

PENTTI AALTO

Marginal Notes on the Meluhha Problem

Babylonian sources mention various goods imported from Meluhha either directly or via Tilmun. The latter place has been identified with the present island of Bahrein. The records of the Sargonid period (2370-2284 B.C.) refer explicitly to Meluhha as the point of departure for ships arriving at Agade. G. Bibby, A. L. Oppenheim and W. F. Leemans regard Meluhha as the country of the Indus Valley civilization (see Leemans p. 159 ff. and Leemans pp. 215-226 with further literature as well as Wheeler p. 64 f.). Since the results of recent archaeological excavations show that this civilization extended at least from Sutkāgen-dor, about 300 miles west of Karachi, to the estuaries of the Narbada and the Kim on the Gulf of Cambay, more than 425 miles east of Karachi (Wheeler pp. 62 ff. and 84 ff. as well as Rao and Dales), it is rather difficult to say what part of this area should be identified as Meluhha. The main seaport of the Indus civilization was—at least as far as we know today—Lothal (cf. Rao and Leemans). Leemans has pointed out that radio carbon determinations have shown that the Lothal dockyard had fallen into disuse by circa 1800 B.C. This date agrees with the end of the South Mesopotamian Meluhha trade (o. c. p. 6).

There have been attempts by scholars to connect this name with *mleccha*, the known Sanskrit word for "non-Aryans". On the other hand, we find in Pāli a word *milakkha* ~ *milakkhu*, "non-Aryan". Besides this same word the Ardha-Māgadhi sources of the Jainas also use *meccha* in this sense, which seems to go back to *mleccha*, while this word and *milakkha* ~ *milakkhu* cannot be etymologically connected, as Geiger (§ 34) and Scheftelovitz (ZII 6, 1928, p. 100 f.) noted.¹

Mayrhofer (II. p. 699 s.v. *mlecchah*) states that the parallelism of these two synonymous words must obviously be explained by a foreign origin of *milakkha*, which was probably the name of a non-Aryan tribe.

1. The lists of the barbarian people occurring in the Jaina texts and quoted by Weber in his *Indische Studien* XVI p. 332 are late, since e.g., the Romans and the Huns are mentioned among the *milakkhas*.

Dales² has shown that the end of the Mohenjo-daro and Harappan civilization was due to natural disasters and not to any massive invasion. According to him, the archaeological evidence proves that the major population shift was to the southeast. Wheeler states (*Enc. Brit.* 12, 1967, p. 190) that this civilization was succeeded in the Indus valley by "poverty stricken cultures, deriving a little from a sub-Indus heritage, but also drawing elements from the direction of Iran and the Caucasus—from the general direction, in fact, of the Aryan invasion." In the south, however, in Kathiāvād (the site of Lothal and others) and beyond, a sub-Indus culture continued in the chalcolithic cultures that characterized Central and Western India between 1500 and 500 B.C. (Wheeler p. 87) and which were thus a material bridge between the end of the Indus civilization proper and the Iron age civilizations that reached Central India about 500 B.C. (Wheeler, *Enc. Brit.* l.c.).

On the basis of his own excavations at Navdatoli on the central reaches of the Narbadā and of radio carbon datings of various other sites too, Sankalia is inclined to date the intrusion of the western influences (viz. the Aryan invasion) to about 1700–1500 B.C. (p. 330, cf. further Wheeler p. 90 ff.). In the opinion of Heine-Geldern (p. 189), the Dravidians came to the south as late as around 700-500 B.C. bringing with them the use of iron and the megalithic burial customs which they had possibly adopted in Baluchistan. Heine-Geldern suggests further (p. 195) that the number of the invading Aryans might have amounted to 100,000—an estimation that is too high rather than too low. We do not feel it proper to suppose that the aboriginal population of the Indus cities and of the surrounding country was totally exterminated nor even all made slaves (*śūdras*): it must to a large extent have been incorporated into the new society and even into its upper ranks (cf. Heine-Geldern p. 200): e.g. Manu (X 20 ff. and 43 f.) reckons the Dravidas among the original *kṣatriyas*.¹

Burrow has shown (p. 373 ff.) that Dravidian has had a remarkable influence on Sanskrit between the late Vedic period and the formation of the classical language, and that there are words of Dravidian origin even in the

1. This seems to be proved e.g. by the traditions regarding the development of the different Indian dynasties described by Pusalker in the Appendix I of his *Traditional History from the Earliest Time to the Accession of Parikṣit*. R. Sh. Sharma has further shown (in his *Śūdras in Ancient India*, Delhi 1958) that the Vedic sources make a clear distinction e.g. between the Dāsas and the Dasyus. "It seems fairly clear that in the early Vedic period there was no considerable *Śūdra* or slave population, and that the *Śūdras* did not suffer from those disabilities which gradually fell on them from the late Vedic period onwards" (p. 41).

Ṛgveda. Since such an intensive influence cannot have been exerted by the present southern Dravidian languages, it seems to imply that there were Dravidians in North-West India and in the central Gangetic plain. It is possible that some of these northern Dravidians withdrew to the south, but the majority must have stayed and merged with the Aryans. Not only certain features in Sanskrit (e.g. the use of the absolutes), but especially the development of the language of the Vedic Aryans into Middle Indo-Aryan and further to New-Aryan seems to be explained only by the presence of a strong Dravidian substratum¹.

As a point of departure of the Indian trade with Mesopotamia, of course only a city on the coast or on the lower course of the Indus is possible. Without entering into any detailed discussion as to the geographical surroundings of Pāli, we note that e.g. according to Lamotte (p. 625) the Girṅār edict of Aśoka is the most nearly related to Pāli. The cradle of this language—as far as it really was based on a living dialect—is, therefore, to be looked for in the west in the Avanti-Kathiāvāḍ region. If we thus suppose that *milakkha* was originally the name of a non-Aryan tribe living in the neighbourhood of the population speaking the basic dialect of Pāli, it may very well refer to a coastal tribe of the Indus culture people. Since there seems to be—as shown above—evidence that the language of the Indus civilization may have been related to Dravidian,² it might be permissible to look for an eventual Dravidian etymon of the above name Meluhha as well as Pāli *milakkha-milakkhu*.

A tempting possibility seems to be DED 4173 Tamil *mē* or *mēl* "excellence", e.g. *mēlukku* "on the other side, extremity", *mēlai* "upper", represented also in other Dravidian languages, e.g. Toda *melu* "upper part of anything" etc., *me'lpaw* "upstream", Kannada *mēlu* — *m-ēla* — *mēle* "the top, upper part" etc. As to the latter part of *Meluhha* or *milakkha* Dravidian *akam* was proposed in *Further Progress* (p. 38). There might, however, be other possibilities too. It seems to be of further interest that it is precisely in the Indus Valley that we later meet place-names with a meaning possibly corresponding to this Dravidian word family. Thus Barnett translates the name of a *janapada* on the

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1. Cf. also Emeneau p. 258, as well as Jules Bloch, *Indo-Aryan from the Vedas to Modern Times*, Paris 1965, p. 325 etc., and *La formation de la langue marathe*, Paris 1920, p. 33 etc.
 2. Shafer regard (p. 64) the Sindhu-Pulindakas mentioned in Mahābhārata as Dravidian living on the Indus and explains (p. 140) the Pulindakas as Gondis.

Indus *Agrodaka* or *Agroda* "place of foremost waters" ("whatever that may signify"), and identifies it with modern "Agroha", which name again may derive from a Prākṛit *Aggarohaya* "foremost bank or stream". On coins the *janapada* in question is called *Agāca*, which Barnett derives from Sanskrit *agrā-tya*. Prazyluski identifies (p. 10) with the above *Agrodaka* the names *Aggala-pura* and *Anguttarāpa* occurring in Buddhist sources. A word *aggala* "greatness, eminence" exists in Kannada and Telugu (*DED* 28), and Barnett quotes from modern Indo-Aryan languages instances like Hindi *agal* "before, in front," Panjabi, Hindi *agla* "first, foremost, chief, best," Sindhi *agaro* "first," Marathi *agla* "superior; excellent," Gujarati, *agal* "before."¹ Barnett suggests (p. 280) that *aggala* had originally been used as the title of a tribe or people and compares it with such names as Kosala, Kerala etc. *Aggala* would thus be synonymous with *Agāca-janapada* and the other names mentioned above. It seems possible that in these Indo-Aryan words a proto-Indian word has been contaminated with Sanskrit *agram* "top, etc." Perhaps these place names all try to render a proto-Dravidian **mēl-akam* or something like that. If that were so, it was not the invading Aryans who exterminated the proto-Dravidian population in question but Alexander the Great. Barnett remarks (p. 282) that the name of the *Agalassians* mentioned by Diodorus Siculus as annihilated by Alexander can be explained as a Vedic Nom. Plur. **Aggalāsas*. Diodorus writes (XVII 96): "finding that the people called Agalassians had mustered an army of 40,000 foot and 3000 horse, he gave them battle and proving victorious put the greater number of them to the sword. The rest who had fled for safety to the adjacent towns, which were soon captured, he condemned to slavery. The remainder of the inhabitants had been collected into one place, and he seized 20,000 of them, who had taken refuge in a large city, which he stormed. The Indians, however, having barricaded the narrow streets, fought with great vigour from the houses, so that Alexander in pressing the attack lost not a few Macedonians. This enraged him, and he set fire to the city, burning with it most of its defenders. He gave quarter, however, to 3000 of the survivors, who had fled for refuge to the citadel and sued for mercy" (Majumdar p. 175).

A positive solution of the problem would indeed be possible if the words of unknown origin, used in Babylonian sources when telling of the imports from Meluhha could be explained with the help of the Dravidian. We have thus e.g. in Accadian *pīlu* or *pīru* "elephant" (Aramean *pīla*, Hebrew *pīl*, Arabic *fil* etc,

1. Already Hemacandra has IV 341 *aggalaū* "superior".

PROF. K. A. N. SASTRI : FELICITATION VOLUME

cf. Zimmern p. 50, Mayrhofer II p. 296) which might be compared with Dravidian *DED* 3288 Kannada *palla* "elephant" probably "having large teeth" from common Dravidian *pal* "tooth"; on the other hand, even a connection of *pilu* with Tamil Malayalam *vēram* "elephant" *DED* 4560 is perhaps not excluded). Latin *pavo* corresponds to Accadian *pa'u* "peacock", but so do Greek *taos*, Mongol etc., *taxus*, all reflecting perhaps an ancestor common with Dravidian *tokai* "tail of peacock" *DED* 2916 (cf. Zimmern p. 52, Hornell p. 208). Greek *kēpos* "ape" seems to go back to Sanskrit *kapi*, which again might be connected with such Dravidian words as Parji *kovva*, Gondi *kowwe*, Gadba *kove* "red-faced monkey" *DED* 1781, which seem to have an original in common with Accadian *uqupu*, Hebrew *qōph* etc. (cf. Oppenheim p. 12 Fn. 21). The evidence supplied by the Dravidian words looks in any case possible, though not conclusive.