NOTES ON THE ENGRAVING PROCEDURES FOR THE ERRAGUDI VERSION OF AŚOKA’S MINOR ROCK EDICT

The purpose of this paper is to reconstruct the last stage of the train of transmission for the Erraguḍi (Er) version of the Minor Rock Edict (MRE). Before starting, however, I would like to mention the fact that the entire train of transmission itself, not only for the MREs but also for the REs, PEs and other inscriptions, is much more complicated than we are sometimes led to believe. So, for example, I have argued elsewhere that the earlier stages of the train of transmission not only of the Er version but also of all other versions of the MRE, i.e. that portion starting with the formulation of the text by Aśoka himself and continuing up to the arrival of his message at the local headquarters of the officials responsible for the publication of the texts at the final sites, was carried out orally.¹ We therefore find a completely different means of transmission here than, e.g., in the case of the REs, which were carried out, for the most part, by means of the reproduction of written manuscripts. But even in the case of the REs we do have sufficient evidence that the “texts” were dictated during the early portions of the transmission;² this thus represents a definite break in the written transmission of these versions. Notice too that we do have evidence that in the final stage of the transmission of various inscriptions the “text” was dictated to the “scribe” who then engraved it onto the stone, thus representing an oral means of transmission.³ In other versions, on the other hand, we have evidence that the “scribe” responsible for engraving the “text” merely copied a written “manuscript” onto the stone, thus representing a written means of transmission.⁴ We therefore cannot conclude that since there was an oral means of transmission in the earlier portion of the train of transmission for Er, the later portions of the train of transmission were also carried out orally. In fact one of the important conclusions to be drawn from my discussion below is that there was a written means of transmission during the last stage at Er, i.e. that a written exemplar was reproduced onto the stone.

It is a well known fact that the Erraguḍi version is the only version of the MREs — and to my knowledge the only inscription of Aśoka — that is engraved not only from left to right, but also from right to left. The first two lines seem to be clearly boustrophedonic, but this tendency is not kept up. The third line is written from left to right, but the fourth starts from the

right to the left and then stops in the middle of the line; it then continues at
the very left side — again from left to right. From here on the next ten or
so lines present us with a kind of jigsaw puzzle. It is now my contention
that the engraver was actually reproducing a written manuscript whose lines
of writing contained many more aksharas than the engraver could carve in
one single line on the stone. The person who engraved the text here,
furthermore, was in all probability merely a stone mason who rather
mechanically haphazardly filled up the available space on the stone with the
aksharas which were contained on the exemplar he had received without
any regard whatsoever to its eventual readability when his task was accom-
plished. I would now like to support my contention with a discussion of the
text as engraved on the stone.

In Andersen (1990: 34ff.) I have presented a critical edition of the Er
version along with detailed notes regarding the reading of the text. The
material employed there has been: (i) Sircar’s (1979) plate II, Pāṇḍey’s
(1965) “Phlak 12”, and a photograph (of very high quality) supplied by the
Chief Epigraphist in Mysore (neg. no. 6722). For our purpose here it will
suffice to give the text in the form that I have presented in that discussion.

There are now 23 lines of writing, the first of which is written from left
to right (→):

1. devānampiye hevāha [a]d[hi]kjani . . .

At the end of this line there are 8 aksharas that I cannot discern, but in
comparison with the other versions we may surmise that these aksharas
were adhātiyāni vasāni.

The second line, as I have pointed out above, is written from right to left
(←):

2. ya[m] hakaṃ upāsak[e] no tu kho ekaṃ samvacharaṃ pakāṃte

I now propose that these two lines of writing on the stone represent the
first line of writing on the exemplar: the engraver was reading from his
exemplar while engraving the text and when he came to the right end of the
available space on the stone he merely dropped down and continued with
the second line (on the stone) engraving back to the left side of the stone
where he had started.

I would now like to introduce the following notation for use in the
following discussion: E¹ = S¹ (→) + S² (←). This is to be read as: the first
line of writing on the exemplar (E¹) was engraved onto the stone in two
lines, the first of which (S¹) was written from left to right (→) and the
second (S²) was written from right to left (←).