ART. XVIII.—*Notes on a Bactrian Pali Inscription and the Samvat Era.* By Prof. J. DOWSON.

IN *Trübner's Record* of June, 1871, I gave a notice of a short Inscription, of which a rubbing was brought from Takht-i-Bahi by Dr. Leitner. The rubbing showed the Inscription to be in a very defective state, and, according to General Cunningham, the original stone has been used for grinding spices on. A photograph of it has since been obtained, from which the accompanying plate has been copied. Many of the letters are indistinct, but the photograph would seem to indicate that the blank space in the middle was blank from the first. The stone is now in the Lahore Museum. I quote what I said in the *Record*.

“Altogether there are six lines of writing, but of these, the first two, containing the name of the King and the date, are alone intelligible. Fortunately this is the only part of the inscription which is of any importance; for the word *puyae*, which is twice legible towards the end, shows that this inscription is a mere record of a votive offering, such as Buddhist worshippers loved to make and to set up in remembrance of their devotion. The opening words of the inscription may be thus translated: ‘*In the 26, twenty-sixth, year of the great King Guna . . . pharasa, on the 7, seventh, day of the month Vaisākha.*’ As usual, the numbers are expressed both by numerals and by words. The ‘great King Guna . . . pharasa’ is probably the ‘Gondophares’ of the bilingual coins, whose name is written in a variety of ways in the Bactrian versions of the name. This identification, however, is open to doubt, for in the inscription three letters are obliterated in the

THE TAKHT-I-BAHI INSCRIPTION OF KING GONDOPHARES.

PHOTO-LITHOGRAPHED FROM A PHOTOGRAPH OF COLONEL YULE.

TAKEN FROM THE ORIGINAL STONE IN THE LAHORE MUSEUM.

middle of the name. There is nothing even to suggest a guess as to what these letters were, but they must have made the name longer than it has yet been met with. It may be that it is a mere difference of spelling, but, on the other hand, it may be a different though similar name."

In a subsequent number of the *Record*, General Cunningham, under his initials A.C., communicated his own version of the Inscription.¹ Before seeing my version he had read the name as Gudupharasa, and had identified it with Gondophares. He had also read the name of the month Vesakha. He then proceeds. "The date of the Inscription I read as Samvat 103, the fourth day of the month Vesākḥ (equivalent to A.D. 46), in the 26th year of the King's reign. The inscription ends with the words *sa puyde mātu pitu puyae*, 'for his own religious merit, and for the religious merit of his father and mother.' It is therefore only a simple record of the building of a *Stūpa* or a *Vihār* by some pious Buddhist."

General Cunningham's decipherment of the word Samvat induced me to take up the Inscription again; and although the letters are very indistinct, I have no doubt that the word is there. The transliteration of the first two lines runs as follows:—

Maha-rayasa Gunu . . . pharasa vasha 113

Samvatsarasa śatamae 111 < 1 veśakhasa masasa divase.

The word *vasha* in the first line is the Sanskrit *varsha* "year," and this line may be unhesitatingly translated, "In the 26th year of the great King Gunu . . . phara (Gondophares)."

The first two words of the second line are *Samvatsarasa śatamae*, "In (the year) one hundred of the Samvat." The other words are *Veśakhasa masasa divase*, "on the day

¹ Reproduced in the *Indian Antiquary* of August, 1873, p. 242.

of the month *Vaiśākha*." The whole of the letters of the word *Samvatsarasa* are not distinct, and my reading has been contested by one well entitled to an opinion. It is admitted, however, that the first two letters and the last one are legible. I myself have no doubt of the *ra* before the final *sa*; but of the medial character, the compound *tsa*, only a faint indication can be found. The stone has in this spot received some damage, and the most conspicuous mark seems to me to be a mere crack, and out of the regular line of writing. The word *Samvatsarasa* requires five distinct characters, and the space occupied by the word in the Inscription occupies just the same space as the well-defined five letters in the line above it. But whatever the doubt about the identity of some of the letters, the word certainly forms part of the date, and as the first two letters and the final one are distinct, the conclusion as to what the word must be would be almost irresistible, even if no traces of the other letters were visible.

There remain the numerals in the middle of the line, and the question is how they are to be taken. My first idea was that the figure $\times$ was a defaced $\times$, and so I read it as 4—thus taking it and the three following strokes to represent 7. But a close examination of the original rubbing and of the photograph has convinced me that the figure is perfect, for there is no sign of abrasion. So it cannot be a 4. General Cunningham seems to have read the figures as (1) one, ($\times$) hundred, and (111) three. But neither of these versions is tenable. The date as given in words is "one hundred of the *Samvatsara*," and, according to the usual practice, that number must be found among the figures. Therefore the sign $\times$ either represents a hundred, and $\times 1$ means 100; or $\times$ is a kind of stop or division separating the hundred from the units, in which case 1 will mean 100. The former is obviously the more probable and sensible reading, so $\times 1$ may be taken as signifying 100. There are then left the figures 111 representing 3, which must belong to the month, making the date "3 *Vaiśākha*, 100 *Samvatsara*." It must be admitted that this interpreta-

tion is not self-convincing, for the number of the year and the date of the month are placed together in a very awkward and deceptive way; and according to the ordinary practice, the figures representing the date of the month ought to follow the name, not precede it. I cannot decipher the word following the name of the month, but I am satisfied that the first character is not a numeral. General Cunningham found a 4 somewhere, but I venture to say there is no such figure—so the three perpendicular marks represent “3 Vaiṣākha.” The translation of the first two lines is—

“In the 26th year of the great King Gondophares (and) on the third day of the month Vaiṣākha, (year) one hundred 100 of the Samvatsara.”

These few words are of great importance, as they prove that an era called Samvatsara was in use in Bactrian Pali days, and that it had become recognized as an era in its hundredth year. Whatever doubt may exist as to the above rendering of the numerals, I feel perfectly assured in the reading of the words “*Samvatsarasa śatamae*,” which can mean nothing else than “in one hundred of the Samvatsara.”

As the word Samvatsara, in its primitive sense, means simply “year,” it has been difficult in early dates to determine whether to read it simply as “year,” or as “*the year*,” or “era.” In translating the Mathura Inscriptions I purposely left the question open. Some of those inscriptions bore very early dates, as 5 and 9; and it seemed very improbable that the Samvatsara, whatever its epoch, should have come to be recognized as an era at so early a time: for the establishment of an era is almost always a retrospective, not a prospective arrangement. Though it may well come to pass that at the end of a long or remarkable reign, its years may continue to be counted onwards, and so the commencement of that reign may become the epoch of an era. Something like this would seem to have been the case with the Samvatsara.

General Cunningham, in reproducing my translations of

the Mathura Inscriptions,¹ took a bolder course than I had ventured upon. Instead of reading Samvatsara as "year," he converted it into "era;" and no doubt he was quite justified in doing so with such high dates as 135 and 281. But there still remained a doubt as to whether the word *samvatsara* might not be used in the inscriptions with its simple primary meaning of "year," as year of a reign or of some unspecified era. The present Inscription, in speaking of the year 100 of the Samvatsara, makes it perfectly clear that the Samvatsara was then recognized as an era. Having thus become fairly established as an era, whenever the word Samvatsara occurs in dates, unqualified by the mention of some other era, it must be taken as being the name of the era; for the use of the word in such a position, with the simple meaning of year, would be not merely ambiguous, but deceptive, and such a use would no doubt be avoided by employing some synonym for "year," as the word *varsha* is used in this Inscription; or by giving the name of the era, as it is found expressed in other Inscriptions, "*Saka-Kāla-samvatsare*,"² "in the year of the Saka era."

A review of all the dates in the Bactrian Pali and Mathura Inscriptions gives the following results:—

KING.	SAMVAT YEAR.	INSCRIPTION.	
Kanishka	9	Mathura	(Arch. Rep. vol. iii. p. 31).
"	11	Bhawalpur	(Journ. Vol. IV. n.s. p. 500).
"	18	Manikyala	(Journ. Vol. XX. p. 251).
Huvishka	39	Mathura	(Journ. Vol. V. n.s. p. 182, and Arch. Rep. vol. iii. p. 30).
"	47	"	
"	48	"	
"	51	Wardak	(Journ. Vol. XX. p. 256).
Moga	78	Taxila	(Ib. p. 223).
Vāsu-deva	5	Mathura	(Arch. Rep. p. 30).
"	44		(Journ. Vol. V. n.s. p. 182, and Arch. Rep. vol. iii. p. 36).
"	83	"	
"	87	"	
"	98		
Gondophares	100	Takht-i Bahi.	

¹ Archaeological Survey, iii. 29.

² Journ. R.A.S. vol. iii. p. 269. Multai Plates. Journ. B.A.S. vol. vi. p. 870.

The only name in the series which presents any difficulty is that of Vâsu-deva. The name is first met with in an inscription of the year 5; but that inscription is very defective. The words Vâsu-deva are clear, but they are not preceded by any title of royalty, and the context in which they occur is unintelligible; it may, therefore, be reasonably doubted if they represent the name of the King. But the name occurs in the year 44, when Huvishka was reigning, and again in the years 83, 87, and 98. Apart from the fact of Huvishka being King in the year 44, it is extremely improbable that the same Vâsu-deva was reigning in that year and in the year 98. Thus the name Vâsu-deva is used apparently in the year 5, and certainly in the years 44 and 98. Can any suggestion be offered to account for this? The name Vâsu-deva, it must be observed, is the only Hindu name in the series; Kanishka, Huvishka, and the rest are of foreign origin. May not Vâsu-deva then have been the Hindu title by which the monarchs of this Scythic dynasty were known among their Hindu subjects?¹ Three foreign Kings, "Hushka, Jushka, and Kanishka," are mentioned in the Râja Tarangini, and it should be observed that the order in which the names succeed each other is a metrical arrangement. Kanishka and Hushka are known by inscriptions; the name of Jushka has not been found, so he may have been known by another name.

The dates of the various Bactrian Pali Inscriptions are, as above shown, entirely in agreement with the Indian Pali Inscriptions of Mathura. In all of them the word Samvat-sara is used. The present inscription proves that it was the title of an era, and its frequent abbreviation to "Sam" shows that it was a well-known familiar term. What, then, was the era it designated? In the Bactrian Pali Inscriptions the Macedonian months are frequently used, so that the natural inference was that the era used was the Seleucidan. But this era carried the inscriptions too far back. An ingenious theory has lately been set up to get over this

¹ This title or name is also found upon the Indo-Sassanian coins of a somewhat later date.—See Thomas's *Prinsep*, vol. ii. p. 113; *Ariana Antiqua*, p. 400.

difficulty. It supposes that the number of the century was suppressed, as we now suppress it in saying '75 for 1875. But we never adopt this practice in dating documents, and it is obvious that it would entirely defeat the object of putting a date upon a monument intended to endure for a long period. It is true that in Bactrian Pali Inscriptions we have no date higher than the year 100; but the Mathura Inscriptions, which are intimately connected with them, have the dates 135 and 281 Samvatsara.¹

The question still remains as to what was meant by the word Samvatsara, and I have no hesitation in answering, The Samvatsara of Vikramâditya. In the first place that era accords with the period to which, for other reasons, these Inscriptions are referred. There has been a disposition of late years to question the great antiquity of this era. Some have said that it does not go farther back than the year 400, and one writer has even disputed its having been in use before the year 1000 A.D.² Little has been adduced in support of these attacks upon the antiquity of the era; but, according even to the most hostile of its assailants, the era known as the Samvat has been current for a thousand years. This era is intimately bound up with Hindu ritual, and it is the one in which are enshrined those methods of computing and recording time which are peculiar to the Hindus. Both these considerations lead to a strong presumption in favour of its antiquity. The Ballabhi Samvat, which was based upon this Samvat, "is shown by the Annals of Râjasthân to correspond with 375 of Vikramâditya."³ There is no very great gap between this date and the date of the present Inscription, and the interval is filled up by the Mathura Inscriptions of 135 and 281 Samvatsara. All the Bactrian Pali Inscriptions and the Mathura Inscriptions designate the era simply "Samvatsara," or, as abbreviated, "Sam." Later inscriptions, which are unquestionably dated in the

¹ Journ. R.A.S. Vol. V. n.s. p. 182; Arch. Rep. vol. iii. pp. 36, 37.

² Extrait des Notices et Communications de l'Académie royale d'Amsterdam, 1873.

³ Prinsep's Useful Tables, in Thomas, vol. ii. p. 158.

era of Vikramâditya, in the same way, name it only as "Samvatsara," and I know of no instance of the word Vikramâditya being used in an Inscription to qualify the word. In modern times the era is known simply as "Samvat." There has thus been an era called "Samvatsara" from the year 100 to the present time; and a natural conclusion follows, that, as it is now, so it was in the beginning, and that the title "Samvatsara" has throughout designated one, and only one era. It is incredible that a second era should have been set up and called simply Samvatsara without any distinctive appellation. There have been other Samvats, as the Ballabhi Samvat, and the Siva Sinha Samvat,¹ but these have their distinctive titles, and it is not to be lightly assumed that the bare word Samvatsara was used to designate either of them. So, when the word Samvatsara occurs in dates unqualified by a distinctive name, I hold to the opinion strongly expressed by James Prinsep, that it designates the Samvat of Vikramâditya, and no other.²

General Cunningham, in his last Archæological Report, has brought forward various arguments, showing that the Samvat era was used by Kanishka and the other Scythic monarchs in India.³ It seems now hardly possible to doubt the fact. What has been above written tends also to substantiate his opinion that the Samvat era of Vikramâditya dates from the establishment of the Scythic power in India.

¹ Prinsep's Useful Tables, in Thomas, vol. ii. p. 158.

² Thomas's Prinsep, vol. ii. p. 258, and a note in p. 259, where Mr. Wathen records his opinion, that he made a mistake in supposing the "Samvat" of a certain Guzerat inscription to have been the Ballabhi Samvat, and that the Samvat so used "is that of Vikramâditya."

³ Arch. Report, iii. p. 45. Coincidentally he proposes to identify Kanishka with Wema-Kadphises. In a later page (139) Chandra Gupta I. is placed in the year 79 A.D.; that is, the very epoch of the era of Sâlivâhana.