

A Note on *silāvigaḍabhīcā* in Aśoka's Rummindei Inscription

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The interpretation of the compound *silāvigaḍabhīcā*, which occurs in the sentence *silāvigaḍabhīcā kālāpita silāthabhe ca usapāpīte* in the inscription¹ set up by Aśoka at Rummindei (ancient Lummini, Pāli Lumbinī), to commemorate his visit to the Buddha's birthplace, has caused a great deal of discussion, and numerous explanations and translations of it have been suggested. In this short article, offered in honour of David Seyfort Ruegg, I should like to examine some of the proposals which have been made, and to make a proposal of my own. Suggestions which had been made up to 1959 included the following:

Barth at first² refused to attempt a translation of *vigādabhīcā*, but later³ divided the compound as though it were from Sanskrit *śilāvi* + *gardabhī*, and translated “ânesse de pierre”.

Bühler⁴ suggested a derivation < Sanskrit *vikaṭābhrī* < *vikaṭa* + *abhra* “bearing a big sun” qualifying *silā*. He quoted Pischel⁵ as believing that the derivation was < Sanskrit *vigardabhī* “not as uncouth as a donkey = finely wrought, polished”.

Bhandarkar⁶ took *bhīcā* as one word and explained it as < *bhittikā*, “wall”.

Smith translated “he had a stone horse made”,⁷ on the assumption that *vigaḍabhī* was < *vigardabhī*, “not a donkey”, i.e., “a horse”, but later he changed this slightly to “a stone bearing a horse”.⁸

¹ See E. Hultzsch, *The Inscriptions of Asoka*, Oxford, 1925, 164–65; K.L. Janert, *Abstände und Schlussvokalverzeichnungen in Aśoka-Inschriften*, Wiesbaden, 1972, 142, and Appendix A.

² A. Barth, “Découvertes récentes de M. le Dr Führer au Nepal”, *JS*, 1897, 73.

³ A. Barth, *Comptes rendus de l'academie des inscriptions et belles-lettres*, 1897, 258.

⁴ G. Bühler, “The Asoka Edicts of Paderia and Nigliva”, *EI*, V, 1898–99, 1–6.

⁵ *ibid.*, 5.

⁶ R.G. Bhandarkar, “A Peep into the Early History of India from the Foundation of the Maurya Dynasty to the Fall of the Imperial Gupta dynasty”, *JBBRAS*, 20, 1900, 366–408 (366, n. 14).

⁷ V.A. Smith, *Asoka: The Buddhist Emperor of India*, 1st edition, 1901, 145.

⁸ V.A. Smith, *Asoka: The Buddhist Emperor of India*, 3rd ed., 1919, 222.

Pischel later gave another explanation,⁹ assuming that *vigaḍa* meant “flawless” < *vi* + *gaḍa* with the *taddhita* suffix *-bha* in the feminine. The meaning was, therefore, “a flawless block of stone”, from which the pillar was made.

Fleet also took *bhīcā* as one word, and suggested a development < Sanskrit *bhittikā*, via **bhittiā*, **bhittiyā*, **bhityā*, but he took *silāvigaḍa* to be < *silā* + *avi* + *gaḍa*,¹⁰ and translated the compound as “a stone wall which is an enclosure and a screen”; he later suggested that *vigaḍa* might mean “brick”,¹¹ but was unable to give any evidence for this meaning.

Charpentier separated *silā* from *vigaḍabhī*, took *bhī* as < *bhrt* and *vigaḍa* as “horse” (supposing a connection with a Jain Prakrit word *gali/gaḍi*, “an unbroken, bad horse”), and translated as “a block of stone bearing a horse”.¹²

Bloch translated “une muraille de pierre”,¹³ accepting the view that *bhīcā* was to be derived from **bhityā*.

Basak took the compound to be the equivalent of Sanskrit *śilā* + *āvis* + *gardabhī*, and translated as “a she-ass as manifested or carved out of stone”.¹⁴

A number of suggestions have been made since 1960, and I should like to consider some of them at greater length:

Paranavitana¹⁵ separated the compound into *silāvi* and *gaḍabhīcā*. He took the first portion to be the absolutive of the causative of the root *śru* (= Sanskrit **śrāvya*, with *-l-* for *-r-*, as is appropriate in the Eastern dialect of this inscription), “having proclaimed” the statement ending in *ti* which immediately precedes it. He took the second portion to be the equivalent of *gāḍha*, “strong, firm” and *abhīcchā*, “longing for, desire of”. The whole would, therefore, mean “he caused a strong desire (to visit the site)”. Although all the phonetic changes postulated by Paranavitana to produce this interpretation can be paralleled elsewhere in Prakrit, I am doubtful that they would already have occurred in the third century BC.

Hettiaratchi¹⁶ divided the compound as *vigaḍa* + *bhī* and explained it as *vikaṭa* + *bhrt*. Guided by Venerable Pandit M. Indasara, he suggested that *vigaḍa* is <

⁹ R. Pischel, “Die Inschrift von Paḍeriyā”, *SKPAW*, 1903, 724–34 [1–11].

¹⁰ J.F. Fleet, “The Rummindei Inscription and the Conversion of Aśoka to Buddhism”, *JRAS*, 1908, 471–98 (477).

¹¹ J.F. Fleet, “The Rummindei inscription”, *JRAS*, 1908, 823.

¹² J. Charpentier, “A Note on the Padariya or Rummindei Inscription”, *IA*, 43, 1914, 17–20.

¹³ J. Bloch, *Les inscriptions d’Asoka*, Paris, 1950, 157, n. 4.

¹⁴ R. Basak, *Asokan Inscriptions*, Calcutta, 1959, 150.

¹⁵ S. Paranavitana, “Rummindei Pillar Inscription of Asoka”, *JAOS*, 82, 1962, 163–67.

¹⁶ D.E. Hettiaratchi, “‘Silā-vigaḍabhī’ in Asokan Inscription”, in N.A. Jayawickrama, ed., *Paranavitāna Felicitation Volume*, Colombo, 1965, 223–25.

vikaṭā, which is quoted from late Sanskrit lexica with the meaning “the Buddha’s mother”: *vikaṭā = māyādevī sā ca baudhdhadevībhedah*. It is to be noted that this sense of the word has not yet been found in Buddhist literature, where *vikaṭa* occurs only in the masculine as the name of a *yakṣa*.¹⁷ We might, in any case, wonder whether a word with a possible pejorative sense would be used by the Buddhists, and it is possible that it is quoted in the lexica from a non-Buddhist text. We should also note that the word is not feminine in the inscription, and the omission of *-ā-* would have to be taken as an error on the part of the scribe (the stone-carver). Nor, for reasons which I give below, do I accept that *-bhī = -bhṛt*, which Hettiaratchi’s suggestion requires.

Even if we assumed that the scribe intended to write *vigaḍā*, and that *-bhī* can be the equivalent of *-bhṛt* in this compound, we should still have to consider the question whether *silā-vigaḍa-bhī*, “bearing a Vikaṭā of stone”, would have the required sense. Since all early Buddhist literature calls the Buddha’s mother Māyādevī, we should have expected Aśoka’s statement to have included a compound meaning “a stone statue of Māyādevī was made”, if that is what he intended to say.

Thieme¹⁸ takes *bhī* to be < *bhṛt*, which again I regard as unacceptable, and suggests that *vigaḍa* is the equivalent of *vinigaḍa*, “fetterless”, a possibility which was mentioned by Pischel.¹⁹ Thieme assumes that *-bhī* qualifies a word meaning “horse” and translates “er (der König Aśoka) liess ein den Fessellosen tragendes [Pferd] aus Stein herstellen”, a reference to the horse which took the Bodhisatta away from Kapilavatthu, when he had rid himself of the fetters of family life. I am, however, not aware of any other reference to the Bodhisatta as described as being “fetter-free” when he left domestic life. If readers of the inscription understood *vinigaḍa* in this meaning, about which I have considerable doubts, it is hard to imagine them interpreting it in any other way than as an equivalent of *nirgrantha*, i.e., a Jain. Since *kālāpita* is feminine, Thieme’s explanation necessitates the belief that, against the evidence of the later legends, Gotama rode a mare. The alternative is to believe that *kālāpita* is a mistake for *kālāpita*.

Hettiaratchi’s suggestion is to some extent supported, presumably unbeknown to him, by the statement in the Chinese sources, to which Falk refers,²⁰ that Aśoka made a statue of the Buddha’s mother and also an encasement for the

¹⁷ See F. Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary*, s.v. *vikaṭa*.

¹⁸ P. Thieme, “Lexikalische und grammatische Bemerkungen zu den Aśoka-Inschriften”, in K. Bruhn & A. Wezler, ed., *Studien zum Jainismus und Buddhismus*, Wiesbaden, 1981, 297–300.

¹⁹ R. Pischel, *op. cit.*, in note 9, 728 [5].

²⁰ H. Falk, “Zur Geschichte von Lumbinī”, *AO*, 52, 1991, 85.

Buddha's first seven steps at Lumbinī.²¹ We should note that the Chinese account says that the statue was made of lapis lazuli, and we must wonder if Aśoka would really be happy to call it *silā*, implying that the statue and the pillar were both made of the same material, when there are specific words for lapis lazuli.²² If the Chinese reference to a statue of lapis lazuli being set up by Aśoka is correct, and if we believe that Aśoka would not have used *silā* to mean lapis lazuli, then the reference here is not to that statue. If the reference here is to a statue, but *silā* is not the equivalent of lapis lazuli, then the statue which is mentioned here is not the one to which the Chinese account refers, i.e., the Chinese pilgrims saw a later one which was attributed to Aśoka. We must, however, recognise that the Chinese pilgrims may have been misled by the Mauryan polish, which may have been on the statue and the encasement. Irwin notes the jade-like texture²³ of the polished sandstone of the Sārnāth pillar, while Fa-hsien describes the pillar which Aśoka erected at Saṅkāśya as having images of the Buddha set into it, each “shining and transparent, and pure as it were of lapis lazuli”.²⁴

Fa-hsien and Hsüan-tsang do not mention either the statue or the encasement, which perhaps indicates that they were no longer in existence when they visited India. If this was so, then Petech's suggestion²⁵ that the sculpture of Māyādevī in the local temple may be a copy of Aśoka's seems less likely. It would, however, not be surprising if a wealthy Buddhist visitor to Lumbinī wittingly or unwittingly followed the example of his predecessor Aśoka and had a statue made in a form appropriate to the birthplace of the Buddha.

Falk²⁶ suggests that the whole compound *silāvigaḍabhī*²⁷ signifies a representation of the mother of the Buddha, perhaps accepting Hettiaratchi's proposal, although he does not specifically say that he is doing so. He also suggests the possibility that *vigaḍabhī* might mean *caṅkama*, but he gives no hint as to how it could have this meaning.

I have to say that I find all these explanations unsatisfactory. Many of them reveal great ingenuity, but I am forced to wonder why Aśoka should use such complicated and opaque language, when the purpose of the inscription was presumably to make his actions known to all who visited the site. By far the greatest

²¹ L. Petech, *Northern India According to the Shui-Ching-Chu*, Rome, 1950, 35–36.

²² G. Buddruss, “Zum Lapis Lazuli in Indien: Einige philologische Anmerkungen”, *SII*, 5, 1980, 3–26.

²³ J. Irwin, “‘Aśokan’ Pillars: a Reassessment of the Evidence”, *The Burlington Magazine*, 95, 1973, 706.

²⁴ J. Legge, *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms*, Oxford, 1886, 50.

²⁵ L. Petech, *op. cit.*, in note 21, 35.

²⁶ H. Falk, *op. cit.*, in note 20, 85.

²⁷ I presume his *-d-for -d-* is merely a misprint, and is not a vital part of his argument.

tortuousness of reasoning has arisen from the fact that Hsüan-tsang stated that the pillar had originally had the statue of a horse upon it, presumably Gotama's horse Kanthaka which took him away from the palace.²⁸ As a consequence of this, many have attempted to see a word meaning "horse" in the compound. I find the linguistic convolutions which have been engaged in to produce such a meaning unconvincing, and sometimes quite ludicrous. Those who concoct these imaginings do not explain why Aśoka did not use a word such as *aśva* "horse", while the suggestion that we are to see the word "(female) donkey" in the compound implies that Aśoka was unable to tell the difference between a horse and a donkey, although Basak suggested that it was Hsüan-tsang who was mistaken, and it was a donkey on the top of the pillar, not a horse. Why Aśoka should have put the statue of a donkey on a pillar is not made clear.

Irwin states that, writing from the viewpoint of an art historian, and in the light of everything known about Mauryan art, he finds it difficult to accept that there was the figure of a horse on top of the Rummindei pillar.²⁹ He concludes that there is a *prima facie* case for assuming that the only animals depicted on Aśokan pillars were lion, bull and elephant.³⁰ I do not know what his art-historical reasons might be, but there is no doubt that there is a horse on the abacus of the pillar at Sārnāth, with a lion, a bull and an elephant. Irwin states that these four animals were especially associated with royalty.³¹

Irrespective of the animal which was on the top of the pillar, I do not myself believe that there is any reference to a horse in the inscription. I believe that any acceptable explanation must start from the assumption that the two compounds *silāvigāḍabhīcā* and *silāthabhe* are parallel in construction, i.e., I think that *silā* is the first element of both compounds, and the final part of each compound must be a noun. Despite all that has been written, and the suggestions mentioned above are only a selection of those which have been proposed, the basic problem, as Falk points out,³² is that we still do not know whether we should read *silāvigāḍabhīcā* or *silāvigāḍabhī cā* (= *ca*),³³ i.e., we do not know whether we have a *ca ... ca*, "both ... and", construction, with the first *ca* written as *cā*, or whether there is only one *ca*, and the *akṣara cā* is the final syllable of a compound beginning with *silā*.

²⁸ As suggested by Pischel, *op. cit.*, in note 9, 725 [2].

²⁹ J. Irwin, "'Aśokan' Pillars: A Reassessment of the Evidence: Part II, Structure", *The Burlington Magazine*, 116, 1974, 716, n. 12.

³⁰ J. Irwin, *op. cit.*, in note 23, 710, n. 20.

³¹ J. Irwin, "'Aśokan' Pillars: a Reassessment of the Evidence: Part III, Capitals", *The Burlington Magazine*, 117, 1975, 631–43 (643).

³² H. Falk, *op. cit.*, in note 20, 71.

³³ I assume that this is the distinction Falk is suggesting. As printed in his article, there is no difference between the two.

If there is only one *ca*, i.e., the *ca* following *silāthabhe*, then *cā* must be the final syllable of a noun. The need to find words which we can recognise suggests that we should divide the latter part of the compound as *vigaḍa-bhīcā*. The first element of this could be < *vigaḍa* or *vikaṭa*. Of these two possibilities, the latter could be < either Sanskrit *vikaṭa* or *vikṛta*, since there are a few examples of the voicing of intervocalic consonants in the Aśokan inscriptions, e.g., *ajala*, *adhigicya*, *thuba*, *libi*, *loga*, *vaḍikā*.³⁴ The second element *bhīcā* looks as though it ought to be connected with *bhitti* and, as already noted, a number of scholars have suggested that this is the way to explain the form. Nevertheless, most writers on the subject have noted that linguistically this is difficult, if not impossible. To get around the difficulty, we might think of an oblique case formation < *bhittiyā*, but the syntax then becomes difficult, with no subject to agree with the past participle *kālāpita*. Alternatively, we might think of a formation from an unattested antecedent, e.g., < **bhid-tyā*.

The alternative view is to assume that *cā* should be separated from the compound, and stands for *ca*. Then, if we maintain the view that the end of the compound must be a noun, we have to reject the possibility of *-bhī* standing for *-bhṛt*. In any case, as an adjective it would need to have a noun to qualify. The suggestion that *-bhī* stands for *bhid*, “wall”, should probably be rejected not only because *bhid* is quoted only from the *Ṛgveda*, where it occurs once,³⁵ but also because the meaning there is not certain.³⁶

A simpler solution to the problem would be to assume that we should read *-bh<it>īca*, which can be explained as an omission of the *ta* portion of the *tī*³⁷ *akṣara*, with its *ī-mātrā* being written on the *bha akṣara*. Many scholars would probably reject this suggestion, because they would be reluctant to think that there could be an error in this inscription, which is so carefully and clearly inscribed.³⁸ I do not, however, think that this rules out the possibility of there being an error in the exemplar³⁹ from which the inscription was carved. I long ago suggested⁴⁰ that although all the versions of the Pillar Edicts agree in reading

³⁴ See Hultsch, *op. cit.*, in note 1, Index, s.vv.

³⁵ RV, I, 174,8.

³⁶ The meaning “wall” is said by M. Mayrhofer (*EWA*, II, 500 [s.v. *bhinātti*]) to be “ganz ungesichert”.

³⁷ For the ending *-ī*, cf. *vacigutī* at Girnār in Rock Edict XII(D).

³⁸ See the plates in Hultsch, *op. cit.*, in note 1, facing page 164, and in Janert, *op. cit.*, in note 1, 252.

³⁹ I use the word “exemplar” to mean any document which was copied or translated anywhere in the transmission of the edicts.

⁴⁰ K.R. Norman, “Notes on Aśoka’s Fifth Pillar Edict”, *JRAS*, 1967, 26–32 (28).

jatūkāṅ ambākipīṅlikāṅ in Pillar Edicts V(B), it is very probable that we should read *jatū kādamākipīṅlikāṅ*, and assume that the error was in the exemplar which underlies all the versions of the Pillar Edicts. Although I have given further thought to this matter in the years since I made the suggestion in 1967, and repeated it in 1974,⁴¹ I still believe that it is correct. In any case, scholars are not worried about assuming that *cā* is a mistake for *ca*, and, as noted above, Thieme does not rule out the possibility of *kālāpita* being a mistake.

Although some have preferred to see a derivation from *vikāṭa*, “of unusual size”, I think that this would be a slightly odd expression for Aśoka to use, since *vikāṭa* frequently has a pejorative sense, and I would rather think that we are dealing with a derivation of *vikṛta*, with the basic meaning of “transformed, altered, changed”. The question we must then answer is why we do not simply have *silābhitī*, to go with *silāthabhe* (as we have *silāphalaka* in Pillar Edict VII(SS)).⁴² I think the answer is that a *silābhitī* would be a wall made entirely of stone, just as a *silātha(m)bha* is a pillar made entirely of stone, and a *silāphalaka* is a slab made entirely of stone. A *silāvigaḍabhitī*, however, would be a wall made up from, decorated with, blocks or pieces of stone.⁴³

Falk states⁴⁴ that the idea of a massive stone wall is not possible. As I cannot see any reason for believing that Aśoka is referring to a “massive” wall, I do not regard Falk’s objection as being convincing. Smith stated⁴⁵ that when he visited the site he saw a brick wall around the base of the pillar, the lower courses of which were composed of very large ancient bricks, while the upper courses were of smaller and more modern bricks. I see no reason to doubt that the large bricks, or their predecessors if they do not date back to the time of Aśoka, could have had some sort of stonework above them, where the modern bricks now stand. In his discussion of the possible date of Lumbinī,⁴⁶ Härtel does not mention the bricks around the pillar, but he dates the large-sized burnt bricks used in the construction of a *stūpa* near the pillar as certainly not later than the second century BC. I regret that I do not have access to the archaeological reports to which he refers.

⁴¹ In my review of Janert, *Abstände und Schlussvokalverzeichnungen in Aśoka-Inschriften*, Wiesbaden, 1972, *AO*, 36, 1974, 489.

⁴² See note 51 below.

⁴³ See M. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, s.v. *vikṛta*: “decorated, embellished, set with” (quoted from *Mahābhārata*).

⁴⁴ H. Falk, *op. cit.*, in note 20, 71–72.

⁴⁵ V.A. Smith, “The Rummindei Inscription: Hitherto Known as the Padariya Inscription, of Asoka”, *IA*, 34, 1905, 1–4 (2).

⁴⁶ H. Härtel, “Archaeological Research on Ancient Buddhist Sites”, in H. Bechert, ed., *The Dating of the Historical Buddha*, Göttingen, 1991, 61–80 (70).

Falk's objection to the meaning "wall" is based upon the fact that the local building material is brick.⁴⁷ It seems clear to me that Aśoka included the word *silā* in both the compounds in this inscription to emphasise the fact that he was doing something unusual, and we know that Aśoka went to great lengths to have stone brought from distant quarries to have his wishes fulfilled. If it were standard practice for all pillars in the region to be made of stone, it would have been sufficient to say that he had had a pillar erected. The inclusion of the word *silā* in the compound *silāthabha* emphasises that it is not a wooden pillar, which might otherwise have been expected. Irwin has interpreted the archaeological evidence from Sāñcī as showing that the stone pillar which bears an Aśokan inscription there is the successor to an earlier pillar with a wooden shaft of approximately the same dimensions as the stone one.⁴⁸

The same consideration, I believe, applies to the wall. Irwin deduces⁴⁹ from the absence of any traces of a railing in the brickwork around the pillar at Rāmpūrvā that it was made of wood and has disappeared without trace. At Sārnāth, however, in the remains of the brick walls which formed the retaining walls for the platform around the pillar were found stone railing posts and cross rails.⁵⁰ I believe that something similar must have been on the brick wall at Rummindei. Aśoka wanted to stress the fact that the wall included stonework, in contrast to a wall made of bricks with a wooden rail. Aśoka made clear elsewhere the reason for the choice of stone instead of wood: "Where there are stone pillars or stone slabs, there this *dhamma*-writing is to be inscribed—that it may long endure".⁵¹ The facts that the railing stones have long since disappeared at Rummindei, thus thwarting Aśoka's hopes, is not surprising. The upper part of the pillar has also disappeared, and so has the horse which once crowned it.

If we accept the suggestion of reading *-bhitcā*, we are still left with the problem of *cā*, for the other two occurrences of *ca* in this edict are written as enclitics and with short *-a*, as is to be expected. Many of the scholars who have considered this inscription assume that since the second *ca* has a short *-a*, the first one should also have short *-a*, and they assume that the scribe simply made a mistake. This is not impossible, but we must investigate the matter further before assuming that it was simply a case of the scribe writing the *ā-mātrā* where he should have written *ca* without any vowel *mātrā*. It can be seen that the

⁴⁷ H. Falk, *op. cit.*, in note 20, 71.

⁴⁸ J. Irwin, " 'Aśokan' Pillars: A Reassessment of the Evidence: Part II, Structure", *The Burlington Magazine*, 116, 1974, 712–27 (726).

⁴⁹ J. Irwin, *ibid.*, 722.

⁵⁰ J. Irwin, *ibid.*, 719.

⁵¹ *iyam dhammalibi ata athi silāthambhānivā silāphalakānivā tata kaṭaviyā ena esa cilaṭhitike siyā*, Pillar Edict VII(SS).

scribe had a propensity to write final *-ā* as *-a*, e.g., *-dasina*, *lājina*, *atana*, *kālāpita*, and also, as we should expect, final *-a* as *-ā*, e.g., *-piyena*, *āgāca*, *hida* (twice), *ca* (twice). The word group *silāvigaḍabhīcā* is the only one in the inscription with the ending *-ā*. It is not obvious why a scribe who wrote final *-a* on every other occasion, for both *-ā* and *-a*, should have written *-ā* for *-a* here.

In considering this problem, we must take into account the fact that in this inscription the words are written in groups, for the most part making syntactic packages, and probably in origin reflecting the speech pattern of someone who dictated the inscription, perhaps Aśoka himself. Some of the gaps between packages are quite clear, but other gaps are much smaller, and in some cases, it becomes a matter of subjective judgement as to whether there is a gap or not. Such variations in the size of the gaps presumably result from comparable subjective judgements made by scribes when drafts of the inscription were being copied. I have commented elsewhere upon the fact that some doubtful cases of word division were already in the original draft of the Pillar Edicts,⁵² and I suggest that the same could have been true of the draft copy of the Rummindei inscription.

Janert prints *devānapiyena* and *piyadasina* as separate words,⁵³ although the gap between them is smaller than other gaps and barely larger than the gaps between *u* and *ba* and *ba* and *li* in *ubalikekaṭe*, which Janert prints not as unambiguous gaps, but as minor gaps designated by ‘and’. This matter of gaps is of importance, because we can deduce that the scribe wrote the final *-ā* of a group as *-a*, but we need to know whether he would write the final *-ā* of a word in a group, but not the final member of that group, e.g., *atanā*, as short.

A comparison with the Nigālī Sāgar inscription⁵⁴ is informative. The phraseology, the word grouping and the shape of the *akṣaras* in this inscription so closely resemble the Rummindei inscription that we can be fairly certain that the two inscriptions were dictated at the same time, and carved by the same scribe. In these circumstances we can, therefore, confirm that the damaged portion at the beginning of the third line of the Nigālī Sāgar inscription, where the traces are consistent with a reading *vīsati*, did indeed include the numeral *vīsati*, and we can, to some extent, use the writing pattern on one pillar as a guide to the writing pattern on the other, although the way in which the two inscriptions do not completely agree in the placing of unambiguous gaps must make us cautious.⁵⁵

⁵² In my review of Janert 1972, *op. cit.*, in *AO*, 36, 1974, 489.

⁵³ Janert, *op. cit.*, in note 1, 142.

⁵⁴ See Hultsch, *op. cit.*, in note 1, 165, Janert, *op. cit.*, in note 1, 143, and Appendix B.

⁵⁵ The words *atanaāgāca* and *mahīyite* are written with a clear gap between them at Rummindei, but without a gap at Nigālī Sāgar.

In these circumstances, I can think of two possible explanations for the writing of *-ā*. First, since *kālāpita* is written with only a small gap between it and *-bhīcā*, the scribe perhaps intended to write the two words together, without any gap between them. If this was so, then it is possible that the incorrect form *bhīca*, which we would need to assume was in his exemplar, was taken by the scribe to be an example of the shortening of final *-ā > -a*. Since it was no longer final, he lengthened it as a “correction”.

Against this suggestion, we must point out that we find in both Rummindei and Nigālī Sāgar that final *-ā* was written as short *-a* even inside word groups. At Nigālī Sāgar the word *lājina* is written without a gap between it and *co-dasavasābhisitena*,⁵⁶ suggesting that at Rummindei *lājina* was intended to go with *vīsativasābhisitena*, rather than with a minor gap which Janert marks with (').⁵⁷ At Nigālī Sāgar, as at Rummindei, there is no gap between *atana* and *āgāca*, although at both sites there are minor gaps, marked by Janert with ('), between other *akṣaras* in this word group. The evidence of these two sites confirms, therefore, that the final *-ā* of words was shortened even if that *-ā* was not the final *akṣara* of the word group. Although there is the alternative possibility that the final *-ā* of *atanā* was pronounced, and therefore written, as short because it occurred before a vowel, the same cannot apply to *lājina* which is followed by a consonant in both inscriptions.

The alternative suggestion is to believe that the scribe at Rummindei wrote *cā* because that was what he saw, or thought he saw, in the exemplar he was copying. I long ago suggested⁵⁸ that if the surface of the material upon which a scribe’s exemplar was written (whether leaf, bark, leather, wood, clay, stone or metal) was not absolutely smooth, but had defects upon it, which could be mistaken for dots or lines, a scribe could be misled. If the scribe at Rummindei received an exemplar with a fleck or mark touching the *ca akṣara*, which he interpreted as the *ā-mātrā*, then we can see how the *cā* reading came about. We should also note that the scribe appears to have omitted the *anusvāra* in *devānapiyena* at Rummindei. I can see no trace of it, although an *anusvāra* is clearly written in *devānaṃpiyena* in the Nigālī Sāgar inscription. It is debatable whether a scribe would spontaneously write the same word in two different ways, and it is perhaps more likely that he was slavishly following his exemplars for the two inscriptions, in one of which the *anusvāra* had been omitted.

⁵⁶ For the purpose of this article I ignore the fact that some *akṣaras* in the Nigālī Sāgar inscription are not completely legible.

⁵⁷ See Janert, *op. cit.*, in note 1, 142–43, and Appendix A.

⁵⁸ K.R. Norman, “Studies in the Epigraphy of the Aśokan Inscriptions”, *Studies in Indian Epigraphy (Bhāratīya Purābhilekha Patrikā)*, II, 1975, 36–41 (40).

I, therefore, believe that the original form of the phrase was *silāvigadabhitāca*, with the meaning “and a wall made from, or decorated with, stone”. This, as can be seen from the suggestions which have been listed above, is by no means a new translation, but I hope that I have shown a way in which we may accept this meaning with a minimum of tortuous linguistic and lexical reasoning. If my suggestion has any merit, it is that a simple textual emendation can produce a reading with a meaning which many other scholars have assumed was intended, although they have been unable to give a satisfactory grammatical explanation of the way in which that meaning might be obtained.

* * *

*Appendix*⁵⁹

A. *The Rummindei inscription*

1. *devānapiyena piyadasina lāji'na'vīsativasābhisite'na*
2. *ata'naāgāca mahīyite hidabudhejāte sakyamunīti*
3. *si'lāvigadabhīcā'kā'lāpita silāthabheca usapāpi'te*
4. *hidabhagavaṃjāteti luṃminigāme u'ba'likekaṭe*
5. *aṭhabhāgiyeca*

B. *The Nigālī Sāgar inscription*

1. *devānaṃ piyena piyadasina lājinacodasavasā(bhisitena)*
2. *budhasa konākamanasa thu'bedutiyaṃvaḍhite*
3. *(vīsativa)sābhisitenaca atanaāgā'camahīyite*
4. *..... (usa)pāpi'te*

⁵⁹ The words are printed in groups as they appear in the inscriptions. I follow Janert in inserting (') to indicate a minor gap.