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Jayamanta Miśra's *editio princeps* of the *Puṣpacintāmaṇi* (PuCi), published in 1966, discloses details about neither the author nor where or when the text was written.¹⁵ However, already in 1953 an article providing relevant information had been published in the journal *Samskṛta Sandeśa*, although there, owing to corrections made to a manuscript, Yogī Devīnātha mistook Pratāpa Malla (r. 1641–1674 CE),¹⁶ a ruler of the late Malla dynasty, for the author of the PuCi.¹⁷ Another erroneous attribution, in this case to Pratāpa's father Lakṣmīnaraśiṃha (r. 1621–1641 CE), was made by Ś. Ācārya et al. (1991) in a publication on Nepalese authors writing in Sanskrit.¹⁸ An account closer to the facts as recorded in the manuscripts is given in the *New Catalogus Catalogorum*. The entry on the PuCi declares that the text was “ascribed to King Pratāpamalla of Nepal; but written by his protege [sic] Māyāsīṃha, at the shrine of Paśupatinātha, Khatmandu [sic]; sponsored by King Jayalakṣmīnaraśiṃha” (Veezhinathan et al. 1988: s.v. *Puṣpacintāmaṇi*). In its original version¹⁹ the PuCi's penultimate verse (4.96), in *śārdūlavikrīḍita* metre, runs:

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- 15 This edition, based on three manuscripts (here treated as manuscripts A₃EF₁), has rarely been referred to; to my knowledge, only by Bühnemann (1988: 161), Majupuria and Joshi (1997: 3–4) and Ācārya et al. (1991).
 - 16 My specification of the regnal periods of Nepalese kings follows Slusser (1998: I, 399–401).
 - 17 *kasmai devāya kiṃ puṣpaṃ ko vidhiḥ kiṃ phalaṃ tataḥ | ityādi sarvaṃ saṃkṣepāt pratāpena samāhṛtam* (Devīnātha 1953: 78). The two manuscripts used by Devīnātha were not microfilmed by the NGMPP (see the descriptions of the manuscripts X₂ and X₃).
 - 18 *naipālakāntipurarājo lakṣmīnaraśiṃhaḥ puṣpacintāmaṇiṃ laghun dharmasāstranibandhagrantaṃ cakāra kila | kintu granthakāranāmaṃviśaye granthe pramāṇaṃ kimapi nopalabhyate* (Ācārya et al. 1991: 13). Their claim that “no evidence with reference to the author's name is found in the book” is, however, puzzling. Although they cite the scribe's colophon from fol. 29v of manuscript C₁, they do not cover verse 4.96 found on the recto of the same folio.
 - 19 This version of the verse is attested in eight manuscripts (ABC₁C_{2b}C₃G₃IX₃). The copies G₁G₂G₃ (and A^{ac}) read *śivāhitamatih śrīmatpratāpānugo* for *satām iha vinā kaṣṭena vāñchāptaye* and *samāptam* for *manojñam*. The version referred to above can be considered authoritative, as a reformulation seems to have taken place during the final redaction (see p. 161 below). The names of the author and his king are also given in the colophons of manuscripts A, G₁, G₂, G₃ and X₃ (a group of textual witnesses comprising A and manuscripts dependent on it): *iti śrīśrīpratāpamallabhūpakārite māyāsīṃhakṛte*

is likened to the sun outshining everything in its rays. The binding of a king to a *kṣetra* and the cult of a “state deity” has been singled out by H. Kulke (1993: 51) as an important general feature of Hindu kingship in the late medieval period.²¹

On the basis of the extant manuscripts, the date of origin of the PuCi can be determined quite precisely. The earliest extant copy of the text is dated N.S. 771 (1651 CE). By that time, Pratāpa Malla had already been in charge of governmental affairs in the royal city Kathmandu for some time; D. R. Regmi (1960: 59–60) presumes from circa N.S. 754 (1634 CE) onwards. In official documents and inscriptions, Pratāpa is always mentioned together with his father Lakṣmīnarasiṃha until N.S. 761 (1641 CE), the year he officially ascended the throne. As the PuCi clearly characterizes him as the sovereign, the text must have been composed in the decade between 1641 and 1651. If, in addition, the hypothesis raised in chapter 6.1 holds true that some of the deviations between the first and second copy (dated N.S. 772, i.e. 1652 CE) are to be viewed as the author’s rectifications, then the years immediately preceding the first copy, that is, those around 1650, appear to be the most probable ones for the creation of the PuCi.

The closing passage of the PuCi has come down to us in different versions. In nine copies, the verses PuCi 4.96–97 are simply missing. In manuscript A₁, dated N.S. 798 (1678 CE), only a single line survives, in which the name of the king is “updated”. It conforms to the changed political reality of the time, during which Pratāpa’s eldest son Nṛpendra (r. 1674–1680 CE) ruled over Kathmandu.²² In another manuscript (X₁), verse 4.96 is strung out further. Unfortunately, due to the low quality of the photographic reproduction, which is overexposed and out of focus, the lines are only partly legible:

*[kṣetre] pāś[u]pate [pa]de [hi]mavato [gu]hy[eśva]r[isaṃ]nidhau
[nepālo]ttarakāśiketi vidite ś[r]īvāgva .. saṃ .. śī ..
.. jā di bhānur iva pratāpanṛpate rājye ’tisaukhyāspade
kṛṣṇā[car]jyasya[taḥ] śi[vā]hitama[...]*

This elaboration seems to agree with the overall style of the verse.²³ Added to the mention of the central divine couple and the region are the more exact location (“Nepāla, known as the northern Kāśī”) and in all likelihood a nod to the Vāgvatī

21 Kulke regards this as a distinctive trait of rulers of the late medieval period. In contrast, earlier kings defined themselves through their relationship with the *brahman*—maintained, above all, by the performance of Vedic rituals; see also Dirks (1987: 28), Inden (1979).

22 The line reads: *kṣetre pāśupate pade himavato guhyeśvarisaṃnidhau bhrājadbhānuni-bhenṛpendranṛpate rājye ’tisaukhyāspade*.

23 The inserted second line even seems to continue in *śārdūlavikrīḍita*, at least up to the *akṣara saṃ*.

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(or Bagmati) River. The term *nepāla* is used in the Malla period to denote the whole area of the Kathmandu Valley. The designation as northern Kāśī is attested in other sources as well; for example, the *Himavatkhanda*, which identifies itself as part of the *Skandapurāṇa* (Michaels 2008: 195–197).

But the passage under discussion occurs not only in alternative versions. Two manuscripts exhibit actual corrections. Emendations to manuscript A affect only those parts of verse 4.96 that distinguish the earlier from the later version. Moreover, in the colophon of this copy the author's name is erased. In manuscript X₂ the portion of the verse containing Māyāsiṃha's name is smeared with *haritāla*, and in the colophon it is stated that the text was written by order of Lakṣmīnaraṣiṃha Malla by his son Pratāpa Malla, whose name is prefixed by a protracted list of titles (see below). These corrections, marked in a manuscript that had once been at the disposal of Yogī Devīnātha, who first wrote about the PuCi, must be held responsible for the confusion about the question of authorship referred to above. To be sure, such modifications, like the previously mentioned ones, may be irrelevant to constituting the critical text of the PuCi. Yet, as will be shown in the following, these changes are valuable indicators of the significance of and regard for the text within its historical surroundings.

2.1 The Political Milieu

Yakṣa Malla was the last of the Nepalese Malla kings to rule from the city of Bhaktapur over the Kathmandu Valley in its entirety. Shortly after his death in 1482 CE, one of his sons, Ratna Malla, established himself as an independent ruler of Kathmandu, at that time more commonly known as Kantipur. The independence of Patan, also called Lalitpur, followed soon. Members of the Malla dynasty—now opposing, now allying with one another—were in power until Pṛthvīnārāyaṇa Śāha, king of the petty kingdom of Gorkha, conquered the valley in 1768/69 CE. The parallel existence of three royal cities governed by close relatives within a limited geographical area triggered political intrigues, but also spurred the rulers to outshine the others in cultural achievements. The 17th century is considered the heyday of the period.

As has been noted above, Pratāpa Malla (r. 1641–1674 CE) was king of Kathmandu when the PuCi was composed there around 1650. The Nepalese chroniclers, as well as modern historians, style Pratāpa as *the* paradigmatic king of the Malla dynasty.²⁴

24 For Pratāpa Malla in chronicles, see e.g. Hasrat (1970: 74–79), Laṃsāla (1966: 82–93), Wright (2000: 212–219); for discussions, see Bledsoe (2004: 138–183), D. R. Regmi (1960: 64–106), Toffin (2005: 203–229).



Fig. 2.1 King Pratāpa Malla and his family on a votive pillar facing the Degutale Temple at Hanumandhoka Palace, Kathmandu. The inscription on the back of the pillar quotes the date of erection as the 12th/13th of the bright fortnight of Bhādrapada in N.S. 790 (27/28 August 1670); photo: 21 March 2012.

He left his imprint on late medieval Nepalese culture in a way that hardly anyone else did. Under his governance, the palace of Kathmandu was renovated and expanded (Slusser 1998: I, 192–194). Pratāpa established new trade links, minted his own coins, undertook military campaigns, sponsored rituals and did not refrain from verbally immortalizing his deeds in numerous inscriptions,²⁵ where the titles frequently used include *Nepāleśvara*, “lord of Nepāla”, and *Kavīndra*, “Indra (i.e. foremost) among poets”. In an inscription from N.S. 769 (1649 CE) at the *Vaṃśagopāla* temple, he was even equated with the on-site statue of *Kṛṣṇa* (Bledsoe 2004: 139–143). By marriage he allied with respected kings. He had himself portrayed together with his wives and children on votive pillars erected in front of temples (see Fig. 2.1). Arts and learning seem to have been fields he took particular interest in, both as a sponsor and an active participant. He surrounded himself with

25 The whole third volume of the journal *Abhilekha Saṅgraha* is devoted to Pratāpa’s inscriptions. Prior to the twelve in it, fifteen others had already been published elsewhere (Vajrācārya and Panta 1961: 4). D. R. Regmi (1960: 97–106) discussed some of them, and Bledsoe (2000; 2004: 139–141, 164–182) has translated a few.

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scholars from Tibet and Indian kingdoms (D. R. Regmi 1960: 69). At his court, plays were composed and staged (Brinkhaus 1987: 4–5, 7). Pratāpa is considered the author of one of the oldest extant dramas in the Newari language, called *Basudhārā debhīyā pyākhana*.²⁶ In *stotras* he composed, engraved in stone to commemorate temple installations, he claimed an intimate relationship with the divine inhabitants of his realm (Bledsoe 2004). Temples and cults of major Hindu deities, such as Śiva-Paśupati, Viṣṇu and Hanumān, and Buddhist institutions as well,²⁷ benefitted from the king's sponsorship. Pratāpa appears to have been even more devoted to goddesses. The temple of Guhyeśvarī in Deopatan as it stands today probably goes back to an endowment by Pratāpa Malla in N.S. 780 (1660 CE); at least this is what the evidence so far, namely inscriptions found at the temple site and chroniclers' tales, suggests (Michaels 2008: 132–135).²⁸

The establishment and support of the *dharma* (the cosmic, political and social order) by way of temple installations, and the sponsoring of rituals, arts and learning, are classical elements in the expected duties of a Hindu king. They have been studied in many cases as aspects of the legitimation and affirmation of royal power.²⁹ In the case of Pratāpa, the self-confidence, even self-esteem, with which he puts himself in the limelight in his texts is notable. By and large hardly any other person apart from him is referred to. Unlike D. R. Regmi (1960: 70–71), who

26 Only fragments of it have been preserved, namely in manuscript NGMPP E 1503/22, dated N.S. 764; for further details, see Brinkhaus (1987: 7), Lienhard and Manandhar (1988: xvi).

27 Bledsoe has stressed that the promotion of Buddhist institutions by the Hindu king should not be regarded as testimony to Pratāpa's non-sectarianism. With her interpretation of an inscription found at the Svayambhūcaitya (Bledsoe 2004: 248–253), the most important shrine of the Kathmandu Valley, she has demonstrated how Pratāpa, from his theistic perspective, relegated the Buddhist Svayambhū, renamed Śiva Śambhu, to a place subordinate to the Hindu deity.

28 The two earliest textual witnesses of the PuCi (N.S. 771 and 772), in which Guhyeśvarī and Paśupati are mentioned together, precede the alledged date of construction of the temple by Pratāpa. However, this formulation cannot be read as a proper proof for the immediate vicinity of the temples of the two deities. The joint mention of Guhyeśvarī and Paśupati is not only known from much older texts (see n. 20 above), but also from an inscription of Pratāpa Malla in the Paśupatinātha temple, dated N.S. 764, which records a royal endowment for the worship of Paśupati on Śivarātri and *pūjā* for Guhyeśvarī on the next day (Ṭaṇḍana 1999: II, 168–170).

29 E.g. Dirks (1987), Kulke (1993). In investigating Nepalese inscriptions of the late Malla period as media for articulating distinct models of ordering the world, Bledsoe (2004) points out how important it is not to overstress the legitimatizing aspect of royal undertakings in the field of religion. A similar line of interpretation is followed by Horstmann (2009), who, in her impressive analysis of the politics of religion as practised by Savāī Jaisingh (1700–1743 CE, Jaipur), states that it revolved around the “cohesion of the world” (“Zusammenhalt der Welt”).

interprets this as an indication of the eccentricity of an egomaniac, Bledsoe takes a more nuanced view, seeing the king

not as a bounded individual, but as a complex agent. The accomplishments of generals and courtiers are his own ..., and one could supply still others: poets, liturgists, and scholars all merge into the figure of the king. (2004: 146)

Such a conception of the king as a complex agent might provide an explanation as to why, in manuscript X₂, the author's name was erased and the text was directly ascribed in the colophon to

Jayāpratāpa Malla Deva, the highly venerable one, who has mastered all fields of knowledge, such as weaponry, scholarship and music, the great king, the overlord, lord of Nepal, the crest jewel of scholars, the overlord of the circle of all kings, twofold venerable king, Indra among the kings.³⁰

In this light, assigning a text to the king can more tellingly be regarded as an attribute that ennobles the text rather than as an attempted fake. Apparently, the PuCi fitted well into the playbook that Pratāpa followed so as to order his realm according to dharmic principles.

But the manuscripts of the PuCi bear also witness to a wider acceptance of the text within Nepal's royal milieu. Manuscript A, updated with the sovereign's name, attests to its being held in high esteem at the court of Kathmandu even after Pratāpa's demise. The sub-colophon of manuscript E, styling the copy as having been commissioned by Jitāmitra Malla (r. 1673–1696 CE), shows that the PuCi was appreciated at the court of Bhaktapur, too.

2.2 The Elusive Author

If the PuCi was written at the royal court of Kathmandu, and the author, Māyasiṃha was, in one sense or another, a protégé of King Pratāpa Malla, then it should be possible to trace him in historical documents. Indeed, there is an inscription in which a person with a similar name is mentioned. The copperplate

30 *iti śrīśrīlakṣmīnarasiṃhabhūpakārite śastraśāstrasamgītādisakala(corr. samkalam ms.)vidyāpāragamahārājādhīrājanepāleśvaravidagdhacūḍāmaṇisakalarājacakrādhiśvaraśrīśrīrājarājendrakavīndrājayapratāpamalladevaparamabhaṭṭarakṛte puṣpacintāmaṇau caturthaḥ prakāśaḥ samāptaś cāyaṃ granthaḥ.*

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records a land grant to Paśupati by Bhīma Malla in N.S. 760 (1640 CE).³¹ The plot of land dedicated is described as bordering on the landholdings of a Mayāsiṃha Ācārya. Transactions of land in Nepal were documented on palm leaves (called *taṃsuka tāḍapatra*), too.³² Among the *tāḍapatras* microfilmed by the NGMPP, there are two from the period in question that mention a Mayāsiṃha. In N.S. 774 (1654 CE) Mayāsiṃha Bhāro from Madhyapur (i.e. Thimi) bought a piece of land bordering on the royal estates from Śujarāma Bhāro.³³ The fact that Hoḍās³⁴ witness this transaction hint at an elite social background for both buyer and seller. The other document speaks of a Mayāsiṃha acquiring a garden property in Kantipur³⁵ from King Nṛpendra Malla in N.S. 797 (1677 CE). The witnesses are the king’s younger brothers, Pārthivendra and Mahīpatendra.³⁶

On the one hand, there seems to be nothing that militates against an identification of any or all of the Mayāsiṃhas designated as landowners with Māyāsiṃha, the author of the PuCi. Assuming that the persons mentioned were at least 20 years old, the roughly forty years from N.S. 760 to 797 added to these make for a long, but not impossible, lifespan for an individual living in 17th-century Nepal. The variant spelling of the names can be explained. The rendering of the first syllable with a long vowel in the PuCi could represent a sanskritized version of Mayāsiṃha, as indeed metrically required in verse 4.96.

On the other hand, apart from the similarity or identicalness of the names, no cross-references have been found that could qualify as definite proof of the identity of either of the two persons in question. The titles in question are very general ones. The term *ācārya*, “master”, that Mayāsiṃha bears in the N.S. 760 inscription and Māyāsiṃha’s father bears in the PuCi is used in a number of

31 The inscription was microfilmed by the NGMPP as PN 4/62; for an edition and translation with references to earlier studies of the inscription, see A. Zotter (2021a).

32 For the standard features of such documents, see Kölver and Śākya (1985).

33 NGMPP DNA 21/18; for a description and the text, see A. Zotter (2013: 377).

34 Hāḍās (or Hoḍās) belong to the Chatharīyas, a group of *thars* that includes, among others, former members of the Malla royalty and various of their officials (Levi 1992: 80, 624). According to Kashinath Tamot, in the Malla period Hoḍās were police officers (personal communication, January 2007).

35 Kantipur, especially at Pratāpa’s court, was used as a synonym of Yaṃbu. In the Malla period these names were exclusively used for the northern part of the old city (north of Makhan Ṭola) of Kathmandu (Slusser 1998: I, 89).

36 NGMPP DNA 21/51. Earlier publications (Rājavaṃśī 1984; Śākyaabhikṣu 2006), which treat the document as important evidence for the royal line of succession after Pratāpa, read *khaśivāhāvālavāṭikā* as a descriptor of the plot sold. A closer inspection of the palm leaf together with Kashinath Tamot in January 2007 revealed that the actual reading is *khaśicāhālavāṭikā* (with a correction after the fourth *akṣara*), “goat pasture garden”. The *akṣaras* for *ca* and *va* are hardly distinguishable in this document. For a transcript and description of the document, see A. Zotter (2013: 378).

circumstances in medieval Nepal. Any high authority, such as the king's preceptor (*rājaguru*) or astrologer (*rājadaivajña*), or other respected scholars and teachers, were addressed with that title (D. R. Regmi 1960: 138–141). Alternatively, it might be a short form for referring to members of the Hindu priestly classes of *karmācārya* and *śivācārya*, or else to Buddhist *vajrācāryas*. *Bhāro*, the other title present in one of the records, is even less clear-cut. According to D. R. Regmi (1960: 437–438), it, along with its short form *bhā*, was an appellation used by aristocrats or state officials, primarily ones from *kṣatriya* families. Kölver and Śākya (1985: 91), however, hold that members of the third estate (*vaiśya*) were given the name affix *bhāro*. Be that as it may, no more specific assertion than that the person(s) mentioned probably belonged to the gentry can be deduced from the use of titles.

Apart from these rather technical documents, there is another, far more spectacular, if unflattering, context in which a person with the name under scrutiny occurs. It is found on a copperplate dated N.S. 818 (1698 CE), located at the northern wing of the Mūlcok, the main courtyard, of the royal palace of Patan, close to the entrance to the staircase leading to Taleju's shrine. This inscription, the text of which has been published several times and was documented *in situ* by myself on 4 February 2007,³⁷ contains a joint proclamation of the three kings of the Kathmandu Valley—Yoganarendra of Lalitpur (r. 1684–1705 CE), Bhūpāendra of Kantipur (r. 1687–1700 CE), and Bhūpatīndra of Bhaktapur (r. 1696–1722 CE)—banning a person from Nepal. The document deems Kantu Ojhā responsible for the death or ruin of many respected persons. The enumeration of his misdeeds is preceded by an uncomplimentary characterization of his father, Mahādeva Ojhā. In this connection, the name *Mayāsiṃha* surfaces:

(2) ... *kaṃtuyā babu mahādeva ujhāna, aneka kataka viṣadāna biyāo phutaku; vinā aparādhasa, ela choñāo kunakāo* (3) *phutaku bhīma mallayā khaṃ, mayāsiṃha kañāo, śrībhīmamalla phutaku aneka rājā rājā phāo, aneka seṣṭa phutaku, aneka devatāyā mantra senaku, bālastrī maithuna yāñāo syāka, thathimṇa mahādeva u(4)jhāyā kāya, kaṃtu ujhā*³⁸

37 For a transcript and photo of the inscription, see A. Zotter (2013: 378–380). My thanks are due to Sarasvati Singh, Purātattva Vibhāga, for her kind permission to document the inscription, to Kashinath Tamot for his explanations of the Newari, and to Mahes Raj Pant for references to earlier publications of the text. With different degrees of accuracy, the text has already been published by D. Vajrācārya and J. Nepāla (1953), D. Vajrācārya et al. (1962: 242–245), Tevārī et al. (1964: 22–40) and again in D. Vajrācārya (1999: 303–310); D. R. Regmi (1960: 321–326) gives a detailed synopsis.

38 Numbers in brackets refer to the beginning of a new line. Commas, double commas and semicolons stand for similar marks in the original used to separate words.

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(2) ... Kantu's father Mahādeva Ujhā ruined many persons by giving them poison, ruined [many] by sending [them] to jail in Patan, although innocent, (3) ruined Bhīma Malla by speaking ill of Bhīma Malla to Mayāsiṃha, separated many kings from kings, ruined many nobles, caused the mantras of many gods to be destroyed, performed [forced] sexual intercourse with and killed women that were [still] children. The son of that Mahādeva (4) Ujhā, Kaṃtu Ujhā

Here, one Mayāsiṃha is someone who, verbally influenced by Mahādeva Ojhā, undid Bhīma Malla. The latter is a well-known figure in Nepalese history, described as a virtual hero in dynastic chronicles (*vaṃśāvalīs*) written in the 19th century. In one of these chronicles, published as *Bhāṣāvamśāvalī*, a person named Mayāsiṃha again occurs in connection with the death of Bhīma Malla. It is said: "Pratāpa Malla thought to himself, 'Thanks to the [wicked] game of that minister Naradeva Mayāsiṃha, I have caused an enormity to occur'".³⁹ This affair is elaborated on in the preceding pages of the *Bhāṣāvamśāvalī* (Laṃsāla 1966: 82–87), which have a parallel in the text printed under the title *Rājabhogamālā* (1970: 13–16). It may be noticed that only in the instance cited is the villain involved called Naradeva Mayāsiṃha; otherwise he is called "Naradeva Kājī from Bhaktapur", or simply "the Bhaktapuri".⁴⁰

The full story runs as follows: King Lakṣmīnaraṣiṃha has a quarrelsome counselor, Naradeva Kājī from Bhaktapur. The latter incites enmity between the king and his son Pratāpa, who subsequently usurps power. Pratāpa's younger brother and counselor, Bhīma Malla, who has been given ill advice by the Bhaktapuri in his efforts to erect a temple for Bhīma Malla, already senses Naradeva's deceitfulness when he is sent to Lhasa by Pratāpa to establish trade links. Even as Bhīma is faithfully carrying out his brother's orders and signing treaties with the Tibetans, he is being defamed at the king's court. Upon his return Bhīma is assassinated. His wife follows him to the pyre. A letter by Bhīma, found only later, proves his innocence. Lakṣmīnaraṣiṃha mourns his younger son and has a temple in Yaṭkhā Ṭola built in his memory.

A slightly different sequence of events is given in another group of texts, namely Wright's (2000: 211–212) translation of a chronicle, the *Rājavamśāvalī* (Śarmā 1969: 1–2), and Hasrat's (1970: 3–4) recounting based on several chronicles.

39 *pratāpamallale manmā vicāra garyā yinai kāji naradeva mayāsiṃkā ṣelale* (for *khelale*) *ṭhulo kuro umkāyā* (Laṃsāla 1966: 87).

40 At this place in the text of the *Rājabhogamālā* he is called Prayāsiṃha, likely a corruption of Mayāsiṃha (*yahāṃpachi pratāpamallale manmā vicāra garyā | inai kāji naradeva prayāsiṃkā ṣelale ṭhulo kurā umakāyāṃ; Rājabhogamālā* 1970: 16).

There, Bhīma Malla, counselor of Lakṣmīnaraśiṃha, is the spouse of the king's younger daughter. He establishes trade links with Tibet, travelling there in person as a faithful servant of the ruler. While stopping at the Paśupati temple on his way back from Tibet, he is elsewhere being discredited to the king's face. The most elaborate text at this point, the *Rājavaṃśāvalī*, reports that the backbiter is a wicked person from Bhaktapur, without, however, mentioning his name. This man accuses Bhīma of laying claim to the succession to the throne in Pratāpa's place. Thereupon King Lakṣmīnaraśiṃha has Bhīma killed in secrecy, but later is informed of the innocence of the victim through a missive delivered by a messenger sent by Bhīma on his way back to Kantipur. Bhīma's wife becomes a *satī* and on the pyre pronounces a curse that proper judgement would never be obtained from this royal court.

The chronicles themselves make no mention of a particular date for Bhīma's death. The connection with Pratāpa's ascent to power would place the events possibly in the year N.S. 761 (1641 CE). Vāsupāsā (2006), who in his historical novel *Pratāpa Malla* spins out the story even further, styling Mayāśiṃha as the wicked mastermind right from the beginning and making him suffer death as punishment for his evil doings, gives the year N.S. 762 (1642 CE). Historical evidence, however, attests to activities involving Bhīma until N.S. 765 (1645 CE). In the month of Māgha of that year "Śrī Bhīma Malla Deva" stands witness to a land transaction involving King Pratāpa Malla.⁴¹ Earlier, on the fifteenth of the bright half of Kārttika in N.S. 763 (1643 CE), he made an endowment of land in memory of his deceased father Pūraṇa Malla, in order to finance the worship of Paśupati on Śivarātri from its income.⁴² According to an inscription published by D. R. Regmi (1966b: 79), three days earlier (N.S. 763, Kārttika, śuklapakṣa 12) he had a Śiva temple consecrated at Yaṭkhā Ṭola to commemorate his father.⁴³ Thus, if we consider inscriptions to be more reliable witnesses to historical facts, some of the points of the chroniclers' tales may be rectified on their basis. It seems that not Lakṣmīnaraśiṃha but Pūraṇa Malla was Bhīma's father, and the temple in

41 NGMPP E 2131/29 (<https://nepalica.hadw-bw.de/nepal/catitems/viewitem/10311>).

42 The copperplate has been microfilmed as NGMPP PN 2/6 (<https://nepalica.hadw-bw.de/nepal/catitems/viewitem/16642>); for a transcription, see Ṭaṇḍana (1999: I, 281; II: 165–166); for a copy together with a Nepali translation, see PN 8/18 (<https://nepalica.hadw-bw.de/nepal/catitems/viewitem/16962>). On the same day, another such endowment was made to Cāṅgunārāyaṇa (Ṭaṇḍana 1999: I, 281).

43 Along with the document by Bhīma Malla dated N.S. 760 referred to above, there is another one attesting a land grant by Pratāpa Malla in N.S. 762, Mārḡaśīrṣa, śuklapakṣa 11, in which Bhīma stands as a witness (Pant 2007a: 106, 116). Furthermore, D. R. Regmi (1960: 60–61) refers to a transaction of land involving Bhīma during Lakṣmīnaraśiṃha's reign, albeit without any specification of the date.

2 The Historical Setting

Yaṭkhā Ṭola was consecrated during Bhīma's lifetime, not after his death. That Bhīma Malla indeed came from the royal family is, however, confirmed by his name being prefixed with a *śrī* and supplemented by *deva*.

It would be wrong to accuse the chronicles of distorting history. As H. Frese (2002: 11) rightly points out in his analysis of the description of Jayasthiti Malla in the 19th-century *vaṃśāvalī*s, what the chroniclers' tales are least concerned with are so-called "historical facts". But what, if anything, can be deduced from the evidence? Firstly, one should not put too much weight on the seeming parallel between the *vaṃśāvalī* story and the Patan inscription. The chroniclers writing in the 19th century are known to have relied on epigraphic sources. Therefore it is not unlikely that Mayāsiṃha's name entered the chronicles from that very inscription, which was on display in a prominent public place. Secondly, one must take special precautions when assessing the factuality of the inscribed text. There is a gap of about 50 years between Bhīma's death and the joint proclamation by the three kings in N.S. 818 (1698 CE). After Pratāpa's death in N.S. 794 (1674 CE), the royal court at Kathmandu seems to have faced a power vacuum. The situation was dominated by strong politicians, weak rulers and repeated interference by the neighbouring kings of Patan and Bhaktapur, who installed Pratāpa's son Nṛpendra on the throne, not, as had been ordained by the deceased king, Mahīpatindra (Tevāri et al. 1964: 28–31). Intrigue and murder were the order of the day. Hence D. R. Regmi's assessment of the inscription, if formulated a bit more soberly, sounds plausible:

Writing off their involvement in the activities of the Ojhā father and son, the three rulers and their advisors had only tried to wash off the taints from the sacred memory of their forefathers. But this could not have been wiped out without exonerating men who had served them We may not, however, think of the two intriguers so singled out in the documents as the villains as only scapegoats made to suffer for the crime of others. (D. R. Regmi 1960: 325–326)

Considering that in known documents of his Bhīma does not make reference to a king, there is reason to suspect that he actually was an unwelcome rival to Pratāpa Malla. As has been noted above, Pratāpa was not one to tolerate powerful men in his orbit. Did he get rid of Bhīma as soon as he could after his consolidation of power? In the present state of knowledge there is no way to establish anything with any certainty, but the inscription and the chronicles do quite certainly recreate historical events so as to be in line with the current political ideology. As Frese puts it:

... historiography here has a very specific purpose, almost fatal for the intentions of a western historian: it does not serve the documentation of the past, but rather the confirmation of the present.⁴⁴

Apart from the fact that it seems impossible to separate fact from fiction in this account, there is again nothing else—given what we know at present—that allows us to equate Mayāsiṃha the politician with Māyāsiṃha the author of the PuCi. The above-mentioned erasures of the author’s name in two manuscripts may point to a kind of *damnatio memoriae*. But more probably, the name of the author was wiped out to enable the work to be attributed to the king himself. Thus, as long as no corroborative testimony turns up—maybe in one of the Nepalese diaries, the so-called *thyāsaphus*⁴⁵—the evidence for relating the author’s name to a historical person remains unforthcoming. Furthermore, it should be kept in mind that the author mentioned in a text is not necessarily its real writer. M.R. Pant remarked with respect to courtly compositions like the PuCi:

They were, to my mind, not written by kings and ministers, rather authored by needy and greedy pundits who coveted the money that powerful people possessed. In a stricter sense, the people in the corridors of power patronised the projects that pundits launched. (email 28 July 2004)

To conclude, an evaluation of the PuCi in its historical setting cannot focus on the writer (whose trail is lost very soon in historical sources) but only on the text itself. More important than the loss of the “original” author is the fact that the alterations in the closing passage and the colophons attest to a vivid interest in the text within the Nepalese royal milieu. The main historical impulse for its composition is probably to be sought in Pratāpa Malla’s intent to depict himself, and have himself depicted, as a king who establishes and upholds the dharmic order within his realm. As will be elaborated in the discussion of the structure and production of the text, the PuCi can be considered a learned contribution to articulating that order.

44 “Geschichtsschreibung hat hier einen sehr konkreten, für die Absichten eines westlichen Historikers geradezu fatalen Zweck: Sie dient nicht der Dokumentation von Vergangenheit, sondern der Bestätigung der Gegenwart” (Frese 2002: 194).

45 The word *thyāsaphu*, folded (*thyā*) book (*saphu*), refers to the material on which books were written, the Nepalese fanfold paper. On the historiographical value of the *thyāsaphus*, see e.g. Malla (1982: 50–51), Raj (2018), D. R. Regmi (1960: 12–21) and Slusser (1998: I, 19). The one published by G. Vajrācārya (1966) starts N.S. 795, after Pratāpa’s death. Those published by D. R. Regmi (1966a: appendix 3) do not coincide with the period under consideration either.