

# EMPEROR AŚOKA AND THE FIVE GREEK KINGS

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(Figures 1 & 2 missing; Footnotes in draft)

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, light was shed on the ancient history of India by the discovery and decipherment of a large number of royal edicts carved in forgotten alphabets on rocks and pillars. The edicts heralded the achievements of a king named Priyadarśi in "moral conquest" or *dharma-vijaya*—an ambitious program of public works and state-controlled moral reform for which he claimed success at home and in many foreign territories.

Since Priyadarśi's edicts were found over a broad area of the Indian subcontinent, ranging from northern Pakistan to South India, it appeared that he was a powerful emperor of great historical importance. At first it was difficult to identify him with any known historical figure. But scholars surmised that Priyadarśi might be Aśoka, an emperor who is mentioned in the dynastic lists of the *Purāṇas* and who is glorified in the Ceylonese Buddhist text *Mahāvamsa* for his efforts to spread Buddhism. They therefore began to refer to Priyadarśi's inscriptions as the edicts of Aśoka. They believed this identification was clinched by the discovery of inscriptions at Maski in 1919 and Gujarra in 1954 that referred to Priyadarśi as Aśoka<sup>1</sup>.

Most of the Aśokan edicts were written in various dialects of Prākṛit, an ancient Indian language closely related to Sanskrit. Many were written in the Brāhmī alphabet, which is the ancestor of many Indian alphabets of today, and a few were written in Kharoṣṭhī, an alphabet related to the Aramaic script of Persia and the Near East.<sup>2</sup>

In 1838, James Prinsep reported the successful decipherment of the Brāhmī alphabet, and he published the first translation of an Aśokan edict. He also reported the translation of the Aśokan rock edict 2, which had been found and transcribed at Girnār in the province of Gujarat and at Dhauli in Orissa<sup>3</sup>.

This achievement was accompanied by a remarkable discovery. Prinsep read what he took to be the name of Antiochus the Great in the Girnār and Dhauli inscriptions. Antiochus the Great was the king of Syria in 223-187 B.C., and he ruled a war-torn empire extending from Asia Minor in the West to Persia in the East. If Antiochus was truly mentioned by Aśoka, this would fix the date of Aśoka's reign and shed light on the political relations between India and the West in ancient times.

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<sup>1</sup> Woolner, 1924, p. xx and Sen, 1956, pp. 10, 51.

<sup>2</sup> Beginning in 1914, Aśokan edicts written in the Aramaic language were found in the area of Afghanistan. Edicts written in Greek began to turn up in this area in 1957 (Mukherjee, 1984)

<sup>3</sup> Prinsep, 1838a

Later in the same year, Prinsep reported another important discovery that he said was "most attractive to all who have been nurtured in the school of western classical associations" <sup>4</sup>. This time he read in Girnār rock edict 13 the names of three additional Hellenistic kings: Ptolemy, Magas, and possibly Antigonus. There was only one candidate for Magas: king Magas of Cyrene who ruled in 300-258 B.C. To make the other kings contemporaries of Magas of Cyrene, Prinsep argued that Ptolemy should be Ptolemy Philadelphus of Egypt and Antiochus should be one of the predecessors of Antiochus the Great—either Antiochus Soter or Theos. For Antigonus he suggested king Antigonus Gonatas of Macedonia<sup>5</sup>.

A few years later in 1845, another name was added to the list. E. Norris deciphered the Aśokan inscriptions of Shāhbāzgarhi in northern Pakistan. Like the Girnār and Dhauli inscriptions, these were divided into 14 texts that are called rock edicts since they are inscribed on natural rock surfaces. The rock edicts at Shāhbāzgarhi and other sites proved to contain essentially the same material as those at Girnār, and in rock edict 13 Norris found the four names already discovered. Norris also added a fifth—an Alexander whom he tentatively identified as king Alexander of Epirus.<sup>6</sup>

Scholars quickly became convinced that the five names discovered in the Aśokan inscriptions had been properly identified as Hellenistic kings living in the period between Alexander the Great and the extension of Roman power to Asia. In books on ancient Indian history, the identifications of the five names are typically presented as follows:

Aśokan name	Hellenistic king	Reign (years B.C.)
Am̐tiyoka	Antiochus Theos of Syria	261-246
Turamāya	Ptolemy Philadelphus of Egypt	285-247
Am̐tikini	Antigonus G <sup>7</sup> onatas of Macedonia	276-239
Maga	Magas of Cyrene	c. 300-c. 250
Alikasum̐dara	Alexander of Epirus or Alexander of Corinth	272-c. 258 252-c. 244

Table 1. Accepted identifications of the five kings of Aśoka's rock edict 13.<sup>8</sup>

Scholars date Aśoka's reign on the basis of his presumed mention of the five Hellenistic kings. If we examine the regnal periods in Table 1, we can see that all five kings were reigning simultaneously in the brief period from 261 B.C. to 258 B.C. This period should be regarded as approximate since the dates assigned to these kings vary somewhat from one textbook to another.

Many scholars maintain that rock edict 13 must have been issued during this period since it seems to refer to all five kings as contemporary rulers. The rock edicts are said to

<sup>4</sup> Prinsep, 1938b, p. 219

<sup>5</sup> Prinsep, 1838b, pp. 225-26

<sup>6</sup> Norris, 1846

<sup>7</sup> xxxxx

<sup>8</sup> Bhandarkar, 1955, p. 43

indicate that they were compiled 12 years after the coronation of Priyadarśi (Bongard-Levin, 1985, p. 89). If we add 12 to 261 B.C. we get 273 B.C. for the date of the coronation. The Purāṇas say that Aśoka reigned for 36 years, and the Ceylonese chronicles give a period of 37 years. Subtracting these figures from 273 B.C., we get 236-237 B.C. for the end of Aśoka's reign.

Of course, there are many different ways to derive dates for Aśoka's reign from this evidence. Nikam (1966, p. 1) and Majumdar (1960a, pp. 108, 115) give a period of about 273 B.C. to 232 B.C. Bongard-Levin (1985, p. 90) gives 268 or 265 B.C. to roughly 232-228 B.C. The essence of the argument is that if the five kings have been properly identified and Aśoka was their contemporary, then Aśoka's reign must overlap with all of their reigns. Then again, if the five kings have been properly identified and Aśoka merely heard about them, it follows that the end of his reign must come after the beginnings of all their reigns. In either case, Aśoka cannot antedate any of these kings.

But have the five kings been properly identified? How do we decide whether a similarity between two names is due to historical identity or is just coincidental? Clearly, the answers to these questions do not depend simply on the names themselves. To arrive at a satisfactory answer, we must examine the names in their historical setting. I will begin by asking how well Priyadarśi's program of *dharma-vijaya* fits into the Hellenistic societies of the 3rd century B.C.

## I. AŚOKA'S MEDITERRANEAN MISSION

If Am̐tiyoka and his colleagues were really the Hellenistic kings of Table 1, then Priyadarśi was apparently running a large scale propaganda and foreign aid program in the eastern Mediterranean region. At least, this is the impression conveyed by the two Aśokan edicts that mention the famous names. The first of these is rock edict 2:

"Everywhere in the dominions of King Priyadarśi, as well as the border territories of the Choḷas, the Pāṇḍyas, the Satiyaputra, the Keralaputra [all in the southern tip of the Indian peninsula], the Ceylonese, the Yona king named Am̐tiyoka, and those kings who are neighbors of Am̐tiyoka—everywhere provision has been made for two kinds of medical treatment, treatment for men and for animals.

"Medicinal herbs, suitable for men and animals, have been imported and planted wherever they were not previously available. Also, where roots and fruits were lacking, they have been imported and planted.

"Wells have been dug and trees planted along the roads for the use of men and animals" (Nikam, 1966, p. 64).

Here the translator gave the name of the Yona king as "Antiochos," but I have restored it to "Am̐tiyoka" in accordance with the actual text of the edict. The second edict mentioning the names is rock edict 13. This edict mentions the names of Am̐tiyoka's four colleagues, and it also makes strong claims regarding the ideological impact of Aśoka's program:

"King Priyadarśi considers moral conquest [*Dharma-vijaya*] the most important conquest. He has achieved this moral conquest repeatedly both here and among the peoples living beyond the borders of his kingdom, even as far away as 600 *yojanas*, where the Yona king Antiyoka rules, and even beyond Antiyoka in the realms of the four kings named Turamaya, Antikini, Maka, and Alikasudara, and to the south among the Cholas and Pāṇḍyas as far as Ceylon" (Nikam, 1966, p. 29).

The program outlined in these edicts is quite realistic for India. The moral laws that Priyadarśi was advocating are part of India's ancient tradition of *sanātana-dharma*, and Indian kings were expected to uphold these principles. The fact that the principles of *dharma* were once prominent throughout the Indian subcontinent suggests that *dharma-vijaya* was accomplished by some Indian rulers, and these may well have included Priyadarśi.

It was also traditional for Indian kings to engage in the public works mentioned in edict 2, and it would have been realistic for Priyadarśi to arrange for such works within India, even in areas not under his direct authority. In India such public works are well known. For example, J. Wilson, who recorded the Girnār edicts, made the following comments about the Jains in Gujarat: "They maintain *pinjarāpurs*, or brute hospitals, like the Banyas of Surat, in many of the towns both of the peninsula and province of *Gujerāt*; and practice to a great extent the long forgotten, but now restored, edict of Asoka" (Prinsep, 1838c, p. 337). Likewise, Perry (1851, p. 152) mentions the universal appearance of *dharmasālas* in all Hindu states. He also refers to groves of artificially planted mangos and other fruit trees that sometimes extend for miles.

But was Priyadarśi's program realistic for the eastern Mediterranean region, where philosophies, customs, and state policies were greatly different from those of India? Although this seems doubtful, Prinsep thought so. Regarding Egypt, he said,

We can easily believe that its enlightened sovereign would afford every encouragement to the resort of Indians thither, for the sake of promoting that commerce with India which was so fertile a source of enrichment: and indeed history tells us that Ptolemy Philadelphus deputed a learned man named Dionysius to India to examine the principal marts on the western coast, and in the interior" (Prinsep, 1838b, p. 226).

He also suggested that Ptolemy would have been eager to study the philosophy of the Indian *brachmani* and *sramani*, and he expected that much evidence would be found of the influence of Buddhist principles on the "prevailing opinions of the day" in Antioch and Alexandria (Prinsep, 1838b, pp. 226-27).

But it turns out that historians have not uncovered any reference to Priyadarśi or his Mediterranean mission in the histories of the Hellenistic kingdoms. The surviving Greco-Roman records do not name the Indian king to whom Dionysius was sent (Bevan, 1968, p. 155). They mention only two Indian kings known to the successors of Alexander the Great, and neither of these is a good candidate for Aśoka (Majumdar, 1960b). One is Amitrochades, who scholars identify as Aśoka's father. The other is Sophagasenus, a minor king who had some dealings with Antiochus the Great. The absence of recognizable Greco-Roman references to Aśoka stands out as an anomaly in the standard reconstruction of Indian history.

If we examine Priyadarśi's edicts, we find that most of them describe a non-denominational social program involving public works and moral instructions. In contrast, the Ceylonese Buddhist chronicle *Mahāvamsa* says that Aśoka sent out missionaries who explicitly preached Buddhist doctrines, built Buddhist temples, and converted large numbers of people to Buddhism (Upham, 1833, pp. 76-83). This discrepancy suggests that the Aśoka of the *Mahāvamsa* and the Priyadarśi of the edicts may not have been the same person, even though the Maski and Gujjarra edicts seem to suggest that they were the same.

If they were not the same person, then the edicts of Priyadarśi tell us nothing about Aśoka. If they were the same, then we would expect to see signs of explicit Buddhist influence in the Hellenistic kingdoms of the 3rd century B.C. As we have seen, Prinsep certainly expected this. Yet the historian R. C. Majumdar said, "Greece knew nothing of Buddhism previous to the rise of Alexandria in the Christian era. Buddha was first mentioned by Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150-218)" (Majumdar, 1951, p. 616). The absence of signs of Buddhist influence in the Hellenistic world is strong evidence suggesting that the agents of Aśoka-Priyadarśi were not active there.

Another reason for doubting the reality of Priyadarśi's Mediterranean mission lies in the list of Hellenistic kingdoms in Table 1. Egypt, Syria, Macedonia, Cyrene, Epirus, and Corinth are a very heterogeneous group. They range in size from Syria, which controlled territories from Asia Minor to the borders of Aśoka's kingdom, to Cyrene and Epirus, which were small principalities dominated by stronger neighbors (Egypt and Macedonia). Corinth, of course, was a Greek city-state.

Why would Priyadarśi publicize programs in these particular places and not mention other states in the same general area? Here is a partial list of additional states (or confederations) that were existing during the general time period assigned to Aśoka's reign. Some of these states were initially provinces or Satrapies of Alexander's empire, and they acquired independence by revolting against his successors.

State	Region	Kings	Key Dates (B.C.)
Achaean League	Greece		c. 280
Aetolian League	Greece		279-217
Athens	Greece		free c. 262
Bactria	N.W. of India	Diodotus I & II	256-235
Bithynia	Asia Minor	Nicomedes I	279-225
Parthia	N. Iran	Arsaces I	c. 250
Pergamum	Asia Minor	Philataerus	282-263
		Eumenes	263-241
Pontus	Asia Minor	Mithradates	280

Table 2. Some states existing during the reign assigned to Aśoka (Davis, 1973, and Kinder, 1974).

Bactria, in particular, would have been situated on Aśoka's western frontier. This territory revolted against Antiochus Theos of Syria in about 256 B.C. under the leadership of Diodotus I, and it quickly became a major political power on the western border of India. Before 256 B.C., Bactria would have been a Satrapy of Antiochus. But even then it

was a logical target for Priyadarśī's program of propaganda and foreign aid. Yet he does not seem to mention Bactria or any of the other countries listed in Table 2.

Modern scholars have taken a great deal of information about Aśoka from Ceylonese Buddhist chronicles, such as the *Mahāvamsa*. We might therefore ask what these sources have to say about Aśoka's mission to the West. The *Mahāvamsa* states that Aśoka's chief priest Moggaly-Tisse-Maha sent out nine senior priests as Buddhist missionaries. These are named in Table 3, along with the countries to which they were sent (Upham, 1833, pp. 76-83).

All of the regions mentioned in this table are in India or directly adjacent to India. Why is there no mention of Egypt, Syria, and Macedonia in this list? According to historian Vincent Smith, "The exclusion of the Hellenistic kingdoms from the Ceylon list is easily explained when we remember that these kingdoms had ceased to exist centuries before that list was completed" (Smith, 1964, p. 44).

Majumdar (1960a, p. 184) held that the *Mahāvamsa* was probably written by the poet Mahānāma in the late 5th century A.D. If this poet could not describe the history of long-vanished kingdoms, then how was he able to write about the long-vanished Aśoka? The story of Aśoka's successful preaching in the Mediterranean countries should have been treasured by the Buddhist chroniclers as one of the great victories of their faith. Even if Aśoka made the whole thing up, it still made a great story—and the *Mahāvamsa* is certainly not lacking in amazing stories. The testimony of the *Mahāvamsa* clearly tends to support the idea that Aśoka-Priyadarśī was not in contact with the heirs of Alexander the Great.

Preacher	Region
Matjantica	Cāsmira and Gandāre (Kashmir and Kandahar)
Mahadewe	Mahimandelle (Mysore)
Racsita	Wannewahse (North Kannara)
Yoneke-Darmeracsita	Aperanta (coast north of Bombay)
Mahadarmeracsita	Rawstra (West Central India)
Maharacsita	Yonacca (N. W. frontier provinces)
Matjeoma Maher	Hemmewanta (Himalayan region)
Seeneca	Swarnewarna (in Burma)
Mihidu and others	Ceylon

Table 3. Buddhist missionaries sent out by Aśoka's chief priest and the lands where they preached.

Some commentators have, indeed, denied the reality of Priyadarśī's Western mission and dismissed his statements about it as "oriental vanity," or mere idle boasting (Perry, 1851, p. 167). The prominent indologist H. H. Wilson even went so far as to deny that the Priyadarśī of the edicts existed as a historical personality. He suggested that "the rulers of several countries or influential religious persons adopted the shadow of a name, to give authority to the promulgation of edicts intended to reform the immoral practices of the people" (Wilson, 1850, p. 250). According to Wilson, the names Antiochus, Ptolemy, Antigonus, Magas, and Alexander had become known in India, and they were simply used

for prestige by the edict writers. If Wilson was right, references to Hellenistic kings in the edicts would tell us nothing about the date of Aśoka.

But suppose Priyadarśī was real and was identical with the Aśoka of the *Purāṇas*. The statements in the Aśokan edicts sound eminently practical and realistic when applied to India or bordering territories under strong Indian influence. Aśoka-Priyadarśī was evidently not given to idle boasting at home. So why should he make wild claims about nonexistent missionary activities in distant countries?

Yet if his western programs really took place, why did they leave no trace in the Western world? Whether they took place or not, why were his claimed successes forgotten by the Buddhist chroniclers who glorified him as a great propagator of Buddhism? The standard theory is not consistent with the historical evidence.

One solution to this problem is to suppose that Priyadarśī's mission was limited to the immediate vicinity of India and that Am̐tiyoka and his colleagues were minor kings of small Indian states. This would explain why the Buddhist chronicles do not name them and why there is no Western reference to Aśoka. It also makes Aśoka's claims uniformly realistic and consistent.

This proposal also accounts for the fact that Am̐tiyoka is referred to in the edicts as Yona-rāja—a rather humble title. Prinsep (1838c, pp. 346-48) pointed out that a Sanskrit inscription near Girnār mentioned a Yavana-rāja named Tushaspa who was under the orders of Aśoka Maurya. Prinsep translated Yavana-rāja as "Greek officer," and, interestingly enough, he pointed out that Tushaspa is a Persian name. The Prākṛit word Yona is generally taken to be synonymous with the Sanskrit word Yavana. This suggests that Yona-rāja in Aśoka's edicts might have designated an inferior king or officer. It also suggests that such a person was not necessarily Greek. He might have been a Persian or perhaps a member of some other non-Indian ethnic group.

Antiochus Theos was a successor of Alexander the Great and the Persian King-of-Kings. One would think that Priyadarśī, as an expert diplomat, would refer to him accordingly. Even if Priyadarśī was making up a story about some famous Western kings, the story sounds better if the objects of successful preaching are important rulers with impressive titles. In contrast, the term Yona-rāja might be appropriate for a minor ruler of some outcast group on the fringes of Priyadarśī's domains.

Of course, the proposal that Am̐tiyoka was a minor Indian potentate is tantamount to a major paradigm shift in modern historical thought. Before we can seriously contemplate such a shift, we will have to consider much additional evidence. The next step is to examine how the five names were discovered and try to evaluate the how close they are to the names of the five celebrated Hellenistic kings.

## II. AM̐TIYOKA

Am̐tiyoka is the best attested of the five names. The following table from Schneider (1978, pp. 25, 76) lists the forms of this name that were known from the rock edicts as of 1978.

Er	aṁtiyoke	aṁtiyokenā	[aṁtiyo]ge	aṁtiyogasa
Ka	atiyoge	a[ṁ]tiyogenā	aṁtiyoge	[a]ṁtiyogasā
Ma	...tiyo[ge]		[a]tiyoge	...[gasa]
Sh	aṁtiyoko	atiyok[e]na	aṁtiyo[k]o	aṁtiyokasa
Gi			aṁtiyako	aṁtiy[a]kas[a]
Dh			...[t]iyoke	aṁtiyo[ka]sa
Jg			aṁtiyoke	aṁtiyokasa

Table 4. Forms of Aṁtiyoka found in rock edicts 2 and 13. Letters that were difficult to read are enclosed in square brackets. Two-letter codes designate the rock edict sites where the names are found. Er: Erṛdaguḍi; Ka: Kālsī; Ma: Mānsehrā; Sh: Shāhbāzgarhī; Gi: Girnār; Dh: Dhaulī; Jg: Jaugāḍa.

The letters enclosed in square brackets proved difficult to read. The Aśokan rock edicts were generally written in a careless fashion, and the effects of time have reduced their original legibility. Figure 1 illustrates how the five names look in one of the original inscriptions. The figure shows the line from the Kālsī rock edict 13 giving the names of the five kings. This edict is written in the Brāhmī alphabet, which is based on 35 letters and a system of vowel marks similar to the one used in Devanagari. The reader might like to try reading this line using the Brāhmī alphabet table in Appendix 3. (The answer is given in Appendix 4.)

[Scanned line from Kalsi rock edict 13]

Figure 1. Line from the Kālsī rock edict 13 giving the names of the five kings. This is taken from a rubbing of the inscription published by Bühler (1894).

From the information in Table 4, Schneider concluded that the proper form of the name Aṁtiyoka is Aṁtiyoke or Aṁtiyoge. This name is certainly similar to the Greek name Antiochos, but can we conclude that it actually refers to one of the Seleucid kings of that name? Before reaching a final conclusion, we should first examine the other four names.

### III. TURAMAYA

In his narrative about the Shāhbāzgarhi inscription, Masson (1846, p. 296) made a passing reference to the villages of Mirdān, Hotti, Tūrū, and Meyār near Shāhbāzgarhi. Note the similarity between Tūrū-Meyār and Turamaya. "It's just a coincidence," you might say. Perhaps so, and I wonder how often such coincidences show up in the vast collection of Asian, African, and European names. The question is: Could the alleged

correspondence between Turamaya and Ptolemaios also be coincidental, or is Aśoka's Turamaya identical with one of the Ptolemies of Egypt?

To Prinsep, identity was proven by the juxtaposition between the name Turamaya and the word Yona-rāja, which he associated with king Antiochus the Great. Prinsep noticed that Turamaya followed shortly after this word. He said,

"The sight of my former friend the *yona rāja*, (whom, if he should not turn out to be Antiochus the ally, I shall soon find another name for), drew my particular attention to what followed; and it was impossible, with his help, not to recognize the name of Ptolemy even in the disguise of Turamayo" (Prinsep, 1838, p. 225).

His implicit reasoning was that if Turamaya is mentioned in connection with a Hellenistic king, then instead of seeking a match for this name in the total set of ancient names, we should restrict our attention to names of Hellenistic kings. Once this is done, it is obvious that Turamaya must be one of the Ptolemies of Egypt.

This reasoning can be accepted, as long as we realize that the key element here is the identification of Arntiyoke the Yona-rāja with one of the Hellenistic kings named Antiochus. Without this identification, there is no compelling reason to link Turamaya with Ptolemaios, since the resemblance between these two names is not very great.

Prinsep tried to strengthen his case by suggesting that the 'r' in Turamaya was doubtful, and the actual reading of the inscription might be Tulamaya, which is much closer to Ptolemaios. It turns out that scholars have continued to read this letter as an 'r' in the Girnār inscription. However, in the Kālsī and Erṛdaguḍi rock edicts the word is written Tulamaye.

This might seem to vindicate Prinsep, and Schneider (1978, p. 76) seems to agree. But it turns out that the Prākṛit dialects of the Kālsī and Erṛdaguḍi edicts convert *all* r's into l's. For example, *rāja* becomes *lāja*. One can argue that the original name Turamaya was converted into Tulamaya when it was written in these dialects. The dialects using the spelling Turamaya (at Girnār and Shāhbāzgarhī) used both r's and l's. So if the name was originally Tulamaya, there would be no reason to write it as Turamaya in these dialects.

The elements of Turamaya appear in Sanskrit literature. In the *Bhāgavat Purāṇa* (9.22.38) there is a reference to Tura, the son of Kalāṣa, a priest of Janamejaya. *Tura* means speedy or energetic in Sanskrit. There are also many *Purāṇic* references to an Asura named Maya who is famous for his technological expertise. Thus Turamaya could possibly be a native Indian word.

Curiously enough, the resemblance between Turamaya and Asura Maya has been exploited by indologists. Ebenezer Burgess, in his translation of the *Sūrya-siddhānta*, maintained that the Asura Maya of that text is a corruption of Turamaya—here identified as the astronomer Ptolemy of the second century A.D. (Burgess, 1860, p. 4).

#### IV. AMTEKINI

Prinsep first read the name Amtekini in the Girnār rock edict 13 as Gongakena, but he conjectured that the correct reading should be Antikono, representing the Macedonian

king Antigonus Gonatas (Prinsep, 1838, pp. 224-25). Later scholars only partially confirmed this guess, giving the following readings (Schneider, 1978, p. 76).

Site	Reading
Erṛdaguḍi	am̐t[i]k[e]ni
Kālsī	am̐teki[ne]
Mānsehrā	am̐t[e...]
Shāhbāzgarhī	am̐tikini
Girnār	[a]m̐t[ek]ina

Table 5. Forms of Am̐tekini.

As before, the brackets around some of the letters indicate that they are difficult to read. Am̐tekini seems to be poorly written in several of the inscriptions, and its exact spelling is therefore somewhat uncertain.

(a).xxxxx (b).xxxxx (c).xxxxx (d).xxxxx

Figure 2. Successive facsimiles of Am̐tekini from the Girnār inscription. These are from (a) Prinsep (1838), (b) Jacob and Westergaard (1843), (c) Wilson (1850), and (d) Bühler (1894).

Prinsep originally read this name in a facsimile of the Girnār inscription in which the first letter looked like a poorly written Brāhmī 'go' (Figure 2a). Since the third letter looked like a 'ga', he arrived at Gongakena. 'Go' can be seen as a Brāhmī 'a' on its side, and 'ga' could be the lower half of 'ta' with some unknown vowel marking. This suggests a reading such as Am̐takena, and Prinsep therefore proposed Antikono in hopes of matching the Greek name Antigonus.

In two later facsimiles reported by Jacob and Westergaard (1843) and Wilson (1850), the third letter of the name is still written as a 'ga', as it was in Prinsep's facsimile (Figure 2b, 2c). Jacob and Westergaard specifically commented that it is "very doubtful if there be an upper stroke to constitute a ta." However, in the estampage published by Bühler (1894), the upper stroke and vowel mark of a 'te' are clearly visible (Figure 2d). The initial 'a' is very poorly formed, and one can see how it might once be mistaken for a 'go'. But it is surprising that three successive observers would read a clear 'te' as a 'ga'—unless, of course, the inscription was deliberately modified to improve the evidence.

But let us leave aside the question of data improvement. The accepted readings of Am̐tekini in Table 5 are not very similar to the Greek name Antigonus or to Prinsep's Antikono. Yet in Prākṛit it is easy to spell and pronounce Am̐tikono and Am̐tigono. Bühler argued that Am̐tekini matches the Greek name Antigenes, but unfortunately none of the Hellenistic kings had this name (Bhandarkar, 1955, p. 43). As with Turamaya, the

identification of Am̐tekini with a known Hellenistic king seems to depend on the precedent set by the initial identification of Am̐tiyoke as Antiochus.

## V. MAGĀ

The rock edicts clearly record the name Magā or Makā. If Turamaya and Am̐tiyoke are accepted as Hellenistic kings, it is natural to seek such a king with a name resembling Magā. Prinsep (1838, p. 225) pointed out that Ptolemaios Theos had a half-brother named Magas who governed Cyrene, a small Egyptian territory in what is now Libya. The name Magas is certainly similar to Magā, but Magas was a very obscure and unimportant ruler. Why would he be singled out for mention by Aśoka among so many other potentates of Asia, Africa, and Europe?

There are many names in India making use of the word *maga*. For example, there are the Magā brahmins and the Magadhas, or bards, after whom the province of Magadha was named. There is even a Makām river near Shāhbāzgarhi (Woolner, 1924, p. xi). Were it not for the Western identifications of Am̐tiyoke, Am̐tekini, and Turamaya, one would not be justified in going all the way to Libya to look for Magā.

By the way, there was a Carthaginian general named Mago who lived in about 550-500 B.C. (Davis, 1861, p. 96). Another Carthaginian general named Mago died in the second Punic war in 203 B.C. (Kinder, 1974, p. 83). If Mago is an ancient Phoenician name, then it might show up in many widely separated times and places.

## VI. ALIKASUDARE

Although Prinsep was the first to read and identify four of the five Greek names, he missed Alikasudare since it was not present in the Girnār or Dhauli inscriptions. This name was first revealed in the Shāhbāzgarhi inscription, which was discovered by M. Court in 1836 (Masson, 1846, p. 293). In 1838, C. Masson visited the site of the inscription in what is now northern Pakistan and made copies and inked impressions on calico cloth.

The inscription is written in the Bactro-Pali or Kharoṣṭhī alphabet and was initially difficult to record and read properly. It was first deciphered by Norris and Dowson in 1845. Norris commented repeatedly in his report to the Royal Asiatic Society that the inscription was poorly legible (Norris, 1846). This was especially true of the back side of the rock where edict 13 was inscribed. However, he noted that "from this illegibility one line, containing the names of the five Western Kings must be fortunately excepted" (Wilson, 1850, p. 156). The unusual legibility of this line gives rise to some questions which I discuss in Appendix 1. The line itself was read as follows in 1850:

*"Antiyoko nama yona raja parancha tena Antiyokena chaturō |||| rajano Turamara  
nama Antikona nama Mako nama Alikasunari nama"* (Wilson, 1850, p. 225).

Later on, students of the Shāhbāzgarhi inscription made some revisions in the spelling of these names. They decided that Turamara should be Turamaye, Antikona should be Am̐tikini, Mako should be Maka, and Alikasunari should be Alikasudaro. Note that Antikona is much closer to Antigonus (and Prinsep's Antikono) than Am̐tikini.

The name Alikasunari was inevitably interpreted as Alexander, and Norris was perhaps the first to suggest that this might be king Alexander of Epirus, a tiny principality near what is now southern Albania (Norris, 1846, p. 305). Since then, scholars have generally identified Alikasudaro either with this Alexander or with Alexander of Corinth, a city in the Peloponnesus of Greece.

In books on Aśoka, Alikasudaro has sometimes been written as Alikasundara or Alikasum̐dara, even though this spelling has apparently not been observed in the inscriptions (Ojha, 1968, p. 59, and Bhandarkar, 1955, pp. 43, 45). This change—an example of data improvement—does make Alikasudaro sound more like Alexander, but the resemblance is still not very close. The Sanskrit form of Alexandros should be something like Alakṣandraḥ. In Prākṛit, this should become Alaṣanda or Alakkhanda. In comparison with these forms, Alikasum̐dara and Alikasudaro both stand out as anomalies.

The word Alasandā is found in Buddhist literature as a name for a city in the land of the Yonas. The Buddhist chronicle *Mahāvamsa* says that there was a large Buddhist community there. It goes on to say that once "the thera Yonaka Mahā Dhammarakkita came to Anurādhapura [in Ceylon] from Alasandā with 30,000 monks" (Malalasekera, 1960, p. 187). This Alasandā is accepted by the Russian scholar Bongard-Levin as the Alexandria founded by Alexander the Great near Kabul (Bongard-Levin, 1985, p. 242).

In the Pali text *Milinda* there is a reference to an Alasanda which Tarn (1951, p. 420) takes to be Alexandria of the Caucasus. Thus the form Alasanda is attested at least twice as an actual Prākṛit word for Alexandria. This suggests that Prākṛit speakers would not represent Alexandros as Alikasudaro.

Interestingly enough, the word Alikasum̐dara is meaningful in Sanskrit. *Alika* means false, and *sum̐dara* means beauty. Thus Alikasum̐dara could mean "deceptive beauty." Since *alaka* means hair, the word Alakasum̐dara could also be a name meaning "one with beautiful hair." It is therefore plausible that Alikasudaro may derive from a Sanskrit name and may have nothing to do with Alexander.

Note that Prinsep's method of proof by association works in reverse. According to this method, if Am̐tiyoke is Antiochus, then the other names listed along with Am̐tiyoke must also refer to Hellenistic kings. But likewise, if Alikasudaro refers not to Alexander but to someone living in India, then one can argue that the other names listed with it also refer to people living in India. We have seen that Turamaya, Am̐tekini, and Alikasudaro are not very close to Ptolemaios, Antigonos, and Alexander. Magā is close to the name of the obscure ruler Magas, and Am̐tiyoke is close to Antiochus. The question is, do the strong points of Am̐tiyoke and Magā counteract the weak points of the other three names, or is it the other way around?

It should also be pointed out that the name Alexander was quite old in the days of Alexander the Great. Paris of Troy was also named Alexander, and some scholars believe that he corresponds to king Alakshandush of Vilusha in Asia Minor, who lived in about 1300 B.C. (Nilsson, 1968, p. 105). If Alikasudaro matches Alexander, then it also matches Alakshandush and other similar royal names scattered over the centuries. It is hard to say when and under what circumstances these names might have found their way to India.

## VII. SAHADEVA VISITS ANTIOCH AND ROME

Thus far, we have seen that (1) historical links between Aśoka and the Hellenistic world are lacking and (2) some of the accepted identifications of the "Greek" names in Priyadarśi's edicts have serious shortcomings. It therefore makes sense to seek an alternative hypothesis to account for these names. To prepare for this, I will first take a side-excursion to South India with Sahadeva of the famous Pāṇḍava brothers.

In the *Mahābhārata*, it is said that when king Yudiṣṭhira of Hastināpura wanted to perform the Rājasūya sacrifice, he sent his four brothers to conquer the surrounding kings in the four directions, north, east, south, and west. Sahadeva was sent to the south, and after campaigning for some time and subduing many kingdoms, he reached the region of the Pāṇḍyas and Tamils in South India. In the translation of van Buitenen (1975, p. 84), this is described as follows:

"Likewise by means of envoys he subjugated and made tributary the Pāṇḍyas and Tamils, Coḍras and Keralas, Āndhras and Talavanas, Kalingas and Uṣṭrakarṇikas, Antioch and Rome, and the city of the Greeks."

Antioch and Rome? How did Sahadeva wind up in these cities, which lie far to the west of Hastināpura? Did the author of the *Mahābhārata* really think these cities are in South India? Or did he think Sahadeva made a sudden side-trip to the Mediterranean while on his southern tour?

The mystery deepens when we look at the Sanskrit for "Antioch and Rome, and the city of the Greeks." In the critical edition of the *Mahābhārata* (*Sabha Parva*, chap. 28, verse 49), this reads,

"*antākhīm caiva romām ca yavanānām puram tathā*"

The word translated as Antioch is Antākhīm. Now it turns out that Antakiya is the modern name of Antioch (Downey, 1961, p. 3). Antioch was founded in 300 B.C. by Seleucus Nikator, and it flourished as an important city until the Muslim conquest of Syria in the 7th century. Its fame was somewhat revived during the Crusades and in late Byzantine times, but it was reduced to obscurity under the Turks. In modern times the small town on the site of Antioch's ruins is called Antakiya.

So how did that name get into the *Mahābhārata*? Some insight into this matter is given by B. S. Suryavanshi (1986, p. 21). He points out that while Antākhīm appears in the critical edition of the *Mahābhārata*, the words Āvarim, Asṭavīm, and Āṭivīm are used in place of Antākhīm in a number of other texts. He argues that Āṭivīm refers to the Āṭavikas who lived near Kaliṅga or modern Orissa. This is consistent with Sahadeva's itinerary, in which he turned north from Tamil Nadu, conquered the Āndhras, Talavanas, Kaliṅgas, and Uṣṭrakarṇikas, and then reached "Antioch and Rome" (Suryavanshi, 1986, p. 29). This would put "Antioch and Rome" somewhere near the lands of the Āṭavikas in the vicinity of Kaliṅga.

According to Bhandarkar (1955, p. 42), the Āṭavyas or Āṭavis are mentioned in the *Purāṇas* along with Pulindas, Vindhyamūliyas, and Vaidarbhas. There is a copper-plate grant describing a king Hastin, master of the Dabhālā kingdom together with 18 forest kingdoms or Āṭavī-rājya. Bhandarkar says that Dabhālā must be modern Bundelkhaṇḍ. He

suggests that in the Gupta period the Ātavī country must have extended from Bāghelkhaṇḍ almost to the sea-coast of Orissa.

Suryavanshi maintains that it is hard to see why the editor of the *Mahābhārata*, Franklin Edgerton, selected Antākhīm for the critical edition, rather than Āṭivīm. Of course, one possibility is that Edgerton perpetrated a hoax. But assuming that this is not the case, why did the word Antākhīm appear in even one manuscript of the *Mahābhārata*? Did an earlier redactor of the text interpolate a name for Antioch out of ignorance or some bizarre motive? Or could it be that Antākhīm is another obscure name of the Ātavikas or of some people living near the Ātavikas?

What about Rome (Romām) and the city of the Greeks (Yavanānām Purām)? One could argue that three references to the Mediterranean world reinforce one another and cannot be denied. However, some of the manuscripts of the *Mahābhārata* refer to Ramyaṁ instead of Romām (Suryavanshi, 1986, p. 28-29). In addition, there are several Sanskrit names beginning with *roma* (hair), such as Romahaṛṣaṇa (hair standing on end), Romapāda, and Romaśa. The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* mentions Romāṇas in a long list of names of peoples (Wilson, 1989, p. 278). The Gypsies of Europe originated in India and call themselves Romany. It seems doubtful that these names all derive from contact with the Romans. Quite possibly they and Romām are simply names of Indian origin that coincidentally resemble Roma. The terms Romām and Ramyām may refer to people living in the vicinity of the Āṭivīm.

Regarding Yavana Puri, many scholars, such as H. H. Wilson (1989, p. 280), insist that the word Yavana originally referred to the Greeks. However, many Sanskrit texts use this word to refer to a class of people who were originally Aryan, but who had deviated from Aryan culture. For example, Wilson's translation of the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* describes how the sage Vasiṣṭha separated the Yavanas "from affinity to the regenerate tribes, and from the duties of their castes" in order to save them from the wrath of king Sagara (Wilson, 1989, p. 536). Here the phrase "regenerate tribes" designates the followers of *varṇāśrama*, a social system that later developed into the modern Indian caste system.

Clearly the Greeks, as we know them historically, never followed the Indian *varṇāśrama* system. If the word Yavana originally referred to the Greeks, then one would have to suppose that the *Purāṇic* traditions tracing the Yavanas to the *varṇāśrama* system were invented later on. One can always hypothesize this, but it is also possible that these traditions are genuine.

There are also *Purāṇic* references to the existence of Yavana kingdoms that are *not* west or north-west of India. For example, the *Bhāgavat Purāṇa* commentator Viśvanātha Cakravarti relates a story from the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* about Kālayavana, the son of a Yavana king living to the south of the Yādavas (Bhaktivedanta Swami, 1988, p. 227). This Kālayavana was "as black as a bee," which is not typical of the Greeks or Romans (Wilson, 1989, p. 783). Since the Yādavas were based in Mathurā, this sets a precedent for the presence of Yavanas somewhere to the south of that city. Thus it is plausible that Sahadeva could have encountered a Yavana city in his southern campaign. (Curiously, H.H. Wilson (1989, p. 783) sets the story of Kālayavana "on the shores of the Western sea," even though the word *dakṣiṇa* or southern is used in the text.)

## VIII. AN ALTERNATIVE IDENTIFICATION OF THE FIVE KINGS

King Priyadarśi begins his 13th rock edict by regretting the suffering and loss of life caused by his invasion of Kaliṅga. Then he mentions the forest peoples or Aṭavi (Woolner, 1924, p. 55). The Aṭavi, he says, have also accepted his ideals, but he warns them that he retains the power to punish wrongdoers, despite his remorse over his subjugation of Kaliṅga (Nikam, 1966, pp. 28-29).

Aśoka then makes his famous statement about the five kings. Although I have quoted this already, I reproduce it here for ease of reference:

"King Priyadarśi considers moral conquest [*Dharma-vijaya*] the most important conquest. He has achieved this moral conquest repeatedly both here and among the peoples living beyond the borders of his kingdom, even as far away as 600 *yojanas*, where the Yona king Antiyoka rules, and even beyond Antiyoka in the realms of the four kings named Turamaya, Antikini, Maka, and Alikasudara, and to the south among the Cholas and Pāṇḍyas as far as Ceylon" (Nikam, 1966, p. 29).

An interesting parallel can be seen between these passages in Aśoka's edict and the story in the *Mahābhārata* of Sahadeva's southern campaign. The left hand column of Table 6 lists the places visited in the last leg of this campaign, when Sahadeva was turning north from Tamil Nadu. Priyadarśi seems to be mentioning the same peoples listed in Sahadeva's itinerary, but he is going from north to south rather than from south to north. To show this, I have listed the peoples and kings mentioned by Priyadarśi in reverse order in the right hand column of the table.

Both columns of the table begin by mentioning kingdoms in the southern tip of India. Going north, they both reach Kaliṅga (modern Orissa). In the vicinity of Kaliṅga they both refer to the Ātavīs. In this same vicinity, they also refer to what scholars take to be Rome, a Greek city, and Antioch (*Mahābhārata*), and a famous king of Antioch (Aśokan rock edict 13). The last four lines of the table do not perfectly line up, but they all seem to refer to the same geographical region (in and around Orissa).

In the case of Sahadeva's southern tour, the references to Greeks, Romans, and Antioch simply make no sense if we take them literally. However, we have seen that the Sanskrit words in question may really refer to Yavanas who could be associated with the kingdoms of the Ātavīs.

Sahadeva's campaign	Rock edict 13 in reverse
Pāṇḍyas and Tamils	Ceylon
Coḍras and Keralas	Pāṇḍyas
Āndhras and Talavanas	Cholas (Coḍa)
Kalingas and Uṣṭrakarṇikas	four neighboring kings
Antākḥī (Antioch?)	Am̐tiyoke (king Antiochus Theos?)
Ātavī (in some mss.)	Ātavi
Rome and Greek city?	Kaliṅga
Table 6. Peoples and kings mentioned in Sahadeva's southern tour and in rock edict 13. The order in rock edict 13 is reversed for the sake of comparison with Sahadeva's tour.	

Could it be that the same is true of Aśoka's rock edict 13? Table 6 suggests that Priyadarśī is listing peoples and kings from north to south. But if Am̐tiyoke and company are Hellenistic kings, then the names in edict 13 jump mysteriously from Kaliṅga and the Ātavīs, to the Mediterranean region (as far as Libya), and from there to South India. Since Priyadarśī is simply giving a list, this is not as bad as saying that Sahadeva visited Antioch and Rome on a march from South India to Orissa. But the parallelism between the two columns of the table suggest that Priyadarśī's "Greek kings" correspond to Sahadeva's "Greeks and Romans." If the latter are native Indian Yavanas living near Orissa, then the same should be true of the former.

But why should Yavanas living near Orissa have names that remind us of Greeks and Romans? I would suggest that we are dealing here with coincidental similarities between words. The following table lists the key words that we have been considering:

1.	Alikasudaro	Alexandros
2.	Am̐tekini	Antigonos
3.	Turamaya	Ptolemaios
4.	Magā	Magas
5.	Am̐tiyoke	Antiochus
6.	Antākḥī	Antakiya (in Turkey)
7.	Romām	Roma (in Italy)
Table 7. Pairs of apparently related words.		

It may appear that each word in the left column is derived historically from the corresponding word in the right column. But I have given several reasons for doubting this: First of all, Alikasudaro in line 1 is probably not the Prākṛit form of Alexandros. If Alikasudaro is not a Hellenistic king, then the matches in lines 2-5 are cast into doubt. The matches in lines 2 and 3 are not very close to begin with. Magā in line 4 is close to Magas, but it seems odd that Aśoka would single out Magas of Cyrene in Libya for special mention. The same can be said of Alexander of Epirus or Corinth.

Someone might argue that Antākḥī in line 6 is a recent name for Antioch that somebody inserted into the *Mahābhārata*, but this theory has some drawbacks. If this

insertion occurred before Prinsep's reading of Am̐tiyoke in 1838, then it involves some remarkable coincidences. First of all, the interpolator selected Antioch out of the total set of ancient cities without knowing that Prinsep would later find an Antiochus in Aśoka's inscriptions. In addition, he placed this Antioch in Sahadeva's tour so that it would line up geographically with the later-to-be-discovered Antiochus as shown in Table 6. Of course, the insertion may have been made after 1838 by someone who knew of Prinsep's discoveries. But why would such a person insert a *modern* form of Antioch? And why not put Antioch in Nakula's tour, which went to the west?

Variant texts of the *Mahābhārata* indicate that Antākhī is associated with the Āṭivīs of Orissa. This and the drawbacks of the recent insertion theory suggest that Antākhī has nothing to do with Antakiya (Antioch) by the Mediterranean sea.

There are many Sanskrit words using the syllables *roma*, and therefore the Romām of line 7 probably has nothing to do with Roma in Italy. If the Antākhī and Romām of lines 6-7 really do refer to the Mediterranean region, then Sahadeva's itinerary is rendered absurd. Thus if the *Mahābhārata* makes sense, the matches in lines 6-7 should be coincidental.

Here one could argue that Greek and Roman merchants used to have trading centers in South India. Perhaps Antākhī and Romām refer to these people. But if this is true, then the parallelism shown in Table 6 suggests that Am̐tiyoke and his colleagues must also be in South India. This means that they are not Hellenistic kings ruling in the Mediterranean region.

Of course, one could say that the parallelism in Table 6 is coincidental. The Greeks mentioned by Priyadarśī have nothing to do with those mentioned in the story of Sahadeva. But one could just as well say that the match between Am̐tiyoke and Antiochus is coincidental. It becomes a game of "name your coincidence."

The two lines 5 and 6 might involve a sound change (dropping the 'yo' sound) that worked both in India and the West. It seems reasonable to suppose that the modern name Antakiya derived from the ancient Antiokheia through such a change, which took place over many years as pronunciations shifted. If Antākhī was not a recent import of Antakiya into the *Mahābhārata*, then it may have derived from Am̐tiyoke by a similar sound change that occurred over many years in India. If this is true, then Am̐tiyoke must have been used for many years in native Indian speech and it probably does not refer to a foreign monarch such as Antiochus Theos, who would hardly have been widely discussed in India. Of course, another possibility is that Antākhī is only coincidentally similar to Am̐tiyoke.

In either case, the name Am̐tiyoke in line 5 may be only coincidentally similar to Antiochus. Rather than being an emperor of Syria and Persia, Am̐tiyoke may have been a minor Yavana king (Yona-rāja) having something to do with Antākhī and the Āṭavīs. His four colleagues would have been similar minor kings ruling in the same general area.

It is instructive to compare the word pairs in Table 7 with the Sanskrit etymologies created by P. N. Oak (1973) for European place names. For example, Oak derives Thames from *tāmasa* (dark), since the Thames river in England is murky and runs through foggy country. He breaks down Scandinavia into Skanda (the god of war) plus *navi* (boat)—a reference to the warlike Vikings and their ships. Since it is easy to create such etymologies, it seems that coincidental similarities between European and Sanskrit names are not uncommon.

One objection to our alternative hypothesis is that after listing the four kings, Aśoka's rock edict 13 says "and to the south among the Cholas and Pāṇḍyas." Some

scholars have interpreted this to mean that Priyadarśi was indicating a change in direction from west to south. However, a reference to the south is not out of place if Priyadarśi was progressing from north to south in his list of places and names. In addition, the word *nica*, which is translated here as south, may have a different meaning. In Apte's Sanskrit Dictionary, *nica* is said to mean low or vile, and no meaning is listed referring to the south. Thus Priyadarśi might have used *nica* to indicate that the peoples he was listing were lowly or degraded. We do find in an Aśokan Prākṛit glossary that *nica* means "in the south," but that interpretation may be based on the accepted reading of rock edict 13 (Woolner, 1924, p. 103).

Here is another objection. Rock edict 13 says that Am̐tiyoke is ruling 600 *yojanas* beyond the borders of Priyadarśi's kingdom. At 4.5 miles per *yojana*, this comes to 2,700 miles, or roughly the distance to Antioch. Surely this supports the identification of Am̐tiyoke with Antiochus.

Curiously enough, one can read the edict in such a way as to give even stronger support to the standard view. The phrase, "beyond the borders of his kingdom, even as far away as six hundred *yojanas*," is ambiguous. It could mean "600 *yojanas* beyond the borders" or "600 *yojanas* away from here, out beyond the borders." The "here" in the latter reading would be Aśoka's capital of Pataliputra (modern Patna).

According to the *Sūrya-siddhānta* the earth's diameter is 1,600 *yojanas*, and the radius is therefore 800 *yojanas* (Burgess, 1989, p. 43). From the latitudes and longitudes of Patna and Antioch, we can compute the great circle distance between them in radians. If we multiply this by 800, we find that this distance is 598.9 *yojanas*. This is only 1.1 *yojanas* off from the 600 *yojana* figure in Aśoka's edict.

This looks like a remarkably good agreement. But if it represents real knowledge of the great circle distance between Pataliputra and Antioch, then both Greeks and Indians in the 3rd century B.C. must have made accurate measurements of latitudes and longitudes. This is contrary to the accepted history of geography. For example, it appears that the astronomer Ptolemy in the 2nd century A.D. did not have accurate knowledge of longitudes in India or even in the Mediterranean region (Nordenskiöld, 1897). The agreement between 586.9 and 600 *yojanas* thus seems to be another one of those coincidences that keep popping up in this study.

The length of the *yojana* is highly variable, ranging from about 4.5 miles to 8 or 9 miles (Cunningham, 1990, pp. 483-89). The *Sūrya-siddhānta* *yojana* falls at the low end of this scale at 5 miles/*yojana*. One could argue the figure of 600 refers to a winding, circuitous route from Pataliputra to Antioch that was measured in larger *yojanas*. Or one could argue that this figure represents a winding route in India measured in smaller *yojanas*.

The 600 *yojanas* might refer only to the distance to Am̐tiyoke's capital, or it might refer to additional peoples and places "as far as Ceylon." If we measure the overland distance from Patna to the southern tip of Ceylon along a reasonably direct route going down the east coast of India and then crossing Adam's bridge to Ceylon, we get a figure of about 1,700 miles. This comes to about 378 *yojanas* of 4.5 miles. For a winding path to total 600 *yojanas*, the path would have to be about 1.6 times as long. This is plausible if the path followed winding roads and went inland to visit the territories of various peoples. Thus the 600 *yojana* distance does not pose an insuperable obstacle to our alternative hypothesis.

A final objection might be that the standard reconstruction of Indian chronology makes Aśoka a contemporary of the Hellenistic kings of Table 1. Since their names and dates are well known, there is no justification in seeking alternative identifications of

Aśoka's five kings among undated and poorly known peoples somewhere in India. The standard chronology is based on extensive scholarly studies, and it should be accepted as objective knowledge.

In reply, I should point out that it is beyond the scope of this paper to reassess the modern system of Indian chronology. However, it is true that the identification of Aśoka's five kings with Hellenistic monarchs is one of the important foundation stones of this system. To argue that the identifications should be accepted because the modern system is true smacks of circular reasoning. Such an argument can be accepted only if the modern system of chronology can be established without reference to the identification of the kings.

There are good reasons for thinking that the accepted identifications of Table 1 are incorrect—or at least highly questionable. At best, they are little more than conjectures based on intriguing similarities between words. On the negative side, these conjectures are burdened by the following drawbacks:

- (1) If Priyadarśi-Aśoka was actually in close contact with famous Hellenistic kings, there should be clear evidence of this in Western historical records. But no such evidence is known. Furthermore, the Buddhist chronicles describe Aśoka's efforts to spread Buddhism in countries near India, but they make no mention of missions to the Mediterranean region (section I).
- (3) Turamaya, Amtekini, and Alikasudaro are not very close phonetically to Ptolemaios, Antigonos, and Alexander (sections III, IV, and VI). In particular, Alikasudaro is not the Prākṛit word for Alexander.
- (4) The accepted identifications of the five kings were fixed at a time when the Aśokan inscriptions were first deciphered and could not be clearly read. There is evidence that the Hellenistic leanings of the early decipherers influenced the initial reading of the names (sections IV and VI). There is even some evidence of questionable dealings in the decipherment of the Shāhbāzgarhi inscriptions (Appendix 1).
- (5) The parallels between the story of Sahadeva's southern campaign in the *Mahābhārata* and Priyadarśi's rock edict 13 strongly indicate that Amtiyoka and his four colleagues were situated near Orissa rather than in the Mediterranean region (section VIII).

If the modern reconstruction of Indian history can stand without the accepted identifications of Aśoka's five kings, then historians would be better off without them. But if the modern reconstruction cannot stand without these identifications, then it rests on very insecure foundations and is in need of serious scrutiny.

## APPENDIX 1. THE STORY OF THE SHĀHBĀZGARHI INSCRIPTION

The Frenchman M. Court discovered the Shāhbāzgarhi inscription in 1836 and mentioned it in a single line of a memoir on ancient ruins near Peshawar. Court reproduced 23 letters from the inscription, which he said were all he could read since the inscription was almost effaced by time (Court, 1836, p. 481). Later on, an agent of Court made a transcript which "appears to have embraced the whole rock" (Wilson, 1850, p. 156). Court sent this transcript to Professor Lassen in Germany, and he, in turn, sent a copy to the Royal Asiatic Society in England.

In October, 1838, C. Masson arrived at the site of the inscription just after the departure of Court's agent (Masson, 1846, p. 298). He had learned of the inscription from one Captain Burnes, and he was led to believe that it consisted of only five lines (Masson, 1846, p. 293). After sending a native servant to make cloth impressions of the inscription, he learned that it was very extensive. Since the servant's work was of very poor quality, he mounted an expedition Shāhbāzgarhi to make a good facsimile.

Masson proceeded to clear the inscription of moss and make two cloth impressions of the letters inscribed on the northern or superior face of the rock. He said that the tilt of the rock and ground surface on the southern or back face made it impossible to make cloth impressions on that side. After clearing the letters with sharp metal tools and marking them with white, chalk-like stones, he made a careful copy of the inscription on the back side (Masson, 1846, pp. 299-300).

Masson read his report on the Shāhbāzgarhi inscription at a meeting of the Royal Asiatic Society in mid-January of 1845. This gave a detailed account of his adventures in the field, but it did not mention the possibility that he might be dealing with Aśokan edicts. On March 1, 1845, E. Norris read a report to the society describing how he and Mr. Dowson had deciphered the inscription. This work was based on the materials supplied by Masson.

Norris first made use of Masson's second cloth impression of the northern face, and later gained further insight from his first cloth impression. When he tried to decipher the inscription on the back of the rock he "was deprived of the resource of a cloth impression," but fortunately the line in Masson's transcription giving the names of the alleged western kings was "with one exception, perfectly legible" (Norris, 1846, p. 304).

In 1849, H. H. Wilson presented a paper on the Aśokan rock inscriptions to the Royal Asiatic Society. There he reproduced some further comments by Norris about the decipherment of the Shāhbāzgarhi inscription. In those comments, Norris amplified on his remark about the legibility of the line containing the names of the five kings. He said that, "from this illegibility one line, containing the names of the five Western Kings must be fortunately excepted, which Mr. Masson copied with special care, and even took off a cloth impression of a small portion, in spite of the difficulties presented by the position of the rock" (Wilson, 1850, p. 156).

This small cloth impression is shown in Norris's lithograph of the inscriptions at the beginning of Wilson's article. The impression is indeed small. It consists of the letters "*turo* |||| *rajani tu*" from the middle of the line giving the names of the kings. Apart from some disconnected letters, this says "|||| kings" or "4 kings."

Here we come to a part of the Shāhbāzgarhi story that strikes me as very puzzling. What motivated Masson to go to the trouble of making an impression of these particular letters? If he simply picked a spot at random on the back of the rock and transcribed a few

of the letters there, it is highly unlikely that he would hit the center of the kings line. It would also be pointless to transcribe a few letters at random. It seems more reasonable to suppose that he could read the letters and that he made an impression of them because he thought they were significant. I would suggest that he knew they referred to the "4 kings" of Aśoka's rock edict 13. Indeed, since he copied the names of the kings with "special care," it would seem that he could read and understand all five names.

If Masson had openly stated this in his report to the Royal Asiatic Society, it would not be surprising. Masson was a regular participant in the affairs of the society, and he must have known about Prinsep's celebrated discovery of the names of Hellenistic kings in Aśokan inscriptions (Prinsep, 1938a and 1938b). It would have been reasonable for him to suppose that the Shāhbāzgarhi inscriptions might be Aśokan and to search through them for the names of the kings. When he spotted "|||| *rajani*" he might well have thought "Here they are!" and made a cloth impression of these letters as evidence of his discovery. Then he might have deciphered the names and carefully copied them.

But Masson said nothing about this in his report. Indeed, he didn't even say that he thought he might be dealing with an Aśokan inscription. The question is: Why?

A month and a half after Masson's report to the Royal Asiatic Society, Norris and Dowson reported their successful decipherment of the Shāhbāzgarhi inscription. Norris explained that his knowledge of legends on Bactrian coins enabled him to recognize that the word *piyasa* occurred repeatedly in the inscription. This word was always preceded by three letters which he later identified as 'de' 'va' 'na' (Norris, 1846, p. 303).

This, according to Norris, was the first step in decoding the Shāhbāzgarhi inscriptions. But if Masson could already understand the names of the alleged Western kings, this cryptographic effort looks like a sham. At the very least, Masson or Norris should have reported that an important part of the inscription had already been deciphered in the field.

Could it be that Masson actually did not decipher the names of the kings? This is doubtful. The unusual legibility of the kings line indicates that he did decipher them. The line is,

*"Antiyoko nama yona raja parancha tena Antiyokena chaturō |||| rajano Turamara nama Antikona nama Mako nama Alikasunari nama."* (Wilson, 1850, p. 225)

From 1850 to 1924, only 8 changes were made in the reading of this line: 6 changes in vowel signs (as in Antikona to Antikini).and 2 changes in consonants (as in Turamara to Turamaye). This could be regarded as minor editing, especially since the vowel signs in the Kharoṣṭhī alphabet are small and easy to misread. In contrast, well over half of the letters in the remainder of rock edict 13 were changed between 1850 and 1924, and these were mostly changes in consonants. This indicates that the 1850 reading was largely erroneous, except for the line listing the five kings. For a detailed discussion of this, see Appendix 2.

The unique legibility of the kings line begins with the first 'A' of Antiyoko, and it ends with the last 'ma' of Alikasunari *nama*. Evidently Norris was correct when he said that Masson copied this line with "special care." I show in Appendix 2 that there is about 1 chance in 500,000 that this special care would begin at random with the first letter of this line and end with the last letter. Therefore, it seems reasonable to suppose that Masson understood the kings line and transcribed it carefully because he knew its importance.



To graphically represent these changes, I selected three code symbols. The symbol 'a' represents an exact match between a letter in the 1924 text and the corresponding letter in the aligned 1850 text. The symbol 'n' represents a near match, in which the two letters have the same consonant value but differing vowel marks (e.g. 'ta' and 'te'). The symbol 'x' represents a mismatch. In this case, the two letters have differing consonant values (e.g. 'kya' and 'ka') or differing values as pure vowels (e.g. 'a' and 'e'). The 'x' symbol is also used to represent a case where a letter in one text lines up with a gap in the other text.

The accompanying figure lists these symbols for the two aligned texts. To illustrate the process of decipherment, I put the symbols 'a', 'n', and 'x' in bold where the 1924 text has the words *devana piyasa* (in various spellings). As I pointed out in Appendix 1, Norris reported that the first step in decoding the Shāhbāzgarhi inscription was to recognize repeated appearances of these words (Norris, 1846, p. 303).

I also put the symbols 'a', 'n', and 'x' in bold in the 55-letter line representing the names of the alleged Greek kings, and I put square brackets around this line. (See section VI or Appendix 1 for this line.) This line begins with the first letter of Antiyoko, and it ends with the last letter of Alikasunari *nama*. Note that there are x's immediately before this line and immediately after it.

The text as a whole has 54.8% mismatches, 8.3% near matches, and 36.9% matches. Most of the matches and near matches are concentrated in small blocks, and several of these correspond to the name *devana-piyasa*. In contrast, the 55-letter line representing the names of the five kings has 2 mismatches, 6 near matches, and 47 matches.

Why was the line containing the names of the five kings so much more legible to early investigators than the rest of the text of edict 13? Did it happen by chance? There are over 1,000 letters in the 13th edict. We can compute the chances of randomly starting a line with the 'A' of Antiyoko and ending it with the 'ma' of Alikasunari *nama*. There are 499,500 ways of picking two letters out of 1,000, and so the chances of getting the starting and stopping letters exactly right are less than 1 in 499,500.

If this didn't happen by chance, perhaps it happened by some traceable cause. In an effort to understand what this cause might be, I carefully studied the history of the discovery, recording, and initial decipherment of the Shāhbāzgarhi inscription. My findings are presented in Appendix 1.

### **APPENDIX 3. THE BRĀHMĪ ALPHABET**

[Place here a table of the Brāhmī alphabet, giving the 35 letters and the rules for adding vowel marks. A couple of examples of ligatures between consonants could also be given.]

### **APPENDIX 4. ANSWER TO THE EXERCISE**

"*Am̐tiyogenā catāli 4 lajāne Tūlamaye nāma Am̐tekine nama Makā nāma Alikyaṣudale*" (Woolner, 1924, p. 29).

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