

## AŚOKA DOCUMENTS - EDICTS XII AND XIII

**Introduction by John Sheldon**

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These Greek inscriptions now in the museum of Kabul were discovered on a stone block in 1963 among the ruins of ancient Kandahar (Alexandria in Arachosia). They are translations of two edicts of the Mauryan Emperor Aśoka (Skt. *a - śoka* ‘free from grief’ – called Piodasses here) who ascended (probably usurped) the throne of Bindusāra, son of Chandragupta (Gk. Σανδράκοπτος) about 269 BCE. A.L.Basham describes Aśoka as ‘the greatest and noblest ruler India has known, and indeed one of the great kings of the world.’ His edicts, which are similar in content and involve statements of policy and instructions to the army, are engraved on rocks and pillars all over India. They are written in a number of different Old Indian scripts and dialects. It is likely that he was emulating Achaemenid inscriptions, although these are mainly records of conquest. Although we read of the conquest of Kalinga at the beginning of Edict XIII, the rest of this famous text tells of the king’s change of heart and his Buddhist- inspired compassion for living creatures. In Edict XII the εὐσέβεια ‘righteousness’ of the Greek version translates the much wider Buddhist concept of *dharma* (Pali *dhamma*). There is a lacuna in this text caused by broken stone which can be supplemented from the Brahmi version. What is more interesting is that it contains some words not in the original which have a distinctly Greek flavour. See lines 8-10. While the Indian version stresses the need for tolerance of other religions, the Greek addition seems to site this in the philosophical schools as well.

### **TEXT SOURCE**

Merkelbach R. & Stauber J., 2005, *Jenseits des Euphrat: Griechische Inschriften* (Leipzig), pp.28, 30

### **REFERENCE**

Canali de Rossi, F., 2004, *Iscrizioni dello estremo oriente greco* (Bonn), pp.187-191

## EDICT XII

### GREEK TEXT

- 1 (D) [. εὐ]σέβεια καὶ ἐγκράτεια κατὰ πάσας τὰς διατριβάς· ἐγκρατὴς δὲ μάλιστα  
2 ὅς ἂν γλώσ(σ)ῃς ἐγκρατὴς ᾗ. καὶ μήτε ἑαυτοὺς ἐπα[ι]νῶσιν, μήτε τῶν πέλας  
3 περὶ μηδενός· κενὸν γάρ ἐστιν· (E) καὶ πειρᾶσθαι μᾶλλον τοὺς πέλας ἐπαινεῖν καὶ  
4 μὴ ψέγειν κατὰ πάντα τρόπον. (F) ταῦτα δὲ ποιῶντες ἑαυτοὺς αὐξοῦσι καὶ τοὺς  
5 πέλας ἀνακτῶνται· (G) παραβαίνοντες δὲ ταῦτα, ἀκλεέστεροί τε γίνονται καὶ τοῖς  
6 πέλας ἀπέχθονται. (H) οἱ δ' ἂν ἑαυτοὺς ἐπαινῶσιν, τοὺς δὲ πέλας ψέγωσιν  
7 διαπράτ(τ)ονται, βουλόμενοι παρὰ τοὺς λοιποὺς ἐγλάμψαι, πολὺ δὲ μᾶλλον  
8 ἑαυτοῦς. (I) πρέπει δὲ ἀλλήλους θαυμάζειν καὶ τὰ ἀλλήλων διδάγματα  
9 (J) ταῦτα δὲ ποιῶντες πολυμαθέστεροί ἔσονται, παραδιδόντες ἀλλήλοις ὅσα  
10 ἕκαστος αὐτῶν ἐπίσταται. καὶ τοῖς ταῦτα ἐπ[α]σκοῦσι, ταῦτα μὴ ὀκνεῖν λέγειν, ἵνα  
11 αμείνωσιν διὰ παντὸς εὐσεβοῦντες.

### TRANSLATION

- 1 *dharma* and self-control in all occupations. And especially he is a master of  
self control  
2 who has mastery of his tongue. And neither would they praise themselves  
nor criticise anything about their neighbours.  
3 For it is vain. And they try more to praise their neighbours and  
4 in no way at all to criticise. By doing these things they exaggerate their own  
importance and  
5 laud it over their neighbours. But doing otherwise they become both more  
inglorious and  
6 hated by their neighbours. And those who praise themselves, and criticise  
their neighbours,  
7 acting in a more ambitious way, wishing in comparison to the rest to be  
conspicuous, by much more do they harm  
8 themselves. For it is proper to value one another and to receive lessons from  
one another.  
9 and by doing these things they shall be more learned, and hand over to one  
another such things as

10 each of them understands. And do not hesitate to speak plainly to those  
practising such things, in order that  
11 they may improve through practising *dharma* in everything.

NB: Line 3 - κενόγ should be κενόν; Lines 10/11 – δει—αμείνωσιν taken as  
διαμείνωσιν ‘improve’ from comparison with the Indian text, rather than  
διαμένωσιν ‘remain’.

## EDICT XIII

### GREEK TEXT

11 ὀγδόωι ἔτει βασιλεύοντος Πιοδάσσου  
12 κατέστρεπται τὴν Καλίγγην. ἦν ἐζωγρημένα καὶ ἐξηγμένα ἐκεῖθεν σωμάτων  
13 μυριάδες δεκαπέντε· καὶ ἀναιρέθησαν ἄλλαι μυριάδες δέκα· καὶ σχεδὸν ἄλλοι  
14 τοι ἔτελεύτησαν. ἀπ' ἐκείνου τοῦ χρόνου ἔλεος καὶ οἶκτος αὐτὸν ἔλαβεν· καὶ  
15 δι' οὗ τρόπου ἐκέλευεν ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν ἐμψύχων σπουδὴν τε καὶ σύνταξιν πεποιήται  
16 περὶ εὐσεβείας· καὶ τοῦτο ἔτι δυσχερέστερον ὑπέιληφε ὁ βασιλεὺς· καὶ ὅσοι  
17 βραμεναι ἢ σραμεναι ἢ καὶ ἄλλοι τινὲς οἱ περὶ τὴν εὐσέβειαν διατρίβοντες, τοὺς  
18 ντας ἔδει τὰ τοῦ βασιλέως συμφέροντα νοεῖν, καὶ διδάσκαλον καὶ πατέρα καὶ  
19 ἐπαισχύνεσθαι καὶ θαυμάζειν, φίλους καὶ ἐταίρους ἀγαπᾶν καὶ μὴ διαψεύδεσθαι,  
20 δούλοις καὶ μισθωτοῖς ὡς κουφότατα χρᾶσθαι, τούτων ἐκεῖ τῶν τοιαῦτα διαπρασσο-  
21 μένων εἴ τις τέθνηκεν ἢ ἐξῆκται, καὶ τοῦτο ἐμ παραδρομῆι οἱ λοιποὶ ἡγεῖνται, ὁ δὲ  
22 [β]ασιλεὺς σφόδρα ἐπὶ τούτοις ἐδυσχέρανεν. καὶ ὅτι ἐν τοῖς λοιποῖς ἔθνεσιν εἰσιν

### TRANSLATION

11 In the eighth year of the reign of Piodasses  
12 he subjected Kalinga. Captured and carried away from there were souls  
13 numbering  
14 150,000. And another 100,000 were killed. And nearly as many others  
15 perished. From that time pity and compassion overcame him. And he  
16 bore it grievously.  
17 On account of this change of attitude he gave orders to refrain from the  
18 desire for living things, and had a treatise drawn up  
19 concerning piety. And yet the King found this undertaking more difficult  
20 (than he expected). The ones living there who were  
21 Brahmans and Buddhist monks and some others who devoted their time  
22 to religious matters living there  
23 ought to appreciate the beneficial things of the King, and (treat) the  
24 teacher and father and mother  
25 with respect and admiration, and love and not deceive their friends and  
26 companions,

- 20 using their slaves and servants as lightly as possible. Of those there of such kinds, doing these things
- 21 if someone is killed or abducted, it (the treatise) is sidelined and the others take precedence\*. And the
- 22 King was exceedingly irate on account of these things. And that in the remaining peoples are

\* ἡγείνται = ἡγούνται