

Pali *mantā* and *mantabhāṇin*

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Pali *mantabhāṇin* has been discussed repeatedly for over one hundred years. Recently, B.G. Levman objected to the *opinio communis* to derive *manta-* from *manda-* as transmitted in parallel versions in other Buddhist dialects.¹ Although Levman brought forward important arguments against this view, he did not arrive at a final conclusion as to how to interpret this expression. Moreover, focusing on *mantabhāṇin* Levman did not pay particular attention to the meaning and usage of *mantā* in canonical Pali texts. However, this seems to precisely be an important clue to an understanding and reasonable interpretation of the former expression. It may, therefore, be worthwhile to collect all the available evidence concerning both words as completely as possible and discuss the problem once again on that basis.

The word *mantā* occurs several times in presumably old text passages from the Pali canon. It has been interpreted in three ways: (1) as an absolutive of \sqrt{man} “to think”,² (2) as nominative singular of an action noun *mantar* (Skt *mantr*) from the same root, or (3) by the commentators, as a feminine noun *mantā* meaning “understanding”. *Mantā* occurs in different contexts of which a prominent one is concerned with the right way to speak. A key passage seems to be the following from the Sampasādanīyasutta where Sāriputta praises the Buddha’s behaviour in speech (*bhassasamācāra*):

¹ See Senart 1898, p. 233; Lüders 1954, p. 126 (§ 167); Brough 1962, p. 249 (with a summary of the discussion up to then); Levman 2014, pp. 388–94.

² Ardhamāgadhī has the same form. Apart from *mantā* at issue here, absolutes related to Pali *maññati* are extremely rare in canonical texts, the only occurrence being *maññitvā* at Th 741. This form occurs also in the *aṭṭhakathās* and later, besides *mantvā* (with the occasional v.l. *mantā*, e.g. at Mhv 12:25; 12:50; Sadd 75,25 et infra). Post-canonical verse texts beginning with the Mahāvamsa also have *mantvāna* and *maññiya*.

idha bhante ekacco na c' eva musāvādūpasamhitam vācam bhāsati, na ca vebhūtiyaṃ na ca pesuniyaṃ na ca sārambhajaṃ jayāpekkho; mantā mantā vācam bhāsati nidhānavatiṃ kālena.

D III 106,21ff.³

In this connection, sir, someone does not speak words that involve lying, nor destructive or slanderous [words], nor impetuous [words] with a view to [gain] victory. He speaks *after careful consideration* words that are rich in content at the right moment.

Since it is hardly reasonable to interpret the double *mantā* as two nouns, it seems obvious to take it as an absolutive “having considered, or reflected” with the double *mantā mantā* expressing either an intensified meaning “having considered carefully” or an iteration “having considered again and again”. The commentary, however, explains the passage as follows:

ettha mantā vuccati paññā; mantāya paññāya. puna mantā ti upaparikkhitvā. idaṃ vuttaṃ hoti: bhassasamācāre thito divasabhāgam pi kathento paññāya upaparikkhitvā yuttakatham eva katheti.

(Sv 892,15ff.)

Here, *mantā* means “understanding”; [used as an instrumental] *mantāya* [it means] “with understanding”. *Mantā* also [means] “having investigated”. This is meant: One who is firm in the [right] way to speak utters only appropriate words after having investigated with understanding, even if he tells what the time of the day is.

Mantā is explained here in two ways, first as a feminine noun “understanding” used as a truncated instrumental,⁴ and second as an absolutive “having investigated”. Based on this analysis, the double *mantā mantā* has, as it seems, been taken in twofold meaning with the first *mantā* interpreted as “with understanding” and the second as “having investigated”. The interpretation of *mantā* as a truncated instrumental of a feminine noun is a stock explanation repeated at various places in the commentaries, while the twofold explanation as feminine instrumental

³ The Sanskrit parallel in *Dirghāgama* 16 (Prasādanīyasūtra, §6, ed. DiSimone 2020) has no equivalent to *mantā mantā*. I am grateful to Charles DiSimone (Gent) who provided me with his unpublished thesis.

⁴ On such forms see Oberlies 2019, p. 226.

and absolutive is given also at text passages with a single *mantā*.⁵ A feminine noun *mantā* “understanding” is not attested outside Pali exegetical texts and would be difficult to explain.⁶ It rather gives the impression of an artificial explanation, perhaps based on an old misunderstanding, and can be disregarded as a historically correct explanation for the canonical *mantā*. The second gloss with the absolutive *upaparikkhitvā* however, could go back to an older explanation of *mantā* as that what it appears to be, namely an absolutive (see below).⁷

A stanza from the Suttanipāta describes the Buddha’s way to speak in terms that are quite similar to the passage from the Dīgha-nikāya:

musā ca so na bhaṇati,
— iti Sātāgiro yakkho —
atho na khīṇavyappatho,
atho vebhūtiyan nāha, mantā atthaṃ so bhāsati.

Sn 159

“He does not speak falsely,”
 (said the yakkha Sātāgira),
 “and his way of speaking is not rough.
 He does not say what is destructive.
 With reflection, he speaks what is meaningful.”⁸

⁵ Nidd I 346,9ff. ad Sn 916; Mp III 402,23f. ad A III 399,23*; twofold explanation at Pj II 204,22f. ad Sn 159; 402,24ff. ad Sn 455; Vv-a 262,22 ad Vv 63:6. Double *mantā* is attested again only as a variant reading for D III 8,4f. *mattaṃ mattaṃ*, quoted in the Sv and explained in the same manner as above: *mattaṃ mattan ti pamāṇayuttaṃ pamāṇayuttaṃ. mantā mantā ti pi pāḥo; paññāya upaparikkhitvā ti attho.* (Sv 821,1f.; B^e, S^e so; C^e, E^e *mantvā mantvā*) All editions of the canonical text available to me read *mattaṃ mattaṃ*.

⁶ Aside from the commentaries there is Abh 153: *bhūrī mantā ca paññāṇaṃ ñāṇaṃ vijjā ca yoni ca*, cf. 979: *mantā paññāyam uccate*. The Saddanīti derives *mantā* besides *manta* (Skt *mantra*) from a verbal root *mant-* (*manta guttabhāsaṇe ... mantā manto ... ettha mantā ti paññā, gavesanasaññā ti pi vadanti*; Sadd 539,14ff.).

⁷ It should be noted that the older subcommentary explains the commentary’s gloss *upaparikkhitvā* with the allegedly synonymous absolutive *mantetvā* (from *manteti*, Skt *mantrayate*), thereby suggesting a relation between *mantā* and *mantetvā* which is hardly tenable; see Sv-pt III 95,27ff.: *mantā ti idaṃ mantetvā ti iminā samānatthaṃ nipātapadan ti āha upaparikkhitvā ti*.

⁸ Translation Bodhi 2017; emphasis added. K.R. Norman, in his translation, takes *mantā* here as in all other places in the Suttanipāta as a nominative

A last passage in this context I would like to quote here provides evidence for a negated form *amantā*. In the Subhasutta of the Majjhima-nikāya, the Buddha asks the brahmin student Subha about his teachers: *katamā tesam seyyo, yaṃ vā te mantā vācam bhāseyyum, yaṃ vā amantā ti?* “What is better for them, that they would speak after consideration or without consideration?” The answer is, of course: *mantā, bho Gotama.* (M II 202,13ff.) It should be noted that the commentary does not quote the stock explanation, but glosses with two absolutes: *mantā ti tulayitvā parigaṇhitvā*, “*Mantā* [means] having weighed, having considered”. (Ps III 447,14)

Other stanzas from the Suttanipāta are concerned with understanding things right and acting accordingly:

*na brāhmaṇo no 'mhi na rājaputto,
na vessāyano uda koci no 'mhi,
gottaṃ pariññāya puthujjanānaṃ
akiñcano manta carāmi loke.*

Sn 455

I am not a brahmin nor am I a prince;
I am not a vessa or anything else.
Having fully understood the clan of worldlings,
owning nothing, *with reflection* I live in the world.

*mūlaṃ papañcasamkhāyā
— ti Bhagavā —
mantā asmī ti sabbam uparundhe
yā kāci tanhā ajjhataṃ
tāsaṃ vinayā sadā sato sikkhe.*

Sn 916

“*By reflection*, he should stop [the conceit] ‘I am,’
the entire root of concepts due to proliferation,”
[the Blessed One said].
“Whatever cravings there may be internally,
he should always train mindfully for their removal.”⁹

mantā “a thinker” without giving a reason for his choice (Norman 2015; cf. the note ad 159). He may not have been aware of the passage from the Dīghanikāya in view of which this interpretation seems unlikely, at least for the stanza in question.

⁹ Translations Bodhi 2017; emphasis added. The shortened final in 455b *manta* is due to the metre.

Finally, I would like to briefly discuss a passage that has come down to us in Pali as well as in two other Indian Buddhist idioms (and in part also in Ardhamāgadhī).¹⁰ The Pali runs:

*paṭikacc' eva taṃ kayirā yaṃ jaññā hitam attano
na sākaṭikacintāya mantā dhīro parakkame (1)
yathā sākaṭiko panthaṃ¹¹ samaṃ hitvā mahāpathaṃ
visamaṃ maggaṃ āruyha akkhacchinno va jhāyati¹² (2)
evaṃ dhammā apakkamma adhammam anuvattiya
mando maccumukhaṃ patto akkhacchinno va jhāyati ti (3)*

- (1) Already in advance one should do what one knows is to one's own benefit. A wise one should not *knowingly* strive for the worry of a carter:
(2) As a carter who has left the main road, [that] even way,¹³ and entered an uneven road, broods when his axle is broken, (3) so the slow-witted person who, having abandoned what is good and

¹⁰S I 57,19*ff. = Mil 66,27*ff. Parallels: PDhp 110–12, Udāna-v 4:16–18, Utt 5:14–15 (corresponding to stanzas 2–3). These stanzas form a fixed triplet, as the parallel versions show. Only in the Saṃyutta-nikāya they are preceded by another triplet that is also found at Dhṃ 66–68. This, as well as the fact that the commentary on the Saṃyutta-nikāya does not comment on the first triplet, but starts rightaway with the first stanza of the second (Spk I 113,14: *dutiye paṭikacc' evā ti*), and the evidence of the parallel versions in the PDhp and Udāna-v where the first and the second triplets are found in different places, suggest that both triplets originally did not belong together, but have been combined at some point in the Saṃyutta-nikāya.

¹¹C^e, E^e *panthaṃ*, B^e (also at Mil) *maṭṭhaṃ*, S^e (also at Mil) *pasatthaṃ*, C^e, E^e, E^{e2} (at Mil) *nāma*.

¹²Spk sees a verb *avajhāyati* here: *akkhacchinno 'vajhāyati ti akkhacchinno avajhāyati, balavacintanaṃ cinteti*. (Spk I 113,14ff.)

¹³As the variants indicate, the text is problematic here. I stick with the reading *panthaṃ* that seems to be reflected in meaning by PDhp 111 *māggam* and Udāna-v 4:17 *mārgam*. Utt 5:14 has *jāṇam* “knowingly” which makes good sense in view of the first stanza that has, however, no counterpart here: *jahā sāgaḍḍio jāṇam samaṃ hiccā mahāpahaṃ* (Utt 5:14a–b), “As a charioteer, who against his better judgement leaves the smooth highway [...]” (Jacobi 1895). The paraphrase in the *īkā* on Spk seems to echo this in negated form: *yathā sākaṭiko ajānitvā visame magge sakaṭaṃ pājento akkhe chinne patikātuṃ [v.l. pakatetuṃ] avisahanto dukkhī dummano balavacintanaṃ cinteti, mahantaṃ cittasantāpaṃ pāpuṇāti, evaṃ adhammavādī maccumukhaṃ patto balavacittasantāpaṃ pāpuṇāti*. (Spk-ṭ I 155,19ff.)

followed what is against the good, has reached the mouth of Death
broods as if his axle is broken.¹⁴

Mantā is only one of several ambiguities in these stanzas. Various possibilities of interpretation have been adapted in previous translations, but it rarely becomes clear how the word has been understood by the translators.¹⁵ In my view, the first stanza fits well in the context of considered action, similar to the stanzas quoted above, which is why I understand *mantā* to be an absolute here too. Another ambiguity lies in the oblique case ending *-cintāya* which I took as a dative,¹⁶ while others took it as an instrumental, as is also reflected in the parallel version of the Udānavarga (4:16–18). Here, the first stanza of the triplet runs:

*pratiyaty' eva tat kuryād yaj jāned dhitam ātmanah.
na śākaṭikacintābhir mandaṃ dhīraḥ parākramet.*

Udāna-v 4:16

¹⁴One could take *akkhacchinno* here as a pun on the same expression in the second stanza: “broods as if his senses are destroyed”. Spk I 113,16f.: *akkhacchinno viya*.

¹⁵Bhikkhu Bodhi takes it explicitly as nominative singular *mantā*: “The thinker, the wise one, should not advance / With the reflection of the carter.” (Bodhi 2000, p. 154) Less clear are W. Geiger, “Nicht soll der einsichtige Weise im Denken mit dem Fuhrmann wetteifern” [“The insightful sage shall not compete in thinking with the carter.”] (Geiger 1930, p. 92), and Bhikkhu Nyānatiloka, “Denke nicht wie manch ein Kärner, / Sondern kämpfe klug und stark.” [“Do not think like some carter, but fight wisely and hard.”] (Nyānatiloka 1985, p. 94). I.B. Horner — “He, who is steadfast in wisdom, in exertion has no ‘carter’s thoughts’” (Horner 1963, p. 91) — with reference to the commentarial explanation of Sn 159 (*mantā = paññā*) took *mantādhīro* as a compound. In T.W. Rhys Davids’ rendering, “Not with the carter’s mode of thought, but firm / Let him, with resolution, step right out” (Rhys Davids 1890–94, pp. 102f.), as well as in Finot’s, “Qui’il marche ferme dans la sagesse et non à la manière du charretier” (Finot 1923, p. 115), one cannot recognise how *mantā* was understood.

¹⁶Compare, for example, Vin III 172,31: *yo pana bhikkhu samaggassa saṅghassa bhedāya parakkameyya*, “Should any bhikkhu attempt to cause schism in a united Saṅgha [...]” (Pruitt & Norman 2008, pp. 16/17).

The most serious difference to the Pali is *mandam* instead of *mantā*, but the instrumental *-cintābhir*¹⁷ standing for Pali *-cintāya* also has consequences, since it restricts the scope for interpretation. In this version the second half of the stanza may be translated as:

The wise one should not proceed slowly/cautiously with the thoughts/
anxieties of a carter.

Or, if one does not construe the negation particle *na* with the verb, but with *śākaṭikacintābhir* (which is not unproblematic):

Not with the thoughts of a carter, [but] slowly/cautiously should the
wise one proceed.

As one can see, the line does not allow for a straightforward interpretation. Notwithstanding how one construes the *na*, and whether one takes *mandam* in its basic meaning “slowly”, or rather as “cautiously”,¹⁸ the sense of the simile as expressed in the Pali is hardly recognisable. In the Pali the advice given seems to be clear: One should act prudently and not rush into disaster, as a carter who ruins his axle by leaving the even road for a rugged bypath. How the version in the Udānavarga is to be understood, however, is not clear to me.¹⁹

As already mentioned, this triplet is transmitted in a third Indian version, namely in the so-called Patna Dhammapada (PDhp 110–12). Again, I quote the first stanza only:

paṭikacc' eva taṃ kayirā yaṃ nāyyā hitam āttano
na śākaṭikamanti ssa mantam dhīro parākrame
PDhp 110

The second half is problematic. Instead of Pali *-cintāya* and Udāna-v *-cintābhir*, the PDhp has the unclear *-manti ssa*. M. Cone takes *ssa* either as a sandhi form for an optative 3rd singular *assa*, or as a particle

¹⁷The plural is probably due to metrical reasons since a singular *-cintayā* would result in the problematic cadence ~ – ~ –.

¹⁸SWTF s.v. “*behutsam* (?)”.

¹⁹Neither Lévi’s rendering, “Pas d’idées de charretier! Que le sage ne fasse pas effort mollement?” (Lévi 1912, p. 253), nor Hahn’s more literal, “Der Kluge darf nicht unentschlossen sein, mit den Bedenken eines Wagenlenkers” [“The wise one must not be undecided, with the concerns of a charioteer”] (Hahn 2007, p. 25), go well with the simile of the carter.

(Skt *sma*).²⁰ Neither option appears satisfactory to me, nor does a reading as *-mantissa*, but I cannot offer any better solution. More important for my argument is that PDhp *mantam* here agrees with Pali *mantā* in showing unvoiced *-nt-* against voiced *-nd-* in the Udāna-v version. However, the transmitted ending *-am* against Pali *-ā* makes it difficult to interpret the reading. Whether this is due to “a version not marking length of vowels or *anusvāra*”, as Cone has suggested, or to a corruption of original **mantā* cannot be decided. There are, however, good reasons to believe that PDhp *mantam* goes back to **mantā* as in the Pali (see below).

After evaluating all occurrences of *mantā* in the Pali canon (most of which have been discussed here) I am of the opinion that in all passages, except for one (see below), an absolutive “after/with reflection” is the preferable interpretation. Even if it appears not unreasonable in some passages to take *mantā* as an agent noun “a thinker”, a careful analysis of context and style rather suggests an absolutive. Take for instance the following passage, again from the Suttanipāta:

ko ubhantam abhiññāya majjhe mantā na lippati
kaṃ brūsi mahāpuriso ti ko idha sibbanim accagā.
 Sn 1040 c–f

This is followed by another stanza (1042) that answers these three questions in the same wording by replacing the question markers *ko ... kaṃ ... ko* with *so ... taṃ ... so*. Bhikkhu Bodhi renders it in his recent translation with:

Who, having directly known both ends,
by reflection does not get stuck in the middle?
 Whom do you call a great man?
 Who here has transcended the seamstress?²¹

²⁰Cone 1986, p. 237f.; she translates, “A wise man should not, with the plans of a carter, advance sluggishly. (Or: One should not have the plans of a carter; the wise man should advance after consideration.)” K.R. Norman also suggests *ssa* < Skt *sma* (Norman 2008, p. 10; originally published in 1989).

²¹Translation Bodhi 2017; emphasis added.

In the Aṅguttara-nikāya these two stanzas, combined in one, are quoted as follows:²²

*yo²³ ubhante viditvāna majjhe mantā na limpati
taṃ brūmi mahāpuriso ti so 'dha sibbanim accagā.*

A III 399.23*f.

The same translator some years earlier translated:

Having understood both ends,
the wise one does not stick in the middle.
I call him a great man:
he has here transcended the seamstress.²⁴

Here, both interpretations appear equally reasonable, one could even claim that the interpretation as action noun “thinker” may appear even slightly better in the stanza as it is quoted in the Aṅguttara-nikāya. But, if one considers the structure of the stanza in the Suttanipāta an apposition *mantā* “thinker” to the first *ko* would disturb the obviously deliberately chosen series of unqualified questions *ko? kaṃ? ko?* (to which two further have been added in pādas a–b not quoted above) and deprives the passage of much of its rhetorical force.

The only passage where *mantā* is indeed an action noun is found in A IV 103.21: *ko mantā ko saddhātā, ... ti*. Here, *mantā* is used as a periphrastic future: “Who would think, who would believe that ...” Except for this single occurrence of *mantā* in a special usage, an action noun *mantar* seems not to be attested in the Pali canon.

I am now turning to the second word to be discussed here by quoting another stanza that can be compared to different Indian versions. Dhp 363 reads:

*yo mukhasaññato bhikkhu mantabhāṇī anuddhato
atthaṃ dhammañ ca dīpeti madhuraṃ tassa bhāsitaṃ.*

Dhp 363

²²The text explicitly confirms that the quotation is from the Suttanipāta: *vuttam idaṃ āvuso bhagavatā Pārāyane Metteyyapañhe*. (A III 399.21f.) Note that the text of the Suttanipāta as transmitted in the Sinhalese manuscripts C^k and C^b used by the PTS edition virtually corresponds to the quotation in the Aṅguttara-nikāya.

²³B^e, E^e, S^e *yo*; C^e *so*.

²⁴Translation Bodhi 2012; emphasis added.

The word *mantabhāṇī* occurs in several places in the Pali canon, except in one always in stanzas in the pāda *mantabhāṇī anuddhato* (or plural ... *anuddhatā*),²⁵ and has puzzled both modern and ancient interpreters. To begin with the latter, it suffices to quote just two examples from the commentaries, scil. *mantā vuccati paññā, tāya pana bhaṇanasīlo* (Dhp-a IV 93.7f. ad Dhp 363), and *mantā vuccati paññā, tāya upaparikkhitvā bhaṇatī ti mantabhāṇī* (Th-a I 33.11f. ad Th 2), to see that *manta-* is explained in the same way as *mantā*, namely as an instrumental of a feminine (!) noun.²⁶

Modern interpreters have looked at parallel versions already some time ago. In view of the readings *manabhāṇi* transmitted in the so-called Gāndhārī Dhammapada (GDhp) 54, and *mandabhāṣī* in Udānavarga 8:9, scholars²⁷ have suggested to see Pali *manta-* as a hypercorrect form of original *mand(r)a-*. However, as Levman rightly points out (p. 392), there is a semantic problem. If one takes it as Skt *manda* in its basic meaning “slow” or “weak” one arrives at “speaking slowly/weakly/softly” what is obviously not appropriate, even if one ignores pejorative overtones that the word *manda* frequently has. But, according to the general usage in Sanskrit, also followed in Buddhist texts,²⁸ this is exactly what *manda* means when used in connection with speaking or voice. Already Senart has suggested to take it as “speaking little” (“qui parle peu”) which looks more reasonable. Lüders has proposed to see

²⁵Besides Dhp 363 and the related stanza Ja II 350,17*f. in Sn 850, Th 2 and Thī 281. On the prose passage A III 254,16 see below.

²⁶The Th-a seems to consider an alternative derivation from *manta* (Skt *mantra*) which, as far as I can see, is unparalleled: *mantabhāṇanavasena vā bhaṇatī ti mantabhāṇī*. (Th-a I 33,13; E^c erroneously reads *-bhaṇanavasena*.)

²⁷H. Lüders referring to a remark by É. Senart and J. Brough; see above, n. 1.

²⁸Cf. pw s.v. “eine schwache, leise Stimme” [“a weak, low voice”]; for Buddhist texts see, e.g., *mṛdubhāṇī mandabhāṇī* (Śikṣāsamuccaya, Bendall 1902, p. 124,18). The Śrāvakabhūmi includes the term *mandabhāṇī* on the one hand in a list of characteristics of a person with deluded behavior (*mohacaritasya pudgalasya liṅgāni*), but on the other in a list of characteristics of one who is without passion (*vītarāgasya liṅgāni*; Shukla 1973, p. 187,6 and 469,16; in the first place the manuscript reads *mandabhāṅī* which has been emended to *-bhāṣī* in Matsunami 2007, p. 28,9, according to Tibetan *smra ba žan pa*; however, *-bhāṇī* seems preferable).

the oldest word form in **mandra-bhāṇin* meaning “speaking kindly” (“freundlich redend”), but this has been objected to by Brough on phonetical reasons in view of the received GDhp form *mana-* that he expected in this case to be rather **madra-*. Instead, Brough refers to GDhp 237 where *mana-bhāṇi* stands for Pali *mita-bāṇin* (Dhp 227) and feels that “‘speaking in moderation’ is adequate in all the passages quoted”.²⁹ This interpretation is also found in Prajñāvarman’s commentary on the Udānavarga as well as in its Tibetan translation, notwithstanding the semantic ambiguity involved.³⁰

The third parallel version in PDhp 54 could not have been taken into consideration by Brough and the scholars before him because it was not known to them.³¹ The reading *mantābhāṣī* preserved here can be compared to *mantam* in PDhp 110 discussed above where Pali has *mantā*. The evidence of both passages clearly shows that, as in Pali, unvoiced *-nt-* is present in the dialect of the PDhp. We have, therefore, to assume a shared dialectal predecessor for the PDhp and the Pali tradition on the one side, and for the dialect of the GDhp (and Gāndhārī, see below) and the Udāna-v on the other. We also see that PDhp has *mantā-* instead of Pali *manta-* which hints to a connection between Pali *mantabhāṇin* and *mantā*. This connection has been considered seriously first by Levman, and I would like to present some additional evidence here that is important in my opinion.

Above I have quoted some passages that show how Pali *mantā* was used in the context of the correct way to speak what already indicates a

²⁹Brough 1962, p. 249; see p. 98f. (§46) for the peculiar development of *nd > n* in the dialect of the GDhp.

³⁰Udānavargavivarāṇa ad Udāna-v 8:10: *dal bus smra žin [mandabhāṣī] žes bya ba ni űuñ űu smra ba yin te*, “‘speaking slowly’ [means] speaking little”; ad 28:8: *dal bus smra ba [mandabhāṣī] žes bya ba ni űag legs par bsdams pa yin pa’i phyir ro*, “‘speaking slowly’ [is said] because he is well restrained in speech” (Balk 1984, p. 372,³⁰ and 777,^{24f.}); the Tibetan translation in both stanzas of the Udāna-v is *dal bus smra*; cf. also Mvy 2389 (Ishihama 1989) *mandabhāṣyo bhavati*, Tibetan *ñuñ űu smra ba yin*, “is one who speaks little”.

³¹N.S. Shukla submitted the *editio princeps* of the PDhp in 1964, two years after the publication of Brough’s GDhp edition, as a dissertation to the University of Delhi, and published it as a book as late as 1979 (Shukla 1979); see Dimitrov 2020, p. 71ff., on the discovery and editorial history of the PDhp.

close relation to the expression *mantabhāṇin*. But there is another passage that seems to be of particular significance. In the *Āṅguttara-nikāya* and the *Parivāra* occurs a list of the well-known four kinds of good verbal conduct (*vacīsucaritāni*) in the following wording: *saccavācā, apisuṇā vācā, saṅhā vācā, mantābhāsā* (A II 141,8 = 228,16; Vin V 126,38). Despite some variant readings³² the cumulative evidence of the available editions points to *mantābhāsā* with *mantā-* instead of *manta-* as it occurs in *mantabhāṇin* discussed above. Here, *mantābhāsā* stands as a positive term for the list's fourth item that more frequently is put negatively as *samphappalāpā veramaṇī* “abstaining from idle chatter”.³³ The commentary on the *Āṅguttara-nikāya* gives the standard explanation for *mantā* as a truncated instrumental of a feminine noun meaning “understanding”.³⁴ The context of the canonical passage makes it clear that this explanation, even though etymologically unsatisfactory, gives the required meaning for *mantābhāsā* as “judicious speech”, the opposite of *samphappalāpā* “idle chatter, meaningless talk”, while an interpretation as “moderate speech” fits the context less well. A similar list of the four *vacīsucaritāni* is preserved also in a commentary on the *Saṅgītisūtra* in *Gāndhārī*:³⁵

*catvari vāya(sucaritā) <-> (sacava)ya sraṣvavaya maṃḍabhaśaṭa
apeśuṇāṭa <-> kim atra vāya <-> maṃḍasa praṃṇavamaṭasa*

³²B^e *mantabhāsā* at A II 141,8; E^e *mantāvācā*, B^e *mantavācā*, C^e *mattābhassam* (< *mantā-* ?) at A II 228,16; Se *mattabhāsā* at Vin V 126,38.

³³Compare, for example, Caillat 1984. The list quoted above finds an echo in Sv 963,7f.: *amusā apisuṇā aphaṛusā mantabhāṇino*.

³⁴Mp III 134,4f.: *mantāsaṅkhātāya paṇṇāya paricchinditvā kathitakathā* (C^e, E^e so; B^e, S^e *manta-*); cf. also the subcommentaries on the *Vinaya*, Sp-ṭ III 474,1f.: *matiyā upaparikkhitvā bhāsanato*; similar Vjb 559,20: *matiyā bhāsā*; Vmv II 289,1: *mantāya paṇṇāya kathanam*.

³⁵I am grateful to Stefan Baums (Munich) for calling my attention to this, and for providing me with the relevant quotation from the unpublished text (British Library Fragment 15, frames 29–32, CKM 17 in Baums & Glass 2002 foll.; reading and reconstruction Stefan Baums). The Pali *Saṅgītisutta* and the Sanskrit version have the negatively formulated expressions *samphappalāpā veramaṇī* (D III 232,9) and *saṃbhinnapralāpād viratiḥ* (*Saṅgītisūtra* §IV.46, quoted from SWTF s.v. *saṃbhinna-pralāpa*).

The parallel to Pali *mantābhāsā* comes as third in the list which is quoted from the text commented on and reads *māṃdabhaśaṭa*. The commentary itself is extremely concise and, unfortunately, syntactically not clear. It seems that *māṃdabhaśaṭa* is the only item from the list that is explained, but, if the word division *māṃdasa praṃṇavamṭasa* is correct, it remains uncertain how the genitive should be construed. However, notwithstanding the unclear construction it seems that *māṃda* is explained here in a similar way as *mantā* in the Pali commentaries, namely with “understanding” (*praṃṇa-*). According to this we can translate the expression *māṃdabhaśaṭa* with “state of judicious speech”.

This is remarkable in two respects. It shows, first, that there was an exegetical tradition that interpreted the word *manda-* in a Gāndhārī text not as Skt *manda* “slow, weak”, and second, it indicates that the explanation in the Pali commentaries is not exclusive to the Theravādins, but is shared at least with a north-western tradition. Thus, the stock explanation *mantā* = *paṇṇā* = *paṇṇāya* in the Pali commentaries seems to go back to an old tradition. It is tempting to see its origin in a gloss **paṇṇāya* that was originally intended as an absolutive “having understood” (Skt *prajñāya*),³⁶ but was wrongly interpreted as an instrumental of *paṇṇā* which, in turn, gave rise to see in *mantā* a truncated instrumental of a feminine noun.³⁷

To sum up, in view of the evidence gathered together — scil., the semantic overlap between Pali *mantā* and *mantabhāṇin* which is also acknowledged by the commentaries, the testimony of the PDhp, and the Gāndhārī commentary on the Saṅgītisūtra — I would suggest to derive *manta-* in Pali *mantabhāṇin* from the absolutive *mantā*, and understand the whole expression to mean “speaking with/after reflection”. In my view, this interpretation perfectly fits the context of the passages in question. Even the juxtaposition of *bahubhāṇismiṃ puggale* and *mantabhāṇismiṃ puggale* at A III 254,4ff. does not necessarily mean that *manta-* is to be taken as “moderate”, since “speaking with reflection”

³⁶I cannot quote an instance of an absolutive of *praṃjñā* in any Middle Indic dialect, but cf. forms like *aṇṇāya*, *abhiṇṇāya*, and *pariṇṇāya* in Pali.

³⁷Differently Brough: “Although this *mantā* was later taken as a fem. sg., there is little doubt that the phrase [scil. *mantā vuccati paṇṇā*, M.S.] originally meant it as a nom. pl.: ‘the term “mantras” is used as a synonym for *prajñā*.’”

can just as well be viewed as the opposite to “talking a lot; garrulous” (DoP s.v.). The interpretation as “speaking with reflection” has the further advance to be very near in meaning to the explanation of the commentaries as “speaking with understanding”. The peculiar usage of *mantā* as an adverbial expression, and not as a proper absolutive of a transitive verb that takes an object, as well as the paucity of commonly-used absolutives related to *maññati* in canonical texts, may have contributed to an early misunderstanding that is reflected in the commentaries’ derivation of the word from an alleged feminine noun. However, the “etymological” derivation is only one — and, as so often, a not particularly strong — side of the explanation put forward in the commentaries. The other is the proposed meaning, and here, I fail to understand Lüders’ reservation against the commentaries’ understanding of *mantabhāṇī* as “speaking with understanding” in view of the stereotyped combination with *anuddhato* “puffed-up, agitated”.³⁸ On the contrary, *mantabhāṇī anuddhato* “speaking with reflection, not being agitated”, as I understand this phrase, goes together very well. Likewise, the fact pointed out by Brough that *anuddhato* is also found in combination with terms meaning “speaking in moderation”, as, for example, at Th 209 *anuddhato sammitabhāṇi*, is not a convincing argument for reading “the normal sense of *manda*”³⁹ into the expression *mantabhāṇin*.

It remains to explain the form *manda-* (Udāna-v, Gāndhārī Saṅgīti-sūtra, *mana-* in GDhp). Levman assumes an intermediate stage *mantā* > **mandā* produced by a sound change *nt* > *nd* attested for several Prakrits,⁴⁰ which appears plausible to me. I may only add that this “intermediate stage” might well have been identical with the final stage *manda-* in a source that did not mark long and short vowels, and thus opened the way to interpret the word as Skt *manda*, as it seems to have happened at least in the Buddhist Sanskrit version of the Udānavarga.

³⁸Lüders 1954, p. 126: “was hat, weise redend‘ [...] mit, nicht hochfahrend‘ zu tun?”

³⁹Brough 1962, p. 249.

⁴⁰Levman 2014, p. 394. The “*maṇa*, (but with an unexplained retroflex nasal)” mentioned by Levman is not attested in the GDhp. For *nt* > *nd* cf. Pischel 1900, § 275.

How *manabhaṇi* (= *mandabhaṇi*), attested four times in the GDhp, should be understood, notwithstanding its phonetic shape, should be reconsidered in the light of the evidence from the Gāndhārī Saṅgītisūtra commentary.

APPENDIX

OCCURENCES OF *MANTĀ* AND *MANTABHĀṆIN* IN CANONICAL PALI TEXTS

1. *mantā*: [D III 8,4 v.l. according to Sv 821,1f.]; D III 106,24; M II 202,13ff. (also *amantā*); S I 57,20* = Mil 66,28*; A II 141,8 = 228,16 = Vin V 126,38 (*mantābhāsā*, v.l. *-vācā*); Sn 159; 455 (*manta* m.c.); 916; 1040/1042, cf. A III 399,23* = 401,25*; Vv 63:6; Nidd I 219,29 (explanatory ad Sn 850); 390,9.⁴¹
2. *mantabhāṇin*: A III 254,16; Dh 363, cf. Ja II 350,17*; Sn 850; Th 2; Thī 281.

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⁴¹*mantāya(m)* at D II 246,14ff. (*mantāyaṃ bodhabbaṃ kattabbaṃ kuśalaṃ*, B^e, C^e so; E^e, S^e *mantāya*; = A IV 136,27ff.: Be *mantāyaṃ*; C^e, E^e, S^e *mantāya*) is a future passive participle in *-tāya* (of the type described by Geiger 1994, §203) related to *maññati* (Skt \sqrt{man}); cf. Mahāvastu III (Marciniak 2019) 268,12: *mantavyaṃ boddhavyaṃ kartavyaṃ kuśalaṃ*. However, the commentaries (Sv 669,10ff.; Mp IV 66,1f.) explain this too as the instrumental of the questionable *mantā*.

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