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Aśoka and the Use of Writing in Ancient India

Abstract: Starting with a brief summary of the recent discussion on the introduction of writing in India, the article examines the material contexts of the written texts produced during the reign of the Indian emperor Aśoka (r. 268–232 BCE). Even if these inscriptions on rocks and rock pillars may not have been the first written evidence, they represent the most extensive and diverse corpus of written texts from the early phase of writing in South Asia. Although this corpus only covers a period of less than twenty years, it shows a fairly quick development and improvement in various material aspects of writing, including writing materials, techniques, surfaces and text transmission. At the same time, the variety of inscribed texts – from royal edicts to short label inscriptions and personal texts – illustrates the rather rapid spread of writing. Moreover, the texts shed light on the practical use of written documents in the dissemination of the emblematic *dharma* teachings of Aśoka.

1 Introduction: The never-ending quest for the origin of Indian scripts

The early history of writing in India has been subject to scholarly debate from nearly the beginning of Indian studies and it seems that this debate will not end in the near future.

While the pioneers of the study of ancient India could not imagine a highly developed civilisation without the art of writing, the twentieth century mainly paved the way for another perspective.[1] German scholars, particularly Oskar von Hinüber and Harry Falk,[2] provided strong arguments that Indian culture was, for a long time, based on oral practices – both in the transmission of literary compositions and the administrative sphere. One of their main points was the fact that no material remains of writing prior to the period of the early Indian emperor Aśoka (third century BCE) could be identified. The Indian ruler Aśoka was an outstanding historical figure. As heir of the vast Mauryan empire created by his predecessors Candragupta Maurya and Bindusāra, he initially continued

1 Falk 1993b. A useful updated summary of the main arguments is found in Falk 2018.
2 Von Hinüber 1989 and Falk 1993b.

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the policy of warfare in order to extend the empire's boundaries. But soon, facing the cruelty of war and apparently strongly influenced by the current Buddhist communities, he turned towards a policy of peace and tolerance. This remarkable change is documented in his numerous royal and personal edicts that cover almost the entire subcontinent. The king propagated a unique ethical code – called *dharma* – in the edicts, based on values such as religious tolerance, non-violence and justice.

According to this approach, the production of Aśoka's numerous edicts, written on rock surfaces or pillars across the entire subcontinent, from Gandhara in the extreme north-west to Orissa in the north-east, from modern Nepal in the north to modern Tamil Nadu in the south, were the main reason to have script widely introduced in India. Only a very few examples of written artefacts other than these royal edicts survived,[3] and their dating before Aśoka cannot be proven.

From the very beginning, the art of writing in India was characterised by the existence of two different scripts – Kharoṣṭhī and Brāhmī. They share certain features, such as the abugida character, i.e. consonant signs that include a short vowel *a* and diacritic vowel signs that change the quality or quantity of the inherent vowel. On the other hand, both scripts are distinctively different: Kharoṣṭhī is written from right to left and was exclusively used in the north-western regions, i.e. present-day north-west Pakistan and the adjacent regions. As Harry Falk showed, it was developed based on the Aramaic script used during the Achaemenid and Seleucid rule in this region.[4] It is, therefore, possible that this new Indian script was already extant when the second Indian script, Brāhmī, was designed and introduced in the rest of the subcontinent. Brāhmī is written from left to right, it shares the abugida character of the Kharoṣṭhī, but introduces additional vowel signs that allow one to designate different vowel quantities (such as *ā* versus *a*, or *ī* versus *i*), a capacity that the Kharoṣṭhī was lacking but which is necessary in order to represent an Indic language. There has been no convincing theory so far that would explain the origin of the Brāhmī script; its different writing direction as well as the rather square and monumental shape of its characters make a certain influence of the Greek script (especially in its majuscule shape) probable. But the forms of the letters and the internal rela-

3 Examples are the copper plate from Sohgaura, or the stone plate from Mahasthangarh. For these objects, see Falk 1993b, 177–181. I abstain from using diacritics here and in all other geographical designations mentioned in this chapter, and give – if attested – the English form of the name or a simplified variant, e.g. Sanchi for Sāñcī, and Mirath for Mirāṭh.

4 Falk 1996.

tionship of phonetically related signs (such as aspirates and non-aspirates of the same class) seem to point to an ad hoc creation in India, without strong relations to any other writing system. The evidence available seems, thus, to speak in favour of a pre-existence of Kharoṣṭhī in the north-west and a subsequent introduction of Brāhmī in the rest of the subcontinent during the reign of Aśoka and mainly designed in order to put his edicts into writing. This could explain the fact that Aśoka's edicts were written in a different script only in the north-west, whereas the Brāhmī script was used anywhere else.

This perspective was widely accepted[5] and seemed to speak in favour of an introduction of script in India 'from above', i.e. by royal order and with the primary purpose of propagating the royal ideology on the vast territory of the Mauryan empire.

This perspective has been recently challenged by radiocarbon data from archaeological excavations in south India and Sri Lanka. These data seem to indicate that the Brāhmī script was in use much earlier, i.e. as far back as the fifth century BCE, in a completely different material and geographical context than that suggested by the Aśokan inscriptions. All of these early inscriptions appear on pots or potsherds, mostly as personal names that probably indicate the ownership of the vessel.[6]

The inscriptions from south India, or more precisely Tamil Nadu, are composed in the Tamil language and written in a variety of the Brāhmī alphabet that was adjusted to this language and is, therefore, called Tamil Brāhmī. Objects inscribed with this script were often found together with potsherds that bear signs of a still unclear character, often called graffiti.[7] They most probably fulfilled the same function as the readable texts: they designated the object as personal property. The shape of these unreadable signs reveals no relation to the Tamil Brāhmī script. Moreover, objects with these signs do not necessarily predate objects with inscriptions. It seems that both sign systems – the Tamil Brāhmī script and the unreadable symbols – were used side by side. The use of the so-called graffiti was not limited to potsherds. The occurrence of these signs on numerous so-called megalith sites shows that this sign system was in a far wider use all over the Indian south. It is possible that it predates the occurrence of the Brāhmī alphabet in the south and was finally replaced by the latter after a

5 Cf. e.g. Salomon 1995.

6 For the different types of pottery inscriptions, mainly in Buddhist archaeological contexts, see Strauch forthcoming a.

7 For the somewhat unsystematic use of the term graffiti in Indian epigraphy, see Strauch forthcoming b.

certain period of coexistence. However, it is not possible to state any relationship of the Brāhmī writing to this supposedly pre-existing sign system. Far less is it possible to regard the latter as a possible source for the creation of Brāhmī.

The Indian archaeologist K. Rajan investigated the entire corpus of Tamil Brāhmī and 'graffiti' potsherds from Tamil Nadu.[8] Out of the nearly eight hundred objects with Tamil Brāhmī inscriptions, more than five hundred originate from the archaeological site Kodumanal (Erode district). Radiocarbon dating of organic material from these excavations resulted in dates that would attribute the earliest Tamil Brāhmī inscriptions to a period before 500 BCE. Such an early date would, of course, be of tremendous significance for the discussions about the origin and introduction of script in India. It would place its origin in the Indian south and within a clearly non-royal, possibly commercial context. However, these dates are not completely beyond doubt, and scholars have expressed their scepticism, in particular Harry Falk.[9]

Harry Falk took the same sceptical attitude towards the radiocarbon dated inscription sherds from Tissamaharama (Sri Lanka), which he edited and published himself.[10] During excavations at the Buddhist site a number of inscribed sherds were discovered, inscribed with an early variety of Brāhmī that is largely identical with the script type used in numerous Buddhist caves for dedication inscriptions.[11] The language used is a variety of Middle Indic (Prakrit) that is typical for early Sri Lankan epigraphy, with some features that point to an influence of the phonology of south Indian languages, such as Tamil. However, the language is clearly an Indo-Aryan and not a Dravidian language.

According to the chronology of the Tissamaharama ceramics – based on radiocarbon dating – at least some of these inscribed potsherds would belong to the period between 500 and 300 BCE.

Both the evidence of the caves and the contents of many of the inscribed potsherds point to the Buddhist background of these objects. The sherds mention explicit Buddhist terms, such as *upāsaka* ('lay follower'), or *bhikṣu*/*bhikṣuṇī*(*saṃgha*) ('[community of] monks/nuns'). The chronology based on the early radiocarbon dating is, therefore, problematic on an additional level: the dating would shift the introduction of Buddhism to Sri Lanka to a time before Aśoka, against the tradition of the Sri Lankan chronicles and everything we believe to

8 Rajan 2015.
9 Falk 2014.
10 Falk 2014.
11 Paranavitana 1970.

know about the early history of Buddhism in South Asia (although there is much more which we do *not* know).

At the time being, there is no possibility to clearly decide on one of these theories. Only a reassessment of the archaeological and epigraphical data, and an attempt of scholars to mediate between them may help to get a more reliable picture. On the other hand, even if we were to dismiss the pre-Aśokan dating of inscribed objects from south India and Sri Lanka, they clearly convey an important message: surprisingly soon, script became integrated in these areas in completely new social contexts that are not directly related to the ruling elites. At the same time, the inscriptions of Aśoka remain a remarkable witness for the use of script, and their character and technical perfection will always characterise them as outstanding products of the art of writing in ancient India. Even if the Brāhmī script was extant before the time of Aśoka, the way in which this ruler implemented literacy in the administrative practice and political landscape of his empire clearly marks a revolutionary shift in the cultural history of ancient India.

In this chapter, I will, therefore, try to subsume what Aśoka's inscriptions can tell us about the early use of script in the historical and cultural context of the Mauryan empire, particularly regarding the material contexts of the early inscriptions and the information that the inscribed texts give us about the function of writing and written artefacts in the transmission and promulgation of the royal edicts.

My survey is largely based on the discoveries and studies by Harry Falk, who visited all the Aśokan sites in the framework of a long-lasting project that resulted in his 2006 publication *Aśokan Sites and Artefacts* – an invaluable source for everybody interested in the legacy of this extraordinary Indian emperor. Falk was especially interested in the material aspects of the Aśokan objects; he investigated the geographical and historical contexts of the inscribed sites and paid special attention to the techniques that were applied in order to inscribe rocks and pillars, including the treatment of the surfaces, the orientation of inscribed surfaces, and the production, transport and erection of pillars. Based on his observations, it is possible to highlight some issues that help to understand the material contexts of these early Aśokan inscriptions better.

2 The material contexts of Aśoka's inscriptions: Places and practices

Among the texts issued on behalf of Aśoka we have to distinguish two major groups: official edicts where Aśoka addresses his subjects in his capacity as king, and Buddhist edicts that are directed to the members of the Buddhist community. In addition, and often in direct relation to inscriptions of these two major groups, a few smaller inscriptions of different types are found.[12]

Aśoka's official inscriptions can be divided into three major groups that are clearly distinguished not only according to their texts, but also regarding the characteristics of their location.

The Minor Rock Edicts (MREs) are usually located in remote places that are hard to access. In many cases, the inscriptions are incised on a rock surface within a cave or below another rock; the surface is usually not prepared for inscribing (see Fig. 1). The MREs are mostly found in the core area of the Mauryan empire (along the Ganges valley), with a remarkable concentration of sites in the far south. The script is often not very carefully executed. The texts are composed in the language of the empire's capital, i.e. the so-called *Kanzleisprache* or Old Ārdhamāgadhī, although many southern texts tend to *normalise* the language by replacing the Old Ārdhamāgadhī *l*- forms with *r*-forms (i.e. *ācariya* instead of *ācaliya* ['teacher']).[13]

The Major Rock Edicts (REs) are found near urban centres or trade routes, generally on the edges of the empire. The inscriptions are written on rocks that are usually well exposed and whose surface is mostly flat and well-suited for inscribing, even without any special pretreatment (see Fig. 2). In a few cases, the surfaces have been prepared for inscribing (Mansehra, Kalsi). According to Falk, the sites of the REs can be identified as 'sacred places of major cities'.[14] The character of these sacred sites was probably similar to those of the MREs, the audience, however, was different: urban people were apparently addressed by REs.

12 A comprehensive survey of all epigraphical material related to Aśoka is found in the appendix, which will also help in orientation throughout this chapter.

13 Cf. Falk 2009, 7.

14 Falk 2006, 111.

Fig. 1: The MRE edict at Sahasram, courtesy of Harry Falk, cf. Falk 2006, 96, fig. 4.

While the majority of these edicts are inscribed on natural rock boulders, two sets were published on stone slabs (Sannati, Sopara), whose original location can no longer be determined. With the exception of the inscriptions in the far south (Erragudi, Sannati) and in present-day Orissa (Dhauli, Jaugada), the texts have been transformed from the eastern language of Pataliputra into the local dialects, not always without mistakes.

Fig. 2: The Girnar rock with RE inscriptions divided in separate compartments, courtesy of Harry Falk.

The Pillar Edicts (PEs) are inscribed into the highly polished surface of large, free standing, monolith pillars of about ten-metre height that were generally erected at Buddhist sites, either *stūpa*s and/or monasteries (see Fig. 3). These pillars are made of sandstone, which is relatively easy to work. Even if no archaeological remains can be identified close to a pillar, their location along Buddhist pilgrimage routes indicates their Buddhist context. As in the case of the earlier MREs, the texts are again composed in the language of the empire's capital. Pillar sites are concentrated in the wider area of the Ganges/Yamuna valley.

Fig. 3: The Buddhist site at Vesali with Aśokan pillar, courtesy of Harry Falk, cf. Falk 2006, 221, fig. 2.

These three groups of official inscriptions[15] represent written copies of texts issued from the capital Pataliputra. Significantly, these texts are not addressed directly to the people but to the royal officers who are responsible for the distribution and enforcement of Aśoka's *dharma*. The texts of each group are identical, with some significant differences that help us to understand the transmission of these edict texts to the different locations.

Since many of the texts contain dates, these groups also represent a chronological sequence, with the MREs written first (regnal year 10,[16] thus, 258 BCE),

15 Among the official inscriptions, there are a number of smaller texts that stand apart: mainly translations of official edicts or parts thereof into other languages, such as Greek or Aramaic, that were found in the extreme north-west, usually on rocks. See Falk 2006, 241–253 and Falk 2009, 5–6, on their different relationship to original Aśokan texts. Due to their rather different character, these inscriptions are not discussed in the present paper.

16 Since Aśoka is referring in this edict to his capacity as Buddhist lay follower (*upāsaka*), the date is not given in regnal years but in years elapsed after he joined the Buddhist community. For the calculation of the resulting regnal year, see Hultzsch 1925, xlvi. Also see Schneider 1978, 163, n. 1. For the sake of convenience, I refer in the following exclusively to elapsed regnal years.

followed by the REs (regnal years 12–18, thus, 266–250 BCE), and concluded by the PEs (regnal years 26 and 27, thus, 242 and 241 BCE).

However, it has been argued that some inscriptions may have been written long after the edict was issued and its date. Therefore, it is imperative to distinguish between the text of an edict and the material form of this text, i.e. the inscription carved in stone.[17]

The character of the second large group, the Buddhist edicts, is rather heterogeneous: either they contain instructions to the Buddhist community (e.g. Calcutta-Bairat, *Schism Edict*, in three copies at Sarnath, Sanchi and Kausambi-Allahabad), or they refer to donations of the emperor or members of his family to the Buddhist *saṃgha* (Lumbini, Nigliva, *Queen's Edict* at Kausambi-Allahabad). The majority of them are found on pillars, which can easily be explained by their relation to Buddhist sites. Only one of these texts, the so-called Calcutta-Bairat edict, was written on a stone slab. The original location of this edict, the Buddhist site of Bairat,[18] is located in Rajasthan, far away from the Ganges/Yamuna valley, and possibly the transportation of a large monolith pillar was beyond the capacities of the time. Before inscribing, the surface of the rock was polished, and the writing is very carefully executed – this puts the inscriptions close to the Pillar Edicts. The inscription is clearly later than the MRE found at the same site.

The inscriptions in the remarkable artificial caves at Barabar, close to the Mauryan capital, Pataliputra, stand somewhat apart: these texts refer to Aśoka's donation of these caves to the Ājīvika religious community in the twelfth and nineteenth years of his reign. This tradition was continued by his son Daśaratha immediately after his consecration in the nearby caves on Nagarjuni hill. It is probable that the work on these caves was started under Aśoka and his son simply completed this task. The inscriptions were executed on specially prepared and sometimes polished surfaces at the entrances of these caves – immediately visible to anyone entering them (Fig. 4).

17 For the recently discovered MRE at Ratanpurva as a later inscription, see Falk 2013. For the influence of the later MRE and PE texts on some of the MRE versions, particularly those in the south, see Gaál and Tóth 2018. The evidence cited by them would indicate that even the text of the edict could be altered when inscribed at a later period. Although Tieken 2002 rightly emphasises the need to distinguish between texts and inscriptions, his conclusions are questionable, suggesting that the production of Aśokan edicts took up to three centuries. Also see Tieken 2023, which I could not consult. For a similar suggestion regarding the Girnar REs – based on their study on population density in Mauryan time India – see Smith et al. 2016, 387.

18 For the archaeological remains of Bairat that probably go back to Mauryan times, see Fogelin 2015.

Fig. 4: The entrance of Nagarjuni cave N1, the Mauryan inscription above the entrance, a later Maukharī inscription in doorway.

Moreover, there are few small inscriptions that were added to one of the types mentioned above: in Kalsi, a drawing of an elephant is accompanied by the label *gajatame* ('the best of elephants'), probably referring to the Buddha (Fig. 5).[19]

Fig. 5: The Kalsi elephant with the label inscription, courtesy of Harry Falk, cf. Falk 2006, 126, fig. 7.

An inscription from Panguraria, one of the MRE sites, is of particular importance among these smaller texts. The official MRE text here is accompanied by a kind of personal note recalling an earlier visit of Aśoka. The connection with the MRE is unclear. Due to the different writing techniques and locations, both texts were conceived as separate entities, but could have been written by

19 Representations of elephants are also found at Girnar and Dhauli, but without accompanying inscriptions.

the same scribe at about the same time.[20] This short text is reminiscent of the later graffiti inscriptions, which have a more personal and private character.[21] Together with the Buddhist edicts, in which Aśoka speaks less as a king than as a Buddhist, I would suggest categorizing these smaller texts as non-official inscriptions, although the Buddhist edicts contain some elements of an official character (e.g. by addressing the royal officials).

Not all of these non-official inscriptions – including the Buddhist ones – are dated, so it is difficult to establish a relative chronology. Based on the dates given, the following relationship can be established between official edicts and 'personal' inscriptions:

Table 1: Relationship between official edicts and 'personal' inscriptions.

Official edicts	Non-official inscriptions
MRE: Year 10	
RE: Years 12–18	Barabar: Year 12
	Barabar: Year 19 Nigliva: Year 20[22] Lumbini: Year 20
PE: Years 26–27	

It is not possible to establish a clear chronology for the undated inscriptions. The rather poor quality of the versions of the *Schism Edict* at Sanchi, Sarnath and Allahabad-Kausambi compared to the PEs points to an earlier date than the PEs. If the erection of the Nigliva and Lumbini pillars in Aśoka's twentieth year of reign can be regarded as the initial phase of pillar production, the 'personal' inscriptions at Sanchi, Sarnath and Allahabad-Kausambi could be dated to roughly the same period. As has already been argued, the Buddhist inscription from Calcutta-Bairat should also be placed in the period of pillar inscription production, i.e. between 20 and 27.

The non-official inscriptions at the Buddhist and Ājīvika sites are clearly addressed to the followers (and visitors) of the respective religious communities and the officials dealing with them. The picture in the case of the official in-

20 On the different writing techniques, a reliable reading and interpretation of this text, see Falk 1997.

21 For graffiti in Indian epigraphy, see Strauch forthcoming b.

22 The text refers to the enlargement of the *stūpa* in the fourteenth regnal year, but was made after a visit by the emperor in his twentieth year, when the pillar was erected.

scriptions meant to convey the emperor's *dharma* (and the small texts related to them) is more complex. If we consider their different local contexts, it seems that the three groups were made accessible to different kinds of audiences: the visitors of religious festivals in the core land of the Mauryan empire (MREs), people living in or travelling to urban centres in the frontier areas of the empire and assembling at certain times at the sites of the edicts (REs), and people frequenting the newly emerging religious Buddhist centres, spread all over the empire, probably with the exception of the far south (PEs).[23]

This shift of audiences is related to an increasing visibility of the inscriptions. The MREs are hard to access, and they rarely occupy a prominent position even on the spot. As the text of the MRE 1 shows, Aśoka here addresses people gathering at places where religious festivals involving animal sacrifices and the consumption of alcohol and other substances took place. Identifying himself as a Buddhist convert who aims at establishing the basic moral codes of Buddhism in the broader society (particularly non-violence, Sanskrit *ahiṃsā*), the king apparently wishes to demonstrate his presence at these sites in the form of his inscriptions, but there is no visible intention to dominate the place.

In the case of the REs, this attitude seems to have changed: the inscriptions are now on large, prominent rocks, the sheer size of the inscribed area attracting attention. Yet, as Falk notes, 'they were not expected to be seen every day. Only when the townspeople went to the sacred sites did they encounter the texts, either on a privately chosen date or on festive occasions'.[24]

However, the greatest visibility is clearly achieved with the PEs. The pillars alone are remarkable monuments, unique in ancient India. There is no doubt that these objects impressed contemporary visitors with their size and technical perfection. Thus, of course, these pillars were the perfect 'advertisement' for the newly emerging Buddhist *stūpa*s and monasteries. The act of placing an inscription on these pillars meant a mutual benefit: the monastery benefited from the presence of a royal, official decree on an exceptional object; the king could demonstrate his power by having these objects erected and inscribed. Moreover, the highly polished surface presented the ideal conditions for the inscriptions: the letters are clearly visible, they could be executed in perfection and the height of the pillar allowed the attachment of the inscription where it could be seen from far away. The pillars are usually inscribed in the upper portion – it is

23 The only exception is perhaps Amaravati, but, so far, there has been no clear evidence for a Mauryan occupation of this site or any other site in the south (Shimada 2013). For the probably post-Aśokan stone inscription from Amaravati, see Falk 2006, 226.

24 Falk 2006, 111.

nearly impossible to read the inscription from below, but apparently that was not the intention of these inscriptions: they had to be *seen*, not *read*. The advanced visibility and prestigious status of pillars are also confirmed by the numerous secondary inscriptions, including graffiti, that were added to the Aśokan texts in the course of history.[25]

The three kinds of edicts do not only differ from each other regarding their locations and expected audiences, but also concerning the technical execution of the inscriptions. As shown, the general development is from rather rough, not always well visible surfaces, often within the reach of the *reader* (MRE, see Fig. 6) to partially prepared, better visible surfaces (RE, see Fig. 7), to highly polished surfaces, mostly beyond the reach of *readers* (PE, see Fig. 8). The quality of the inscriptions generally improves considerably regarding the arrangement of the texts on the surface and the execution of the writing. While the MRE inscriptions display a number of mistakes, miswritings and misrepresentations of the texts, the PEs are nearly perfect and very homogeneous.

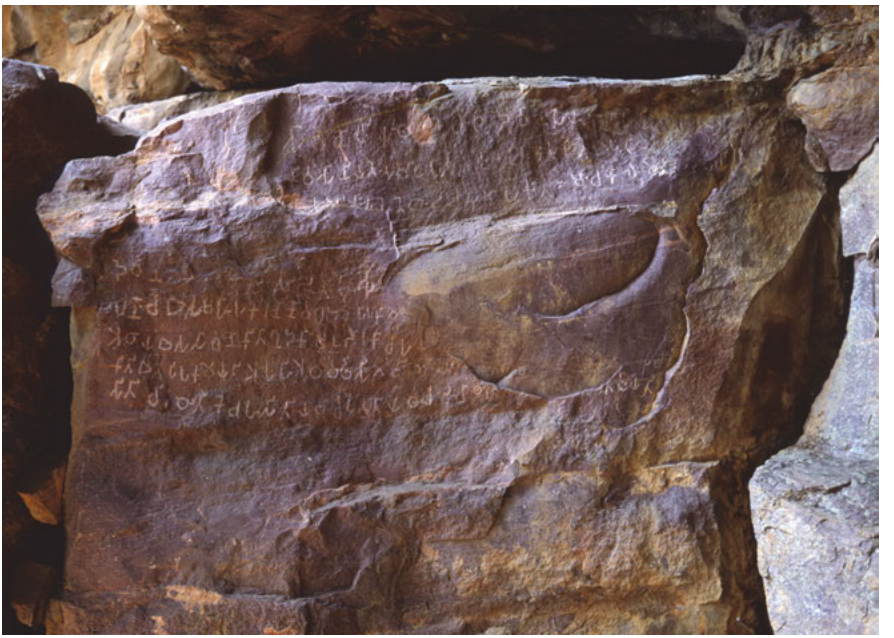

Fig. 6: The MRE at Panguraria, courtesy of Harry Falk, cf. Falk 2006, 90, fig. 7.

25 See Strauch forthcoming b.

Fig. 7: The RE at Dhauli, courtesy of Harry Falk, cf. Falk 2006, 115, fig. 7.

Fig. 8: The PE on the Topra pillar in Delhi, courtesy of Harry Falk.

These differences can partially be explained by the different modes of transmission of the edict text from the capital, Pataliputra, to the various sites. As Harry Falk showed, the production of the first two groups, i.e. the MREs and the REs, was carried out based on written copies of the emperor's announcements. The differences between the individual inscriptions of the MREs and REs reveal[26] that different sets of written copies existed that were dispatched to the various sites and copied by stonemasons into the rock surfaces. The rather large corpus of REs that were issued over a period of six years were usually dispatched in several batches. The stonemasons could not know how many texts would follow, thus, they sometimes had difficulties to plan the arrangement of texts on the rock surface exactly.

In some cases, however, the entire set was sent at once, naturally after the announcement of the last edict in the eighteenth regnal year. In these cases, the texts were carefully arranged on the rock (Girnar, Dhauli, Jaugada).[27]

Kenneth Roy Norman suggested for the first time that these written copies were probably accompanied by 'covering letters' that contained some instructions concerning the correct transmission of the texts and their use (see below for more on these assumed 'covering letters').[28] In the earliest set of inscriptions, the MREs, some stonemasons (and perhaps intermediary officials who were responsible for the production of the inscriptions) were not able to correctly distinguish between the edict text meant for publication and the cover letter that was actually not meant to be inscribed. That is why we find remnants of these letters in some places, especially in the south. The entire text of what is usually called MRE 2 is probably nothing more than (part of) such a cover letter, mistakenly copied onto the stone in some places.[29] As Falk observed, it was meant to 'clarify the meaning of MRE 1 with additional instructions'.[30] The text itself makes it clear that these instructions concern the propagation of the key elements of Aśoka's ethics in an oral form. We can, therefore, be sure that the whole enterprise of covering the entire territory under the control of the Mau-

26 For synoptic editions of the available versions, see for the REs – including a stemma – Schneider 1978, and for the MREs, Andersen 1990.

27 See the detailed discussion in Falk 2006, 111–112.

28 Norman 1983 and Norman 1984. Also see for these cover letters and their possible Western models, von Hinüber 2010.

29 See the careful comparison of the different versions of MRE 2 in Falk 2006, 57–58 and Falk 2009, 6–8. Falk argues that the entire text of MRE 2 should be regarded as 'an addition by one of his clerks, formulated with best intentions, but possibly not meant to be inscribed anywhere' (Falk 2009, 6).

30 Falk 2006, 58.

ryas through rock and pillar edicts was accompanied by an extensive campaign in which royal officials (*mahāmātra*) were supposed to proclaim and explain these edicts, either based on written copies in their archives or – more likely – because they knew them by heart. This somewhat unintentional 'publication' of an internal communication could even contain the signature of the official responsible. Thus, the MRE 2 is published in Brahmagiri, Siddapur and Jatinga-Ramesvara together with the signatures of the *lipikara* ('clerk') Capaḍa. In all three instances, the word *lipikareṇa* ('by the clerk') is written in Kharoṣṭhī, the script of the north-west. Falk rightly observed that the three inscriptions were written by different hands – the *lipikara* Capaḍa is, therefore, the clerk responsible for the written template rather than the executing stonemason.[31] The relation of the Kharoṣṭhī addition *lipikareṇa* to the main text and the concluding signature remains unclear. Heather Walders rightly points out in her interesting study of the carving techniques and writing tools used to engrave the Aśokan inscriptions that

> the addition of *lipikarena*, might have been done as a 'signature' from a different carver or foreign scribe using a distinct toolkit. This could have taken place either contemporary with the carving of the Brahmi text, or at another point in time.[32]

The erroneous 'publication' of cover letters is not the only feature that seems to point to rather unexperienced stonemasons and to a not yet ideally organized system of the transmission of royal orders and the production of their inscribed versions. At Erragudi, the scribe arranged all the REs in a rather arbitrary way, without paying too much attention to their correct order, which he probably did not even know. It seems here that the space was used as it was available (Fig. 9). His probable ignorance of Brāhmī writing is still more apparent in the case of the MREs, where the scribe/stonemason

> was of the opinion that every line on his exemplar should be turned into one unbroken line on the rock. However, the rock was too narrow to allow an exact copy. So, wherever he ran out of space at the right border, he incised the rest running backwards to the left above or below the first part of the line. The resulting mixture of right and left running pieces would never have been deciphered, if the correctly written parallels at other places were not done.[33]

31 Falk 2006, 58 and Falk 2009, 7–8.

32 Walders 2018, 618.

33 Falk 2013, 44.

Fig. 9: The edict site in Erragudi with the marking of the locations of the REs, courtesy of Harry Falk.

It is certainly no coincidence that many of the 'irregularities' in terms of text representation occur at the sites in the south. The majority of the inscriptions there belong to the group of MREs, only two sites – Sannati and Erragudi – were inscribed with the texts of the later REs. No inscribed pillar has been found in

the south. Contrary to all the other sites where Aśokan inscriptions have been found, the southern versions were embedded in a completely different linguistic environment. There can be no doubt that the people living in these areas spoke a Dravidian language and reading or even proclaiming the edicts in the official chancery language of Pataliputra would certainly not have had much effect there. It seems that during the time of Aśoka, not even the slightest attempt was made to translate his edicts into the language(s) of the south. Instead, they were written entirely in the language of the north-east, including the southern versions of the REs that are otherwise translated into the local dialects. It is possible that the entire administration was formed by officials imported from the north. However, in order to propagate the edicts, these northern officials were certainly supported by locals who mastered the local languages. These multipliers of the edicts needed the written versions as inscribed on the stone far less than in the north. It is possible that they used translated versions that were never written down and kept by heart. The fact that probably few (if any) people in the south were able to read the texts written in a foreign language could explain the much more careless execution and the many irregularities of the southern inscriptions.

It seems that even the emperor himself became worried about the varying quality of his inscribed edicts based on this unsatisfactory mode of transmission and production. In his very last RE 14 issued in his eighteenth regnal year, he explicitly refers to faulty versions of this edict and explains them, inter alia, by the locality (*deśa*) and by the fault of clerks (*lipikarāparādha*).

It may, therefore, have been decided to change the method of transmission. The set of the first six PEs seems to have been written down all at once, probably not based on a written copy but directly from the oral recitation of the edicts. The various versions are remarkably coherent and have only a few mistakes that indicate errors in transmission. In the case of the MREs and REs, copying errors were quite common and often led to later corrections when the inscribed texts proved to be erroneous.

According to Falk,[34] the actual production of the inscription was now centralised: they were all produced in the quarry (either Cunar or Prabhosa) from where the inscribed pillars were transported to their destinations. Such a centralisation would, of course, favour the employment of highly experienced and trained stonemasons. The arrangement of most of the PEs in columns on different sides of the pillar suggests that they were inscribed before the pillars were erected. After the stonemason had finished his work on one side, the pillar was

34 The main arguments are given by Falk 1993a, with some updates by Falk 2018.

turned and he continued his work. There are, however, differences in how this technique was applied.[35] In one group, the pillars were turned 180°, resulting in the inscriptions facing two opposite sides of the pillars. This type is found in the extreme north, close to the modern Nepal–India border: Rampurva, Araraj and Nandangarh (Fig. 10).

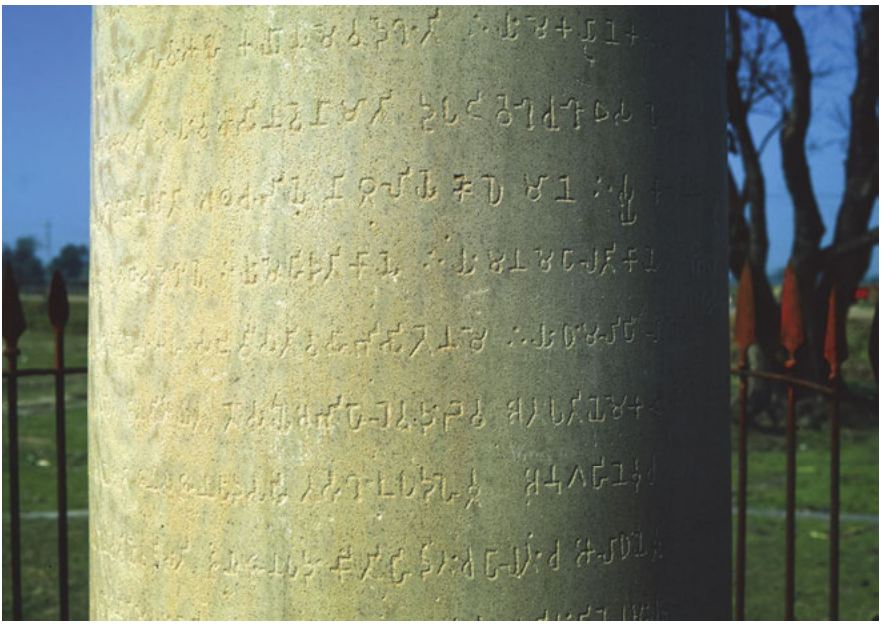

Fig. 10: PE text on the Nandangarh pillar covering one half of the surface, courtesy of Harry Falk, cf. Falk 2006, 185, fig. 4.

In the other group, the pillar was turned 90° each time, thus, the inscriptions form four narrow columns. This different technique was applied at the Delhi-Topra (Fig. 11) and Delhi-Mirath pillars which both originate from places north of modern Delhi. According to Falk,[36] the inscriptions of both groups can be attributed to two individual handwritings. Moreover, the arrangement of the edicts is identical in both groups, which clearly supports Falk's idea of a centralised endeavour.

35 See Norman 1987a; Falk 1993a.
36 Falk 1993a.

Fig. 11: PEs on the Topra pillar: PE 1–6 on the top forming columns, PE 7 below, courtesy of Harry Falk, cf. Falk 2006, 216, fig. 4.

Apparently, after all these pillars had been inscribed and erected, the emperor issued a seventh, last edict that found its way only to one of them: in Delhi-Topra, the stonemason added this seventh PE under the previous six in continuous lines while the pillar was standing (see Fig. 11).

There are other cases where pillars were clearly inscribed while already standing on the spot: the Allahabad-Kausambi pillar probably already carried two other minor edicts – a version of the so-called Buddhist *Schism Edict* and the *Queen's Edict* – before the PEs were added. Apparently, the writing was done with the help of a large scaffolding surrounding the pillar. The text of the PEs goes more than halfway around the pillar in continuous lines, well above the two smaller inscriptions. Such a technique would have been quite impractical if the column had still been on the floor.

It appears that the *Schism Edicts* at Sanchi and Sarnath were also added when the pillar had already been erected at these Buddhist sites.

This evidence clearly shows that the free-standing monolith pillars with highly polished surfaces were not created with the purpose of supporting the royal edicts. Instead, they probably represent another form of testimony to the presence and support of the king. Their royal character is evident in the iconography of their capitals, which depict animals, such as lions, bulls and elephants, closely associated with kingship and supremacy.

In the case of the two pillars at the birth places of the Buddhas Śākyamuni and Kanakamuni/Koṇāgamana, at Lumbini and Nigliva, respectively, the text of the inscriptions clearly refers to the erection of *śilāstambha*s ('rock pillars'), a term to be distinguished from the later term *dharmastambha*, i.e. pillars conveying the emperor's moral code.[37] It is evident that the erection of pillars at Buddhist sites – with or without dedicatory texts – precedes the tradition of *dharma* pillars. In their origin, Sanchi, Sarnath and Allahabad-Kausambi belong to this category of *śilāstambha*s, which have a symbolic meaning of their own. Falk rightly remarks that 'all those three pillars [...] were inscribed when they were already erected'.[38]

By using these pillars as support for his last set of royal edicts, the king combined the symbolic values of pillars and written edicts.

37 See Norman 1984, 224–232.

38 Falk 1993a, 87.

3 Aśokan texts on the purpose and the use of the written edicts

What was the purpose of writing the edicts, and what role did these written texts play in the broader context of the dissemination of Aśoka's *dharma*? How were they used in the environments mentioned above? It is not easy to answer these questions, but some valuable information about the purpose of the edicts emerges from the presumed remains of the accompanying letters that probably accompanied the written copies of the MREs. The identification of parts of such accompanying letters is usually based on the fact that the text occurs only in a few places and, therefore, does not seem to belong to the basic text of the edicts, which is common to all versions. It speaks for the advanced mode of transmission and the grown experience that such miscopied texts do not seem to occur in the later groups of REs and PEs.[39]

Some southern versions of the MRE 1 add an introductory formula to the text of the edict, showing that the template of both inscriptions was sent from a place called Suvaṃnagiri to the royal officials (*mahāmātā*) at Isila. The formula is that of a letter addressed to these local officials wishing them health (*ārogiyaṃ vataviyā*).[40] As the other versions of this edict clearly show, this text was not part of the edict itself, but gives important information about the intermediate stages of transmission from the capital to the actual spot. Apparently, this transmission was made through regional officers, including a *ayaputa* (Skt. *āryaputra*; 'prince').

As Norman suggested,[41] the final portion of MRE 1 from Rupnath, Sahasram, Panguraria and Ratanpurva,[42] belongs to another cover letter. This portion contains the command to inscribe the edict text on rocks (Skt. *parvata*) or – if available – on stone pillars (Skt. *śilāstambha*).[43] Norman seems to believe that this

39 A doubtful case is the final portion of PE 7, see von Hinüber 2010, 264, and the discussion below.

40 This portion is part of the MRE inscriptions at Brahmagiri, Siddapur and Jatinga-Ramesvara. For the identification and discussion of this cover letter, see Norman 1984, 227–228 and von Hinüber 2010. The synoptic text is accessible in Andersen 1990, 112.

41 Norman 1984.

42 The Ratanpurva inscription was not yet known to Norman. Parts of a very similar covering letter are also reproduced in Panguraria, apparently unnoticed by Norman. But see Norman 1983, 259.

43 Rupnath version (reconstructed text after Anderson 1990, 90, without text-critical marks): '*iyaṃ ca athe pavatisu lekhāpetiye ti. hidha ca athi silāthambhe silāthaṃbhasi likhāpetaviye ti*'.

phrase of the cover letter refers to existing stone pillars at the time of the proclamation of the edict, i.e. the tenth regnal year. This cannot be excluded, but we should also consider the possibility that the actual production of the inscriptions at Sahasram, Rupnath, Panguraria and Ratanpurva took place at a much later time, when many of the inscribed pillars had already been erected (see above). At least in the case of Ratanpurva, Falk has identified a number of features that speak for such a late date.[44] According to this, the cover letter would refer to a situation that clearly post-dates the period of the initial composition of the early MREs.

While the Sahasram and Ratanpurva texts are nearly identical and were probably even written by the same scribe, the Rupnath version adds another phrase that should be attributed to the same (or a similar) cover letter:

> *etenā ca vayaṃjanenā yāvatake tuphākaṃ ahāle savata vivasetivye*[45]
>
> And true to the letter (Skt. *etena vyañjanena*)[46] [this edict] must be distributed everywhere, as far as your district [extends].

This Rupnath addition to MRE 1 is nearly identical with a phrase that is found in the Sarnath version of the *Schism Edict*.[47] The other two versions of the *Schism Edict* preserved at the pillars at Sanchi and Kausambi-Allahabad are much shorter and contain only the text of the edict itself, in slightly diverging versions.[48] The Sarnath text, however, is much more extended and contains many practical instructions which seem to reproduce a similar type of covering letter to those discussed above. Similar to the other versions of the *Schism edict*, the

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For a synoptical view of the other versions, see Andersen 1990, 118. For the Ratanpurva version, see Falk 2013.

44 Falk 2013.

45 Reconstructed text after Andersen 1990, 90, without text-critical marks.

46 The exact meaning of this expression is not beyond dispute. It should be related to the Buddhist term *vyañjana*, where it seems to indicate 'letter', in contrast to *artha* ('meaning'). See the frequently attested Buddhist phrase *arthato vā vyañjanato vā* ('according to the meaning and letter') (Edgerton 1953, s.v. *vyañjana*). See the closely related phrase from RE 3 *hetuto ca vyaṃjanato ca*, probably with a similar meaning: 'by [indicating] the reasons and true to the letter'. For an extensive discussion of this phrase, see Lüders 1914, 836–839. For a different, but less satisfactory interpretation (*vyañjanato* = 'schriftlich') and a re-evaluation of the available arguments, see Schneider 1978, 122.

47 For a discussion of this phrase and its relation to the Sarnath variant, see Norman 1983, 259–262.

48 For a detailed discussion of the three versions and the final part of Sarnath as part of a covering letter, see also Norman 1987b, 200–204.

text was probably addressed to the king's officials (*mahāmātra*) and tells us that this order (*iyaṃ sāsane*, Skt. *idaṃ śāsanaṃ*) is to be made known to the monks and nuns. It also prescribes that individual copies of such edicts (*hedisā ca ikalipi*, lit. 'and identical individual copies') are to be deposited both in a place called *saṃsalaṇa* and with the lay-people. Although the exact meaning of *saṃsalaṇa* remains unclear,[49] the term seems to refer to an institution related to the royal officials (*mahāmātra*) who are to be understood as the addressees of this cover letter. Similar to the case of the Rupnath version of the MRE 1 cited above, the cover letter at Sarnath concludes with the phrase that prescribes the wide distribution of the edict, true to its letter, as far as the district (under the governance of the officials) extends:

> *āvate ca tuphākaṃ āhāle savata vivāsayātha tuphe etena viyaṃjanena hemeva savesu koṭaviṣavesu etena viyaṃjanena vivāsāpayāthā*[50]
>
> And as far as your district [extends], dispatch [this edict] everywhere, true to the letter. In the same way cause (it) to be dispatched – true to the letter – in all territories [protected by a] fort.

Since the wording of this phrase is largely identical with that from Rupnath, it seems to represent a typical instruction found in the cover letters that accompanied the transmission of the Aśokan edicts.

It is possible that the very last known Aśokan inscription, PE 7, which is inscribed only at Delhi-Topra, also contains (part of) a covering letter. It was probably dispatched as a written copy to Topra, where the clerk or stonemason was unsure of the actual shape of the text. In this PE and its covering letter, the king seems to sum up his *dharma*-related activities and explicitly addresses their character and purpose. The king emphasises his manifold proclamations of *dharma* and the activities of his officials in order to distribute and to explain it, including instruction in the *dharma* (*dhaṃmānusathi*, Skt. *dharmānuśāsti*). In this context, the text also refers to the appointment of special officers responsible for the *dharma* (Skt. *dharmamahāmātra*). The text of the RE 3 shows that these activities and *dharma* instructions (Skt. *dharmānuśāsti*) included inspection tours of officials that took place every five years.[51]

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49 Hultzsch 1925, 163: 'office'; Norman 1987b, 201: 'meeting place or office'; Bloch 1950, 153: 'la salle de réunion'.

50 Cited from Hultzsch 1925, 162.

51 See the synoptic text in Schneider 1978, 28. Ulrich Schneider's reconstructed version in the language of Pataliputra: '*savata vijitasi mama yutā lājūke ca pādesike ca paṃcasu paṃcasu vasesu anusaṃyānaṃ nikhamaṃtu etāye vā aṭhāye imāye dhaṃmānusathiye athā aṃnāye pi*

We learn more about these tours from RE 8, which seems to refer to similar events called *dharma* tours (Skt. *dharmayātrā*). It also mentions instructions in the *dharma* (Skt. *dharmānuśāsti*) and interrogations regarding the *dharma* (Skt. *dharmaparipṛcchā*) as activities during these tours.[52]

In the context of these dissemination activities, the text of PE 7 refers to the erection of *dharma* pillars (Skt. *dharmastambha*), which should, thus, be understood as one of the means that accompanied Aśoka's *dharma* campaign. However, the main activities were realised through oral dissemination and enforcement by state officials.

If read together with the final phrase of PE 7, it becomes clear what these *dharmastambha*s are apparently the act of inscribing a royal *dharma* edict transformed a 'rock pillar' (*śilāstambha*) into a *dharmastambha*. This final phrase of PE 7 is probably part of the covering letter that accompanied the dispatch of this edict. Its contents and wording are strongly reminiscent of the MRE 1 from Rupnath, Sahasram, Panguraria and Ratanpurva discussed above:

> *iyaṃ dhaṃmalibi ata athi silāthaṃbhāni vā silāphalakāni vā tata kaṭaviyā ena esa cilaṭhitike siyā*
>
> This *dharma* scripture must be made wherever rock pillars or rock plates [= flat rocks?] are. Thus this may be of long duration.

This final phrase introduces another important aspect to our discussion. Here, the king expresses the wish that his *dharma* be of long (if not eternal) duration. This wish is also repeatedly referred to in other edicts (e.g. RE 4, RE 5, RE 6, PE 2). In this context, the king sometimes addresses his successors directly, for example, in the phrase:

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kaṃmane' ('Everywhere in the country my [officials, namely] the *yuktas*, the *rājūka* and the *prādeśika* shall go out on a tour every five years for this purpose, [namely] for the instruction in the *dharma* and also for other work') These inspection tours in a five-years cycle are also referred to in the SepE 2 from Kalinga (see Schneider 1978, 93–94).

52 See the synoptic text in Schneider 1978, 53–54. Schneider's reconstructed version in the language of Pataliputra: '*tenatā dhaṃmayātā. heta iyaṃ hoti: samanabaṃbhanānaṃ dasane ca dāne ca vuḍhānaṃ dasane ca hilaṃnapaṭividhāne ca jānapadasa janasa dasane dhaṃmānusathi ca dhaṃmapalipuchā ca tadopayā*' ('Therefore *dharma* tours [were introduced]. Here this [following] takes place: visiting and offering to *śramaṇas* [i.e. ascetics] and Brahmins, visiting of old people and supporting [them] with gold, visiting the people of the countryside, and [providing them with] instruction in the *dharma*, and a corresponding interrogation about the *dharma*').

> *etāye aṭhāye iyaṃ dhaṃmalipī likhitā kiṃti cilaṭhitīkā hotu iti tathā ca putā papotā me palakamaṃtū savalokahitāya* (RE 6, Dhauli version).[53]
>
> For this reason this *dharma* scripture was written: that it may stay long and that my sons and grandsons strive in the same way for the welfare of all people.

One could conclude from this that the decision to publish these royal orders in the form of stone inscriptions was also motivated by the desire to preserve them in a material form for as long as possible. What better material for this purpose than stone?

Additionally, in some of the Buddhist and Ājīvika inscriptions of Aśoka (and his son Daśaratha), writing in stone was linked to the desire for longevity of communities and donations.[54]

However, at least some edicts also indicate a more practical use of the objects inscribed. The separate rock edicts published only in Kalinga (Dhauli, Jaugada) and in Sannati in the south are of particular interest here. On these, the king orders that this written edict (*lipi*) be heard (*sotaviyā*) regularly on certain days.[55] Whether the edict is read or recited by heart is left open by the text. However, it seems likely that the inscribed places where people gathered on certain occasions were used in this way: to proclaim the *dharma* aloud.

4 Conclusions

Although we cannot be certain that the Aśokan inscriptions truly represent the initial state of writing on the Indian subcontinent, there can be no doubt that the reign of this emperor marks a turning point in the history of writing. For the first time, an impressive variety of writings are used – from inscriptions of royal edicts on ethical and political issues, to messages to the Buddhist community, donative inscriptions to other religious groups, personal commemorative texts and label inscriptions. Even if we assume that the Brāhmī script, at least, was

53 Cited from Schneider 1978, 47–48, without text-critical marks.

54 *Schism Edict* (Sanchi version): *putapapotike caṃdamasūriyike* ('[as long as my] sons and grandsons [will reign, as long as] moon and sun [will last]') (ed. Hultzsch 1925, 160–161, without text-critical marks); Nagarjuni cave inscriptions: *ācaṃdamaṣūliyaṃ* ('as long as moon and sun [will last]') (ed. Falk 2006, 276).

55 Cited from Hultzsch 1925, 99 (without text-critical marks). For a synoptic view of the Kalinga versions, see Schneider 1978, 92–93. The incomplete Sannati text was edited and discussed by Norman 1991.

created primarily to record the royal edicts, the written artefacts testify to the very rapid diversification of genres and the use of the script even beyond this supposed initial purpose. The way these different types of inscriptions were produced and inserted into a broader natural and architectural landscape is evidence of a creative search for ways to address various audiences in different spatial settings. This search clearly shows a direction of improvement in terms of technical execution, the placement of the inscriptions on different surfaces, the treatment of the surfaces before the inscription and the way the texts were transferred from the place of their composition to the places of the inscription.

It is difficult to determine the exact role of these inscriptions in their various settings, but it is probable that their material presence alone was considered an important aspect: in close association with symbols of royal power (such as pillars and figurative representations of royal animals), they represent the presence and influence of the king. In the case of the official edicts, it can be assumed that their presence also motivated the regular promulgation and explanation of the royal edicts and ensured that these rules were remembered and followed by the king's officials and people. The material chosen – stone – was also associated with the explicit connotation of longevity.

As far as we know, Aśoka's *dharma* was soon forgotten after his death. His successors were neither able to continue his policies nor to ensure the continuity of the Mauryan empire. But many of the inscribed sites remained important places for further political and religious activities. In particular, the better exposed sites of the REs and PEs served for secondary inscriptions: by successive rulers for their own imperial inscriptions and by visitors from different social classes for their personal inscriptions (graffiti).[56]

Abbreviations

MRE = Minor Rock Edict
PE = Pillar Edict
RE = Rock Edict
SepE = Separate Edict
Skt. = Sanskrit

56 See for secondary inscriptions on pillars, Strauch forthcoming b.

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Appendix 1

Table 2: Aśokan sites and related inscriptions and figural representations (with the exception of Greek and Aramaic inscriptions from the north-west).

Sites	Official edicts (with parts of covering letter = C)	Buddhist inscriptions	Other Aśokan inscriptions or figural decorations (only the capital animal for pillars)
Minor Rock Edict Sites			
North and central India			
Ahraura	MRE 1		
Bairat	MRE 1	Calcutta-Bairat edict	
Gujarra	MRE 1		
Delhi	MRE 1		
Panguraria	MRE 1 (C)		Commemorative text (‘preamble’)
Ratanpurva	MRE 1 (C)		
Rupnath	MRE 1 (C)		
Sahasram	MRE 1 (C)		
South India			
“South-western group” (Chitaldrug district)			
Brahmagiri	MRE 1 + 2 (C)		
Jatinga-Ramesvara	MRE 1 + 2 (C)		
Siddapur	MRE 1 + 2 (C)		
“Eastern group” (Kurnool district)			
Erragudi	MRE 1 + 2		REs (see below)
Rajula-Mandagiri	MRE 1 + 2		
Raichur district			
Gavimath	MRE 1		
Maski	MRE 1		
Palkigundu	MRE 1		
“North-western group” (Bellary district)			
Nittur	MRE 1 + 2		
Udegolam	MRE 1 + 2		

Sites	Official edicts (with parts of covering letter = C)	Buddhist inscriptions	Other Aśokan inscriptions or figural decorations (only the capital animal for pillars)
	Major Rock Edict Sites		
Dhauli	RE 1–10, 14, SepE 1 + 2		Elephant sculpture
Erragudi	RE 1–14		MREs (see above)
Girnar	RE 1–14		Elephant drawing
Jaugada	RE 1–10, 14, SepE 1 + 2		
Kalsi	RE 1–14		Elephant drawing, label inscription
Mansehra	RE 1–14		
Sannati	RE 12 + 14, SepE 1 + 2		
Shahbazgarhi	RE 1–14		
Sopara	RE 8 + 9		
	Aśokan Pillars		
Araraj	PE 1–6		missing
Fatehabad-Hisar	PE chiselled out ?		missing
Kausambi	No Aśokan texts		missing
Allahabad-Kausambi	PE 1–6	*Schism Edict* *Queen's Edict*	missing
Bansi	Pillar not preserved, only parts of the capital		lion
Gotihava	No Aśokan texts preserved		missing
Lumbini		Lumbinī inscription	missing
Mirath (Delhi)	PE 1–6		missing
Nandangarh	PE 1–6		lion
Nigliva		Niglīvā inscription	missing
Pataliputra	No Aśokan texts		missing
Rampurva, lion pillar	PE 1–6		lion
Rampurva, bull pillar	No Aśokan texts		bull
Sanchi		*Schism Edict*	lions
Sankisa	Pillar not preserved, only capital		elephant
Sarnath		*Schism Edict*	lions
Topra-Delhi	PE 1–7 (C)		missing
Vesali	No Aśokan texts		lion

Sites	Official edicts (with parts of covering letter = C)	Buddhist inscriptions	Other Aśokan inscriptions or figural decorations (only the capital animal for pillars)
Cave Sites			
Barabar caves (B1–B4)			Ājīvika donative inscriptions by Aśoka (B1, B2, B4)
Nagarjuni caves (N1–N3)			Ājīvika donative inscriptions by Daśaratha (N1–N3)

Appendix 2

Fig. 12: Map of the area discussed here drawn by Sauvage and Strauch.