviṣya-purāna* (ch. 124, vv. 13–39) and comments (Sharma 1975, 41), “The Bhaviṣya Purāna gives a detailed account of these two figures and they are also shown in almost all the sculptures of Sūrya particularly of the mediaeval period. As Revanta is the son of Sūrya, it is not surprising that his two attendants are also sometimes shown with him particularly when he is going for hunting in a forest.” Unfortunately Sharma was not aware of the relevant passage of the *Bhaviṣya-purāna*, viz. ch. 79, which has been referred to by us in this essay.



figure, i. e. Piṅgala, holds perhaps a stylo in the right hand and an ink-pot together with the reins in the left hand<sup>19</sup>.

In our attempt to find out a reference to Daṇḍa and Piṅgala in connection with Revanta, the son of the sun-god, we found that the *Bhaviṣya-purāṇa* which deals elaborately with various aspects of the sun-god, has an interesting story on this episode. The *Bhaviṣya-purāṇa*, *Brahma-parvan*, ch. 79, which describes the family members of the sun-god and relates the story of origin of his children, describes also the birth of Revanta as an equestrian deity and his connection with Daṇḍanāyaka and Piṅgala. Verses 55–62 of the chapter describe that after the birth of the twins, Nāsātya and Dasra, the Aśvins, from the sun-god as a stallion and Saṃjñā as a mare receiving his semen through her nostrils, the sun-god assumed his own form. Saṃjñā was satisfied to see that. She gave birth to Revanta (v. 58 *tatas tu janayāmāsa saṃjñā sūrya-sutaṃ śubham / rūpeṇa c ātmanas tulyaṃ revataṃ nāmanāmataḥ*), but hardly as he was born he ran away with the eighth horse of his father<sup>20</sup> and never released it. Thereupon the sun-god (*arka*) instructed Daṇḍanāyaka and Piṅgala to bring back the horse without blemishing the horse by force. They being desirous to blemish the horse of the noble soul, could not do that till today.

*pitur grhy āṣṭamaṃ so'śvaṃ jāta-mātrah palāyata/  
sa tasmint sakṛd ārūḍhas tam aśvaṃ n aiva  
muṃcati//* 59  
*tato 'rkena samādiṣṭau daṇḍanāyaka-piṅgalau/  
aśvaṃ pratyānayethāṃ me mā balāc chidrato 'sya  
tu//* 60  
*pārśvasthau tiṣṭhataḥ tasya asva-cchidr-ābhikāṃ-  
ṣkhiṇau/na cchidraṃ tu labhete tau tasy ādy āpi  
mahātmanah//* 61<sup>21</sup>.

Viśvakarman then told Sumantu, Bhānu, i. e. the sun-god, employed Revanta to the command of horses, who was the son of Arka (i. e. the sun-god) and looked like him. He who worships Revanta on the journey, goes peacefully on the road, (Revanta) is the bestower of happiness to the mortals, oh, Son of the Yadu family.

*revantaṃ nāma yo 'rkasya rūpeṇ ārka-samaḥ sutaḥ/  
aśvānām ādhipatye tu yojitaḥ sa tu bhānunā//* 78  
*kṣemeṇa gacchate 'dhvānaṃ yas taṃ pūjayate  
pathi/sukha-prasādyo martyānām sadā yadu-kul  
odvaha//* 79<sup>22</sup>.

It will be quite interesting to find out whether this passage of the *Bhaviṣya-purāṇa* connecting Revanta with Piṅgala and Daṇḍanāyaka, which appears to be quite abrupt in the text, is earlier to the sculptural representation of the three equestrian figures in relief-sculptures of the Pratihāra period or later<sup>23</sup>.

We regret very much as we could not include in our study two important articles: Schmidt 1977 and Carter 1988.

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<sup>19</sup> Compare the other figures of Piṅgala in the various reliefs.

<sup>20</sup> No source is known to us where the sun-god is given eight horses; he is always described as *saptāśva*, i. e. with seven horses, and his chariot is being drawn later by seven horses.

<sup>21</sup> There is a bit difficulty for us to follow the sense of the passage here.

<sup>22</sup> The author of the *Bhaviṣya-purāṇa* gives a pseudo-philological explanation of the term *revanta* (v. 62b), and then gives the names of the nine children of the sun-god (i. e. Ravi), viz. Manu, Maya, Yami, Sāvarni, Śanaīścara, Tapatī, Aśvins and Revanta (v. 63: *manur mayo yamī c aiva sāvarṇi sa śanaīścaraḥ/tapatī c aśvinau c aiva revantaś ca raveḥ sutaḥ//*)

<sup>23</sup> For the date of the *Bhaviṣya-purāṇa* we have to consult the studies of R. C. Hazra. Hazra (1975, 188), however, remarks (on chapter 79), "The lower limits of the dates of the remaining chapters are not known". For most of the other chapters he puts the date between 1000 and 1200 AD.



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