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.
Introduction

There is a story told in the Chinese version of the *Mūlasarvāstivādin Vinaya* 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. –ẏ-) signifying that a stop has been omitted. So apparently a clumsy translator substituted –k- for –ẏ- in the first word resulting in *udaka* (which means “water”) and –k- for –ẏ- in the second word to get *bakaṃ* (“heron”) and, ignored the geminate consonant (which represented a Prakrit change from vy- > vv- > bb). 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.

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. The requirement to recite the sutras is well documented within the Pāli scriptures themselves. 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 *Āṭṭhakavagga* from the *Sutta Nipāta* (Sn) were memorized and repeated by
the monks, and several of the suttas – like DN 33 Sangītisutta and DN 34 Dasuttara Sutta - were part of the recitation liturgy from early in the life of the Sangha. 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 – 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 – which was formulated sometime in the third century B.C. – i. e. in Aśokan times – and transmitted to Śri 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, which has undergone even more Sanskritizations than Pāli. Both dialects appear to have developed “side by side at the times of their origin”; 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.”

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 -\(\text{-}ya\)-, which could be interpreted by the hearer according to the custom in his or her dialect. 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. Bechert wondered if differences in Pāli prose and verse pointed to a middle Indic Dichtersprache (poetic language) which was transregional in use. 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.

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. 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. 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.” 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, 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-. Parallel conflicting (but cognate) phrases from the Mahāparinibbāna and Mahāparinivāṇa sūtras (vedha-missakena and dvaidha-niśrayena) can also be explained in the same fashion. 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. Conjunct 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-* (*š* and *ś* in the northwestern dialects for example), were nevertheless pronounced as a single dental *s*.\(^{21}\) 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.\(^{22}\) 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 conjunct 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*, *š*, *ś* > *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-satvan*) as the Tibetans take it (*byang chub sems dpa’*) – to name only the most obvious possibilities.\(^{23}\) 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 noun²⁴ (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.)²⁵ or *pahitāṃ prahitaṃ* (Mvu)²⁶ which leads to various clumsy translations like “resolute in exertion”²⁷ or “I strove the striving”.²⁸ However, as Edgerton points out, *pahita* in BHS is always taken by the Tibetans as “abandonment” (*spong ba*), presumably from the root *pra + hā*.²⁹ The past participle for this verb would be *pahita*, not *prahita*, which would be derived from *pra+ hi* which also has the meaning of “abandoned” or “relinquished” (MW). Now *pahita* 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 *prahāna* ³⁰ 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 (*pahāna* *prahitaṃ mayā*) because he has transcended all striving (*parikrāmya vyāyamantāṃ*) in order to reach the highest goal (*uttamārthasya prāptaye*). The other references to *padhāna* in the Pāli (and *pahāna* 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 *pahāna* can mean either striving (< Skt. *pra+dhāna*) or abandonment (< Skt. *pra+hāna*) 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.\textsuperscript{31}

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 *Saddharmapuṇḍarikasūtra.*\textsuperscript{32} 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.* \textsuperscript{33} From this exercise we may deduce that the original Buddhist Middle Indic word transmitted was *pacceVya* (*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 *Sobhiyasutta,* 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 *viraẏo* which is back-translated as noted. The sequence is reversed in Sn 531 where Pāli has *virato* and Mv has *virago* (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 *viraẏo,* which existence alone can account for these opposing interpretations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pāli:</th>
<th>Mvu:</th>
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| *Samitāvi pahāya puññaapāpaṁ*  
*Virajo ṇātvā imaṁ paraṁca*  
*lokaṁ,*  
*Jātimaraṇaṁ upātivatto*  
*Samaṇo tādi pavuccate tathattā.*  
520 | *samitāvi prahāya puṇyāvipākaṁ*  
*virato jñātvā imaṁ paraṁ ca*  
*lokaṁ //*  
*jātimaraṇaṁ upātivṛtto*  
*śramaṇo tādi pravuccati tathatvā //*  
*Mvu 3.396/7* |

He who has quieted himself has given up evil and merit; free from passion, he knows this world and

He who has quieted himself has given up the maturing of merit; he is ceased, and knows this world
the other world. He has gone beyond birth and death. Such a one is called a samaṇa, in truth.

and the other world. He has gone beyone birth and death. Such a one is called a śramaṇa, in truth.

Virato idha sabbapāpakehi Nirayadukkhamaticca viriyavā so, So viriyavā padhānavā Dhīro tādi pavuccate tathattā. 531

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.

yah prahīṇabandhano prahāṇavāṃ sarvadukkhasayaṃ janetvā / nānyān sarvatra na rakṣati virājo vīryavān pravuccati tathavā

// Mvu 3.398

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.

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. 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), 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. 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\(^{37}\) 13 A (Shāhbāzgarhī = Sh.): -y- > Ø: (Skt.)
   devānāmpriyasya > (Sh.) devanapriyasa; RE 1 E,F (Sh.):
   devanapriyasa, devanapriyasa (“beloved of the gods”).

2) RE 1F, 13A: (Skt.) priyadarśinaḥ > (Sh.) priadraśasa,
   priadraśasa (“au regard amical”,\(^{38}\) Proper name).

3) RE 13 AA: Skt. ihalaukika > (Kālsī=K. Sh.)
   hidalokika > (Mānsehra=M.) ialokika (“in this world”).\(^{39}\) See also RE 9
   M: (Skt.) iha > (Kālsī = K. M.) hida > (Sh.) ia (“here”).
   Mehendale suggests that the correct derivation is *idha > *hidha > hida.\(^{40}\)

4) RE 4 C: (Skt.) sthavira > (Girnār=Gir.) thaira (P. therā). This
   word only occurs in Girnār. The other REs use the word
   vudha or mahālaka for “elder”.

5) Pillar Edict (PE) 5 B: (Skt.) kādamba > kāamba (“goose with
   dark grey wings.”).\(^{41}\) In Ardha-Māgadhī (AMg.) the word is
   kayāmbaga or kayāmba or kāamba in Māhārāṣṭrī.\(^{42}\)

6) RE 1 E: (Skt.) *ekatya > *ekatiya > (K. Jaugaḍa=J.) ekatiyā, >
   (M.) ekatiya, > (Gir.) ekacā, > (Sh.) ekatia (“some”).

7) RE 13 B: Skt: dvyardha > (K. M. Erṛagudi=Erṛ.) diyaḍha, >
   (Sh.) diāḍha (“one and a half”).\(^{43}\)

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.\(^{44}\) 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.) ihalokam > (Dhauli=Dh.) hidalokam > (J.) hidalogam (“in this world”). (Skt.) paralokam > (Dh.) palalokam > (J.) palalogam (“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).

3) Separate Edict 2 K (Skt.) acala > (Dh.) ajalā > (J.) acala (“unshakeable”).

4) Pillar Edict (PE) 7 SS: (Skt.) dharmalipi > dhamṃalipi > 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. For change -ḷ- > -ḍ-, see also PE 5 B where (Skt.) duli > (Delhi-Toprā =Top.) daṭi, but > (Allāhābad-Kosam=All.) duḍī (“turtle”). PE 5 C also has another example of change -ḍ- > -ḷ-, i. e. (Skt.) edaka > (Top.) elakā (“ram”). Also RE 2 A: (Skt.) kerala > (Sh.) keraḍa (PN) and RE 9 C: (Skt. mahilā > (Gir.) mahiḍā (“woman”).

5) Rummindei (Rum.) Pillar B: (Skt.) vikṛta > vigaḍa (“decorated”).

6) Nigālī Sāgar (west of Lumbini) A: (Skt.) stūpe > thube (“relic-shrine”).

7) Queen’s Edict (Allahabad, east India) B, PE 7 R: ambāvṛtikā > ambāvadikā (“mango grove”). vaḍikā < *vartikā < (Skt.) vṛtikā (vṛt + ka).

8) Separate Edict 1 X, also PE 4 H: (Skt. śaksyatha, śaksyanti,) > caghatha, caghanti (“You/they will be able”). -sy- would normally go to –kh-, –ch- or –jh- but not to –gh-. The sequence must have been śaksyati > 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. Some have argued for a meaning ardha (“half”).

10) Sep. Ed. 1 N: (Skt.) anāvṛttika/anāyuktika > (Dh. J.) anāvuttīya (“lack of practice”; or “obstinacy”).

11) PE 5 B: (Skt.) sāṃkuci > sāṃkuja (“an aquatic animal”).
12) RE 5 F: (Skt.) hāpayisyati > (Sh.) hapešadi (“he will omit”).
13) RE 5 J: (Skt.) hitasukha > (K. Sh. M.) hidasukha (“welfare and happiness”). Only Dh. and Eṛṛ. preserve the unvoiced –t-.

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

1) RE 6 D: (Skt.) vraja > (Gir. K. Dh. Eṛṛ.) vaca, > (Sh. M.) vraca (“cow-pen”).
2) RE 5 J: (Skt.) kamboja > (Dh.) kamboca. Generally Lüders treats these as hyperpalisms, while Mehendale believes that devoicing was a genuine phonetic feature of the eastern dialect.
3) RE 8 E: (Gir. Dh.) tadopayā, (K. Eṛṛ.) 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. Tu²; Pāli = tādūpiya, “agreeable”, “pleasant”), then K. Sh. and M. are an example of devoicing –d- > -t-. The Skt. prototype is probably tadā + upaga > tadopaga > tadopaya (“suitable for that occasion”), which is a further example of lenition, -g- > -y-.54
4) Sep. Ed. 1 C, M: (Skt.) pratipadayeyam > (J.) paṭipātayehaṃ (“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.
5) RE 13 Q: (Skt.) Magā > (K. Sh. M. Eṛṛ.) Makā (PN). Only Gir. preserves the voiced –g-. In the same section we also find Antiyoge (K. M.) for Antiochus with devoicing in Sh. and Eṛṛ. (Amtiyoko/Amtiyoke) and in RE 2A, in Gir. (Amtiyako).
6) MRE 1: (Skt.) ārogyam > (Eṛṛ.) ārokaṃ (“health”).

D. Change of intervocalic stop to a glide.

1) RE 13 C: dhammavāyo (Gir.), dharmavāye (K.), dhramavaye (M.), dhammāvāye (Eṛṛ.). vāyo is obscure; per Sheth 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”.58

2) RE 13 M (Skt.) āṭavika > (Gir.) ataviyo (“forest inhabitant”).

3) RE 5 J: (Skt.) kamboja > (Sh.) kamboya (Proper Name).

4) RE 1 D: (Skt.) rājā > (Sh.) raya (“king”).

5) RE 1C: (Skt.) samāje > (Sh.) samayasi (“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”). √gev, √khev, √kev, √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,59 but there is no need to postulate a mistake as √gev is a valid root.

7) RE 5 G: (Skt.) supradāraka (su+ pra + √dṛ) > (K. Dh. Eṛṛ.) supadālaye, (M.) supadarave ([sins are] “easy to be dispersed”). Gir. and Sh. have sukaram (“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.60

8) PE 7 EE: (Skt.) śucitā > socave, > PE 2 C (Top. Delhi-Mīrāṭh= Mīr., All.) socaye, (Lauṛiyā-Ararāj =Ar., Lauṛiyā-Nandangāṛ =Nand., Rāmpūrvā =Rāṃ.) soceyey ("purity"). Pāli form is soceyya. The change –i- > -e- and –u- > -o- is explainable as a guna form; –i- > -a- is unusual but possible under the influence of the back vowel –o-.

9) PE 4 D: (Skt.) atapatike > atapatiye (“discretion”).61

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. Eṛṛ.) > hoti.

4) PE 7 R: (Skt.) nyagrodha > nigoha (“Banyan tree”).

5) Sep. Ed. 2 H: (Skt.) labheyuḥ > (Dh.) lahevu > (J.) laheyū (“they may obtain”)

6) RE 4 C: (Skt.) bahubhīḥ > (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+√hr) > (Dh. J.) nagalaviyohālakā (“business of the city”, “administration of justice in the city”). vyāva- > vīyāva- > viyo (-āva- > -o-).

2) RE 5 E: (Skt.) kariṣya(n)ti > (Gir.) kāsatī, (Sh.) kaṣamti, (M.) kaṣati, > (K. Dh. Eṛṛ.) kachamti (“he/they will do”). Here we have –ari- > -a-, and -ṣy- > -s- or -ṣy- > -ch-. Normal change of -ṣy- is to -ss- or -h- as in gamīhii < gamisyati (“he will go”) or Pāli kāhāmi < kārisyāmi (“I will do”).

3) PE 5 E: (Skt.) ksapayitavya > jhāpetaviye (“to be burnt”)

4) RE 4 E: (Skt.) vardhayisati > (Gir. Dh.) vaḍḍhayisati, (K.) vadhrayisati, > (Sh.) vadhiṣati (“will cause to grow”).

5) RE 5 F: (Skt.) hāpayisati > (K. Dh.) hāpayisati, > (Gir.) hāpesati > (M.) hapeśati > (Sh.) hapesadi (“he will omit”). Note the double change in Sh. –aya- > -e- and lenition of –ati- > adi-.

6) RE 4 B: (Skt.) darśayati > (M.) draśeti (“he displays”). All the other versions have an absolutive (dassayitvāpā in Gir. and dassayitu in the others).

7) RE 13 O: (Skt.) samacarya > (Gir.) samacairām (“spiritual calm”; Sh. has samacariyam and K. ṣamacalīyam). Derivation of Gir. is samacarya > samacariya > samacaira.

8) RE 13 X: (Skt.) vijayitavya > (Gir.) vijetavyaṃ, > (Sh.) vijetavia. K. maintains syllables (vijayataviya), while Eṛṛ. has vijetaviyaṃ (“to be conquered”).

9) RE 6 F: (Skt.) ājñapayāmi > (M.) anapemī (“I order”). Other REs maintain the 5 syllabic structure (e.g. Sh. anapayami).

10) RE 5 J: (Skt.) vyāprta > (Gir.) vyāpatā, > (K. Dh.) vyāpaṭā, > (Sh.) vapāta, > (M.) vapuṭa (“busy”, “engaged”). It is not clear whether vyāprta was pronounced as three syllables of four; certainly in the east it was four.

G. Various other unusual changes:

1) Change of -sy- > -ss- (normal) and –h- (rarer). Separate Edict 2 M: (Skt.) esyatha > (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. Eṛṛ.) cu.
Bloch suggests that *cu* is a combination of *tu* and *ca*, “que la prose brahmanique ancienne emploie avec sens adversatif.” It does not appear in the *Ṛg Veda*. Another example is in RE 4 F: (Skt.) *tiṣṭhantah* > (Gir.) *tiṣṭamto*, (Sh.) *tithii*, > (K. Dh. M. Erṛ.) *ciṭhitu* (“abiding”).

3) RE 12 D (Skt.) *garhaṇa* or *garhā* > (Gir.) *garahā*, (K. Erṛ.) *galahā*, (Sh.) *garana*, (M.) *garaha* (“blame”). Gir. K. and M. may be viewed as Ø > *-a-*, insertion of an epenthetic vowel in *garhā*; Sh. *garana* is either –*aha-* > -*ana-* or –*h-* Ø from (Skt.) *garhaṇa*.

4) RE 12 H: (Skt.) *ātman* > (Gir.) *ātpa* > (K. Sh. M. Erṛ.) *ata* (“self”). The *appa-* form of *ātman* (P. *atta*) is well attested in ArdhaMāgadhī and Māgadhī. 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. 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) but the change –*v-* > –*p-* is uncommon, it usually being the other way around, as a form of intervocalic lenition. Munda characteristically has an interchange of –*m-* and –*p-*.

We find a similar change with aspiration, in RE 13 B (K.) *tasmāt* > *taspāt* > *tapphāt* > *tapphā* (“therefore”) and in Separate Edict 2, I: (Skt.) *asma* > *aspa* > (J. D.) *appa* (“we”, written as *apha*) and (Skt.) *tuṣma* > *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-*.
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71 and ēṛṛata (“self”). In the minor rock edicts - MRE 1 H, - several locations (Br. ēṛṛ. Pāṇ. Rāj. Ude.) have mahātpa for (Skt.) mahātmā (“great soul”) which Mehendale sees as a northwest influence on these southern rock edicts; 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.) kālyāṇa > (Gir.) kalāṇaṃ, > (Sh.) kālaṇaṃ > (K. Dh. ēṛṛ.) kāyāne, > (M.) kāyaṇaṃ (“beneficial”). –ly-usually goes to –ll- in AMg., i.e. it is an eastern form, however Dhauli has kāyāne which normally results from –ry- > -yy-. 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- (*kāryana, 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) *kāryana would have been pronounced/written as kālyana or kalyaṇa which could easily have been interpreted as being derived from kalyāṇa, with a completely different meaning.

6) RE 13 U: (Gir.) ladhā, (Sh. ēṛṛ.) 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.): sakhinālambhe, usually interpreted as derived from Skt. ślakṣṇa, “gentle” + ārambha, “undertaking”, viz., “whose undertaking is soft”, counterposed against Jaugāḍa version’s aphalusaṃ (“kind”). Since the compound is proceeded by acāṃḍe (< Skt. acāṇḍa, “soft”) which means the same thing, and ārambha is superfluous in this context, it is more likely derived from sākṣina + ārambha (“undertaking it with his own eyes”, i.e. “seeing it for himself”) with sākṣina probably nom. sing., rather than sākṣinā, instr. singular. sākṣin > sakhin seems a much simpler derivation than ślakṣṇa > sakṣṇa > sākṣina > sakhina.

8) PE 4 D: atapatiye usually taken as derived from āṭma + patya (“depending on one’s self”; but more likely patiye is
derived from (Skt.) *pratyaya* > (AMg.) *patteya* > (P.) *pattiya* > *patiya* (“believing, trusting, relying”).

9) RE 9 I: Skt. *śāṃsayita* > (K.) *sāṃsayikye* and (Sh.) *saśayike* (“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”).

10) RE 9 B: (K.) *pajopadāye*, (Dh. Erṛ.) *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, from the fem. stem *uptad*; 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- > -n/nn- in the Dhp vs. 33 where P. has *dunnivārayaṃ* (“hard to guard”, “hard to check”) and the *Udāna-varga* (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- > -n/nn- is rare in Prakrit, but the interchange of the two letters is fairly common in Munda, at least at the beginning of a word.

11) RE 4 C: (Skt.) *yādṛśā* > (K.) *ādisā*, > (Dh.) *ādise*, > (M.) *adiše*, > (Sh.) *yadisām* > (Gir.) *yārise* (“such as”). Loss of –d- in (Gir.) and retention of –r- is unusual. This also applies to correlative (Skt.) *tādṛṣa* > (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.

14) RE 2 A: (Skt.) *kerala* > (Gir.) *ketala* (PN). Unusual change of -r- > -t-. M. preserves original and K. has *kelala*. Omitted in Erṛ.

15) RE 3 B: (Skt.) *dvādaśa* > (Gir.) *dbādasa*, (K.) *duvādasa*, > (Dh.) *duvādasa*, > (M.) *duvaḍaśa*, > (Sh.) *badaya* (“twelve”). *dv-* usually goes to *d-*, but can also go to *b-* as is evident here and in numerous other examples, where the –v- > -b- and the *d- > Ø*. 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 *dvaidha* (in the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*) as is attested.87

16) RE 13 Q: (Skt.) *catvārah, > (Gir.) catpāro, > (K. Eye.) catāli, > (Sh.) *cature* (“four”). Change of –v- > -p- in Gir. (see #4 above) and –v- > Ø in the others.

17) RE 2 B: (Skt.) *upta > (Sh.) vuta* (“sown”) from √vap.).88 Could also be derived from √vrdh, p.p. *vrddha* (“grown”) but this usually takes the form of *vudha* 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.89 *godha* is derived from √grdh (“to covet, desire”) and *palibodha* perhaps from pari√rudh by dissimilation (PED s. v. *palibuddhati*).

**Discussion**

The most phonologically advanced of the dialects is the northwestern dialect from Shāhbażgarhī 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 (1st – 2nd 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 \(-l\) \(\rightarrow\) \(-d\)- or \(-l\) \(\rightarrow\) \(-d\)- 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 \(-ayī\)- 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.\(^{90}\) 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 \(tisṭaṃto\), 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. \(tiṭhiṭi\). Gir. is also the only dialect to preserve the form \(yārīsa\) \(<\ yāḍṛśa\), with the other dialects keeping the \(–d\)- and losing the \(–r\). Gir. also preserves the unusual forms \(āṭpa\) or \(āśta\) \(<\ Skt. āṭman\), \(dassayiptā\) \(<\ Skt. darśayitvā\) and \(catpāro\) \(<\ Skt. catvārah\). These forms – with their change of \((–m\)\) \(\rightarrow\) \((–v\)\) \(\rightarrow\) \(-p\)- are phonologically related to the eastern forms \(appha\) \(<\ asma\) 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 Gīrṇār version of Aśoka’s Rock Edicts (RE);\(^{91}\) 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,\(^{92}\) 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 (Kālṣī, Shāhbārzgaṛhī and Mānsehrā taken cumulatively) - but only 19% of the Gīrṇār vocabulary - are closest to Pāli. To give two telling examples of important words: Gir. preserves the form \(atpā\) for self \(<\ Skt. āṭman\) 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. 93 Other significant differences between Pāli and Gir. are the loss of conjunct consonants such as –ṣṭ-, pr-, tr- and kr- in P. all of which are preserved in Gir. Here P. is closest to K. 94

Conclusions

1) Shāhbāzgarhī in the north-west is the most phonologically advanced of the Aṣokan 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 Aṣokan 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 Aṣokan 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 Aṣokan 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. Karoṣṭhī was older than Brāhmī and quite possibly its precursor and model. If Buddhist teachings were first written down in this dialect, - because of the rapid spread of Buddhism northwest through the existing trade routes - 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. 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 is 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. = Lauṛīyā-Ararāj (Pillar Edict)
BHS = Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit
BMI=Buddhist Middle Indic
Br.= Brahmagiri
Dh. = Dhauli (Rock Edict)
Dhp = Dhammapada
Erṛ. = Erṛaguḍī (Rock Edict)
GDhp. = Gāndhārī Dhp. (Brough 1962)
Gir. = Gīrā (Rock Edict)
J. = Jaugāda (Rock Edict)
K. = Kālsī
M. = Mānsehrā (Rock Edict)
MIA = Middle Indo-Aryan
Mir. = Delhi-Mīrāṭ (Pillar Edict)
Mvu=Mahāvastu
MW = Monier Williams Sanskrit English Dictionary
Nand. = Lauṛīyā-Nandangārh (Pillar Edict)
Nig. = Nigālī Sāgar
P. = Pāli
Pān. = Pāngudāriyām
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. = Rāmpūrā. (Pillar Edict)
RE = Rock Edicts (capital letter following refers to Hultzsch’s section
designations, 1969)
Rum. = Rummindeī
Sah. = Sahasrām
Sep. Ed.=Separate Edict
Sh. = Shāhbāzgarhī (Rock Edict)
Sn. = Sutta Nipāta
SN = Samyutta Nikāya
Top. = Delhi-Toprā (Pillar Edict)
Uḍe. = Uḍe-go-laṃ
t>/< changes to/changes from or cognate with (depending on context).

Bibliography


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NOTES

1 Recounted in Brough 1962, 45-47.
2 Pischel 1965, ¶286, ¶201.
3 As Brough points out (1962, 47-8), the story makes more sense if udaka was in the source transmission. In Gândhārī 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.
4 Bechert 1992, 45.
5 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 niruttiyā buddhavacanam pariṣṭhitun āti.” (Vin II 139, 16). See Levman 2008-2009. When one studies all the usages of the word niruttī 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 niruttī does not have the meaning of “dialect.” He is in fact insisting that the Dhamma be taught in his own niruttī, his own terms, designations and names.
8 von Hinüber 2001, ¶43.
9 von Hinüber 1994, 192.
10 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 (‘usure phonétique’).” Trans. by the author. See also Lamotte, 1988, 587.
11 Geiger 1916, 3.
12 Smith 1952, 178.
13 Bechert 1980, 34.
14 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 Hinayāna Buddhist texts which we possess are translations, and even the earliest we possess are translations of some still earlier version, now lost.”

15 Lüders, 1954, 8, in the introduction by Waldschmidt. See also footnote 2. Elsewhere, Lüders also calls the language of the Urkanon, Ardhamāgadhi or Old Ardhamāgadhi.

16 ibid, p. 9.

17 Lamotte, 1988, 573.

18 Salomon 2000, 46.

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

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

21 Senart 1892, 145f.

22 Edgerton 1934, 43.

23 see discussion with references in Levman 2009, 28.

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

25 Sn 427

26 Mvu 2.238


29 See Edgerton 1953, s.v. prahāṇa. In The Buddhist Path of Awakening, Rupert Gethin deals with the four sammappadhāṇas, (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 sammappadhāṇa 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 sammappadhāṇa or samyak-prahāṇa was that it was understood as directly facilitating the abandoning of unskilful states either at the moment of attaining the transcendent path or during the prior stages [italics in the original].
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 Buddhaghośa, who, in his gloss on the compound (Suttanipāta-aṭṭakathā 2, 386), writes: padhānapahitatta nti nibbānatthāya pesitacittam pariccattātthāvām 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).

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, –ẏ-, as per Pischel ¶187), and the missing consonant (thought to be –k-) was mistakenly replaced. See Norman 2006b, 87. For vowel palatalization 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 Hultzsch 1969, lxxxiv, where manyate > meñate under the influence of the palatal ŋ.

Senart (1897, vol III, 396 with notes on p. 520) corrects the text in front of him (nāryena or nāryena) 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.”

Capital letters (A, etc.) refer to location of the text with the rock inscription as per the Hultzsch system of notation, found in his Inscriptions of Aśoka monograph (1969).

Bloch 1950, 90-1.

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.


Norman 1990, vol 1, 70.

Per Pischel ¶244.
Mehendale (1956/57, 164) changes his mind on this compound and later decides it is just a simple compound of *di + aḍha*. Lüders (1954, 78, footnote 2) believes it is derived from Skt. *dvyardha*.

In Hultzsch 1969, 56, footnote 13, [ ] indicate reconstruction.

Lüders 1954, ¶87

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

Pischel ¶317-22, ¶326.

Hultzsch 1969, 135.

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

Hultzsch 1969, 14.


Lüders 1954, ¶122-148

Mehendale 1968, 67f.

Bloch 1950, 94, footnote 8

Mehendale 1968, 63.

Bloch 1950, 151, line 20.

Sheth 1963, 758.

Bloch, 1950, 125, footnote 5.


Geiger 2005, ¶46.

Hultzsch 1969, 124 footnote 3; Lüders 1940, 277.

notated by Hultzsch –*chh-* (87) and by Bloch –*cch*- (102) but in Brāhmī only – *ch*- as far as I can tell from Hultzsch’s plate (page 88, RE 5, line 2, middle and end)

In Ardhamāgadhī per Pischel ¶523.

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

Bloch 1950, ¶50.

Pischel ¶277.

Woolner, 1928 ¶33; Pischel ¶270

Pischel ¶251

Pischel ¶199

Kuiper 1991, 37.


Pischel ¶367a

Pischel ¶287, in Māgadhī.

The *–ā-* shortened because of the following double consonant per Geiger 2005 ¶5.

Woolner 1924, 138.

Pischel ¶406.
The various forms and the RE where they are located are as follows:

Shāhībāzgarhī: bramaṇa (3D), bramaṇanam (4A), bramaṇa (4C), bramaṇibhēṣu (5K), bramaṇanam (8E), bramaṇa (9G), bramaṇa (11C), bramaṇa (13G).

Mānehrā: bramaṇa (3D), bramaṇa (4A), bamaṇa (4C), bramaṇibhēṣu (5K), bramaṇana (8E), bramaṇana (9G), bramaṇana (11C), braṃane (13J).

Girnār: bāmhaṇa (3D), brāmhaṇa (4A), bramhaṇa (4C), bāmhaṇa (8E), bāmhaṇa (9G), bāmhaṇa (11C), bāmhaṇā (13G).

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

For example, Gir. sesṭa, P. setha; Gir praṇa, P. pāṇa; Gir putra, P. putta; Gir atikṛātaṃ P. atikkanta.

See for example, statements in the Kauśītaki-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 Ambatṭhasutta, the brahmin Ambatṭha 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 –rīṣ- where changed to –ṛṣ- 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/parsad survive and why in Pāli there are several different reflexes for the Skt. word puruṣa – See Geiger §30.3.