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## Interpreting the Aśokan Epithet *devānaṃpiya*

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In this paper, I will briefly look at the use of the expression *devānaṃpiya* in Aśokan inscriptions along with references to *devas* in those inscriptions. Further, I will look at the Vedic precursors of the Aśokan term *devānaṃpiya*, as well as its subsequent history in the traditions of *Purāṇas*, Sanskrit Grammar, and literature. I will also review how this term appears in Sri Lankan inscriptions, chronicles and *Aṅgathakathās*, as well as its complete absence in the northern Buddhist Sanskrit legends about Aśoka, such as the *Aśokāvadāna*. Most of these dimensions have been covered in the extensive previous research regarding the term *devānaṃpiya*/*devānaṃpiya*, but there may be nuances that I can add to this discussion.

### Occurrence of *devānaṃpiya* and *deva* in Aśokan Inscriptions

In his *Glossary* of Aśokan inscriptions, Woolner (1924, pt. II: 95–96) conveniently lists all occurrences and variants of the term *devānaṃpiya*. Almost invariably associated with the title *piyadasi* of Aśoka, the term *devānaṃpiya* occurs in most of Aśoka's inscriptions, sometimes several times in a given inscription. Geographically, it occurs in all regions where Aśoka's inscriptions are found, as well as chronologically it occurs in all periods of Aśokan inscriptions and in all types, namely the minor rock edicts (c. 258 BCE), major rock edicts (c. 257 BCE), and pillar inscriptions (c. 243 BCE). According to W.B. Henning's (1949: 84) interpretation of Aśoka's Aramaic inscription in Lampaka, the term *devānaṃpiya* gets transcribed into Aramaic as [dy]wnprys [= *devānapriyasa*]. But Karttunen (1997: 269) says that elsewhere it gets translated into Aramaic as *mārān*.<sup>1</sup> We find no trace of it in Aśoka's Greek inscriptions, while they do transcribe into Greek his personal name *piyadasi* as Πιοδασης, without translating it (Karttunen 1997: 264, 269). It would thus seem that *devānaṃpiya*, unlike *priyadarśī*/*piyadasi*, was an honorific term, rather than part of Aśoka's personal name. The question of

<sup>1</sup> A number of colleagues inform me that the Aramaic word *maran* is made up of *mar* "Lord" and the suffix *-an* "our," and basically means something like "Our Lord." This expression is used with reference to God, Jesus, kings, and high officials, and can have either theological or non-theological meaning, depending on the context. This seems to be similar to the range of the use of the word *deva* in Sanskrit.

whether the expression *devānaṃpiya* was exclusively associated with Aśoka must be answered in the negative.<sup>2</sup> Among the five variant versions of Rock Edict VIII (Cunningham 1877, p. 76) referring to journeys undertaken by previous kings, only the Khalsi version uses *devānaṃpiyā* to refer to these previous kings, while other versions use *ne raya* (Shahbazgarhi), *rājano* (Girnar), *lājāno* (Dhauri), and *lājā* (Jaugada).<sup>3</sup> We must thus agree with D. R. Bhandarkar (1969: 6) that “Devānaṃpriya was an auspicious mode of address used with reference to kings. And, as a matter of fact, the Dīpavaṃsa (XI.14, 19, 20, 25 etc.) applies the appellation Devānaṃpriya to Tissa, the ruler of Ceylon and contemporary of Aśoka, and often employs it alone to denote that king.” Bhandarkar further points out that the term *devānaṃpriya* is used in the Nāgārjunī Hill Cave inscriptions to designate a king called Daśaratha, who has been identified to be the grandson of Aśoka. Thus, quite clearly the term is used for several generations within this dynasty to refer to kings. I will later come back to the use of this term in Sri Lankan records.

We also need to look at the use of the terms *deva* and *devī* in Mauryan inscriptions to get some further understanding of *devānaṃpiya*.<sup>4</sup> Of these two terms, the term *devī* clearly seems to be used in the sense of a queen, see *devinaṃ*, *deviye*, *devīye*, for queens, and *devikumālānaṃ* referring to princes, sons of the queens, Murti and Aiyangar 1951: 118, 132; also see Woolner 1924, pt. II, p. 96. The term *deva* on the other hand has been variously interpreted especially in the context of the

2 A clearly related term *devānuppiya* occurs in Jain texts like *Bhagavatisūtra* (15.7), *Vivāgasūya* (1.11, 1.22), *Ovavāiyasutta* (18), and *Rāyapaseṇiyasutta* (1.7). These are just a few sample references. The term occurs widely. Bollée (2002: 34) translates the term merely with “folks,” and offers a philological history on p. 261. G. T. Deshpande (1969: 204, fn. 1) informs: “The term *devānuppiya* is equated by Hoernle and Pischel with Deva+anupriya; but most of the scholars take it as a variant of Devānaṃpriya. Prof. K. V. Vaidya equates it so. This use has been noted by E. Hultzsch in his introduction to the Inscriptions of Aśoka, Vol. I, pp. xxix–xxx. It is noted by Barua and Sen also.” We should also note that the late Jain tradition does not seem to see any connection between the Sanskrit term *devānaṃpriya* and the old Prakrit term *devānuppiya*. Hemacandra (11th century CE) in his *Abhidhānacintāmaṇi* (stanzas 352–3) says that the term *devānaṃpriya* refers to a fool. The terms *devānaṃpriya* and *devānuppiya* remind me of the Marāṭhī honorific term *rājamānya* lit. “honored by the king.” But in its actual use, it was used only as an honorific. Similar was the Marāṭhī use of *rājaśrī*. Letters in the generation of my grandfather would often begin with the abbreviation “rā. rā.,” a shortened form for *rājamānya rājaśrī*. However, the term *lokamānya* as a title of Lokamānya Tilak was deliberately coined to contrast those recognized by the kings (of old, including the British rulers) and those new leaders now recognized by the people at large (*loka*). So even the conventional terms do not often lose their basic etymological meaning.

3 Hettiarachy (1972: 47) further adds: “Devānaṃpiya in the Second Separate Edict at Dhauri corresponds to the *lājā* of the Jaugada text.”

4 It may be noted that while a number of scholars have suggested that the Achaemenid inscriptions may have provided a template for Aśokan inscriptions, Aśoka’s references to *devas* are far too few and generic to stand comparison with the Old Persian inscriptions like the Behistan inscription of Darius: “Saith Darius the King: By the favor of Ahuramazda I am King; Ahuramazda bestowed the kingdom upon me. . . . These are the countries which came unto me; by the favor of Ahuramazda. . . . By the favor of Ahuramazda, they were my subjects. . . . By the favor of Ahuramazda these countries showed respect toward my law. . . . Ahuramazda bore me aid until I got possession of this kingdom; by the favor of Ahuramazda I hold this kingdom.” (Kent 1950: 119)

Yerragudi rock edict (*iminā ca kālena amisā munisā devehi te dāni misibhutā*, Murti and Aiyangar 1951: 72) and the Maski Edict (*pure jambu[dipa]si ye amisā devā husu te dāni misibhutā*, Murti and Aiyangar 1951: 86). The statement contained in these edicts, namely that previously the *devas* were not mixed with men, and now they are mixed with men, has been variously interpreted in modern scholarship.<sup>5</sup> Assuming that the term *deva* refers to gods, there is still a question of where exactly do the men and gods mingle. Do the gods appear on earth, as they do in numberless Buddhist stories, to meet holy enlightened men like the Buddha? Or do men, on account of their dharmic behavior go to heaven and there mingle with gods?<sup>6</sup> The Vedic expression *miśrā devebhiḥ* is an exact parallel to the Aśokan inscription, and the Vedic expression clearly refers to gods, rather than to kings. But the word *deva* begins to appear in the meaning of ‘king’ only in non-Vedic and post-Vedic Sanskrit literature. On the other hand, Sylvain Lévi (1911: 124) suggests that the word *devā* in *amisā devā husu* refers to kings. Considering the widespread use of *deva* for king and *devī* for queen in the Sanskrit and Prakrit/Pali literature, and the conclusive use of *devī* for queen in Aśokan inscriptions themselves, Lévi’s interpretation is not to be easily cast aside. What Aśoka may be saying is that previously the kings used to stay away from the people, while now under his rule they mingle with the subjects. This is a possibility. Coming back to our main concern with the expression *devānāṃ priya* as seen in Aśoka’s usage, the term may then either mean “beloved of the gods” or possibly “beloved of the kings.”<sup>7</sup> The second alternative that I have proposed finds support in Vedic passages where one is praying to become dear to gods, kings, and equals:

5 On these passages, see: Lévi (1911), Filliozat (1949), Meile (1949), Schlingloff (1985), and Schmithausen (1992). Norman (2001: 65), after reviewing previous research, comments: “This statement has been variously interpreted, e.g., as processions with effigies of gods, or as public appearances of the king, or as gods actually visiting men on earth. I take it to mean that Aśoka had succeeded in bringing men to heaven, where of course they would be reborn as gods, i.e., mixed with other gods. In this interpretation of the phrase ‘mixed, i.e., associated, with the gods’ I agree with Schmithausen, who shows clearly that the expression *miśraṃ devā* or *miśrā devehi* refers to the attainment of heaven after death.”

6 This second interpretation has clear antecedents in the Vedic literature. Compare: *kramadhvam agninā nākam ukhyān hasteṣu bibhrataḥ | divaspr̥ṣṭhaṃ svar gatvā miśrā devebhir ādhvam, Śaunakīya Atharvaveda*, 4.14.2, rendered by Whitney as: “Stride ye with the fire to the firmament, bearing in your hands vessel-[fires]; having gone to the back of the sky, to the heaven, sit ye mingled with the gods.” Whitney, *Atharvaveda Saṃhitā*, Vol. I, p. 170. Whitney also cites parallels from the *Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā* (xvii.65), *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* (iv.6.5), and *Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā* (ii.10.6).

7 There is a further question of what the word *priya* means in *devānāṃpriya*. Hara (1969: 14), using the analysis of Scheller (1958), proposes: “the word means primarily ‘one’s own’ and not ‘dear to’ or ‘beloved of’ as it does in the later Sanskrit literature.” Hara takes the term to mean “son of gods” and connects this to the Hindu notion that a king is an incarnation of gods. While Hara’s interpretation may find further support in Kushan kings using the epithet *devaputra* to refer to themselves on their coins (see: B. Chattopadhyaya 1967: 32), in my view the meaning “dear, pleasing” for the word *priya* is already present in Vedic passages, and one cannot argue that *priya* in *devānāṃpriya* means something different from the immediately next word, i.e., *priyadarśi* in Aśokan inscriptions. In Pali, the word *pīya* is often followed by its synonym *manāpa*, “pleasing.”

*priyam mā kuru deveṣu*, “Make me dear among the gods.” *Ṛgveda Khila* 10.128.11a, *Śaunakīya Atharvaveda* 19.62.1a, *Paippalāda Atharvaveda* 2.32.5a, *Hiraṇyakeśi Gṛhyasūtra* 1.10.6a.

*priyam mā kuru rājasu*, “Make me dear among the kings.” *Hiraṇyakeśi Gṛhyasūtra* 1.10.6d.

*priyaḥ samānānām bhūyāsam*, “May I become dear to my equals.” *Śaunakīya Atharvaveda* 17.1.5f.

Aśoka does not use the term *samrāt* to put himself above other kings, but just uses the term *rājā/lājā* to refer to himself. If the word *deva* also refers to a king, then a possible understanding of *devānāmpriya* is that Aśoka would ideally like to rule his empire by endearing himself to the kings he may have subdued as well as his neighboring kings. However, this probably did not preclude Aśoka’s contemporaries from reading a theological meaning into this term and reacting to it in their own ways.

### Vedic Usage of *priya* with *deva*

In order to get a better sense of what Aśoka may have meant by the term *devānāmpriya*, and, moreover, how it may have been read by others, both his contemporaries and later generations, we can take a look at the related usages in the Vedic literature. A [convenient electronic] search through Bloomfield’s *Vedic Concordance* shows that the Vedic literature is replete with usage of the word *priya* with generic gods, as well as with specific Vedic gods, and others. I am documenting some of this data below:

#### [A] Usages of *priya* with specific gods and others

*priyam indrābhirakṣasi*, “O Indra, you protect the one dear to you.” *Ṛgveda* 10.86.4b, *Śaunakīya Atharvaveda* 20.126.4b.

*priyaṃ mā kuru rājasu*, “Make me dear among the gods.” *Hiraṇyakeśi Gṛhyasūtra* 1.10.6d.

*priyaḥ samānānām bhūyāsam*, “May I become dear to my equals.” *Śaunakīya Atharvaveda* 17.1.5f.

*priyāḥ devasya savituḥ syāma*, “May we become dear to god Savitṛ.” *Ṛgveda* 2.38.10d, *Maitrāyaṇi Saṃhitā* 4.14.6d, *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* 2.8.6.3d.□

#### [B]<sup>8</sup> Usages of *priya* with generic *deva*, where *priya* precedes *deva*

*priyaṃ devānām apy etu pāthaḥ*, “Let it go upon the dear path of the gods.” *Śaunakīya Atharvaveda* 2.34.2d, *Paippalāda Atharvaveda*

<sup>8</sup> G. T. Deshpande (1971: 212–213) cites *priyo devānām . . . bhūyāsam*, and provides *Yajurveda* XVI.1.2 and *Yajurveda* XXXVI.18 as textual references.

3.32.3d, *Kāṭhaka Saṃhitā* 30.8, *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* 3.1.1.4d.

*priyaṃ devebhyo mā kuru*, “Make me dear to the gods.” *Paippalāda Atharvaveda* 5.14.7b.

*priyaṃ mā kuru deveṣu*, “Make me dear among the gods.” *Rgveda Khila* 10.128.11a, *Śaunakīya Atharvaveda* 19.62.1a, *Paippalāda Atharvaveda* 2.32.5a, *Hiraṇyakeśi Gṛhyasūtra* 1.10.6a.

*priyo devānām*, “dear to the gods.” *Rgveda* 10.16.8b, *Śaunakīya Atharvaveda* 18.3.53b, *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* 6.1.4b.

*priyo devānām*, “dear to the gods.” *Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā* 26.2, *Rgveda* 10.56.1d, *Śaunakīya Atharvaveda* 18.3.7d, *Sāmaveda* 1.65d, *Kāṭhaka Saṃhitā* 35.17d, *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* 6.3.1d, *Mānava Śrautasūtra* 3.4.1d.

*adītiḥ . . . priyā devānām*, “Aditi, dear to the gods.” *Kāṭhaka Saṃhitā* 1.11.

[C] Usages of *priya* after *deva* with intervening words

*tvaṃ devānām bhava priyaḥ*, “May you become dear to the gods.” *Paippalāda Atharvaveda* 10.2.7c.

[D] The word *devānām* directly followed by *priya*

*tvaṃ viśveṣāṃ devānām priyam pātho ‘pīhi*, “path dear to the gods.” *Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā* 8.50, *Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā-Kāṇva* 8.22.4, *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 11.5.9.12, *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* 3.3.3.3, *Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā* 1.3.36, *Kāṭhaka Saṃhitā* 30.6

*devānām priyeṇa nāmnā*, “name dear to the gods.” *Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā* 1.1.12: 7.17; 4.1.13: 18.8.

*devānām priyeṇa dhāmnā*, “by the abode dear to the gods.” *Kāṭhaka Saṃhitā* 1.11.

From the above sample citations, it is clear that the terms *devānām* and *priya* do not occur as a compound form in the Vedic usage. In preponderant usages, the word *priya* occurs before *deva*, and in a large number of cases where *deva* occurs before *priya*, other words intervene. Even in an example like *devānām priyām* [*Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā* 8.50] where each word retains an *udātta* syllable, the accents indicate that there is no compounding. Thus, the Vedic usage gives us no indication of an honorific usage of the term, and yet it gives us some indication how the Aśokan expression could have been read by the followers of the Vedic tradition and how they may have perhaps felt some shock that a king who became a Buddhist was, dishonestly in their perception, calling himself *devānām priyaḥ*. The *Bhagavadgītā* (12.14–20) essentially continues the Vedic usage of “*priya* of god(s),” though indicating the new direction of *bhakti* through frequent use of expressions like *sa me priyaḥ*. In its own way, the *Bhagavadgītā* seems to fulfill the request seen in the

Vedic texts: *priyo devānām. . . bhūyāsam*, “May I become dear to the gods?” If the *bhakti* portions of the *Bhagavadgītā* are post-Aśokan, as is assumed by many scholars, one may see the assertions in the *Bhagavadgītā* as a post-Aśokan revival of the days of devotees/sacrificers returning to the state of being *devānām priya* in a neo-Vedic sense, a neo-Vedic reaction to the use of this expression by the Mauryas. A similar approach is indicated by the *Bodhāyana Gṛhyaśeṣa Sūtra* (1.25.15): *yo devasya priyo vidvān devasya padam āpnuyāt*, “the wise one, dear to God, will go to the abode of God” [cited by Palsule 1969: 138], see *madbhaktaḥ . . . yaḥ sa mām eti, Bhagavadgītā* 11.55.

The reactions of the Brahmanical tradition to the claims of the Mauryas are recorded in the various *Purāṇas*<sup>9</sup>:

*tataḥ kalau sampravṛtte sammohāya suradviṣām / buddho nāmāñjana-  
sutaḥ kīkaṭeṣu bhaviṣyati // Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Canto 1, Chapter 3,  
verse 24.

Then, after the Kali age begins, there will be the Buddha [incarnation of Viṣṇu], son of Añjana, in the region of Kīkaṭa, in order to delude the haters of the gods, the demons.

*devadviṣām niḡamavartmani niṣṭhitānām / pūrbhir mayena vihītābhir  
adṛṣyatūrbhiḥ / lokān ghnatām mati-vimoham ati-pralobham / veśam  
vidhāya bahu bhāṣyata aupadharmyam // Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Canto 2,  
Chapter 7, verse 37.

The Lord [Viṣṇu having assumed the form of the Buddha], wearing an appearance that was very attractive and capable of deluding the minds [of onlookers], spoke a great deal of pseudo-*dharma* [to delude] those demons, haters of gods, who were steadfast on the Vedic path and [yet] were destroying the worlds with the flying fortresses, designed by Maya, which were invisible and fast-moving.<sup>10</sup>

*vādair vimohayati yajñakṛto ‘tadarhān / śūdrān kalau kṣitibhujo  
nyahaniṣyad ante // Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Canto 11, Chapter 4, verse 22.

With his doctrines, [the Buddha-incarnation of Viṣṇu] deluded the Śūdra kings during the Kali age, who were conducting Vedic sacrifices, though actually being ineligible to do so, and finally he destroyed them.

9 Among these *Purāṇas*, some like the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* are old, while others like the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, *Skanda Purāṇa*, and *Agni Purāṇa* are relatively late. However, in many cases the later *Purāṇas* seem to copy the wording of older *Purāṇas*, indicating a degree of continuity of narratives.

10 To a modern Hindu reader, this characterization of the Buddha is so shocking that there is an urge to somehow interpret this verse to save the Buddha as we know him. A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, commenting on this verse of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (Second Canto, Part II, p. 396, Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, New York, 1972), says: “This incarnation of Lord Buddha is not exactly the same Buddha incarnation as we have in the present history of mankind. According to Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī, the Buddha incarnation mentioned in this verse appeared in a different Kali age.”

*Skanda Purāṇa, Kāśīkhaṇḍa* (4), Chapter 58, pp. 403–407.

*vakṣye buddhāvataṛaṃ ca paṭhataḥ śṅhvato 'rthadam / purā devāsūre  
yuddhe daityair devāḥ parājitāḥ // rakṣa rakṣeti śaraṇam vadanto  
jagmur īśvaram / māyāmohasvarūpo 'sau śuddhodanasuto 'bhavat //  
mohayāmāsa daityāṃs tāṃs tyājitā vedadharmakam / te ca bauddhā  
babhūvur hi . . . // Agni Purāṇa, 16.1–3.*

I will narrate the Buddha-incarnation [of Viṣṇu] that grants the wishes of those who recite it and those who listen to it. In ancient times, in the battles between gods and demons, the gods were defeated by the demons. Saying ‘save me, save me,’ they took refuge in the Lord [Viṣṇu]. Assuming a form of illusion and delusion, he became the son of Śuddhodana, and deluded the demons, and he made them abandon the Vedic dharma. Thus they became the followers of the Buddha.

With such passages, we see the *Purāṇas* staking a claim that Viṣṇu appeared in the form of Buddha and Mahāvīra to delude the Asuras into believing in the anti-Vedic doctrines of Buddhism and Jainism, and once the Asuras were so deluded, the gods were able to destroy them without any feeling of guilt.<sup>11</sup> The followers of Buddhism and Jainism, especially the kings, are referred to not just as Asuras,<sup>12</sup> they are called *suradviṣ* and *devadviṣ* “haters of gods,” quite a contrast from the Mauryan self-description as *devānāṃ priya*, and especially the expression *śūdrān kṣitibhujāḥ* is a clear reference to kings like Mahāpadma Nanda<sup>13</sup> and the Mauryas, who were described by the *Purāṇas* as Śūdras who usurped the rule of the earth: *tataḥ prabhṛti śūdrā bhūpālāḥ bhaviṣyanti, Viṣṇu Purāṇa, 4.24.21*, and *tato nṛpā bhaviṣyanti śūdraprāyās tv adhārmikāḥ, Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Canto 12, Chapter 1, verse 9*.

11 For an insightful study of such Purāṇic narratives, see P. S. Jaini (1977).

12 A. J. Karandikar (1962: 7), a Hindu nationalist historian, finds a “hidden” reference in the *Mahābhārata* to Aśoka as an incarnation of a great Asura named Aśva: *yas tv aśva iti vikhyātaḥ śrīmān āsīn mahāsuraḥ / aśoka iti rājābhūn mahāvīro 'parājitāḥ //*. This verse is found in the Critical Edition of the *Mahābhārata* (1.61.14). The text of the *Mahābhārata* gives no clue that this is a reference to our Aśoka, and yet Karandikar’s attempt reveals how the Brahmanical mind can read such texts. Karandikar (1962: 16) says that from the point of view of the Hindus, the kingdom of Aśoka was not a Rāmarājya, but a Rāvaṇarājya. Karandikar (1962: 44) further relies upon the late Sanskrit grammarians who interpret *devānāṃpriya* to refer to an animal that is offered in sacrifice to gods, and says that by using this title for himself, Aśoka wanted to stop the animal sacrifices. From the Hindu nationalist point of view, Aśoka’s *ahimsā* weakened the “nation,” as did Gandhi’s.

13 *mahānandīsuto rājan śūdrāgarbhodbhavo balī / mahāpadmapatiḥ kaścin nandaḥ kṣatравināśakṛt // sa ekacchatrāṃ pṛthivīm anullāṅghitaśāsanaḥ / śāśiṣyati mahāpadmo dvitīya iva bhārgavaḥ // Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Canto 12, Chapter 1, verses 8, 10. Also: mahānandinās tataḥ śūdrāgarbhodbhavo 'tilubdho 'tibalo mahāpadmanāmā nandaḥ paraśurāma ivāparo 'khilakṣatrantakārī bhaviṣyati / Viṣṇu Purāṇa, 4.24.20–21.*

Sanskrit Grammarians and *devānāṃpriya*

The history of the expression *devānāṃpriya* in the Sanskrit grammatical tradition is most interesting, and convoluted at the same time. For a detailed and yet convoluted explanation, let me quote from Radha Kumud Mookerji (1962: 108, fn. 3):

The form *devānāṃ-priya* instead of *deva-priya* would be an epithet of contempt under a rule of Pāṇini [vi.3.21], but is mentioned among the exceptions of the rule by Kātyāyana (about 350 B.C. according to Sir R. G. Bhandarkar), supported by Patañjali (150 B.C.) and even the Kāśikā (A.D. 650). The exception is not, however, allowed by the later grammarian, Bhaṭṭojidīkṣita, who insists on taking *devānāṃpriya* as a contempt term implying a fool (*mūrkhā*) devoid of the knowledge of Brahma, and hence addicted only to sacrifices and offerings by which they please gods, as cows please men by offering milk (vide *Tattvabodhinī* and *Bālamānoramā*). Thus a title which was complimentary during the Nandas, Mauryas, and Śuṅgas, suffers a deterioration in sense under later Brahmanical prejudice against the most distinguished Buddhist monarch.<sup>14</sup>

There is no indication in Pāṇini's grammar that he himself was particularly concerned with this expression. But Kātyāyana and Patañjali have paid attention to this expression. One of the first features that begins to appear is the recognition in Kātyāyana's *Vārttika* (*devānāṃpriya iti ca*) on Pāṇini 6.3.21 (*ṣaṣṭhyā ākrośe*) that *devānāṃpriya* is a compound expression (*samāsa*). The exceptional feature of this compound is that the case-ending after the first member of this compound has not been deleted. Pāṇini's rule 6.3.21 says that if the compound expression denotes a sense of *ākrośa* "accusation," then the genitive case-ending after the first member of such a compound is not deleted (*aluk*). The other well-known compound of this type is *dāsyāhputra*, which is an expression of cursing, rather than literally stating that someone happens to be the son of a maid. The normal compound *dāsīputra* can serve that plain indicative function. What Kātyāyana seems to recognize is that such a non-deletion of the genitive case-ending takes place in some cases even when there is no sense of accusation. The example *devānāṃpriya* is one such example. Kātyāyana suggests that a separate provision for this expression needs to be made. Had the expression any accusatory meaning, one could derive it by the rule of Pāṇini as it stands, and it would not need a special provision. This point is gradually lost in the later versions of this *Vārttika* as seen in the works of Bhaṭṭoji Dīkṣita. On the same rule, Kātyāyana also makes a provision for Vedic names like Divodāsa, that clearly do not have any accusatory meaning. The treatment of *devānāṃpriya* by Kātyāyana makes it clear that the order of words *devānāṃ* and *priya* has now become invariant, and perhaps, like most other compounds, the two words have now

<sup>14</sup> The last assertion of Mookerji that the sense of the term changed under later Brahmanical prejudice against the most distinguished Buddhist monarch is shared by Chaturvedi (1935). As I have discussed, there is no evidence to support this view.



developed one single *udātta* accent. These would be the external signs of compounding. While the Aśokan edicts exhibit the invariant order of *devānām* and *priya*, we do not have an attested example in an accented post-Vedic text to verify if the expression developed a single *udātta* accent. There is no sign of such a development in the available Vedic accented texts, and it is most likely a post-Vedic development, perhaps contemporary with the Aśokan Prakrits. The one thing that is clear from Kātyāyana's *Vārttika* is that the word *devānāmpriya* did not have any accusatory meaning in his opinion, because otherwise it would have been covered by Pāṇini's rule 6.3.21 (*ṣaṣṭhyā ākrośe*).

On the other hand, we see Patañjali adding significant information regarding the use of this expression as an honorific term. Commenting on Pāṇini 5.3.14 (*itarābhyo 'pi dṛśyante*), Patañjali says that the rule should be restricted to a specific group of words beginning with *bhavat* (*bhavadādi*). This group of words is fully specified by Patañjali: *bhavān*, *dīrghāyuh*, *devānāmpriyaḥ*, and *āyusmān*, *Mahābhāṣya* (Kielhorn edition, Vol. II, p. 405). From Patañjali's discussion of these words and the usages cited by him, it is clear that the term *devānāmpriya* is just a plain honorific term, similar to the other words listed by him.

Beyond these two occurrences of *devānāmpriya*, there is a third occurrence of the term in the *Mahābhāṣya* on Pāṇini 2.4.56 (*ajer vy aghañapoh*), a rule that teaches substitution of the root *aj* with *vi* under certain conditions. Here we have an imagined conversation between a chariot-driver (*sūta*) and a grammarian (*vaiyākaraṇa*):

*evaṃ hi kaścid vaiyākaraṇa āha / ko 'sya rathasya praveteti / sūta āha / āyusmann ahaṃ prājiteti / vaiyākaraṇa āha apaśabda iti / sūta āha prāptijñō devānāmpriyo na tv iṣṭijñā iṣyata etad rūpam iti / Mahābhāṣya* (Kielhorn edn., Vol. I, p. 488)

Thus a certain grammarian said: "Who is the driver (*pravetā*) of this chariot?" The driver said: "Sir, I am the driver (*prājitā*)." The grammarian said: "[The word *prājitā* for a driver] is incorrect." The driver said: "You, beloved of the gods (*devānāmpriya*), know only what obtains from the rules of grammar,<sup>15</sup> but not what is actually desired in the usage. This usage (= *prājitā*, instead of *pravetā* of the grammarian) is the desired form.

The grammarian clearly takes offense at this rebuke by the driver (*āho khalv anena durutena bādhyāmahe*) and uses the word *dur-uta* to mean "a bad driver" to refer to

<sup>15</sup> Patañjali elsewhere seems to suggest that there are normative speakers of good Sanskrit, the *śiṣṭas*, who do not learn Sanskrit by using the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* of Pāṇini, and yet fluently speak good Sanskrit. To explain this miraculous event, Patañjali says that it must be their innate nature (*svabhāva*) or the grace of some divinity (*daivānugraha*), that these people can speak good Sanskrit without any effort, *Mahābhāṣya* (Kielhorn edn.) on Pāṇini 6.3.109, Vol. III, p. 174. The implication here is those who are graced by a divinity do not need to make deliberate effort. This may also account for the sarcastic use of *devānāmpriya* in the above passage. The grammarian may think he is graced by a divinity and need not make any deliberate effort to go beyond the rules of grammar to take note of actual usage in the world. That makes him appear foolish.

the driver. But then the driver points out that the word *dur-uta* is incorrect, and that if the grammarian correctly wishes to curse, he should use the word *duḥ-sūta* (*sūta āha / na khalu veñāḥ sūtaḥ, suvater eva sūto, yadi kutsā prayoktavyā duḥsūteneti vaktavyam, Mahābhāṣya*, Kielhorn edn., Vol. I, p. 488). It is quite clear that Patañjali is poking fun at the obstinate grammarian who is not willing to adjust his grammar to the changing usage. The use of *devānāmpriya* in this passage is clearly sarcastic, and this is similar to Patañjali's sarcastic use of the expression *tatrabhavan*, which is normally used as an honorific:

*kiṃ ca bhoḥ ślokā api pramāṇam / kiṃ cātaḥ / yadi pramāṇam ayam  
api ślokaḥ pramāṇam bhavitum arhati / yad udumbaravarṇānāṃ  
ghaṭīnāṃ maṇḍalaṃ mahat / pītaṃ na gamayet svargaṃ kiṃ tat  
kratugataṃ nayet // iti / pramattaḡīta eṣa tatrabhavato, yas tv apra-  
mattaḡītas tat pramāṇam / Mahābhāṣya* (Kielhorn edn., Vol. I, p. 3).

O Sir, are even [cited] verses to be treated as authoritative?

What is the problem?

If [all cited verses] are authoritative, then even this verse should be authoritative:

If drinking a whole chain of a hundred [wine] pots, with the color of figs, does not lead one to heaven, how could it do so when drunk during a sacrifice?

This verse was recited by his honor (*tatrabhavataḥ*) when he was under delusion. A verse recited when one is not under delusion can be authoritative.

In this passage, it is clear that Patañjali is using the word *tatrabhavan* sarcastically, while elsewhere he uses it as a normal honorific (see use of *tatrabhavat* in reference to the sages Yārvaṇastarvāṇaḥ, *Mahābhāṣya*, Kielhorn edn., Vol. I, p. 11). Thus the sarcastic use of a word need not change the basic meaning of a word, since any normal expression can be used sarcastically.<sup>16</sup> There is one interesting indication built in this passage that could be of some significance. What sort of behavior prompted Patañjali to speak sarcastically using a normal honorific expression? It looks like the verse cited questions the validity of Vedic ritual practices, and this seems to invoke Patañjali's ire. Any "honorable" person who speaks in such a manner about Vedic sacrifices must indeed be *pramatta* "deluded, intoxicated." The verse could have come from a Lokāyata, Buddhist, or Jaina author poking fun at the Vedic sacrifices, and Patañjali's response to such insinuations is that these speakers are in delusion, and this prompts his sarcastic use of *tatrabhavat*. As I have discussed elsewhere, Kātyāyana and Patañjali are firm defenders of the Vedic tradition and for them Sanskrit grammar is first and foremost a tool to preserve the Vedas (*rakṣārthaṃ vedānāṃ adhyeyaṃ vyākaraṇam, Mahābhāṣya*, Kielhorn edn., Vol. I, p. 1). If the honorific *tatrabhavat* can be used sarcastically to refer to those heterodox disputants who denigrate the Vedas, one can easily imagine how Brahmans with the mindset of Patañjali may have looked at the use of the term

<sup>16</sup> Hara (1969) has examined sarcastic use of other expressions in Sanskrit.

*devānāmpriya* in the inscriptions of Aśoka who became a Buddhist and used the royal treasury to construct eighty-four thousand<sup>17</sup> Buddhist *stūpas*. The proclamations of *ahiṃsā* in his inscriptions may have put limitations on the performance of Brahmanical sacrifices involving immolation of animals. We should note that while Aśokan edicts do not expressly show anti-Brahman discourse, it is clear that while there are Mauryan donative inscriptions in favor of Buddhists and Ājīvikas, there is not a single donative inscription that I know that is in favor of the Brahmans.

This is where I would like to mention the four other celebrated references in Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*:

[A] *mauryair hiraṇyārthibhir arcāḥ prakalpitāḥ / bhavet tāsu na syāt / yāḥ samprati pūjārthās tāsu bhaviṣyati / Mahābhāṣya*, Kielhorn edn., Vol. II, p. 429.

[B] *iha puṣyamitraṃ yājayāmaḥ / Mahābhāṣya*, Kielhorn edn., Vol. II, p. 123.<sup>18</sup>

[C] *candraguptasabhā / puṣyamitrasabhā / Mahābhāṣya*, Kielhorn edn., Vol. I, p. 177

[D] *yeṣāṃ ca virodhaḥ [śāśvatikaḥ P.2.4.9] ity asya avakāśaḥ / śramaṇa-brāhmaṇam / Mahābhāṣya*, Kielhorn edn., Vol. I, p. 476.

These passages have been extensively discussed and debated in available research, see: R. G. Bhandarkar (1933: 148ff). Without getting into the textual and philological issues, the cumulative conclusions that can be drawn are as follows. Patañjali's *samprati*, "now, these days," refers to the immediate post-Mauryan period. At the very least the passage indicates that in Patañjali's eye's, the Mauryas—lusting after gold—did something or other to the images of gods. It is not clear what the expression *arcāḥ prakalpitāḥ* exactly means.<sup>19</sup> However, the

17 The number 84,000 for the *stūpas* constructed by Aśoka is not a historical number, but a trope that is shared by the Buddhist narratives of Aśoka with other Buddhist texts like the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra* (p. 239) and the *Samādhirājasūtra* (p. 218), which describe other kings and Bodhisattvas building 84,000 (or larger multiples of this number) *stūpas*. John Strong, during his presentation at this symposium, brought out these shared similarities. The connection of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* (p. 239) story with Aśoka is even stronger, since as Strong pointed out, the Bodhisattva constructing these *stūpas* is named Sarvasattva-priyadarśana, a likely allusion to Aśoka's common title Priyadarśin in his inscriptions.

18 For multiple references to Puṣyamitra (variant reading: Puṣpamitra) performing sacrifices, see: *Mahābhāṣya*, Vol. II, p. 34. The *Aśokāvadāna* (133) describes Puṣyamitra, aided by his "non-believer" Brahman minister, planning to destroy Buddhist shrines and monasteries: *rājñāśokena caturaśītīdharmarājikāsahasraṃ sthāpitam atas tasya nāma ciram tiṣṭhati / bhavāṃś cet tāni nāśayed bhavato nāma cirataram sthāsyati /*

19 The passage is taken by the commentators of the *Mahābhāṣya* to mean that the Mauryans prepared for sale the images of gods. The word "for sale" (*vikretum*) is not there in the text of Patañjali, but supplied by the commentators. For a detailed discussion of these passages, see R. G. Bhandarkar (1933: 148ff). The historical situation of the state of iconography of gods during the Mauryan period is unclear. The Buddha himself is not iconographically represented at this time as a human figure. As against whatever disrespect to Hindu gods shown by the gold-driven Mauryas reported by Patañjali, the inscriptions seem to depict a rather different picture. Von Glasenapp (1970: 19) remarks: "The importance of

subsequent sentence *yās tv etāḥ samprati pūjārthāḥ* clearly seems to suggest that in the post-Mauryan “today” of Patañjali, the images of gods were worshipped or perhaps worshipped again. There is indeed some suggestion of change in the treatment of images of gods from the Mauryan period to that of Patañjali. The passage *iha puṣyamitraṃ yājayāmaḥ* minimally seems to tell us that Vedic sacrifices were being performed by and for Puṣyamitra. While there are clear inscriptions of the later imperial Guptas performing Vedic sacrifices, one must again note that Mauryan inscriptions make no reference to Aśoka or his Mauryan successors performing any Vedic sacrifices like Aśvamedha or Rājasūya. So Patañjali does seem to indicate some sort of neo-Vedic revival under Puṣyamitra. The passage C is a reference to the courts of Candragupta and Puṣyamitra. The non-mention of Aśoka in this passage is perhaps very loud, deliberate and symptomatic of Brahmanical reactions to Aśoka. The later Brahmanical tradition has retained significant memories of Candragupta and Puṣyamitra, as seen in Sanskrit dramas like the *Mudrārākṣasa* and the *Mālavikāgnimitra*, but there is no Brahmanical parallel to the Buddhist *Avadānas* dedicated to stories about Aśoka, even negative ones depicting him as a Kālāsoka or a Caṇḍāsoka from the Hindu point of view. That makes one wonder if this began as a systematic strategy on the part of the *Purāṇa* authors.<sup>20</sup>

The passage D is also revealing for our understanding of Patañjali’s attitudes as against what one sees in Aśoka’s inscriptions. A. C. Woolner (1924: 140) in his *Glossary* of Aśokan inscriptions lists all the occurrences of the compound *samaṇabambhaṇa* in Aśoka’s inscriptions. In all the occurrences, the inscriptions use this compound in plural, and the context seems to indicate that Aśoka is referring to two equally respected groups. The Aśokan usage is parallel to the use of the compound *samaṇabrāhmaṇa* in Pali texts like the *Suttanipāta*: *samaṇabrāhmaṇāse* (nom. pl.), 5.7.3–6; *samaṇabrāhmaṇā*, 3.2.17 and 4.10.12. In Patañjali’s usage, the compound *śramaṇabrāhmaṇa* can only be used as a collective *dvandva* (*samāhāradvandva*), in neuter singular, referring to two groups that are in permanent conflict, like the compound *ahinakulam*, “snake-n-mongoose.” It seems most likely that here we have two parallel streams of linguistic usage, one represented by the Aśokan inscriptions and the Pali texts like the *Suttanipāta* on one hand, and Patañjali’s neo-Vedic Brahmins on the other. For Patañjali, there is a permanent conflict between the *śramaṇas* and the *brāhmaṇas*.

popular belief in gods is confirmed by the edicts of the emperor Ashoka. In the fourth rock-edict the ‘Lord Beloved of the Gods’ says that he showed his subjects images of gods and columns of flame (perhaps images of the fires of hell) together with processions of elephants, and that this resulted in a considerable uplift of general morals.” Perhaps the *Mahābhāṣya* passage is referring to these displays of the images by the Mauryas, but then it is not clear how the characterization *hiranyārthibhiḥ* can be explained. Perhaps they collected the offerings made to the images of gods, an aspect not evident from the Aśokan inscriptions. Nonetheless it is clear that the stature of Vedic gods is considerably diminished within Buddhism: “One of their functions is to proclaim the Buddha’s glory, and always to venerate him,” von Glasenapp (1970: 23). This may have been taken as an offence by the Vedic worshippers of those gods.

<sup>20</sup> “It is interesting to note that the *Purāṇa* says nothing of the Mauryan achievements, or of the westward expansion of the empire.” R. Morton Smith (1973: 362).

The next significant landmark in the tradition of Sanskrit grammar as regards the expression *devānāṃpriya* is the comment of Kaiyaṭa, a Kashmiri grammarian of the early 11th century CE, in his commentary *Pradīpa* on Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*. Of the three places in the *Mahābhāṣya* where the term *devānāṃpriya* occurs, Kaiyaṭa has absolutely not a word to say where the term is clearly used as a normal honorific title. On the passage of the *Mahābhāṣya* where Patañjali uses the term sarcastically in the conversation between a chariot-driver and a grammarian, Kaiyaṭa, without noting that the word is used sarcastically, offers a straightforward negative interpretation:

*devānāṃpriya itī / devaśabdo mūrkhavācī / mūrkhāṇāṃ ca priyā mūrkhā eva bhavanti / athavā sukhāsaktatayā śāstre 'nabhiyogo 'nena pratipādyate / Kaiyaṭa's Pradīpa, Nirṇayasāgara edn. of the Mahābhāṣya, Vol. II, p. 558, on Pāṇini 2.4.56.*

*Devānāṃpriya.* Here the word *deva* refers to fools.<sup>21</sup> Those who are dear to fools can only be fools. Or perhaps this expression indicates non-engagement in *śāstra* [on the part of those beloved of the gods] because they are addicted to pleasure.

It is interesting note that while Kaiyaṭa correctly grasps that the expression *devānāṃpriya* in this context has a negative force, he fails to indicate that this negative force is there because a positive term is being used sarcastically. His explanation seems to make the components of the word itself yield this meaning. What may be the reason for Kaiyaṭa to propose this negative meaning? One possibility is that he may have come across a predominantly sarcastic/negative use of this expression, as against its honorific use. Among the clear predecessors and contemporaries of Kaiyaṭa, Vasubandhu,<sup>22</sup> Śābara,<sup>23</sup> Śāṅkara,<sup>24</sup> Abhinavagupta,<sup>25</sup> and Mammaṭa<sup>26</sup> use this term sarcastically, precisely the way it is used in the

21 This is the most shocking statement. We do not know what basis Kaiyaṭa had to suggest that the word *deva* itself refers to a fool.

22 *prāptijñō devānāṃpriyo na tv iṣṭijñāḥ, Abhidharmakośabhāṣya, p. 56; granthajñō devānāṃpriyo na tv arthajñāḥ, p. 76; both passages are discussed by Hara (1969: 22).*

23 *ādītyam paśya devānāṃpriya /, Śābarabhāṣya on Mīmāṃsāsūtra 1.1.15. Palsule (1969: 143) disputes Ganganath Jha's sarcastic reading of this passage. I believe Jha is correct in his reading. But finally Palsule seems to concede: "This is, then the first instance of the tendency which is clearly noticeable in later scientific literature viz. that devānāṃpriya was to be used (for tvam) only when some defect of the person addressed was to be pointed out. Śābara might have understood the Mahābhāṣya passage in an ironical tone and so might have used the word in imitation," Palsule (1969: 143).*

24 *idam tāvad devānāṃpriyaḥ praṣṭavyaḥ, Śāṅkarabhāṣya on Brahmasūtra 1.2.8.*

25 *tasmād adṛṣṭagurubhiḥ aparīśilitaśāstrasampradāyaiḥ svavimarśasūnyaiḥ devānāṃpriyaiḥ yat kiñcid atrocitate tad upekṣyam / Tantrāloka (4.172) of Abhinavagupta, cited by V.P. Limaye (1974: 145).*

26 *te 'py atāparyajñās tātparyavācayukter devānāṃpriyāḥ, Kāvya prakāśa of Mammaṭa, BORI edn., pp. 225–226. Palsule (1969: 148–149) observes: "We will not be much mistaken if we take the expression to have been used here in the sense of 'ignorant' which approaches the mūrkhā of the commentators. What exactly was responsible for Mammaṭa's idea that devānāṃpriya was equivalent to mūrkhā we do not know for certain. A speculation in this respect has been attempted below. For the first time being attention may be*

*Mahābhāṣya* conversation between a chariot-driver and a grammarian.<sup>27</sup> Though there is also evidence in Bāṇa's usage of this term in his *Harṣacarita* as an honorific,<sup>28</sup> it seems clear that there is a preponderance of the negative/sarcastic use of this term in the literature that may have been available to Kaiyaṭa.

In Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* there is an exact copy of Patañjali's sarcastic words directed at the foolish grammarian: *prāptijñō devānāmpriyo na tv iṣṭijñah*.<sup>29</sup> Vasubandhu's usage is remarkable in that it shows that there is a clear continuity of the sarcastic usage from Patañjali (1st century BCE) to Vasubandhu (about 4th or 5th century CE) and that Vasubandhu is directly imitating the usage of Patañjali. Palsule (1969: 142) discusses Yaśomitra's commentary *Abhidharmakośavyākhyā* on this passage of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*: *ko 'yam devānāmpriyo nāma / rjukaḥjātīyo devānāmpriya ity eke vyācakṣate / aśaṭho hi devānāmpriyo bhavati / mūrkhō devānāmpriya ity apare / yo hīśvarānām iṣṭaḥ sa na tāḍanena śikṣate iti mūrkhō bhavatīti /*, Vol. II, p. 46. Yaśomitra (8th century CE) is to my knowledge the first Sanskrit commentator who explicitly offers both a positive and a negative interpretation as alternatives, the negative interpretation using the word *mūrkhā* a few centuries before Kaiyaṭa, but Kaiyaṭa clearly drops the positive interpretation and keeps only the negative interpretation. The question is not whether Kaiyaṭa or Yaśomitra is right or wrong (as posed in Palsule 1969), but that through their comments we have access to changing perceptions of linguistic usage. In Kaiyaṭa's mind, the negative interpretation, most likely because of the preponderance of the sarcastic usage, was the only viable interpretation. Under such circumstances, he perhaps rightly treats the usage not as a sarcastic usage, but as a usage literally indicating negativity. The subsequent history within the grammatical tradition is well known. As Kielhorn (1908: 505) already notes, Rāmacandra in his *Prakriyākaumudī* first adds the word *mūrkhē* to the wording of Kātyāyana's *Vārttika* (*devānāmpriya iti ca*), and this revised *Vārttika* (*devānām priya iti ca mūrkhē*) makes its way further into Bhaṭṭoji Dikṣita's *Siddhāntakaumudī* and its commentaries like the *Tattvabodhinī*.<sup>30</sup> During this late period of Sanskrit grammar,

drawn to a coincidence: Kaiyaṭa who was the first to express this view that *devānāmpriya* meant a fool is said to have been a brother of Mammaṭa."

27 For further discussions of these quotations, see: G. T. Deshpande (1969), Hara (1969) and G. B. Palsule (1969). Also see Kielhorn (1908: 504–5), where he refers to a number of authors (Śaṅkara, Mammaṭa, and Haradatta) who use the expression *devānāmpriya* sarcastically, but Kielhorn does not note that Kaiyaṭa is the first grammarian to directly interpret the expression to refer to a fool (*mūrkhā*). Referring to the *Mahābhāṣya* conversation between the chariot-driver and the grammarian, Kielhorn (1908: 504) says: "I may add that in imitation of this passage of the *Mahābhāṣya* the word *devānāmpriya* has been used in a similar way by later writers. . . and that to that passage is due in the first instance the meaning *mūrkhā*, assigned to *devānāmpriya* in more modern times."

28 *ihāpi janmani dattam evāsmākaṃ amunā tapahkleṣena phalam asulabhadarśanaṃ darśayatā devānām priyam / Harṣacarita*, p. 219; *saujanyaparatantrā ceyam devānām priyasātībhadratā kārayati kathām na tu yuvatijane sahotthā taralatā*, *ibid*, p. 25.

29 *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, p. 56.

30 For details of these subsequent transmissions, see: Kielhorn (1908), G. T. Deshpande (1969) and Palsule (1969). Kielhorn (1908: 505, fn. 2) reads: "It is amusing to see how commentators try to account for this meaning of the word *devānāmpriya*. The author of the *Manoramā* says: *mūrkhā hi devānām prītiṃ janayanti devapaśutvāt*; to which is added in my

the term *devānāmpriya* decisively attains a negative meaning, though one should keep in mind, that no one in this tradition at this late period has a clue that this term has any association with the ancient emperor Aśoka.

### The term *devānāmpriya* and the Buddhist Narratives on Aśoka

While the legacy of Aśoka was all but forgotten in non-Buddhist India, the Buddhist tradition kept his memory alive. This is seen in the traditional accounts from Sri Lanka, as well as in the Sanskrit *Avadānas* which were further translated and transmitted to China and Tibet. In most of these Buddhist accounts, there is a common thread that shows that the Buddhist narrators divided Aśoka's reign into two periods, one before his conversion to Buddhism and the second that began with his conversion to Buddhism. The Aśoka of the pre-conversion period is typically described as being a cruel king who was devoted to the heretics, and he is generally referred to as Kālāśoka or Caṇḍāśoka. The post-conversion Aśoka is described as the ideal Buddhist king, and named Dharmāśoka.<sup>31</sup> The stories coming from both the southern and the northern traditions highlight this transformative process, and narrate many episodes in Aśoka's life with a view to giving prominence to Buddhism in his life and his contribution to its propagation. Both of these traditions have been extensively studied by scholars, and I am interested here only in the light these traditions throw on the Aśokan designation *devānāmpriya*.

To begin with, we may note that not a single Buddhist narrative of Aśoka, southern or northern, has retained any memory whatsoever that Aśoka used the title *devānāmpriya*. The northern Buddhist tradition codified in various *Avadānas* relating to Aśoka does not use the term *devānāmpriya* for anyone, while the Sri Lankan tradition uses this epithet for the Sri Lankan king Tissa, who was a contemporary of Aśoka, and for some of his successors, but never for Aśoka, whose close relationship with Tissa is at the same time emphasized in Sri Lankan sources, such as the *Dīpavaṃsa*, *Mahāvāṃsa*, and the *Vinaya Aṭṭhakathā Samantapāsādikā*. Robin Coningham (1995: 226) shows that there is inscriptional evidence from early Sri Lanka that “the king Mahaculika (r. 77–63 BCE) was a member of the royal family which carried the name Devanampiya (friend of the gods).” A number of Sri Lankan inscriptions recorded by Paranavitana (1970, Vol. II., pt. I, nos. 1, 9, 23, and 36) refer to kings of this dynasty using this title for themselves. Especially, the first

MSS. the marginal note *mūrkhā hīti / brahmajñānarahitā ity arthaḥ / te hi paśuvad devaniyamās tad āha devapaśutvād iti /*. And the *Tattvabodhini*, in commenting on the above passage of the *Manoramā* has: *brahmajñānarahitatvād saṃsāriṇo mūrkhās te tu yāgādikarmāny anuṭṭhantaḥ puroḍāśādipradānavārā devānāṃ atyantaprītiṃ janayanti / brahmajñāninas tu na tathā teṣāṃ yāgādyanuṭṭhānābhāvāt / ato gavādisthānāpānatvān mūrkhā eva devapaśava iti /*. Nāgojibhaṭṭa, on the other hand, following Kaiyaṭa, takes the gods themselves to be fools, and appropriately adds that fools are fond of fools.”

<sup>31</sup> See *caṇḍāsoko ti nāyittha pure pāpena kammunā / dhammāsoko ti nāyittha pacchā puññena kammunā // Mahāvāṃsa* (5.189). Also: *āryo mauryaśrīḥ sa prajānāṃ hitārthaṃ / kṛtsne stūpān yaḥ kārayāmāsa loke // caṇḍāśokatvaṃ prāpya pūrvaṃ pṛthivyāṃ / dharmāśokatvaṃ karmanā tena lebhe // Pāṃṣupradānāvadāna, Aśokāvadāna* (edn. by S. Mukhopadhyaya, p. 55).

Tissa is almost universally called Devānampiyatissa in the early chronicles *Dīpavaṃsa* and *Mahāvāṃsa*, and in the accounts of the *Samantapāsādikā* that rely upon these chronicles. The fact that these Sri Lankan texts use the title *devānaṃpiya* exclusively with the Tissa of Sri Lanka (contemporary with Aśoka) and the fact that only a single inscription of Aśoka (discovered relatively later) names his personal name Aśoka while most inscriptions of Aśoka carry the titles *devānaṃpiya* and *piyadasī* for the king led Prinsep, the first scholar to decipher the Aśokan Brāhmī characters, to initially assume that these inscriptions belonged to the Sri Lankan king Devānampiyatissa. This initial impression was soon cleared by Tournier who identified Priyadarśin with Aśoka. “He pointed out that the Sinhalese chronicle, the *Dīpavaṃsa*, gave Piyadassi or Piyadassana as but another name of Aśoka. . . . This identification, it is true, has not since then been called in question, but it was definitively demonstrated only nine years ago when the sixth copy of Minor Rock Edict I was discovered at Maski. . . . For this inscription mentions the name of Aśoka clearly and in the very first line,” D. R. Bhandarkar (1969: 4). While the identity of Aśoka as the *devānaṃpiya* of the inscriptions was eventually firmly established, it creates an interesting situation that while we in modern times can make a guess that the Sri Lankan Tissa took the title *devānaṃpiya* for himself to suggest his special relation with the Indian emperor Aśoka, or that Aśoka conferred this title on Tissa, the Sri Lankan sources have no idea that Aśoka himself used this title for himself, and hence the Sri Lankan narratives are clearly not trying to suggest that Tissa took this title for himself in imitation of Aśoka.<sup>32</sup> In fact, the Sri Lankan narratives, on the surface, make it appear as if Tissa was always called Devānampiyatissa.<sup>33</sup> Thus, we have an interesting situation involved here. It would

32 Hettiarachchy (1972: 48): “Opinion is divided as to how this title which was fostered by Aśoka came to be applied to the kings of Ceylon. Paranavitana suggests that the Indian emperor may have allowed Devānaṃpiya Tissa to use his title when the latter was consecrated by the former. But Nicholas, who seems rather sceptical about the emperor Aśoka’s connexion with the consecration of Devānaṃpiya Tissa, states that Devānaṃpiya Tissa may have imitated the title of Aśoka.” Also: Hettiarachchy (1972: 49): “Although the title *devānaṃpiya* may have carried some glamour and lustre during the time of Devānaṃpiya Tissa when the prestige of the Maurya empire was at its peak, once it had become a family name the title had no implication of power and prestige except [for] those that were associated with the Anuradhapura royal house.” We must keep in mind that by the time the Sri Lankan chronicles are put together, there is no surviving memory that *devānaṃpiya* was once also the title of Aśoka. At some time, the term is abandoned in Sri Lanka itself. Hettiarachchy (1972: 50) speculates about its disappearance: “Even before the Christian era the term *devānaṃpiya* (Skt. *devānāṃpriya*) became a term of abuse in India. These ideas may have penetrated to Ceylon which maintained some contact with the subcontinent after the introduction of Buddhism, and this may have been one of the reasons why the title was discarded by the members of Devānaṃpiya Tissa’s house, if we take the absence of the title after Mahādāṭhaka Mahānāga as positive evidence.” There is no evidence to support Hettiarachchy’s claim that the term *devānāṃ-priya* had become a term of abuse in India before the Christian era.

33 See *devānaṃpiyatisso ti vissuto dutiyo suto / tesu bhātisu sabbesu puññapaññādhiko ahu // devānaṃpiyatisso so rājā ‘si pitu accāye / tassābhisekena samaṇ bahūnacchāriyāna huṃ // Mahāvāṃsa* (11.6–7). Also: *devānaṃpiyatisso ca dhammāsoko ca dve ime / adīṭṭhasahāyassu hi cirappabhūti bhūpati // Mahāvāṃsa* (11.19). The *Samantapāsādikā* says: *tattha asokadhammarājassa sattarasame vasse idha muṭasīvarājā kālam akāsi /*



seem beyond doubt that Tissa of Sri Lanka took the title *devānaṃpiya* in imitation of the title of Aśoka, and this must mean that historically the Sri Lankans contemporary with Aśoka must have known that Aśoka used the title *devānaṃpiya* for himself. But at the same time, from this early period, sometime along the way, the knowledge that this was a title of Aśoka has been lost or suppressed in the subsequent tradition available to us in *Dīpavaṃsa*, *Mahāvāṃsa*, and *Samantapāsādikā*. Considering the fact that the northern tradition of Aśoka legends also does not show this awareness, one may make a guess that the Buddhist proto-narratives about Aśoka had lost this piece of information before these narratives appeared in the specific northern and southern textual forms. The northern tradition codified in Sanskrit texts like the *Aśokāvadāna* also has no awareness that Tissa of Sri Lanka took this title for himself, though the southern versions of stories were clearly not completely unknown in the north, as evidenced by Saṅghabhadra's Chinese translation (*Shan-Chien-P'i-P'o-Sha*) of the Pali *Samantapāsādikā* completed in 489 CE. The Chinese translation of *Samantapāsādikā* contains all the same information about Devānaṃpiya Tissa of Sri Lanka and his connection with Aśoka that is contained in the Pali text, and very much like the Pali text, the Chinese version has no information that Aśoka used the title *devānaṃpiya* for himself. One gets the impression that the Buddhist tradition as we know it across the board shares this loss of information about *devānaṃpiya* being an epithet of Aśoka. The occurrence of this term in the *Abhidharmakośa* of Vasubandhu, as discussed before, is clearly in imitation of Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*, and shows no sign of any awareness that a Buddhist king may have used this term as his invariant honorific title.

This analysis, if valid, poses important questions regarding the origins and transmission of Aśoka legends within the Buddhist tradition. Under the heading "The Forming of the Tradition," Eggermont (1956: 169) says:

At the beginning of the tradition there is the historical Asoka figure. Asoka was of such an outstanding significance to Buddhism that the forming of the legend may have started already during his lifetime. The stages of the growth of this legend were traced back by Przyluski in an admirable book. It is useful to recall briefly Przyluski's theory.

*devānaṃpiyatisso rajjaṃ pāpuṇi* / Vol. I, p. 63. The *Samantapāsādikā* (Vol. I, p. 64) narrates an interesting story of Devānaṃpiyatissa's first encounter with the monk Mahinda. Mahinda addresses him merely as: *tissa tissa ito ehi*, "O Tissa, O Tissa, come here." Devānaṃpiyatissa is shocked: *imasmim dīpe jāto maṃ tissā ti nāmaṃ gahetvā ālapitum samattho nāma natthi*, "There is no one born in this island who would dare address me just using my name Tissa." Hettiarachchy (1972: 47): "The *Mahāvāṃsa* gives Devānaṃpiya Tissa as the name of the Sinhalese ruler who ascended the throne of Anuradhapura after Muṭasīva. In one instance the *Mahāvāṃsa* (11.42) states that his name is hidden in *devānaṃpiya* (*devānaṃpiya-vacanopagūlhanāmo*). The *Vamsatthappakāsini*, commenting on this, states that the king's name is Tissa and this is hidden in the *upapada* of *devānaṃpiya*. That work adds further that the king was known as Devānaṃpiya by the people because he was bent on meritorious work leading to heavenly life. The fact that *devānaṃpiya* is called an *upapada* suggests that it was taken by the king at a later date in his life and was not his original name. However, the inscriptions reveal that *devānaṃpiya* (P. *devānaṃpiya*) was not confined to one ruler but was taken by most of the kings belonging to the first dynasty."

Here is Eggermont's (1956: 169) summation of Przyluski's theory:

Already in the Moriya period a 'Cycle d'Açoka' arose in Magadha. About the middle of the II<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. this Cycle became known in Kosambī, at the time an important Buddhist centre. There an *Asokasutta* was written in Pali. From Kosambi, a trade centre, this *Asokasutta* followed the routes of trade. It came to the North West, in Mathurā, a centre of Brahman culture. Here the Pali *Asokasutta* was rewritten in Sanskrit. Thus the *Aśokāvadāna* came into being. At the same time the Pāli *Asokasutta* reached Ceylon by sea via the trade route Kosambī--Ujjayinī--Bharukaccha. In Ceylon it became the basis of the Asoka tales of the *Dīpavaṃsa* and the *Mahāvāṃsa*. The Asoka legend also extended to the East. . . . From Mathurā the Asoka legend came to the North West of India in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. The reflection of the Asoka legend in this last form we find in the *Avadānakalpalatā* by Kṣemendra (XI<sup>th</sup> century A.D.). Another historical work of Kṣemendra, which among other things contained an Asoka biography, was lost.

After reviewing Przyluski's theory, Eggermont (1956: 169–170) concludes:

To what extent does my study modify and supplement this theory? Firstly a more accurate idea can be formed of the Magadhan 'Cycle d'Açoka,' the starting point of the whole tradition. This Cycle must have had the character of a chronicle, which related the events mentioning the year of reign after the king's anointment. . . . Both the Pāli sources and the *Aśokāvadāna* had drawn freely from the same ancient source.

Eggermont (1956: 169) also asserts, in positing such a proto-chronicle, that "there are so many concurrences between the inscriptions and the tradition." I am not interested in fully examining Eggermont's theory here, but I would like to point out that while there may be strong "concurrences between the inscriptions and the tradition," as pointed out by Eggermont, the glaring absence of *devānampiya* in the tradition and its almost universal presence in Aśoka's inscriptions have not been addressed by Eggermont or any subsequent scholar that I am aware of.

Going back to Przyluski's formulation of the stages of development outlined above, we may focus on a few important points. The first point is that the primary agency in the design of the proto-Asoka narrative is with the Buddhist monks. Secondly, even while admitting Przyluski's notion that at the Brahmanical center of Mathura, the Pali proto-version first became Sanskritized, what may be the role of the Brahmins in the transformation of the story? Do we assume that these are Brahmanical Brahmins, or Brahmins who converted to Buddhism, albeit without renouncing their love for Sanskrit? As we consider these various likely agents in the design and transmission of the Aśoka legend, we can rule out the Brahmanical Brahmins from producing a loving narrative showing Aśoka in a positive light. The evidence from the *Mahābhāṣya* and the *Purāṇas* would assist us in arriving at this conclusion. The Brahmanical Brahmins were probably offended by the use of the

term *devānaṃpiya* by a king who became a Buddhist. So who might then be the likely agent for the removal of the term *devānaṃpiya* from an otherwise loving narrative in favor of the Buddhist Aśoka? I cannot think of anyone other than the Buddhist monks themselves, who loved the Dharmāśoka, Aśoka after his conversion to Buddhism, and depicted the Caṇḍāśoka, the cruel Aśoka before his conversion with great contrastive effect. In designing the Aśoka narrative for Buddhist audiences, they probably found the title *devānaṃpiya* rather absurd and inconvenient. In support of my guess, I can point to passages in both the Sanskrit versions and the Sri Lankan Pali versions, where the Buddhist monastic narrators seem to be at pains to point out that before his conversion to Buddhism, Aśoka and his father were devoted to Brahmanical religion, a terrible thing from the Buddhist point of view. The *Samantapāsādikā* (Vol. I, p. 38) says:<sup>34</sup>

*rājā kira abhisekaṃ pāpuṇitvā tīṇīyeva saṃvaccharāṇi bāhiraka-  
pāsaṇḍaṃ pariḡaṇhi / catutthe saṃvacchare buddhasāsane pasīdi /  
tassa kira pitā bindusāro brāhmaṇabhatto ahoṣi, so brāhmaṇānaṃ ca  
brāhmaṇajāṭīyapāsaṇḍānaṃ ca paṇḍaraṅgaparibbājakādīnaṃ saṭṭhi-  
sahassamattānaṃ niccabhattaṃ paṭṭhapesi /*

Having been consecrated to his kingship, only for the first three years did the king accept outsiders-heretics. During his fourth year, he developed affection for the Buddhist doctrine. His father, Bindusāra, was devoted to Brahmans. He instituted daily meals for sixty-thousand ash-white ascetics of the Brahman caste and [other] Brahmans.

Such “anti-Brahmanical” passages can be traced in both the southern and northern versions of the Aśoka legends, and in my view they go back in all probability to the proto-narrative that Przulski was talking about. The above cited passage of the *Samantapāsādikā* uses the words *brāhmaṇajāṭīyapāsaṇḍa* with absolute contempt, and in such cases, we can contrast the positive non-contemptuous usage of the terms *brāhmaṇa* and *pāsaṇḍa* in Aśoka’s own inscriptions: (Rock Edict VII, Gīmar version): *devānaṃpiyo piyadasī rājā savata icchati save pāsaṇḍā vaseyu save te sayamaṇa ca bhāvasuddhin ca icchati /*, “Beloved of the Gods, king Piyadasī desires that all religious sects can live anywhere. They all desire self-control and purification of beings.”<sup>35</sup> I want to conclude my presentation by saying that the

34 For parallel passages, see: *pitā saṭṭhisahassāni brāhmaṇe brahmapakkhike / bhojesi, so pi te yeva tīṇī vassāni bhojayi // Mahāvamsa* (5.34). The account in Tārānātha’s *History of Buddhism in India* (p. 53) often depicts Brahmans as demon-worshippers: “Following the advice of the anchorite of the Bhr̥ku [Bhr̥gu] family, the worshipper of *ḍākinīs* and *rākṣasas*, Aśoka accepted for his deity the mother goddesses of the crematorium including Umā-devī. Indulging as he did in lust for several years, he came to be known as Kāmāśoka.”

35 Edmund Weber (2001: no page no.): “In the eyes of the Buddhist emperor the true dharma doesn’t exclude the gods from the human beings; just the opposite is right: the true dharma demands the close association and even mixture of gods and men. . . . There is no question: Ashoka was not only loved by the gods; he loved them too. . . . He effectuated a restitution of the worship of gods and brahmanas. According to him gods and brahmanas were not contradictory to Buddhism. Rather, they were an essential pillar of a society defined by Buddha dharma.” Weber’s statements, sometimes almost seeming to suggest that Aśoka

Aśoka of the inscriptions is a ruler far more rooted in the local cultural tradition and tolerant of the plurality of existing religious traditions and groups, in spite of his clear conversion to Buddhism and his zeal in its propagation. The Aśoka of the Buddhist narratives is a narrow-minded intolerant convert to Buddhism who is yanked away by the monastic authors from his tolerant historical personality and made to be a defender of the Buddhist faith and honor. In his mission of being a defender of the Buddhist faith and protector of its honor, the Buddhist authors tell us that the great Dharmāśoka killed eighteen thousand Ājīvikas in the city of Puṇḍravardhana, burned alive the whole family of a Jain layman because of the report that he had painted the scene of a Buddha image falling at the feet of Mahāvīra, and announced the payment of one gold-coin for each severed head of a Jain monk.<sup>36</sup> The loss of Aśoka's epithet *devānaṃpiya* must, in my view, be attributed to this sectarian rivalry into which the Buddhist Aśokan legends were composed.

The other strategy evident in both the southern and northern Aśoka narratives is an effort to subordinate the *devas* to Buddha, Buddhism, and Aśoka. The subordination of the *devas* to Buddha and Buddhism goes back to early canonical texts of Buddhism and has been examined in detail by von Glasenapp and others. Buddha is often referred to as being the teacher of gods and men (*satthā devamanussānam*) and that gods worship the Buddha (*devā pi yaṃ namassanti*), rather than the Buddha worshipping the gods. Better to say that the *devas* loved Aśoka than saying that he loved them.<sup>37</sup> The *Aśokāvadāna* as well as the Sri Lankan sources seem to tailor the narrative along this direction. Even before Aśoka assumes kingship and is competing with other princes, he declares that if he has any accumulated merit, then an army will manifest for him. As soon as he says that, the *devatās* bring to him an army and weapons (*yadi mama rājyavaipākyaṃ kuśalam*

was a pro-Brahman ruler, may perhaps suggest to us how Aśoka perceived the religious world. But there is clear evidence that the Brahmanical tradition as well as the Buddhist tradition did not see it that way. The texts of these two traditions seem to pull Aśoka into a sectarian personality, viewed negatively by the Brahmanical tradition and positively by the Buddhist tradition.

<sup>36</sup> *Aśokāvadāna* (edn. by Mukhopadhyaya, p. 67–68): *tasmimś ca samaye puṇḍravardhananagare nirgranthopāsakena buddhapratimā nirgranthasya pādayor nipatitā cītrārpitā / . . . śrutvā ca rājñābhīhitaṃ śīghram ānīyatām / puṇḍravardhane sarve ājīvikāḥ praghātayitavyāḥ / yāvad ekadivase 'ṣṭādaśasahasrāṇi ājīvikānāṃ praghātītāni / . . . śrutvā ca rājñāmarṣitena sa nirgranthopāsakaḥ sabandhuvargo grhaṃ praveśayitvāgninā dagdhaḥ / ājñaptaṃ ca yo me nirgranthasya śīro dāsyati tasya dīnāraṃ dāsyāmi iti ghoṣitam. Mahāvamsa (5.74): tūthiyānaṃ sahasāni nikkadḍhitvāna saṭṭhi so / saṭṭhi bhikkhusahasāni ghare niccam abhōjayi //*. The Aśokan inscriptions give no evidence that his gift-giving was limited to only the Buddhist monks. The inscriptions show him giving donations to Ājīvikas, contrary to the narratives in the *Aśokāvadāna*.

<sup>37</sup> There is an interesting passage in the late Sri Lankan Pali work *Dhātuvamsa: so āyasmā mahākassapatthero yebhuyyena bahunnaṃ devānaṃ piyo manāpo / therassa hi dānaṃ datvā sagge nibbattānaṃ pamāṇo nāma natthi /*, “The monk Mahākassapa was dear to a large number of gods. There is no counting of numbers of those who were born [as Devas] in heaven as a result of giving *dāna* to this monk,” Romanized text file on GRETIL—Göttingen Register of Electronic Texts in Indian Languages (SL Page 013). Here, “dear to the gods” is clearly accounted for in a paradigm that subordinates gods even to Buddhist monks, let alone to the Buddha.

*asti sainyapraharaṇam prādurbhavatu / evam ukte kumāreṇa pṛthivyām avakāśo datto devatābhiḥ sainyapraharaṇāni copanītāni / Aśokāvadāna*, edn. by Mukhopadhyaya, p. 39). In another passage we are told that Aśoka makes a declaration that if the kingdom legally (*dharmeṇa*) belongs to him, then let the gods tie the band of kingship for him. The gods then tie his band of kingship (*yadi mama dharmeṇa rājyaṃ bhavati devatā mama paṭṭaṃ badhnantu / yāvad devatābhiḥ paṭṭo baddhaḥ / Aśokāvadāna*, p. 41).<sup>38</sup> The story of the gods assisting Aśoka in gaining the kingship and the gods bringing sixteen jars of holy water from Anotatta lake for him is narrated in the *Samantapāsādikā* (Vol. I, p. 37): *tathā upari ākāse anotattadahato aṭṭhahi kājehi soḷasa pānīyaghaṭe divase divase devatā āharanti*. This would probably indicate that the subordination of the *devas* to Aśoka was part of the Buddhist Aśoka narrative from the very beginning, on the same lines that the *devas* were subordinated to the Buddha. In the inscriptions of Aśoka there is no trace of this subordination of *devas* to the king, who seems to look up to them respectfully, in spite of his conversion to Buddhism<sup>39</sup>. Thus, a careful study of the absence of the inscriptional term *devānampīya* in the Buddhist narratives of Aśoka, both southern and northern, allows us to understand how these narratives developed, and how the Aśoka of these narratives gradually moved away from the historical Aśoka of the inscriptions.<sup>40</sup>

38 The *Kuṣālavādāna* narrates a story told by Upagupta to Aśoka regarding Buddha's birth. When the child was brought to Śuddhodana, a prediction was made that the Bodhisattva would at this place of the Śākya worship a god (*devam arcayīṣyati*). But all the gods actually fell at the feet of the Bodhisattva (*sarvadevatā ca bodhisattvasya pādāyor nīpatitā*). Then Śuddhodana realized that his son, the Bodhisattva, is a god of gods, and so he named him Devātideva "god of gods." See *Aśokāvadāna*, p. 83.

39 For the co-existence of worship of *devas* and Buddhism, see: Gombrich (1971: 46ff.).

40 Referring to H. Kern (1896, 1972: 115), Basham (1959: 57) says: "The Aśoka of the Buddhist legends is, in the words of a 19th-century authority, 'half monster and half idiot,' his humanity and practical benevolence overlaid by the accretion of monkish legends of later centuries."

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