

The *Praśastis* of the Maitraka Kings: Dynastic Tradition and Historical Discontinuity

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Almost all of the more than hundred available, fully preserved copper-plate charters of the Maitraka dynasty, who ruled in Kathiawar from the 5th to the 8th centuries, contain a *praśasti* preceding the description of the grant recorded therein. Such a genealogical account of the royal house – in contrast to the metrical genealogies of many later dynasties, always in prose – is merely missing in the earliest known charter from the beginning of the 6th century. So far, the Maitraka *praśastis* have only been utilized for constructing the line of succession, but hardly received attention as historical sources and pieces of literature.

A first standardized genealogical description was composed in the early 6th century and then, by order of the succeeding Maitraka kings, continuously updated until the end of the 6th century. At the beginning of the 7th century, a remarkable change in the depiction of the predecessors is evident. i.e., the three direct successors of the founder of the dynasty were skipped. The omission of these early kings poses the question whether the considerable amendment has to be explained as purely motivated by the endeavour to shorten the ever growing text, or whether it rather indicates an actual break in the line of succession. Besides genuine Maitraka material, forged charters referring to the rule of this dynasty can also be consulted to answer this question. The modified Maitraka *praśasti* was updated until the second half of the 8th century, without any further considerable abridgement or alteration in the reception of former kings. However, particularly in the latest charters, some negligence regarding the precise definition of the relationship between individual predecessors can be observed.

The fact that the *praśastis* of the Maitraka charters have been nearly ignored as sources of history might be explained by their specific character: they offer less clear information on actual political events and military activities than parallel passages in the inscriptions of other royal families. Nevertheless, these genealogical descriptions in *kāvya* style contain an extensive and valuable stock of material on the ideal, metaphorical presentation of early medieval Indian kingship in an epigraphical context. They depict the military superiority of the Maitraka rulers over their enemies, the charity and protection offered to their relatives, friends, vassals, and subjects, their donative activities towards religious persons and institutions as well as their intelligence and learning, beauty and wealth in a prototypical manner.