

# Aśokan Phonology and the Language of the Earliest Buddhist Tradition

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*Abstract:*

*The extant Middle Indic Buddhist scriptures in Pāli, BHS and Gāndhārī, are translation remnants from a lost oral transmission dialect called Buddhist Middle Indic (BMI). BMI was a kind of Buddhist lingua franca, a phonologically simplified portmanteau language, free of the most conspicuous differences between the different dialects spoken at that time, and characterized by loss of conjunct consonants, disappearance or lenition of intervocalic consonants, including replacement of stops by glides, change of aspirate stops to aspirates only, and other features facilitating cross-dialect communication. At the same time, because of the phonological simplifications, many homonyms resulted which caused potential confusion when the teachings were written down. Most of the linguistic features in BMI are also found in the Aśokan rock inscriptions, especially those from Shāhbāzgarhī (Sh.) in the northwest, a correspondence that may be due to Buddhism's rapid spread on existing trade routes to the northwest, the early development of writing in that area and the prestige of the northwestern form of speech. A study of the phonological development of the dialects in the Sh. and other Aśokan edicts are a useful template for the corresponding phonological evolution of the surviving witnesses of BMI (Pāli and the other Prakrits), helping to isolate and disambiguate some of the confusions that have resulted through the oral transmission process.*

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## Introduction

There is a story told in the Chinese version of the *Mūlasarvāstivādin Vinaya*<sup>1</sup> about a monk who chants a verse from the *Dhammapada* (Dhp) in the following manner: If a man were to live for a hundred years, and not see a water-heron, it were better that he live only for one day, and see a water-heron. Ānanda, Buddha's chief disciple hears him and corrects him. That's not what the Buddha said. His words were: If a man were to live for a hundred years, and not see the principle of coming into existence and passing away, it were better that he live only for a day... The monk reports the incident to his teacher, who tells him that Ānanda is wrong and to go on reciting as before.

The source of this confusion are the words in Dhp verse 113: in the Pāli we have *udaya-bbayam*, but, as we shall see below, a *-y-* in Prakrit is often simply a weak intervocalic glide (sometimes written with a dot over the letter, i. e. *-ỵ-*) signifying that a stop has been omitted. So apparently a clumsy translator substituted *-k-* for *-ỵ-* in the first word resulting in *udaka* (which means "water") and *-k-* for *-ỵ-* in the second word to get *bakam* ("heron") and, ignored the geminate consonant (which represented a Prakrit change from *vy-* > *vv-* > *bb*).<sup>2</sup> Now he/she must have been a clumsy translator indeed; for there is a word in the source dialect *udaya* and that means "coming into existence" and *vyayam*, from which *bbayam* developed, means "passing away". And *udaya-bbayam* or *udaya-vyayam* is a fundamental teaching of the Buddha – that all things which rise must pass away. So the story may well be apocryphal, but it does show that the Buddhist translators (the story comes from a Chinese translation of a lost Sanskrit work) were themselves well aware of the possibilities of error in the transmission.<sup>3</sup>

## Buddhist Middle Indic

The teachings of the Buddha were preserved orally by his disciples in the fifth century B.C., through a *bhāṇaka* (reciter) tradition, and were not written down until the first century B.C. in Śri Laṅka.<sup>4</sup> The requirement to recite the sutras is well documented within the Pāli scriptures themselves.<sup>5</sup> All the *saṅgha* were expected to memorize and recite his rules and teachings at regular intervals – the *Pāṭimokkha*, or *Vinaya* rules, were recited every fortnight, for example, - sayings of the Buddha like the *Aṭṭhakavagga* from the *Sutta Nipāta* (Sn) were memorized and repeated by

the monks, and several of the suttas – like DN 33 *Saṅgāhisutta* and DN 34 *Dasuttara Sutta* – were part of the recitation liturgy from early in the life of the *Saṅgha*. However, everything is changeable, especially language, and as the centuries passed by, the phonology of the language changed as well. The teachings which have survived to this day – and Pāli contains some of the earliest layers<sup>6</sup> – are certainly not in the phonological form that the Buddha taught, although their meaning may well be accurately preserved. It is generally accepted that Pāli itself is a composite Middle-Indic (MI) dialect of unlocalisable provenance –preserving elements of western, eastern and northern dialects and later Sanskritisations<sup>7</sup> – which was formulated sometime in the third century B.C. – i. e. in Aśokan times – and transmitted to Śrī Laṅka by Aśoka’s son, the monk Mahinda, who went to the island in approx. 250 B.C. to promote the Dhamma. Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit (BHS) is another MI dialect, believed to stem from the school of the Mahāsāṃghikalokottaravādins,<sup>8</sup> which has undergone even more Sanskritizations than Pāli. Both dialects appear to have developed “side by side at the times of their origin”;<sup>9</sup> they “flow from the same source”, which von Hinüber calls “Buddhist Middle Indic,” a language which lies “chronologically between Pāli and the language of the oldest tradition and therefore of the Buddha himself.”<sup>10</sup>

The nature of what this source is has occupied researchers for decades. As early as 1916, Geiger surmised that it was a *lingua franca* containing elements of all dialects but free of the most conspicuous dialectal phenomena, like the replacement of voiced and unvoiced consonants by a weakly articulated *-ya-*, which could be interpreted by the hearer according to the custom in his or her dialect.<sup>11</sup> He variously termed it a *Hoch- und Gebildetensprache* (high and scholarly language), a *Verkehrssprache* (a *lingua franca* or interlanguage) and a *Kunstsprache* (artificial language). Helmer Smith called it a *Koine Gangétique* in 1952.<sup>12</sup> Bechert wondered if differences in Pāli prose and verse pointed to a middle Indic *Dichtersprache* (poetic language) which was transregional in use.<sup>13</sup> The various MI texts which we have before us – principally in Pāli, BHS and Gāndhārī – are therefore translations from this underlying oral linguistic stratum, a translation or transmission which preserves many of the peculiarities of the earlier layer.<sup>14</sup>

Lüders maintained that underneath the Pāli canon was an “*Urkanon*” composed in an eastern dialect, coinciding largely with the Māghadhī of Aśoka’s inscriptions, in part already at a further stage of

phonological development.<sup>15</sup> Lüders felt, that because in general the Aśokan inscriptions preserve intervocalic stops, the language of the Urkanon was younger than the edicts, for in the younger stages of MI, intervocalic stops were ejected and hiatuses left, and some of the anomalies of MI can only be accounted for on the basis of the loss of intervocalics, and other advanced phonological developments; see further discussion below. Lüders did acknowledge, however, that the vernacular of Aśoka's time was probably more advanced than the official language (Kanzleisprache) of the rock edicts.<sup>16</sup> Lamotte also makes the point that the Buddhist texts available to us are at a more evolved linguistic stage than the Aśokan edicts and asks the question how that is possible? Since Buddhism began at least 100 years before Aśoka's time. He concludes that "the texts which we have at our disposal therefore do not reflect the state of the language which served for the preaching of the Buddha and his first disciples; they represent a codification at a more recent stage."<sup>17</sup> In fact, a careful study of the Aśokan dialects shows that the language is quite a bit further advanced phonologically than is generally thought to be the case, and, although Pāli, which was not committed to writing until the first century B.C., is more linguistically evolved than the Aśokan dialects, most of the former's phonological changes are present in the latter, at least in an inchoate form.

### **Ambiguities in the transmission**

While the complexities of oral language transmission make it impossible to reconstruct Lüders' Urkanon,<sup>18</sup> nevertheless some of the ambiguities in the canon can only be resolved by positing and establishing an underlying Buddhist Middle Indic (BMI) form which allowed for multiple interpretation when it was translated into the local dialect. For example, there are instances of phonological confusion in the oldest Pāli writings, which can only be explained by loss of intervocalics. Some of the etymologies of the *Sabhiyasutta* of the *Sutta Nipāta*, for example, only make sense if the words were originally composed in a dialect that replaced *-t-* and *-j-* with *-y-*;<sup>19</sup> parallel conflicting (but cognate) phrases from the *Mahāparinibbāna* and *Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtras* (*vedhamissakena* and *dvaiddha-niśrayena*) can also be explained in the same fashion.<sup>20</sup> In this way standard historical linguistics methods of comparing different but related cognate forms yield very revealing results about the nature of the underlying transmission dialect. The purpose of this paper is to try and isolate something of the phonological nature of this oral transmission source dialect and show that many of the features were

already present in some of the Aśokan dialects. Since it is India's earliest decipherable writing, the dialects are an indispensable witness to the state of the Prakrits in the third century B.C. As Lüders opined, the rock inscriptions were also probably much more conservative than the actual state of the colloquial Prakrit. Senart, for example, believed the orthography of the edicts did not always reflect the pronunciation. Conjoint consonants may have been written in that form (in deference to Skt. *tatsamas*) but were pronounced as geminates, as was the case for the sibilants, which, though sometimes written as retroflex and palatal *s-* (*ṣ* and *ś* in the northwestern dialects for example), were nevertheless pronounced as a single dental *s-*.<sup>21</sup> Edgerton has made a similar point with regard to initial conjuncts which were always pronounced as single consonants and therefore did not make position metrically.<sup>22</sup> The following four classes of changes – all present in the Aśokan Prakrits – are hallmarks of the Prakrits and responsible for much of the linguistic confusion which resulted when the sounds were transcribed and translated:

1. weakening or loss of intervocalics as mentioned above.
2. loss of intervocalic aspirated stops, leaving only the aspiration (*bh*, *dh*, *ph*, etc > *h*)
3. loss of most conjoint consonants (consonant clusters), changed to geminates (e.g. *-kt-* > *-tt-*) internally or to single consonants at the beginning of a word (e.g. *pr-* > *p-*).
4. change of various glides (*-y-* > *-v-* and *-v-* > *-y-*), liquids (*-l-* > *-r-* and *-r-* > *-l-*), labials (*-m-* > *-v-*) and sibilants (*s-*, *ś-*, *ṣ-* > *s*).

A simple word like *satta* which occurs in numerous compounds, could refer back to Skt. *sakta*, *śakta sattvam*, *sattvan*, *sapta*, etc. (there are at least 12 different possibilities if one takes into account long and short vowels). The “true” meaning of the word *bodhisatta*, as transmitted in the Pāli, has been debated for years. Does it mean a being whose nature is awakening (*bodhi-sattva*), a person capable of awakening (*bodhi-śakta*), a person dedicated to awakening (*bodhi-sakta*) or a hero of awakening (*bodhi-sattvan*) as the Tibetans take it (*byang chub sems dpa'*) – to name only the most obvious possibilities.<sup>23</sup> There are lots of instances like this in the Buddhist writings. Most times the context made the meaning clear, but often it had to be disambiguated. That is why the Prakrits made various alterations – and Sanskritizations – to the transmission – for the purposes of clarification. A well-known example is the re-introduction in Pāli of the Skt. absolute ending *-tvā* (which had been received as Pkt. *-ttā*) in order

to distinguish it from the homonym *-ttā* for the *nomen agentis*, agent noun<sup>24</sup> (von Hinüber 1994, 188; Norman 2006b, 83).

### Three examples

Following are three examples of the usefulness of this method: i. e. tracing words back to their hypothesized earlier BMI form, by back-tracing the words' phonological evolution. Sometimes potential doctrinal ambiguities are exposed.

1) In the *Padhānsutta* of the *Sutta Nipāta*, for example, the key word *padhāna* is always translated as “exertion” or “striving” and the cognate word *pahita* (which is considered a past participle of *pa+dhā*) is translated as “resolute.” In the first *gāthā*, there is the phrase *padhānapahitaṃ* (P.)<sup>25</sup> or *prahāṇaṃ prahitaṃ* (Mvu)<sup>26</sup> which leads to various clumsy translations like “resolute in exertion”<sup>27</sup> or “I strove the striving”.<sup>28</sup> However, as Edgerton points out, *prahāṇa* in BHS is always taken by the Tibetans as “abandonment” (*spong ba*), presumably from the root *pra + hā*.<sup>29</sup> The past participle for this verb would be *prahāta*, not *prahita*, which would be derived from *pra + hi* which also has the meaning of “abandoned” or “relinquished” (MW). Now *prahita* in this context makes much more sense as “abandoned” than “resolute”. This points to an underlying BMI word *p(r)ahāna* which the Pāli translator took as *padhāna*, “striving” (although it could have been *pahāna* which is a valid Pāli word) and the BHS translator took as *prahāṇa*<sup>30</sup> which was a homonym with two meanings (< *pra + dhā*, “striving” and *pra + hā/hi* “abandonment”). For the original BMI author, both meanings were probably present, as was the case with the past participle form *p(r)ahita*. So the Pāli *gāthā* should be translated as “I who have abandoned striving” and the BHS verse is even clearer: the Buddha has abandoned striving (*prahāṇaṃ prahitaṃ mayā*) because he has transcended all striving (*parikrāmya vyāyamaṃ*) in order to reach the highest goal (*uttamārthasya prāptaye*). The other references to *pradhāna* in the Pāli (and *prahāṇa* in BHS), are all about abandonment, not striving, as a close reading will confirm. So arguably, all but the first reference have been mistranslated in the Pāli, while BHS has it correct, since *prahāṇa* can mean either striving (< Skt. *pra+dhāna*) or abandonment (< Skt. *pra+hāṇa*) depending upon context. The sutta, both in P. and BHS, is much more about abandonment than striving and the very Pāli title (*padhānasutta*) may in fact be a misnomer for *pahānasutta*, - although the first *padhāna* is correct (in *gāthā* 427), the others are probably mistakes

for *pahāna*. The point is, that the underlying BHS oral transmission would have allowed for both possibilities.<sup>31</sup>

2) Is a *paccekabuddha* one who has awakened for him/herself, i. e. without the benefit of a Buddha’s Teaching (from Skt. *pratyeka*?) or one who has awakened by understanding causes and conditions, i. e. a *paccayabuddha* (from Skt. *pratyaya*?), which is how it is etymologized in the *Saddharmapundarikasūtra*.<sup>32</sup> The word that has come down to us is the Pāli form *pacceka*. Does this derive from Skt. *pratyeka*? (*pratyeka* > *pacceka*) or is it just as or more likely to derive from Skt. *pratyaya* (*pratyayabuddha* (Skt.) > *paccayabuddha* > *\*pacceyabuddha* > (palatalization *-a-* > *-e-* in the presence of [-ANT] cons. *-cc-*), > P. *paccekabuddha*.<sup>33</sup> From this exercise we may deduce that the original Buddhist Middle Indic word transmitted was *\*paccVya* (V=vowel, *-a-* or *-e-*), which by the Pāli tradition was interpreted as *pacceka* and by the BHS tradition as *pratyaya*.

3) The method is extremely useful when there are two different but related words, as in Norman’s example referred to above from the *Sobhīyasutta*, preserved in Pāli *Sutta Nipāta* as *virajo* (“free from defilement or passion”) and in the *Mahāvastu* as *virato* (“stopped”, “ceased”), indicating an underlying Buddhist Middle Indic form of *\*virayo* which is back-translated as noted. The sequence is reversed in Sn 531 where Pāli has *virato* and Mv has *virajo* (Mv 3.398). I quote both sets of stanzas here in full as it is very illustrative of the ambiguities of the process and points to the existence of a BMI word *\*virayo*, which existence alone can account for these opposing interpretations.

Pāli:	Mvu:
<p><i>Samitāvi pahāya puññapāpaṃ</i>  <i>Virajo ñatvā imaṃ parañca</i>  <i>lokaṃ,</i>  <i>Jātimaraṇaṃ upātivatto</i>  <i>Samāno tādi pavuccate tathattā.</i>                      520</p> <p>He who has quieted himself has given up evil and merit; free from passion, he knows this world and</p>	<p><i>samitāvi prahāya puṇyavipākaṃ</i>  <i>virato jñātvā imaṃ paraṃ ca</i>  <i>lokaṃ //</i>  <i>jātimaraṇaṃ upātivrtto</i>  <i>śramaṇo tādi pravuccati tathatvā //</i>                      Mvu 3.396/7</p> <p>He who has quieted himself has given up the maturing of merit; he is ceased, and knows this world</p>

<p>the other world. He has gone beyond birth and death. Such a one is called a <i>samaṇa</i>, in truth.</p>	<p>and the other world. He has gone beyond birth and death. Such a one is called a <i>śramaṇa</i>, in truth.</p>
<p><i>Virato idha sabbapāpakehi Nirayadukkhamicca viriyavā so, So viriyavā padhānavā Dhiro tādi pavuccate tathattā.</i> 531</p> <p>He is abstaining from all evil deeds, he has conquered the sufferings of hell, he is energetic and rightly concentrated. Such a one is called constant, in truth.</p>	<p><i>yaḥ prahīṇabandhano prahāṇavām sarvaduḥkhakṣayaṃ janetvā / nānyān sarvatra na rakṣati virajo vīryavān pravuccati tathatvā // Mvu 3.398</i></p> <p>He whose bonds are relinquished, who is full of energy, who has caused the destruction of all suffering; he who always protects others, - he is called free from passion, diligent, in truth. Mvu 3.398.</p>

Note that verse 520 is almost identical in each recension with the exception of *virato/virajo* and *pāpaṃ/vipākaṃ*. The Mvu version of *gāthā* 531 is, however, very different; were not the previous P. and Mvu *gāthās* very similar, one might doubt that these were a translation of a common source, and indeed the Mvu version seems very garbled with the third line making little sense.<sup>34</sup> The first line contains a play on *prahīṇa* (“cast off”) and *prahāṇa* (which can mean either “full of energy” or “full of abandonment”). Between the two *gāthās*, there are six corresponding words (counting *virato/virajo* as cognate),<sup>35</sup> but, except for the last line, they are almost all out of order, showing how inconsistent and garbled the transmission can be in some cases.

### Aśokan phonology

So while there is no hope of establishing an Ur-transmission as Lüders had hoped, one can establish some Ur-BMI lexemes and these can help to identify and (sometimes) clarify potential ambiguities in the oral transmission. The usefulness of this method is further corroborated by an understanding of Aśokan phonology, which shows that all these features present in the hypothesized BMI language were also present in the Aśokan Prakrits to one extent or another, confirmed by our oldest available



witness, the rock engravings. This section of the paper will present some of the principal evidence, without claiming to be exhaustive, for the advanced state of Aśokan phonology, especially in the northwest. In what follows I leave out the “normal” changes of conjunct consonants to geminates, change of sibilants, interchange of *-v-* and *-y-*, eastern *-l-* for western *-r-*, etc., which may all be found in Hultzsch or Mehendale.<sup>36</sup> Instead, I am concentrating on examples which show the advanced phonological state of the Aśokan edicts (e.g. lenition and vanishing of stops, glides, syllables) and other unusual phenomena.

### A. Dropping of intervocalic stops or glides.

- 1) Rock Edict (RE) 1 A<sup>37</sup> 13 A (Shāhbāzgarhī =Sh.): *-y- > ∅*: (Skt.) *devānāmpriyasya > (Sh.) devanapriasa*; RE 1 E,F (Sh.): *devanapriasa, devanapriasa* (“beloved of the gods”).
- 2) RE 1F, 13A: (Skt.) *priyadarśinaḥ > (Sh.) priadraśisa, priadraśisa* (“au regard amical”,<sup>38</sup> Proper name).
- 3) RE 13 AA: Skt. *ihalaukika > (Kālsī=K. Sh.) hidalokika > (Mānsehrā=M.) ialokika* (“in this world”).<sup>39</sup> See also RE 9 M: (Skt.) *iha > (Kālsī = K. M.) hida > (Sh.) ia* (“here”). Mehendale suggests that the correct derivation is *\*idha > \*hidha > hida*.<sup>40</sup>
- 4) RE 4 C: (Skt.) *sthavira > (Girnār=Gir.) thaira* (P. *thera*). This word only occurs in Girnār. The other REs use the word *vuḍha* or *mahālaka* for “elder”.
- 5) Pillar Edict (PE) 5 B: (Skt.) *kādamba > kāmba* (“goose with dark grey wings.”)<sup>41</sup> In Ardha-Māgadhī (AMg.) the word is *kaṃbaga* or *kaṃbaṃba* or *kālamba*; *kāmba* in Māhārāṣṭrī.<sup>42</sup>
- 6) RE 1 E: (Skt.) *\*ekatya > \*ekatiya > (K. Jaugada=J.) ekatiyā, > (M.) ekatiya, > (Gir.) ekacā, > (Sh.) ekatia* (“some”).
- 7) RE 13 B: Skt: *dvyardha > (K. M. Eṛṛaguḍi=Eṛṛ.) diyadha, > (Sh.) diadha* (“one and a half”).<sup>43</sup>
- 8) RE 13 X: (Skt.) *vijayitavya > (Sh.) vijetavia*. Derivation: *vijayitavya > (K.) vijayitaviya > (Sh.) vijetavia* (“to be conquered”).
- 9) RE 5 E, RE 5 N: (Skt.) *mama > (Sh. M.) maa* (“mine”). Bühler reads *ma[ha]* for Sh.<sup>44</sup> See also RE 3 C for Sh. *maa*.

## B. Lenition of intervocalic unvoiced to voiced stop.

- 1) Bhabhra edict (north of Jaipur) E: (Skt.) *adhikṛtya* > *adhigicya* (“regarding”).
- 2) Separate Edict (Sep. Ed.) 2 H: (Skt.) *ihalokaṃ* > (Dhauḷi=Dh.) *hidalokaṃ* > (J.) *hidalogaṃ* (“in this world”). (Skt.) *paralokaṃ* > (Dh.) *palalokaṃ* > (J.) *palalogaṃ* (“in the other world”). Lüders believes that the lenition *-k-* > *-g-* has to do with how the word was pronounced (as *loga*, not *loka*) and the underlying etymology of *loka* derived from *lujyate* = *rujyate* = P. *lujjati* (“it falls apart”, SN IV 52).<sup>45</sup>
- 3) Separate Edict 2 K (Skt.) *acala* > (Dh.) *ajalā* > (J.) *acala* (“unshakeable”).
- 4) Pillar Edict (PE) 7 SS: (Skt.) *dharmalipi* > *dhammalipi* > *dhammalibi* (“religious edict”), also > RE I A, et al. (Sh. M.) *dhramadipi*, with an unusual *-l-* > *-d-* change which Woolner says is Iranian in origin.<sup>46</sup> For change *-l-* > *-d-*, see also PE 5 B where (Skt.) *ḍuli* > (Delhi-Toprā =Top.) *daḷī*, but > (Allāhābād-Kosam=All.) *duḍī* (“turtle”). PE 5 C also has another example of change *-d-* > *-l-*, i. e. (Skt.) *edaka* > (Top.) *elakā* (“ram”). Also RE 2 A: (Skt.) *kerala* > (Sh.) *kerada* (PN) and RE 9 C: (Skt. *mahilā* > (Gir.) *mahiḍā* (“woman”).
- 5) Rummindei (Rum.) Pillar B: (Skt.) *vikṛta* > *vigaḍa* (“decorated”).
- 6) Nigālī Sāgar (west of Lumbinī) A: (Skt.) *stūpe* > *thube* (“relic-shrine”).
- 7) Queen’s Edict (Allahabad, east India) B, PE 7 R: *ambāvṛtikā* > *ambāvaḍikā* (“mango grove”). *vaḍikā* < \**vartikā* < (Skt.) *vṛtikā* (*vṛti* + *ka*).
- 8) Separate Edict 1 X, also PE 4 H: (Skt. *śakṣyatha*, *śakṣyanti*,) > *caghatha*, *caghanti* (“You/they will be able”). *-ṣy-* would normally go to *-kh-*, *-ch-* or *-jh-* but not to *-gh-*.<sup>47</sup> The sequence must have been *śakṣyati* > *cakhati* > *caghati*.
- 9) PE 7 S: (Skt.) *aṣṭan* > *aḍha*. (“eight”). Wells were dug every eight *kos* which represents approx. 9 miles or a day’s march for an army.<sup>48</sup> Some have argued for a meaning *ardha* (“half”).
- 10) Sep. Ed. 1 N: (Skt.) *anāvṛttika/anāyuktika* <sup>49</sup> > (Dh. J.) *anāvuttiya* (“lack of practice”,<sup>50</sup> or “obstinacy”,<sup>51</sup>).
- 11) PE 5 B: (Skt.) *sāṃkuci* > *saṃkuja* (“an aquatic animal”).

- 12) RE 5 F: (Skt.) *hāpayiṣyati* > (Sh.) *hapeśadi* (“he will omit”).  
 13) RE 5 J: (Skt.) *hitasukha* > (K. Sh. M.) *hidasukha* (“welfare and happiness”). Only Dh. and Eṙṙ. preserve the unvoiced *-t-*.

### C. Devoicing of intervocalic voiced to unvoiced stops (fortition).

- 1) RE 6 D: (Skt.) *vraja* > (Gir. K. Dh. Eṙṙ.) *vaca*, > (Sh. M.) *vaca* (“cow-pen”).  
 2) RE 5 J: (Skt.) *kamboja* > (Dh.) *kamboca*. Generally Lüders treats these as hyperpalisms,<sup>52</sup> while Mehendale believes that devoicing was a genuine phonetic feature of the eastern dialect.<sup>53</sup>  
 3) RE 8 E: (Gir. Dh.) *tadopayā*, (K. Eṙṙ.) *tatopayā*, (Sh.) *tatopayam*, (M.) *tatopaya* (“suitable”). What this word is derived from is a mystery. If it is derived from *tad-upa-ka* as per PED (s. v. *Ta*<sup>o</sup>; Pāli = *tadūpiya*, “agreeable”, “pleasant”), then K. Sh. and M. are an example of devoicing *-d-* > *-t-*. The Skt. prototype is probably *tadā* + *upaga* > *tadopaga* > *tatopaya* (“suitable for that occasion”), which is a further example of lenition, *-g-* > *-y-*.<sup>54</sup>  
 4) Sep. Ed. 1 C, M: (Skt.) *pratipadayeyam* > (J.) *paṭipātayeham* (“I may produce”). Dh. has the voiced *-d-*. At section M, J. has *paṭipātayema* (“you should practice”), with Dh. *-d-*. Sep. Ed. 2 C also has *paṭipātayeham*. An interesting example of devoicing in two eastern locations suggests that devoicing, not voicing is an eastern characteristic as per Mehendale.<sup>55</sup>  
 5) RE 13 Q: (Skt.) *Magā* > (K. Sh. M. Eṙṙ.) *Makā* (PN). Only Gir. preserves the voiced *-g-*. In the same section we also find *Aṅtiyoge* (K. M.) for Antiochus with devoicing in Sh. and Eṙṙ. (*Aṅtiyoko/Aṅtiyoke*) and in RE 2A, in Gir. (*Aṅtiyako*).  
 6) MRE 1<sup>56</sup>: (Skt.) *ārogyam* > (Eṙṙ.) *ārokaṃ* (“health”).

### D. Change of intervocalic stop to a glide.

- 1) RE 13 C: *dhaṃmavāyo* (Gir.), *dhaṃmavāye* (K.), *dhrāmavaye* (M.), *dhaṃmāvāye* (Eṙṙ.). *vāyo* is obscure; per Sheth<sup>57</sup> it refers to, inter alia, *vāda* (“discourse”), *vāka* (“speaking”), *vāta* (“wind”), all of which are appropriate in the context. It is unlikely to be originally *vāya* in the sense of “leader” or

“weaver”, the normal meaning of *vāya*. Bloch calls it “obscure”.<sup>58</sup>

- 2) RE 13 M (Skt.) *āṭavika* > (Gir.) *aṭaviyo* (“forest inhabitant”).
- 3) RE 5 J: (Skt.) *kaṃboja* > (Sh.) *kaṃboya* (Proper Name).
- 4) RE 1 D: (Skt.) *rājā* > (Sh.) *raya* (“king”).
- 5) RE 1C: (Skt.) *samāje* > (Sh.) *samayaspi* (“in the assembly”; loc. ending *-asmin* > *-aspin* > *-aspi*; see below, G.4 “various other unusual changes”)
- 6) PE 1 E: (Skt.) \**gevaka* > *gevayā* (“the low ones”).  $\sqrt{gev}$ ,  $\sqrt{khev}$ ,  $\sqrt{kev}$ ,  $\sqrt{sev}$  are all related and mean “to serve”. The *kṛt-aka* ending has been added to the root and changed to *-aya*. Norman suggests that *gevayā* is a mistake for *sevayā*,<sup>59</sup> but there is no need to postulate a mistake as  $\sqrt{gev}$  is a valid root.
- 7) RE 5 G: (Skt.) *supradāraka* (*su+ pra + \sqrt{dṛ}*) > (K. Dh. Er̥.) *supadālaye*, > (M.) *supadarave* ([sins are] “easy to be dispersed”). Gir. and Sh. have *sukaraṃ* (“easy to commit”). The original Skt. word could also be viewed as a gerundive (*supradārya*), with an epenthetic vowel added. Interchange of *-y-* and *-v-* is common.<sup>60</sup>
- 8) PE 7 EE: (Skt.) *śucitā* > *socave*, > PE 2 C (Top. Delhi-Mīraṭh= Mīr., All.) *socaye*, (Lauriyā-Ararāj =Ar., Lauriyā-Nandangarh =Nand., Rāmpūrvā =Rām.) *soceye* (“purity”). Pāli form is *soceyya*. The change *-i-* > *-e-* and *-u-* > *-o-* is explainable as a *guṇa* form; *-i-* > *-a-* is unusual but possible under the influence of the back vowel *-o-*.
- 9) PE 4 D: (Skt.) *atapatike* > *atapatiye* (“discretion”).<sup>61</sup>

## E. Change of intervocalic aspirated stops > *-h-*

- 1) PE 6 C: (Skt.) *vidadhāmi* > *vidahāmi* (“I establish”).
- 2) PE 7: (Skt.) *laghu* > *lahu* (“light”, “little”).
- 3) RE 4 H: (Skt. Gir.) *bhavati* > (Sh.) *bhoti* > (K. Dh. M. Er̥.) > *hoti*.
- 4) PE 7 R: (Skt.) *nyagrodha* > *nigoha* (“Banyan tree”).
- 5) Sep. Ed. 2 H: (Skt.) *labheyuḥ* > (Dh.) *lahvevu* > (J.) *laheyū* (“they may obtain”).
- 6) RE 4 C: (Skt.) *bahubhiḥ* > (Gir. Dh.) *bahūhi*, > (K. Sh. M.) *bahuhi*.

## F. Simplification of two syllables into one:

- 1) Separate Kalinga Edict B: (Skt.) *nagaravyāvahārika* (from *vi-ā-ava+√hr̥*) > (Dh. J.) *nagalaviyohālakā* (“business of the city”, “administration of justice in the city”). *vyāva-* > *viyāva-* > *viyo* (*-āva-* > *-o-*).
- 2) RE 5 E: (Skt.) *kariṣya(n)ti* > (Gir.) *kāsati*, (Sh.) *kaṣaṃti*, (M.) *kaṣati*, > (K. Dh. Eṙṙ.) *kachaṃti* (“he/they will do”).<sup>62</sup> Here we have *-ari-* > *-a-*, and *-ṣy-* > *-s-* or *-ṣy-* > *-ch-*. Normal change of *-ṣy-* is to *-ss-* or *-h-* as in *gamihii*<sup>63</sup> < *gamiṣyati* (“he will go”) or Pāli *kāhāmi* < *kariṣyāmi* (“I will do”).
- 3) PE 5 E: (Skt.) *kṣapayitavya* > *jhāpetaviye* (“to be burnt”)
- 4) RE 4 E: (Skt.) *vardhaviṣyati* > (Gir. Dh.) *vaḍḍhayisati*, (K.) *vaddhiyisati*, (M.) *vadhrayisati*, > (Sh.) *vaḍhiṣati* (“will cause to grow”).
- 5) RE 5 F: (Skt.) *hāpayiṣyati* > (K. Dh.) *hāpayisati*, > (Gir.) *hāpesati* > (M.) *hapeṣati* > (Sh.) *hapeṣadi* (“he will omit”). Note the double change in Sh. *-aya-* > *-e-* and lenition of *-ati-* > *-adi-*.
- 6) RE 4 B: (Skt.) *darśayati* > (M.) *draṣeti* (“he displays”). All the other versions have an absolutive (*dassayitvā* in Gir. and *dassayitu* in the others).
- 7) RE 13 O: (Skt.) *samacarya* > (Gir.) *samacairam* (“spiritual calm”; Sh. has *samacariyam* and K. *ṣamacaliyam*). Derivation of Gir. is *samacarya* > *samacariya* > *samacaira*.
- 8) RE 13 X: (Skt.) *vijayitavya* > (Gir.) *vijetavyam*, > (Sh.) *vijetavia*. K. maintains syllables (*vijayataviya*), while Eṙṙ. has *vijetaviyam* (“to be conquered”).
- 9) RE 6 F: (Skt.) *ājñāpayāmi* > (M.) *anapemi* (“I order”). Other REs maintain the 5 syllabic structure (e.g. Sh. *anāpayami*).
- 10) RE 5 J: (Skt.) *vyāpṛta* > (Gir.) *vyāpatā*, > (K. Dh.) *viyāpatā*, > (Sh.) *vapaṭa*, > (M.) *vapuṭa* (“busy”, “engaged”). It is not clear whether *vyāpṛta* was pronounced as three syllables of four; certainly in the east it was four.<sup>64</sup>

## G. Various other unusual changes:

- 1) Change of *-ṣy-* > *-ss-* (normal) and *-h-* (rarer). Separate Edict 2 M: (Skt.) *eṣyatha* > (Dh.) *ehatha* > (J.) *essatha*.
- 2) Change of *t-* > *c-* ([+ANT] > [-ANT]) at the beginning of a word. RE 5, 7, 9, 12, 13: (Skt.) *tu-* > (K. Dh. M. Sh. Eṙṙ.) *cu-*.

Bloch suggests that *cu* is a combination of *tu* and *ca*, “que la prose brahmanique ancienne emploie avec sens adversatif.”<sup>65</sup> It does not appear in the *Ṛg Veda*. Another example is in RE 4 F: (Skt.) *tiṣṭhantaḥ* > (Gir.) *tistamto*, (Sh.) *tiṣṭhiti*, > (K. Dh. M. Eṛṛ.) *ciṭṭitu* (“abiding”).

- 3) RE 12 D (Skt.) *garhaṇa* or *garhā* > (Gir.) *garahā*, (K. Eṛṛ.) *galahā*, (Sh.) *garana*, (M.) *garaha* (“blame”). Gir. K. and M. may be viewed as  $\emptyset$  > *-a-*, insertion of an epenthetic vowel in *garhā*; Sh. *garana* is either *-aha-* > *-ana-* or *-h-* >  $\emptyset$  from (Skt.) *garhaṇa*.
- 4) RE 12 H: (Skt.) *ātman* > (Gir.) *ātpa* > (K. Sh. M. Eṛṛ.) *ata* (“self”). The *appa-* form of *ātman* (P. *atta-*) is well attested in ArdhaMāgadhī and Māgadhī.<sup>66</sup> The Brāhmī script shows a conjunct consonant with a *pa-* on top of a *ta-*, which is normally read *ātpa*. Pischel says that it should be read *āpta-* by way of transposition of stops, *ātma-* > *\*atva-* > *\*ātpa-* > *āpta-* > *atta* (P.), based on the rule of consonant assimilation that between equals (*-p-* and *-t-* being equals) the second prevails.<sup>67</sup> If the reading were *ātpa* as Hultzsch has interpreted it in RE 12 Gir., then the normal derivation is *appa*, which is only found in AMg. – most reflexes (P. and the other REs) are *atta-* or *atva* in M. and *ātpa* in Gir., see below. The change of *-m-* > *-v-* is fairly common in Middle Indo Aryan (MIA)<sup>68</sup> but the change *-v-* > *-p-* is uncommon, it usually being the other way around, as a form of intervocalic lenition.<sup>69</sup> Munda characteristically has an interchange of *-m-* and *-p-*.<sup>70</sup> We find a similar change with aspiration, in RE 13 B (K.) *tasmāt* > *taspāt* > *tapphāt* > *tapphā* (“therefore”) and in Separate Edict 2, I, L: (Skt.) *asma* > *\*aspa* > (J. D.) *appa* (“we”, written as *apha*) and (Skt.) *tuṣṭa* > *\*tuṣpa* > *tuppha* (“you” pl., written as *tupha*). The *-v-* > *-p-* phenomenon seems to be most prevalent in the west and northwest. See, for example, RE 4 B: (Gir.) *dassayitpā* < (Skt.) *darśayitvā*; RE 9 H also attests to this change in Sh. and M. where (Skt.) *svāmika* > (Sh. M.) *spamika* (“master”) and RE 6 L shows the same change in (Skt.) *svarga* > (Sh. M.) *spagra*, > (Gir. K. Dh.) *svagga* (“heaven”). RE 10 A has (Gir.) *tadātpano* < (Skt.) *\*tadātvanam* > (K. Dh.) *tadatvāye*, and > (Sh. M.) *tadatvaye* (“present time”). In RE 12 F *passim*, the Mānsehrā edict shows several versions of *atva-*, while Gir. has *ātpa-*, K. Sh.

and Eṛṛ *ata* (“self”). In the minor rock edicts - MRE 1 H, - several locations (Br. Eṛṛ. Pān. Rāj. Uḍe.) have *mahātpa* for (Skt.) *mahātmā* (“great soul”) which Mehendale sees as a northwest influence on these southern rock edicts;<sup>71</sup> in the same section there is also a (common) *-p- > -v-* change: (Skt.) *prāptum* > (Sah.) *pāvatave* with other versions showing *pāpotave* (“to achieve”).

- 5) RE 5 B: (Skt.) *kalyāṇa* > (Gir.) *kalāṇaṃ*, > (Sh.) *kalaṇaṃ* > (K. Dh. Eṛṛ.) *kayāne*, > (M.) *kayaṇaṃ* (“beneficial”). *-ly-* usually goes to *-ll-* in AMg., i. e. it is an eastern form;<sup>72</sup> however Dhauli has *kayāne* which normally results from *-ry- > -yy-*.<sup>73</sup> This would change the meaning of this phrase from “it is difficult to perform virtuous deeds” to “it is difficult to do that which has to be done” assuming the form *kārya* can take the suffix *-aṇa-* (*\*kāryaṇa*, which is not attested). The normal *-r- > -l-* change for eastern forms would also add to the potential confusion as to what the correct underlying form was; i. e. assuming that the exemplar originated from an eastern locale (i.e., Pāṭaliputra, where Aśoka’s court was located) *\*kāryaṇa* would have been pronounced/written as *kālyāṇa* or *kalyāṇa*<sup>74</sup> which could easily have been interpreted as being derived from *kalyāṇa*, with a completely different meaning.
- 6) RE 13 U: (Gir.) *ladhā*, (Sh. Eṛṛ.) *ladha*, (K.) *gadhā* < (Skt.) *labdha* = “obtained”, or *gadhā* < (Skt.) *gādha*, “firm” or related to Pāli *gāhati*, “to stand firm” or < (Skt.) *\*grbdhā*, p.p. of *√grah*, “to grasp”).
- 7) Sep. Ed. 1 Z: (Dh.): *sakhinālabhhe*, usually interpreted as derived from Skt. *ślakṣṇa*, “gentle” + *ārambha*, “undertaking”, viz., “whose undertaking is soft”,<sup>75</sup> counterposed against Jaugada version’s *aphalusam* (“kind”). Since the compound is preceded by *acaṃḍe* (< Skt. *acaṇḍa*, “soft”) which means the same thing, and *ārambha* is superfluous in this context, it is more likely derived from *sākṣiṇa* + *ārambha* (“undertaking it with his own eyes”, i. e. “seeing it for himself”) with *sākṣiṇa* probably nom. sing.,<sup>76</sup> rather than *sākṣinā*, instr. singular. *sākṣin* > *sakhin*<sup>77</sup>, seems a much simpler derivation than *ślakṣṇa* > *sakṣṇa* > *sakṣiṇa* > *sakhina*.
- 8) PE 4 D: *atapatiye* usually taken as derived from *ātma* + *patya* (“depending on one’s self”;<sup>78</sup> but more likely *patiye* is

- derived from (Skt.) *pratyaya* > (AMg.) *patteya*<sup>79</sup> > (P.) *pattiya* > *patiya* (“believing, trusting, relying”).
- 9) RE 9 I: Skt. *saṁśayita* > (K.) *saṁsayikye* and (Sh.) *saśayike* (M.) *śaśayike* (“doubtful”, “questionable”). Change of *-t-* > *-k-* is very unusual. cf *Kaccāyanabyākaraṇaṃ Sandhikappo, Dutiyakaṇḍo*, Sutta 20.27 which gives an example in P. *niyato* > *niyako* (both meaning “restrained”, “bound”).<sup>80</sup>
- 10) RE 9 B: (K.) *pajopadāye*, (Dh. Eṛṛ.) *pajupadāye*, (M.) *prajopadaye* (“birth of children”), (Sh.) *pajupadane* (“obtaining of children”). Norman thinks that the *-ane* in Sh. is just a mistake and that *-aye* is the correct locative ending,<sup>81</sup> from the fem. stem *utpad*;<sup>82</sup> Sh. could well come from Skt. *paj-upādāna* (“appropriating children to oneself”) which has the same meaning as *putra-lābhesu* in Gir. (“acquisition of children”). There is a similar change of *-y-* > *-ṅ-* in the Dhp vs. 33 where P. has *dunnivārayaṃ* (“hard to guard”, “hard to check”) and the *Udānavarga* (UV) has *durnivāraṇam*. Pāli shows both forms with the same meaning. The oldest is probably *nivāraṇa* which evolved to *nivāraya* and was later re-Sanskritized in the UV. Change of *-y-* > *-ṅ/n-* is rare in Prakrit, but the interchange of the two letters is fairly common in Munda, at least at the beginning of a word.<sup>83</sup>
- 11) RE 4 C: (Skt.) *yādrśā* > (K.) *ādisā*, > (Dh.) *ādise*, > (M.) *adiše*, > (Sh.) *yadiśaṃ* > (Gir.) *yārise* (“such as”). Loss of *-d-* in (Gir.) and retention of *-r-* is unusual. This also applies to correlative (Skt.) *tādrśa* > (Gir.) *tārise* in the same RE.
- 12) PE 5 H: (Skt.) *caturdaśa* > *cāvudasa* (“fourteen”). Change of *-t-* > *-v-*.
- 13) RE 1 G: (Skt.) *mayūra* > (K. J.) *majūlā* > (Sh. M.) *majura* > (Gir.) *morā* (“peacock”). Note change of *-ayū-* > *-o-* in Gir. Change of *-y-* to *-j-* was common in at least one of the Prakrits.<sup>84</sup>
- 14) RE 2 A: (Skt.) *kerala* > (Gir.) *ketala* (PN). Unusual change of *-r-* > *-t-*. M. preserves original and K. has *kelala*. Omitted in Eṛṛ.
- 15) RE 3 B: (Skt.) *dvādaśa* > (Gir.) *dbādasa*, (K.) *duvādasa*, > (Dh.) *duvādasa*, > (M.) *duvaḍaśa*, > (Sh.) *badaya* (“twelve”). *dv-* usually goes to *d-*,<sup>85</sup> but can also go to *b-* as is evident here and in numerous other examples,<sup>86</sup> where the *-v-* > *-b-* and the *d-* >  $\emptyset$ . Thus when a translator (who is perhaps



familiar with Northwestern dialects) encounters a form like *vedha* (*Mahāparinibbānasutta* (DN II 100), it can be legitimately interpreted as *dvaiddha* (in the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*) as is attested.<sup>87</sup>

- 16) RE 13 Q: (Skt.) *catvārah*, > (Gir.) *catpāro*, > (K. Eṛṛ.) *catāli*, > (Sh.) *cature* (“four”). Change of *-v-* > *-p-* in Gir. (see #4 above) and *-v-* >  $\emptyset$  in the others.
- 17) RE 2 B: (Skt.) *upta* > (Sh.) *vuta* (“sown”) from  $\sqrt{vap}$ ),<sup>88</sup> Could also be derived from  $\sqrt{vr̥dh}$ , p.p. *vr̥ddha* (“grown”) but this usually takes the form of *vuḍha* in Sh. as for example in RE 4 C.
- 18) RE 9 G: (Skt.) *gurūṇām* >(Sh.) *garuna*. The other forms maintain the *-u-* in the first syllable. However in RE 13 G, Sh. has *guruna* and K. has *galu*. In MRE 1 N, Br. and Eṛṛ. both have *garu*.
- 19) RE 5 K: a strange situation with Gir. and Sh. using the word *aparigodha* (“no attachment”, see BHSD, s. v. *paligodha*) and K. Dh. and M. *apalibodha* (“no obstruction”), from a different root. See discussion in Woolner.<sup>89</sup> *godha* is derived from  $\sqrt{gr̥dh}$  (“to covet, desire”) and *palibodha* perhaps from *pari* $\sqrt{rudh}$  by dissimilation (PED s. v. *palibuddhati*).

## Discussion

The most phonologically advanced of the dialects is the northwestern dialect from Shāhbāzgarhī which is an early form of Gāndhārī written in Karoṣṭhī script where there are several instances of the intervocalic stops and glides dropping out, a phenomenon which becomes more prevalent in the later text (1<sup>st</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> century A. D.) of the *Gāndhārī Dharmapada* (Brough 1962, ¶32-34). Mānsehrā is also a Gāndhārī dialect, but not as phonologically advanced as Sh. Lenition of intervocalic unvoiced stops to voiced stops is common, not just in Sh., but also occasionally in the Pillar and Separate Edicts, including Rum., Nig. and Qu., but not invariably so. Mānsehrā usually preserves the voiced stops. All cases of consonantal disappearance between vowels are found in Sh. and many cases of syllable simplification, plus lots of examples of lenition (unvoiced > voiced stops and voiced stops > glide). M. also has many but not as much as Sh., which is the furthest phonologically evolved of the dialects.

An unusual change of  $-l- > -d-$  or  $-l- > -ḍ-$  occurs in Sh., M. Gir. and also at All., and in reverse, at Top. This may be associated with Munda, an indigenous, tribal language.

Softening of intervocalic stops to a glide is common in all areas, but predominantly in Sh. and all areas (esp. in the PEs) show some evidence of the incipient tendency to replace intervocalic aspirated stops between two vowels with aspiration only (in the instr. plural and forms with the root  $\sqrt{bhū}$ ; elsewhere they are often retained), and to simplify the di-syllabic  $-aya-$  or  $-ayi-$  or  $-ari-$  into one syllable in causative and future verb forms, and forms with  $-ava-$  (but not always).

As in Pāli, voicing and devoicing are both sporadic.<sup>90</sup> The Eastern dialects (Dh. J.) sometimes devoice, but this is not consistent, although there is evidence to support Mehendale's hypothesis that devoicing is a characteristic of the eastern dialects. Devoicing also appears in several instances in the northwest (Sh. and M.) and the south (Eṛṛ.), but it is not common in the west.

The Gir. dialect has several anomalies: it preserves the initial  $t-$  in words like *tu* and *tisṭamto*, whereas most of the other dialects change to *cu* and *ciṭhitu*, except for Sh. and M. which show both the *tu* and *cu* forms; M has *ciṭhitu* and Sh. *tiṭhiti*. Gir. is also the only dialect to preserve the form *yārisa* < *yādrīśa*, with the other dialects keeping the  $-d-$  and losing the  $-r-$ . Gir. also preserves the unusual forms *ātpa* or *āpta* < Skt. *ātman*, *dassayitpā* < Skt. *darśayitvā* and *catpāro* < Skt. *catvāraḥ*. These forms – with their change of  $(-m-) > (-v-) > -p-$  are phonologically related to the eastern forms *appa* (< *asma*) and *tuppha* (< *tuṣma*) in J. and D. and *spamika* (< *svāmika*) and the loc. ending *-aspi* (< *-asmin*, e.g. *vracaspi*, “in the cow-pen”, RE 6 D and *passim*) in Sh. and M.

It has often been observed that Pāli is closest to the western Indian Gīrnār version of Aśoka's Rock Edicts (RE);<sup>91</sup> however a word-for-word study of the inscriptions casts some doubt on this assumption. As I have written on this elsewhere so will not go into the details here,<sup>92</sup> but only present my conclusions: a detailed study of one arbitrarily chosen sample Rock Edict (RE 4) shows that 43% of the words in the northern and north-western dialects (Kālsī, Shāhbāzgarhī and Mānsehrā taken cumulatively) – but only 19% of the Gīrnār vocabulary – are closest to Pāli. To give two telling examples of important words: Gir. preserves the form *atpā* for self (<Skt. *ātman*) while Pāli has *atta*, the same as K. and Sh. For

the word *brāhmaṇa*, Pāli has been re-Sanskritized, which form is closest to Sh. and M.<sup>93</sup> Other significant differences between Pāli and Gir. are the loss of conjunct consonants such as *-st-*, *pr-*, *tr-* and *kr-* in P. all of which are preserved in Gir. Here P. is closest to K.<sup>94</sup>

## Conclusions

- 1) Shāhbāzgarhī in the north-west is the most phonologically advanced of the Aśokan dialects. In actual parlance, it may even be more advanced than the orthography shows, given the propensity for colloquial language to evolve faster than the conservative court language. in any case, with the drop or lenition of intervocalics, change of aspirated stops to aspirates, collapsing of syllables and simplification of consonants, it is well on its way to a much simpler phonological structure of which Mahārāṣṭrī was later to become the most advanced representative.
- 2) The phonological state of Sh. and the other Aśokan Prakrits provides a fairly accurate snapshot of Middle Indic linguistics in the middle of the third century B.C. Buddhist Middle Indic, - the Prakritic form in which the original oral teachings were transmitted – must have been very similar to the Aśokan dialects, especially Sh., the most phonologically evolved.
- 3) Because of the diachronic oral transmission process leading to simplification, Buddhist Middle Indic forms were very malleable with many homonymic forms. This was also due to the fact that it served as a *lingua franca* for the transmission of the Buddhist teachings, a sort of common denominator understandable by different speakers in different parts of India; it was a dialect characterized by loss of conjunct consonants, disappearance or lenition (including glide replacement) of intervocalic consonants, replacement of aspirated stops by an aspirate alone, etc., to name some of the principal features, all of which are quite prevalent in the Aśokan inscriptions. When these forms were translated into a local dialect – at the time the teachings were committed to writing – certain decisions had to be made as to ambiguities in meaning. The different interpretations were subject to potential confusion as to what the original message was.

- 4) In some cases, comparative historical linguistic techniques can isolate what these proto forms were, help to indicate potential linguistic confusions and potentially resolve them. By uncovering this underlying linguistic layer, one may be a step closer to “what the Buddha said”; however, one can not make the assertion that BMI forms were actually spoken by the Buddha as it is impossible to establish a time line: they themselves may postdate the Buddha by a century or more.
  
- 5) The north/north-western connection to Buddhist Middle Indic may be due to the fact that writing first developed in the Gāndhāri area, utilizing the Aramaic script.<sup>95</sup> Karoṣṭhī was older than Brāhmī and quite possibly its precursor and model.<sup>96</sup> If Buddhist teachings were first written down in this dialect, - because of the rapid spread of Buddhism northwest through the existing trade routes - <sup>97</sup> it is not surprising that the local orthography and pronunciation would have had a major influence on the dialect transmission to other parts of India. This would account for the fact that Pāli is closest to the Sh. M. and K. dialects and that Buddhist Middle Indic is phonologically closest to Sh.
  
- 6) A more important reason for Pāli’s closeness to the north/northwestern dialect may be sociolinguistically based. We have a great deal of evidence of the longstanding hostility between the eastern tribes and the incoming (from the northwest) Indo-Aryan groups. These former peoples were considered unsophisticated and of a meaner nature than the Indo-Aryans and they spoke with an accent which was looked down upon by those with the “purer” accent of the north and northwest.<sup>98</sup> Although it is a well known fact that the Vedic writings contain many dialects, it was the dialect of the northwest which predominated in terms of social status. Pāṇini was himself a north-westerner and it is of course this dialect which he established as the standard in his famous grammar; its influence on Pāli would therefore be an expected sociolinguistic fact. While it is beyond the purview of this article to discuss this in further detail, it is nevertheless a fruitful area for additional research.

## Abbreviations

- All. = Allāhābād-Kosam (Pillar Edict)  
 AMg. = ArdhaMāgadhī  
 Ar. = Lauriyā-Ararāj (Pillar Edict)  
 BHS = Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit  
 BHSD = *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary* (Edgerton 1953, 1998).  
 BMI=Buddhist Middle Indic  
 Br.= Brahmagiri  
 Dh. = Dhaulī (Rock Edict)  
 DhP = *Dhammapada*  
 Eṛ. = Eṛaguḍī (Rock Edict)  
 GDhp. = Gāndhārī DhP. (Brough 1962)  
 Gir. = Girnār (Rock Edict)  
 J. = Jaugāḍa (Rock Edict)  
 K. = Kālsī  
 M. = Mānsehrā (Rock Edict)  
 MIA = Middle Indo-Aryan  
 Mīr. = Delhi-Mīraṭh (Pillar Edict)  
 Mvu=*Mahāvastu*  
 MW = *Monier Williams Sanskrit English Dictionary*  
 Nand. = Lauriyā-Nandangaṛh (Pillar Edict)  
 Nig. = Nigālī Sāgar  
 P. = Pāli  
 Pān. = Pānguḍāriyāṃ  
 PDhp = Patna Dhammapada  
 PE = Pillar Edicts (capital letter following refers to Hultzsch's section designations, 1969)  
 PED = Pali Text Society Pali=English Dictionary  
 PN = Proper Name  
 Qu. = Queen's Edict  
 Rām. = Rāmpūrvā. (Pillar Edict)  
 RE = Rock Edicts (capital letter following refers to Hultzsch's section designations, 1969)  
 Rum. = Rummindeī  
 Sah. = Sahasrām  
 Sep. Ed.=Separate Edict  
 Sh. = Shāhbāzgaṛhī (Rock Edict)  
 Sn. = *Sutta Nipāta*  
 SN = *Samyutta Nikāya*  
 Top. = Delhi-Toprā (Pillar Edict)

Uḍe. = Uḍeḷoḷam

>/< changes to/changes from or cognate with (depending on context).

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**NOTES**

<sup>1</sup> Recounted in Brough 1962, 45-47.

<sup>2</sup> Pischel 1965, ¶286, ¶201.

<sup>3</sup> As Brough points out (1962, 47-8), the story makes more sense if *udaka* was in the source transmission. In Gāndhārī the form *udaka* is a legitimate spelling of Skt. *udaya* (¶38, with the *-k-* representing an intervocalic dropped consonant, i. e. a *-y-*) and one of the manuscripts in Senart's *Mahāvastu* had *udaka*, one *udaya*. If the translator had *udaka* as his/her exemplar, then the mistake is perhaps not so far-fetched.

<sup>4</sup> Bechert 1992, 45.

<sup>5</sup> Rhys Davids 1881, xxi; Lévi 1915; Gombrich 1990a, 7; 1990b, 32; Collins 1992, 127; Allon 1997, 357f; Wynne, 2004; Norman 2006b, 64. I omit from this discussion the controversy over whether there was a single or multiple transmission, i. e. whether the Buddha allowed his teachings to be translated into different dialects, as per the famous Vinaya passage *Anujānāmi bhikkhave sakāya niruttīyā buddhavacanam pariyaṇitun ti.*" (Vin II 139, 16). See Levman 2008-2009. When one studies all the usages of the word *nirutti* in the Pāli scriptures, it becomes clear that the Buddha is talking about his own terms and designations, i. e. his own Dhamma terminology and that the word *nirutti* does not have the meaning of "dialect." He is in fact insisting that the Dhamma be taught in his own *nirutti*, his own terms, designations and names.

<sup>6</sup> von Hinüber 2001, ¶34, ¶71.

<sup>7</sup> Lüders 1954; Norman 1983, 4; Lamotte 1988, 563; von Hinüber 1994, 180f.

<sup>8</sup> von Hinüber 2001, ¶43.

<sup>9</sup> von Hinüber 1994, 192.

<sup>10</sup> von Hinüber 2001, ¶40. See also Lévi 1912, p. 511, who was the first to isolate this linguistic stratum: "The sterile debates about the authenticity of the Pāli canon or the Sanskrit canon are eliminated. Both of these are only the late inheritors of a previous tradition, recited or drawn up in a dialect which has disappeared and which had attained already a stage of advanced phonetic wearing down ('usage phoné-tique')." Trans. by the author. See also Lamotte, 1988, 587.

<sup>11</sup> Geiger 1916, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Smith 1952, 178.

<sup>13</sup> Bechert 1980, 34.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 26. "We can conclude that no text that we have contains the language of the Buddha or of the oldest Buddhist tradition and accordingly the texts lying before us in some way are based on older transitional stages in a divergent oral form, so that we must presume that there was a transference/transmittal/passing on (*Übertragung*) from one speech form to another – with or without stages, in the form of a consciously carried out translation (*Übersetzung*) or through a gradual conversion (*Umsetzung*) in oral transmission (*Überlieferung*)." (trans. from German by the author). See also Norman 1993, 84: "... even if we establish the

form of the Sanskrit version correctly, all it tells us is what the person or persons responsible for making that translation thought his Middle Indo-Aryan exemplar meant. It cannot be emphasised too much that all the versions of canonical Hīnayāna Buddhist texts which we possess are translations, and even the earliest we possess are translations of some still earlier version, now lost.”

<sup>15</sup> Lüders, 1954, 8, in the introduction by Waldschmidt. See also footnote 2. Elsewhere, Lüders also calls the language of the *Urkanon*, Ardhamāgadhī or Old Ardhamāgadhī.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*, p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> Lamotte, 1988, 573.

<sup>18</sup> Salomon 2000, 46.

<sup>19</sup> Norman 1990a, 151. *virajo* in Sn verse 520 and *virato* Mvu 3.396. Sometimes written as a –y- with a dot over it (–ỵ-) to indicate a weakly articulated intervocalic glide, replacing a stop as per Pischel ¶187.

<sup>20</sup> Levman 2009, 21f. Lüders documents many of the anomalies which result from intervocalic consonant lenition or disappearance in his *Beobachtungen*, 1954, ¶87f.

<sup>21</sup> Senart 1892, 145f.

<sup>22</sup> Edgerton 1934, 43.

<sup>23</sup> see discussion with references in Levman 2009, 28.

<sup>24</sup> in many of the Prakrits, *kattā* (from Skt. *kṛtvā*, “having done”) and *kattā* (nom. sing. from Skt. *kartā*, “doer”) are identical.

<sup>25</sup> Sn 427

<sup>26</sup> Mvu 2.238

<sup>27</sup> Thanissaro Bhikkhu 1999-2010, available at <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/snp/snp.3.02.than.html>

<sup>28</sup> Jones, 1952, 225. Norman (2006a, 49) translates as “my self intent upon striving.”

<sup>29</sup> See Edgerton 1953, s.v. *prahāṇa*. In *The Buddhist Path of Awakening*, Rupert Gethin deals with the four *sammappadhānas*, (usually translated “right exertions”) which not surprisingly show the same ambiguity in meaning between “effort” and “abandonment.” He summarizes his conclusions as follows (72):

The point is that one cannot exclude the possibility that the Buddhist tradition *deliberately* capitalized on the ambiguity of a Middle Indo-Aryan form from an early date – prior to any schism between the Sarvāstivāda and the Theravāda....One cannot, then, simply characterize *samyak-prahāṇa* [the BHS form] as an ‘incorrect’ backformation. Although *samma-ppadhāna* must, I think, take precedence over *samyak-prahāṇa* as reflecting the correct primary exegesis, it does seem that the Buddhist tradition as a whole preserves an explanation of the terms which focuses on the notion of abandoning. In terms of Buddhist spiritual psychology, one of the significant aspects of *samma-ppadhāna* or *samyak-prahāṇa* was that it was understood as directly facilitating the abandoning of unskillful states either at the moment of attaining the transcendent path or during the prior stages [*italics in the original*].

<sup>30</sup> With a change of *-n-* > *-ṇ-* as per Pischel ¶224.

<sup>31</sup> An equally likely scenario is that the author was aware of the ambiguity in the term and that he/she intended both to be understood. This seems to be the position of Buddhaghosa, who, in his gloss on the compound (*Suttanipāta-aṭṭakathā* 2, 386), writes: *padhānapahitatta nti nibbānatthāya pesitacittam pariccattātabhāvaṃ vā*. “*padhānapahitatta* means a mind directed towards Nibbāna or he whose existence as an individual has been abandoned.” (*attabhāva* = bodily form, body; existence as an individual; living being (CPD). or (1) person, personality, individuality, living creature; form, appearance, (2) life, rebirth, (3) character, quality of heart (PED).

<sup>32</sup> Edgerton, BHSD, s. v. *pratyaya*. From the *Saddharmasūṇḍarikasūtra*: *anye sattvā anācāryakaṃ jñānaṃ damaśamatham ākāṅkṣamānā ātmaparinirvāṇahetur hetu-pratyayānubodhāya tathāgataśāsane bhīyujyante* [contrasting with the earlier aspiration of the Hinayāna *pratyekabuddhas*, who seek to understand only the four noble truths], “Other beings [aspiring to the *Mahāyāna* path], desiring tranquillity, taming, wisdom and a state that needs no teacher, apply themselves to the teaching of the Tathāgata in order to awaken to causes and conditions, which is the cause of the complete extinction of the ego.”

<sup>33</sup> In this case the *-y-* form encountered by the translator was interpreted as an intervocalic glide replacing a consonant (often represented as a *-y-* with a dot over it, *-ỵ-*, as per Pischel ¶187), and the missing consonant (thought to be *-k-*) was mistakenly replaced. See Norman 2006b, 87. For vowel palatization under the influence of *-cc-*, see Brough 1962, ¶22a. This is a feature of the north-western dialect as represented in the Shāhbāzgarhī Rock Edict. See Hultsch 1969, lxxxiv, where *manyate* > *meñate* under the influence of the palatal *ñ*.

<sup>34</sup> Senart (1897, vol III, 396 with notes on p. 520) corrects the text in front of him (*nāryeṇa* or *nāryyeṇa*) to *nānyān* which does not make much better sense. He says “The correction *nānyān* hardly satisfies me. The sense which results ‘He protects others everywhere’ is very vague. The comparison with Pāli here is lacking.” Jones (1956, 397, footnote 9) says “the text must be regarded as very doubtful.”

<sup>35</sup> Seven if one believes with Norman that *vīro* should replace *dhīro* (2006a, 262).

<sup>36</sup> Hultsch 1969; Mehendale 1997.

<sup>37</sup> Capital letters (A, etc.) refer to location of the text with the rock inscription as per the Hultsch system of notation, found in his *Inscriptions of Aśoka* monograph (1969).

<sup>38</sup> Bloch 1950, 90-1.

<sup>39</sup> This would also require a change from *-h-* > *-d-* which would be unusual. Bloch (¶10) attributes the *h-* before initial vowel as due to “l’expressivité”. Woolner (1924, 149) also derives *hida* < (Skt.) *iha*.

<sup>40</sup> Mehendale 1948, 12. Johansson connects *hida* with Vedic *idā* (in Mehendale, *ibid*).

<sup>41</sup> Norman 1990, vol 1, 70.

<sup>42</sup> Per Pischel ¶244.

<sup>43</sup> Mehendale (1956/57, 164) changes his mind on this compound and later decides it is just a simple compound of *di* + *adhā*. Lüders (1954, 78, footnote 2) believes it is derived from Skt. *dyardha*.

<sup>44</sup> In Hultsch 1969, 56, footnote 13. [ ] indicate reconstruction.

<sup>45</sup> Lüders 1954, ¶87

<sup>46</sup> Woolner 1924, 97. See Pischel ¶226 for the change *-ḍa-* > *-ḷa-*, but not vice-versa, which only happens in Mundan; see Kuiper 1948, 6 which shows equivalence of *d/r/l/* in proto-Mundan.

<sup>47</sup> Pischel ¶317-22, ¶326.

<sup>48</sup> Hultsch 1969, 135.

<sup>49</sup> the second suggestion is per Mehendale 1948, 11, but it is quite a complex derivation, involving a change of *-v-* > *-y-*.

<sup>50</sup> Hultsch 1969, 14.

<sup>51</sup> Bloch 1950, 138.

<sup>52</sup> Lüders 1954, ¶122-148

<sup>53</sup> Mehendale 1968, 67f.

<sup>54</sup> Bloch 1950, 94, footnote 8

<sup>55</sup> Mehendale 1968, 63.

<sup>56</sup> Bloch 1950, 151, line 20.

<sup>57</sup> Sheth 1963, 758.

<sup>58</sup> Bloch, 1950, 125, footnote 5.

<sup>59</sup> Norman 1990, vol. 1, 98.

<sup>60</sup> Geiger 2005, ¶46.

<sup>61</sup> Hultsch 1969, 124 footnote 3; Lüders 1940, 277.

<sup>62</sup> notated by Hultsch *-chh-* (87) and by Bloch *-cch-* (102) but in Brāhmī only *-ch-* as far as I can tell from Hultsch's plate (page 88, RE 5, line 2, middle and end)

<sup>63</sup> In *ArdahMāgadhī* per Pischel ¶523.

<sup>64</sup> See, for example, Whitney §129 (c) where *vi+aṅga* is pronounced *viyaṅga*, rather than *vyaṅga*.

<sup>65</sup> Bloch 1950, ¶50.

<sup>66</sup> Pischel ¶277.

<sup>67</sup> Woolner, 1928 ¶33; Pischel ¶270

<sup>68</sup> Pischel ¶251

<sup>69</sup> Pischel ¶199

<sup>70</sup> Kuiper 1991, 37.

<sup>71</sup> Mehendale 1955, 90. Sircar (1979, 135, section "E") and Andersen (1990, 115, section "H") transcribe *āpta*.

<sup>72</sup> Pischel ¶367a

<sup>73</sup> Pischel ¶287, in *Māgadhī*.

<sup>74</sup> The *-ā-* shortened because of the following double consonant per Geiger 2005 ¶5.

<sup>75</sup> Woolner 1924, 138.

<sup>76</sup> Pischel ¶406.

<sup>77</sup> Pischel ¶317.

<sup>78</sup> Woolner 1923, 56,

<sup>79</sup> attested in Pischel ¶281.

<sup>80</sup> Tiwari, 1992, 47.

<sup>81</sup> Norman 1990, vol 1, 47.s

<sup>82</sup> Hultsch 1969, 38, footnote 22.

<sup>83</sup> Kuiper 1991, 37.

<sup>84</sup> Norman 2006b, 88-89.

<sup>85</sup> Pischel ¶298.

<sup>86</sup> Pischel ¶300

<sup>87</sup> Levman 2009, 26.

<sup>88</sup> Per Mehendale 1948, 15.

<sup>89</sup> Woolner 1923, 63, 110.

<sup>90</sup> Geiger 2006, ¶38-39; he attributes this to dialect variation.

<sup>91</sup> e.g. Bloch 1950, 44-45; Lamotte 1988, 565; Salomon 1998, 73f; von Hinüber 2001, ¶39.

<sup>92</sup> Levman 2010.

<sup>93</sup> The various forms and the RE where they are located are as follows:

Shāhbāzgarhī: *bramaṇa* (3D), *bramaṇanaṃ* (4A), *bramaṇa* (4C), *bramaṇibheṣu* (5K), *bramaṇanaṃ* (8E), *bramaṇana* (9G), *bramaṇana* (11C), *bramaṇa* (13G).  
Mānsehrā: *bramaṇa* (3D), *bramaṇana* (4A), *bamaṇa* (4C), *bramaṇibhyeṣu* (5K), *bramaṇana* (8E), *bramaṇana* (9G), *bramaṇana* (11C), *bramaṇe* (13J).  
Girnār: *bāmhaṇa* (3D), *brāmhaṇa* (4A), *bramaṇa* (4C), *bāmhaṇa* (8E), *bamaṇa* (9G), *bāmhaṇa* (11C), *bāmhaṇā* (13G).

The Pāli form is *brāhmaṇa* which is a full re-Sanskritisation of the word

<sup>94</sup> For example, Gir. *seṣṭa*, P. *seṭha*; Gir *praṇa*, P. *pāṇa*; Gir *putra*, P. *putta*; Gir *atīkrātaṃ* P. *atikkanta*.

<sup>95</sup> Salomon 1988, 46.

<sup>96</sup> *ibid*, 54.

<sup>97</sup> Thapar 2000, 926.

<sup>98</sup> See for example, statements in the *Kauṣītaki-Brāhmaṇa* that those who want to learn the best speech go the north(west), since the best known speech is spoken in the north (west) (Keith 1971, 387). In the Buddhist *Ambaṭṭhasutta*, the brahmin Ambaṭṭha insults the Sakyans, the sub-Himalayan eastern tribe to which the Buddha belonged. They are “fierce, rough-spoken, touchy and violent. Being of menial origin, being menials, they do not honour, respect, esteem, revere or pay homage to Brahmins” (Walshe 1995, 113). In his *Altindische Grammatik*, Wackernagel points out how words containing *-riṣ-* where changed to *-rṣ-* to avoid the epenthetic vowel which was felt to be an eastern vulgarism (1964 vol 1, §53 (c)). This explains why two different forms of the word *pariṣad/parśad* survive and why in Pāli there are several different reflexes for the Skt. word *puruṣa* – See Geiger §30.3.