Beginnings of Candella history; from Nannuka to Harsa.

The earliest prince of the Candella dynasty, according to the evidence of the Khajuraho Inscriptions, is Nannuka. In the Khajuraho Inscriptions nos. 2 and 4 he has been mentioned as 'nṛpati' and 'mahīpati', respectively. The records however do not furnish any definite data about him or the circumstances leading to the foundation of the Candella State. Nannuka has been extolled in vague and conventional phrases in verse 10:-

Tatra Kṣatrapa-sūrma-sāra-nikṣeragravā yaśas-candana-kriśālaṃkṛta dik-purandhi-vadanaḥ Śrī Nannukokkabhunnpaḥ/
Yasya-pūrva parākramakramananam-mihēsa-vidvesiṇāh sambhrāntah śīraṇa-vahan-nṛpatayāḥ sasāvivājñāṁ bhayat//

The verse thus describes him as 'a touchstone to test the worth of the gold of the regal order', and 'one who playfully decorated the faces of the women of the quarters with the sandal of his fame'. He is said to have forced even the enemy princes to bow down their heads before him, and made them carry his commands on their heads like diadems. Another verse (no. 11) describes him as a conqueror of many

2. ibid., P. 141, V. 11.
3. ibid., pp. 125, 131.
4. ibid.
hosts of enemies (bahuvairivargajayinah). Verse 15 of the Khajuraho Inscription no. 4 refers to him as one ‘whose skill in the use of bows and arrows reminded people of the great Epic hero, Arjuna’.

He was succeeded by his son, Vākpati, who has been mentioned as the lord of the country (‘kṣitipta’), the most favourite of his subjects (janāmāndasundarah śrimān). He must have achieved this popularity by granting them freedom from fear by the display of his valour (prajānam-ātanka-sāñkuma-akalanka-vikrama). Besides his military abilities in defeating enemies in battle (parājītārtha), he possessed wisdom and power of speech like his namesake, ‘Vākpati’ (Eṛhaspati, the preceptor of the Gods). (‘Śrī Vākpatir-Vākpati-tulya-vacah’; ‘Vākpatiriva Vākpatih kṣitipaḥ’). In combining in himself wisdom and valour Vākpati is said to have excelled the mythical kings, Prthu and Kakutstha.

The traditional accounts, preserved in the folk-ballads and stories, do not make any mention of Nannuka. The unanimously refer to one Candravarma as the founder of the Candella dynasty. The Mahoba Khand or the Parmāl Rāsa, current in the Bundelkhand region, gives a fanciful story about the

5. ii. I., P. 141;

Tena vikramadhanena dhanvinā krāmata yadhī vadhāya vidviṣāṁ
Dhunvatā dhanuradhiyunām Arjunāṁ śamaritā divi vimāna-gāminah/

6. ibid., V. 16.
7. ibid., V. 17.
8. ibid., P. 125., V. 12.
9. ibid., P. 141., V. 16.
10. ibid., V. 17.
birth of Candravarman. The military exploits ascribed to the prince in those bardic legends hardly agree, as I have shown, with the facts known from authentic sources. The legendary account has, therefore, generally been rejected by scholars.

In one of the MSS. of the Mahoba Khand, however, Cunningham noticed Sam 225, mentioned as the date of the consecration of Candravarman. Presuming it to be dated in the Harsa Era, Cunningham concluded that the founder of the Candella State began to rule from c. 851 A.D. The date of the Khajuraho Inscription of Yasovarman, 6th in descent from Nannuka, the founder of the family, is V.S. 1011 (A.D. 954). Calculating on the basis of an average of 20 to 25 years per reign, Cunningham placed the founder in the beginning of the 9th cent. A.D. This, he pointed out, supported his theory that the date in the Mahoba Khand should be assigned to the Harsa Era.

V. Smith and H.C. Ray accept the view of Cunningham as regards the date of the founder of the Candella dynasty. Smith suggests further on the basis of the traditional accounts, preserved in the Qanungo families of Mahoba, that Nannuka might have been the leader who wrested Mahoba from the Pratiharas.

With regard to the status of Nannuka and his successor, Vakpati, Smith holds that they are not referred to simply as ancestors, but that they must have enjoyed some sort of sovereign power, as indicated by the use of such epithets as

12. ibid.
'nrpa' and 'mahipati' in the Khajuraho inscriptions.

H. C. Ray controverting this assumption of Smith, holds that it was rather unlikely for the early Candellas to establish a sovereign state ousting the Parihārs, while the latter were at the height of their power. Though suggesting that the name Candravarman might have been the 'biruda' of Nannuka, Dr. Ray thinks that Nannuka was at best a feudatory to the Imperial Gurjara-Pratihāras, probably to Nāgabhaṭa II (615-833 A.D.). But why should it be presumed that from the very beginning the Candellas were feudatories to the Gurjara-Pratihāras?

A survey of the political condition of Northern India during the beginning of the 9th cent. A.D. reveals the utter instability that was prevailing in the region due to the continued struggle for supremacy between the three contemporary powers, - the Gurjara-Pratihāras, the Rastrakūṭas and the Pālas of Bengal. During these troublous days it might have been possible for a local tribal leader in the Bundelkhand region to establish an independent chiefship, not necessarily owing allegiance to any suzerain power. It need not be supposed that the Candellas during this period wrested Mahohā region from the Parihāras, as suggested by Smith. In fact there is no positive evidence of any direct conflict between early Candellas and the Gurjara-Pratihāras. It may be assumed that Nannuka, the leader of a local tribe, found a suitable opportunity in the prevailing circumstances to organise it on

a military basis, and that it was under his leadership that the nucleus of the Candella State was founded in the region, which later came to be known as Jejabhukti or Jejakabhukti. As the Pratihāras were preoccupied with deadly struggles against their powerful enemies, it may have been possible for the Candellas to lay the foundation of the chieftship.

But the picture of the Pratihāra power, as drawn by Dr. Ray, seems to be, I am afraid, a little exaggerated. The Gurjara-Pratihāra power did not rise to its height even by the end of Nāgabhāṭa II's reign. Dr. R.C. Majumdar thinks that the evidence of the Jain text Prabhāvaka Carita, connecting Kanauj with Nāgabhāṭa II, is not reliable. Thus Kanauj may not have formed a part of the Gurjara-Pratihāra dominion even during Nāgabhāṭa II's time, i.e., 833 A.D. He was followed by Rāmabhadra (833-36 A.D.) on the Pratihāra throne, who again was a weak ruler. Down to about the middle of the 9th cent. A.D. the Pālas were still a considerable power in Northern India. If all these circumstances are taken into account it does not become necessary to presume that the Candellas could not have existed except as a feudatory to the Pratihāras.

18. H.B. I., P. 12, fn. 3.
In V. 13 of the Khajurāho Inscription of V.S. 1011, however, it is stated that the Vindhyas became the pleasure-mount (Krīḍā-giri) of Vākpati, where he was entertained by the Kirāta women. Dr. H.C. Ray concludes from it that 'Vākpati succeeded in extending to some degree the limits of his small ancestral principality'. He has not however specified the extent of this increased power. As mentioned in the Introduction there were hills connected with the Vindhyas in the territory which later came to be known as Jejakabhukti. It is quite probable that some of these ranges may have been meant, and comprised in the territory originally held by the Candellas. The passage need not necessarily be taken as indicating any definite advance of territorial power without concrete details.

Vākpati had two sons, Jayaśakti and Vijayaśakti, both of whom appear to have been closely associated in the task of consolidating their political status. In connection with Vijayaśakti, it may be observed that he is described as having carried on expeditions to the far south to help the cause of an ally.

Suhrd-upakṛti-dakṣo daksināṃ jīgasuḥ
punaradhita payodhara-bandha vaidhuyamaryah/v. 20.

If Jayasakti and Vijayaśakti were feudatories to the Pratihāras, to whom this epithet 'suhrd' should be applied?

It would not be an appropriate epithet for a Gurjara-Pratihāra king, if he was their overlord. Further nothing is known about any expedition of the Pratihāras to the extreme south of India, in which they may have been helped by the Candellas. R. C. Majumdar thinks that the Candella Chief, Vijayāśakti might have helped Devapāla in latter's southern expedition, and earlier, Vākpati might have similarly been associated with Devapāla in his exploits in the Vindhyā region. If this view is accepted it will appear that the Candellas were free to help other powers, such as the Pālas, who were the bitter enemies of the Pratihāras. If the Candellas were really feudatories to the Gurjara Pratihāras, as supposed by some scholars, it would have been unusual for them to do so. Thus it appears that the feudatory status of the Candellas in relation to the Gurjara-Pratihāras during the early stages of their history, is not clearly established.

Dr. Majumdar suggests that the Candellas had helped Devapāla in his fight against Bhoja (Pratihāra) and were rewarded, after the latter's defeat, with the sovereignty of the territory near Khajurāho, perhaps under the suzerainty of Devapāla. In the absence of positive evidence, I am afraid, it is difficult to accept the contention that the early Candella rulers were feudatories of the Pālas of Bengal.

The Candella ruler, Yaśovarman, however was a feudatory to the Pratihāras. Before him Harṣa had helped the Gurjara-Pratihāras, possibly in a domestic strife. There is no definite indication of his status in relation to the Gurjara-Pratihāras. When, then, did the Candellas first accept the position of a feudatory to the Pratihāras?

From about the middle of the 9th cent. A.D. there was a progressive weakening of the Pāla power and a temporary cessation of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa attacks. The Candellas in all probability, may have accepted the suzerainty of the Pratihāras during this time, as no other power was stronger than the Pratihāras in Northern India then. By doing so they gained for themselves a recognised political status, though it was that of a feudatory. Jayaśakti’s importance in the family is indicated in the statement found in its records that Jejā gave his name to Jejābhuki as Prthu did to Prthivi.

Jejākhyayāthas mratih sa babhūva Jejābhuktiḥ
Prthoriva yataḥ Prthiviṃś-āśiḥ।

Further it may also be observed that the later Candella rulers generally invoke Jayaśakti and his brother, Vijayaśakti as the early ancestors of the family in the opening verse of their records.

25. This is evident from the reference to Vināyakapāla as ruling over the earth in the Khajuraho Inscription of V.S. 1011., L. 29. “Sri Vināyakapāladeva pālayati vasudhāṃ ...”. E.I., I., P. 129.

26. This is evident from the reference to Vināyakapāla as ruling over the earth in the Khajuraho Inscription of V.S. 1011., L. 29. “Sri Vināyakapāladeva pālayati vasudhāṃ ...”. E.I., I., P. 129.


Jayatahlyodayan-viśvaṃ Viśvaśvara-sīrodhṛtah
Candratreya narendrānām Veṣṇuścandra iv-ōjjalah//
Tatra pravarddhamāne virodhi vijaya bhrajīṣum
Jayāśakti-Vijayaśaktyādi virāvirbhāva bhāsvare 30.

The importance appears to have been due to the fact that he (Jayāśakti), by submitting to the overlordship of the Pratiharas, the greatest power in Northern India in his time, was able to win a recognised status for his family. But this must have happened sometime after Vijayaśakti’s expedition to the south, when he might have been assisting the Pālas as suggested by Dr. Majumdar.

Nannuka founded the nucleus of the Candella dominion, but he was a tribal chief only. For about fifty years the Candelas profited by the political disturbances in which other powers were seriously involved. Afterwards when the superiority of the Pratiharas was firmly established they submitted to their overlordship, as there was no other alternative.

Rāhila, the son of Vijayaśakti, is mentioned in two of the Khajurāho Records. He is, however, only vaguely eulogised as a great warrior, “never tired at the sacrifice of battle”, and “thinking of whom the enemies enjoy little sleep at night” (nidrā daridratāṁ yānti yam vicintya niśidvijāṁ).”

32. ibid. V. 16.
Rāhila undertook works of public interest, viz., excavation of tanks and lakes and construction of temples, remnants of which are still visible at Ajaygadh and Mahobā. At Ajaygadh a temple bears some stones inscribed with his name, and an old lake with a fine cruciform granite temple on its bank, near Mahobā, is still called 'Rāhilya Sēgar' after his name. The traditional account of the Parmāl Rāṣo, ascribes to him the construction of the township of 'Bhasāu', which is now identifiable with a village of the same name in the Pargana Badausa, 20 miles north-east of Kalanjar, where A. Cadell noticed some old fortifications and a temple of the usual Candella type.

It was during the time of Harṣa, who succeeded Rāhila, that the Candellas appear to have made a steady progress towards the attainment of a significant status in the political history of Northern India. Their position seems to have been greatly strengthened by matrimonial alliances with other contemporary powers. Khajurāho Records eloquently refer to the marriage between Harṣa and Kañcukūkā of the Gahamāna dynasty (Gahamāna kulodbhavān). The Benares Grant of Lakṣmi-Karṇa (Kalacuri) alludes to the marriage of the Kalacuri king

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34. J.A.S.B. (1881), P. 8.
35. P.R., P. 27. V. 68.
37. Sonurūpa ma surupāṃgah Kañcukākhyān-akunthadhīh/
    savarnnāma-vidhinovāha Gahamāna-kulodbhavāṃ//V. 21,
    E.I., I., P. 126.
Kokkalla I with Nattë or Nattakhyadevi, a princess of the Candella lineage. As Harṣa, mentioned in the same record, is identical with Candella Harṣa, Nattë was possibly related to him. The Kalacuris appreciate this marriage as an ideal one like the celestial unions of Śacī with Indra, Kamalā with Uśṇḍra, and Uma with Candramaulī.

An additional indication of friendly relations between the Kalacuris and the Candellas during this time is furnished by the same record, which states that Harṣa, along with three other rulers including Bhoja II of the Pratihāra dynasty and Vallabharāja (i.e., Rāstrākūṭa Krishna II) had been granted freedom from fear by the Kalacuri king Kokkalla (c. 875 - 925 A.D.). It seems that Kokkalla assured Harṣa of his intention not to injure the interest of the Candellas, and at the same time to secure indirectly protection for them by allying himself both with the Gurjara Pratihāras and the Rāstrākūṭas, who had been bitterly opposed to each other for a long period.

It is, however, well-known that the hostilities between the Pratihāras and the Rāstrākūṭas took a serious turn after 915 A.D., when Indra III sacked even the Imperial city of Mahodaya (Kanauj). But the Gurjara Pratihāras were able to

38. Śacimivendraḥ Kamalamūpendra Nagendra-kanyām-iva
Gandramaaulih/
Candella-vasa (vamsa) prabhavā susilā (susilā)
Nattākhyadevi sa tu parjjanaisit//8.
B.I., II., P. 306.
39. Bhoja Vallabhāraja Śrī-Harṣe Citrakūta-bhūpale
Samkaragane ca rājani yasyāsid-abbhayadah pāṇih//7.
ibid.
40. ibid., VII., P. 38.
recover substantial portion of their dominions after the
death of Indra III. Ksitipāla (Mahipāla) in his attempt to
rebuild the Pratihāra power, was aided by some of his feuda­
tories including the Candellas. The Chatsu Stone Inscription
refers to an expedition of conquest led by the Guhilot prince,
Bhaṭṭa, against the kings of the south, evidently the
Rāstrakūṭas, at the behest of his overlord, generally
identified with the Pratihāra ruler, Mahipāla. The Khajurāho
Inscription similarly claims for Candella Hārṣa the unique
distinction of restoring Ksitipāla-deva on the throne. It is
therefore quite reasonable to believe that the Candella king
Hārṣa by his successful intervention in the affairs of the
suzerain power enhanced his status in contemporary politics,
which, as pointed out by Dr. H.C. Ray, 'in the end proved
fatal to it' (the Imperial Pratihāras). An almost similar
situation developed in the history of Bengal in the latter
half of the 11th century A.D., when Bampāla secured the help
and cooperation of his 'Sāmanta-cakra' (feudatory powers) to
recover 'Varendra' (North Bengal) from the clutches of his
enemy.

42. "Punar-yena Śrī Ksitipāladeva nrpatiḥ simhāsane
sthāṇa(pitah)". B.I., I., P. 122, L. 10.
43. D.H.N.I., I., P. 582.
The allusion to this important political incident in the Khajurāho record is a clear indication of the growing power of the Candellas. It provides the missing link as to the circumstances that led to the rise of the Candellas as an independent power free from political subservience to the Pratihāras. Henceforth the Candellas retain only a nominal show of allegiance to their overlord, which continued till the days of Yaśovarman.