

VI. INDIAN SOURCES

Before we go on to a more detailed comparison of the Greek and Indian sources, it is necessary to survey these Indian sources and discuss their chronology and reliability as sources. Too often comparisons have been made indiscriminately, without taking notice of chronological difficulties.¹ And yet, when a time gap of a thousand years or even more separates the classical sources from the Indian they are compared with, we cannot rely much on any correspondences. In an ideal case we should have contemporaneous sources – and the Indian sources should somehow refer to the Northwest, if possible – but this is rarely the case. And even the few cases commonly supposed to be contemporaneous contain more problems than is often admitted. One interesting and important point is to find out such Indian sources that can be placed with some degree of confidence within the pre-Mauryan (and thus pre-Alexander) period. In this respect the inscriptions – otherwise chronologically the best source, if reliably dated – are of no help as the oldest known Indian inscriptions are those of Aśoka (third century B.C.).

The chronology of Indian literature is notoriously uncertain, and in many cases there seems to be still less reliable evidence for even an approximative date than is often supposed. The “higher level of acceptance” we are sometimes asked to have² makes everything easy for us, but does not give any reliability to our conclusions. Perhaps nowadays few think anymore that we can see ancient things “as they actually happened”, but we should try and approximate what happened as much as possible, proceeding from the evidence we have and critically examining our sources without giving in to fascinating guesswork or building castles in the air.

A full study of the literary chronology of ancient India would be very important, but for our present purposes it is impossible and unnecessary. I shall restrict my discussion to the sources that are in some way important for the present task. The result is that there are really very few sources we can with any confidence place within our period (sixth to fourth centuries B.C.). Of course, I do not mean that everything which is not indisputably written before Alexander's Indian campaign is unusable for our purposes. But we must be conscious of chronological difficulties and be critical of our sources. A post-Alexander date gives a possibility of Hellenistic influence, but the actual cases of such influence are so few – with some well-defined exceptions like astrology – that we cannot easily

¹ Timmer (1930, 43f. and 49ff.) is an exception. Zambrini (e.g. 1983, 1107, note 4 “la letteratura indiana – di cui, per altro, sappiamo i quasi insormontabili ostacoli per una precisa determinazione cronologica”) is very conscious of the difficulty, but his viewpoint rarely involves Indian sources.

² This demand was stated by a well-known Western scholar of Buddhism in an international symposium, when the authenticity of parts of the Pāli canon as sources for the Buddha was cautiously questioned.

suppose some loose element being borrowed from Greek sources (or from the Indo-Greeks) if there is no evidence for such borrowing. I shall come back to this later.

The question of Indian text history is also very complicated. We have cases like the Vedas, Sūtra texts (Pāṇini) and to some extent Buddhist and Jaina canonical works (though the final date of their canonization seems to be unfortunately late for our purposes), where a text is transmitted in a definitive form, often without even minor changes, not to speak of recensions. Often this has taken place through an oral tradition. And yet there are cases where even written texts have been subjected to continuous revision resulting in many widely different recensions. The complete textual chaos we encounter with many of the so-called great Purāṇas is a good example of this.³

In the following survey I shall begin with secular literature and with such cases where more or less exact dates have been suggested. Then I shall go on to the epics and related literature, to Dharmasāstra and to Buddhist sources. The last case will be the oldest of all, the Veda.

1. Pāṇini and Patañjali

An important and often used source for our period is Pāṇini, dated variously in the fourth, fifth or even sixth century B.C.⁴ In any case most scholars seem to agree that he belongs to the pre-Mauryan period, perhaps to the middle of the fourth century. As he came from Śalātura⁵ in ancient Gandhāra he is therefore supposed to have been a subject of the Achaemenian empire, though there is no trace of this in his *Aṣṭādhyāyī*.⁶ Otherwise his northwestern origin is clearly seen in the geographical horizon of his work, which abounds in northwestern place names.⁷ But they give no help for his chronology.

Patañjali is commonly supposed to have lived in the middle of the second century B.C. There is also evidently a long interval between Kātyāyana and Patañjali, let us say at least a hundred years. This gives the middle of the third century as a date for Kātyāyana,

³ See Bakker *forthcoming* (with important remarks about the relation between oral and written literature in India). I am indebted to Dr. Bakker, who gave me a manuscript copy of his unpublished article.

⁴ Among well-known scholars in the field Renou suggested the fourth or perhaps the fifth, Thieme the fifth or even the sixth century B.C., Agrawala about 500 B.C. See Cardona 1976, 260 and Scharfe 1977, 88. Kane (1968, 79) suggests the second half of the fifth century (but adds that the possible late date for Patañjali would bring him forward some 150 years!). Still older dates are occasionally given, but can be dismissed here as wholly unlikely.

⁵ Mentioned even by himself in P. 4, 3, 94 *tūḍiśalāturavarmatikūcavārāḍ ḍhakchaṇḍāñyakaḥ*. Cf. Agrawala 1963, 8ff. Scharfe 1987 contains a short account of the place itself.

⁶ Scharfe 1977, 89.

⁷ Agrawala 1963, 38ff., 49ff. and 70ff.

who would therefore belong to the Mauryan period. There seems furthermore to be a long interval between Kātyāyana and Pāṇini as well, again at least a hundred years, we are told. Thus runs the argument, which gives 350 B.C. as the conventional date and a supposed *terminus ad quem* (as the intervals could have been longer) for Pāṇini.⁸ On the other hand, Kātyāyana's mention of the Mauryan title **devānām priya** probably indicates that he at least cannot have been much earlier.⁹ There are some other arguments for the date of Pāṇini I shall take up soon, but let us discuss this interval argument first.

The date of Patañjali is the key to everything. The well-known evidence apparently giving the date c. 150 B.C. for him was presented long ago by Goldstücker (1864) and Bhandarkar (1872).¹⁰ The most important point is the example given of action begun but not finished, **iha puṣpamitraṃ yājayāmaḥ** "here we perform (as priests) the sacrifices (instituted) by Puṣpamitra".¹¹ If Puṣpamitra is the first Śuṅga king – as he probably is – and if Patañjali was personally among the priests performing his sacrifice, a date in the second century B.C. seems incontestable. In another example, this time of a known event which one could have seen with one's own eyes, we find the interesting statements **aruṇad yavanaḥ sāketam** and **aruṇad yavanaḥ mādhyamikān** "the Yavana besieged Ayodhyā/the Mādhyamikas".¹² This seems to refer to the Indo-Greek invasion and has been taken as a *terminus a quo*, which it certainly is. Yet the exact date of this invasion is so controversial that this *terminus a quo* actually tells us much less than Bhandarkar and the others were thinking. Some additional evidence is mentioned, but its force is much weaker and does not stand without the main arguments.¹³

These arguments soon roused a controversy which mostly took place on the pages of the *Indian Antiquary* (1872-78).¹⁴ The main criticism came from Weber and Kielhorn, who both argued for a late date (Weber c. 25 A.D.). Their main counter-argument was that it was quite possible for Patañjali to use conventional examples taken from earlier grammatical tradition otherwise lost to us. The very examples in question were used in grammatical literature later, too, e.g. in *Kāśikāvṛtti*. The controversy was continued by others, and in 1920 Winternitz could summarize its results by his cautious remark that the second century B.C. is a likely but by no means a certain date, and the first century A.D. is the latest possible date for Patañjali.¹⁵ Ten years later, La Vallée Poussin took up the question again. He referred to earlier criticism and added the example where Patañjali mentions the dvandva **sakayavanam**, Sakas and Yavanas as not impure śūdras.¹⁶

⁸ Winternitz 1920, 390 calls it a mere "Arbeitshypothese", but many have taken it as a more or less conclusive argument. For literary history it is perhaps good enough, but our chronological considerations need more. See also Cardona 1976, 267f.

⁹ Scharfe 1971, 211ff. (for another argument perhaps indicating the same view see *ibid.* 219ff.).

¹⁰ Joshi 1980, 34ff. gives a summary of both. See also Cardona 1976, 263ff.

¹¹ Text and translation of Pat on P. 3, 2, 123 (**varṭamāne iat**) according to Bhandarkar 1872b, 300. Puṣpamitra is later often corrected to Puṣyamitra.

¹² Text and translation of Pat on P. 3, 2, 111 (**anadyatane iañ**) according to Bhandarkar 1872b, 299f. These examples were already mentioned by Goldstücker.

¹³ See Joshi 1980, 41f..

¹⁴ A summary is found in Joshi 1980, 40ff.

¹⁵ Winternitz 1920, 389.

According to him, a mention of the Sakas is unlikely in the second century B.C.¹⁷ This roused a new controversy, this time mostly in the pages of *Indian Culture*, where D.R. Bhandarkar and Konow defended the early date.¹⁸ But though it is quite possible that the Sakas were known in India as early as in the second century B.C. – this was their main counter-argument – it is questionable if a people still living far away would have been given a place – and not a very low place either – in the Indian social hierarchy. This was also pointed out by Frauwallner in his attempt to show that Patañjali's Sakas were probably already living in India.¹⁹ Consequently, he again ended up with the first century A.D. as the probable date of Patañjali.

A late date for Patañjali is not proven. As one scholar puts it, “what one wishes to conclude depends, then, on how sceptical one wishes to be”.²⁰ After all, it is quite possible that such an early author formulated his examples himself. I am personally inclined to think that he really belongs to the second century B.C. But it is not certain. It may also be that he was living only in the first century A.D., and this we must always keep in mind if we try to build any chronological conclusions upon his date.²¹

It is time now to come back to Pāṇini and his date. If Patañjali belongs only to the first century A.D., the working hypothesis allowing two or even three hundred years between Pāṇini and Patañjali brings us only to the second or third century B.C.²² A date in the fourth century supposes the earlier date for Patañjali. But even so, are these “at least a hundred years” for each interval so certain? Sometimes changes take place quite rapidly. And there is also the geographical factor. Pāṇini belongs to the Northwest, Kātyāyana perhaps to the south,²³ and Patañjali probably to Madhyadeśa.²⁴ Though the Sanskrit tradition seems quite uniform to us, the fine differences noted by grammarians can partly depend on differences in local traditions. These differences are not necessarily contemporaneous, but changes do not take place at the same time everywhere. Therefore, I am afraid that it is not safe to propose any such intervals as the mentioned 100 + 100/200 years.

¹⁶ Pat. on P. 2, 4, 10.

¹⁷ La Vallée Poussin 1930, 201f. (more generally 199ff.).

¹⁸ See e.g. Konow 1937. The discussion is summarized in Cardona 1976, 265f., who himself leaves it open as inconclusive.

¹⁹ Frauwallner 1960, 108ff.

²⁰ Cardona 1976, 265.

²¹ I would like to quote here what was stated about the question by a great Indian Indologist. Referring to D. C. Sircar, who in an article (in *IHQ* 15, 633ff.) defended a late date c. 100 A.D., P. V. Kane wrote: “We should not be cocksure about the date of the Mahābhāṣya and not regard 150 B.C. as a certain date for Patañjali's Mahābhāṣya but should regard it only a possible or at the most a probable one” (Kane 1968, 76). This is exactly what I have tried to say.

²² These intervals are discussed e.g. by Kane (1968, 76ff.) who, with necessary scepticism and pointing also to the possible influence of the geographical factor, himself suggests an interval of 100–150 years.

²³ Scharfe 1977, 139. On the other hand, the *Kātyāyanaśrautasūtra* does not contain any southern elements (cf. Witzel 1987a, 201). For Pāṇini see also Witzel 1987a, 207. Kātyāyana's southernness and his date in the Mauryan period suit well with the fact that Vārttika 1 on P 4, 1, 175 mentions, apparently for the first time in Sanskrit literature, the southern Cola country.

²⁴ Scharfe 1977, 153. See also Deshpande 1985.

There are more arguments for the date of Pāṇini. Charpentier's Kamboja/Cambyses argument was quite far-fetched and can be left as such.²⁵ The word *yavanānī* does not prove his date as he *may* have known Greeks at any time from the late sixth century onwards.²⁶ As to the more general idea of Pāṇini belonging to a period before the real spreading of Buddhism,²⁷ there is little evidence that this spreading ever took place before Aśoka. Buddhism belongs together with the early urbanization of the Ganges region,²⁸ and contemporaneous with the rising Middle Indian urban civilization the Old Indian Vedic Sūtra period still continued in the villages.²⁹ And with the new, reduced chronology for the Buddha himself, every other date somehow linked with that of the Buddha will be automatically reduced, too.³⁰ On the other hand, there is a sūtra teaching the formation *kumāraśramaṇa* '(virgin) girl who is a śramaṇa', which could well point to Buddhist or Jaina nuns.³¹

It has been pointed out that the language used and described by Pāṇini is archaic, but this is hard to prove or give a real chronological significance to in terms of centuries. Pāṇini is related to certain Vedic texts,³² but the Vedic chronology is only based on a working hypothesis similar to that of the early grammarians. The few fixed points of Vedic chronology are mostly fixed from the supposed dates of the Buddha and Pāṇini. If these are changed, they must be changed too. And even the relation of Pāṇini to the Vedas is not as clear as is often supposed.³³

In the light of all this I think we cannot confidently place Pāṇini in the fourth century, not to speak of still earlier dates.³⁴ A long time ago Sylvain Lévi tried to show that Pāṇini belongs more or less to the time of Alexander's Indian campaign. In the *Āmbhi* of the *Gaṇapāṭha* and the *Sāṅkala* of the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* he saw the Omphis and Sangala of the historians of Alexander.³⁵ Be this as it may, the famous *yavanānī* of Pāṇini

²⁵ Charpentier 1923, 147ff. and criticism by La Vallée Poussin 1930, 39f.

²⁶ P. 4, 1, 49 *indravaruṇabhavaśarvarudramṛḍahimāraṇyayavayavanamātulācāryāṇām ānuk* (fem. to *yavana* is *yavanānī*). It was used by Weber and Lévi as an argument for a late date (contemporary or later than Alexander). It may be, as there is no certain evidence of an Indian knowledge of Greeks before Alexander, but such knowledge is by no means wholly excluded. See Cardona 1976, 261.

²⁷ Winternitz 1920, 383.

²⁸ Sarao 1987.

²⁹ Of course it came to the cities, too. Pat on P 2, 4, 10 *kaḥ punar āryanivāsaḥ/ grāmo ghoṣo nagaram samvāha iti*.

³⁰ Cf. Scharfe 1977, 88, note 3.

³¹ P. 2, 1, 70 *kumāraḥ śramaṇādibhiḥ* discussed in Cardona 1976, 261f.

³² Scharfe 1977, 88f.

³³ Without going into details, I refer to an unpublished paper read by J. Bronkhorst at ICANAS in Hamburg 1986.

³⁴ See also the discussion in La Vallée Poussin 1930, 35ff. I cannot see how Cardona (1976, 268), after examining the evidence and criticism mentioned above, could conclude: "The evidence for dating Pāṇini, Kātyāyana and Patañjali is not absolutely probative and depends on interpretation. However, I think there is one certainty, namely that the evidence available hardly allows one to date Pāṇini later than the early to mid fourth century B.C."

³⁵ Lévi 1890b, 234ff. (with some further examples from the *Gaṇapāṭha*). Similar ideas were stated already by Bhandarkar (1872a).

unfortunately cannot be used as evidence of Indian knowledge of Greeks or of a Greek presence in the Indian northwestern borderland before Alexander, although it is by no means impossible. As to the Greek alphabet, this was mentioned only in Kātyāyana's Vārttika, Pāṇini could have some other idea of yavanānī in his mind.³⁶ On the other hand, Pāṇini belonged to the orthodox rural society and the image he gives of Indian and Northwestern society can to some extent be used as a source for the pre-Mauryan period, even if it really was written only in the third century B.C. I am not claiming that it was, only emphasizing that it is a possibility. We must always keep in mind the complications of his chronology and consider their significance in every case.

In addition to the chronological problems discussed above there is another difficulty with Pāṇini. With the extremely condensed sūtra style of his work, the cultural information actually contained in the work itself is rather meagre. On the other hand, the explanations and examples given by later Pāṇinists like Patañjali and the authors of the *Kāśikāvṛtti* contain much interesting additional information. These examples may go back even to Pāṇini's own time, and in any case they are worth noticing, but we must always keep in mind that we do not have them from Pāṇini himself. But very often they have been quoted as if they were, and this is bound to be a source of misguided conclusions. Several examples are cited in the present study, and I have never referred to Pāṇini himself without checking the reference from the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*.

The *Gaṇapāṭha* is also problematic. Its characteristic form, consisting of lists, often open ones (*ākṛtiganas*), makes many interpolations likely. So even if we may suppose that the original *Gaṇapāṭha* goes back to the times of Pāṇini himself or near to him, especially anything that is not situated at the beginning of a list may come from a later period.³⁷

2. The Arthaśāstra

The *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya is in any case later than our period, so that here I can be rather brief. The text has often been taken as an important source for the Mauryan period, and as such it could have contained much which could be applied even to earlier times. But its date has always been a matter of controversy, and now the studies of Scharfe, Trautman and Goyal³⁸ have definitely confirmed a late date, perhaps in the first century A.D. or even later. It was not a work written by a minister of Candragupta Maurya and it cannot be taken as a reliable account of the Mauryan period (or even of the theory as it

³⁶ Cf. Konow 1937, 5.

³⁷ On the *Gaṇapāṭha* and its problems see Cardona 1976, 164f. and especially Scharfe 1977, 102ff.

³⁸ Scharfe 1968, Trautman 1971 and Goyal 1985.

was taught during the Mauryan period), though much of it may originally be derived from the Mauryan period. The conclusions Stein derived from his comparison between Megasthenes and Kauṭilya, and the significant differences between them, are thus confirmed.³⁹

Yet *Arthaśāstra* and many other later texts are not wholly unusable even in a study dealing with the pre-Mauryan period. When it is important to exclude any possibility of later developments and influences, they cannot be used, but often this is not needed. In India, as well as in other countries, ancient society was slow to change in normal conditions. In chapters VII.–VIII. there will be several cases where evidence is collected from sources ranging over more than two millennia. The point may be to establish that some feature was already part of ancient Indian society or at least known to it, like for instance falconry, and was not introduced only by Muslims. In this way we can use many sources from different periods, but even then they should include some from the early period, if possible. The next period, c. 300 B.C. to 300 A.D. introduced many new features into Indian society, and often their origin can be derived from the Greek, Iranian and Central Asian peoples we so often find invading India from the Northwest.

3. Epics

It is more or less a consensus among Indologists that the *Mahābhārata* was gradually shaped during a long period extending perhaps four centuries either side of the beginning of the Western era (400 B.C. to 400 A.D.) and took its more or less final form in a recension of the Gupta period.⁴⁰ This recension is often considered, and with good grounds, as the ultimate text form we can attempt to reach by means of textual criticism. In practice, even this is often beyond our reach, and in only a few cases can we confidently say of a passage that this is the definite form it had already 1500 years ago.

As to the second great epic, the common opinion is that *Rāmāyaṇa* similarly acquired its final recension in the Gupta period. It also contains different strata, but here there is a main story that can easily be seen and the whole is a much more coherent one than the *Mahābhārata*. It is also somewhat younger than the other epic, though it contains some very old material.⁴¹ Vālmīki as the author of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is not such a completely vague figure as Vyāsa for the *Mahābhārata*. Yet the first and last book are commonly

³⁹ Stein 1922.

⁴⁰ See e.g. Van Buitenen's Introduction to the *Mbh* translation, p. XXIVf. See also his summary of the Western studies on *Mbh*, *ibid.* p. XXXIff. Agrawala 1956, 2ff. quotes several examples of Gupta material in the *Mahābhārata*, but stresses on page 7 that there is nothing later than this. The old discussion by Winternitz (1908, 389ff.) is still worth reading.

⁴¹ For a summary of the problems of dating the *Rāmāyaṇa*, see Goldman's introduction to the *R* translation, p. 14ff.

thought to be later additions.

Recently Goldman has stated that the oldest parts of the *Rāmāyaṇa* come from no later than the sixth century B.C., and even portions of the first book belong in the early fourth century B.C.⁴² But although it is true that the geographical and political milieu points to this period, and thus there might have been a kind of proto-text then, on the other hand the present text also contains later elements. And anyway, as Goldman himself states, his dates depend on the date of the Buddha (486 B.C.), and must therefore be corrected according to what is said in chapter VI.5. There is also the difficulty of giving too great an antiquity to the *Mahābhārata*, when stylistic criteria clearly point to an older date than that of the other epic.

Therefore, we cannot ascribe any great antiquity to any of the two epics in the form we have them. On the other hand, their individual parts are of different age and some might go back to a very early period. Some might indeed, but some certainly do not. Obviously the main story in both must be old, but not always in the form it has come to us. Among less critical scholars there is often a tendency to think that as parts of the *Mahābhārata* probably go back about 400 B.C. (or still earlier), we are entitled to select for this great antiquity precisely those passages we want to use as evidence for the early period. Of course this is not a sound method. We should somehow try and ascertain the real age (or at least the relative age) of our passages independently of the context in which they are used as evidence. Often this is not easy.

In some cases the cultural elements contained may give some help. Thus it has been noted that epic descriptions of cities (like Ayodhyā in *Rāmāyaṇa* I) – with all the poetic stereotypes – correspond to the stūpa reliefs of the second century B.C. Both reflect the same stereotypic idea of a city, and it clearly belongs to Mauryan and post-Mauryan times.⁴³ As the fully urbanized period only began with the Maurya dynasty, such passages cannot be given any greater antiquity. But they may also easily have been added to the text.

Then there is the archaeological approach used by Lal.⁴⁴ Excavations at the sites corresponding to those mentioned in the epics have brought the interesting result that occupation at the *Mahābhārata* sites begins with Painted Grey Ware,⁴⁵ while at the *Rāmāyaṇic* sites it only began in the early stage of Northern Black-Polished Ware. From this Lal infers approximate dates in the second half of the ninth century B.C. for the *Mahābhārata*, and in the early seventh century B.C. for the *Rāmāyaṇa*. But here an important modification must be made. When Lal seems to think that these dates are related to a “historical kernel” of the epics, I think we should instead think of an original frame of oral tradition which later gave rise to the epics. The situation seems to be analogous to Homeric epics, the *Iliad* reflecting the bronze age society of the late second millennium

⁴² Introduction to the *R* translation, p. 22.

⁴³ Erdosy 1985, 90f., see also Vasil'kov 1982, 53f.

⁴⁴ Summarized in Lal 1981, but see also Vasil'kov 1982, 51, 58 and passim.

⁴⁵ According to Parpola (1984a, 457) *Mbh* sites are not mentioned in the *Saṁhitā* and *Brāhmaṇa* texts.

B.C., but without being any historical source of this age, while the *Odyssey* belongs to a later age. Another problem is that it is not so clear how reliably we can identify the few places mentioned in the *Rāmāyaṇa*.⁴⁶ Still Dr. Lal's study is a very useful contribution to the epic question.

There are other means too. We should use internal criticism to try and ascertain the age and textual reliability of each particular passage. Not a great deal has been done on this line, the very massiveness of the *Mahābhārata* in particular makes it necessary that textual studies are mostly restricted to individual passages, and with the present study we cannot go very deeply into the problems involved. The most general division is of course into bardic and Brahmanic passages, and it is also quite obvious that the central story itself must be fairly old. But some very old passages can be included even in the Brahmanic passages, and as to the central story, it is not always clear that the extant form we have is necessarily a reliable heritage of the oldest epic phase. The outlines of the story certainly are, but what about the individual passages?⁴⁷

An interesting and for us important part of the epics are the various lists of peoples and countries like the *digvijaya* of Yudhiṣṭhira and the search of Sītā. It has been suggested that the catalogue form used here is a characteristic of great antiquity.⁴⁸ But there are two serious objections. First, the catalogue form is not necessarily a mark of antiquity as such, but of oral transmission, and this has probably had an important place in the history of the great epics for a very long time. We can also note that features of oral composition were often used at the manuscript stage, too, so that the boundary is very difficult to draw.⁴⁹ On the other hand, lists and catalogues, however old they may be, are very likely to attract interpolations. In western or northern directions all geographical lists contain names clearly belonging to the early centuries A.D.⁵⁰ and according to Agrawala the *yavadvīpaṃ saptarājyopasoḥhitam* in the search of Sītā belongs to a period after the third or the fourth century A.D. (Gupta period).⁵¹ And yet the lists were

⁴⁶ Without going into details I refer to the interesting studies of Bakker (1986, 1ff.), who concludes that old Sāketa was identified with the mythical capital of Rāma only in the fifth century A.D.

⁴⁷ I cannot here do better than quote the old verdict of Winternitz (1908, 399): "Es folgt aus all dem die wichtige Lehre, dass in Wirklichkeit das Alter eines jeden Stückes des Mahābhārata, ja eines jeden einzelnen Verses für sich bestimmt werden muss, und dass Aussprüche wie 'Das kommt schon im Mahābhārata vor' keinerlei Berechtigung und in chronologischer Beziehung gar keinen Sinn haben. Um so weniger Berechtigung hat es, mit dem Mahābhārata als Ganzem bestimmte Zeitangaben zu verbinden, als nicht nur in entschieden 'alten' Partien jüngere Einschübe stattgefunden haben, sondern auch ebenso oft in 'jüngeren' Partien sich sehr alte Stücke finden." To this we can only add that now we have the great help of the critical edition which Winternitz lacked (but tried vigorously to amend). But still the critical edition is not a final text (and this is true also for the *Rāmāyaṇa*) but just a good basis for further textual studies. Such studies can still greatly improve our understanding of the ancient Indian Epics. Without adding to my long list of references I would like to mention here the recent *Rāmāyaṇa* studies of Dr. Brockington.

⁴⁸ Puskás 1983, 206 and 1986, 262.

⁴⁹ Bakker *forthcoming* passim (mostly with Purāṇa material).

⁵⁰ E.g. in the *Digvijayaparvan* of *Mbh* (2, 23ff.) such names as the Harahūṇas and the Pahlavas are mentioned in the west (ch. 29), in the south perhaps even Antioch and Rome (2, 28, 49, see Edgerton 1938).

⁵¹ Agrawala 1956, 4 referring to R 4, 39, 28bc.

probably part of the epics much earlier and also contain much older material.

We may conclude by noting how futile the often attempted idea to find out a historical kernel in the Indian epics is likely to be. Of course there may very well be such a kernel, but the possibility of finding and discerning the original, historical elements among the later elements is slight. If we take the supposed eight hundred years or so for the gradual (and oral!) formation of the *Mahābhārata*, it is clear that such a kernel must be completely distorted at the end.⁵² And of course there is always the possibility that instead of a historical kernel the great epic is purely mythical in its origins. But if this is not accepted – and personally I am not much inclined to do so – the analysis of the epic text and its possible historical elements (especially in the case of the *Mahābhārata*) must always take into account the oral origin of epic poetry. A comparison with what is known about oral or originally oral epic traditions elsewhere (such cases as Homer, South Slavonian epics, Russian Bylinas etc.) is here of essential value. But when such an analysis may succeed in finding out historical elements and layers (rather than “kernel”),⁵³ the chronological problems involved reduce their value for our present study.

4. The Dharmaśāstra

Among the extensive dharma literature the part chronologically best suited for comparison with early Greek sources on India is without doubt the Vedic Dharmasūtras. They will be discussed as a part of the Vedic corpus in chapter VI.6. As for the later Dharma texts, there is no question that all of them are of later date, most of them so much so that it is best to ignore them at present. However, I shall at times quote the oldest texts, not as contemporary material, but in order to show that something was an established practice or at least known in traditional Hindu society.⁵⁴

The *Mānavadharmasāstra* and the *Yājñavalkyadharmasāstra* are commonly agreed to be the two oldest representatives of the Dharmaśāstra, and these two texts will be considered here. As so often in Indian literary history, there are no exact dates for them, and probably never will be. Tradition claims a very great antiquity for them, scholars have been more cautious. For the first, a date extending from the second century B.C. to the second A.D. has been suggested;⁵⁵ for Yajñavalkya, the third or fourth century A.D. or

⁵² See the short, but interesting paper by Vekerci (1974). For an attempt to find a new solution to the historical origin of the main story of the *Mahābhārata* see Parpola 1984a, 453ff. discussed by me in VIII.3.

⁵³ See Vasil'kov 1982.

⁵⁴ Like falconry in chapter VII.2.

⁵⁵ Winternitz 1920, 489 quoting Bühler, who is also, after a thorough examination, supported by Kane (1968, 327ff.).

even later.⁵⁶ It has also been pointed out that the Dharmasāstras are in fact slowly crystallized end products of early dharma schools.

In some cases I have also referred to the commentators on Manu, like Medhātithi (9th century A.D.) and Kullūka (between 1150 and 1300).⁵⁷ They belong to such a late period that they can even be dated, and they are about one and a half millennia later than our Greek sources. Thus, they have been consulted for only two reasons: to find a probable explanation for some unclear passage of Manu and to show that some practice was an established part of Hindu society at least in the pre-Islamic period.

5. Buddhist literature

There was a time when everything seemed to be clear. The death of the Buddha was established, sometimes it has even been called the first fixed date in Indian history.⁵⁸ Of course this was an exaggeration, the first fixed date is the expedition of Alexander, which also gives quite a good starting point for the chronology of the Mauryas.

Leaving out the various traditional dates still current in Buddhist countries, it was for a long time believed by most scholars that the death of the Buddha took place sometime in the early fifth century, probably about 480 B.C.⁵⁹ Yet this "corrected longer chronology" based on the (uncorrected) Theravāda Buddhist tradition has never been the only one, there are also attempts to establish the "short chronology", which is already found in most of the Buddhist sources in Sanskrit and Chinese.⁶⁰ Therefore, it has been accepted in Japan by Buddhists as well as by scholars.⁶¹ In the West, too, the shorter chronology has always found advocates, though the older ones provided defective arguments. This chronology has been propounded e.g. by Westergaard (1860), Kern (1875), E.J. Thomas (1946), C.G. Mendis (1947), Eggermont (1969/1971) and Bechert (1982/1986).⁶² It would be superfluous and take too much space to repeat the arguments so well presented by Eggermont and especially Bechert. After their studies I do not think that

⁵⁶ Winternitz 1920, 498. A somewhat older date is suggested by Kane (1968, 442ff.), who concludes: "There is nothing to prevent us from holding that the extant *smṛti* was composed during the first two centuries of the Christian era or even a little earlier" (*ibid.* 447).

⁵⁷ Dates according to Derrett 1973, 49.

⁵⁸ Cf. Bechert 1986, 3f.

⁵⁹ Various calculations have given 477, 478, 480, 483, 486 and 487 (Bechert 1986, 4). Bechert 1986, 5ff. and especially 24ff. summarizes the various arguments brought forth for these.

⁶⁰ Evidence summarized in Lamotte 1958, 14f. and Bechert 1986, 43f.

⁶¹ Bechert 1986, 44ff.

⁶² For Westergaard see Bechert 1986, 7, for Kern his own 1875, for Thomas and Mendis Bechert 1986, 19, for Eggermont his own 1969, 94ff., 1971, 69ff. and 1979, 55ff. and for Bechert his own 1982 and 1986.

the longer chronology can be maintained anymore.

Unfortunately, the short chronology does not give us any reliable date for the death of the Buddha. Various Buddhist sources date the coronation of Aśoka (268 B.C.) variously 70, 100, 116 or 160 *post nirvāṇam*, whilst one Chinese translation seems to indicate 290 B.C. as the date of nirvāṇa.⁶³ Modern scholars following the short chronology have suggested many dates mostly in the fourth century, but the actual evidence seems to be insufficient for any exact date.⁶⁴ With caution Bechert remarks that the exact date is probably impossible to discover. Yet it must be at least ten or twenty years before the expedition of Alexander, but perhaps not earlier, which means sometime in the mid-fourth century B.C.⁶⁵ Still more cautiously we can say that the Buddha probably died at least hundred years later than the common opinion has supposed.

This conclusion has far-reaching consequences as so many dates and chronological hypotheses of ancient India depend on the date of the Buddha. Many dates must be moved about a century later. Above all, this applies to the canonical texts of Buddhism. It is well-known that the various canonical texts have their origin in different periods, the latest parts being much younger than Aśoka.⁶⁶ And though the oldest parts most probably contain material from the Buddha's lifetime, their final redaction was only after his death. It is often a difficult task to say with certainty which part reflects faithfully the time of the Buddha and which has acquired its final form in later redaction. And in any case, the lifetime of the Buddha can no longer be extended to the sixth century. A reference to the Greeks (*yona*) and the Kambojas apparently as northwestern peoples in the *Majjhimanikāya* (*Assalāyanasutta*) suits well with the later date.⁶⁷

A special case in canonic literature and because of its contents a very important one for present study are the Jātakas. As is well known, only the verses (*gāthās*) are considered as canonical, while the prose is a commentary, the *Jātakaṭṭhavaṇṇanā*, traditionally ascribed to Buddhaghosa (5th century A.D.). But it seems that this ascription is rather arbitrary, and few scholars take it seriously. Perhaps the prose is written somewhat earlier than Buddhaghosa, and certainly old material is included in it. But when it is said that some Jātakas may go back to a time even beyond the Buddha himself, we must be cautious. This is not impossible, but there must be good grounds for such an assumption. Here it is important to see if the prose is more or less consistent with the verses (which is not always the case).⁶⁸

We must not pass over Jainism and its founder. Mahāvīra was an elder contemporary and rival of the Buddha; therefore, an attempt to change the chronology of the latter must necessarily be noted with respect to the former. In fact, this has already been done by

⁶³ Bechert 1986, 55f., 43 and 41.

⁶⁴ See the discussion in Bechert 1986, 19ff., 44ff. and 52ff.

⁶⁵ Bechert 1986, 39 and 52ff. Bechert finds a hundred years before Aśoka's coronation too round a number, as it indeed is. This (368 B.C.) was Eggermont's choice (1971, 75 and 1979, 56f.), but in a letter he informs me that he is now considering still later dates.

⁶⁶ See e.g. Bechert 1986, 38.

⁶⁷ Bechert 1986, 54f.

⁶⁸ See e.g. Alsdorf 1977, 30.

Eggermont and Bechert, and the foundations of the Jaina chronology (as far as they are independent of the Buddhist chronology) have turned out to be as weak as those of the Buddhist chronology.⁶⁹

6. Veda

On the whole, the Vedic chronology is very problematic. In standard textbooks we often read of a traditional system of subsequent periods for the *Rigveda*, later *Saṁhitās*, *Brāhmaṇas* and *Sūtras*, each period lasting at least two hundred years (and the *Sūtra* period more). As the Veda including the *Upaniṣads* precedes Buddhism and the Buddha, the dates are counted back from c. 500 B.C. Of course, it is not as easy as this. This chronology hails from Max Müller, who proposed it as early as 1859. It was a good working hypothesis but no more than that, and this was expressly stated by Max Müller himself. But in the absence of any better it has been referred to ever since, and nowadays it is often considered as a "common opinion of scholars", as an established theory or even a fact.

There are, or seems to be, only a few fixed points in the Vedic chronology, and unfortunately they are linked to Pāṇini or to the Buddha. As we have already seen the dates of these two are anything but settled, and in addition their relation to Veda has also been questioned. Though it is difficult to connect Pāṇini definitely with some text or text group, Thieme and others have succeeded to some extent in this.⁷⁰ But we still cannot draw chronological conclusions at all easily.⁷¹ And even if we could, a *terminus ad quem* obtained with the help of Pāṇini is not very useful in as much as the date of Pāṇini himself cannot be definitely fixed.

It is also too simple to say that Buddhism presupposes the Veda as a whole, as it is a reaction against it. Most of the Veda – the ritual itself and the ritual texts – is rather irrelevant to Buddhism and is not often mentioned in Buddhist texts.⁷² It is the *Upaniṣads* which are somehow related to Buddhism, and as they presuppose an older strata of the Vedic corpus, a chronological sequence is obtained. But even if it is accepted as such, we must note two points. Though a general idea about the Buddha and his doctrine *may* perhaps be formed, there are very few points where we can say that this or that particular

⁶⁹ Eggermont 1979, 57ff. and Bechert 1983 and 1986, 141ff.

⁷⁰ Scharfe 1977, 106 and Brucker 1980, 61f.

⁷¹ Without going into details I refer to Bronkhorst's unpublished paper I mentioned in connection with Pāṇini. After a criticism of existing attempts to antedate most of the Vedas (including Yāska) to Pāṇini, he concluded that the Vedic dates must probably be put forward by some two or three centuries. In the subsequent lively discussion it was rightly stressed that at least the *beginning* of the Veda cannot be put forward.

⁷² This was also pointed out by Bronkhorst.

passage hails from the Buddha himself. This means that the Upaniṣads perhaps precede only the canonical Buddhist texts, and in some cases this could even bring us to the first century B.C. In any case, the new Buddha chronology necessarily puts forward any date based on his dates by about a century.

But can we really say that the end of the Upaniṣads coincides with the life of the Buddha? It is probably not too much to suppose that ideas, like those proposed in the Upaniṣads, were known in his times, but this does not necessarily mean that our texts were already written.⁷³ It has been pointed out that the link between the Buddha and the Upaniṣads was even at best weak and distant (not necessarily in the temporal sense).⁷⁴ It was indeed. While Buddhism represents the new urban heterodoxy, the Upaniṣads belong to the conservative and orthodox rural world. As far as Buddhism and the Upaniṣads represent the same trend at all, the latter are an orthodox compromise. We must also be cautious in supposing a knowledge of a single text when we find identical tenets (but no clear quotation). The tenets were probably not exclusively Upaniṣadic, but a more general cultural property,⁷⁵ we simply have not got other texts than the Upaniṣads.

Therefore, it is very difficult to date definitely the late Vedic periods. Probably the two centuries of Max Müller were really the lowest limit. The differences, philological, religious as well as social, between different strata of the Vedic corpus are so great that we can easily add to its duration, even if the beginning cannot be postponed. The archaic language,⁷⁶ the close parallels with Iranian and with the Mitanni Aryans, the still western (the Indus and the Pañjab) geographical setting, the remarkably archaic religion,⁷⁷ even the (still somewhat ambiguous) archaeological evidence⁷⁸ – with all this one can hardly deny the traditional date sometime in the second half of the second millennium B.C. (if not even earlier) for the oldest part of the corpus, the *Rigveda*. Incontestable is also the general statement that the corpus came into being in several at least partly subsequent periods, though there was certainly some overlapping, too. It is perhaps still safe to place the later Sañhitās and even the Brāhmaṇas in the first half of the first millennium B.C. Consequently, they also necessarily precede any contact with the Greeks.⁷⁹

⁷³ Cf. Chandra's statement: "There cannot be much doubt that the oldest and most important Upaniṣads – the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*, the *Chāndogya*, and the *Aitareya*, in particular – were pre-Buddhistic, though not in their finally redacted form" (Chandra 1971, 317, my emphasis). Chandra takes up interesting points but after them he still concludes that the Upaniṣads were pre-Buddhistic (Ibid. 323).

⁷⁴ Chandra 1971, 320f.

⁷⁵ Cf. Chandra 1971, 322f.

⁷⁶ It was not fully understood anymore even in the later Vedic times. Thus, at the time of the codification of the *RV*, the prosody of its language was no longer fully understood, and the author of the *SB* (11, 5, 1) had great difficulties in understanding the Purūravas-Urvaśī hymn.

⁷⁷ The lively pantheon of the *RV* as opposed to the all-dominating sacrifice of later periods, not to speak of the speculation of the Upaniṣads and heterodox doctrines like Buddhism.

⁷⁸ See e.g. Allchin & Allchin 1982, Index s.v. *Rigveda* and Parpola (1988, 204ff. and 211ff., especially 216f.), who identifies the Dāsa forts conquered by Rigvedic Aryans as the fortified villages of Bronze Age Bactria and Margiana (Namazga V period c. 1800–1300 B.C.).

⁷⁹ Unfortunately, the Veda as the only literary source for early India gives us a very fragmentary picture as it reflects both socially and geographically a small section of what we often think of as ancient India.

It is thus with the Upaniṣads and the Sūtras that the real difficulty arises. As was already pointed out, even the so-called classical Upaniṣads may be later than is commonly supposed, but the Upaniṣads are not important to us in this study. As to the Sūtras, their period is necessarily very long, extending at least to the first half of the first millennium A.D. But the oldest Sūtras still belong to the pre-Mauryan period, and therefore are the best possible source for comparisons with the early Greek sources in India. In some cases the dates must perhaps be put somewhat later than is usually thought, but this does not change too much as the Sūtras are conservative works of an orthodox rural society with a definite prejudice against and even a hate for the towns, their increasing wordly power, the rising capitalism of their artisans and traders, and the new elements of their social life, such as the mixing of class rankings and heterodox doctrines.

Fortunately, it is just the Sūtras where we can sometimes find the kind of material we are looking for. The Gṛhya and especially the Dharmasūtras give a lively picture of rural high class (Brahman) society and prejudices. Of course, it is important to keep in mind that they do not describe the society as it actually was, instead they paint an ideal picture of society as the orthodox Brahmans would like to have it. But often we can read between the lines: what was strictly condemned clearly also existed.⁸⁰

There seems to be a general agreement that the oldest of the extant Dharmasūtras is Gautama, who is mentioned as an authority by Baudhāyana and Vāsiṣṭha.⁸¹ There is a problematic passage stating that children born of a Brahman man and a Yavana woman are Śūdras.⁸² But this is not conclusive, as the passage may be an interpolation, but may also indicate an early contact with the Greeks.⁸³ If we follow Winternitz as the exponent of the traditional view, Āpastamba should belong to the fifth or fourth century B.C.,⁸⁴ and Baudhāyana is somewhat older.⁸⁵ For Vāsiṣṭha Winternitz says only that he must be later than Gautama, Kane gives him a definitely later date.⁸⁶ The last of the important

With the later phase we have additional evidence from Buddhist and other sources, but for the early period it is wise to keep in mind the words Przyluski (1927, 184) wrote down long ago: "On voudrait expliquer l'Inde entière par le veda et l'on oublie que les hymnes védiques ne reflètent qu'incomplètement une civilisation déjà complexe." But this early period does not concern us much here.

⁸⁰ An interesting contrast is seen in a comparison between the ideal society of the Dharmasūtras and Dharmaśāstras, and the society as given in the epics, not to speak of the *Arthaśāstra*. In spite of the orthodox garb the epics are often given by their redactors, they contain much which was clearly against the Dharma ideal. Think for instance how the Pāṇḍus broke all the established laws of chivalry and even Rāma is not faultless in this respect. There are also the fierce Bhṛṅgus, and they were Brahmans (for them, see Goldman 1977).

⁸¹ Winternitz 1920, 481. Its date has been discussed by Kane (1968, 22ff.), who concludes that it is not later than 600 to 400 B.C. (*ibid.* 36).

⁸² *GautDh* 4, 21 *pārasavayavanakaraṇasūdrāṅ chūdretyeke*.

⁸³ Bühler (Introduction to SBE II, lvi) suggests an interpolation, Kane (1968, 35f.) suggests an early knowledge of the Greeks. For *pārasava*, which might denote the Persians, see Mayrhofer s.v.

⁸⁴ Winternitz 1920, 480 quoting Bühler. Kane (1968, 53ff.) ends up with the same date (450–350 B.C.), adding "when the Mīmāṃsā system had already been founded" (*ibid.* 70).

⁸⁵ Winternitz 1920, 481. Kane (1968, 38ff.) concludes that he must be later than Gautama, and suggests a date between 600 and 300 B.C. (*ibid.* 52).

⁸⁶ Winternitz 1920, 481f. and Kane 1968, 94ff. According to Kane (*ibid.* 105) it is "tentatively assigned to the period between 300–100 B.C."

Dharmasūtras, the *Viṣṇu-Smṛti*, is already later, at least in its extant form, where both Manu and Yajñavalkya are quoted.⁸⁷ When there are clear arguments in some cases for an internal chronology, an absolute chronology is very difficult to find.⁸⁸

Brucker's long discussion of the chronology of the sūtras is based on internal relations between the texts.⁸⁹ As far as the Dharmasūtras are concerned he divides them into three groups. The first and oldest contains Gautama, Hārīta and Baudhāyana, the second group contains Āpastamba, Śaṅkhalikhita, Satyāśāḍha (Hiraṇyakeśin) and Vāsiṣṭha.⁹⁰ An absolute chronology is gained accepting Bühlers c. 450 B.C. for Āpastamba, who is then preceded by the first group, and is himself the oldest member of the second.⁹¹

The contents of the Dharmasūtras also give some evidence which can be used in attempts to date them. They contain information related to material culture and social history, and interesting parallels are often offered by other disciplines like archaeology. Among such attempts we can note Smith, who compared the fiscal and monetary accounts (including taxes, monopolies, duties, coinage, loans and interest) of the Dharmasūtras and constructed accordingly an internal and even absolute chronology, corroborated with other kinds of information, for instance military (knowledge and use of the chariot, cavalry and elephants). Thus he finds approximate dates for the four classical works which follow: Gautama c. 500 B.C., Baudhāyana c. 430 B.C., Vāsiṣṭha c. 330 B.C. and Āpastamba in the late third century B.C. in Andhra country.⁹² On the other hand, the anachronistic and idealistic (rural and Brahman) character of the works – of which Smith was fully conscious – as well as the development of archaeology and economic history in the last thirty years weakens these absolute dates, and a different set of evidence may even make the internal chronology seem different. Still, we can with some probability ascribe part of the Dharmasūtras and much of the information contained in most of them (leaving out some late specimens like the *Viṣṇu*) to the pre-Mauryan period.

⁸⁷ Winternitz 1920, 482f. and Kane 1968, 112ff., both with more arguments for its late date. According to Kane (*ibid.* 125), the original *Vaiṣṇavadharmasūtra* may belong to a period 300 B.C. – 100 A.D., "the present inflated text" to 400–600 A.D.

⁸⁸ Kane 1968, 52: "All these dates are more or less tentative and there is no finality about them at least at present."

⁸⁹ Brucker 1980, 42ff. For a table of the relations between the Dharmasūtras see *ibid.* 49.

⁹⁰ Brucker 1980, 59.

⁹¹ Brucker 1980, 59ff.

⁹² Smith 1957, 192ff.