The Dissemination of Aśoka’s Rock and Pillar Edicts *

1. Introduction

The corpus of inscriptions attributed to the Maurya emperor Aśoka includes two sets of inscriptions which each appear as a series. The Rock Edict (RE) series consists of fourteen consecutive proclamations carved on large boulders at nine widely scattered sites (including the fragments of Sopārā and Sannathi); the Pillar Edict (PE) series consists of seven proclamations found on free-standing pillars at six different places. With one exception (in Erāgudi), the edicts occur everywhere in exactly the same order. This would suggest that the texts of both the Rock and Pillar Edicts were received at those places as existing and complete series. However, as far as I know this conclusion has never been explicitly drawn. Instead, all options regarding this matter seem to have been kept open. Thus, Norman, for instance, writes: “the fact that at all sites ... PE 1-6 were inscribed while the pillars were lying horizontally on the ground implies either that all six edicts were received at the same time, or that the scribes were informed that more edicts were on their way and the pillars should not be raised until they

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1 For the so-called Rock Edicts (RE), the references are to the texts as reconstructed by Schneider 1978; for the two Separate (Rock) Edicts (SE) of Dhauli (Dh.) and Jaugada (J.), I quote from Alsdorf 1962. Note that Alsdorf’s SE I is Hultsch’s II (Hultsch 1925). I have retained the alphabetical labels of the sentences introduced by Hultsch; for the Minor Rock Edicts (MRE), I refer to Andersen 1990; for all the remaining edicts, which include the Pillar Edicts (PE), I refer to Hultsch 1925.

2 For maps showing the distribution of Aśoka’s edicts, see Allchin-Norman 1985. Note that the fragments of the texts of the Rock Edicts at Sopārā (Hultsch 1925: xv) and Sannathi (Ramesh 1990) are not found on rocks but on stone slabs.

3 The confusion of the order in Erāgudi seems to have been caused by the fact that the edicts are distributed over several smaller, dispersed boulders.
had arrived, or that each edict arrived before the carving of the preceding one had been finished and the pillar had been erected” (Norman 1987: 137).

Norman’s scenario applies in the first place to the Pillar Edicts, which were all (except for the seventh) issued within the span of one year, namely in the twenty-sixth year of the emperor’s reign. However, in the case of the Rock Edicts the situation is much more complicated. Of these, only the fourth has been formally dated, namely in the emperor’s twelfth year. The fifth edict - and something similar is seen in REs III, VIII, and XIII - refers to the institution of a particular kind of officer by the emperor in his thirteenth year. All we can say about the date of this edict is that it was issued some time after the thirteenth year.

If the edicts, which for all we know belonged to different years, were indeed disseminated gradually and individually, complications arise when we turn to the stemmatical relationships existing between the different versions of the Rock Edict series. The edicts at the various sites, which occasionally show considerable textual variation, were divided by Schneider (1973 and 1978: 9-19) into two recensions. The versions of Girnar in the west and Dhauli and Jagdā in the east have many new features in common in practically all edicts of the series. These three versions appear to constitute a separate recension distinct from the one transmitted in the four other versions from the northwest (Mānehrā and Shāhīdzārāhī), the north (Kālshi) and the south (Er-ṛāṛudī). However, it is not easy to explain how the local authorities of Girnar, after having received the text of Edict I from the source which also fathered the Dhauli and Jagdā versions, years later received the text of Edict XIV from this very same source. In fact, the easiest way to explain the close stemmatical relationship between Girnar, on the one hand, and Dhauli and Jagdā, on the other, is to assume that the edicts were disseminated as a set.

Scholars appear to have been reluctant to draw this conclusion. One of the reasons for this is probably the absence of convincing internal evidence. However, as I will try to show, we are not dealing with two sets of inscriptions which originated more or less accidentally and over the course of time. Instead, we appear to be dealing with two carefully selected compilations of edicts, one of which was to be engraved along the outer borders of the empire, and the other in the centre of it. The content of each series appears to have been specifically adapted to its intended audience.

It will be clear that it makes a considerable difference for the reconstruction of the history and function of the inscriptions if they were simultaneously disseminated as a series and not gradually and individually. For instance, while RE IV was issued in the twelfth year, on the basis of RE V it is clear that the series as a whole can only have been compiled some time after the thirteenth year. This means that against the (often tacit) assumption that the edicts were drawn up for the specific purpose of serving as texts for inscriptions, we will have to make a distinction between the edicts proper and the inscriptions, the latter representing a secondary use of existing documents. Both the edicts and the inscriptions will each have had their own specific functions, which have to be determined all over again.

Another problem to be reconsidered is the relationship between the Rock Edicts, on the one hand, and the Pillar Edicts, on the other. The Pillar Edicts, or at least the first six of them, are all dated to the twenty-sixth regnal year. At first sight it is as if the emperor, after having dispatched Rock Edicts to the extreme corners of the realm during the first part of his reign, in the second became more interested in the core area of the realm and caused inscribed pillars to be erected there. However, on closer inspection the time gap between the “earlier” Rock Edict inscriptions and the “later” Pillar Edicts may have been much less than assumed so far, if there was one at all. For all we know the Rock Edict series might have been issued as late as the twenty-sixth year. In any case, the thirteenth year of RE V is no more than a date post quem. Given this, it is important to note that, as I will try to show, the two series of edicts are virtually complementary, each having been directed at an “audience” of its own. This would suggest that the dissemination of the Rock Edicts to the outer districts and that of the Pillar Edicts to the districts lying in the interior were part of one and the same centralized undertaking.

Finally, then arises the question of whether the compilation of the texts of the inscriptions and their dissemination indeed took place during the lifetime of the emperor in whose name the edicts were originally issued. As I will argue, we should reckon with the possibility that the inscriptions were not, in which case we would be dealing with monuments...
dedicated to a past ruler who had already acquired legendary status. As such, the inscriptions provide evidence corroborating the Buddhist legends about Aśoka, whose name is indeed found, albeit as a later insertion, in some of the inscriptions.

2. The Rock Edict Series as a Compilation

Schneider (1978: 152-176) divides the series of fourteen Rock Edicts into three blocks: I-IV, V-XIII, and XIV. He distinguishes between an original series, formed by I-IV, and material which has been added more or less randomly later (V-XIII and XIV). As far as section V-XIII is concerned, Schneider was not able to detect even a trace of a system which could account for the sequence as a whole. All he could point to are occasional thematic connections between pairs of immediately following edicts, with the criteria changing from case to case. The situation in I-IV is no better, as this block was subdivided by Schneider into two pairs of edicts, namely I-II and III-IV.

Thus Schneider was unable to find a principle which could account for the selection of the edicts in the series as a whole. According to Schneider, we are ultimately dealing with a random collection of edicts, which had grown over a certain period of time. In this connection the following two points discussed by Schneider may be mentioned. Regarding the Edicts III and IV he concludes that this pair, despite their close formal connection, can hardly have been written (or engraved) at the same time. Likewise, in connection with the sequence of Edicts IV and V Schneider notes that the order of the edicts is chronological, reflecting a development in the emperor’s political thought. The main point of discussion for Schneider is the time or the number of years involved in this development (op. cit., p. 160-163).

One argument for the Rock Edict series not being a random collection but rather a careful compilation is furnished by the fourteenth and final edict, which seems to serve as a veritable caputio benevolentiae to the preceding texts:

[A] iyāṁ dharmāṁ ādhutam piyādassamā tājina līkhāpitā: athi yeva samkhileva, athi majhimena, athi vithaṭenē.
[B] no hi savata save ghaṭīte.
[C] mahātāke hi vijite bahu ca likhite līkhāpayiṣāt eva nikāyam.
[D] athi ca hetu puna puna lapite tasa tasa atthasa madhuliyāye eva: Jane tathā paṭipajeyat.
[E] se sīyā ati kichi asamati likhite desaṁ va samkhāya kālanamo va alocayītā tipikālāpalādhena va tī.

Schneider translates the edict as follows (1978: 119):

[A] Diese Schrift über den Dharma ist auf Veranlassung des Königs D.P. geschrieben worden: Sie existiert schon, sei es in mehr oder weniger abgekürzter, sei es in ausführlicher (Form).
[B] Denn nicht überall paßt alles.
[C] Denn weit ist mein Reich, und viel ist geschrieben worden: und ich werde auch in Zukunft (?) noch weiter schreiben lassen.
[D] 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.

Bloch (1950: 133, n. 1) rightly characterized this edict as a “post-face”. Indeed, contrary to the preceding edicts, it does not provide instruction, and instead apologizes for elements in the texts which may have annoyed (repetition, writing mistakes) or confused (different versions) the reader.

The preceding thirteen edicts may be roughly divided into two groups, namely I-III and IV-XIII. IV-XIII may be divided again into two sec--

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5 “Es sieht so aus, als seien von VII an die Edikte nur noch lose, fast möchte man sagen: nach Bedarf oder geplant, angehängt worden, ohne daß sich Aśoka über ihre logische Abfolge viel Gedanken gemacht hätte” (Schneider 1978: 164).

6 “Allenfalls könnte man ... den starken Verdacht äußern, daß III und IV trotz ihrer engen formalen Zusammengehörigkeit, kaum in einem Zuge geschrieben (und eingemischt) wurden” (Schneider 1978: 160). On the same page, while discussing the following block of edicts, Schneider wishes to leave open “ob dann das Ganze auch in einem Zuge oder nur stückweise diktiert, bzw. geschrieben wurde”.

7 “Wachsende Schwierigkeiten ... werden es am ehesten gewesen sein, die ihn zu den in V sich widerspiegelnden härteren Maßnahmen – und in diesem Zusammenhang auch zur Fortsetzung der, ursprünglich mit IV abgeschlossenen, Edikt-Reihe – veranlaßt haben” (Schneider 1978: 169).

8 This sentence will be discussed by me in more detail in a forthcoming article entitled “The Aśoka Inscriptions and the Original Milieu of the Kāvya Poetic Tradition”.
tions, namely IV-VIII and IX-XIII. This division of IV-XIII is based partly on formal aspects. To begin with section IV-VIII, all these edicts (with the exception of VII) share a similar pattern and terminology. First they mention the past (atikamtaṃ amtalama) in IV A, V H, VI B, VIII A), in which, for instance, many living beings were killed. Next, the focus switches to the emperor’s own time, in which the killing of living beings does not take place any longer. Some of the edicts (IV and V) go even one step further and mention measures undertaken by the emperor which should ensure that in the future the situation will not relapse, but instead will improve.

With IX the pattern and terminology change. In section IX-XIII the emperor introduces a distinction between ordinary liberalities or ordinary ceremonies, on the one hand, and dharma-liberalities and dharma-ceremonies, on the other. Only the latter type of undertakings he deems (ma[m]nati) fruitful (mahāphala or mahākāvaka) because they are done with the life in the hereafter in mind (palata, palatika). A variant of the expression (ma[m]nati) mahāphalā/mahākāvaka found in IX, X, XII and XIII is the phrase “There is no liberality (so beneficial) as dharma-liberality” (nathi hedise dâne adîse dhammadâne), found in XI B and IX p.

It should immediately be added that the division between these two groups is not completely watertight. That is to say, a reference to happiness in heaven is also found in VI (L). On the other hand, no reference to the past (atikamtaṃ amtalama) is found in the second group. Furthermore, because of the absence of the phrase atikamtaṃ amtalama in RE VII, its positioning in the atikamtaṃ amtalama group is unclear. Unfortunately, other possible factors which might account for the present position of this extremely brief edict are not clear.

If group IV-XIII is indeed mainly concerned with formal aspects, the edicts providing samples of types of edicts, this is only part of the picture. In addition it is possible to detect in section IX-XIII a kind of logical order, with the edicts as it were working towards a particular point. Thus, after the enumeration of all kinds of activities (e.g. ceremonies, the acquisition of fame, and liberality), which are contrasted to their dharma-inspired counterparts, in RE XIII three different types of conquest are mentioned. The third type of conquest is the so-called dharma-conquest (dhammanvijaya), which the emperor considers the most fruitful of the three because it brings happiness in this life as well as in the hereafter (see XIII P: iyam cu mokhyamute vijaye devanam-

piyasa e dhammanvijaye, and X-Y: tam eva ca vijayaṃ mumṇantu e dhammanvijaye. se hi kidalokikapalatalotike). This type of conquest is characterized by the absence of any element of force or violence and consists basically of advertising one’s ideas and trying to convert people to them. The dharma-conquest is applied in particular to the people living at and beyond the outer limits of the empire—precisely where the Rock Edicts are found!

This outcome seems to be foreshadowed in the beginning of the series. Thus in I-III we can see how the scene shifts quite explicitly from the emperor’s palace to the realm as a whole and its neighbours and to the neighbours of its neighbours. The emperor is thus indirectly presented as attempting to introduce ideas which he practiced at home into his vast realm and even beyond.

After an introduction (iyaṃ dhammalipi devānampiyena piyudasinā lājinā Ekhāpita A) RE I opens with the word hida “here”. Opinions have been divided as to whether this hida refers to the capital, the realm, or the site where the inscription is found (see Schneider 1978: 120-121). In an attempt to reach a decision in this matter, we might have a look at the measures enumerated in the edict. First (B) the emperor mentions that “here” he has abolished animal sacrifices. After this (C-E) he says to have limited the number of samāyās to the necessary minimum. As in the case of the abolishment of animal sacrifices, the motive behind this measure was most likely to minimize the killing of animals, for festive gatherings used to involve large dinner and drinking parties. So far we seem to have to do with public or official occasions. Next (F), the emperor seems to switch to more private matters and describes how he has managed to reduce the number of animals killed in his own palace kitchen for the sake of his daily meals (sūpāthāye). In my opinion, the emperor: does not switch in this edict from the great achievement of having abolished the killing of animals in his entire realm to reducing the quantity of meat in his own private menu. Instead, the enumeration proceeds from killing no animals (abolishment of sacrifices), to killing animals occasionally (in the case of necessary gatherings9), to killing animals daily (anuvivasanā [F]), but in this case only a few (in

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9 In this connection I would like to refer to, for instance, the aksapatala meetings, described in Arthasastra 2.7. During this meeting the mahāmātras reported their activities during the last year (or season or month).
the palace kitchen). The implication of the enumeration is that like the third the first two measures would concern in the first place occasions at which the emperor is present in person or in the organization of which he is personally involved.

If *hida* in RE I indeed refers to the emperor's capital or home base, in II the scene shifts radically. Edict II opens with the words *savāta vijitasi* “everywhere in the realm”. The horizon is extended even further by a list, which follows immediately, of the people neighbouring on the realm, namely the Greek kings in the northwest and, e.g., the Cholas in the south. As regards the Greek kings in the northwest the edict also refers to the people living beyond these Greek kings. After this are mentioned, among other things, the facilities which the emperor had provided everywhere along the roads for men and beasts.

After some introductory formulae RE III, like RE II, opens with the words *savāta vijitasi* (C). This is followed by the description of a measure introduced by the emperor in the twelfth year of his reign, namely inspection tours made once every five years by the *yutas, lājükas* and *pādesikas*. During these tours the said officials are to see to (1) “this matter” (*etāye athāye*), (2) “this dharma instruction” (*imāye dharmānusathīye*), and (3) “(any) other business” (*annāye pi kaṃmane* [C]). It is tempting to take the first measure (1) as referring to the maintenance of the facilities mentioned in RE II. If so, it could, as Schneider would have it (1978: 122), of course also include the promotion of the abolition of sacrifices mentioned in RE I. In any case, the edict itself does not seem to contain a specification or example of what is meant with *etāye athāye*, unless it refers to the institution of the inspection tours itself. In this respect the case of the two following measures is different. Thus, D seems to supply an example of a *dharma instruction* (2): *sāduḥ mātāpituhu svāsa mitasamsthulanātikānaṃ ca bhāvvanasamanānām ca sāduḥ dāne pannanam annāmbhe sāduḥ*. The next phrase, *apavijita apubhamdattā sāduḥ* “it is good not to spend too much, it is good not to hoard too much”, concerns financial matters, and seems in its turn to provide an example of the type of business involved under the heading *annāye pi kaṃmane* (3).

From PE IV it appears that the *yutas* and *lājükas* mentioned here are independently operating local rulers or administrators. PE IV mentions their *atapatiye*, or autonomy (D and J). The very name or title *pādesika* suggests that we are dealing with a local administrator as well. The position in the administration of the *paliṣā*, mentioned in E (*paliṣā pi ca gananasi yuttāni anapayisam[ā]miḥ hetu ca viyanjyanate ca*) is unfortunately less clear. It all depends on whether *paliṣā* is singular (the emperor’s *parisad*) or plural (the *yutas* own *parisads*) as well as on the meaning of the verb *anapayisam[ā]mi* (“order” or “inform”; in the latter case we might translate: “the [local] *parisads* inform the *yutas* [and lājükas and *pādesikas*] about the calculations by [supplying] reasons and specifications”).

Whatever is exactly the case here, RE III does contain a silent admission that the emperor cannot personally check upon the way his instructions are being implemented by the local authorities. Given the extent of the realm, the emperor simply has to leave matters to the local authorities. Completely in accordance with this, the ideas and measures mentioned in the edicts which follow (IV-XIII) seem to lie in the sphere of ethics rather than in that of practical government. Furthermore, the edicts IV-XIII seem to have served mainly as examples of types of edicts such as were issued by the emperor, which further reduces their practical use. In any case, at the moment of the compilation of the series the measures mentioned in them appear to have been secondary to aspect of format and vocabulary. In addition, the Rock Edicts are not systematically dated, as a result of which they lack a temporal context, and the measures announced in them are removed even further from the daily practice of government. All these peculiarities become all the more clear if we compare the Rock Edicts with the pillar Edicts, which will be discussed next and which will appear to breathe a completely different spirit.

In the above I have tried to show that the Rock Edict series is not the random collection it has often been taken to be. For one thing, it appears to have been arranged according to at least some plan, with an

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10 As noted by Zimmermann (1987: 182), “The meat diet was a feature of royalty and served not only as an observable fact of life but also as a representative model of life”.

11 A more complete description of the realm is furnished in RE XIII, which adds Orissa (C) as well as, among others, the Bhojas from the west (Q).

12 See below, p. 16. PE IV will be discussed by me in more detail in a forthcoming article entitled “The Interrogative Pronouns *kam, kāni* and *kimti* in the Aśoka Edicts”.

13 Note, however, that according to PE IV G-H the contacts between the emperor and the local administrators such as the *yutas* were not maintained by the emperor’s *parisad* (*paliṣā*) but by his *pulisas* or “men”.

introduction (I-III) and a conclusion (XIV). The group in the middle may be divided into two subgroups on the basis of formal criteria. It is also possible to detect some logical order, in the sense that the scene goes from the emperor’s own home base in I to the policy to be adopted towards the people living at and beyond the outer limits of the empire. Interestingly, it is at sites facing these people that the Rock Edict inscriptions are found.

3. The Contents of the Pillar Edicts

One of the more obvious differences between the Rock and Pillar Edicts concerns the dates. Thus, while some of the Rock Edicts, since the Edicts presumably cover the entire period of the emperor’s reign, would no longer have been topical at the time of their engraving, six of the seven Pillar Edicts belong to one and the same, the twenty-sixth year of his reign.14 Thus the Pillar Edicts are provided with a context. It is as if in the inscriptions we are dealing with real edicts and as if the measures announced in them are topical, requiring the immediate attention of the authorities. Interestingly, at the same time, the importance of edicts in government is downplayed in favour of a more direct contact of the emperor with the local authorities. In what follows I will try to show that, like the Rock Edicts, the Pillar Edicts, or at least the first six of them, do not form a random collection but that their arrangement betrays some definite design.

In RE XI the emperor as a true mīmāṃsaka distinguishes between ordinary ceremonies leading to happiness in this life and so-called dharma-ceremonies, which lead to happiness both in this life and in the hereafter. In PE I15 the emperor returns to this combination by noting that this happiness is difficult to realize without the utmost (aśa) lust (kāma) for dharma, the utmost prudence, the utmost obedience, the utmost fear of sin and the utmost energy.16 The emperor continues by noting that as a result of his own instruction (presumably through edicts) the desire for dharma as well as the lust for dharma (dhammaśeṣkā dharmakāmatā cā) has increased and will continue to increase (D). His officials are involved in the implementation of this dharma polities as well. Here the emperor distinguishes between pulisas (E), i.e., officials directly answerable to him,17 and amitamahāmātras (F), that is, officials living far away from the centre at the edges of the empire who more or less go their own ways.

One of the key-words in PE I ostensibly being dharma, in PE II the emperor deals with the question of what dharma is: dharma involves actions which bring little “influx” (apāśinave) and much virtue (kaṇā),18 such as compassion, liberality, truth and purity. Next, he enumerates three types of action undertaken by him in this line. Thus, he says, he has bestowed many kinds of gifts of vision (cakñudāne [D]) and has shown many types of compassion (anuvāke) to men and animals, including sparing their lives (pāṇadākhiṇā [E]); he concludes (G) that writing this dharma-edict itself is yet another part of the same policy.

In the third Pillar Edict the emperor provides a list of counter-productive actions, that is, actions which cause “inflow” (dśinavāgāṁti [F]). He does so because people in general have great difficulty in recognizing (and acknowledging) their bad deeds (C). One of the key-words in this edict is the verb dekkhī “to see, to regard”. It occurs in B (kayānāma dekkhati), C (no mina pāyam dekkhati), D (dupatiyeyake), E (heeyam cu kha esa dekkhiye), and G (esa bātha dekkhiye). Given the pivotal role played by this verb one may rightfully ask if it is not this edict which the emperor anticipated when in the preceding edict he mentions that he had made the cakñudāne. Indeed, one cannot escape from the impression that the edicts III-VI elaborate the programme announced in II. For, if PE III indeed provides an elaboration of the “gift of the eye”, PEs IV and V deal with compassion towards men and animals, including sparing their lives. And, as we will see, PE VI deals among other things with the effects of edicts, the third point specified in PE II.

However, if this is so, the set IV-VI elaborates yet another point, namely one already made in PE I. Thus, while in PE I the emperor mentions the role played by his officials in the execution of his dharma-

14 I shall return to the status of PE VII in the Pillar Edict series below, p. 27f.
15 Unless otherwise stated, references to, and quotation from, the Pillar Edicts are based on the Delhi-Tōpāra version.
16 (C) hiddīparāte dveṣapatiyād eṣṭaṇantā agāya dhammakāmatāya agāya politkāya agāya susūyāya aghera bhagyā aghera uṣkṣhena.
17 For the pulisa, see also what I have said above, p. 13, n. 13.
18 I take apāśinave bhaktyāne (C; bhaktyāne as a compound, with Bloch 1950: 162) as providing a general characteristic of dharma, and what follows (dayā dāne aṣe socaye) as a list of specific items. Compare PE III (F), in which first we have imdāni dśinavāgāṁtina nāma and then a list of sins: alha (Skt. yathā “such as, for instance”) camīghiye, niṭṭāliye ...
policy, IV deals explicitly with delegation. At the same time, in IV as well as in V he indicates several concrete measures he did not want to leave to the discretion of the local administrators but had introduced himself. Something similar is seen in PE VI. As said, in PE I the emperor mentions the role of instruction in the fostering of the desire and lust for dharma. As suggested, it is not unlikely that he is referring to instruction through edicts here. If so, in PE VI he is returning to that, in the sense that according to him, writing edicts is not enough for fostering the dharma but requires in addition his personal attendance as well.

In PE IV the emperor notes that in matters of rewards and punishments he has given the lajúkas a free hand (atapatiye me kale, D; see also J), so that they will be able to work confidently and fearlessly towards the welfare and happiness of the people dependent upon them. At the end of the edict, however, the emperor specifies the space in the political arena which he claims for himself:

[L] My direct, personal involvement (āvuti) goes so far: to people who have been imprisoned, have gone through the judicial process and have (finally) been convicted to death, three days are given by me as a yote.

Whatever the meaning of the word yote may be, it is clear that what is meant here is a three-day stay of the execution. As such, we are dealing with an instance of pānadākkhīna mentioned in PE II. While in this edict it concerns the “gift of life” to men, PE V elaborates the gift of life made to animals. Again we seem to be dealing with measures which he did not leave to the discretion of the local authorities but introduced himself: “By me the following species (of animals) are declared inviolable” (B).

PE VI reads as follows:

[A] devānmampiye piyadasi lāya kevam akā
[B] dūvadassasa abhisitena me dhammalipi līkāpātā lokāsā hītāsukkhāye se tam apahatā tam tam dhammavaddhi pāpovā
[C] kevam lokāsā hītāsukke ti paṭivekkhāmi atha iyaṃ nātisu kevam paṭiyāsaṃmesu kevam apakāthesu kim am kāni sukkam āvahāmi ti tathā ca vidahāmi

The first I would like to take a closer look at the sentences A and B, which seem to form a section in themselves. The first thing to note is the absence of iyaṃ in B. Thus, where PE I, IV, B, and the very last sentence of the edict under discussion read saduvaṭisasa abhisitena me iyaṃ dhammalipi līkāpātā, in PE VI B we have duvuṭivadasa abhiseṭena me dhammalipi līkāpātā. I think that Hultsch is correct in translating: “(When I had been) anointed twelve years, rescripts on morality were caused to be written by me”, that is, the emperor refers to the activity of writing edicts here, not to the writing of this particular edict. The latter he does in sentence G, in which we find iyaṃ again: saduvaṭisasa abhisitena me iyaṃ dhammalipi līkāpātā.

The grammar of the second part of B, se tam apahatā tam tam pāpovā, is problematic. In the first place we have the sequence se tam... tam tam, and secondly we have the curious form pāpovā. As regards the sequence se tam... tam tam, it should be noted that this is the only instance of the combination se tam in the corpus of the Aśoka inscriptions. As far as I can see, we seem to be dealing with a variant of tam tam, and we have to do with a sequence corresponding to Sanskrit tad tad... tad tad “here and there ... here and there”. If so, pāpovā, which in one way or the other has been derived from pāpovā (Bloch 1950: 167, n. 3), must be a past participle (pāpovā for pāpota!) like apakahā (Skt aparhtitā). The question that arises is what is the subject of apakahā. Theoretically it could be the dhammalipi mentioned in the preceding part. Most likely, however, it is feminine dhammavaddhi found with pāpovā. Sentences A and B may conformingly be translated as follows:

[A] King Devānanmāpiya Piyadasī says thus:
[B] In the twelfth year after my anointment dharma-edicts have been ordered by me to be written for the good and welfare of the people. Here and there (the growth of the dharma) has been aborted, here and there the growth of the dharma has been realized.

19 The exact meaning of the term āvuti, which occurs here as well as in SE I (Dh. J. K) and SE II (Dh. M. J. N), will be dealt with in the forthcoming article mentioned above, p. 13, n. 12. There I will also attempt an interpretation of the following sentence M, which involves, among other things, a new interpretation of the form nāsāmam.

20 See PE II E: dvapadaṭupadesu ... vividhi me anugaha kale ā pānadākkhīnaye.

21 For āka having the present tense, see Goodall 2001: 109. n. 9.

22 The interpretations of Hultsch and Bloch of the second part of sentence B differ considerably from the one given by me above. I would like to quote these
Interpreted in this way sentences A and B imply that in the attempt to foster the dharma writing edicts is not sufficient, as the message is not taken up everywhere in the same way. And indeed in the following sentences the emperor insists on the importance of his personal interference in the lives of his subjects:

[C] Knowing that [this promotes] the good and the welfare of the people, I look after each individual (pañca) group: in the same way as [I look after] my relatives, [I look after] the people living close by and those living far away. And, knowing how I can bring happiness to each and every one, I arrange things accordingly. 24

[D] In exactly the same way | look after all the individual (Buddhist) groups.

[E] And also all heretics are honoured by me with various forms of honour.

[F] However, a personal visit to (or: joining the ceremonies of) each (of these groups), is considered by far the most effective (thing) I can do.

[G] In the twenty-sixth year after my anointment this edict was caused by me to be written.

If my interpretation of the first six Pillar Edicts is correct, then, as in the case of the Rock Edicts, we are dealing with a compilation of carefully selected edicts. This finding has far-reaching consequences for our interpretation of the inscriptions. One of the more obvious consequences, to be discussed in the following, is the necessity of maintaining a clear distinction between the edicts and the inscriptions.

24 Already here I wish to make an exemption for the word lipi in RE XIV and in PE VII, in which cases it does seem to refer to the inscription. For the nature of PE VII, see below, p. 27f. and 32f. For RE XIV, see above, p. 9.


26 Scholars’ translations without further comments. Hultzsch (1925: 129) translates: “rescripts on morality were caused to be written by me for the welfare and happiness of the people, (in order that), not transgressing [aprahṛtad] those (rescripts), they might attain a promotion of morality in various respects”; and Bloch (1950: 167): “Quiconque le [the edict H.T.] respectera [a-praḥṛtad] doit obtenir de façon ou d’autre le progrès dans la Loi”.

27 Compare Hultzsch 1925: 129 (“Thinking): ‘thuze the welfare and happiness of the people (will be secured), I am directing my attention not only [bha iyan] to (my) relatives, but to those who are near and far, in order that [kima] I may lead them [kasi] to happiness, and I am instructing (them) accordingly.”) and Bloch 1950: 167-168 (“Voici comment j’entends le bien et le bonheur du monde. Comme pour mes parents, pareillement les proches et les lointains, je veux procurer à certains le bonheur, et prends des mesures en conséquence”).

4. EDICTS VERSUS INSCRIPTIONS

Until now, scholars do not seem to have distinguished between the edicts and the inscriptions. The edicts are taken to have been specifically composed for the inscriptions. Thus, the word lipi, with which the edicts refer to themselves, has often been translated with “inscription”. See, for instance, Alsdorf’s translation (1962: 37) of SE I (Dh. N) iyam ca lipi ... sotaviyā with “Und diese Inschrift ist ... zu Gebühr zu bringen”.

However, if the Rock and Pillar Edict series are indeed compilations we have to do with selections out of a corpus of existing documents. The word lipi found in the edicts should then be taken to refer to the original document, the function of which need not necessarily be to provide the content for an inscription. 25 In this connection I would like to refer to Separate Edicts I and II, in which the local authorities are enjoined to have the documents (lipi) read aloud on the Tsya day at the beginning of every new season. 27 It is indeed not very likely, or at least there are no indications, that the communal or administrative meetings referred to here took place on the hilltops or slopes where the two inscriptions are found. 26 Moreover, the passage referred to just now, which mentions the reading aloud of the text during communal meetings, is followed by another that states that every mahāmātra should read the text to himself whenever he cares to. 27 This passage evidently...
makes more sense in the case of, for instance, a letter kept in an archive
than that of an inscription situated in a "public" place.

As I see it, we have to do with original letters of the emperor which
had been addressed to the local authorities. Note in this connection the
opening sentences in the Separate Rock Edicts, e.g. SE I (Dh. A): de-
vānappyaya vacanena tosaliyam kumāle mahāmātā ca vataviyā. "Auf
Anordnung Seiner Majestät ist dem Vizekönig und den Mahāmātras
zu Tossali kundzutun" (Alsdorf 1962: 36). The vice-king and the
Mahāmātras are ordered to have the text read aloud during the com-
munal gatherings organized by them. Examples of such ceremonies are
the day of the settling of the accounts in the royal aksapatala hall
(described in the Arthāśāstra) and the Buddhist uposatha (see Tieken
2000: 11-13). In either case, we are dealing with achaepalas organiza-
tions, in which every individual member, as a co-sharer (mahāmātra and
bhikkhu respectively), had a voting right, or rather, had a right to put
his ideas before the meeting and to try to win the agreement of the
other members. The purpose of the meetings was to report of one's
activities of the past year (or season or month) and to establish the
conditions for future collaboration. The sending of letters such as
preserved in the Separate Edicts to the local leaders at Tossali (Dhauil)
and Sānpā (Jaungāda) and the request that they have these letters read
at the communal gatherings seem to represent an attempt by an out-
sider to establish control over the respective communities. As for the
local leaders, their having the letters read at the meeting implies
acceptance of the sender as an important member of the community
and agreement with his ideas concerning government and administra-
tion. As such the missives played a role in the attempt to establish con-
tral, however nominal, over an area extending far beyond the nuclear
area over which the king was able to exercise direct control through his
personal presence; they betray the king's imperial aspirations.

Whatever may have been the exact function of the original documents,
I think we would do well to maintain a rigorous distinction between
these original documents and the inscriptions, which represent their
secondary use. This situation raises a number of questions. One of these
concerns the time elapsed between the composition of the original
documents and their compilation. This question becomes most obvious
if we compare the Rock Edicts with the Pillar Edicts. It is generally
assumed that the Rock Edicts hail from the earlier period of the
emperor's reign and the Pillar Edicts from the later period. This
assumption has been based on the dates mentioned in the texts, which,
however, seem to belong to the original documents. As such they do not
provide information on their compilation and engraving, which may
have taken place many years later. In this light the relationship between
the two sets of inscriptions will have to be considered anew, in which
some of the findings made above concerning the differences between
the two sets will play an important role. Another question concerns the
function of the inscriptions, that is, the purpose of making compil-
ations of existing documents and having them engraved on rocks and
pillars. A related question concerns the role of Aśoka, who has been
generally credited with the composition of the texts of the inscriptions.
Among these problems I will also discuss the evidence which suggests
that the edict series were accompanied by colophons which provided
specifications concerning the engraving of the inscriptions.

5. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ROCK EDICTS
AND THE PILLAR EDICTS

As far as I am aware, the question of the relationship between the Rock
Edicts and the Pillar Edicts has not to date been explicitly dealt with.
I have the impression, however, that the Rock Edicts, the edicts as well
as the inscriptions, are generally believed to belong to the first part of
the emperor's career and the Pillar Edicts to the later part. The tacit
assumption is that in the course of his reign the emperor switched from
engraving edicts on rocks to engraving them on pillars. Thus, while the
"dates" found in the Rock Edicts do not go beyond the thirteenth year,
the PEs I-VI are indeed all issued as late as the twenty-sixth year of
the emperor's reign; there is a seventh Pillar Edict, found only in Delhi-
Tōprā, which was issued one year later.

In this connection I would like to turn to the nature of the dates men-
tioned in the Rock Edicts. As already noted above, of the fourteen Rock
Edicts only the fourth was formally dated: the text was drawn up in
the twelfth year of the emperor's reign (RE IV K). As indicated, years
are mentioned in some other edicts but these are part of the message.
Thus, in III it is mentioned that in his twelfth year the emperor ordered
that inspection tours were to be held (RE III B-C), and in V that the
emperor prides himself on the institution of the office of dhammadha-

28 See, for instance, Andersen (1986: 85), who notes that "me als Agens vor-
wiegend in den späteren Säuleninschriften verwendet wird" (italics mine).
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hāmala in his thirteenth year (RE V I). However, in either case these dates need not be those of the respective edicts, which may have been issued many years later. This situation is even clearer in the thirteenth edict in which the emperor, after having mentioned the conquest of Kalinga in his eighth year, continues with “then, later, now that the country of the Kalinagas has been (completely) taken” (RE XIII C: tato pachā adhvunā ladhesu kaligesu). We do not know how much time had elapsed between the eighth year and “now”, that is, the year in which the edict was drawn up. To that we would now have to add the time elapsed between the composition of the edict and the compilation of the edict series.

Contrary to the Rock Edicts, the first six Pillar Edicts are all dated in one and the same year, namely the twenty-sixth year of the emperor’s reign. If it is supposed that this was also the year in which the Pillar inscriptions were engraved, it will be clear from the foregoing that the rock inscriptions cannot be much older than those on pillars. In fact, I think we should seriously reckon with the possibility that the two sets of inscriptions were engraved more or less simultaneously.

I would like to draw attention to the division of labour between the two edict series, each of which, as we have seen, has a programme of its own. Thus, as argued above, the Rock Edicts IV-XIV seem to have been selected mainly as samples of edicts. As such the series shows a concern with the phenomenon of edicts in government rather than with the contents of the particular edicts. This impression is further strengthened by the fact that the majority of edicts have not been dated and as such are presented out of context. By contrast, the first six Pillar Edicts are dated in the same year, which, while providing a temporal context, draws attention to the contents of the edicts and the implementation of the measures mentioned in them. Furthermore, after having acknowledged the difficulties his officials and subjects might have in living according to the dharma, in the Pillar Edicts the emperor provides clear guidelines. Some of the measures mentioned in the Pillar Edicts are indeed of a strikingly concrete nature, certainly if they are compared to the admonishments given in the Rock Edicts, which are mainly concerned with general ethics and life in the hereafter. Reference may be made here to the list of animals one is forbidden to main or kill on certain festive days given in PE V. At the same time, in addition to edicts good and effective government is said to require the personal presence and active interference of the ruler in the local affairs. As said, with this the Pillar Edicts present a picture which is entirely different from that emerging from the Rock Edicts, which deal, among other things, with ruling from a distance and conquest through conversion.

A similar type of distinction may be seen if we compare the Minor Rock Edicts - found on rocks - with the Schism Edict - found on pillars. Both the Schism Edict and the Minor Rock Edicts each in their own way deal with the emperor’s involvement in the affairs of the Buddhist sāṅgha. However, in the Schism Edict the emperor provides concrete legal aid to the sāṅgha with regard to how to deal do with monks exhibiting disruptive behaviour (see Tiekken 2000). The Schism Edict contains a legal formula and specifies exactly the tasks of the various parties involved in the case of the threat of schisms. By contrast, MRE I lacks any concrete message. Instead, the emperor is basically concerned with his image, in this case that of a Buddhist monarch, describing his activities in terms derived from the lives of wandering monks.39

This distinction, or rather, contrast, between the Rock and Pillar Edicts may be explained with reference to their locations. While the Pillar Edicts are found in the middle of the realm in the Ganges basin, the inscriptions on rocks (the Rock Edicts as well as the majority of the Minor Rock Edicts) are found far removed from the centre at its very edges. As such they were addressed to people living outside the emperor’s direct control. While these people, unlike those addressed in the Pillar Edicts, could not be regularly visited by him, let alone be conquered, they could be brought over by persuasion. One of the means of achieving this would have been to take care that they at least heard of royal policy and, for instance, in the way in which the subjects and officials are instructed. Note in this connection RE XIII S:

ata pi dūtā devānampiyasase go yanti, te pi sutu devānampiyasase dhamma-vulama vihanam dhamma-nusathi dhamma na anuvihīyanti anuvihīyisanti ceto.

And where the messengers of the Beloved of the Gods do not go, the people living there, having heard ... the dharma-instruction of the Be-

39 It cannot be coincidental that these two edicts, the Schism Edict and the Minor Rock Edict, which have been disseminated individually and are not part of a series, are concerned in a direct way with the affairs of the sāṅgha. Admittedly, also RE VIII refers to a visit by the emperor to Sambodhi, the place of Buddha’s enlightenment, and in PE VI it is said that one should regularly visit the various sects in the realm. On the other hand, the term sāṅgha, and for instance also that of upāsaka, is found only in the two edicts under discussion.
loved of the Gods, will live according to that instruction and will remain doing so in the future.

Leaving aside for the moment the question of whether the Pillar Edicts were indeed immediately engraved, as argued above (p. 22), the time gap between inscriptions on rock and those on pillars may have been much less than the dates found in them might at first sight suggest. In fact, the complementarity of the two sets of edicts suggests that their dissemination and engraving was part of an activity coordinated from one and the same centre. At this centre, the capital, one would have followed two different strategies depending on whether the inscriptions were to be directed to the people living at the faraway borders or to those living in the centre of the realm.

6. THE EVIDENCE OF COLOPHONS

As stated, the Rock Edicts are found on rocks (or stone slabs) situated on the outskirts of the empire and the Pillar Edicts on pillars in the central locations. There are no cross-overs, except in the far northwest. 30 Combined with the fact that no Rock Edicts are found at frontiers within the realm, 31 that would suggest that with the dissemination of the texts and their engraving we are dealing with one and the same well-coordinated activity. As I have tried to show, the Rock Edict and Pillar Edict series differ considerably in tone and contents. Nevertheless it is doubtful that this difference alone could at all times have prevented a text which was meant to be engraved on a boulder on the outermost frontiers from being engraved on a pillar placed somewhere in the middle of the realm, or vice versa. Given this situation, it is not unreasonable to expect that the texts were accompanied by colophons with specifications as to their engraving. If so, these colophons were naturally omitted from the inscriptions. However, we do come across a few passages in the edicts themselves that contain orders concerning the inscribing of the texts. A closer look at these passages would suggest that we might have to do with the texts of colophons, which, however, somehow came to be incorporated into the texts of the edicts proper.

The first instance to be discussed is found in MRE I. The end of the Rûnpâthi version of MRE I reads as follows:

[J] etiya athâya ca sâvane kaṭe
[K] khudâka ca ufâlâ ca pakamaṃta ti
[L] aṁtâ pi ca jânaṁti
[M] iyaṁ pakame ca kimti ciraṅhitke siyâ
[N] iyaṁ hi aṁte pavâhiṃ vadhîstim ca vadhîstim aveladhiyânâ diyâdhiyân vadhîstim
[Q] iyaṁ ca aṁte pavâhiṣu lekhâpetaviye ti hîdha ca ati silâthambhe si-
lâthambhasi lekhâpetaviye ti
[R] etenâ ca vayâmyanenâ yâvatâke tuphâkaṇy âhale savata vivasâthe ti
[S] vyuthenâ sâvane kaṭe 200 50 6 sata vivasâ ti

Among the many versions of the Minor Rock Edicts, the instruction concerning engraving (Q) is peculiar to Rûnpâth, Pâhgrâriā and Sahasrâm only. R is found only in Rûnpâth, but is a variant of the Schisri Edict (Sârnâth I): âvate ca tuphâkaṇi âhale savata vivasâyatha tuphe etena vayâmyanena). In Rûnpâth the instructions (Q) are found within the text of the edict. By contrast, in Sahasrâm and Pâhgrâriā the corresponding text is found at the very end, namely after Rûnpâth’s R-S, which occurs immediately after N. Sahasrâm reads as follows:

[J] se etâye athâye iyaṃ sâvane
[K] khudâka ca ufâlâ ca pakamaṃta ti
[L] aṁtâ pi ca jânaṁti
[M] silâhitke ca pakame hotu
[N] iyaṁ ca aṁte vadhisiṣṭi vâpulâm pi ca vadhisiṣṭi diyâdhiyân ava-
lâdhiyânâ vadhîstim
[Q] iyaṁ ca sâvane vyuthena
[P] dvâv sa paṇna maṭaṣṭiṣṭi vivuthâ ti 200 50 6

30 In the extreme northwest, the text of PE VII (in Middle Indic in the Aramaic script with the Aramaic translation interspersed) has been found on a slab (Kandahâr I; see Benveniste 1966, Shaked 1969), which is the functional equivalent of a rock or mountain. In Taxila an Aramaic version of RE IV is found on a pillar. Note that the Lâmpâka (Pul-i Darântâ) inscription is found on a slab, while the text ends with the (fragmentary) instruction: “Thers were ordered to be written on pillar[s] of stone... these injunctions which we have made known [for the benefit of those that will come] after us” (Henning 1950: 87; see also Shaked 1969: 122).

31 Admittedly, some versions of the Minor Rock Edicts are found in the “centre” of the realm as well; see Alchin – Norman 1985.
In this way, MRE I came to include information about the dissemination of the Asoka Rock and Pillar Edicts, which in some versions then led to the incorporation of the colophon into the edicts themselves. Other evidence of a colophon may be found in the Seventh Pillar Edict (written in 186 B.C.), which records the text as having been completed in the year 186 B.C.

I have argued elsewhere (Tieken 2000: 25) that sentences Q and R in the Rock Edicts are characterized by a linguistic feature that makes them distinct. This feature is found in the elision of the words ‘loja hara dina’ at the end of the first edict. In this way, the colophon is incorporated into the text itself. While the first six edicts were completed by 186 B.C., the seventh edict was not completed until 180 B.C. This is evident in the colophon, which states that the edict was completed in the year 180 B.C.

Taking our cue from the words ‘loja hara dina’ at the end of the first edict, we can infer that the colophon was added to the text after the edict was completed. This is supported by the fact that the colophon is missing in the Rock Edicts, which were completed in 186 B.C. However, the colophon is present in the Pillar Edicts, which were completed in 180 B.C.

As for the Rock Edicts, the colophon is not present in the first edict. This suggests that the colophon was added to the text after the edict was completed. This is supported by the fact that the colophon is present in the second edict, which was completed later than the first edict.

In conclusion, the colophon of the Rock Edicts was added to the text after the edict was completed. This is evident in the elision of the words ‘loja hara dina’ at the end of the edict. The colophon is not present in the first edict, which suggests that the colophon was added to the text after the edict was completed. This is supported by the fact that the colophon is present in the second edict, which was completed later than the first edict.
reference to the year the edict was issued in: satavatisasahisitena me iyam dhammalibi likhapatitā ti.\footnote{30} Indeed, there is some evidence suggesting that the text that follows (RR-SS), which enjoins the Edict's engraving, was only secondarily provided with the status of an edict. Note in this connection especially the abbreviated form of the introduction, which instead of the complete series of titles has only devānampiyē.\footnote{31}

[RR] etam devānampiyē āha

[SS] iyam dhammalibi ata ati sīlāhanbhāṇi vā sīlāphalabhāṇi vā tata kaṭavīyā ena esa cilāṭhitike siyā.

I think we should reckon with the possibility that the Seventh Pillar Edict indeed represents the reproduction of the text of an edict series, such as at the time may have circulated in the local administrative centres. The almost surreptitious way in which the final part (SS) was turned into a proper edict suggests that such texts included instructions concerning the engraving. During the engraving of the Seventh Pillar Edict the latter instruction was at the last moment transformed into an edict by providing it with a proper introduction.

MRE I and PE VI thus seem to testify to the existence of texts of edicts or edict series which included colophons with instructions concerning the medium on which the texts were to be engraved.\footnote{38} However, on one point the evidence does not provide an answer. The two available examples of colophons, from MRE I and PE VII, appear not to discriminate between pillars and rocks (or stone slabs), mentioning both possibilities. Apart from the fact that this did not affect the final choice - all Minor Rock Edict versions are found on rocks and the Seventh Pillar Edict is found on a pillar - this can hardly represent the original situation. That is to say, if the texts had been accompanied by instructions concerning their engraving, we may expect that these would have been clear and unambiguous. In order to understand the reference in the available colophons to rocks (or slabs) as well as pillars, we should, however, take into account the circumstances under which the available colophon texts were preserved. They were preserved only because for some reason they had come to be incorporated into the edict proper. However, in the context of the edict it is no longer a matter of engraving this particular edict. Instead, the emphasis is on the dissemination of instructions through edicts engraved wherever it is appropriate. What originally were two different colophons may have come to be combined here for the sake of completeness.

As can be seen, the (pseudo-)colophons only mention the medium, that is, stone pillars, stone slabs, and mountains. As such they cannot account for the fact that the Rock Edicts are found only at the fringes of the realm and that not even one stray Rock Edict is found in the middle of the realm. "Mountains" (or frontiers) within the realm have been ignored completely. This seems to point to the conclusion, at least as far as the Rock Edicts are concerned, that the text was probably received at each site directly from the centre. In this connection it should be noted, however, that the dissemination of the Rock Edicts has taken place in two consecutive rounds. First the series (Schneider's p\textsuperscript{1} version) was sent to the north and northwest (Kālä and Mānsehṛa and Shābāzgārhī respectively) and the south (Erragudi). Only after a revision was the text (Schneider's p\textsuperscript{1}) sent to the west (Girnār) and the east (Dhauki and Jaugāda). Even so, the time gap between the two rounds must have been short as the persons responsible for the dissemination of the texts to the west and east were apparently still well acquainted with the criteria involved in the dissemination, with Rock Edicts on rocks and Pillar Edicts on pillars. Most likely the second round was not an afterthought and had been planned from the very beginning. In any case, it fills in the gaps left open in the east and the

\footnote{30} It is difficult to assess the function of final ti. The particle could mark the end of an individual edict, a use found in the Pillar Edicts I-VI, or indicate the end of the text as a whole (see above, n. 32). However, it could also anticipate etam in the following etam devānampiyē āha; cf. H-I: ... dhammajāti mātyā ti etam devānampiyē piyadasī lāja āha. "How could I elevate them by the promotion of moral? Concerning this, king Devānārāṇiya Priyadarśin speaks thus" (Hultsch).

\footnote{31} The implication of the peculiar mark found on top of the syllable de of devānampiyē, for which, see Hultsch (1925: 133, n. 6), is unclear. Hultsch remarks that a similar mark was found above the word athāye in OO, on the basis of which he concluded that the writer of the inscription wanted us to place RR and SS before OO. If so, this mark would have nothing to do with the abbreviated form of the introductory formula.

\footnote{38} Also in Dhauki and Jaugāda a reference is found to the medium on which the texts have been engraved, in the given case on "mountains". Thus, inbetween the opening words of RR I iyam dhammalipī and devānampiyēna piyadasinā lājaṇā likhāyēti have been added the words kēpiśiyālaśi pawātasi (Jaugāda). In the Dhauki version the greatest part of this line is unreadable except for [st: pawātasi]. We are almost certainly dealing with a local addition here.

\footnote{29} That is, except in the northwest, where the text of PE VII has been found on a stone slab; see above, n. 30.
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7. The Inscriptions as Monuments

As stated above, in the inscriptions we seem to be dealing with old letters which had already for some time been lying in the archives. Evidently the inscriptions were not supposed to replace these letters or to take over their function. In fact, the emperor who had ordered the original letters may already have been long dead. It follows that the inscriptions are a kind of commemorative monument\(^{42}\) erected by the

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\(^{40}\) Note that the “chronological order” of the p\(^2\) and p\(^1\) versions agrees with the order of appearance of the people concerned in the Rock Edict series: the addressees of the “earlier” p\(^2\) versions are mentioned in RE II, which specifies the people living on the northwestern and the southern borders; those of the “later” p\(^1\) versions occur in the definition of the realm given in RE XIII, which enumerates, for instance, the Bhogas, which is a name with a definitely western ring, and the Kalingas from the east. However, it cannot be concluded from this that the persons responsible for the first round in the dissemination of the texts had not yet considered the second round as well, because RE XIII was already available to them.

\(^{41}\) See p. 26, and also Tiek 2000: 4-7. The identification of this corruption is the only point from this article with which Wright seems to agree with me in his study of MRE I-II (Wright 2000: 332).

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\(^{42}\) The inscriptions on boulders have often been considered as elements borrowed from the Achaemenids. Apart from inscriptions on buildings and seals, mostly found inside their towns, the Achaemenids have left a number of impressive inscriptions in the countryside. A case in point is Darius’ famous Bistoti inscription, which is found high up on a steep cliff. While the inscription as such is visible from a far distance, it is virtually impossible to read the text. We seem to be dealing with an original, peculiar Achaemenid custom, in which mountains were held sacred. A fact already mentioned by Herodotos (Lecoq 1997: 84). Note in this connection also Darius’ tomb at Naqš-e Rostam, which had been cut high up into a steep mountain side (Briant 1996: 182-183). However, I think that as far as the Aśoka rock inscriptions are concerned the agreement between the developments in Persia and India may well be purely coincidental. The “mountains” of the Rock Edicts seem to suggest the function of a boundary, the various ideas concerning boundaries having been loaded on the mountain. We are clearly dealing with an archetype or a symbol here, which as such could itself be represented again by; for instance, the single boulder at Girnar, the stone slab at Sopārā and later the hero stones elsewhere in India.
emperor’s successors or by rulers who claimed to be his successors. As monuments, the inscriptions are tributes to a great reformer and lawmaker as well as to a great political thinker.

As to the emperor’s role of reformer, the key word of the new world order taught by him is dharma. Mahāmātras are transformed into dharma-Mahāmātras and liberality into dharma-liberality, which is a liberality undertaken not for any immediate benefits but for happiness in the hereafter. It should be noted that this reformation involves a complete reversal of the Hindu worldview. Whereas in Hinduism the dharma is found in the past and in going forward it has to be retrieved, in the edicts the dharma begins with the emperor himself. In RE V C he calls himself the adikale kayānossa, or “the one who starts to practise altruism”. The past being imperfect, one cannot go backwards but only forwards, to a future which may even be better than the present time.

Letters containing instructions for the local authorities, and through them for the people, form an important instrument in this process of reformation. Even if at the time writing had been a novelty, its potentials especially in the matter of legislation were apparently grasped immediately. It should be noted that before writing had become common the law had to be formulated over and over again by the people concerned. Through being fixed in writing, the laws were kept free of any intrusions from local and contemporary interests, which enhanced their authority in solving conflicts considerably. In fact, the very fact that the legislation came from outside generally proved an advantage.

As already indicated, the references to writing in the edicts would concern the original missives, not the inscriptions. The Seventh Pillar Edict seems to form an exception. The text is concluded with the words (SS): iyam dharmalibā tāla atthi silāmahābhāṇi vā silāphala-kāṇi vā tata kātaviyā eva esa cilārītike siyā, “Wherever there are stone pillars or stone slabs this dharma-document is to be inscribed, so that it (sc. the edict) is of long duration”. In addition, in the middle of the text (P) a reference is found to edicts on pillars: dharmathāmahābhāṇi kātāni, “dharma-pillars were made (by me)”. The context suggests that we are dealing with pillars engraved with “edicts”. However, the relationship of the Seventh Pillar Edict to the six of the first series is not as obvious as it might seem at first sight.

I have above attempted to show that Pillar Edict VII is a composition which imitates a compilation of edicts, including the colophon, such as formed by Pillar Edicts I-VI. In connection with the secondary, derived, nature of Pillar Edict VII I would like to draw attention to the “misuse” in it of a stock phrase from the Rock Edicts. The opening lines of the edict contain the phrase atikaram anutalām, which is otherwise common in the Rock Edicts (see above, p. 10). However, where in the Rock Edicts this phrase was used to depict the author of the edict as a reformer, in Pillar Edict VII it is given an entirely different twist:43

The kings who were in times past, had this desire, that men might (be made to) progress by the promotion of morality; but men were not made to progress by an adequate promotion of morality. Concerning this, king D.P. speaks thus. ... How then might men (be made to) conform to (morality)?

The image given is that of a ruler who, however diligently, merely continues his predecessors’ work. In the end, the Seventh Pillar Edict has all the characteristics of a poor imitation.

In addition to this it is clear that the Seventh Pillar Edict, which was issued in the emperor’s twenty-seventh year, that is, one year after the Pillar Edicts I-VI, was not disseminated with the latter series. Pillar Edict VII is found only at Delhi-Tōprā, and while I-VI were engraved when the pillar was lying on the ground, the engraving of VII was carried out only after the pillar had been erected. The question then is who was responsible for the text of PE VII: the same persons who compiled the Rock Edict and Pillar Edict series or some later, local writer? Unfortunately, no definite answer to this question seems possible. Note in this connection the fragment of the text of PE VII on a stone slab in Kandahār,44 which suggests that we are not dealing with a text composed locally. However, if the text had indeed been distributed as widely as that of the Pillar Edicts I-VI, we would have to assume that it was no longer considered worthwhile to erect new pillars for this edict. Engraving the text on pillars already standing was not practical; its engraving on the Delhi-Tōprā pillar below the first series, carried out after the pillar had been erected, forms an exception. All this, however, seems to presuppose a change in the political situation between the Pillar Edicts I-VI and VII. This would, incidentally, suggest that the time

43 B.F. in the translation of Hultzsch 1925: 133-134.
44 It is curious that in the northwest a fragment has been found precisely of this one Pillar Edict which is rare in India, while so far nothing has been found there of the “common” Pillar Edicts I-VI.
Finally, the inscriptions are also a tribute to a great political thinker. Thus, in RE XIII a veritable theory of empire is unfolded, which includes an outline of the different strategies to be employed towards the various people in the realm. In all, three types of conquest are outlined. The first consists of brutal force and involves a great loss of lives. The emperor refers in particular to his conquest of Kalinga here, which he had come to regret because of the many people killed. The second type of conquest consists of the show of a superior military force, which could serve as a deterrent to potential invaders. It is said to be particularly effective in dealings with the people living in the forests (atavī). The third type of conquest is said to be specifically suitable as regards people living far beyond the boundaries of the realm, such as the Greek kings and people living even farther away. It is basically a policy of conversion.

The difference in the approaches to the atavī, on the one hand, and the people living far away in the northwest and the south, on the other, is significant. The atavī are the people living in the forests and the uncultivated tracts of land immediately surrounding the so-called janapada. They supply forest products to the janapada but at the same time form a threat to it, carrying out raids on the richer, cultivated lands. Note in this connection Arthasastra 2.1.36, in which a king is advised to grant tax exemption to a land exhausted by raids of forest people (paracakrāvāgriṣtam ... dešam parihared rājā). As such, the atavī cannot be ignored. Every ruler, however petty, has to deal with the forest people which surround his janapada, either by negotiations or more often by the deployment of force. However, in the case of the Greek kings living far away to the northwest of the realm or the Cālas living in the south, the use of force was not practical: they simply could not be kept in check by force or by threats. The only way open was to seek their cooperation. One of the ways to achieve this was thus to actually try to “convert” the people at the frontiers by acquainting them with the type of administration and government current in the realm.

As we have seen, the distribution of the inscriptions is in agreement with this classification of types of conquests found in the inscriptions themselves. Thus, the Rock Edicts, which are found at the fringes of the empire and seem to provide mere examples of edicts, present the picture of an absentee ruler whose main interest is the life hereafter. In contrast the Pillar Edicts, found in the centre of the realm, present a ruler who is prepared to interfere in local affairs directly and personally.

In this connection it may be rewarding to take a more detailed look at the Rock Edicts as documents specifically addressed to the various peoples living at the fringes of the empire. The contacts between the emperor and these peoples will have been mainly through trade. This might, for instance, explain the reference in Rock Edict II to wells dug along the roads as well as the emperor’s frequently expressed concern for the welfare of wandering ascetics, who plied these same trade routes.

Another point which will have to be considered more carefully than can be done here concerns the translation of the texts of the Rock Edicts into the various local administrative languages. Why did one go to all the trouble of translating if the inscriptions are “only” monuments? I have the impression that it is generally assumed that the translations were carried out at the respective local administrative centres themselves. But in the light of the conclusions presented above concerning the dissemination of the edicts as a series dispatched in practically one go from the same centre this would not really make sense. I think we should at least reckon with the possibility that the translation was carried out in the capital, that is, in the same place where the texts have been compiled. The translation would be part of the projection of the image of a large, tolerant empire in which many languages were in use.

8. Aśoka

One of the questions that remain is what the edicts or else the inscriptions have to do with the emperor Aśoka of Buddhist and Purānic legends. It should be noted that the link between the edicts or inscriptions and Aśoka is a tenuous one. It has been based mainly on the name Piyadassi, which in the Pāli sources is indeed used for Aśoka. In the inscriptions, however, the name Aśoka is rare. It is found only in the

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45 As such the inscriptions seem to forshadow a later tradition which links the legendary author of the Arthasastra specifically with the Maurya dynasty.

46 This is not contradictory with the finding that the texts were occasionally misunderstood. Even though these misunderstandings may have affected whole passages, they appear to have been based in details.
In this respect the situation of the name used by the Buddhists, namely Piyadasi, is different. It is found in the Greek version of this formula, prīya-adasi. However, since the personal name dāsā has been left untranslated, which would show that it was taken as a personal name, like in the case of dāsā in the Nagārjuna Hill Cave Inscriptions of the 1st century B.C. (see n. 47) and in the Margārata Cave Inscriptions (Hultzsch 1893: 77-78). However, we should seriously reckon with the possibility that prīya-adasi was as it is not a personal name but part of a descriptive title. As I see it, prīya-adasi would form a meaningful combination as a title while dāsā would be taken as a personal name. Note that the title prīya-adasi was ascribed to the emperor by the Greek grammarian, Diodoros. It is not difficult to understand then why in some inscriptions it was dāsā, which would thus refer to the person's earthly existence, which was sacrificed in favour of his personal name.

In this regard it should be mentioned that the name Piyadasi is assigned to the king of the Buddhist inscriptions, as it is also the inscribed name of the king of the Buddhist inscriptions, as it is also the inscribed name of the king's manifestation on earth. It is not difficult to understand then why in some inscriptions it was Piyadasi, which would thus refer to the person's earthly existence, which was sacrificed in favour of his personal name.

Whatever is exactly the case here, all this does not mean that the emperor of the Buddhist inscriptions is presented by the Buddhists as the same person whom the Buddhists remember under the name of Asoka. In this connection it should be noted that, by a law-giver, reformer, political thinker and supporter of heretical sects, including the Buddhists, corresponds with the person's earthly existence, which was sacrificed in favour of his personal name.

In this regard it should be mentioned that the name Piyadasi is assigned to the king of the Buddhist inscriptions, as it is also the inscribed name of the king of the Buddhist inscriptions, as it is also the inscribed name of the king's manifestation on earth. It is not difficult to understand then why in some inscriptions it was Piyadasi, which would thus refer to the person's earthly existence, which was sacrificed in favour of his personal name.

The fact which has been overlooked by Yassakoff (1999: 109-110) is that, in the Buddhist inscriptions, the name Piyadasi is used in the forms 1) dāsā, 2) prīya-adasi, and 3) dāsā prīya-adasi. The opening of the Udayagiri Inscriptions (1999: 68-69) of Mānasā, who is mentioned as the earliest evidence of the Buddhist legend. The few isolated instances of the name Asoka in the Buddhist inscriptions (see above, n. 47) well may represent insertions made locally by Buddhists in recognition of the importance which they assigned to Asoka.
The case of the inscriptions from Rummelldal and Nigalj Sagar is different again. Both mention a visit to the sites by the emperor personally. In his fourteenth and twentieth years respectively, Onur reigned, the king of the Buddhist saint Kankanamake and to the occasion of his visit to Nigalj Sagar, the emperor gave orders to expand the pillar and the building of some unidentified object. In addition, the Buddha was granted freedom from the tax burden in Rummelldal. However, we are also likely to draw attention to the two almost identical inscriptions found in Edava (Iraq), the one from Durma, the other from Xerxes (see Leclercq 1997, 127).

The inscription that might bring us closest to the Askha of Buddhist and Pachmichael legends are the three Ngarjuna Hill Cave Inscriptions of the Askha (1936, 77-78). They are also mentioned among Askha's successors (Pugner 1913, 57-298). It is interesting to note that these inscriptions testify to the sudden rise of the Askha since the first thing the king did (zandana/tsgan) was to donate caves to them for shelter. During the reign of the Askha, until the conclusion of the Askha's inscription, the Askha's ascension to the throne was an immediate and complete reversal of the face of the Askha. Since the first thing the king did (zandana/tsgan) was to donate caves to them for shelter, during the reign of the Askha, up to the conclusion of the Askha's inscription, the Askha's ascension to the throne was an immediate and complete reversal of the face of the Askha. 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peror who issued the original edicts, on the one hand, and the Rock Edict and Pillar Edict inscriptions, on the other. In trying to date the inscriptions anew we should now first make a distinction between the original documents, their supposed storage in the royal archives and their recycling in the inscriptions. As I see it, this whole complex of activities will somehow have to be compressed into a period probably not much longer than three centuries. Thus, while the emperor of the original missives mus: have lived during or after the establishment of Greek settlements on the northwestern borders of India, the inscriptions most likely predate the inscriptions of, for instance, the Sātavāhanas from the first century B.C. onwards - for the latter inscriptions signal a new political situation not compatible with the imperial ambitions emanating from the texts and the distribution of the Aśoka inscriptions.

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