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The Relics of the Buddha and the Elixir of Immortality – Mythological Parallels

Rien ne se perd, rien ne se crée, tout se transforme. ["Nothing is lost, nothing is created, everything is transformed."]
Antoine Lavoisier, *Traité élémentaire de chimie*, 1789.

Cóż Grek w Tartarii znajdzie, jeśli jak Grek szuka? ["What would a Greek in Tartary find if searching like a Greek?"]
Cyprian Kamil Norwid, *Rzecz o wolności słowa* [*On Freedom of Speech*], 1869.

"The sacred is a fine hiding-place for the profane […]."
David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, 2004.

"Philology must not simply look at the web but at the spider also."
Patrick Olivelle, *The Semantic History of Dharma*, 2009.

Abstract

This is a preliminary analysis of issues resulting from comparing two images present in the Indian tradition, in their Buddhist ('device' guarding the relics of the Buddha) and Epic ('device' guarding the Elixir of Immortality) variants. Both images are located within the range of the notions of the sacred. That complicates but does not prevent the reconstruction of ideological messages directed to their prospective recipients. They are illustrated by the fate of the 'holy substance' obtained after breaking into and destroying

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both devices. The first one sanctifies the principles of *free access* and *free participation*, the second – of *inherited privilege* and *inherited exclusion*.

Keywords: relics, sacred, access, participation, inheritance, privilege, exclusion, tradition – Buddhist, Hindu

Introduction

The source database used in this paper is limited to two texts. The first one is a fragment of Buddhaghosa's *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī* ('*Shining Forth with Great Auspiciousness*', hereafter referred to as *Smv*),[1] constituting a commentary to the VIth chapter of the *Mahāparinibbāṇa-sutta* (hereafter *MPs*).[2] The second – a fragment of the Vth sub-chapter (*Āstīka-parvan*) of the *Mahabharata's* "Book of the Beginning" (*Mahābhārata* 01, 017–030; hereafter *Mbh*).[3] These texts have not been, so far, compared. Inasmuch, their analysis takes into account only selected variants of the rich traditions surrounding Aśoka Maurya, the first historically documented king of the Gangetic Plain – and the mythical, divine Bird Garuda (s[anskrit]. garuḍa), the conclusions of this comparison form hypothetical assumptions and, as such, should be treated as *research postulates*.

The author's translations of the selected fragments of both texts have been placed in the annex closing the paper.

The paper's geographical background is the water catchment area of the Ganges and Yamuna – the vast lowland extending from the Himalayan ridge to the Deccan Plateau's foothills.[4] For the early forms of the development of Indian civilization, this is the original space;[5] the status of its peripheries, especially the western ones, was continually changing.

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[1] Sumangalavilasini was created in the fifth century A.D. Principal edition William Stede 1971, *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī, Buddhaghosa's Commentary on the Dīgha Nikāya*, Part II.: [D.XVI, 6.26], pp. 611–615, Viewed 17 May 2020 <https://ia801602.us.archive.org/2/items/in.ernet.dli.2015.343980/2015.343980.The-Sumangala-vilasini.pdf>. Recent critical translation: An Yang-Gyu, *The Buddha's Last Days. Buddhaghosa's Commentary on the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, Oxford 2003.

[2] Sixteenth Sutra in the "Collection of Long Discourses" (*Dīgha-nikāya*), contained in the "Basket of Discourse" (*Sutta-piṭaka*), the second of the three collections composing the extant Pali "Triple Basket" (*Ti-piṭaka*) – the canon of the School of the Elder Monks (*theravāda*), first written down in Ceylon in approximately the first century B.C.

[3] The Mahabharata is estimated to have been composed in the period from the fourth century B.C. to the fourth century A.D. Episode numbering is consistent with the electronic version of the text (Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune 1999), Viewed 22 March 2020 <http://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil/1_sanskr/2_epic/mbh/mbh_01_u.htm>. Classic translations: Владимир Иванович Кальянов [Kal'yanov], *Махабхарата. Адипарва. Книга первая,* Москва-Ленинград 1950, pp. 80–105; Adrianus Bernardus van Buitenen, *The Mahābhārata.* I. *The Book of the Beginning*, Chicago 1973, pp. 75–90;

[4] Irfan Habib, Faiz Habib, *Atlas of Ancient Indian History*, Oxford 2012, p. 7.

[5] In: Johannes Bronhhorst's, *Greater Magadha. Studies in the Culture of Early India*, Leiden 2007, terminology, the '*Great Magadha'* – an area of intense economic development and the cradle of Buddhism. On the forms of the administrative managemenet of this area, see Ray Himanshu Prabha, 'Interpreting the Mauryan Empire: Centralized

The historical framework was adopted arbitrarily, in keeping with the events presented in the narratives constituting the content of the paper.[6] The discussed texts were created almost simultaneously,[7] but the messages in them refer to different historical experiences – related to the Maurya (IV–II century BC) and, later, to the Gupta dynasty (IV–VI century AD).

The analyzed texts do not in any way refer to the period separating the two great dynasties – to the era of relatively small kingdoms[8] involved not only in local conflicts but also in the lively commercial and cultural exchange. At that time, under these conditions, the great Sanskrit epics – the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* – took shape, with their concepts of '*man-in-the-world*.' There appeared texts covering in many ways issues of power and law, and the rules of administration. Works on agriculture, metallurgy, and medicine, on accounting techniques and practical geometry, were created, and computational astronomy arose.[9]

In the sphere of social life, these tendencies of change also found their expression, mirroring in a way the processes that finally resulted in the ousting of Buddhism from the Indian political scene and replacing it with the religious formation of Brahmanism.[10] To use the language of Andrzej Wierciński: *the attempts to implement adaptative functions ultimately maximized the time of existence of only one of them, the later one*.[11]

It was then that the dispute about the political importance of possessing one of the two great *sacred things*, the relics of the Buddha and the mythical Drink of Immortality – as a source of enduring power – was settled.

State or Multiple Centers of Control?', in: *Ancient India in its Wider World,* eds. Grant Parker and Carla Sinopoli, Ann Arbor 2008, pp. 13–51.

[6] Beyond this framework falls the period of the first Indian urban culture. The reasons for the collapse of the Indus civilization have not been fully recognized. The remains of it have survived in rural areas, mainly in the west of the subcontinent, manifesting themselves in iconic archaisms referring to the phallic cult and the cult of Mother Goddess. In their developed forms, they are widespread throughout India, especially in Shaivism and Shaktism. Outside the contents of the analyzed narratives also falls the period after the fall of the Gupta dynasty – the era of rapid development in the material and cultural sphere, caused by intense contacts with the world of Islam.

[7] Buddhaghosa was most probably active in the first half of the fifth century. The final stage of Mbh's composition and the commentatorial work of Buddhaghosa fall on roughly in the same period.

[8] Among the few studies devoted to that epoch – Patrick Olivelle (*ed.*), *Between the Empires: Society in India 300 B.C.E. to 400 C.E.* (South Asia Research), ed. Patrick Olivelle, New York 2006; see also: Upinder Singh, *Rethinking Early Medieval India. A Reader,* Oxford 2012, pp. 368–471.

[9] D. M. Bose, S. N. Sen, Bidare Venkatasubhaiah Subbarayappa, *A Concise History of Science in India*, Calcutta 1971.

[10] The systematic belittling of the meaning of the Buddha's message and his role in the history of India is a process reinforced by Indian nationalists since the 19th century; its political aspects presented lately in his pioneering work by Giovanni Verardi, *Hardships and Downfall of Buddhism in India*, New Delhi 2011; review: Geoffrey Bamford, 'Giovanni Verardi, Hardships & Downfall of Buddhism in India, Manohar publication New Delhi, 2011', *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies* 10 (2016), pp. 167–189]. New, expanded edition: 2018. On '*colonial Indology*' see also Dilip Kumar Chakrabarti 'Colonial Indology and Identity', *Antiquity* 74 (2000), pp. 667–671.

[11] Andrzej Wierciński, *Magia i religia. Szkice z antropologii religii*, Kraków 1994, p. 49.

I

The relics of the Buddha, treated since times immemorial with great reverence, have not been, until recently, receiving adequate attention. The Latin term *reliquiae* denotes 'residue'. The Indian term (*dhātu*) possesses various meanings – among them 'element', 'ingredient', 'property', 'principle' – none of them, however, contains references to *temporality*.[12] Although their materialization confirms the thesis about the impermanence of all forms of life, the relics of the Buddha are the signs of his permanent presence: '*whoever sees his relics, sees the Victor*',[13] The Victor – that is the very founder of the *saṅgha*, the Buddhist Community.

The edicts of the emperor Aśoka, discovered already in the 19th Century,[14] confirm the ruler's close ties with Buddhism. The information obtained from them places the beginnings of relics' worship in a solidly documented time frame.[15] However, the Pali and Sanskrit texts remain in the center of the buddhologists' attention – as repositories of the *Word.* Their contents continue to serve as a basis for reconstructions of the Buddha's personage and his original message, his *ipsissima verba*.[16]

It has been assumed that there may have existed a now lost, ancient biographical text that would link traditions about the Buddha's death and the first Buddhist council. This hypothesis, however, has not gained sufficiently strong confirmation.[17] Additional attempts, carried out in the spirit of biblical philology, to screen out from the received texts any later accretions and reach 'the words of the [historical] Buddha (*buddha-vacana*)

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[12] Steven Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities. Utopias of the Pali Imagin*aire, Cambridge 1998, p. 278.

[13] p[ali]: *dhātusu diṭṭhesu diṭṭho hoti jino.* Wilhelm Geiger, *The Mahāvamsa or the Great Chronicle of Ceylon*, New Delhi-Madras, 2000, p. 92.

[14] A detailed description of the process of discovering epigraphic material and ascribing it to the 'lost ruler' – Charles Allen, *Aśoka. The Search for India's Lost Emperor*, London 2012. See especially the chapter devoted to disputes led by British scholars cooperating with the colonial administration: *Furious Orientalists*, pp. 69–95.

[15] The generally accepted dates of Aśoka's rule are 268–232 BC. For a thoroughly documented biography of the ruler, taking into account not only his edicts but also traditions preserved in Sanskrit texts – see Ananda W.P. Guruge, *Asoka, The Righteous: A Definitive Biography*, Colombo 1993.

[16] An overview of the major directions of nineteenth-century research on Buddha's biography – see Charles Hallisey, 'Roads Taken and Not Taken in the Study of Theravāda Buddhism', in: *Curators of the Buddha. The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism*, ed. D.S. Lopez, Jr., Chicago 1995, pp. 31–61. Also, Kevin Trainor, *Relics, Ritual, and Representation in Buddhism. Rematerializing the Sri Lankan Theravada Tradition*, Cambridge 1997, pp. 1–23; Contemporary research, which takes into consideration material from various areas of culture (including mythology and visual arts) hitherto seen as secondary to texts, see Juliane Schober, 'Trajectories in Buddhist Sacred Biography', in: *Sacred Biography in the Buddhist Traditions of South and Southeast Asia*, ed. Juliane Schober, Honolulu 1997, pp. 2–3, 12. On specific differences appearing in interpretations of the same fragment of the received tradition if analyzed as 'text' (written/seen) or as 'word' (pronounced/heard), see Frank J. Hoffman 'Evaṃ me Sutaṁ. Oral Tradition in Nikāya Buddhism', in: *Texts in Context. Traditional Hermeneutics in South Asia*, ed. Jeffrey R. Timm, Albany 1992, pp. 195–219.

[17] Louis Finot, 'Mahāparinibbāna-sutta and Cullavagga', *The Indian Historical Quarterly* VIII/2 (1932), pp. 241–246; on the problems of research on the first Buddhist council: Artur Karp 'O tradycji pierwszego soboru buddyjskiego (Culla-vagga XI)', *Politeja* 4/18 (2011), pp. 229–242 [Polish translation of the text: pp. 243–252].

and the authentic history' of the early Buddhist community have not brought the expected results.[18] David Drewes recently raised the issue of the quality of Buddha biography studies. In a critical review, he presented the principles used for over a century in a peculiar *'buddhological industry'* – to re-create the figure of the Buddha and ultimately transform it into a real, entirely historical persona.[19]

Drewes' theses turned out to be highly controversial. As soon as two years after their publication, Alexander Wynne presented an extensive study in which he convincingly documented the Buddha's actual existence in the Indian historical process. To do that, Wynne focused on early Buddhist discourses and the signs of authenticity they possessed, indicating their individual, not group authorship.

While searching for signs of the Buddha's authenticity, Wynne does not limit himself to the sphere of ideas. He also presents realistic references to the Buddha's physical features and his bodily needs and ailments. He draws attention to those elements of the extant textual tradition that document its direct connection with the realities of the pre-imperial era. For example, the production, transport, and use of bricks as a building material are never mentioned in these sources. The same applies to the use of coins as generally accepted signifiers of value.[20]

Both Drewes' and Wynne's approaches exceed the limits of traditional research and open up new areas within the discussion about the origins of Buddhism.

II

The source of the last, and therefore the most important words of the Buddha, has been, primarily, *The Great Sutra on the Perfect Extinction.*[21] In his seminal paper, Raymond Williams recognized early on (1970) the need for a radical shift in approach to the text – from an analysis of the *Buddha's words* to the *history of the nascent Buddhist community*.[22]

The sixth, final chapter of the *MPs* describes the funeral ceremonies and the resolution of the war-threatening dispute over the distribution of the bone fragments collected from

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[18] On the Buddhist understanding of *'history'* and the Eurocentrism of such concepts as *'the historical Buddha'* and '*original Buddhism*' see Timothy Hugh Barrett, 'History', in: *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism*, ed. Donald S. Lopez Jr., Chicago-London 2005, pp. 143–161.

[19] 'The Idea of the historical Buddha', *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 40 (2017), pp. 1–25.

[20] 'Did the Buddha Exist?', *Journal of the Oxford Center for Buddhist Studies* 16 (2019), pp. 98–148.

[21] Further on, the titles of the Pali (*Mahāparinibbāṇasutta*) and Sanskrit (*Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*) versions of the text are shortened to *MPs*. Principal translations and monographs by Thomas William and Caroline Augusta Foley Rhys Davids 1910, pp. 71–191; also Maurice Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha, a translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*. Boston 1995; An Yang-Gyu, *The Buddha's last days*.

[22] *Historical Criticism of a Buddhist Scripture:* "The Mahāparinibbāna Sutta", Journal of the American Academy of Religion 38/2 (1970), pp. 156–167.

the Buddha's funeral pyre's embers.[23] Though these descriptions present the first Indian record of politically effective mediation, they did not spur scholars to reflect on the integrative symbolism of the relics. In her universally quoted *Ethics, Religion and Social Protest in the First Millennium BC in Northern India*,[24] – Romila Thapar, the world-renowned historian of the epoch passes the question in silence.

According to Robert Sharf, a significant role in shaping the dismissively negative approach to relics and their cult may have been played by psychological reasons. By an aversion, present mainly in Western Protestant societies, to raising the subject of the '*unclean and loathsome bodily remains of the dead*', that is to the sanctification of the physical symptoms of death. The Enlightenment era strengthened this approach by introducing the image of Buddhism as faith without-God, as *a critical and essentially rational tradition that has more in common with Occidental philosophy and ethics than with religion per se*.[25]

Religiological/anthropological studies devoted to Indian tradition ascribe a paramount importance to *ritual pollution* as an offense resulting in temporary or permanent exclusion from the faithful community.

Johannes Bronkhorst draws attention to the extremely negative attitude of the Brahmin tradition towards contact with the bodies of the deceased.[26] What role in the sphere of Indological research could be played by the echoes of the ideas of *purity* present in Indian scholars' works[27] – and contrary to the Buddhist cult of the relics?

III

Interest in the various aspects of the Buddhist cult of relics has increased in the last three decades. A strong impulse towards changing the approach to their worship came from Gregory Schopen, in his fundamental *Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions in*

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[23] Jean Przyluski, *Le Parinirvana et les funérailles du Buddha*, Paris 1920; John S. Strong, 'The Buddha's Funeral', in: *The Buddhist Dead. Practices, Discourses, Representations*, eds. Bryan J. Cuevas, Jacqueline I., Honolulu 2007, pp. 32–59. In Polish: Artur Karp, *Budda. Śmierć i pogrzeb*, in: *Religia. Encyklopedia PWN*, T. 2, Warszawa 2001, pp. 306–307.

[24] 'Wisdom, Revelation, and Doubt: Perspectives on the First Millennium B.C.', *Daedalus* 104/2 (1975), pp. 119–132.

[25] Robert H. Sharf, 'On the Allure of Buddhist Relics', in: *Embodying the Dharma. Buddhist Relic Veneration in Asia*, eds. David Germano, Kevin Trainor, Albany 2004, pp. 164–165.

[26] Johannes Bronkhorst, *Language and Reality. On an Episode in Indian Thought*, Leiden 2011, pp. 194–196. For the early analysis of the cultural concept of *grave pollution as a religious offense* – in a broad, worldwide context, see Mary Douglas 1966: *Purity and Danger: an analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo*, London 1966, pp. 73–75; examples from India (Orthodox Brahmins vs. Untouchables): 33–36, 145–146. See also Veena Das, *Structure and Cognition. Aspects of Hindu Caste and Ritual*, Delhi 1977, p. 121, critically: *the act of dying is a very significant act for a Hindu. Hindu scriptures enjoin upon the individual the duty of preparation for death and the preservation of the purity of body and spirit. Yet, the only aspect of death which has received some attention in anthropological literature is the attendant pollution of the mourners and the ritual procedures for its removal.*

[27] The issue is heavily present on the Internet. The phrase *ritual pollution in Hindu caste system* brings, depending on the type of search engine used, from 217 000 to 437 000 results.

the Study of Indian Buddhism.[28] In keeping with his views, the most significant obstacles to a realistic assessment of the cult's importance in the sphere of Buddhist civilization are the Protestant presuppositions nested in the theoretical foundations of British and American religiology, traditionally focused as they are on bibliological research. According to them, the '*locus of the sacred*' resides in the *Word*, not in the forms of worship and their symbolic representations – hence the importance assigned to the methodology of textual research, criticism, and, especially, reconstruction.

As seen from this perspective, cultic forms signify a departure from the original Word. Accordingly, they should be regarded as vernacular, superstitious manifestations of religiosity cultivated by lay followers.

Two examples are sufficient to illustrate this peculiar attitude towards the primary evidence – with the reservation that they were not exceptional but, instead, confirmed the rule.

A glaring disregard for displays of cultic behavior is evident in the openly manipulative treatment of archeological material. In 1851, Alexander Cunningham, the then director of the *Archaeological Survey of India*, while conducting renovation works at the Great Stupa[29] at Sanchi, decided to remove, as unwanted rubbish, a large number of small stone stupas lying in layers around the central object. Contemporary research performed at many other Buddhist sites makes it apparent that they were, in fact, the funerary stupas of the deceased members of the community. Their accumulation at the greater stupas – containing important relics – documents the believers' spiritual aspiration to have their ashes buried *ad sanctos*,[30] as close to the sacred as possible.

Extreme differences of views about the nature of relics and the essence of their worship revealed themselves distinctly in the exchange of letters between Paul Carus, the Western propagator of Buddhism, and the Ceylonese Buddhist monk Alutgama Seelakkhandha Thera. Not only that, but their correspondence also reveals the colonial conviction about the superiority of Western scientific thought, with its power to transform foreign religions into objects of critical research.

In 1896, while rejecting the gift of relics offered to him by Seelakkhandha in recognition of his merit in the propagation of Buddhism, Carus wrote:

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[28] Gregory Schopen, 'Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions in the Study of Indian Buddhism', *History of Religions* 31/1 (1991), pp. 1–23; published later in *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks. Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India*, Honolulu 1997, p. 122. In 2014 a continuation of research directed towards the social determinants of Buddhist forms of religious life, including the cult of relics: *Buddhist Nuns, Monks, and Other Worldly Matters*, Honolulu. See also Kevin Trainor, 'When Is a Theft Not a Theft? Relic Theft and the Cult of the Buddha's Relics in Sri Lanka', *Numen* 39/1 (1992), pp. 1–26; Charles Hallisey, 'Roads taken', pp. 31–61.

[29] Extensive literature has been devoted to the development of forms of Buddhist reliquaries (s. *stūpa*, p. *thūpa*), from earthen burial mounds to monumental structures; see Lars Fogelin, 'Ritual and Presentation in Early Buddhist Religious Architecture', *Asian Perspectives* 42/1 (2003), pp. 129–154.

[30] See esp.: Gregory Schopen, 'Burial 'Ad Sanctos' and the Physical Presence of the Buddha in Early Indian Buddhism: A Study in the Archaeology of Religions', *Religion* 17, 3 (1987), pp. 193–225.

> *According to my conception of Buddhism, the most sacred relics we have of the Buddha and his saints are the words which they left – the sutras [...]. Words, thoughts, and ideas are not material things; they are ideal possessions, they are spiritual. [...] The worship of relics, be they bones, hair, teeth, or any other material of the body of a saint, is a mistake. [...] The soul of Buddha is not in his bones, but in his words, and I regard relic-worship as an incomplete stage of religious worship [...].*[31]

Paradoxically, the representatives of the conservative circles within 'Southern' Buddhism continue supporting Carus' opinion. According to them, the worship of relics is typical of lay followers only.[32]

IV

Relics of the Buddha, the already classic work of John Strong,[33] was a long-awaited breakthrough in research on the Buddhist cult of the relics. Since its 2004 publication, the relationship between forms of worship and the development of the Buddha's biographical cycles has become an area of particular interest. Previous works narrowed the concept of relics to corporeal, osseous remains (p. *sarīrika-dhātu*). This concept is now much more extensive. It also includes objects and even spaces traditionally connected with the Buddha (*paribhoga-dhātu*), his images, and texts containing his words (*uddesika-dhātu*) – regardless of the time of their creation. In this new perspective, the spread of Buddhism is not perceived as a result of solely verbal propagation of the holy faith, but rather, in the words of Robert Sharf, '*in terms of diffusion of sacred objects, most notably icons and relics, along with the esoteric technical knowledge required to manipulate them.*'[34]

Insight into the essence of popular cult practices, which have always been a form of the Buddha's message's daily experience, enables a fuller view of the mechanisms linking the sphere of power and secular life with religious activity in Buddhist countries.

The postulate of restoring the material dimension (*rematerializing*) of the Buddhist tradition, as raised by Kevin Trainor,[35] has shifted the center of gravity in the field of research, moving philological and religiological Buddhology closer to areas of a 'social' nature: to archeology, anthropology, and sociology of culture.

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[31] Trainor, 'Introduction: Beyond Superstition', pp. 6–7.

[32] Julia Shaw, 'Buddhist and Non-Buddhist Mortuary Traditions in Ancient India: Stūpas, Relics and the Archaeological Landscape', in: *Death Rituals, Social Order and the Archaeology of Immortality in the Ancient World. "Death Shall Have No Dominion"*, eds. Colin Renfrew, Michael J. Boyd, Iain Morley, Cambridge 2015, pp. 386–387.

[33] John Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, Princeton 2004, see esp. p. 232.

[34] Sharf, *On the Allure of Buddhist Relics*, p. 165.

[35] Trainor, *Relics, Ritual, and Representation in Buddhism*, pp. 11–17; also, Robin Coningham, 'Buddhism "Rematerialized" and the Archaeology of the Gautama Buddha', *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 8/1 (1998), pp. 121–126; Strong, *Relics*, pp. 235–238.

The turning point came in 2007, with the publication of Julia Shaw's work. It presented several years of exploration of the Buddhist 'archaeological landscape', covering a large area of Central India. Shaw conducted her research as part of the *Sanchi Survey Project*. Avoiding the limitations of *monumentalism* – supported by the tendency to fund work on large, impressive objects – it has documented the relationship between the layout of trade routes (major and local) and the localization of minor Buddhist monastic institutions. The Project has revealed far-reaching connections, linking Buddhist sanctuaries with local power centers and their economic base – especially with the network of roads and marketplaces, and, also, with elements of rural water management: canals, dams, and ponds. Within the area of 750 square kilometers stretching around the complex of hills, Shaw's teams identified and described the remains of 35 Buddhist sites, 145 settlements, 17 dams, and over 1000 architectural fragments of unclear origins, mainly remnants of local cults, some of them possibly representing early forms of Hinduism and Jainism.

As Shaw points out, *these figures shed new light on the dynamics of inter-religious relations, as well as on the development of exchange networks between the Buddhist monastic and agrarian communities.*[36] This new approach was reflected in the works of Jason Neelis, which focused on the mechanisms of spreading the Buddhist message along trade routes.[37] It also found a confirmation of the adopted methodological principles in the latest summary of the state of the 'Indian' archaeology of Buddhism by Lars Fogelin.[38]

V

Shaw's and Fogelin's works have highlighted the fundamental flaw that continues to lower the quality of the current state of knowledge concerning the origins of Buddhism. Although field research confirms that Buddhist and Jainist sanctuaries *co-existed* and functioned side by side with those representing earlier folk or tribal forms of worship – it identifies them with Hinduism by the very fact of their not answering the widespread notions of Buddhism or Jainism.

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[36] P. 43. For a broader perspective see *Rethinking trade as a social activity: an introduction*, in: *Social archaeologies of trade and exchange: exploring relationships among people, places, and things*, eds. Alexander A. Bauer and Anna S. Agbe-Davies, Walnut Creek 2010, pp. 13–28.

[37] Neelis (a), *Early Buddhist Transmission and Trade Networks. Mobility and Exchange within and beyond the Northwestern Borderlands of South Asia*, Leiden, Brill 2011, pp. 183–216. Also: Neelis (b). 'Polyvalent Perceptions of the Uttarāpatha in History: Archaeological Evidence, Epigraphic References and Literary Demarcations', in: *Revisiting Early India (Essays in Honour of D.C. Sircar)*, eds. S. Ghosh, S.R. Bandyopadhyay, S.B. Majumdar, S. Pal, Calcutta 2011, pp. 13–24. See also, earlier, James Heitzman, 'Early Buddhism, Trade and Empire', in: *Studies in the Archaeology and Palaeoanthropology of South Asia*, eds. Kenneth A.R. Kennedy, Gregory L. Possehl, New York 1984, pp. 121–137; Nayanjot Lahiri, *The Archeology of Indian Trade Routes (up to c. 200 BC)*, Delhi 1992, pp. 367–399.

[38] Fogelin, *An Archaeological History of Indian Buddhism*, pp. 34–69.

David Ludden emphasized that – contrary to the theses presented in Romila Thapar's works[39] – there similarly *co-existed* different forms of statehood, referring to their particular ideologies of power.[40]

Only recently have archaeologists documented the practices of settling tribal cultic centers, among them *burial mounds*, by itinerant brahmins, monks, or ascetics. On the broader perspective, such customs resulted in the formation of new, syncretic cult forms, referring on the one hand to the core of already established patterns of religious life, on the other – to locally differing mythologies and rituals.[41]

The removal of small stone stupas placed around the Great Stupa at Sanchi – as rubbish, as something that does not correspond to deeply ingrained ideas about what is Buddhist, is an act of barbarity, still repeated today. Those elements of the cultural memory, which elude standard descriptions, are usually brushed aside and abandoned – by placing them within categories serving as conceptual rubbish dumps, such as *folk religiosity*, *prejudice*, *superstition*. It is done in the spirit of scientific rigor, without regard to the fact that they characterize areas of unfettered contact with other manifestations of religious life – of *collective raptures*, of *crossing over*, of *change*.

Warnings against the attribution of particular epistemic value to ideal forms developed within religious studies, anthropology of culture, and other areas of the humanities are appearing more and more often – and should not be underestimated. Like everywhere else, also in India, the newly formed, state-supported religious groups attempted to escape from that space of cultural mediation, a zone of the ever-changing social and economic *context*. In the struggle for their distinct identities, they generated competing myths of origins and first heroes – secondarily considered by Western religious studies as representing the archaic forms of depicting the world.[42]

Separating them and carefully assessing them as the products of what Walter Ong termed as '*organizing decontextualization*'[43] is one of the main postulates facing modern Indology – and Buddhology. Its fulfillment requires moving away from the study of

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[39] See, esp. *From Lineage to State*, 1984.

[40] *An Agrarian History of South Asia*, pp. 63–64.

[41] See Henry H. Pressler, *Primitive Religions in India. A Textbook on the PrimitiveReligious Type among India's Tribals*, Madras 1971, pp. 227–235 – on the effects of '*Rajputization*' and '*Sanskritization*' on the tribal forms of religiosity. See also Greg Bailey, Ian Mabbett, *The Sociology of Early Buddhism*, Cambridge 2013, pp. 138–139; Julia Shaw (a), 'Archaeology of religious change, *World Archaeology*, 45/1 (2013), pp. 1–11; see also Julia Shaw (b), 'Archaeologies of Buddhist propagation in ancient India: "ritual" and "practical" models of religious change', *World Archaeology*, 45/1 (2013), pp. 83–108.

[42] The first systematic presentation of the issues relating to 'establishing the tradition' – Eric Hobsbawm, 'Introduction. Inventing Tradition', in: *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Eric Hobsbawm, Terence Ranger, Cambridge 1983, p. 14.

[43] Concept and terminology: Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy. The Technologizing of the Word*, New York 1982. On the sources of contradictions appearing within civilizations – see Guy G. Stroumsa, 'Religious memory, between orality and writing', *Memory Studies* 9/3 (2016), pp. 332–340. On contemporaneous de-contextualization/ idealization of some aspects of Indian Civilization – see Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion. Postcolonial Theory, India and "The Mystic East"*, London 1999.

typological constructs[44] towards the study of social mechanisms and tendencies in the processes of *change* and *differentiation*.[45] It is equally important to identify the sources of contradictions in the material under investigation and the ways of removing them.[46] According to Guy Stroumsa, while examining the '*environment in which religions exist*,' it is necessary to consider several parameters. Among them are *political identity* (state, nation, the legal system, ethnicity), *cultural identity* (language, systemic features, the tradition of tolerance/intolerance, attitudes towards status and behavior), and *economic and social identity* (production methods, the socio-economic spectrum, redistribution of goods).[47]

VI

The cult of the Buddha's relics (and the issue of the universal accessibility of sanctuaries containing them) is at present conceived as a religious factor supporting the creation of a network of centers of economic activity and political mediation. It helped accelerate the process of radical change in the status of the societies peopling the Gangetic Plain and Central India – their shift from ethnic to territorial identity. Until recently, this process used to be defined as the cultural and linguistic accommodation (*sanskritization*) of tribal societies and immigrant groups to the model included in the Brahminic 'Great Tradition',[48] New research presents this process multiaspectually, mainly in the light of archaeological evidence; textual testimonies are seen as somewhat unreliable additions.[49]

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[44] For theoretical approaches to texts and their content present in Indian philology – see Richard Larivière, *Protestants, Orientalists, and Brāhmaṇas: Reconstructing Indian Social History*, Amsterdam 1995. For the lack of a 'proper perspective' in research on data obtained from India, see Giovanni Verardi, *Hardships and Downfall of Buddhism in India*, New Delhi 2011, p. 161.

[45] Gary M. Feinman, 'Variation and Change in Archaic States. Ritual as a Mechanism of Sociopolitical Integration', in: *Ritual and Archaic States*, ed. Joanne M. A. Murphy, Gainesville 2016, p. 12.

[46] David Berliner, 'Anthropology as the science of contradictions', *Anthropology and the study of contradictions. Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 6/1 (2016), p. 5.

[47] 'Religious Transformations and Societal Changes', in: Üner Kırdar, Leonard Silk, *A World Fit forPeople*, New York 1994, pp. 253–263. A newer, wider presentation of the issue of context in political analysis, see: *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis*, eds. Robert E. Goodin and Charles Tilly, Oxford 2006.

[48] A summary of the condition of the theory: A. Bopegamage, R.N. Kulahalli,., 'Sanskritization and Social Change in India', *European Journal of Sociology* 12/1 (1971), pp. 123–132; a description of the process and a detailed bibliography: Timothy Lubin, 'The Transmission, Patronage, and Prestige of Brahmanical Piety from the Mauryas to the Guptas', in: *Boundaries, Dynamics and Construction of Traditions in South Asia*, ed. Federico Squarcini, Firenze-New Delhi 2005, pp. 77–103.

[49] See esp.: Herman Kulke, Dietmar Rothermund, *A History of India* (fourth edition), London 2004, pp. 50–60; David Ludden, *India and South Asia. A Short History*, Oxford 2005, pp. 20–25; Shaw (a), *Archaeology of religious change*, pp. 12–22 Chakrabarti Dilip Kumar, *The Geopolitical Orbits of Ancient India. The Geographical Frames of the Ancient Indian Dynasties*, Oxford 2010, pp. 5–36; Bailey-Mabbett, *The Sociology*, pp. 89–103; Jit Pal Singh Uberoi, *Mind and Society. From Indian Studies to General Sociology*, ed. Khalid Tyabji, Oxford 2019, pp. 213–246.

As material objects, relics played a part in the strategies of consolidation of political territory, of its extension, and the setting of its symbolic boundaries.[50] In this role, they were and are still used by members of the elite controlling the monastic and secular patronage networks[51] – as signs of the legitimacy of their authority. *Stupas*, magnificent reliquaries located in the centers controlled by the dynasties ruling over areas of intensive trade received legal persons' status; the monastic communities that oversee them have thus become – somehow indirectly – full-fledged participants in the political and economic life of the state.

VII

Traditional Indian philology, supported by the methodological rigor of comparative linguistics, paid particular attention to the study of texts containing those elements of Indian mythology that would support the reconstruction of the complex of Indo-European beliefs. Specific attention was drawn to the old tale of the abduction of the Elixir of Immortality (s[anskrit]. *amr̥ta*) by the divine Bird – falcon/eagle, known to the Vedic tradition as 'Beautifully feathered' (s. *suparṇa*).[52] In the epic tradition, in which the Bird receives the title of Garuda (s. *garuḍa*, 'Devourer'), the story about the emergence and further fate of the Elixir forms the axis of the Mahabharata myth of the primogenesis of the universe during the Churning of the Ocean of Milk (s. *kṣīrasāgaramanthana*), undertaken by gods and their demonic opponents.[53]

Although referring to the Vedic tradition, this description of cosmogony belongs to the youngest layers of the *Mahabharata.* That is indicated by its specific location – at the end of the chain of thematically closely related stories.[54]

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[50] In the episode of the war between the Sinhalese and the Hindu Tamils recorded by the Ceylonese chronicle ("*The Great Lineage*", *Mahāvaṁsa* XXV 108–111), the hierarchs of the national monastic community exempted the Sinhalese ruler from responsibility for genocide, seeing in his acts a justified form of defense of the island's territory as a relic (*paribhoga-dhātu*), as an 'object' used by the Buddha himself. See Wilhelm Geiger, *The Mahāvamsa*; the newest ed.: New Delhi-Madras 2000, p. 178; overview: Artur Karp, 'Relikwia Buddy w grocie włóczni – buddyjskie troski Sri Lanki', in: *Religia w konfliktach etnicznych we współczesnym świecie*, Tom 2, *Afryka i Azja*, eds. Andrzej Szabaciuk, Dariusz Wybranowski, Radosław Zenderowski, Lublin 2016, pp. 408–409. See also Geiger, *The Mahāvamsa*, p 178; on justifying extreme violence in the Sinhala-Tamil conflict in Sri Lanka: Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, *Sri Lanka – Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy*, Chicago 1986.

[51] Kevin Trainor, 'Introduction: Beyond Superstition', in: *Embodying the Dharma. Buddhist Relic Veneration in Asia*, eds. D. Germano., K. Trainor, Albany 2004, p. 13.

[52] Classical research on the myth: Jarl Charpentier, *Die suparṇasage. Untersuchungen zur Altindischen Literatur- und Sagengeshichte*, Uppsala 1920; see also: Mahesh Mehta, 'The Evolution of the Suparṇa Saga in the Mahābhārata', *Journal of the Oriental Institute of Baroda* 21/1–2 (1971), pp. 41–65.

[53] Franciscus Bernardus Jacobus Kuiper, *Ancient Indian cosmogony*, New Delhi 1983; James Hegarty, *Religion, Narrative, and Public Imagination in South Asia: Past and place in the Sanskrit Mahābhārata*, London 2013, pp. 96–105.

[54] See Mahesh Mehta, 'The Problem of the Double Introduction to the Mahābhārata', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 93/4 (1973), pp. 547–550. More on the Janamejaya's Serpent Sacrifice as the place and time of

Modern studies on Indian epic tradition do not solely depend on philological methods; in their findings, they consider the contributions of archeology, anthropology, and sociology of culture. However, the new research paradigm has not entirely freed itself from the belief about *spirituality as the dominant feature of Indian culture*. Research on the material available to philologists, aimed at – under the watchword of philological hermeneutics – the reconstruction of the original sense of the texts concentrates mainly on following changes in the philosophical-ethical ideas contained in them and does so by placing the analyzed documents *in a context built from other texts*.[55]

No attention is paid in such studies to the role of the myth of the Elixir of Immortality in shaping the social awareness of the audience of the Sanskrit epic (and its local transformations), and there is no mention of the term *amṛta*[56] in them. Additionally, these works contain no references to the essential material indicators of the progress of change within the framework of the revolution of '*axial time*', understood as the era of the irreversible reconfiguration of physical, temporal, social, and symbolic space – taking place simultaneously in Greece, Israel, India, and China,[57] and focused on processes caused by the introduction of iron and urbanization. Indexes ending these studies do not include terms such as *iron*, *money*, *marketplace*, *trade*, *trade route*, *cart*, *plow*, *plowing*, *irrigation channel*.[58]

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the whole epic being told, see Alf Hiltebeitel, *Dharma: Its Early History in Law, Religion, and Narrative*, New York 2011, pp. 189–190.

[55] Jeffrey R. Timm (*ed.*), *Texts in Context. Traditional Hermeneutics in South Asia*, Albany 1992, pp. 1–5.

[56] So presented for example in the writings of Johannes Bronkhorst: *Greater Magadha*, Leiden 2007, Bronkhorst (a), *Language and Reality*, Leiden 2011, Bronkhorst (b), *Buddhism in the shadow* (2011), Bronkhorst, *How the Brahmins Won* (2016). See also: Adam Bowles, *Dharma, Disorder, and the Political in Ancient India. The Āpaddharmaparvan of the Mahābhārata*, Leiden 2007 (the term, without reference to the myth, appears in the text twice: pp. 390 and 420); the list of works circumventing the term, and the myth, is long.

[57] On the "Axial Age" and its reflections on South Asia, see Abrutyn Seth, 'Religious Autonomy and Religious Entrepreneurship: An Evolutionary-Institutionalist's Take on the Axial Age', *Comparative Sociology* 13 (2014), pp. 105–134; David Shulman, 'Axial Grammar', in: *Axial Civilizations and World History*, eds. Johann P. Arnason, S.N. Eisenstadt, Björn Wittrock, Leiden 2005, pp. 369–394 (in the same volume: Sheldon Pollock, 'Axialism and Empire', pp. 397–450); in the context of the early development of Buddhism see: Tambiah, 'The Reflexive and Institutional', pp. 453–471.

[58] *Iron* appears in the index of one of the works of Bronkhorst (*Buddhism in the shadow*, pp. 215–220) only in the context of the debatable issue of the material used to make the "trough-with-oil" (*tela-doṇī*), used, according to tradition, to place the already washed body of the Buddha. For an overview of archaeological sites of the early Iron Age, see Amita Ray and Dilip Kumar Chakrabarti, 'Studies in Ancient Indian Technology and Production: A Review', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 18 (1975), pp. 219–232.On the lack of textual evidence for the use of iron, see Dilip Kumar Chakrabarti, *The Early Use of Iron in India*, Delhi 1992, p. 124. A novel analysis of the accessible texts and documentation of the traces of a developed iron processing technology hidden, as it were, under a terminology referring to the Bronze Age – see James L. Fitzgerald, 'Sanskrit Pīta and Śaikya/saikya: Two Terms of Iron and Steel Technology in the Mahābhārata', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 120/1 (2000), pp. 44–61. See also Vijay Kumar Thakur, 'Iron Technology and Social Change in Early India (350 B.C.–200 B.C)', in: *Metallurgy in India: A Retrospective*, eds. P. Ramachandra Rao and NG Goswami, New Delhi 2001, pp. 134–142. Also: Sahu Bhairabi Prasad (ed.), *Iron and Social Change in Early India*, Delhi 2004.

VIII

Ancient Sanskrit texts were not created to describe phenomena from the sphere of material culture. It could, however, and even should be expected that references to this area would appear in those texts somewhat secondarily, among the descriptive terms, as elements of comparisons. If they are not present in the indexes, then they might not have been noticed in the texts by the researchers themselves. Alternatively, they might have been considered irrelevant – even though it is them, along with archaeological data, that could significantly supplement the knowledge necessary for a proper chronologization of the epics, making it more precise than ever. If, however, such references are not really to be found in the texts, their lack should be considered a conscious demonstration of their creators' negative attitude towards the changes taking place in their environment.

The issue of dramatic conflicts, ultimately dividing the participants of the cosmogony into those who were entitled to drink the Elixir and those who were denied access to it, although central and, in a way, carefully recorded, disappears into the background. The myth itself loses its significance, even though the divisions it describes form a fundamental social structure based on religious premises, validating the stigmatization of *otherness* – and demonization of *others*. This structure constitutes a *quasi-archaic model*, re-created in many variants and enriched over the centuries.

In the world of actual social relations, this very model continues to sanctify extreme forms of negative stereotyping and marginalization of numerous weaker tribal communities who are the victims of historical violence – it normalizes their dehumanization, confirming it and making it permanent through the *practices of untouchability*.[59]

IX

Separate fields and methodologies of research (Hinduism vs. Buddhism, historical philology vs. comparative religiology) were not conducive to acknowledging the importance of the similarities in the narratives relating to accessing the Elixir of Immortality and the Buddha's relics. The image of the baneful wheel protecting the *sacrum* was used both in

[59] A legal Indian framework for the exclusion model is presented in "The Laws of Manu" (*Manusmṛti*; *MS*); principal research: Pandurang Vaman Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra (Ancient and Mediaeval, Religious and Civil Law)*, vol. 1–5. Poona 1930–58. Polish translation: Maria Krzysztof Byrski, *Manusmryti, czyli Traktat o zacności*, Warszawa 1985. See also: Patrick Olivelle, *Dharmasūtras. The Law Codes of Āpastamba, Gautama, Baudhāyana, and Vasiṣṭha*, Delhi 2000. On the causes and effects of violence on the scale of the Indian subcontinent and South Asia – Veena Das, *Structure and Cognition. Aspects of Hindu Caste and Ritual*, Delhi 1977; *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia*, Delhi–New York 1990; '*Violence and Nonviolence at the Heart of Hindu Ethics',* in: *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence*, eds. Mark Juergensmeyer, Margo Kitts, Michael Jerryson, Oxford 2013, pp. 15–40. See also Veen Das, 'BROKEN PEOPLE. Caste Violence Against India's "Untouchables"', *Human Rights Watch*; New York, Washington, London, Brussels 1999, Viewed 17 May 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/india/India994.htm>, where an extensive bibliography on the outbreaks of communal violence.

the early-Hindu and Buddhist traditions. That fact itself begs the question of the primacy in forming the concept, together with its striking imagery.

The image of the eternally rotating wheel 'with twelve spokes', already attested to in the Rigveda,[60] may confirm the – accepted until recently – '*linear*' model of the development of Indian culture, based on the premise of its uninterrupted linguistic continuation, from the archaic Sanskrit of the Vedas (through Brahmanas and Upanishads) to the epic Sanskrit literature. Using the later, already Middle Indo-Aryan forms of language, the Buddhist tradition would have to be younger.

During the period so far widely recognized as the time of the domination of the archaic Vedic tradition, these 'younger' language forms conveyed images alien to this tradition – of social life in densely populated settlements, developing into *market-towns*,[61] images that propagated new ideas of power and illustrated new patterns of cult behavior. Described and studied separately, they are still considered marginal. When examined as a whole, as a complex, they create a vivid representation of the emerging civilization of *dissent* – based on the non-Vedic model of free participation and exchange.[62]

The location of the Buddhist image of the wheel in the era of Aśoka's rule seems to indicate the primacy of the Buddhist tradition, despite those younger forms of language used by it to specific layers of the Sanskrit epic. It adds a strong argument for the '*non-linear*' model, as postulated by Johannes Bronkhorst in 2007.[63] This model does not exclude the possibility of interception and processing of Buddhist motifs by the creators/editors of the Epic, according to their patrons' needs.

X

In what relations to each other were the traditions that served to build the myth's main versions? Despite differences in form and language, both share, relevantly, commonalities, which may form the basis of comparison. In both, the seizure of *the ultimate value*, that 'holy substance' represented by the relics or the Elixir, is necessary if world-altering actions are to be initiated. Moreover, in both, the chief obstacle in acquiring it is a dangerous, artificially created wheel.

Does their formal closeness prove only the existence, within Indian culture, of a set of standard images that could be used by all who wished to present a dangerous secret –

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[60] I, 164. 11. 1: […] *dvādaśāraṃ* […] *cakraṃ.*

[61] Bailey-Mabbett, *The Sociology*, pp. 24–29, 77–107.

[62] Rejection of the schematic thesis on Brahminism as the background to all developmental forms of Indian culture – Johannes Bronkhorst, *How the Brahmins Won. From Alexander to the Guptas*, Leiden 2016, pp 6–9.

[63] Pp. 265–275; also Johannes Bronkhorst, 'Misunderstood origins: how Buddhism fooled modern scholarship and itself'. in: *The Complex Heritage of Early India. Essays in Memory of R.S. Sharma*, ed. D.N. Jha, New Delhi, 2014, pp. 307–325. On the placing of the *Mahabharata* in the post-Aśokan era see James L. Fitzgerald 'Mahābhārata', in: *The Hindu World*, eds. Sushil Mittal, Gene Thursby, pp. 52–74, London 2004, pp. 52–74. The same author on the politics of the enthroning of Yudhishthira: 'Making Yudhiṣṭhira the King: The Dialectics and the Politics of Violence in the Mahabharata', *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 54/1 (2001), pp. 63–92.

and the hero who unravels it? That is a strong hypothesis; it is spoken for by thousands of commonplaces in Sanskrit and Buddhist literature, *loci communes*, narrative motifs, paintings, poetic metaphors, rhetorical figures.

However, it is not enough to notice the existence of such a set. Those who reach it *creatively* would certainly differ – regarding historical and personal experience, ethnicity, religious identity, social position, gender, or age. The choice of a given image is always determined by its meaning-bearing capacity. Its symbolic polyvalence allows overcoming the differences that divide its recipients, directs them towards syncretic forms corresponding to the needs of the time, and thus – to *change*.

It is the idea of *crossing over* contained in the selected image that gives it the character of a nodal form; it takes on the role of a social message with the ability to transform or defend forms of present reality.

XI

The Sanskrit epic and Buddhist texts' discourses, given their specific location within the civilization of South Asia, possess, through the models of the behavior they have established and stored, the driving force in social constructions. While constituting in every reproduction a kind of social action, they demand analyses within the framework built by the relationships between power, knowledge, sexuality, and (idea) of the body.[64]

However, some expressions of those emotions have been noticed and offered a central place within the *Mahabharata's* message. They are the manifestations of political anger and resentment revealed by groups of landowners, and their religious patrons, when faced with the loss of some of their previous privileges brought about by Aśoka's internal policy.[65]

In the broad sense of the term, Indology has not yet developed analytical tools that would allow us to reach the real center of the Indian epic tradition finally. It lacks instruments that could enable it to assess the degree of intensity of social emotions induced by changes in the political and economic sphere and exposed on the axis *indigenous peoples – new owners of the land.*[66]

It is still an Indological *terra incognita*.

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[64] Joanna Jurewicz, 'Ciało boskie – ciało kosmiczne – ciało społeczne w myśli starożytnych Indii', *Colloquia Anthropologica et Communicativa* 4 (2011), pp. 45–59.

[65] "*A deep and bitter political rage*": Fitzgerald, *Mahābhārata*, 2004, pp. 59–60; the same author: 'Making Yudhiṣṭhira the King: The Dialectics and the Politics of Violence in the Mahabharata', *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 54/1 (2001), pp. 63–92; critically about Fitzgerald's analysis, see: Alf Hiltebeitel, 'More Rethinking the Mahābhārata', *Indo-Iranian Journal* 47/3, 2004, pp. 58–59.

[66] Indian scholars representing the school of historical materialism in the second half of the last century called for the inclusion of social and ideological backgrounds in the analysis of myths, treating them as expressions of persistently reappearing needs. The groundbreaking works of Damodar Dharmananda Kosambi ('The Autochthonous Element in the Mahābhārata', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 84/1 (1964), pp. 31–44 and *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, London 1965), the most outstanding exponent of that school, have been prematurely forgotten. For an evaluation of these works – see Romila Thapar, *History and Beyond*,

XII

Buddhaghosa's description of the fate of the Buddha's relics was composed in prose, in the style typical for the Pali commentatorial scholastic literature. It consists of one continuous text (*Smv* 6.26) and presents a broad scenario of events. At the beginning of the narration, the words '*And thus it was in the days of old*' refer to the sentence that ends the VIth chapter of the *MPs*: the participants of the post-mortal ceremonies take the Buddha's relics to their lands.[67]

King Asoka sets out to look for the relics. However, he does not know that Mahākassapa, the great disciple of the Buddha, and king Ajātasattu had decided to protect the relics against uncontrolled dispersal and stored them in a secret place, in an underground edifice, behind a fearsome wheel. Their power was supposed to help Asoka realize his plans – to establish the cult of the Buddha in his realm. The king has the original burial mounds dug up and, ultimately, finds and destroys the wheel.

The epic narrative about the Elixir of Immortality [*Mbh* I, 5] is not continuous. Compared to the spare, despite its repetitions, account of the *Smv*, it is strikingly rich in expanded images and similes. Its style is characterized by a typically poetical overabundance of attributive adjectives, especially those that might move and frighten listeners (such as *excellent*, *huge*, *fearsome*, *dreadful*, *horrible*). In this version, the legendary history of the Elixir is inseparably associated with two tales that have long been the material for countless literary transformations and images in India's art.

The Story of the Churning of the Ocean of Milk presents the two forms of coexistence shared by the groups populating the world of the myth – cooperation and conflict.

Oxford 2000, pp. 89–113. Among critical studies touching upon the methodological questions appearing in research on the formation of the Indian Civilization, see: Thottamon Kantan Kesavan Narayanan Unnithan; Indra Deva; Yogendra Singh, *Towards a Sociology of Culture in India: Essays in Honor of D.P. Mukerji*, New Delhi 1965; Yogendra Singh, *Modernization of Indian Tradition*, Delhi 1973; Subhash Chandra Malik, *Understanding Indian Civilization. A Framework of Enquiry*, Simla 1975; Subhash Chandra Malik, *Dissent, Protest and Reform in Indian Civilization*, Simla 1977; Ram Sharan Sharma, *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India*, Delhi 1983; Anees Jahan S(a)yed, *D.D. Kosambi on History and Society: Problems of Interpretation*, Mumbai 1985; Ludden, *An Agrarian history*; Niharranjan Ray (*ed.*), *A Sourcebook of Indian Civilization,* New Delhi 2002; Patrick Olivelle (ed.), *Between the Empires: Society in India 300 B.C.E. to 400 C.E.* (South Asia Research), New York 2006; Sheldon Pollock *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men. Sanskrit, Culture and Power in Premodern India*, Oakland 2006; David N. Lorenzen, *Who Invented Hinduism*, New Delhi 2006; Alexey Alexeevich Vigasin, *Ancient India: from source to history*, Moscow 2007; Upinder Singh, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India. From the Stone Age to the 12th Century*, New Delhi 2008; O'Flaherty Wendy Doniger, *On Hinduism*, Oxford 2014.

[67] MPs VI, 27: *And lo, the king of Magadha, Ajatasattu Vedehiputta, built a mound over the relics and performed the [appropriate] ceremonies. And the Licchavis of Vesala built a mound over the relics [...]. And the Sakyas of Kapilavatthu […]. And the Buliyas of Allakappa […]. And the Koliyas of Ramagama […]. And the brahmin from Vethadipa […]. And the Mallas of Pava […]. And the Kusinara Mallas […]. And the brahman Dona built a mound over the pitcher […]. And the Moriyas of Pipphalivana built a mound over the coals […]. There were eight mounds with relics, the ninth mound contained the pitcher, the tenth contained the coals. And so it came to pass.*

Initially, the gods and anti-gods work together to win the Elixir. However, when it emerges from the primeval Ocean, they start fighting with each other, attempting to get it for their exclusive possession. Finally, it is the gods who win it, and it is they who hide it, having entrusted its protection to Indra.

The *Story of Garuda* starts with a quarrel between two sisters, the daughters of Prajāpati – the Lord of Creatures – and wives of the sage Kaśyapa. One of them lays two eggs; from one, Garuda is hatched. To free his mother from slavery at her sisters', Garuda sets out to search for the Elixir. Garuda reaches its hiding place in the subsequent episodes and seizes it – destroying the wheel and overcoming its defenders.

XIII

Both the narrations use strikingly a related set of names for the secondary characters, even if they may bestow synonymous names to them – but assign them other functions. Due to their Middle Indo-Aryan form, numerous Pali names, among them Mahākassapa, Sakka, and Vissakamma, seem to be later than their quasi Vedic *Mbh* equivalents, such as *Kaśyapa* – a revered Vedic sage, *Śakra – ('mighty')*, the ancient cognomen of Indra, *Viśvakarman* – the celestial architect.

Comparative analysis of the narrations shows in their first part convergences that indicate the existence – and intentional use – of the pattern of the hero overcoming a dangerous obstacle hidden in the darkness of the underworld.[68]

Further phases cease to refer to the archaic myth; they take the form of recordings of strictly political activities and illustrate – in short – separate projects for establishing order in the world.

In the 'political' phase, the tales sharply diverge – thus documenting the possibility of using a universally available pattern as a suitable material for forming distinctly differing short-term goals corresponding to different political cultures. Civilizational directives, derived from both traditions, become the building blocks for two fundamental and radically

[68] The question of the origins of the motif of a secret structure, constructed underground as the depository of the most cherished heirlooms, falls beyond the scope of this paper. It is worth noting that in its basic, lay form, the motif appears in the Arthashastra (*Arthaśāstra*, II BCE to III CE). In section II, 5, 2 the text advises the treasurer to build a locked treasure room, an underground four-cornered (*caturāśraṁ*) chamber in which to store and protect the state's riches. According to R. P. Kangle's edition (*The Kauṭilīya Arthaśāstra. Part I: A Critical Edition with a Glossary*, Bombay 1960, p. 40), the key fragment of the text reads: *ekadvaraṁ yantrayuktasopānaṁ devatāpidhānaṁ bhūmigrhaṁ kārayet*. Patrick Olivelle, (*King, Governance, and Law in Ancient India. Kauṭilya's Arthaśāstra. A New Annotated Translation*, Oxford 2013, p. 107) translates it as: *He should have an underground chamber constructed [...] and have a single door with a staircase attached to a mechanical device and concealed by a statue of a deity.* Despite the explanatory note (see p. 508), where the staircase is "controlled by a mechanical device known only to the king or treasurer", his translation is not convincing. Instead of being attached (*yukta*) to the device (*yantra*), the staircase may rather be imagined as linked to it – possibly to react to its unauthorized use and so activate the device's movement. Is it the entrance to the chamber that is hidden beyond the frightening figure of a guardian god (*devatā*), or, rather, the device itself – the mechanism that is to guard the state's treasury?

different interpretations of the human situation in the world of Indian social relations. If the Buddhist tradition alleviates and even abolishes potentially sharp social divisions, epic mythology generates and strengthens them.

XIV

As communicated in the *Smv*, the description of the attempts to immobilize the ominous wheel somewhat marginally touches on the vital aspect of cultural context: on the presence of notions about the power of the indigenous deities of forests and villages – *alongside* the forms of Buddhist worship. The unbroken existence of interpenetrating *parallel worlds* is confirmed archaeologically (and, in Hinduism, also ethnographically). The sacred edifice in which Asoka found himself could, according to the authors of the text, belong to one of the indigenous peoples and be guarded by their protective, apotropaic spells (similarly to the Nagas' mound, which resisted, successfully, the attempts to dig it up?[69]). Unable to overpower the threatening wheel, the king calls his servants, the Yakkhas. It was only when their spirit-medium rites[70] proved ineffective that the king received help from Indra (*Sakka*) and his messenger (*Vissakamma*).

In recalling supernatural beings, pre-Buddhist guardian deities,[71] one can see a deliberate stylization: the location of the great Asoka in the area of Buddhist cosmology as a central figure, referring in this role to the Vedic myth of Indra as the guardian of the Elixir of Immortality.[72] However, it is worth paying attention to the elements of formal, as it were court titulature appearing in the text. It refers to Indra as the 'Lord of the Deities' (*deva-rājā*), to Asoka, as the emperor – using terms to which the Buddha alone is entitled – as the 'Lord of the Universal Law', or 'Universal Lord' (*dhamma-rājā*).[73] Indra has a subordinate relationship with the representatives of human authority: contrary to Lamotte's claim that '*The gods… surround the Buddha rather than serve him*',[74]

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[69] See Annex.

[70] P. *yakkha*, s. *yakṣa* (*Yaksha*). An Yang-Gyu, *The Buddha's Last Days*, p. 223: '*the yakkha servants*', The Pali compound *yakkha-dāsake* could suggest "persons entering a frenzied state like the Yaksha". On the position of Yakshas and their cults in Indian tradition see Nancy Falk, 'Wilderness and Kingship in Ancient South Asia', *History of Religions* 13/1 (1973), pp. 1–15; Gail Hinich Sutherland, *The Disguises of the Demon. The Development of the Yakṣa in Hinduism and Buddhism*, Albany 1991.

[71] On the presence and position of pre-Buddhist gods in Buddhist religiosity see Étienne Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism,* Louvain 1988, pp. 685–690 (759–765 of the original French edition; subsection on "secondary forms of religion").

[72] In one of the Kushan inscriptions, relics of the Buddha are described as *amuda* (i.e. *amṛta*); see Gregory Schopen *Buddhist Monks and Business Matters. Still More Papers on Monastic Buddhism in India*, Honolulu 2004, pp. 323–324.

[73] The equivalent of the Buddhist "ideal ruler" (*dhamma-rāja*), personified by Aśoka, in the Mbh is a ruler whose ascension to the throne should end fratricidal wars over access to the source of omnipotence (*dharma-rāja*). Nick. Sutton, 'Aśoka and Yudhisthira: A Historical Setting for the Ideological Tensions of the Mahābhārata?', *Religion* 27/4 (1997), pp. 333–341 – identifies him with Yudhishthira.; see also Fitzgerald, 'Making Yudhiṣṭhira the King'.

[74] Lamotte, *History*, p. 685.

in the *Smv*, deities serve the two rulers, Ajatasattu and Asoka. The full assistance that the deities provide to them can be read as a symbolic record of political action, as the confirmation and renewal of the creative alliance, linking the state's Buddhist center with its non-Buddhist components still maintaining their own identity.

Having erected – according to *Smv* – eighty-four thousand monasteries[75] throughout the entire territory of his country, Asoka transfers to them the relics he had acquired. It is a project of superimposing, on the already existing state, an overarching structure regenerating – in a way – the Mystical Body of the Buddha (p. *dhamma-kāya*).[76] The sequence of events presented in the *Smv* finds its equivalent in the Pali "*Great Chronicle*."[77] According to it, the Buddhist '*Triple Basket*' (p. *Ti-piṭaka*) contains eighty–four thousand sections; having learned about this, Aśoka decides to set a monastery (p. *vihāra*) to honor each of them.[78] According to the Sanskrit '*Narrative of Aśoka*', the ruler issues the order for erecting eighty-four thousand burial mounds – '*on one particular day, at the same time*' (*Aśokāvadāna*, 55).[79]

All the inhabitants of such a territory would participate in its sanctity, passively – by the very fact of living in it, and actively – by participating in community rites and pilgrimages to monuments containing the relics of the Buddha. *Smv,* in a way, anticipates the already mentioned innovative thesis formulated by Robert H. Sharf.[80] His Aśoka does

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[75] The number 84, often seen as the multiplier of the seven days of the week and twelve months of the year, multiplied by one thousand was to represent a (perfect) whole; on the numerological structures in the Indian tradition: so Willibald Kirfel, *Die Kosmographie der Inder nach den Quellen dargestellt*, Bonn-Leipzig 1920. Ruth Satinsky, 'What Can the Lifespans of Ṛṣabha, Bharata, Śreyāṃsa, and Ara tell us about the History of the Concept of Mount Meru?', *International Journal of Jaina Studies* (Online) 11/1 (2015), pp. 1–24, derives the number from the pre-Buddhist and pre-Jainist period, from the area of the so-called Great Magadha; a list of "royal edifices" consisting of eighty-four thousand items, see Artur Karp, 'Wielka sutra o królu Sudassanie', in: *Między drzewem życia a drzewem poznania. Księga ku czci Profesora Andrzeja Wiercińskiego*, eds. Mariusz Ziółkowski, Arkadiusz Sołtysiak, Warszawa-Kielce 2003, pp. 109–123.

[76] According to the Pali "Great Chronicle" (*Mahāvaṁsa*, V.77–80), the Buddhist "Triple Basket" containing all the words of Buddha, consists of eighty-four thousand sections. A detailed analysis of the fragment in Adrian Snodgrass, *The Symbolism of the Stupa*, New Delhi 1992, p. 366; on the "Body of Buddha" as the "Body of Instruction" see Bronkhorst, *Buddhism in the shadow*, p. 199.

[77] See footnote no. 37 [V.77–80]; probably somewhat later date, V–VI AD.

[78] Wilhelm Geiger, *The Mahāvamsa or the Great Chronicle of Ceylon*, London 1912, p. 33 [the newest ed.: New Delhi–Madras 2000]. The beginnings of permanent 'monasterial' architecture, have long been a matter of some controversy. Referring to John H. Marshall's work ('The Monuments of Ancient India', in: *The Cambridge History of India*, ed. E.J. Rapson, vol. 1, *Ancient India*, Cambridge 1922, pp. 612–619), Kevin Trainor ('Vihāra', in: *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, ed. D. Keown, C.S. Prebish, London 2007, pp. 799–801) and Schopen ('Cross-Dressing with the Dead. Asceticism, Ambivalence, and Institutional Values in an Indian Monastic Code', in: *The Buddhist Dead. Practices, Discourses, Representations*, eds. B.J. Cuevas & J.I. Stone, Honolulu 2007, p. 61), and, following them, Bronkhorst, *Buddhism in the shadow*, pp. 17–19, point to a period later than Aśoka by *at least* a century – that is II–I BC. See Artur Karp, 'Who sees whom? A note on dasaṇe and thaira in Aśoka's Rock Edict VIII', in: *CEENIS – Current Research Series*, Vol. I, eds. Danuta Stasik, Anna Trynkowska, Warszawa 2013, p. 62.

[79] John Strong, *The Legend of King Aśoka. A Study and Translation of the Aśokāvadāna*, Princeton 1983, pp. 109–119, 219–221.

[80] See footnote no. 23.

not link the spread of Buddhism with the propagation of the ethical and philosophical concepts contained in the texts, but, instead, with the movement of the Buddha's relics. It was they who visibly shaped the area of safety, one able to hold diverse populations together – 'a field of communicable spiritual strength capable of guarding against harmful spirits',[81]

XV

Also, in the *Mbh* narration, there appear significant (though so far unnoticed) references to cultural context. They are usually masked by stylization, imposed by the formula of the old heroic myth. When Garuda approaches the Elixir's hiding place, its guards disperse to the '*four corners of the world*',[82] This seemingly irrelevant phrase suggests, however, an edifice with four gates facing the cardinal points.

Could this edifice be modeled on the ideal form of Buddhist burial mounds,[83] containing in their inner, underground chamber the *sacrum* – the relics of the Buddha or one of his disciples?

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[81] Bailey, Mabbett, *The Sociology*, p. 10. An analogous mechanism appeared during the period of Buddhist renewal in India. The reconstruction of events made by Brekke ('Bones of contention', pp. 292–297) confirms that these were not critical editions of Buddhist texts published since the end of the 19th century, and no ideas contained in them, but the relics of two great disciples of the Buddha, Sariputta and Moggalana, recovered from Great Britain, that showed in 1949–1952 the power of attracting and mobilizing the masses to participate in the ceremonies of welcoming them to India and their ceremonial placement in the Great Stupa at Sanchi. These events strengthened the Maha Bodhi Society, providing thus, after fifteen centuries, a real basis for the restitution of Indian Buddhist communities.

[82] Bronkhorst, *Buddhism in the shadow*, p.194, reminds us that in the archaic "Brahmana of the Hundred Paths" (*Śatapathabrāhmaṇa*) which continues the Vedic tradition, there is a remark on the existence of quadrangular (s. *catuḥsraktīni*), "godly", and circular (*parimaṇḍalāni*) "demonic" forms of burial mounds; he sees the latter as prototypes of later Buddhist stupas. There is no evidence to show that this tradition was continued. The oldest known stupas, though built on a circular plan, possess "enclosures" with four gates; see Alexander Cunningham, *The Stûpa of Bharhut: A Buddhist Monument Ornamented with Numerous Sculptures Illustrative of Buddhist Legend and History*, London 1879. In one of Buddha's last instructions before his death, he orders that "the stupa for Tathagata be built where four great roads [come together] (*cātummahāpathe tathāgatassa thūpo kātabbo*), *MPS* 96; he also indicates that for the Emperor (the One who sets the Wheel [of the Law] into motion), a stupa should customarily be built "in the place where four great roads [come together] (*cātummahāpathe cakkavatissa thūpaṁ karonti*), *MPs 644.* On the symbolism of the 'four corners' in the sphere of Hindu ritual, see Das' analytical study *Structure and cognition*, pp. 9–27.

[83] A wide array of literature is devoted to the architectural forms of the Buddhist reliquary; see Fogelin, 'Ritual and presentation, pp. 129–154; newest research: Le Huu Phuoc, *Buddhist Architecture*, Grafikol.com 2010, and (especially on iconography) Monika Zin, 'When stones are all that survived. The case of Andhra Buddhism', *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 65/1 (2012), pp. 236–253 and 'The Buddha's Relics and the Nāgas an Attempt to Throw Light on Some Depictions in the Amaravati School', *South Asian Archaeology and Art* 2 (2012), pp. 757–774. On archaeologically confirmed Buddhist monuments of the Aśokan period – see Harry Falk, *Aśokan Sites and Artefacts*, Mainz am Rhein 2006, and 'The fate of Aśoka's donations at Lumbinī', in: *Reimagining Aśoka: Memory and History*, eds. Patrick Olivelle, Janice Leoshko, Himanshu Prabha Ray, New Delhi 2012, pp. 204–216.

If the relationship between the layout of the edifice and the final arrangement of the guards is to be considered as non-accidental, the purpose of acquiring the Elixir becomes self-evident. According to the myth, Garuda sets out to obtain the Elixir as the means that would enable him to free his mother from slavery.

However, the way his deed is carried out points to the less apparent, political reason for his heroic act. It results in overthrowing the previous order of things – by taking over what is sacred, for the winner's exclusive possession, while using extreme violence, without any attempts to reach an agreement with its hitherto dispensers.

Indra warns Garuda of them and advises [I, 30.7*c–e*]: 'If you do not intend to take *soma*,[84] give it over to me. For those others to whom you could offer it, would *shove us away*' (s. *asmāṁs te hi prabādheyur yebhyo dadyād bhavān imam*). That is tantamount to negating the principle of universal access to the sacred and is confirmed in the final words of Garuda himself: "…I will not let just anyone enjoy soma" (s. *na dāsyāmi samādātuṃ somaṃ kasmaicidapyaham* [I, 30.8*b*]).

In the world of myth, Indra is to become the sole steward of the Elixir obtained from Garuda. Indra, the bellicose leader of the celestials, deeply rooted in the Vedic tradition. Who could fulfill this role in the world of actual social relations? Within the sphere of Indian Civilization, it was not the *divine* ruler. The *deified* ruler, tied in by the ancestral priests – the Brahmins – to the heroes of archaic, sacred myths.

Historical data on the Brahmins are sparse, and the sources on which they rely are uncertain.[85] There are, however, firm indications that it was the Guptas who first put them on a pedestal, in a dual role – as religious hierarchs and servants of the state. Only the Brahmins, the sole depositaries of the *sacred tradition*, could become custodians and stewards of the *sacrum* as the royal status source. Exclusively them – by re-enacting in the great royal rites[86] the myths on the heroic attainment of the Elixir of Immortality.

XVI

Garuda's figure served as its heraldic emblem to the kingdom of Samudragupta[87] (reign, dated approximately, from 335 to 375 AD), after Aśoka, the greatest ruler known to Ancient India.[88] According to traditional accounts, he was the victor of wars with *two* kings tracing their bloodline back to the dynasty of Nagas, the mythical Serpents.

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[84] The appearance of the term *soma* in this fragment of the epic does not seem to be accidental. While using it in place of the term *amṛta*, the editors of the epic legitimize, as it were, the dynasty of their protectors; via the myth about the heroic eagle/falcon, they connect it to the archaic time of the Vedic texts.

[85] Michael Witzel, 'Toward a History of the Brahmins', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113/2 (1993), pp. 264–268.

[86] Abraham Eraly, *The First Spring: The Golden Age of India*, New Delhi 2011, p. 283.

[87] Ellen M. Raven, *Gupta Gold Coins with a Garuḍa Banner*, Leiden 1994.

[88] Although some historians believed that Samudragupta considered himself to be equal to the gods, as a 'god-on-earth', such appellations are currently seen rather as attempts to elevate the status of the ruler. See Upinder Singh, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India. From the Stone Age to the 12th Century*, New Delhi 2008, p. 485.

Who may have been the adversaries of Garuda? Were they the descendants of the subjects of Aśoka – the predecessor of Garuda in the search for the *sacrum*, and its first winner? Remembering still the Buddhist rules he did implement while building his state? Could their memory of the freedom of religious practices, exchange of ideas and trade be recognized as the source of political projects, potentially harmful for the post-Buddhist dynasties?

These are essential questions, the clues suggesting that the proper area of comparison is not the pair of Aśoka – Garuda; it should be the pair of Aśoka – Samudragupta. On the royal insignia of Samudragupta, Garuda does not carry the pitcher with the Elixir of Immortality. On its own, it appears there as a representation of a heroic act, a fearsome symbol of the king's lordly power.

The "Chapter on the Suparna" (*Suparṇādhyāya*),[89] of late provenance, but scrupulously observing the rules of the Vedic prosody, commands Indra to caution Garuda against offering to the Serpents even a single drop of the Elixir. Otherwise, they would turn his world into a 'people-less (desert)' (s. *ajanaṃ te kariṣyanti* [XIV, 28. 10*b*]).

The critical phrase shows a peculiar semantic change – from '*would shove us away* [us, gods, from the humans]' to '*would deprive us of* [our] *subjects*', Is that modification only a trace of the creative search for a fitting verse meter? Alternatively, could it be an emotional warning against treating with contempt the pent-up political aspirations of the mythical Nagas, subjugated by Samudragupta?

XVII

The mythical figures of Garuda and Aśoka are linked by a structural correspondence, based on the opposition of reconstructive ideological premises that dominate in both narratives. There is no symmetry nor a relation of direct entailment in their relationship – the succession is followed by negating the state-building guidelines established by the predecessors. That is an additional argument in favor of Mehta's and Hiltebeitel's views on the internal chronology of the Mahabharata.[90] If the myth about the Elixir of Immortality's seizure by Garuda was created in reaction to the traditions about Aśoka the Great,[91] the model Buddhist king, these passages of the Epic that contain it must belong to its youngest parts.

Garuda's acts, described in episodes that complement the central myth and describe the preparations for setting out to the place where the Elixir had been hidden, are with a high degree of probability elements of the founding myth of the Gupta dynasty. Among them,

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[89] Known also as "The Story of Suparna" (*Suparṇākhyāna*). Johannes Hertel, 'Der Suparṇādhyāya, ein vedisches Mysterium', *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 23 (1909), p. 318. On the date of this quasi–Vedic text see Maurice Winternitz, *History of Indian Literature*. Vol. I, New Delhi 1972, p. 312.

[90] See footnote 46.

[91] The bibliography of the book *Reimagining Aśoka. Memory and History*, eds. Patrick Olivelle, Janice Leoshko, Himanshu Prabha Ray, Oxford 2012, contains 730 items.

the two defeated kings' image, *two* blinded and put by Garuda to their deaths monstrous Serpents – the Nagas, recumbent behind the iron wheel that would defend access to the Elixir.[92] It includes examples of establishing territorial order,[93] supporting the Brahmin penetration of tribal areas,[94] punishing the enemies of dynastic rule,[95] and providing care to groups of wandering ascetics.[96] The contents of those episodes, hitherto in fact overlooked, demand a separate, meticulous analysis and comparative research, which would take into account the extant inscriptional, iconographical, and literary material.

Garuda's flag (s. *garuḍa-dhvaja*) on the gold coins of Samudragupta supplants imprinted on them till his time schematic images of the Buddhist funeral mound (s. *caitya*). The flag symbolizes the new state order. However, in contrast to the expressions of glory, standard in the descriptions of the ruler's achievements, his state's framework does not undergo any radical reconstruction. The antecedent government structures, taken over from the state of Aśoka and his successors, continue to function.[97]

XVIII

Transformations affect other areas of life. The ruler, aware of the force of the opponents of change, bestows on brahmins the privileges and land grants. In this way, he initiates the process of transforming newly conquered tribal groups[98] into administratively and religiously controllable, economically specialized communities of farmers, breeders, and craftsmen. Their gradual inclusion in the caste system bases on the recognition of inherited status and locally assigned roles.[99] In the coastal areas of eastern India, brahmins participated in the organization of agriculture while taking advantage of royal grants. However, that was met with some expressions of discontent: there are indications of grassroots radicalization in historical data, both in the social and political sphere.[100]

At the same time, this new order constitutes a profound revision and overhaul of the messages proposed by Buddhism, their overhaul tantamount to the rejection of ideal

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[92] *Mbh* 1.029.002–009.

[93] Story of a genocidal attack on the land of the Nishadas: *Mbh* 1.024.010–014.

[94] Story of a boon granted to a Brahmin and his Nishada wife: *Mbh* 1.025.001–005.

[95] Story about the dehumanization and punishment by death of two brothers quarreling over property: *Mbh* 1.025.010–033.

[96] Story about showing respect to Valakhilya ascetics: *Mbh* 1.026.001–014.

[97] V. R. Ramachandra Dikshitar, *The Gupta polity*, Delhi 1993, p. 62.

[98] Cf. lines 21–23 of Samudragupta's *praśasti* (transl. James Faithful Fleet, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol. 3 (Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings), Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing 1888): *"… has made all the kings of the forest regions to become his servants; [his] formidable rule was propitiated with the payment of all tributes, execution of orders and visits (to his court) for obeisance by […] frontier rulers […]"*.

[99] Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilisation*, p. 32; Anne Casile, 'Changing Religious Landscapes in Gupta Times: Archaeological Evidence from the Area of Baḍoh-Paṭhāri in Central India', *South Asian Studies* 30/2 (2014), pp. 245–268.

[100] Verardi, *Hardships and Downfall*, 2011, p. 234; *The Gods and the Heretics. Crisis and Ruin of Indian Buddhism*, Delhi 2018, p. 310.

forms symbolized by the sanctified number 84 000. These forms were considered final, definitive, and, as such, meant solely for *faithful reproduction – s*imilarly to the words of the Buddha contained in the "Triple Basket". His calls, formulated centuries ago, could not be subject to time-enforced adjustments for social remodeling of the world.

XIX

The period of the decline of the Gupta era was witness to the not fully controllable processes of the reorganization of religious worship – by the scattering of its centers and authorities and was conducive to diversification. New paths were ceaselessly sought to clarify further and improve any preexisting tenets – in the atmosphere of fierce, politically supported competition (often turning into an open confrontation). The rules of debating ideological opponents were refined.

In the confrontation with Islam, traditional forms were subject to a critical review. In the pursuit of precision in the expression of opinions, the axiom of their inviolability was waived. Paradoxically, conditions were created for the development of all sciences and, consequently, of the innovative technologies associated with them.

Perfection was no more naturally obtainable, once and for all. The excellence, in its closest approximations, had to be now fought for.[101]

XX

In a paper published in 2008, Phyllis Granoff postulates the need to link the Buddhist cult of relics with much older notions of the magical power of dead body particles preserved in Brahminical mythology and ritual.[102] It seems, however, that it would fit Indian reality better to link the two cultic forms, both the developed Buddhist and the only fragmentarily documented Brahmin, with the world of beliefs of those groups who were poorly integrated with the life of the state and who were denied participation in the process of shaping the *formal patterns* of Indian civilization. The reflections of the universal faith in the magical power of the places where the burnt remains of the dead were interred (s. *caitya*, p. *cetiya*), and which were then to be populated by their evil spirits, may often be found in both Epic and Buddhist traditions.[103]

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[101] Artur Karp, 'W poszukiwaniu doskonałości', in: *Tajemnice czasu i religii*, ed. Izabela Trzcińska, Kraków 2005, pp. 78–99.

[102] See: 'Relics, Rubies and Ritual: Some Comments on the Distinctiveness of the Buddhist Relics Cult', *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 81/1–4 (2008), pp. 59–72.

[103] Robert DeCaroli *Haunting the Buddha. Indian Popular Religions and the Formation of Buddhism*, Oxford 2004, pp. 20–30. For a comparative study of the figures of Evil the Christian (Satan) and the early Buddhist (Māra), see James W. Boyd, *Satan and Māra: Christian and Buddhist Symbols of Evil*, Leiden 1975.

Those groups' spiritual needs emerged forcefully in response to the programmatic religious exclusivism of Samudragupta and his successors, attested by the epic myth of Garuda. They manifested themselves on the one hand in the spread of the cult of the body remains of the Goddess-Mother (s. *śakti*), worshipped at present on the entire subcontinent.[104] On the other in the enrichment of the original mythology of Garuda – by establishing the cult of four drops of the Elixir of Immortality that had fallen to the ground from his pitcher.[105]

Religious institutions created in the places of these hierophanies served to mediate contradictions – cultural, social, and political. By allowing the possibility of religious services by non-Brahmin (even untouchable) priests, and by giving ritual support for local languages, they at the same time broke the principle of men's monopoly for active participation in religious life.

Both cults (though not only they) sanctified the area of the Indian subcontinent afresh. By conveying their internal dynamism to mass pilgrimage movements, they continued, mostly, the pattern of Buddhist devotional religiosity, with the predominant role of ecstatic collective experience – as a *manifestation of the gift of participation* commonly available to the faithful.

As documented above, specific ideas and images of the world expressed in the epic Sanskrit, although referring to the Vedic tradition, must have been borrowed from the generally accessible set of popular Buddhist concepts and transformed according to the period's needs. Mahabharata's linguistic archaism is not a sign of natural development. Instead, it is a signal of the attempt to depart from the hitherto political limitations and build a new tradition, such as would ultimately exclude Buddhist monastic institutions and tribal, mostly land-owning communities, so far independent and using local dialects.

XXI

In his 2009 concise essay on the concept of *dharma* in its non-Vedic, uniquely Buddhist forms, Patrick Olivelle scrupulously documented the pattern that would ultimately serve as the background for the Hindu ideas of the world order. The manifestations of political, economic, and social order are hidden in subsequent historical periods under religious and political correctness masks. [106]

However, while publishing four years later his major work, his *King, Governance, and Law in Ancient India*, Olivelle decided not to consider his earlier findings. In the index (pp. 715–753), there do not appear any words that could suggest links of the book's

[104] Classical approach, see William Crooke, 'The Cults of the Mother Goddess in India', *Folklore* 30/4 (1919).

[105] In the broad cultural-political context Kama Maclean, *Pilgrimage and Power. The Kumbh Mela in Allahabad, 1765–1954*, Oxford 2008, pp. 87–88.

[106] *Semantic History of Dharma. The Middle and Late Vedic Periods*, published in 2009 but not mentioned in Bronkhorst's 2011 book.

material to earlier, non-Hindu traditions: no terms such as *Buddha*, *buddhism*, *buddhist*, *Aśoka*, *dhamma*, *bhikkhu*, *monastery*.

Disregarding his previous, serious reservations, also Johannes Bronkhorst entitled his major 2011 work, *Buddhism in the shadow of Brahmanism*.

Were those scholars of renown in that practice alone? In the practice of cleansing the available textual material[107] of all that would not fit their preconceived notions of how na should developed religion look like?

These questions (and the earlier ones presented in the article) open the previously only superficially recognized research area.

Two issues form the outlying background for these considerations. Both are related to the theme of *purity*, recognized on the one hand as a necessary feature of *ideal forms of thought*, enabling their comparison and ideological gradation, on the other – as an attribute of *goods intended for sale*.

To what extent the new, already 'Hindu' cults are the direct extension of the Vedic tradition? To what – are they cults of, not fully recognized in their core, substitutes of the relics of the Buddha? Such as observed in 1885 by Sir Edwin Arnold in Bodh Gaya, in a ruined pilgrimage sanctuary, commemorating at one time the place of Siddhartha Gautama's Awakening, and functioning in later centuries as a Shaivite *mandir*?[108]

[107] Critically – see Hegarty, *Religion, Narrative*, p. 113: 'The process of placing stories and teachings in the mouth of Vedic characters extends throughout the Mahābhārata and indeed, to an extent characterizes the text (it is after all the work of 'Veda' Vyāsa, the arranger of the Vedic corpus, and is being told to Śaunaka, our great Vedic innovator)',

[108] Edwin Arnold, *India Revisited*, London 1886, pp. 221, 234–236.

ANNEX

On the acquisition and protection of holy objects (from the *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī* and the *Mahabharata*).

1. Concealment

Smv 6. 26:

Evam etaṁ bhūta – pubban ti:	*And so it came to pass.*
Evam eva dhātu – vibhajanañ c' eva dasa –thūpa – karaṇañ ca Jambudīpe bhūta – pubban ti, pacchā saṅgītikārā āhaṁsu.	This is how the distribution of the relics and the construction of ten burial mounds took place in Jambudipa. This, according to the participants of the later [first] group recitation.
Evaṁ patiṭṭhitesu pana thūpesu Mahākassapa –tthero dhātūnaṁ antarāyaṁ disvā Ajātasattuṁ upasaṅkamitvā: 'Mahārāja, ekaṁ dhātu – nidhānaṁ kātuṁ vaṭṭatī' ti āha.	Once the mounds had been built, Elder Monk Mahakassapa realized that the relics were in danger. Therefore he went to king Ajatasattu and said: "Oh great king, the relics should be placed in one location".
'Sādhu bhante nidhāna – kammaṁ tāva mama hotu, dhātuyo pana kathaṁ āharāpemī?' ti. 'Na Mahārāja dhātu – āharaṇaṁ tuyhaṁ bhāro, amhākaṁ bhāro' ti. 'Sadhu bhante, tumhe dhātuyo āharatha, aham nidhānaṁ karissāmī' ti.	"Very well, Master, I shall take pains to safeguard them – but how can I acquire the relics?" "No, great king, this is not your task; fetching the relics is our duty". "Very well, Master, you shall bring [me] the relics, and I shall prepare a place for their safe storage".
Thero tesaṁ tesaṁ rāja – kulānaṁ paricaraṇa – mattakaṁ eva ṭhapetvā sesa – dhātuyo āhari. Rāmagāme pana dhātuyo Nāgā parigaṇhiṁsu, tāsaṁ antarāyo n'atthi. Anāgate Laṅkādīpe Mahāvihāre Mahācetiyamhi nidhīyissantī ti: tā na āharittha.	So the Elder Monk left each ruling dynasty only so much of the relics as was required to worship them and took the rest away. However, in Ramagama, the relics were held by the Nagas. Those [relics] he did not collect, as he assumed they were not in danger and that later, they would be deposited in Mahacetiya in the Mahavihara on the island of Lanka.
Sesehi sattahi nagarehi āharitvā Rājagahassa pācīna–dakkhiṇa–disā–bhāge ṭhatvā: 'Imasmiṁ ṭhāne yo pāsāṇo atthi so antaradhāyatu, paṁsu	Having collected [the relics] from the other seven cities, he went to an area located to the south-east of Rajagaha and declared [the

suvisuddhā hotu, udakañ ca mā uṭṭhahatū ti', adhiṭṭhāsi.	following]: "Let the rocks disappear from this place, let the soil be cleansed, let no water gush here".
Rājā taṁ ṭhānaṁ khaṇāpetvā tato uddhaṭa – paṁsunā iṭṭhakā kāretvā asīti mahā – sāvakānaṁ cetiyāni kāreti. 'Idha rājā kiṁ karetī?' ti pucchantānaṁ pi: 'Mahā – sāvakānaṁ cetiyānī' ti vadanti. Na koci dhātu – nidhāna – bhāvaṁ jānāti.	The king ordered the ground to be dug up, bricks to be formed from the clay, and [sanctuaries] commemorating the eighty Great Disciples to be built from them. Moreover, when anybody asked what the king was building there, he was told it was sanctuaries [commemorating the eighty] Great Disciples. And no one knew about the relics being [deposited] there.
Asīti hattha–gambhīre pana tasmiṁ padese jāte heṭṭha loha–santhāraṁ santhārapetvā, tattha […] tamba–lohamayam geham kārāpetvā aṭṭh' aṭṭhā–hari–candan' ādi–maye karaṇḍe ca thūpe ca kārāpesi. […] […]	When [the diggers] reached a depth of eighty cubits, the order came to lay an iron floor, raise a copper house on it […], and deposit in it eight chests and eight reliquaries fashioned of yellow sandalwood […] […]

Mbh 01, 017.030a:

tato 'mr̥taṃ sunihitameva cakrire surāḥ […]	Thus, the gods carefully concealed the Nectar of Immortality […]

2. Prophecy

Smv 6.26:

Ath' āyasmā Mahākassapo: Mālā mā milāyantu, gandhā mā vinassantu, padīpā mā vijjhāyantū ti' adhiṭṭhahitvā suvaṇṇa – patte akkharāṇi chindāpesi: 'Anāgate Piyadāso nāma kumāro chattaṁ ussāpetvā Asoko Dhammarājā bhavissati, so imā dhātuyo vittharikā karissatī' ti.	And then venerable Mahakassapa [said]: "may the wreaths not wither, the perfumes not lose the scent, the lamps not go out", [and] having expressed [this] wish, he ordered these words be carved on a golden tablet: 'In the future, a prince named Piyadasa[a] shall raise the parasol [of monarchic rule]. And he shall become Asoka, a righteous ruler.[b] And it is he who shall distribute [throughout his kingdom] these relics',

[a] P. *Piyadāsa*, s. *Priyadarśin* – "the beautiful one", a cognomen of Aśoka.
[b] P. *dhammarāja* – "the king of righteousness; of the Universal Law".

Rājā sabba – pāsadhanehi pūjetvā ādito paṭṭhāya dvāraṁ pidahanto nikkhami. So tamba – loha – dvāraṁ pidahitvā āviñjana – rajjuyaṁ kuñcika – muddiyam bandhi. Tatth'eva mahantaṁ maṇikkhandhaṁ ṭhapesi: 'Anāgate daliddarājāno imaṁ maṇim gahetvā dhātūnaṁ sakkāraṁ karontū' ti akkharāni chindāpesi.	Thus, the king honored [the relics] with all manner of precious objects and exited, shutting [consecutive] doors as he went, from the first to [the last]. And when he closed the copper door, he hung a seal and a key on the string on it. And [he] placed in that very place a tremendously big jewel, [and] ordered these words to be carved: 'In the future, let poor kings take this jewel and [thanks to its value] worship the relics properly',

3. Protection

Smv 6.26:

Sakko devarājā Vissakammaṁ āmantetvā: 'Tāta Ajātasattunā dhātu–nidhānikaṁ kataṁ, ettha ārakkhaṁ ṭhapehī' ti pahiṇi.	Sakka, the king of the gods, summoned [at this time] Vissakamma. And he sent him [to earth] saying: "Cherished friend, Ajatasattu has built a chamber in which to keep the relics. Make sure that they are [appropriately] guarded".

Mbh 01, 017.030c:

dadau ca taṃ nidhimamṛtasya rakṣituṃ kirīṭine balabhidathāmaraiḥ saha	And the vanquisher of Bala,[a] together with the Immortals,[b] entrusted that vessel with the Nectar to the Diadem's Wearer[c] for safekeeping.

[a] S. *balabhid* – "the killer of Bala", Indra.
[b] S. *amara* – the lesser gods.
[c] S. *kirīṭin* – Indra.

Smv 6.26:

So āgantvā vāḷa – saṅghāṭa – yantaṁ yojesi. Kaṭṭha – rūpakāni tasmiṁ dhātu – gabbhe phaḷika – vaṇṇa – khagge gahetvā, vāta – sadisena vegena anupariyantaṁ yantaṁ yojetvā,	There appeared [Vissakamma], and he built a 'snake-connected'[a] device; in the [last] chamber containing the relics, he constructed a device spinning at the speed of the wind, with wooden effigies holding swords gleaming like crystal [placed on it].

[a] P. *vāḷasaṁghāṭayanta* – meaning unclear; in the Ceylon tradition, *vāḷa* – *'snake'*, in the linguistic tradition of the subcontinent, *vāḷa* – *'predatory animal'*. In the *Comparative Dictionary of the Indo-Aryan Languages*, Oxford 1966), entry no. 12212, *vyāla*. According to some interpretations, the compound term coul*d mean 'mechanism constructed from (frames in the shape of) snakes / predatory animals'*.

ekāya eva āṇiyā bandhitvā samantato giñjak' āvasatth' ākārena silā – parikkhepaṁ kāretva, bhūmiṁ samaṁ katvā, tassa upari pāsāṇa – thūpaṁ patiṭṭhapesi.	And he fixed it [from the top] on only one pin and placed boulders all around, like a house of bricks. And he closed [the structure] from the top with a headstone, covered it all with soil, leveled the ground, and raised a stone burial mound over it.

4. Search

Smv 6.26:

Apara – bhāge Piyadāso nāma kumāro chattaṁ ussāpetvā Asoko nāma Dhamma – rājā hutvā so tā dhātuyo gahetva Jambudīpe vitthārika akāsi.	And later, prince Piyadasa raised the parasol [of royal rule] and, having become Asoka, the righteous ruler, took the relics and distributed them amongst [all] of Jambudipa.[a]
Kathaṁ? So Nigrodha – sāmaṇeraṁ nissāya sāsane laddha – pasādo catur – āsīti-vihāra – sahassāni kāretvā bhikkhu – saṅghaṁ pucchi: 'Bhante mayā catur – āsīti – vihāra – sahassāni kāritāni, dhātuyo kuto labhissāmī?' ti.	How [did this happen]? Novice Nigrodha had caused [Asoka] to trust the Knowledge and order the construction of eighty-four thousand monasteries. And [the king] asked the monk community: "Masters, I have ordered the construction of eighty-four thousand monasteries, [but] where do I find [the relics] to place in them?"
Mahārāja, dhātu – nidhānaṁ nāma atthī ti, suṇoma, na pana paññāyati asuka – ṭṭhāne' ti	[They replied]: "Oh great king, a place surely exists where the relics have been deposited, such news we have heard, but we know not where it is".
Rājā Rājagahe cetiyaṁ bhindāpetvā dhātuṁ apassanto, paṭipākatikam karetvā, bhikkhu – bhikkhuniyo upāsaka – upāsikāyo ti: catasso parisā gahetvā Vesāliṁ gato.	The king ordered the [burial] mound in the city of Rajagaha to be opened, but discovering no relics, he had the mound restored [to its previous condition]. He then went to Vesala, with the four communities, with monks and nuns, and with lay followers of both sexes.

[a] P. *Jambudīpa*, s. *Jambudvīpa* – "the Continent of the Rose Apple Tree", India.

Tatrâpi alabhitvā Kapilavatthuṁ, tatrâpi alabhitvā Rāmagāmaṁ gato. Rāmagāme Nāgā cetiyaṁ bhindituṁ na adaṁsu, cetiye nipatita –kuddālo khaṇḍâ – khaṇḍaṁ hoti.	When nothing was gained, he [moved on] to Kapilavatthu, and having found nothing, he [continued] to Ramagama. At Ramagama, the Nagas did not consent to the mound being opened; the shovel shattered to pieces when it hit the mound.
Etaṁ tatrāpi alabhitvā Allakappaṁ tatrâpi alabhitvā Veṭhadīpaṁ Pāvakaṁ Kusinaraṁ ti: sabbattha cetiyāni bhinditvā va paṭipākatikāni katvā puna Rājagahaṁ gantvā catasso parisā sannipātetvā: 'Atthi kenaci suta – pubbaṁ asuka – ṭṭhāne nāma dhātu – nidhānan?' ti pucchi.	Still empty-handed, he [went in turn] to Allakappa, Vethadipa, Pavaka, and Kusinara. He opened mounds everywhere, but not having come across any relics, he restored them [to their previous condition] and returned to Rajagaha. Once there, he [again] summoned the four Communities and asked: "Is there anyone here who would [possibly] know where the relics had been deposited?"
Tatth' eko vīsaṁ–vassa–satiko thero: 'Asukaṭṭhāne dhātu – nidhānan ti, na jānāmi. Mayhaṁ pana pitā Mahāthero satta – vassa – kāle mālā – caṅgoṭakaṁ gāhāpetvā: Ehi sāmaṇera asuka – gacch' antare pāsāṇa – thūpo atthi, tattha gacchāmā ti, gantvā pūjetvā: "Imaṁ ṭhānaṁ upadhāretuṁ vaṭṭati sāmaṇerā" ti āha. Ahaṁ ettakaṁ jānāmi Mahārājā' ti āha.	And a certain Elder Monk, one hundred and twenty years old at the time, said: "I know not where the relics are deposited. Nevertheless, once, when I was seven, my father, a noted Elder Monk himself, asked me to carry a basket containing garlands and said: 'Come, novice, amongst those bushes, there is a stone mound; this is where we shall go', And when we got there, he worshipped [at the place] and said: 'It would be well, novice, if you remembered this place', This is all I know, great king".

Mbh 01, 024–026:

[To gain the necessary strength, Garuda, at his mother's advice, devours a Nishada tribe – but spares a Brahmin living with the tribe and his Nishada wife. He goes on to feed on two brothers who are feuding over an inheritance and who had been transformed into an *elephant* and a *tortoise* as a result of the curses cast upon each other. Carrying them in his talons, Garuda sits on the branch of an enormous tree; the branch breaks, but Garuda, noticing the Valakhilya[a] ascetics holding onto it, transports it to a safe place and only there devours both brothers.]

[a] S. *Vālakhilya* – the name of mythical ascetics.

5. Discovery

Smv 6.26:

Rājā: 'Etad eva ṭhānaṁ' ti vatvā, gacchaṁ harāpetvā pāsāṇa – thūpañ ca paṁsuñ ca apanetvā heṭṭhā sudhā – bhūmiṁ addasa, tato sudhā ca iṭṭhakāyo ca harāpetvā anupubbena pariveṇaṁ oruyha […] asi–hatthāni ca kaṭṭha – rūpakāni samparivattantāni addasa.	The king [said]: "This [surely] is the place". And he had the bushes removed, as well as the stone mound and the soil [on which it stood]. And he caught sight of a layer of plastering, and when he had the plaster and bricks removed […][And when] he descended into the internal chamber, he saw […] wooden effigies spinning around with swords in their hands.

Mbh 01, 028.003–004:

Tatra cāsīdameyātmā vidyudagnisamaprabhaḥ bhauvanaḥ sumahāvīryaḥ somasya parirakṣitā sa tena patagendreṇa pakṣatuṇḍanakhaiḥ kṣataḥ/ muhūrtamatulam yuddhaṁ kr̥tvā vinihato yudhi	There stood Bhauvana[a] of the immense spirit, shining like lightning and fire, the all-powerful guardian of the soma, endowed with immense strength. Attacked by the wings, beak, and talons of this Indra of Birds, he fought splendidly on but soon succumbed to the onslaught.

[a] S. *Bhauvana* – a cognomen of Viśvakarman.

Mbh 01, 028.016–017:

sādhyāḥ prācīṃ sagandharvā vasavo dakṣiṇāṃ diśaṃ / prajagmuḥ sahitā rudraiḥ patagendra – pradharṣitāḥ / diśaṃ pratīcīmādityā nāsatyā uttarāṃ diśam	Hounded by the Indra of Birds, the Sadhyas and Gandharvas ran east, while the Vasas and Rudras escaped south, the Adityas to the west, and the Nasatyas to the north.

6. Breaking into the hiding place

Smv 6.26:

So yakkha – dāsake pakkosāpetvā bali – kammaṁ kāretvā pi n' eva antaṁ na koṭiṁ passanto,	And [though] he summoned servant men [familiar with] the magic of the *yakkhas* and promised them a reward, he could not discern either the [lower] end or the top [of the mechanism].
devatā namassamāno: 'Dhātuyo gahetvā, catur – āsitiyā vihāra – sahassesu nidahitvā sakkāraṁ karomi, mā devatā antarāyaṁ karontū' ti āha.	He [then] bowed to the gods, saying: "When I access the relics, I shall place them in the reliquaries of eighty-four thousand monasteries and [in this way] worship them. Let the gods not hinder me [in this endeavor]".

Mbh 01, 028.022–025:

tānkṛtvā patagaśreṣṭhaḥ sarvānutkrāntajīvitān / atikrānto ‘mṛtasyārthe sarvato ‘gnimapaśyata āvṛṇvānaṃ mahājvālamarcirbhiḥ sarvato ‘mbaram dahantamiva tīkṣṇāṃśuṃ ghoraṃ vāyusamīritam tato navatyā navatīr mukhānāṃ kṛtvā […]	[And] when he stepped over their [bodies], to come near the Nectar of Immortality, he saw all round it a wall of fire. [And] its huge leaping flames covered the whole firmament. [And] it burnt like the Sun and swayed in terrifying whirlwinds. He then assumed ninety times ninety beaks […],
nadīḥ samāpīya mukhaistatastaiḥ suśīghramāgamya punarjavena jvalantamagniṃ tamamitratāpanaḥ samāstaratpatraratho nadībhiḥ	and drank up whole rivers with them, and returning without further ado, flooded the fiery flames with their waters.
tataḥ pracakre vapuranyadalpaṃ praveṣṭukāmo ‘gnimabhipraśāmya	Having vanquished the fire, he assumed a different, small body. He was now planning to enter […]

Mbh 01, 029.001a–003c:

jāmbūnadamayo bhūtvā marīcivikacojjvalaḥ praviveśa balātpakṣī vārivega ivārṇavam / sa cakraṃ kṣuraparyantamapaśyad amṛtāntike paribhramantamaniśaṃ tīkṣṇadhāramayasmayam jvalanārkaprabhaṃ ghoraṃ chedanaṃ somahāriṇām ghorarūpaṃ tadatyarthaṃ yantraṃ devaiḥ sunirmitam	He became like a golden spark from the embers. [And] he broke into [that place] with the force of a river flowing into the Ocean. [And] he beheld by the Nectar an iron wheel […], [and] its edge was as sharp as a razor blade, and it turned incessantly. It [was] menacing, fiery like the Sun, and ready to cut [in half] anyone who tried to steal the soma. Terrible beyond words was that device so carefully constructed by the gods.

Mbh 01, 029.004a–007a:

tasyāntaraṃ sa dṛṣṭvaiva paryavartata khecaraḥ arāntareṇābhyapatatsaṅkṣipyāṅgaṃ kṣaṇena ha adhaścakrasya caivātra dīptānalasamadyutī	[And] the Bird looked into it and began flying over it. And, temporarily making himself small, he flew into a gap [between its spokes].
vidyujjihvau mahāghorau dīptāsyau dīptalocanau cakṣurviṣau mahāvīryau nityakruddhau tarasvinau rakṣārthamevāmṛtasya dadarśa bhujagottamau […] sadā cānimiṣekṣaṇau […] tayoreko ‘pi yaṃ paśyetsa tūrṇaṃ bhasmasādbhavet	Under the wheel, he encountered two giant Serpents guarding the Nectar. They shone as brightly as the blazing Fire; their tongues were like bolts of lightning; they had fiery maws and eyes. Their sight was venomous […], and they never closed their eyes. Anyone who saw them would immediately turn to ash.

7. Overcoming the wheel

Smv 6.26:

Sakko Deva – rājā cārikaṁ caranto taṁ disvā, Vissakammaṁ āmantetvā: 'Tāta, Asoko Dhammarājā: "Dhātuyo nīharissāmī" ti, pariveṇaṁ otiṇṇo, gantvā kaṭṭha – rūpakāni hārehī' ti.	Sakka, the king of the gods, beheld him […]. He summoned Vissakamma [and said to him]: "Cherished friend, Asoka, a righteous ruler, has entered the chamber, go [there], and remove the wooden effigies".
So pañca – cūḷa – gāma – dārako viya gantvā, rañño purato dhanuka – hattho ṭhatvā: 'Hāremi Maharājā' ti āha. 'Hara tātā' ti.	[Vissakamma] made his way there under the guise of a peasant youth with his hair knotted into five buns. He stood before the king with his bow in his hand and asked: "Shall I remove [them]?" "Do so, dear friend".
Saraṁ gahetvā sandhimhi yeva vijjhi. Sabbaṁ vippakiriyittha.	[The boy] took an arrow and shot it into the element holding everything in place. The whole [mechanism] fell to pieces.

Mbh 01, 029.008–009:

tayoścakṣūṃṣi rajasā suparṇastūrṇamāvr̥ṇot adr̥ṣṭarūpas tau cāpi sarvataḥ paryakālayat tayor aṅge samākramya […]	The Beautifully Feathered One threw the dust into their eyes and, now invisible, attacked both. Having stamped on their bodies

8. Acquisition of the holy

Smv 6.26:

Atha rājā āviñjane bandha – kuñcika – muddikaṁ gaṇhi, maṇi – kkhandhaṁ passi.	And lo, the king [tore off] the seal and took the key hanging on the string. And he beheld a pile of precious stones.
'Anāgate dalidda – rājāno imaṁ maṇiṁ gahetvā dhātūnaṁ sakkāraṁ karontu' ti pana akkharāni disvā, kujjhitvā: Mādisaṁ nāma rājānaṁ 'dalidda – rājā' ti, vattaṁ na yuttaṁ ti, punappuna ghaṭṭetvā, dvāraṁ vivaritvā anto – gehaṁ paviṭṭho.	And he saw the letters [inscribed thereon]: 'In the future, let poor kings take as many gemstones [as they require] to be able to worship the relics properly', Upon reading this, he became angry and banging on the door repeatedly he said: "It is not proper to call a king like me a poor king". And when the door opened, he went inside.

Aṭṭhārasa vass' ādhikānaṁ dvinnaṁ vassa – satānaṁ upari āropitā dipā tath'eva pajjalanti, nīl' uppala – pupphāni taṁ khaṇaṁ āharitvā āropitāni viya, puppha – santhāro taṁ khaṇaṁ santhato viya, gandhā taṁ muhuttaṁ pisitvā ṭhapitā viya.	The lamps, which had been placed there two hundred and eighteen years earlier, still shone; the blue lotus flowers looked as if they had been brought and placed there a moment ago, the flowers scattered on the floor looked as fresh as ever, and the incense seemed to have been prepared and arranged just then.
Rājā suvaṇṇa – pattaṁ gahetvā: 'Anāgate Piyadāso nāma kumāro chattaṁ ussāpetvā Asoko nāma Dhamma – rājā bhavissati, so imā dhātuyo vitthārikā karissatī' ti vācetvā	The king held up a golden tablet and read: 'In the future, prince Piyadasa shall raise the parasol [of monarchic rule]. And he shall become Asoka, a righteous ruler. And it is he who shall distribute [throughout his kingdom] these relics',
'Diṭṭho bho ahaṁ ayyena Mahākassapatherenā' ti vatvā, vāma – hatthaṁ ābhujitvā dakkhiṇa – hatthena appoṭhesi. So tasmiṁ ṭhāne paricaraṇaka – dhātu – mattaṁ eva ṭhatvā sesā dhātuyo sabbā gahetvā dhātu – gehaṁ pubbe – pihita – nayen' eva pidahitvā sabbaṁ yathā – pakatiyā va katvā, upari pāsāṇa – cetiyaṁ patiṭṭhāpetvā	And saying: "The august Mahakassapa knew about me already", he bent his left palm and hit it with his right. And having left in that place as many relics as necessary to enable their worship, he took all the remaining relics, and he closed the chamber precisely in the same manner in which it had been closed previously. And he restored everything to its original condition and had a stone mound erected [over this place].

Mbh 01, 029.009c–010:

ācchinattarasā madhye somamabhyadravat tataḥ / samutpāṭyāmṛtaṃ tat […] utpapāta javenaiva yantramunmathya […]	[…] he thrust himself inside, towards the soma, and extracted the Nectar […]. And having destroyed the mechanism, he flew upwards […]

9. Project

Smv: 6.26:

catur – āsītiyā – vihāra – sahassesu dhātuyo patiṭṭhāpetvā, mahāthere vanditvā pucchi: 'Dayado 'mhi bhante Buddha – sāsane?' ti.	And when he had distributed the relics amongst eighty-four thousand monasteries, he greeted the most notable Great Monks and asked: "Am I, oh Masters, an heir of the Enlightened One?"

‘Kissa dāyādo tvaṁ Mahāraja? bāhirako tvaṁ sāsanassā’ ti’,	“The heir? Of what? You [remain] outside the Knowledge”.
‘Bhante, cha – navuti – koṭi – dhanaṁ vissajjetvā catur – āsīti – vihāra – sahassāni kāretva ahaṁ na dāyādo, añño ca ko dāyādo?’ ti	“Masters, I spent nine hundred and sixty million, I erected eighty-four thousand monasteries – and yet am not an heir? Who else is the heir, then?”
‘Paccaya – dāyako nāma tvaṁ Mahārāja! Yo pana attano puttañ ca dhītarañ ca pabbājeti, ayaṁ sāsane dāyādo nāmā’ ti.	“Oh, great king, you are the one who fulfills the needs [of the monk community]. The heir of the Knowledge is one who allows his son and his daughter to leave home”.
So puttañ ca dhītarañ ca pabbājesi. Atha naṁ therā āhaṁsu: ‘Idāni Mahārāja sāsane dāyādo ‘sī ‘ti	He allowed his son and daughter to leave home. And [then] the Elder Monks said to him: “From this moment, great king, you have become the heir of the Knowledge”.

Mbh 01, 030.008c:

na dāsyāmi samādātuṃ somaṃ kasmaicidapyaham	[Garuda pledges:] “I will not let [just] anyone enjoy soma”.

References

Mbh – *Mahābhārata*
MPs – *Mahāparinibbāṇa-sutta*
SmV – *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī*

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