

Varāhamihira's Physiognomic Omens in the Garuḍapurāṇa

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Résumé de l'article

In this paper, I study the three chapters devoted to human physiognomy in the Garuḍapurāṇa. Two of the three come directly from Varāhamihira's sixth-century Bṛhatsaṃhitā with the commentary (vivṛti) of the Kaśmirian Bhaṭṭotpala (fl. ca. 966 or 969 CE). I hope to make two research contributions. First, I hope to show that the date of this section of the Purāṇa, if not indeed the entire Purāṇa, cannot be before the sixth century and probably after the tenth century. Second, I will illustrate how a text in different metres was normalised into anuṣṭubh metre for ease of memory and recitation. I shall conclude with a discussion of the lessons we can learn from this kind of ancient Indian redaction process

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INTRODUCTION

ALMOST A CENTURY AGO, JOHANN JAKOB MEYER WAS THE FIRST to claim that *Garuḍapurāṇa* (GP) 1.65 relied entirely on *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* (BS) 67.¹ Some years later, the Dutch Arabist Dina Johanna Kohlbrugge provided a well-edited version and translation of 1.65 in which she clearly revealed the similarities the GP and BS.² In this paper, then, I should like to take these works as points of departure to expand the study to include all the three chapters devoted to human physiognomy in the GP since they elucidate a process of Puranic redaction of Jyotiḥśāstra. Two of the three chapters come directly from Varāhamihira's sixth-century *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* with the commentary (*vivṛti*) of the Kaśmirian Bhaṭṭotpala from about 966 or 969 CE, while the third derives from an unidentified source or sources.³

I hope not only to show that the date of this section of the Purana (Skt. *purāṇa*), if not indeed the entire Purana, cannot be before the sixth century and is probably after the mid-tenth century, but also to illustrate how a text in different metres was normalised into *anuṣṭubh* metre for ease of memory and recitation, a point already noticed by Meyer. I shall conclude with a discussion of the lessons we can learn from this kind of ancient Indian redaction process.

1 Meyer 1929. See also Rocher 1986:175–6. In the numbering of the chapters of the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*, I follow the vulgate edition with Bhaṭṭotpala's commentary, originally published by S. Dvivedī (1895–7), and revised by K. Dvivedī and Tripāthī (1996–7). Other editions count an extra chapter, i.e., 67 becomes 68 and 69 is 70. The German-American Indologist Meyer was born to German parents in Michigan, USA, and was an autodi-

dact in Sanskrit. His scholarly writings were in German.

2 See Kohlbrugge 1948:36–76. Kohlbrugge, who sometimes used the initial "H." short for (Jo)Hanna, was one of the very few female Indologists of her day. Sanskrit was her secondary interest, her first being Iranian (Karttunen 2019).

3 On the date of Bhaṭṭotpala see Pingree 1970–94: A4, 270.



1 CHAPTERS IN THE GARUḌAPURĀṆA

SINCE DATING OF PURANIC LITERATURE IS BY NO MEANS AN EXACT SCIENCE, scholars disagree on the precise date of the *Garuḍapurāṇa*. Most would place it in tenth century,⁴ while others suggest between the fourth to eleventh centuries,⁵ sixth and ninth centuries,⁶ or from the first to sixth centuries.⁷ It is clear that it was a text that evolved over many centuries mostly in a Vaiṣṇava religious context.⁸

The GP contains three successive chapters devoted to the marks of men and women: 1.63, 64, and 65. The first two are devoted respectively to men and women, and the last combines both genders into one chapter.⁹ According to the colophons, they occur in the section of the text that concerns the Jyotiṣa system of human marks (*sāmudrika*). Some verses attributed to GP also occur in Mitramiśra's early seventeenth century compendium of legal and religious materials (Skt. *smṛtinibandha*), the *Vīramitrodaya*. However, they show considerable variation to the two printed editions.¹⁰

GP 1.63 and 1.64 are truncated and corrupt versions of the marks of men and women. Chapter 1.63 begins as a redaction of BS 67, but the following chapter 1.64 has very few correspondences to BS and uses material drawn from other sources. Chapter 1.65 is entirely based on BS 67 and 69. Therefore, the focus of this paper will be chapters 1.63 and 65 in comparison to BS 67 and 69.

GARUḌAPURĀṆA 1.63

This chapter, devoted to the marks of men, consists of twenty verses. The examination of the men's marks begins with the feet and moves quickly up the body to the belly, where it ends. It is essentially a greatly abbreviated version of 1.65.

The second *pāda* of verse 10 to the end of the chapter is devoted to Rekhāśāstra or palmistry, encompassing an examination of the lines on the body that reveal a man's longevity. The lines on the forehead (verses 10–13) are followed by the lines on the hands (verses 14–18). The remaining part of the man's marks is missing. A breakdown of verses in relationship to BS and GP 1.63 and 65, given in Table 1, shows clearly the results of the redactor's attempts at converting BS's chapter in Puranic verses.

The first twelve verses of this chapter are corrupt and give the appearance of being an aborted redaction of BS 67. Their metrical boundaries indicate that the verses are reformulations originally from verses in different metres. They are not, as first thought, based on 1.65, but rather a redaction of BS 67 by a different hand.¹¹ Although there is often a common choice of vocabulary between 1.63 and 1.65, there are also considerable differences, which would indicate that they had two different redactors. The remaining verses of 1.63 (i.e., 13–20) derive from another source.

4 Hazra 1940: 144. See Rocher 1986: 177.

5 von Stietencron, Flamm, et al. 1992: 871, ¶ 5003.

6 Kane 1968–77: 889.

7 For example Tiwari 1958, cited by Rocher 1986: 177.

8 Roshen 2010: 145.

9 According to the editor of the Venkateśvara edi-

tion, Kṣemarāja, chapter 65 precedes 64 in one version of the Purana: अग्रिमोऽध्यायोऽस्मादध्यायात्प्रागेकस्मिन्पुस्तके पठ्यते.

10 The verses are found variously in the chapter called *Lakṣaṇaprakāśa* or the "elucidation of the marks."

11 Zysk 2016: v. 1, 184.

BS 67.2	GP 1.63.1–2	GP 1.65.2b–3b
BS 67.3ab	GP 1.63.3–4b	GP 1.65.3c–4b
BS 67.3cd		GP 1.65.4c–5d
BS 67.4	GP 1.63.4cd	GP 1.65.5d–7a
BS 67.5ab	GP 1.63.5	GP 1.65.7bd
BS 67.5c–7a	GP 1.63.6	GP 1.65.8a–10d
BS 67.7ab	GP 1.63.7	GP 1.65.11–14
BS 67.9cd–10	GP 1.63.8–9b	GP 1.65.14d–16b
BS 67.18c–20c	GP 1.63.9c–10a	GP 1.65.23ab
BS 68 (67).75–78	GP 1.63.10b–12	GP 1.65.78c–81
	GP 1.63.13–20 do not rely on BS 67	

Table 1: Parallel verses: BS 67, GP 1.63 and GP 1.65.

BS 70 (69).23a	GP 1.64.8	GP 1.65.120c
BS 70 (69).16	GP 1.64.11	GP 1.65.112
BS 70 (69).1a, 2ab	GP 1.64.14	GP 1.65.92ab,c3d–94a
BS 70 (69).3b, 3a	GP 1.64.15	GP 1.65.92a, 93c, 94cd,95c

Table 2: Parallel verses: BS 70, GP 1.64 and GP 1.65.

GARUḌAPURĀṆA 1.64

This chapter has sixteen verses devoted to the marks of women and does not, like 1.63, find as many correspondences with BS 69 and GP 1.65. Only four verses bear resemblance to the two other redactions. The version of 1.64 cited at *Vīramitrodaya* 119 and 122 is erratic, corresponding to verses 1–4, 6, 8, 11, 16, where the division into auspicious and inauspicious marks occurs. Both auspicious and inauspicious marks are intermingled with each other in a more or less ordered fashion. Its overall presentation is somewhat haphazard and unsystematic, but there seems to be a general attempt to provide an abbreviated version of the woman's marks.

Moreover, it seems to start from the head, which is opposite to what is normally found, indicating a deviation from the customary method. But the head-to-toe approach falls apart before the end of the chapter. There is a preponderance of composite verses of mixed body parts, reflective of later *Sāmudrikaśāstra*, the science of human marks. It would appear that this chapter may represent a part of a larger work, from which salient aspects were selected more or less at random and assembled in a single chapter on the woman's marks, as a counterbalance to the short presentation of the male marks at 1.63. A breakdown of verses in comparison to BS 70 and GP 1.65, given in Table 2, shows the redactor's chaotic presentation of the female's marks.

GP 1.63.1–9b	=	BS 67.1–10.
GP 1.63.9c–10a	=	BS 67.18c–20c
GP 1.63.10c–12	=	BS 67.75–78
GP 1.64.14	=	BS 69.1a, 2ab
GP 1.64.15	=	BS 69.3b, 3a
GP 1.65.2–90	=	BS 67.1–88ab
GP 1.65.91–121b	=	BS 69.1–23
GP 1.64	clearly has the fewest correspondences to BS.	

Table 3: Correspondences between the *Garuḍapurāṇa* and the *Bṛhatsamhitā*.

GARUḌAPURĀṆA 1.65

Unlike GP 1.63 and 1.64, this chapter, containing 121 verses, derives essentially from BS 67 and 69. It is a reformulation of the two chapters of BS in śloka-metre to accommodate the Puranic style.¹² The text is very sloppily redacted, showing little or no regard to verse-boundaries and is indicative of a transmission from one literary form to another, which in this case consists of verses in diverse metres normalised into verses of *anuṣṭubh* or *śloka* metre.

The chapter contains both the men’s and the women’s marks in one chapter. As can be seen in Table 3, verses 2–91 correspond to BS 67.1–88, and 92–121b to BS 69.1–23. In the section on men, correspondence to the remaining verses of BS 67, i.e., 89–116, is wanting; and in the section on women, the last three verses, i.e., BS 69.24–26 find no parallels in GP. These missing verses, corresponding to the section beginning with the examination of the bodily shadow-like auras in BS 67, deal principally with the so-called “basic marks” on the body. They occur originally in the *Gārgīyājyotiṣa*, but do not, according to Bhaṭṭotpala, belong to Samudra’s system, which is the sole basis for BS 67.1–82. BS 67.83–88 treats the marks of the great man, which occur also in the *Agni-* and *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇas* as well as Garga’s collection. It would appear, therefore, that the redactor of GP 1.65 used only the material that Bhaṭṭotpala claims to have derived from Samudra’s system, along with the verses detailing the marks of the great man found in Garga as well as elsewhere. He omitted the remaining verses corresponding to Garga for some unknown reason. This does not, however, imply that the Puranic redactor used a now lost version of a text attributed to Samudra, since, as will become clear, his basis was BS, not another formulation of the human marks.

In the female’s marks found at BS 70 (69), the last three verses, according to *Vīramitrodaya*, apply to both men and women and offer a method for ascertaining a person’s longevity based on the marks. They too are not attributed to Samudra, which could have been the reason they were not redacted at 1.65.

SUMMARY OF CORRESPONDENCES

The three chapters on human marks from *Garuḍapurāṇa* rely on two chapters from the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* as shown in Table 3.

2 FROM COMPLEX METRES TO ANUṢṬUBH METRE

IN THIS PART, I WISH TO ILLUSTRATE BY WAY OF EXAMPLES how *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*'s chapter on the "marks of men" (*puruṣalakṣaṇa*), composed in different metres, was recast in the easier *anuṣṭubh* metre and the problems it poses for the correct reading of the Puranic verses. Whereas the majority of the verses in the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* 67 are in *āryā* metre, Varāhamihira chose to illustrate his literary acumen by composing verses 2–5 in different sophisticated metres as follows: verse 2 is in *vasantatilakā*, verse 3 in *śārdūlavikrīḍita*, verse 4 in *puṣpita-grā*, and verse 5 is in *śālīnī*.

3 ANALYSIS OF READINGS

THE FIRST THING TO NOTICE in the two redactions from the *Garuḍapurāṇa* is that they show important differences from each other, indicating the likelihood of different composers. As mentioned above, 1.63 and 64 are short chapters with an abbreviated version of the marks. At 1.63 only the first twelve verses correspond to BS, while 1.64 has only two verses that have similarities to BS. Chapter 1.65, on the other hand, is faithful to BS and completes the redaction of verses missing from 1.63. Therefore, it would appear that 1.63 was a first attempt at redacting BS, which was properly and completely redacted in 1.65. Moreover, because 1.63 and 65 show significant differences, it would seem that they were composed by different people.

Secondly, as indicated in the charts comparing the different versions, Tables 4 and 5, the redactions in *anuṣṭubh* metre do not correspond to full verses, leaving an overflow of material from one pāda to the next. Thirdly, while most of the words and phrases are the same, alterations were made to the original to accommodate the metre. These are illustrated in the following six ways:

1. Word reduction (*sunigūḍhagulphau* → *sugulphau* → *gudhagulphau*)
2. Use of synonyms [*manujeśvarasya*, *nṛpavarasya*, *nṛpateḥ*; *dāridrya* (BS 3a) → *niḥsvasya* (GP 65.4c); *dhanarahitāḥ* (BS 4d) → *niḥsvasya* (GP 65.7a)]
3. Change of word order
 - (a) In verse (BS 3ad → GP 63.3 → GP 65.4b)
 - (b) In compound (BS 3ab → GP 63.4b)
4. Use of idiomatic expressions (optative of \sqrt{as} + genitive: GP 63.2d, 4b, 5a; *nātra kāryā vicāraṇā*: GP 63.4b; and *smṛta*: GP 65.3b, 6d)
5. Use of fillers (*tathaiiva ca*: GP 63.5d; *tathā*: GP 65.4b; *śriye*: GP 65.7d)
6. Resolution of compounds (GP 65.3c–4b).

¹² Rocher 1986: 175–76.

BS 68 (67).2-5b

GP 1.63.1c-5

GP 1.65.2-7

2 अस्वेदिनौ मृदुतलौ कमलोदराभौ
श्लिष्टाङ्गुली रुचिरताम्रनखौ सुपाष्णी ।
उष्णौ शिराविरहितौ सुनिगूढगुल्फौ
कूर्मोन्नतौ च चरणौ मनुजेश्वरस्य ॥

3ab शूर्पाकारविरूक्षपाण्डुरनखौ वक्रौ शिरासन्ततौ
संशुष्कौ विरलाङ्गुली च चरणौ दारिद्र्यदुःखप्रदौ ।

3cd मार्गायोत्कटकौ कषायसदृशौ वंशस्य विच्छेदतौ
ब्रह्मघ्नौ परिपक्वमृद्युतितलौ पीताव् अगम्यारतौ ॥

4 प्रविरलतनुरोमवृत्तजङ्घा
द्विरदकरप्रतिमैर् वरोरुभिश् च ।
उपचितसमजानवश् च भूपा
धनरहिताः श्वसृगालतुल्यजङ्घाः ॥

5ab रोमैकैकं कूपके पार्थिवानां
द्वे द्वे ज्ञेये पण्डितश्रोत्रियाणाम् ।

1c अस्वेदिनौ मृदुतलौ कमलोदरसन्निभौ ॥
2 श्लिष्टाङ्गुली ताम्रनखौ सुगुल्फौ शिरयोद्भिस्तौ ॥
कूर्मोन्नतौ च चरणौ स्यातां नृपवरस्य हि ॥

3 विरूक्षपाण्डुरनखौ वक्रौ चैव शिरानतौ ।
शूर्पाकारौ च चरणौ संशुष्कौ विरलाङ्गुली ॥

4b दुःखदारिद्र्यदौ स्यातां नात्र कार्या विचारणा ।

4cd अल्परोमयुता श्रेष्ठा जङ्घा हस्तिकरोपमा ॥

5 रोमैकैकं कूपके स्याद् भूपानां तु महात्मनाम् ।
द्वे द्वे रोम्णी पण्डितानां श्रोत्रियाणां तथैव च ॥

2 अस्वेदिनौ मृदुतलौ कमलोदरसन्निभौ ।
श्लिष्टाङ्गुली ताम्रनखौ पादाव् उष्णौ शिरोद्भिस्तौ ॥
3a कूर्मोन्नतौ गूढगुल्फौ सुपाष्णी नृपतेः स्मृतौ ॥

3c शूर्पाकारौ विरूक्षौ च वक्रौ पादौ शिरालकौ ॥
4a संशुष्कौ पाण्डुरनखौ निःस्वस्य विरलाङ्गुली ।

4c मार्गायोत्कटकौ पादौ कषायसदृशौ तथा ॥
5a विच्छिन्नतदौ च वंशस्य ब्रह्मघ्नौ पक्वसन्निभौ ।
5c अगम्यनिरतौ पीतौ

5d जङ्घा विरलरोमिका ॥
6 मृदुरोमा समा जङ्घा तथा करिकरप्रभाः ।
ऊरवो जानवस् तुल्या नृपस्योपचिताः स्मृताः ॥
7a निःस्वस्य शृगालजङ्घा

7b रोमैकैकं च कूपके ।
7d नृपाणां श्रोत्रियाणां च द्वे द्वे श्रिये च धीमताम् ॥

Table 4: Comparison of versions – original Sanskrit texts.

BS 68 (67).2-5b	GP 1.63.1c-5	GP 1.65.2-7
<p>2 A king's feet do not perspire. They have soft soles, are coloured like the inside of a lotus, have contiguous toes, radiant copper-coloured toenails, and lovely heels. They are warm and devoid of vessels, have well-hidden ankles, and are upraised like tortoise-shells.</p>	<p>1-2 Expect a king's feet not to perspire; to be soft-soled; to resemble the inside of a lotus; to have contiguous toes, copper-coloured toenails, and lovely ankles; to be devoid of surface vessels; and to be arched like tortoise shells.</p>	<p>2-3b A king's feet do not perspire. They have soft soles and resemble the inside of a lotus; their toes are contiguous and have copper-coloured toenails; they are warm, devoid of surface vessels, arched like tortoise shells; and they have hidden ankles and beautiful heels.</p>
<p>3ab Feet shaped like winnowing fans, that are rough with pale toenails, crooked, covered with surface vessels and that are completely emaciated and have toes that spread wide apart bestow poverty and misery.</p>	<p>3-4b Without doubt, expect feet that have rough and yellow toenails and that are crooked, covered with surface vessels, shaped like winnowing fans, and completely dried up with toes wide apart to yield misery and poverty.</p>	<p>3c-4b Paupers have feet shaped like winnowing fans. They are rough, crooked, covered with surface vessels, completely dried up, and have toes spread wide apart and yellow toenails.</p>
<p>3bc Larger than normal feet are for the road; dull red feet bring about the destruction of the family; feet with soles whose surface lustre is that of burnt clay cause the killing of Brahmans; and two yellow feet are fond of forbidden women.</p>		<p>4c-5c Feet larger than normal are for the road; dull red feet bring about destruction of the family; feet whose soles resemble burnt clay bring about the killing of Brahmans; and yellow feet are fond of forbidden women.</p>
<p>4 Kings have round calves that have hairs that are sparse and soft, with thighs like elephants' trunks, and knees that are uniform and covered over with flesh. Paupers have calves that resemble those of dogs and jackals.</p>	<p>4cd The best calf has few body hairs and the best thigh resembles an elephant's trunk.</p>	<p>5d-7a A king's calf has sparse and soft hairs and is identical to his other calf; his thighs are like splendid elephants' trunks; and his knees are the same and covered over with flesh. A pauper's calf is like that of a jackal.</p>
<p>5ab Limbs that have a single hair in a single pore belong to kings; limbs that have two hairs in a single pore belong to intellectuals and to Brahmans learned in the Vedas....</p>	<p>5 Expect magnanimous kings to have a single hair in a single pore; intellectuals and Brahmans learned in the Vedas to have two hairs in a single pore.</p>	<p>7b-d Kings have a single hair in a single pore; and for good luck, Brahmans learned in the Veda and intellectuals have two hairs in a single pore.</p>

Table 5: Comparison of versions – English translations.

These techniques were employed by the redactors to adjust the *akṣaras* to fit the smaller *anuṣṭubh* metre. Emphasis was placed solely on producing a metrically and grammatically correct version of the verses from the BS. While the recast texts contain most of the words from the original, the correspondence between protasis and apodosis, however, is corrupted, rendering a loss of meaning. As was already shown by Kohlbrugge, only an informed reader will be able properly to combine the metrical feet. Misreading leading to misunderstanding can easily occur, as illustrated in the currently available English translations of the GP.¹³

4 REDACTOR'S KNOWLEDGE OF BHAṬṬOTPALA

THE ARGUMENT OF THE SECOND REDACTOR'S KNOWLEDGE of Bhaṭṭotpala's commentary is revealed by his choice of verses from BS to be converted into *ślokas* at GP 1.65. GP 1.65.2–91 corresponds to BS 67.1–88ab, while BS 67.88cd–116 finds no parallels in GP. In his commentary to BS 67.82, Bhaṭṭotpala mentions that verses BS 67.1–82 are based on the Samudra's system, and the following verses (83–116) relay on an another source that has been identified as Garga's system as expounded in the Gārgīyajyotiṣa.¹⁴ The intervening verses used by the redactor of GP 1.65 (BS 67.83–88 = GP 1.65.85c–90), as previously mentioned, are the thirty-two marks of the great man (*mahāpuruṣalakṣaṇāni*) found in Garga's text and throughout Hindu literature. It seems clear enough that the redactor of 1.65 was aware of Bhaṭṭotpala's identification of this clear division of Varāhamihira's two sources and where it occurs in text of BS and chose only to use the material that corresponded to Samudra's system plus the marks of the great man. Both Samudra, from whose name Jyotiṣa's subdiscipline of Sāmudrikaśāstra is derived, and the thirty-two marks of the great man, are well known throughout Brahmanic literature.¹⁵ This would, therefore, indicate that the redactor of this chapter of the *Garuḍapurāṇa* was aware of Bhaṭṭotpala's division of source materials and chose to redact only those verses well recognised in Brahmanic circles, since familiarity with Garga was restricted to the vary limit group of scholars learned in Jyotiḥśāstra, who probably resided for the most part in the western part of the subcontinent. Moreover, the redactor's knowledge of Bhaṭṭotpala implies that his redaction could not have been completed before the latter half of the tenth century at the earliest.

5 CONCLUSIONS

WE CAN LEARN SEVERAL IMPORTANT LESSONS from this brief exploration of Jyotiḥśāstra in the *Garuḍapurāṇa*. First, the presentation of the Jyotiṣa-omen series on the human marks found in the *Garuḍapurāṇa* results in large part from a process of redaction

13 Dutt 1908: 162–75 and Shastri and A Board of Scholars 1978–80: part 1, 203–5, 206–17.

14 Bhaṭṭotpala to BS 67.82: आचार्येणोक्तं “सामुद्रविद्वि-
दतियातमनागतं वेत्ति” अतो अत्रास्माभिः सामुद्राणि पुरुषलक्ष-
णान्युदाहृतानि यावदाचार्यस्य तेभ्योऽप्यधिकमस्तीति ज्ञेयमिति,
“The teacher (Varāhamihira) said (at BS 67.1d) that ‘the learned in Samudra's system of marks ex-

plains men's past or future.’ Hence, here we call them as Samudra's system of men's marks. This is as far as it goes. It should be understood that the teacher supplements them [with the marks according to Garga].” See also Zysk 2016: 2, 659–60.
15 Zysk 2016: v. 1, 113–48; 149–72.

from an earlier source. Secondly, the method of redaction involves the recasting of verses in different metres into *anuṣṭubh*, so that readers or listeners with but a basic knowledge of Sanskrit could understand it. Thirdly, the redaction process probably involved multiple composers; and fourthly and most importantly, the redacted jyotiṣa-information cannot always be assumed to be a faithful and correct transmission of the original. It is for this reason that such Puranic sources of especially Jyotiḥśāstra must, therefore, be used with caution or in conjunction with its original source if it can be identified and is available. If indeed this example from *Garuḍapurāṇa* is at all indicative of Puranic composition, then it might well illustrate a general trend of the Puranas to normalise knowledge by means of poetic verses in *anuṣṭubh* metre.

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