

## Is Pāli Closest to the Western Aśokan Dialect of Gīrnār?

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India's earliest decipherable writings, the Aśokan rock inscriptions are an indispensable primary witness to the state of the Indian polity and language of the third century B.C. Utilizing these inscriptions it has often been observed that Pāli (P.) is closest to the western Indian Gīrnār (Gir.) version of Aśoka's Rock Edicts (RE) (e. g. Bloch 1950, 44-45; Lamotte 1988, 565; Salomon 1998, 73f.), and this is commonly accepted as a linguistic "fact". Sometime after 250 B.C., Mahinda, Aśoka's son and a Buddhist monk, brought the Buddhist teachings to Sri Lanka in Pāli, where they were memorized, transmitted and eventually written down, in the first century B. C. Indeed there are many similarities between the Pāli linguistic form and that of Gīrnār; however, the differences are just as striking as the similarities. This article will explore the similarities and differences and reevaluate Pāli's linguistic proximity to the other Aśokan dialects of the north (Kālsī=K.) and north-west (Mānsehrā=M. and Shāhbāzgarhī=Sh.).

### The Provenance of Pāli

Despite Buddhaghoṣa's belief that Pāli was in fact Māgadhī, the original language of the Buddha (quoted in Norman 1990B, 128-30), we know that it is a mixed language containing mainly western elements with some eastern features, plus Sanskritizations normalized for ecclesiastical purposes (Lüders 1954; Norman 1983, 4; Lamotte 1988, 563; von Hinüber 1994, 180ff). Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit (BHS) is another Middle-Indic (MI) dialect, believed to stem from the school of the Mahāsāṅghikalokottaravādins (von Hinüber 2001, ¶43), which has undergone even more Sanskritizations than Pāli. Both dialects appear to have developed "side by side at the times of their origin" (von Hinüber 1994, 192); they "flow from the same source", which von Hinüber calls "Buddhist Middle Indic" (von Hinüber 2001, ¶40). The nature of what this source is has occupied researchers for decades. As early as 1916, Geiger surmised that it was a *lingua franca* containing elements of all dialects but free of the most conspicuous dialectal phenomena (p. 3). He variously termed it a *Hoch-und Gebildetensprache* (high and scholarly language), a

*Verkehrssprache* (a *lingua franca* or inter-language) and a *Kunstsprache* (artificial language). Helmer Smith called it a *Koine Gangétique* in 1952 (p. 178). Bechert (1980, 34) wondered if differences in Pāli prose and verse pointed to a middle Indic *Dichtersprache* (poetic language) which was transregional in use. Przyluski believed that "The first canonical texts were written in the Magadhan dialect. When the Sthavira and Sarvāstivādin sects asserted themselves in the regions of Kauśāmbi and Mathurā, each of them drew upon a literary language which was a source of prestige and an instrument of propaganda. Thus, the Scriptures were eagerly translated into Sanskrit at Mathurā and into Pāli at Kauśāmbi" (quoted in Lamotte, 1988, 584).

### Differences between Pāli and Gīrnār

The mystery of Pāli's provenance remains to this day. Lamotte has provided a comprehensive list of the similarities between Pāli and Gīrnār (1988, 565), which list is often cited as evidence of Pāli's "western connection" (see below). I list here a few of the principal differences, in no particular order:

1. All the Aśokan Prakrits have ā or āvu (Gir.) for (Skt.) *Yāvut*, yet Pāli reverts to *yāvu* ("as much as", "until").
2. For the word "self", Gir. has *atpā* < (Skt.) *ātma*, while Pāli always has *atta*. Yet Gir. preserves some absolutes in *-tpā* which Pāli echoes in *-tvā* (e.g. Gir. *dasayitpā*, P. *dassetvā*, "having seen")<sup>1</sup>. So, apparently the western version (and certainly the northwestern version) was *ātman* > *atpa* > *atva*. The form *atva* is well attested in the north-western dialect of Mānśhrā (M.) (RE 12 F<sup>2</sup>, *passim*) and although the Shāhbāzgarhī (Sh.) RE adopts *ata-*, Mehendale maintains this is an eastern borrowing and the proper northwestern treatment of *ātman* is > *atpa* > *atva*, (1956/57, 167). Nevertheless, in the case of Skt. *ātman*, P. is closest to Sh. and the dialects of Kālsī (K.), Jaughada (J.) and Eṛṛaguḍi (Eṛṛ) which also have *ata*. The form *atva-* survives in the Gāndhāri version of the Dhṛp, verse 362 (*ajātva-rado* vs. P. *ajjhata-rato*, "delighting in one's self"). To complicate matters, *appa* also survives as an Ardhamāgadhī (AMg.) or eastern form.<sup>2</sup>
3. In some cases Gir. is more phonologically advanced than Pāli (e. g. RE 13 O, (Skt.) *samacarya* > (Sh. K.) *samacariyaṃ* *Isamacaliyaṃ*, >

- (Gir.) *samacairam* ("spiritual calm"), yet Pāli reverts to the (phonologically) older form (*samacariyā*) as used in Sh. and K.
4. Gir. has *mahiḍā* (RE 9C, Skt. *mahilā* > *mahiḍā*) showing an *-l-* > *-ḍ-* change,<sup>4</sup> but Pāli reverts to Skt. *mahilā* ("woman").
  5. Gir. has *yārisam* < (Skt.) *yādṛśa* ("which like"), but Pāli has *yādisa* (a NW form). Eastern, southern and Mānsehrā forms are *ādisā/ādise/adiṣe* (RE 4 C).
  6. It appears that the normal form of Skt. *guru* ("heavy", "teacher") in Gir. is the same, i. e. *guru*. In RE 9 G, Gir. and K. have *gurūnam* < (Skt.) *gurūnām*, while Sh. has *garuna*; This is also the case in RE 13 G, where Sh. now shows *guru* and only K. (a northern dialect) has *galu*. Later in the same rock edict Gir. has a single instance of *garumat* for Skt. *gurumat* ("serious"), while the other REs show *gurumat*. The normal and oldest form attested in P. is *garu*, similar to the northern and northwestern form. Although *guru* is used in P., it is a younger form dating from the commentaries.
  7. In RE 9 C, Gir. has *chudam* (< Skt. *kṣudram*), M. has *khuda*, K. has *khudā* and Dh. has *khudam* (Sh. *putika*; but *khudra* in RE 10 E), yet Pāli reverts to *khuda* ("futile"). Note also in RE 13 L where Gir. has *chamitave* and Sh. has *kshamitaviya* (dat infinitive, "to bear") and Pāli does not use the western form, but the northwestern form *khanti* < Skt. *ksānti*.
  8. How does Pāli end up with the gerundivium ending *-tabba*? Gir. Sh. and the eastern dialects usually have *-tava* and *-tava* should go to *-tavva*, by regular assimilation (Geiger ¶51-3) and *-v-* > *-b-* is not a normal change (*-v-* > *-p-*, although unusual, is well-attested as noted above). Kuiper calls the interchange of *-v-* and *-b-* "a well-known crux" (1991, 33) and notes the *-b-* > *-v-* change was an attempt to Sanskritize a foreign word with a foreign phoneme, *-b-*. The change *-v-* > *-b-* is "inconceivable" (for the *Rigveda*; *ibid*, 34) and one does not observe it in the Prakrits; however it does happen later in Pāli (Geiger ¶54-6) and von Hinüber (2001, ¶255) notes the use of *-tavvo* in Pāli inscriptions and oldest manuscripts. There are also several uses of *-bb-* for *-vv-* in the *Dhammapada* (Dhp), e. g. verse 53 (P. *kattabbaṃ* vs. PDhp *kātavvaṃ*, "to be done") and verse 113 P. *udayabbayaṃ* vs. Pdhp<sup>3</sup> *udayavyayaṃ* ("rising and falling"). Sn verse 537 has the word *paribbājayitvā*, which, as Norman points out is a pun on *pari* + *√vraj* (to wander) and *pari* + *√vrj* (to reject, abandon) which "only works in a dialect where *bb-* changes to *-vv-*" (Norman 2006A,



263). However it is still not clear phonologically why *-v-* > *-b-* unless through the process noted above (with *ātman*) of *-v-* > *-p-* > *-b-* (i. e. *-tavya* > *-tavva* > *-tappa* > *-tabba*). The latter lenition (*-p-* > *-b-*) is very common and the former fortition (*-v-* > *-p-*) is well attested, if uncommon, in Gir. (Skt. *darṣayitvā* > Gir. *dassayitpā*, "having seen"), Sh. (Skt. *svāmika* > Sh. *spāminka*, "master") and P. (Skt. *P rāvaraṇa* > P. *pāpuraṇa*, "cloak"; Skt. *hāvayati* > P. *hāpeti*; "to sacrifice", see Mehendale 1968, 40). So in this case the P. *-Tabba* Ending seems to relate both to the western and the north/north- Western dialects.

9. In RE 14 E, we find: (Skt.) *saṃkṣaya* > (Gir.) *sacchāya*, > (K.) *ṣaṃkheye*, > (Sh.) *samkhay-*, (M.) *saṃkhay-*, (Err.) *saṃkhāyāyā*, but Pāli goes back, not to the western, but to the northern version *sankhaya* ("loss" as a noun, or "having omitted" as a gerund).
10. Where the northern form and the eastern form are different, Gir. goes with the northern form, as does Pāli: RE 6 F: (Skt.) *āryayika*, > (K. Dh.) *atīyāyike*, > (Gir.) *āccāyika*, > (Sh.) *acayika*, (M.) *acayike*, Pāli (*accāyika*; "urgent").
11. While Gir. often preserves the *-ṣ-* conjunct (e. g. RE 4 C: (Skt.) *anusīṣṭaye* > (Gir.) *anusīṣṭaye* "instruction"; RE 4 G: (Skt.) *śreṣṭha* > (Gir.) *seṣṭe*, "best" and RE 6 D: (Skt.) *sthita* > (Gir.) *ṣṭitā*, *hapax legomenon*, "standing", "being", it is not preserved in Pāli (*anusatthiyā*, *seṭṭha*, *ṭhita*). In this case P. is the similar to K. Dh. and Err. (*anusatthiyē/anusatthiyā*, *seṭṭhe*) and to Sh. and M. which, however, retain the *-r-* (*sreṭṭhe/sreṭṭhaṃ*).
12. Many consonantal clusters are retained in Gir. (*kr*, *tr*, *pr*, *vy*) but few of these are kept in Pāli which often adopts the northern/ eastern form: e. g.
  - A. RE 1 G: (Skt.) *prāṇa* > (Gir.) *prāṇa* > (K. J. Err.) *pāna*, (P.) *pāna* ("living being");
  - B. RE 1 F: (Skt.) *priya* > (Gir.) *priya*, > (K. J. Err.) *piya*, > (Sh.) *pria*, > (M.) *priya*, (P.) *piya* ("dear");
  - C. RE 5 I: (Skt.) *trayodaśa* > (Gir.) *traidasa*, > (K. Dh. Err.) *tedasa*, (Sh.) *todaśa*, > (M.) *treḍaśa*, > (P.) *terasa/telasa* ("thirteen"). The Pāli word shows a *-d-* > *-r-* change which is characteristic of Gāndhārī, the north-western dialect (Brough 1962, ¶43-b);
  - D. RE 10 C: (Skt.) *-tika*, > (Gir.) *-trika*, > (K. Dh. J.) *-tika*, > (Sh. M.) *-trika*, (P.) *-tika* ("threefold"). In the Aśokan edicts this word occurs in the compound

- pāra-trika* (MW: “advantageous in another world” or “with a view to the next world” (Woolner 1924, s.v.). Strangely, the compound does not exist in Pāli which uses the northern/eastern form *or-tika*, not the western;
- E. RE 4 F: (Skt.) *putrāḥ* > (Gir.) *putrā* > (K. Dh.) *putā*, > (Sh. M.) *putra*, > (P.) *puttā* (“sons”)
- F. RE 6 B: (Skt.) *atīkrāntam*, > (Gir) *atīkrātam*, > (Sh. M.) *atīkratam*, > (K. Dh. J) *atīkajtam*, (P.) *atīkkanta* (“passed”). Pāli follows the northern/eastern form. The same situation exists for the common verb *parāvā kram*;
- G. With the common Skt. word *Brāhmaṇa*, P. is closest to the Sh and M. versions (*Bramaṇa*), although P. is clearly a back-formation to Skt. Gīrnār uses the *br-* form of *Brāhmāna* in two out of 7 cases.<sup>8</sup>
- H. A case where Pāli preserves the conjunct *vy-*, from Gir. is found in RE 5 J: (Skt.) *vyāpṛta* > (Gir.) *vyāpatā*, > (K. Dh.) *vīyāpaṭā*, > (Sh.) *vapaṭa*, > (M.) *vapuṭa* > (P.) *vyāvāṭa* (“busy”, “engaged”). Note the change of *-p-* to *-v-* and *-t-* to *-ṭ-*. The preservation of *-vy-* does not appear to be invariably the case as in RE 8 B, Gir. has *magavyā* (< Skt. *mṛgavya*, “hunting”), while P. has *migavā*, unless the latter is derived from alt. Skt. word *mṛgayā* (also meaning “hunting”) with a change *-y-* > *-v-*. Other examples where the *vy-* is not retained is Skt. *vyāda* > P. *vāla* (“snake”) and Skt. *vrata* > P. *vata* (“religious observance”).
13. In RE 4 F (Gir.) uses the term *prapotrū* to mean “great-grandson” (< Skt. *prapautra*), with *potrū* meaning “grandson”, and *putrā*, “son”; the other REs use *paṇatika* for “great-grandson” (< Skt. *pranapṭṛ*) and *natāle/nataro* to mean grandsons (< Skt. *naptāraḥ*, pl. of *naptṛ*). Pāli has the word *paputta*, but it means “grandson”, not “great-grandson” and has no equivalent to Gīrnār’s *potra*. For “great-grandson” Pāli has *panattu* (not in PED, but in Buddhadatta 1979, 232) which, once again, corresponds with K. (*panāṭikyā*), Dh. (*panattī*), Sh. (*praṇatika*) M. (*paṇatika*) Eṛṣ. (*panāṭikā*), but not Gir. Pāli also has the word *nattar* for “grandson” which corresponds to all the REs but Gir.

What we are witnessing in the above collection is that Pāli is not as closely related to the Aśokan western dialect as has commonly been believed. In fact, in all but a few cases above, P. is much more closely related to the northern (K.) or northwestern (Sh. M.) dialects.