

SOME “MAJOR” TRENDS IN AŚOKA’S MINOR ROCK EDICTS

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It is commonly held among scholars that Aśoka’s Minor Rock Edicts were the king’s first attempts at engraving his messages on stone, and as such, they represent the earliest evidence for writing in India. While this may be true, it has not been duly emphasised that the text of the Minor Rock Edicts, in several versions as we have it, shows considerable traces of influence by the Major Rock Edicts and Pillar Edicts. Particular instances for such an influence in the text are the intrusion of the key term *dhamma* or the use of a general formulaic language characteristic of the later edicts. In our discussion, we wish to bring out some of these “Major” trends in the Minor Rock Edicts, making proposals for new interpretations and reading in Minor Rock Edicts I and II. On a similar basis, we will propose placing the Greco-Aramaic edict from Kandahar in the context of the Minor Rock Edicts, and try to account for the elements which may be derived from the Major Rock Edicts by the same scribal procedure as can be supposed to have been at work in formulating the text of the Minor Rock Edicts.

Key words: Aśoka, Minor Rock Edict I, Minor Rock Edict II, Greco-Aramaic edict, *dhamma*, exertion, scribes.

Introduction

Aśoka’s Minor Rock Edicts have always tended to remain more or less on the periphery of Aśokan studies, being considered as secondary in importance to the great series of Major Rock Edicts and Pillar Edicts.¹ The reason for this relative neglect of the MREs might be sought for in the general conviction that they belong to a separate category of edicts, namely, those edicts which specifically deal with the ruler’s personal

¹ Abbreviations used in the following for Aśoka’s Minor Rock Edicts, Major Rock Edicts, Separate Edicts, and Pillar Edicts are MRE, RE, SE, and PE respectively.

affairs with the Saṃgha, the Buddhist order.² Now, there is a certain tendency among scholars to underrate the significance of Aśoka's affiliation to the Saṃgha. And this might have served as sufficient reason for not ascribing as much importance to the MREs as they deserve, since MRE I has Aśoka's conversion to Buddhism as its main subject.³

The situation is more complex, however, and it would be useless to repeat here much of what has been written on the subject, which goes to prove that Aśoka's preference for Buddhism is no less reflected in several parts of his Major Rock Edicts and Pillar Edicts.⁴ What we wish to do here is call attention to certain features in the MREs which make the distance between the great edict series and the MREs less remarkable, and may shed light on a relationship of the two which is more organic than assumed so far.

Although there have been a few attempts in this direction in the past,⁵ according to the common opinion today the MREs were the first edicts caused to be engraved by Aśoka, and as such, the first pieces of evidence for writing in ancient India (Hultzsch 1925, pp. xlili–xlvi; Falk 2006, pp. 55–58; Norman 2012, pp. 51–52; Olivelle 2012, p. 178). It is not our intention to oppose this general view.⁶ There is more to be done in this field for enabling us to advance arguments on palaeographical, dialectal as well as terminological grounds. For the time being, we should rather define our aim in trying to prepare the soil for subsequent research by making some individual remarks.

Minor Rock Edict I

Since P. K. Andersen's critical edition of the 17 extant versions of MREs (Andersen 1990),⁷ the second part of which regrettably never appeared,⁸ there has come to light another version of MRE I at Ratanpurwa, a long analysis of which is now given by H. Falk (Falk 2013; see also Thaplyal 2009). With this, the number of extant versions grew to 18. Uniform theories on the origin and function of the MREs are rare to find.

² It is this category to which also belong Aśoka's letter to the Saṃgha on reciting some of the more important texts, the edict on Saṃghabheda, and the engraved pillars raised as memorials at important Buddhist sites.

³ On Aśoka's inscriptions in general, see the articles by a series of illustrious scholars in the two most recent collections by Olivelle (2009) and Olivelle–Leoshko–Prabha Ray (2012). Even in these volumes, however, not much space is devoted to the MREs.

⁴ References to Sambodhi and Saṃgha might suffice for our purpose, see RE VIII(C); PE 7(Z).

⁵ See, for example, Mehendale (1955; 1956–1957, esp. p. 159, note 9).

⁶ Some challenges have been initiated against the common opinion in Aśokan studies by Ticken (2002).

⁷ Cf. Norman (1991) for a review.

⁸ The second part of the edition would have contained textual criticism, translation, and interpretation.

Special mention must be made in this connection of Falk’s recent theory, claiming that MRE I was engraved at a large number of sites with the purpose of converting people from popular religion to Buddhism (Falk 2006, pp. 55–58; 2013, pp. 34–37). This theory has much to recommend it, and the presentation of the arguments is ingenious. Still, it is not completely devoid of flaws. To mention just one point, a crowd in a religious ecstasy, some of them believing to be united with gods for the moment, does not seem to be a very apt audience for being converted by the words that “gods have not mingled with men before but now after king Aśoka visited the Saṃgha they are mingled with men”. These words would really have sounded strange to an audience on such an occasion.⁹

Whatever the original function of the MREs may have been, it can be stated with confidence that they were engraved on stone in two broader areas of the Indian subcontinent.¹⁰ First, sites of the MREs are to be found roughly along the line of the Ganges-valley in various distances from the river, even reaching as far as the heart of the Vindhya Range. Second, they are spread in the region more or less in the vicinity of the river Tuṅgabhadrā, corresponding to the area which was later to become the centre of the Vijayanagara Empire.¹¹ The reason for engraving the text of MRE I in these different places is explicitly given in the text by saying that the message of the proclamation should be known even to the farthest “ends” (*aṃtā*) of Aśoka’s empire (MRE I(L)).

As to the contents of the proclamation, it is undoubtedly a personal narration by the king of his conversion to Buddhism in two phases, the first of which was characterised by a weak exertion of one and a half years, while the second by a strong exertion of more than a year, incited by his personal visit to the Saṃgha, and leading to the happiness of the world. Aśoka then expresses his wish that all his subjects, both of low and high ranks, will follow his example, make a strong exertion and reach heaven. Finally, the purpose of engraving the edict is given in that even the farthest “ends” may know it and the universal exertion may last long and increase widely (MRE I(C–N)).

The key term of the edict is “exertion” (*palakama*, Skt. *parākrama*), the usage of which is not restricted to the noun form in the text, but there is also repeated occurrence of the corresponding verbal and participle forms (*palakamati*, *palakaṃta*, *palakamamīna*) of the term.¹² This may even have an effect on the reader of mechanical repeating as in a lesson. It is usually not stressed in due measure by commentators that “exertion” is to no less degree a recurring theme in Aśoka’s Major Rock Edicts.

⁹ Cf. even Falk (2006, p. 55): “It seems quite possible that the men of old were as puzzled as we are when confronted with this text.”

¹⁰ For the possibility of the existence in predicted areas of further Aśokan inscriptions, see Smith–Gillespie–Barron–Kalra (2016).

¹¹ For an evaluation of a group of sites in this region with their network connections, see Sugandhi (2013).

¹² In some of the versions *pakama* is used instead of *palakama*, without, however, any apparent change in the meaning.

In much the same context as in MRE I, the ruler is speaking of his utmost exertion to secure heaven to all his subjects, both of low and high ranks, which he considers his most important task, and hopes that the same exertion will be made by his progeny (RE VI(L–N); X(C)). He does not even fail to add that for people to follow his example in his utmost exertion the greatest renunciation will be needed, which is more difficult to accomplish for those of the higher rank (RE X(E–F)).

It has long been observed that the MREs are more free in their handling of what can be called the “standard version” of the text, as a result of which there are in cases considerable divergences between the individual versions (see, particularly, Andersen 1986). The most remarkable instances for such divergence are the versions at Gujarrā and Maski. Interestingly, they both have a common characteristic of referring to the king in the introducing sentence by his name Aśoka.¹³ It is more striking, however, that these versions at places proceed by attaching glosses or paraphrases to the standard version of the text. One of the peculiarities of MRE I is that there is not any mention of Aśoka’s *dhamma* in the whole text, which can easily be taken as proof for the edict having been written much before the series of the Major Rock Edicts, which in one way or another all have reference to and make *dhamma* the central principle.¹⁴ In the versions at Gujarrā and Maski the illusion of the existence of a proof of this kind seems to vanish. The Gujarrā-version seeks to relieve the monotony caused by the repetition of the term “exertion” by replacing it with word formations such as are familiar from the Major Rock Edicts. In order to explain what should be meant by one who is “making an exertion” the text introduces “practising *dhamma*, having self-control towards living beings”.¹⁵ From this point on, the text even becomes reluctant to use the word “exertion” and makes an automatic replacement on every occasion with “practising *dhamma*” or “working zealously”.¹⁶

The phrases substituted by the version at Gujarrā are stock elements taken from the typical phraseology of the Major Rock Edicts. “Practising *dhamma*” is one of the common ways to denote “leading life” (Skt. *carati*, *carāṇa*) according to the principle of *dhamma*. More precisely, RE IV, an edict to deal with Aśoka’s teaching and propagation of *dhamma*, has a predilection for using the compound *dhammacalana* both for the ruler, his progeny and his subjects (RE IV(B, D–F, H)). The compound is used five times in succession here, always with the hope expressed, as in MRE I, that “practising *dhamma*” will be ever more increasing among people (cf. PE 4(O) for a similar context). When at the end of the edict the purpose of engraving this *dhamma*-

¹³ A similar feature can only be seen in the versions at Niṭṭūr and Uḍegolam.

¹⁴ Among themes of the edicts one can specify *dhamma*-journey, *dhamma*-ceremony, *dhamma*-gift, *dhamma*-victory. There is often word about *dhamma*-high officials, *dhamma*-teaching, *dhamma*-hearing. And most of all, the edicts themselves are called *dhamma*-inscriptions.

¹⁵ MRE I(I) Gujarrā: *parakamaṇenā dhammaṃ caramānenā pānesū samyatenā*.

¹⁶ MRE I(K) Gujarrā, in place of an omitted *parakamaṇtū*: *dhammaṃ caraṇtū y[o]gaṃ yuṃjaṃtū*. At the end of the edict there are effaced traces of the noun phrase *dhammacaraṇa*, but the reading is uncertain.

inscription is given we find the pair of the expression "working zealously" in a similar construction and with the very same intent.¹⁷

Definition of the contents of "exertion" in the Gujarrā-version is not exhausted with the general rendering "practising *dhamma*". Another item is added which makes a special distinction of one part of Aśoka's *dhamma*, namely, the sparing of animal life. In this case, again, it is beyond doubt that the formulation of the text of MRE I is based on a sample that goes back to the Major Rock Edicts. No clearer evidence can be adduced in favour of this than an expression used by one of the edicts with almost the same wording, scarcely a coincidence. In RE IX, as part of an enumeration of the constituents of *dhamma*, "self-control towards living beings" appears in the form as the text in the Gujarrā-version has it,¹⁸ and later it will be repeated by RE XIII, the famous edict on *dhamma*-victory.¹⁹

The version at Maski is a hard nut to crack since the deviations from the standard text are more numerous here and sometimes even impossible to follow. What is most peculiar to this version is that the word "exertion" is systematically omitted. No satisfactory explanation can be offered for this, except that the audience was not supposed to understand the true meaning of the word.²⁰ Nevertheless, the text in all but one occurrences does not even bother to make the word clear, but drops it instead. In the only exception, at the very place where the first of the glosses was inserted in the Gujarrā-version, the participle form "making an exertion" is replaced by the term "being devoted to *dhamma*".²¹ Here, again, the term *dhamma* is made to intrude in the shape of a compound which is otherwise used in the Major Rock Edict and Pillar Edict series (RE V(J–K, N); PE 4(E); 7(N)).

It will be easy to discover further traces of influence by the formulaic language of the Major Rock Edicts on the version of MRE I at Maski. In the inventory of the great edict series, gerundive or absolute formations are of common use in instructions for subjects or officials. "It is to be seen", "it is to be heard", "they are to be told" are characteristic examples of the first type. The second type may be represented by such formulations as "acting in this way". And some of these usages have made their way into the closing sentences of MRE I in the Maski-version. The text chooses to say, in a slightly forced manner, "it is not to be seen in this way" that only people of high rank can reach heaven.²² One is tempted to see here an echo of PE 3 with five occurrences in succession of the verb "to look, to see", in function of an instruction telling how one should see or not see matters of virtue and vice (PE 3(B–E, G)).²³ That people are to be told such and such a message is commonplace usage in the

¹⁷ RE IV(J) Erraguḍi: *etāye aṭhāye iyaṃ li[khite] imasa [a]ṭhasa [vaḍhi yu]jāmtu*. For a similar use, cf. SE I(Y/Z); II(M/N).

¹⁸ RE IX(G) Erraguḍi: *pānānaṃ saya[me]*.

¹⁹ RE XIII(O) Erraguḍi: *sava[bhū]tānaṃ achati sayamaṃ*. For the requirement of self-control in general, cf. RE VII(B, E); PE 4(O).

²⁰ For this explanation, see Falk (2010, p. 15).

²¹ MRE I(H) Maski: *dhamay[u]e[na]*.

²² MRE I(I) Maski: *na hevaṃ dakhitaviye*.

²³ Cf. also in instructions for high officials, SE I(Q/R).

Aśokan edicts. The Maski-version goes on to say that all of the king's subjects, both of low and high rank, should be told this, namely, that heaven can be reached by all.²⁴ Finally, we have the stock phrase at the end that people “acting in this way” will have their reward.²⁵

All these observations are very likely to be explained by the fact that the scribes at Gujarrā and Maski were familiar with Aśoka's Major Rock Edicts, or at least they had access to the same scribal apparatus of stock elements and phrases of which the texts of Aśoka's edicts were to be constructed. Although even in the standard text of MRE I there are certain overlappings of themes and subjects with the Major Rock Edicts, e.g. reaching heaven, hope of increase in the future, giving the purpose of issuing the proclamation,²⁶ in the so-called “covering letter”,²⁷ serving as an introduction and clause to the text, there are more signs pointing to this considerable degree of agreement.

First, the introducing sentence has the usual formula, even if with some variation, “thus said the king”. This places the whole text in a very personal context, such as we find in some of the Major Rock Edicts and the Pillar Edicts (RE III; V–VI; XIV; PE 1–7). In these, the king speaks in the first person, introduced by the sentence “thus said Piyadasi the king, dear to the gods”. Curiously, there is some hesitation in the Gujarrā-version as to where the king's words actually ended, in consequence of which in the middle of the text the king is unexpectedly spoken of in the third person, and referred to by his title “dear to the gods” (MRE I(F) Gujarrā).²⁸ Since this is an accepted mode of the king's talking of himself in the Major Rock Edicts (RE I–II; IV; VII–XIII), it may not take us by surprise.

Second, in the three versions of MRE I which belong to the Mysore-group, parts of the royal command in the shape of a letter addressed to high officials have been preserved. This has close resemblance to what we read at the beginning of several edicts, e.g. the edict on Saṃghabheda, the two Separate Edicts, and the Queen's Edict. The letter form is followed in the edict containing an admonition to the Saṃgha by the ruler to recite particular works.

Third, one should not forget that MRE I has a clause at the end, of variable length in the different versions. Here an instruction is given that the text of the proclamation should be engraved on rocks and pillars wherever there is one (MRE I(P–Q) Sahasrām, Ratanpurwa, Rūpnāth, Pāṅgurāriā). A similar instruction is found, with almost the same wording, at the end of the series of Pillar Edicts (PE 7(SS)). Perhaps most interesting of all, an order to high officials which is only extant at Rūpnāth has word for word correspondence with the closing sentence of the edict on Saṃghabheda

²⁴ MRE I(K) Maski: *khu[dak]e [ca] ma[h]ālake ca vataviyā* (with Falk's conjecture).

²⁵ MRE I(L) Maski: *hevaṃ ve kalaṃtaṃ*. For the same phrase, see RE XI(E); XII(F–H); SE I(X); II(L/M, P/R).

²⁶ In resemblance to giving the purpose of engraving the edicts.

²⁷ To use K. R. Norman's designation for any accompanying material.

²⁸ For the whole problem of the extent of the citation of the king's words, see Falk (2010, p. 9).

(MRE I(R) Rūpnāth).²⁹ Although the exact meaning of this order is not clear, there is good reason to believe that it is about distributing the edicts.

Minor Rock Edict II

As is well known, a unique feature at a number of sites where MRE I was engraved is the existence of a further edict called MRE II, which was either added to the text of the former without any interruption or engraved on another boulder in the vicinity of the former. The sites in question, seven in number, are centred round what is today Bellary, south of the river Tuṅgabhadrā, occupying a place which is to be regarded as the farthest geographical limit in the south of Aśoka's MREs known to date.³⁰

It is generally believed that MRE II served as a complementary to the text of MRE I which was not easy to understand in itself (see Falk 2006, pp. 57–58). This explanation would find support in the fact that MRE II gives a short list of items called "constituents of *dhamma*" (*dhammaguṇa*), which might be interpreted as attempts on the part of the scribe at expounding what remained unclear through the vague usage of the term "exertion". If so, then we would have another piece of evidence for the intervention of Aśoka's scribes in order to elucidate details by means of stock elements.³¹

There are, however, other ways of interpreting the nature and contents of MRE II. A proper understanding of the edict is needed for a due estimation of its value and a recognition of its right to individual existence. We should keep in mind that not all versions are of equal length. Comparing, for example, the versions at Niṭṭūr and Uḍegolam with those of the Mysore-group it will at once become clear that the series of instructions to officials which are preserved in the former are completely lacking in the latter. The versions at Erraguḍi and Rājula-Manḍagiri are halfway between the latter and the former. In the versions of a more or less full extension there is much repeated occurrence of the personal pronoun "you" (*tuphe*), a usual mode of addressing high officials by Aśoka in his two Separate Edicts which were engraved at particular sites, such as Dhauli, Jaugaḍa, and Sannati, as a sort of addendum to the Major Rock Edicts, containing instructions to high officials in issues of regional concern. It appears that a similar thing happened to the MREs when a complementary text with instructions to high officials were appended to the main text at several places. The high officials addressed are likely to be the same as those mentioned in the "covering letter" at the beginning of the Mysore-group (MRE I(A) Brahmagiri, Jaṅṅga-Rāmeśvara, Siddāpur). Here the formulas show close affinity to those used at the beginning of the Separate Edicts, as well as other edicts, in that they refer to specific place names and contain typical phrases like "the high officials at such and such a place are to be told

²⁹ Cf. also MRE I(R) Niṭṭūr.

³⁰ The sites are Niṭṭūr and Uḍegolam, the three sites representing the Mysore-group, Brahmagiri, Jaṅṅga-Rāmeśvara, and Siddāpur, and finally Erraguḍi and Rājula-Manḍagiri.

³¹ One may recall the presence of Capaḍa the scribe's signature at the end of the Mysore edicts.

such and such a message, with the word of the king or the prince” (*devānaṃpiyasa vacanena*) (SE I(A/AB); II(A/AB) Dhauḷi–Jauḡaḡa).³² The latter expression, which was to accompany royal messages, is even found inserted twice in the middle of the text of MRE II in the longer versions (MRE II(I) Niṭṭūr–Uḡeḡoḡam, Erraḡuḡi–Rāḡjula-Maḡḡagiri).

The “constituents of *dhamma*” given by the text in the form of a concise list are three or four in number: obedience to father and mother as well as to gurus, compassion for living beings, and speaking the truth (MRE II(E–G)).³³ A sentence is added with the injunction that these “constituents of *dhamma*” are to be practised (MRE II(H)). Nothing further would be known had not the text specified the persons to whom these precepts are intended and the circumstances under which they are to be performed. It is in these latter points that commentators have failed to offer a satisfactory explanation.

There is constant reference in the text to the different levels of hierarchy the royal command must pass through in order to reach its final destination. It appears that the command is addressed directly to the high officials (*mahāmāta*, *pulisa*) who are to hand it over to the chief functionary (*rajūka*, *lajūka*). It is this chief functionary, often referred to in Aśoka’s Major Rock Edicts and Pillar Edicts, who is entrusted with the task of delivering the message to the ordinary people and the regional functionaries (*raṭhika*) (MRE II(C–D, I) Niṭṭūr–Uḡeḡoḡam, Erraḡuḡi–Rāḡjula-Maḡḡagiri).

At the same time, the high officials are to give command in the king’s name to two distinguished groups of people. These groups have to do with two of the items in the list of the “constituents of *dhamma*”, namely, compassion for living beings and obedience to gurus. Therefore the persons addressed are first people who are in one way or other concerned with causing suffering to living beings, both humans and animals, and second, disciples who are expected to show obedience to their teachers.

Four members are mentioned in the first group of persons, and it is strange how the clue to right interpretation has escaped even the most competent scholars.³⁴ In pair with the “mahouts” (*hathiyārohāni*) one will be able to note the presence of “horse-trainers” (*yūgyācariyāni*), not unfamiliar to passages in the *Arthaśāstra* and the Pali Canon.³⁵ The third members are undoubtedly human “torturers” or “executioners” (*kāranakāni*), a meaning attested in several Pali sources.³⁶ And fourth, “priests” (*baṃbhanāni*) are mentioned quite surprisingly, which can only be explained by the fact that they here represent animal sacrifice, known to have been condemned by Aśoka (RE I(B)). It is clear that these four types of people are called upon with special force to keep to the precept of compassion in their dealings with living beings, both human and animal (MRE II(J) Niṭṭūr–Uḡeḡoḡam, Erraḡuḡi–Rāḡjula-Maḡḡagiri).

³² Cf. the introductory words in the Queen’s Edict and the Edict on Saṃghabheda.

³³ Speaking the truth is omitted in the versions at Niṭṭūr and Uḡeḡoḡam.

³⁴ For example, Norman (1966, pp. 116–117 / 1990, pp. 80–81).

³⁵ For references, see Silk (2000, p. 281, note 60). The term corresponds with Pali *yoggācariya*, Skt. *yogyācārya*.

³⁶ See Cone’s Pali Dictionary, s.v. *kāraṇika*.

The remaining part of MRE II focuses on another group of persons, “disciples” (*aṃṭevāsi*). By the mouth of the high officials the royal command must be imparted to them that they should respect and obey their teachers according to ancient custom. It is also emphasised that they should behave in a proper manner with their teachers’ relatives (MRE II(K–O)). What is generally read in the following lines has led to confusion among interpreters. Falk was not wide of the mark to realise that in some versions *jha-* is clearly visible in place of *a-* at the beginning of the word *aṃṭevāsi* and was led to the conclusion that this must be due to scribal error (Falk 2006, p. 103, Uḍegolam; p. 71, on drawing of Erraguḍi). But this is certainly not the case since we need only separate the words in a different way to gain an understandable reading in all extant versions. The proper word in all versions will be *sajhaṃṭevāsi* “fellow-disciple” with *sadhi-* “together” as first part of the compound, which is also known in Pali in the form *saddhi-*. *Jha-* as a result of assimilation of *dhi-* with an initial *a-* is attested in the Major Rock Edicts.³⁷ Consequently, the lines which have so far been unintelligible will give the sense that “in a similar way, disciples should behave in a proper manner with their fellow-disciples, according to ancient custom”.³⁸

At the end of the edict, the wish is expressed, as usual, that the future will see an increase in good conduct if disciples abide by these prescriptions (MRE II(S–T)).

Greco-Aramaic Edict from Kandahar

It was no little sensation when in the middle of the 20th century Greek versions of some of Aśoka’s edicts came to light in old Kandahar, Afghanistan, in the capital of what once had been ancient Arachosia. A discovery of RE XII–XIII, partially preserved on a stone slab, entailed fewer difficulties for interpreters since it was clear from the outset that we had to do with translations, more or less precise, of the texts known to us in Prakrit of Aśoka’s Major Rock Edicts. There was even ground for the supposition that on similar stone slabs the whole series of edicts may have been engraved and displayed in public for reading on the outer wall of a building such as the council house. At least the existence of two other slabs must inevitably be supposed

³⁷ RE XII(M) Girmār: *ithījhakha-* (Skt. *stryadhyakṣa*); cf. also such formations as *nijhati*, *nijhapayati* (Skt. *nidhyapti*, *nidhāpayati*) etc. For the phonetic rule, see Pischel (1900, pp. 193–194, §280); Mehendale (1948, p. 18, §37, 2 v); von Hinüber (2001, p. 192, §247). *Saddhi-* as first member of a compound is found in literary as well as in epigraphic sources, first of all, in the stock phrase *saddhivihārin* and cognate forms. For the occurrences, see Lüders (1912, p. 223, under *sadhryagvihārin*) and Sircar (1966, pp. 284, 301–302).

³⁸ MRE II(Q–R) Uḍegolam: *hemeva sajhaṃṭevās[i]su pi yathālaham pavatitaviye [yā]disā porānā pakiti*; (P–S) Erraguḍi: *[he]meva sajhaṃṭevāsīsu yathāraha[m] pavatitaviye yārisā porānā pakiti yathāraham*. Within the Mysore-group, the versions at Jaṭiṅga-Rāmeśvara and Siddāpur make a similar reconstruction possible with the respective forms *śa(jhamṭ)e(v)ā(sine)* and *(sajha)ṃṭevāsi-ne*. In Brahmagiri, the line is dropped.

for containing the first part, no longer extant, of the text of RE XII as well as the second part of RE XIII.³⁹

As far as another major find is concerned, a bilingual text in Greek and Aramaic, we are in much greater trouble with ascertaining its nature. It has no word for word correspondence with any of Aśoka's edicts known to us and therefore it has been suggested that it must be something like an extract made from several other edicts, or a concise or abridged version of a particular edict.⁴⁰ The possibility that the text in question may have close relations, both in contents and in structure, with the MREs has never been dealt with, and only a few incidental references, without further elaboration, have been made here and there in scholarly literature to its being a "Minor Rock Edict" rather than anything else.⁴¹ It is all the more surprising because a number of characteristics would qualify this edict for being a remote counterpart, adapted to Greek and Aramaic languages, of MRE I.

First, it was engraved, just as the MREs at all sites, on the surface of a living rock, with the text standing by itself, not accompanied by other edicts as in the case of the Major Rock Edicts and Pillar Edicts. Except MREs not any other edict was engraved in this way in Aśoka's practice, and the Major Rock Edicts, as we have seen, were preferred to be engraved on stone slabs in old Kandahar.

Second, the location of the edict in old Kandahar, at the westernmost border of Aśoka's empire, seems perfectly to fit the requirement expressed in MRE I that the edict should be engraved with a view that even the farthest "ends" might get to know the message of the proclamation.

Third, even if some elements would seem to make a stronger connection with the Major Rock Edicts more likely, this will lose much of its weight in light of our previous discussion which was to show that even in some versions of MRE I, such as those at Gujarrā and Maski, a number of glosses came to be inserted from the common stock of the Major Rock Edicts and Pillar Edicts, in order to make it easier for the audience to receive the message.

³⁹ For details, see the recent editions of the text, with further bibliography, by Canali de Rossi (2004, pp. 187–191, Nos 291–292); Merkelbach–Stauber (2005, pp. 26–35, No. 201); Rougemont–Bernard (2012, pp. 171–173, No. 83).

⁴⁰ For the recent editions of the text, with bibliography, see Canali de Rossi (2004, pp. 185–187, No. 290); Merkelbach–Stauber (2005, pp. 35–36, No. 202); Rougemont–Bernard (2012, pp. 169–171, No. 82). In the following, KD I and KD II will be used as abbreviations for the bilingual Greco-Aramaic edict and the Greek translation of RE XII–XIII respectively, in accordance with the general practice.

⁴¹ Cf. Sircar (1959–1960, p. 333 / 1979, p. 113): "We may regard the Shar-i-Kuna inscription [= KD I] as Minor Rock Edict IV" (the author proposes regarding Aśoka's letter to the Saṃgha on reciting particular works as Minor Rock Edict III); Eggermont (1984, p. 80): "Eine der Versionen des Bekehrungsedikts [= MRE I] wurde 1957 [correctly 1958] bei Kandahar, dem alten Alexandria in Arachosien, gefunden"; Schmitt (1990, p. 45): "Inhaltlich hat der Text der Bilingue in vielem – ähnlich dem aramäischen Text, doch unabhängig von ihm – als die freie Wiedergabe, keine Wort-für-Wort-Übersetzung eines Präkrit-Originals zu gelten, das selbst allerdings nicht greifbar ist, doch v. a. mit Aśokas erstem 'Kleinen Felsedikt' gewisse Berührungen zeigt"; Christol (1998, p. 77): "pour que l'administration maurya [...] prenne le soin de faire traduire et graver en grec un résumé des MRE et une traduction des RE (au moins RE XII et RE XIII)".

With these points in view, we are going to offer a brief analysis of the Greco-Aramaic edict and attempt to establish some remarkable correspondences between parts of the latter and the text of MRE I as we have it.

KD I tells how king Aśoka showed to his people *dhamma*, a term which is rendered into Greek as εὐσέβεια "piety". The result of this *dhamma*-teaching is also given. From that time on, he made people more pious, and everything thrives on the whole earth. What comes next in the text is giving the mode the king's *dhamma*-teaching worked out. It was through following the king's example by the "rest of the people" that abstaining from living beings universally took place, both in what concerns eating and hunting or fishing, so that each man ceased from intemperance to the best of their abilities. They at the same time became obedient to their fathers and mothers and to the elders. Finally, the prospect of a still better state in the future is held out for the people if they keep on doing the same deeds.

The close similarity in subject matter between KD I and MRE I is easier to see by bringing out the opposition, underlying the whole edict, between the king and his subjects (οἱ ἄνθρωποι, οἱ λοιποὶ ἄνθρωποι).⁴² This roughly amounts to what is constantly expressed in MRE I with the pair of terms "people of high and people of low ranks". That this must be the case is shown by the peculiarity of the text being a proclamation of the king in which he lets his subjects know that his personal example in practising *dhamma* can and should be followed. It is also stressed that the desirable results of "exertion" can be attained by all, irrespective of rank or social position. This social aspect may have been simplified in the Greco-Aramaic edict by reason of the fact that social distinction played no significant part in the Western areas.

Another difference which will only prove apparent in nature is that in opposition to MRE I, which is introduced by the usual formula "thus said the king" and is spoken at full length by the king in the first person, KD I is made to conform to another pattern, no less familiar in the Major Rock Edicts and Pillar Edicts, in which the king is spoken of in the third person and referred to by his name "dear to the gods". This title was replaced in the Greek by a simple "king", and in the Aramaic by the more majestic "Our Lord the king". However, as we have noted earlier, in at least one version, the version at Gujarrā, the quotation of the king's own words is interrupted untimely, as it seems, at one point and the phraseology is changed into the latter pattern with *devānaṃpiya* used for designating the king in the next sentence (MRE I(F) Gujarrā). In light of all this, it is less surprising to see the same pattern followed in the text of KD I.

In the very first line of the Greek text, there is a problem of interpretation caused by an unfortunate lacuna, which occasioned quite a lot of dispute among scholars. What can be made out of the series of letters visible on the stone is πληρη[...]ων. This was amended at an early date by the editors to πληρη[θέντ]ων, an anomalous form not attested elsewhere. But the main problem with this suggestion is that there is not

⁴² The above terms are used to denote Aśoka's subjects thrice in the Greek version, and the Aramaic version even goes further in the usage of the corresponding terms denoting "all men" (*klhm 'nšn*). The exact Prakrit should have been *munisā* "men, people", cf. MRE I(F).

enough space in the lacuna for four letters of a size presupposed by the reconstruction. Only three characters would fit the lacuna well. For this reason, alternative solutions were proposed, but so far no consensus has been reached.

We will not go here into the intricacies of the problem. Let it suffice to refer to the last two publications which seem to make an advance towards a more plausible interpretation (Gallavotti 1992; Pugliese Carratelli 1995). The old construction of the sentence with the meaning “when ten years had been filled” is no longer tenable, since it is compelling that the form *πληρη[.]* should be supplied as *πλήρη[ς]*. This will in turn force us to construe *δέκα ἐτῶν* with *πλήρης*, which would necessarily lead to a sense “full of ten years” referring to the king himself. What is left after this is a lacuna of two characters with a particular ending *[..]ων*, placed immediately before the nominative singular of the king *βασι[λ]εὺς Πιοδάσσης*, functioning as the subject of the sentence. We cannot see after due deliberation any other way out of this textual crux than tentatively reading *[ήμ]ων βασι[λ]εὺς Πιοδάσσης*, in similarity to the form used by the Aramaic “Our Lord the king” (*mr'n mlk*).⁴³

But what does the statement “our king Piyadasi, full of ten years” mean? We must have recourse to MRE I in order to answer this question. At the beginning of the Indian edict, as can be easily recalled, there are some pregnant phrases mentioning particular terms given in years and half years. A period of “weak exertion” for one and a half years on the part of the king is mentioned which was followed by a period of “strong exertion” for more than a year. It is at the end of the first and the beginning of the second periods that king Aśoka visited the Saṃgha and made *dhamma*-teaching his task by setting his own example for the people to follow. This turn in his life is explicitly placed by KD I to the time of his being “full of ten years”, which must mean that he had just filled ten years in his reign. The expression in Greek seems apt for referring to such a jubilee.⁴⁴ More significantly, the victory over Kalinga is known to have been when Aśoka was anointed eight years (RE XIII(A); KD II,11–12). If we suppose that this event took place just at the half between eight and nine years then one and a half years of “weak exertion” should be added to reach the jubilee of ten years. As to the following period of more than a year of Aśoka’s “strong exertion”, it must be noted that it is during this time that he made a visit to Saṃbodhi, say, at the half between ten and eleven years (RE VIII(C)).⁴⁵ And to make our calculation complete, the proclamation of MRE I must have been made when more than a year of “strong exertion” had passed, that is, at the first quarter of year eleven of Aśoka’s reign.

As has long been recognised, the Greco-Aramaic edict is unique in its specifying the date of the beginning of Aśoka’s *dhamma*-teaching, placing it on year ten of his reign (KD I,1–3). A comparison with the successive phases of “exertion” in MRE I and other data in the Major Rock Edicts and Pillar Edicts lends support to this dat-

⁴³ A less probable reconstruction would be *[Ivδ]ων βασι[λ]εὺς Πιοδάσσης*.

⁴⁴ Regrettably, the Aramaic does not help add to the meaning of the passage.

⁴⁵ That this is a period of “strong exertion” is corroborated by RE XIII(C) which makes a reference to Aśoka’s intensive *dhamma*-immersion, *dhamma*-desire and *dhamma*-teaching.

ing.⁴⁶ Both KD I and MRE I go to describe the results that followed after Aśoka's undertaking of his *dhamma*-teaching.⁴⁷ An adverb of time is used in the original as well as in the Greek and Aramaic with the same meaning, pointing to the time "during" which or "since" when the beneficial results have been effected.⁴⁸ Then a short description of what these beneficial results consist of follows. In the original a sort of figurative language is introduced by saying that in Jambudvīpa (the Indian subcontinent proper, but the whole world in a broader sense) people who have not mingled with gods before are now made to mingle with gods, or in some of the variants, gods who have not mingled with men now are mingled with them (MRE I(F)).⁴⁹ There can be little doubt that this picture of ideal happiness on earth is the same as was intended to be expressed in the Greek text by the words "everything thrives on the whole earth".⁵⁰ The Aramaic gets even more specific here when it appears to refer to the disappearance through Aśoka's activity of "evil" (*mr'*) and "misery" (*'dwšy'*) for all men.

The middle part of the edict which deals with the mode of Aśoka's leading his people to *dhamma* by way of his own example has some points of interest to offer for our enquiry. Nothing in the standard version of MRE I was told on this matter except that the king has made a "strong exertion". In the versions at Gujarrā and Maski, however, it was not only the term *dhamma* which made an intrusion in the text but even the precept, obviously deemed principal in practising this *dhamma*, of self-control towards living beings. Compassion for living beings was also listed among the "constituents of *dhamma*" by MRE II. These additional elements which came secondarily to the main text in the shape of glosses or an appendage were taken principally from the Major Rock Edicts and Pillar Edicts and served as a guide for people to make the vague term "exertion" clearer. Apparently, the same holds true for KD I. Here we have the statement in the Greek that "the king abstains from living beings" just as do the "rest of the people", and "the king's huntsmen and fishermen ceased from hunting and fishing", and "those who had been intemperate ceased from intemperance to the best of their abilities" (KD I,5–10). As the alternative wording in the Aramaic proves, which rather says that for the king's table only a few number of animals are killed, the inspiration was taken from the Major Rock Edicts. More precisely, the king makes an assertion in RE I that at the time of engraving the edict only three animals were killed daily for the royal kitchen, two peacocks and one gazelle, and even these were to be spared in the future (RE I(F–H)). The same concession in abstaining from living beings might have furnished the reason for supplementing the words in the Greek

⁴⁶ For further considerations on the number 256 in the "covering letter" of MRE I, which if interpreted as *uposatha*-days would give a similar outcome of more than ten years for the proclamation, see Falk (2013, pp. 41–43).

⁴⁷ References to Aśoka's "*dhamma*-teaching" (*dhammānusathī*) in his edicts are numerous, cf. RE III(C); IV(C); VIII(E); XIII(C, R–S); PE 1(D); 7(K, M).

⁴⁸ MRE I(F): *etena ca aṃtalena*, with variants *iminā cu kālena* and *imāyaṃ velāyaṃ*; KD I,3: καὶ ἄπὸ τοῦτου.

⁴⁹ For a possible echo of this intermingling of gods with men, see RE IV(B).

⁵⁰ KD I,4–5: καὶ πάντα εὐθηνεὶ κατὰ πᾶσαν γῆν.

that whoever had been intemperate ceased from intemperance “to the best of their abilities”.⁵¹ At any rate, it should not be a coincidence that here as well as in MRE I, as the version at Gujarrā has it, the precept of sparing animals is defined in terms of “self-control” or “intemperance”.

The other half relating to *dhamma* to be followed by people concerns obedience to father and mother and to the elders (KD I,10–12). This is not unfamiliar again from MRE II. It is an old observation that in the construction of the Greek sentence which makes a simultaneous use of the dative and the genitive for the same word “obedient” one might see a reflection of an original Prakrit construction used in some regional versions of RE IV.⁵² While the Aramaic has avoided this awkwardness, it seems that it has ascribed a different meaning to the last words of the sentence. Since in MRE II it was “ancient custom” (*porānā pakiti*) which was appointed as the guideline for obedient behaviour a better sense would be gained if one were to accept the interpretation of the Aramaic which instead of a bad practice of the recent past speaks of an ancient “fate” or “destiny” (*hlqwt*) laid down of old.

In the closing words of the Greco-Aramaic edict once more the promise of an even more blissful state in the future is set before the people who would keep “acting in this way”.⁵³ It is to be noted that a very close parallel to this formula will crop up again not in the standard version of MRE I but in the modified text of the Maski-version which has the closing words “there will be a bliss for them acting in this way”.⁵⁴

Conclusion

To conclude with a few words, MREs are worth considering in the context of their relations to the great series of Major Rock Edicts and Pillar Edicts. There seem to exist more traces of influence by the latter on the former than generally assumed, first and foremost in the versions, less studied, which bear the marks of scribal intervention. Scribal hands seem to have been largely at work and a well-functioning administrative network present in the case of MRE II, which would imply a well advanced stage in Aśoka’s practice of edict making. It is in this light that we tried to make a reevaluation of the problem of which layer of original Prakrit texts KD I may have belonged to. It seems likely that in constructing the Greco-Aramaic edict, the narrower frame of MRE I, originally a proclamation of the king in his own mouth, was used and later enlarged by means of stock elements known from his Major Rock Edicts and Pillar Edicts. If this is how it worked, the process would not be too much different from what we have found in some of the redacted versions of MRE I.

⁵¹ KD I,10: κατὰ δύναμιν. The words are missing in the Aramaic.

⁵² RE IV(C) in the North-Western versions; cf. Christol (1998, pp. 82–83).

⁵³ KD I,12–14: ταῦτα ποιοῦντες.

⁵⁴ MRE I(L) Maski: *hevaṃ ve kalaṃtaṃ bhada[k]e [h]o(s)i(ti)*.

APPENDIX

Below we give the text of MRE I as found in the versions at Gujarrā and Maski, along with the so-called “standard version”, a hypothetical construction based on the extant versions. Bold characters are used for highlighting those elements in the text which might be taken as intrusions of glosses from the Major Rock Edicts or Pillar Edicts.

[] doubtful reading

() conjecture

< > omission

† † corrupt form

MRE I “Standard version”

(B) devānaṃpiye hevaṃ āha (C) sātīlekāni aḍhatiyāni vasāni aṃ sumi upāsake (D) no cu bādhaṃ palakaṃte (E) saṃvachale sādḥike aṃ me saṃghe upayīte bādhaṃ ca palakaṃte (F) etena ca aṃtalena jaṃbudīpasi amisaṃdevā saṃtā munisā misaṃdevā kaṭā (G) palakamasa hi iyaṃ phale (H) no ca iyaṃ mahateneva cakiye pāpotave (I) khudakena pi palakamaṃīnena vipule pi svage cakiye ālādhayitave (J) etāye aṭhāye iyaṃ sāvane (K) khudakā ca uḍālā ca palakamaṃtu (L) aṃtā pi ca jānaṃtu (M) cilathitike ca palakame hotu (N) iyaṃ ca aṭhe vaḍhisati vipulaṃ pi ca vaḍhisati avaladhiyā diyadhiyaṃ vaḍhisati (O) iyaṃ ca sāvane vivuthena 200 50 6

MRE I Gujarrā

(B) d[e]v[ānā]ṃpiyasa piyadasino asokarāja(sa) (C) a[ḍha]tiyāni sa[m]vacharāni upāsak[e] s[mi] (E) sādḥike sa[m]vacha[re] yaṃ ca me saṃ[ghe] y[ā]te t[ī] [a]haṃ [b]ā[ḍha] ca parakaṃte tī [ā]hā (F) etenā aṃtarenā jaṃbudīpasi devānā[m]pīyās[ā] amisaṃdevā saṃt[o] munisa misaṃdevā kaṭā (G) parakamasa iyaṃ phale (H) no [ca] iyaṃ mahatenā t[ī] va cakiye pāpotave (I) khudākeṇa pī parakamaṃīnenā **dhaṃmaṃ caramīnenā pānesū saṃyatenā** vipu[l]e pī svage cakiye ārādhayitave (J) se etāye aṭhāy[e] iyaṃ sāvane (K) khudāke cā uḍāre cā **dhaṃmaṃ caramtū y[o]gaṃ yuṃjaṃtū** (L) aṃt[ā] pi cā jānaṃtū (M) [ki]ṃt[i] ca cilathitike **dhaṃmaṃca(raṇe hotū)** (N) (ca vipulaṃ vaḍhisa)ti [ca] enaṃ va **dhaṃmaṃcara[m]** ati[y]o (O) iyaṃ (ca) sāvane vivuthenā [200] 50 6

(B) *asāke rāja* (miswritten for *asoke rāja*) Falk (C) *upāsaka si* Falk (E) *sa[m]vacha[ra] yaṃ ca mā saṃpe* (miswritten for *saṃghe*) *ghāyite* (*ghā* as a result of misreading *upa*) *ti āhā* Falk (I) *sayatenā* Falk (J) *sāvane* Falk (L) *aṃtaṃ* Falk (M) *cilamthitike dhaṃmaṃ ca* (nothing ever followed) Falk (N) (the beginning of this line is completely distorted) *-ti | enā vā* Falk (O) *iyaṃ sāvana* Falk.

MRE I Maski

(B) devānāpiyasa asokasa (rājasa) (C) (sātirekāni) [a]ḍha[tiyāni] vasāni aṃ sumi †bumpāśake† (E) [sava](chare sāt)ireke (aṃ) [su]mi [s]aṃgh[e] u[pa]gate b(āḍhaṃ ca) [s]umi upagat[e] (F) pure jāmbu(dīpasi ami)s(ā ye) [m](unisā devehi) [te dā]ni misibhūtā (H) iya<ṃ> aṭhe [khu]dake[na pi] **dhama**y[u]t[e]na sake adhigatave (I) na **hevaṃ dakhitaviye** uḍālake v[ā] ima<ṃ> adhigach[e]yā ti (K) khu[dak]e [ca] ma[h]ālake ca **vata**viyā (L) **hevaṃ ve kalaṃtaṃ** bhada[k]e [h]o(s)i(tti) (M) [cirath]i[t]ike] ca (N) va[ḍhi]siti cā diya[ḍh]iya hositi

(B) *devanāpiyasa* Falk (C) *vaṣā[ni]*, *budhaśake* (*upā* was corrected to *budha*) Andersen [*aṃ aṃ* (the scribe repeated the character) *sumi upāsaśake* (*upāsa/pāsakaśake* is a doubly missed attempt at writing *upāsaśake*) Falk (E) [*s]aṃghaṃ* Andersen (I) *uḍālāke* Andersen (K) *uḍālake* Andersen (N) *diya[ḍh]iyaṃ he[v]aṃ ti*] Andersen.

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