Aśoka’s Fourteenth Rock Edict and the Guṇa mādhurya of the Kāvya Poetical Tradition

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mādhuliya in Aśoka’s Rock Edict XIV

There is a striking similarity between a passage from Aśoka’s Rock Edict XIV and the definition of the Guṇa mādhurya in the Nātyaśāstra. The agreement is so close that the question arises if we are not dealing with the very same concept here. If so, this would have important consequences for the reconstruction of the early history of the Kāvya poetical tradition as well as for our interpretation of the Aśoka inscriptions.

Aśoka’s Rock Edicts consist of a series of fourteen edicts. The final one is not a proper edict in the sense that it provides instruction as the preceding thirteen do. Instead, it offers some considerations concerning the nature of the edicts themselves. Thus, it explains why there are complete as well as abbreviated versions of the edicts and why certain topics are treated over and over again. Furthermore it apologizes for possible writing mistakes. U. Schneider’s reconstructed text of RE XIV reads as follows:

A iyam dhammalipi devānampiyena piyadasinā làjinā likhāpitā: athi yeva samkhītena, athi majhimena, athi vithātenā.
B no hi savatā savaghaṇite.
C mahālake hi vijitā bahu ca likhite likhāpayisāmi ceva (p² adds nikāджyam).
D athi cu heta puna puna lapite (p¹ reads vute) tasa tasa aṭhasa mādhuliyāye ena (p¹ reads kimti [ca] instead of ena): jane tathā paṭipajeyā.
E se siyā ata kicchi asamati likhite desam vā samkhāya kālanam vā alocayitu lipikāpaladādhena vā ti.

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1 An earlier version of this article was delivered as a paper at the Second International Conference on Indian Studies, held from 19 to 23 September 2001 at the Jagiellonian University at Kraków, Poland. Apart from comments and suggestions made by the participants of the conference, I am especially grateful to the discussions with Henk Bodewitz and Jan Heesterman.

I am particularly interested in sentence D here. As I see it, the available translations fail to account for the dative mādhuliyāye. Thus, E. Hultzsch’s translation of the Girnār version runs as follows:3

And some of this has been stated again and again because of the charm of certain topics, (and) in order that men should act accordingly.

U. Schneider translates:4

Es ist aber schon in dieser Hinsicht immer wieder gesagt worden, wegen der Unwiderstehlichkeit [wörtlich: “Süßigkeit”] der verschiedenen Themen (und) damit die Leute sich entsprechend verhalten.

mādhuliyāye is a dative and should be translated as such. In fact, as I see it, it is a dativus finalis which provides the purpose for which the action mentioned in the first part, atbi cu beta puna puna lapite (vute), was carried out. Before venturing to provide a translation I would like to consider the context. In A–C the emperor mentions the fact that there are different versions of his edicts. Sometimes passages may have been skipped, for, as he says himself: “not everything fits everywhere, for my realm is vast and I have written much and I will continue to (commission to) write much”. In sentence D he refers to exactly the opposite phenomenon, namely not to the deletion of certain topics or passages but to their repetition. Finally, in C it is observed that the text might deviate from the one authorized by him (sammati, cp. sammata). One of the causes mentioned for such possible deviations are writing mistakes made by the scribe (lipikalāpalādhena). Unfortunately, the meaning of the remaining part of the sentence (desaṃ vā samkhāya kālanam vā alocayitu) is still far from clear.5

Returning to sentence D, the first part may be translated as follows:

On the other hand (cu) here (i.e. in these edicts) one or the other topic has been raised again and again in order that the sweetness of it arises (it becomes something sweet to the listener).

For the second part there are two possibilities, depending on whether we read kimti ca or ena or kimti without ca. In the first case, kimti ca jane tathā paṭipajeyā supplies a second reason for the repetition beside mādhuliyāye: “and that the people will behave accordingly”. With the reading ena or kimti

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5 For a recent attempt at interpreting this passage, see H. Falk 1993, pp. 84–85. H. Falk’s interpretation is, however, to a large extent based on the reconstructed reading samkhāye (for samkhāya), which reconstruction is supported only indirectly through samkhaye of Kālsī. In all the other versions the final vowel is a.
without ca the sentence becomes dependent on mādhuliyāye: “so that [due to this sweetness] the people will behave accordingly”. The translation of sentence D in its entirety would run as follows:

On the other hand here (in these edicts) one or the other topic has been raised again and again in order that the sweetness of it arises (it becomes something sweet to the listener) so that (or: and in order that) the people will behave accordingly.

It is not difficult to understand what Aśoka means when he says that if a matter is mentioned over and over again people will act accordingly. Due to the repetition they will become aware of the importance of the matter to the emperor and act in that way if only in order not to insult him. However, it is more difficult to follow Aśoka where he claims that if a topic is repeated often enough people may actually start to like it. For that to happen more would seem to be required. However, the connection between repetition and sweetness (mādhurya) is found elsewhere as well, namely in the definition of the Guṇa mādhurya in the Nāṭyaśāstra.

The so-called Guṇas, or “merits”, are part of the standard repertory of treatises on poetics and drama. Their earliest treatment is found in the Nāṭyaśāstra (XVI 96–112). The Guṇa mādhurya is found in Nāṭyaśāstra XVI 104:

babuṣṭo yac chrutam vākyam uktam vāpi punah punah
nodvejayati yasmād dhi tan mādhuryam iti smṛtam /104/

When a sentence has been heard many times or has been said again and again and (nevertheless) this does not cause annoyance, we speak of (the Guṇa of) mādhurya.

The agreement between the inscription and the Nāṭyaśāstra is striking. The main difference lies in the fact that where the Nāṭyaśāstra speaks of sweetness arising when repetition for once does not cause annoyance, what seems to be an exception has in the inscription been turned into a compelling relationship, namely that repetition produces sweetness in all circumstances. However, before going into this difference I intend to have a closer look at the Guṇas in Kāvya poetics in order to find out if the “repetition” which Bharata has in mind is indeed of the same type as the one meant in the inscription.

The Guṇas of Kāvya poetics

There are ten Guṇas, i.e. (in the order in which they are found in the Nāṭyaśāstra) śleṣa, prasāda, samatā, samādhi, mādhurya, ojas, saukumārya, arthavyakti, udāratva/udāitta, kānti. As said, they belong to the standard
reperatory of texts on poetics and drama. The earliest treatment of the Guṇas is found in the Nāṭyaśāstra and they are dealt with in practically all the subsequent Alāṅkāraśāstras, such as Daṇḍin’s Kāvyādāraśa. The history of the Guṇas in the poetical tradition is complicated but at the same time characteristic of that tradition: what we have is a fixed set of ten terms, with each author apparently inventing the meaning of the terms all over again. A case in point is the Guṇa prasāda, which according to the Nāṭyaśāstra involves a kind of ellipsis, while according to the Kāvyādāraśa it is an aspect of alliteration. In this connection it should be noted that in the Kāvyādāraśa all the ten Guṇas are interpreted as types of alliteration.

However, the Nāṭyaśāstra and Kāvyādāraśa agree on one point. In both treatises the Guṇas are said “to have opposites” (viparyaya), or else “to be opposites”. Thus, in Nāṭyaśāstra XVI the Guṇas are enumerated in 96–112, that is, immediately after the Doṣas in 89–94, and are presented as the opposites of these Doṣas:

\[
ete dosā hi kāvyasya mayā samyak prakīrtitāb
gunā viparyayād eśāṁ mādhuryaudāryalakṣanāḥ /95/
\]

With these the Doṣas of Kāvya have been properly explained by me. The Guṇas such as mādhurya and audārya arise as the opposites of these (Doṣas).

It should immediately be noted, however, that, contrary to the impression created, there does not exist a one to one relationship between the Guṇas, mentioned in 96–112, and the Doṣas in 89–94. Instead, we seem to be dealing with what must originally have been two independent lists.

In Daṇḍin’s Kāvyādāraśa the Guṇas are treated in chapter I (41ff.) and the Doṣas only in chapter III (125ff.).\(^6\) At the same time Daṇḍin echoes the idea expressed in the above passage from the Nāṭyaśāstra that the Guṇas have “opposites”. Note in this connection the phrase eśāṁ viparyayād eśāṁ in the Nāṭyaśāstra:

\[
iti vaidarbhamārgasya prāṇā daśa gunāḥ smṛtāḥ
eśāṁ viparyayāb prāyo lakṣyate gaudavartmanī
\]

These ten Guṇas are known as the life-breaths of the Vidarbha style. Their opposites are in most cases met with in the Gauḍa style.

However, with Daṇḍin the Guṇas of chapter I are not opposed to the list of Doṣas, enumerated in chapter III. In fact, in I 42 Daṇḍin is concerned with

\(^6\) Quotations from the first book of the Kāvyādāraśa are from the new 2002-edition by D. Dimitrov, those from the third book from the edition by O. Böhtlingk from 1890.
something entirely different, namely the distinction between various styles, ranging from the ideal Vidarbha style, which is characterized by the presence of the Guṇas, to the inferior Gauḍa style, which is marked by their absence.

In order to throw further light on this problem I would like to have a closer look at the Guṇas themselves. For at least six of the ten Guṇas it will appear that we are dealing with what might be regarded as various kinds of flaws, which normally would annoy the reader (that is to say, they are dosas) but under certain circumstances become merits (guna). The following investigation of the Guṇas is primarily based on the definitions given in the Nāṭyaśāstra, which are most likely the original ones. Those of the Kāvyādāraśa and other later texts seem to be the result of attempts to give meanings again to a given set of terms after the original meanings had somehow been lost sight of.

A good example of what is meant by the Guṇas being opposites of Dośas is furnished by the definition of the Guṇa mādhurya in Nāṭyaśāstra XVI 104, already quoted above. Above I interpreted the Guṇa mādhurya as actually consisting of a “flaw”, namely that of useless repetition. This flaw, which normally would cause annoyance, might under particular circumstances have a contrary effect or make a different impression, namely that of sweetness.

In the case of the Guṇa mādhurya this interpretation could in part at least be based on the formulation of the definition (na+udvejayati). In addition, however, it is supported by at least five other Guṇas, in which the same idea is found. Thus, the Guṇa prasāda involves ellipsis:

apy anukto budhair yatra śabdo’rtho vā pratīyate
sukhaśabdārthaprayogāt prasādah sa tu kīrtiye /99/

When a word or an idea, though not used or explicitly expressed, is understood as a result of a (well-chosen) word or presentation, we speak of prasāda.

7 Contrast Kāvyādāraśa I 51: madhuraṃ rasavad vāci vastuny api rasah sthitah / yena mādyanti dhīmanto madhumeva madhuvratāḥ, “Sweet means ‘being full of enjoyment, of rasa’. This rasa, by which the learned are intoxicated like bees by honey, is found in the words as well as in the topic.” In verse 52 this rasa, which would produce the Guṇa of sweetness, is itself said to be produced by a kind of anuprasa. As has already been indicated above, the Guṇas are all identified by Daṇḍin as forms of alliteration. This applies in the first place to the first five Guṇas. In the next five, which are aptly headed by arthaṇvyakti, contents become a factor as well beside the anuprāsa.

8 From the text itself it does not become clear whether this sweetness is a feeling or sentiment experienced by the reader or one which the reader ascribes to the author of the text.

9 Daṇḍin (Kāvyādāraśa I 45–6) defines prasāda as the use of conventional words. For the sake of alliteration poets might take recourse to rare and difficult words, possibly at the expense of clarity.
Another Guṇa which might be mentioned here is ojas. According to the Nātyaśāstra ojas is marked by the use of many compounds and wonderful, passionate and solemn words:

\[
\text{samāśavadbhir bahubhir vicitraiśca padair yutam}
\]
\[
\text{sānurāgair udāraiśca tad ojaḥ parikīrtaye /105/}.
\]

What is full of many and wonderful words consisting of (long) compounds, which are passionate and solemn, is called ojas. ojas is exalted speech. In the following verse, 106, it is implicitly condemned as involving exaggeration or even lying. But as such it may serve a purpose of its own:

\[
\text{avagito'pi bino'pi syād udātāvabhāsakab}
\]
\[
\text{yatvā sābārthasambātīyā tad ojaḥ parikīrtitam /106/}
\]

If through the good use of words and meanings one manages to make even a despicable and low person appear great, we speak of ojas.

In the case of the Guṇas śleṣa, samādhi, and samatā we seem to be dealing with the use of figures of speech. The aspect of the figures of speech stressed here is their nature as circumscriptions, the way in which they hide the intention of the speaker or, in short, the way in which they stand in the way of easy and immediate understanding. The Guṇa śleṣa is identical to the figure of speech with the same name:

\[
\text{ipsitenārthajātena saṃbaddhānām parasparam}
\]
\[
\text{sliṣṭatā yā padānām sa śleṣa ityabhidhiyate /97/}
\]

When words are connected on the basis of meanings which are intended but when (inadvertently, through the very combination) a double meaning arises, this is called śleṣa.

The following verse, which was not commented upon by Abhinavagupta and in the GOS-edition has accordingly been bracketed, describes the difficulties presumably involved in trying to grasp a pun:

\[
\text{vicāragahanam yat syāt sphuṭam caiva svabhāvatah}
\]
\[
\text{svatah supratibhādham ca sliṣṭam tat parikīrtitam /98/}
\]

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10 According to Daṇḍin (I 80–3), ojas is marked by the occurrence of a great number of (long) compounds. As such, it would be the “soul” of the prose style. The compounds in his examples show, again, all kinds of alliteration (see, e.g., astamastakaparyāṣasamasta and pinasantasthitātāmmantraśabhāṣṭāstra in 82).

11 Daṇḍin (Kāvyādāraśa I 43–4) defines śleṣa as a kind of alliteration marked by “looseness” as a result of the use of mainly vowels, anusvāra and sibilants (asprṣṭa-śaithilya), and other sounds pronounced with little effort (alpaprāṇākṣarottara).
An expression impenetrable to examination, which becomes clear (only) accidentally (i.e. not through examination) as well as an expression which happens to be completely entangled, both these we call “conjoined”.

The Guṇa samādhi “concentration” is concerned with the problem of extracting the essence of a message which is covered under a blanket of figures of speech:

\[
\text{upamāṇaḍyupadiṣṭānām arthānāṃ yatnatas tathā} \\
\text{prāptānāṃ cāpi samkṣepāt samādhibi nirnayo yatāḥ} /103/
\]

samādhi occurs when one finds out (the meaning) by combining (samkṣepāt) those parts of the text which have been expressed in an elaborate way (yatnatas) with figures of speech such as comparisons, with those which are clear.\(^{12}\)

The Guṇa samatā consists of, among other things, the occurrence of yamaka:

\[
\text{nāticuñnapadār yuktā na ca vyarthaḥ bhidhāyibhib} \\
\text{durbodhanaścā na kṛtā samavāt samatā mataḥ} /100/
\]

Where there is no excessive use (ati) of words which can be broken up in different ways (cuñnapada), nor of words which are meaningless or obscure, we speak of samatā on the ground of the quality of sama.\(^{13}\)

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\(^{12}\) The translation of verse 102, which provides the “first” definition of samādhi, is problematical, if only because the text is uncertain. There seem to be basically two variants, namely abhiyuktyair viśeṣas tu yo’rthaṣyevopalaksyate / tena cārthena sampannah samādhibi parikīrtitaḥ and abhiyuktaire viśeṣaḥ tu yo’rtha evopalabhyaḥ / tena so’rtho’bhisampannah samādhibh parikīrtitaḥ. The first variant may be tentatively translated as follows: “When the specific (implication) (viśeṣaḥ) of an intention (arthaḥ) is grasped by people after a great effort (abhiyuktaḥ) and that implication is (on final analysis) in accordance (sampannah) with what is intended (tena arthaḥ), we speak of samādhi.” I think the variants of the second version, or at least some of them, were the result of the attempt to fit in the word viśeṣaḥ, which may be secondary, the instrumental plural having been triggered by preceding abhiyuktaḥ “by persons who apply themselves to it”. The second variant may tentatively be translated as follows: “When the intention is grasped on the basis of the specific (words) which are used (abhiyuktaie viśeṣaḥ), (and) that intention arises (abhisampannah) because of that, we speak of samādhi.” It may have been this latter version which lies behind Daṇḍin’s interpretation of samādhi as referring to metaphorical language. As examples of samādhi Kāvyādāraśa I 93ff. provides phrases like kunudāni nimitanti, the verb nimita- normally being used for the closing of the eyes. His examples abound again in assonance, as in pītā pāvakaśiprah. However, it might equally well be possible that the second version of verse 102 is itself due to the secondary influence of Daṇḍin’s interpretation.

\(^{13}\) Daṇḍin’s definition is again quite different, treating samatā as a kind of anuprāṣa (Kāvyādāraśa I 47–50).
**yamaka** is one of the earliest defined *alamkāras*.\(^{14}\) In the verse which follows, i.e. 101, all the items mentioned in 100, the *yamaka* as well as the *vyarthā* and *durbdhāna* words or expressions, are together placed in the category of *alamkāras*:

\[
\text{anyonyasadyśā yatya tathā hy anyonyabhuṣanāḥ} \\
\text{alamkārā guṇās caiva samāh syuh samātā matā /101/}^{15}
\]

Where *Alamkāras* and Guṇas are in balance and match and beautify each other, we speak of *samatā*.

Thus, here, too, we have to do with features which are used to embellish the words spoken, but which at the same time tend to obscure their intention. Verse 101 seems to imply that these embellishments are Guṇas only when they are not used disproportionately, hindering immediate understanding.

How the remaining four Guṇas (*saukumārya*, *arthavyakti*, *udāratva*, and *kānti*) belong to this category of felicitous flaws is not immediately clear. Their nature needs further investigation. It should be noted, though, that we need not have to do with a homogenous list at all. Whatever is the case here, the six Guṇas discussed so far – a small majority – do throw a different light on the idea that the Guṇas are opposites (*viparyaya*) of flaws. In this connection I would like to draw attention to Daṇḍin’s *Kāvyādarśa* again. As we have seen above in the discussion of the Guṇa *mādburya*, in the Guṇa section of the *Kāvyādarśa* the individual Guṇas are not discussed in terms of opposites or reversals of the Doṣas. As indicated, Daṇḍin instead distinguishes between two *mārgas*, or literary “styles”, one (Vidarbha) marked by the presence of the Guṇas and the other (Gauda) by their absence. If, next, we turn to the third chapter of the *Kāvyādarśa*, where the ten Doṣas are treated, there each definition is regularly followed by an enumeration of some circumstances in which the flaw in question could instead be a fitting literary ploy. Thus, the definition in III 135 of the Doṣa of *ekārtha*, which is another term for useless repetition, or *punarukta*, is followed in 137 by an enumeration of some circumstances, in which this same flaw could be highly effective instead, for instance in sentences expressing compassion:

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\(^{14}\) For a definition of *yamaka*, and its various subtypes, see E. Gerow 1971, pp. 223–238. Daṇḍin (*Kāvyādarśa* I 66) quotes as an example of *yamaka* the phrase *yā bhavataḥ priyā* “the girl who is dear to you”, which may also be parsed as *yābhavataḥ priyā* “the girl dear to the man who ‘fucks’ her”.

\(^{15}\) *samatā matā* is my emendation for *samatāmatāḥ*, a type of compound which is otherwise unattested (except in the Aśoka inscriptions!).
yatibhrasta, which The Bharata ing here. than participates nature. two the the parts ten

\[ \text{anukampādyaṭiśāyo yadi kaścid vivakṣyate} \\
\text{na doṣab punaruktoṭi pratyutteyam alaṃkriyā /137/} \]

When [the author wishes to present] a person conveying an excess of emotions such as compassion, the use of repetition is not a flaw but rather an alaṃkāra.

The Doṣa ekārtha appears to be the counterpart of the Guṇa mādhurya (as defined in the Nātyaśāstra). While on closer inspection of the two lists possibly more such pairs may be found, it should be stated once more that the ten Guṇas are not opposites of the ten Doṣas in question. For instance, the latter include technical flaws such as grammatical and metrical mistakes,\(^\text{16}\) which may be used to good effect but which as such have no counterparts among the traditional ten Guṇas. While thus the Guṇas as well as the Doṣas include features of their own, the treatment of the two lists in the Nātyaśāstra and Kāvyādāraśa do show an acute awareness of the fluid boundaries between flaws and merits and that the distinctions between the two are far from absolute.

The six Guṇas discussed above, including mādhurya, appear to concern stylistic flaws which under certain circumstances may be turned to good effect.\(^\text{17}\) The context of mādhulīya in the inscription is of exactly the same nature. As we have seen, in RE XIV the emperor is enumerating certain peculiarities, including scribal errors, of the edicts. He clearly feels the need to explain why certain topics are repeated again and again. In doing so he anticipates that the readers might be puzzled by such passages. Given this close agreement in the context or the conditions of mādhurya in the Nātyaśāstra, on the one hand, and mādhulīya in the inscription, on the other, it is more than tempting to conclude that we are dealing with the very same concept here. In fact, without the support from the Nātyaśāstra Aśoka’s claim that repetition creates sweetness is indeed difficult to understand.

However, as already indicated, where the Nātyaśāstra speaks of an accidental effect, in the Aśoka inscription repetition is presented as producing sweetness under all circumstances. If we are indeed dealing with the same sweetness as in the Nātyaśāstra here, the claim made by Aśoka that repetition under all circumstances leads to sweetness is evidently not what Bharata had envisioned. In the inscription we seem to be dealing with a rather clumsy interpretation of the Nātyaśāstra definition. However, if we

\(^{16}\) Note visāma, visamādhi, and śabdacyuta in Nātyaśāstra XVI 93–94 and śabdahīna, yatibhaṣṭa, bhinnacṛta, and visamādhi in Kāvyādāraśa III 148–161.

\(^{17}\) There does not seem to be any reason to assume that we are dealing with, for instance, a well-liked poem or play which continues to delight despite repeated performances or hearings.
are indeed dealing with a case of clumsiness, as I will try to show presently, this is not the only one found in Rock Edict XIV.

Another point to be noted concerns the occurrence of mādhurya in the inscription as a technical term. In the Nātyasāstra we are clearly dealing with a concept which resulted from a scholarly reflection of literary compositions. Does the occurrence of mādbuliya in the inscriptions mean that these documents had been subjected to some kind of scholarly investigation as well? On the basis of the content of RE XIV one might conclude that they were. Furthermore, the way the texts for the inscriptions appear to be collected assumes some kind of overview of the entire material on the part of the compilers.

Rock Edict XIV and the nature of the Rock and Pillar Edict series

The Asoka inscriptions include two series, to wit, the Rock edicts, which consist of fourteen edicts engraved on large boulders on mountain sides or stone slabs, which are found in nine sites mainly on the fringes of India. The other series consists of six edicts\(^1\) engraved on pillars found in six places in the interior of North India. It is generally assumed that the edicts were disseminated individually and one after the other. Recently, I have tried to show that the Rock and Pillar Edicts have each been disseminated as a series.\(^2\) We are not dealing with more or less random collections but with carefully arranged compilations. This means that, for instance, RE IV, which had been issued in the emperor’s twelfth year, had not been disseminated before the thirteenth year, which year is mentioned in RE V, if not much later than that. Apparently, in the Rock Edict series the measures mentioned in the edicts were not requiring immediate action.

While almost all Pillar Edicts are dated, namely in the 26th year, of the fourteen Rock Edicts only IV is formally dated, namely in year twelve. In some of the other edicts years are mentioned, but as part of the message. For instance, in the beginning of RE XIII the emperor refers to his conquest of Kalinga in his eighth year. However, after that he proceeds with the words, “next, later, now that Kaliṅga is completely taken”. While the edict must

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\(^1\) On the pillar in Delhi-Töprä a seventh edict had been added secondarily. Fragments of this seventh Pillar Edict have also been found at Kandahār.

\(^2\) H. Tieken 2003a. In fact, the Rock Edict series has been disseminated in two consecutive rounds, namely, first, to the north, north-west and south, and, later, to the west and east. This point is not dealt with here.
have been issued after the eighth year, how long after that this took place remains unclear.

Going by the dates mentioned in the inscriptions it is as if the emperor in the course of his reign had switched from inscriptions on rock to those on pillars. However, as I have tried to show, on closer consideration, the two sets of edicts appear to be complementary, which suggests that they were disseminated almost simultaneously from the same centre, the one set to the edges of the empire, the other to the interior. The Rock Edict series was thus not engraved before the 26th year, which implies that the compilers of the series were using old edicts. On closer consideration this conclusion may apply to the entire corpus. In any case, there is evidence of the editing of the texts, which can be traced back to the time of their compilation. We seem to be dealing with old royal missives, which were given a second life in the inscriptions. This reduces the institution of dhāmmamahāmātās in the thirteenth year (RE V) or the ban on killing certain animals in the 26th year (PE V) to purely historical facts. The inscriptions appear to be monuments dedicated to a famous emperor from the past.

If the inscriptions are indeed based on a selection made from a corpus of old missives this assumes a reflection on the part of the compilers of the nature and style of the original documents, which may well have included the finding that repetition is not under all circumstances a flaw.

While the majority of edicts may indeed have been based on old letters, some edicts seem to have been composed specifically for the occasion. Those edicts which come into consideration for this, such as the two Separate Rock Edicts and the Seventh Pillar Edict, happen to be marked by a stylistic (or linguistic) innovation, which seems to set them apart from the other edicts. The feature in question concerns the use in dependent Why-questions of yena instead of kimti.20 Another edict which might have been composed for the occasion is the final, fourteenth Rock Edict, which seems to function like a kind of colophon to the series as a whole. RE XIV does indeed read ena (ena jane tathā paṭipajeyā) but only in the “original” p1 versions. In the supposedly secondary p1 versions ena has been replaced by more authentic kimti again.

Above, I have already referred to the curious twist given in RE XIV to the concept mādhuliya, that is, if we compare it to the definition given in the Nātyaśāstra. It should be noted, however, that this is not the only feature in RE XIV which might, retrospectively, be labelled naive. In this connection

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20 See H. TIEKEN 2003b.
I would like to draw attention to two peculiarities in its vocabulary. In the first place there is the occurrence in sentence C of the Middle Indic word *mahālaka* “old” (see RE V [L]), appearing in a Middle Indic context in the Sanskrit meaning “great, vast”. The second peculiarity concerns the word *nikāya*. In C this word, which normally means “group” or “class” (see RE XII [M]), appears to be used for once in the meaning “much, a lot”: ... *bahu ca likhite likhāpayisāmi ceva nikāyanī*, “I have written much and also in the future I will” (commission to) write much (or: a pile). In both cases we seem to be dealing with *ad hoc* synonyms based on etymological speculation.\(^{21}\) If so, one may ask if the fact that the two words occur elsewhere in the corpus is a coincidence or if the author of the edict in his search for words restricted himself to the vocabulary of the available corpus. In any case, the words *mahālaka* and *nikāya* make the same rather clumsy impression, as does the use of the concept *mādbhuliya.*\(^{22}\)

The Aśoka inscriptions and the Kāvya tradition

If *mādbhuliya* in RE XIV is the Guṇa *mādbhura* of the Nāṭyaśāstra we are dealing with one of the earliest attestations of a concept of Kāvya poetics.\(^{23}\) As such it raises questions concerning the relationship between Kāvya

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\(^{21}\) *nikāya* from *ni-ci*-

\(^{22}\) Another, third, instance of clumsiness concerns the instrumentals/adverbs *samkhitena, majhimena*, and *vithätena* in combination with the verb *atbi* in sentence B: “Sie existiert schon, sei es in mehr oder weniger abgckürzter, sei es in ausführlicher (Form)” (translation U. Schneider 1978, p. 119).

\(^{23}\) The date of the Nāṭyaśāstra is unfortunately uncertain. The Junaṅgar inscription of Rudradāman of the middle of the second century AD is generally taken to mention the Guṇas of Kāvya poetry. The line in question reads as follows (D. C. Sircar 1993, pp. 175–180; the reconstruction of the text with the words *kāvyavidhānaprāvīneṣnaḥ* is by G. Bühler 1892, pp. 53 and 88, note 1): *śphntalaghbumadbhuracitrañtaśabdasamayodārāl- amkrtagadyapadya/kāvyavidhāna-prāvīneṣna ... mahāksatrapaṇa rudradāmnā,* “... by the Mahākṣatrapa Rudradāman, who was highly proficient in the composition of Kāvya, both in prose and in metre, which was clear, easy to follow, sweet (madhura), varied, lovely (kānta), lofty (udāra) as a result of śabdasamaya (?)” and provided with alamkāras.” It should be noted, however, that all we get here is a set of terms, some of which are indeed later used for Guṇas. We lack definitions, except possibly in the case of udāra. However, if śabdasamaya is to be construed directly with udāra, the definition does not agree with any of those found in the later poetical treatises. The absence of definitions is all the more awkward as we seem to be dealing with rather common characteristics of speech, which lack specific meanings. Note in this connection the many references collected by V. Raghavan from the epics and later literature to “sweet (madhura) speech (gīt)” or to speech which is “exalted” (udāra) (V. Raghavan 1963, p. 249ff.).
and inscriptions. G. Bühler in his seminal publication “Die indischen Inschriften und das Alter der indischen Kunstpoesie” of 1890 was the first scholar to draw attention to the fact that inscriptions belong to Kāvya as well. Some inscriptions actually refer to their own texts as kāvyas.\(^{24}\) Evidently, it was the same type of poets who were responsible for the inscriptions as well as the epic Kāvya poems. However, the insessional evidence discussed by G. Bühler was not older than the first century AD. One may now ask if, and if so, to what extent the subsequent situation may be traced back to inscriptions as early as the Aśoka ones. Another question that arises is how inscriptions and the Kāvya tradition have become linked up with each other.

As to the first question, I think it cannot be ruled out that the later situation in inscriptions applies to the earlier Aśoka inscriptions as well. In any case, the Aśoka inscriptions are not demonstrably older than the earliest traces of Kāvya. If, as indicated, the Rock and Pillar edicts are compilations of old letters, we have to distinguish between the original letters and the inscriptions, in which these letters are, so to speak, recycled. Consequently, the question of the date of the inscriptions is completely open again. As I see it, the inscriptions must be later than has been assumed so far. For one thing, their date can no longer be calculated with reference to Aśoka, whenever that emperor may have lived.\(^{25}\) However, on the basis of the imperial ambitions evident from the distribution of the Rock Edicts, the inscriptions must be dated some time before the rise of the Sātavāhanas. If so, this does not necessarily make them older than the first evidence of Kāvya poetry, which consists of stray Sanskrit verses found in the Mahābhāṣya\(^ {26}\) as well as some verses in Middle Indic dialects engraved on the walls of the caves in Rāmgarh.\(^ {27}\)

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\(^{24}\) See, e.g., the Allahābād Stone Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta, lines 31–32: etaca kāvyam eṣāṁ eva bhaṭṭārakapāḍānām dāsasya ... hariṣenasya sarvabhūtahītasukhāigailu, “And may this poetic composition (kāvyan) of Hariśena, the servant of the very venerable Bhaṭṭāraka ... lead to the welfare and happiness of all beings!” (CII III [Revised], pp. 203–220; see also G. Bühler 1890, pp. 31–45).

\(^{25}\) The date of Aśoka itself is uncertain. It has been calculated on the basis of, among other things, the Greek kings mentioned in the edicts. However, in the identification of these kings those who lived before or after the third century BC were for some reason ignored. In addition to that, it is highly unlikely that the knowledge of the western world evinced in the inscriptions was available in India before Alexander’s campaign in India in 327–324 BC.

\(^{26}\) F. Kielhorn 1885.

\(^{27}\) H. Falk 1991.
Another point to be mentioned here concerns the language of the Aśoka inscriptions. One of the main characteristics of later Kāvyā literature is its language, Sanskrit. Kāvyā literature is primarily the domain of – Pāṇinian – Sanskrit. ²⁸ It is virtually synonymous with that type of Sanskrit, presenting us with a skillful exploitation of its linguistic possibilities. The Aśoka inscriptions are clearly not in Sanskrit and the first explicit evidence of Sanskrit in its role as the language for public documents dates after the Aśoka inscriptions.²⁹ However, while the original missives used in the inscriptions do not show any direct influence of Sanskrit, there are some indications to suggest that the persons who were responsible for the compilation of the texts of the inscriptions did compare the language of the letters with Sanskrit. Take, for instance, the use of Why-questions introduced by (y)ena instead of those introduced by kimti in edicts which may have been added only secondarily or composed for the occasion. This use of the (y)ena construction could be a case of the interference of other styles or of other vernaculars. However, it could equally well be an instance testifying to the influence of Sanskrit. The same question applies to the use, referred to above, of the Middle Indic word mabālaka “old” in the meaning “vast”, which meaning is strange starting from another eastern dialect such as, for instance, Pāli.

On closer consideration neither the date nor the dialect of the inscriptions seem to argue against simultaneous existence of the Aśoka inscriptions and Kāvyā, or rather, the presence of Kāvyā poets or their predecessors at the court which was responsible for the Aśoka inscriptions. The fact that in the inscriptions typical features of Kāvyā are absent is irrelevant here, as the compilers did not compose their own text but carefully pieced one together on the basis of a selection from old royal missives. On the other hand, when we look at the inscriptions as objects the picture may change again. With the inscriptions we are no longer dealing with practical bureaucratic documents

²⁸ One of the earliest Kāvyā inscriptions discussed by G. Bühler 1890 is the one by the Sātavāhana king Sīrī-Pulumāyi. Like all Sātavāhana inscriptions it is in Prākrit. However, as pointed out by E. Senart 1892, esp. pp. 258–261 we are dealing with a language just as artificial as Sanskrit. As subsequently argued by S. Lévi 1902, pp. 112–113, we are actually dealing with Sanskrit scrambled for the use in profane documents.

²⁹ The earliest direct evidence so far for Sanskrit as a language for public documents, apart from the Junāgārh inscription of Rudradāman already referred to in note 23, consists of a few brief inscriptions dated in the first century BC (see R. Salomon 1998, p. 86ff.). It remains to be seen, however, if these inscriptions may be considered public rather than private documents.

³⁰ Note, however, the word play in Pillar Edict IV, with lamghamti in F being taken up by cafmlghamti in H (see E. Hultzsch 1925, p. 123).
but with monuments dedicated to a predecessor of the ruling king. In this respect they resemble later developments in Sanskrit inscriptions. I refer here in particular to the Allahabad pillar with its fictional Sanskrit Kāvyā poem inscribed on it, which describes the pillar as Earth’s raised arm proclaiming King Samudragupta’s fame.\footnote{C/II III, no. 1.}

The original milieu of the Kāvyā tradition

The presence of Kāvyā poets at the courts is taken more or less for granted. Another question, however, is how the Kāvyā tradition came to be practised there. Or, to put it differently, whether with Kāvyā we are dealing with an external, independent science which through its epic poems has managed to secure a position at the courts and whose practitioners subsequently usurped the function of scribe or with a by-product of the art of writing royal missives. In what follows I would like to discuss two points which might be relevant in this connection.\footnote{In what follows I do not take into account the evidence of the epistolary literature as known from the Buddhists, as the available evidence seems to be later than the period considered here (O. von Hinüber 1996, pp. 202–205).}

The first point to be noted concerns the written nature of Kāvyā. While the Sanskrit epics pay lip-service to a tradition of oral, on-the-spot composition, a Kāvyā poem is a complicated, carefully constructed piece of art. It is learned poetry, in which the author shows off his knowledge of grammar, poetics, metres and whichever other sciences may have been relevant. As a result, reading Kāvyā is often like solving riddles. In this connection I need only to refer to verses 33 and 34 from canto II of Aśvaghoṣa’s Saundarananda, in which the form adīdapat occurs four times, namely as the reduplicated aorist of dā “to give”, dā “to cut”, dā “to purify” and dī “to destroy” respectively. Another aspect of the complex style (or syntax) of Kāvyā are long sentences. These may consist of strings of verses describing one and the same concept (see Kumārasambhava 1.1–17) or – especially in prose – compound after compound specifying one and the same noun (examples abound in, for instance, Bāṇa’s Kādambarta). Other typical Kāvyā features are found in the vocabulary (pratispardhin “vying with” used in the meaning “like”) and the attempts at circumscription. An interesting example of circumscription, already referred to by L. Renou, is Kirātārjunīya 3.62, in which a man is praised by saying that while
enumerating excellent men the finger did not move any further after having counted him.\textsuperscript{33}

While in the course of the history of Sanskrit literature pandits may have managed to learn by heart whole epic Kāvya poems, it is not at all certain if these compositions were produced on the spot and if they were meant to be fully understood after one recitation or quick reading only. As I see it, one may rightly ask if we do not have to do with a written literature instead, which requires a slow and careful reading with the possibility to go back and forth over the text repeatedly.

As far as I know, the question if Kāvya is a written literature has never been explicitly dealt with before. A complicating factor in this is no doubt formed by the existence of Sanskrit drama, which implies immediate comprehension of the text (script) during the performance. However, was Sanskrit drama indeed meant to be performed? In this connection I would like to refer my study of the pūrvaraṅga, or prologue, in Sanskrit drama.\textsuperscript{34} In this article I have suggested that one of the functions of the pūrvaraṅga was to inform the reader of the fact that the text he was going to read was not an ordinary text but a play. If this was indeed the case, this implies that the tradition to which the texts of Sanskrit plays which we now have belong, is a purely literary tradition, rather than one concerned with performance. The texts were not scripts intended to be performed but texts to be read at leisure. This is not to deny the existence in ancient India of traditions of dramatic performances. The point is that there does not seem to be hard and fast evidence of a performance tradition of Sanskrit drama, at least for the older period,\textsuperscript{35} despite the impression given by the Nātyaśāstra.

Kāvya is a literature exploiting, apart from anything else, the possibilities offered by writing itself, writing providing the time to plan, on the part of the author, and the time to study, on the part of the reader. As such Kāvya presupposes a serious writing culture.\textsuperscript{36} That is to say, it could only have developed in a milieu which was (already) familiar with writing and which was

\textsuperscript{33} L. Renou 1959, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{34} H. Tieken 2002.
\textsuperscript{35} Apparently, at a certain point in time Sanskrit dramatic texts came to be performed, as is shown by the so-called Trivandrum Sanskrit plays, which have come down to us as part of the repertory of Kūṭiṭyaṭṭam acting groups. Earlier evidence may be found in the Kuṭṭanīmatā (eighth century), which reports the performance of Harsa's Ratnāvali (see H. Tieken 1993).
\textsuperscript{36} I have used the expression "serious writing culture" in order to exclude writing used for such things as marking ownership (grafitti) or shopping lists. I am concerned in particular with writing as an organized activity.
subsequently not adverse to making learned experiments. This leads us back to the royal chancery as the possible or most likely cradle of Kāvya.

In the second place I would like to draw attention to the highly convoluted style of Kāvya. Whatever else, Kāvya shows an overriding concern for the way in which the message is phrased. It might of course be argued that this was merely the outcome of centuries of poetic activity which goes back to the epics or the Vedic hymns. On the other hand, the royal chancery seems to provide what may be called a natural context for the development of this kind of style. Given the important role letters played in the administration of the realm and the contacts with local administrators far removed from the centre, the way things are put is almost as important as the things themselves. The letters should be clear and, what is even more important, should not cause unnecessary annoyance and ideally make the readers carry out the instructions contained in them.\(^{37}\)

The Arthaśāstra has in fact preserved in 2.10 a small treatise on royal edicts, which shows that already quite early the writing of diplomatic letters was considered an art in itself.\(^{38}\) Besides many other details concerning the contents and format of the edicts, the Arthaśāstra (2.10) also contains lists enumerating the possible merits (lekhasampat) and flaws (lekhadośāh) of dispatches. Interestingly, in the list of merits given in 2.10.6–12 (arthakramah saṃbandhaḥ paripūrṇaḥ mādhuryam aśāryaṃ śaṣṭāvatvam iti lekhasampat) we come across several terms which we find later in connection with the Guṇas as well. Thus, as we have seen, the terms mādhurya and aśārya also occur in the list of the Guṇas, and śaṣṭāvatva could well be a synonym of prasāda. In the corresponding list of flaws that might vitiate a royal letter, found in Arthaśāstra 2.10.57–62, we come across akānti, or “the absence of kānti”, a term otherwise in use as a Guṇa as well.\(^{39}\) However, while as far as the terms are concerned the agreement with the Guṇas is striking, when we turn to the definitions there is no question of any agreement. Thus, while in, for instance, Nātyaśāstra XVI 112 kānti is defined as the description of pleasing images, in Arthaśāstra 2.10.58 akānti is taken to refer to the ugly appearance of a letter due to, among other things, an uneven hand

\(^{37}\) The letters were most likely delivered in person by messengers. One of the tasks of these messengers must have been to decide on the spot if it was wise to hand over the letter at all. What further role they may have had in connection with the text and contents of the letters requires further investigation.

\(^{38}\) The passage has been dealt with in detail by H. Scharfe 1993, pp. 60–66.

\(^{39}\) The list of flaws furthermore includes vyāghāta, punarukta, apāśābda, and samplava. Of these punarukta “needless repetition” and apāśābda “wrong word-formation” are found in the standard lists of Doṣas in the Nātyaśāstra and Kāvyādarśa as well.
of writing (tatra kālapattrakam acāruviṣamavirāgākṣaratvam akāntih). The Arthaśāstra definitions of the lekhasampats mādhurya, audārya and spaṣṭatva are likewise difficult to match with those of the Guṇas so named. For instance, mādhurya as a lekhasampat involves the use of easy and lovely expressions (sukhopaniṣacicārvarthasabdābhidhānam mādhuryam, 2.10.10), audārya, or the presentation of miraculous scenes (see Nātyaśāstra XVI 110–111), the use of polite expressions (agrāmyaśabdābhidhānam audāryam, 2.10.11), and spaṣṭatva, if the same as prasāda, or ellipsis (see above), the use of common, well-known words (pratītasabdapravayaḥ spaṣṭatvam, 2.10.12). In this respect we have here the same situation as met with in the later poetical treatises, which show different definitions for one and the same Guṇa.

This concern of the scribes for the format and the verbal contents of the royal dispatches is to a certain extent anticipated by their predecessors, the messengers, or dūtas,⁴⁰ who according to Mānavadharmaśāstra VII 64, besides knowing what to say when and where (desakālavitaḥ), had to be vāgmin, or “eloquent”.⁴¹

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⁴⁰ In this connection I would like to draw attention to a passage from the Mahābhārata which seems to show that repetition, or saying things again and again, is typically part of the “rhetoric” of the messenger. The passage in question, Mahābhārata 1.38, deals with a young ascetic, Śrīṅga, who had cursed king Parikṣit for having placed a dead snake on his father Smīka’s shoulder. Within seven days Parikṣit will be killed by the snake Takṣaka. Smīka reprimands his son for having acted too rashly. Unfortunately, the curse cannot be withdrawn. Therefore Smīka decides to send a pupil as a messenger to warn Parikṣit against Takṣaka. The pupil is properly instructed by Smīka in what to say (samādiṣya kuśalaprasnaṁ kāryavṛtīṁ eva ca, v. 14). The reception of the messenger by king Parikṣit is a formal affair. Thus, it takes place in the sābhā, where the king is accompanied by his advisors (mantrisamnidhau v. 16). The messenger is properly announced by the doorkeepers (dvāḥsthair niveditaḥ), honoured (pūjitaḥ, v. 15), and allowed to take a rest (parisrānto, v. 16) before addressing the king and the mantrins. After that he addresses Parikṣit, informing him of the curse: “within seven days Takṣaka will be your death” (takṣakah saptaratrena mṛtyus te vai bhavīṣyati, v. 19). The next passage of the message is interesting, for the pupil is reported to have said “again and again (sic) [to Parikṣit]: protect yourself against him!” (tatra raksām kuruveti punah punar athābhavītai, v. 20). The reason for this “repetition” seems obvious: it is meant to convey an idea of urgency. It is also meant to express the anxiety on the part of the messenger or his guru Smīka that Parikṣit takes the necessary precautions against Takṣaka’s attack.

⁴¹ Mānavadharmaśāstra VII 64: anuraktah śucir daśah smṛtimāṃ desakālavitaḥ / vāpūsmaṁ vītabhir vāgmi dūto rājñāḥ prasāyate, “(Such) an ambassador is commended to a king (who is) loyal, honest, skilful, possessing a good memory, who knows the (proper) place and time (for action, who is) handsome, fearless and eloquent” (G. Bühler 1886, p. 226).
Some conclusions

I do not want to force the issue of which developed out of which, Kāvya out of the art of writing diplomatic records or, vice versa, the art of writing diplomatic letters out of Kāvya. However, the first evidence of a serious, organized writing culture consists of edicts issued from the royal chanceries. In the case of fictional literature the use of writing is not self-evident. Furthermore, the specific direction taken by Kāvya in its poetics might be explained as an elaboration of the art of writing letters, with its concern for saying things diplomatically. On the basis of these points it is tempting to suggest that Kāvya developed in the margin of the activity of writing royal edicts. The alternative scenario of independent origination of the art of writing letters and Kāvya is in any case less economical.

An entirely different question is what may have made the scribes employed in the royal chanceries start to write epic and mythological “fiction”, as their foremost task was to write diplomatic letters. One of the reasons one might think of was that they did so as an intellectual exercise. They wrote poetry in order to practice their skills and to explore the limits of their art, or, what practically comes to the same thing, to give evidence of their proficiency. What they produced were basically so-called occasional texts, which as such were not considered important enough to keep and transmit. These compositions had in the first place been aimed at the small circle formed by the scribes themselves and possibly those who were entrusted with the appointments of the scribes. Apart from anything else, this would also account for the character and subsequent history of Kāvya, which was a literature by and for a small group of like-minded connoisseurs and has been the field for learned experiments.

This tentative scenario might also help us to understand the awkward gap in the subsequent history of Kāvya between Aśvaghoṣa and Kālidāsa. For all we know, Aśvaghoṣa (first century) provides the very first evidence of writing literary Kāvya texts as an activity in its own right. Or else, he simply was the first author whose compositions were considered worthwhile to preserve and transmit. Kālidāsa, who is generally dated in the fifth century, does mention several predecessors, but these need not have been very much older than he was himself. The absence, or rareness, of Kāvya poems during this period – and the same applies to inscriptions – could be accounted for by referring to the desires or the possibilities of the royal houses to entertain an active culture policy involving public poetry in Sanskrit. Even so, the real question is how the art of Kāvya managed to survive during these four intermediate centuries. We could now argue that it was simply never absent.
It was there in the royal chanceries as part of the training of prospective scribes. For, even if between the first and fifth centuries no (or hardly any) public inscriptions and Kāvya poems were produced, the writing of official documents continued, and with that, the development of the art and the examination of its practitioners. When in the fifth century the Guptas tried to revive, or establish, a “classical” literary tradition, they did not have to look very far for poets who were able to write in that vein. The poets had, so to speak, been living under one roof with them from the beginning. It could thus have been the chanceries and their scribes who account for the continuity in the otherwise chequered early history of Kāvya.

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