

THE GODS AND THE HERETICS
CRISIS AND RUIN OF INDIAN BUDDHISM



Cāmuṅḍā seated on dead *asura* in the shape of the Buddha.
Photo courtesy National Museum, New Delhi.

GIOVANNI VERARDI

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Appendices by

FEDERICA BARBA

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Preface

This book was first published in 2011 by Manohar in New Delhi with the title *Hardships and Downfall of Buddhism in India*, which received, as to be expected, mixed reviews. What surprised me most were the positive ones, especially when made with the intent to accurately pull all the threads of the discussion and understand the different levels of the enquiry. Many are the changes brought to the text, not considering the correction of mistakes and oversights that even the dedication of the publisher could not avoid. In some cases it is a matter of minor adjustments, but in several others of additions and even rectifications of perspectives, as in the third chapter, where I thought it necessary to distinguish with clarity between the changes observable in the *samghas* and the effort of the emerging Mahāyāna that, in a much changed situation, aimed at strengthening the religion — an issue fraught with problems that I hope someone shall be able to discuss in depth. The book, thoroughly revised, now has a new title, which, I think, better reflects the main thesis it presents.

One of the interpretive model I used in writing the book pointed directly towards its target, that of challenging the commonly accepted opinion that Indian Buddhism disappeared from the country where it had originated for reasons due to a poorly explained internal weakening, without violence having had any role in it; the second model was addressed at collecting the evidence from fields of research rarely visited by the students of Indian Buddhism: Hindu texts (especially the Purāṇas), Hindu iconography, and archaeological data. I have also tried to focus on the chronologies, with the aim of giving some order — within the limits of a study of this kind — to the interaction of the different social and religious groups

present in a scenario as vast as, at times, convulsive. On the constrained limits of this search into, and interpretation of the sources, the reader is referred to the Introduction, practically unchanged with respect to the 2011 edition. Once again, I regret not having been able to supply the text, but for a single addition, with a larger number of illustrations, especially in relation to the evidence provided or suggested by the Purāṇas and the Tamil literature, and to the processes set in motion by the Vajrayāna.

Recently, contributions by Indian scholars have begun to appear that address the issue of violence: an obvious theme in any history but denied in modern India, which on the alleged lack of violence in its own history has built an actual foundation myth. Contributions have also appeared that rediscuss the relations between political-dynastic powers and what is traditionally attributed to them in terms of religious policy, patronage, and chronological dynamics. If only a small part of these studies owes something to this book, having written it shall not have been useless.

I am grateful to the persons who helped me most in preparing this edition, which was made possible thanks to the concern of the Venerable Bhikkhunī Dhammadinnā, to whom I am also indebted for having made accessible to me materials which otherwise I would not have been able to see. A very special thank goes to Margarita Vázquez Formoso of the Fundación Bodhiyāna of Buenos Aires, who carried out the typesetting with care and patience, and to the President of the same foundation, the Venerable Bhikṣu Zhihan, for having allowed the space for the completion of this task. Thanks are also due to Claudine Bautze-Picron, Daniela De Simone, Minoru Inaba and Tiziana Lorenzetti. Last but not least, it is my pleasure to acknowledge Aditya Goel's readiness to embrace the project of publishing this book with Aditya Prakashan, once again, in New Delhi.

GIOVANNI VERARDI

Introduction

This book is not so much about Buddhism, as about Indian history, a general knowledge of which is taken for granted. It is a kind of advanced history of India aimed at discussing the mechanisms that started to set in motion the events that, with increasing force, characterised the Indian middle age until the thirteenth century, and at examining the often elusive or disregarded evidence that document the weakening and collapse of Buddhism. I do not share the inclusive paradigm that assumes that in ancient India, for all the recognised differences, there was — we speak here of the structured systems — a single development model, broadly shared by all the forces in the field. I see India as the only civilisation of the ancient world that generated two opposing models of social and economic relations that coexisted for a long time in conflict, whatever the attempts to reduce or mask the incompatibilities. Far from being a history with a low level of conflict, it was highly confrontational. Despite the widespread tendency to underestimate historical discontinuities and create inclusive paradigms, it is possible to deconstruct Indian history entering it through the visible fractures that mark its surface. These fractures are comparable to those encountered in volcanic soils, where fumaroles and sulphurous deposits make one understand that an explosive magma is lying beneath. In many cases, fissures have unexpectedly widened, allowing a vision that, if not unprecedented, is nevertheless noteworthy.

The issues raised in this book are numerous, but two emerge, I think, with particular clarity. The first is that whereas the idea of state and society the Buddhists had in mind was compatible with the extremely varied peoples inhabiting the subcontinent, the Brahmanical model implied their forced incorporation into the well-guarded perimeter of an agrarian society. It was not just a state society that, especially from the Gupta period onwards, started being established in vast portions of India but a *varṇa* state society, and this made the difference. Its establishment caused the arising of an extremely strong opposition, generally underestimated by historians. The *varṇa* state was opposed not only by the natives who, against their will, saw themselves downgraded to the lower peasantry ranks, but also by the Buddhist *brāhmaṇas* who were in favour of a trading society less dependent on agricultural resources, and consequently less bound to the strict rules of *varṇa* and *jāti*. The second point is that the imposition of the rules of the *varṇa* state implied much violence. This appears most clearly in the non-brahmanised regions of central and north-eastern India where, from the eighth century onwards, the followers of the Vajrayāna decided to play the card of social revolt, but is already clear from the very beginning of the process: hence the central position that Gupta policy is given in this book. Intimidation and violence also caused a number of transformations in the religion of Dharma, where, rather early, a section of the *śramaṇas* started organising themselves according to a community model paralleling the Brahmanical priesthood and lifestyle.

The historical domain covered by this book is thus one where an antinomial model takes the shape of a religious system, Buddhism, which is bound, by ideology and vio-

lence, from within and without, to renegotiate continuously and dramatically its own antinomial position. In the course of the historical process, this resulted either in being suppressed or else in being cornered into a subaltern position. The antinomial stance of early Buddhist thought and early Buddhist communities, not to speak of later forms of the religion such as the Vajrayāna, condemned them to the impossibility of emerging out of their subaltern positioning throughout the whole of ancient and medieval history.

The large gaps that still exist in Indian history favour the persistence of a positivist approach. Positive data are in demand not just for filling these gaps, however, but because they have the unparalleled force of always being there, whatever the theoretical construct. The extraordinary force of philological research work, for example, derives from this. Nevertheless, data do change their position on the chessboard according to constructs, and while some of them come fully into focus, others end up in an indistinct periphery. My aim has been not so much to accumulate data, although a number of new facts are provided, but, rather, to reconsider them and rearrange them in the puzzle that the early historical and medieval history of India still is. Much though there is to explore within the inclusive historiographical model that we have received, I think that new, decisive data are the product of new perspectives, and not the other way round. I hope that this book can serve this purpose.

The great progress of Buddhist studies worldwide, aimed at constituting the “literary corpus” of Indian Buddhism (Cristina Scherrer-Schaub) and largely focused on the recovery of texts lost in India but preserved in other traditions, has led to a perceptible decline in interest towards Buddhism in modern Indian scholarship and society. Western and East Asian scholars

working on the corpus often have — there are naturally many remarkable exceptions — an episodic, incomplete knowledge of Indian history, and, in addition, they do not interact with Indian scholars as happened in the past. For their part, scholars in India have pulled out of the venture, their interests, and those of their country, lying elsewhere. In a sense, India is reverting to a pre-nineteenth century situation, when Buddhism was forgotten when not remembered with hostility. Yet it was precisely the great Indian intellectuals of the past, especially Bengali intellectuals, who, at least with regard to the facts discussed in this book, had a clear perception of how things had gone, and who preserved the memory of events that, in some parts of the country, belonged to a not too distant past.

Regarding the “data archive” of Indian Buddhism, the situation is partly reversed, but to nobody’s advantage. Archaeology has long since become the exclusive concern of Indian scholars, and this has created an asymmetry that contributes to deepen the gap between the parties and risks undermining the validity of the new evidence, allocating it to the exclusive domain of nationalistic self-congratulation and tourist use. For all the criticism that today we reserve for the idea of Indian Buddhism created in the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, its force lay in the close interrelationship which then existed between the literary corpus and the data archive. The restoration of the Pāli Canon and of a certain number of Mahāyāna texts remains closely related in everybody’s mind to the stūpas of Sanchi and the monasteries of Taxila. It was an extraordinarily powerful model, regardless of whether those associations were right or wrong. This unity is now broken. The data archive is broken in turn, because Indian scholars monopolise fieldwork but show little interest for

the iconographical section. Here non-Indian scholars are again more active, although often disinclined to come face to face with the darker aspects of Indian history.

An important limitation to the understanding of both early and medieval Buddhism is the scarce attention paid by students of the religion of Dharma to the Brahmanical world — a traditional attitude that has now become more widespread because of the shifting north and eastwards of philological studies. Yet we might provocatively argue that while it is possible to write a history of India that ignores Buddhism, the more limited task of writing a history of Indian Buddhism that ignores Brahmanical India seems hardly possible. Nevertheless, this is frequently done, and the result is a partial if not mistaken view of the matter that risks affecting also the work of the most self-confident, specialised fields of the research. Brahmanical sources, be they prescriptive texts, literary works or religious-mythical compilations like the Purāṇas, contain a surprising amount of information on Buddhism. Students of Brahmanical literature have taught us to read literary texts paying attention to the multiplicity of meanings and references specific to *sandhyābhāṣā*, and recently the idea has come to the fore that iconographies respond to the same subtle, complex network of allusions and overtones. Nothing new under the sun, some will say, except that the teachings and methodology of the Warburg school have so far failed to establish themselves in Indian studies, where the barrier interposed by the constant resorting to a symbolism nurtured by the ideas of the early twentieth century seems unbreakable. Though it is not only a question of *sandhyābhāṣā*, if the breach is now open by acknowledging the existence of instruments specific to India for understanding texts and images, we can only rejoice. The task is intimidating,

because historians of religions should also contribute to this effort by offering us a more realistic view of the Brahmanical world.

The reference made above to the Warburg school suggests some considerations. Students of classical antiquities and of the Renaissance, whatever their specialisation may be, know what colleagues are up to in bordering sectors of their own field of research, and the wealth of such studies comes from a continuous dialogue between all the sectors, and many a scholar can competently address different sets of data. Some may say that in the case of ancient and medieval India data archives and literary corpora have too many empty boxes to allow us to proceed in this direction, desirable as it may be. I believe this is only partly true. When Aby Warburg began his investigations on the Italian Renaissance, things were not much different from at least some periods of Indian history, given the strong discontinuity in the history of Italy that we can symbolically fix to the year 1527. The Catholic Reform had strongly reshaped, and in part deleted, the past, and it was now necessary to retrieve it using a methodology that broke the boundaries between disciplines. There are no cheap shortcuts here: for those who use the tools of the Warburg school, it would be unthinkable to make easy escapes into the region of ill-defined or consolatory symbolisms, either fuelled by texts or iconographies, and, above all, to adhere to any form of reassuring (and authoritarian) inclusiveness. Historical modelling goes together with extremely careful distinctions.

The idea of writing this book has its distant origin in the unexpected results of an excavation carried out in Kathmandu in the 1980s, which the reader will find briefly summarised in a section of Chapter IV. There was indisputable evidence of

a Buddhist sanctuary dismantled and interfaced to make way for a Vishnuite temple, the operation being sanctioned by an inscription containing a *damnatio memoriae* of the Saugatas. My career as a student of things Indian had begun in the 1970s, when the long debate on the end of Indian Buddhism held in the past had gone out of fashion. My explanation of the facts proved correct but rudimentary, and as to the papers I wrote on this subject from different angles in the following years, they turned out to be mere attempts, only partly successful, to fill a gap in the knowledge. During the sabbatical year 1997-98, I spent a few months at the Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient in Pondicherry and at the Asiatic Society in Kolkata, where I could go through much of what had been written on the matter in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. In Kolkata, I met a young *paṇḍita* with whom, for a few years, I exchanged an extensive correspondence regarding known and less known texts containing material relevant for the work that I felt an increasingly urgent need to do. At the time, the idea of re-examining known textual sources and making new textual sources known — some in Bengali — seemed feasible. It became increasingly clear, however, that this would have meant preparing a set of preliminary works each implying a considerable effort. Moreover, for the book to be written, several other sources were needed, and they were written in a number of Indian languages, from Tamil to Kannada, let alone the Tibetan, Chinese and Islamic sources. All the relevant passages, it appeared, would have required, for one reason or another, a very careful re-examination. In the end, the only viable solution has been for me to give the texts in the available translations. Regarding the Brahmanical texts, I have limited myself, when confronted with some passages glossed by

learned insiders, to indicate to the reader how challenging their interpretation may happen to be. The subtle implications of these texts can hardly be understood without opening a dialogue with learned *paṇḍitas*.

Iconographies are often better dated than texts, and cannot be easily altered. Moreover, they are part of specific, recognisable contexts, to which they can be referred, at least to an extent, even when they have been moved away from their original place. Since patronage is necessary for iconographies to come into existence, they often provide us with precise references to the historical reality of a given place. Far from providing a mere illustration of a text, they often make explicit what in the texts is left out or only ambiguously alluded to. Here we are in the domain of iconology, which, as already said, is still struggling to make its way into Indian studies, where the mechanical juxtaposition of text and image continues to be proposed almost unchallenged. The recovery of meaning in the sense indicated by Erwin Panofsky still seems, with notable exceptions, a distant objective. For all the information gaps that characterise the contexts discussed in this book, I have tried to give a contextualised interpretation of images or suggest for them a credible scenario, deliberately ignoring the metaphysical and theological level. I have aimed neither too low (a mere description of little significance for my argument) nor too high (a discussion of overburdening priestly symbols, of equally little significance), and if some conclusions sound disturbing, this interpretive level provides us, I think, with the maximum historical information. The enormous weight of violence expressed by a large proportion of Brahmanical images and, later on, by the images of Vajrayāna Buddhism, cannot be ascribed, *sic et simpliciter*, to the world of symbols but require

a more specific, historically motivated explanation. Limitations and constraints have affected this part of the work, too. With few exceptions, I have utilised material published in art history studies. During the writing of this book, I could visit only some major museums and a few sites, and it has been impossible for me to organise extensive and repeated surveys in central and north-eastern India, where I especially wanted to go. The iconographical output of Indian regions other than those mentioned in the book is ignored, and inevitable though this is, it is not less regrettable. Finally, I regret that only a part of the drawings could be provided that *in votis* should have accompanied the text.

The third class of sources I have utilised are archaeological, but although this is my specific area of investigation, there is, regrettably, not much to say. *Per se*, the archaeological evidence is the only one definable as objective. The facts underlying both the setting in of the process of stratification and the production of artefacts are of course due to players comparable to those who produced texts and iconographies, but the slow formation of the archaeological deposit escapes the control of political players and ideologues. When diggings begin, a mound is really the objective whole of what has taken place. Unfortunately, even the best excavation is a compromise, because of its complexity and the technicalities involved. As regards the majority of the sites mentioned in this book, we face, in addition, inadequate excavations, where the loss of evidence has been enormous. The situation cannot be remedied because, unlike literary texts, which can be re-examined now and again, the archaeological text is difficult to reassess in that it is destroyed on reading. What we have is thus scattered evidence, partly handed over to us, if ever, by incomplete

reports, and partly forgotten in inaccessible storehouses. Nevertheless, the reader will find information based on this kind of data throughout the book, and will also find a reassessment of the sites of Bodhgayā and Sarnath by Federica Barba in the Appendices.

The book is divided into six chapters. In the first, the issues I have raised are seen in perspective. Although the scholars of the past generations had access to a smaller amount of information and paid little attention to the social implications of the issues at stake, many of them had a more realistic vision of Indian past than the historians of the period of Independence and even modern historians. I fully distance myself from the current trend that sees a colonial construct in any position taken by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholars. Many of the ideas that nurtured foreign students were those of the learned *babus* they worked with, and by the end of the nineteenth century Indian scholars mastered the new methodologies very well, influencing the debate.

The second chapter tries to explain that Buddhism belongs to a cultural horizon that is vaster than India, something that has marked its destiny — in India, in the first place. For all the paramount contributions of Indian historians to the understanding of early Buddhism, it has not been fully realised how unprecedented was the attempt at building an antinomial society. The role of Aśoka as a Buddhist *cakravartin* must be clearly asserted, while the early attacks on the religion of Dharma ought to be seen within the framework of a deeply revised chronology provided by the archaeological evidence. This revision ends up with assigning to the Śuṅgas the role of pioneer supporters of a new Brahmanical orthodoxy based on

the encounter of Vedic ritualists and new theistic movements, without compromising with the world of the *śramaṇas*. If we pay due attention to chronology, we also realise that the Guptas — we go now to the third chapter — have nothing to do with Buddhism, which succeeded in re-establishing itself in some regions only around the mid-fifth century to coincide with the loosening of the powerful political and administrative network created by a dynasty that was supported by the new orthodox groups. The Kali Age literature is an unequivocal sign of Brahmanical hostility towards the *śramaṇas* and the social sectors that they represented. While the difficult times experienced by Buddhism in the middle Ganges valley in the early fifth century is documented by Faxian and other sources, in the new kingdoms of the Deccan this hostility turned into a cleansing policy. The idea of a large Buddhist oecumene, fuelled by new trading perspectives, came again to the fore at the time of Harṣavardhana and of an expanding Tang China, but Xuanzang's enthusiasm and involvement in the project did not prevent the great Chinese intellectual bearing witness to the ground lost by Buddhism in many Indian regions, starting from the North-West.

In the fourth chapter, after addressing a few methodological issues, I have discussed the poorly understood question of the doctrinal debates characteristic of the Indian scene. The stakes were the loss of political power and, therefore, of patronage, and the presence of militant, theistic groups transformed the debates into ordeals where the Buddhists were doomed to be the losers. All this should be seen as part of the slow but unrelenting occupation of the tillable lands by the *brāhmaṇas*, who dislodged the former owners or put under cultivation the lands of the natives, clashing with non-agricultural peoples.

Intimidation and violence became frequent. Militias were created which brought destruction to the Sramanic establishments and social network, pushing for the construction of temples of the gods and the imposition of *varṇāśramadharmā*. In border regions like Orissa (the Pālas were ruling in the neighbouring territories), minority groups like the Kāpālikas were tolerated in that they took upon themselves the great sin of selectively getting rid of high-caste Buddhists.

The fifth chapter addresses at some length the question of the long, multi-faceted fight against the heretics as allegorised in Brahmanical texts and iconographies. A distinction is made between the battlefield, a ground where official war was waged, and the suppression of those who opposed not just the state but the *varṇa* state. The latter was a qualitatively different war. At the representational level, goddesses like Cāmuṇḍā and the *yoginīs* are shown to have been performing this task on the fault-line along the Vindhya beyond which the Buddhist strongholds of Bihar and Bengal were located. As regards the Buddhists, they probably started reacting to violence rather early, but developed a coherent system of defence at the theoretical and factual level with the Vajrayāna.

The last chapter opens with the attempt at providing a picture of the Indian scene at the eve of the Muslim invasion. A section of the Buddhist *śramaṇas* was a priesthood composed of married monks, and the others were increasingly radicalised exponents of the Vajrayāna, either *siddhas* or monks, pitted against the attempt at normalisation and integration into the *varṇa* state of the Buddhist strongholds of Magadha, Bengal and upper Orissa. When the Brahmanical powers understood that striking an agreement with the Muslims — that which had not happened in Sind — could better serve their interests

than continually lost battles, they bargained for the establishment of tributary but strict *varṇa* states (the best example is Mithilā) against the final suppression of Buddhism.

The implosion of Magadha has cast a long shade on northern India, conditioning its history to the present day, and awaits proper investigation. It would be high time for Indian historians, the only ones who are in a position to access and discuss the large amount of existing documentation, to abandon every form of reticence and give us at least a part of the true story.

CHAPTER I

Historical Paradigms

THE PARADIGM OF DISCOVERY

Very little was known on Indian Buddhism when scholarly research began at the end of the eighteenth century. Today we are inclined to believe that, though neglected for a long time, the monuments characterising the landscape of South Asia, from the monasteries of Taxila in north-western Punjab to the stūpas of Sanchi in the Vindhya, from the holy place of Sarnath near Benares to the caves of Ajanta in western Deccan, have always been there as the visible, concrete witness of a complex but shared history. But it is hardly so. Two centuries ago none of these places was known, their ancient names having also been forgotten: they often still are. The physical traces of Buddhism had vanished but for some abandoned and unaccountable ruins in remote estates and jungles. The Indian historical landscape looked rather different from what we see now. Similarly, nowhere were the Buddhist texts we are familiar with available, and nobody retained any memory of them. What today, after two centuries of research, is for us a crucial part of the history of India and Asia, had disappeared from the horizon of Indian history. The little that was known was based on the living tradition of South-Eastern Asia, China (of which few had direct experience) and Sri Lanka, a country that only later, however, was to play a central role in the recovery of the religion of Dharma. And yet, in 1788, it was well known that

“[t]he *Brahmans* universally sp[oke] of the *Bauddhas* with all the malignity of an intolerant spirit”:¹ Sir William Jones, unable to understand why, despite this, they considered the Buddha an incarnation of Viṣṇu, imagined the existence of two Buddhas, and it is interesting for us to know that “another Buddha, one perhaps of his followers in a later age, assuming his name and character, attempted to upset the whole system of the *Brahmans*, and was the cause of that persecution, from which the *Bauddhas* are known to have fled into very distant regions”.² It was in 1794 that at Sarnath the workmen of Jagat Singh, *dīvān* of the *rājā* of Benares, discovered the inscribed pedestal of a Buddha image and two stone reliquaries.³ When in 1798 Jonathan Duncan, British Resident of Benares, broke the news of the discovery,⁴ a great interest developed for the antiquities of the site. Several British officers started digging “in many places around” and unearthed a great number of “flat tiles, having representations of Buddha modelled upon them in wax [...]. Many were deposited in the Museums and collections of private individuals”, any trace of them being soon lost.⁵ Only later, in 1815, it was possible for the members of the Asiatic Society in Kolkata to admire the sculptures found by Colonel Colin Mackenzie during the excavation he had carried out at the site.⁶ In 1788, Charles Wilkins, the translator of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, had published an inscription found at Bodhgayā in the first issue of the *Asiatick Researches*. The

¹ *AsRes* 2 (1790): 123 (W. Jones in his essay “On the Chronology of the Hindus Written in January, 1788”, pp. 111–46).

² *Ibid.*: 124.

³ *ASIR* 1 (1871, A. Cunningham): 114–15, 118–19.

⁴ *AsRes* 5 (1797): 131–33. For Duncan, “the worshippers of Buddha [were] a set of Indian heretics”, a piece of information that only *paṇḍitas* could have provided him.

⁵ Cunningham (1863: cix) quoted Emma Roberts (R. Elliot & E. Roberts, *Views of India, China, and on the Shores of the Red Sea*, 2 vols., London 1835; vol. 2, p. 8). The “flat tiles”, of which “there were cart loads”, were, clearly, votive tablets.

⁶ Sahni (1923: 7).

Buddha there appeared as a manifestation of Viṣṇu, and was recognised as the deity of the place (“the province of Keekātā”), where he had erected his “house”.⁷ The inscription drew attention to the place of the Awakening.⁸ Bodhgayā was the only Buddhist site that had never been completely forgotten, and in 1811 Francis Buchanan, the indefatigable surveyor and intelligencer to whom we are indebted for a number of works,⁹ gathered a still living tradition regarding the mechanisms by which the brāhmaṇas had appropriated the place.

According to “[t]he only person of the sect of the Buddhas” found in the district,

Gautama [...] lived some years in that vicinity, under a large tree which is therefore considered holy by his followers, and is called the Gautama Bat. The orthodox call the same tree Akshay Bat, and it is one of the chief places of worship at Gaya. A sacred pool near this tree is called Gautama kunda by the Buddhists, and Rukmini kunda by the orthodox.¹⁰

Buchanan’s informant stated that “all the other places of worship at Gaya are the invention of Vyas, a person who lived long after Gautama, who introduced the doctrine of caste, and the worship of Vishnu, and who, having fabricated the legend of Gayasur, pointed out places to correspond”.¹¹ The site had

⁷ *AsRes* 1 (1788): 284–87; cf. pp. 286–87; R. Mitra (1878: 202–203). The inscription, dated Vikram Samvat 1005, had been copied from a stone found in Bodhgayā in 1785. For Kīkaṭa, see below, Chapter V.

⁸ According to some, the inscription was a forgery (R. Mitra 1878: 203–206), but Horace H. Wilson (1865a: 180) thought that there was no reason to question its authenticity; cf. also Fergusson (1884: 80, n. 1).

⁹ On Buchanan, see Allen (2003: 10 ff. and passim).

¹⁰ Buchanan (1936, I: 100).

¹¹ *Ibid.*: 100–101. An abridged version of Buchanan’s report on Patna and Gayā was published by Montgomery Martin in the first volume of *The History, Antiquities, Topography, and Statistics of Eastern India [...]*, published in London in 1838. Vyāsa (Vyas) is the ṛṣi variously considered to be the arranger of the Vedas, as well as the author of the *Mahābhārata* and the Purāṇas. On the Brahmanical appropriation of Bodhgayā, see below in this chapter, in Chapters V and VI, and especially Appendix 1.

been spoilt of many Buddha images, which had been carried to Gayā, where there was “no trace of any considerable building of the least antiquity”.¹²

Buddhism remained almost unknown until the 1840s,¹³ but it was commonly believed that the relationship between Buddhism and Brahmanism had been marked by deep conflict. In the sixth part of his long essay devoted to the origin and decline of Christianity in India published in the *Asiatic Researches*, Lieutenant Francis Wilford reported that the brāhmaṇas “unanimously acknowledge[d]” the former practise of holding “conferences” (i.e. doctrinal debates) between them and the Buddhists, and that towns appointed for the purpose, called *Charchita nagari*, were selected. “One of them is mentioned in the *Cumáricá-c’handá*, according to which ‘[i]n the year 3291 of the *Caliyuga* (or 191 after Christ) *King Sudraca* will reign in the town of Charchita-nagari, and destroy the *workers of iniquity*.’ This points out a persecution in religious matters, at a very early period”. Wilford further noted that

[t]hese conferences ended in bloodshed, and the most cruel and rancorous persecution of the followers of Buddha, even from the confession of the Bráhmens themselves. They were tied hand and foot, and thus thrown into rivers, lakes, ponds, and sometimes whole strings of them. Be this as it may, the followers of Budd’ha did not fail to retaliate whenever it was in their power; for Dr. F. Buchanan informs me, that in the *Dekhin* the *Jainas* make their boast of the cruelties that they exercised at different

¹² Buchanan (1936, I: 101).

¹³ In his essay on the history of Kashmir based on the *Rājatarāṅgiṇī* (*AsRes* 15, 1825: 1–119), Horace H. Wilson wrote, “[...] it is equally inexplicable also how a prince of central India, should have borne so prominent a share, in the introduction of a religious innovation, the earliest vestiges of which are so clearly referable to the North West of India, to Bactria or even to Tartary” (p. 112).

times upon the Brāhmins, and that there are even inscriptions still extant in which they are recorded.¹⁴

Wilford largely depended, for his works, on the misleading information provided to him by the *paṇḍitas* of Benares,¹⁵ and was prone to “hasty generalizations”¹⁶ and groundless theories, but the information given in the quote above reflects ancient and widespread beliefs handed down by the brāhmaṇas themselves.¹⁷ To make just an example, one century later T. A. Gopinatha Rao, the founder of modern research on Indian iconography, was to report that as late as the mid-nineteenth century the belief among the teachers of history in the schools and colleges of Travancore was that “Buddhism died in the land of its birth not long after its birth, and that the Brahmins killed it and drove away all of its followers”.¹⁸

Horace Hayman Wilson, who was appointed Secretary to the Asiatic Society in 1811 and was to become the most distinguished student of Sanskrit of his times,¹⁹ shared these opinions for a long time. In the preface to the first edition (1819) of his

¹⁴ *AsRes* 10 (1808): 91–92. This issue of the *Asiatic Researches* contains the fifth part, dealing with the “Origin and Decline of the Christian Religion in India” (pp. 27–157) of Wilford’s “Essay on the Sacred Isles in the West, with Other Essays Connected with that Work”. No mention is made of Carcitā Nagara in the *Kumārikā khaṇḍa* translated by G.V. Tagare (AITMS). On doctrinal debates, see discussion below in Chapter IV.

¹⁵ “Poor Wilford was the laughing stock of the Benares Brahmins for a whole decade” (Keay 1988: 46; cf. also Kejariwal 1988: 43).

¹⁶ Kejariwal (1988: 52).

¹⁷ Wilford also mentioned the anti-Buddhist persecution “begun by ‘Cumarilla Bhattacharya’ and carried on afterwards by Sancaracharya, who nearly extirpated the whole race”, a topical issue in the nineteenth century. Wilford’s main concern was not Buddhism, although he was struck by the fact that “[i]n many parts of the Peninsula, Christians are called, and considered, as followers of Buddha”, something which is confirmed by Paolinus a S. Bartholomaeo in his *Systema brahmanicum* (1791: 161).

¹⁸ Rao, T.A. Gopinatha (1920, II: 123). Gopinatha Rao, however, accepted the opinion, which had become commonplace, that “the downfall of Buddhism [wa]s due to Muhammadans” (ibid.: 124).

¹⁹ R. Mitra (1885: 78–79). On Wilson see also Kejariwal (1988: 118 ff.).

Sanskrit Dictionary,²⁰ he devoted several pages to the question of anti-Buddhist persecutions, gathering the evidence on the role played by Kumārila Bhaṭṭa and Śaṅkara.²¹ His knowledge of Sanskrit texts and, for what was known at the time, of Indian history, as well as his familiarity with Indian *paṇḍitas*, allowed him to sketch a tentative chronology of the events concerning the relationships of Buddhism and Brahmanism:

[...] we know that the utter extermination of the Bauddha sect in India did not take place till some time between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries, and we must conclude, consequently, that the contending parties were for a long period too equally matched for any permanent and vigorous persecution of either by the other to have taken place, and especially for some time after the beginning of the conflict. If therefore the contest began in the third century, and the temporary ascendancy of the Brahmans was established some time before the eighth, we may conjecture, with every appearance of conjecturing happily, that the fifth and sixth centuries form the season, in which the Bauddhas were most actively and triumphantly assailed by the interested professors of the orthodox creed.²²

Today we would suggest a partly different chronology, but it is interesting to note that Wilson dated the first serious crisis of Buddhism to the time of the collapse of the Kuṣāṇa empire and of the establishment of the Gupta dynasty, of which he had no knowledge.²³

Even more interesting is the fact that Wilson had collected enough evidence to be convinced that “the persecution of the

²⁰ Cf. Wilson (1865a).

²¹ Wilson (ibid.: 191) distrusted the accuracy of the tradition which attributes to Śaṅkara the annihilation of the Buddhists. See discussion in Chapter IV.

²² Ibid.: 197–98.

²³ As late as 1838, on the evidence of the Purāṇas, Guptas was for Wilson “a term indicating a Śūdra Family” (cf. Wilson 1864: 136). It was, in 1837, James Prinsep’s translation of the Allahabad Fort inscription, first brought to notice in 1834, which opened a new field of study (Chhabra & Gai 1981: 203).

followers of Buddha by the Brahmanical order” was “a subject on which both sects are agreed”.²⁴ Wilson wrote that

[t]he concurring traditions of the Brahmanical, Bauddha, and Jaina sects report a two-fold persecution of the second, by each of the others severally, although they are not agreed about the order of their occurrence. If I have conjectured rightly, the priority seems due to that instigated by the members of the orthodox faith, and they effected a partial suppression of the Bauddha heresy about the fifth and sixth centuries [...]²⁵

further observing that

[...] it does appear that an utter extirpation of the Bauddha religion in India was effected between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries. By whom then was this important revolution brought about? I cannot answer this question with confidence, but think it highly probable that the Jainas performed an important part in the event, especially as there is reason to suppose that the period assigned for the overthrow of the Bauddhas was that in which the Jainas had attained in many parts of India their highest pitch of power and prosperity.²⁶

By the early nineteenth century the religion and customs of the Jains were already well known: much information had been collected by Buchanan in *A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara, and Malabar*, published in 1807, and the manuscripts that Colonel Mackenzie was gathering in South India had begun to circulate.²⁷ In 1828 Wilson wrote that “the papers related to the *Jains* were the most novel and important, and first brought to notice the existence of a Sect which is very extensively dispersed through-

²⁴ Cf. Wilson (1865a: 187).

²⁵ *Ibid.*: 224–25.

²⁶ *Ibid.*: 226.

²⁷ The three parts into which the manuscripts were divided ended up in Kolkata, Chennai and London, respectively. Those deposited in the library of the Asiatic Society in Kolkata were eventually moved to Chennai. On Colonel Mackenzie's life, see Mackenzie (1952) and *Mackenzie Manuscripts (Mahalingam)*: i–xxii.

out India [...]”.²⁸ The often violent confrontation between Buddhists and Jains, the Brahmanical repression of Jainism and the final transformation of the latter into a bastion of caste orthodoxy, were facts better known in the nineteenth century than they are today.

Wilson, who became professor of Sanskrit at Oxford in 1832, was to change his opinions radically, but the idea that Indian history had many skeletons in the cupboard spread, and several scholars remained convinced that much violence had been exercised. Some of them, belonging to different fields of research and deriving their evidence from separate sets of sources, can be counted among the sharpest minds ever engaged in the study of Indian history.

ALLEGORIES

An insightful scholar was Reverend William Taylor, entrusted by the Asiatic Society with the task of examining the manuscripts collected by Mackenzie when Wilson abandoned their classification after publishing a volume in 1828.²⁹ Taylor was a resident of Madras and a member of the Madras Literary Society, auxiliary of the Asiatic Society,³⁰ and from 1838 to 1850 (although the bulk of his work was already concluded in 1839), published an accurate and often detailed summary of the manuscripts, first in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, and then in the *Madras Journal of Literature and Science*.³¹ Left without sufficient support, he suspended his work in

²⁸ Wilson (1828: xiii).

²⁹ Id. (1828).

³⁰ On the branches of the Royal Asiatic Society and their libraries, cf. Otness (1998).

³¹ *Mackenzie Manuscripts 1–6 & Suppl.* Summaries of the Mackenzie manuscripts kept in Chennai have been provided in more recent times by T.V. Mahalingam, thanks to whose efforts a catalogue is now available; see *Mackenzie Manuscripts (Mahalingam)*. We will usually refer to Taylor’s work, which provides more expanded summaries than Mahalingam’s.

1850, leaving only the Kannada documents unexamined.³² Taylor realised that the accounts reported in the Mackenzie papers, often available in different versions and languages, framed a disquieting history of South India.

In these manuscripts, Jains and Buddhists appear as the earliest rulers of South India,³³ subsequently suppressed by the brāhmaṇas who put pressure on local kings with the purpose of getting rid of them. During the doctrinal disputations attended by the conflicting parties, Taylor observed, the Buddhists were always the losers and were killed, martyred, or forced to leave the country. To make an example, when king Cēramāṇ Perumāḷ³⁴ intimated to the brāhmaṇas that they must unite with the Buddhists and follow their system,

[...] the brahmans went to the king and remonstrated with him, calling for a public disputation, when if they, the brahmans were vanquished, their tongues should be cut out, and the like done to the bauddhas if these should be overcome. The dispute was held, terminating favourably to the brahmans in consequence of a magical influence emanating from the head brahman at *Tri-Cārūr*: the tongues of the bauddhas were cut out and they were banished the country. The king who had adopted their system was dethroned, and some lands were set apart for his support.³⁵

The Jains were crushed with equal violence, as was reported in relation to the well-known story of the eight thousand Jains put to death in Madurai on instigation of Campantar.³⁶ In the manuscripts collected by Mackenzie there were several

³² *Mackenzie Manuscripts*, Suppl: 100–101.

³³ *Ibid.*: 1: 109–10, 121; 3: 6, 32; 5: 14, 18, 25; 6: 430; etc.

³⁴ On Cērumāṇ Perumāḷ, who ruled at the end of the eighth and early ninth century (Sastri, K.A. Nilakantha 1966: 162), see below in Chapter IV.

³⁵ *Mackenzie Manuscripts* 1: 183. See also Logan (1887, I: 228); Menon (1924–37, III: 124–25); Alexander (1949: 50–51). *Tri-Cārūr* is Trikkariyur (Thrikkariyoor) in Ernakulam district; the Nampūtiri brāhmaṇas had moved there to escape the hardships of the recently established Buddhist rule.

³⁶ *Mackenzie Manuscripts* 1: 123; 4: 295–96; 5: 328.

other stories set in small villages that made the hypothesis that a thorough elimination of the heretics had taken place more credible: the village of Patuvur, for instance, “was formerly in possession of the Jainas, as is visible from the remains of their *Bastis*, or fans. They were destroyed by the Brahmans in the time of Adondai; and some embraced the Brahmanical system”;³⁷ in the Cota village, “a dispute arose between the Brahmans and the Jainas; and many of the Jainas were killed. The remains of their class emigrated towards the south”.³⁸

In other contexts, the Jains appeared to share the brāhmaṇas’ hatred against the Buddhists. The story of Akaḷaṅka is repeatedly reported, according to which the Digambara *ācārya* overcame the Buddhists in a public disputation. “Some of the *Bauddhas* were intended to be put to death in large stone-oil-mills; but instead of that were embarked on board ships, or vessels, and sent to Ceylon”.³⁹ Elsewhere, at the end of the same dispute, which lasted eight days, “the conquered sect he bruised to death in oil-mills of stone”.⁴⁰

Taylor observed that “[t]he punishment by grinding to death in oil-mills, is one well known to Indian History; and in the progress of development of these papers it will be seen that *Bauddhas* and *Jainas* were subjected to it, at a later period, by Hindu kings, under Brahmanical influence”.⁴¹ The India which disclosed its past to William Taylor was marked by a continually resurgent violence. The Jains were crushed, later on, by the Vīraśaivas: in the *Cennabasava Purāṇam*, both Basava and Cenna Basava were

³⁷ Ibid. 3: 32. The deeds of Atontai *cakravartin* is often recorded in the manuscripts (e.g. *ibid.* 1: 110, 120): he is said to have been the son of King Kulōttuṅka Cōḷa (*ibid.* 2: 399).

³⁸ Ibid. 3: 61.

³⁹ Ibid. 4: 284.; cf. also *ibid.* 1: 121–23; 3: 423, 436.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 4: 260–61. On this ordeal, see below in Chapter IV.

⁴¹ Ibid. 1: 123.

fit agents for the work of exterminating a *Jaina* king, and *Jaina* people; which they accomplished. [...] the development of the whole *Jangama* system *ab oro usque ad nauseam*, certainly is an object of some interest in itself, and connected with the historical details of the N.W. of the Peninsula: where the destruction of the *Jainas*, and the establishment of a champion system of extermination, are distinguished features.⁴²

Taylor can be easily accused of having believed in the facts as reported in the sources without keeping any critical distance from them,⁴³ but it must be admitted that the evidence was impressive. Taylor, pushing his convictions farther, sensed that the epics and the *Purāṇas* had to be deconstructed in order to understand what lies at the core of a literature produced by the *brāhmaṇas* in late ancient and medieval India that is at the same time outspoken and reticent. In his *Sixth Report*, after examining a Telugu version of the *Varāha Purāṇa*, he remarked that

[t]he use of this *Purāna* in illustrating mythology is considerable. In so far as historical enquiries are concerned the most remarkable sections are 10 and 11. The latter, in particular, very clearly relates to the great exterminating war made against the votaries of *Buddha*. The combat of *Durga* against *Mahéshāsura* has been, by some, ridiculously termed the combat of personified virtue, against personified vice. No doubt there is personification, and mystic allegory; but not precisely to that said effect. There are several great wars indicated in *Hindu* stories; some of them under a similar mystic veil; as:

- 1st. That of *Subrahmanya* against the *Asuras*.
- 2nd. That of *Parasu Rāma* against the *Cshetriyas*.
- 3rd. That of *Rāma* against *Rāvana*, and other *Rácshasas*.
- 4th. That of *Durga* against *Mahéshāsura*.

⁴² *Ibid.*, *Suppl.*: 83.

⁴³ There is little doubt that Taylor was a stern rationalist: he even took on John Milton because of “his absurd pauranical description of war in heaven” (*ibid.* 2: 384).

And *Mahéshásura*, in my opinion, is very probably only another name for the mysterious personage more usually in the south denominated *Sáliváhana*.

The clue of symbolical writing which I have been enabled to get hold of in the course of these enquiries, will, I am persuaded, if patiently, and perseveringly followed out, by individuals more capable in the earlier languages than myself, ultimately tend to solve much of the marvellous, and paradoxical, contained in *Hindu* writings [...].⁴⁴

With reference to a Kannada manuscript book on Satyendra-Colaraja [Catyēntira Cōḷa Rājā], a devotee of the Vīraśaiva sect, and on the basis of other Vīraśaiva sources, Taylor further observed that the destruction of the *asura* whose skull Śiva used for the head of his *vīṇā* had “an enigmatic meaning”, and was led “to conjecture that the aforesaid *asura* [wa]s a personification of the *Jaina* system; exterminated by the two *Vasavas*, and their followers”.⁴⁵

Another case in point was the myth of Paraśurāma, exterminator of the Kṣatriyas and founder of a well-ordered Brahmanical society.⁴⁶ Taylor believed that Paraśurāma was at the centre of a recent foundation myth, and had no doubts

that all the alleged *avatāras* of Vishnu shadow forth, each one, some great historical event; not always possible to be rescued from the obscurity of fable. [...] from Parasu Rāma downwards, all clearly appear to have occurred within the boundaries of this country. Hence I think the incarnation of Parasu Rāma points to the first acquisition of

⁴⁴ Ibid. 6: 401 (misprints corrected). Cāḷivāhana was a king of Kāñcīpuram protector of the *śramaṇas* against whom the orthodox waged war. He is mentioned several times in the Mackenzie manuscripts, the most comprehensive text dealing with him being the *Chola pūrva Patayam* [Cōḷa pūrva patayam], examined by Taylor in his Second Report (ibid. 2: 371–84).

⁴⁵ Ibid., *Suppl.*: 81.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 1: 183; cf. also ibid. 2: 490, 493–94; 6: 418; in a Marathi manuscript with an account of the Kadambas, Paraśurāma’s founding exploit is transferred in the Kannada country (ibid., *Suppl.*: 66).

power by the brahmans, after their coming to India from the northward of *Himálaya*.⁴⁷

Taylor was persuaded that in Hindu texts there was “much enigmatical, or symbolical, writing and when such a veil is studiously employed, as seems to be the case in all early Hindu writings, it may be inferred, that the earliest colonists of India wished to conceal their true descent, or to falsify something concerning themselves”.⁴⁸

There are several reasons for the facts narrated or alluded to in the Mackenzie Manuscripts to have sunk into oblivion. The gradual vanishing of the early interpretive paradigm of Indian history was joined by the views that later historians had on these types of sources. Their task was to discover and discuss positive facts, dates and names; they did not take late and tainted texts into any consideration. It is more difficult to understand why the Mackenzie material is ignored today, when modern historiographic currents favouring history written out of the most disparate materials have also made their way, and for quite a long time now, into the circle of Indian historians.⁴⁹

Taylor’s insightful views were not immediately lost. In his monumental *History of India*, the first to be written on an ambitious scale, James Talboys Wheeler rediscussed some of the issues raised by Taylor. The *rākṣasas* of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, he observed, are “the especial enemy of the Bráhmans”, and “are not to be simply confounded with the original population”, nor are they to be regarded

⁴⁷ Ibid. 2: 501.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 4: 11. Here Taylor hit again the mark.

⁴⁹ Recently Kesavan Veluthat has struck a blow for the *Kēralōlpatti* as a reliable historical source (in its own terms), observing that it is expressed in the forms that were found more suitable in the given situation (Veluthat 2006). I hope that Veluthat’s observations will encourage a thorough exploration in terms of actual history of the large amount of un-Rankean material awaiting investigation. We shall deal with these types of sources throughout this work, and will discuss them especially in Chapter IV.

as mere creations of the imaginations, like the cannibal Asuras who were conquered by Bhíma. They are described as forming an empire, more or less civilised, having its capital in Lanká, in the island of Ceylon; but having military outposts in different quarters of the Dekhan, and extending their operations as far to the northward as the right bank of the Ganges. [...] the Rákshasas are described as being violently opposed to the sacrifices of the Bráhmans, and as being utterly wanting in faith in sacred things; circumstances which seem to identify them with the Buddhists [...].⁵⁰

Wheeler also realised that six of the *avatāras* of Viṣṇu

possess a substantive historical value, namely, the avatāras as a lion and dwarf, and those of Parasuráma, Ráma, Krishna, and Buddha. One idea runs through them all, namely, that Vishnu became incarnate in order to destroy the giants or demons who sought to dethrone the gods. [...] But the myths of the incarnations or avátaras of Vishnu [...] belong to the age of Brahmanical revival, when the persistent efforts of Buddhist teachers to deny the authority of the Vedas, and to dethrone or ignore the gods in general, had created an antagonism which culminated in a persecuting war.⁵¹

Wheeler and Taylor ended up considering the epics and the Purāṇas as allegorical texts provided with historical meaning, but later historians have addressed them (the Purāṇas in particular) mainly to reconstruct past lineages and dynasties.⁵² Wheeler also made available to a large audience the often for-

⁵⁰ Wheeler (1869: 232–33).

⁵¹ Id. (1874: 369–70).

⁵² A notable exception has been, for all his reticence on the subject, Vasudeva S. Agrawala (below, Chapter III). For K.P. Jayaswal, cf. below in this chapter. As to Pargiter (1913), the founder of modern Purāṇic studies, he believed some passages of the Purāṇas to be fabrications of the bráhmaṇas and later readers (cf. p. XIX), but considered them as direct sources of history. It should be clear that the construction of the lineage (and thereby of lineages) is in itself part and plan of the Brahmanical ideology of historical, as it were, traceability of the (pure) lineage as an agenda for legitimation.

Historians of religions continue to consider the Purāṇas, analysed from different angles, as primary sources of myths. It would seem that their allegorical aspect is not even suspected.

gotten evidence on the destruction of Buddhist Sarnath carried out by the brāhmaṇas:

The ashes and charred remains sufficiently indicate that the whole was destroyed in some sudden conflagration; and as Buddhist pagodas have been converted into Brahmanical temples, suspicion points to a sudden outbreak instigated by the Brāhmins. Possibly some bitter disputation had been brought to a violent close; and a nest of infuriated fanatics had poured out of Benares to destroy the heretics and atheists of Sárnáth as enemies of the gods. [...] At present, however, the story lies beneath the mounds; Sárnáth was sacked and burned at the instigation of the Brahmins.⁵³

Taylor found an heir in Rajendralala Mitra, one of the most brilliant scholars of the second half of the century and a representative of the first generation of those extraordinary Bengali intellectuals who have marked the history of India until half a century ago. Born in 1824, in 1846 he was appointed librarian to the Asiatic Society, and became the first Indian president of the association in 1885.⁵⁴ Two of his major works, *Buddha Gayá, the Hermitage of Sákya Muni* and *The Antiquities of Orissa*⁵⁵ deserve special attention.

When Mitra started his work, important contributions had already been made on Gayā and Bodhgayā, the most important by Alexander Cunningham.⁵⁶ Mitra's book on Bodhgayā was the object of an anonymous, severe review in *The Indian Antiquary*,⁵⁷ where Mitra's blunders in iconographical matters were especially deplored. The majority of the British residents of Kolkata disliked Mitra,⁵⁸ who was, in particular, on extreme-

⁵³ Wheeler (1874: 359–60).

⁵⁴ Information on Rajendralala Mitra's life can be found in D.K. Mitra (1978).

⁵⁵ R. Mitra (1878; 1875–80).

⁵⁶ Cunningham (1863: iii–xii); *ASIR* 1 (1871, id.: 79–105; 107–39).

⁵⁷ *IA* 9 (1880), pp. 113–16, 142–44.

⁵⁸ D.K. Mitra (1978: 61–62).

ly bad terms with James Fergusson:⁵⁹ there was nothing better than showing Mitra's amateurishness in the field of archaeology and art history. Yet the *babu*, who enjoyed Max Müller's admiration,⁶⁰ was a gifted intellectual embodying tradition and an innovator who understood both the pettiness of the colonisers and the mental attitude and ideological manipulations of Hindu intellectuals, including past manipulations.

Referring back to Buchanan's account on the "monstrous legend" of Gayā, a powerful *asura*,⁶¹ Mitra maintained that the story, narrated in the *Gayā Māhātmya* attached to the *Vāyu Purāṇa*, was yet another foundation myth based on violence. The *asura* "practiced the most rigorous austerities for many thousand years on the noble hill of Kolāhala. The Devas were oppressed by his austerities, and dreaded serious misfortune".⁶² The *asura* agreed to have his enormous body purified by a sacrifice performed by Brahmā, but, to the latter's surprise, at the end of the ritual "the demon was still moving on the sacrificial ground",⁶³ continuing to move even when all the gods sat on the *dharmasīlā* or sacred stone placed on his head. Not even a "fierce form" drawn forth from Viṣṇu's person and placed on the stone could stop the demon, and only "by plying his mace, Hari rendered the demon motionless", being therefore called "the first or sovereign wielder of the mace (*ādigadādhara*)".⁶⁴

The allegory is transparent, and Mitra observed that Gayāsura

⁵⁹ Fergusson replied to Mitra's criticism in a violent pamphlet with partly racist and partly heavily patronising attitudes of a real scholar who had to mingle with a native *babu* (Fergusson 1884; cf. also U. Singh, 2004: xiv–xv).

⁶⁰ B.N. Mukherji in D.K. Mitra (1978: 53).

⁶¹ Buchanan (1936, I: 98–99).

⁶² R. Mitra (1878: 10); cf. *Gayā Māhātmya*: II.5–6 (pp. 28–29). Kolāhala corresponds to the Brahmayoni hill at Gayā.

⁶³ R. Mitra (1878: 12).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*: 13. For this part of the myth, cf. *Gayā Māhātmya*: II.47–52 (pp. 50–53).

revels not in crime, he injures none, and offends neither the gods nor religion by woes or deed. [...] The most serious charge brought against him was that he made salvation too simple and summary. The epithet in his case can, therefore, only mean that he did not profess the faith of the Brāhmanas, nor follow their ways: in short, he was a heretic. This character has always been assigned to the chief among the Buddhists. They were pious, they were self-mortifying, they devoted themselves greatly to penance and meditation; but they did away with the sacrifices and ceremonies of the Brāhmanas, and Gayā therefore may safely be taken to be a personification of Buddhism. [...] The attempts of the gods to put down the head of the monster typifies the attempts of the Hindus to assail Buddhism at its inspiring centre, the head-quarters; and the thwack of Vishnu's mace indicates the resort which had been made to force when religious preaching had failed to attain the end. The rock of religion was placed on the head of the infidel, and the force of the gods kept it fixed and immovable. It was the blessing of the gods, too, which sanctified the seat of Buddhism into a principal sanctuary of the Hindu faith.⁶⁵

Hard to say it better: the brāhmaṇas, who displaced to Gayā a number of stūpas from Bodhgayā transforming them into *liṅgas*,⁶⁶ built their hegemony on the control of *śrāddha* rituals. Mitra observed that no mention is generally made of Buddhism or any other heterodox system in Brahmanical texts.⁶⁷ Discussing ancient Puri, Mitra maintained that “[i]t is impossible to suppose that they [the brāhmaṇas] knew nothing of the ascendancy of Buddhism, and the omission, therefore, can be attributed solely to religious hatred. They would do anything to avoid naming the Jains and the Buddhists [...]”⁶⁸

⁶⁵ R. Mitra (1878: 16–17).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*: 121. Cf. *ASIR* 3 (1874, A. Cunningham): 87, note: “I suppose they [= the stūpas] have been carried off to Gaya, and are now doing duty as lingams, or symbols of Mahādeva. No conversion is required, as the people accept one of these votive *stūpas* of the Buddhists as a ready-made lingam”. See Chapter IV for votive stūpas transformed into *liṅgas* that are documented in Kathmandu.

⁶⁷ As we will see, this would have meant admitting the existence of other histories that do not originate from and are not controlled by orthodoxy.

⁶⁸ R. Mitra (1875–80, II: 175).

Gayāsura's enormous size (576 x 268 miles) was for Mitra an allegory of the large territory, from Kaliṅga to the Himalaya and from central India to Bengal, where Buddhism had spread and held out.⁶⁹ Gayā represented the head of Buddhism, Puri its navel, or an equally vital part, and Yājapur (Jajpur) its chest:⁷⁰ “Viṣṇu, to mark his success over the demon, left his foot-mark at Gayā, his lotus at Koṅārak, his club at Yājapur, his discus at Bhuvanesvara, and his conch-shell at Puri”. In the latter place, the revivalists were few in number, and could not forcibly subdue the Buddhists, and the plan of action was that of gradual appropriation and assimilation:

It was not the Moslem sword that was brought into play, not the *Qoran* in one hand and the scymetar in the other, but the policy of conciliation and compromise [...] The Buddhist belief of the sanctity of the Bo tree [was] made a part of the Hindu religion; the Buddhist repugnance to animal sacrifices [were] taken up by the Vaisnavas and Buddhist emblems, Buddhist temples, Buddhist sacred places, and Buddhist practices [were] appropriated to Hindu usages.⁷¹

Even when there was no open violence, the brāhmaṇas' appropriation of Buddhist sites was not exactly pacific:

[w]here it was impossible to appropriate a Buddhist temple to Hindu worship, rival temples were erected in close neighbourhood, and services and ceremonials were so moulded and adapted as to leave nothing to the former to maintain its pre-eminence in the estimation of the people.⁷²

⁶⁹ Id. (1878: 17).

⁷⁰ Id. (1875–80, II: 180). The author maintains elsewhere that Gayā's navel “was located at Yājapur, and its memory is preserved in the name of the place Nābhi Kṣetra” (ibid. II: 257).

⁷¹ Ibid. II: 180. The *babu* was far from accepting the apocalyptic vulgate on the Muslim conquest of India introduced by H.M. Elliot's edition of *The History of India as Told by its Own Historians* in 1849.

⁷² R. Mitra (1875–80, II: 111). A similar occurrence is recorded by Faxian at Śrāvastī (see Chapter III).

We wonder how would the history of India have been written in the past century if William Taylor's insights and Rajendralala Mitra's interpretations had been given due credit. But Taylor was a marginal scholar who soon lost all support, and Mitra was an unwanted member of the academic establishment. After his death, little was made to keep alive his memory and scientific contributions. Right on the pages of the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* — a deplorable perfidy — Louis S.S. O'Malley criticised Mitra's theory on the assumption that Buddhism had never been prominent at Gayā and that the *Gayāśrāddhas* were connected to popular demonolatry.⁷³ In the 1930s Benidhab Barua, one of the most distinguished pre-Independence scholars, refuted it with weak, unproblematic arguments.⁷⁴ Only in recent times the question of the identity of the *asuras* with actual political and religious opponents has started being discussed again.⁷⁵

FIELDWORK

The work of philologists and linguists was accompanied from the beginning by that of sociologists, such as Buchanan, as well as by that of antiquarians. To the former goes the merit of having gathered still living traditions (generally ignored by later positivist historians); to the latter, that of having laid the foundations for the development of archaeological and art-historical research. Alexander Cunningham was a distinguished epigraphist and historian,⁷⁶ but he is, above all,

⁷⁴ O'Malley (1903).

⁷⁵ He based his discussion on the assumption that “[i]t is difficult to associate the demon Gaya with Buddhism for the simple reason that he figures nowhere in its long tradition”, and that “[w]e have every reason to doubt if Gaya proper or Benares proper was at any time a site for Buddhist sanctuaries” (Barua 1931-34, 1: 40, 45).

⁷⁵ See, e.g. Granoff (1984). We shall discuss the matter at length, especially in Chapters III and IV.

⁷⁶ In *The Ancient Geography of India*, published in 1871, Cunningham restored a number of place names of a rewritten past. Wilson spoke ironically of his linguis-

the founder of Indian archaeology: in 1871 he was appointed Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India and initiated the publication of the *Archaeological Survey of India Reports*. When he started excavating at Sarnath in winter 1835-36 he was only twenty-one years old, and one wonders what his work was like—not just because of his age, but because archaeology as an autonomous discipline was not yet born.⁷⁷ However, when some thirty years later he published the results of his juvenile work (further excavations at Sarnath had been carried out by Major Markham Kittoe) and started writing the reports on his other tours and excavations in northern India, he had accumulated a remarkable experience and knew very well what he was talking about. He was seldom mistaken at the level of macro-analysis: he could easily distinguish between the collapse and the wanton destruction of a structure, its complete desertion and partial reuse, its having been slowly robbed through time or voluntarily sacked. His tireless, extensive travelling from site to site for decades, his analysis of thousands of monuments made him fit for observing patterns and creating models.⁷⁸ His observations were often crucial because, whereas the relationship between facts and the

tic and philological competence defining him “a courageous etymologist” (Wilson 1862a: 313), but, as observed by Chakrabarti (1999: 9), the criticism by some of his contemporaries in retrospect sounds generally “malicious and invariably trivial”. See Cunningham (1963).

⁷⁷ It is hardly necessary to mention that archaeological research had received an extraordinary impetus, a real baptism (thus emerging from the limits of a more or less random antiquarian research), by the discovery of Pompeii, which strongly marked the cultural history of the eighteenth century, and then with Napoleon’s campaign in Egypt. We cannot consider the work carried out by Cunningham of the same quality as that of the philologists of his times, who came from a centuries-old tradition. Strata started being recorded in the second half of the nineteenth century, and even then methods and techniques were still too poorly developed for the stratigraphic method to give satisfactory results. An example of Cunningham’s primitive stratigraphic reasoning is the following observation regarding the Mahābodhi temple: “[...] five successive layers of flooring were also discovered indicating well-marked and distinct epochs in the history of the temple” (*ASIR* 16, 1883, A. Cunningham & H.B.W. Garrick: 135).

⁷⁸ Cf. his model of India as a country swinging between political unity and fragmentation (Cakrabarti 1999: 8).

narrations made known by the philologists was uncertain, the material remains objectified facts, or pretended to. During his visit to Nālandā in 1861, he examined the north-eastern corner of the terrace of Temple Site 3, where he found the dismantled remains of several small, carved stūpas:

The solid hemispherical domes are from 1 foot to 4 feet in diameter. The basement and body of each stupa were built of separate stones, which were numbered for the guidance of the builders, and cramped together with iron to secure greater durability. No amount of time, and not even an earthquake, could have destroyed these small buildings. Their solid walls of iron-bound stones could only have yielded to the destructive fury of malignant Brahmins.⁷⁹

In Mathurā, he fixed the crisis and demise of Buddhism to the period between Xuanzang's visit in AD 634, when there were only five *deva* temples, and the raid of Maḥmūd of Ghazni in AD 1017. It is worth noting that he did not attribute *all* destructions to the Muslims, as the majority of historians had started doing. He was able to unfold various levels of complexity:

Of the circumstances which attended the downfall of Buddhism we know almost nothing; but as in the present case we find the remains of a magnificent Brahmanical temple occupying the very site of what must once have been a large Buddhist establishment, we may infer with tolerable certainty that the votaries of *Sakya Muni* were expelled by force, and that their buildings were overthrown to furnish materials for those of their Brahmanical rivals; and now these in their turn have been thrown down by the Musalmāns.⁸⁰

At Bodhgayā, a site to which Cunningham devoted particular attention, the pilgrims who in the fourteenth century

⁷⁹ *ASIR* 1 (1871, A. Cunningham: 33). Temple Site 3 is now numbered Temple F. The first volume of the *Archaeological Reports*, which includes the report on Nālandā, reproduces Cunningham (1863) without any modification.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*: 237.

still continued to visit the place found that the brāhmaṇas had appropriated the site:

It seems probable also that their claim to the holy site was disputed by the Brahmins, as there still exists a round stone which formerly stood in front of the Temple with the feet of Vishnu sculptured on its face, and the date of Saka 1230, or A.D. 1308, carved on its side. This stone was originally the hemispherical dome of a Stūpa. The square socket hole still exists on the rounded face for the reception of the pinnacle.

From this time I believe that both the holy Pipal Tree and the Temple were appropriated by the Brahmins, although the place must still have been visited by occasional pilgrims from Nepal and Burma. At present there is a large Brahmanical monastery, with a Mahant and upwards of 200 followers.⁸¹

Cunningham thought that “[f]rom the fifth to the seventh century the decline of Buddhism was gradual and gentle”, but that “from the eighth century the fall was rapid and violent”. In the eleventh or the twelfth century “the last votaries of Buddha were expelled from the continent of India. Numbers of images, concealed by the departing monks, are found buried near Sárnáth; and heaps of ashes still lie scattered amidst the ruins to show that the monasteries were destroyed by fire”.⁸² In the notes that he wrote during fieldwork, published in 1863 with only marginal additions, Cunningham had written that

[i]t will have been observed that every excavation made near Sámáth has revealed traces of fire. I myself found charred timber and half burnt grain. The same things were also found by Major Kittoe, besides the evident traces of fire on the stone pillars, umbrellas, and statues. [...] he [Major Kittoe] summed up his conclusions to

⁸¹ Cunningham (1892: 56–57). The last contacts between Bodhgayā and the outside world before modern times seem to have taken place in AD 1472 when King Dhammazedi sent a mission from Burma to take plans of the Bodhi Tree and of the temple as a model for buildings of Pegu/Bago (Harvey 1925: 119).

⁸² Cunningham (1854: 106). It is unlikely, however, that the images were hidden to save them from plundering (see Appendix 2).

me in a few words: “*All has been sacked and burnt, priests, temples, idols, all together. In some places bones, iron, timber, idols, &c., are all fused into huge heaps; and this has happened more than once.*” Major Kittoe repeated this opinion in almost the same words when I saw him at Gwalior in September, 1852.⁸³

Cunningham also reported a passage from Edward Thomas’s paper about the great conflagration which destroyed the monastery,⁸⁴ but what is worth noting is that he emphasised the fact that Sarnath had been the object of repeated destructions: the message was, once again, that the Muslims, held responsible for the end of the sanctuary, could not conceivably be the authors of earlier attacks. Towards the end of his career, Cunningham was more than ever convinced that three conflicting forces had been at work in medieval India, and rejected the binary system according to which a culturally unified India had been subdued by the Muslim fury. In the twentieth volume of his *Annual Reports*, Cunningham noted that

it is the fashion now to attribute the ruin of all temples to the iconoclastic Muhammadans, and certainly the followers of Islām have plenty to answer for in India. But it must be remembered that Buddhism had disappeared in Northern India long before the Muhammadan conquest, although it still lingered in Bihār, or Magadha, where it first originated.⁸⁵

The evidence on Buddhism having been suppressed by the brāhmaṇas was provided by the brāhmaṇas themselves, as for instance by Madhavācārya and Kṛṣṇa Mīśra, the author of the *Prabodha Candrodāya*. Cunningham gave the essential

⁸³ Id. (1863: cxv–cxvi); *ASIR* 1 (1871, id.: 126). Major Markham Kittoe, who, as Archaeological Enquirer to the North-Western Provinces, had excavated at Sarnath in 1851–52, died before publishing his notes and drawings (ibid.: xxiv–xxvii).

⁸⁴ Cunningham (1863: cxvii–cxviii); cf. E. Thomas (1854: 472).

⁸⁵ *ASIR* 20 (1885, A. Cunningham: 103).

details of this morality play, which, as we will better see in Chapter V, bears witness to the forced Buddhist diaspora. As regards the Jains, they

suffered the same fate, and all their wealth and influence have not been able to save them from the persecution of Brāhmins. Everywhere, even at the present day, at Delhi, at Agra, and at other places, the Brahmins had succeeded in preventing the Jains from holding processions. The persecution has not proceeded from the bigotry of the Musalmāns, but from the more rampant intolerance of the Brāhmins.⁸⁶

A contemporary of Cunningham's was James Fergusson, who founded the study of Indian architecture. Many a difference separated the two men, even without considering the long controversy on the reconstruction of the Mahābodhi temple at Bodhgayā,⁸⁷ but their views did not differ on the subject we are dealing with. Fergusson made a statement that is perhaps the most lucid among those made in the nineteenth century. In his most celebrated work, the *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, published in 1876, he wrote:

[...] the curtain drops on the drama of Indian History about the year 650, or a little later, and for three centuries we have only the faintest glimmerings of what took place within her boundaries. Civil wars seem to have raged everywhere, and religious persecution of the most relentless kind. When the curtain again rises we have an entirely new scene and new dramatis personae presented to us. Buddhism had entirely disappeared, except in one corner of Bengal, and Jainism had taken its place throughout the west, and Vishnuism had usurped its inheritance in the east. On the south the religion of Siva had been adopted by the mass of the people [...]. My impression is that it was during these three centuries of misrule that the later temples and viharas of the Buddhists disappeared, and the earlier

⁸⁶ Ibid.: 104.

⁸⁷ See the controversy on the restoration of the temple summarised in U. Singh (2004: 218–30).

temples of the Jains; and there is a gap consequently in our history which may be filled up by new discoveries in remote places but which at present separates this chapter from the last in a manner it is by no means pleasant to contemplate.⁸⁸

Indian chronology was still tentative, but Fergusson saw clearly that the deep Indian crisis began with the death of Harṣavardhana (AD 647), and that three centuries were necessary for neo-Brahmanism to win the battle against its opponents and remain unchallenged. The above passage remained unchanged in the various editions of the book, but in *The Caves Temples of India*, published in 1880, Fergusson's statement was so mitigated that nothing remained of its original force, perhaps because of young James Burgess's co-authorship, and certainly because of the quickly changing intellectual climate. There is a gulf between the lucidity of the passage reported above and the conformism of what we read now:

[i]n the seventh century of our era it [= Buddhism] had begun to decline in some parts of India; in the eighth apparently it was rapidly disappearing: and shortly after that it had vanished from the greater part of India, though it still lingered about Banāras and in Bengal where the Pāla dynasty, if not Buddhists themselves, at least tolerated it extensively in their dominions. It existed also at some points on the West coast, perhaps till the eleventh century or even later. It has been thought that it was extinguished by Brahmanical persecution; but the evidence does not seem sufficient to prove that force was generally resorted to. Probably its decline and final extinction was to a large extent owing to the ignorance of its priests, the corruptions of its early doctrines, especially after the rise of the Mahāyāna sect, the multiplicity of its schisms, and its followers becoming mixed up with the Jains, whose teachings and ritual are very similar, or from its followers falling into the surrounding Hinduism of the masses.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Fergusson (1876: 209). Fergusson's early text on Indian architecture was published in 1867 as the second volume of *A History of Architecture in All Countries*, London 1865–67 (cf. vol. 2, pp. 445 ff.).

⁸⁹ Fergusson & Burgess (1880: 19).

THE WORM WITHIN

Between 1824 and 1838, Brian Houghton Hodgson, Assistant Resident and then Acting Resident and Resident to the Nepal Darbar, started collecting Buddhist manuscripts and sending reports to the Asiatic Society.⁹⁰ As is known, the manuscripts that he sent to Paris allowed Eugène Burnouf to write the first comprehensive study of Buddhist doctrines ever presented to the intellectual elite of the West.⁹¹ Hodgson shared the idea that Buddhism had been persecuted,⁹² and he had, in addition, the clear perception that it had been pushed by force from the plains towards the mountains:

Nor, though furious bigots dispersed the sect, and attempted to destroy its records, did they succeed in the latter attempt. The refugees found, not only safety, but protection and honour, in the immediately adjacent countries, whither they safely conveyed most of their

⁹⁰ Hunter (1896: 35). Hodgson's life and activity in Kathmandu have been recently examined by a group of scholars whose contributions have been edited by Waterhouse (2004).

⁹¹ Burnouf (1844). The attention paid to Hodgson's manuscripts in France (they had been largely ignored in Kolkata and London) was to mark the distance separating, until recently, French and French-oriented Buddhist studies from those carried out by Anglo-Saxon scholars: by the end of the nineteenth century, the latter steered *en masse* for Pāli Buddhism. Burnouf never doubted the existence of anti-Buddhist persecutions. With regard to preaching, something unheard of in India before the Buddha, he insightfully observed that "elle [= la prédication] donne le secret des modifications capitales que la propagation du Bouddhisme devait apporter à la constitution brahmanique, et des persecutions que la crainte d'un changement ne pouvait manquer d'attirer sur les Bouddhistes, du jour où ils seraient devenus assez forts pour mettre en peril un système politique principalement fondé sur l'existence et la perpétuité des castes. Ces faits sont si intimement liés entre eux, qu'il suffit que le premier se soit produit, pour que les autres se soient, avec le temps, développés d'une manière presque nécessaire" ("it explains the secret of the capital changes that the spread of Buddhism was to bring to the Brahmanical organisation, and of the persecutions that the fear of a change could not but draw on the Buddhists from the day when they would become strong enough to jeopardise a political system largely based on the existence and perpetuity of castes. These facts are so closely interrelated that it is sufficient that the first occurred for the others to have developed in time in an almost necessary way"). Ibid.: 194–95.

⁹² Hunter (1896: 66).

books, and where those books still exist, either in the original Sanskrit, or in most carefully made translations from it.⁹³

Despite his visible annoyance at “Brahmanical ignorance”,⁹⁴ it was difficult for Hodgson to understand and accept Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism as they were slowly disclosing themselves in texts and living practices. The doctrine to which they bore witness was such that “few Baudddhas can be called wise”; the principle according to which “*man is capable of extending his moral and intellectual faculties to infinity*” was brought to “its most extravagant consequences”, becoming the corner-stone of their faith and practice.⁹⁵ Hodgson was keen to defend Buddhism against the ill-informed, but took his distance from it (“I had no purpose, nor have I, to meddle with the interminable sheer absurdities of the Baudddha philosophy or religion”), nor did he intend to defend “*details as absurd as interminable*”.⁹⁶ It was not a question of considering Newār Buddhism a “modern corrupt Buddhism”⁹⁷ because this would have implied the existence of an earlier acceptable form of Buddhism, which had never existed. It was, rather, a structural problem.

The information on Newār Buddhism supplied by Hodgson was a shock to many, and was responsible for a change of perspective. As early as 1828, H. H. Wilson, after illustrating the contents of the texts sent from Kathmandu to Kolkata, remarked:

⁹³ Hodgson (1874: 99).

⁹⁴ Hunter (1896: 135).

⁹⁵ The point raised by Hodgson is crucial, because it shows that the Buddhist conception of the position of man, which we will discuss in Chapter II, remained unchanged in the course of time even in the most changed circumstances. Hodgson also realised that “the Baudddhas of Nepal have not *properly* any diversity of castes” (ibid.: 63), and that Buddhism was born as a heresy within the Brahmanical system (ibid.: 68, 121).

⁹⁶ Hunter (1896: 99).

⁹⁷ Ibid.: 63.

Such is the nonsensical extravagance with which this and the Tantrika ceremonies generally abound; and we might be disposed to laugh at such absurdities, if the temporary frenzy, which the words excite in the minds of those who hear and repeat them with agitated awe, did not offer a subject worthy of serious contemplation in the study of human nature.⁹⁸

Not only did some scholars begin to consider Buddhism extravagant — to say the least — but became persuaded that, if it had been violently uprooted by the brāhmaṇas, it had deserved its fate. The evidence of violence against the Buddhists started being played down, as Wilson would do in 1854 in his précis of Buddhist history,⁹⁹ where he abandoned his former views. The brāhmaṇas, once “aroused from their apathy”, had set to work

to arrest the progress of the schism. The success that attended their efforts could have been, for a long time, but partial; but that they were ultimately successful, and that Buddhism in India gave way before Brahmanism, is a historical fact: to what cause this was owing is by no means established, but it was more probably the result of internal decay, than of external violence.¹⁰⁰

Wilson could not get out of recalling the “traditions of persecutions”, and reported a passage of the *Lotus Sūtra* translated by Burnouf to that effect.¹⁰¹ He claimed, however, that only “local and occasional acts of aggression were perpetrated by the Brahmanical party”.¹⁰² There were no record of persecution having been universal,

⁹⁸ Wilson (1862a: 39).

⁹⁹ “On Buddha and Buddhism” was the title of the lecture that Wilson published two years later. Cf. Wilson (1862b).

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.: 364–65.

¹⁰¹ The reader shall find it in Chapter III. Burnouf had published his translation of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra* and the accompanying essays two years before (cf. *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra* a).

¹⁰² Wilson (1862b: 365).

and its having been of any great extent may be reasonably doubted: it seems more likely that Buddhism died a natural death. With the discontinuance of the activity of its professors, who, yielding to the indolence which prosperity is apt to engender, ceased to traverse towns and villages in seeking to make proselytes, the Buddhist priest in India sunk into the sloth and ignorance which now characterise the bulk of the priests of the same religion in other countries, especially China, and seem there to be productive of the same result, working the decay and dissolution of the Buddhist religion.¹⁰³

Thus it was not only Newār Buddhism that was inherently corrupt. In China, “[t]he people in general do not seem to take much interest in the worship of the temples, nor to entertain any particular veneration for their priests”,¹⁰⁴ and regarding Sri Lanka, Wilson made his own the words of Robert Spence Hardy: “in no part of the island that I have visited, do the priests as a body appear to be respected by the people”.¹⁰⁵ Things went even worse “in the most northern provinces of Russia”, where Buddhism, degraded to Shamanism, is nothing more than a miserable display of juggling tricks and deceptions, and even in the Lamaserais of Tibet, exhibitions of the same kind are permitted, whatever may be the belief and practice of those of the community who are better instructed, and take no part in them themselves. Ignorance is at the root of the whole system, and it must fall to pieces with the extension of knowledge and civilisation.¹⁰⁶

The Buddhist population — this was the advice of Christian missionaries — needed to be educated:

The process is unavoidably slow, especially in Central Asia, which is almost beyond the reach of European activity and zeal, but there is no occasion to despair of ultimate success. Various agencies are at work, both in the north and the south, before whose salutary in-

¹⁰³ Ibid.: 367.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.: 368.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.: 369. Hardy’s famous *Manual of Buddhism* was published in 1853.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.: 377–78.

fluence civilisation is extending; and the ignorance and superstition, which are the main props of Buddhism, must be overturned by its advance.¹⁰⁷

It would be easy to accuse Wilson of religious zeal and colonial conceitedness, had his target not been so univocal. Wilson's distancing from his earlier positions went along with a growing admiration for the world and lifestyle of the brāhmaṇas, due to his familiarity with the learned *paṇḍitas* with whom he had been in contact (his "nègres", actually, as brutally the French would have said). He maintained that, if the greatness of Brahmanical literature had not been recognised before modern times, it was because of the Muslims and "their disdainful intolerance with which they regard the languages and literature of all nations that profess a different religious faith".¹⁰⁸

THE PARADIGM OF EXOTICISM

The generation of scholars that came to the forefront in the 1870s-1880s and exerted their influence well into the twentieth century had at their disposal an impressive amount of evidence, which they contributed to enlarge further. This allowed for the drafting of ambitious, comprehensive works in several fields of Indian history. Buddhism was no longer an unknown religion as it had been at the beginning of the century. The interest towards the living Buddhist tradition of Sri Lanka, where, after the pioneer work of George Turnour, Robert C. Childers had started collecting Pāli texts, replaced that towards Tantrism shown by Hodgson a few decades earlier. Sri Lankan Buddhism had been made known by Robert Spence Hardy in his *Manual*,¹⁰⁹ and the first Pāli dictionary, edited by Childers,

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.: 378.

¹⁰⁸ Wilson (1865b: 256). Only Akbar was spared general condemnation.

¹⁰⁹ Hardy (1853).

started being published in 1872. Thomas William Rhys Davids, who had arrived in the island in 1871 and was at first involved in the excavations of Anuradhapura, would establish the Pāli Text Society in 1881. Between 1881 and 1885, he and Hermann Oldenberg would publish the translation of the *Vinaya*.¹¹⁰

In 1880, John Ware Edgar, author of a *Report on a Visit to Sikkim and the Thibetan Frontier in October-December 1873*,¹¹¹ wrote an article on later Buddhism containing a particularly virulent condemnation of Tantric Buddhism and criticised the scholars who, at least in part, defended it in the name of a theism which “seem[ed] to have obscured their moral sense”. Edgar concluded his presentation as follows:

It seems an accepted notion among people who get their ideas from the worthless books which have long passed current as Buddhist history, that the religion was driven out by Brahminist persecutions somewhere about the end of seventh or the beginning of the eighth century after Christ; but I believe this to be an almost groundless fiction. These two centuries seem to have been pre-eminently a time of public controversy, when Brahmins challenged Buddhists, and men of one sect of Buddhism challenged those of other sects, to support their opinion in public. [...] the Buddhists were sometimes defeated, and had to pay the penalty. It is also quite possible that local disputes may have led to local persecutions. But it is a matter of absolute certainty to me that the Brahminists and Buddhists lived on fairly good terms till Buddhism in India was destroyed by the Mussulmans in the eleventh and twelfth centuries [...].¹¹²

Similar statements would be uncritically repeated for more than a century. The publication, ten years later, of Monier Monier-Williams’s comprehensive volume on *Buddhism in its*

¹¹⁰ T.W. Rhys Davids & Hermann Oldenberg, *Vinaya Texts*, three volumes published in the series of *The Sacred Books of the East* at Oxford (1881-85).

¹¹¹ It was published the following year in Kolkata.

¹¹² Edgar (1880: 820–21).

Connections with Brāhmanism and Hindūism, and in its Contrast with Christianity made a particular impact.¹¹³ Monier-Williams was Wilson's successor as professor of Sanskrit at Oxford, the founder of the Indian Institute, and the author of a Sanskrit-English dictionary in use to this day. His prestige as a scholar was enhanced by his being an Evangelist of the Church of England,¹¹⁴ whose missionary zeal was, at the time, ambitiously addressed to the conversion of India to Christianity. Besides identifying the "truest and earliest form of Buddhism" with Pāli Buddhism,¹¹⁵ he introduced a construct destined to become commonplace: Buddhism, originated within Brahmanism, reverted peacefully to it. Buddhism becomes an episode of Brahmanism:

It may, I think, be confidently affirmed that what ultimately happened in most parts of India was, that Vaishnavas and Śaivas crept up softly to their rival and drew the vitality out of its body by close and friendly embraces, and that instead of the Buddhists being expelled from India, Buddhism gradually and quietly lost itself in Vaishnavism and Śaivism. [...]

Its ruined temples, monasteries, monuments, and idols are scattered everywhere, while some of these have been perpetuated and adopted by those later phases of Hindūism which its own toleration helped to bring into existence.

At all events it may be safely affirmed that the passing away of the Buddhistic system in India was on the whole like the peaceful passing away of a moribund man surrounded by his relatives, and was at least unattended with any agonizing pangs.¹¹⁶

It was thanks to Vishnuism and Sivaism if Buddhism "dropped its unnaturally pessimistic theory of life and its un-

¹¹³ Monier-Williams (1889). Some key constructs were already present in *Hinduism* (id. 1877: 81, 137).

¹¹⁴ On Monier-Williams, especially with reference to his contribution to the history of religions, see T. Thomas (2000: 84–89).

¹¹⁵ Monier-Williams (1889: 12, 14).

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*: 170–71.

popular atheistic character, and accommodated itself to those systems".¹¹⁷ For Monier-Williams, even the establishment of a celibate monastic order had in it "something altogether agreeable to the spirit and usages of Brāhmanism",¹¹⁸ although he certainly knew that the celibacy of monks was one of the targets of the orthodox, who considered it a major threat for social order. The difference between Buddhism and Brahmanism is admitted, but is minimised also from the social point of view — a construct that continues to enjoy much credit. The core of the Brahmanical system, i.e. the preservation at any cost, for all the necessary adaptations, of caste privileges, largely escaped Monier-Williams, for whom caste division was just one of the innumerable Indian oddities:

It has been usual to blame the Brāhmans for their arrogant exclusiveness, but their arrogance has been rather shown in magnifying their caste-privileges and carrying them to an extravagant pitch, than in preventing any discussion of their own dogmas, or in resenting any dissent from them.

The very essence of Brāhmanism was tolerance. Every form of opinion was admissible [...]. The only delicate ground, on which it was dangerous for any reformer to tread, was caste. The only unpardonable sin was the infringement of caste-rules. Nor was anyone tempted to adopt the role of a violent agitator, when all were free to express any opinion they liked without hindrance, provided they took care to abstain from any act of interference with caste-privileges.¹¹⁹

India as depicted by Monier-Williams is entirely unreal, an exotic dream: we can easily imagine him, once the Mutiny was put down, seated in his bungalow attended by well-trained and silent servants:

¹¹⁷ Ibid.: 165.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.: 163.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.: 164–65.

The peculiar calm of an Indian atmosphere, though occasionally disturbed by political storms sweeping from distant regions, has rarely been stirred by violent religious antagonisms. The various currents of Hindū religious life have flowed peacefully side by side, and reformers have generally done their work quietly. As for Gautama, there can be little doubt that [...] he imbibed his tolerant ideas from the Brāhmanism in which he had been trained.¹²⁰

At Ellora, brāhmaṇas, Buddhists and Jains “lived on terms of fairly friendly tolerance, much as the members of the Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Wesleyan communions live in Europe at the present day”, and even in modern Benares, in “the stronghold of Brahmanism, I witnessed similar proofs of amicable mutual intercourse”.¹²¹ Even well documented conflicts are denied or played down, the only exceptions being those in South India, for which the evidence was too strong to be ignored:

It must nevertheless be admitted, that in the extreme South of India, and perhaps eventually at Benares and a few other strongholds of Brāhmanism, the difference between the systems became so accentuated as to lead to grievous conflicts. Whether blood was shed it is impossible to prove; but it is alleged, with some degree of probability, that violent crusades against Buddhism were instituted by Kumārila and Śaṅkara — two well-known Southern Brāhmins noted for their bigotry — in the seventh and eighth centuries of our era. It does not appear, however, that they were successful either in the conversion or extermination of Buddhists.¹²²

Thomas William Rhys Davids, the then highest authority in the field of Buddhist studies, put a seal on Monier-Williams’s assessment with a paper at the Paris Conference of 1897 addressed to the parterre of orientalist to whom he devolved the

¹²⁰ Ibid.: 163.

¹²¹ Ibid.: 169–70.

¹²² Ibid.: 170.

interpretatio autentica of Indian history. He made a distinction between war massacres and persecutions, and questioned the existence of the latter, from those of Puṣyamitra and Śāśānka to that promoted by Kumāriḷa Bhaṭṭa. Conversely, he gave full credit to the sources that documented, or seemed to document, Muslim violence. At Nālandā, “they not only destroyed the buildings — without any military necessity — but burnt the books and murdered the unoffending students. It is impossible to deny in this case that religious rancor was as much to blame as mere ignorant savagery. And the signs of murder and arson at Sarnath are probably due to the same gentle hands”.¹²³

The logic of war could be invoked also in the case of Nālandā,¹²⁴ but the principles appealed to by the author in relation to the conflicts between Indian-born religions did not seem to apply in that case. In India, with a few negligible exceptions,

[...] the adherents of faith logically so diametrically opposed lived side by side for a thousand year in profound peace. It is a phenomenon most striking to the Western historian, who will not refuse to recognise, as one continuing factor, the memory of the marvellous tolerance of the great Buddhist emperor Aśoka. But this tolerance itself rests on anterior causes. It must be reckoned to the credit of the Indian people as a whole; and it is evidence of the wide spread, in the valley of the Ganges, during the centuries before Aśoka, of a higher level of enlightenment and culture than has, I venture to think, been hitherto sufficiently recognised in the West.¹²⁵

¹²³ Rhys Davids (1896a: 91). We will see that the Muslims had nothing to do with the fire that destroyed the Ratnodadhi Library of Nālandā (Chapter VI).

¹²⁴ The reader is referred to Chapter VI for evaluating the events that took place in Nālandā in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century.

¹²⁵ Rhys Davids (1896a: 92). The tolerance of the Indian people “as a whole” brings us back in time to the little-informed Voltaire of the *Essai sur les mœurs et l’esprit des nations* (Chapter 17), where the Indians are said to be “the plus doux de tous les hommes” (“the sweetest of all men”). The astonishing belief of the Enlightenment thinkers, though usually not of Voltaire, in the natural goodness of man has cast very long shadows.

The statements contained in texts such as those divulged by Reverend Taylor, “written centuries after the events they refer to, and unsupported by details sufficient to form any judgement as to what is really meant, are not evidence of persecution at all. They are only proof of the belief of the persons making the statements”.¹²⁶ Rhys Davids did not seem to realise that his words could easily backfire on him, since Indian texts written much later than the described events were very numerous indeed, and included Pāli texts. But the construct had already been introduced that in the crucial field of religious tolerance and freedom India was, from time immemorial, a different place, and a model from which to draw inspiration. A decade before, the movement for universal peace had been launched, and the first Universal Peace Congress had been held in Paris in 1889 (the last being held in Zürich in 1939). The question of religious intolerance was one of the debated issues, and the scene was dominated by the Indian model. The need for inter-religious dialogue was underlined by Max Müller:

If the members of the principal religions of the world wish to understand one another, to bear with one another, and possibly to recognise certain great truth which, without being aware of it, they share in common with one another, the only solid and sound foundation for such a religious peace-movement will be supplied by a study of the Sacred Books of each religion.

One such religious Peace-Congress has *been* held already in America. Preparations for another are now being made; and it is certainly a sign of the times when we see Cardinal Gibbons, after conferring with Pope Leo XIII at Rome, assuring those who are organising this new congress: “The Pope will be with you, I know it. Write, agitate, and do not be timid”.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Id. (1896b: 108).

¹²⁷ Müller (1895: xi).

Here is at work the secularism fuelled by colonial-based capitalism: religions have the right to exist, but cannot go beyond well-defined limits, and cannot pretend to represent and control the whole reality. Modern society can work only if each religion takes a step back, leaving the state as final arbiter. The principle of religious neutrality, reinforced after the Mutiny, introduced in India one of the cornerstones of the bourgeois state: it would work only in part.

Rhys Davids reintroduced a binary interpretive model: the incompatibility between brāhmaṇas and Buddhists was replaced by that between the Muslims and a unified, non-Muslim India. Just around the mid-1890s, the separation between Hindus and Muslims was becoming a political issue,¹²⁸ and it is hard to determine whether the political events weighed on the interpretation of the past, or else the new paradigm legitimised them.

Exoticism marred fundamental political questions, and an exotic “elsewhere” was created. It was the equivalent, as far as religion was concerned, of the exoticist views of China, dreamt of by the Enlightenment as a country ruled by a tolerant and wise hierarchy, an example for obscurantist Europe. Exoticism applied to the world of religion owes much to Edgar Quinet’s magniloquent *Du génie des religions*, published in 1842. Son of the Enlightenment and of the French Revolution, Quinet did not commit himself to any religion, but, in accord with the spirit of the *Romantik* — he translated Johann Gottfried Herder into French — expressed sympathy for them all.¹²⁹ In his book, Quinet devoted a remarkable space to Indian religions and lavished praise on them, although he concluded stating that the common denominator of Indian religions was inaction — a construct that, as we will see in

¹²⁸ M. Misra (2007: 81).

¹²⁹ With the typical exception of Roman Catholicism — in the wake of Voltaire and the Lumières and in keeping with a tendency that persists to this day.

the next chapter, would nourish Max Weber. He also emphasised the idea of the incalculable antiquity of the Vedas and of the extraordinary wisdom of Indian thought: “les orientalistes publièrent qu’une antiquité plus profonde, plus philosophique, plus poétique tout ensemble que celle de la Grèce et de Rome, surgissait du fond de l’Asie. Orphée cédera-t-il à Vyasa, Sophocle à Calidasa, Platon à Sancara?”¹³⁰ We find in embryo much of the bad literature that was to follow, marked by pseudo-history, exoticism and spiritualism.¹³¹ When, at the close of the century, Rhys Davids attributed religious tolerance to the “Indian people as a whole” — a statement that had to sound rather absurd even in the cultural context of the period — we are before an extremist form of exoticism. It is the beginning of that process which, in the following century, thanks to the unwanted complicity of Leninist theories, would see many Westerners overburden themselves with a sense of guilt for being the heirs of a historical past deemed to be, when compared to that of other cultures, not only extraordinarily aggressive towards the exterior, but, by its nature, irredeemable.

THE YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE

Indian upper caste elites were quick to take advantage of the unexpected bonus granted to them by Western scholars. Before and after Independence, a conscious revision of ancient

¹³⁰ Quinet (1842: 62): “the Orientalists have revealed that an antiquity at the same time deeper, more philosophical and poetical than that of Greece and Rome has emerged from the depths of Asia. Will Orpheus give way to Vyasa, Sophocles to Calidasa, Plato to Sancara?”

¹³¹ With regards to Buddhism, Quinet shared the “paradigm of discovery”. The Buddha “devait rejeter comme une profanation la lettre trop grossière des livres canoniques, et par là provoquer contre lui la haine réunie des peuples et des brahmanes”. [...] Dans cette lutte, la doctrine qui cessait de s’appuyer sur la foi populaire devait nécessairement être vaincue par l’autre”. ([The Buddha] “had to reject as a profanation the rudimentary letter of the canonical books, and thus cause the hate of both the people and the Brahmins to rise against him. [...] In this struggle, the doctrine that no longer relied on popular faith had to be inevitably defeated by the other”). See Quinet (1842: 268).

Indian history was firmly pursued. It was pursued to such a degree that nowadays early nineteenth-century constructs and the facts discovered at that time are very little known. Hindu revivalists were very active on the political scene from the 1870s, when the history of Indian religions started being rewritten, in Max Müller's footsteps, in the exclusive light of the Vedas, as was done, in particular, by Dayananda Saraswati, who in 1873 founded the Ārya Samāj.¹³² The positions of Monier-Williams and T.W. Rhys Davids became *idées reçues* accepted by all but a few European scholars and a few Indian intellectuals who were staunch nationalists but not conformists, as for instance K.P. Jayaswal. The religious and social tolerance attributed to Hinduism (an increasingly popular term), was turned into an identity trait and into a card which was played at the political level until very recent times. The Mahātmā would place tolerance side by side with *ahimsā* so as to cause a complete merging of the two concepts.

The conceptualisation of the positions matured between the end of the nineteenth and the early decades of the twentieth century was due to Ananda K. Coomaraswamy. He was in line with what was being written on Indian cultural identity, and made his own even the exhortation to awakening made by Pierre Loti to young Egyptians, as we read in the preface to the *Essays in National Idealism*.¹³³ He also made his own the concept of swadeshi [*svadeśī*], criticising no less than the capitalist ownership of the means of production typical of the West.¹³⁴ Coomaraswamy shared the opinion that "India is the land of religious tolerance",¹³⁵ but his intellectual refinement put him in the position of discussing the relationship between

¹³² M. Misra (2007: 70). On early Hindu revivalism, cf. also Bandyopadhyay (2004: 234–47).

¹³³ Coomaraswamy (1909: viii).

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*: 162.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*: 149.

Brahmanism and Buddhism in a much more original and complex way than scholars like Monier-Williams would have ever been able to do. “All writers upon Buddhism — he wrote in 1916 — are faced with the difficulty to explain in what respect the teaching of Gautama differs from the higher phases of Brāhman thought”, given that the polemics of the Buddhists “was after all merely the popular aspect of Brāhmanism”.¹³⁶ Such polemics was addressed towards a wrong target, however: probably the Buddha had never “encountered a capable exponent of the highest Vedantic idealism”, and the Buddhists had never “really understood the pure doctrine of the Ātman”.¹³⁷

Two points raised by Coomaraswamy are worth mentioning. The first is that the teaching of Gautama, which the “exponents of Buddhism” (namely, the western advocates of Pāli Buddhism) tried to retrieve, was too limited an ideal to stand comparison with Brahmanism. Only Buddhism as a whole, inclusive of Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna, stood comparison with it. This allowed Coomaraswamy to state that “[t]here is no true opposition of Buddhism and Brāhmanism, but from the beginning one general movement, or many closely related movements. The integrity of Indian thought [...] would not be broken if every specifically Buddhist element were omitted”.¹³⁸ He did not understand, or did not want to see, that Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna aimed at preserving the core of Buddhist identity in a situation where Brahmanical pressure had become so great as to put the religion of Dharma with its back to the wall. The second point is that Coomaraswamy, radicalising earlier views, considered “unhistorical” the assumption

¹³⁶ Ibid.: 197.

¹³⁷ Ibid.: 197–98.

¹³⁸ Ibid.: 218.

“that Gautama was a successful reformer who broke the chains of caste [...]”.¹³⁹ The real reformers were the brāhmaṇas who have seen a profound significance in the maintenance of the order of the world, considering it a school where ignorance may be gradually dispelled. It is they who occupied themselves with the development of an ideal society, which they anticipated in the Utopias of Vālmīki, Vyāsa, and Manu.¹⁴⁰

At the time of the Buddha, “the so-called chains” of caste system did not even exist, and in any case the existing system “is a sort of ‘Guild Socialism’ within which each caste is “self-governing, internally democratic”.¹⁴¹ This extraordinary reversal of facts delegitimised Buddhism as an autonomous system also from the point of view of its social impact: nothing remained of it after its doctrine had already been demeaned. India never gave birth to opposing, incompatible systems: there was one India that, in the past as in the present, mediated internal conflicts having as her guides the great founders of neo-Brahmanism: Manu, Vālmīki, Vyāsa.

Coomaraswamy discussed again the relationship between the two systems forty years later, when the influence of René Guénon had been manifest in his writings for a long time: it is now the champion of *philosophia perennis*, the esoteric Coomaraswamy who speaks, as distant as possible from the concerns of history, which is entirely reabsorbed within a principal reality.¹⁴² We are in the 1940s, and Coomaraswamy’s position appears unchanged: “The more superficially one studies Buddhism, the more it seems to differ from the Brahmanism

¹³⁹ Coomaraswamy (1916: 214).

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.: 216.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.: 215.

¹⁴² It was, however, the Coomaraswamy of the 1930s and 1940s who wrote some of the best essays on symbolism in Indian art, which influenced a generation of scholars, from Stella Kramrisch to Vasudeva S. Agrawala. See them collected in Lipsey (1977-78, I-II).

in which it originated; the more profound our study, the more difficult it becomes to distinguish Buddhism from Brahmanism, or to say in what respect, if any".¹⁴³ Coomaraswamy repeats that the Buddha was not a social reformer: if he ever was a reformer at all, it "is not to establish a new order but to restore an older form" that he descended from heaven.¹⁴⁴ The Buddha was not even a man, but Man, whatever "a majority of modern scholars, euhemerist by temperament and training" may say.¹⁴⁵ Buddhist myth and doctrine are de-historicised in a sea of learned quotations where the reader, though lost in admiration, cannot but get drowned — from Plato to St. Bernard, from Meister Eckhart to Descartes back to antiquity to Plutarch, let alone those borrowed from Indian texts.¹⁴⁶ Although little read and not always well understood in India, Coomaraswamy's positions *vis-à-vis* its cultural and religious history were perfectly clear. They were much more conservative than those professed by the majority of Indian intellectuals, from which he was separated by a personal history that had made him an Indian nationalist but also, and even more deeply, a European Indologist who paid a high price to his own intelligence.¹⁴⁷

If we turn from Coomaraswamy's a-historical level — legitimate in itself but invalidated by a strong ideological bias — to the level of historical research, mention should

¹⁴³ Coomaraswamy (1943: 45).

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*: 50. Here the author draws on Hendrik Kern and his *Manual of Indian Buddhism* (Kern 1896). Coomaraswamy's polemic against the supporters of Pāli Buddhism continues, not without reasons, as when, for instance, he maintains that if it is true that the means employed by Buddhism are partly ethical, *nirvāṇa* is not an ethical state (Coomaraswamy 1943: 66).

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*: 57 ff.

¹⁴⁷ Coomaraswamy's father, Sir Mutu, was a Sri Lankan Tamil. The infant Ananda was brought to England by his mother who, left a widow, remained in her home country. The boy was educated in England, and made his first journey to South Asia in his twenties. On Coomaraswamy's life and works see Lipsey (1977-78, III).

be made of one of the most important works written and edited around that time by Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, the historian of Independent India. The first volume of *The History of Bengal*, was published in 1943, but was composed in the 1930s. It contains a thorough acquittal of the responsibilities of the brāhmanas; there we read with interest the pages exculpating Śaśānka from the accusations of both Xuanzang, “whose writings betray a deep personal prejudice, amounting to hatred, against him”,¹⁴⁸ and Bānabhaṭṭa. With reference to the murder of Rājyavardhana in AD 606, Majumdar, distancing himself from other historians who, underlining the agreement between contemporary sources, were inclined to give credit to the story, maintained that

[...] Hiuen Tsang made no secret of his wrath against Śaśānka for his anti-Buddhist activities. That Hiuen Tsang was ready, nay almost glad, to believe anything discreditable to Śaśānka, is abundantly clear from the various stories he has recorded of Śaśānka’s persecution of Buddhism, and his ignoble death. The attitude of Bāṇa is also quite clear from the contemptuous epithets like *Gauḍādharma* and *Gauḍābhujāṅga* by which he refers to Śaśānka.

Such witnesses would be suspect even if their stories were complete, rational, and consistent. But unfortunately both the stories are so vague and involve such an abnormal element as would not be believed except on the strongest evidence.¹⁴⁹

Had Majumdar really required “the strongest evidence” for other events of ancient Bengal history, he would have hardly been able to start writing his book. The task of a historian is not just to produce incontrovertible documents, but generate hypotheses based on whatever traces may be available — traces which, though difficult to assess for many periods of Indian history, are nevertheless of considerable importance.

¹⁴⁸ Majumdar (1943: 62).

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.: 73-74.

It is hardly fair, in any case, to use a double standard when dealing with them. Although Majumdar raised doubts on the “numerous acts of oppression perpetrated by Śaśānka against the Buddhists”, he could not discard a piece of information of a typically historical nature — that Harṣavardhana’s mission, as explained by Xuanzang, was to “raise Buddhism from the ruin into which it had been brought by the king of Karnaśuvarna”, and that Śaśānka, a fervent Sivaite, waged war against him to hasten the decline of Buddhism. Majumdar’s comment was that the truth about Śaśānka’s “acts of oppression” rested upon “the sole evidence of the Buddhists writers who cannot, by any means, be regarded as unbiased or unprejudiced, at least in any matter which either concerned Śaśānka or adversely affected Buddhism.”¹⁵⁰

With his authority, Majumdar eclipsed Indian intellectuals who had not entirely fallen into line. Radhagovinda Basak, for instance, had maintained that Śaśānka could not be exculpated from his cruel actions.¹⁵¹ K.P. Jayaswal, who died in 1937,¹⁵² had not denied the facts reported in the last chapter of the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, even when anti-Buddhist persecutions were mentioned,¹⁵³ but for Majumdar even this evidence was “somewhat vague and uncertain”, and it would have been, therefore, “extremely unsafe to accept the statements recorded in this book as historical”¹⁵⁴. The point is that he denounced *all* the sources providing evidence on what he was not willing to admit. Instead, quite unproblematic is Majumdar’s treatment of the collapse of the Pālas and the normalisation of north-eastern India carried out by the Senas. He considers it as a normal political rotation, the only real

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.: 67.

¹⁵¹ Basak (1967: 134). The first edition of the book goes back to 1934.

¹⁵² For a short biography of Jayaswal, see Ram (1981).

¹⁵³ Jayaswal calls Śaśānka, accused in the text to have tried to destroy the religion of Dharma, “an orthodox revivalist” (Jayaswal in *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*: 51).

¹⁵⁴ Majumdar (1943: 64).

break in the history of the region being, predictably, the Muslim conquest. The idea that Sena policy substantially contributed to the final collapse of Buddhism does not seem to have ever come to his mind. We see here at work one of the most unfortunate, inclusive construct of Indian historiography, that of the existence of a unified “Pāla-Sena period”.

If we have lingered over *The History of Bengal*, it is partly because it would be impossible to analyse in detail Majumdar’s major work, the planning and editing of the monumental *History and Culture of the Indian People*, the first volume of which was published in 1951, and the last in 1977. Majumdar’s presence as editor is constant. He makes himself heard through brief introductions and *mises au point*, unifying the message he wanted Indian students and the outside world to receive. The *History and Culture*, reprinted many times and considered the best achievement of Independent India in the field of historical research, is the product of a century-long debate. The idea that India was the guardian and guide to universal peace and tolerance is central and even more effective in that the tone of the work is seldom over the top.

Three points deserve our attention: the insistence on the “Catholicism” of Brahmanism, the responsibility of Buddhism for its own crisis and that of Islam for its final destruction. Regarding the first point, almost universally accepted and already discussed, the role of the brāhmaṇas in actively opposing Buddhism is ignored because conflict in Indian history is seen as exclusively imported from the outside. Even in later times, Hindus “did not show any lack of the spirit of toleration which marked the religious evolution in India through the ages. This spirit was displayed even towards the Muslims in the face of the greatest provocation caused by their iconoclastic fury”.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ Id. (1957: 404).

Regarding the second point, Majumdar maintained that the degradation of religious life became a widespread phenomenon with the introduction of Tantric practices. Tantrism, which affected both Buddhism and Brahmanism, was responsible for [...] the degradation in ideas of decency and sexual morality brought about by the religious practices. How far this evil corroded the whole society would be plain from a study of contemporary literature. [...] It is impossible to describe in a modern book some of the worst features of Tāntrik theories and practices which have been described by an eminent Indian scholar to be “at once the most revolting and horrible that human depravity could think of”. Fortunately the esoteric character of Tāntrik religion limited its field of operation, and it may be conceded that such debased forms of religious practices were exceptional and not normal.¹⁵⁶

It was the “universal appeal” of Buddhism that “wrought its own ruin”. In order to satisfy the masses, it had to come down from its high pedestal to their level and present itself “in a popular garb”, and by an “inevitable process it also incorporated to a large extent the crude ideas, beliefs and religious practices held by them”.¹⁵⁷ Here Majumdar hits the point: late Buddhism had advocated the cause of the outcastes, rousing a real social war. And yet, instead of laying his cards on the tables, he prefers to avoid a difficult discussion, maintaining that whereas “the growth of Tantrik ideas was sapping the vitality of Buddhism, Brahmanical religion was enthroned on a high pedestal by philosophers like Śaṅkarācārya, whose “triumphant career” did not simply assure the success of Sivaism, but of Brahmanism as a whole.¹⁵⁸

The real destroyers — this is the third point — were the Muslims, who were not only foreign conquerors, but had

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.: 400–401.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.: 400.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.: 258.

deeply wounded the religious susceptibilities of the Hindus “by indiscriminate demolition of temples and destruction of images of gods on a large scale”.¹⁵⁹ The disappearance of Buddhism “from the land of its birth” seems to have as its principal reason “the destruction by foreign invaders of the numerous monasteries in Bihar and Bengal which formed the stronghold of that religion”,¹⁶⁰ a commonplace view that we will discuss in Chapter VI.

An example of reasoning where facts are provocatively turned upside down is contained in a passage by K.A. Nilakantha Sastri, the distinguished historian of South India:

In view of the fact that religious persecution in ancient India was an exception rather than the rule, and keeping in mind the tendency of the Buddhist writers to distort facts and invent imaginary accounts of the evil deeds of non Buddhists — even Aśoka has not been spared — we cannot give the same credence to these accounts as has been accorded by some writers. While it may be conceded that some Buddhists, particularly the monks, may have suffered from certain disabilities, the story of a general persecution of all and sundry is evidently the invention of frustrated minds which found that the state patronage was rapidly being shifted to Brahmins, and were aghast at the revival of the ancient Vedic ritual of the *aśvamedha*. It is not even unlikely that the hardships of the Buddhists were in many cases due to political reasons and were of their own inviting.¹⁶¹

That certain facts never happened, and could never have happened in India, here becomes axiomatic. What Nilakantha Sastri noted a few years later in relation to the well-known episode of the execution of the Jains by Kuṇ Pāṇṭiya (“This, however, is little more than an unpleasant legend and cannot be treated as history. There is no reason to believe that, even in

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.: 399.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.: 401.

¹⁶¹ Sastri, K.A. Nilakantha in HCIP 2: 99.

those days of intense religious strife, intolerance descended to such cruel barbarities”) may reassure us on his good faith, but warns us against his blindness as a historian.¹⁶²

To conclude with *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, the assessment on Aśoka’s personality and deeds is of particular interest because it is part of a broader debate on Indian culture and politics. Radha Kumud Mookerji, who wrote the chapter on the Mauryan emperor, was persuaded that Aśoka became a Buddhist convert. A few years earlier, B.M. Barua had shown that Aśoka’s *dhamma* derived directly from the Buddhist scriptures.¹⁶³ For Mookerji, however, what Aśoka really stood for was the religion of *ahimsā*: “His was a total pursuit of non-violence in every sphere”, and if he was unable to abolish capital punishment, it probably was because “man who can distinguish between right and wrong” is less innocent than animals. The India that had just attained independence had little to offer to the world emerging from the Second World War besides the ideology of non-violence, which was made partly credible by Gandhi’s political action and partly ludicrous by the bullet that killed him and the disasters of Partition. Making *ahimsā* the body bolster of Indian history from so remote a time meant adding further authority to the model and providing it not only with political, but also with historical dignity.

Political use of an idealised Aśoka was made by Jawaharlal Nehru when he decided that the *cakra* surmounting the Aśokan capital at Sarnath should be reproduced on the central, white band of the Indian flag. It was “a symbol of India’s ancient culture”, a symbol “of the many things that India had stood for through the ages”. Aśoka for Nehru was

¹⁶² Id. (1966: 424). The book was first published in 1955.

¹⁶³ Barua (1946); see below in Chapter II.

“one of the most magnificent names not only in India’s history but in world history”, especially in a “moment of strife, conflict and intolerance”.¹⁶⁴ When a few years later, in 1950, the whole Sarnath capital — accompanied by a motto taken from the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* — was chosen as the emblem of the country, and reproduced on banknotes and passports, the appropriation of a past rewritten to serve the official ideology was completed. Since then, the Sarnath capital, brought to light in 1905, speaks with a voice that is not its own: it also shows that excess of polishing typical of the chemical treatment that had become common in Britain since the end of the eighteenth century, when the original lustre of stones and marbles was revived according to a practice that continued for a long time.

In actual reality, Aśoka had been cast into oblivion for two millennia, and modern Indians had first heard of him by James Prinsep in 1837.¹⁶⁵ his *ahimsā*, though based on historical facts, was not authoritative for the orthodox, who could not but consider it as milk originally pure put into a dog-skin bag.¹⁶⁶ Now Aśoka had been transformed into the inimitable model of Indian history. Contemporary divided India could not be said to have a unified history, but ancient India could. Vasudeva S. Agrawala ratified the brahmanisation of the *cakradhvaja* overloading the Sarnath capital with a heavy symbolism where the Buddhist pertinence of the artefact gets entirely lost.¹⁶⁷ The historians of Independence transformed beliefs nourished by exoticism into the tools that made up the image of their country. This image lasted for decades to come, even when the ideology of non-

¹⁶⁴ The resolution moved by Nehru and passed by the Constituent Assembly in July 1947 is reproduced in V.S. Agrawala (1964: 94–96).

¹⁶⁵ Prinsep’s successful reading of the early Aśokan inscriptions that had been brought to notice and the final identification of Piyadassi with Aśoka Maurya have been told by Allen (2003: esp. 186–88).

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Kane (1930–62, III: 843).

¹⁶⁷ V.S. Agrawala (1964).

violence turned into pro-Soviet pacifism. The emergence of *hindutva* and the modernisation of the country have eventually outdated it.

ANOTHER INDIA

A few nationalist scholars followed an entirely different approach vis-à-vis the Indian past in the effort to shape Hindu identity, directly or indirectly recognising that India had not a unified history but many histories. For Kashi Prasad Jayaswal, Buddhism was an alien system and an anti-national movement, fought against not only by the Śuṅgas but also by many other dynasties. The Indian “nation” is identified with the “nation” of the brāhmaṇas, and is not an all-inclusive construct. Jayaswal’s influential book of 1933, *History of India, 150 A.D. to 350 A.D.*, may sound outdated today, but comes as an exception to historiographical conformism and raises not minor questions. Jayaswal’s nationalism may be regarded as naïve concerning certain aspects, but is not overflowing with sentiment and is closer to facts. The “legitimate” dynasties that emerged in several parts of India from the early third century AD onwards voiced a deep-rooted identity that would emerge fully in Gupta time. They tried to put an end to the unbearable abuses of the Buddhists and the Kuṣāṇas such as that carried out by Vanaspara, who was first the Kuṣāṇa governor and then Viceroy in the territory of Benares:¹⁶⁸

He made the population practically Brahmin-less (*prajās ch-ā-brahma-bhūyishthāḥ*). He depressed the high-class Hindus and raised low-caste men and foreigners to high positions. He abolished

¹⁶⁸ Vanaspara, cited in the Kaniṣka inscription of the year 3 (*EI* 8, 1905–6, J. Ph. Vogel: 173–79, I. 8), has been identified with the Viśvaphani, Viṃśapatika and Viśvapurja of the Purāṇas. Cf. *IA* 47 (1918, K.P. Jayaswal: 298–99). The inscription of Rabatak has shown the extent of Kuṣāṇa rule in the middle and eastern Ganges Valley (Sims-Williams & Cribb 1995–96: 78, I. 5–6).

the Kshatriyas and created a new ruling caste. He made his subjects un-Brahmanical. The same policy was followed by the later Kushans [...] — a policy of social tyranny, and religious fanaticism — both actuated by political motives. Vanaspara created a new ruling or official class out of the Kaivartas (a low caste of aboriginal agriculturists, now called *Kewaṭ*) and out of the *Pañchakas*, i.e. castes lower than the Śūdras — the untouchables.¹⁶⁹

Jayaswal was aware of the existence of a structural, identitarian question and captured the link between the fortunes of Buddhism and foreign domination and influence. Orthodox dynasties performed rituals exclusively intended for brāhmaṇas, such as the *br̥haspatisava*,¹⁷⁰ not to speak of the *aśvamedha*, which was a symbol of political revival in strict connection with military campaigns.¹⁷¹ Jayaswal clearly saw that when no foreign kings were left, it was against the Buddhist kings that the *aśvamedha* started being performed. He understood the reasons of the otherwise unaccountable revival of the horse ritual by Puṣyamitra Śuṅga and Sātakarṇi Sātavāhana, and understood as well the role played by the Guptas after AD 344 and the reasons of their Bhāgavata commitment. The identification, made possible by *bhakti*, between king and God made the former “the missionary and agent of the Lord”, and the Guptas “felt and believed that they were Vishnu’s servants and agents, that they had a mission from Vishnu, that like Vishnu they should conquer the unrighteous and sightless sovereigns, and that like Vishnu they should rule in full sovereignty [...]”.¹⁷² We are far from the conformist glorification of the Guptas as tolerant rulers and patrons of the arts popularised by the majority of scholars — a groundless vision, as we will see.

¹⁶⁹ Jayaswal (1933: 43).

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.: 65–66. This ritual is an *aṅga* of the *vājapeya* ritual (Kane 1930-62, II: 1211, note).

¹⁷¹ In relation to Pravarasena I, cf. Jayaswal (1933: 90 and passim).

¹⁷² Ibid.: 121.

Jayaswal confers to the Guptas the importance they have for the right reason, that of embodying a political model that was both profoundly rethought with respect to Vedic tenets and alternative to the model of the *śramaṇas*.

The nub of neo-Brahmanical and Hindu identity and, conversely, the anti-Brahmanical, *mleccha* nature of Buddhism were perfectly caught by Babasaheb R. Ambedkar, the neglected *pater patriae*, advocate of a political project that aimed to overturn Indian society from its very foundations. He was as distant as possible from a man like Jayaswal, but he shared the same opinion on the incompatibility of the two systems. Both Jayaswal and Ambedkar, from the opposite poles of the social hierarchy (or, better to say, from two separate worlds inhabiting the same territory), had in common very deep roots in traditional India and were indifferent to good manners.

Ambedkar shared the opinion that Buddhism had been overthrown by the Muslims, but made unusual observations. The first was that at the time of the Muslim invasion the Indian states were entirely under Brahmanical control and Brahmanism had the support of the state, whereas Buddhism did not enjoy such support. The second, very perspicacious (although not entirely true), was that Buddhism was handicapped by the creation of its priesthood, which was neither so organised nor so pervasive within society as in Brahmanism, where *grhasthas* are not less entitled as priests than *bhikṣukas*. The difference between the two systems was so great that “it contain[ed] the whole reason why Brahmanism survived the attack of Islam and why Buddhism did not”.¹⁷³ Buddhist priests could not be easily replaced, while “[e]very Brahmin alive became priest and took the place of every Brahmin priest who died”.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ Ambedkar (1987: 233).

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.: 235.

Ambedkar's third consideration stemmed from the question, posed by Surendra Nath Sen, of the distribution of Muslim population in India. Sen had observed that it was no accident that "the Punjab, Kashmir, the district around Behar Sharif, North-East Bengal where Muslims now predominate, were all strong Buddhist centres in the pre-Muslim days". As had happened in Sind, this was ascribable to the prospect of improvement that the Buddhists expected regarding their political status.¹⁷⁵ Ambedkar observed that "the causes that have forced the Buddhist population of India to abandon Buddhism in favour of Islam have not been investigated", but was inclined to believe that the persecution of the Brahmanic kings was responsible for the result. He concluded by saying that "the fall of Buddhism was due to the Buddhist becoming converts to Islam as a way of escaping the tyranny of Brahmanism".¹⁷⁶ Ambedkar would have certainly developed this intuition if he had had at his disposal a more reliable chronology and a less reticent literature.

PARADIGMS OF OBLIVION

In the 1950s and 1960s, a new class of historians emerged which, in the light of Marxist theories and of the increasingly successful analyses provided by the methods of the social sciences, started replacing the concerns typical of the previous generation with investigations aimed to retrieve an Indian past freed from both narrow nationalism and official Indology. The founder of this new group of historians was Damodar Dharmananda Kosambi, followed by Ram Sharan Sharma,

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.: 236–37.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.: 238.

Irfan Habib, Dwijendra Narayan Jha, Romila Thapar, Radha Champakalakshmi, and a few others. Despite their different attitudes towards Marxist orthodoxy, their contributions have several points in common, including the capacity to exploit the known sources with new insights and the new ones with unusual attention.¹⁷⁷

Despite his approach to Indian history, Kosambi accepted without discussion the vulgate on the end of the Buddhist monasteries of north-eastern India, making his own the idea of India as “a land that could tolerate many incompatible systems at the same time”, even though “they [the Indians] would not bother to make a permanent record of their traditions and doctrine”. The latter was a surprising statement for a scholar so attentive to micro-history and well aware that brāhmaṇas have recorded absolutely everything with regard to their own institutions and customs: what they did not want to perpetuate was the history that was not their own. For Kosambi, “[t]he question of the ‘restoration of Hinduism’ or of some king being Buddhist or Hindu [wa]s meaningless”: the donations made at Sarnath about AD 1150 was due to a “Buddhist” (in inverted commas) queen of a Hindu king, Govindracandra Gāhaḍavāla.¹⁷⁸ Paradoxically, Kosambi seems to go beyond nationalist historians. R.C. Majumdar denied facts, but tried to explain; Kosambi seems to have been persuaded that the problem did not even exist, refusing, against his own convictions, to understand that a sovereign embracing one religious system

¹⁷⁷ R.S. Sharma, in particular, has exploited the archaeological evidence without being discouraged in the face of often incomplete and elusive excavation reports (see for instance R.S. Sharma 1996).

¹⁷⁸ Kosambi (1965: 181). The queen whom Kosambi does not think worth mentioning is Kumāradevī (see Chapter VI). See also what Kosambi says in relation to Harṣavardhana (id. 1975: 314).

rather than another is likely to indicate radical changes in the social and political set-up of a given territory.¹⁷⁹

Economic activity is crucial, but may be seen — not considering deep, *longue durée* processes — as just one of the several activities to which man is committed; many other activities, inextricably intertwined with it, are carried on at one and the same time. Historians take the task of arranging a huge and confused mass of material and, in the impossibility of analysing the phenomena in all their aspects, hierarchising them, but we do not *know* if man's activities and perceptions, as well as social phenomena, are ordered, *per se*, according to some objective hierarchy. For Marxist and post-Marxist historians, who often forget how important is the “superstructure” in Marx's construct, religious and ethnic identities, ideological factors and even the role of the elites (despite the importance of vanguards in Marxist theory and praxis) are generally subordinated to what is taken to be the economic “base” of society, or are at best thought to be enacted by social “forces” often escaping analysis. The scattered knowledge we have of this economic “base” for many periods of ancient India makes the constructs all the more fragile.

With regard to the questions examined here, Romila Thapar's positions as they have developed through time are worth mentioning. She is the only modern historian who has paid some attention to the matter. In a conference held in 1987, she observed — and it was a criticism long due from official historians — that

¹⁷⁹ In fact, Kosambi had also written: “[...] historical periods must be demarcated according to the means and relations of production, not by fortuitous changes of dynasty or battles. Even here, it can be recognised that major wars, great changes in rulers, significant religious upheavals do often signalise fundamental changes in the productive relations of the people. That such critical changes manifest themselves through wars or reformation in religion is due to the undeveloped stage of society with its attendant concealment of the true social forces guiding or forcing historical development [...]” (Kosambi 1950: 358).

[...] the insistence on the tradition of religious tolerance and non-violence as characteristic of Hinduism, which is built on a selection of normative values emphasising *ahimsā*, [...] is not borne out by the historical evidence. The theory is so deeply ingrained among most Indians that there is a failure to see the reverse of it even when it stares them in the face. The extremity of intolerance implicit in the notion of untouchability was glossed over by regarding it as a function of society and caste. The fact of this intolerance is now conceded so casually, that the concession is almost beginning to lose meaning. Apart from this, we also need to look at more direct examples of religious persecution. Curiously, even when historians have referred to such activities as indications of intolerance and persecution, there has been a firm refusal on the part of popular opinion to concede that Hindu sects did indulge in religious persecution.¹⁸⁰

Thapar recalled the anti-Buddhist persecutions in Kashmir and the manifest hatred against Buddhists and Jains transpiring in literary works and iconographic sources.¹⁸¹ After mentioning the anti-Jain persecutions in South India by the Sivaites, she rightly observed that “[w]e have here a major historical problem which requires detailed investigation”: if the question had not been tackled by historians, it was because of the desire “to portray tolerance and non-violence as the eternal values of the Hindu tradition”.¹⁸² For the first time a modern historian recognised the existence of a serious historiographical problem. “A related question — Thapar further noted — is whether the Hindus as a community were aware of or perpetrated this hostility, or whether it was perpetrated only by a segment of the Hindu community, substantially the Saivas”.¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ Thapar (1994: 15–16).

¹⁸¹ Among the first, Mahendravarman’s *Mattavilāsa*, Viśākhadatta’s *Mudrārāksasa*, and the *Prabodha Candrodāya* by Kṛṣṇa Miśra; she also mentioned the offensive representations of *śramaṇas* at Khajuraho. We will discuss some of this evidence in the following chapters.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*: 18.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*: 18–19.

Thapar supported the latter interpretation, even though it was not “to suggest that the Vaisnavas were altogether partial to Buddhists and Jainas. But there seem to be fewer examples of persecution perpetrated by the Vaisnavas”.¹⁸⁴ This conviction, probably conditioned by the later developments of Vishnuism, has prevented Thapar from evaluating the events in their complexity and extent, as also did her opinion that religious violence originated only about the middle of the first millennium AD, gaining force “through the centuries until Buddhism eventually fled the country and Jainism was effectively limited to a few pockets”.¹⁸⁵ That, at a certain point, the process accelerated, is true, but a careful analysis shows that violence played an important role since a much earlier time, since when the *śramaṇas* showed their capacity to build an actual, theoretically autonomous political power. The point is that Thapar has never subscribed to the idea that Aśoka’s policy was strictly dependent on his having embraced Buddhism,¹⁸⁶ and it has thus been impossible for her to identify a real, dramatic fracture in ancient Indian society. She admits that the Mauryas supported heterodox sects, but maintains that they “were not hostile to Brahmanism”, the principles of Aśoka’s *dhamma* being such “that they would have been acceptable to people belonging to any religious sect”.¹⁸⁷ In Thapar’s construct Aśoka embodies, to a certain extent, the principles of secularism.

Postponing the discussion on this point to the next chapter, it matters here to underline that in a lecture delivered in 1999,

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.: 20.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.: 19.

¹⁸⁶ Thapar devoted a volume to Aśoka in 1961, and has not changed her views in the revised edition of 1997. Already Wilson (1850: 236; cf. also p. 250) had doubted that the inscriptions of Aśoka were made public with the design of propagating Buddhism, and had wondered if they had “any connection with Buddhism at all”.

¹⁸⁷ Thapar (2002: 201–202).

Thapar partly retracted her statements. She observed that even though conflicts are to be expected in a complex society, in India

the conflict was limited to specific areas and groups, and was not pan-Indian. There was no sense of holy war — a *jihad* or a crusade. Religious intolerance was less severe when compared to Europe or west Asia, but acute intolerance took a social form, with untouchability constituting the worst form of degradation known to human society.¹⁸⁸

Thus while it is reaffirmed that untouchability is a form of violence, the other “major historical problem” requiring detailed investigation identified in 1987 — that of religious violence — reverts to a minor question. The two issues, as we will see, may be said to be one and the same, and if Buddhism was eventually defeated, it was because the revolt of the natives and of the untouchables ended in failure. Thapar, forgetting the nature and role of the elites (the *brāhmanas* in India), believes that Hindus had no consciousness of belonging to a religious community, to a “nation”, and that, therefore, their stand against other sects was segmented and episodic.¹⁸⁹ Eventually, in the revised edition of *Early India, from the Origins to AD 1300*, published in 2002, a book destined to a large audience, the issues raised in 1987 are ignored.¹⁹⁰

Moving to the opposite side of the historiographical debate, mention should be made of the consequences of *hindutva* theorisation. The extent to which Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, the founder of the *hindutva* movement,¹⁹¹ was in-

¹⁸⁸ Id. (1999: 17).

¹⁸⁹ Id. (1992b: 74–75).

¹⁹⁰ Only one of the examples brought up in previous works, that of Puṣyamitra Suṅga, is cited, and here Thapar gives credit to Puṣyamitra’s anti-Buddhist policy, distancing herself from the opinion expressed in the first edition of the book (id. 1997: 200).

¹⁹¹ Savarkar’s *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* was published in 1921.

debted to the interpretive paradigm of Indian history created at the end of the nineteenth century is all too obvious, but contemporary *hindutva* intervenes with devastating violence at the social and political level.¹⁹² Such is its ideological furore that we would be tempted to drop the question. However, *hindutva* ideology is so pervasive that it affects the works of scholars who would never subscribe to its political programme.

Hindutva preaches that being Hindu means having one's own birthplace and sacred sites in India, unlike foreigners and unlike those Indians — Muslims and Christians — who have their main places of worship, and thereby frames of reference elsewhere. The Buddhists are, therefore, Hindus (an old if crudely expressed construct), something that rules out the possibility that anti-Buddhist persecutions ever existed. In the words of a heated supporter of Hindu fundamentalism,

[i]n the case of their purely concocted grand theory of pre-Muslim persecution of Buddhism by Hindus, we see our leftist historians throw all standards of source criticism to the wind. Such is their eagerness to uphold this convenient hypothesis, and their care not to endanger what little supportive testimony there is. After all, from the millennia of pre-Muslim religious pluralism in India there are not even five testimonies of such persecution, so these few should be scrupulously kept away from criticism.¹⁹³

It is not clear who the secularist historians mentioned by Elst may be, since no Indian scholar has ever tackled the problem of the formation of neo-Brahmanical identity in relation to the other Indian systems. The critics of *hindutva* have been unable or unwilling to discuss the fundamentals of Indian history, and have thus ended in subscribing to at least some of its positions. From the one hand, they have forgotten the

¹⁹² There was still much of Mazzini in Savarkar, but the Italian patriot would be shocked in front of many a theory and the practice of present-day *hindutva*.

¹⁹³ Elst (1991: 87).

contributions of historians such as Jayaswal, driven back by his outspoken nationalism¹⁹⁴ and on the other, have ignored Ambedkar's insights. However, history weighs, and especially when it is denied, it ends up presenting the bill. In addition to this, scholars with a command of ancient and medieval India history are fewer and fewer¹⁹⁵ and questioning the fundamentals has become a very difficult task.

Oblivion also comes as the result of a more general trend in modern historiography, which is largely the work of secular, globalised scholars who prefer to smooth edges and tend to ignore hot issues such as the role of religion in both ancient and modern societies. Religion is reduced to an unfortunate component of human behaviour, and there is a propensity to deconstruct it into a number of less controversial issues. The role played by conflicts tends to be equally overshadowed. This attitude is a function of academic interests: to access funds that are increasingly managed by supranational organisations, for all borders to be open, and a quick relocation of activities to take place, conflicts must be kept to a minimum or ignored. A common way to minimise them in writing history is to overlook the role played by strongly motivated elites and the devastating effects that their theories and actions have caused. An analysis of historical issues at the level of the common people is often preferred, because questions of political power are not posed at the base of the social pyramid.

Last but not least, most scholars seem to be culturally and ideologically conditioned by a middle class, as it were, frame

¹⁹⁴ S.P. Gupta, a scholar indebted to K.P. Jayaswal, distancing himself from the official positions of *hindutva*, has maintained that no doubt is possible on Aśoka having been a Buddhist and on Aśokan sites being Buddhist sites (S.P. Gupta 1980: 47), further asserting Puṣyamitra Śuṅga's hostility against the Mauryas and all the *śramaṇas* (ibid.: 215).

¹⁹⁵ Among the exceptions, mention must be made of the *People's History of India*, ed. Irfan Habib, the first volume of which was published in 2001.

of mind — which does not necessarily reflect individual background and upbringing but rather results from an increasing levelling of education and formation in terms of unquestioned bourgeois assumptions. International scholarly exchange is no longer limited to the elite level but, with the development of mobility, information networks and facilities, becomes part of intellectual practice and identity. An awareness of larger issues, however, does not generally foster critical, let alone antagonistic, reorientation of one's methodologies and approaches to the past. The predisposition to turn one's head away from the tragedy and violence of history, inherent to bourgeois ideology and world-view, finds thus new expression within the context of a post-modern middle-class homogenisation, unless issues are involved that can be capitalised to create a distinct profile as scholars of a globalised world. To a greater or lesser degree, we are all affected by the many relationships that the world of today imposes on us, and only our successors will be able to clarify the deep reasons of our beliefs and our choices.

CHAPTER II

The Open Society

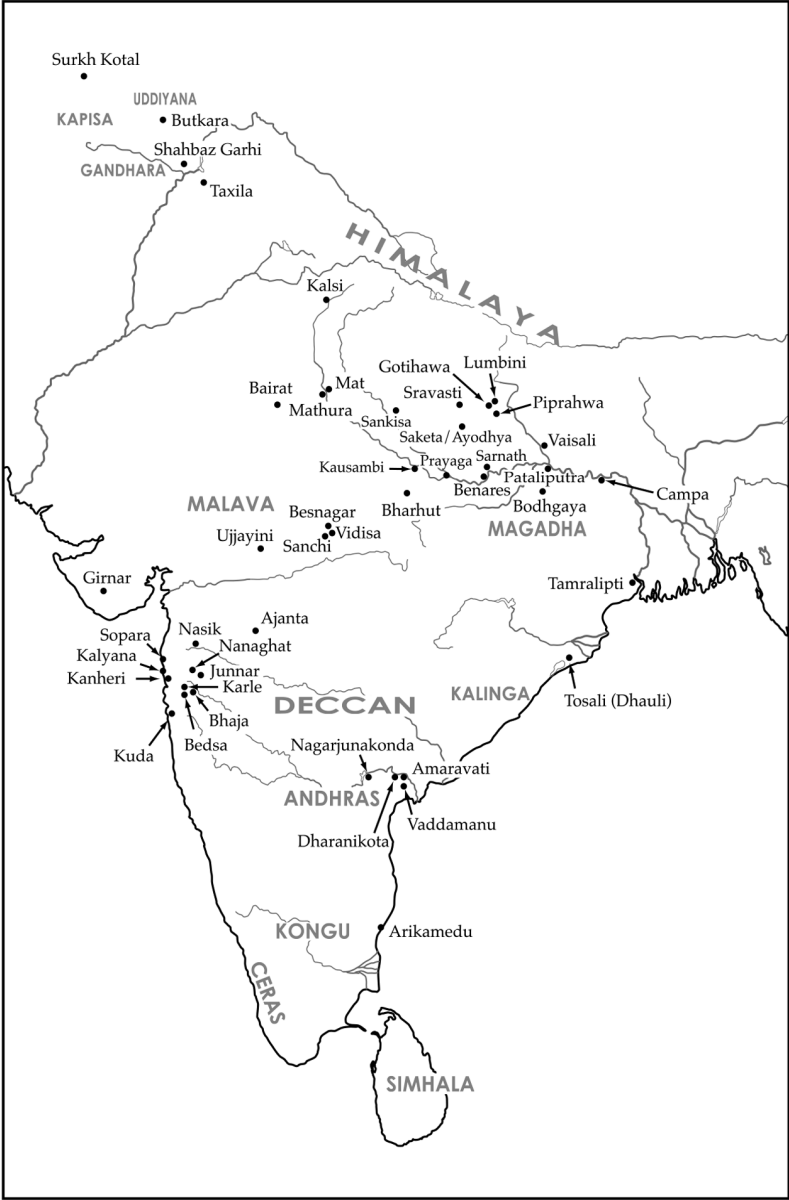
THE Gnostic PERSPECTIVE

Many misconceptions formed over time on Buddhism and its position towards Brahmanism depend on the assessments made on the relationship between early Buddhism and the world of the Upaniṣads. The phenomenological aspects common to the two systems conceal the profound difference that separates them. Buddhist speculation has significant points in common with the systems that implicitly affirmed that the sensible world is evil and set liberation as their goal,¹ and the earliest, very influential Upaniṣads share this vision. Many authoritative scholars have seen here a dualism that is anthropological and cosmic together: on one side there would be being and eternity, on the other becoming and temporal succession, soul and body, *ātman* and things.² Between *ātman* and cosmos there would be an irreducible antinomy. Geo Widengren accepted this interpretation when he drew a parallel between the anti-cosmic dualism of the Upaniṣads, of which he underlined the concept of *māyā*, the illusion or error that this world is, and that of the Gnostics.³

¹ Tucci (1977, II: 30).

² Ibid.: 52.

³ Widengren (1952; 1967). Cf. also id. (1964: 78).



Map 1. Early historical India.

Is it really so? The *māyā* doctrine is only just mentioned in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* and *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣads*;⁴ in the *ātman/brahman* relationship, perceived and insistently indicated as identical, empirical diversity comes from the *brahman*, to which it returns,⁵ so that the cosmos cannot be absolutely “other” from the absolute. The stated *ātman/brahman* identity is, rather, an example of monistic idealism,⁶ and Upaniṣadic speculation on asceticism is not without significant limitations. It would seem that the Upaniṣads hesitate to proclaim complete detachment from the world: the phenomenal aspects possess a part of truth as reflection of the *brahman*, and thus are all justified. Renunciation is recommended, but life comes first, and the idea is present that the apparent reality must come before the intuition of the ultimate reality, which without the former is mutilated. Man, therefore, anchored to earth, cannot abstract from the experiences of his condition.⁷ All the Upaniṣads proclaim their bond with the Veda and Brahmanical authority, thus stopping not only in the face of any speculation that is effectively dualistic, but also in the face of too explicitly anti-cosmic, antinomial and anti-sacerdotal positions.

Even allowing for more radical positions of Upaniṣadic thought before neo-Brahmanical normalisation, it can be maintained that in the early centuries BC/AD two distinct models of ascetic life developed in India. The first, for all the differences within it, did not break with Brahmanical authority and let itself be controlled by it; the second, just as differentiated (besides the various Buddhist schools there were the other Sramanic systems), rejected Brahmanical

⁴ S. Dasgupta (1932-55, I: 50).

⁵ *Ibid.*: 48.

⁶ Della Casa (1976: 20).

⁷ *Ibid.*: 23–24.

authority.⁸ They catalysed anti-system movements and institutions having their political-social propellant in a part of the *kṣatriyas*, in the *vaiśyas* — the “free commoners”⁹— and in a part of the *brāhmaṇas* as well.

It is precisely early Buddhism that shares many features with the Gnostic systems.¹⁰ At the phenomenological level,¹¹ we observe anticosmism (the phenomenal world is sorrow, and the causal chain keeps men bound to it) and dualism (*saṃsāra* is in sharp contrast with *nirvāṇa*, however the dynamic between the two came to be represented). The subordination of the divine is another typical feature of early Buddhism and of the Gnostic systems, different as the two perspectives may be: god is evil for the Gnostics, an obstacle for the achievement of *sophia*; for the Buddhists the gods are not relevant with respect to either the teaching, revelation and attainment of *prajñā*.¹² Antinomism is expressed by the refusal to recognise that caste division is sanctioned from above; it has, if ever, only a *de*

⁸ Johannes Bronkhorst has observed that it is a mistake to reinterpret the distinctive features of early Buddhism so as to agree better with what we know of the other Indian religions of its day, and that (as maintained here) it has no links with Vedic asceticism, being distinct as well from the other forms of non-Vedic asceticism (Bronkhorst 1998: 95–96).

⁹ The definition is Max Weber’s (1958: 58).

¹⁰ The very existence of “Gnosticism” as a usable historical category has been questioned: the better knowledge we have of the formation of Christianity after the discovery of the Nag Hammadi library would advise us not to use it, even not considering the cheap intrusions of alien subjects and concepts into the construct (M.A. Williams 1996: 3–5 and *passim*). However, “biblical demiurgy” is hardly an expression that can replace the term “Gnosticism”, especially for the discussants who seek a relationship between the Gnostic groups of the Mediterranean and other religious movements of antiquity.

¹¹ Edward Conze, who devoted an important paper to the correspondences between Gnosticism and Mahāyāna in the early centuries of our era, warned that not all the Buddhist doctrines that were close to gnosis were “exclusively Mahayanistic” (Conze 1967: 651). He did not think, however, that a systemic relationship could exist between Buddhism and Gnosticism.

¹² The devotional practices of the laymen were admitted and encouraged, although, as observed by Lamotte (1958: 477), even in the Mahāyāna devotion is depersonalised and focuses on the original aspiration that consists in the reawakening of the thought of *bodhi*. Orthodox *brāhmaṇas* always remained convinced that the Buddhists were atheist.

facto validity. Deconstructing the self, Buddhism tends to destructure society.¹³ Here we find an anti-clerical position: the brāhmaṇas, from whose ranks the priestly class comes (they are both priests and *gr̥hasthas*) have no rights deriving from birth. The true brāhmaṇa is whoever enters the spiritual elite founded by the Buddha. The opposition to rituals, especially bloody ones, has the aim of emptying the sacerdotal functions. Another shared feature is individualism: while *jñāna* or gnosis is a means of individual salvation valid for the *āryas*, corresponding to the pneumatics or spirituals of the Gnostics and to the Manichaeans *electi*, an individualist ethic informs as well the *upāsakas*, who are the equivalents of the Gnostic psychics and the *auditores* or hearers of the Manichaeans. The individual moral action guarantees their well-being on earth and a favourable rebirth.¹⁴ We also note the typical hierarchy of human beings: the Buddha of the Pāli Canon maintains that humans fall into three categories, of lower, medium or higher quality, like lotuses in a pond. Some do not emerge; others surface on the water; and still others “stand thrusting themselves above the water”, unwetted by it.¹⁵ Regarding universalism, a feature common to all Gnostic systems, the Buddha’s

¹³ In the countries where no pre-existing Brahmanical control over society was present and where Buddhism put down roots, there is no trace of a caste system. According to Thapar (1978: 53), the Buddha distinguished between caste system understood as a frame of the socio-economic structures, which he accepted, and the notion of caste purity inherent in the upper castes, which he rejected. Buddhism thus succeeded only partially, and only in certain periods, to hegemonise Indian society, against which it could more often set up only that sort of counter-society represented by the *saṃgha* (ibid.: 87). On the Buddhist position on caste, the reader is referred to Eltschinger (2000), which we shall often recall.

¹⁴ Thapar (1978: 52–53, 78, and passim; 1992b: 49–50 and passim). In a study on Ajanta, Bautze-Picon (2002), subtracting a large number of images to the class of “decorative motifs”, has shown that besides having a protective function, they are owners of wealth, their attendants pouring money from a bag or holding a cornucopia full of flowers or coins. For all their possible “higher” symbolic meaning, they indicate that material wealth matters, functional though it is to the well-being of the *saṃgha* (cf. p. 234).

¹⁵ *Samyutta Nikāya*: VI. I.1 (vol. 1, p. 174).

preaching is freed from social, ethnic, national and even religious ties. Lastly, Buddhism soon developed a saviour figure, the bodhisattva. The Gnostic saviour was similarly conceived as an enlightener (*phōstér*) whose teaching saves.¹⁶

In a subordinate position,¹⁷ two other features characteristic of the Gnostic systems should be mentioned: docetism, favoured especially by the Mahāsāṃghikas: the Buddhas have nothing in common with the world,¹⁸ and as in Gnostic docetism, the idea is implicit that what belongs to this inferior world cannot possess and grasp that which is luminous and divine.¹⁹ Docetism is connected to the negative judgement of the body, “privileged place of the action of the demons” for the Gnostics.²⁰ For the Buddhists the body is foul, transient, and seat of desires: hence the meditation on its impurities, which takes place in cemeteries, where the body is found in varying states of decay and decomposition.²¹ If the common feature of the Gnostic systems is a dualist anthroposophy at the basis of which there is an anti-cosmic and anti-demiurgic polemic,²² the Gnostic perspective clarifies better than any other the historical-religious position of the religion of Dharma.

The two models of ascetic life in ancient India mentioned above, whose common phenomenological aspects risk obscuring the differences separating them at the historical level,²³ recalls the distinction between the models

¹⁶ Puech (1985: 286–87).

¹⁷ See in any case Conze (1967) for important observations.

¹⁸ Lamotte (1958: 690–91); for a brief précis on the Mahāsāṃghikas and Lokottaravādins, see P. Williams (2008: 18–20).

¹⁹ Bianchi (1967: 13).

²⁰ Filoramo (1993: 135); cf. Puech (1985: 222–24).

²¹ See for instance *Dīgha Nikāya*, *Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* 8–10 (pp. 338–39). The meditation on impurity is known as *aśubhabhāvanā*.

²² Bianchi (1967: 13).

²³ Eliade (1982) is as illuminating in examining and comparing complex phenomena as he is misleading in considering them expressions of a unified historical tradition, and as regards historians, Thapar (1978), for all her penetrating vision, does not distinguish clearly between the phenomenical and the historical-social level.

of asceticism in the eastern Mediterranean. Christian ascetics believed in the goodness of creation, which includes matter *and* the body: the possibility of regaining the original purity was its proof.²⁴ For the Gnostics, as for the Buddhists, asceticism meant rather to put all possible distance between oneself and the world — not, however, as maintained by Max Weber, the world *tout court*²⁵ — but that submitted to the *nómos*. The fundamental point of the dissent²⁶ was that Christian ascetics always recognised the authority of the Great Church, while Gnostic ascetics did not, preferring, if anything, to create alternative churches. For both Gnosticism and Buddhism, the breaking point with orthodoxy passes very clearly through antinomial and anti-sacerdotal positions, something which caused similar sanctions.

THE FREEDOM OF THE INDIAN OCEAN

Buddhism has long been judged as belonging to an urban and mercantile environment, of which it represents the religious and ideological referent. Early Buddhist establishments were located just outside the cities and, in the vast non-urbanised regions of the subcontinent, along the communication routes that joined distant and different areas. Overseas trade was already well developed from the second half of the second century BC, at the time of Republican Rome,²⁷ but intensified

²⁴ Drijvers (1984: 115); Peter Brown (1992: 304).

²⁵ For instance, Weber (1995, II: 193, 230–31, 233). See discussion below.

²⁶ At times violent, as in Syria (Drijvers 1984: 109; Peter Brown (1992: 302–303).

²⁷ The demand among Mediterranean elites for goods from India was already high (De Romanis 1996: 169), and during the Republic, Greek and Roman merchants were aware that the Indian goods demanded on the market could be obtained more directly and probably at lower prices by sea (Lyding Will 1991: 154). After 127 BC, the merchants began to crowd the ports of Syria and Alexandria (De Romanis 1996: 165).

enormously from the age of Augustus and Tiberius onwards. The new large ships that made the direct route between Aden and the Deccan possible attest to the extraordinary boom of maritime traffic in the Arabian Sea.²⁸ The Buddhist monasteries were often able to supply merchants and caravans with the capital they needed;²⁹ loans and sales to cultivators and merchants are documented, especially by the Mahāsāmghika communities,³⁰ which we have mentioned for their docetist orientation. To give some examples, at Nāsik the local *samgha* received a money grant from the wives and daughters of some merchants thanks to the investments of the corporations of potters, plumbers, and the owners of oil presses.³¹ At Junnar, the *samgha* invested with the corporations of the bamboo workers and of the coppersmiths.³² The monasteries were not only halting places but also centres with functions of supplying and banking.³³ The models are, clearly, the banking functions of the Greek and Hellenistic temples, which in Roman times prospered especially in the eastern Mediterranean.³⁴

Taking, in this, our cue from Max Weber, we can say that between merchants and monasteries a relationship was created deriving from the need for warehousing and roads.³⁵ By using a particular road and storing the goods in a particular port or at certain crossroads, the earnings from the commercial activity were maximised, and it became possible to create

²⁸ Ibid.: 170.

²⁹ Kosambi (1965: 182).

³⁰ Ibid.: 183.

³¹ *Lüders List*: no. 1137.

³² Ibid.: no. 1165.

³³ Kosambi (1965: 185). On the lending on interest by Buddhist monasteries, see Schopen (2004), with relation to the *Vinaya* of the Mūlasarvāstivādins. Lending on interest, a crucial activity for economic development, was forbidden in a number of religious traditions, and the ban had somehow to be circumvented (see the role played by the Jewish communities in the middle age, both in Europe and in the Islamic world).

³⁴ Liu (1988: 121).

³⁵ Weber (1993: 200).

the infrastructure of trade and bear the costs of the building of roads and other services. At the same time — the example comes from Junnar, a major terminus on the Western Ghats for the ports of Kalyāṇa (the Kalliena of the *Periplus*) and Sopara/Sūrpāraka — the monasteries were subdivided into small groups widely spaced to permit separate rapports and patronage between different schools and different classes of merchants.³⁶

Giving a quick look at the inscriptions from the first century BC to the second century AD, we get a vivid picture of the social sectors supporting Buddhism: at Kanheri, due north of Mumbai, we find among the donors merchants, jewellers, treasurers, blacksmiths,³⁷ some of whom lived in Kalyāṇa and Sopara. At Kuda, on the Ghats, at the beginning of the second century AD, the lay donors included traders, bankers, scribes, doctors;³⁸ in the same period we find bankers, perfumers and carpenters at Karle³⁹ and bankers at Bedsa.⁴⁰ At Junnar, the *yavana* Irila, arguably a merchant, pays for two cisterns;⁴¹ and donations of the corporation of the grain merchants and from a goldsmith are recorded.⁴² The picture does not change if we move to one of the greatest Buddhist foundations of eastern Deccan, Amaravati, which rose near the river port of Dharaṇīkoṭa.⁴³ Here, too, we find merchants, perfumers,

³⁶ Kosambi (1965: 185).

³⁷ *Lüders List*: nos. 987, 995, 998, 1000–01; no. 1005; nos. 993, 996, 1033; no. 1082, respectively.

³⁸ *Ibid.*: nos. 1055, 1062, 1065–66; nos. 1063–64, 1073; nos. 1037, 1045; no. 1048, respectively.

³⁹ *Ibid.*: nos. 1087, 1090, 1092.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*: no. 1109.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*: no. 1154.

⁴² *Ibid.*: no. 1180.

⁴³ At Vaddamanu, a few kilometres from Amaravati, located immediately outside ancient Dharaṇīkoṭa, there was a Jain sanctuary, one of the few that have been excavated. Only a few fragments of inscriptions have come to light, but the presence of lay donors is documented (Sastri, Kasturibai & Veerender 1992: 267).

bankers,⁴⁴ and still other artisans.⁴⁵ Further north, on the Vindhya, Sanchi and the nearby Buddhist monasteries channelled the commercial traffic along the valley of the Betwa towards the western part of the Gangetic plain and Mathurā, while Bharhut channelled it along the Son, towards Pāṭaliputra and the south-eastern part of the great plain. At Sanchi, the majority of donors were from Mālavā (Malwa), and included a chief artisan, a tailor, weavers, masons, the corporation of the ivory artisans of Vidiśā and some corporations of Ujjayinī.⁴⁶ The Buddha would have preferred that the young kṣatriyas should enter the *saṃgha*, which instead was largely formed of monks from the social background we have just described⁴⁷ and was supported by merchants and bankers.⁴⁸ The monastic order, centre of gravity of the economic system, thus linked the urban and mercantile circles to the circle of the upper-caste administrative officials,⁴⁹ to the higher ranks of the army,⁵⁰ and to the petty kings and princes, who also appear in the inscriptions,⁵¹ whose importance was crucial for the political fortunes of Buddhism. The female presence deserves at least a mention: they are the wives, the daughters, the mothers, the sisters of merchants, bankers and princes who appear in the

⁴⁴ *Lüders List*: nos. 1213–14, 1229, 1281–82, 1285; nos. 1210, 1230; no. 1261, respectively.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*: no. 1298.

⁴⁶ Lamotte (1958: 455–56). For the inscriptions of Sanchi, edited by N.G. Majumdar, see Marshall & Foucher (1940: 264 ff.); cf. also *Lüders List*: nos. 162–668.

⁴⁷ Cf. also Thapar (1978: 71). This was made easy by the fact that for merchants, artisans and small owners it was possible to embrace the monastic state only for a limited time after which they would return to lay life (Lamotte 1958: 61).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ See, for example, for Amaravati, inscription nos. 1250 and 1279 of the *Lüders List*; for Nāsik, cf. *ibid.*: nos. 1141, 1144, etc.

⁵⁰ See at Nāsik the dedication put up by the wife of a general (*ibid.*: no. 1146).

⁵¹ Lamotte (1958: 455; for Bharhut, cf. *Lüders List*: nos. 687 ff.). The documentation is plentiful for almost all the monasteries of the Deccan and the Vindhya that have left epigraphic material.

foreground: many joined the *saṃgha* as nuns.⁵² The link between Buddhism and the mercantile world is genetic: suffice it to recall that the Bactrian merchants Trapuṣa and Bhallika were the first to whom a *deva*, astonished witness to the Awakening, ordered to run and pay homage to Śākyamuni.⁵³

Similarly, the variables from which Mediterranean Gnostics developed have been identified in the city-country conflict and in the opening of trade.⁵⁴ They originated in the most Hellenised Jewish milieus of Alexandria, but were rejected by orthodox Judaism and were not accepted, although they sought assimilation, by the Greek elite, being denied access to Greek institutions. Born from the transformation of the Ptolemaic mode of production into the privatisation of land favoured by the Romans, they felt a profound personal and social alienation.⁵⁵ The response mechanism they set in motion may be compared to that started by a part of the kṣatriyas and their allies, to whom the Brahmanical elite denied equal social status.

Among the Jews of Alexandria there were, in addition to small owners, tenants, soldiers, officials, farm workers, shepherds, petty bureaucrats, artisans organised in professional groups.⁵⁶ The de-monopolisation of key industries had placed

⁵² B.C. Law (*IA* 57, 1928: 49–54, 65–68, 86–89) has provided an account of the most prominent women in early Buddhism.

⁵³ Bareaux (1963: 106 ff., with discussion of the different versions of the episode). Bactria never became part of the westernmost provinces of the Mauryan Empire annexed by Aśoka, but circulation of men and merchandises with the regions south of the Hindukush and India had been continuous since the remotest times.

⁵⁴ This is the historiographical perspective opened by Rudolph (1977a; 1977b). Green (1985: 3–4), who judged it not sufficiently motivated, has given it a more analytical basis.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*: 262. It should be recalled that, as stated by Tacitus, the administration of Roman Egypt had been entrusted by Augustus to the *equites* (*Historiae*: I.11), namely – I simplify – the capitalists of the time (along with the most enterprising freedmen). Senators could not set foot in Egypt.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*: 94–95; cf. also Rudolph (1977a: 38), who observes that the Gnostics recruited followers in almost all social strata where the communities of the great Church had their roots, a serious reason for the Church Fathers to react.

in private hands, quite often those of the Hellenised Jews, the production of and trade in papyrus, glass, perfumes and unguents.⁵⁷ Even the shipping industry was in good part in their hands.⁵⁸ Everything indicates their involvement in the trading enterprises, which proliferated not only in relation to the traffic between Alexandria and Jerusalem or Rome, but also to that of the Red Sea⁵⁹ and therefore with India. Dio Chrysostom, addressing the inhabitants of the Egyptian metropolis (we are in the second half of the first century AD), states that “not only have you a monopoly of the shipping of the entire Mediterranean [...], but also the outer waters that lie beyond are in your grasp, both the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, whose name was rarely heard in former days”.⁶⁰

Under Vespasian (AD 69–79) the value of the goods imported by sea amounted to 25 million sesterces a year⁶¹ — not only an impressive figure in itself, but the largest that could ever have been realised in the ancient world with free private trade, without controls and state subventions of any sort. It is especially in maritime trade, which partially escaped the sanctions of the anti-chrematist ethics,⁶² that the Gnostic communities, composed of men from the middle class

⁵⁷ Green (1985: 66).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*: 136.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*: 97, 136. For the trade in the Red Sea and in the Arabian Sea, see the details provided by Casson in *Periplus* (11 ff.) and, especially in relation to the information gathered from Pliny, by De Romanis (1996: 157 ff., 167 ff.).

⁶⁰ *Lógoi*: XXXII.36 (vol. 3: p. 207). The Indian Ocean was already known to Dio as *Indikē thálassa*.

⁶¹ Weber (1993: 307). The information come from Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*: VI.101; according to another version of the passage, the sesterces would have been 50 million (De Romanis 1996: 202; Conte in *Naturalis Historia*: 1.710–11). Weber relied upon Karl Julius Beloch’s studies of economic history, and recent studies (Miller 1974, Casson in *Periplus* and De Romanis 1996) amply confirm the estimates made at the end of the nineteenth century and up to Warmington (1974 [1928]). The figures given by Pliny (*Naturalis Historia*: XII.84, *minimaque computatione*) are considered exact and reliable (Miller 1974: 225–26).

⁶² Weber (1993: 38–39).

and characterised by individualist and antinomial positions, prospered. Marcion, who was from Sinope on the Black Sea, was a shipowner.⁶³ In the *Acts of Thomas*, the Indian merchant Ḥabban buys Thomas, a carpenter and mason by profession, from Jesus to take him to King Gondophares, who ruled at Taxila: we would expect a journey by land. Instead, “Judah [Thomas] went and found Ḥabban the merchant carry-ing his goods on board the ship, and began to carry (them) on board with him”.⁶⁴ The activity of merchants on the sea trade was private, and the area involved in the mercantile operations — the Arabian Sea — was free from government controls. We are, as in the deserts of Xinjiang that also started being crossed by Buddhist merchants,⁶⁵ in a geographic context where the existence of strong landed powers cannot even be imagined, in an open society where the very diversifications of the Gnostic groups can be considered functional, according to the Buddhist model,⁶⁶ to economic development.

Mercantile activity in Alexandria resumed after the crisis caused by the policy of the Ptolemies, especially that of Ptolemy Euergetes and his successors.⁶⁷ After the battle of Actium (31 BC), Alexandria boomed again thanks to the Roman policy of privatisation and the enormous volume of trade with the countries on the Arabian Sea, and in particular with the west coast

⁶³ Harnack (1921: 1 ff., 21 ff.).

⁶⁴ *Acts of Thomas*: I.3 (p. 61).

⁶⁵ According to tradition, Buddhism was introduced into China during the reign of Emperor Mingdi (AD 58–76), the first monastery to be established being that of the White Horse (*Baimasi*) in Luoyang in AD 65. By that time, Buddhism had already been introduced into the country, however (Ch'en 1964: 31), and the Xinjiang trade routes must have been already used by Buddhist merchants. According to an apocryphal tradition, eighteen Buddhist monks brought *sūtras* to Xianyang in Shaanxi as early as 242 BC (cf. Zürcher 2007: 19–20).

⁶⁶ What has been said above for Junnar, could also be said for Bhaja and Karle, located almost opposite one another in the same small valley.

⁶⁷ I follow Lamotte (1953: 100); however, “at least from 62 BC and perhaps as early as 74/3 BC” in the Ptolemaic bureaucracy there was a superintendency on the Erythrean and the Indian Sea (De Romanis 1996: 165).

of the Deccan.⁶⁸ Dio Chrysostom, in the above-mentioned oration addressed to the inhabitants of Alexandria, remarks that among his addressees in the theatre, besides Ethiopians and Arabs, Bactrians, Scythians and Persians, there were “some of the Indians”.⁶⁹ The recent discovery on the Egyptian coast of the Red Sea of *ōstraka* inscribed with the names of Indian merchants in Prakrit and Tamil⁷⁰ and the documented presence of Indians on the island of Socotra off the Horn of Africa⁷¹ point to the same conclusion.⁷² It is very unlikely that merchants of South India could be, in the first and second centuries AD, other than lay supporters of the *śramaṇas*. The maximum expansion of the heterodox movements in the Deccan coincided with the epoch of the overseas trade with Rome and South-eastern Asia.⁷³ A Tamil-Brāhmī inscription records the donation of a cave to a Jain monk probably made by a merchant from Laṅkā, and in the Buddhist sites of Āndhra there were Siṃhala merchants along with monks and nuns.⁷⁴ Gifts to the Buddhist and/or Jain ascetics by the Cēra ruling family and by merchants are recorded in inscriptions from the Koṅgu region of Karnataka.⁷⁵ It seems that there was a division of tasks between the *śramaṇas*, and thus also boundaries to be observed: Buddhist monks mostly lived in coastal areas and

⁶⁸ Casson in *Periplus*: 22.

⁶⁹ *Lógoi*: XXXII.40. Cohoon (cf. vol. 3, p. 111) translates “a few Indians”, but ‘*Indōn tivas* may perhaps be better rendered with “some of the Indians”; Dio was aware that India was inhabited by different kinds of people.

⁷⁰ Salomon (1991); I. Mahadevan in V. Begley & al. (1996: 291). Inscribed sherds in Tamil-Brāhmī script with the names Kaṇaṇ and Cātaṇ dated to the first century BC, have been found at Quseir al-Qadim (Myos Hormos; on this toponym, see De Romanis 1996: 147 ff.). The fact that the name Kaṇaṇ was also found on the rim of a thick jar at Arikamedu on the Coromandel coast (V. Begley & al. 1996: 309) may not be a coincidence (ibid.: 23–24). An inscription reading “Korṇaṇ, the chieftain” comes from Berenike (ibid.: 291).

⁷¹ Didri (2002: 581–83) and esp. Strauch & Bukharin (2004).

⁷² The old question whether there was a Buddhist settlement in Alexandria, answered in the negative (de Lubac 1987: 20 ff.) should now be reopened.

⁷³ Thapar (1978: 72).

⁷⁴ Champakalakshmi (1996: 105, 114).

⁷⁵ Ibid.: 119.

were actively involved in maritime trade, whereas the Jains were mostly involved in internal trade.⁷⁶ Except for brief periods, Brahmanical dynasties had not yet succeeded in controlling the Deccan,⁷⁷ and a market mechanism had probably been developed by the early Tamil kings.⁷⁸

The Gnostics, like the Buddhists, define an urban and mercantile phenomenon: besides Alexandria, we find them at Seleucia, Antioch, Ephesus, and Rome.⁷⁹ In the capital of the empire, Valentinus and Marcion, and before them Cerdon and other groups, had opened schools,⁸⁰ probably with the aim to protect and extend the network already created in the eastern Mediterranean and on the south-eastern borders of the Roman territories, to seek political patrons and open a breach in the elites. Here enter the women, “who come from good families and who have fine clothes and are very rich”; their contributions made Marcus the Magian wealthy.⁸¹ In the Gnostic communities, women were offered possibility of self-fulfilment unthinkable elsewhere.⁸²

The social position of the merchants was superior to that of the artisans, workmen, and peasants, but inferior, in the West, to that of the landed aristocracy,⁸³ and, in India, to that of the

⁷⁶ K. Rajan (2008: 57–58, 67).

⁷⁷ In the second half of the first century BC the Sātavāhanas (an orthodox dynasty) took possession of the region of Junnar and of other parts of upper Deccan. I limit myself to referring the reader to Sircar (1965*b*: 190–97) for the inscriptional evidence and to id. (HCIP 2: 191 ff.) for the historical picture, as well as to Cribb (1998) for a reappraisal of the whole question. Around the mid-second century AD, Gautamīputra defeated the pro-Buddhist Kṣatrapa Nahapāna and took possession of Nāsik, where, at least initially, he confirmed the privileges granted to the monasteries (Sircar in HCIP 2: 201; cf. Cribb’s revised chronology). We will see below that a famous monument ascribed to Sātavāhana patronage such as the stūpa of Amaravati has little to do with this dynasty.

⁷⁸ Whittaker (2009: 11).

⁷⁹ Rudolph (1977*a*: 41); Kippenberg (1984: 121).

⁸⁰ Cancik (1984: 175).

⁸¹ *Adversus haereses*: I.13.

⁸² Rudolph (1977*a*: 39).

⁸³ Green (1985: 71).

brāhmaṇas and kṣatriya landowners. Despite this, a substantial part of the goods and the money from and to India passed through their hands, whether they belonged to Gnostic or Buddhist communities. The reason why late ancient sources continue to know, in relation to India, only the world of the brāhmaṇas —familiar to them since the early classical period—and to ignore Buddhism⁸⁴ is because those in direct contact with India were not “Greeks” and “Romans” but Roman Jews and Gnostics. The fact that the first Western writer to mention the Buddhists and Jains is Clement of Alexandria (c. AD 150-215)⁸⁵ is significant: his informants had certainly plied the maritime trade routes and frequented the ports of the Deccan.⁸⁶

Moses Finley contended that mercantile society was always marginal in the ancient world, even in the periods of greatest commercial growth, but we cannot follow him,⁸⁷ as we cannot accept the belief that the Gnostics were none other than marginal intellectuals, as maintained by Max Weber, who is behind the poor understanding of the Gnostic phenomenon to these days. Significantly, Weber also gave an erroneous interpretation of Buddhism. Weber was the first to define the Gnostics as a stratum of de-politicised, frustrated intellectuals, lacking an ethics of responsibility and incapable of political action.⁸⁸ He removed Gnosticism from the ambit of the Greek-Roman world, placing it on the side of the “Asiatic religions”.⁸⁹ He was on the right track when he considered the two systems as structurally related, but drawing Brahmanism

⁸⁴ This aspect of the classical sources has been underlined by some authors; cf. e.g. Filliozat (1949: 27–28); Daffinà (1977: 32–33).

⁸⁵ *Strōmata*: I.76.6; II.60.2-4.

⁸⁶ Daffinà (1995: 36).

⁸⁷ Finley revised his own theories, which have been again questioned on the basis of the archaeological evidence (Cameron 1993: 123). This new perspective is clear to Thapar (1992a: 4). Finley’s ideas were accepted by Henry Green (1985: 67).

⁸⁸ See, e.g. Weber (1995, II: esp. 196–200); see also Kippenberg (1981).

⁸⁹ Drijvers (1984: 110).

together with Gnosticism and Buddhism was a serious, misleading mistake.⁹⁰ Western asceticism represented for Weber the intramundane model; the various types of Asiatic asceticism, the model of the rejection of the world and contemplative withdrawal from it.⁹¹ In his distinction between ethical and exemplary prophet, the Buddha represents the latter, indeed capable of indicating a path of personal salvation but not of founding a universal ethics.⁹² Buddhism, the Asiatic religion to which, as has been observed, Weber did least justice,⁹³ would have been a religion of ascetic mendicants, apolitical and antipolitical. This interpretation has been dismantled and abandoned for decades:⁹⁴ in early Buddhism not only a great capacity to organise the world of the laymen has been recognised, but also one that promoted in them the principle of individual moral responsibility centred on the puritan ethics of saving and investment.⁹⁵ Early Buddhism is now placed in a perspective practically the opposite of what Weber maintained.

Regarding the Gnostics, it is in the wake of Max Weber that scholars continue to hold that the Gnostics' response to their social and psychological alienation was mystic, and not political. The institutional forms they worked out would have developed in isolation from the dominant culture, and gnosis — an individual liberation — would have exempted them from the necessity of reforming the world.⁹⁶ They would

⁹⁰ We have already noted Max Weber's unintentional dependence on positions such as those of Edgar Quinet. Here the influence on his thought of the paradigm of a socially and culturally unified India must be also underlined.

⁹¹ Weber (1995, II: esp. 230–31, 233).

⁹² *Ibid.*: esp. 147, but *passim*. Weber (1958: 193 ff., 203 ff.) marvels that Buddhism became one of the world's greatest religions given that "Buddhistic monastic ethic simply does not represent a rational, ethical endeavor" (p. 218). For the discussion on Weber's constructs, the reader is referred to Roth & Schluchter (1984), Bechert (1986) and, for a critique as dispassionate as it is acute, to Thapar (1992*b*: 41–58).

⁹³ *Ibid.*: 56.

⁹⁴ See especially Kosambi (1952; 1965) and Thapar (1978; 1992*b*).

⁹⁵ Thapar (1978: 52–53, 93; 1992*b*: 56).

⁹⁶ Green (1985: 176; 263); Rudolph (1977*a*) rejects these positions.

have been only an intellectual class placed at the margins of the Roman Empire, prisoners of an a-historical perspective.⁹⁷ It is difficult, however, to believe that the Gnostics were satisfied with a simple role of intellectual opposition: certainly not those who were able to organise themselves in the “forest” mentioned by Tertullian.⁹⁸ Their geographic marginality in the empire was due, if indeed it was such — we think of the thousands of pages written against them by the Church Fathers — to their presence in the Indian Ocean and in those areas of the Mediterranean and Near East that were touched most directly by a proto-capitalist economy. We could rather agree with an observation of Ioan Couliano that Gnosticism represents an anthropological optimism without equal in the history of Western ideas.⁹⁹ The Gnostic communities, and with them the Buddhists, were the optimistic bearers of a model of an open economy and society freed from the impositions of *nómos*.¹⁰⁰ The withdrawal of the Gnostics from the urban centres after the second century — a fact probably triggered by the great epidemic of the third century¹⁰¹ — did not mark, like the sim-

⁹⁷Kippenberg (1970: 225). Odo Marquard stated, from his particular viewpoint, that “gnosis is de-politicised Platonism” (cf. *ibid.*: 134).

⁹⁸*Adversus Valentianianos*: 39.2 (p. 940).

⁹⁹Couliano (1989: 189). This author does not include Marcion in the picture.

¹⁰⁰Although it is difficult for me to accept Kippenberg’s interpretation of the Gnostic phenomenon, he is certainly right in considering central their passion for liberty (Kippenberg 1970: 225), which can be experienced, however, not only through gnosis (characteristic of the pneumatics), but (for the psychics) through operating in a social and economic context that eludes *nómos*. For the “vocation for liberty” of the Gnostics, cf. also Rudolph (1977a: 43).

¹⁰¹A devastating plague started spreading in AD 251, and ravaged the Roman world for fifteen years. It first affected Alexandria, where the blow to an economic model (not perceived as such) based on urban growth, trade, and production of non-primary goods must have been serious. The symptoms of the plague, not exactly identified, have been imprecisely described by Cyprian, bishop of Carthage (in present-day Tunisia), who was interested in transforming it into an opportunity for the triumph of Christianity. See the description of the “horrible and deadly plague”, causing a high number of deaths in *De mortalitate*: esp. 14–15. Naturally, other factors, such as a state budget heavily imbalanced in favour of military expenses and the enormous taxation, contributed to the crisis of the third century, characterised by the constant devaluation of the currency.

ilar withdrawal of the Manichaeans after the fourth century,¹⁰² their rescue from the shipwreck of ancient culture,¹⁰³ but rather the failure of a daring, albeit economically not formalised attempt to build an alternative economic model.

Buddhism and the Gnostic systems remain linked from a systemic point of view, and it would be high time to resume discussion on the relationship between *sophia* and *prajñā*,¹⁰⁴ and on that between the Mahāyāna concept of *bodhicitta* and the divine Gnostic spark in relation to their identification with sperm.¹⁰⁵ The relationship between the Gnostic identification of the self with the divine and the Mahāyāna doctrine of the original presence of the Buddha nature within the individual¹⁰⁶ is another point awaiting clarification. For the early centuries of our era, it is possible to identify not only how the loans between the Gnostics and the Buddhists took place, something which was still unclear to Edward Conze,¹⁰⁷ but also the reasons why they had doctrinal points in common.¹⁰⁸ Both systems had the need to adopt similar strategies to represent similar social situations, and were both interested in providing a response to the great organised powers.

¹⁰² Peter Brown (1975: 97).

¹⁰³ Kippenberg (1984: 121 ff.).

¹⁰⁴ It was first suggested by Conze (1967: 656–57).

¹⁰⁵ For the Gnostic side, we can recall the Valentinian Marcus (*Adversus haereses*: I.13.3), and for the Phibionites I refer the reader to Eliade (1982). According to Augustine, the Manichaeans and dependent groups believed that the divine substance was imprisoned in food and drink and should be purified; the *electi* would “consume a sort of eucharist sprinkled with human seed in order that the divine substance may be freed even from that” (*De haeresibus*: 46. 25–100; pp. 86–91).

¹⁰⁶ See the discussion on the theory propounded in the *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra*, a third-century work, by Zimmerman (2002: esp. 50 ff., 62 ff.).

¹⁰⁷ Conze (1967: 665–66). For Kennedy, who had not read Weber, it was very clear that “Indian merchants, as a rule, have always been Buddhists or Jains. Buddhism was a merchant religion par excellence” (Kennedy 1902: 386–87): it was their monopoly of the Indo-Alexandrian trade that made possible the meeting between Buddhism and the Gnosticism of Basilides (the object of Kennedy’s investigation).

¹⁰⁸ A further question Conze (1955: 162) would have been pleased to see clarified.

Regarding the Manichaeans, who according to some embody the essence of the “Gnostic religion”, we know that its fortunes east of Iran were linked to the merchants of Chorasmia and, after the fall of the Sasanian state, to those from beyond the Amu Darya¹⁰⁹ — from Sogdia, and Samarkand in particular.¹¹⁰ In the West, the Manichaeans were present especially in the cities,¹¹¹ and when, with the decline of the mercantile economy, the merchants settled down as local landowners,¹¹² they lost their most typical supporters. In the Mediterranean, Manichaean groups came into strong conflict with the society where they lived¹¹³ and were regarded with horror¹¹⁴ because the economic-social model proposed by the *electi* was disruptive to the secure world of conservative Romans, and then of the Christians of the victorious Church. The characteristic prohibition for them of any act against the life of animals and plants¹¹⁵ says a great deal about the Manichaeans’ hostility towards and extraneousness to the world of farming, namely, to large landownership and closed society. The position of the *electi* recalls the *ahimsā* of the Buddhists and Jains (whose teachings and practices were known to Mani and his followers).¹¹⁶ Lay Jain followers were not allowed to farm, and restrictions were imposed on the very ownership of land.¹¹⁷

¹⁰⁹ H.-Ch. Puech in Doresse, Rudolph & Puech (1988: 180).

¹¹⁰ Widengren (1964: 153).

¹¹¹ Peter Brown (1969).

¹¹² I follow Peter Brown (1975: 98–99).

¹¹³ *Ibid.*: 94.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*: 92.

¹¹⁵ Widengren (1964: 114).

¹¹⁶ It is in relation to this that also Gardner (2005) and Deeg & Gardner (2009) have shown that the contacts between Indians and the people of the eastern Mediterranean were direct. It is not always the case to call in question Iran as an intermediary, as is often done.

¹¹⁷ Thapar (1978: 44). The Manichaeans have in common with the *śramaṇas* also the practice of fasting; see Henning 1945 and Doresse, Rudolph & Puech (1988: 238 ff.) for the former and Deo (1954–55) for the Jains. Although the Buddha had rejected extreme asceticism, several groups of monks, in the light

The Gnostics were suppressed by the Church, and Manichaeism did not succeed in taking hold even marginally in Mani's homeland, where it was cut-off at birth. Instead, Buddhism realised in India, at least in part, an alternative model to the world as it was structured socially and mentally. The success obtained is remarkable in historical terms, and is something that finds no comparison in any other society of the ancient world. As regards the ascetics of the Upaniṣads, they have very little to do with all this, since they were one of the polarities of the closed society.

THE ABSOLUTE RULER

Unable to get the support of the traditional powers, it became essential for the Buddhists to seek the support of the monarch, the only figure capable, under favourable circumstances, to oppose the establishment. The function of the ruler for an antinomical system to take hold and checkmate the anti-urban aristocracies justified by sacerdotal classes, is very clearly observable.¹¹⁸ Putting the question into focus is difficult because the nature of the Buddhist kingdoms of India and the role played by Buddhism in elaborating a specific political vision and specific institutional mechanisms have not attracted sufficient attention.¹¹⁹ The breaking point was the Kāliṅga

of a docetist interpretation, considered the life of Śākyamuni as a model worthy of imitation, including his severe fasting. We have Gandharan iconographies of, probably, the second century AD attesting the monks' worship for Siddhārtha fasting (Verardi 1994: 38–39), and in the third century AD, Dharmarakṣa translated into Chinese a text on the “three months of prolonged fasting” (Forte 1971), which developed out of the *uposatha/poṣadha* days. Forte & May (1979: 396–98) have pointed out the passages of the Pāli Canon documenting the periods of fasting of the *upāsakas*. On the *uposatha*-day observance, see also Norman (1994: 208 ff.).

¹¹⁸ See, for example, Conze (1955: 80 ff.).

¹¹⁹ Gokhale (1969) has underlined the special relationship between early Buddhism and the monarch, and has analysed the relation between *dhamma* and *ānā*, the state, emphasising as well the impasse in which Buddhism came to be when a vicious king was ruling. Ruegg (1995) discusses later developments.

war: Aśoka had been certainly crowned king according to tradition, but he probably distanced himself from traditional kingship introducing new rules regarding the enthronement rituals. In the *rājasūya*, animal sacrifices played an important part, especially in connection with the relationship between the king-sacrificer and the people,¹²⁰ and it is unlikely that Aśoka would leave a similar legacy to his successors.

Aśoka's Buddhist kingdom was perhaps not far in time from the preaching of the Awakened One,¹²¹ and the policy of the emperor was aimed at creating a Buddhist model of kingship and society. Mainland India was far from both the Arabian Sea and the deserts, where commoners were not subject to any hierarchical control, and with Aśoka, who made himself *upāsaka*,¹²² the economic initiative of the new urban classes that erupted after the expedition of Alexander, Buddhist political ideology and hegemony consolidated. For the first time an antinomial, anti-sacerdotal, anti-*varṇa* state founded on the axis formed by the monarch, kṣatriyas broken off from Brahmanical tutelage, apostate brāhmaṇas, monasteries and commoners was established. If its nature is not always recognised, it is because it was established in the conditions possible, that is, in relation to a society where the weight of Brahmanical power remained crucial. The problem remains that of evaluating the extent to which it differed from the Brahmanical model.

¹²⁰ Heesterman (1957: 201). We do not know the degree to which the ritual described in the texts correspond to the practice of the third century BC. The inclusion of both a barren and two pregnant cows among the sacrificed animals (*ibid.*: 168, 201) would indicate an early practice.

¹²¹ See Bechert (1991-92) for a discussion on the long and short chronology of the Buddha, and in particular his own contribution (vol. 1, pp. 222–36).

¹²² MRE I [Sahasram, Bairat and Siddhapura versions] (Hultzsch 1925: 166–69; cf. note 18 on p. 167); MRE II (*ibid.*: 169–72); *Dīpavaṃsa* 6. 55 (cf. p. 151). Here and below, the quotations from Aśoka's edicts are taken from Hultzsch's translation (integrations not reported). Occasional reference is made to Ulrich Schneider's critical edition of the rock edicts (Schneider 1978).

It is generally recognised that *jāti* differentiation within the four traditional *varṇas* gained importance in Mauryan times, and the phenomenon may be understood as the inability of the landed aristocracies to propose a theory of the state both capable of protecting their interests and starting up, at the same time, an innovative process. When faced with the growing disparity between the agrarian horizon and the new moneyed urban classes, they preferred to close ranks tightening the caste system and squaring up against a revolutionary attempt that threatened to reduce them to insignificance.¹²³ In the alternation of kings and dynasties that followed the downfall of the Mauryas — an issue to which modern historians have attached little importance — we can often discern the attempts to translate into terms of political power the antinomial model of society or, from the Brahmanical point of view, the rising and setting up, in successive waves, of the Kali Age. The memory of Aśoka, always kept alive in Buddhist countries, was to disappear from the horizon of Indian history not because of an inexplicable refusal or inability of the Brahmanical elites to keep the record of past and present events in chronicles and histories, but because of a targeted hostility to handing down whatever history was not their own. They would have been obliged to acknowledge that what they cared for most of all, intellectual supremacy and political power, had escaped their control for quite a long period.

Two antithetic positions on Aśoka's rule still oppose one another in the historiographical debate. The first is upheld by the majority of Indian scholars, disinclined to acknowledge

¹²³ I prefer this explanation to that provided by Baechler (1988), who has contended that the caste system developed as a response to the check of Mauryan imperialism and to the political inconsistency that followed the end of the dynasty. The caste system was reinforced under Śuṅga rule as a response to the anti-*varṇa* policy of the Mauryas.

the central role played by the heretical movements in the first territorial unification of the country and recognise a catalysing function and an autonomous role of historical causality to religious factors. Aśoka, as already observed in the preceding chapter, is often considered the founder of a secular genealogy that continues up to the present day: hence their assessment of Aśoka's edicts — in particular of the major edicts that exhort to the diffusion of *dhamma* without apparently mentioning Buddhism, its value system and precepts. They inevitably recognise the Buddhist content of the *Aśokavacana* only in relation to the pillar and minor edicts, which are too explicit to allow for a secular interpretation. We are thus facing an Aśoka alienated in the modern manner, in some cases manifesting his personal religious choice,¹²⁴ and in others declaring himself promoter of a policy borrowed from the Brahmanical tradition supported by the *Arthaśāstra* and/or founded by himself.¹²⁵

The *Arthaśāstra*, discovered in 1905 and published in 1909, was attributed, not without oppositions, to the Mauryan period by identifying its author, Kauṭilya, with Cāṇakya, the minister of Candragupta Maurya.¹²⁶ The treatise appeared unencumbered by the religious and ritualistic burden of Vedic and post-Vedic texts — a “secular” text and an early testimonial of an autonomous conception of politics.¹²⁷ However, the *Arthaśāstra* is not only a stratified text, but is not earlier than the second century AD, and probably written in its pre-

¹²⁴ See Tambiah's criticism of Thapar (Tambiah 1976: 59)

¹²⁵ Thapar's statement that “*Dhamma* was Aśoka's own invention” (Thapar 1997: 149) can be accepted only within a modelling of political categories and behaviours. See below.

¹²⁶ On the difficulty of this identification, endorsed by Kangle (1960-65, III: 101 ff.), see Burrow (1968).

¹²⁷ Hence, also the parallels with Machiavelli (Max Weber again!), entirely out of place: the *Arthaśāstra* is an orthodox text created within and for the maintenance of Brahmanical power, while Machiavelli radically breaks off with the establishment and the current conceptions of his time.

sent form in the mid-fourth century AD.¹²⁸ It is a Brahmanical treatise on *artha*, the science of government based on the concepts of *daṇḍanīti*, or politics exercised through coercion, and of *rājadharmā*, the king's duty to preserve, as a first thing, the order of the four *varṇas*. It is not surprising that fines (100 *panas*) would be applied for “one feeding Sakya, Ajivaka and other heretical monks at rites in honour of gods and manes”,¹²⁹ the venues where getting food was easiest. Significantly, the *Arthaśāstra* sanctions the killing of calves, bulls and milk cows,¹³⁰ keeping silent on the killing of animals destined for sacrifices.

Historians often belittle the historical value of early Buddhist texts, denying their authority as sources endowed with a sufficient level of objectivity to integrate the epigraphic evidence.¹³¹ It is yet another way of reaffirming Aśoka's extraneousness to Buddhism. The Indian scholars who have not hesitated to recognise the Buddhist nature of Aśokan *dhamma* are not many.¹³² Benimadhav Barua, for all his judging of the inscriptions of Aśoka as “not altogether inconsistent with those of other systems”,¹³³ following the observations of preceding

¹²⁸ Willis (2009: 62); after Trautmann's book (1971), Scharfe (1993: 293) has proposed a second-century AD date. Trautmann attracted a barrage of criticism in India, and still does (Mital 2000). Thapar (1997: 292–96) still maintains that the core of the treaty goes back to the Mauryan epoch, an opinion shared by Habib & Jha (2004: 46–50). In an earlier contribution, Irfan Habib had contended that it is not easy to assume the existence of a Mauryan core in *Arthaśāstra*'s Book II, and did not make use of that evidence in “Mapping the Mauryan Empire” (Habib & Habib 1989–90: 57). For the range of early opinions on the date of the treatise, see Mishra (1989). The belief that the *Arthaśāstra* is a Gupta work is gaining momentum, however (see, e.g. D. Ali (2007: 9) and shall be accepted when both the nature of the Gupta state and policy and, conversely, the nature of the Mauryan state are understood — or, better to say, accepted.

¹²⁹ *Arthaśāstra*: 3. 20.16.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*: 2.26.10. It also sanctions the killing of animals kept in reserved park enclosures (*ibid.*: 2.26.1-3), arguably destined for royal hunting.

¹³¹ Cf. Ananda W.P. Guruge in Seneviratna (1994: 145 ff.).

¹³² An example is Basak (1959: XXV).

¹³³ Barua (1946, I: 225).

authors provided a list of the correspondences between them and the *Buddhavacana*, the Buddha's sayings. Technical terms drawn from the scriptures are numerous in the major rock edicts,¹³⁴ and direct loans or indirect inspirations from Buddhist scriptures on a number of issues are present.¹³⁵ The Bairat edict mentions several texts,¹³⁶ and loans from the *Buddhavacana* are frequent even in often apparently anodyne words of the emperor. We detect for instance traces of the *Dhammapada* and of the debate on the *cakkavartin*.¹³⁷

Few things are more distant from Brahmanical orthodoxy and praxis than the texts and monuments left by Aśoka, the use of writing being by itself a dramatic break with tradition. The Sarnath capital was crowned by the symbol of Buddhist *dharma*, the *cakra*, the wheel that the *cakravartin* sets in motion instead of holding the *daṇḍa*, the coercive staff of command. The *dharmacakra* is more effective than force even in the work of conquest. The three hierarchical levels of Brahmanical political thought — *dharma*, or the principle securing the correspondence between cosmic order and worldly order on the basis of caste order; *artha*, the policy that guarantees the pre-eminence of the brāhmaṇas in society; and *kāma*, all what brings pleasure — are replaced in Buddhism by a *dharma* at two levels, the absolute level that can be experienced by the renouncers, and that of the rightful sovereign. The conqueror and ruler of the world, Aśoka, and the *saṃgha* are strictly complementary. The Buddhist theorisation of *dharma* opens to the *cakravartin* a grandiose imperial conception,¹³⁸ unknown to Brahmanism, where the ambitions of the kṣatriyas

¹³⁴ Ibid., II: esp. 62 ff.

¹³⁵ Ibid., II: esp. 38 ff.

¹³⁶ See on this K.R. Norman's observations in *Sutta Nipāta*: Introduction, pp. xxix–xxx.

¹³⁷ Tambiah (1956: 40). I make my own Tambiah's arguments also for the statements that follow.

¹³⁸ Ibid.: 52.

must be continuously watched over: the brāhmaṇas are co-indispensable to whatever form of political government and prevent kṣatriyas from taking autonomous decisions, potentially detrimental to their power.

Despotic consequences are inherent in the Buddhist model, as was the case of many Buddhist rulers, not only in India.¹³⁹ Aśoka's absolutism sought and found support in the social groups that considered caste organisation repressive, and saw in the *cakravartin* the guarantor of their freedom. It was not the individual freedom of the moderns, but the freedom that merchants and artisans experienced in the guilds, not recognising traditional affiliations, and that of small landowners not subject to Brahmanical control. The emperor's despotic drift found a strong deterrent exactly in the vaiśyas: the guilds were even allowed to issue coins, which circulated after receiving the royal marks.¹⁴⁰ Imperial order had the advantage of keeping at bay the intrusiveness of structured local powers, and the serious limits they would interpose, if left autonomous in their territories, to the freedoms of the new dynamic, organised social groups.¹⁴¹

In an attempt at modelling, and at clarifying the mechanisms of Aśoka's policy, the European absolutism of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, which hinged upon a monarchical power that was, or tended to be, unrestrained by traditional institutions, be they church hierarchies or social elites (the noblemen), can be a useful reference to an extent. It was associated with the unification and reinforcement of the state and the strengthening of royal power to the detriment of well-established interests, as well as with the rise

¹³⁹ The most sensational case was that of Empress Wu Zhao (AD 690–705), on which see Forte (2005: 204–42).

¹⁴⁰ Kosambi (1975: 178–80).

¹⁴¹ This statement should be toned down if the thesis of Vigasin is accepted, according to which not only was the structure of the Mauryan state neither bureaucratic nor centralised, but the cities were governed by a council of *mahāmātas* constituting a *paṇṣad* (Vigasin 1993-94: 20–21).

of professional armies and bureaucracies, the codification of state laws, and the rise of ideologies that justified absolute monarchy. The monarch bound himself to supporting the economic development of the state with reforms that favoured progress and assured better conditions of life to his subjects, rescuing them from the conditioning of a closed culture. The relationship between the state and the trading classes was based on policies that protected business and trade. In exchange, taxes were paid to support the military-bureaucratic structure of the state. The merchants and allied classes freed their behaviour from the current morals and operated in the world according to principles of economic rationality, performing their functions as traders, undertakers and bankers. The despotic state remained largely based on agriculture, but merchants were encouraged to operate in order to increase the wealth and prestige of the state and their own: the state guaranteed stability, public order and the enlargement of the market through territorial conquests. In the area of agriculture, canalisations and specialised cultivation (works and activities theorised by the physiocrats) were aimed at increasing agricultural productivity and modernising agriculture.

From the standpoint of historical modelling, the points in common with Aśoka's policy are significant. The absolute monarch even bound himself to the task of providing for the "happiness of the people" in the same way that Aśoka reigned on the basis of a new — Buddhist — ethic with the aim of securing "the welfare and happiness of the people".¹⁴² Here, however, ends every possible parallel with modern despotism. The latter could do without being backed by a religious perspective, but ancient despotism, like ancient democracies, could not.

¹⁴² PE VI (Hultzsch 1925: 128–30). See also RE VI, Kalsi (ibid. 34–36): "For I consider it my duty to promote the welfare of all men" (p. 35). Schneider (1978: 109) has "[...] werde ich selbst die Angelegenheiten der Leute behandeln".

The anti-Brahmanical character of the *Aśokadharmā* is very clear. In his first major edict, Aśoka maintains that no living being must be killed and sacrificed,¹⁴³ and in the rock edict IV observes that “[i]n times past, for many hundreds of years, there had ever been promoted the killing of animals”, and warns that now this is not to be done.¹⁴⁴ *Avihimsā/ahimsā* implies the delegitimation of the functions of the brāhmaṇas-priests, who drew authority and earnings from the enormous number of blood rituals. The past centuries mentioned by Aśoka are those — the *Buddhavacana* not heard yet — of Vedic rituals. In the pillar edict V, the emperor orders that living animals must not be fed with other living animals, tries to regulate the castration of bulls, he-goats, rams, boars and whatever other animals are subjected to castration, and forbids the killing of a number of animals, including all the quadrupeds which are neither useful nor edible.¹⁴⁵ Here the target are the activities of the agrarian horizon, largely controlled by the *grhasthas*.¹⁴⁶ The request to abstain oneself from killing animals is insistently repeated in other edicts, such as the rock edicts I, IV and XI, as well as in the pillar edict II, where Aśoka recalls having conferred various benefits, including the boon of life, on bipeds and quadrupeds, on birds and aquatic animals.¹⁴⁷

In the rock edict IX Aśoka takes note of the most widespread rituals, including the crucial rites of passage, but maintains that they bear little fruit. To consider useless the rituals performed “at the marriage of a son or a daughter” and “at

¹⁴³ RE I, Girnar (Hultzsch 1925: 1–2).

¹⁴⁴ RE IV (ibid.: 30–31).

¹⁴⁵ PE V (ibid.: 125–28).

¹⁴⁶ Gokhale (1980: 69–71) has shown that *brāhmaṇagāmas* designated in a proprietary way for the residence and maintenance of learned brāhmaṇas and *brahmadeyya* lands given as royal gifts to brāhmaṇas, of which they became an absolute property, existed from early times. The relevant epigraphic evidence is naturally later than the third century BC, and chronological questions exist as regards villages owned by brāhmaṇas mentioned in the Canon (below, Chapter III).

¹⁴⁷ PE II (Hultzsch 1925: 120–21).

the birth of a child”, so strongly identitarian and requesting the presence of the brāhmaṇa-priest, is an extraordinary polemic initiative, inconceivable outside a Buddhist vision of society. Though aware that few people would renounce them, Aśoka makes fun of all the other rites, particularly those performed “by mothers and wives”, that he unhesitatingly defines “vulgar and useless”.¹⁴⁸ The brāhmaṇas, settled in a considerable number of villages, prospered thanks to a myriad of minor rituals. However, it is not Aśoka who is against them but, in the first place, Buddhism, which made of them one of its principal polemic targets. Aśoka’s explicit attack against family life is addressed to the priestly coercion exercised upon it; brāhmaṇas made profits from this fundamental institution. Once again, Buddhist tenets are behind Aśoka’s convictions and political measures. Because of his hostility to household life, orthodox ascetics such as Māgandiya called the Buddha *bhūnahā*, *bhūnahū*, foetus killer.¹⁴⁹ It would take a long time for the Buddhists to reconsider the matter.

The liberality and courtesy towards *śramaṇas* and brāhmaṇas recommended by Aśoka in the rock edicts III and IV, and the famous passage of the edict XII where he declares to honour “all sects: both ascetics and householders”, warning that “all sects should be both full of learning and pure in doctrine”, and that wronging other sects means injuring one’s own sect, has been interpreted as a call to religious tolerance. It is not, however, tolerance as understood in a modern secular state; the admonition must be seen within a Buddhist perspective. The Buddhists tried hard to convert and proselytise,

¹⁴⁸ RE IX, Kalsi (ibid.: 37–39); “primitive und unnütze” in Schneider (1978: 111).

¹⁴⁹ Barua (1946, I: 242) explains why the word *bhūna/bhrūna*, which may occasionally stand for learned brāhmaṇa, normally means fetus, as in the case discussed here. In a recent translation of the *Māgandiya Sutta* (“Indeed, Master Bhāradvāja, it is an ill sight we see when we see the bed of that destroyer of growth, Master Gotama”; *Majjhima Nikāya*: 75.5 [502]; p. 607), an explanation at the symbolical level is suggested (cf. note 740 on p. 1281).

but did not interfere with the non-Buddhists, once the freedom and prosperity of the *saṃghas* were safeguarded. Thus Aśoka's sayings reflect a twofold concern. The first is about intellectual proselytism: it was from the ranks of Brahmanical intelligentsia that the most influential disciples of the Buddha, such as Mogallāna and the Kassapa brothers, had come, and the Buddha's attempt at bringing the brāhmaṇas to his side or not antagonising them is all too apparent in the *suttas*.¹⁵⁰ Several among the Buddhist thinkers would be brāhmaṇas by birth,¹⁵¹ nor could it be otherwise. This fracture in the Indian elite that the Buddhists were able to produce would grow deeper and deeper and overshadow the rift between kṣatriyas and brāhmaṇas of earlier times. Aśoka, who already enjoyed kṣatriya support — his well-organised army proves it — tries to split the orthodox front addressing the modernising brāhmaṇas and encouraging them to become part of the new monastic elite. To avoid the intermediation of non-cooperative brāhmaṇas, he sends his trusty officers, the *mahāmātas/mahāmātras*, to spread *dharma*.¹⁵² In any case, it is significant that in half of his edicts, he places the *śramaṇas* before the brāhmaṇas.¹⁵³

The second concern is keeping the *śramaṇa* front united, the various groups being often in open conflict one with the other.¹⁵⁴ Aśoka tries to channel all the *śramaṇas* towards his autocratic project of building an alternative society. Before his

¹⁵⁰ Gokhale (1980) has calculated that 40 per cent of the early Buddhist elite was formed by brāhmaṇas, some of *mahāsāla* families. Cf. also below, Chapter III.

¹⁵¹ For example, Nāgārjuna and Aśvaghōṣa, Asaṅga and his brother Vasubandhu, Buddhaghōṣa, Dinnāga and Dharmakīrti, and several others (see the question discussed in Chapter IV). Others were kṣatriyas, often recognisable as bearing a *-varman* (armour) name.

¹⁵² RE V, Kalsi (Hultzsch 1925: 32–34). Vigasin (1993–94) maintains that the term *mahāmāta* does not denote a professional bureaucrat, but either an important person sent by the emperor on tours of inspection or a member of the local bodies of self-government.

¹⁵³ Habib & Jha (2004: 66).

¹⁵⁴ See for instance the Buddhist and Jain charges against the Ājīvikas (Basham 1951: 121–25, 134–41).

conversion to Buddhism, he had the rock-cut caves in the Barabar hills, the earliest in India, hewn for the Ājīvikas,¹⁵⁵ and as regards the Jains, their association with the Mauryas went back to the time of the founder of the dynasty, Candragupta.¹⁵⁶ The apparent oddness of that passage of the already mentioned pillar edict V, where the killing of the most unexpected species of animals is prohibited, from bats to porcupines, and the prohibition of burning the husks containing living creatures¹⁵⁷ tended to reassure the followers of systems even more radical than Buddhism. At the time, Jainism was mainly urban and very rigid in its anti-agrarian stand, and polemically attentive to not sacrificing any living being, however infinitesimal.

If so much ambiguity hovers about Aśoka's *dharma*, it is because when the emperor addresses his people — mainly the *jātis* of the third *varṇa* — he does not overlap with the *saṃghas*: it is not his task to predicate the religion.¹⁵⁸ What he intends to teach them is a conception of benevolent kingship and an exertion of political authority inspired by Buddhist ideas and values¹⁵⁹ and the Buddhist optimistic ethics of work and social relationships. This is why a technical term like *nibbāna/nirvāṇa* is not mentioned in any of his edicts, where the term *svaga/svarga*, heaven, is mentioned. *Nirvāṇa* is the concern of monks, not of merchants and householders, who know very well that *nirvāṇa* is only for those who, having crossed an almost infinite number of rebirths, have attained

¹⁵⁵ *ASIR* 2 (1871, A. Cunningham): 40–53, pls. 18–20; S.P. Gupta (1980: 189–221).

¹⁵⁶ Unanimous Jain tradition (difficult to verify) claims that Candragupta abdicated and followed Bhadrabāhu as his teacher to Sravana Belgola, where he died. Cf. Mookerji (1966: 39–42).

¹⁵⁷ PE V (Hultsch 1925: 125–28). A substantial step forward in the identification of the animals mentioned by Aśoka in his edicts has been made by Norman (1990*b*) with reference to PE V. In this case, the apparent random list of animals cited includes talking birds, a series of aquatic birds, aquatic animals, a series of reptiles and three birds of the pigeon/dove family.

¹⁵⁸ Tambiah (1976: 54).

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*: 60.

the condition of awakened beings — a very rare occurrence, and an objective alien to the urban trading middle class. The attainment of *nirvāṇa* is foreign to Aśoka, a layman.¹⁶⁰ His message to the vaiśyas is condensed in these words, “And whatever effort I am making, is made in order that I may discharge the debt which I owe to living beings, that I may make them happy in this world, and that they may attain heaven in the other world”.¹⁶¹ This statement is in line with the optimism of doing, the virtuous enrichment, and a reasonable reward after death: Buddhism, precisely, such as we know it today in the countries where it is professed. In his major edicts, Aśoka addresses the laymen with the Buddhist language for laymen. They complement the edicts addressed to the monastic community and the *upāsakas*, and represent the other end of a policy that is as simple as it is coherent, by no means divided between personal religious choices and the general needs of the state.

In the pillar edict VII, Aśoka states to have had banyan-trees planted along the roads in order that they might afford shade to cattle and men and have also had mangroves planted; to have caused stepped wells dug at intervals of 8 *kos*, and numerous drinking-places to be established, here and there, for the enjoyment of cattle and men, with the aim of following the practice of *dharma*.¹⁶² The passage may sound bizarre and marginal, and at first we do not understand what *dharma* has to do with planting trees: but is not so in the perspec-

¹⁶⁰ Even Habib & Jha (2004: 70), who raise this point and get close to an explanation in terms of social history, hesitate in recognising the nature of Aśoka’s *dharma*. Some of Weber’s undervaluations of Buddhism still linger about.

¹⁶¹ RE VI, Girnar (Hultsch 1925: 11–13, cf. p. 13). Here I have deliberately reduced to the terms which I consider essential the discussion, which comes from afar, about the absence of the term *nirvāṇa* in the edicts of Aśoka.

¹⁶² Cf. *ibid.*: 130–37; cf. pp. 134–35; see also RE II, Girnar. (“On the roads wells were caused to be dug, and trees were caused to be planted for the use of cattle and men”; Hultsch 1925: pp. 2–4).

tive of the Buddhist *cakravartin*, who supports specific social groups. Caravans led by merchants, whose journey must be protected and whose animals must be saved from harm, pass along the roads connecting one town to the other; hence the need for halting places and water supply. The wealth of the empire and a more effective protection against Brahmanical revanchism depend on the economic multiplier constituted by trade. In this perspective, we can explain a passage from the rock edict XIII (where Aśoka declares his repentance for the Kalinga massacres) regarding the tribal populations. It would sound surprising if we did not know that punishment by death would not be inflicted:¹⁶³

[...] even the inhabitants of the forests which are included in the dominions of Dēvānāmpriya, even those he pacifies and converts. And they are told of the power to punish them which Dēvānāmpriya possesses in spite of his repentance, in order that they may be ashamed (of their crimes) and may not be killed.¹⁶⁴

Which were the crimes with which the natives inhabiting the regions not controlled by Pāṭaliputra soiled themselves? Aśoka could not permit them to be a menace to the safety of the roads, which penetrated into their territories for hundreds kilometres, and endanger trade.¹⁶⁵ At the same time, the emperor blandishes these populations trying to attract them into the orbit of his project. To appraise the fruit of this poli-

¹⁶³ Cf. Norman (1990a).

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Hultzsch (1925: 69).

¹⁶⁵ The urbanised regions of the empire under direct Mauryan administration were situated at a great distance from one another, connected by long corridors crossing territories inhabited by tribals (Allchin 1995: 133–51, 207–209). The opinion that the whole subcontinent was controlled by a centralised and many-eyed administration — an idea derived from the *Arthaśāstra* — is almost completely abandoned today. According to Fussman (1988), the Mauryan empire had a strong central administration but regional governments were looser and looser proceeding towards the periphery. We may update this interpretation, in part, considering that the local *saṃghas* had an active role in the transmission of the emperor's edicts (Tieken 2000: 27) and, therefore, an active political role at a local level.

cy is not possible, but less than one and a half century after Aśoka, we see tattooed demi-gods, arguably modelled on local princes and princesses, politically emerged thanks to the instruments offered by Buddhism, on the *vedikā* of the stūpa at Bharhut.¹⁶⁶ Later Buddhist rulers, and Buddhists in general, would adopt a policy of good neighbourliness and support as regards the “tribal” populations, as we shall better see in the following chapters.

Archaeology is the weak point in the debate on the Mauryas and Aśoka. No Mauryan settlement has ever been excavated, nor have the relationships been examined between *dharma* pillars and stūpas and the territorial contexts where they were erected. While the debate on the nature of Aśokan policy continues,¹⁶⁷ no monumental area has been re-examined through fieldwork,¹⁶⁸ and our knowledge on the Aśokan pillars and the nearby stūpas is only slightly better than it was after the inaccurate excavations carried out in the nineteenth century.¹⁶⁹ No significant excavations have been carried out at Patna/Pāṭaliputra in the last decades, and no useful information is available on Aśoka’s capital town, which is impossible to coherently describe. Its plan remains the object of speculation.¹⁷⁰ What we know a little better today, thanks to extensive surveys and modelling, is the territory of ancient Magadha and nearby regions and their settlement

¹⁶⁶ Coomaraswamy (1956: pls. XXI, XXXVIII.114); Cunningham (1879: pl. LII).

¹⁶⁷ See the lively debate among scholars in Seneviratna (1994).

¹⁶⁸ An exception is the site of Gotihawa (Verardi 2007b: 104 ff., 131 ff.), on which see more in the next chapter.

¹⁶⁹ I refer the reader to Falk (2006) for a thorough re-examination of all the Aśokan sites. Maps, photographs and drawings, as well as an exhaustive bibliography, makes this book an indispensable companion to Aśokan studies. The author has checked the texts of the edicts, accounting for the discrepancies between the present state of the inscriptions and their earliest documentation.

¹⁷⁰ Patil (1963: 371–421) has collected all the relevant information on Patna, and S.P. Gupta (1980: 227–46) has tried his best to deduce a *forma urbis* from the scattered and insufficiently checked evidence. De Simone (forth. a) has questioned S. P. Gupta’s conclusions and has proposed a mapping of the Mauryan town that includes the Kumrahar hall.

history, especially the area of the plain that stretches up to the Tarai.¹⁷¹ The network of roads and junctions, checking points, river crossings and monumentalised areas show a complexity which goes far beyond the traditional notion of an *uttarāpatha* that, dotted with *dharma* pillars, runs along the left bank of the Gandak river. The network of roads and sites is much more complex than previously believed, pointing to the fact that economic transformation affected rather vast territories.

Regarding the *saṃgha*, or, rather, the *saṃghas*,¹⁷² Aśoka proceeds in three directions. As a first thing, he breaks with the tradition and invests in monumental sanctuaries, causing stūpas to be erected along with high pillars symbolising the preaching of the Buddha and his role as model of the earthly *cakravartin*. The impact of Aśoka's monuments, the earliest in India, must have been extraordinary, granting the Buddhists an absolute prominence with respect to the competing systems. The social groups involved in his project had to step much ahead, in terms of prestige, of the most titled Brahmanical aristocracies. Interpreting Aśoka's *dharma* as an improvised ethics means to underestimate the complexity of artistic patronage and its motivations, which are never restricted, in antiquity, to the realm of policy. For its scale and the investment required — and we know only a limited number of Aśokan sites — Aśoka's patronage is unthinkable outside a religious perspective, peculiar and non-conformist as it may have been.¹⁷³ His monuments, in particular the *dharmastambhas*, represent an extraordinary novelty, and the breaking off with the past a

¹⁷¹ Chakrabarti (2001: 160 ff., 191 ff., 209 ff.).

¹⁷² The discussion on this important point was raised by Bechert (1961) in relation to the Sarnath edict, and has been joined by several scholars.

¹⁷³ We should not need to remember that in antiquity, even the realities perceived by us as near to modern mentality, were deeply set in a religious perspective. Explaining Pericles's Parthenon with the ascendancy of the "democrats", the response to the Persian wars and Pericles's own political objectives is patently insufficient: there would have been no Parthenon, and even no Pericles without Athena to be installed in the sanctum, and all the connected, complex rituals.

radical move. In the middle Ganges plain, where the conflict between Buddhism and Brahmanism was, and would remain, more acute, they characterised the whole territory, rising at the centre of sanctuaries: their meaning and importance were underlined by the pilgrimages Aśoka personally made. In the rock edict VIII, the emperor emphasises the clean break that he has made with the past: he, the Buddhist *cakravartin*, goes on pilgrimage and not, as the sovereigns of yore used to do, on “pleasure-tours” during which “hunting and other such pleasures were enjoyed”.¹⁷⁴

As a second thing, Aśoka intervenes directly to ensure the integrity of the *saṃgha* by infiltration that might undermine its stability and efficiency. Aśoka’s choice in favour of Buddhism aroused resentment and led to attempts from the excluded religious groups, which tried to influence it from within. These attempts were suppressed, like that carried out at the Aśokārāma in Pāṭaliputra.¹⁷⁵ Aśoka took care that copies of this edict be available in the places reserved for the *upāsakas*, who were thus informed that the *saṃghas* had the right to carry out expulsions should infiltration take place elsewhere.¹⁷⁶ Every form of disorder in the *saṃghas* imperilled the double level of the Buddhist *dharma* and the political action of the *cakravartin*. Fostering cohesion in the local *saṃghas* and avoiding conflicts was also a means for not interrupting the smooth flow of trade along the long-distance routes.¹⁷⁷

Finally, at Bairat — we have already mentioned this edict — the emperor did not hesitate to point out to the local *saṃgha*, by mentioning them one by one, those discourses of

¹⁷⁴ RE VIII, Shahbazgarhi (Hultzsch 1925: 59–60). See discussion on this point in Schneider (1978: 135–36).

¹⁷⁵ For the so-called schism edicts, see the Sarnath Pillar inscription (Hultzsch 1925: 161–64). I follow K.R. Norman’s interpretation of the events alluded to (Norman 1992).

¹⁷⁶ Cf. *ibid.*: 90.

¹⁷⁷ Tiekens (2000: 27).

the Buddha that in his opinion were best suited at assuring a long life to his political project.¹⁷⁸ Monks and *upāsakas* were the recipients of both the edicts copied on the pillars raised in the proximity of stūpas and of the minor rock edicts expressly written for the Buddhist community.¹⁷⁹ The *mahāmātas* had the task of making the *Aśokavacana* known to as many people as possible. The political challenge consisted in the urban transformation of the agrarian horizon, in the promotion of individual merit that is worth acquiring for this and the next life, and in the wealth-producing activities governed by a personal ethics borrowed from the *Buddhavacana*.

The state established by Aśoka and the policy he pursued are a unique phenomenon. No other Gnostic system succeeded, even approximately, in achieving a similar result. The Mediterranean Gnostics were suppressed before they could develop a large-scale, politically significant project. As regards Manichaeism, Mani long sought political support in Iran: only the court would have been able, from above, to oppose the Magi and the establishment. Mani was the scion of a princely family and obtained the protection of Šāpur's brothers, Mehršāh and Piruz, managing to draw to his side also a few petty princes.¹⁸⁰ The political-religious orientation of Šāpur's successors was decisive for Mani's personal fate and for that of Manichaeism in the Sasanian state. Where the Manichaeans did not obtain the support of the prince, or whenever he was overthrown, it was impossible for them to bring together the social sectors supportive of an antinomial society. In the West, the attempts at occupying social spaces

¹⁷⁸ Calcutta-Bairat inscription (Hultzsch 1925: 172–74). For the texts cited, see A. Sen (1956: 132–33); see also Barua (1946, II: 32–37).

¹⁷⁹ A copy of the Sarnath pillar edict was expressly ordered to be deposited with the *upāsakas* (cf. Hultzsch 1925: 163; for an updated translation of the Sarnath text, see Tieken 2000: 9–10 and discussion).

¹⁸⁰ Widengren (1964: esp. 42–43; 51). See the existing texts on the life of Mani collected in *Manichaean Texts*: 5 ff., 141 ff., 185 ff.

and seeking political protection must have been unrelenting, though unavailing, even though in the fourth century, the *dux* Sebastianus, a Manichaeian hearer, was on the point of becoming emperor.¹⁸¹

The disparity between Buddhism, on the one hand, and the Gnostic groups and Manichaeism on the other is accentuated at the historical level by the fact that in the centuries that followed Aśoka's reign, the Buddhists held power in a considerable part of the Indian territory. Numerous inscriptions dated to the second century BC/AD are both due to petty sovereigns and their immediate entourage and to major rulers. When, towards the end of the second century BC, the orthodox wave raised by Puṣyamitra Śuṅga's *coup* calmed down, the *saṃghas* managed to take advantage of the social and geographic spaces left empty by the multi-faceted Brahmanical power and of the favourable international conditions. At Kanheri we find a minister and the daughter of a *mahārājā*,¹⁸² at Kuda, the daughter of a royal minister and that of a *mahābhoja*, another word for "king",¹⁸³ at Mahad there is a prince.¹⁸⁴ At Karle mention is made of the son-in-law of the Kṣatrapa king Nahapāna;¹⁸⁵ among the donors at Sanchi there is a queen, and at Bharhut there are no fewer than seven princes and princesses and a local chief;¹⁸⁶ and so on. Buddhist kingdoms, whatever their

¹⁸¹ Peter Brown (1975: 94). It is not by chance that the political fortunes of Manichaeism coincided with the reign of the Uighurs in Mongolia once the Manichaeans of Central Asia and China obtained the support of the third *qaḡan* Bögü. The Uighurs, after defeating the Chinese, found in Manichaeism the ideological tools to support their new state (Hambly 1970: 63–64), which was modern in comparison to their previous semi-tribal organisation, and at the same time free from the influence of bureaucracies and landed aristocracies. On the conversion of Bögü and the presence of the Manichaeans in the eastern part of Central Asia, see also Golden (1992: 159–60, 172–73, 174 ff.). For the trilingual inscription of Karabalgasun, see *Manichaeian Texts*: 235 ff.

¹⁸² *Lüders List*: nos. 994, 1021.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*: no. 1053.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*: no. 1072.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*: no. 1099.

¹⁸⁶ Lamotte (1958: 455–56; see also nos. 55, 60).

nature in terms of state organisation and social complexity, mushroomed with extraordinary rapidity and force.

KANIṢKA AND HARṢAVARDHANA

The foreign dynasties that from the first century BC to the early third century AD ruled over a considerable part of India could not make themselves into “national” dynasties, and allowed Buddhism, but also neo-Brahmanical movements, to grow. The case of Kaniṣka I is particularly interesting. Under his reign (second quarter of the second century AD),¹⁸⁷ Indian Buddhism reached, as documented by the imposing building activity and the iconographical output, its greatest economic power and territorial expansion. Unlike Aśoka, Kaniṣka was not Buddhist. The inscriptions of Surkh Kotal¹⁸⁸ and Rabatak¹⁸⁹ document his personal relationship and that of the dynasty with the Iranian gods, something that characterises also his coinage. In the complicated Indian universe, where traditional Brahmanical power drew new nourishment from the Sivaite movements from the one side and from Bhāgavatism from the other, Kaniṣka, like other Kuṣāṇa rulers, addressed the circles of theistic brāhmaṇas for acceptance. Nothing is more explicit than his image in the Māṭ *devakula*, where the Kuṣāṇa rulers appear as seeking legitimisation appealing to Sarva and Caṇḍavīra, two forms of Śiva.¹⁹⁰ The standing emperor holds a sword, which suggests his self-promoted status of *digvijayin*, and a *daṇḍa*, the symbol of political coercion. Neither attribute is compatible with the idea of a Buddhist *cakravartin*, rather

¹⁸⁷ Falk (2001;2004).

¹⁸⁸ This famous inscription has been published and commented upon several times; I refer the reader to Göbl (1965) and Gershevitch (1979). For the archaeological evidence, see Schlumberger, Le Berre & Fussman (1983: 70, 136–37).

¹⁸⁹ Sims-Williams & Cribb (1995-96); Sims-Williams (2004).

¹⁹⁰ Lüders (1961: 143–45).

suggesting a tentative Sivaite theorisation of kingship. In the Rabatak inscription, Kaniṣka says of the Iranian god Srōš that “in India [he] is called Mahāsenā and is called Viśākha-Narasa, (and) Mihir”.¹⁹¹ Mahāsenā is a name of Kārttikeya, the warlike Sivaite god (and then Śiva’s son), and the same is true for Viśākha.¹⁹² The attempt at building a bridge between the dynasty’s power-conferring gods of Iranian stock and the gods of Sivaism is clear, and may shed further light on the experiment being carried on at Māt after Kaniṣka’s death.

For all the attempts of the Kuṣāṇas to compromise with the theistic movements, it was the growing economic power of the Buddhist *saṃgha* and its supporters that ensured the stability of both the dynasty and the king, who left them free to operate. In the North-West, which was the hinge of the empire, the Buddhists were hegemonic, and Kaniṣka stood there as their great patron, gaining the everlasting gratitude of the Buddhists of later ages, who turned him into a second Aśoka. Kaniṣka is credited as having convened a great Buddhist council in Kashmir (a tradition that also Xuanzang made his own),¹⁹³ although it is probably a pious fabrication.¹⁹⁴ As foreigners, the Kuṣāṇas did not — could not — close the society within an agrarian horizon, because this policy would have quickly swallowed them up. Thanks to unparalleled international conditions, they opened the society as had never happened before. This did not take place in the paradigmatic, dramatic way Aśoka had done by generating an alternative model of state from within Indian society: with Kaniṣka we do not have a founding axis with Buddhism, but rather a *de facto*

¹⁹¹ Sims-Williams (2004: 56).

¹⁹² For a thorough examination of Kārttikeya’s names in the literature, some of which documented at a very early age, cf. A.K. Chatterjee (1970: 2 ff., 7 ff.). In the Purāṇas, Viśākha is also one of Skanda’s brothers (Dikshitar, V.R. Ramachandra 1951: s.v.).

¹⁹³ *Xiyuji* a: III (vol. 1, pp. 151–56).

¹⁹⁴ Rosenfield (1967: 31–32).

axis. If an example of religious tolerance (hardly a convenient expression, since it was rather a question of maintaining the balance between the various factions) is ever to be found in Indian history, it is to Kaniska and the Kuṣāṇas that we should look.

Aśoka's equal, albeit in an entirely different context, was Harṣavardhana of Kanyakubja/Kanauj, a vaiṣya by caste and, like Aśoka, a convert after six years of bloody military campaigns and a number of family misfortunes.¹⁹⁵ Political motivations may have played an important role in Harṣa's conversion: his worst enemies, Śaśāṅka of Gauḍa and Pulakeśin II were staunch Sivaites. The discussion on the change of his religious perspective appears, in any case, misplaced. There is a systemic asymmetry between Buddhism and the theistic religions. For the Buddhists, Śiva, Viṣṇu and the other gods were just *devas*, occupying a well-defined place in the hierarchy of beings. This conception, seen from the point of view of the *bhaktas*, is pure nonsense: for the groups of Pāśupatas and the other theists who formed what we call Śivaism, Śiva was not just a god, but God, endowed with an overwhelming ontological weight, and such was Viṣṇu for the Bhāgavatas. When a Brahmanical ruler embraced the cause of Buddhism, he did nothing but lower the position of Śiva or Viṣṇu from God to god, which did not prevent him from being, often under pressure, also the patron of *deva* temples: the *bhaktas* were free to assign the highest ontological value to the God hidden in the *garbhagrha*. From a historical-religious, and above all ideological viewpoint, the cause of many, often self-interested misinterpretations depends on not taking into account this asymmetry.

¹⁹⁵ Thaplyal (1985: 71). On Harṣa's caste see e.g. *Xiyuji* b: 344–45.

Harṣa's actual role as Buddhist *cakravartin* is thus often ignored,¹⁹⁶ yet the testimony of Xuanzang is certainly reliable in this respect: "Once in five years he held the great assembly called *Môksha*. He emptied his treasuries to give all away in charity, only reserving the soldiers' arms, which were unfit to give as alms".¹⁹⁷ Here Xuanzang describes the *pañcavārṣika*, a ritual the origins of which are perhaps traceable to the tours made every five years in the provinces of the empire by the *mahāmātras* appointed by Aśoka,¹⁹⁸ and to Brahmanical rituals.¹⁹⁹ The ceremony, which is not mentioned in the early Buddhist literature, took shape and acquired momentum in the Indian versions of the Aśoka legends and in their Chinese translations, where it was understood as deriving its legitimacy from the Mauryan emperor.²⁰⁰ This literature was popular not only in India, but throughout the Buddhist world, in Central Asia and China: Faxian describes the *pañcavārṣika* as performed by the king of Kashgar,²⁰¹ and Xuanzang explains its mechanism in full in relation to the king of Bamiyan:

The king of this (*country*) every time he assembles the great congregation of the Wu-che (*Môksha*), having sacrificed all his possessions, from his wife and children down to his country's treasures, gives in addition his own body; then his ministers and the lower or-

¹⁹⁶ See, however, Tripathi (1964: 163–64).

¹⁹⁷ *Xiyuji* a: V (vol. 1, p. 214).

¹⁹⁸ RE III (Hultzsch 1925: 4–5 [Gimmar], 29–30 [Kalsi], 52–53 [Shahbhzagarhi], etc.); see the discussion in Deeg (1995–97, I: 69–71).

¹⁹⁹ The corresponding Buddhist ritual, as shown by V.S. Agrawala, was called *nirargaḍa* (cf. Deeg 1995–97, II: 66 ff).

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, I: 71 ff.. Aśoka's performance of the ceremony was recorded, according to Xuanzang, in "a mutilated inscription" on a pillar at Pāṭaliputra: "Aśôka-râjâ with a firm principle of faith has thrice bestowed Jambudvîpa as a religious offering on Buddha, the Dharma and the assembly, and thrice he has redeemed it with his jewels and treasure; and this is the record thereof" (*Xiyuji* a, VIII; vol. 2: 91). In the seventh century the Aśokan script could hardly be read, however.

²⁰¹ *Faxian* b: 7–8; see discussion in Deeg (1995–97, I: 83–84).

der of officers prevail on the priests to barter back these possessions; and in these matters most of their time is taken up.²⁰²

In his account, Xuanzang also describes a religious assembly that took place at his presence in Bengal with the active participation of Bhāskaravarman, king of Kamarūpa, an ally and a friend of Harṣa's.²⁰³ A detail of the ceremony is worth quoting:

The king, on leaving the resting-hall, made them bring forth on a gorgeously caparisoned great elephant a golden statue of Buddha about three feet high, and raised aloft. On the left went the king, Śīlāditya, dressed as Śakra, holding a precious canopy, whilst Kumāra-rāja, dressed as Brahmā-rāja, holding a white *chāmara*, went on the right [...]. The king, Śīlāditya, as he went, scattered on every side pearls and various precious substances, with gold and silver flowers, in honour of the three precious objects of worship. Having first washed the image in scented water at the altar, the king then himself bore it on his shoulder to the western tower, where he offered to it tens, hundreds, and thousands of silken garments, decorated with precious gems. At this time there were but about twenty Śramaṇas following in the procession, the kings of the various countries forming the escort.²⁰⁴

Buddhism makes Indra and Brahmā, the highest Gods of early Brahmanism, the conscious subordinates of the Buddha, whom they entreat to preach the Law, and it is interesting for us to note that in the ceremony described by Xuanzang, Harṣa, the great monarch, incarnates Indra, the king of the gods, and Bhāskaravarman, a Sivaite kṣatriya representing a subordi-

²⁰² *Xiyuji* a: I (vol. 1, pp. 51–52). *Wuzhe hui* is the Chinese term supposedly corresponding to an undocumented *mokṣa pariṣad* which came to indicate the ritual (Deeg 1995-97: esp. II, 63 ff.).

²⁰³ On Bhāskaravarman or Kumāra and his relationship with Harṣavardhana the reader is referred to Basak (1967: 189 ff.). His kingdom may be considered one of the numerous kingdoms that Kanauj protected and controlled.

²⁰⁴ *Xiyuji* a: V (vol. 1, p. 218).

nate power,²⁰⁵ Brahmā. This apparently curious ritual probably has its roots in the *avadāna* literature, where the Tathāgata accepts by his silence Śakra's proposal to perform a ceremony that is also called *pañcavārṣika*,²⁰⁶ but we must consider it, in the first place, one of the rituals that were part of the attempts at establishing an autonomous model of kingship, free from Brahmanical conditioning and interference.

If we turn to China, we note that Liang Wudi had performed the *wuzhe hui* several times, the first in AD 519, and the last in AD 547.²⁰⁷ In the second half of the sixth century, the emperors of the southern Chen dynasty had also performed it.²⁰⁸ Particularly significant are the *wuzhe hui* ceremonies performed by Wendi, the first emperor of the Sui Dynasty, in AD 601 and 606. He had attained power ruthlessly, and claimed legitimation by repenting the deeds of the past and directly referring to Aśoka.²⁰⁹ Even Gaozu, the founder of the Tang dynasty (AD 618), felt the need to perform a *wuzhe dahui*, or *great pañcavārṣika*, although he was inclined towards Taoism:²¹⁰ in that period Buddhism was growing inordinately in China, and could hardly be ignored.

Harṣa's policy should be weighed up in the context of the Buddhist kingdoms of Central Asia and early Tang China, all strongly shaped by Buddhism. Harṣa must have perceived as real the possibility of building an empire destined to be the most important part of a Buddhist oecumene: the holy places were all in northern India. Powerful but minor states such as

²⁰⁵ Bāṇa maintains that from childhood Bhāskaravarman's resolution was "never to do homage to any being except the lotus feet of *Çiva*" (*Harṣacarita*: 246; p. 217). For his interest in Buddhism, see below.

²⁰⁶ Deeg (1995-97, I: 74).

²⁰⁷ There is evidence for an even earlier performance than that of AD 519 not recorded in the official histories (*ibid.*, II: 76 ff.).

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*: 80-81.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*: 81.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*: 82.

the Brahmanical kingdoms of eastern India and upper Deccan would not prevail against an Asian block. Harṣa assumed the title of “King of Magadha” in AD 641,²¹¹ when steps were finally taken to send an embassy to Tang China. This is not without significance: to be the king of Magadha, the land of the Buddha, was an added value to his stature as a sovereign.²¹² For all his successes, Harṣa’s position was more difficult than Aśoka’s. Brahmanical power had already reorganised itself, and brāhmaṇas were a constant presence at his court. If we have to give credit to Xuanzang, who dwells at length on the episode, they even tried to murder him through a hired killer because of the resentment they felt for being ill-treated: the treasury had been “exhausted” in offerings to the *śramaṇas*.²¹³

Harṣa’s was not only “the last, great, personally administered, centralised empire”²¹⁴ of India, nor simply an example of “feudalism from above” before “real” feudalism set in.²¹⁵ He embodies the last attempt at establishing a Buddhist kingdom based on an open society and open borders, where trade would continue to play a crucial role. Xuanzang mentions the “valuable merchandise” collected at Kanauj “in great quantities”,²¹⁶ a piece of information implying the still flourishing conditions of the commoners. Harṣa, a vaiśya, may be considered an expression of the social sectors that had been able to reaffirm their position after the end of the Guptas and that neo-Brahmanism was still unable to represent or suppress. The interest towards Tang China, which was booming thanks to the economic revolution introduced by the Buddhists in the

²¹¹ For the exchange of embassies with China, see below.

²¹² Devahuti (1983: 249) maintains that Harṣa counted on the fact that Magadha had a reputation as the seat of imperial power from pre-Mauryan days, but I do not think this to be the real point.

²¹³ *Xiyuji* a: V (vol. 1, pp. 220–21).

²¹⁴ Kosambi (1975: 310).

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*: 295; 308 ff. The reader shall find a few considerations on the question of Indian feudalism at the beginning of Chapter IV.

²¹⁶ *Xiyuji* a: V (vol. 1, p. 206).

urban areas, may be taken as an indication of what was being foreshadowed at the political level.

Towards the end of the sixth century, as we will better see in the next chapter, the Karakorum route between India and Central Asia, and hence with China, had shifted westwards through the passes of the Hindukush (Xuanzang came to India through the new variant); yet a more direct route, difficult though it was, was opened through Nepal and Tibet. The Tibetans, then in good terms with Tang China, established the Buddhist king Narendradeva on the throne of Nepal in the early 640s²¹⁷ to coincide with the beginning of the official relationship between China and Kanauj. Narendradeva's kingdom represented an important pawn in the game that the Buddhists intended to play. Harṣavardhana sent an embassy to Chang'an in AD 641, reciprocated by the Tang Emperor Taizong, who sent Liang Huaijing to Kanauj. At the end of AD 643, a second Chinese embassy reached India, sent on behalf of the Chinese Buddhist clergy. It was led by Li Yibiao and Wang Xuance; the latter, who was a lay Buddhist,²¹⁸ was again sent to India in AD 646, but by that time Harṣa was dead, and the situation was rapidly evolving in a direction entirely different from the project on which the powerful Buddhist lobby at the Tang court was working.²¹⁹ It is worth noting that among the gifts that Harṣa sent to China with Li Yibiao when the latter left India there was a sapling of the Bodhi tree.²²⁰

The multiplication of embassies to and from Chang'an in the 640s shows that the design of an alliance of the Buddhist kingdoms and Tang China was becoming an actual political project. It has been shown that the Sino-Indian missions were

²¹⁷ On Narendradeva discontinuing the previous royal lineage, see Verardi (1992: 33).

²¹⁸ T. Sen (2003: 40).

²¹⁹ Devahuti (1983: 238 ff.) has collected all the available documentation, again discussed by T. Sen (2003: 16–25).

²²⁰ Ibid.: 45.

inspired by political, commercial, and religious motives,²²¹ these should be more precisely seen in the frame of an ambitious project that included also Central Asia and had Buddhism as its engine.²²² This explains, *a latere*, the otherwise incomprehensible episode of Xuanzang's invitation to the court of Bhāskaravarman, which caused a crisis in the relationship between the king of Kamarūpa and Harṣa. Bhāskaravarman claimed that he expected "the opening of the germ of religion" within himself: Xuanzang's refusal would have caused the world "to be for ever plunged in the dark night (of ignorance)" and would have been detrimental to his "invincible longing to think kindly of and show respect to (the Master) [...]".²²³ That two close allies had come at loggerheads for a monk in search of Buddhist *sūtras* is hardly believable. Xuanzang must have played an important political role, making proposals to which both Indian kings were deeply interested. The pilgrim had left China without formal authorisation, and his activism aimed, among other things, at avoiding repercussions on his return.²²⁴ Bhāskaravarman eventually gave in, leaving Harṣa as the only interlocutor of the Tang, but after the death of his ally and master, he had further contacts with the Chinese.²²⁵

It is hardly the case of resorting to counterfactual history, but hypotheses allow us, in an anti-deterministic vision of history, to give a better assessment of the situation. The death of Harṣa put an end to a project that might have changed Asian history. A large Buddhist oecumene economically strong, thanks to the engine of early Tang China (nearly a substitute of the Rome and Alexandria of a few centuries before) and

²²¹ Devahuti (1983: 249, 253-54). T. Sen (2003: 38-40) recalls the transmission of the sugar-making technology from India to China.

²²² In *ibid.*, pp. 37 ff., T. Sen has emphasised the role of Buddhism in Tang-India diplomacy.

²²³ *Life*: 170-71.

²²⁴ T. Sen (2003: 17).

²²⁵ *Ibid.*: 45-46.

strongly motivated from a religious point of view, might have stopped the Muslim advance and would not have easily sold cheap to Islam the social sectors involved in trade and industry. To make use again of Kosambi's categories, northern India might not have shifted from "feudalism from above" to "feudalism from below".

CLOSING THE SOCIETY

VIOLENCE AND NEW STRATEGIES

The main reason why even unbiased scholars have embraced and perpetuated the idea of the religious tolerance of the Śuṅgas despite much contrary evidence, is the chronology once assigned to famous monuments. Coomaraswamy dated the stūpa of Bharhut to *c.* 150 BC, Stūpa 2 at Sanchi to the second century BC, and the railing of Bodhgayā to *c.* 100 BC.²²⁶ Percy Brown, in the third revised edition of his widely read *Indian Architecture (Buddhist and Hindu Periods)*, published in 1956, still maintained that the gateway of the stūpa at Bharhut was built at a slightly later date than the palace of Aśoka in Pāṭaliputra.²²⁷

In 1958, in an epoch-making article published in *The Art Bulletin*, Walter Spink radically revised the chronology of the so-called "Śuṅga" and "Śuṅga-Sātavahana" monuments, none of which can be attributed to the second century BC, i.e. to the epoch when it would be possible to speak of a Śuṅga dynasty in full power and capable of promoting the construction of important monuments. Spink dated Bharhut to *c.* 90 BC, the gateways of Stūpa 1 at Sanchi to the years AD 1-30, and regarding the rock-cut caves of Deccan, he dated Bhaja (just to mention one) to 100-50 BC, that is, one century later than

²²⁶ Coomaraswamy (1927: 32, 34-35, 231).

²²⁷ Percy Brown (1956: 10).

the date suggested by Coomaraswamy²²⁸ and several other scholars after him. This change of perspective was quickly registered. In 1971, Jeannine Auboyer and Herbert Härtel dated Sanchi 2 to *c.* 100 BC, Bharhut to 100-75 BC, and Bhaja to the first century BC,²²⁹ and similar dates were proposed by Susan Huntington in 1985.²³⁰

Another good reason for believing that the Śuṅgas were patrons of Brahmanism and Buddhism alike depended on John Marshall's chronology of the building phases of Stūpa 1 at Sanchi. The monument was first erected about 255 BC by order of Aśoka,²³¹ and its original structure of burnt bricks suffered great damage repaired by the addition of an outer casing. Such damage was "wantonly inflicted", and was arguably done by order of Puṣyamitra, "who was notorious for his hostility to the Buddhists and his vindictive acts of vandalism in destroying their sacred monuments".²³² Marshall maintained that the subsequent additions to Stūpa 1 were effected under one of the Śuṅga kings about the middle of the second century BC. They comprised

the existing envelope of stone [...]; the lofty stone terrace and two flights of stairs at its base; the stone flagging of the procession path; the three stone balustrades [...]; and, lastly, the *harmikā* and umbrellas [...]. Under which particular king this transformation took place, we do not know [...]. It seems probable [...] that it took place during the reign of Pushyamitra's son Agnimitra, or of the latter's immediate successor, Vasujyestha.²³³

Marshall's relative chronology of Stūpa 1 has Aśoka at one end and the four *torāṇas*, dated by him to the latter part of the

²²⁸ Spink (1958).

²²⁹ Auboyer & Härtel (1971: 161–62).

²³⁰ Huntington (1985: 62, 65).

²³¹ Marshall & Foucher (1940, I: 28–29).

²³² *Ibid.*: 23–24.

²³³ *Ibid.*: 29.

first century BC, at the other. But since the *toranas* go back to the early decades of the first century AD, the chronology of the monument should be correspondingly revised. It is reasonable to assign the reconstruction of Stūpa 1 to the years when the yard reopened on the Sanchi hill and the railing of Stūpa 2 was also erected, that is, around 100 BC. The investment was made possible thanks to the profits made after the real beginning of overseas trade, and especially after 127 BC, and was operated by the Buddhist masters grouped in the Hemavata school who, under the guide of Gotiputra, had established themselves in the region some time before. The relics of these masters were deposited in Stūpa 2 at Sanchi and in the nearby stūpas of Andher and Sonari.²³⁴ The weakening Śuṅga rule and the divided Brahmanical front could not make a stand against the positive results of the quickly expanding trade benefitting the Buddhist communities. Around the same time, in the periphery of the Śuṅga state, local kings were quick in supporting the resurfacing Buddhists: the *vedikā* and *torana* at Bharhut were built by Dhanabhūti Vātsīputra, grandson of the local king Viśvadeva Gārgīputra, during the reign of a late Śuṅga ruler.²³⁵ It took the brāhmaṇas about thirty years to react.

There is a complete halt in the patronage of Buddhist monuments between Puṣyamitra's coup and *c.* 100 BC. A second halt is observable between 75 BC and the early first century AD, after that Devabhūti's minister Vāsudeva, a brāhmaṇa, murdered the Śuṅga king in *c.* 73 BC, starting the orthodox Kāṇva rule. During the first halt, there is no trace of Buddhist monuments having been built anywhere in the Śuṅga territories. Whenever the situation allowed it, the orthodox wing in-

²³⁴ See Willis (2001), who has underlined the presence at Vidiśā of the Hemavata masters and their importance.

²³⁵ Sircar (1965b: 87, n. 4) observed that “[t]he absence of the Śuṅga king's name in the inscription may suggest that the Śuṅga power was then on the decline”.

tervened to re-establish proper rule,²³⁶ but for all the conflicts between the brāhmaṇas of different persuasions, the Vidiśā court appears to have been no less extraneous to Buddhism than the northern Śuṅga territories. It was described from within by Kālidāsa, a dramatist and poet whose very existence shows how talented were the minds which contributed to the re-organisation of Brahmanical power.²³⁷

Regarding the second halt, we can indirectly form an opinion on the religious policy of the Kāṅvas by observing that there is no trace of what — with the Besnagar temple — had made Vidiśā one of the capitals of theistic Brahmanism, and that the building activity at Sanchi was resumed only after they left the stage. The Kāṅvas thus seem to have followed a strict Vedic path operating against the religion of the *śramaṇas* and providing only limited support to neo-Brahmanical strategies. The impressive *nāga* images from the Sanchi area date to the mid-first century BC,²³⁸ and we do not know if they are part of a Bhāgavata or a Buddhist attempt at controlling “lower” agricultural cults.

The corresponding halt in patronage that we observe in the Deccan in the same period may help to throw some light on what was happening in the north. The building activity on the Western Ghats was resumed only in the early decades of

²³⁶ Vāsudeva’s political murder was not the first by which the brāhmaṇas had ruthlessly called the ruling family to order. According to Bāṇa (*Harṣacarita*: VI.222; cf. p. 192), Agnimitra’s son Sumitra had also been killed by a brāhmaṇa, Mitradeva (or Mūladeva), possibly a scion of the same brāhmaṇa ministerial family to which Vāsudeva belonged (HCIP 2: 97–98). Sumitra is identifiable with the fourth Śuṅga king Vasumitra.

²³⁷ Kālidāsa’s chronology, discussed in a number of papers and in practically every edition and translation of his works (cf. e.g. Rajan 2006), is not well established. He has been often associated with the Guptas, more in the attempt at shaping the Gupta period as the golden age of Indian history than on a factual basis. Several scholars consider him a contemporary of the Śuṅgas or the Kāṅvas (see, for instance, B.C. Sinha 1977: 143–44).

²³⁸ J. Shaw (2004: 22–23; figs. 2–3).

the first century AD after the long break²³⁹ caused by the taking over of power by the Sātavāhanas. The founder of the dynasty, Śātakarṇi I, was an *aśvamedhin* king, as we know from the *praśasti* at Nanaghat.²⁴⁰ As regards the most famous monument ascribed to Sātavāhana patronage, the first and second phases of the stūpa railing at Amaravati are pre-Sātavāhana, and the third is ascribable to the declining years of the dynasty and to the early Ikṣvāku period.²⁴¹ The very existence of a “Śuṅga art”, if by this term we mean a set of monuments and iconographies datable to the second century BC or to the Śuṅga-Kāñva phase, is questionable. The same caution should be used for terms such as “Śuṅga-Sātavāhana” or “Sātavāhana” (Buddhist) art.

The fallout of Mauryan policy, which opened India to the outside world, and the emergence of an urban society in a proper sense²⁴² caused an unprecedented acceleration of social dynamics and the partial setback of Brahmanical power. Social mobility, controlled by the heterodox movements, neutralised Brahmanical opposition, which needed time to reorganise and react. When this happened, we witness both an outburst of viol-

²³⁹ Spink (1958) dated Kondane to AD 1-10, the *caityagrha* at Nāsik to AD 10-30; etc. The new chronology of the Deccan caves has been generally accepted, an exception being Nagaraju (1981).

²⁴⁰ Georg Bühler in Burgess (1883: 59–64).

²⁴¹ Shimada (2006: 133–34). The role played by the Sadas of the Aira family, ruling locally, would be worth investigating. Their rule in the Krishna-Guntur region came as a consequence of Khāravela’s expeditions, and lasted until the time of the Kṣatrapas and later (cf. D.C. Sircar in *EI* 32, 1957-58: 85–86). Śivamakaśada, known from an Amaravati inscription, is still wrongly identified with Sivaskanda Śātakarṇi (Knox 1992: 13). The names of other Sada rulers have emerged from the excavations at Vaddamanu (above, n. 43), where their coins appear only in around AD 200.

²⁴² Scholars have usually accepted the opinion propounded by Ghosh (1973), according to which the second urbanisation of India started in the sixth century BC in the Ganges Valley, being part of the same process which led to the formation of Buddhism. Horizontal excavations are still wanting, but in any case the recent archaeological evidence no longer supports a similar view (Barba 2004). The real urbanisation is to be seen in the frame of the building up of the Mauryan state, which in turn was the result of the establishment of new powers in the former eastern Achaemenian territories.

ence and an extraordinary intellectual effort in the production of new religious models. These often were in strong contrast with each other, but all were adequate in the opposition to the state and society, disruptive of Brahmanical order, which the heterodox tried to realise.

Puṣyamitra Śuṅga, a Bhāradvāja brāhmaṇa,²⁴³ either a general (*senapati*) of the Mauryan army²⁴⁴ or simply a leader of an army division,²⁴⁵ taking responsibility for the needs of the first *varṇa*, carried out a *coup d'état* against Brhadratha Maurya in 186 BC, performed *aśvamedha*, and started a campaign aimed at dismantling the Buddhist monasteries, which were the nerve centres of the open society. The most extraordinary events in Puṣyamitra's career were certainly the two performances of the *aśvamedha* ritual, revived thanks to the pressure of the most revanchist wing of Brahmanical lineages. It was something unheard of since ancient times.²⁴⁶ The ritual implied a great number of animal sacrifices²⁴⁷ — an overt challenge to the *Aśokavacana*. The *aśvamedha* had extremely archaic traits, hardly compatible with the new era India had entered with the Mauryas, and marked a step back of centuries, yet it was performed not only by Puṣyamitra but, for many centuries to come, by a considerable number of kings. Some adjustments were introduced, and *aśvamedhas* were performed not only with the aim of reaffirming orthodox king-

²⁴³ B.C. Sinha (1977: 59 ff.).

²⁴⁴ *Harṣacarita*: 222 (p. 193).

²⁴⁵ Bagchi (1946: 82, n. 3). As such, Puṣyamitra could count on his armed men, perhaps the *puṣyamanavas* mentioned in some sources (see Alahakoon 1980: 119). To this author I refer the reader for a narration of Brhadratha's murder (ibid.).

²⁴⁶ It is "a disused sacrifice" in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (XIII. 3.3.6; vol. 5, p. 334), where detailed directions are given in order to revive it.

²⁴⁷ See for instance the twenty-one animals sacrificed to Agni and Soma on the twelfth day of the ritual (Dumont 1927: 96–97), those sacrificed with the horse (ibid.: 175), the twenty-one sterile cows sacrificed at the end of the *soma* ritual (ibid.: 228–29); etc.

ship, but to complement the rituals introduced by the theistic groups which, fiercely opposed to the *śramaṇas*, were exploring new paths. During the main rite, the dead horse, a solar animal to which the king was equated, was made to lie with the first queen representing earth, and the rite took place during the month of Phālguna, to coincide with the public festivals connected to the bestowal of fertility upon earth.²⁴⁸ The whole ritual appeared functional to the needs of an agrarian society, acknowledging the role of the king as guarantor of the regular sequence of the agrarian cycles.

The distance from the model of kingship propounded by Aśoka could not be greater, and behind the revival of the ritual we detect, besides the reference to the Veda, the world of the *brahmadeyya* lands and of the *brāhmaṇāgamas*. The economic fallout of the *aśvamedha* amounted to the *dakṣiṇās* bestowed upon *brāhmaṇas*. These were usually cattle, whose great number²⁴⁹ implies the gifting of lands, and gold,²⁵⁰ which the *brāhmaṇas* traditionally hoarded up in contrast to the economic and monetary mechanisms of the open society. More

²⁴⁸ Dange (1966-67); on the sacrificed horse and the *mahiṣī*, see Dumont (1927: 178–79). The fertility aspects of the *aśvamedha* have been emphasised, in particular, by J.J. Meyer, after reporting the dialogue between the *mahiṣī* and the *hotṛ* priest (Meyer 1937, 3, Anhang: 246 ff.), and the identification horse/sun by Bhawe (1939: 68) in his search for the meaning of the *aśvamedha*. The conceptualisation of a sacred king as a solar deity periodically re-enacting fertility rites goes back to James Frazer. On the methodology followed, in particular, by Meyer, who, for all his erudition and insight, made a completely de-historicised use of the sources, some reasonable doubts could be raised today.

²⁴⁹ In relation to the *soma* ritual the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (IV.3.4.3; vol. 2, p. 340) states that no priest should officiate for a fee less than 100 cows; other sources give much larger figures. Cf. Kane (1930-62, II: 1188–90).

²⁵⁰ *Mālavikāgnimitra*: V. I (“Ever since the Queen heard that Prince Vasumitra was appointed the guardian of the sacrificial horse by the General, she has been bestowing on worthy (Brāhmaṇas) *Dakṣiṇā* amounting to eighteen *suvarṇas* of gold”; cf. p. 163); *Mahābhārata, Aśvamedha Parvan*, section 4 (“Desirous of celebrating a sacrifice, that virtuous monarch [...] caused thousands of shining golden vessels to be forged”; *ibid*, section 10 (“Then that monarch, the slayer of his enemies, with a delighted heart, placed heaps of gold on diverse spots, and distributing the immense wealth to the Brahmanas, he looked glorious like Kuvera, the god of wealth”; vol. 12, pp. 5, 16).

dakṣinās were distributed for the performance of other rituals, the multiplication and segmentation of which was meant to satisfy as many brāhmaṇas as possible. The most vivid description of these donations is preserved in the *praśasti* at Nanaghat, referring to a context not too different from that of Puṣyamitra. A *dakṣinā* of 1,101 cows, to be arguably divided among the officiating priests, recurs frequently, and larger figures occur in relation to certain other rituals, as for instance the *ṛka yajña*, which involved the donation of 11,000 cows and 1,000 horses, and the *bhagala daśarātra yajña*, for which a sacrificial fee was given consisting of 10,001 cows. Donations of money were also made, such as the 24,400 and 6,001 *kārsāpanas* given for a ritual that remains unknown due to a gap in the text.²⁵¹ For the second *aśvamedha* performed by Śātakarṇi, a village was donated along with 14,000 *kārsāpanas*; golden objects and an elephant, as well as “1 excellent village”, in addition to other donations, were given for the unknown ritual mentioned above.²⁵²

We ignore which policy Aśoka had followed regarding the economic expectations of the brāhmaṇas — whether his request to respect them was accompanied by concrete measures making up for the consequences of *ahimsā*: probably not. Landowners had to feel discriminated when they compared their condition to the treatment reserved for commoners and urban bourgeoisie. However, it would be difficult to believe that the representatives of agrarian interests organised the anti-Buddhist reaction for economic reasons only. The question of power — an issue at the centre of classical historiography that

²⁵¹ Sircar (1968: 2–3) wondered why only few gold *kārsāpanas*, frequently referred to in early literature, had been discovered, and assumed that they had a very limited circulation, being used, in addition, as ornaments.

²⁵² Georg Bühler in Burgess (1883: 59–64). See the inscription re-edited by Sircar (1965b: 192–97).

is often neglected by modern historians — must have played a crucial role. The urban revolution could have hardly been prejudicial, in itself, to agrarian interests (in any case largely predominant), but the new society in the making was an unprecedented challenge at the level of political power.

When placed in this framework, the sources, all well known, which accuse Puṣyamitra of having persecuted Buddhism, appear less questionable, although they are not such to make us take them literally. According to a famous passage of the *Aśokāvadāna*, Puṣyamitra, “intending to destroy the Buddhist religion” equipped a fourfold army and proceeded to attack the Kukkuṭārāma monastery in Pāṭaliputra,²⁵³ from which he was repelled by the roar of a lion that was heard at the gate. The Kukkuṭārāma, or Aśokārāma, was the central royal monastery founded, according to a tradition, by Aśoka himself.²⁵⁴ Eventually Puṣyamitra destroyed the monastery, but the town stūpas escaped destruction. Puṣyamitra is said to have gone forth destroying stūpas and monasteries and slaughtering the monks throughout northern India. When he reached Śākala (Sialkot), he “proclaimed that he would give a hundred dināra reward to whomever brought him the head of a Buddhist monk”.²⁵⁵ As reported by the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, “[h]aving seized the East and the Gate of Kashmir, he the fool, the wicked, will destroy monasteries with relics, and kill monks of good conduct”.²⁵⁶ Puṣyamitra did not succeed in his plan and was killed in battle by Kṛmiśa, a king whose identification is problematic, whom the *yakṣa* Daṃṣṭrānīvāsin, arguably a Buddhist king of north-

²⁵³ *Aśokāvadāna*: 133 (p. 293).

²⁵⁴ John S. Strong’s introduction to *Aśokāvadāna*: 86.

²⁵⁵ *Aśokāvadāna*: 134 (p. 293).

²⁵⁶ *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*: [53], 532–33 (cf. §10, p. 18).

western India, called for help.²⁵⁷ Literary sources are, in one way or another, almost always partial, but with all due caution we can say that, like many other Buddhist sources, the *Aśokāvadāna* (absorbed into the *Divyāvadāna*), and more so the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* (a later text), have not been given the credit they deserve. The story under discussion has been handed down unchanged from an earlier source or an earlier version of the *Divyāvadāna*. A Chinese translation of c. AD 300 is in accord with the present version of the chronicle.²⁵⁸

Puṣyamitra's attacks were particularly violent in Magadha — the centre of Mauryan power and heartland of Buddhism — and caused the weakening of eastern Buddhism, marking an era of decentralisation, and the monks' diaspora towards the mountain regions,²⁵⁹ the first of a long series.²⁶⁰ The destruction of the Kukkuṭārāma had a strong symbolic meaning, and showed the extent to which destructions were effective: Buddhism was structured in such a way that the devastation or forced abandonment of a monastery meant the beheading of the Buddhist community at a local level. Lay followers were left without interlocutors and could not but fall under the control of one of the numerous neo-Brahmanical groups. The will to hit the centre of Mauryan power would also be evident from the big fire that destroyed the Mauryan hall at Kumrahar that A.S. Altekar and V. Mishra (the archaeologists

²⁵⁷ I follow, in part, Bagchi (1946), according to whom Puṣyamitra's defeat took place at Barikot, in Uḍḍiyāna, and Kṛmiśa is identifiable with Demetrios of Bactria. It is difficult, however, to establish which Demetrios he may have been, the chronology of the Indo-Greek kings being still much debated. According to Cribb (2005), Demetrios I would have ruled between 200 and 190 BC (too early for Puṣyamitra), and Demetrios II between 175 and 170 (but his figure remains elusive; cf. *ibid.*: 2009; MacDowall 2005: 203). Regarding the *yakṣa* Daṃṣṭrānivāsin, Bagchi identified him with Menander, whose accession to the throne is now generally dated to c. 150 BC.

²⁵⁸ Bagchi (1946: 83).

²⁵⁹ Przyłuski (1967: 101).

²⁶⁰ The statement of Tāranātha that the majority of the monks who had not been killed “fled to other countries” (*Tāranātha*: 42B; p. 121) may refer to later events, which we will discuss in the following chapters.

who resumed excavations at the site in the 1950s) date to the Śuṅga period.²⁶¹

An assessment of the religious and social repression attempted in the early years of Śuṅga rule is particularly difficult because the anti-Buddhist reaction was closely connected with the wars waged against the Yavanas of north-western India, in turn actuated for reasons to which religious considerations were not extraneous.²⁶² The Buddhists, as was to happen in later history, looked with favour to the invaders, whose presence was considered as an opportunity to react against the Brahmanical attempt at shaking the fundamentals of the open society. The “anti-national” nature of Buddhism ought to be understood as an attempt at giving Indian society an entirely different course, finding allies wherever possible, be they apostate brāhmaṇas, representatives of lower castes or tribal and foreign populations extraneous to the logic of *varṇas* and *jātis*.

Puṣyamitra had to perform *aśvamedha* as soon as he reached power to inaugurate formally his patronage of the Vedic religion,²⁶³ but the Ayodhyā inscription records the performance of two horse sacrifices. The inscription was engraved by order of Dhanadeva, a descendant of Puṣyamitra’s,²⁶⁴ whose sixth ancestor, Sarvatāta, had also performed the horse

²⁶¹ Śuṅga brick structures dated by the excavators to 150–100 BC were built on the ashy layer observed during the excavations (for the chronological sequence of Kumrahar, see Altekar & Mishra 1959: 17–18, 22–23). Daniela De Simone, who is presently collecting the archaeological evidence on Mauryan Pāṭaliputra (De Simone, forth. *a, b, c*), informs me that at Bulandibagh a sealed layer of dark soil with Mauryan antiquities was observed resting on the deposit of the remains of the wooden wall (the “palisade”), and that the hexagonal wooden pillar found in the easternmost portion of the Bulandibagh excavated area, a similar layer of what appeared to be ashes and charcoal was also observed. The fire would have thus affected a large part of the Mauryan town.

²⁶² Bagchi (1946: 90). See Chapter III for a discussion of the Kali Age literature, which equates, with the due exceptions, *nāstikas*, *yavanas* and *mlecchas*.

²⁶³ I follow Bagchi (1946: 89–91).

²⁶⁴ Chanda (1929: 604–7). This author dated the inscription to the mid-first century BC, but Sircar (1965b: 95, n. 1) maintains that it “cannot be much earlier than the first century AD”.

sacrifice.²⁶⁵ The decision to record Puṣyamitra's great ritual shows the extent to which the memory of epoch-making events was preserved, and shows the growing role of Ayodhyā (where Dhanadeva was arguably ruling) as a centre of orthodox power. We do not know to which event the second *aśvamedha* refers,²⁶⁶ but the emergence of an orthodox Ayodhyā is significant in relation to the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* and to the message that this work conveys. Ayodhyā corresponds to the Sāketa of the Buddhist records,²⁶⁷ and the fact that Brahmanical tradition calls it with a different name is an early example of the parallel geography that in the course of time would cancel all undesired identities.

The hero of *kaṇḍas* II-VI of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is an antagonist of the Buddha, since his duty is to protect the four *varṇas* and rule the kingdom as a householder. Whatever the distant origin of the narration, Rāma appears as an alternative to the Buddhist *cakravartin*, his righteous kingdom being challengingly located at a short distance from the territories that marked the history of Buddhism. In the poem, Ayodhyā appears as a pole of orthodox rule, opposed to unorthodox Pāṭaliputra. Situated at a short distance from Śrāvastī, it is a response to the Buddha's claim for supremacy towards the brāhmaṇas, whom the Buddha had confounded appearing to them in the form of Agni.²⁶⁸ The date of the poem is a much debated question, but the bulk of the work goes back to the

²⁶⁵ Sircar (1965a: 42).

²⁶⁶ Most scholars, on the basis of the *Mālavikāgnimitra*, relate it to a victory over the Yavanas, but for the Indo-Greeks Sāketa/Ayodhyā was only a stage towards Pāṭaliputra, from where the Greeks withdrew for internal reasons (Bagchi 1946: 88). The *Yuga Purāṇa* (56-57, p. 105) seems to confirm this.

²⁶⁷ Bareau (1979: 77); for the history of Sāketa/Ayodhyā during the period discussed in this section, see Bakker (1986: esp. 19 ff.).

²⁶⁸ The Buddha, represented as a pillar of fire at Amaravati (Coomaraswamy 1935: 9-10), in Gandharan art is depicted as emanating flames from his shoulders or with the head in the form of flame, while water flows from below his feet: Agni, as is known, originates from water. See a few Gandharan examples in Kurita (1988-90: pls. 381-84, 388). The "great miracle" of Śrāvastī is known from the post-canonical literature; see the twelfth chapter of the *Divyāvadāna* (*Divyāvadāna* b: esp. 270-281).

third-first century BC:²⁶⁹ the poem in the Vālmīki version is thus part of the effort at re-establishing Brahmanical power after the dramatic setback endured in Mauryan times. The poem is all the more remarkable in that, while accepting old rules and rituals, narrates a story that is in itself a new and sophisticated operative model.

In the kingdom of Rāma, the virtual model of the Śuṅgas, other strategies started being experimented, which incurred the condemnation of the strictest Brahmanical circles. The complex phenomenon of Bhāgavatism²⁷⁰ acquires an extraordinary visibility in Vidiśā, the capital of Agnimitra. The early phase of the temple at Besnagar may go back to the first half of the second century BC.²⁷¹ It was reconstructed in the years 120-100 BC, when in its proximity were erected six *stambhas*, the capitals of which bore the emblems of the *pañcavīras*, the “five heroes” of the Bhāgavata religion.²⁷² The seventh *stambha*, rising just in front of the temple, bears an inscription in honour of Vāsudeva made by Heliodorus, the Indo-Greek ambassador to king Bhāgabhadra.²⁷³ The autonomy of the regions forming the Śuṅga state favoured the development of

²⁶⁹ Brockington (1985: 329); id. in Bailey & Brockington (2000: 353). It is a largely accepted opinion that the first and seventh *kāṇḍas* are later additions to the poem (cf. e.g. Thapar 2000: 655–56), but there are scholars who have considered the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa a unitary work (Renou & Filliozat 1947-53, I: 404). The very early date suggested for the poem by Robert P. Goldman (1984: 14 ff.) is debatable because it ultimately depends on his accepting an early chronology of the towns of the Ganges Valley.

²⁷⁰ The early authors who studied Bhāgavatism did not doubt that it was to be understood in the light of “the struggle for life and death between Brahmanism and Buddhism” (see George Grierson in *IA* 37, 1908: 251–62, 373–86; cf. p. 257).

²⁷¹ Khare (1967: 24) dated the early temple to the end of the third century BC, but the relevant ¹⁴C date (295±110 BC) hardly supports a similar chronology. The date suggested in Ghosh (1989, II: 62), the fourth-third century BC, is even less acceptable. The foundations and the base of the early temple were of baked bricks, and there is definite evidence of baked bricks used in Aśokan monuments (Verardi 2007b: 115 ff.), though this is not enough for attributing the temple to as early an age as this.

²⁷² Härtel (1987).

²⁷³ Sircar (1965b: 88–89).

different strategies to reassert Brahmanical rule. According to the *Yuga Purāna*, a work from the end of the first century BC, Agnimitra had “a terrible quarrel with the Brahmins”, causing a “very dreadful and very terrible conflict”.²⁷⁴ That it was caused by “a girl of exceedingly beautiful form” may be doubted (although Cleopatra’s nose has some weight in history), and it can be conjectured that the reason for the confrontation was the implementation, at the court of Vidiśā, of a different strategy for opposing the Buddhists. There is evidence of frictions between the brāhmaṇas of Udayagiri and the low-caste śramaṇas of Satdhara in the second century BC, as appears from the *Mātanga Jāṭaka*, a story set in Vidiśā where the Buddha, born as a low-caste *cāṇḍāla*, is abused by the brāhmaṇa Jātimanta.²⁷⁵

The enlarged Bhāgavata temple of Besnagar, where new rites could be performed in consonance with the physical and symbolic reality of a monumental structure, is something unheard of and clearly antagonistic to the Buddhist sanctuaries of Sanchi, Satdhara and Sonari lying to the south-west of the town. The temple implied image-worship and *bhakti*, which required a re-orientation of the priestly functions. The opponents of the Bhāgavatas pretended image-worshippers not to be brāhmaṇas and be non-Vedic,²⁷⁶ and the conflict between the two parties was destined to last for long.²⁷⁷ To the *vaidikas*, the idea that the divine could be expressed anthropomorphically was a Greek, *mleccha* idea. However, Bhāgavata monotheism and iconism were to prove a successful

²⁷⁴ *Yuga Purāna*: 78-79; the date of the work is discussed by Mitchiner on pp. 92-94.

²⁷⁵ The merit to have contextualised this *jāṭaka* goes to Dass & Willis (2002: 31-32).

²⁷⁶ S. Dasgupta (1932-55, III: 17).

²⁷⁷ The reader is referred to von Stietenron (1977) for a vivid description of the conflict and the relevant sources. In strictly orthodox circles the Bhāgavatas were considered outcastes (S. Dasgupta 1932-55, I: 546-47).

strategy against Buddhist hegemony: the *Yuga Purāṇa* attests that as early as the end of the first century BC the four-armed Keśava, i.e. Viṣṇu, “bearing the conch, disk and mace [will be] called Vāsudeva”.²⁷⁸ A consistent, complex Bhāgavata system of thought and practice existed from the beginning, favouring the integration of social sectors with low or no ritual status through appropriate rituals.²⁷⁹ The challenge to Buddhism was thus open. Etienne Lamotte observed that it was the first time that “Buddhism was confronted with a living theist doctrine positing in precise terms the problems of God, the soul and their interrelationship”.²⁸⁰

The breakthrough caused by lower, modernising brāhmaṇas in Vidiśā can be further appreciated if we give the place it deserves to the colossal statue of Kubera, the largest in a group of standing images found at Baba Dana Ghat on the river Betwa at Besnagar, not far from the Heliodorus pillar.²⁸¹ It was the main object of worship in a *yakṣa* precinct, to which pertains at least another image, that of a life-size *yakṣī*, and a *kalpavṛkṣa* from which Kubera’s *nidhis* hang.²⁸² These sculptures, now dated to the second half of the first century BC and later,²⁸³ are the result of a determined, conscious patronage. Towards the end of the first century BC, Balarāma images replaced former *nāga* sculptures on the edge of ancient irrigation systems, pointing to the involvement of Brahmanical institutions in landownership and agrarian

²⁷⁸ *Yuga Purāṇa*: 29-30 (p. 102).

²⁷⁹ Hudson (2002).

²⁸⁰ Lamotte (1958: 434). The quotation is from the English translation.

²⁸¹ R.C. Agrawala (1969: 47); Dass & Willis (2002: 30).

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ J. Shaw (2004: 23). Julia Shaw’s study of the Vidiśā-Sanchi region is an example of the results that can be obtained combining the methods of landscape archaeology with art-historical analysis.

production, suggesting competition with Buddhism.²⁸⁴ This early Brahmanical pantheon spread into the surrounding rural areas from Vidiśā, a town at the centre of a large geographical area invested by Bhāgavata innovation that in promoting theistic doctrines played a role equivalent to that of Mathurā.

It is more difficult to suggest a pattern for early Sivaism. Patañjali, a contemporary of the early Śuṅgas and an advocate of theirs (he mentions one of Puṣyamitra's *aśvamedhas*),²⁸⁵ speaks of Śivabhāgavatas bearing iron spears,²⁸⁶ and it is reasonable to assume that the movement had been in existence for a certain time, being possibly identifiable with particular groups of Pāśupatas.²⁸⁷ The point, however, is when it became so relevant as to stimulate the interest of a part of the Brahmanical elite. The beginning of the iconographical output may be taken as the litmus test for evaluating the social relevance of the Sivaites, because it implies a complex theological system, the acquired capacity to conceive icons and to have them realised. The earliest images and *liṅgas* go back to the second-first century BC and are mostly found in the upper and middle Ganges Valley.²⁸⁸ Icons such as the *pañcamukhaliṅga* from Bhita and the *ūrdhvaretra Śiva* from

²⁸⁴ Ibid.: 20. For the early involvement of Buddhist monks in agricultural activities, see Shaw & Sutcliff (2001: 71–73; 2005: 18–19).

²⁸⁵ Raychauduri (1938: 315–16); B.C. Sinha (1977: 97).

²⁸⁶ Bhandarkar (1913: 165); Kreisel (1986: 19 [*Mahābhāṣya* on Pāṇini V.2. 76]).

²⁸⁷ Banerjea (1956: 449–50). David N. Lorenzen is very cautious about this identification, and prefers to consider the Pāśupatas as an order founded, and not only systematised, by Lakulīśa (Lorenzen 1972: 175). D.C. Sircar warned long ago that the authority of the *Mahābhāṣya* is not beyond doubt when chronological questions are involved, given the uncertain date of the present text (Sircar 1939a). However, different groups of Pāśupatas existed, and not only the better-known Lakulīśa Pāśupatas (Dyczkowski 1988: 20 ff.).

²⁸⁸ Srinivasan (1984). Including the Gudimallam *liṅga* among the early Sivaite icons (cf. also Kreisel 1986: 45) seems wrong to me, and I rather follow Sarkar (1986). The excavations carried out in the Paraśurāmeśvara temple of Gudimallam (I.K. Sarma 1994) has provided much new information but has not clarified the question of the date of the *liṅga*.

Rishikesh²⁸⁹ show that the fundamentals of Sivaite speculation were already developed, and that, in the case of the Śiva image from Rishikesh, the patrons could count on skilled sculptors.

The Pāśupatas, or some of the groups which bore this name, were ostracised by the *vaidika* brāhmaṇas to an even greater extent than the Bhāgavatas, but their hostility to Buddhism was such that no organised opposition to the latter could do without them. Their social radicalism found its limit in the theistic perspective,²⁹⁰ but they had the extraordinary capacity of organising the vast Indian countryside. They modernised it ideologically by offering it, for the first time, a unified reference model and arming it, metaphorically and in actual facts, against the urban modernity of the Buddhists. Pāśupata opposition to Buddhism can be best appreciated from the daring creation of a new model of ascetic, Śiva, who is not a Gnostic creation — a prince, a *guru* and a saviour in the way of the Buddha — but a God, and an immensely powerful one for that. The uncritical endorsement of the large number of scholars of the alleged continuity of Śiva with Vedic Rudra, searched for and built up to obtain credit in orthodox circles, is an obstacle to understanding the upsetting rise of the God-ascetic, who would soon acquire the attributes of a violent, fighting divinity for entirely new reasons.

The Buddhists felt the impact of the new Brahmanical theistic movements of both Bhāgavata and Sivaite orientation: they offered ontologies, something that the Buddhists could not do. The emergence of docetist positions in Buddhism, aiming

²⁸⁹ These early, monumental images are still waiting for a comprehensive study. See them in Srinivasan (1984: 35 and pls. 22, 23). On the *liṅga* from Bhita, see Kramrisch (1981: 179 ff.); the faces carved on the *liṅga* would point to the Sadāśiva form (B.N. Sharma 1976: 1 ff.).

²⁹⁰ van Troy (1990) has underlined that for the Pāśupatas the decisive cause of man's distress was the tight grip of *varṇāśramadharmā*; at the same time, they sought liberty in the union with Śiva. It is in this contradiction that the different Pāśupata traditions (on which see Dyczkowski 1988: esp. 24–25) grew.

at conferring on the Buddha an extra-mundane status,²⁹¹ may be traced back to the need to present a viable alternative to the faithful. Indian Buddhism should not be studied *per se*, but in counterpoint with Brahmanical theorisations.

There is little doubt that the closing down of the open society of the Buddhists and the resulting weakening of the religion of Dharma coincides with the fall in international trading activities, and in particular with the much decreased demand for Indian goods from Rome. Kuṣāṇa currency, circulating over a vast territory, was linked to the Roman currency system. The collapse of the Han dynasty in China (AD 221) contributed to changing the picture in Central Asia. By that time, we observe a change in the Indian landscape, namely, a rapid process of de-urbanisation.²⁹² It is every archaeologist's experience that even in the case of continuous human occupation, post-Kuṣāṇa levels display much poorer building techniques and reuse of earlier building material. A great number of small and large towns were abandoned in the third century, and in certain areas, as is shown by territorial surveys, the collapse of a whole network of roads and small settlements, which had been kept functioning by Buddhist monasteries, is observable.²⁹³ This

²⁹¹ See above in this chapter. This is a difficult question to tackle, but from a relatively early period, many if not all the Buddhist sects started, to give an example, to conceive the Buddha symbolically as a white elephant and make his birth from Queen Māyā's side a miraculous one, thus considering him a super-human being of sort.

²⁹² R.C. Sharma (1987). B.D. Chattopadhyaya's thesis, according to which the growth of new urban centres compensated for the collapse of the early historical towns has been endorsed by Deyell (1990: 11–12), but we may object that the new settlements either were *tīrthas* or small, short-lived dynastic capitals. The similarities with the early historical towns, characterised by a proto-capitalist economy (and transformed, in turn, into *tīrthas*), are superficial. It should be underlined that Chattopadhyaya's vision is much articulated (Chattopadhyaya 1994: 130 ff., 155 ff.).

²⁹³ Cf. the territory of Taulihawa, in the Nepalese Tarai, where the Aśokan sites of Gotihawa and (questionably) Nigali Sagar are located. The early abandonment of Gotihawa and, on the other side of the border, of the Piprahwa monastery, is related to the abandonment or decrease in size of a number of settlements. See Verardi (2007b: 20, 23 ff.).

process was probably aggravated by the collapse of the trading activity with the West that followed St. Cyprian's plague of the years AD 251-66, which is an important component of the "crisis of the third century" in the Roman Empire.²⁹⁴

It was imperative for the Buddhists to enact new strategies. They had sufficient intellectual resources and supporters to survive and grow even stronger, as happened in the North-East and in the regions bordering India to the North-West. If Buddhism disappeared from many areas as early as the third century, the reason cannot be only the change in the economic horizon. The active, de-legitimising hostility of the Brahmanical elites is to be taken into account because their strategies were not aimed at weighing more in the construction of an open, affluent society, up to taking control of it, but at suppressing it by supporting an opposite economic model.

If we unburden of the nationalistic load, ideological obsessions and occasional mistakes the depiction of the political-institutional situation of the third century AD given by K.P. Jayaswal,²⁹⁵ we see that in many Indian regions the rulers followed the same policy of the Śuṅgas and Kāṅvas, opposing both Buddhism and Kuṣāṇa rule, and only occasionally supporting the theistic brāhmaṇas. The number of kings who performed the great Vedic rituals, including the horse sacrifice, is astonishing. The Bhārasivas performed ten *aśvamedhas*,²⁹⁶ Harītiṅputra Pravaraṣena I, in the Deccan, performed four, assuming the title of *samrāj*,²⁹⁷ and an *aśvamedha* was also per-

²⁹⁴ Above, n. 101, and McNeill (1998: 131, 135–37). The plague is likely to have especially affected urban centres and port towns (we know of its effects in Rome, Alexandria and Carthage), and even though it was not as deadly as the pandemic of the sixth century, it caused a shortage of human resources, affecting communications and trade. We must imagine a well-working machine suddenly coming to a halt for lack of fuel.

²⁹⁵ K.P. Jayaswal (1933).

²⁹⁶ Ibid.: 8.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.: 65, 94. This king seems to have died about the end of the first quarter of the fourth century (HCIP 2: 221).

formed in the early third century by Cāṃtamūla I of the Ikṣvāku dynasty,²⁹⁸ who claimed descent from the mythical Ikṣvākus of Ayodhyā. The general lack of artistic patronage at the elite level with regard to the theistic movements in the territories controlled by these dynasties indicates the strength of the orthodox brāhmaṇas, who exercised control over the personal faith of the rulers²⁹⁹ and drained all royal resources. Once the conditions created by Kuṣāṇa rule dissolved, and the imposing building activity and impressive amount of artistic output in key-cities like Mathurā and in Buddhist sanctuaries came to a halt, India, besides being de-urbanised, appeared as an iconic desert.

PĀṢANḌAS AND NĀSTIKAS

The *pāṣanḍas* are the impious, the impostors, the supporters of false doctrines. The epithet very often denotes the Buddhists in the literature: but why did the Buddhists continued to be branded as *pāṣanḍas* until the end, while the Bhāgavatas and Pāśupatas did not? The doctrines propounded by the theistic movements were as distant from Vedic orthodoxy as Buddhist doctrines. Could there be anything more extraneous to Vedic doctrine and praxis than the worship of the *liṅga*? Yet the Pāśupatas found their place in the Brahmanical system, ultimately governed by the *vaidika* brāhmaṇas, reserving sectarian rivalry (often very serious) for the other great theistic religion of the Bhāgavatas-Pāñcarātras. The divide between strongly dissenting voices and actual anti-system heretics may seem at first difficult to trace.

A scholarly tradition that emphasises inclusiveness rather than otherness does not favour investigation on an issue

²⁹⁸ K.P. Jayaswal (1933: 175). On the Ikṣvākus, see Chapter III.

²⁹⁹ The Vākātakas, for instance, were strict Sivaites (ibid.: 94).

such as orthodoxy/heterodoxy, and a comprehensive study on the question is lacking. However, several scholars — especially in the past — had very clear ideas on the matter. Rajendra Candra Hazra summed up the position of the religious movements that rose in ancient India before AD 200, classifying them, according to their position *vis-à-vis* Vedic orthodoxy, as anti-Vedic (Jainism, Ājīvākaism and Buddhism) and semi-Vedic, in particular Vishnuism and Sivaism. These movements, besides looking upon the worship of their gods as the means of attaining salvation, were imbued with non-Brahmanical ideas and practices and violated the rules of caste and *āśramas*, but within them soon emerged a class of “Smārta-Vaiṣṇavas” and “Smārta-Śaivas” (as Hazra proposed to call them). They looked upon the Vedas as authorities, attached great importance to *varṇāśramadharmā* and *smṛti* rules, and did not want to give them up.³⁰⁰ The call for Vedic orthodoxy goes back to a very early age in Bhāgavatism,³⁰¹ and neo-Brahmanical orthodoxy was the result of the conciliation of the Vedic rules and the need inherent to the theistic systems to open their ranks to converts of different social stands. In this regard, it is interesting for us to note that the revived *aśvamedha* ritual appears to have been performed by King Gājāyana, the Bhāgavata ally of Puṣyamitra.³⁰² Despite the caveats, we have here an early example of Vedic and theistic compromise.

Buddhism, despite numerous, and sometimes substantial adjustments to Brahmanical diktats (we will discuss the point in the coming chapters), resisted submitting to the principle of the existence of either a divine, preordained social order³⁰³ or

³⁰⁰ Hazra (1940: 193, 203). On the definition of heresy in the Brahmanical world, see also O’Flaherty (1971: 272–73; 275 ff.).

³⁰¹ Matsubara (1994: 136–37).

³⁰² Joshi & Sharma (1991-93: 58–59), re-examining the Ghosundi inscription.

³⁰³ See the penetrating analysis of the Buddhist positions *vis-à-vis varṇa* and *jāti* made by Eltschinger (2000), a question that we shall touch again in our discussion.

an omniscient and omnipotent being. The latter point explains why the Buddhists were always called *nāstikas*, atheists. In the medieval literature, the term applies almost exclusively to them, since the other atheist schools had long since disappeared from the Indian religious horizon and the Jains, as we will see in Chapter VI, had conformed to Brahmanical order to an even greater extent than a part of the Buddhists.

A parallel with the religious situation of early Christianity, especially of the second century AD, would help clarify concepts and would serve the scope of modelling. The canon of the Great Church based on the four gospels and a few other texts was established in that period to coincide with the creation of an orthodox theology and praxis and in opposition to the Gnostic interpretations of the scriptures,³⁰⁴ and in the two following centuries heresiological categories and classifications were established.³⁰⁵ We are forced to limit the scope of our investigation, confining ourselves to making our own the methodological considerations made by Tadeusz Manteuffel in relation to the heretical movements of medieval Europe. The relationship between orthodoxy and heterodoxy/heresy was not defined once for all, but was the consequence of the establishment of the medieval Church. The papacy judged some opinions orthodox, and other, almost identical ones, heterodox. The decisive factor was the obedience towards the Church authorities: this and not the substance of the professed ideas decided the attitude towards the innovators. An unconditioned submission to Rome usually allowed the innovators to remain faithful to the professed ideology

³⁰⁴ Pagels (2005) has recently re-ignited an ever-lasting debate setting the Gnostic gospel of Thomas, according to which each of us can individually come into contact with God, in opposition to John's fourth canonical gospel, some passages of which imply priestly mediation (on the fourth gospel and Irenaeus's role in creating an orthodox system, see esp. pp. 96 ff.).

³⁰⁵ Humfress (2007: 217 ff.).

without opening up a conflict. Conversely, any refusal to obey, determined the condemnation of the ideas propounded by the rebels, as heretical.³⁰⁶

Likewise, the theistic movements of ancient India could propound the most eccentric doctrines and rituals inasmuch as they accepted the Vedas and what the Vedas meant in terms of social order: *varṇāśramadharmā* and, within it, the superiority of the *brāhmaṇavarṇa*. Instead of opposing the *brāhmaṇas*, the theistic innovators made themselves acceptable to the highest *varṇa*, if they were not already part of it. On the contrary, the Buddhists refused to recognise the superiority of the *brāhmaṇas* as a caste, disobeying and opposing them. Buddhist heresy is definable in relation to the progressive formation of neo-Brahmanical orthodoxy and to the obedience that any orthodox system requires. Here comes another important point discussed by Manteuffel, that is, the question of heretical tenacity and obstinacy, and of heretical doctrines reaching a point when no compromise with the orthodox is possible and a final break occurs. This is what, despite the numerous attempts at establishing conditions of non-belligerence and coexistence, happened in medieval India.

The use of the expression “inter-sectarian rivalries”, so common in the literature, should be avoided when discussing the relationships between Buddhism and orthodoxy. The differences and clashes between *Bhāgavatas* and *Pāśupatas* or between the *vaidikas* and the theistic groups can be rightly described as “sectarian”, but those between the *vaidikas* and the neo-orthodox from the one side and the Buddhists from the other are not:³⁰⁷ in this case, differences and clashes are systemic.

³⁰⁶ Manteuffel (1986: 125–26).

³⁰⁷ Cf. O’Flaherty’s argumentation on the two levels of heresy (O’Flaherty 1971: 273–74).

CHAPTER III

The Gupta Sphinx

QUESTIONING THE SPHINX

The India of the third century and of the early Guptas, notably so that of Candragupta I and Samudragupta, almost appears as an iconic desert, an age of strictly orthodox rule. The Guptas ignored artistic patronage as the Śuṅgas had done. It is possible to speak of “Gupta art” only with Candragupta II, and to a limited degree: the reference is to the Brahmanical caves at Udayagiri near Vidiśā, which go back to the early years of the fifth century, to Padmāvati (Pawaya),¹ and to the patronage granted to a Sivaite (probably Pāśupata) temple in Mathurā.² Even less possible is to speak of a patronage dispensed with equal generosity to brāhmaṇas and śrāmaṇas — a still current opinion which is not only contrary to historical truth, but to every historical likelihood³— the exceptions being the inscribed

¹ On Udayagiri, see discussion below; on Pawaya, cf. Gottfried Williams (1982: 52 ff. and pls. 49–54) and Willis (2009: 195–97) in relation to the famous lintel, a rather exceptional representation of a Vedic ritual.

² Chhabra & Gai (1981: 234–42).

³ Scholars still rely upon assessments made when Indian archaeology was in its infancy and excavations were not carried out under strict stratigraphic control. The authors of the revised edition of the third volume of the *CII*, for instance, accepted Jean Philippe Vogel’s description, going back to 1914, of the flourishing conditions of Buddhism at Sarnath in Gupta times. This led them to overlook the absence of epigraphic material in the fourth and early fifth century and conclude that the sanctuary “was in as flourishing a condition as ever before” (Chhabra & Gai 1981: 140). The association of the Gupta kings with Nālandā seems equally groundless (cf. B.N. Misra 1987–89). The view that the Buddhists benefitted from Gupta patronage is shared by Davidson (2002: 75, 111) and Deeg (cf. *Faxian* a: 133). Nakamura (1987: 212, with statements made in previous works) and Chappell (1980: esp. 129, 139–40) are notable exceptions.

images of Candraprabha that “the illustrious Mahārājādhiraja Rāmagupta” caused to be made in Vidiśā “under instruction from the mendicant Chēlla [Cella]”.⁴ Rāmagupta’s turning to a Jain *guru*, whose *paramparā* is also reported in the inscription, may find an explanation in his distancing from his father Samudragupta and his younger brother Candragupta II, who murdered him.⁵ As is known, he underwent the *damnatio memoriae*.

Buddhist texts preserved in Chinese translations convey the sense that in the late third century and when Gupta power was established Buddhism was tested very hard. The *Mahāpārinirvāṇa Mahāsūtra*, composed after the end of Kuṣāṇa rule, at the time of the *aśvamedhin* kings and of Gupta rule,⁶ predicts that it will not be long before the teaching of the Buddha disappears. When the *sūtra* reports the Buddha saying that “700 years after my death, the devil Māra Papiyas will gradually destroy my True Dharma”, it indicates that the end of Buddhism “was in process in AD 317”.⁷ In the fifth century, Buddhaghōṣa, in his five-stage scheme for the disappearance of Buddhism, argues that the *saṃgha* will not be supported, novices will not be taught, and the scriptures will gradually be lost for the world.⁸ The passage implies not only lack of patronage, but the diaspora of monks (who

⁴ Chhabra & Gai (1981: 233–34); see the images in Gottfried Williams (1982: 25–26; pls. 12–15).

⁵ On Rāmagupta see Chhabra & Gai (1981: 46–52); P.L. Gupta (1974, I: 290–96); Mirashi (1975: 109–24).

⁶ It would be impossible for me to discuss the many issues raised by scholars on this famous work, a version of which was translated into Chinese by Faxian in AD 418 (two other translations are slightly later). An English translation of the work is available at <http://www.nirvanasutra.org.uk>. For the questions raised here, I follow Nakamura (1987: 211 ff.) and Chappell (1980: esp. 139–40).

⁷ *Ibid.*: 139.

⁸ *Ibid.*: 131. Buddhaghōṣa’s scheme should be seen in the light of the complex reasons that in both India and China brought to the formulations of the predictions on the end of *dharmā*, but this passage seems to fit well with the situation in which Buddhaghōṣa had to live.

are no longer in the position to teach new novices) and of the scriptures. The latter detail grabs our attention because it is a rare, early mention of the dispersal of texts.

An interesting testimony on Samudragupta's conduct is provided by the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, which, though a later text,⁹ is a vigilant sensor of whatever negative occurred to the religion of Dharma. This work is one of the few independent sources on the Gupta emperor, whose deeds we otherwise know from his inscriptions and coins:

[...] Samudra, of good fame, will be *nripatiḥ*. [...] He (Samudra) was lordly, shedder of excessive blood, of great powers and dominion, heartless, ever vigilant, (mindful) about his own person, unmindful about the hereafter, sacrificing animals; with bad councilor he greatly committed sin.

His government [or kingdom] was inundated with carping logicians (*tārkikaiḥ*), vile Brahmins.

He marched systematically and reached the West, and in the North reached the gate of Kashmir. He was victorious on the battlefield even in the North.

He ruled after that (conquest) for 22 years and 5 months. On this earth on account of a fell disease he fainted several times (at his death), and in great pain he died, and went down.¹⁰

The author of the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* relies on a former, unknown chronicler who was clearly impressed by Samudragupta's deeds and who, while deploring the bloody rituals and the free hand left to the brāhmaṇas, tends to discharge the emperor's responsibilities to his entourage — a well-known technique in the administration of power. That Samudragupta was unsympathetic, if not overtly hostile, to Buddhism, appears from the story of two monks,

⁹ The date of this stratified text is discussed in Matsunaga (1985); see p. 893 for the last chapter of the work, translated and commented upon by K.P. Jayaswal.

¹⁰ *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*: [53], 699-718; cf. §31, p. 48.

Mahānāman and Upa[sena] who, during the reign of King Meghavarna of Laṅka (c.AD 352-79) went on pilgrimage to Bodhgayā. The story, as briefly narrated by Wang Xuance, is the following:

[...] The two *bhikṣus* paid homage to the Diamond throne [...] under the tree of Bodhi. The monastery did not offer them any shelter. The two *bhikṣus* returned to their country. The king questioned the *bhikṣus* “You had gone to pay your compliments to the sacred spots. What suspicious omen was found o *bhikṣus*”? They replied “In the large country of Jambudvīpa there is no place where we could live”. The king having heard them sent them with precious stones for offering to the king *San-meou-to-le-kin-to* (Samudragupta). And it is for that reason, uptil now, that the *bhikṣus* of the kingdom of Ceylon are residing in that monastery.¹¹

The gems were given to Samudragupta in addition to the usual gifts,¹² which was the same as paying a tribute of subjection. For Meghavarna, as for any other Buddhist king, the construction of a monastery near the Bodhi tree had crucial political implications; Samudragupta was well aware of this fact, and made them pay dearly for the privilege. In the Allahabad inscription, the Siṃhalas would be enlisted among his vassals.¹³ What is most striking in the story is that there was

¹¹ Wang Xuance: 29, 97b, 2 (p. 15). Mahānāman has been considered the author of the long inscription of Bodhgayā (Fleet 1888: 274–78), for whose exegesis I refer the reader to Lévi (1996b) and especially to Tournier (2014). The Mahānāman of the inscription, which cannot be dated to the fourth century as proposed by Lévi (it goes back to AD 587), declares himself to be a native of Laṅkā, and to have inhabited at Āmradvīpa, identified with Ambatitthaka in central Laṅkā (ibid.: 23).

¹² V. Smith (1967: 304).

¹³ Chhabra & Gai (1981): II. 23-24, pp. 217–18. Lévi in Wang Xuance (38-39) recalls that Meghavarna was one of the titles preferred by the kings of Laṅkā, and correlates it with the part played by the traitor Meghavarna, the king of crows arrived from the island in the third book of the *Hitopadeśa*. The brāhmaṇa author of this work, modifying a story of the *Pañcatantra* to his ends, wantonly abuses the Laṅkan Buddhists, whose king bears a name that “implies metaphorically a shameless person”. I report Lévi’s argument to show how cryptic the derogatory allusions to the Buddhists in Indian texts may be. The *Hitopadeśa* is obviously a text composed much later than Gupta times.

no place for the Siṃhala monks to live in the whole of India: there were no patrons who would protect and benefit them.¹⁴

Buddhist icons of the end of the fourth century or datable to *c.* AD 400 are known from Bodhgayā, Sarnath and Mathurā, and are very few.¹⁵ The early standing Buddha images in what we consider the typical Gupta style were produced in Mathurā in the decade of the 430s,¹⁶ and a real artistic output, in both Mathurā and Sarnath, is documented only from around the mid-fifth century.¹⁷ None of these images has any relation with the Gupta ruling class. An exception whose circumstances are difficult to evaluate is the donation that a high officer of Candragupta II, Āmrakārdava, together with three local rulers, made to the monks of the monastery of Sanchi presiding over the main stūpa.¹⁸ The donation was made towards the end of Candragupta's life, arguably in a climate of political difficulties and change, both at central and local level. What is usually labelled as "Gupta art" is a set of monuments and iconographies that are either ascribable to the fifth century or, in their majority, to the complex period that followed the death of Skandagupta in AD 467 and to a much later age. Gupta art has been made too comprehensive a container since the times of A.K. Coomaraswamy and V.S. Agrawala, whose

¹⁴ The story, in a more extended but apparently more imprecise version, is also narrated by Xuanzang (*Xiyuji* a: VIII; vol. 2, pp. 133–35). The duress experienced on the continent by the one and only *śramaṇa* protagonist of the story appears equally serious, and the king of the island appears as a vassal king ("he gave in tribute to the king of India all the jewels of his country"), but in Xuanzang the narrative acquires a hagiographic tint intended to emphasise the final triumph of the religion.

¹⁵ Gottfried Williams (1982: 30–31 and pl. 19; 32 and pls. 21–22; 33–34 and pls. 25, 26).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*: 68–69 and pls. 61–63.

¹⁷ Gottfried Williams (*ibid.*: 76) observes, without attempting to explain the fact, that Sarnath "burst into prominence in the 470s" after "the limited artistic production of the fourth century".

¹⁸ See the inscription in Chhabra & Gai (1981: 247–52); I follow, however, the interpretation of V.V. Mirashi (1982), who restores Fleet's translation.

great talent were at the service of the nationalist cause.¹⁹ They distorted the questions involved and injected into them a poison from which even free-thinking historians have not since been immune. V.S. Agrawala, in particular, tackling cultural problems at large and ignoring the contradictions and discontinuities that distinguish Indian history between the fourth and the mid-seventh century, postulated the existence of a unified golden age with Kālidāsa at its beginning and Bāṇa at its end.²⁰

During Skandagupta's reign the game restarted, and in places the Buddhists even succeeded in re-establishing themselves as rulers, as happened at the time of the Vākāṭaka King Hariṣeṇa (AD 460-77) in western Deccan. Whether it was this ruler, "long thought to be only one of a number of different (presumably Hindu) sovereigns from a number of different generations and houses of kings" who made of Ajanta "a royal Vākāṭaka site"²¹ (a hypothesis that is ill-suited to our interpretive model, which questions the "catholicism" of Indian orthodox rulers, and the Vākāṭakas were such), or a local ruler, as other authors suggest,²² we witness that kind of sudden, hectic building activity that characterises the rise of many Buddhist sites, and to an equally typical, sudden collapse of the

¹⁹ Coomaraswamy (1927: 71 ff.); V.S. Agrawala (1977, a posthumous work). Monuments such as the Daśavatāra Temple at Deogarh and the temple of Bhitargaon, which have become symbols of Gupta architecture, are better assigned, as Gottfried Williams has done, to "Gupta art after the Guptas". The difficulty in establishing a date for the end of the dynasty may explain the different attempts at defining a Gupta canon in terms of chronology, yet it is surprising to find the above-cited monuments included among the Gupta temples in Meister, Dhaky & Deva (1988), usually so fastidious regarding the questions of patronage. On the later Gupta history, see the observations made by Willis (2005).

²⁰ See, for instance, V.S. Agrawala (1969: 2).

²¹ Spink (1992: 178). At the end of his long work on Ajanta, Spink has devoted a study in five volumes to the chronology of the site and to the historical setting that, according to him, made Hariṣeṇa's patronage possible (Spink 2005-7: see, in particular, vol. I).

²² Hans Bakker has questioned Spink's construction of Ajanta as a royal Vākāṭaka site (Bakker 1997: 37 ff.), and Cohen (1997: esp. 128 ff.), through a new reading of the relevant epigraphic material, has equally raised, among other things, the question of Hariṣeṇa's patronage.

patronage. In any case, the rather long period during which everything seemed to be once again at stake, at least in central and northern India, came to an end with the death of Harṣavardhana.

A picture of Gupta India towards the end of the reign of Candragupta II (who died in AD 414) is provided by the travelogue of Faxian (Map 2). The North-West, including Punjab, was firmly controlled by Buddhist rulers.²³ In the region of Mathurā there was a Buddhist revival, and Dharma was in full blossom.²⁴ The situation starts changing when the pilgrim enters Madhyadeśa. Here Faxian, usually exclusively concerned in retracing the steps of the Awakened One and his disciples and in collecting pious stories, observed the extent to which the burden of taxation fell upon the peasants working on the king's lands, and was struck by the social phenomenon of the *cāṇḍālas*. He was also a witness of the popularity of the vegetarian diet among high-casters,²⁵ and of the mushrooming of apparently Brahmanical schools (ninety-six, according to him), believing in the real existence of this and the next world.²⁶ Only proceeding further east, Faxian found other flourishing Buddhist communities, and it was in a monastery of Tāmralipti (Tamluk) in coastal Bengal that he eventually decided to reside for two years “copying out sūtras and drawing pictures of images”.²⁷ Neither the two monasteries at Sarnath nor those in Pāṭaliputra, despite their close connection with the Buddha and Aśoka, respectively, had offered him the conditions that he was looking for. Only in Bengal he felt at ease, living in what we may call a Buddhist society that satis-

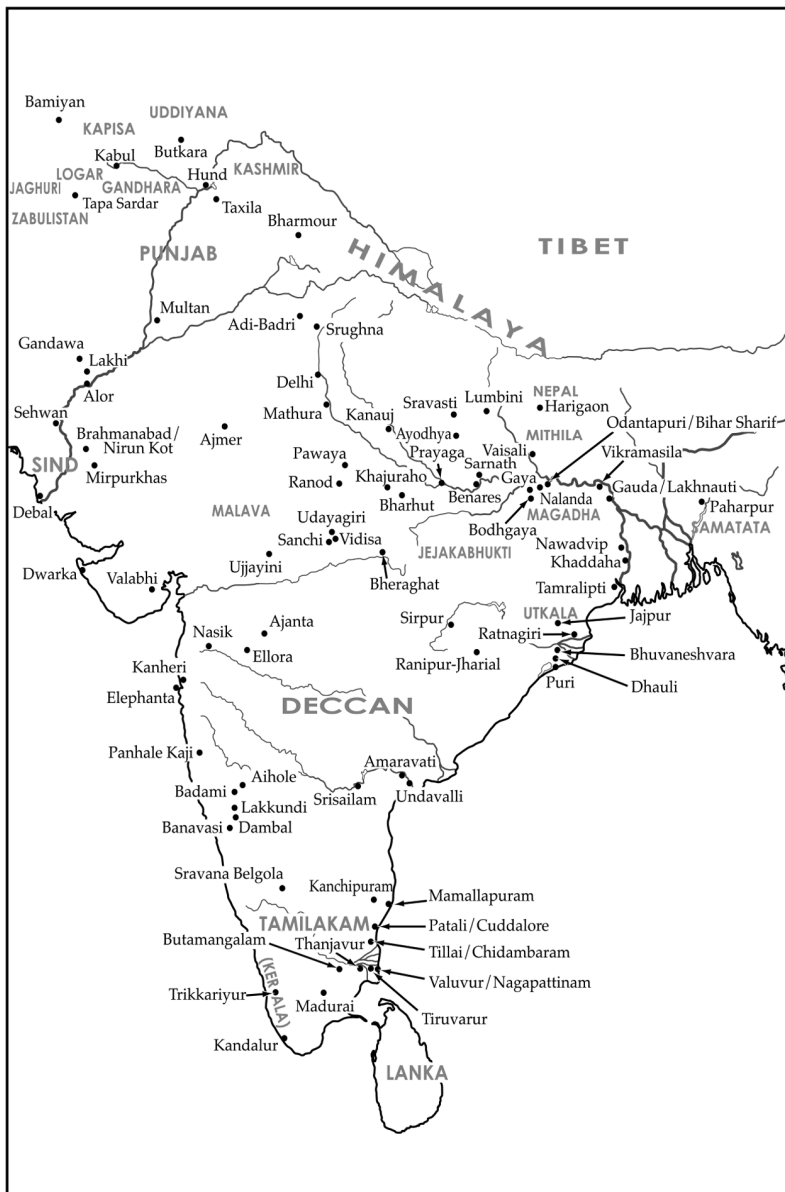
²³ *Faxian* a: 14-20 (pp. 524-28).

²⁴ *Ibid.*: 20 (p. 528).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 529. Vegetarianism had found orthodox sanction in Manu. See W. Doniger's discussion in *Manu*: xxxiii ff.

²⁶ *Faxian* a: 55 (p. 540); *Faxian* b: 34.

²⁷ *Faxian* b: 65-66. Cf. *Faxian* a: 148 (p. 563).



Map 2. Late Ancient and Medieval India.

fied him, comparable to the society still existing in the North-West, and to that which he would experience in Sri Lanka after his departure from India.

This picture matches other known facts. It was in Mathurā, in the first half of the fourth century, that the Saṃmitīya School propounded, arguably in response to the Brahmanical theory of the *ātman*, the audacious idea of the *pudgala*.²⁸ In an inscription dated AD 332, the Buddha is given the attributive of Pitāmaha, which pertains to Brahmā as creator, thus suggesting — to the opposite field, at least — that the Buddha might be a sort of god and creator of the universe.²⁹ Buddhist casuistry, developed out of theistic pressure, would succeed in keeping this and similar theories distinct from those of the orthodox, and it is, indeed, typical of mature Buddhism, though not of Vajrayāna, to yield, or pretend to yield, to the arguments and constrictions of its adversaries in order to preserve an identity in peril. The theories of the Saṃmitīyas were probably helpful in limiting the losses to neo-Brahmanical movements, very powerful in Mathurā, as were the other numerous attempts at adjusting the doctrine to Brahmanical tenets, as for instance the idea, variously presented and discussed, of the eternalness of the Buddha.³⁰ The variety of positions and adjustments took

²⁸ The Saṃmitīya School was the most important among those of the Pudgalavādins, stemmed out from the Vātsīputrīyas. See Thích Thiên Châu (1999: 11–15 and 19 ff.) for the literature and doctrine of the Pudgalavādins. In the Chakka Nipāta of the *Anguttara Nikāya*, the Buddha criticises a brāhmaṇa for excluding the self as an independent agent (“Pray, how can one step onwards, how can one step back, yet say: There is no self-agency; there is no other-agency?”) (*Anguttara Nikāya* VI. iv.38; cf. vol. 3: 238).

²⁹ Cf. Chhabra & Gai (1981: 140–42). “[T]he holy Pitāmaha, the Supremely Enlightened” is already mentioned, not necessarily with the meaning it would acquire later, in a Mathurā inscription dated to the 14 year of Kaṇiṣka (Lüders 1961: § 81).

³⁰ As is known, this idea is central to the *Mahāpārīṇirvāṇa Mahāsūtra*, to remain within the Gupta chronological horizon. The question of the Buddha’s eternalness may have risen independently from the continuous debating with the orthodox because, after that the earthly *kāya* of the Buddha was no more, a solution for asserting the authority of Buddhist teaching had to be found. Yet the *Buddha-* or *Dharmakāya* doctrine lends itself very well, with the help of the iconographies, to build a paratheistic model of Buddhism.

a doctrinal, argumentative form because Brahmanical pressure, as we will see in the next chapter, resorted to public debates, which became hot political issues, crucial for the survival of Buddhism.

The most effective Gupta rule was exercised, apart from the central Vindhyan region and Bengal, in the Doāb.³¹ Candragupta II's coins are in plenty here, while only a few have been found in Bihar, particularly so gold coins.³² They are usually believed to have circulated in connection with trade in luxury articles,³³ but the difference between their number and that of the other circulating coins (Gupta copper coins are few) points to the absence of a real monetary economy. This strongly suggests that the gold coins were almost exclusively minted to serve as gifts to brāhmaṇas and for propaganda.³⁴ Gold is scanty in India,³⁵ and hunting for gold and hoarding it up has been a constant behavioural pattern of the Indian well-off and politically influential milieus up to the present. If this assumption is correct, the spatial distribution of the Gupta gold coins indicates that the majority of royal rituals were performed in the lower Doāb. In Magadha, orthodox Gupta rule was less incisive, and the Brahmanical model of society more difficult to introduce and implement.

In relation to allegations of slaughter against some rulers of his time, Voltaire maintained that there is nothing more likely than crimes, but that it is at least necessary that they are ascer-

³¹ Cf. the map showing the epigraphic and numismatic finds relative to the Guptas provided by Gérard Fussman for his 2006-7 course at the Collège de France (Fussman 2006-7: 704).

³² P.L. Gupta (1974, I: 293-94).

³³ Kosambi (1965: 194).

³⁴ There is no ratio between the amount of gold coins and that of silver and copper coins in circulation, and Kosambi (1965: 195) recognised that their total amount was not sufficient to support commodity production. The propagandistic aims of the gold issues have been underlined by B.N. Mukherjee (1990: 16).

³⁵ Gold deposits are mainly located in the Deccan, where there is evidence of ancient workings. See Nanda (1992: 7 ff.).

tained.³⁶ Lack of patronage, hostility towards the *śramaṇas*, strengthening of caste rules do not necessarily imply violence. They may simply point to a strategy based on the assertion of hegemony over society. Even though a better chronology of sites and iconographies allows us to reject well-established opinions regarding the purported “catholicity” of the religious and social attitudes of the Guptas and the Brahmanical elite of their time, we are not authorised to conclude, on the basis of the unyielding silence of contemporary Indian sources, that rulers and brāhmaṇas resorted to physical violence against the Buddhists. However, Faxian provides us with some valuable information, encouraging deeper investigation.

In the region of Sāketa-Śrāvastī, the centre of Gupta power at the symbolic level,³⁷ the situation was marked by conflict. In Sāketa, says the pilgrim,

[o]utside the south gate of the city, on the eastern side of the road, is the place where Buddha formerly stuck in the ground a piece of his willow chewing-stick (for cleansing the teeth), which forthwith grew up to the height of seven feet, never increasing nor diminishing. Heretics and Brahmans, in their jealousy, at one time cut it down, at another pulled it up and threw it to a distance; but it always came up again as before on the same spot.³⁸

Regarding Śrāvastī, half of the town was abandoned, including the house thought to have been Anāthapiṇḍika’s. Here, on the site of the monastery of Mahāprajāpati (Queen Māyā’s sister), as well as on the site of Aṅgulimālya’s conversion, stūpas had been erected by “men of after ages”, and

³⁶ Preface to the 1748 edition of the *Histoire de Charles XII*.

³⁷ Hans Bakker (1986: 26 f.) has summed up the evidence on Ayodhyā in Gupta times. The disappointing lack of archaeological evidence (Bakker draws on B.B. Lal and his “Rāmāyaṇa Project”) arguably depends on the fact that the Gupta capital was rather an itinerant camp where the court resided as long as required by the circumstances, and not a permanent place with stone and/or brick structures, etc. A Gupta capital *sui generis* was certainly Udayagiri.

³⁸ *Faxian* b: 29; cf. *Faxian* a: 37 (p. 536).

“[t]he heretic Brahmans, growing jealous, wished to destroy them; whereupon the heavens thundered and flashed lightning with splitting crash, so that they were not able to succeed”.³⁹

At some distance from the Jetavana, in the place where Devadatta had fallen into hell, a shrine had been built, over 60 ft in height, which contained an image of the seated Buddha:

On the east side of the road there is a heretical Brahman temple, called “Shadow-covered”. It stands opposite the above-mentioned shrine, on the other side of the avenue of trees, and is also over sixty feet in height. It was called “Shadow-covered” because when the sun is in the west, the shadow of the shrine of the World-Honoured-One darkens the temple of the heretical Brahmans; whereas, when the sun is in the east, the shadow of the temple darkens the north, and never falls upon the shrine of Buddha.⁴⁰

In this case, the quarrel between the Buddhists and the brāhmaṇas ended up with the conversion of the latter, who “at once gave up their family ties and entered His [the Buddha’s] priesthood”.⁴¹

The unsuccessful attempt at destroying the stūpas in the city implies the fact that in other cases it had been successful, at either Śrāvastī or elsewhere. The construction of a Brahmanical rival temple just opposite a Buddhist temple provided with a particular symbolic meaning (Devadatta’s final defeat), is an early testimony of the encircling technique to which brāhmaṇas used to resort, along with the harassing techniques observed at Ayodhyā, when getting rid of their adversaries was either impossible or untimely. These techniques, which, in Chapter I, we have already seen explained by Rajendralala Mitra, have been in use to these days.

³⁹ *Faxian* b: 30. Deeg has “Verschiedene Häretiker und Brahmanen” (my emphasis); cf. *Faxian* a: 42 (p. 536).

⁴⁰ *Faxian* b: 34-35; cf. *Faxian* a: 54 (pp. 539–40).

⁴¹ *Faxian* b: 35; cf. *Faxian* a: 55 (p. 540).

According to the *Waiguo shi* or *Matters of the Outside Countries* of Zhi Sengzai, a Chinese monk active towards the end of the Jin dynasty (AD 265-420)⁴² and therefore a contemporary of Faxian, Śrāvastī was ruled by a Gupta prince acting as viceroy, and the people of the kingdom did not follow the law of the Buddha:⁴³ the cleansing policy must have started some time in the fourth century. The *Waiguo shi*, an independent source, probably records the situation of the Buddhists in India as it was known in China before Faxian's journey.

The most instructive story reported by Faxian is set in Pāṭaliputra:

There was living inside this city and belonging to the Greater Vehicle, a Brahman (by caste) whose name was Raivata. He was a strikingly enlightened man of much wisdom, there being nothing which he did not understand. He led a pure and solitary life; and the king of the country revered him as his teacher, so that whenever he went to visit the Brahman, he did not venture to sit beside him. If the king, from a feeling of love and veneration, grasped his hand, when he let go, the Brahman would immediately wash it. He was perhaps over fifty years of age, and all the country looked upon this one man to diffuse widely the Faith in Buddha, so that the heretics were unable to persecute the priesthood.⁴⁴

We are struck by the behaviour of a Buddhist master, a brāhmaṇa by birth, who considers the contact with a stranger (arguably a petty king of lower birth) polluting. Yet it was this very behaviour that induced the orthodox to consider him as one of their folk, and leave the monastic community in peace.

⁴² This monk never visited India, and his *Waiguo shi* is lost but for a few fragments. It probably dealt with the Buddhist sanctuaries of India and Sri Lanka (Petech 1974: 551).

⁴³ *Ibid.*: 556.

⁴⁴ *Faxian* b: 45-46. Deeg has: “[so daß] die Häretiker den buddhistischen *saṅgha* nicht übertreffen konnten”; cf. *Faxian* a: 97 (p. 548).

The elimination of high-caste adversaries was a painful and difficult task for the orthodox, since caste identity was the real bonding agent of orthodoxy. Regarding the Buddhists, or a part of them, adaptation to caste rules, despite the radical criticism of Brahmanical essentialism in this regard,⁴⁵ and the creation of a priesthood, were a *fait accompli*.

The persecution of the Buddhist monks is only hinted at by Faxian, but this should not be dismissively interpreted as referring to sporadic occurrences that do not deserve to be reported. The tone of Faxian's statement implies that in the given case (and certainly in many others) persecution could not be put into effect but that it was something that could be expected. The pilgrim's homeland, China, was as different a country from India as can be imagined, but Buddhism found a staunch opposition there, too. To agree with Paul Demiéville, Buddhism in China had introduced private capitalism, which jeopardised state capitalism and the privileges of the bureaucrats, and from the fourth century at least, the state took various measures to put the Buddhists under control.⁴⁶ As early as AD 335, Wang Du, minister of Emperor Shi Hu of the Later Zhao dynasty presented a memorial calling upon the ruler to forbid the worship of the Buddha, who was "a foreign deity", and to return to the laity those who had become monks,⁴⁷ a measure that was repeatedly taken in the following centuries. In AD 340, at the court of the Eastern Jin, the question arose as to whether or not the monks should show respect like just any other subject, and that if the *saṃgha* should occupy a position equal to and independent of the state, there would be confusion within the land.⁴⁸ This burning issue was destined to provoke serious clashes. In South China, the literate Cai Mo

⁴⁵ On the various Buddhist arguments against both *varṇa* and *jāti*, the reader is again referred to Eltschinger (2000).

⁴⁶ Demiéville (1974: 18). "Capitalism" is the word used by Demiéville.

⁴⁷ Ch'en (1964: 80).

⁴⁸ Id. (1954: 261 ff.; 1964: 75–76).

(AD 312-85) upheld that Buddhism was “the custom of the barbarians”,⁴⁹ which became a frequently utilised polemical tool, similar to that utilised in India, with even less reasons, by the brāhmaṇas, who equalled the Buddhist folk to the *mlecchas*. In fourth-century China, there was also an acrimonious debate between the Buddhists and the Taoists over the problem of historical priority of one system over the other.⁵⁰ Naturally, Faxian could not foresee the first anti-Buddhist measures that were taken in China in AD 444-46 under Tai Wudi (AD 424-52) of the Northern Wei dynasty,⁵¹ but could not ignore that in both China and India Buddhism did not enjoy the support of the establishment. What he saw in Madhyadeśa and Pāṭaliputra could not surprise him, but the fact remains that he preferred to proceed to Tāmralipti and Sri Lanka to carry out his work. In some respects, the choice of Faxian is ahead by almost two centuries of that of Yijing and the other Chinese pilgrims of the second half of the seventh century (Chapter IV), and is due to reasons of the same order.

The excavations carried out at Maheth in the latter half of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the last century⁵² are rather confusing; yet there is some ground to believe that an anti-Buddhist revolt, implicit in Faxian’s narrative, was actually kindled. A temple decorated with panels depicting scenes from the *Rāmāyaṇa* was apparently erected in Gupta times on the remains of a Kuṣāṇa monument of uncertain nature and, as reported by Jean Philippe Vogel, of two stūpas.⁵³ We are

⁴⁹ Id. (1952: 169).

⁵⁰ Id. (1964: 184). Taoist priesthood was organised, from the beginning, on the model of the Han Imperial bureaucracy and never rose as a challenge to state authority (Gregory & Ebrey 1993: 24).

⁵¹ Ch’en (1964: 147–51).

⁵² Hoey (1892); *ASIAR* 1907-8 (J.-Ph. Vogel): 81–131; *ASIAR* 1910-11 (J.H. Marshall): 1–24.

⁵³ *ASIAR* 1907-8 (J. Ph. Vogel): 94.

unable to be more detailed in terms of both archaeological analysis and chronology, but the evidence is made credible, *ex post*, by the description of the town of Śrāvastī made by Xuanzang two centuries later. He states that the majority of Buddhist monasteries were in ruins, and that the brethren, followers of the Saṃmitīya School, were very few. The only great stūpa was that of Anāthapiṇḍika, already mentioned by Faxian, the others being small structures standing at the top of the ruins. This detail indicates that the destruction and/or de-functionalisation of earlier buildings had been followed by a period of abandonment, after which a minor building activity had taken place. This is a very common occurrence, and only a careful analysis of the interface(s) could allow us to reconstruct at least some events. Xuanzang maintains that in Śrāvastī there were one hundred *deva* temples “with very many heretics”.⁵⁴ A similar breakdown cannot take place according to the theory of the “slow decline” of Buddhism and its “natural death”, unless one intends to offend not only the intelligence of the historian but also common sense. Xuanzang may have amplified the situation at Śrāvastī (even though the pilgrim's interest was rather that of depicting a flourishing Buddhist India), but it would be difficult not to see that it was the coherent consequence of the tense state of affairs described by Faxian two centuries earlier. Despite the effort of the Buddhists to describe Śrāvastī as a place of their own, Brahmanical opposition had been obstinate, as is shown by the “miracle” performed there by the Buddha and if, as reported in the *Divyāvadāna*, a banker had to apply for the help of the royal army in erecting a stūpa.⁵⁵ The latter story is told as having occurred at the time of the ancient kingdom of Kośala, but is likely to reflect more recent events.

54 *Xiyuji* a: VI (vol. 2: 2–3).

55 Cf. Law (1935: 27 [*Divyāvadāna* a: XVIII, pp. 243–44]).

Regarding the town of Vaiśālī, Faxian limits himself to mentioning the existence of the stūpa erected by the courtesan Amradārikā, and for the rest he speaks of his visit to a few stūpas outside town,⁵⁶ soon leaving the region. The above-mentioned *Waiguo shi*, which, as we have seen, depicts a situation preceding that observed by Faxian, reports that the house of Vimalakīrti, where the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*, or teaching of Vimalakīrti, had been imparted,⁵⁷ was in ruin and that only the site where it once was standing and its foundations were visible. In this case, too, the people of the kingdom did not honour the Buddha, and were heterodox in everything.⁵⁸

Archaeologists have paid little or no attention to late Kuṣāṇa and Gupta sites but for a few Buddhist sanctuaries the remains of which have often been wrongly dated.⁵⁹ Yet the study of the desertion phases of once flourishing settlements and a careful study of non-monumental sites would be of the utmost interest. Even a limited number of excavations, if carried out under a strict stratigraphic control, would provide a great amount of evidence regarding the present matter. A case in point is the Aśokan site of Gotihawa in the Nepalese Tarai, for whose abandonment a *terminus post quem* in the third century has been established. When the stūpa was deserted, the nearby sandstone pillar was deliberately pulled down at the level of the footing, as can be inferred from the

⁵⁶ *Faxian* b: 41–44.

⁵⁷ Vimalakīrti was a lay bodhisattva (although he followed the *śramaṇacarita*: cf. *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*: II. 3, p. 127), and this *sūtra* has a place of honour in Mahāyāna; it was translated several times into Chinese.

⁵⁸ Petech (1974: 557). Lamotte (introduction to *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*: 81) rightly points out that the information provided by the local guides were not necessarily reliable. This point has never been critically discussed, but that the local guides took full advantage of the travellers' gullibility, often making up the information they were giving, is likely. In the case under discussion, what is important is the evidence provided by the last sentence.

⁵⁹ An example is the Dhamekh Stūpa at Sarnath, attributed in the past to the Guptas but datable to the time of Harṣavardhana, as is now maintained (see, e.g. Gottfried Williams 1982: 168–69).

find of one of its fragments in the first desertion layer of the *pradakṣināpatha* and of two more fragments clearly infiltrated from an overlying layer, also related to the abandonment of the sanctuary. The other finds point to the emergence of a new cultic use of the site associated, in all likelihood, with the still visible stump of the Aśokan pillar, interpreted as a *liṅga*,⁶⁰ a usual occurrence. The reasons why the pillar was pulled down would appear a matter of mere speculation, but the archaeological context suggests that it was demolished when other important Buddhist sites west of the Gandak river such as Piprahwa were also abandoned.⁶¹ They are to be looked for in the determination to demolish a symbol. The removal of the marble columns from Greek and Roman buildings in late classical antiquity was carried out for reusing them in churches, or for producing lime, but reuse can be excluded in the case of Gotihawa, because only a few domestic utensils were worked out of its fragments,⁶² and the dwellings of the small village grown around and on top of the dilapidated stūpa were made of wattle and daub.

⁶⁰ Verardi (2007b: 131–32).

⁶¹ Cf. Chapter II, n. 293. The *Shuijingju*, mostly composed of material dating back to the third and fourth centuries, besides containing abridged passages from Faxian's travelogue (see Petech's introduction, p. 8), describes the situation of the kingdom of Kapilavastu as follows: "The kingdom of Chiawei-lo-yüeh has not got a king now. The city and the ponds are desert and dirty, and there is only the empty space. There are some *upāsaka*, about twenty households of the Śākya family; they are the posterity of King Śuddhodhana. [...] In those days, when the stūpas were dilapidated, they completely repaired them. [...] But now there are (only) twelve monks who dwell inside that (city)" (*Shuijingju*: 1, 9b-10a; p. 33). The description of Kapilavastu provided by this text is independent from those of both Faxian and Xuanzang. We still ignore the exact location of Śuddhodhana's town, situated not far from Lumbinī, either in Nepalese or Indian territory.

Regarding other evidence of destruction of Buddhist monuments during the Gupta period, a Brahmanical temple seems to have been raised on a stūpa base (the monument was thus interfaced) at Ahmedpur in the vicinity of Vidiśā in the fifth century (Dass & Willis 2002: 31) but no report has been published so far which can detail the evidence.

⁶² Grindstones, pestles, etc., were and are normally obtained from the large pebbles carried by the floods, easily available in the area, and the column was certainly not demolished for obtaining stone.

In Gupta times, Benares, the most famous and least known of ancient Indian towns,⁶³ had become the spearhead of the religious movements of the Pāśupatas and Bhāgavatas. The latter, in particular, carried out a complete reorganisation of the Brahmanical institutions between the fourth and fifth century. The seals found at Rajghat⁶⁴ attest to the existence of centres devoted to the study of the Vedas, and Benares took the leading part in the Bhāgavata movement for the resuscitation of the *sanātana dharma*. The early-fifth century image of Kṛṣṇa Govardhana from Bakaria Kund attests, by its imposing size, to the existence of a large Bhāgavata shrine — a challenge to the strict orthodox circles.⁶⁵ It has been suggested that the story of Sūrya as Lolārka narrated in the *Vāmana Purāṇa* delineates the conflict between the Buddhists, represented in Benares by Yogācāra monks residing in a monastery situated near the present-day Lolārka Kuṇḍa, and the theistic groups. The conflict erupted “in its most severe form”, and “the struggle was ultimately settled in favour of the Brahmanical way of life”. V.S. Agrawala, to whom a brilliant if reticent reconstruction of Gupta and post-Gupta Benares is due,⁶⁶ did not go into those details that his erudition and insight would

⁶³ A brief excavation campaign was carried out by Krisna Deva at Rajghat in 1940 after that railway diggings had brought to light important materials. More extensive excavations followed in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Narain & al. 1976-78). Despite the good work done (the chronology established at Rajghat has been a reliable reference for long in Gangetic archaeology), we still lack a convincing picture of the town history. The available evidence has been presented and discussed by B.P. Singh (1985: esp. 22–74). For a stratigraphic sequence in the territory of Benares (at Aktha), see now V. Jayaswal (2009). Many useful insights on the history of Benares can be found in the introduction to the *Varāṇāsi Mahātmya* of the *Skanda Purāṇa* (Bakker & Isaacson 2004: 19 ff.).

⁶⁴ V.S. Agrawala (1984b).

⁶⁵ The people of Vṛndāvana had decided to become devotees of Kṛṣṇa, and Indra reacted stirring up a tempest to flood the country and kill the peasants and their cattle. Kṛṣṇa saved them by lifting mount Govardhana to shelter them. Indra, defeated, went back to heaven. Cf. *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*: X.16-49; XI (vol. 2, pp. 721–28). I follow Harle (1974: 46) for the date of the sculpture.

⁶⁶ For the questions summarised here and below, see V.S. Agrawala (1983: 5–6; 48–52).

have allowed him to disclose, but his analysis of this passage of the *Vāmana Purāṇa*⁶⁷ is an example of the difficulties we have in grasping the subtleties, as well as the historical information, contained in the stories narrated in the Purāṇas. How to understand, outside the more authentic Brahmanical tradition, that the earthly Sun oscillating between the river Varanā/Varuṇā, flowing near Sarnath and binding the ancient town of Benares to the north, and the river Asi flowing to the south⁶⁸ alludes to Buddhism (the Buddha's lineage is *sūryavamśī*) and that the Vijñāna Sūrya of the Buddhists is seen in opposition to the Sūrya firmly replaced in the sky by Śiva, a symbol of the stability of the Vedas? Yet the story is consistent with the other evidence at our disposal for believing that Sarnath, the stronghold of Buddhism in the region, was temporarily appropriated by the brāhmaṇas. A fourth-fifth century structure in the so-called Hospital area and Court 36, as well as the Gupta Brahmanical sculptures found on the site point to the life of the Buddhist sanctuary having been discontinued.⁶⁹

THE FULFILMENT OF A DUTY

The Guptas gave the political answer that the authors of the early Kali Age literature were overtly expectant and pressing for.⁷⁰ The picture becomes even clearer if we look at the Guptas as a dynasty of brāhmaṇas.⁷¹ The targets of this literature are typical: merchants and artisans (and in the Kali Age *all* had

⁶⁷ *Vāmana Purāṇa*: 16. 51-63 (pp. 90–91).

⁶⁸ The two rivers give the name to the town (Vārāṇasī).

⁶⁹ See Appendix 2. Today Sarnath is a jumble of badly excavated, poorly restored and little understood monuments where even targeted controls, desirable as they may be, would probably give scarce results.

⁷⁰ There is agreement on assigning the epic and Purāṇic passages on the early Kali Age literature to the fourth century (R.S. Sharma 2001: 49).

⁷¹ Willis (2009: 200–201).

turned into traders)⁷² were responsible for social disorder,⁷³ and the vaiśyas refused to pay taxes and offer sacrifice⁷⁴ in a context where the possession of wealth was the only source of acquiring high family status.⁷⁵ A few excerpts from a passage of the *Vāyu Purāṇa*, which is perhaps the oldest of the major Purāṇas,⁷⁶ exemplify all the relevant points:

In Kali Yuga, people do not accept the authority of Smrtis. [...] There is danger and fear to people owing to wrong performance of sacrifices, neglect of (Vedic) studies, evil conduct, misleading religious scriptures and faults in the performance of holy rites of Brāhmaṇas. [...] There is much of agitation and turbulence at the advent of Kali Yuga. There is no regular study of the Vedas. The Brāhmans do not perform Yajñas. All men inclusive of Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas gradually decay. Low-born and insignificant persons have contact with brāhmaṇas in sharing beds, seats and food in Kali Age. Kings are mainly Śūdras propagating heretic ideas. People never hesitate to kill a child in the womb. They behave in such way. [...] When the end of the Yuga approaches, thieves and robbers administer kingdoms like kings; kings adopt the methods of thieves and robbers. [...] Women become unchaste and disinterested in holy rites. They become fond of wine and meat. When Kali Age sets in, they resort to deceptive means. [...] Then, when the end of the age approaches, even the great goddess like the earth will yield but little fruit. Śūdras will begin to perform penance. [...] The kings do not belong to the Kṣatriya clan. Vaiśyas maintain themselves with the help of Śūdras. The noble brāhmaṇas perform obeisance to Śūdras at the end of the Kali Age. [...] In this base Yuga, people will have

⁷² R.S. Sharma (2001: 56–57). Here and below I limit myself to refer to Sharma's paper ("The Kali Age: A Period of Social Crisis"), where the reader shall find the references to the Kali Age texts (the Aranyaka and Sānti Parvan of the *Mahābhārata*, the *Harivaṃśa*, the *Vāyu* and *Viṣṇu Purāṇas*, etc.).

⁷³ Ibid. Traders and artisans indulge in many tricks and sell enormous commodities by adopting fraudulent weights and measures (ibid.: 60–61).

⁷⁴ Ibid.: 50.

⁷⁵ Ibid.: 61.

⁷⁶ Hazra (1940: 13). G.V. Tagare, in the introduction to his translation of the text suggests a date to the fifth century; see *Vāyu Purāṇa*: p. lxii.

trading propensity. By false measures, the buyers will be deceived of their due share in the commodities. The whole society abounds in heretics of foul conduct and activity with their false appearance. Men will be in a minority and women will be many, when the end of the Kali Yuga is imminent. [...] When the close of the Yuga is imminent, Śūdras exhibiting their white teeth, with lean shaven heads and wearing ochre-coloured robes will perform sacred rites, proclaiming that they have conquered the sense-organs. [...] The maximum life expectations of the people afflicted by misery will be a hundred years. In Kali Yuga, the Vedas will be seen in some places and not seen in some places. Yajñas are forsaken when Dharma receives a setback. There will be many types of heretics like wearers of ochre-coloured robes (Buddhists), Jainas and Kāpālikas. There will be sellers of the Vedas and of the sacred places. Heretics antagonistic to the discipline and arrangement of different castes and stages of life will be born. When Kali Yuga sets in, the Vedas will not be studied. Śūdras will be experts and authorities in the affairs of Dharma. [...] People will kill and destroy children in wombs. [...] The Vedas will be seen somewhere and not seen in some places. When Dharma is harassed Yajñas are forsaken.⁷⁷

Whole regions were thus under the control of the *pāṣaṇḍas*, protected by non-orthodox kings. A part of the population had turned to religious practices extraneous to the teaching of the Vedas and performed by priests who often belonged to low castes; many brāhmaṇas had apostatised; women had reached a certain degree of independence from male control. The people mainly responsible for the changed situation were śūdras and merchants. The detail on foetuses being killed is particularly interesting, because it takes us back to the allegations made to the Buddha in the *Māgandiya Sutta* (above, Chapter II), further clarifying that the Kali Age is the actual age of the Buddha and of Buddhist hegemony.

⁷⁷ *Vāyu Purāna*: I.58.34-70 (vol. 1, pp. 411–14; the transliteration fluctuates between Kali Yuga and Kaliyuga). The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāna* (I.2.31.34-70; vol. 1, pp. 305–8) makes these statements its own.

We find similar concepts in the *Viṣṇudharma Upapurāṇa*, a work of the Bhāgavatas, dating from the same period as the *Vāyu Purāṇa*.⁷⁸ Referring the reader to the quotations provided by R.C. Hazra,⁷⁹ we confine ourselves to quote a passage on mendicant monks showing that the target were, in particular, the Buddhists:

At the time, the vile Śūdras, bearing the signs of mendicancy will not serve the twice-born people nor will they practice their own *dharma*. Some will become Utcokas, Saugatas, Mahāyānists, and the heretical Kāpilas and Bhikṣus, while other wicked Śūdras will turn Sākyas, Śravakas, Nirgranthas and Siddhaputras in the Kali age. Turning wandering mendicants the villainous Śūdras will undergo no (physical) purification, have crooked nature, and habitually live on food prepared by others.⁸⁰

Going through the copious evidence at our disposal, the “general commotion amounting to a revolt and agitation” on the part of the subject castes and the “general tenor of intense hostility between the brāhmaṇas and the sudras” identified by R.C. Sharma⁸¹ are one and the same thing with the Buddhist hegemony over urban society and the reaction against Buddhism. Not that Buddhism was the only dissident voice in the third and fourth century, but it exercised hegemony over change and was identified with it. Missing this point and failing to understand that, as we have already noted, in deconstructing the notion itself of identity Buddhism deconstructs society,

⁷⁸ Hazra (1958-1963, I: 137–43).

⁷⁹ Ibid.: 147–49.

⁸⁰ Ibid.: 149. It is not known who the Utcakas may have been. The presence of “Mahāyānists” may lead us to think that this passage is a later interpolation, but Faxian mentions the “Great Vehicle” (*Faxian* a: 97; p. 548). Schopen (1987) has shown that the Mahāyāna was not perceived as an independent and organised set of beliefs and practices until a relatively late age, and it is difficult to say when the term started being used. Several other authors have questioned the inconsistencies of the term “Mahāyāna” (see for instance Silk 2002), and the reader is referred to the considerations made below in this chapter.

⁸¹ R.S. Sharma (2001: 54–55).

has perpetuated inclusive paradigms. Even when the target is multiple, we should make the convenient distinctions. A passage from the *Ṣaṭtrimśanmata* maintains that

[a] man should bathe with all his clothes on if he chances to touch the Bauddhas, the Pāśupatas, the Jainas, the Lokāyatikas, the Kāpilas, and those Brāhmaṇas who have taken up the duties not meant for them. But if he touches the Kāpālikas, he should perform Prāṇāyāma in addition.⁸²

The Pāśupatas, or at least some of the groups known by this name, became part of the neo-Brahmanical synthesis in early Gupta time, and perhaps even before, after Lakulīśa's reform (Lakulīśa was a brāhmaṇa), and the social impact of the Lokāyatatas, for all their criticism towards the theists, was not relevant.⁸³ Regarding the gruesome Kāpālikas, not only were they never a threat to the Brahmanical order, but found their place very early in the political system⁸⁴ and were utilised by it, to be got rid of when they were no longer needed. Their unpardonable, if necessary sin, as we will see, was apparently that of physically eliminating the apostate brāhmaṇas, who are mentioned in the passage quoted above. For the orthodox, the need of (re-)establishing *varṇāśramadharmā* and the role of brāhmaṇas in society was made urgent not so much by the emergence of sūdras (a process that could be handled) but by the slipping of many brāhmaṇas to the value system of the heretics. The *Vāyu Purāṇa*, after observing that brāhmaṇas had turned heretics like the other castes, says that “[a] Brāhmaṇa

⁸² Quoted in the *Smṛti Candrikā* (II. 310; cf. Hazra 1940: 201, to whom the reader is referred for the Sanskrit text). See also Kane (1930-62, IV: 114-15; on the *Ṣaṭtrimśanmata*, see *ibid*, I: 535-37). Hazra refers the passage to a pre-AD 200 context, which seems too early a date.

⁸³ On their doctrine, see Tucci (1971a). S. Dasgupta (1932-55, III: 512 ff.) identified the Lokāyatatas with the Cārvākas, accused of resorting to tricky disputations. For other Purāṇic passages condemning Lokāyatatas and Kāpālikas, see Choudhary (1956: 250 ff.).

⁸⁴ Willis (2009: 172 ff.); cf. below.

who keeps matted hair without any specific aim, who shaves off his hair for nothing, and goes about naked purposelessly” is called *nagnādaya*, namely, an apostate brāhmaṇa who has joined the Buddhists and Jains. These heretics are naked because they are not protected by the three Vedas.⁸⁵

The above discussion is briefly but effectively summed up in a passage of the Jābāli episode in the Ayodhyā Kāṇḍa of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Here the Buddha is reviled as a thief and an atheist.⁸⁶ The accusation of being a thief is not easily understandable at first, but the *Harivaṃśa* gives us a clue when it states that in the Kali Age thieves and robbers would become rulers and rulers would behave like thieves and robbers, and that, oppressed by kings and thieves, people would be driven to destruction.⁸⁷ In the Bhāgavata perspective of the Ayodhyā Kāṇḍa, Rāma, guarantor of *varṇāśramadharmā* and punisher of śūdra ascetics,⁸⁸ considers the Buddha a thief because he sees him in his function of *cakravartin*: the Buddha robs Rāma of the royal function that is due by right only to a kṣatriya who has remained faithful to the Brahmanical order. The Buddhist *cakravartin* is the usurper presiding over an alternative society: Aśoka and the *mleccha* kings, not considering the *rājās* ruling locally, are clearly alluded to. A further clue on the real stakes is contained in Rāma’s speech when he says that his father Daśaratha had tolerated the presence of *nāstikas* but that from now on no such people will be tolerated. Thus the revised poem becomes a literary companion to the *Manusmṛti*, a turning point in the attitude of the orthodox: they must now do away with the Buddhists.

⁸⁵ *Vāyu Purāṇa*: II.16.31 (vol. 2, p. 613). This point was already clear to Abs (1926: 391).

⁸⁶ *Rāmāyaṇa*, Ayodhyā Kāṇḍa: 109 (p. 376). Here we deal with a relatively late period.

⁸⁷ Cf. R.S. Sharma (2001: 55).

⁸⁸ Cf. the well-known episode of Śambūka in the last, added *kāṇḍa* (*Rāmāyaṇa*, Uttara Kāṇḍa: 75-76; pp. 1381-84) — an episode in keeping with the Kali Age literature.

A crucial corollary of the wretched depiction of Indian society in the early centuries AD made by the Brahmanical sources is the request for mechanisms of coercion aimed at radically redressing the situation. The exercise of *daṇḍa* acquires a previously unknown importance, and the role of the king as suppressor is emphasised.⁸⁹ R.C. Sharma would have been able to bring a sharper focus on the responses developed against the Kali Age if he had accepted a more convincing date for the *Arthaśāstra*, a text that shows the complete, full reorganisation of Brahmanical power. When there is a king (to be understood as a *king-daṇḍa*), states the *Rāmāyaṇa*, even the atheists, who have unhesitatingly broken all norms, can revert to a better behaviour.⁹⁰ The *dharmamahārājas* of the Pallavas, Viṣṇukundins, Vākāṭakas and other dynasties of the Deccan claimed to have established *dharma*,⁹¹ which, in that context, meant the *varṇa* system. But the attempt at restoring Brahmanical *dharma* had already been the concern of the early *aśvamedhin* kings, whose pioneer work was brought to completion in northern and central India by the Guptas: this point should not be missed. The question is: up to what extent was the work of suppression exercised, and upon whom? If the *cāṇḍālas* had to be physically punished and suppressed according to the Santi Parvan, and if this measure was extended to the śūdras in general,⁹² was physical punishment extended to the persons actually responsible for the śūdra revolution, the *pāṣaṇḍas*? Was it possible to impose *varṇāśramadharmā* without disconnecting the middle and lower ranks of society from their intellectual elites? What could physical punishment be in this case? Faxian's mentioning Buddhist monks

⁸⁹ Ibid.: 63.

⁹⁰ *Rāmāyaṇa*, Ayodhyā Kāṇḍa: 67 (p. 298). Later evidence (cf. Chapters IV and V) throws some light on the systems used by orthodox kings to reduce the nihilists to impotence.

⁹¹ R.S. Sharma (2001: 67).

⁹² Ibid.: 64.

being persecuted points to the fact that they were not simply the metaphorical target of literary compositions, but the real object of discrimination and violence.

A passage from the Sanskrit version of the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka Sūtra* should convince us of the situation as it was. This famous Mahāyāna text is generally thought to be a rather early one, because it was translated into Chinese by the *yuezhi* monk Dharmarakṣa in AD 285.⁹³ However, there is strong evidence that this translation was based, like the translations of the other Buddhist texts circulating in China until the third century, on a version written in a Prakrit vernacular.⁹⁴ The Sanskrit text that we have is therefore a post-third century redaction, and can arguably be dated to the fourth or fifth century, although later interpolations are possible. The passage, which is given here in the vintage, condensed translation from the French of Eugène Burnouf made by Horace H. Wilson is the following:

When you have entered into Nirvāṇa, and the end of time has arrived, we shall expound this excellent Sūtra, in doing which we will endure, we will suffer patiently, injuries, violence, menaces of beating us with sticks, and the spitting upon us, with which ignorant men will assail us. The Tīrthakas, composing Sūtras of their own, will speak in the assembly to insult us. In the presence of kings, of the sons of kings, of the Brahmins, of Householders, and other religious persons, they will censure us in their discourses, and will cause the language of the Tīrthakas to be heard; but we will endure all this through respect for the great Rishis. We must endure threatening looks, and repeated instances of contumely, and suffer expulsion from our Vihāras, and submit to be imprisoned and punished in a

⁹³ Boucher (2006: 27).

⁹⁴ On the complex matter of the early century AD translations into Chinese, see Nattier (2008: esp. 20 ff.; id. in *Ugraparipṛcchā*: esp. 48 ff.; on the *Lotus Sūtra*, see Boucher 1998). Nattier maintains that the *Lotus Sūtra*, so important in East Asia, had a less important, and even marginal status in India (cf. *Ugraparipṛcchā*, p.86). This, however, does not seem to agree with the existence, in India, of early demotic versions of the text.

variety of ways; but recalling at the end of this period the commands of the chief of the world, we will preach courageously this Sūtra in the midst of the assembly, and we will traverse towns, villages, the whole world, to give to those who will ask for it, the deposit which thou hast entrusted to us.⁹⁵

The passage seems free from propagandistic aim, and has the accent of truth. Injuries and menaces, punishment and imprisonment, as well as expulsion from the monasteries, though not detailed, sound as precisely reported facts. The most interesting detail is the mention of public debates in the presence of the king, of which we have a good documentation from the first half of the seventh century onwards and of the bullying behaviour of the *tīrthikas*, which were to become increasingly common in the course of time.

Coming down to facts, who attacked the monks and carried out the destruction of the Buddhist institutions? In some cases, we can think of operations directly organised by the Gupta leadership under pressure of *vaidika* brāhmaṇas and, later on, of Bhāgavatas and Sivaite groups. Although not detailed, the references to Samudragupta as a great sinner and to the responsibilities of his entourage contained in the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* would lead to this conclusion. Army units were probably responsible for operations of the kind carried out by Puṣyamitra Śuṅga against the Kukkuṭārāma and by Śāśāṅka's attack on Bodhgayā. The anti-Buddhist violence of the king of Gauḍa is

⁹⁵ Wilson (1862b: 365; cf. *Saddharmapūṇḍarīka Sūtra* a: 165–66). Although Indian chronology was far from established and Buddhism was little known, Burnouf scored an almost direct hit on the date of the text and the questions involved. The text was for him a testimony of the persecutions of the Buddhists monks before they left central India (that is, Madhyadeśa): the *sūtra* kept the memory of painful events, and could hardly have been written during the most flourishing period of Buddhism; either the text was written outside India or when the brāhmaṇas were the winners (ibid. 408). This said, Burnouf believed that Buddhism flourished in the fourth century, while we know that the Buddhist revival took place in the late fifth and early sixth century. For the quoted passage, cf. also *Saddharmapūṇḍarīka Sūtra* b (1884: 259–61).

too well known to be recalled in detail, and to this regard the reader is referred to Xuanzang's *Xiyuji* and to the last chapter of the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*.⁹⁶ In the case of Śaśānka, there is no distorted chronological and cultural perspective to rectify, but, at most, a biased negationism. D.D. Kosambi, usually insensitive to historical explanations at the religious level, observed that the remarkable feature of Śaśānka's invasion of Magadha was "its novel religious guise": the destruction of Buddhist monasteries and the burning down of the Bodhi tree would show "some conflict at the basis which, for the first time, was fought out on the level of theological consciousness. [...] This was an entirely new development, not to be compared to the earlier differences between Vedic Brahmin and early Buddhist".⁹⁷ Our point is that the *post quem* for these "developments" is probably the third-fourth century.

It is possible that, on occasions, armed groups were organised by the leaders of the theistic groups. A set of archaeological finds from all over northern India, notably from the middle Ganges plains, which, in spite of their diffusion, have not attracted due attention, may help us to clarify the religious landscape once we set foot outside the deputed places of the pre-Gupta local dynasties and of the Guptas themselves. They are the fragments of small or middle-size terracotta images, especially heads, which are unmistakably those of ascetics, as is shown by their hair arranged in a *jaṭā* (Fig. 1). A number of heads display a circlet on the forehead, further point-

⁹⁶ *Xiyuji* a: esp. VIII (vol. 2, p. 118). In the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* [53], 715-18 (§33, pp. 49-50), Śaśānka is accused of having destroyed the establishments of the Jains, too: "Then Soma, an unparalleled hero, will become king up to the banks of the Ganges, up to Benares and beyond. He, of wicked intellect, will destroy the beautiful image of the Buddha. He, of wicked intellect, enamoured of the words of the Tīrthikas, will burn that great bridge of religion (Dharma), (as) prophesied by the former Jinās (Buddhas). Then that angry and evil-doer of false notions and bad opinion will fell down all the monasteries, gardens, and chaityas; and rest-houses of the Jainas [Nirgranthas]"; cf. pp. 49-50.

⁹⁷ Kosambi (1975: 305).

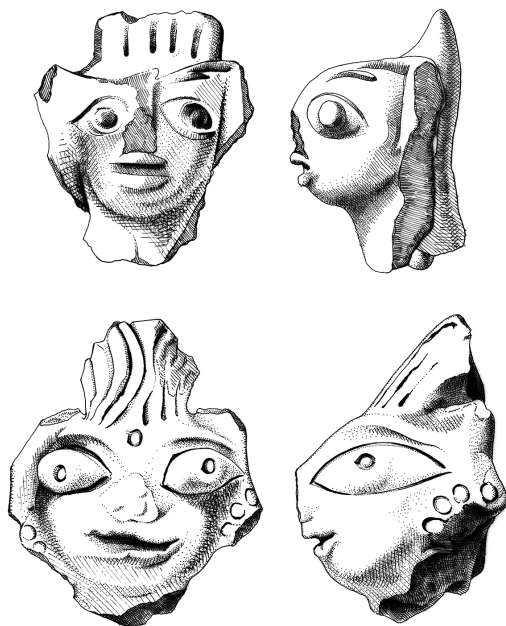


Fig. 1 - Heads of Sivaite ascetics, second-third century AD.
Pipri, Kapilabastu district (Nepal).

ing to the Sivaite affiliation of a production spread with impressive uniformity over a very large territory and dated to the second-third centuries AD and later.⁹⁸ These fragmented materials have never been found *in situ*, and archaeologists have only seldom tried to place them in context on the basis of their spatial distribution and associated finds, nor have these images attracted the attention of art historians, usually concerned with works related to higher forms of patronage. Their pertinence to places of worship is beyond doubt, however — small

⁹⁸ Discussion on these images in V. Jayaswal (1991) and B.B. Lal (1993: 109); cf. also Verardi (2007b: 196). The reader will find these terracotta fragments, heads in particular, published in practically all the excavation reports of early historical sites. Heads, arms, legs and decorative parts were separately worked and joined to the main part of the body before the baking process. The heads, found in large number, were inserted into the body by means of a tenon.

shrines with wattle-and-daub walls. They cannot be dismissed as belonging to “folk cults” because of their iconographic traits, uniformity and territorial distribution, which imply conceptualisation and organisation from above. At Pipri, a site near Gotihawa in the Nepalese Tarai, these images are associated with figurines of animals, and in particular with a large terracotta bull.⁹⁹ The groups of Pāśupatas who identified with Śiva’s bull¹⁰⁰ are the best candidates to whom the creation of models, the territorial diffusion of images (all locally executed) and the related cults can be attributed. This may explain, at one and the same time, the great impact of the proselytising activity of the Pāśupatas and their invisibility in the sources, in which they would emerge only when they were granted high patronage. In the case of Pipri, these finds are contemporary to the late phases, or to the very end, of what had been the Buddhist sanctuary at Gotihawa, and tell a history of extraneousness and opposition.

Conversely, there is no evidence of the involvement of *bhaṭṭas* and *caṭṭas*, as has been surmised.¹⁰¹ Early mention of the official status held by *bhaṭṭas* and *caṭṭas* is found in the Mota Machiala grant of Dhruvasena I of Valabhī dated AD 525¹⁰² and in Harṣa’s Madhuban and Banskhera copperplate inscriptions, where they are listed after the rulers of districts (*viṣayapatis*) and before the servants in a long list of authorities addressed by the emperor.¹⁰³ If their role was that of keepers of the custom houses (*ghaṭikā[sthāna]s*), we can suppose, at most, that they could put pressure on the king, but we have no other information on their activities for this

⁹⁹ Ibid.: 196; 206.

¹⁰⁰ van Troy (1990: 7).

¹⁰¹ Veluthat (1975).

¹⁰² The grant (*EI* 31, 1955-56, A.S. Gadre: 299–304, l. 11) is mentioned by Veluthat (1975: 102). Mota Machiala is situated near Amreli.

¹⁰³ For the Madhuban plate, see *EI* 1 (1892, G. Bühler): 67–75, l. 9 and p. 74; for the Banskhera plate, see *EI* 4 (1896-97, id.): 208–11, l. 8.

period.¹⁰⁴ Their being mentioned at the end of the list make us doubt that in Gupta times they were in possession of the royal seal as they did later, when their bargaining power, as we will see in the next chapter, increased dramatically.

DEFAMATIONS, COMPROMISES, AND A BETTER STRATEGY

The extent to which the brāhmaṇas disliked *śramaṇas* in general and Buddhist monks in particular is well documented in the Pāli Canon, where the distance between the two parties is often very great, despite the imperative need of the Buddhists to proselytise.¹⁰⁵ From the Aggañña Sutta of the *Dīgha Nikāya* (where the Buddha's argument against Brahmanical social order is strongest), we learn what the brāhmaṇas thought of the *śramaṇas*. The Buddha requests Vasettha, a young brāhmaṇa who has apostatised, to report to him the criticism to which he and his companion are exposed, and Vasettha replies that the blame thrown upon them is absolute because, whereas the brāhmaṇas are born from Brahmā's forehead and are consubstantial with him, the shaven petty ascetics are unclean, born of Brahmā's foot like servants and dark-skinned persons:¹⁰⁶ they are, in a word, *sūdras*. In the Vasala Sutta of the *Sutta Nipāta*, the Buddha, who had gone to Śrāvastī for alms, approaches the house of Aggika, and a Bhāradvāja brāhmaṇa who was performing a fire ritual in his house, greets him with these words: "Stop there, shaveling; stop there, wretched ascetic [*samaṇaka*]; stop there, outcaste [*vasalaka*]"¹⁰⁷ Buddhist texts attest to the discrimination against the *śramaṇas*, despite

¹⁰⁴ On the meaning of *ghaṭikā*, a term erroneously identified with *maṭha*, see Ticken & Sato (2000) and the discussion in Chapter IV.

¹⁰⁵ Reference is again to Gokhale (1980).

¹⁰⁶ *Dīgha Nikāya*: 27.3 (p. 407).

¹⁰⁷ *Sutta Nipāta*: 1.7 (115); cf. p. 14.

their interest to focus on the successes of Buddhist predication. Proselytising among the brāhmaṇas, something necessary for the Buddhists, collided with the strict social control to which the former, however well-disposed, were submitted, precluding them the possibility to make choices that were at odds with *āśrama* life, as is shown by the story of Sonadanda narrated in the *Dīgha Nikāya*. This learned brāhmaṇa, well versed in the Three Vedas,¹⁰⁸ was convinced of the greatness of the Buddha, but even after inviting the Buddha and his monks to his house and sharing food with him he felt uneasy at the idea of having to rise from his seat to bow down before Gautama in public because the upper caste citizens of Campā would criticise him. The Buddha was to understand that his taking off his turban on entering the assembly was equivalent to having bowed at his feet, something that he could not publicly do. Sonadanda's company would despise him if, when riding in his carriage, he were to alight to salute the Lord, who must be satisfied that he merely raise the goad in greeting.¹⁰⁹

What is striking in this story is that the Buddha (or the learned monks who were responsible for the drafting of the text) seems to accept this as inevitable. The usual behaviour of the proud brāhmaṇas towards the *bhikṣus* is that disrespectfully shown by the young brāhmaṇa Ambaṭṭha on meeting Gautama for the first time. The Lord was seated, but Ambaṭṭha “walked up and down” uttering “some vague words of politeness” because “as for those shaven little ascetics, menials, black scourgings from Brahmā's foot”, it was fitting to speak as he did.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ *Dīgha Nikāya*: 4. 4 (p. 126).

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*: 26 (p. 132).

¹¹⁰ *Dīgha Nikāya*, Ambaṭṭha Sutta 1.9-10 (p. 113). Other stories from the Canon may refer to the furious polemics that took place among *śramaṇas*. In a passage of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (XX.191; pp. 162–63), today's brāhmaṇas (*śramaṇas* of different persuasions were often brāhmaṇas by birth, as we have seen) are likened to dogs, the worst possible comparison. The comparison is made in order to demonstrate that they have nothing to do with the brāhmaṇas of yore, and convince those who identify themselves in the old virtues to find a way out — that indicated by the Buddha.

In the Piṇḍolya Sutta of the *Samyutta Nikāya*, the Buddha goes for alms to Pañcasālā, a village owned and inhabited by brāhmaṇas where a festival is being held and where, consequently, there is abundance of food to beg for. Inspired by Māra, the brāhmaṇas refused to give him anything, and “even as with washen bowl he entered Pañcasālā for alms, so with washen bowl came he back again”.¹¹¹ The story reflects behaviours that had to be fairly common: by attributing the unpleasant episode to the Buddha, the monks were encouraged to persevere. The brāhmaṇa householders of the Māratajjanīya Sutta, possessed by Māra,

abused, reviled, scolded, and harassed the virtuous bhikkus of good character thus: “These bald-pated recluses, these swarthy menial offspring of the Kinsman’s feet, claim: ‘We are meditators, we are meditators!’ and with shoulders drooping, heads down and all limp, they meditate, premeditate, outmeditate, and mismeditate”.¹¹²

Regarding the post-Canonical literature, the *Divyāvadāna* remains, like the Jātakas, a mine of information. It reports the story of a young brāhmaṇa, Panthaka, who is unable to receive an education appropriate to his status. Thus he decides to become a monk, and he is quick to learn the doctrine. However, he is careful not to wear the monk’s robe in his own town, where he is known by everybody, and asks permission to live aloof, devoting his life to meditating and to the scriptures.¹¹³ There were brāhmaṇas who, without renouncing their status and duties, honoured the Buddha as a holy man, but many were openly hostile to him and his follow-

¹¹¹ *Samyutta Nikāya*: IV.2.8 (vol. 1, p. 143).

¹¹² *Majjhima Nikāya* b: 50.13 [i. 335] (p. 433; the “Kinsman” is Brahmā). In the text, the brāhmaṇas go on comparing the monks to owls, cats and donkeys.

¹¹³ In *Divyāvadāna* a: XXXV (pp. 485 ff.). On the composite nature of the *Divyāvadāna* and the chronological questions involved, see Andy Rotman’s introduction to *Divyāvadāna* b: 12 ff., 15 ff. The majority of the stories depict an affluent urban society, and circulated in the early centuries AD.

ers. In another story narrated in the *Divyāvadāna*, that of the householder Meṇḍhaka, it appears that at Śrāvastī the *nirgranthas* had made an alliance with the *ṛṣis* (an early testimony of the Jains' positioning)¹¹⁴ and had now settled in the town of Bhadraṅkara, from where they feared to be dislodged after being again defeated in a doctrinal debate. They announced the visit of the Buddha as of one “hurling his razor-like thunderbolt, making many women childless widows”, and suggested the following strategy:

Drive all the people away from the areas around Bhadraṅkara, they said, and force them to live in the city of Bhadraṅkara. Plough under the grassy meadows, break down the altars, cut down any trees with fruits or flowers, and pollute the water sources with poison.¹¹⁵

The “influential men” whose services had been requested adopted a scorched earth strategy, and only the intervention of Śakra as *deus ex machina* saved the situation. In the tales of the *Divyāvadāna*, as in the Canon, the brāhmaṇas are in many cases convinced and converted by the Buddha, whose deeds are extolled, but a story like that of Meṇḍhaka has, by contrast, a true ring about it. Its interest also lies in being another testimony of the early existence of public debates in which the losers had to abandon the country where they lived.

The hostility to whatever form of religious and social movement that could jeopardise the *varṇa* system had found an early systematisation in the *Manusmṛti*, the founding text of the ideologised *dharmasāstras* that in the early centuries AD became the standard source of authority in the orthodox tradi-

¹¹⁴ See below, Chapters IV and VI. For the *nirgranthas* and the *ṛṣis*, see *Divyāvadāna* b: 266.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*: 229. The poisoning of water resources in case of conflict was a common occurrence everywhere in antiquity. When in 430 BC the plague first broke out at the Piraeus, says Thucydides (II, 48, 2), the Athenians thought that the Peloponnesians had poisoned the wells.

tion.¹¹⁶ This text marked an important step in the belittlement and de-legitimisation of the Buddhists. The heretics, equalled to gamblers, bootleggers and the like, must be expelled from town because they are “concealed thieves who, living in the king’s kingdom constantly oppress his good subjects by their bad actions”.¹¹⁷ A twice-born “should not give honour, even with mere words, to heretics [*pāṣaṇḍins*], people who persist in wrong action, people who act like cats, hypocrites, rationalists, and people who live like herons”.¹¹⁸ Women who have joined a heretical sect are equalled to those “who live on lust, or have abortions, or harm their husbands, or drink liquor”,¹¹⁹ outcaste women in a word.

Derogatory references to members of both the *saṃgha* and the lay community are plentiful in Brahmanical texts, even taking into account the fact that the pattern of not referring directly to Buddhism is common to many of them:¹²⁰ the totalitarian strategy of silence is very frequently adopted. The poor reputation enjoyed by monks and nuns is often made clear. Monks are probably referred to in the *Yājñavalkya Smṛti*, composed in Gupta times, where the sight of yellow-robed people is said to be an evil omen.¹²¹ The accusation, often repeated in the *Purāṇas*, is serious, considering the context: monks went out begging, and lived on alms in principle, and the charge is aimed at isolating them from the residents of a given place. The transformation of the *saṃgha* into either a landed, self-sufficient entity or into a set of family-based transmittable institutions has many causes, but one would say that from a certain pe-

¹¹⁶ See O’Flaherty’s introduction to *Manu*: xviii.

¹¹⁷ *Manu*: 9.225-26 (p. 222). G.P. Upadhyay (1979: 186) suggests that proselytising activities may be meant here.

¹¹⁸ *Manu*: 4.30 (p. 77). The reference to herons is perhaps due to their well-known aggressive behaviour.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*: 5.90 (p. 109).

¹²⁰ M.M. Deshpande (1994: 97).

¹²¹ Kane (1930-62, I: 447 [*Yājñavalkya Smṛti* I, 273]).

riod onwards monks would no longer been able to continue their door-to-door quest. They were becoming visible targets of social opprobrium. Sarcastic retaliations were not lacking. In the *Bodhisattva Womb Sūtra*, translated into Chinese at the end of the fourth or at the beginning of the fifth century,¹²² there is a derisive description of *ṛṣis*, all, or almost all ordinary ascetics, practising twenty-six types of *tapas*:

Some detach their body parts at the joints searching for the location of their spirit [...]. (21.4.8) Some say to themselves: I keep my own release back, and first release my father and mother. And after throwing their father and mother into their fire they sing for them to be reborn in Brahmā's heaven. (21.4.14) Some eat cow dung. (21.4.15) [...] Some make their food vessels out of bones. (21.4.21).¹²³

If living in a monastic community was considered to be an unnatural life for men, nunneries were perceived as an explicit attack on social stability. Women were seen exclusively for marriage and procreation, and that a woman could make a choice, be it for the strictest monastic discipline, was inadmissible. The much-hated Buddhist nuns are the object of contempt in the literature, from the *Arthaśāstra*¹²⁴ to Vātsyāyana's *Kāma Sūtra*.¹²⁵ Here, a *viṭa* (a sort of gigolo) relies upon female mendicants, shaven-head female ascetics expert in the arts, women of loose morals and old whores as go-betweens.¹²⁶ The date of the *Kāma Sūtra* is debated: in an unspecified period,¹²⁷ the brāhmaṇa Vātsyāyana assembled a number of works that had become difficult to procure.

¹²² Legittimo in her introduction to the *Bodhisattva Womb Sūtra*, I: p. 2.

¹²³ *Bodhisattva Womb Sūtra*, II: 56-57. In 21.4.8, "spirit" is to be understood as *ātman*. The Chinese word used is *shen*, as Elsa Legittimo has kindly informed me.

¹²⁴ *Arthaśāstra*: I, 10, 12.

¹²⁵ *Kāma Sūtra*: V, p. 69; XXI, p. 234; XXVII, p. 290.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*: 1.4.87 (p. 87).

¹²⁷ Alain Daniélou, on whose translation I rely, maintains that the work was compiled in the fourth century but that it describes Mauryan customs (preface to *Kāma Sūtra*, p. 12); this is rather unlikely.

Some details, such as Sāketa being depicted as the flourishing commercial town known from the Buddhist literature, point to a relatively early context. The *Kāma Sūtra* has the merit, in its own way, of presenting the anti-Buddhist point of view rather clearly, like the *Arthaśāstra*: the only companions of Buddhist nuns are women of loose morals and whores, members of the seedy ambience typical of the low-caste sex workers. It does not contain a critique of individual cases; it rather implies that they *naturaliter* belong to a distasteful, if unavoidable, underworld. Blaming the Buddhist nuns of acting as go-betweens became commonplace, and accusations were made easier by the fact that nunneries were exclusively located within the towns.¹²⁸ We find examples of these charges in tales which still reflect a mercantile society. In a story of the *Daśakumāracarita* set in Ujjayinī, a loafer and member of the Mathurā demimonde, Kalahakaṇṭaka, finds an ally in Arhantikā, a *śramaṇikā*, to gain the favour of Nitambavatī, the wife of the merchant Ananta-kīrti.¹²⁹ In the story of Guhasena and his wife Devasmitā from the *Kathāsaritsāgara*, as soon as the merchant's false friends arrive in Tāmralipti, they get in touch with a Buddhist nun, Yogakaraṇḍikā, as an agent to try to subvert the fidelity of Guhasena's wife Devasmitā. In this case, the nun shows an intrinsically corrupt nature: she is already rich, and declines the reward that the four merchants are willing to pay for her services. Yogakaraṇḍikā's disciple, Siddhikarī, is worth her teaching, and is depicted as a tricky thief.¹³⁰

Ostracism, in the form of imposition of customs and ferry and police stations dues, was exercised upon the merchants. The *Divyāvadāna* talks about the attempts of the

¹²⁸ Schopen (2008).

¹²⁹ *Daśakumāracarita*: 11.156-62 (pp. 440-43).

¹³⁰ *Kathāsaritsāgara*: II, 5, 75-115 (vol. I, pp. 102-103).

latter to escape these impositions by various means.¹³¹ From the orthodox side, the *Harivaṃśa* compares the markets, widespread in the countryside, to thorns.¹³² The target of the orthodox is threefold: against the Buddhists, either monks and nuns or laymen, against the apostate brāhmaṇas, and against the economic sectors supporting the *saṃghas*.

The discussion carried out in recent years on the emergence of the Mahāyāna and its nature allows for some considerations. The opposition between *araṇya* and *grāma* monks has been brought into focus by several scholars,¹³³ who have put the accent on the polemics of the *araṇya* bodhisattvas towards the monks roaming “among upper-class patrons in town”,¹³⁴ directly involved in agriculture and trade,¹³⁵ and settling in villages.

The early bodhisattva path was for few: the bodhisattvas, who are at the centre of a value system focused on salvation, may be defined as the pneumatics of the new *yāna*, but the term “bodhisattva” conceals different trends, not necessarily referable to the new vehicle. An attempt to put in relation the different positions held within the Buddhist community to the Indian reality may help clarifying the nature and functions of the bodhisattvas and the bodhisattvas-mahāsattvas,¹³⁶ and may give us some clues on the Mahāyāna understood in its proper terms, namely, as the second set in motion of the Wheel of the Law.

¹³¹ Cf. R.S. Sharma (2001: 61).

¹³² Cf. *ibid.*: 56. The arguments against the merchant class are summed up and discussed in Gokhale (1977).

¹³³ See, e.g. Karashima (2001) and Daniel Boucher in the introduction to his translation of the *Rāṣṭrapālāparipṛcchā Sūtra* (pp. 52 ff., 64 ff.).

¹³⁴ *Rāṣṭrapālāparipṛcchā Sūtra*: 178 (p. 138); cf. also 95 (p. 129).

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*: 84, 180 (pp. 127, 138).

¹³⁶ Kajiyama (2005a) has shown, on the authority of Haribhadra, that this is the appropriate definition of the Mahāyāna bodhisattva provided with altruism — a term not always suitable for the bodhisattvas’ actual behaviour.

The early householder bodhisattva of the *Ugrapariṣṭcchā* (*The Inquiry of Ugra*) is ready to start his work as a saviour, not allowing even a single being to be born into any evil rebirth in the “village, town, city, kingdom, or capital” where he happens to live.¹³⁷ He appears as a product of the urban revolution that between the first century BC and the second century AD created a dense network of large and minor settlements, too numerous to be controlled by the existing monastic institutions. Ugra is untouched by the enticements of urban life, and his critique of family life¹³⁸ conforms to the traditional Buddhist critique stemming from the example set by Siddhārtha the night he left his wife in disgust. We do not know exactly which people Ugra was addressing in his mission as saviour, but the evidence from the *Aṅgavijjā*, a Prakrit work on prognostication composed in the Kuṣāṇa period,¹³⁹ gives us an idea of the social context where the householder bodhisattva carried out his activity. There were people regarded as belonging to two *varṇas* at the same time, and in the most various combinations: *bambha-khatta* and *khatta-bambha*, *bambha-vessa* and *vessa-bambha*, *bambha-suddha* and *suddha-bambha*, *khatta-vessa* and *vessa-khatta*, *khatta-suddha* and *suddha-khatta*, *vessa-suddha* and *suddha-vessa*.¹⁴⁰ A further *mélange* derived by the intermarriage of the *anuloma* and *pratiloma* sons of the above-mentioned misalliances had already been a serious concern for Manu.¹⁴¹ The *Ugrapariṣṭcchā* bodhisattva is a brāhmaṇa who is not alarmed by social change and has given himself the task of introducing new means of hegemonic control. This is the reason why he is a brāhmaṇa, namely an intellectual who is given due reverence and is unassailable, from the crucial point

¹³⁷ *Ugrapariṣṭcchā*: 8D (p. 236).

¹³⁸ See, e.g. *ibid.* 9A-F (pp. 237–40); 13A-B, G-I (pp. 247 ff.).

¹³⁹ Yadava (1966: 75) on the authority of V.S. Agrawala’s edition of the text; also, B.N. Mukherjee (1980-81: 42–43).

¹⁴⁰ Yadava (1966: 75–76); V. Jha (1986-87: 22, n. 3).

¹⁴¹ Cf. V.S. Agrawala (1970: 17–18).

of view of caste identity and of the authority deriving from it, by the enemies of the religion.

The *Mahāvastu* states that “Bodhisattvas are born in one of two classes of families, either noble or brāhman”. The bodhisattva’s family is “distinguished, well-known, and dignified”, and “is of high birth and lineage [...]”.¹⁴² Likewise, the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, a text of uncertain date (ultimately depending on the date of Asaṅga), in describing the varieties of bodhisattvas, says that those who are reborn in the families of men, “are reborn in good families, i.e. among nobles, Brahmins and well-to-do householders”.¹⁴³ The new situation is enlightened by the emergence of Maitreya, the Buddha-Saviour who shall be born in the *brāhmaṇavarṇa*. The emphasis on the social origin of the Buddhist elite shows that the new challenges were better coped with by educated, apostate brāhmaṇas. Jan Nattier has observed that the bodhisattvas of the *Ugraparipṛcchā* are typical family men, living at home and interacting with the organised monastic community on occasion. Since there is no evidence of a *guru*-disciple relationship,¹⁴⁴ this raises the question of the legitimacy, within the Buddhist community, of their acts. Nattier suggests that Ugra’s position is not too different from that of a traditional *upāsaka*,¹⁴⁵ but his being named “bodhisattva”, a designation also used for ordained monks, prompts us to ask a number of questions. Nattier is probably right in maintaining that the *Ugra*’s authors were not trying to introduce a type of ordination different from the traditional one reserved for the monks.¹⁴⁶ However, the emer-

¹⁴² *Mahāvastu*: I.197 (vol. I, p. 156).

¹⁴³ *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*: I, 2, 3c, 5 (pp. 69–70).

¹⁴⁴ Nattier in *Ugraparipṛcchā*: 77–78.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*: 78.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*: esp. 121 ff. Akira Hirakawa, however, as a result of his view of the lay origins of the Mahāyāna, maintained, that “in the period of the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra* the renunciant bodhisattva received the *upāsampadā* and became a *bhikṣu* like the *śravaka* by the *vinayapitaka*, but there also existed a bodhisattva *śikṣā* with its own method of ordination and there were people who undertook it.” (Hirakawa 1963: 79).

gence of these new figures, subordinate as they may have been to monastic bodhisattvas, indicates new needs, new strategies and a significant change in the world of the *śramaṇas*. Who in towns and villages did perform the rites of passage? Who celebrated, for instance, the marriage of a high-caste Buddhist, or, for that matter, of a Buddhist layman of the third *varṇa*? Since it is unthinkable that such rituals were celebrated in disagreement with the accepted rules, an enormous power was left in the hands of the *tīrthikas*. This resulted in a corresponding loss of power for the Buddhists, and this is the area where the lay, high-caste bodhisattva acted. I have mentioned the rites of passages, but there were a number of other rites which common people could not renounce, either out of belief or for reasons of social constraint.¹⁴⁷ Ugra is a brāhmaṇa because his *varṇa* empowers him to perform rites and other operations of crucial social importance: to remain in the field of marriage, who made the horoscope of the couple, and who performed the rites for the new-born child? This was the way by which the lay bodhisattvas took root socially and, considering the hardships to which their *saṃghas* were increasingly subjected, the way they came to compromise.

The *Rāṣṭrapālāparipṛcchā Sūtra* depicts a situation where not only *grāma* bodhisattvas but also “corrupt” monks have firmly established themselves on an independent or semi-independent basis. The autocephaly of the lay bodhisattvas is

¹⁴⁷ The acceptance of a certain number of traditional rites from at least the first-second century AD, including *homa*, is documented in the art of Gandhāra (Verardi 1994; see criticism by Muldoon-Hules 2011: 250 ff.). We assist as well to the introduction of the concept of the transfer of merit, a practice attested to by an inscription from Bharhut (Lüders, Waldschmidt & Mehendale 1963: A 108, pp. 54–55) and by inscriptions of the early centuries AD in Āndhra, in relation to which see Hanumantha Rao’s observations (Rao, B.S.L. Hanumantha 1990: 833, 835–36) and the Āndhra inscription collected in Rao, B.S.L. Hanumantha & al. 1998; for earlier textual evidence, see Kajiyama (2005b). The transfer of merit was theorised to correct a position that was cause for easy criticism and greatly favoured the Brahmanical model. The latter was always in favour of the second *āśrama* (S. Dutt 1924: 47–48, 57–60).

implied in the allegation that they “[do] not pay homage to the teachers and saints [āryajana]”,¹⁴⁸ and regarding their functions as independent rites performers, they are perhaps alluded to when the author of the text says: “Taking up the banner of the Buddha, they perform services for people in the household”.¹⁴⁹ Regarding the corrupt monks, “[t]hey keep cows, horses, asses, livestock, male and female slaves”, and consider a single property “[w]hat belongs to the *stūpa*, to the *saṅgha*, and what is acquired for oneself”. Moreover, “[t]hey would have wives, sons, and daughters just like a householder”.¹⁵⁰ Here it would seem that family-based institutions run by Buddhist priests were already in existence, even though we read below that “[t]hey are not householders, and they are not monks”, and that those who were always thinking to the village were all the same forest-dwellers of sort.¹⁵¹ Moreover, real monasteries provided with cells are referred to.¹⁵² It can perhaps be assumed that householder monks already existed who spent certain periods of the year in retirement.

We have other sources that hint at the existence of Buddhist priests. A passage from the *Xiyuji* testifies to the existence of householder monks in early seventh-century Sind. Xuanzang noted a group of adherents to the Little Vehicle who shaved their heads and wore the *kaśāya* robes of the *bhikṣus*, “whom they resemble[d] outwardly, whilst they engage[d] themselves in the ordinary affairs of lay life”. In the past, “they had obediently walked according to the doctrine of religion”, but “the changed times have weakened their virtue”, and now “they live without any moral rules, and their sons and grandsons

¹⁴⁸ *Rāṣṭrapālāpariprcchā Sūtra*: 99 (p. 130).

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*: 179 (p. 138). Immediately below, they are said to serve as go-betweens; the point, however, is that they enter the houses wearing the monastic robe.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*: 180, 181, 183 (p. 138).

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*: 190, 192 (p. 139).

¹⁵² *Ibid.*: 196, 198 (pp. 139–40).

continue to live as wordly people, without any regard to their religious profession".¹⁵³

According to the *Rājatarāṅgiṇī*, in early historical Kashmir, Yūkadevī, the second queen of king Meghavāhana of the Gonandīya dynasty, had a *vihāra* built in competition with the other queens, and

[i]n one half of it she placed those Bhikṣus whose conduct conformed to the precepts, and in the [other] half those who being in possession of wives, children cattle and property, deserved blame for their life as householders.¹⁵⁴

Here Kalhaṇa discusses a period of the history of Kashmir of which he knows little, and he may project a later reality into early Kashmir, but, from the other side, we must assume that his information were based on earlier sources. The above-quoted passage indicates the existence of two separate classes of monks, or, better to say, of a priesthood and a monkhood which lived side by side. It also indicates that *vihāras* started being opened to monks and priests alike.

The hauteur towards the deviant monks shown by both the author of the *Questions of Rāṣṭrapāla* and Xuanzang, as well as by Kalhaṇa's source, not to speak of the position arguably held by the Mahāyāna intellectuals who proudly embodied a tradition opposed to the doctrines and lifestyle of the *tīrthikas* (they would strenuously defend it in a growing number of doctrinal debates, Chapter IV), prompts us to raise the question whether the new *yāna*, once it was recognisably constituted, did really amalgamate the different trends that had emerged. It is not easy to believe that the great monks of the leading monasteries endorsed the wordly practice of the *grāma* bodhisattvas, whom Xuanzang, in fact, would disdainfully relegate among the adherents of the Small Vehicle. The latter, in turn,

¹⁵³ *Xiyuji* a: XI (vol. 2, pp. 273–74).

¹⁵⁴ *Rājatarāṅgiṇī*: III.12.

cannot be considered a lot of unworthy, debased adepts, an accident in history. We assist, rather, to a process that on the one hand led to the formation of a priestly class that compromised with the Brahmanical structuring of society, and on the other to the reaffirmation, on a new basis, of the traditional monastic organisation. Here I leave open the question of the possible relationship between the householder bodhisattvas and the *śākyabhikṣus*, who in the fifth century formed a separate group of monks,¹⁵⁵ and whom in Newār Buddhism we know as householder monks. The emerging awareness of the variety of relationships between *saṃghas* and monks and of the different behaviours of the latter, in their own way legitimate, foreshadows a major breakthrough in our understanding of ancient Indian Buddhism.¹⁵⁶

The frequent occurrence of the term *grāma* and the rare mention of towns, as well as the emergence of the *araṇya/grāma* polarity point to a context of declining urbanisation, a process started in the second half of the third century. We have seen how widespread was the presence of the Pāsupatas in the villages: they acted as priests, or at least as second or third-class *pujārīs* (this depended on the degree of

¹⁵⁵ Richard S. Cohen (2000) has shown that *śākyabhikṣu* is a kinship term connected with the rapport Śākyamuni-Rāhula-Sumati/Dīpaṃkara. Buddhahadra, a donor of Ajanta cave 26 (it is at Ajanta that there is ample epigraphic evidence on *śākyabhikṣus*) refers to himself as a “powerful and affluent bodhisattva, who desires mundane pleasures as well as ultimate liberation” (ibid.: 29), an unusual presentation. The explicit association of these *bhikṣus* with the Śākya family underlined by Cohen may indicate actual lineages of married priests seeking legitimation in precisely this kind of association. The existence of a Buddhist married clergy would be in accord with the religious climate of the orthodox Vākāṭaka house, whoever the patrons of the Ajanta caves may have been. At Ajanta there were *vihāras* for the dwelling monks, and the latter were rather numerous (see the calculations made by Spink 2005-7, V: 387). This would seem to rule out any association with householder monks, but for all what we know, we cannot exclude the possibility that fifth-century Ajanta was for them a temporary retreat.

¹⁵⁶ See Shayne Clarke’s discussion on the meaning of *asaṃvāsa* (not being in communion with one’s own *saṃgha*) and his questioning our understanding of what it was to be a monk in India (Clarke 2009).

acceptance of the various Pāsupata groups). Their presence became increasingly important, and village priests became a structured part of the religious and economic reality. Competing with them was no easy matter, especially when patronage towards Buddhist institutions sank as a result of the great economic crisis of the third century and when, in Gupta times, the monasteries came under attack. While the *araṇya* bodhisattvas probably clustered in the regions where monastic life remained a viable possibility even during the hardest times of Gupta rule, in the rest of India the groups of monks had no other choice than organise themselves around a priesthood paralleling the Brahmanical priesthood.

An early text that may be associated to the formation stage of a householder monkhood is the *Upāyakauśalya Sūtra* (*The Skill in Means Sūtra*), which justifies the behaviour that the *araṇya* monks condemned. This *sūtra* tells the story of a young brāhmaṇa lusted after by a female water-carrier whom at first he rejects so as not to break his *vrata*. Being not able to be with him, she prefers to die, but to save her life, he decides to break his vows. “Taking the woman by the right hand, he said, ‘Sister, arise, I will do whatever you desire.’” Thus he “lived the home life for twelve years before leaving it again to generate the four stations of brahma”.¹⁵⁷ The Buddha sanctions this behaviour maintaining that in one of his former lives he was the young brāhmaṇa, the water-carrier being no other than Yaśodharā. Here, as in the *Ugraparipṛcchā*, family life is subordinate to celibate life, but the vows are broken: the young brāhmaṇa carries on the life of an orthodox *grhapati*, who leaves his family to devote himself to spiritual practices only at a later stage in life.

¹⁵⁷ *Upāyakauśalya Sūtra*: 33-34 (p. 34). I quote from the briefer and earlier version of the work, known from a Tibetan translation (cf. Katz’s introduction, pp. 17–18).

The introduction of the concept of skill-in-means (*upāya*)¹⁵⁸ and the social ambiguity inherent in it opens an unexpected scenario, which we will better examine in a later chapter. In the *Upāyakauśalya Sūtra*, bodhisattvas “attenuate even a great transgression with skill in means”.¹⁵⁹ As regards the sense desires, the bodhisattva “enters the great swamp of sense-desire but he will be reborn in the world of Brahmā”; he “will take pleasure in the five kinds of sense-qualities; he will allow himself to be permeated by them”, but “will cut through all the sense-qualities whenever he so desires [...]”.¹⁶⁰ Thanks to *upāya*, he “indulges in pleasure and play with the five kinds of sense-desire”, so that some will say that if he cannot save himself, he cannot save others. However, whenever he so desires, the bodhisattva with skill in means can “slash all nets of defilement with his sword of wisdom and betake himself to a purified Buddha-field that is free from licentious women”.¹⁶¹ Sex is thus, predictably, the most important of the “five kinds of sense-desire”, and we should try to enter the reality of the time in order to understand these episodes and those reported above in the text. It is extremely unlikely that the lay bodhisattvas and the much-maligned *grāma bhikṣus* could experience sex other than in a family context. Villages were too small to allow for casual sex (which, if ever, was easier for the *araṇya* monks), and that is why both the *Rāṣṭrapālapariṣecchā* and the *Upāyakauśalya Sūtras* explicitly mention family life in connection with *bhikṣus*.

All the segments forming the Buddhist world were affected, to a greater or lesser extent, by the situation created by the cleansing policy of the Guptas, which is the real dividing

¹⁵⁸ See the classical study by Pye (1978), and in particular the discussion on the term *upāya* (12–14).

¹⁵⁹ *Upāyakauśalya Sūtra*: 20 (p. 29).

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*: 44–45 (pp. 37–38).

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*: 47 (pp. 38–39).

line in the history of Buddhism in late antiquity: the Raivata mentioned by Faxian was not a *grāma* priest (Faxian would have reacted like Xuanzang in that case), but a celibate *guru* member of a monastery, where high-caste monks were numerous and occupied key positions. His behaviour can hardly have been an isolated case. Yet it is difficult to find a common denominator between the praxeis of the Buddhist *saṃghas* that adapted themselves to survive under Brahmanical guardianship and the doctrines of the new *yāna*. The latter originated as a better strategy (so we could translate the term *mahāyāna*) by formidable thinkers capable, among other things, of introducing the speculation on *sūnyatā*, which was closer to a real ontology and therefore competitive with the orthodox systems. They subverted the traditional, vertical *cakravāla* cosmology, causing it to explode horizontally in an infinite number of universes,¹⁶² overpowering the traditional vision of the *tīrthikas*. All this has little to do with the lifestyle of the *grāma* bodhisattvas.

It would seem that actual Mahāyāna is not a synthesis of the various trends that we observe in the Indian Buddhism of late antiquity. We should abandon the idea that any change with respect to earlier Buddhism is a sign of, and convergence towards the Mahāyāna. The latter is rather a coherent attempt to reinforce the doctrine and monastic rules by firmly opposing the challenge of the *tīrthikas* — all welded by an extraordinary doctrinal refoundation. The doctrinal-temporal partition handed down to us by the Indian Buddhist tradition is to be taken seriously: the *dharmacakrapravartanas* that followed the first

¹⁶² The reader is referred to Kloetzli (1983) for the difference of perspective between the single universe cosmology and the *asaṃkheya* cosmologies. We do not know when the speculation on single *buddhakṣetras* became systematic impinging on a significant number of *saṃghas*. Among the emerging evidence of early Mahāyāna in Gandhāra, mention can be made of the early text describing the characteristics of Akṣobhya's "paradise" found in a monastery in Bajaur (Strauch 2010) and the well-known "Amitābha stela" first published by Brough (1982).

one, whatever the judgement we give of them, were operations carried out with the clearest intents and the utmost determination. The second *pravartana*, which concerns us here, was necessary because, after the Gupta normalisation, little remained of the first *dharmacakrapravartana* in terms of social rooting and reactivity to the challenges of the *tīrthikas*.

This said, we should also try to put ourselves in the shoes of these *tīrthikas*, the new brāhmaṇas who had emerged on the social horizon of India thanks to their embracing the theistic cause, and evaluate the phenomenon in its complexity and wider perspective. The *tīrthikas* were committed not only to build systems capable to withstand the fierce criticism that they suffered from the more traditional sectors of the *brāhmaṇavarṇa*,¹⁶³ but had to oppose the arguments and behaviours of the Mahāyāna intellectuals, whom they considered the quintessence of an atheist, incomprehensible hubris. Their path seemed impracticable, but would prove to be the right one.

There is a lack of wide-ranging research on the rise of the theistic religions in the early centuries of our era. What occurred in the Mediterranean, particularly with Christianity, and what took place in India are related phenomena, both emerging from the deep crisis of the third century. Parallels could be drawn between India and the Roman world at the political level, too: the extreme political fragmentation in India, followed by the advent of the Guptas in AD 319 and the emergence of theistic systems after the death of Samudragupta (c. 380 AD) finds an almost perfect match in the hectic succession of more than thirty emperors in Rome after Septimius Severus, nearly all murdered, and the establishment of Christianity with Theodosius (379-95 AD).¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ See e.g. S. Dasgupta (1932-55, III: 14 ff.); von Stietencron (1977).

¹⁶⁴ The lack of studies on the matter misled, I think, a scholar of the calibre of Frits Stahl, who placed the religious caesura at the Khyber. Septimius Severus died in AD 211 in York.

THE WEAPONISED SPACE OF THE GODS

It has long been recognised that in the *Mahābhārata*, not only the Bhāgavatas, but also the Pāśupatas have become part of the new Brahmanical tradition born out from the compromise between the theistic movements and the *vaidikas*.¹⁶⁵ The caves of Udayagiri near Vidiśā are even better evidence, owing to the fact that they date to about AD 400 (the inscription of AD 401 is outside Cave 6).¹⁶⁶ They have been recently investigated in great detail and with great insight in relation to the Gupta ideology by Michael Willis, to whose book, which shall remain for long the reference work for the students of early Hinduism, the reader is referred.¹⁶⁷ About the same time, an image of Hari-Hara, also from central India,¹⁶⁸ testifies to the compromise between the two great theistic systems. Thus the grafting of the theistic religions onto the Vedic tradition, besides producing works like the *Ramāyaṇa*, a large part of the *Mahābhārata* and the early Purāṇas, was now able to create iconographies of great emotional impact and the related rituals. The world of the gods was expressed with unprecedented potency and subtlety.

At Udayagiri, the Bhāgavata gods have a leading role but are flanked by Sivaite icons and by the goddesses. In Cave 3 there is an image of Kārttikeya, an avowedly warrior-god, and outside Cave 6 a four-armed Viṣṇu with his weapons and a twelve-armed Mahiṣamardinī who appears as a real war machine. Viṣṇu Anantaśayana, one of the polarities of the sacred layout of the site together with Viṣṇu-Varāha,¹⁶⁹ is obviously

¹⁶⁵ Bhandarkar (1913: 160 ff.). In the Nārāyaṇīya section of the Śānti Parvan, a typical text of the early Kali Age literature, we find Rudra, “devoted to Yoga”, together with Nārāyaṇa (see section CCCXLIX; vol. 10, p. 188).

¹⁶⁶ Chhabra & Gai (1981: 242–44); Willis (2009: 33–34, 57).

¹⁶⁷ Willis (2009).

¹⁶⁸ Now in the National Museum, New Delhi. See it in Huntington (1985: 194).

¹⁶⁹ Willis (2009: 55–56). For Varāha, see especially *ibid.* 41 ff., 79–81 (also, Gottfried Williams 1982: 40–49, pls. 34–39, 43 and Harle 1974: 9–10, 33–36; pls. 3–17). Willis (2009: 55) has been good enough to recall a minimal contribution of mine,

unarmed, but we know that he wakens to kill the two *asuras* Madhu and Kaiṭabha. The disquieting Narasiṃha, Viṣṇu's *vāma* aspect, is also depicted: he marks the dawn of a new age¹⁷⁰ because he has killed the *asura* Hiranyakaśipu, thus being entitled to welcome the new initiates who abandon their asuric nature¹⁷¹ to see the light of God. The *mātrkās*, led by Skanda, are present outside Cave 4, and are in relation to the cremation ground and the rites performed by the Atharvavedic *purohita*, a Kāpālika.¹⁷² we know that they play a non-secondary role in fighting the *asuras*, whose blood they drink.¹⁷³ The Brahmanical pantheon, with his multi-armed gods provided with weapons, is virtually complete.

In Brahmanical myth and iconography, we usually associate the concepts of violence and destruction to some aspects of Śiva and some forms of the Goddess. Śiva is born as a destructive god, as is shown by the trident and the other weapons he is endowed with from the beginning.¹⁷⁴ He holds the trident

but a clarification may be useful. The cave is unique in Indian art because the scene — an aquatic scene — runs uninterrupted along the three walls of the cave and on the bottom. The prototype, as far as the evidence goes, is the so-called Fish Porch of Tapa Shotor, Hadda (M. & Sh. Mustamandy 1969; Mustamandy 1972), destroyed in 1979, a chapel with an extraordinary aquatic landscape occupying the whole space that is deeply indebted to Hellenistic models, a sort of three-dimensional Nilotic scene that is likely to have also influenced the riverine imagery of early Pendžikent in Sogdia. But it would be wrong to think that Udayagiri owes something to the art of Central Asia.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.: 37.

¹⁷¹ Hudson (2002: 145). See also below.

¹⁷² Willis (2009: 175 ff.).

¹⁷³ *Devī Māhātmya*: 8.9-19 ff. (pp. 63 ff.).

¹⁷⁴ The trident's "essential feature is the triple metal pike in sharp points" (Rao, T.A. Gopinatha 1914-16, I: 8). Śiva first appears holding it and the club in north-western India on the coins of Mauves (Banerjea 1956: 120-21) in the first quarter of the first century BC, and constantly holds it on Kuṣāṇa coins (Göbl 1984: 43-44). On Huviška's coins, he is also shown holding other weapons, namely the wheel, the club and the thunderbolt (ibid). The earliest relief of Śiva holding *triśūla* is also from the North-West (Härtel 1985: 392-96). In the Central Himalayas, Śiva appears with the trident/battle axe (*triśūla-paraśu*) on the Catreśvara type of Kuninda coins (M.P. Joshi 1989: 61-62), and in Gangetic India he is depicted with the trident in third-century Sāṃkāśya (Sankisa); cf. N.P. Joshi (1984: 49).

on the third-century seals found at Sankisa, in Madhyadeśa,¹⁷⁵ as well as in a stela from the region of Kauśāmbī datable to the third-fourth century, which shows him four-armed and holding *ḍamaru*, a rosary and a pot.¹⁷⁶ His *aghora*, ferocious aspect on *caturmukhaliṅgas*, well documented from Kuṣāṇa times onwards,¹⁷⁷ also betrays one of his main characteristics. Skanda is armed with a spear when he makes his first iconographical appearance in the North, and — as Subrahmaṇya — with a *vajra* in the South.¹⁷⁸ He is at the head of the Mothers as early as the Kuṣāṇa period in Mathurā¹⁷⁹ and of the army of the *devas*, whom he victoriously leads in battle against the *asuras* led by Tāraka, as stated in the *Vāyu Purāṇa*, where the god is called “slayer of Asuras” and “enemy of Daityas”.¹⁸⁰ The name of his spear is *aparājītā*, unvanquished.¹⁸¹ Skanda’s association with Śiva is sanctioned by a myth that makes him his son, and, at the same time, the son of Agni¹⁸² in order to make him accepted in orthodox circles.

Vāsudeva, a deity on whose characteristics and worship the complex figure of Viṣṇu was largely to depend, is not less fierce a divinity. He is given, from the beginning, two deathly weapons, *gadā*, the club meant “to strike the enemy at close quarters”¹⁸³ and *cakra*, “resembling the modern quoit” which “must have been used as a missile to be thrown against the

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Harle (1974: pl. 54).

¹⁷⁷ For the Mathurā icons and a general discussion see Kreisel (1986: 65 ff.).

¹⁷⁸ The formation of the god Skanda/Subrahmaṇya and that of his iconography is too complex to be even simply touched on in this context. For a general information on his early forms and worship, the reader is referred to P.K. Agrawala (1967) and Chatterjee (1970), and for a discussion on his characteristics in South India, where he even assumes the role of Indra, to L’Hernault (1978; 1984).

¹⁷⁹ N.P. Joshi (1986:19 ff.; 28 ff.; drawings 9–12).

¹⁸⁰ *Vāyu Purāṇa*: II.11.47-48 (vol. 2, p. 573).

¹⁸¹ Ibid.: II.11.43-44 (vol. 2, p. 573).

¹⁸² Ibid.: II.11.21-34 (vol. 2, pp. 571–72).

¹⁸³ Rao, T.A. Gopinatha (1914-16, I: 5).

enemy to cut him through and kill him".¹⁸⁴ *Śankha* is another tool used in war, its sound striking terror into the hearts of the enemies.¹⁸⁵ The Udayagiri Viṣṇu has Vāsudeva as his model, and he is in fact ready for the fight.

The ferocious nature of the gods of the Bhāgavatas, the *pañcavīras*, is exemplified in the third-fourth centuries by their association, in a famous relief from Piduguralla village in the Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh, with Narasiṃha, one of the most frightening Indian deities, who is two-armed and is endowed with *cakra* and *gadā*.¹⁸⁶ As seen above, Narasiṃha kills the *asura/daitya* Hiranyakaśipu,¹⁸⁷ and is represented with increasing frequency from the Gupta period onwards:¹⁸⁸ after the Guptas, the god would be mostly shown as pulling out the *asura*'s entrails after killing him.¹⁸⁹ The *Narasimha dīkṣā*, the initiation into the worship of the God, was the main rite of the *Pāñcarātra Āgama* through which *mlecchas* could be cleaned up,¹⁹⁰ and the growing presence of the deity points to both proselytism and a call to arms against the enemies of Bhagavān.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. I: 4. On *cakra* as a weapon in a Vishnuite context, see W.E. Begley (1973: 7–22); also, Auboyer (1965). Vāsudeva's early icons, dating to the late and post-Kuṣāṇa period, come from Mathurā, the weapons he is provided with being a very large *cakra* and a gigantic *gadā* (K.S. Desai 1973: 8; figs. 1–3). Saṃkarṣaṇa and Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa, two of the *pañcavīras* who contributed in shaping Viṣṇu's identity are depicted on Agathocles's coins (first half of the second century BC) holding club and plough and *cakra* and *śankha* (?), respectively (Filliozat 1973: 113–23; Narain 1973: 113–23). For the iconographical relationship between Vāsudeva and Viṣṇu the reader is referred to Härtel (1987: esp. 586–87).

¹⁸⁵ Rao, T.A. Gopinatha (1914-16, I: 3).

¹⁸⁶ A.W. Khan (1964).

¹⁸⁷ The *Vāyu Purāṇa* (II.6.61, 66; vol. 2, p. 516) calls him the lord of *daityas*, which are equated to the *asuras* and *dānavas* (II.6.63). The war against Hiranyakaśipu is the first of the *devāsura* wars (below, Chapter V), which may suggest the identification of this *asura* with Aśoka or, less probably, with the last Mauryan emperor.

¹⁸⁸ K.S. Desai (1973: 86–88).

¹⁸⁹ See, as an early example, the sixth-century image kept in the Bharat Kala Bhavan in Benares (Biswas & Jha 1985: 52 and pl. III, 6, 6a). On the iconography of Narasiṃha see especially Ducrey Giordano (1977), where the *Narasimha Purāṇa* and the relevant passages from other texts are thoroughly examined. For Narasiṃha's myth, see Soifer (1992: esp. 73–111).

¹⁹⁰ Hudson (2002: 145).

Regarding the Goddess, she makes an early appearance in the destructive form of Durgā slaying the *asura* Mahiṣa: the early images of Mahiṣamardinī were created in Kuṣāṇa Mathurā.¹⁹¹ At Udayagiri the Goddess is depicted thrice. In the first image, magnificently executed, she has twelve arms holding the war attributes that were given her, according to the *Devī Māhātmya*, by the gods (the *śūla* by Śiva, the bow by Vāyu, the *vajra* by Indra, the sword and the “spotless” shield by Kāla), as well as the lotus garland of the Ocean.¹⁹² In the second, she has twelve arms, and is armed “with sword and shield, bow and arrows, club, discus, and thunderbolt”.¹⁹³ The third, much worn out, is also multi-armed, and is sculpted on the northern wall of the courtyard of Cave 6.¹⁹⁴ The Udayagiri image suggests that the features and deeds of the Goddess depicted in the *Devī Māhātmya* had already found a firm theorisation in the late fourth century. In this extraordinarily vibrant text, the Goddess takes the place of Viṣṇu in fighting the *asuras* Madhu and Kaiṭabha, who had assailed Brahmā,¹⁹⁵ and carries out a memorable battle against Mahiṣa and the two other *asuras* Sumbha and Nisumbha, whose myth is almost unknown in earlier literature. At Badoh-Pathari, in the Bina Valley (the Bina is a tributary of the Betwa), the Mothers, some of whom are armed and led by Vīrabhadra, are sitting on thrones in a row, the set being dated to the first half of the fifth century.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹¹ See Härtel (1992) and von Stietencron (2005: 131 ff.).

¹⁹² *Devī Māhātmya*: 2.19-30. This text has been attributed to the fifth-sixth century (Coburn 1984: 1), but a later date has been suggested (cf. Willis 2009: 176).

¹⁹³ *ASIR* 10 (A. Cunningham): 50. Cunningham saw the relief in a better condition than it is now. See these two reliefs illustrated in Harle (1974: pls. 16–17).

¹⁹⁴ Cave 5 according to the numeration of the Archaeological Survey of India. See this image in von Mitterwallner (1976: fig. 4).

¹⁹⁵ Coburn (1984: 192–95) and id. in *Devī Māhātmya*: 22–23.

¹⁹⁶ Harle (1974: 12–13, 38; pls. 27–30).

The alarming amount of destruction and violence that typify the new Brahmanical gods cannot find its reason buried in inexplicable myths. When we attribute the narrations of the epics, the Purāṇas and the Agamas and their visual renderings to the realm of myth, we risk exempting us from giving an explanation at the historical level. Yet the more recent debate on the nature of myth has made the evolutionist hypothesis of the passage from *mythos* to *lógos* obsolete.¹⁹⁷ Myth is reconciled with the demand for rationality to the point of not being considered inferior to science but in historical-factual terms,¹⁹⁸ and we should feel free to examine it from a historical and social perspective without prejudicing its autonomy.¹⁹⁹ In any case, myth has the inherent ability to continuously generate metaphors and allegories. These, taken one by one, have a shorter life than the myth's core (the symbol), their operational field being politics and ideology, but nonetheless remain a structural part of myth, and can outlive it for centuries, as is shown by the allegories nourished by the dead classical myths in Europe as late as the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Is it possible to anchor myths to history, without denying the atemporal and universal situations they embody.

Why are Brahmanical gods born with so many arms and weapons, manifestly hostile in aspect and looking increasingly destructive and terrifying? Which interpretation should we give of the *asuras*, who appear to be so present and dangerous in an epoch so relatively near to modern times? The *devāsura* war appears as the major scenario in which man's history is set. Vedic gods, too, were struggling with the *asuras*, and creation itself depends on Indra killing Vṛtrāsura.²⁰⁰ Vedic

¹⁹⁷ The reader is referred to the *Mythos-Debatte* of the 1980s and 1990s, which was set up by the publication in 1979 of *Arbeit am Mythos* by Hans Blumenberg.

¹⁹⁸ Hübner (1990: 302, 459).

¹⁹⁹ This was the concern of Károly Kerényi and Mircea Eliade, while O'Flaherty (1981: 9–12) particularly feared reductionism.

²⁰⁰ See a comment on this *Rgveda* myth in Kuiper (1983: esp. 50–51, 104–105).

asuras, however — either human enemies or divine beings possessed of *māyā* — are not easily identifiable, because our knowledge of Vedic society remains very limited.²⁰¹ But whatever interpretation we may give of them, the demons who dispossessed the gods in late ancient and medieval times cannot be the same as those of pre-archaic India, just as the gods so familiar to us are not the same as the Vedic gods, despite the process of Vedicisation and the extraordinary effort to fuse them in a timeless perspective. This fusion made the transition from early to new Brahmanical order possible, but cannot persuade us that Śiva is really the same god as Rudra, and that his enemies are the same against whom the anger of the Vedic god was addressed.²⁰² Regarding Viṣṇu, some of his traits, like that of his Trivikrama form, are deliberately taken from the *Ṛgveda*,²⁰³ and he is further identified with late Vedic Nārāyaṇa,²⁰⁴ but nonetheless he appears as a new, multi-faceted divinity with new functions to perform. As regards the Goddess, in spite of her pre-archaic connections, which are to be seen within the re-statement of the Vedas “in the pattern of the Purāṇic style”,²⁰⁵ she hardly expresses the characteristics of Vedic female divinities.²⁰⁶

²⁰¹ On Vedic *asuras*, see Hale (1986); predictably, it is with the *Atharvaveda* that we come closer to the use of the term *asuras* understood as demons who oppose the gods. Archaeology, severely conditioned in pre-archaic India by the absence of funerary monuments and of the large amount of materials they usually yield, has been of limited help in clarifying the traits of Vedic society at the level that would be necessary in this discussion.

²⁰² There is a rich literature on this subject and related matters. For Rudra-Śiva, cf. in particular Gonda (1970: 1–17); Kramrisch (1981: passim).

²⁰³ On Vedic Viṣṇu and his three strides, cf. Gonda (1954: 55–72).

²⁰⁴ Cf. M. Dasgupta (1931).

²⁰⁵ V.S. Agrawala (1983: 1). On the Vedic connections of the Goddess, in relation to the *Devī Māhātmya*, see Coburn (1984: 53 ff. and passim).

²⁰⁶ The increasing number of gender studies has caused several contributions on the goddess to be written, but a thorough investigation on the relationship between the neo-Brahmanical Goddess and the Vedic female deities is lacking. S.K. Lal (1980) has devoted a study to the Vedic goddesses who, in one form or another, have continued to be of significance in neo-Brahmanism.

Only recently has it been recognised that the *asuras* and *daityas* of the Indian myths are the practitioners of the heretical religions, and that the use of a mythological paradigm by saints and rulers has legitimised crusades and persecutions.²⁰⁷ A thorough reinterpretation of the evidence still lies ahead of us, however. With the new Purāṇic myths (which, as all myths, mark the beginning of a world),²⁰⁸ the brāhmaṇas tried to establish a new history, pushing historical events into a mythical past, that we should try to understand critically. The difficulty in writing history in India does not lie in the lamented lack of documentation (which is, on the contrary, imposing), but in our inability to interpret the data in the right perspective and even in not being able to recognise them as such. Ancient and medieval India is still, and wrongly, understood as being not only different, but also exotically “other”.

To limit ourselves to the myths mentioned above and to sources compatible with the period under study, we learn that Hiranyaśipu, as soon as he was born out of the womb of Diti, “narrated the verses of the four Vedas” and “performed severe penances for a hundred thousand years without taking any food and standing topsy-turvy”. Through his yogic power and Brahmā’s boon he attained the power of not being slain by any human being and obtained the lordship of all *devas*, whom he tried to make the equals of *dānavas* and *asuras*.²⁰⁹ The *asura* appears as a high-born, apostate *yogin* who, taking undue advantage of the boon bestowed upon him by Brahmā, tries to dispossess the *devas*, and is brutally punished by Narasiṃha:

²⁰⁷ Granoff (1984). The author, discussing religious biographies, has shown how this paradigm is persistent over time, and provides also relatively recent examples.

²⁰⁸ See Kerényi introduction in Jung & Kerényi (1972: esp. 20–24).

²⁰⁹ *Vāyu Purāna*: II, 6.58-63 (vol. 2, pp. 515–16).

“The Devas along with great sages made obeisance to that quarter which is resorted to by King Hiranyakaśipu.” O Brāhmaṇas, Hiranyakaśipu, the Lord of Daityas, had such prowess. In ancient times, Viṣṇu, in the form of Man-Lion, became death unto him [...]. He was torn by him by means of his claws. Hence the nails are remembered pure.²¹⁰

The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, also an early text,²¹¹ specifies that Hiranyakaśipu “had formerly brought the three worlds under his authority” and “had usurped the sovereignty of Indra”, appropriating to himself “all that was offered in sacrifice to the gods”.²¹² *Gandharvas*, *siddhas* and *nāgas* “all attended upon the mighty Hiranyakaśipu”.²¹³ The identity of the *asura* is transparent, once we rescale the time-span of the events (the one hundred thousand years of penance) and understand that the actors of the drama are all conceived as belonging to the sole existing reality, that created and controlled by the Brahmanical gods, the rest being nothing but *māyā*, delusion. Viṣṇu’s role as deluder may be recalled, even if the story as told in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* is not part of the early text.²¹⁴ The *devas* ask Viṣṇu to protect them, because the *daityas* “have seized upon the three worlds, and [have] appropriated the offerings which [we]re [their] portion”, and Viṣṇu, hearing their request,

emitted from his body an illusory form, which he gave to the gods, and thus spoke: “This deceptive vision shall wholly beguile the Daityas, so that, being led astray from the path of the Vedas, they may be put to death [...]”²¹⁵

²¹⁰ Ibid.: II, 6. 65-66 (vol. 2, p. 516). The sentence between inverted commas is uttered by Brahmā.

²¹¹ Hazra (1940: 24).

²¹² *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*: I.17.2-4 (vol. 1, p. 190).

²¹³ Ibid.: I.17.6-7 (vol. 1, p. 190).

²¹⁴ According to Hazra (1940: 25), the Māyāmoha story, reported also in other Purāṇas, did not originate earlier than AD 500.

²¹⁵ *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*: III.17.37-44 (vol. 1, pp. 486-87).

Viṣṇu first approaches the ascetics identifiable as Jains, and then

the same deluder, putting on garments of a red colour, assuming a benevolent aspect, and speaking in soft and agreeable tones, addressed others of the same family, and said to them, “If, mighty demons, you cherish a desire either for heaven or for final repose, desist from the iniquitous massacre of animals [...], and hear from me what you should do. Know that all that exists is composed of discriminative knowledge. Understand my words, for they have been uttered by the wise. This word subsists without support, and engaged in the pursuit of error, which it mistakes for knowledge, as well as vitiated by passion and the rest, revolves in the straits of existence”. In this manner, exclaiming to them “Know!” [...] and they replying, “It is known” [...], these Daityas were induced by the arch deceiver to deviate from their religious duties [...], by his repeated arguments and variously urged persuasion. When they had abandoned their own faith, they persuaded others to do the same, and the heresy spread, and many deserted the practices enjoined by the Vedas and the laws.²¹⁶

As we will see in the next chapter, only one reality is admitted and, in history, only one player. This is why the new Brahmanical gods are multi-armed: their many arms indicate the annexation of the whole space, where only their devotees have the right to live according to the law imposed upon them. And the space is defended from the enemies of this law by the extraordinary number of weapons that they possess and use. The occupation of the whole space, which only devotees and converts can share, is very well illustrated by the myth of Vāmana/Trivikrama, who not only circumscribes and controls the entire universe with his three strides, but does it in warlike setup. An apparently early version of the story of Vāmana and Bali, is reported in the *Vāyu Purāṇa*:

²¹⁶ Ibid.: III.18.13-20 (vol. 1, p. 490).

The noble-minded Bali who was a great Yogin was bound (by Vāmana). He took birth in the human womb, being desirous of children, as the family was nearing extinction due to absence of issues. He begot sons who established the disciplines of four castes on this earth. He procreated the sons Aṅga, Vaṅga, Sulha, Puṅdra and Kaliṅga. These are called Bāleya Kṣatras [...]. That lord had Brāhmaṇa sons also called Bāleya Brāhmaṇas. They established the line (of Bali). Many boons were granted to the intelligent Bali by the delighted Brahmā. The boons granted were *Mahāyogitva* [...], longevity of life lasting for a Kalpa, invincibility in war, great inclination towards righteousness and piety, the vision of the three worlds, importance among his descendants, unrivalled state in strength as the ability to see the true principles of Dharma. “You will establish the [...] four castes” — on being thus told by the lord, king Bali attained great peace (of mind).²¹⁷

What then had Bali done to become an *asura* king causing the wrath of Vāmana? The events familiar to us are report-ed in another passage.²¹⁸ Vāmana addresses Bali while he is performing a *yajña*, but unlike Narasiṃha — the Dwarf has nothing to do with the *vāma* aspect of the God — he does not kill Bali and his son, but “[s]eizing the royal glory of Asuras from all the three worlds, he forced them to retreat to the bottom of the nether-world along with their sons and grandsons”.²¹⁹ The names of Bali’s sons give us a clue, because they correspond to as many countries of eastern India as are those where unorthodox rule prevailed.²²⁰ Bali and his sons are identified with the Kṣatriya rulers who have supported the heretics and have not played their role of righteous sovereigns and guarantors of *varṇāśramadharmā*. This is why they have be-

²¹⁷ *Vāyu Purāna*: II.37.26-32 (vol. 2, p. 792).

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*: II.36.72 ff. (vol. 2, pp. 785 ff.). It is perhaps an interpolated passage, where the number of the *avatāras* is said to be ten, but no mention is made of the first and ninth.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*: II.36.80 (vol. 2, p. 785).

²²⁰ The *Viṣṇu Purāna*: XVIII.1 (vol. 2, p. 621) gives a similar, though not identical list of geographical names.

come *daityas*, enemies of the gods/brāhmaṇas: hence Vāmana's punishment.

Iconographies may tell us much more than what the patrons who commissioned them meant to communicate. Moving to the second half of the sixth century, and to a region that played a major role in establishing a firm Brahmanical rule in the Deccan and all over India in continuity with Gupta policy, we see the story of Bali depicted twice in the rock-cut caves of Badami (Vātāpī), the early Cāḷukya capital.²²¹ They were executed thanks to the patronage of Kīrtivarman I (AD 566-97). In Cave 2, the king of the *asuras* is standing below the gigantic image of Trivikrama while he is offering the *arghya* water to the Dwarf, whom he has recognised as a venerable person (Fig. 2). Bali is shown with clipped hair, long ears and a dress reminiscent of the monastic robe, and Vāmana has mockingly made his own some of the Buddha's *lakṣaṇas* so as to be mistaken for the Awakened One. Viṣṇu, coherently with the textual evidence, represents the whole reality, including heresy.²²² In the panel of Cave 3, the largest at Badami, the identification of the king of the *asuras* with a Buddhist ruler is even more evident because he has an *uṣṇīṣa*. A crowned *asura* and his consort accompany him, and above him, there is another demon falling to the ground, defeated by Viṣṇu. Aschwin Lippe, to whom we owe a detailed analysis of the scene,²²³ realised that the relief symbolises the triumph of Brahmanism over the Buddhists. However, he accepted R.D. Banerji's identification of Bali with the Buddha, which is proved wrong by the fact that the Dwarf, as a deluder, omi-

²²¹ For the Brahmanical caves at Badami, see Burgess (1874:15–25); R.D. Banerji (1928); Soundara Rajan (1981: 47–72).

²²² I interpret the material discussed by O'Flaherty (e.g. 1971: esp. 297 ff.) in this perspective, and I refer the reader to Chapter IV for an attempt at transposing this point on the historical level. O'Flaherty (1980) again discusses the question at length, but here the use of terms such as "evil", "sin", and even "fall of man" leads us to a dimension alien to the present discussion, and somewhat questionable in itself.

²²³ Lippe (1972: 282-83); also, id. (1969-70: 8).



Fig. 2 - Badami, Cave 2. Vāmana and Bali from Trivikrama panel.

nously shows some of the *lakṣaṇas* of the Awakened One. Bali is, rather, one of his followers and supporters, portrayed with the Buddha's features in order to be easily recognised as a king of an adharmic kingdom.²²⁴

In Cave 3, the inscription of Kīrtivarman's brother Maṅgaleśa, dated AD 578, helps us to circumscribe the events narrated in the reliefs. The recent conflict must have been considered very important for the iconographical programme of Caves 2 and 3 to be conceived by the brāhmaṇa advisors of either Kīrtivarman or Maṅgaleśa because the latter, who was charged with completing the cave, expressly mentions Viṣṇu

²²⁴ Lippe recalls a relief at Ranjim where "the Brāhmin dwarf Vāmana is shown with *samghati*, curled hair and *usnisa*." (id. 1972: n. 31).

as destroyer of “the army of the enemies of the gods with his discus”.²²⁵ We know that Kīrtivarman fought successfully against a number of enemies, and Maṅgaleśa defines himself “victorious in battle”.²²⁶ The royal supporter of Buddhism alluded to in the reliefs is one of the defeated rulers. There is a Buddhist cave at Badami, and at Aihole (not far from Badami in the Malprabha Valley) there is a two-storeyed building, partly rock-cut and partly built, recognised as a Buddhist edifice.²²⁷ The defeated king identified with Bali was probably ruling locally before the rise of the Cālukyas. The changeover of this king and a complete surrender of the Buddhists is implied in the iconographies. Another Badami inscription mentions the exploits of an unknown, important dignitary named Kappe Arabhaṭṭa, defined as “an exceptional man in the Kaliyuga”, to whose evils he can put an end. He is, in fact, a very Mādhava, an equal of Viṣṇu on earth. His enemies, “saying ‘What is this to us?’ came to injure and destroy the eminence that he had achieved, [but] they were worsted, and then they died [...]”.²²⁸

We will examine in more detail in Chapter V the degree to which the identity of the *asuras* with the *śramaṇas* and their royal supporters was carried out in the Purāṇic literature. Here we will conclude with V.S. Agrawala’s remarks on the *Vāmana Purāṇa*, composed in the first half of the seventh century,²²⁹ when Harṣavardhana was holding the *tīrthikas* at bay. This Purāṇa contains a rich material on the *asuras*, and the figure of Pulastya stands out as founder of a society organised according to the principles taught by the *asuras*, as teacher of the doctrine, and as Rāvaṇa’s grandfather:

²²⁵ J.F. Fleet in Burgess (1874: 12-14); cf. also *IA* 10 (1881, id.): 57–59.

²²⁶ *IA* 3 (1874, J. Eggeling): 305–306; cf. also *IA* 10 (1881, J.F. Fleet): 57–59.

²²⁷ A.M. Annigere in Nagaraja Rao (1978: 232–33).

²²⁸ *IA* 10 (1881, J.F. Fleet): 61–62. I try here to elucidate the meaning of the first lines, unclear to J.F. Fleet.

²²⁹ V.S. Agrawala (1983: vi).

[...] the Asura — Agrawala says — is a pseudonym for the Buddhists in the mind of this Purāṇa-writer. The teachers of the moral code followed by the Asuras are said to be *Māgadhamunis*, i.e., the recluse-monks of Magadha, and the moral code which the latter preached is practically identical with the teachings of the Buddha. The *Purāṇa* writer was a personal witness to the fact that the *Dharma* contained in those instructions was quite an exalted one and powerful enough to bring about a rejuvenation of society and naturally worthy of praise.²³⁰

A LANDSCAPE WITH RUINS

Albert Henry Longhurst's sharp mind can be appreciated both as a field archaeologist and as the author of essays such as *The Story of the Stūpa*,²³¹ one of the best on the subject. Between 1927 and 1931, he carried out excavations at Nagarjunakonda on the lower Krishna Valley, of which he published the results in 1938. Longhurst was not misguided by the unfavourable intellectual climate of the 1930s, and summing up the results of his investigations, stated that

[t]he ruthless manner in which all the buildings at Nāgārjunakoṇḍa have been destroyed is simply appalling and cannot represent the work of treasure-seekers alone as so many of the pillars, statues and sculptures have been wantonly smashed to pieces. Had there been a town close at hand as at Amarāvātī, one can understand the site being used as a quarry by modern builders [...]. But this never occurred at Nāgārjunakoṇḍa as there are no towns and no cart roads in or out of the valley.²³²

²³⁰ Ibid.: viii. The appellation *Mahābhāgavatas* given to the *asuras* applies to them as followers of the Buddha, addressed as *Bhagavān* (ibid.: 50). V.S. Agrawala recognised the Buddhists not only in the *asuras* of the *Vāmana*, but of the *Viṣṇu* and *Liṅga Purāṇas* as well (ibid.: 4 and passim). He could have developed William Taylor's insights and reanalysed Rajendralala Mitra's contention regarding the story of Gayāsura, disclosing the historical aspects of Purāṇic narrations, but as one of the most distinguished representatives of the "paradigm of Independence", he could hardly say everything he knew.

²³¹ Longhurst (1936).

²³² Id. (1938: 6).

The considerations made on the archaeological techniques still insufficiently developed, even after the introduction of John Marshall's new stratigraphic method, to tackle the questions of the desertion phases in a given site also apply to Nagarjunakonda, and doubts could be raised on Longhurst's conclusions, which, in fact, have been largely invalidated by the excavations carried out in the 1950s.²³³ Some facts reported by Longhurst, such as that of the "statues and sculptures ... wantonly smashed to pieces" seem, however, of a nature that may not have been entirely misinterpreted. Longhurst, in the absence of any other explanation on hand, took a short cut resorting to a local tradition — one among many all over India — according to which

the great Hindu philosopher and teacher Śaṅkarācārya came to Nāgārjunakoṇḍa with a host of followers and destroyed the Buddhist monuments. Be this as it may, the fact remains that the cultivated lands in the valley on which the ruined buildings stand represent a religious grant made to Śaṅkara, and it was only with the sanction of the present Religious Head of the followers of this great teacher that I was able to conduct the excavations. The same Brahman Pontiff, who resides in the Nallamalais, which no doubt was acquired in the same manner, as it seems to have been a Buddhist site originally.²³⁴

Śaṅkarācārya lived in too late an epoch with respect to the reported destructions to be held responsible for them. The last artistic output at Nagarjunakonda goes back to the early

²³³ Only the upper part of the Nagarjuna Hill is visible today after the construction, in the 1960s, of a dam that caused the valley of Nagarjunakonda to be submerged by water. Some of the ancient monuments were reassembled at the end of an ambitious project the limitations of which, in today's perspective, have become evident, despite the outstanding quality of the fieldwork, matched by the drawing up of the final report of the excavations related to the historical period (Soundara Rajan 2006). The c. 130 sites partially excavated in the 1920s and 1930s were systematically investigated between 1954 and 1960, and the research project had the merit of exposing a sequence going from the Lower Palaeolithic to the middle age. Besides Soundara Rajan (2006), the reader is referred to Sarkar (1962) and Sarkar & Misra (1966).

²³⁴ Longhurst (1938: 6).

decades of the fourth century,²³⁵ and it would have been absurd for the followers of Śaṅkara to destroy monuments and images of a site long abandoned to the jungle. The monumental, iconographical, epigraphic and numismatic evidence, along with that of the material culture (they are all tightly woven at Nagarjunakonda), help to compose a multifaceted history of the town, even though the data on its decline in the fourth century — this is what interests us more — remain scanty but for the now documented evidence that after AD 300 it became increasingly difficult, and indeed impossible, to control the rise of the river level, with the ensuing consequences on the town's life.²³⁶

The Ikṣvākus, stemming perhaps from the famous Ayo-dhyā lineage,²³⁷ replaced locally the Sātavāhanas in the early third century AD. Their capital town, Vijayapurī, which included a citadel built on the right bank of the Krishna, was at the centre of a complex settlement system, where a cluster of early Brahmanical temples²³⁸ and numerous Buddhist sanctuaries rose. We know the names of the Ikṣvāku rulers, among which stand out Vāśiṣṭhiputra Cāṃṭamūla (AD 220-45), Māthariputra Vīrapuruṣadatta (AD 245-70), Vāśiṣṭhiputra Ehuṅula Cāṃṭamūla (Cāṃṭamūla II, AD 270-300) and Vā-giṣṭhiputra Rudrapuruṣadatta (from AD 300 to 310 or later),²³⁹ all Sivaite and *aśvamedhin* kings, to whose patronage also the Brahmanical temples on the river bank owed their

²³⁵ Elisabeth Rosen Stone, mainly on the basis of stylistic evidence, has suggested to push forward the reign of the last known king of the Ikṣvākus, Rudrapuruṣadatta, until c. AD 325 (Rosen Stone 1994: 6–7).

²³⁶ Soundara Rajan (2006: 29 ff.; 51).

²³⁷ Sircar (1939b: 10 ff.); id. in HCIP 2: 224.

²³⁸ In connection with these temples, we have, as at Udayagiri, Śiva, Kārttikeya and, at a later stage, Viṣṇu, but the goddesses are conspicuous for their absence.

²³⁹ I follow the chronology proposed in the excavation final report (Soundara Rajan 2006: 54-55).

existence.²⁴⁰ The presence of two shrines of Kārttikeya²⁴¹ is notable, because they are a testimony of the early association of the god to Śiva, who, as Sarva (as in the Māt sanctuary), presided over the largest Brahmanical temple of the town.²⁴² The patronage of the Buddhist community was deputed to the female representatives of the dynasty, in particular to Cāmṭaśrī, sister of the first Cāmṭamūla, to whose pious patronage the *mahāstūpa* was largely due.²⁴³ Until after the mid-third century, there is an embarrassing disparity, as far as we can determine from the artistic output, between the means that the Buddhists had at their disposal and the Sivaites' share, although patronage, in the latter case, took the shape of a significant inflow of money for the brāhmaṇas on the occasion of the *aśvamedhas* and other major rituals (the *aśvamedha* site was situated within the citadel). The Ikṣvākus, though unwilling to adhere to Buddhism — an increasingly common position — had clearly to come to terms with the Buddhists, whose economic activities probably ensured to the town a

²⁴⁰ Even Cāmṭamūla I, though not ill-disposed towards the Buddhists, was an *aśvamedhin* king who also performed *vājapeya* and other Vedic rituals (Sircar 1939b: 17; id. in HCIP 2: 224), with the ensuing economic fallout in favour of the priests.

²⁴¹ Soundara Rajan (2006: 212 ff. for Site 82; 230-32 for Site 57).

²⁴² Ibid.: 209 ff.; cf. also Sarkar & Misra (1966: 24-29). In relation to this temple, Rosen Stone (1994: 12) underlines the fact that the related inscriptions are in Sanskrit, and not in Prakrit like the Buddhist inscriptions — an evidence of general order, actually (Soundara Rajan 2006: 55).

²⁴³ *EI* 20 (1929-30, J. Ph. Vogel): 19 (*āyaka*-pillar inscription B5). Cāmṭaśrī may have inspired the figure of Śrīmālā, the queen of a famous early Mahāyāna text written in the third century for a Buddhist sect of Nagarjunakonda (Rosen Stone 1994: 13-16). This text was translated from various sources by A. Wayman & H. Wayman in 1974 (*The Lion's Roar of Queen Śrīmālā: A Buddhist Scripture on the Tathāgatagarbha Theory*. Columbia University Press), and recently by Diana Y. Paul, who has underlined the importance of this *sūtra* for the Buddhist attitude towards women (D.Y. Paul 1974: 6-7). As regard patronage, we find the division of functions between the male and female members of ruling houses as late as the twelfth century (Chapter VI), and *The Lion's Roar*, representative of the Tathāgatagarbha theory, could help clarifying the role of women, guiding us into a still unexplored territory. A part of the original Sanskrit text has recently surfaced, and has been edited and translated by Kazunobu Matsuda (*Śrīmālādevīsīmaṇādanirdēśa*, in Jens Braarvig, ed., *Buddhist Manuscripts I* (Manuscripts in the Shøyen Collection 1), pp. 65-76, Oslo 2000).

large part of its income. The presence of a small amphitheatre, or, better perhaps, a stadium²⁴⁴ that recalls Roman prototypes, and the strict connection, observable in the artistic output, with north-western India,²⁴⁵ show the degree to which, as late as the first half of the third century, the productive urban elites of the lower Krishna Valley were still involved in the economy of an open world.

A clue on the events that took place at Nagarjunakonda after the end of the balanced Ikṣvāku rule is the presence of a Viṣṇu temple, once housing an eight-armed image of the God, probably built by the Ābhīra king Vaṣuṣena between AD 332 and 348²⁴⁶ downstream of the Nāgārjuna hill at a distance of about 2 km from the last in the row of the Sivaite temples built upstream by the Ikṣvākus. The Ābhīras in question were probably one of the small dynasties that rose to power after the decline of the Sātavāhanas:²⁴⁷ they are not, however, the Ābhīras mentioned in the Samudragupta's Allahabad inscription,²⁴⁸ but perhaps one of the unnamed ruling families of the Dakṣiṇāpatha to which, after the conquest, the Gupta emperor showed his favour.

The decline and end of Buddhist Nagarjunakonda is probably connected to the establishment of a stronger Brahmanical rule already at the time of the later Ikṣvāku rulers and of their successors, and later on, conjecturally, as a consequence of Samudragupta's conquests, even though that part of the Krishna Valley was already in decay when the Gupta

²⁴⁴ Soundara Rajan (2006: 107 ff.). We inevitably think of those Indians who at the beginning of the second century were listening to the oration of Dio Chrysostom in the theatre of Alexandria (see Chapter I).

²⁴⁵ Gandharan prototypes are observable in a number of reliefs, as for instance that illustrated in Rosen Stone (1994: pl. 111 and cover); the well-known guardian figure in Central Asian dress (ibid.: pl. 232) is not simply a citation, but reflects a real knowledge of that class of people.

²⁴⁶ Soundara Rajan (2006: 224 ff.). The date of this temple has been discussed by Rosen Stone (1994: 8–9, 81–82).

²⁴⁷ Sankaranarayanan (1977: 205, 208).

²⁴⁸ Chhabra & Gai (1981: II. 19-20, 22-23, pp. 213, 217).

emperor was campaigning in the South.²⁴⁹ The destruction of the Buddhist images lamented by Longhurst may have taken place either with the strengthening of Bhāgavata power, made manifest by the post-flood construction of the Aṣṭabhujasvāmī temple by the Ābhīras, or in relation to the emergence of a strong anti-*śramaṇa* movement centred on nearby Śrīparvata (modern Srisailam in Kurnool district), presided over by Śiva Mallikārjuna.²⁵⁰ The team of scholars responsible for the final report on the excavations of the historical period at Nagarjunakonda do not deny the possibility that the “resurgent Brāhmaṇical religion had its bandwagon of patrons from other parts of India to snuff out Buddhism”, without prejudice to the fact that the decay of the town depended on the “riparian model of the metropolis”, when it became impossible to face up to the destruction of the river banks due to geomorphological causes.²⁵¹

V.S. Agrawala maintained that the account of the *Matsya Purāṇa* whereby one of the sites on which the burning city of Tripura fell was the Srisailam mountain may be of a historical character,²⁵² the myth being connected with the extirpation of the *asuras*/heretics. The apparently silent fourth century AD again appears as a crucial turning point in the history of ancient India, and the Sphinx continues to give us answers less ambiguous than expected.

More clues on the real situation in Gupta times come from Kashmir, only apparently a peripheral area. Religious-political events show a trend not dissimilar from that of other parts of northern and central India and, up to the fourth century, even comparable to the situation in the lower Krishna Valley. No

²⁴⁹ Soundara Rajan (2006: 18).

²⁵⁰ On early Śrīparvata, see Sankaranarayanan (1977: esp. 205–10).

²⁵¹ Soundara Rajan (2016: 11, 63–64).

²⁵² V.S. Agrawala (1963: 286).

archaeological evidence is available in Kashmir for the period under discussion, but the written sources allow a reasonable reconstruction of the events.

At the time of the Kuṣāṇas, Kashmir “was, to a great extent, in the possession of the Bauddhas”²⁵³ and even later, arguably under the protection of the Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna,²⁵⁴ “[a]fter defeating in disputation all learned opponents, these enemies of tradition brought to an end the [observance of the rites] prescribed in the *Nīla[mata]purāṇa*”.²⁵⁵ This happened in spite of the fact that the country was ruled by an orthodox king, Abhimanyu, who favoured the introduction of the Mahābhāṣya into Kashmir.²⁵⁶ Orthodox observances were introduced, or reintroduced, by a brāhmaṇa named Candradeva who practised austerities to please Nīla, the Lord of those very *nāgas* who had first opposed the introduction of Buddhism in the valley.²⁵⁷ Nīla had caused heavy snowfalls that had endangered the land, but “the Brahmans, who offered oblations and sacrifices, escaped destruction, while the Bauddhas perished”.²⁵⁸ To Abhimanyu and Candradeva went the merit of having brought to an end “the intolerable plague of the Bhikṣus”,²⁵⁹ although it was the concern of King Gonanda III

²⁵³ *Rājataranṅinī*: I, 171.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*: I, 173.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*: I, 178.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*: I, 174-76.

²⁵⁷ Buddhism was introduced into Kashmir by Madhyāntika, a disciple of Ānanda, who, according to the oldest Chinese version of the legend, preserved in the *Ayuwang zhuān* (*Taishō* 50, 116a), found the resistance of a great *nāga*, who was eventually overcome by the supernatural power of the monk (cf. Funayama 1994: 367 and n. 1 on pp. 373-74; 369). Toru Funayama further observes that, according to Xuanzang, Kashmir was protected by *yakṣas*, and not by *nāgas*, who were often opposed to Buddhism (ibid.: n. 5 on p. 374; on *nāga* opposition to Buddhism see also N. Dutt 1939: 10-12). Funayama has proposed a reconstruction of the history of Buddhism in Kashmir comparing the evidence from the *Rājataranṅinī* and Xuanzang’s *Da Tang Xiyuji*, the relevant passages of which he has translated anew. I follow also Witzler (1994), besides resorting to the other available sources.

²⁵⁸ *Rājataranṅinī*: I, 181.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*: I, 184.

to establish a righteous government,²⁶⁰ and the concern of his great-grandson, Nara, to complete the work:

A Buddhist ascetic (*śramaṇa*) who was living alone in a Vihāra, situated in *Kimnaragrāma*, seduced the [king's] wife through magic power. In his wrath over this the king burned thousands of Vihāras, and granted the villages which had belonged to them, to Brahmans residing in *Madhyamaṭha*.²⁶¹

Thus two waves of anti-Buddhist persecutions seem to have taken place: the first, under Abhimanyu and his advisor Candradeva, who paved the way to Gonanda's orthodox rule; the second launched by Nara, arguably under Brahmanical pressure but under different circumstances. The relationship between his queen and the *śramaṇa*, maliciously interpreted by Kalhaṇa, makes us strongly suspect that the Kashmiri queens played a role similar to that of the wives and sisters of the Ikṣvākus, who guaranteed the balance of power between brāhmaṇas and *śramaṇas* by granting protection to the latter. With Nara, the balance was lost to the detriment of the Buddhists.

Gopāditya, who ruled after Nara, favoured the arrival of brāhmaṇas from Āryadeśa, "removed those who ate garlic to Bhūkṣiravātikā, and transferred the Brahmans who had broken their rule conduct to Khāsaṭā",²⁶² applying the rules established by Manu.²⁶³ We see once again that measures were taken against apostate brāhmaṇas, who must have formed the leadership of the Buddhist community of Kashmir. Gopāditya's son, Jaulaka, was a Sivaite like his father (they built the Tuñ-

²⁶⁰ Witzler (1994: 248) emphasises the fact that Gonanda recalls, with his name, the mythical founder of the Kashmiri kingdom. His would then be a re-enactment of a pristine state of virtue.

²⁶¹ *Rājatarāṅginī*: I, 199-200.

²⁶² *Ibid.*: I, 342-43.

²⁶³ Manu forbids brāhmaṇas to eat garlic, scallions, onions and mushrooms among other things (*Manu*: 5.5, p. 99). Khāsaṭā has not been identified.

geśvara Temple in Srinagar),²⁶⁴ and his instructor in the doctrines “was the saint Avadhūta, the vanquisher of crowds of Bauddha controversialists, who at that time were powerful and flushed [with success]”.²⁶⁵ Kalhaṇa adds that

[h]e was endowed with mighty courage, expelled the *Mlecchas* who oppressed the land and conquered in victorious expeditions the earth up to the encircling oceans. The place where the *Mlecchas* who occupied the land, were routed (*ujjhaṭitās*) by him, is called by the people even at the present day *Ujjhaṭaḍimba*. Having conquered the earth, including *Kanyakubja* and other [countries], he settled from that region people of all four castes in his own land, and [particularly] righteous men acquainted with legal procedures.²⁶⁶

Discounting Kalhaṇa’s eulogistic exaggerations, the passage provides evidence of the fact that the brahmanisation of Kashmir was made stronger by the arrival of experts of *dharmaśāstras* and newcomers observing *varṇāśramadharmā*. The fallout of Gupta policy is all too apparent, and we probably observe the effects of the *Arthaśāstra*. Orthodox brāhmaṇas replaced the *mlecchas* supported by the apostates: their identity is unclear, but may be identified as late or post-Kuṣāṇa rulers and elite groups. The anti-Buddhist attitude of the court of Gupta and post-Gupta Kashmir is underlined by a passage of Śyāmilaka’s *Pādatāḍitaka*, a play written in the second half of the fifth century.²⁶⁷ Buddhism was restored some time between the fifth and sixth century by a foreign king whom Xuanzang

²⁶⁴ *Rājatarāṅginī*: 2.5-14. I follow Witzler (1994: 246 ff.), who identifies Gopāditya with Pratāpāditya, making possible the identification of his son with one Jaulaka presumed to be a son of Aśoka’s.

²⁶⁵ *Rājatarāṅginī*: 1.112.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*: 1.115-17.

²⁶⁷ Cf. Witzler (1994: 250). Witzler mentions a passage ridiculing *jātaka* tales, but at the *locus citatus* (cf. n. 105 on p. 285), I am unable, in the text available to me, to find anything else than Buddhist monks being ridiculed because they delight in indifference (*Pādatāḍitaka*: 65; cf. pp. 30–31).

knows by the name of Himatala, and flourished throughout the seventh and eighth century.²⁶⁸

The evidence presented so far makes us understand better the description of Buddhist India provided by Xuanzang's travelogue and by the *Biography*. The *Da Tang Xiyuji* describes a severely wounded reality only partly softened by Xuanzang's political projects, which induced him to provide an encouraging report on the conditions of Buddhism in India. A good, concise summary of the situation depicted by the Chinese monk with an eye focused on the approaching disintegration of the Buddhist world is found in *The Decline of Buddhism in India* by R.C. Mitra, the first edition of which goes back to 1954, being thus strongly affected by the nationalist ideology of the time.²⁶⁹ We can make Mitra's words our own when he says that "from the account of the Chinese pilgrim is the spirit of depression and despair which his narrative unmistakably conveys to the mind of his readers".²⁷⁰ The matter is worth discussing again because the *Xiyuji* is usually considered a source book useful to fill the many gaps in Indian history, from chronology to social history, and more rarely a source on the conditions of the religion, and because it is possible to supplement Xuanzang's testimony with some other evidence.

Uḍḍiyāna and Gandhāra are a case in point. In Gandhāra the royal family had already become extinct and the deputies from Kapiśi governed a scarce population in deserted towns and villages. Most people followed the heretical schools and few believed in the True Law. There were one thousand *saṅgharāmas*, which had been deserted, in ruins, filled with

²⁶⁸ Funayama (1994: 369–71).

²⁶⁹ The second edition of this book (R.C. Mitra 1981), to which reference is made here, was edited by D.C. Sircar, who did not add any new material.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*: 11.

wild shrubs, and solitary to the last degree. The stūpas had mostly decayed, but the heretical temples, numbering about one hundred, were occupied pell-mell by heretics. Even the Buddha's alm-bowl, one of the relics that made the pilgrimage to the land worth undertaking, had disappeared.²⁷¹ In Uḍḍiyāna, of the fourteen hundred monasteries and eighteen thousand monks which were said to have once existed, only very few survived. The monks were followers of the Mahāyāna, but were unable to penetrate the deep meaning of the scriptures, being "specially experts in magical exorcisms".²⁷²

By the mid-sixth century, a major change had taken place in the North-West, crossed for centuries by the trade route for Khotan and China. The trans-Himalayan route remained under Buddhist control but had shifted to the west, which caused, among other things, the emergence of Bamiyan, whose monuments started being built around AD 600 thanks to the surplus accumulated by the trading activities.²⁷³ The shift to the west was the consequence of the brahmanisation of Gandhāra and the neighbouring regions and of the hostility of the local kings towards Buddhism. Huisheng, who came to Uḍḍiyāna and Gandhāra through the old Karakorum route as a member of a small group of envoys in search of *sūtras* led by Song Yun in AD 519,²⁷⁴ has left us a testimony on the cool reception, bordering on insult, which the king of Gandhāra had reserved to them:

All the people in the kingdom are Brahmins and they like to read the *sūtras*. But the king liked killing and was not a follower of the

²⁷¹ *Xiyuji* a: I (vol. I, pp. 98–99). Cf. Kuwayama (2002: 35 ff.).

²⁷² *Xiyuji* b: vol. 2, p. 226; Watters amends Beal's translation here.

²⁷³ Kuwayama (2002: esp. 153 ff.); on the monuments of Bamiyan and their date, see Klimburg-Salter (1989).

²⁷⁴ Huisheng's narrative has reached us edited by Yang Xuanzhi in the fifth volume of the *Luoyang qielan ji* (*A Record of the Buddhist Monasteries in Luoyang*) dated c. AD 547–50. See Max Deeg's discussion in *Song Yun*: 65 ff.; cf. also Kuwayama (2002: 109).

Law of the Buddha and had inflicted war on the territory of Jibin [...]. He received the imperial letter while seated, in a rude manner and without (keeping) the etiquette. He sent the envoys off to a monastery but offered very little.²⁷⁵

We have some clues about the events that took place in the region between Song Yun's mission and the years preceding Xuanzang's visit: the Buddha's bowl was still probably in its place in the 540s,²⁷⁶ and it was probably before the eighth decade of the century that the Buddhist properties were devastated. The silence of the written sources has not been adequately filled by archaeological research. In the fifth century, however, to coincide with the slackening off of Gupta hegemony, we observe a profound change in Gandharan art: stone sculpture is abandoned and figural art finds expression in clay and stucco images, whose shaping was cheaper and quick. There was an extraordinary rush to renovate sanctuaries and build new ones. It was this sudden output that came to an end in the sixth century.

What happened in Gandhāra and the surrounding regions between *c.* 550 and 580? The answer can only be indirect, but monks are likely to have departed *en masse*, and the merchant class as well. The impact, presumably heavy on the economy of Gandhāra, caused by the Plague of Justinian — the first large, well-documented epidemic of bubonic plague whose first, strongest wave affected the Mediterranean and the Red Sea from AD 540 to 594 causing the death of a considerable

²⁷⁵ *Song Yun*: 79.

²⁷⁶ Kuwayama (2002: 39–40). Kuwayama has questioned the widely accepted idea that the Hephthalites were responsible for the destruction of the Buddhist sites of Gandhāra and Uḍḍiyāna, showing that the collapse of Buddhist Gandhāra started later, to coincide with the shift westwards of the Trans-Himalayan route (*ibid.*: 41–42). To Kuwayama we also owe a thorough investigation of the historical-political situation of north-western India, Afghanistan and Tokharistan between the fifth and the ninth century based on both the Chinese sources, some of which he has translated for the first time, and of the archaeological evidence.

proportion of the population²⁷⁷ — cannot be invoked as a reason for the shifting to the west of the economic axis of North-Western India, because the distance from the former route is irrelevant from the point of view of a deadly plague of enormous proportion. If the change of the main trade route was the cause of the extraordinary flourishing of Buddhist Afghanistan and western Central Asia, for the Buddhists of India proper it was another setback. Nor can we believe that the change of economic model in Gandhāra took place without any violence: a slow, peaceful transformation would have induced the Buddhists to get used to the new circumstances and transform their economy and lifestyle, as happened elsewhere.

The figure of Mihirakula (in power from *c.* AD 513 to 542) as depicted in both Chinese and Indian sources is the object of too great uncertainties to be fully discussed here,²⁷⁸ but his favouring the relocation of Gandharan brāhmaṇas to Kashmir and establishing for them 1,000 *agrahāras*²⁷⁹ in continuity with Gupta policy is an important clue to understanding what really took place. From his coins, he appears as a Sivaite,²⁸⁰ and as incessantly engaged in the worship of Paśupati in the Gwalior inscription.²⁸¹ The most likely thing is that Mihirakula, one of those rulers devoid of any recognisable social status — be they native of India or of foreign origin — was utilised by the Pāśupatas to strengthen their power and settle in those regions where they were still weak. His anti-Buddhist attitude

²⁷⁷ The plague erupted in the port of Pelusium in the Nile delta, near Alexandria, and spread rapidly thanks to the large amount and speed of traffic by sea. On the Plague of Justinian, described by Procopius (*The Persian War*, II, 22-23), see Stathakopoulos (2004: 110 ff., 277 ff.) and Rosen (2007).

²⁷⁸ Xuanzang refers him to an impossibly early age, and probably attributes to him the deeds of other persecutors of the Law (*Xiyuji* a: IV, pp. 167–72).

²⁷⁹ *Rājatarāṅgiṇī*: I, 307.

²⁸⁰ Cf. Aurel Stein's note to *ibid.*: I, 289.

²⁸¹ Sircar (1965*b*: 424-26; cf. n. 6, p. 425) has explained the meaning of *abhāṅga*, which appears in the third line of the inscription.

was a consequence of this. Two Buddhist texts preserved in Chinese translation, the *Lianhuamian jing* (the *Lotus-face Sūtra*) and the *Da fangden dajijing* (*Sūtra of the Great Assembly of Great Doctrinal Universality*, translated in AD 566) reflect the hardships of Buddhism at the time of Mihirakula's rule,²⁸² or perhaps at a somewhat later period. It has been argued that Dao Chuo (AD 562-645), an early representative of Chinese Pure Land Buddhism, was influenced by the facts reported in these texts and by refugees who had probably entered China.²⁸³ Regarding the years 550-80, for such a destructive climate to have set in Gandhāra, the local rulers must have turned from an unsympathetic and occasionally brutal attitude towards Buddhism into a systematic hostility.

The Turkic people who established themselves in south-eastern Afghanistan in the sixth-seventh century supported Buddhism, but the Turkī Ṣāhī dynasty that rose to power in AD 666 or slightly later was increasingly subject to Brahmanical pressure. We know the Turkī Ṣāhīs as patrons of Brahmanical temples in Logar and Kapiśi, characteristically large, fertile valleys fit for agriculture.²⁸⁴ The base of the family was in Zamin Dawar, but they had already migrated to or established their rule in Gandhāra before rising into prominence.²⁸⁵ The Brahmanical temple atop the Barikot hill in Swat, erected in the seventh century,²⁸⁶ is testimony to the transformation of Uḍḍiyāna, and the presence of an even earlier Sivaite temple in Kapiśi and of still another Brahmanical temple in the Kunar Valley, just to the west of Swat, throws more light on the changes that took place in the region.²⁸⁷ The introduction

²⁸² Chappell (1980: 129–30).

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Kuwayama (2002: 222–48) has attributed the whole set of Brahmanical marble sculptures found in eastern Afghanistan to the Turkī Ṣāhīs.

²⁸⁵ Rahman (1979: 47).

²⁸⁶ Callieri (2001); Filigenzi (2001).

of *varṇāśramadharmā* and its implementation must have been pursued with particular determination, if Uḍḍiyāna came to be identified with one of the four early *pīṭhas* (*catuspīṭhas*).²⁸⁸ The surviving Buddhist community was marginalised into the upper Swat Valley and the adjoining mountainous regions.²⁸⁹ In Gandhāra, the still active monasteries remained probably confined to the edge of the plain and to the hilly regions.²⁹⁰

In the upper Ganges Valley, where Buddhism does not seem to have ever been particularly rooted, the situation, according to the pilgrim's report, was near to collapse but for few strongholds such as Jalandhara and, to a lesser degree, Mathurā. In Sthāneśvara (Thanesar), the hometown of Harṣa, there were three monasteries against some fifty temples, and in Śrughna²⁹¹ there were five monasteries and one hundred forty temples. In Madhyadeśa, Xuanzang's list becomes even more stunted: only two monasteries survived in Prayāga. In a number of cases, we should probably interpret the word "temples"

²⁸⁷ The temple at Tapa Skandar in Kapiśi, excavated by S. Kuwayama, was situated in Xuanzang's Xibiduofalaci, arguably "the town where the shrine for Svetaśvatara was" (Kuwayama 2002: 178–79). For the later temple at Chiga Sarai, see van Lohuizen-de Leeuw (1959). For a more detailed analysis of the brahmanisation of Gandhāra, the reader is referred to Verardi (2011).

²⁸⁸ Sircar (1948: 11 f.).

²⁸⁹ This process is documented by the Buddhist reliefs cut in the cliffs of the Swat River and its tributaries from the seventh century onwards (Filigenzi 1997; 2000; on Swat, see also Chapter V). The history of the north-western regions in relation to the period preceding their Islamisation is still little known, but Elverskog (2010: 45) has too hastily concluded on the "lack of Hinduisation" of north-western India, ignoring not only the role of the Turkī Šāhīs, but that of the Hindū Šāhīs, who controlled eastern Afghanistan and Gandhāra until the rise of the Ghaznavids.

²⁹⁰ An example could be Ranighat, in the hills north of Swabi. The excavation report has not yet been published but for the plates (Nishikawa 1994), though in the small attached brochure it is suggested that the site's life lasted until "the end of the Ephtalite Era" (p. 12), too vague an indication. Some of the buildings, especially in the "South-west Area", seem definitely late (Nishikawa 1994: pls. 73–76, 84); here the site acquired the aspect of a fortress (brochure, pp. 9–10). The site's name is spelt Ranigat.

²⁹¹ Corresponding to Sugh on the western Yamunā canal, north of Thanesar, commanding the passage of the river (*ASIR* 1, 1871, A. Cunningham: 291).

(*tian ci*) as small shrines, but they testify to the ramified Brahmanical control of the territory. Not everywhere were things so critical, but the pre-eminence of the Brahmanical faith was patent, the (presumably various) groups of Pāsupatas being particularly noticeable. The exceptions were Ayodhyā, where the brāhmaṇas had only ten temples and the Buddhist monks numbered three thousand; Kanauj, where, for obvious reasons, there was a balance between the different parties; and Sarnath, where Xuanzang found thirty monasteries instead of the two mentioned by Faxian. We have seen the early symptoms of Buddhist revival at Sarnath around the mid-fifth century, and a massive building activity is observable in the following two centuries.²⁹² Thanks to Harṣa's victory over Gauḍa, in Magadha and Bengal the situation was particularly favourable to Buddhism, but the unimaginable had occurred only a short time before Xuanzang's journey: Śaśānka's uprooting of the Bodhi tree²⁹³ gives the measure of the anti-Buddhist escalation wherever orthodox kings were ruling.

Xuanzang was more familiar with anti-Buddhist propaganda and persecutions than Faxian. In China, Confucian intelligentsia had continued to accuse Buddhism of undermining the imperial state. That foreign religion had brought three hundred years of confusion by denying the proper relations between father and son, prince and minister, etc.: the Confucian code of social relationships was seriously endangered.²⁹⁴ In AD 574, the Emperor Zhou Wudi issued a decree proscribing Buddhism, calling for the destruction of Buddhist temples, images and scriptures; monks and nuns had to return to the laity, and the treasures of the monasteries were

²⁹² See Appendix 2.

²⁹³ See Appendix 1 for an evaluation on Śaśānka's intervention at Bodhgayā.

²⁹⁴ These allegations, and others charging the Buddhist monks with sedition, immorality, economic liability and hypocrisy, are contained in the *Memorial Discussing Buddhism* (*Lun fojiao biao*) that Xun Ji presented to Emperor Wu of the Southern Liang dynasty (AD 502-549). See Ch'en (1964: 127, 142-44).

to be distributed to the Confucian aristocracy. Three years later, after the emperor's territorial conquests, the proscription was extended to the rest of northern China.²⁹⁵ That the religion of Dharma was in constant danger was a matter of course. If Xuanzang narrates with unusually rich details Śāśānka's exploits, it is because their symbolic gravity could not be passed over in silence and because they had been counterbalanced by the victory of Harṣavardhana, who was his trump card at the Tang court.

Buddhism was virtually extinct in central and northern Rajasthan,²⁹⁶ despite the fact that the local king was a young courageous kṣatriya who believed in the law of the Buddha,²⁹⁷ and at Ujjayinī only a few monasteries were still in existence, the king being a brāhmaṇa "well versed in heretical books".²⁹⁸ The situation was better balanced in Mālavā, controlled by Valabhī.²⁹⁹ The heretics, mostly Pāśupatas, were very numerous, and at only twenty *li* from the capital there was "the town of the Brahmins"; however, there were one hundred monasteries and two thousand monks.³⁰⁰ An interesting piece of narrative is about the public debate between a brāhmaṇa and the monk Bhadraruci, which the pilgrim projects into an undetermined past and supplements with fabled details. In this case, the proud brāhmaṇa had to confess himself conquered, and the king, reminding that "[h]e who is defeated in discussion ought to suffer death [...] prepared to have a heated plate of iron to make him sit thereon". Bhadraruci interceded for the

²⁹⁵ Ibid.: 190–92. Xuanzang was born in *c.* AD 602, a generation after these events.

²⁹⁶ Xuanzang's *Jusheluo* [*Kū-che-lo*] according to Vincent Smith (in *Xiyuji* b; vol. 2: 341–42). The identification is not certain.

²⁹⁷ *Xiyuji* a: XI (vol. 2, pp. 269–70).

²⁹⁸ Ibid.: XI (vol. 2, pp. 270–71).

²⁹⁹ Xuanzang's *Molapo* is identified with the Mālavaka province of the Valabhī kingdom (see discussion in Jain 1972: 11–12).

³⁰⁰ *Xiyuji* a: XI (vol. 2, p. 261).

brāhmaṇa, who was let free. Such, however, was his hatred for the Buddhists, that he could not refrain himself from abusing the monk and the doctrines of Mahāyāna, so that the earth opened and swallowed him.³⁰¹ We will see in the next chapter as this testimony is only one among those brought about by Xuanzang on the institutionalised debates that took place between different political and religious subjects, and how deep were the fractures within Indian society.

Xuanzang's narrative reminds us that even in Valabhī and the dependent territories, where in the sixth and seventh century we witness a spectacular revival of Buddhism and where we are fortunate enough to have an inventory of the existing monasteries,³⁰² the presence of anti-Buddhist brāhmaṇas was paramount. The policy of kings was subject to sudden changes, and shifting of patronage and occasional crackdowns were a common occurrence. In the epigraphic record, mention of elephants being routed is plenty, and for us to understand whose elephants are meant, the records are to be put in context. In the copper-plate inscriptions of the Maitraka king Dhara-sena II we read that he was “a great devotee of Śaṅkara” and that he “[h]ad even from his early age, his sword his only companion, shown marks of excessive valour by splitting open the temples of mad elephants/belonging to his enemies”,³⁰³ and we wonder what the real target was. We are in Valabhī in AD 571-72, at the time of the strong Sivaite ascendancy that we have seen to take place, with dramatic destructions, in Gandhāra, and Dharasena II was one of those early Valabhī

³⁰¹ Ibid.: pp. 263–64.

³⁰² Njammasch (2001: 200 ff.).

³⁰³ Copper-plate grant from Katapur near Mahua, dated Valabhī *saṃvat* 252 (Peterson 1895: 35–39, p. 37), where the statement is repeated thrice. The same words are found in a copper-plate from Jhara (ibid.: 30–35). Śaṅkara, “he who confers weal”, is an epithet of Śiva.

kings who greatly benefitted brāhmaṇas by granting them lands.³⁰⁴ Significantly, a few years after Harṣavardhana's death, and thus to coincide with Brahmanical revivalism, Dhruvasena III (AD 651-53) celebrated his ancestor Guhasena describing him as "a devout worshipper of Maheśvara": "ever sword in hand from his infancy, brightened the touchstone of his courage by splitting the temples of the rutting elephants of his foes", and made the word "king" true to its meaning.³⁰⁵ The implication here is that a rightful rule is based on *varṇāśramadharmā* and that it is high time to re-establish it.

At the time of Xuanzang's journey, the king of Valabhī, Dhruvapata, a relative of Harṣavardhana's, had performed *pañcavārṣika* after becoming a supporter of Buddhism,³⁰⁶ which made a king not true to his function. Dhruvasena III's reign was brief and his armed repression of Buddhism perhaps only an episode, but we observe that after him the donations of lands to Buddhist monasteries fall sharply, and then cease altogether.³⁰⁷ We will see in the next chapter that the apparently rhetorical metaphors in the above-mentioned inscription (and in many others), like that of the king who, like the sun, destroys the dense darkness in all quarters, allude to the repression of anti-Brahmanical groups and institutions.

From the history of Valabhī, we can appreciate the extent and effectiveness of Harṣa's control over the whole of northern India, where he succeeded in turning the situation to the advantage of the Buddhist cause. This also happened in Oḍra

³⁰⁴ Njammasch (2001: 279, 281). This author argues that the support given to the brāhmaṇas by the Maitraka kings between AD 525 and 590 is correlated with the difficulty of legitimising their sovereignty. The case of the Maitrakas parallels that of the Cālukyas of Badami discussed above, the difference being that the geographical position of the kingdom of Valabhī allowed Harṣa to contain, during his reign, the brahmanisation of the land.

³⁰⁵ *EI* 1 (1892, E. Hultzsch): 85-92, II. 1-6.

³⁰⁶ *Xiyuji* a: XI (vol. 2, p. 267). The Jains appropriated this king, to whom the revival of Jainism was attributed. Cf. Lévi (1996a: 219).

³⁰⁷ Njammasch (2001: 278-79).

(northern Orissa), where he favoured the ascendance of the Bhauma kings, who assured Buddhist rule for quite a long time,³⁰⁸ and in South Kośāla. Here Buddhism, says Xuanzang, supported by a kṣatriya king (probably not Mahāśivagupta Bālārjuna, as has been often maintained, but an earlier ruler)³⁰⁹ was flourishing. The memory of Nāgārjuna was hovering about. There were, in any case, a great number of heretics who lived intermixed with the population, and *deva* temples.³¹⁰

Proceeding southward, the identification of the places described by Xuanzang is not always easy,³¹¹ and we cannot always relate his narrative to the events known to us from other sources. The pilgrim spent much less time in Deccan than in northern India and in the other regions controlled by Kanauj. At Dhanyakāṭaka, in the Krishna delta, once crowded with Buddhist sites, the monasteries were “mostly deserted and ruined”, and of those preserved there were “about twenty, with 1000 or so priests”.³¹² The region had been conquered by the Cālukyas in AD 611, and a few years later the independent line of the Eastern Cālukyas had been established. The pilgrim attributes the responsibility of the deserted state of the two monasteries of Pūrvaśilā and Avaraśilā, abandoned “one hundred years” before, “to the spirit of the mountain changing

³⁰⁸ S. Tripathy (2000: 3–6).

³⁰⁹ Pāñḍuvaṃśī or Somavaṃśī kings according to S.A. Banerji (1970: 17–18). The long reign of Mahāśivagupta Bālārjuna is assigned either to the first half of the seventh century or to c. AD 725–85: see the matter discussed in A.M. Shastri (1985; 1995: esp. 144 ff.). Shastri is in favour of a late chronology, of which I am also convinced, and in this case, the identification of this king with the kṣatriya ruler of Xuanzang would be impossible. On Bālārjuna, see also below, Chapter V.

³¹⁰ *Xiyuji* a: X (vol. 2, p. 209). After Bālārjuna, South Kośāla was occupied by the Nalas (S.A. Banerji 1970: 19), an orthodox dynasty (HCIP 3: 188–90), but the picture is far from being clear (cf. for instance the confused description of the events provided by Singh Deo (1987: 158 ff.).

³¹¹ See Watters’s criticism of too many approximate identifications proposed by nineteenth-century scholars and his observations on the reliability of *juan X* and *XI* in *Xiyuji* b: vol. 2, p. 233.

³¹² *Xiyuji* a: X (vol. 2, p. 221). Beal’s identification of Dhanyakāṭaka with Dharaṅkōṭa has been disproved; cf. *Xiyuji* b: vol. 2, p. 216; Bateau (1965).

its shape, and appearing sometimes as a wolf, sometimes as a monkey, and frightening the disciples”.³¹³ This probably hints at the violent changes that had taken place in the region at about the same time that witnessed the transformation of Gandhāra. The variform spirit of the mountain seems to embody the various facets of the anti-Buddhist movements.³¹⁴ In relation to Āndhra, though not in that region but, apparently, in Kośāla, the pilgrim gives us a key for understanding the mechanisms that caused the abandonment of the monasteries by reporting what had happened in the rock-cut monastery of Brahmaragiri, very famous because it was said to be related to no less an authority than Nāgārjuna, although it had been deserted since long and the pilgrim did not visit it.³¹⁵ In Xuanzang’s rather confused story, the brāhmaṇas had their own abodes in the proximity of the monastery, and came to quarrel with the monks:

Then these wicked men consulting together, waiting for the occasion, destroyed the *saṅgharāma*, and afterwards strongly barricaded the place to keep the priests out.

From this time no priests of Buddha have lived there. Looking at the mountain caves [...] from a distance, it is impossible to find the way into them [...].³¹⁶

³¹³ *Xiyuji* a: X (vol. 2, p. 223).

³¹⁴ Robert Sewell argued that the once Buddhist caves of Undavalli were probably appropriated by the brāhmaṇas, observing that “[i]n the Undavilli group the *Asuras* are represented as in actual conflict with the gods. The *Asuras* are raising their clubs and advancing to the attack, one of them especially eyeing the newly-created Brahma with open hostility depicted in his glance no less than in his attitude. [...] we found that the Brahmins at Undavilli, of an age subsequent to that of the original stone sculptors, had partially bricked up the group of *Asuras*, so that their weapons were concealed. This piece of brick-work can be accounted for on no other assumption than that they desired to conceal to a certain extent the bold hostility of the demon figures [...]. They thought the antagonism too marked and tried to hide it” (Sewell 1878: 21). See the Undavalli caves described by Soundara Rajan (1981: 261 ff.).

³¹⁵ On this monastery, see Beal’s notes 80 and 81 to Xuanzang’s text (*Xiyuji* a: X (vol. 2, pp. 214–15)).

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 216–17.

In the Cōḷa country, difficult to demarcate with accuracy since it is improbably described as being “deserted and wild, a succession of marshes and jungles”, the monasteries were “ruined and dirty as well as the priests” — a possible reference to householder monks — and the local population was attached “to heretical teaching”, the Nirgrantha heretics being particularly numerous.³¹⁷ They were equally numerous in Malakūṭa, which Xuanzang probably did not visit:³¹⁸ there were, in fact, “the ruins of many old convents”, of which only the walls were preserved, and “few religious followers” were left.³¹⁹

Lower Deccan, with the exception of Kāñcī, where, despite the presence of many *nirgranthas*, there were “some hundred of *saṅghāramas* and 10,000 priests”,³²⁰ was lost for the faith. Xuanzang’s journey after leaving South Kośala and, according to the *Biography*, after a sojourn of several months in Dhānyakaṭaka, where the Mahāyāna flourished,³²¹ must have been a nightmare that convinced him to trace his steps back to upper Deccan and north-western India. The situation of Buddhism in the South was not only critical but had come near to collapse in places, as had happened in the North-West. In Kāñcī, the most important centre of Tamil Buddhism, the majority of the monks had become Mahāyānists in the fifth century,³²² clearly in the attempt at finding new means to counteract Brahmanical revivalism, and several of them had left

³¹⁷ Ibid., vol. 2, p. 227. According to Vincent Smith (in *Xiyuji* b: vol. 2, 341), Xuanzang’s Cōḷa country broadly corresponded to the Kadapa (Cuddapah) district in southern Andhra Pradesh.

³¹⁸ Cf. Watters in *Xiyuji* b: vol. 2, p. 229.

³¹⁹ *Xiyuji* a: X (vol. 2, p. 231).

³²⁰ Ibid. (vol. 2, p. 229).

³²¹ *Life*: IV (p. 137).

³²² Hikosaka (1989: 21–26).

the country.³²³ The Pallavas had started claiming Bhāradvāja descent,³²⁴ and their first known ruler, Śiva Skandavarman, had performed *aśvamedha*.³²⁵ The struggle for power against the Kalabhras, who supported the *śramaṇas*,³²⁶ meant the strengthening of their religious identity. Hence the “aura of menace” that southern India was to assume in medieval Buddhist mythology: demonesses were ready to seize Buddhist monks and merchants, and blood-drinking kings were ready to sacrifice travellers to angry goddesses.³²⁷ In the following chapters we will see how the menace was brought to effect in central Deccan and in the Vindhya, but the fact remains true that it was the South that embodied at best the policy of the Guptas, which was re-exported from there in the North.

In the first half of the seventh century, the survival of Buddhism as a religious and social system capable of upturning the fundamentals of Indian society was in the hands of Harṣavardhana. Huili, the author of the *Biography*, attributes a prophetic dream to Xuanzang during his stay in Nālandā: the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī appeared to him at night in the deserted monastery where he lived, and

pointing to the outside of the convent, he said: “Do you see that?” The Master of the Law looking in the direction indicated by his finger, saw a fierce fire burning without the convent, and consuming to ashes villages and towns. Then the golden figure said: “You

³²³ Hikosaka argues that they were attracted by Gupta patronage; they, rather, went to northern India during the period of Buddhist revival after the mid-fifth century, when the situation in the south started changing. Bodhidharma (on which see below, Chapter V) went as far as China, where he landed before AD 478; Dharmagupta went to China in the sixth century (*ibid.*: 30 ff.), etc.

³²⁴ Fleet (1896: 316); Sircar (1939*b*: 155); Sastri, K.A. Nilakantha (1966: 102).

³²⁵ Sircar (1939*b*: 154).

³²⁶ Rao, T.N. Vasudeva (1979: v-vii, 175–77). On the religion of the Kalabhras, seen from the perspective of a mature Brahmanical system and through the eyes of the *Periya Purāṇam*, see Arunachalam (1979: 46 ff.).

³²⁷ Davidson (2005: 29).

should return soon, for after ten year Śilāditya rāja will be dead, and India be laid waste and in rebellion, wicked men will slaughter one another; remember these words of mine!”³²⁸

The chaos that followed Harṣavardhana’s death, so critical that even China was affected by it to a degree,³²⁹ had serious consequences on the fortunes of Buddhism. The enthusiastic rulers who had supported it were swept away by the orthodox powers. The “impenetrable gloom” surrounding Kanauj,³³⁰ Harṣavardhana’s capital, until Yaśovarman occupied the throne some time about, or more probably some time before, AD 725³³¹ bears out Huili’s statement. According to the Korean pilgrim Hyecho (Hui Chao), who arrived in Bengal by sea in c. AD 724 and proceeded to Madhyadeśa, “the country of Varanasi” was “desolate” and there was no king.³³²

Buddhism remained strong in north-eastern India and, for a short period, in the Hindukush, but in the rest of the country it was marginalised in scattered pockets. The evidence points to an increasing religious hatred and the progressive setting up of a totalitarian vision of history. The situation became serious especially in those regions like Orissa that were on the fault line between the North-East and an almost entirely brahmanised South. A long period followed which, echoing James Fergusson, is not pleasant to contemplate.

³²⁸ *Life*: IV (p. 155).

³²⁹ It is at this point in history that the episode of Wang Xuanze took place.

³³⁰ If we give credit to the late Deogarh inscription, which is perhaps a copy of an early text (HCIP 3: 128).

³³¹ Tripathi (1964: 196-97) suggests for this ruler the dates c. AD 725-52, and Thaplyal (1985: 79-80) suggests AD 720 as the date of his accession. Kuwayama (2002: 269-70), on the basis of Hui Chao’s account, has established that Yaśovarman “came to the throne in some year between 691/2 and 717, or more properly, in a year quite close to 717”.

³³² *Hui Chao*: 3 (p. 39).

CHAPTER IV

A Period Which is Not Pleasant to Contemplate

PRELIMINARY

The long period of hardships that Buddhism experienced from the mid-seventh century onwards was the result of the unrelenting effort of both the *vaidika* and theistic *brāhmaṇas* to prevent undesired social sectors from holding power or from sharing it in the regions where they were settling in increasing number and with growing determination. The social sectors representing themselves as Buddhist were incorporated, step by step and through the frequent use of violence, into the Brahmanical model of society. Only later the Vajrayāna supplied a theoretical framework where the innovations introduced by the Mahāyāna and the practices followed by the *saṃghas* that had compromised with the Brahmanical model of society reached a balance point. In addition, the third *yāna* opened with great determination towards the “tribals” and the out-castes, pursuing the model of a non-*varṇa* state.

To frame the discussion that follows in a broader perspective, I should enter the debate on Indian feudalism, but I hesitate to do so because, while appreciating the results of decades of research, it is difficult for me to accept a historiographical approach based on a phenomenon — European feudalism — whose very existence is, in many aspects, even disputed. In Europe, the concepts of vassalage and fief are

largely the work of scholars-ideologues who, from the sixteenth century onwards, have given an inaccurate interpretation of the social relationships based on customs, court judgments and imperial constitutions contained in the *Libri feudorum*. Composed in Lombardy between the twelfth and the early thirteenth century, they were integrated into the *Corpus iuris*, and had only vague connections with the law applied in the courts of the alleged feudal kingdoms of early medieval Europe, whose received history appears to be, as has been maintained, a pseudo-history.¹

In the nineteenth century, the extraordinary historiographical success of the construct “Feudalism” was not so much due to the long wave of the Enlightenment or to the Romantik but, rather, to the fact that Marxism, instead of dismantling the construct with the acuity and mercilessness that one could have expected, made it a necessary stage in the development of human history. The century that is behind us has witnessed not only the work of the great medievalists of the *Ecole des Annales*, but that of the influential Soviet historians, who have often stiffened Marx’s considerations on the matter into generalising schemes. Indian historians moved their footsteps from Soviet Marxism (the back and forth of politicians and intellectuals between New Delhi and Moscow went on for decades), though not without distinctions, if only because of the unresolved, and unsolvable, question of the “Asiatic mode of production”.² In India, the way the issue of “Indian feudalism” has been rethought after Independence,

¹ This is, in a nutshell, the thesis of the extremely analytic work of Susan Reynolds (2004). Reynolds does not discuss the Marxist, manorial feudalism that fuels the Indian debate, but warns against the too many models of feudalism used by Marxist scholars for the sake of comparison. They either are elaborations of models created in sixteenth-century France or include aspects of the phenomenon that are superficial or irrelevant from a Marxist point of view.

² On this much debated question, I limit myself to refer the reader to Sofri (1974) and to Bailey & Llobera (1981).

thanks to the pioneering work of such a historian as D.D. Kosambi, appears for many aspects a Marxist matrix attempt to normalise the history of India of the centuries preceding the advent of Islam. This attempt has the merit, among several others, of putting in the corner all sort of spiritualist and pseudo-historical gibberish, but in channelling Indian history into the developmental trends that affect, or should affect, much of world history, tends to make the longest leg jump and does not answer to what seems to me the most important question: who did what, exactly, and how?

The issue of a feudal India has been debated among Indian historians with renewed interest from the 1980s onwards, and opinions remain mixed.³ In the Gupta and post-Gupta period no form of feudalism is observable; there was, rather, an exchange between the king, guardian of the *varṇa* system, and the *brāhmaṇas* who, rewarded with lands, supported his authority and rights.⁴ The point is that in many cases, and as late as the time of the Senas, the kings themselves were *brāhmaṇas* performing the duty of *kṣatriyas*, at least in the case of major dynasties and when the establishment of the desired social order proved difficult. This would show that the setting up of a “feudal” hierarchy was not so much a matter regarding the relationships between the centre (an independent royal court) and local rulers and landlords in the periphery, but between Brahmanical *gotras* as a whole and the tax and rent-paying peasants. In the case of the local chiefs who were integrated into the *varṇa* system, the *brāhmaṇas*’ dual role of intellectuals/administrators and priests was instrumental in determining their policy. Wherever the control over society was exercised through a network of temples, the rulers were figureheads

³ See, for instance, the contributions edited by D.N. Jha (1987; 2000; see, in the latter work, Jha’s introduction, pp. 1–58) and Mukhia (1999). It was Harbans Mukhia who reignited the discussion on Indian feudalism in the late 1970s.

⁴ Willis (2009: esp. 161–63).

with little real power or authority outside of what was ceded to them by the temple priests.⁵ Focusing on Kerala, M.G.S. Narayanan has recognised the existence of “a bold and visible Brahman oligarchy, thinly disguised as a monarchy to satisfy the sentiments of the lawgivers of India”,⁶ a statement that has much weight and is worth developing. The settlement model, implemented by the Guptas, was exported and adapted wherever the brāhmaṇas would put down roots. The Brahmanical revivalism of early medieval South India, crucial for the destiny of the whole subcontinent,⁷ was the work of settlers imbued with the ideology prevalent in fourth-fifth century northern India who had moved to the coastal plains of southern Deccan.

In this perspective, it is also difficult for me to accept the attempts at adapting the model of segmentary state proposed by Burton Stein for Tamiḷakam⁸ to other Indian regions, or subscribe to the existence of the *sāmanta* feudalism. The latter mimics a system of relations — that between a small military elite and a large mass of subject peasantry — that has no real counterpart in India in the course of the crucial centuries going from the death of Harṣavardhana to the advent of Islam. I share the observations made long ago by D.C. Sircar, who observed that but for a few examples, there are no charters recording grants or land to people of the warrior class, and there is no mention of obligations of the feudal type.⁹

⁵ In Kerala, for instance; see Davis (2004: 35–36), with references.

⁶ Narayanan (2002: 116).

⁷ D.C. Sircar (1983*a*), providing examples of brāhmaṇa settlers in the north-eastern regions under south Indian rulers, observed that the impact of the phenomenon would require careful consideration, but we still lack a comprehensive study on the matter.

⁸ Stein (1969; 1980). Stein’s model has been vigorously criticised by many Indian historians (see e.g. Narayanan 1988 and Veluthat 1993).

⁹ Sircar (1966: 58). For Sircar, the contrary evidence provided by Yadava (1966) was not sufficient to support the construct of a political structure equalled, in the twelfth century, to “a network of vassal and suzerain relationship” (Sircar 1966: 84). On the *sāmantas* as rulers of little kingdoms, see S. Bhattacharya (1988, with reference to Bengal).

The above constructs end up masking the identity of the real protagonists of Indian medieval history. To readdress the issue, we need to identify with clarity the forces in the field, trying to wipe away the foggy atmosphere that mystifies the logic of events.

The structural change that affected India with the strengthening of the agrarian society and the deteriorating of the proto-capitalist economy of the Buddhists that maximised the profits of trade is linked to the great sixth-century crisis in the Mediterranean and the Near East. The structural weakening of the West caused by the Plague of Justinian has been associated, in the West, with the ease with which the Muslims arrived quickly, almost without striking a blow, as far as the Maghreb:¹⁰ they operated in a region fallen short of human resources. The setback must have been serious also in the sub-continent, as shown by Xuanzang's travelogue, though not for everybody. The orthodox not only had nothing to lose from the general collapse of trade, but had everything to gain instead. The agrarian model that identified them at the social level, brought to perfection through centuries of experience, compensated for the losses in macro-economical terms.

If any signs of change appear between the centre and the periphery, they are all to the advantage of the brāhmaṇas. If *ghaṭikā* is an abbreviation of *ghaṭikāsthāna*, "custom house"¹¹ — this interpretation gains strength from the term being found for the first time in the *Arthaśāstra*, a Gupta work — the early prohibition for *bhaṭṭas* and *cāṭṭas* to enter the lands granted to brāhmaṇas points to some kind of exemption in addition to the known immunities. The *bhaṭṭas* and *cāṭṭas* were in charge of

¹⁰ Rosen (2007: 3, 320–21). McNeill (1998: 137) thought that the bubonic plague might have originated either in Africa or north-eastern India, but western Africa is now being recognised as having been at the origin of the infection (Rosen 2007: 195–96).

¹¹ Tieken & Sato (2000).

the *ghaṭikāsthānas*, and the expression *achātabhaṭapṛāvesya* is very frequently found in land grants, an early example being the royal charter of the Parivrājaka King Hastin, who began his rule in AD 475.¹² Much remains to be investigated here. In a Kadamba inscription of AD 450, only *bhaṭtas* are mentioned and not *cāṭtas*.¹³ This may suggest a rapid evolution of the institution, whose members, in the eighth century but possibly also before in places, not only had a role in the choice of rulers, but were also the performers of the *rājasūya*.¹⁴ Granting lands with immunity from the entry of *cāṭtas* and *bhaṭtas* became the rule, and this means that an ever-growing number of lands did not contribute to the state coffers.

It is often repeated that the cause that brought about the decline of Buddhism was the shifting of patronage, but this is, rather, an effect of the situation as it developed in the early middle age. The rulers were less and less free to dispose of their will and means, patronage becoming an independent variable in the hands of the *tīrthikas*. In the myth of Vāmana and Bali, Viṣṇu says flatly that once the Brahmanical rites are established, there should be no share to the *asuras*.¹⁵ The speech, addressed by Bhīṣma to Yudhiṣṭhira in the Anuśāsana Parvan of the Mahābhārata, would deserve a long comment: the king is not only invited to give the brāhmaṇas whatever they ask, but he is warned that “[w]hen angry they are like snakes of virulent poison”.¹⁶ The king should regard the brāhmaṇas “as fire covered with ashes”; blazing with penances, “they are capable of consuming the whole earth”.¹⁷ This is exactly what

¹² R.B. Pandey in *EI* 28 (1949-50): 264–67, l. 13 and p. 265. The Parivrājaka *mahārājas* controlled the territories of the Rewa-Satna region.

¹³ *EC* 4 (1898, Mysore Inscr. 2; B.L. Rice): 84–85, 136.

¹⁴ Hudson & Case (2008: 69–70). On *ghaṭikās* see also below in this chapter.

¹⁵ *Vāmana Purāna*: 10.81 (p. 162).

¹⁶ *Mahābhārata*, Anuśāsana Parvan: section LIX (vol. 11, p. 63).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*: section LX (vol. 11, p. 64).

happened to their adversaries, and the kings knew it. Outside the literary realm, the crucial concept of the superiority of the first *varṇa* was developed with the utmost rigour by Kumārila Bhaṭṭa, one of the greatest opponents of Buddhism.

Violence played a major role in progressively preventing the trading class and the mid-lower and lower social groups from continuing to resort to Buddhism as to a hegemonic force. If the process of brahmanisation was slow — the situations greatly varied in the different parts of India — it was so because some of these groups obstinately resisted their expulsion from the social and political scene, and their opposition was difficult to put down. Moreover, the outlying, clan-based, non-agricultural communities that the brāhmaṇas intended to integrate into the *varṇa* system were not prone to surrender in a number of cases. This was particularly true in the upper Deccan and eastern India, where a part of the Buddhists, undergoing a profound transformation, not only remained faithful to their stand against the *varṇa* society, but radicalised their positions.

In a large part of the country, Buddhism ceased early enough to constitute a threat to Brahmanical social order. Going through the *Biography on the Eminent Monks Who Went in Search of the Law in the Western Countries During the Great Tang Dynasty* written by Yijing at the end of the seventh century, it appears that the Chinese and Korean monks who came to India mostly sojourned at Bodhgayā, Nālandā, and in other monasteries of south Bihar.¹⁸ North of the Ganges, they mainly sojourned in the Monastery of the Great Faith (*Xīnzhési*)¹⁹ in the kingdom of Anmaluoba, identified with

¹⁸ There were monasteries “everywhere” in the region (cf. *Eminent Monks* b: 49).

¹⁹ See *ibid.*: e.g. 11, 27, 40. Lahiri is not consistent in rendering the name of this monastery throughout his translation. Chavannes (*Eminent Monks* a: passim) has always Sin-tché, but we cannot follow him as regards the identification of the country where it was located (cf. n. 4 on pp. 18–19).

Vaiśālī, ruled by a Licchavi king.²⁰ Some monks visited Kuśīnagara and some other holy places outside Bihar,²¹ but only a few ventured into north-western and western India and into the Deccan. We note an eastward shift of the Buddhist oecumene, a phenomenon that we shall examine again in a later chapter: in eastern India, open to South-East Asia and China, as well as to Tibet, it was possible to recreate the trading society that in the west and south had suffered a severe blow. Now many foreign monks arrived from East Asia by sea and not by land, and many travelled to Lañkā without even touching India. Nevertheless, in Magadha Buddhism had succeeded in creating an impassable monastic network: “[e]verywhere there were monasteries”, says Yijing,²² and in fact, Ādityasena of the Later Guptas, an *aśvamedhin* king,²³ had to comply and had a monastery built at Bodhgayā.²⁴ In the years 670s-680s, there was a very large number of monks residing at Nālandā,²⁵ and the emergence of Pāla power in the eighth century would reinforce Buddhism. In particular, Pāla expansionism was instrumental in the strengthening and spreading of the Vajrayāna, which affected all the existing forms of the religion.

Even where Buddhism structured itself in such a way as to be compatible with Brahmanical principles, it remained a symbol for all anti-Brahmanical identities, and symbols, we constantly learn from history, must be destroyed. There is more than that, however. Starting from the eighth century, and more so in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the Buddhists were perceived as joining forces with the Muslims. The or-

²⁰ Cf. *Eminent Monks* c: 26–27. Thanks are due to Minoru Inaba for providing me with this information.

²¹ For Kuśīnagara, see *Eminent Monks* b: 42, 82.

²² *Ibid.*: 49.

²³ HCIP 3: 127; B.P. Sinha (1954: 285) has emphasised the role played by Ādityasena as king of Magadha.

²⁴ *Eminent Monks* b: 48–49.

²⁵ *Yijing*: XXXII (p. 154).

thodox were faced with an explosive mixture of loss of political power caused by the Islamic conquest and of radical anti-caste positions adopted by the Vajrayānists. This thwarted their centuries-long effort to establish full control over society. To eliminate Muslim power was impossible, but getting rid of the Buddhists and leaving the outcastes without political representation was feasible, and this is what happened. The most crucial facts took place in northern India, but what remained of the Buddhist elites in the rest of the country was equally beheaded.

Not considering the explanations provided by the most indulgent forms of Orientalism, the poor understanding of the long crisis and final collapse of Indian Buddhism depends on the tendency of projecting into early medieval and medieval India the hegemony over society that in actual reality the brāhmaṇas acquired very slowly and with great difficulty. The establishment of the “state society”, as has become customary to call it, was a long, difficult process. Even in South India, the brāhmaṇas did not dominate society until a relatively late period. There was, in fact, a large number of peasant settlements of non-brāhmaṇas, individual landowners, military lords and old locality chiefs.²⁶ The new agrarian order was imposed, as documented by several copper-plate records and stone inscriptions, by either subjecting the pre-existing peasantry or replacing them by new peasant settlers,²⁷ and it would be naïve to believe that this happened without conflict. The new order was based on a more efficient management of landed-property and was provided with an ad hoc ideology.²⁸ It inevitably entailed the suppression of the Buddhists and Jains or the restructuring of their institutions. What took place from

²⁶ Veluthat (1993: 17–18 and *passim*).

²⁷ *Ibid.*: 15 and especially 222 ff., where Veluthat questions Burton Stein’s paradigm. See also below in this chapter.

²⁸ Cf. *ibid.*: 201.

the mid-seventh century onwards was an extremely serious and long conflict, if progressively limited to the regions where the Buddhists showed themselves capable of hegemonising the strong resistance of the threatened natives and the have-nots. “*Varṇa* state society” would be a better expression than “state society”. The latter expression ultimately implies that only one model of state and society was proposed in India, and this does not correspond to the dynamics of the Indian middle age. Brahmanism and caste system, rather than “feudalism” are a better guidance to understanding the process by which the hierarchic structure of Indian society was held together, with some classes producing use value and some other classes appropriating and distributing the surplus among themselves. This is the reason why I prefer to draw attention on the slow but relentless acquisition of power by the brāhmaṇas, regardless of the nature of the “feudal” relationship between a “centre” and a “periphery”.

It would be both difficult and misleading to present the evidence in chronological order, not so much because the chronology of individual facts is, at times, uncertain, but because the logic of events is better understood if separate sets of evidence are examined. Within each set, facts repeat themselves with striking regularity, which betrays the slowness of Brahmanical normalisation and the presence of a permanently unsolved social question.

The evidence comes from written and archaeological sources, as well as by the subtle testimony of iconography. Literary sources are often plain-spoken, and there are plenty of them in the south: the difference between the majority of Sanskrit Purāṇas and such a work as the *Periya Purāṇam* (a poem on the lives of the Nāyanmār resorting to a narrative

technique close to that employed in the hagiographic accounts of Christian saints), is very great. There are also a number of chronicles and tales reporting facts lacking Rankean status and resorting to stratified literary clichés. Their distance in time and space, and their being written in different languages is not, *per se*, a reason to consider them independent one from the other and relating to separate events. They are the work of literate brāhmaṇas who, though settled in different parts of India, were bound together not only by the bonds of caste and faith but by what could be called the perception of forming a nation, if we attribute to this term one of its pre-modern meanings. It is not that easy to question their fundamental veracity, even when they resort to repetitive *tópoi*, supernatural intervention, etc. They often contain informative details, and their repetitiveness betrays, once again, the existence of unsolved problems dragging on for centuries.

Regarding the hagiographic material, we still lack a clear picture, not to speak of easily available editions and translations; in particular, we still lack a methodology in dealing with them, especially as regards the possibility of seeing through the grain a series of stratified events. To make my point clear, I will take an example from the Tamil literature, which lies on relatively firmer grounds. It regards the chain of the developing hagiographic tradition on the Nāyaṇmār. In the first place, we have the material contained in the *Tēvāram* hymns, then Cuntaramūrti Nāyaṇār's *Tiruttoṅṭar Tokai* (*The Roll of the Holy Servants [of Śiva]*), which gives a short account of their lives (Cuntaramūrti is the sixty-third Nāyaṇār). This work is the primary source of Nampi Aṅṭār Nampi's *Tiruttoṅṭar Tiruvantāti* (*The Holy antāti of the Holy Servants*), composed between AD 870 and 1118. Finally, we have Cēkkiḷār's *Periya Purāṇam*, written in the second quarter

of the twelfth century.²⁹ If we had at our disposal only Cēkkiḷār's work, we would be inclined to believe that the events narrated in the *Periya Purāṇam* are the result of a late discourse, but it is not so, despite the fact that "Cēkkiḷār is entirely incorporated into the *Tēvāram* and nobody after him has been able to read it except through him".³⁰ The hymns written by the first three Nāyaṇmār, which seem to have been chanted in temples as early as the second half of the ninth century,³¹ show that they were instrumental in the suppression of the *śramaṇas*. So steep is, in fact, the relationship between the *Tēvāram* hymns and the *sthalas*, of which they give a sort of inventory, that "[t]he sense of the earth appropriated in the service of Śiva" may be considered a structural feature.³² We face here the modalities of Brahmanical settlement, which, as already said, implied violence. Considering these facts, we must be cautious in rejecting *all* the traditions regarding Śaṅkara and the other opponents of the Buddhists, or in considering them a mirror of exclusively late events and constructs, as is now often maintained. A balanced evaluation of the relevant material is, I think, necessary if we do not want simply to overturn the positions of nineteenth-century scholars,³³ often inclined to trust the hagiographic material *ad litteram*.

Things are easier with the epigraphic sources, after their exuberance is thinned and their metaphors and allegories are unveiled (this is often far from simple, but can be done to an extent): fortunately for us, many of them are dated or datable. Archaeological sources in a proper sense are rare: the Indian

²⁹ McGlashan (2009: 293–94). The *antāti* is a particular kind of verse. The date of the *Tēvāram* and of the early Nāyaṇmār has been the object of much discussion, and for a balanced assessment of the question I refer the reader to the sophisticated contribution of Gros (1984).

³⁰ *Ibid.*: xliii.

³¹ For all that we know: cf. *ibid.* viii/xl.

³² Cf. *ibid.*: lvii–lviii.

³³ This has been, to make an example, the position of David N. Lorenzen (1978: 65).

middle age is an archaeological blank. However, they are supplemented by the analysis of monuments, an extremely rewarding study matching the importance of iconographical analysis. The transformations to which monuments have been subject through time is revealing, little studied details (they are plenty) often being crucial.

THE LOGICIANS AND THE RIFT IN THE *BRĀHMAṆAVARṆA*

Chapter III closed with the death of Harṣavardhana, though not in compliance with the thesis that his reign constituted the last stage of India's classical age. We have rather emphasised the deep discontinuity that exists between his policy and that of the Guptas, and if his death marked the end of an epoch, it was so because it meant the impossibility for any Buddhist power or institution to be established without some form of Brahmanical control, with the exception of north-eastern India.

It seems appropriate to resume the discussion where it was left by past scholars and take up old issues fallen into oblivion. We can better assess the traditions associated with Kumāriḷa Bhaṭṭa and be more accurate than the nineteenth-century scholars who first quoted the texts that provide evidence of the qualitative leap that the most important exponent of the *Pūrvamīmāṃsā* is said to have caused anti-Buddhist positions to make. To this end, it is necessary to reconsider the nature and impact of the doctrinal controversies that for centuries were a crucial test for the affirmation of one system over another. The subject is familiar to the students of philosophy, especially to epistemologists, but the historical dynamics of the public debates that frequently took place in appointed places have not thus far been highlighted. Historians have considered the question extraneous to their interests, though wrongly so.

Debates have a long tradition in India, and their animosity is known from early times, as shown by a passage of the *Āṅguttara Nikāya* where the Kālāmas of Kesaputta confessed that great was their confusion:

Sir, certain recluses and brāhmins come to Kesaputta. As to their own view, they proclaim and expound it in full: but as to the view of others, they abuse it, revile it, depreciate and cripple it. Moreover, sir, other recluses and brāhmins, on coming to Kesaputta, do likewise.³⁴

Public debates gained full acceptance when it was agreed upon that reasoning could not be opposed to the injunctions of the Veda,³⁵ and, we may add, when the theistic instances were made to converge into Vedic orthodoxy. The Vaibhāṣika, Sautrāntika, Vijñānavāda and Śūnyavāda schools were the object of a continuous, relentless critique,³⁶ but until the seventh-eighth century, and occasionally later, Buddhist logicians took part in public contests in opposition to both *vaidika* and theistic controversialists on an equal footing. The situation became serious when the theistic discriminating factor was introduced and acquired importance. Doctrinal debates became hot political issues, and the very development of Buddhist logic and Brahmanical critique can be construed as functions of the political confrontation characterising the Indian scene. That the stake was political can be deduced from a passage of Yijing,

³⁴ *Āṅguttara Nikāya*: III.7.65.ii (vol. 1, p. 171). Kesaputta is an unidentified locality in Kośāla.

³⁵ Vidyabhusana (1920: 36 ff.). Vidyabhusana's book has been criticised by many for its inaccuracies, from D.N. Shastri (1964: e.g. 98, n. 63) to Frauwallner (1982: 847) and Sung (2003: 8, n. 23), but he is one of the few providing information at the historical-hagiographical level that are relevant here. For some of the chronological questions related to the Buddhist logicians the reader is referred to Frauwallner (1982), the earlier literature — including F. Th. Stcherbatsky's famous *Buddhist Logic* — being less utilisable today.

³⁶ Kher (1992).

who arrived in India by sea in AD 673. Buddhist controversialists, after studying at Nālandā or in Valabhī and “discuss[ing] possible and impossible doctrines”, acquired confidence in themselves, and

[t]o try the sharpness of their wit, they proceed to the king’s court to lay down before it the sharp weapon (of their abilities); there they present their schemes and show their (*political*) talent, seeking to be appointed in the practical government. When they are present in the House of Debate, they raise their seat and seek to prove their wonderful cleverness.

When they are refuting heretic doctrines all their opponents become tongue-tied and acknowledge themselves undone.³⁷

Yijing describes exactly what Kumārila is reported to have hold: that the Buddhist teachers with their own following used to propitiate kings and through them persuade people to accept Buddhism and discard the Vedic faith.³⁸ This seems to have been the role of such an authority as Nāgārjuna.³⁹ Xuanzang’s account of the dispute between the Bodhisattva Guṇamati and Mādhava, a follower of the Sāṃkhya system — unreliable as it may be in relation to the actual protagonists of the story — shows the decisive role played by the king of Magadha in securing the victory to the Buddhists.⁴⁰ Dinnāga (c. AD 480-530 or 540),⁴¹ besides acquiring the fame of being an invincible controversialist (he was known as *tarka puṅgava*, “a bull in discussion”)⁴² both in relation to the exponents of

³⁷ *Yijing*: XXXII.v (p. 177).

³⁸ Gopinath Kaviraj in his introduction to *Tantravārttika*: vii.

³⁹ Scherrer-Schaub (2007: 762–63). Scherrer-Schaub is well aware of the political role of the *vādins* and the political fallout of philosophy.

⁴⁰ *Xiyuji* a: VIII (vol. 2, pp. 105 ff.). On the reliability of the story, see Thomas Watters’s observations in *Xiyuji* b (vol. 2: 108–109).

⁴¹ Cf. Hattori (1968: 4–6); Frauwallner (1982: 856–59).

⁴² Cf. Vidyabhusana (1920: 272).

the other Buddhist schools⁴³ and to orthodox opponents,⁴⁴ had succeeded, in the south, in having “most of the damaged centres of the Doctrine established by the earlier *acāryas*” reconstructed.⁴⁵ While the latter piece of information implies that destructions had previously taken place, pro-Buddhist patrons must have backed Dīnnāga’s victory and implemented the reconstruction work. It is not important for us to establish whether the facts handed down really relate to Dīnnāga: they refer to a time when the Buddhists were still able, in the south, to buy their positions back with the decisive support of a king.

The pan-Indian arena where the *vādins* met has nothing in common with the set of Raphael’s *School of Athens*, the conscious or unconscious model of philosophical discussion in the West. It was rather a set instrumental to an epoch-making transformation of Indian society, and it has been recognised that debates were not conducted with the aim of arriving at the truth, but in order to inflict a defeat on the opponents.⁴⁶ That they were staged “as a form of entertainment”⁴⁷ should not make us forget that they were a very serious matter, which involved a radical change in the religious life of a given territory: in fact, the losers were compelled to renounce their religion or quit.

⁴³ Debates were also common among Buddhists of different persuasion; cf. for instance the debate between Vindhyavāsin and Buddhāmitra, Vasubandhu’s teacher, at the presence of King Vikramāditya, which resulted in the victory of the former and provoked Vasubandhu to challenge him; cf. Hattori (1968: 4 [Paramārtha’s chapter on the life of Vasubandhu, *Posoupandoufashi zhuan*, in *Taishō* 2049, pp. 189b.24-190a.281]). Several examples are to be found in the *Xiyuji*: cf. e.g. the debate organised by the king of Kapiśi (*Xiyuji* a, I: 56) and by Harṣa in Kanauj, which was aimed at demolishing the “abusive minds” of the followers of the Little Vehicle (ibid.: 176–80), and the seven-days long debate in the kingdom of Viśākha where Dharmapāla Bodhisattva “overthrew a hundred writers of *śāstras* belonging to the Little Vehicle.” (ibid.: 92). The debates between Buddhists would also be better understood if put in relation to the strategy to oppose the *īrthikas*.

⁴⁴ See several examples in *Tāranātha*: 66A-68A (pp. 181–85).

⁴⁵ *Tāranātha*: 68A (p. 184).

⁴⁶ S. Dasgupta (1932-55, I: 406–407).

⁴⁷ John Taber in *Ślokavārttika*: xvii.

Detailed rules were to be followed in the discussion, and the debates, which lasted for weeks or even months, could be either peaceful (*sandhāya*) or hostile (*vigrhya*), and the assembly where they took place could be indifferent to the parties or committed to one side.⁴⁸ For certain aspects, these debates were similar to the disputations, questions and quodlibetal questions that took place very frequently in medieval Europe between the representatives of the most various philosophical schools, especially but not exclusively in universities. In particular, they resemble, for the great crowd of people participating in them and watching, the solemn quodlibetal questions that were held twice a year, before Easter and before Christmas. For other aspects, however, they rather recall the trials of heretics, theatrically staged as public entertainments, which by late Roman antiquity had become ritualised and were not simply theological debates but legal trials.⁴⁹ The legal dimension of Indian debates eludes us, but as in late Roman antiquity, after Theodosius, we see the judicial experience appropriated by the bishops and an increasing overlapping of civil court and ecclesiastical court,⁵⁰ in India we see the judiciary pass under the control of the theistic movements.

The stakes must have already been high during the Gupta rule, when Vātsyāyana, the author of the *Nyāyabhāṣya*, criticised Nāgārjuna and, significantly, started clarifying the theistic doctrine of the early Nyāya *sūtras*,⁵¹ thus acquiring the status of major representative of Gupta ideology. Uddyotakara, author of the *Nyāyavārttika*, attacked Vasubandhu, Nāgārjuna and Dinnāga,⁵² but by the end of the sixth century or in the

⁴⁸ On the method of debate, see Vidyabhusana (1920: 28–35).

⁴⁹ Humfress (2007: 248 ff.).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*: esp. 153 ff.

⁵¹ Vattanky (1978: 396–99); see also Kher (1992: 13 ff.). See Vidyabhusana (1920: 117–23) for some information on Vātsyāyana.

⁵² *Ibid.*: 123–33.

early seventh century, the political climate in northern and central India was still not always favourable to the orthodox. The brāhmaṇas still had to learn a lot from the Buddhists before being able, “[going] across the Vedas” — as we read in the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* — to go round all over the country for controverting and exporting this technique “over all the three Oceans”, namely South-East Asia, engaging themselves in controversies.⁵³ The Buddhists were accused of not making any distinction between a logical argument and a tricky disputation: they used the term *vāda* to denote both these forms of argument.⁵⁴ However, as we know from the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka Sūtra*, quoted in the preceding chapter, they were not the only ones to falsify the cards; the brāhmaṇas did not behave differently.

After the death of Harṣavardhana, things started changing precisely with Kumāriḷa Bhaṭṭa, who was more than a philosopher, as has been said.⁵⁵ He lived between c. AD 625 and 675,⁵⁶ or perhaps a little earlier, and in the first part of his life he studied for twelve years with various heterodox *gurus*. Tradition has it that he betrayed his real beliefs protesting against his Buddhist teacher who ridiculed the Vedas, and that his companions threw him headlong from the third floor of the residence where they lived.⁵⁷ The tradition according to which Kumāriḷa

⁵³ *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*: [53], v. 957-58 (§55, p. 76).

⁵⁴ S. Dasgupta (1932-55, III: 512-13).

⁵⁵ Eltschinger (2001: 7).

⁵⁶ Chris Bartley in *EAP*: 303. See the different opinions on Kumāriḷa’s chronology in P.S. Sharma (1980: 13 ff., 16 ff.).

⁵⁷ I follow Piantelli (1998: 149), Kumāriḷa’s life is known from the hagiographies of Śaṅkara and from Tāranātha. Śaṅkara’s life has been reconstructed as convincingly as possible by Pande (1994: 73-98; 337-71) and Piantelli (1998: 93-206), who have provided a narrative of the saint’s life after thoroughly discussing the literary sources, as well as by Bader (2000: 71-229), who has discussed the events of Śaṅkara’s life putting eight hagiographies in close comparison. The introductory part of Anton Ungemach’s edition and translation of Nīlakaṇṭha’s *Śaṅkaramandārasaurabha* also provides a précis of the saint’s life (Ungemach 1992).

studied with a Buddhist *guru* sounds authentic because of the fact that it would have been impossible for him, as has been noted, to learn such a text as the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* of Dīnṇāga without the assistance of a Buddhist teacher:⁵⁸ the elliptical style of that extremely difficult work is typical of inner-directed groups. Only some centuries later were philosophical ideas set forth in an exposition that a general reader might understand.⁵⁹ This we should keep in mind if we want to grasp what lies behind the seemingly naïve stories that we will mention below.

As the tradition of Kumārila's suicide seems to imply, he probably was one of those extremely talented young brāhmaṇas looking for self-affirmation who soon after Harṣavardhana's death were quick to understand that Buddhism had no future and did not hesitate to put their knowledge at the service of rulers who were willing to enforce orthodox rule to the detriment of Buddhist political fortunes. Śaṅkara — or the tradition associated with him — recognised Kumārila “as an incarnation of Guha born for the eradication of [the] Buddhists”.⁶⁰ Kumārila's battle for the establishment of *apauruseyatā*, the non-human character of Vedic revelation, and *vedamūlatā*, the root-ness of the Veda, which certifies the orthodoxy of mature Brahmanism, is rooted in a deep hostility towards Buddhism:⁶¹ the Buddha, an irreligious man, taught practices opposed to the injunctions laid down in the Veda “to the deluded men of the lowest caste”. As a kṣatriya, he was not entitled to impart any teaching and transgressed his own duties

⁵⁸ Cf. Taber in *Ślokavārttika*: n. 76 on pp. 169–70.

⁵⁹ H.H. Ingalls in Hattori (1968: vi–vii).

⁶⁰ These are the words addressed by Śaṅkarācārya to the *bhaṭṭa* in the *Śaṅkara Digvijaya* (7.106-07, p. 79), on which see n. 64 below.

⁶¹ Eltschinger (2001: 7). As is known, in his *Ślokavārttika* Kumārila carried out a close critique of Buddhist epistemology. See also Kher (1992: 357–64).

“tak[ing] up the duties of the Brāhmaṇa”.⁶² Leadership in society pertains *naturaliter* to the brāhmaṇas, and brāhmaṇasness is recognised by means of direct sense-perception handed down by an unbroken line of tradition.⁶³ Here Kumārila exerted tremendous pressure on the apostate brāhmaṇas (that is, all the possible contenders in public debates) who had accepted to defend and promote a teaching that was illegal and/or antinomial at its very root.

The most famous story regarding Kumārila’s zeal in spreading orthodoxy is preserved in Mādhava’s *Śaṅkara Digvijaya*.⁶⁴ An ordeal took place at the presence of King Sudhanvan, a supporter of the Buddhists who ruled in Dvārakā (Dwarka).⁶⁵ In a public controversy, Kumārila had defeated the Buddhists (compared to “excited snakes trampled upon by a pedestrian” when they were addressed by the *bhaṭṭa*),⁶⁶ but the king, still unconvinced by his arguments, challenged the contenders “to jump down unhurt from the top of yonder mountain”, which

⁶² *Tantravārttika*: I.iii.iii (vol. 1, p. 167).

⁶³ *Ibid.* I.ii.i (vol. 1, p. 10). Here Kumārila responds, with unconvincing arguments, to the Buddhist criticisms of the naturalisation of the concept of caste. In addition to dialectics, the Buddhists did not lack sarcasm when they resorted to arguments of the type *mater semper certa, pater incertus* (cf. Eltschinger 2000: 79–80, discussing Candrakīrti); the Jains, Prabhācandra for example, also used similar arguments (*EI* 6: 1525). On the question of the perception of *jāti* in Kumārila see Eltschinger (2000: 116 ff.).

⁶⁴ The *Śaṅkara Digvijaya* has been known to scholars as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century and has been frequently quoted, in the first place by Horace Wilson (see Chapter I). Piantelli (1998: 51–52 and n. 70 on pp. 68–69) seems to consider it a modern apocrypha, but Bader (2000: 53–62), rejecting the identification of Mādhava with Vidyāranya, estimates it a work of the eighteenth century incorporating a vast amount of material from earlier hagiographies, judiciously collected from the best available sources by its author. Bader’s considerations bring us nearer to a correct understanding of the information contained in this sort of texts. The translation of the *Śaṅkara Digvijaya* into English by Swami Tapasyananda is rather free, but a German translation of the first chapter (particularly relevant for Kumārila) is found in Deussen (1908: 181–89).

⁶⁵ Piantelli (1998: 149); see also Bader (2000: 86).

⁶⁶ *Śaṅkara Digvijaya*: 1.66 (p. 7).

Kumārila did without being hurt.⁶⁷ His adversaries claimed that he had saved his life thanks to his magical powers, so that Sudhanvan resorted to a variant of the pot-cum-snake ordeal, maintaining that he would inflict capital punishment on the party that failed it. Kumārila got through the test recognising Viṣṇu Anantaśayana in the cobra concealed in the vessel. A divine disembodied voice urged the king to carry out his promise, and he ordered his people that those who would not kill the Buddhists, including old men and children, from the bridge of Rāma to the Himalaya, should be killed in turn.⁶⁸

It is difficult to see Kumārila as a devout Bhāgavata, and there is little doubt that the story handed down to us was adjusted to meet later developments. Moreover, no king in the second half of the seventh century had the power to have a similar order obeyed. What is interesting for us to note, however, is that the order was not simply to oblige the heretics to leave the country, as was customary, but to have them killed. This detail appears in all the versions of the story. Kumārila's former *guru*, Sugata, was among the heretics sentenced to death, and was crushed in an oil-mill. Although Kumārila was only indirectly responsible for his death, the remorse for having caused the death of his *guru*, an extremely serious sin, led him to commit suicide. It took place at Ruddhapura/Rudrapura, a suburb of Prayāga,⁶⁹ allegedly in the presence of Śāṅkara.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Ibid.: 72–77 (p. 7). Since a similar story is referred to Udayana, a later adaptation of the story is likely. Udayana had defeated the Buddhist logicians in several contests, but on one occasion, being unable to convince them of the existence of God, took a brāhmaṇa and a Buddhist with him to the top of a hill. Falling down, the brāhmaṇa cried aloud “there is God” and came to the ground unharmed; the Buddhist, crying “there is no God”, died of the fall (cf. Vidyabhusana 1920: 142; a different version of the story is reported by D. Bhattacharya, 1987: 6). The contest-ordeal took place in Mithilā.

⁶⁸ Deussen (1908: 188).

⁶⁹ According to the *Bṛhacchāṅkaravijaya* mentioned by Piantelli (1998: 151). Other texts set the scene elsewhere.

⁷⁰ For all its unlikelihood, the meeting points to Śāṅkara as Kumārila's heir in fighting the heretics.

There is nothing hagiographic in the tradition of Kumāriḷa's suicide.

Kumāriḷa's role in silencing the heretics is emphasised in other hagiographies, notably in Anantānandagiri's *Śaṅkaravijaya*,⁷¹ which reports the exploits of the *bhaṭṭa* who came from the North:⁷²

He defeated countless Buddhists and Jains by means of different types of arguments in the various sciences. Having cut off their heads with axes, he threw them down into numerous wooden mortars and made a powder of them by whirling around a pestle. In this way he was fearlessly carrying out the destruction of those who held evil doctrines.⁷³

The fact that the events related to Kumāriḷa's life are all contained in the hagiographies of Śaṅkara (and, as far as the Buddhists are concerned, in the sources used by Tāranātha) obliges us to be cautious and make the appropriate distinctions. The story of the pot-cum-snake ordeal sounds spurious when referred to the great polemicist, not to mention the ordeal of the jump from the cliff, but the tradition of Kumāriḷa's suicide is unique and not easy to be dismissed as either a biased detail or a later interpolation.

In any case, debates appear to have been increasingly associated with ordeals, which were administered to the defendant.⁷⁴ There were clauses protecting the brāhmaṇas from the riskiest ones, such as the poison ordeal. As already said, the ordeals were run by the king or the judge appointed by him,

⁷¹ For this work, his author and date (Anantānandagiri lived in the thirteenth century), see *IA* 5 (1876, K.T. Telang), pp. 287–93, and Bader (2000: 26–32).

⁷² According to some sources, Kumāriḷa was born in northern India (regions vary, Bihar being the most likely option); according to others, including Tāranātha, he was born in South India like Śaṅkara.

⁷³ Cf. Bader (2000: 215), quoting the *Śaṅkaravijaya* (eds. Jayanarayana Tarkapanchanana & Nabadwipa Chandra Goswami, Calcutta 1868, p. 173, II, 5-8). Bader mentions a similar but briefer description contained in Cidvilāsa's *Śaṅkaravijayavilāsa* (*ibid.*: 86, n. 27).

⁷⁴ I follow Kane (1930-62, III: 361 ff.).

and the place varied according to the caste of the defendant. It is not always clear which procedures were followed. P.V. Kane observes that the procedures of the water, fire and weight ordeals cited in Xuanzang's *Xiyuji* do not agree in several respects with the descriptions of the *smṛtis* and digests, and that the poison ordeal described by the Chinese pilgrim has nothing in common with the *smṛti* poison ordeal.⁷⁵

Since we know that the losers underwent punishment (leaving the territory, or even the death penalty, as attested to also by Xuanzang),⁷⁶ we must conclude that they were regarded as a judicial procedure, and this is why they took place only in the courts of kings and judges.⁷⁷ It remains to be determined whether these debates-ordeals occurred after a formal plaint or, as seems more likely, they were what may be called "restorative ordeals". In this case, those who were believed to have committed some wrongdoing, arranged for themselves to undergo an ordeal in order to test their innocence and restore their social priority status. This is, I think, the case which best suits our evidence. It should be added that *ānvīkṣikī*, the science of inferential reasoning, central to doctrinal controversies, was not connected to philosophy, but pertained to the domain of *nītiśāstra* and *rājadharmā*,⁷⁸ thus being strictly related to

⁷⁵ Ibid. 376, n. 591. Cf. *Xiyuji* a: II (vol. 1, p. 84). As regards the snake-in-the-jar ordeal, it was referred to among *mlecchas*: it consisted in taking out a ring or coin with the hand from a jar in which a snake was placed; if there was no snake-bite or no effect from it, the person was declared innocent (Kane 1930-62, III: 366, n. 580; 367).

⁷⁶ See for instance the story regarding the Buddhists who, defeated by the *tīrthikas*, raised the challenge again, inducing the king to decree, "Whoever is defeated shall die, as a proof of his inferiority." (cf. *Xiyuji* a: VIII; vol. 2, pp. 97-99). This happened in Vaiśālī or Pāṭāliputra (discussion by Watters in *Xiyuji* b: vol. 2, p. 100).

⁷⁷ I arrive at these conclusions on the basis of David Brick's discussion on Devaṇa Bhaṭṭa and his *Smṛticandrikā*, composed in South India between AD 1150 and 1225 (Brick 2010: 30-31).

⁷⁸ Hacker (1958: esp. 64-67). The horizon of Hacker's analysis is the *Arthaśāstra*, and his conclusions are all the more pertinent to the present discussion if we refer this work to the Gupta period.

kingship. Finally, as regards the punishments inflicted upon the Buddhists, if our un-Rankean sources make us believe that they reflect twelfth- and early thirteenth-century events, there is other evidence, both literary and iconographical, as well as archaeological, advising us not to take them as simply reporting facts of the last hour. They describe late events that stratify on earlier facts of the same nature.

The numerous stories about this or that controversialist making his way into the opposite camp to steal the dialectical secrets of his opponents may not be as anecdotal as they seem at first when we become familiar with the historical context of which these accounts are a distant echo. Tāranātha reports that Kumārila defied Dharmakīrti (c. AD 600-60) after the latter had won the favour of a king: “He demanded of the king, ‘Should I be victorious, Dharmakīrti is to be killed. If Dharmakīrti be victorious, I should be killed’”⁷⁹ — a proposal that Dharmakīrti refused (he did not want Kumārila to die), turning to the more traditional condition that whoever was defeated should accept the doctrine of the winner. Thus Dharmakīrti went to Kumārila’s *āśrama* in South India in disguise and learnt “all the secrets of philosophy”.

Jain sources depict similar situations. The second version of the biography of Haribhadra, a Śvetāmbara Jain who lived in the eighth century, initiator of what has been called Indian doxography,⁸⁰ is worth reporting. According to the earliest account of his life, two of his disciples went to study logic at Bodhgayā in disguise, and when they were discovered,⁸¹

⁷⁹ *Tāranātha*: 90A (p. 232).

⁸⁰ Qvarnström (1999).

⁸¹ An interesting detail of the story is that the teacher, looking for the culprits of the refutation of the Buddhist doctrines, had an image of the Jina drawn on the floor, knowing that a Jain would never tread on it. The students outsmart their teacher adding a line that converted the picture into that of the Buddha (cf. Granoff 1989: 112). The ordeal recalls the anti-Catholic practice of *fumi-e* introduced by Tokugawa Ieyasu and still in use in nineteenth-century Japan.

their Buddhist teacher caused them to be killed. Haribhadra, stricken with grief, responded to the Buddhist violence with a suicidal depression. One of the two disciples (here turned into Haribhadra's nephews) had suggested, to have his life spared, that he debates with the Buddhists and that if he won he be set free, if not, that he be killed: he was defeated and killed. Haribhadra responded by making a cauldron of boiling oil and magically caused not only the person directly responsible for the death of his nephew, but seven hundred Buddhists to fly through the air and land in the cauldron, where they were scalded to death.⁸² Haribhadra as a persecutor of the Buddhists is probably a later development connected to the dire twelfth-century predicament, but the story, besides mirroring a logic of rigged debates and violence, shows the importance of mastering the skills of the opponents. Being defeated did not simply mean to have a laurel less to boast of. It should also be noted that it would have been impossible for a king to get rid of *all* the brāhmaṇas if these were the losers — although due attention must be paid to the story reported by Xuanzang, according to which Harṣa banished five hundred brāhmaṇas “to the frontiers of India”⁸³ — but getting rid of a few hundred monks, if not in the whole kingdom, least in the territory where the debate had been held, was feasible.

The controversy between the Buddhists and the eighth-century Digambara Jain Akaṣaṅka, who brought Jain logic to the level of sophistication of Buddhist and Brahmanical *vādins* and became the most effectual critic of Dharmakīrti, and whose *Tattvārthavārthika* (*Rājavārttika*) is to these days

⁸² Ibid.: 116-17. Phyllis Granoff recognises three distinct versions in Haribhadra's biography, which circulated independently and concurrently. She doubts whether these stories were attached to Haribhadra on the basis of the traditions regarding Akaṣaṅka.

⁸³ *Xiyuji*: V (vol. 1, p. 221). The ban was in relation to the attempt at assassinating the king after that Harṣa had “exhausted [the] treasury” to benefit the *śramaṇas*, leaving the brāhmaṇas empty-handed.

a text used by advanced Digambara students,⁸⁴ took place in the crucial eighth century. The orthodox were taking advantage of the traditional enmity between Buddhists and Jains and used the latter against the former.⁸⁵ Akaṣaṅka defeated the Buddhists severally, also resorting — the relevant sources are not Buddhist — to unfair systems. The *Pāṇḍava Purāṇa* of Vādicandra, a Jain work of the sixteenth century, reports that on one occasion the *ācārya* could not stand up to the arguments of a Buddhist antagonist until the point when he understood that it was Māyādevī who was prompting the Buddhist from within a jar and put an end to the advantage of his adversary by kicking the jar over with his foot.⁸⁶

A variant of this story is found in the account of the dispute reported in a Tamil manuscript of the Mackenzie collection, either derived from the *Rājāvalī Kathe*, a Kannada work,⁸⁷ or from the earliest recorded version of Akaṣaṅka's life history related in Prabhācandra's *Kathākośa*,⁸⁸ a Digambara work of the second half of the eleventh century. The story is set in Kāñcīpuram, where the Buddhists, who “ruled over one-third of the country forming the Daudacaranya”, had their own temples. The ruling king was Hemaśītala, who has been identified — we are in the early decades of the eighth century — with Hiraṇyavarman, father of Pallavamalla Nandivarman.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Jaini (1979: 83–84).

⁸⁵ In the South, the Jains do not answer the stereotypical image of a community exclusively belonging to the merchant class, but were agriculturists (Zydenbos 1999: 198). It would be interesting to know how far back in time this trend went. The Digambaras may have sided with the brāhmaṇas in the reorganisation of the agrarian order as early as the early Pallava period.

⁸⁶ Vidyabhusana (1920: 186). As already seen, the goddess hidden in a pot to help a party is a *tópos* frequently met in the accounts of rigged debates. In the text and translation of the *Pāṇḍava Purāṇa* provided by Padmanabh S. Jaini, I only find mentioned the defeat of the Buddhists in debate by Akaṣaṅka. Cf. *Pāṇḍava Purāṇa*: 1.21 (pt. 1, p. 109).

⁸⁷ Cf. B.L. Rice in *EC* 2 (1889, Sravana Belgola): 45–46 (Introd.).

⁸⁸ For this version of the story, see Granoff (1989: 113–14).

⁸⁹ Sastri, S. Kuppaswami (1937: 27). Hiraṇyavarman's position in Pallava succession is not clear (cf. HCIP 3: 262, 281), but he lived in the early decades of the

The identification helps us in setting the story in context and makes us understand that later amplifications fuelled by new contrapositions have a firm root in the past.

The story as narrated here supplements the account of the controversy with an antecedent fact that seems to be an independent tale, and is worth reporting because it is a vivid testimony, with several others, of the relations existing between Buddhists and Jains:

Two persons named Acalangan and Nishcalangan produced a persecution by privately writing in a *Bauddha* book that the *Jaina* system was the best one. A device was had recourse to in order to discover the authors; and, on being discovered, they were forced to flee for their life, hotly pursued; when Nishcalangan, by sacrificing his life, contrived to allow Acalangan to escape, charging him, on succeeding to spread their system. The *Bauddha*, in the heat of the moment had tied a piece of flesh in all the *Jaina* fanes, with a *ślōca* of contemptuous import. Acalangan after his escape put a vessel containing ordure in the *Bauddha* fanes, with another *ślōca* in retaliation. Under these circumstances of discord, the *rāja* ordered an assembly of *Bauddha*, and *Jaina*, learned men to dispute with each other, and to finish within a specified time, when he would himself embrace the victorious system, and put all of the opposite party to death by grinding them in oil-mills.⁹⁰

The interventions of the deities follow, and eventually Akaḷaṅka unmasks and defeats the Buddhists: “The king in consequence declared the *Bauddhas* to be conquered, to which they were compelled to accede”, and Akaḷaṅka became the king’s instructor. What really happened after Akaḷaṅka’s victory is not clear. According to another version of the story,

eighth century. According to the *Akaḷaṅkacarita* (a work in Sanskrit), the learned Jain would have defeated the Buddhists in Vikram Samvat 700 (*EC* 2, rev. ed. R. Narasimhaçar 1923, Sravana Belgola: 84). The name of the ruler in Taylor’s transliteration is Yemasithalan; the Daṇḍakāraṇya is the forest region described in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (for instance, *Rāmāyaṇa*, Kiṣkindhā Kāṇḍa: 61, p. 645); here it stands for Toṅṭaimaṅṭalam.

⁹⁰ *Mackenzie Manuscripts* 1: 121–22.

“the conquered sect he [the king] bruised to death in oil-mills of stone”, even though a number of Buddhists were made to adopt Jainism and others “went to Ceylon by sea; where their power continues”.⁹¹ According to yet another version, some Buddhists “were intended to be put to death in large stone-oil-mills; but instead of that were embarked on board ships, or vessels, and sent to Ceylon”.⁹² Phyllis Granoff has examined a later, longer version of the story in an attempt at typologising the divine intervention in debates,⁹³ and here, too, the narrative keeps the memory of king Hemaśīṭala/Hiraṇyavarman, the ruler who tipped the balance of the situation in what is apparently the story’s earliest layer. The defeat of the Buddhists in Kāñcī was an epoch-making event for the Jains, and the debate is mentioned in the Sravana Belgola epitaph of Mallisena in the second half of the eleventh century. Here Akaḷaṅka speaks in the first person as the advocate of a theistic religion:

[...] because (I) felt pity for those people who, having embraced Atheism, were perishing, that, in the court of the glorious king Himaśīṭala, I overcame all the crowds of Bauddhas, most of whom had a shrewd mind, and broke (*the image of*) Sugata with (*my*) foot.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Ibid., 4: 260–61.

⁹² Ibid., 4: p. 284. This is how the story ends according to the *Rājāvalī Katha* (B.L. Rice in *EC* 2, 1889, Sravana Belgola: 46 [Introd.]). According to the same work, as a young man Akaḷaṅka studied with a Buddhist teacher, Bhagavaddāsa, and fought the Sivaites; some versions set the debate at the court of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa king Sāhasatuṅga Dantidurga (mid-eighth century): see the intricate question discussed by Sastri, S. Kuppaswami (1937: 27-28).

⁹³ Granoff (1985: 461–62).

⁹⁴ *EI* 3 (1894-95, E. Hultzsch): 184–207, v. 23. Hultzsch naturally knew Taylor’s account and B.L. Rice’s material, but, characteristically, maintained that he would “entirely ignore king Himaśīṭala of Kāñchipura for historical purposes as long as no contemporaneous epigraphic records, but only legends, are available as proofs of his existence” (p. 187). There are other medieval inscriptions that keep memory of the event. An epigraph from Sravana Belgola of AD 1128 recalls the debate as follows: “He by whom Tārā, secretly born in the earthen pot (*ghaṭa kuṭī*), was vanquished together with the Bauddhas, trouble of the false professors; doing reverence only to the gods; he who forced Sugata as penance for the faults to perform ablution with the pollen of his lotus feet; — such was Devākalaṅka paṇḍita, to whom is he not a refuge?” (*EC* 2, 1889, Sravana Belgola, B.L. Rice: 134–40, 41–47; cf. p. 136). Rice wondered about the peculiarity of the detail of

From these and other stories, we realise that the contenders are all brāhmaṇas, all have the same curriculum and all are associated with a political milieu, and yet contraposition is so sharp as to be pushed as far as death. Tāranātha provides complementary evidence of the bitterness of interpersonal relationships, a crucial fact in small communities and in political-religious milieus. In his account of Diñnāga's life, he reports the reaction of Kṛṣṇa, a brāhmaṇa whose behaviour had been already extremely hostile:

The *ācārya* returned and, staking their respective creeds, entered into a debate. The *tīrthika* was repeatedly defeated. He [Diñnāga] said, "You have now to accept the Law of the Buddha." At this, he [Kṛṣṇa] threw enchanted dust, which burnt the belongings of the *ācārya* and even the *ācārya* himself narrowly escaped the fire. The *tīrthika* fled.⁹⁵

We must assume that the Buddhist brāhmaṇas represented social groups whose interests could neither be reconciled with the tenets of the caste-bound Mīmāṃsakas nor with those of the theistic groups. The history of debates reveals an incurable split in the *brāhmaṇavarṇa*: if a part of the brāhmaṇas could not be admitted to live in one and the same territory (as made evident by the consequences of doctrinal debates), it was because they represented the intellectual leadership of an incompatible social model. This has little to do with the remote cleavage between brāhmaṇas and kṣatriyas, although the latter continued to contribute to fill the ranks of the Buddhist

Tārā in the earthen pot, present in all the traditions: the goddess used to reply incognito to all the questions posed by Akalaṅka from within a pot of toddy, "the intoxicating fermented juice of the palmyra palm" placed behind a curtain (ibid.: 45, Introd.). An inscription of AD 1183 praises Akalaṅka in these terms: "The glory of Akalaṅka-Dēva, by whom can it be described? by the blows of the sword of whose speech the unenlightened (*vibuddhi*) Buddha was slain" (EC 3, 1894, Mysore Inscr. 1, B.L. Rice: 89–90, 171–72; cf. p. 89).

⁹⁵ *Tāranātha*: 67A (p. 183).

intelligentsia.⁹⁶ It rather was a new fracture, first brought to the fore by the Kali Age literature of the Gupta period. The use of the term *tīrthikas* to indicate the orthodox is perfectly justified: at the level of leadership groups, neither Tāranātha nor the orthodox chroniclers and hagiographers would have been able to distinguish between the two parties on the basis of *varṇa*, which was the same for both.

Now we can better explain that apparently strange, inclusive myth according to which the *asuras* are high-caste rebels whom Viṣṇu and the other gods either annihilate or convert. Viṣṇu plays both the role of the enemy of the *asuras* and that of the deluder, thus encompassing the whole reality, because the latter is made to coincide with the *brāhmaṇavarṇa*, which is one by definition. It could not be admitted that two antagonist systems had generated from it: Hiraṇyakaśipu is a high-caste demon, but cannot be entitled to rule in Indra's place. The considerations arising from the analysis of the *devāsura* wars that the reader shall find in the next chapter will make this point even clearer.

THE LOGIC OF THE SAINTS

Kumārila and Campantar were almost contemporary, but were carriers of different, if related instances. The *vaidika* Kumārila put an end to his life by suicide; conversely, Campantar in his works appears as a triumphant, remorseless theist. Thus the defensive battle of the Buddhists must unfold on two levels: they were under pressure from and had to develop arguments against different kinds of adversaries. It is no accident that the Buddhist campaign against the theism of the Naiyāyikas was started in the seventh century by Dharmakīrti, who reacted

⁹⁶ For instance, Candragomin, who, according to Tāranātha (75A, p. 200), was the son of a learned śāstriya *paṇḍita*.

against his contemporary Uddyotakara, a Pásupatācārya.⁹⁷ The latter maintained that Īśvara is the efficient cause of the universe and introduced the concept of inferential reason (*hetu*).⁹⁸

In Tamilakam, the Nāyanmār in the first place and then the Ālvārs entered, with great determination, in competition with the Buddhists at the level of the political representation of the lower segments of society. The Nāyanmār included a certain number of śūdras and women, not to count the untouchable Nantamar. The presence in their ranks of vaiśyas and petty chieftains is equally significant.⁹⁹ In northern India, however, where the events related to King Sudhanvan are set, and where Kumārila committed suicide, the “impenetrable gloom” of the second half of the seventh century mentioned in Chapter III stands for a rather different story. There the attempts at stemming the tide of the insurgency of the outcastes, disclosed by the story of Śāṅkara meeting the *cāṇḍāla* in Kāśī,¹⁰⁰ were not as successful, and this eventually allowed for the establishment of the Pāla dynasty in the central-eastern and eastern Ganges plains.

The young brāhmaṇa Campantar, one of the most popular saints of South India, lived in the second half of the seventh century,¹⁰¹ being thus a younger contemporary of Kumārila Bhaṭṭa. His exploits fit well in a political climate where the

⁹⁷ Vidyabhusana (1920: 604–605).

⁹⁸ The reader is referred to the limpid article of Vattanky (1978). Dharmakīrti's arguments are at the base of all later confutations, an example of which is found in the *Tarkabhāṣā* 20.1-2, with useful comments by Yuichi Kajiyama (see *Tarkabhāṣā*, pp. 282 ff.). See also P.G. Patil (2009) for a thorough presentation of the critique of the Īśvara-inference carried out by Ratnakīrti, “gate-keeper” at Vikramaśīla in the eleventh century. While I sympathise with Patil's attempt at transferring the Buddhist-Naiyāyika debate to the level of general philosophical discussion, and even with his pointing to the “tyranny of social and cultural history” (p. 6), it should be remembered that Indian history is still too little known to forgo less traditional approaches than those offered by historical-philological studies. Not always have these shaped our idea of Indian history for the better.

⁹⁹ See the Nāyanmār subdivided according to caste in Dehejia (1988: 154–55).

¹⁰⁰ Pande (1994: 87); Piantelli (1998: 166–68).

¹⁰¹ I follow Dehejia (1988: 46).

conservative positions embodied by his Sivaite faith were increasingly popular: he quickly understood that action would pay. His half-legendary life (we can hardly believe in his exploits as a child) has its *raison d'être* in Sivaite propaganda and in the fight against the *śramaṇas*. The conversion from Jainism to Sivaism of King Arikēsari Parāṅkusa Māravarman, who ruled between AD 670 and 720¹⁰² and the consequent suppression of the Jains of Madurai, is the best known of Campantar's exploits, if we want to give credit to it. The story is told at length in the *Periya Purāṇam*¹⁰³ and is represented in a number of reliefs and paintings throughout Tamil Nadu.¹⁰⁴ Its veracity as regards the final martyrdom by impalement of the Jains, better than in any written record or figurative scene, is attested to by the re-enactment that takes place every year in Tirunelvely, Tiruchendur, Kalugumalai and Vilattikulam in southern Tamil Nadu on the occasion of the Kaluvēttal (Impalement) festival associated with the Jains:

The model of a human head is stuck on a spike and carried in procession. To lend spirit to the performance temple servants turn out with their bodies bedaubed with black and red paint; some suspend false tongues from their mouths and coil round their bodies the intestines of a sheep, or sit as if impaled on a stake; others appear to be hanging from gibbets, or have a leg bent double and tied up to suggest that it has been cut off; others again lie in pits in the ground, showing only what pretends to be a head cut from its body. The idea of the performance is to suggest mutilation [...].¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² He is generally known as Kūṅ Pāṅṭya in literary sources, but as Netumāraṅ in the *Periya Purāṇam*.

¹⁰³ The final ordeal and impalement of the Jains are described in *Periya Purāṇam*: 33.796-856 (vol. 2, pp. 154-65). K.A.Nilakantha Sastri, as we have seen in Chapter I, refused to believe in the authenticity of the story (Sastri, K.A. Nilakantha 1966: 424). In some accounts, the Buddhists, and not the Jains, are the victims of Kūṅ Pāṅṭya (cf. *Mackenzie Manuscripts* 3: 8), but Buddhists and Jains are easily confused in later sources.

¹⁰⁴ See a few temple reliefs in Verardi (1996: 222-27; pls. I-IV) and later paintings in L'Hernault (2006).

¹⁰⁵ Pate (1917, I: 100).

Campantar's struggle against the Buddhists is less known, yet the tenth verse of every hymn he wrote contains a thorough denunciation of the Buddhists and Jains.¹⁰⁶ The saint triumphantly asserts to have caused the head of a Buddhist *vādin* to roll on the ground by the potency of a song in the course of a controversy at Bōthi Maṅkai/Būtamaṅkalam in Cōḷamaṅṭalam, tentatively identified with the native place of the *thera* Buddhadatta.¹⁰⁷ The amplification of the story provided by the *Periya Purāṇam* helps us clarify what may have really happened. When Campantar, welcomed by the local Sivaites with joyful music, arrived in town, the Buddhists of Būtamaṅkalam reported the news to their elder, and

[...] Buddha Nandi of flawed
And hateful heart, rose up in wrath, and circled
By the crowd of Buddhists, came before the servitors
And roared in wrath, thus: "Tis only after vanquishing me
In disputation, you can blare your triumphant instruments."¹⁰⁸

When Campantar's followers came to know that the saint had accepted the challenge,

Burst out thus with the uncontainable utterance:
"May the head of Buddha Nandi roll down
Slashed by thunder winged with lightning."
When the command of the Lord whose banner

¹⁰⁶ Rao, T.N. Vasudeva (1979: 207); Champakalakshmi (1981: 255–56). Rao quotes several epithets by which Campantar calls the Buddhists in his hymns, a particularly interesting one being "the Sākkyas who argue till death" (esp. pp. 216–18), obviously referring to the public debates.

¹⁰⁷ Dikshitar, V.R. Ramachandra (1931: 689, n. 1). The place is probably present Budalur near Tirukkattupalli in Thanjavur district (Ramachandran 1954: 11). Thera Buddhadatta, who lived in the fifth century and ran several monasteries in both Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu, is the author, among many other works, of the *Abhidhammāvātāra*. His connection with Cōḷamaṅṭalam during the Kalabhra rule has been underlined by Rao, T.N. Vasudeva (1979: 182–86).

¹⁰⁸ *Periya Purāṇam*: 33. 906 (vol. 2, p. 176).

Sports the Bull was thus pronounced,
 Like the great thunder, the peerlessly puissant
 Mantric weapon — impossible to fend —,
 Which annihilates all troubles that beset the way
 Of Saivism, by reason of the truth-laden
 Pronouncement of the divine serviteur,
 Rent asunder the head from the body of Buddha Nandi,
 The hair-splitting logomachist that came thither;
 Witnessing this the Buddhist crowds, struck with fear,
 Ran helter-skelter and quailed.

The serviteurs of Śiva who witnessed the plight
 Of the Buddhists and also the head and the trunk
 Of Buddha Nandi severed by the mantric weapon
 Of words, came before the godly child — the conferrer
 Of Triumph —, and humbly narrated
 The happenings; thereupon he said: “The Lord
 Has ruled even thus to quell the opposing obstruction;
 So, may you all chant, ‘Hara, Hara’”.¹⁰⁹

Despite the death of their elder, the Buddhists insisted on a debate to be held, though not “[...] by flawless mantric disputation through words”,¹¹⁰ and accompanied the *vādin* Cāri Buddha to the “choultry *maṅṭapam*” where Campantar, “who had the head/Of Buddha Nandi pulverized” was waiting.¹¹¹ A long debate on *mokṣa* followed, which ended with the victory of Campantar. The saint observed that the omniscience of the Buddha was hollow like his *mokṣa*, and so were “the works in this connection”.¹¹² The Buddhists “[t]hat became clarified in their mind-heart/Neared the Sacred Brahmin child of Sanbai/And adored his roseate feet”, and “fell down prostrate before

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.: 33.908-10 (vol. 2, p. 177).

¹¹⁰ Ibid.: 33.911 (vol. 2, p. 178).

¹¹¹ Ibid.: 33.913-14 (vol. 2, p. 178).

¹¹² Ibid.: 33.924 (vol. 2, p. 181).

him and rose up/As Saivites”, celestial flowers raining everywhere.¹¹³

Heads do not roll down by the potency of a *mantra*, and the story is transparent. The Sivaite crowd that welcomed Campantar caused the death of the Buddhist elder through an intimidatory act in order to condition the debate and preventively put the Buddhists with their backs to the wall. Nothing was left for them to do but to convert to Sivaism, and our thoughts go to an eighth-century relief from Tiruvalanjuli depicting two converts worshipping Śiva now in the Thanjavur Art Gallery.¹¹⁴ Intimidations and preventive acts took place to avoid an open fight or a massacre.¹¹⁵

The South was largely Sivaite in the seventh century. Pāśupatas and Kāpālikas appear as important components of Kāñcī religious and social life in the *Mattavilāsa*, the play composed by the Pallava king Mahendravarman I (AD 571-630),¹¹⁶ and Appar, the convert from Jainism and spiritual guide of Campantar, testifies that in the streets of Tiruvarur, one could meet “Virati ascetics with matted hair,/brahmins and Śaivas,/Pāśupatas and men of the Kāpālika sect”.¹¹⁷ The Kāpālikas, who in Kāñcī¹¹⁸ presided over the Ekāmbiranātha Temple, seem to have originated in South India,¹¹⁹ and in point

¹¹³ Ibid.: 33.925-26 (vol. 2, p. 181).

¹¹⁴ Inv. no. 89. (A recent attempt to verify this datum, collected long ago, has come to nothing).

¹¹⁵ In the same locality, Campantar vanquished another Buddhist *vādin*, Śāriputra, and defeated once again the Buddhists at Sattamankai (Cattamankai; Ramachandran 1954: 7, 10).

¹¹⁶ After his conversion, a *śuddha* Sivaite for Dehejia (1988: 37). However, the fact that the farce ridicules the Buddhists and, to a lesser extent, the Kāpālikas and the Pāśupatas while no Jain appears on stage, may point to a pre-conversion chronology of the play. The particularly strong bias against the Buddhists is shown, at the beginning of the work, by the Kāpālin who associates the Buddhists to dogs (“I suspect a dog or a Buddhist friar has taken it”); eventually, the Madman gives back to the Kāpālika the skull he got “from the most respectable dog belonging to a Caṇḍāla”. See *Mattavilāsa*: 706, 715.

¹¹⁷ *Poems to Śiva*: 182 [*Tirumurai* IV.20.3].

¹¹⁸ Lorenzen (1972: 50).

¹¹⁹ Ibid.: 53.

of fact Śiva, in Appar's hymns, is very often depicted as wearing a garland of skulls and bearing a skull bow, and even as "[h]olding a garland of dead men's skulls in His hands", being thus seen in his *vāma* aspect of Bhairava.¹²⁰ The identification of these "dead men" with the heretics is inevitable. We read, in fact, of the triumphant entry of Śiva in Valampuram (hence Tiruvalampuram), to the south of Chidambaram, "whose streets are rich/In cloud-capped mansions", and which we may picture as a village only partly inhabited by Sivaite devotees like Campantar's Būtamaṅkalam. Here Śiva

Caused the huge heads of the warring Rakshasa
To fall on dust. Our Lord, the Lofty One gently pressed
His beauteous toes and crushed his heads and then Graced Him [...].¹²¹

The multi-headed Heresy, allegorised as a *rākṣasa*, is violently placed in the condition not to harm, and has to compromise. The followers of Śiva (the God in this hymn is described as "ash-bedaubed" and "[s]urrounded by His Bhoota-Hosts")¹²² have suppressed and intimidated the adversaries and have enthroned Śiva in the new temple. Once again, we are not dealing with dubious hagiographic material, although we can always suspect Appar's hymns to have been given their present form at a relatively late time.

Although in eighth-century Tamil Nadu Brahmanical power, in both its Sivaite and Vishnuite variants, was firmly established (the evidence from Kāñcīpuram is particularly strong), social resistance was still vigorous in places even in the ninth century, as is shown by the anti-Buddhist exploits of the brāhmaṇa Māṅikkavācakar, author of the *Tiruvācakam*.

¹²⁰ *Appar Tirumurai* VI.13.5 (p. 100); cf. also VI.2.8-9 (pp. 14-15), etc. In VI.8.1, "He is the mighty One of the crematory" (p. 60).

¹²¹ *Appar Tirumurai* VI.58.10 (p. 391).

¹²² *Ibid.*: VI.58.3, 4 (pp. 387-88). *Bhūtas* ("billions and billions"), accompany Śiva "in sheer ecstasy" according to the *Periya Purāṇam*, I. 16 (vol. 1, p. 11).

The *Tiruvatāvūrar Purāṇam*,¹²³ which in the sixth canto gives a detailed account of his disputations with the Buddhists, reports that the saint, being unable to convince them in a great debate organised at Chidambaram, where the king of Lankā had come with his chief priest, resorted to his miraculous powers, first striking dumb the priest, and then making the king's dumb daughter to speak.¹²⁴

According to this *Purāṇam*, the debate between the Sivaite and the Buddhists at Tillai (Chidambaram) was organised with the understanding that it would last a week. It was Śiva himself who, appearing to Māṇikkavācakar in the night, convinced the saint to take part in the debate. The following morning, Māṇikkavācakar went to the hall where the Buddhists were assembled, and asked them to speak about their god, their sacred book and the destiny waiting for those who followed their principles. The Buddhists discussed resorting to evidence and inference, but Māṇikkavācakar proved that not all their arguments were founded on evidence, and that they had lost. The Buddhists requested him to show his god by means of the evidence, but the saint observed that “[i]t is not possible to make a blind man see the shining sun. Our God is above everything. He only is visible to those who put themselves to his service, besmeared with ashes.” The Buddhists requested at least to establish, based on evidence, the relationship existing between Śiva and the ash, and agreed upon being grinded in an oil-mill if such a proof was given. Māṇikkavācakar took some dried cow-dung, put it in the fire and heated it. When it turned red, he took it out of the fire and showing it to the Buddhists said: “The glittering body of our

¹²³ Vadāvūrar was the saint's name as minister of the Pāṇṭya king Varakuṇavarman II (862-880 AD).

¹²⁴ Rao, T.N. Vasudeva (1979: 229–30); cf. also Dikshitar, T.N. Ramachandra (1931: 690–91). The same story, summarised by Taylor, is reported in the “Baudha section” of the *Vātur Sthalapurāṇam*, where the king of Sri Lanka and his followers become Sivaite converts (cf. *Mackenzie Manuscripts* 5: 343–44).

Śiva and the ash he is besmeared with are like this cow-dung reddened on fire and the ash layer covering it.”¹²⁵ Unable to counter this evidence, the Buddhists lost their cause, and the Cōla king who supported them, after the miracle performed by the saint who caused his dumb daughter to sing the praises of Śiva, made the Buddhists to serve the sentence they had previously accepted.¹²⁶

By the end of the eighth century, the turn of the screw was felt in Koṅgu Nadu and Kerala, where the brāhmaṇas who had settled in the country developed into an organised, powerful community enjoying the patronage of the state.¹²⁷ The Nampūtiri brāhmaṇas, keepers of the Śrauta traditions and of the tenets of the *Pūrvamīmāṃsā*, are the best-known example of conservative orthodoxy. The brahmanisation of the country was given its myth of origin in the extermination of the kṣatriyas carried out by Paraśurāma and the resulting distribution of lands to the brāhmaṇas by the violent hero-god — a myth re-actualised in Purāṇic Brahmanism so as to sanctify the battle against the rulers who did not conform to Brahmanical order. The myth, discussed in the next chapter, was made to combine with the story of King Cēramāṇ Perumāḷ who, after a debate at Trikkariyur, had the tongues of the Buddhists cut, as already reported in Chapter I.

¹²⁵ This passage corresponds to *Tiruvīlaiyātar Purāṇam*: 64.97-108 as summarised and partly translated by Dessigane, Pattabiramin & Filliozat (1960: 100–101). These are the passages in French: “Il n’est pas possible de faire voir à un aveugle le soleil brillant. Notre Dieu est au dessus de tout. Il peut être visible que pour ceux qui se mettent à son service, en se frottant de cendre”; “Le corps luisant de notre Śivaṇ et la cendre qu’il porte sur lui sont comme cette bouse de vache chauffée au rouge et la couche de cendre qui la couvre.” The *Tiruvīlaiyātar Purāṇam* was written by Perumparrappuliyūr Nampi in the twelfth century, the edition followed by the authors being that of V. Cāminātaiyar, Madras 1927². This work has a popular parallel in a text with the same title composed at the beginning of the sixteenth century by Parañcōti Muṇivar, on which the nineteenth-century paintings of Madurai are based. Finally, there is a Sanskrit translation in verse, the *Hālāsya Māhātmya*. For all these questions, cf. *ibid.*: ii–iii.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*: 101 (*Tiruvīlaiyātar Purāṇam*: 64.109–13).

¹²⁷ Narayanan & Veluthat (1986: 259).

The Perumāls were a local lineage of kings who had been conferred kṣatriya status by the brāhmaṇas and who, from a certain period onwards, had become staunch supporters of Brahmanism. The king of the story is probably to be identified with the eighth-century Cēramāṇ Perumāl of Makōtai (modern Kodungallur) in the Cēra country, known as the author of literary works.¹²⁸

From this and the preceding evidence, the successful attempt of the brāhmaṇas to replace the śramaṇas at the court and play an undisputed political role emerges with great clarity. Conversions to Sivaism followed one another, though not without difficulties at first.¹²⁹ The brāhmaṇas had caught perfectly the structural relationship between the king, the *saṃgha* and the laity, and every effort was made to undermine it. The following is a Kannada tale curiously reversing the story of the fourth Nāyanār, Meipporuḷ:

Mēporuḷ-Nāyanār, a king or chief of the Lāda country, long waged war, unsuccessfully, with a Bauddha-rajā: at length he took advice from Śaiva votaries; and, at their suggestion, disguised himself as a Śaiva ascetic, and with a Tambiran, went to the palace of the Bauddha king with a book in his hand. The king came out to meet him, and asked him what he wanted, to which the reply was that he came to teach him the contents of the book, and that if allowed to enter inside the palace, he would do so. Leave was granted, and, putting the book into the hands of the king, he told him to read;

¹²⁸ Zvelebil (1975: 142–43). According to the version of the *Kēralōtpatti* followed by P.C. Alexander, the Perumāl king who had converted to Buddhism was Palli Pana Perumāl, who after being obliged to have the Buddhists mutilated, “abdicated in great remorse and left for ‘Makkam.’” (Alexander 1949: 51). The common identification as *mlecchas* of both Buddhists and Muslims, as well as of Christians, and the chronological inconsistencies of the chronicle make the evaluation of this and other passages of the *Kēralōtpatti* difficult. See the discussion by Alexander (ibid.: 51–61).

¹²⁹ The traditions according to which Mahendravarman I Pallava and Arikēsari Parāṅkusa Māravarmaṇ were Sivaites who converted to Jainism, eventually reverting to Sivaism, reflect the climate of the time when they lived, a turning point in the history of Tamiḷakam.

while the latter was doing so, the disguised chief took out a knife, and cut the king's throat. An alarm arose in the palace; and the Lāda chief prevailed on the warder of the palace to allow the Tambiran to escape out of the bounds of the country, before he should lose his own life. The god is represented as being pleased at this affair; and, appearing on his bullock-vehicle, gave tokens of favour, and beatitude to the said Mēporul-Nāyanār.¹³⁰

Any discussion on the role played by the saints or philosophers-saints in the eradication of Buddhism would be incomplete without mentioning Śaṅkarācārya, but the deeds attributed to him are so many that it would be impossible to give an even sketchy presentation of the questions involved, and the reader is referred to the scattered reference we will make of his deeds in this and the next chapter. Here we limit ourselves to recall a passage of Tāranātha, which demonstrates that his fame as eradicator of the heretics has not only been handed down by Hindu texts and oral tradition, which may have had all the interest in expanding the extent of his triumphs over the *śramaṇas*, but also by the Buddhists. Tāranātha, though emphasising Buddhist victories and the malice of the adversaries, recognises the superiority of orthodox *vādins* in a number of cases. The Lama recalls the distant events that took place in the south and seriously jeopardised the existence of the Law observing that, after a series of defeats suffered in debates with Kumāriḷa and another brāhmaṇa whom he calls Kaṇataroru, “[...] there were many incidents of the property and followers of the insiders being robbed by the *tīrthika brāhmaṇa-s*.”¹³¹ In connection to a debate where Śaṅkara himself is told to have accepted the challenge of some young, unwise Buddhist *vādins* of a monastery in Bengal, the Lama says that “the Buddhists were defeated and, as a result, everything belonging to the twentyfive centres of the Doctrine was lost to

¹³⁰ EC 4, 1898 (Mysore Inscr. 2, B.L. Rice): 36.

¹³¹ Tāranātha: 87A (p. 226).

the *tīrthika*-s and the centres were deserted. About five hundred *upāsaka*-s had to enter the path of the *tīrthika*-s.”¹³²

Doctrinal debates continued to be held long after the period considered in this section (seventh to ninth century). In the following chapters, we will give some more examples of debates that had become mere excuses to get rid of the opponents.

ELEPHANT HUNTING AND BEHEADING

Kumārila Bhaṭṭa was known as the Lion’s Roar of Brahmanical learning,¹³³ an appropriation of the ancient Lion’s Roar expounding the *Buddhavacana* from atop the Aśokan pillars and of the image of the teaching imparted by the learned Buddhists.¹³⁴ Kumārila’s association with the lion is not simply a rhetorical expression, but is connected to his deep enmity towards the Buddhists, who were often mockingly called “elephants” from — presumably — the form that the Buddha had assumed to enter the womb of Māyādevī. Lions are the natural enemies of elephants, which they seize by the throat jumping on their back. In the *Śaṅkara Digvijaya* we read that “[w]hen the elephants of Jaina and Buddhist heretics disappeared because of the roaming lion of Kumarila, the tree of Vedic wisdom began to spread everywhere with luxuriant foliage.”¹³⁵

In the epigraphic record of medieval India, the equation Buddhists-elephants is common and explicit. At Raṇipadra (Ranod, in Shivpuri district of Madhya Pradesh; Map 3), an inscription datable to the end of the tenth or the beginning of the eleventh century accounting for the lineage of the Mat-

¹³² Ibid.: 86B-87A (pp. 225–26).

¹³³ Pollock (2006: 55).

¹³⁴ See the discussion by Anālayo (2009) on the lion’s imagery in the teaching of the Buddha in the *nikāyas* and in the Chinese *āgamas*.

¹³⁵ *Śaṅkara Digvijaya*: 1. 95-98 (p. 9).

tamayūra ascetics of the now deserted but still standing *maṭha*, compares the Śākyas to elephants, and the Jains to jackals.¹³⁶ In Karnataka, we have both Brahmanical and Digambara Jain inscriptions attesting to this equivalence in the context of the new series of attacks against the Buddhists that took place in the eleventh and twelfth century. In an inscription from the Belur district of AD 1136, a Jain “emperor of logicians”, Vādībhasiṃha, is described as “a lion to the elephant disputants”.¹³⁷ In an inscription from Sravana Belgola of AD 1100, Yaśakīrti, brother of the *guru* Vāsavaçandra, is defined as “the splitter of the frontal globes of the elephants, the Bauddha and other disputants”.¹³⁸ In an epigraph of AD 1163, a Digambara Jain *guru* is called “destroyer of the rutting elephant the indomitable Bauddha”,¹³⁹ the “elephant(s) in rut” being a frequent, derogatory expression that, when applied to the Buddhists, is perhaps meant to stigmatise their immoral behaviour.

The best-known symbol of elephant hunting and killing in Purāṇic literature and figurative art is, easily, the Gajāsurasamhāramūrti of Śiva.¹⁴⁰ The myth is set in Benares, and is concisely narrated in the *Kūrma Purāṇa* in relation to the Kṛttivāseśvara Liṅga, the *liṅga* of the Lord who is clad in the garment of the skin:

Formerly a Daitya assumed the form of an elephant in this place and came near Bhava (Śiva) to kill those Brāhmaṇas who worship the Lord here everyday. O Excellent Brāhmaṇas, in order to protect those devotees, the three-eyed Mahādeva, favourably disposed to the devotees, appeared out of the Liṅga. Contemptuously Hara

¹³⁶ *EI* 1 (1892, F. Kielhorn): 351–61, l. 41.

¹³⁷ *EC* 5/1, 1902 (Hassan Inscr., B.L. Rice): no. 17 (cf. transl. p. 51).

¹³⁸ *EC* 2, rev. ed. 1923 (Sravana Belgola, R. Narasimhachar): no. 69; p. 35, transl. section.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*: no. 63; p. 15, transl. section.

¹⁴⁰ See the iconographical evidence and the relevant texts on this myth collected in Melzer (2002).

killed the Daitya of the form of an elephant with his trident. Its hide he made his robe. Hence the lord is Kṛttivāseśvara.¹⁴¹

Here the myth allegorises the clash between the Sivaite devotees and the *śramaṇas*, whose elder, the elephant, was killed as an intimidatory act aimed at dispersing his followers. An analysis of the myth at the symbolic level leads us to the same conclusion: the *gajāśura* is slain by Śiva at the beginning of his cosmic dance because the God has to remove all obstruction to the dance, the hide of the elephant being “the symbol of covering and limitation (*āvaraṇa*) which on the plane of matter is known as *charman* and on the level of Prana or the life-force is known as *śarman*”.¹⁴² The Buddhists-elephants are the major obstruction to the complete affirmation of Śiva, and they must be removed, or made to submit. Campantar, as early as the second half of the seventh century, clears up all doubts. In one of his hymns he says:

Those Buddhists and mad Jains may slander speak.
Such speech befits the wand’ers from the way.
But he who came to earth and begged for alms,
He is the thief who stole my heart away.
The raging elephant charged down at him;
O marvel! He but took and wore his hide;¹⁴³

The association between the elephant killed by Śiva and the “elephant of rut” of the epigraphic record is established in the hymns of Cuntarar, the great eighth-century Nāyaṇār. Ārūrār speaks of “the elephant of the oozing must”, of “the

¹⁴¹ *Kūrma Purāna*: 1.32.16-18 (vol. 1, p. 253).

¹⁴² V.S. Agrawala (1984a: 41). Agrawala further states: “The elephant is the symbol of the universal the Mahat and was transformed as Gajāśura, the elephant-demon, in the Purāna story whose Asuric form was bent in order to bring him into the rhythmic mould of the yajña.”

¹⁴³ Kingsbury & Phillips (1921: no. 18; p. 27). The killing of the elephant is very frequently recalled in the poems of Campantar’s elder companion, Appar; see for example *Appar Tirumurai* VI.4.8 (“Is He the One who destroyed/The ichor-abounding and haughty tusker [...]”, p. 32); VI.8.7 (“He, is Kaapaali who mantled Himself/In the tusker’s hide and joyed at it”, p. 64); etc.

black colour of the oozing must” and of “the intoxication and pride of the elephant, thanks to this oozing”. The elephant is “monstrous, fierce and big”, and nobody “could prevent its on-slaughter on the universe” before Śiva’s exploit.¹⁴⁴ The use of sexual metaphors to describe the Buddhists and their behaviour seems thus to be rather early, antedating the epigraphic evidence.

The sections of the *Kūrma Purāṇa* dealing with *śivaliṅgas* and the glorification of Benares¹⁴⁵ are additions of the Pāśupatas and do not seem to be earlier than AD 700,¹⁴⁶ but Campantar’s verses persuade us that by that time the myth had already formed. Kāśī, like many towns that had known a spectacular growth in the first and second centuries AD, had been transformed — like Mathurā, Ujjayinī, Prayāga, and a number of other towns enriched by the trade multiplier — into a major *tīrtha*, the Pāśupatas being the most active promoters of this transformation.¹⁴⁷ Kāśī became a centre under strict Sivaite control. The scant amount of information on ancient Benares remarked in the preceding chapter becomes even scantier, and I know of no iconographical evidence that can help us to detail the formation of a myth that seems to have its origins there. However, the distribution pattern of the myth in both its literary and iconographical form shows that events similar to those that took place in Benares were common. The myth is depicted, among many other places, in that sculptural *summa* of Śiva’s exploits that is the eighth-century Cave XVI of Ellora.¹⁴⁸ In Tamil Nadu, it is narrated

¹⁴⁴ See Rangaswamy (1990: 348–49).

¹⁴⁵ *Kūrma Purāṇa*: I.31–34 (vol. 1, pp. 246–47).

¹⁴⁶ Hazra (1940: 73).

¹⁴⁷ V.S. Agrawala (1984a: 47).

¹⁴⁸ Regarding the Gajāntaka panel, Soundara Rajan (1981: 193) observes that “the main episode is almost overpowered by the attendant figure sculpture suggesting not only ritual significance but a conceptual degeneration.”

in the Sivaite *āgamas*,¹⁴⁹ where Śiva's destructive act retains a protracted potential of violence historically assessable. Valuvur, a neighbourhood of Buddhist Nagapattinam,¹⁵⁰ is, at a local level, the reputed place of the killing of Gajāśura, and the exceptional Cōla bronze of Gajahāmūrti kept in the Virattēśvara Temple,¹⁵¹ testifies to an event that saw one or more "elephants" killed and Sivaism established unopposed.¹⁵²

The semantic ambiguity of figurative art makes an interpretation at the historical-political level convincing when other data are integrated in the discourse, and makes it, in turn, a primary source of information when other data are lacking. The task is particularly difficult in relation to aniconic imagery. The antinomy lions-elephants, or *vyālas*-elephants, falls within the case of extremely ambiguous signifiers. The rampart lions attached to the bases of the pilasters decorating the angles of the main shrine of the Tālagirīśvara Temple at Panamalai, built by the Pallava king Narasiṃhavarman II (AD 700-28) are crushing the heads of small recumbent elephants, and the interposed inscribed band extols the king as "vanquisher of the elephants".¹⁵³ Are the elephants simply vanquished political enemies? In his inscription in the Rājasimheśvara Temple of the Kailāsanātha compound at Kāñcīpuram, the Pallava emperor, known as Rājasimha, after recalling that Puruśottama (Viṣṇu) "was born to rescue from the ocean of sin the sinking people, who were swallowed by the horrid monster, (*called*)

¹⁴⁹ Rao, T.A. Gopinatha (1914-16, II: 150-52).

¹⁵⁰ Nagapattinam, known for the famous bronzes (Ramachandran 1954), survived as a Buddhist site until the fifteenth-sixteenth century (see, for instance, Bronze no. 84 in *ibid.*: 60-61).

¹⁵¹ Rao, T.A. Gopinatha (1914-16, II: 150, 153-54 and pl. XXXI).

¹⁵² Valuvūr as the place where the elephant was flayed is recorded by Nampi Ārūrār (Rangaswamy, M.A. Dorai 1990: 354 [*Tēvāram* 7.10.1]).

¹⁵³ Longhurst (1930: 5-6). See the section of the *adhithāna* of the Panamalai Temple in Meister & Dhaky (1983: 48, fig. 30a).

the *Kali age!*”,¹⁵⁴ defines himself “that pious king of kings, who made all quarters obedient to his orders and who proved a royal lion [Rājasimha] to the dense troops of the elephants of his daring foes!”¹⁵⁵ The reference to the Kali Age persuades us to follow a precise track, especially when, among the panels showing Śiva triumphing over defeated *asuras* and framed upon elephants heads, we see the God in his aspect of *yogin* and *guru* (Śiva Dakṣiṇamūrti) seated under a tree in company of a couple of deer disturbingly similar to those of the Buddha’s first sermon: the *ṛṣis* are listening, replacing Gautama’s few disciples.¹⁵⁶ The elephant head below is a cut-off head (Fig. 3).¹⁵⁷

The Vaikuṅṭha Perumāḷ Temple, built by Nandivarman II Pallavamalla (c. AD 730-95)¹⁵⁸ in the second half of the eighth century, is in accord with the prescriptions of the *Pāñcarātra Āgama*,¹⁵⁹ the Bhāgavatas having replaced the Sivaites at the court of Kāñcī. As in the Kailāsanātha temple, from the outer walls of both the *garbhagr̥ha* and the *maṇḍapa*, decorated with niches and a variety of images, protrude a long series of large-size, fierce rampant lions — technically, *vyālapāda* pilasters¹⁶⁰ — which seem to have the function of defending the place from the outside. This impression is strongly enhanced by the row of *vyālapāda* pillars of the *mālikā* cloister enclosing the temple, the back walls of which display the reliefs depicting the historical events related to the Pallava dy-

¹⁵⁴ *SII* 1 (1890, E. Hultzsch): v. 8 (p. 14).

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*: v. 11.

¹⁵⁶ The panel is part of the decoration of the *ardhamaṇḍapa* (Rea 1909: 39; pl. LXII).

¹⁵⁷ See also the cut-off elephant heads in the *adhithāna* (Meister & Dhaky 1983: pl. 30).

¹⁵⁸ For the chronology of this king, see HCIP 3: 262–63.

¹⁵⁹ Hudson (2002: 134).

¹⁶⁰ Meister & Dhaky (1983: 71).

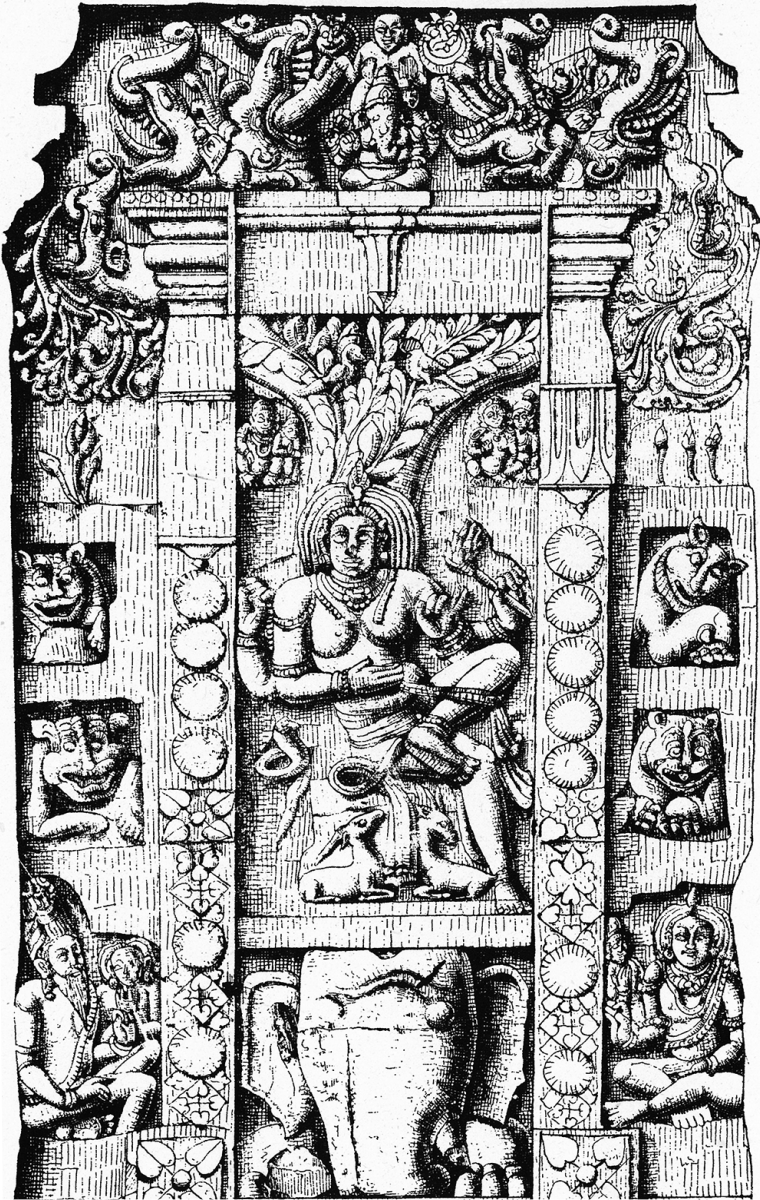


Fig. 3 - Śiva as yogin on cut-off elephant head.
Kāñcīpuram, Kailāsanātha Temple.

nasty and to Nandivarman II.¹⁶¹ Walking in the space between, the visitor is snarled at from both sides.¹⁶²

Pallavamalla was a resolute persecutor of *śramaṇas*, and the evidence brought forward by Cadambi Minakshi with regard to the Buddhists is worth reporting. A panel in the western part of the cloister, to the right of the entrance, shows two men being impaled, the king sitting in a pavilion where judgement has been delivered (Fig. 4). They cannot be mistaken as ordinary criminals (impalement was customary in South India until the Vijayanagara period)¹⁶³ because the relief is located amongst other panels that have a bearing on the religious policy of the king. The panel to the right displays an Ālvār (probably one the first three Ālvārs) and a shrine resembling the Vaikuṅṭha Perumāl, the series being preceded by an image of Viṣṇu, arguably the one installed in the temple. Minakshi observes that “this row of panels represents nothing less than the establishment of Vaisnavism on the destruction of the heretics.”¹⁶⁴ The Ālvārs, particularly Tirumaṅkai and Toṅṭaratiṭṭoṭi, went very far in their anxiety to get rid of the *śramaṇas* and condition the policy of the rulers. Toṅṭaratiṭṭoṭi, who was born in a family of brāhmaṇas near Kumpakōṇam/Kumbakonam in AD 726¹⁶⁵ and is therefore a contemporary of Pallavamalla, supported an extermination policy in one of his *Tīrumālai* hymns:

¹⁶¹ Minakshi (1941).

¹⁶² I find it difficult here to follow Hudson & Case (2008: 63–64) who, although rightly refusing the idea that the “Pallava-style lions” are “merely adornments”, suggest them to allude to the conquering power of Durgā embodied by the king. For all the complexity of mature, inclusive Bhāgavatism, Durgā seems to me to be out of place here, and we should rather recall the inherent leonine nature of Viṣṇu, betrayed by both the lion-head he displays in his crown (below, n. 181) and by his Narasiṃha, *vāma* aspect.

¹⁶³ Minakshi (1938: 172).

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Chari (1997: 11, 26–27).

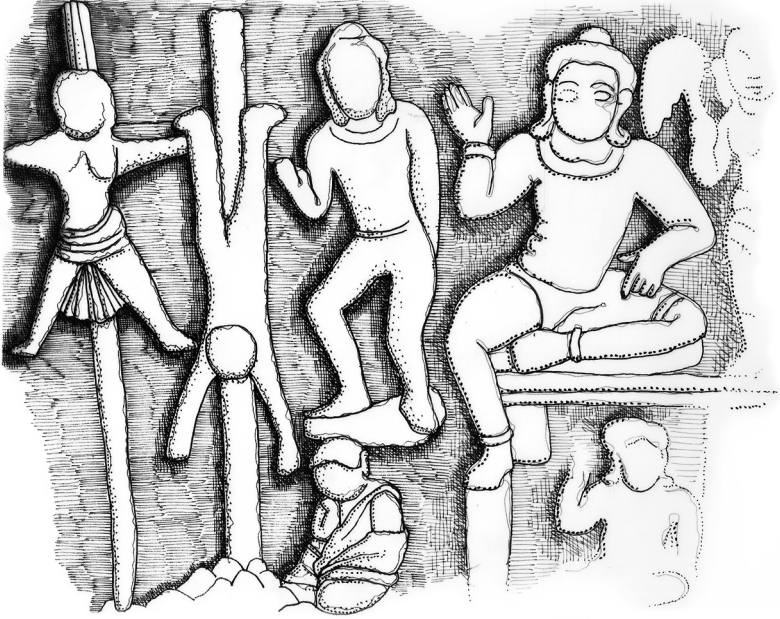


Fig. 4 - Pallavamalla Nandivarman II delivering judgement and impalement of Buddhists. Kāñcīpuram, Vaikuṅṭha Perumāl Temple.

Oh Lord of Śrīraṅga, our ears have become diseased by listening to the series of unceasing and unbearable slander of the so-called preachings of the Samaṇa ignoramuses and the unprincipled Śākyas. If you would only endow me with sufficient strength I shall deem it my duty to do nothing short of chopping off their heads.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ Dikshitar, V.R. Ramachandra (1931: 692, n. 4; cf. also Rao, T.N.Vasudeva 1979: 235). The Tamil text, also quoted by Minakshi (1938: 172) runs: *Ve-ruppoṭu camaṇar muṇṭar vitīyil cākkīyarkaḷ ninpāl/Poṟuppariyanaḷ pēsīl pōvatēṇōyatāki/Kuṟippenakkataiyumākil kuṭumēl, talayaiyāṅke/Aruppatē karumam kaṇṭāy arāṅkamānakaṟuḷāṇē*. As an example of the difficulty in interpreting these and similar passages, I report the observations kindly provided to me by François Gros. Line 1: according to some commentators, *muṇṭar* refer to the Sivaites, who would thus be included, coherently with the strong sectarian nature of Tamil Vishnuism, among the enemies to eradicate. Line 2: *pōvatēṇōyatāki* decomposes as *pōvat(u)-ē* (“this will go, will end” + emphatic *ē*) and *nōy-ātu-āki* (“an illness this having become”). Three interpretations are possible: (a) *pōvatu* (to go, to leave) can be understood, with reference to the blasphemers, as “to be

Minakshi has shown that the last few lines of the Udayendiram [Uṭayenṛirām] grant, mentioning the destruction of all persons whose observances were not in accordance to *dharma* (*anyān adharmā kṛtyān*) do not refer to the Jains, but to the Buddhists.¹⁶⁷ The radical measures alluded to were preliminary to the donation of four pieces of *aranya* land, with all the usual immunities, to the brāhmaṇa Kulācāṇmaṇ in the Kāñcīvāyil village. The verses of Toṅṅaraṭippoṭi may be considered suggestive of the mechanisms usually followed when land distribution in favour of the brāhmaṇas took place in the myriad of villages dotting the plains. The Buddhists and the other heretics living in the villages were not simply obliged to leave but were killed — at least some of them — *sur-le-champ*,¹⁶⁸ that is, in the very place where they were carrying on their sinful life. What actually happened must have depended on how strong, at a local level, was the resistance of the peasants and of the low- and outcastes. The land was appropriated and, made free from the presence of the former owners and their religious representatives, donated to the brāhmaṇas, village after village.

This process is substantiated by a few Pallava records where we find the expressions *kuṭi nīkki*, which means “re-

ruined, to be destroyed”: this is the interpretation accepted for the translation above; (b) the Vishnuite devotees, affected by the blasphemers as by an illness, will die; (c) the devotees, being unable to endure the sufferance caused by the evil plans of the blasphemers, will leave covering their ears. Line 3: there is a variant for *kuṛipp(u)enakku aṭaiyūm*, that is, *kuṛippinukku aṭaiyūm* (“[the question being of] reaching one’s aim”). However, the Āḷvārs speak very often in the first person in their poems, also for reviling the heretics. Line 4: the commentaries underline the advisability of immediate justice, and the text may thus be understood that the heretics are to be killed in the very place where they have blasphemed. A tentative French translation would thus be: “Qu’avec répulsion, Camanar, crânes-rasés, infortunés Cakkiyar, sur Toi/Tiennent des propos intolérables, cela finira, certes, comme un mauvais mal;/Mais s’agissant d’atteindre mon but, — si possible — le karma, voyez-vous,/Est bien de leur trancher la tête sur-le-champ. O Lui-qui-réside dans la grande Cité d’Arangam!”.

¹⁶⁷ Minakshi (1938: 171). The grant was published by Thomas Foulkes (*JA* 8, 1879: 273–84; cf. I. 74, p. 276).

¹⁶⁸ Cf. n. 166 above.

moving the earlier occupants” and *mun-perrārai māṛri*, which has the same meaning. As observed by Kesavan Veluthat, both these expressions “signify that the recipients of the land were at liberty to evict the earlier occupants of the land and settle it with new occupants of their own choice”.¹⁶⁹ It should be noted here that the “inherent expansionism” of the land-granting system implemented by the Guptas, which had proved sustainable due to the vastness and even to the marginality of the territories to colonise,¹⁷⁰ had reached saturation, and that now there was much more ground for clashes and violence.

The evidence regarding Pallavamalla and the Ālvārs is to be seen in relation to the other events that had already taken place in Kāñcīpuram, as for instance the defeat of the Buddhists by Akaḷaṅka and their expulsion during the reign of Hemaśīṭala/Hiraṇyavarman, discussed above. A controversy ending with the expulsion of the *śramaṇas* is said to have taken place also between the Buddhists and Śaṅkarācārya when the latter established the *śāktapīṭha* of the Goddess Kāmākṣī in Kāñcī.¹⁷¹ The change in the structure of the society is reflected by the thorough transformation of the capital town in the eighth century, when the Buddhist establishments were obliterated. T.A. Gopinatha Rao recognised a number of scattered Buddhist images exactly in the area of the Kāmākṣī Temple,¹⁷² and assumed that the latter was built on the place of a former Buddhist building.¹⁷³ Whatever the historical reliability of the

¹⁶⁹ Veluthat (1993: 224).

¹⁷⁰ Willis (2009: esp. 158–59).

¹⁷¹ *IA* 44 (1915, T.A. Gopinatha Rao): 128; Champakalakshmi (1996: 398).

¹⁷² See now the few known Buddhist images from the town and the district of Kāñcīpuram in Fukuroi (2002).

¹⁷³ The learned scholar noted that while in his times the Jain temples of Kāñcī were still in existence, there were no relics of the places and objects of worship of the Buddhists: cf. T.A. Gopinatha Rao in *IA* 44 (1915: 128). If we accept the role of Śaṅkara in the replanning of the city, we should also assume his presence in Kāñcī before the Court turned to Bhāgavatism (above). This would be a factor in determining the uncertain chronology of the great saint.

traditions concerning the saint, the presence of Śaṅkara at Kāñcī, where he is also said to have established a famous *maṭha*,¹⁷⁴ seems well grounded. According to tradition, the saint had the plan of the town completely changed and shrines erected in such a way as to form a larger *śrīcakra* around the Kāmākṣī Temple.¹⁷⁵ Even if we do not want to believe in Śaṅkara's direct involvement, the substance of things does not change. Only a small Buddhist community survived the dramatic years of the Brahmanical transformation of Kāñcīpuram: a Bauddhapalli and a merchant street are recorded as late as the thirteenth century.¹⁷⁶

In Orissa, the clash with the Buddhists was particularly violent and lasted until the sixteenth century, and aniconic imagery retained for long its deeper meaning, without turning into decorative imagery. In the temples of Bhubaneswar the lions-elephants opposition is striking, echoing on a smaller scale the lions-elephants opposition constitutive of the Kailāsanātha temple of Ellora, which is literally built on elephants, fiercely attacked by lions. We will return to Ellora in the next chapter, and here we concentrate on Bhubaneswar. The square tassels in a row below the now empty niches on the *bāda* of the temple of Paraśurāmeśvara depict either elephants assailed and bitten into by lions or tamed elephants paying homage to the lion-king. This temple dates to the first half of the seventh century,¹⁷⁷ and has many iconographical peculiarities in common with the Vaitāl Deul. Cāmuṇḍā, the

¹⁷⁴ As is known, there is a bitter dispute between the Kāñcī and Śrīgeri *maṭhas* as to which of the two is Śaṅkara's original monastery. Sankaranarayanan (1995: 293) observes that the street where the Kāñcī *maṭha* is located bears the name *cālai teru* (Salai Street), that is, a street marked by the presence of a *cālai/sālai*, that is, a *maṭha*. Kāñcī was probably Śaṅkara's last sojourn (Piantelli 1998: 192 ff.; Pande 1994: 342, 359–60).

¹⁷⁵ Piantelli (1998: 192).

¹⁷⁶ Champakalakshmi (1996: 398).

¹⁷⁷ Panigrahi (1961: 26 ff.); Meister, Dhaky & Deva (1988: 256).

mātrkāś and Kārttikeya are depicted on the outer walls of the *jagamohana* along with several other divinities and symbolic imagery.¹⁷⁸ Lakulīśa with his four disciples is present on the front facade of the superstructure, being thus given a prominent status. The original name of the temple was, in fact, Parāśareśvara, from the *liṅga* enshrined in the *garbhagrha* in the name of a famous Pāśupata teacher.¹⁷⁹ An image of Śiva Bhikṣātana, also present in the Vaitāl Deul, among the images decorating the temple points to Śiva's exploit against Brahmā.

On the outer walls of the Vaitāl Deul we observe panels depicting huge, fierce *vyālas* mounted by riders who have just defeated two-armed warriors, on whose identity we remain uncertain (Fig. 5). Long strings of pearls come out from their mouths.¹⁸⁰ Higher up, the rectangular tassels just above the *garbhagrha* at the height at which the roof starts are decorated with pairs of elephants crushed by gnashing lions which are holding their paws on the elephants' heads. The *kīrtimukha*/lion-head from which hang strings of pearls, known from a number of Brahmanical temples, held a deep meaning before being transformed into a decorative motif. The *kīrtimukha* was transformed into a lion-face motif in Gupta and post-Gupta art, and the lion became a symbol of Śiva's wrath.¹⁸¹ The large pearls hanging from the mouths of the lions acquired by "breaking open the temples of the elephants" is a common literary metaphor,¹⁸² but when we find it in a passage of the *Ādipurāna*, the ninth-century work of

¹⁷⁸ The most complete description of the iconographies profusely displayed in this temple is, to this day, that of Panigrahi (1961: 69–77), though it is not an iconographical study in a proper sense.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.: 224–25.

¹⁸⁰ Donaldson (1976) provides other examples from the temples of Bhubaneswar.

¹⁸¹ V.S. Agrawala (1965: 235 ff.). A similar, subtle allusion, harking back to *sandhyābhāṣā* in literary texts, may be seen in the early crowns of Viṣṇu decorated with lion heads and strings of pearls, pointing to the parallel role of the Bhāgavatas in curbing the power of the heretics.

¹⁸² See for instance *Kādambarī*: 57 (cf. p. 39 of the transl.).



Fig. 5 - Strings of pearls seized by *vyālas* in the Vaitāl Deul, Bhubaneswar.

the Digambara Jinasena, where victory over delusion (*moha*) is alluded to,¹⁸³ it is probable that reference is made to the riches stolen from enemies, and, in context, to the destruction of Buddhist stūpas and institutions. A passage from Bu Ston's prophecy on the end of Buddhism seems to fit in this picture:

The hosts of Māra and other foes of the Doctrine will appear there and become powerful. The kings, ministers, etc., will lose faith and will no more draw a distinction between virtue and sin. They will inflict wounds upon the Highest Doctrine, and will rob and carry away the property of the 3 Jewels and that of the Congregation. They will have no shame in committing sinful deeds and will destroy the images and sanctuaries, so that the objects of worship will grow scant.¹⁸⁴

Regarding the later evidence at Bhubaneswar, I will limit myself to making a few observations on the Brahmeśvara

¹⁸⁴ I read the passage in Kramrisch (1946, II: 336, n. 118); cf. *IA* 14, 1884 (K.B. Pathak): 105 [*Ādipurāna*: XXI. 231-32]; "temples" has the sense of "frontal globes". On Jinasena, see below, Chapter VI.

and Rājarāni temples, built in the eleventh century, although clarifying the semantic ambiguity of the concerned images is particularly difficult. The temple known today as Rājarāni is identifiable with the Sivaite temple of Indreśvara.¹⁸⁵ Its *jagamohana*, *pañcaratha* in plan, attracts attention because of the massive columns entwined by *nāgas* flanking the entrance and the side balustraded windows. The front of the pedestals have the form of three lions riding as many tamed elephants, and the back that of fierce *vyālas* mounted by riders assailing diminutive elephants. A lion, arguably identifiable with the unknown ruler who caused the temple to be built, towers on the top of the structure before the *kalaśa*. Mistaking for decorative features what is in fact an aniconic representation would be a serious misunderstanding, even considering that the iconographical programme was left incomplete and that the temple was repaired from serious damages in 1903.¹⁸⁶ *Gajavyālas*, and in some cases rampart lions attacking men (*naravyālas*) are found in the recesses of the *deul*, too.

Fierce *vyālas* mounted by riders going on with the hunt, while the dismounted ones trample on the elephants, are observable in the Brahmeśvara Temple, erected by Kolāvatī Devī, mother of Uddyōta Kēśarī (c. AD 1040-65),¹⁸⁷ and in fact the motif has been long associated with the Kēśarī or Somavaṃśī kings.¹⁸⁸ The elephants crushed by the *yālis* are depicted as small, clumsy animals doomed to be defeated. The Somavaṃśīs were staunch Sivaites, apparently acting under

¹⁸⁴ *Bu ston*: fol. 132 a-b (p. 173). The great Tibetan scholar (AD 1290-1364) places these events before an ephemeral recovery of the religion and the appearance on the Indian horizon of three kings, “neither of Indian, nor of Chinese descent”, but “Yavana, Pahlīka and Čakuna”.

¹⁸⁵ Panigrahi (1961: 94–95).

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*: 97.

¹⁸⁷ See the Ananta Vāsudeva inscription in R. Mitra (1875-80, II: 150–52).

¹⁸⁸ Ganguly (1912: 203).

the influence of the Maṭṭamayūras, the already mentioned Sivaite sect that originated in central India.¹⁸⁹ The inscription (now lost) recording the construction of the Brahmeśvara Temple mentions King Janamejaya II Mahāśivagupta's difficult but victorious fight against the elephants of a political enemy.¹⁹⁰ Political enemies are also mentioned in relation to his predecessor Uddyōta Mahābhavagupta IV, who caused "numberless rājās to bow down their heads",¹⁹¹ so that we would be inclined to refer the temple imagery to victorious wars, and consider the construction of the temples not only a celebration of the greatness of Śiva, but of the kings' military power and glory. However, in the complex reality of Orissa that we will examine again below and in the next chapters, we should ask ourselves who those "numberless rājās" and their supporters may have been. The social and political dynamics governing the relationships between Hindu kings and native chiefs that characterises the history of the region up to the eighth-ninth century¹⁹² had not much changed in the tenth and eleventh century. Although the process of *varṇa* state formation was more advanced, the social and religious implications of the military offensive of the Kēśarī kings supported by the Sivaite *ācāryas* must be set in the geopolitical perspective of the fault line running along the Vindhya and of the armed Buddhist response to Brahmanical expansionism.

¹⁸⁹ Panigrahi (1981: 238–39). The temples of Kadvaha, their religious seat in Gopakṣetra (then Candella territory), which dates back to the tenth and eleventh centuries, were erected by their *ācāryas* with the support of the local rulers. On the Maṭṭamayūras, see Mirashi (1955: cli ff.); Pathak (1960: 32–34) is not in agreement with Mirashi's identifications, and believes Maṭṭamayūra to be located in Punjab. See, however, Willis (1997: 80).

¹⁹⁰ R. Mitra (1875–80, II: 151 [I. 2]). Mahāśivagupta ruled between AD 1065 and 1085.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.: 151–52 (1. 10).

¹⁹² Kulke (1986: 127–29).

MILITARY TRAINING

Attention has been drawn by several authors on the early testimonies regarding the large establishments where young brāhmaṇas from many parts of India were trained in a number of disciplines. These included the study of the Vedas, grammar, the science of logic — Mīmāṃsā, Sāṃkhya, Vaiśeṣika, Naiyāyika *darśanas*, and, significantly, Buddhadarśana — but the students also practiced archery and shield sport, and were engaged in crossing swords, handling arrows and different kinds of stakes, in fighting with spears and clubs and wrestling hand to hand and fist to fist. The evidence comes from a Jain work, the *Kuvalayamālā*, a *campū* composed by Uddyotanasūri in AD 779¹⁹³ that, despite being an unsympathetic source, is of particular interest for us. The hero of the romance, the prince Kuvalayacandra, arrives at Vijayāpurī on the western coast of the Deccan or in Kerala¹⁹⁴ in search of Kuvalayamālā, and is wrongly directed to a *caṭṭānam maḍham*, that is, a *maṭha* housing young brāhmaṇa students. It is here that the prince is struck by the great number of subjects taught. Uddyotana critically addresses the group of students who brought all their intelligence to recite the Vedas, and nothing else. They gave each other slaps on their curly hair and hit their plump limbs with brutal kicks; they shrugged their shoulders, and fattened on the alms of others their already ample flesh; they aspired to visit other people's women and were incredibly proud of their good fortune and beauty.¹⁹⁵

Christine Chojnacki has warned us against considering the novel a reflection of the reality of the eighth century with-

¹⁹³ *Kuvalayamālā*: 150.20-151.6 (vol. 2, pp. 439–41); for the date of the work, see Chojnacki in *ibid.* I: 64.

¹⁹⁴ Chojnacki, following A.N. Upadhye, editor of the manuscript, identifies Vijayāpurī with Vijayadurg, due north of Goa (cf. *Kuvalayamālā* II: 436, n. 1388), but Krishnan (1970), followed by other authors, has proposed the identification with ancient Kāntalūr — probably Thiruvananthapuram (see below).

¹⁹⁵ *Kuvalayamālā* II: 151.15-16 (vol. 2, p. 442).

out reading the context,¹⁹⁶ but with regard to *maṭhas* we have further evidence confirming Uddyotana's report. These *maṭhas* were known in Kerala as *śālais* (from *śālā*), which were attached to temples.¹⁹⁷ Going by a Tamil inscription of King Karuṇāntataṅkan of the Yādava or Āy family dated AD 866,¹⁹⁸ the strict rules governing the *śālais* had started relaxing in the ninth century. In fact, the charter forbids the *caṭṭars* to keep concubines (as would have been obvious for *brahmācāryas*) and prescribes fines for a number of faults. Later sources prove the continued existence of arms-bearing brāhmaṇas and, at the same time, a further relaxation of the discipline.¹⁹⁹ The existence of orthodox schools throws light on the formation of the intellectual elite who opposed the Buddhist logicians in debates, but their most striking characteristic, however, is that the students underwent military training and made use of weapons, acting as a volunteer force in defending the properties of the school and the temple. This arms-bearing community of dedicated scholars must have constituted a formidable force.²⁰⁰

It was probably in one of these institutions that Śaṅkarācārya was trained.²⁰¹ His fame as controversialist²⁰² and his knowledge of Buddhism point to this conclusion. If the oversimplification of nineteenth-century authors, ready to saddle

¹⁹⁶ Chojnacki in *Kuvalayamālā* I: 23, 244.

¹⁹⁷ Krishnan (1970: 347-48). The *Kuvalayamālā* (150.15-20; vol. 2, pp. 439-40) clearly distinguishes between *maṭha* and temple. In fact, the prince mistakes at first the former for the latter, until a passerby tells him that it was not a temple but an educational institution.

¹⁹⁸ Rao, T.A. Gopinatha (1920, I: 19-34; cf. p. 33). The plate is about the establishment of a *śālai* at Kāntalūr, identified by him with Valiyasali, a locality in Tiruvananthapuram (Krishnan 1970: 349-50).

¹⁹⁹ Veluthat (1975: 100).

²⁰⁰ Narayanan (1970: 128).

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*: 129. Almost all the sources agree in locating Śaṅkara's birthplace at Kālaṭi (Kalady) in the Ernakulam district (Bader 2000: 79). The reader is referred to *ibid.*, pp. 313 ff., for the construction of the myth of Śaṅkara as a restorer of Brahmanism by both hagiographers and modern Hindu nationalists.

²⁰² With regard to the tradition of Śaṅkara's challenge to the Buddhists, see *Tāra-nātha*: 90B-93A, pp. 232-37, for his repeated debates (two of which after being reborn) with Dharmakīrti at Nālandā.

Śāṅkara with the extermination of the heretics in accord with the stories narrated in the hagiographies and/or handed over by local traditions, is to be rejected, it remains to be understood why such stories have been so unanimously transmitted: there is a thread, we have suggested, that binds earlier events with those closer in time to the period when the literary sources were written. The *maṭha* where Śāṅkara is likely to have received his training and the *maṭhas* he founded according to a unanimous tradition can be considered aggressive institutions, and the members of his *maṭhas* are likely to have played a part in the uprooting of the *śramaṇas* by taking action in a number of cases. The initiative of the king of a given territory under Brahmanical pressure was not the only way to wipe out the power of the monasteries: the initiative could come from below, from militias organised by religious groups.

The question of the relationship between the *cāṭṭas* of the *maṭhas* and those of the *ghaṭikās*, who are associated with *bhaṭṭas*, remains open. We have seen that *ghaṭikā* has been considered synonymous with *śālai/maṭha*,²⁰³ but that it rather denotes an institution regulating trade where the seal of the dynasty was kept:²⁰⁴ hence the role played by the *ghaṭikā* of Kāñcī in the selection and consecration of the new king Nandivarman II Pallavamalla in AD 732.²⁰⁵ *Ghaṭikās* are associated with the establishment of the new orthodox powers, as is shown by the story of Mayūraśarman of Banavāsī, who eventually quarreled with the persons responsible for the Kāñcī *ghaṭikā*:²⁰⁶ after becoming king in his country, he

²⁰³ It is in this perspective that Narayanan (1970) and Veluthat (1975) have developed their interpretations. There is much to be kept here, but the whole question should be rediscussed.

²⁰⁴ Ticken & Sato (2000) and above.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.: 217 (the authors have retranslated the relevant passage of the Vaikuṅṭha Perumāḷ label inscription in n. 20 on pp. 221–22).

²⁰⁶ See the Tālagunda pillar inscription of the Kadamba king Śāntivarman (c. AD 450–75) that contains this early reference to a *ghaṭikā*: the relevant passage has been retranslated in *ibid.*: 213–14.

is reported to have performed eighteen *aśvamedhas*,²⁰⁷ an inflated number that, in any case, indicates that the Kadamba *kula* was under strict Brahmanical control. An inflated number of *aśvamedhas* are also attributed to several Viṣṇukuṇḍin kings²⁰⁸ after the *kula* became a bulwark of orthodox power with the conversion to Sivaism of Govindavarman (c. AD 422-62), who had formerly supported Buddhism.²⁰⁹ This is not the case of Indrabhaṭṭārakavarman, to whom the re-establishment of Viṣṇukuṇḍin power after a serious crisis was due;²¹⁰ his ascending the throne of Veṅgi in c. AD 526, in any case, is connected with the establishment of a *ghaṭikā*.²¹¹

At the present state of our knowledge, it is difficult to say if the *cāṭṭas* of the *ghaṭikās* were imparted military training as happened to those attached to *maṭhas*. Brāhmaṇas proudly claimed kṣatriya role,²¹² and we cannot exclude that kṣatriya training was imparted in other institutions besides *maṭhas*. It is possible that a paramilitary force was established to guarantee the operations for which the *bhaṭṭas* and *cāṭṭas* were responsible. The association between the king and the brāhmaṇas of both the administrative machinery and the *maṭhas* grew so close as to make the decisional level difficult for us to identify. The religious cleansing of the Kāñcīvāyil village under Nandivarman Pallavamalla discussed above probably needed the intervention of a regular army unit, because the land was granted by the king, and the same had been probably true for the orders imparted by Mahendravarman I Pallava.

²⁰⁷ Moraes (1931: 16).

²⁰⁸ Sankaranarayana (1977: 2 ff.).

²⁰⁹ Ibid.: 37-40, 45. If the Sivaite temple of Srisailam was erected on the ruins of a Buddhist establishment, Govindavarman may have been the king responsible for the radical transformation of the site (ibid.: 40).

²¹⁰ Ibid.: 66.

²¹¹ Ibid.: 236.

²¹² In the Kasakudi [Kācākūṭi] plates, Nandivarman says of one of his ancestors that "[t]hough born from a race of Brāhmaṇas, he possessed in the highest degree the valour of the Kshatriyas, which was inherent in him" (*SII* 2/3 [1895, E. Hultzsch]: 342-61: v. 18).

Born a Sivaite, he joined the Jain monastery at Pāṭali (modern Cuddalore),²¹³ which he caused with other shrines to be destroyed when the first Nāyaṇār, Appar, reconverted him to his former creed.²¹⁴ Conversely, in such a case as that of Campantar entering Būtamāṅkalam, or of the Sivaitees establishing their power at Valuvur, the use of militias is more likely.

The reason why *maṭhas* fell gradually into a state of anarchy lies probably in the fact that their adherents, kept under control until when — the ninth century in the South — they were invested with the major objective of eradicating heresy, were no longer offered any major task. It is interesting to note that ranks would tighten again when the situation became tense once more. Social dynamics tend to present themselves again almost unchanged, although in disguise, when a situation gets stuck in its fundamentals or evolves into a renovated contraposition of social models (this happened in the eleventh and twelfth century). It has been maintained that the groups of warrior ascetics of the Indian middle ages are not the gradual evolution of previously existing institutions but arose only after the Muslim conquest.²¹⁵ This, however, is not very likely. The presence of warrior ascetics in earlier times was better understood, though in a simplistic way, by nineteenth-century observers. James MacNabb Campbell in 1896 noticed that the Pāśupatas, identified with the Dasanāmīs because the latter were “Nakuliśas in their discipline doctrines and habits”,

²¹³ Cf. Aiyangar, S. Krishnaswamy (1923: 237).

²¹⁴ It should be kept in mind that — as recalled by Gros (1984: xiii) — our only source for all this is the *Periya Purāṇam*: “The Kadava king who came to con the falsity/Of the Jains who knew not the way to salvation,/Came by truth; he razed all the shrines/And mutts of the Jains at Pataliputra, and with/Their spoils brought to Tiruvatikai, raised the temple/Gunaparaveechharam for the brown-eyed Lord” (26.146; vol. 1, p. 291). The temple of Guṇadhārīśvara is located at Tirupputipulliyur, Cuddalore, which before becoming a Jain and then a Sivaite centre, was a centre of Buddhism (cf. Ramachandran 1954: 11). It was a Mahendravarman’s patronage, as shown by Ramaswamy (1975), that the Sivaite monuments of Māmallapuram were erected (against Ramaswamy’s chronology, see e.g. Rabe 1997).

²¹⁵ Lorenzen (1978: 64).

were ever ready to fight for their school and often helped and served in the armies of kings who became their disciples. Till a century ago these unpaid followers recruited the armies of India with celibates firm and strong in fighting. It is apparently to gain these recruits that so many of the old rulers of India became followers of the Pasupata school. To secure their services the rulers had to pay them special respect. The leaders of these fighting monks were regarded as pontiffs like the Bappa-pāda or Pontiff of the later Valabhi and other kings. Thus among the later Valabhis Śīlāditya IV, is called Bārapādānudhyāta and all subsequent Śīlāditya Bappapādānudhyāta, both titles meaning Worshipping at the feet of Bava or Bappa.²¹⁶

THE *MAHAVRĀTA* OF THE KĀPĀLIKAS

In Orissa we are in a position to appreciate both the pan-Indian unison in which the brāhmaṇas acted in connection with the creation of an agrarian society and the radicalisation of the social and political struggle involved in the process. The lands in the coastal plains of Orissa started being granted to the brāhmaṇas in the fourth and fifth centuries AD,²¹⁷ but the complete acquisition of the land and the control over the whole territory was a long, strongly opposed process. There is a certain similarity with the situation in Tamil Nadu, even if we do not accept the theory of segmentary state adapted to the Orissan situation, but in Orissa the brahmanisation process was more difficult and painfully slow, which resulted in continuous warfare. Discussing the political-religious events of the region and the often convulsive, contradictory state of the affairs, we should never lose sight of the fact that it bordered Bihar and Bengal, which were under Pāla control. Pāla interference

²¹⁶ Campbell (1896: 84). On this recurring formula in Maitraka inscriptions see Njammasch (2001: 8 ff.). Dyczkowski (1988: 200, n. 53) has underlined the dependency of the Dasanāmīs from previous traditions (though obviously not as early as the Sivaite groups of Valabhī).

²¹⁷ U. Singh (1994: 29). The author gives a full account, based on the epigraphic evidence, on land distribution in the various parts of the region.

was continuous, even when the dynasty lost part of its power. Unlike Tamil Nadu, in Orissa the front of anti-Brahmanical forces would continue to look northwards, never giving up hope. The breadth and weight of the non-brahmanised areas and the presence of numerous local chiefs in a territory with a weaker identity than Tamiḷakam, make of Orissa the best possible vantage point for the fault line, pretty much coinciding with the ridge of the Vindhya mountains, which was subjected to centuries of violent shaking. The ultimate objectives of the neo-orthodox were the trans-Vindhyan plains of Magadha, the Mahanadi delta (a replica of the Kaveri delta), and Bengal. We lack the extraordinary directness of Tamil literary sources, reflecting an unrivalled degree of self-confidence, but the directness of Orissan iconographical sources have probably no equal in the whole of India.

Let us go back again to the Vaitāl Deul on the Bindusarovara at Bhubaneswar. At first, looking at the ithyphallic image of Lakulīṣa accompanied by his four disciples²¹⁸ and, just below, at a relief with Śiva and Pārvatī on the southern side (the front part) of the superstructure, the affiliation of the temple would seem evident. Nevertheless, it is the iconographical programme of the *garbhagr̥ha* that provides us with better clues to understanding the *raison d'être* of the temple. The presiding deity is Cāmuṇḍā, depicted at the centre of the back wall.²¹⁹ She tramples on a corpse, according to the iconographies developed in the late eighth century.²²⁰ Two series of *mātr̥kās*, lesser in size, are found on both sides of the Goddess along the back and side walls. The first is led by Vīrabhadra,

²¹⁸ A thorough analysis on Lakulīṣa on early Sivaite temples of Orissa is provided by D. Mitra (1984; for Bhubaneswar, pp. 106 ff.).

²¹⁹ For this condensed iconographical description, I follow Panigrahi (1961: 78 ff.) and Donaldson (2002, I: 109–10). For other Orissan temples presided over by Cāmuṇḍā, see *ibid.*: 417 ff.

²²⁰ See the typology proposed by Donaldson (1991: 122 ff.), whose interpretation develops on an exclusively symbolical level.

the other by a deity analogous to the female aspect of the God. In the northern wall, near to an image of Gaṇeśa who has, among his attributes, a battle-axe, there is an ithyphallic Bhairava in his skeletal form (Atirikāṅga Bhairava) wearing a garland of skulls (Fig. 6). The God, who wears a garland of skulls, “sits in a fighting posture”, resting the weight of his body on the left knee, and holds in the right hand a *kartrī* or sacrificial knife.²²¹ A severed head, with the feature of the Buddha, lies in front of him, and two chopped heads are depicted on a tripod on the pedestal, while a wild pig (?) is eating the remnants.²²² Among the other images in the *garbhagr̥ha*, stands out an unusual Gajāsurasamhāramūrti, with an ithyphallic Śiva engaged in killing Gajāsura with a knife; the *asura* in the shape of an elephant is visible in the upper right corner.²²³

Outside the temple, just in front of the entrance to the *jagamohana*, there is a much worn, reworked Buddhist sculpture serving as the base of a *yūpa* (the socket on top was made to insert another stone element or a wooden feature, Fig. 7),²²⁴ testifying to the sacrifices — including human sacrifices — offered up to the Goddess.²²⁵ K.C. Panigrahi has shown, on textual basis, that the Cāmuṅḍā of the Vaitāl Deul was known as Kāpālinī, and that the Vaitāl Deul was a shrine of the Kāpālikas, its name being derived from the *vetālas* or spirits by

²²¹ In the words of Panigrahi (1961: 80), “a large knife usually seen in a butcher’s shop”.

²²² *Ibid.*

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ This is how I interpret the piece (Panigrahi rightly maintains that it is “the remnant of a *yūpa*”, *ibid.* 234). For Mohapatra (1986, II: 39), a Buddha image was carved on the sacrificial post as an insult to him (the images are two, actually), but it is definitely a reused piece. As to Donaldson, he is reticent on this point. According to Panigrahi (1961: 80), one of the images in the *garbhagr̥ha* “is definitely that of Amoghasiddhi [...] the left hand — the right one is broken — holds a vase and the deity is seated in *yogāsana* with an attendant on each side and a canopy of seven serpent hoods over the head”. If the identification is correct, it must be assumed that the relief was reused here from an earlier or contemporary Buddhist shrine, reinterpreting the iconography. A careful examination of the slab would be necessary to form an opinion on this point.

²²⁵ Panigrahi (1961: 234); Donaldson (2002, I: 108).

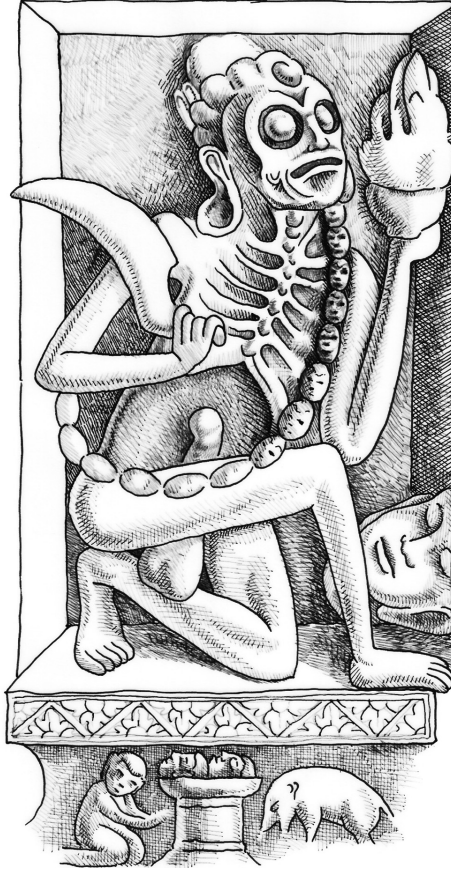


Fig. 6 - Bhairava in the *garbhagrha* of the Vaitāl Deul, Bhubaneswar.

whose help they attained their *siddhis*.²²⁶ The Kāpālikas, naked and holding *khatvāṅgas*, are in fact represented in the *barāṇḍā* recess of the temple superstructure along with Śiva Bhikṣātana and *līṅgapūjā*.²²⁷

²²⁶ Panigrahi (1961: 233).

²²⁷ Donaldson (2002, I: 108; III: fig. 627).

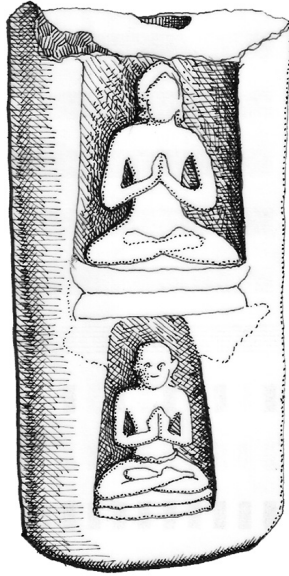


Fig. 7 - *Yūpa* obtained from a Buddhist architectural fragment in front of the Vaitāl Deul, Bhubaneswar.

The Kāpālikas are unanimously reviled in the literature, and the struggle carried out by Śaṅkara against them is also well known.²²⁸ Yet the fact that in the eighth century, high-level patronage was available for such a temple as the Vaitāl Deul to be built indicates that their function in society was far from being marginal, and responded to a specific need. The influence of the Kāpālikas, already well established in Gupta time at the highest political level (Chapter III) grew exponentially wherever their services were required. On the basis of a somewhat later evidence (ninth-tenth century), it appears that whereas the Kālāmukhas took root in Tamil Nadu and lower Andhra Pradesh, where they often filled the role of

²²⁸ The reader is referred to Lorenzen (1972: 31 ff.) for an appraisal of the information available in both the *Śaṅkara Digvijaya* and the *Śaṅkaravijaya*. See also Dyczkowski (1988: 29–30).

royal chaplains, it was the Kāpālikas who emerged at a higher level of responsibility further north, as for instance in the Candella territory.²²⁹ The presence of Lakuliśa's on the Vaitāl Deul suggests that there was a real ambiguity in the relationships between Kāpālikas and Pāśupatas, or at least between the former and some groups of the latter, and that probably it was not only a question of a mistaken identification of the two sects in later sources.²³⁰ The fact that the Kāpālikas do not seem to have had any scriptures of their own points to their need to borrowing from other compatible traditions.²³¹ On the authority of Bavabhūti's *Mālatīmādhava* we know that in the eighth century they were adepts of both Śiva and the Goddess (in their *vāma*, "left" shapes), since Aghorakaṇṭha and Kapālakunḍalā were about to sacrifice Mālatī to Cāmuṇḍā-Karālā:²³² the information fits the iconographical programme of the *garbhagrha* of the Vaitāl Deul. The cult of the Goddess had gained ground, and Śiva would gradually be left in the background. Even Śiva's murderous Bhairava aspect would be slowly put aside to the advantage of the Goddess and her multiplication in space through the *yoginīs*.²³³

²²⁹ Dagens (1984: 26–27). In Tamil Nadu and lower Andhra Pradesh the Kālāmukhas were replaced by the Pāśupatas from the twelfth century onwards (ibid.: 41, 46–47). On the role of Śivaite officiants as royal *purohitas* in medieval Indian courts, see Sanderson (2004).

²³⁰ See Lorenzen's analysis of a passage of the *Rājataranṅinī* (Lorenzen: 1972: 66–67). The *vratas* of the Pāśupatas consisted in the besmearing of and sleeping over ashes, as explicitly told in the *Pāśupata Sūtra*: I.1-9, 2-17 (pp. 25–26). The *vratas*, which included several other unsocial behaviours, were to be kept secret (ibid.: IV: 2-7, p. 30). The Pāśupatas hated the Kāpālikas (Sircar 1948: 10, n. 1), but contexts and chronology should be carefully evaluated.

²³¹ Dyczkowski (1988: 27).

²³² *Mālatīmādhava*: Act V (pp. 94–97/41ff.). Bhavabhūti naturally cuts out for himself the position of an observer completely alien to the compromises between high-caste, orthodox brāhmaṇas and *vāmācāras* (on this, see the next chapter).

²³³ This trend is shared by other Śivaite groups (Dyczkowski 1988: 13). In the South, Bhairava did not acquire the gruesome aspect that he has in central and northern India because his adversaries were successfully got rid of in a relatively short time. To a certain degree, this is true also for Cāmuṇḍā, the *mātrkāś*, and the *yoginīs*. See the evidence from southern Andhra Pradesh provided by Dagens (1984, I: 58–60 for Bhairava; 181 ff. for the *mātrkāś* and Cāmuṇḍā; cf. the relevant photographs in the second volume).

The presence and influence of the Kāpālikas remain, in part, obscure, but some light can be shed on the meaning of the *mahāvratā* that identified them as a distinct sect and bound them together as well as on the myth with which they were connected. Their great vow was the penance for removing the sin of killing a brāhmaṇa, as prescribed in the *śāstras*. This meant carrying the skull of the person slain on a stick, like a flag, and taking a human skull as drinking vessel if — these are the textual prescriptions — the person killed was not an ordinary but a learned brāhmaṇa.²³⁴ This is exactly the point: why should the Kāpālikas kill learned brāhmaṇas, and who could the latter ever be? It is extremely unlikely that their target were the *vaidikas* or the theists imbued with ritualistic doctrine, and the only learned brāhmaṇas to be killed were, to our knowledge, the Buddhists — the apostate brāhmaṇas representing the antinomial elite, and especially the controversialists who kept the orthodox in check. David N. Lorenzen has maintained that the Kāpālikas adopted their vow in order to be at the same time the holiest of all ascetics and the lowest of all criminals, that which is lowest in the realm of appearance becoming a symbol for the highest in the realm of the spirit.²³⁵ This may be true, but the evidence provided by the Vaitāl Deul and the discussion made earlier in this chapter show that real people were killed, and the paradoxical position of the Kāpālikas cannot be considered as purely symbolic. The apparently split personality of the murderous ascetics finds an explanation in the equally split personality of Śiva, who turns to ascetic practices after casting off his *saṃhāra* aspects, that is, after slaying the *asuras*/heretics.

In the *bhrūṇahan* (the killing of a learned brāhmaṇa) we discover the reason why the Kāpālikas created or made

²³⁴ Lorenzen (1972: 74–77; cf. esp. p. 75).

²³⁵ Ibid.: 77.

their own the myth of Śiva who cuts Brahmā's fifth head, an act providing for the same type of *mahāvratā* that identifies them. In the *Śiva Purāṇa* it is, significantly, Kālabhairava who commits the murder.²³⁶ In the myth, known in various versions, Śiva is condemned to wander from *tīrtha* to *tīrtha* until he is delivered from his sin, symbolised by the head of Brahmā that remains magically attached to his body, in the Kapālamocana *tīrtha* in Benares.²³⁷ In the same way, the Kāpālikas, who re-enact Śiva's deed, move from one place to the other ready to kill again, and once again be pardoned.

The suppression of the Buddhists is to be seen — as we will better see in the next chapter — in relation to the subjugation of the local *rājās*, who in Orissa mushroomed after the crisis of the Bhaumakaras. They were ready to hold up their heads again whenever war was waged (for instance against the Cōlas) even after the firm establishment of the Somavaṃśī dynasty by Yayāti I Mahāśivagupta (AD 922-55). Our working hypothesis is that the Buddhists actively entered the anti-Kēśarī front, trying to bind together local chiefs, tribal people, and, in the more developed areas, urban low-caste people and outcastes to react against the policy of the dynasty. The radical measures taken by Yayāti I after gaining power deserve some attention. He is reputed to have invited ten thousand brāhmaṇas from Kanauj to settle in the region, where present-day brāhmaṇas claim descent from them, and to have performed ten *aśvamedhas* at Jajpur.²³⁸ The arrival of

²³⁶ *Śiva Purāṇa, Rudrasaṃhitā*: II.xxxiv.52 (vol. 1, p. 434).

²³⁷ I refer again the reader to Lorenzen (1972: 77–81), who examines the version of the *Matsya Purāṇa* and provides references to other relevant material. The Vāraṇasī Māhātmya of the *Matsya Purāṇa* has long been thought to be the earliest in the literature, but see Bakker & Isaacson (2004: 40 ff.). As regards the myth, see it analysed from quite a different point of view, and unsatisfactorily for me, by O'Flaherty (1980: 277 ff.; 1981: 123 ff.).

²³⁸ Panigrahi (1981: 80). This fact is extraordinary, since by that time *aśvamedhas* had long been replaced by the neo-Brahmanical rituals.

such a large number of new settlers implied the elimination of the previous landowners or users, and inevitably led to clashes. Yayāti made the town on the Baitarani (Vaitaraṇī) one of his major headquarters, and Yayātipura or Yayātinagara,²³⁹ also known as Viraja/Virajā, at the centre of the Virajakṣetra,²⁴⁰ grew into an important *tīrtha*.²⁴¹ An outlying part of the town was Guhiraṭikirā, the seat of power of the Bhaumakaras,²⁴² which rose in the immediate neighbourhood of the Buddhist site of Khaḍipada.²⁴³

THE BHĀGAVATAS AND PĀŚUPATAS OF NEPAL

In the eighth century, coherently with the majority of Indian regions (though differently from the plains south of the mountains, ruled by the Pālas), Nepal²⁴⁴ underwent a major transformation. This may be considered, in part, a reaction against the Tibetan domination, an issue that has long been the subject of debate. Mary Shepherd Slusser, taking her cue from Sylvain Lévi, has maintained that there were either two periods of

²³⁹ D.C. Sircar in *EI* 28 (1949-50): 180.

²⁴⁰ See the *Virajā Māhātmya* and U.N. Dal's introduction to the text.

²⁴¹ As early as 1836, Markham Kittoe noticed "a number of Jain and Buddhist figures in different places scattered around" in the town (Kittoe 1838: 55). Outside Jajpur, he saw "a very large tank and a high mound around it, on which there are traces of there having been buildings in former years. [...] The mounds are now covered with jungle and brambles. I remarked a figure of Buddh under a large banyan tree, it was all besmeared with sendoor (red lead) and worshipped by the villagers as the thakoor (Mahadeo); there were other pieces of sculpture scattered about in different directions" (ibid.: 201).

²⁴² The Buddhist Bhaumakaras had to yield, in course of time, to Sivaite pressure. The mechanism observed at Nagarjunakonda (Chapter III) is, significantly, reversed: Sivaite patronage is assigned to the female representatives of the dynasty, as is documented for the temple of Mādhavēśvara, built in the seventh century thanks to the patronage of Mādhavadevī, the wife of king Subhākara I (D.C. Sircar in *EI* 28, 1949-50: 179-85, II. 3-4 and p. 182). On the Bhaumakaras as active participants in the furtherance of the Buddhist faith, see Donaldson (2001: 5-7).

²⁴³ See the complex matter summed up by Snigda Tripathy (2000: 54-59).

²⁴⁴ Here Nepal is considered in its proper sense, as the valley of Kathmandu.

Tibetan domination, i.e. at the time of Narendradeva and in the first half of the ninth century, or one that lasted more than two centuries.²⁴⁵ There are a number of arguments against the latter possibility, but it is quite probable that during the eighth and ninth centuries the Tibetans made their presence felt in Nepal raiding the valley from time to time.²⁴⁶ Buddhism, though already seriously conditioned by Sivaism,²⁴⁷ played a leading role until the second half of the eighth century.

The events which took place at Andigrāma (present-day Harigaon), which was part of the early town of Viśālanagara,²⁴⁸ help us to clarify the picture, all the more so because they have been reconstructed on the basis of a strictly controlled excavation. The very name of Andigrāma has re-emerged thanks to a dedicatory inscription on a water drain dated AD 749²⁴⁹ representing the latest piece of evidence associated with the Buddhist sanctuary that rose in the excavated area during the third occupation period (c. AD 640-second half of the eighth century). The most significant remains of this phase are the foundations of a square-based stūpa (Stūpa 21) in the

²⁴⁵ Shepherd Slusser (1982, I: 34).

²⁴⁶ Ibid.: 35. D.R. Regmi has reacted vigorously against Lévi's conjecture that Tibet held control over Nepal into the ninth century, i.e. until the new era of AD 879 (Lévi 1905-8, II: 171 ff.), arguing that Nepalese subjugation lasted until AD 704, when the Tibetan king was defeated and killed in battle by the Nepalese (Regmi 1969: 218-19). Petech (1984: 25) is even more restrictive, judging the available information "confused" and holding that "the Tibetan ascendancy in Nepal waned during the decades after 651."

²⁴⁷ Narendradeva, already mentioned in Chapter II, is a good example of the compromise reached by Buddhist kings. He was a devotee of Lord Pāśupati and on his coins (known as "Pāśupati coins") there is always a bull, standing or recumbent.

²⁴⁸ As known to the *vaṃśāvalī*s. It lay to the north-east of the town of Kathmandu of Malla times, and the residence of the Licchavi kings of the fourth and fifth century AD, as well as the Kailāsakūtabhavana of Aṃśuvarman were probably located there.

²⁴⁹ Inv. no. HSN 142. See the text and translation of the inscription in Verardi (1992, I: 143-44).

form of a grid-shaped chamber with nine square pits.²⁵⁰ The monument, built with baked bricks, was completely dismantled some time after AD 749, and its foundations, which remained under the walking level, were covered by the new, large floor of a Vishnuite temple compound, where a Garuḍastambha was also erected (Fig. 8). The latter bears a famous, long but undated inscription — a hymn, actually — in praise of Dvaipāyana Kṛṣṇa or Vyāsa, the mythical ṛṣi credited with the composition of the *Mahābhārata*. An extremely violent earthquake destroyed the temple in the thirteenth or fourteenth century,²⁵¹ and the 1934 earthquake destroyed it again, but the Garuḍastambha has survived intact, despite the extensive work that was carried out all around after it was first erected. A trial-trench at the base of the pillar has revealed three successive floors, the lowest of which is stratigraphically one and the same with the floor of the temple compound covering the stūpa remains. The bricks used or rather — on the evidence of the many wear marks displayed — reused in the sub-structure on which the pillar stands are those plundered from the stūpa or from some other building of the Buddhist sanctuary.²⁵²

Dvaipāyana is praised in the inscription²⁵³ because he has cured the evils that we have seen described and condemned in the Kali Age literature, at a time when “men had taken to atheism” opposing the Veda and when “leaning only upon their foolishness constantly, the false logicians were

²⁵⁰ The stūpa seems to have been built according to the rules laid down in the *Mañjuśrīvāstuvīdyā Śāstra* or in a similar text. See *ibid.* I: 72–78.

²⁵¹ It could be the earthquake which took place in Newār Saṃvat 375 (AD 1255) recorded in the *Gopālarājavamśāvalī*: fol. 26 (p. 129).

²⁵² For the stratigraphic evidence, see Verardi (1992, I: 88–90). What was carried out at Andigrāma was made easier by the fact that the Buddhist buildings were made of bricks. The plundering of brick structures and the reuse of bricks is very common in the alluvial plains, where this building material is normally used. This largely accounts for the lesser number of surviving temples and ancient edifices in the plains of northern India.

²⁵³ I follow Regmi’s translation (Regmi 1983, I-II: no. XXVII).

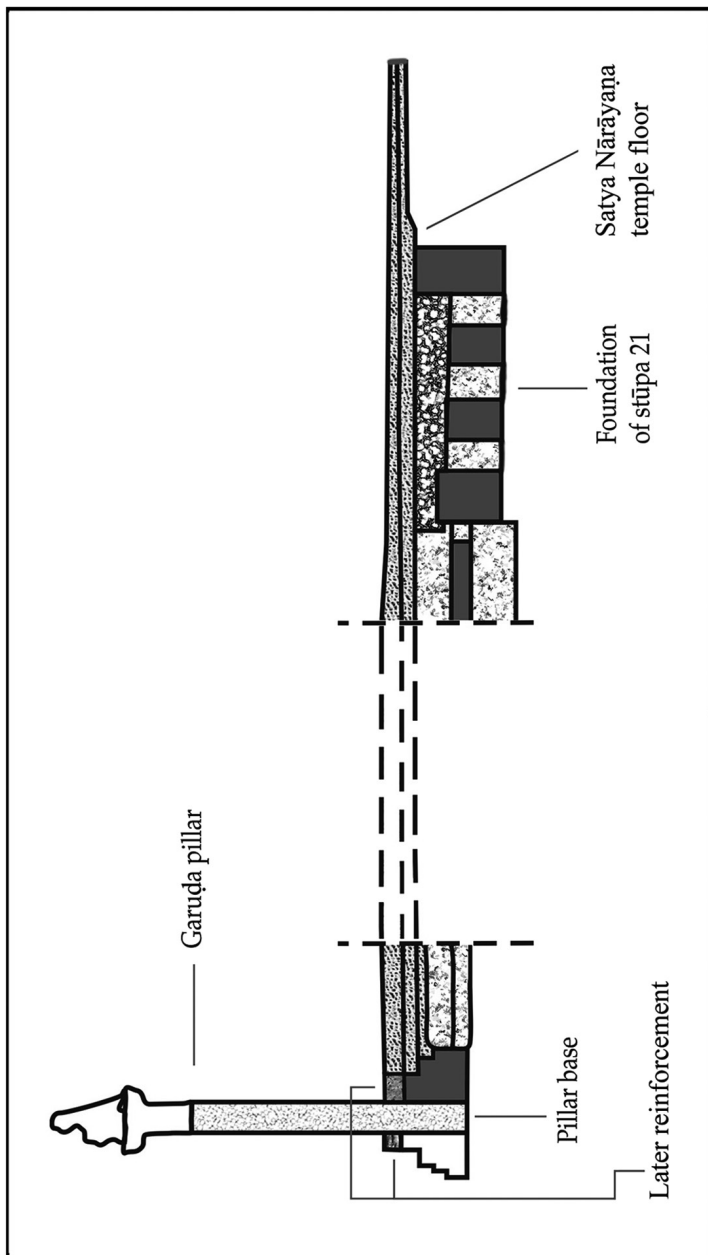


Fig. 8 - Hariagaon Satya Nārāyaṇa (Andigrāma), Kathmandu.
 Section showing foundation of Stūpa 21 and Garuḍa Pillar.

suppressing the truth”.²⁵⁴ The “false logicians” are the Buddhist controversialists whom we have seen to prevail at first over the *vaidikas* and *tīrthikas* and then start being silenced. Those responsible for past evils are expressly said in the inscription to be “these disciples of the Sugata”, further called “crooked distorters of this world”.²⁵⁵ The explicit reference to the Buddhists leaves no doubt as to the meaning of the metaphors employed in other parts of the hymn and suggests the actual meaning of a number of passages in other texts, both literary and epigraphic. Dvaipāyana is invited to destroy “all this network of illusion like the Sun destroys darkness”.²⁵⁶ He is the “breaker of evils”, and thanks to him the world was liberated “from all evil passions, like the sky which dispelled darkness as the sun shines”, and the “thick clouds of illusion spread in the world” have been dissipated; the *ṛṣi* is further praised because he has broken “the chains of the world”.²⁵⁷ (When, for example, Nandivarman Pallava appears in the Kasakudi plates as having dispelled all darkness,²⁵⁸ we realise, knowing the king’s exploits that we have mentioned earlier in this chapter, what is meant).

The inscription has long been assigned to the fifth-sixth century on the basis of the alleged identification of the Anuparama mentioned in the last verse with the father of Bhaumagupta, chief minister at the time of king Gaṇadeva (c. AD 560-65),²⁵⁹ but the excavation data show that it cannot be earlier than AD 749. Palaeographically, it was not until the latter half of the eighth century that the Northern Brāhmī of the Licchavi

²⁵⁴ Ibid.: 1. 21 and 27, respectively.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.: 1. 42 and 50, respectively.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.: 1. 54.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.: 1. 63–71.

²⁵⁸ Cf. *SII* 2/3 (1895, E. Hultzsch): 345–61, v. 71 (p. 359).

²⁵⁹ Regmi (1983, III: 72).

inscriptions showed any sign of change.²⁶⁰ The new date is also in keeping with the attribution, on stylistic ground, of the Garuḍa image to the seventh-eighth century²⁶¹ and, indeed, with the text itself.

The evidence from Andigrāma/Harigaon shows that the condemnation of Buddhism issued by the Bhāgavata representatives of neo-orthodoxy was not only theoretical and sermonising but took, once again, the form of very concrete measures. At Harigaon, the destruction of the Buddhist sanctuary was so radical that all the related material, not just the relics of Stūpa 21, was scattered and lost. With the exception of the inscribed water drain — a heavy stone artefact — which was found re-utilised in the last period of occupation of the site, the only objects pertaining to the Buddhist sanctuary found in the excavation were the handle of a terracotta lamp showing a Buddha in *bhūmiśparśamudrā* and a small inscribed sealing exhibiting a stūpa.²⁶² The latter was sealed up in an interstice of the floor that interfaced the area of Stūpa 21, and resurfaced thanks to the wearing out of the brickwork. Important economic consequences were to follow the events that the archaeological evidence partly illustrates. The lands owned by the monastery were transferred to the new temple, and in fact, in accord with a general pattern, the name of the place was changed into Harigaon, the village of Hari, that is, *Hari(mandira)-grāma*, “the village of the temple of Hari”, to be understood as the village whose revenues have been assigned to the maintenance of the temple of Viṣṇu.²⁶³

The Bhāgavatas were recognised as the authors of the Harigaon pillar inscription already by Sylvan Lévi.²⁶⁴ Despite

²⁶⁰ Cf. Verardi (1992, I: 24).

²⁶¹ Pal (1974: pl. 10).

²⁶² Inv. nos. HSN 31, 58 (Verardi (1992, I: 143).

²⁶³ For the names of Andigrāma and Harigaon, see discussion in *ibid.*: I, p. 21, n. 48.

²⁶⁴ Lévi (1905-8, III: 32).

the fact that in some quarters they were still considered *sātvatas*, low-caste, and the Pāñcarātra texts adopted by them invalid and non-Vedic,²⁶⁵ their involvement in temple worship had made them extremely influential, and in eighth-century Nepal, as in Kāñcī, they succeeded in controlling kingship to the detriment of the Sivaites — a general trend in India. Nepal kingship would remain Vishnuite-oriented until its recent extinction. The period between the death of the last known Licchavi king, Jayadeva II (c. AD 750), and AD 879/80, marking the beginning of the Newār era, for which almost no information is available,²⁶⁶ witnessed the consolidation of orthodox power. The so-called “Transitional Period” (an over three-centuries long span of time, AD 879-1200)²⁶⁷ may be understood as the real Licchavi period in Nepalese history. This dynasty, supported by the Bhāgavatas, remained stable for long, having nothing to fear from other models of kingship as had happened earlier between the fifth and the eighth century. The Buddhists had no hand in the matter now, and were obliged to accept the rules of *varṇāśramadharmā*, while the Sivaites were integrated into the new political-institutional framework. In the valley of Kathmandu, the lack of epigraphic records from c. AD 750 to 1300 is not in itself a sign of “decadence”, reduced economic resources and the like, but rather a sign that the established ideology was successful in absorbing and controlling any conflict that might arise without the need to resort to propaganda and self-assuring eulogies. Bhāgavatism established itself as a powerful, unifying, and all-pervasive ideology, and epigraphs no longer served any purpose, nor did any other records. History was, to a certain degree, reduced to ideology.

²⁶⁵ S. Dasgupta (1932-55, III: 14-15, 18-20); cf. above, Chapter II.

²⁶⁶ See for instance the considerations of the editors and translators of the *Gopālarājavamśāvalī* (p. VIII); Pal (1974: 7); etc.

²⁶⁷ Shepherd Slusser (1982, I: 41).

The role played by the Sivaites in curbing the power of the monasteries in the valley was not less effective. The evidence, carefully examined by Ulrich Wiesner, is supplied by the transformation into *liṅgas* of early votive *stūpas*.²⁶⁸ Though provided with niches opening along the superimposed square and/or circular tiers into which they are subdivided, these *stūpas* bear no images, even though the profuse decoration of the niche frames imply the presence of icons. In the example from Chabahil,²⁶⁹ there are twelve niches on each of the four levels, all empty, as is also the case of the votive *stūpas* shaped according to a different plan. In addition, the *stūpas* have no base nor finial, essential as the latter is for the purpose of worship. The majority of the *stūpas* have not been under continuous worship and are in a dilapidated state. Some appear to be the result of the reassemblage of elements taken from different *stūpas*, and only in a few, exceptional cases, are the icons in the niches still present. Whenever, in modern times, the *stūpas* have been reactivated, they have been provided with a new finial and a base, because none of the Licchavi *stūpas* now situated in *vihāras* stand on their original bases.

The images once housed in the niches were carefully chiselled away, as is shown by the marks left on the back walls. This was not deemed to be necessary for the *kīrtimukhas*, *kalahaṃsas*, *makaras* and *kinnaras* decorating the niche frames, because their semantic ambiguity did not identify them as Buddhist. Deprived of their most significant features, the *stūpas* started being revered as *liṅgas*, according to a procedure documented in the narrative of a Nepalese pilgrim — recorded by Brian H. Hodgson — who observed that the *caityas* to the north of the Mahābodhi Temple in Bodhgayā

²⁶⁸ Wiesner (1980).

²⁶⁹ The Cārumatī Vihāra set of *stūpas* in the Chabahil village, now part of modern Kathmandu.

were worshipped as *liṅgas* by the local brāhmaṇas after breaking off the *cūḍāmaṇi* from each.²⁷⁰ Thus the present-day aspect of the Licchavi votive stūpas is not the consequence of neglect over a long period, nor can the evidence they provide be construed as the outcome of a process of a long decline affecting the religion of Dharma; rather, they attest to “a once-for-all and conscious act” and a “centrally organized, large scale operation”, in the course of which all the votive stūpas were systematically revised and adapted for the purposes of another cult.²⁷¹

Oral traditions, widely current in Nepal, have afforded us the knowledge of the poor relations between the Buddhists and the various currents of Brahmanism. A major clash between Hindus and Buddhists is insistently said to have occurred in Viśālanagara, the early town that included Andigrāma/Harigaon and where some of the Licchavi stūpas analysed by Wiesner are also located. The *vaṃśāvalīs* contain a lot of information that, if properly understood and set in context, helps to get a non-stereotyped view²⁷² of the history of medieval Nepal and medieval India. With regard to the events that took place in Viśālanagara, the Buddhist *vaṃśāvalī* made known in 1877 by Daniel Wright in a somewhat amplified translation reports a version of the story that we would not expect to find in a Buddhist chronicle:

Long before this time, out of hatred to Shankarāchārya, a party of one thousand Bānrās murdered seven hundred Brāhmanas residing in Bisālanagara. The wives of these Brāhmanas immolated themselves as Satīs, and their curses were so powerful that the thousand murderers were burned to ashes. The spirits of these Satīs became so turbulent,

²⁷⁰ Hodgson (1874: 135-36). See also the testimony of Cunningham in Chapter I, n. 66.

²⁷¹ Wiesner (1980: 171).

²⁷² *Ibid.*: 172.

that no one would venture to pass that way. The Rājā, therefore, in order to put a stop to this trouble, caused an emblem of Siva to be placed there by venerable pandits.²⁷³

These or similar events are likely to have taken place in the eighth century, to coincide with those described in relation to the destruction of Andigrāma, even though the chronicle interprets earliest facts in the light of the Vajrayāna transformation of Newār Buddhism.

Of great interest is the information provided by the Buddhist chronicle on the change that Buddhism was subjected to as a result of the alleged sojourn in Nepal of Śaṅkarācārya. To the latter is ascribed the restoration of worship in the temple of Paśupatinātha — a deep-rooted tradition according to which the *varaliṅga* installed there would be one of the five *liṅgas* that the saint received from Śiva on Mount Kailāsa.²⁷⁴ The fact that the temple cult has been administered for centuries by Nampūtiri brāhmaṇas cannot be taken as evidence of Śaṅkara's responsibility for the transformation of Nepal society, but raises the question of the extraordinary strength and influence of southern Brahmanism. Śaṅkara is said to have defeated "the Buddhāmārgis" after ousting the Goddess Sarasvatī who, according to the usual *tópos*, was helping them in a debate from within a water jar:

Some of them fled, and some were put to death. Some, who would not allow that they were defeated, were also killed; wherefore many confessed that they were vanquished, though in reality not convinced that they were in error. These he ordered to do *hinsā* (i.e. to sacrifice animals), which is in direct opposition to the tenets of the

²⁷³ *History of Nepal* a: 159–60. "The word Bandyā, the name of the Buddhāmārgi sect [...] is metamorphosed by ignorance into Bānra, a word which has no meaning" (Hodgson 1874: 51); the *bandyas/vandyas* include all the Buddhists of Nepal (ibid. 63). The custom of *satī* is documented in Nepal as early as AD 464 (cf. Michaels 1993: 22–23).

²⁷⁴ Pande (1994: 348); Piantelli (1998: 48; 179).

Buddhist religion. He likewise compelled the Bhikshunīs, or nuns, to marry, and forced the Grihasthas to shave the knot of hair on the crown of their heads, when performing the *chūrā-karma*, or first shaving of the head. Thus he placed the Bānaprasthas (ascetics) and Grihasthas on the same footing. He also put a stop to many of their religious ceremonies, and cut their Brahmanical threads. There were at that time 84,000 works on the Buddhist religion, which he searched for and destroyed. He then went to the Manichūra mountain, to destroy the Buddhists there. Six times the goddess Mani Jōginī raised storms, and prevented his ascending the mountain, but the seventh time he succeeded. He then decided that Mahākāla, who was a Buddha and abhorred *hinsā*, should have animals sacrificed to him. Mani Jōginī or Ugra Tārinī was named by him Bajra Jōginī. Having thus overcome the Buddhists, he introduced the Saiva religion in the place of that of Buddha. [...].

Shankarachārya thus destroyed the Buddhist religion, and allowed none to follow it; but he was obliged to leave Bauddhamārgīs in some places as priests of temples, where he found that no other person would be able to propitiate the gods placed in them by great Bauddhamārgīs. [...].

Very few Bauddhamārgīs were left in the country now, and the Bhikshus began to intermarry with the Grihasthas.²⁷⁵

What follows in the text is at the same time moving and informative, and accounts for the transformation of Buddhist monkhood. The *bhikṣus* of the Cārumatī Vihāra,²⁷⁶ “who had married their aunts through fear of Shankarāchārya”, were disheartened and uncertain about their future and that of their kinsfolk, who were unable to perform the crucial *cūḍākaraṇa* ritual.²⁷⁷ Those who had been living as *bhikṣus* are now forced to live as *grhasthas*, “contented with the scanty means

²⁷⁵ *History of Nepal* a: 119–20.

²⁷⁶ Above, n. 267. That the site was erected by Aśoka’s daughter Cārumatī may not be credible, but the main stūpa is an early one, as is shown by a brick inscription in Aśokan *brāhmī* (Verardi 2004: 43–44).

²⁷⁷ See it described in Vaidya (1986: 14 ff.); cf. also Gellner (1992: 199–202).

of livelihood” and keeping “the things they know in their hearts”: they are well aware that having to obey the rule about sacrificing animals, they shall commit “a great breach” of the rules of their own religion. It was in that time that the stūpa of Svayambhū was established: the Śākya priests appointed for keeping up the worship were now made to follow “the Tantra Shāstras”, while the Buddhist *ācāryas* (themselves *bhikṣus-grhasthas*) took charge in turn of the *caitya*.²⁷⁸

In the preceding chapter we have contended that doctrinal changes and social adjustments originated from the situation with which Buddhism had to make terms, and that many of the changes said to have been introduced by Śāṅkara are seemingly earlier than the eighth century, but the process of transformation was certainly accelerated during the period under examination. The *vaṃśāvalīs* tell the truth in their own way. The monks were left without any choice but to comply or abjure.²⁷⁹ The account of the Buddhist *vaṃśāvalī* shows that no exceptions were tolerated to a family-based society (the Brahmanical obsession with family had grown so strong that even the relationships between gods were normalised).²⁸⁰ The normalisation of Buddhism meant, among other things, the elimination of an all-male or all-female life in communities based on positive law and the insistence on *lex naturalis*.

²⁷⁸ *History of Nepal* a: 121–23. The story accounts for the two classes of married monks of Newār Buddhism, the Vajrācāryas and the Śākyas. See below, Chapter VI.

²⁷⁹ A case of an abjuration antedating any possible journey of Śāṅkara to Nepal (we are in the second half of the seventh century) is probably that of a Chinese monk descended from a high family. Yijing reports that while his companion returned to the lay state, he went to reside in the temple of Śiva, arguably that of Paśupatināth. So I interpret the evidence in *Eminent Monks* a: 18–19, pp. 50–51. *Eminent Monks* b: 30–31, has instead: “There were two other monks in Nepal. [...] One of them later on, entered the family life again. They lived at the great Rājavihāra.”

²⁸⁰ Kārttikeya and Gaṇeśa, for instance, were made at first the sons of Śiva’s and then given consorts. This is especially significant for Gaṇeśa, a combination of child-ascetic-eunuch who is “an explicit denial of adult male sexuality” (Courtright 1985: 111); Gaṇeśa’s *śākti* is Gaṇeśānī.

The evidence regarding the destruction of books is also notable. That books were burnt when monasteries were attacked is a matter of course, but the passage of the *vaṃsāvalī*, however amplified the reported facts may be, implies ad hoc actions. The loss of the Sanskrit Canon and of many Mahāyāna works cannot be generically accounted for as the consequence of the disappearance of Buddhism from the Indian horizon. It was probably in the eighth and ninth centuries that a larger number of texts started being destroyed in India, where the violent upsetting of Buddhist life led the monks to concentrate on the new texts (the *tantras*), which provided a better description of the situation that Buddhism was now facing.

The *Bhāṣā Vaṃsāvalī*, a Hindu work, reports some of the facts also recorded in the Buddhist *vaṃsāvalī* after describing in paradoxical terms the religious conditions of the country at the time of King Vṛkṣadevavarman, an early king in whom we can recognise, through the grain, such rulers as Narendradeva and Harṣavardhana:

[...] the sect of the Buddhists became very powerful and built a Vihār called Punya-Vihār which was inhabited by their class, who used to throw leavings of their food and drink on Paśupatiṅgā every evening and [...] next morning remove[d] it from his image and worship[ped] it. In this way [...] all the religious rites of Paśupati were there performed by their sect who were the sole Pujaris in Nepal; for the Rajahs and the people had all embraced Buddhism and plunged themselves in the ocean of Buddhamārga.²⁸¹

In the Valley of Nepal, Śaṅkarācārya was assisted, according to this *vaṃsāvalī*, by the goddess Guhješvarī, and the saint defeated the Buddhists in debate, so that some of them “fled the country, and others were slaughtered on the very instant and their sacred books were destroyed and burnt to

²⁸¹ *History of Nepal* b: 38.

ashes”.²⁸² It would be easy to discard the entire narrative as a cluster of late banality were it not for the fact that the archaeological evidence and the structure of Newār Buddhism convince us to dig deeper into the nature of these sources. Later violence is the filter through which early violence is also handed over to us.

How tenacious in Nepal was the tradition of Śaṅkara as destroyer of the Buddhist religion and how far went the desire for revenge appears from a story, recorded by Brian H. Hodgson, set in Tibet:

The Lamas are orthodox *Buddhamārgis*, and even carry their orthodoxy to a greater extent than we do. Insomuch, that it is said, that Sankara Achārya, *Siva-Mārgī*, having destroyed the worship of Buddha and the scriptures containing its doctrine in Hindustan, came to Nepaul, where also he effected much mischief; and then proceeded to Bhot. There he had a conference with the grand Lama. The Lama, who never bathes, and after natural evacuations does not use topical ablution, disgusted him to that degree, that he commenced reviling the Lama. The Lama replied, “I keep my inside pure, although my outside be impure; while you carefully purify your-self without, but are filthy within;” and at the same time he drew out his whole entrails, and shewed them to Sankara; and then replaced them again. He then demanded an answer to Sankara. Sankara, by virtue of his *yoga*, ascended into the heavens; the Lama perceiving the shadow of Sankara’s body on the ground, fixed a knife in the place of the shadow; Sankara directly fell upon the knife, which pierced his throat and killed him instantly.²⁸³

²⁸² Ibid.: 39. Bikrama Jit Hasrat, after expressing his doubts on Śaṅkara’s visit to Nepal, observes in note 1 that “the debates and struggles by the two creeds referred to in the text, have relation to what occurred in the plains of India, where the prosecution of the Buddhists was furious—root and branch eradication in fact.”

²⁸³ Hodgson (1874: 48)

CHAPTER V

The Inauspicious Rivers of India

THE BLOOD OF THE ASURAS

The *devāsura* wars were devastating for both the demons and the gods. Already the *Vāyu Purāṇa* acknowledges the exhaustion they resulted in and the misfortune they brought upon the people.¹ In later Purāṇas, weapons multiply and blood flows freely. In the massacre which took place in the war against the *asura* Kālakeya, the enemies of the gods had their heads “broken with pestles”,² and “the whole earth with mountains, forests and groves was flooded with blood”.³ In the war against Bala and Namuci, both “gods and demons showered blood oozing”: arms and legs were cut off, and “abdomens cut-off lay in hundreds on the ground. Crores of thousands of elephants, horses and demons fell variously on the ground in the stream of blood. From there, inauspicious rivers flew there”, and “a great ocean of blood due to many other beings falling therein” was formed: the entire earth “was having the stream of blood”.⁴

¹ *Vāyu Purāṇa*: II. 35.87 (vol. 2, p. 767).

² *Padma Purāṇa*: I.65.85-89a (vol. 2, p. 822).

³ *Ibid.*: I.65.89b-92a (vol. 2, p. 822).

⁴ *Ibid.*: I.67.10-21 (vol. 2, p. 828). The inauspicious rivers, as glossed by the translator, are streams of blood.

In the battle against “the best demon”, Tripura’s son, “gods of great might, fell down with their bodies covered with streams of blood”.⁵ Even Gaṇeśa was wounded, and fought back with his body “moistened with blood”.⁶ In the battle against Bala, the bodies of both the *asura* and Indra were “moistened with blood spreading forth” like “the blossomed Kimśuka trees in the spring”.⁷ In the Kālakeya war, the allegory becomes transparent: the gods-brāhmaṇas need medical treatment, and Dhanvantari, the physician of the gods, moves to the battlefield carrying medicines, thanks to which “the gods that were dead in the great war, again came back to the life”.⁸ The four major *asuras* who were then fighting, Madhu, Dhundhu, Sunda and Kālakeya, “had mastered the science of all weapons”,⁹ a detail that indicates that the heretics had developed a system of defense and fought back. Their historical identity is disclosed in a passage of the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*: “Formerly, in the battle between the Devas and the Asuras, the Asuras were defeated. They created the heretics, like Vṛddhasrāvakīs, Nirgranthas, Śākyas, Jīvaskas and Kārpaṭas”,¹⁰ who do not follow *varṇāśramadharmā* and discard “the *trayī* or triple Veda, declared as the protective covering for all living beings”,¹¹ being thus considered *nagnas*, naked.

The myth of the Deluder, as already suggested, does not only emphasise the fact that the power of the *asuras* derives from God, since no being in the *triloka* exists independently from an act of creation (that very creation denied by Buddhism), but indicates the theoretical difficulty to admit the existence of apostates. Admitting this — that the *brāhmaṇavarṇa* was

⁵ Ibid.: I.74.30 (vol. 2, p. 845).

⁶ Ibid.: I.74.19-20 (vol. 2, p. 844).

⁷ Ibid.: I.67.34-36 (vol. 2, p. 829).

⁸ Ibid.: I.65.94-95 (vol. 2, p. 823).

⁹ Ibid.: I.65.60 (vol. 2, p. 820).

¹⁰ *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*: 2.3.38b-42 (vol. 2, p. 541).

¹¹ Ibid.: 2.3.35-38a (vol. 2, p. 541).

split — was tantamount to declaring that the whole *varṇa* system was groundless. The issue became central in post-Gupta times, and in fact we meet an increasing number of high-caste *asuras* in the literature. Mahiṣa's status, for instance, was raised in the course of time; he is said to have been born from the involuntarily emitted semen of the ṛṣi Sindhuvīpa,¹² an enemy of Indra and father of another *asura*, Vetrāsura.¹³ Nothing reminds us here of the destructive, early agrarian buffalo-demon. Gaja becomes Mahiṣa's son in later works, and he performs penance meditating on Brahmā, who grants him the boon of being immune from death by men or women overwhelmed by lust.¹⁴ The *asura* Tāraka, doomed to be killed by Skanda, does penance to propitiate Śiva and gets a boon to the effect that none other than a son born to Śiva should be able to kill him.¹⁵ This amounts to saying that only brāhmaṇas (allegorised as gods) are entitled to get rid of other brāhmaṇas (allegorised as *asuras*). With the passing of time, myths tend to clarify the caste identity of the *asuras* because we are now in the epoch of doctrinal debates in which brāhmaṇas of different belief oppose each other in a tough struggle. The blood that in the texts flows more and more abundantly is not symbolical, but metaphorical, and refers to a real clash.

The *asuras* repeatedly said to have dispossessed the gods, to have taken possession of the *triloka* and harassed the brāhmaṇas are of high caste. The *asura* kings belong to patrilinear lineages and are assisted by courageous relatives (like Hiraṇyakaśipu's brother Hiranyākṣa) and their rule lasts for a long time (eons in the expanded temporal perspective of neo-Brahmanical literature). They are *cakravartins* who have displaced Indra after conquering all the rival kings on earth,

¹² *Varāha Purāṇa*: 95.18-21 (vol. 1, p. 97).

¹³ *Ibid.*: 28.6-16 (vol. 1, pp. 97-98). Vetrāsura succeeds in vanquishing Indra.

¹⁴ *Śiva Purāṇa, Rudrasaṃhitā*: 5.57.17-18 (vol. 2, p. 1055).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*: 3.15.41 (vol. 2, p. 531); *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, Lalitā Māhātmya: 11.7-17 (vol. 4, pp. 1074-75).

thus mirroring the kings of the Kali Age. Twelve *devāsura* wars are listed, sometimes rather confusedly as is the case of the early *Vāyu Purāṇa*, which had to accommodate them in a Bhāgavata perspective,¹⁶ and in later texts in a rather extended way. In the *Vāyu Purāṇa* the initial “great friendship” between *devas* and *asuras* is, significantly, acknowledged:¹⁷ the reference is to an epoch when heresy did not yet threaten the identity of the first *varṇa*. Only later, “a terrible, violent dispute” arose between them, causing “horrible devastation” to both parties.¹⁸ Far from being extraneous to history, this *Purāṇa*, like several others, speaks very clearly: all we need is a code to enter the archives.

The slaying of Hiraṇyakaśipu takes place at the end of the first *devāsura* war, and I have already suggested that the great *asura* may be identified with Aśoka or, less probably, with the last Mauryan emperor. The exploit of Śiva against Tripura, included in the early list of the *Vāyu Purāṇa*, should be also considered an early *devāsura* war. Śiva’s fight against Andhaka, where the role of the *mātrkās* is paramount, is alluded to;¹⁹ conversely, in the *devāsura* war known as Tārakāmaya no mention is made of the role of Skanda.²⁰ In the *Vāyu Purāṇa* and dependent texts no mention is made of the war against Mahiṣa, and we can conclude that the myth of the buffalo-demon started being interpreted as an allegory of the eradication of heresy only at a later date, and/or that it developed in a region foreign to the Bhāgavatas. These early

¹⁶ *Vāyu Purāṇa*: II.35.68-104 (vol. 2, pp. 765–68). A similar list is found in the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* (II.3.72.72-88; vol. 3, pp. 908–909; cf. also the table provided by G.V. Tagare in the introduction, p. lv) and in the *Matsya Purāṇa* (47.36), usefully commented upon by V.S. Agrawala (1963: 145–46).

¹⁷ *Vāyu Purāṇa*: II.35.69 (vol. 2, p. 765).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*: II.35.71 (vol. 2, p. 765).

¹⁹ The text says that in the course of the eight wars the *devas* defeated the *asuras* and the *rākṣasas* “who were Andhakāraḥas” (*ibid.*: II.35.83-84; vol. 2, pp. 766–67).

²⁰ “Virocana, the son of Prahlāda, always attempted to kill Indra. In the Tārakāmaya war he was killed by Indra by means of his exploits” (*ibid.*: II.35.80; vol. 2, p. 766).

myths indicate that the wars against the heretics were fought from the beginning by the Bhāgavatas and Pāśupatas, who acquired power by this means.

The escalation of violence that took place from the second half of the seventh century is best illustrated by the great Sivaite myths, one of which, that of Śiva Gajāsūramardana, we have already discussed in an earlier chapter. The story of the *asuras* of the three towns is narrated in the Kārṇa Parvan of the *Mahābhārata*. The root of evil lies in the defeated Tārakāsura, whose three sons, Vidyumālī, Tārakākṣa and Kamalākṣa, practising austere penances that caused their bodies to become emaciated, obtained from Brahmā the boon of residing in three cities. These shall eventually transform into one and be only destructible by means of a single shaft. The *asura* architect, Maya, built a golden city set in heaven, a city of silver in the air, and one of iron on the earth, of which the three *asura* brothers became the kings. The towns, with wide streets, houses, mansions and lofty walls and porches, attracted millions upon millions of people from every side, “desirous of great prosperity”. Having received further boons, the wicked *dānavas* (a class of malign beings equated with the *asuras*) ceased to show respect for anybody, afflicting the *triloka*. Though impartial to all creatures, Brahmā decided that the unrighteous should be slain, and that the task of destroying the triple city should be conferred upon Īśāna. Mahādeva asked the gods for half of their *śakti*, to add to his own strength: Viṣṇu, Agni and Soma became his shaft, Brahmā the charioteer and the Vedas the steeds. Before the armed god, the three cities became united, and Śiva sped the shaft at the triple city, which began to fall down. “Burning those *Asuras*, he threw them down into the Western Ocean. Thus was the triple city burnt and thus were the *Danavas* exterminated by Maheswara [...]”²¹

²¹ *Mahābhārata*, Kārṇa Parvan: XXXIII-XXXIV (vol. 7, pp. 74–82).

The story betrays the hostility towards urban life and enrichment: the three kings have an asuric nature just because they promote wealth and “millions” of unchecked people benefit from it escaping the control of the gods-brāhmaṇas. The destruction of the triple town is a metaphor for the collapse of the rich towns of the heretics, and in the fire that eventually destroys them we make out the fires that destroyed their symbols, the Buddhist monasteries.²²

The battle against Andhaka, who had become king of the *asuras*, is a further step leading Śiva towards his final dance. It is, at the same time, a story of destruction and submission. There are several versions of the myth, one of the most extended narratives being that of the *Kūrma Purāṇa*.²³ The Pāśupata recasting of the original Pāñcarātra text would date the passage to the eighth century.²⁴ No mention, however, is made here of the *asura*'s faculty of regenerating, nor are the *mātrkās* associated with Śiva. The latter features are found in the *Padma Purāṇa* that, in accord with the *Kūrma Purāṇa*, ends the story with the submission and conversion of the demon/heretic. The narrative lingers over the initial defeat of Śiva who, falling on the earth, causes the three worlds tremble and the disjoined constellations go in various directions:²⁵ the power of the heretics is at its apex. With the help of the other gods, Śiva, who wears the elephant's hide (the trophy of his previous battle against Gajāśura) succeeds in wounding Andhaka, but from the *asura*'s blood

hundreds and thousands of Andhakas sprang up. When they were being pierced, other fearful Andhakas sprang up from their blood, and they occupied the entire world. Then the god of gods having

²² We have already recalled that V.S. Agrawala contended that the Tripura myth has a historical basis, and that one of the cities that took fire fell on Srisailam (above, Chapter III), marking the ruins of Āndhra Buddhism.

²³ *Kūrma Purāṇa*: I.131b ff. (vol. 1, pp. 154 ff.).

²⁴ Hazra (1940: 71).

²⁵ *Padma Purāṇa*: I.46.31b-36 (vol. 2, p. 639).

seen that deceitful Andhaka, created the Mothers to drink his blood. [...] Then the destroyer of Tripura pierced the demon with his trident. The Mothers then drank the blood that flowed out.²⁶

In this version of the myth, the bloodless *asura* does not die; instead of reviving the fight, he starts praising Śiva, asking his mercy for having gone to the battlefield: “[t]hus praised with respect, Śiva gave him the position of his attendant and named him “Bhṛṅgīritī.”²⁷ Here the *mātrkās* perform their function of drinking the blood of the multiplying *asuras* assigned to them by the *Devī Māhātmya*,²⁸ and Śiva is obliged to recognise their crucial role: alone, he would not have been able to defeat the *asura*. This is an important step in finding new means to silence the Buddhists, although the progressive space conceded by Śiva to the Mothers can be interpreted symbolically: the stepping up of the fight involves a greater flow of blood, with which is understandably the Goddess who identifies herself.

The task that the *mātrkās* and Śiva carry out jointly is best appreciated at Ellora, where Andhaka’s story is repeatedly depicted. In Cave 15, the Dasāvātāra Cave, the Andhakāsuravadhamūrti panel combines the Gajāntaka and Andhakāri stories: Śiva goes to fight with the *asura* wearing the elephant skin, the head of the elephant being represented to his left, and the legs and tail to his right. The *mātrkās* are condensed in the frightening figure of Kālī/Cāmuṇḍā collecting the blood spilt in a bowl.²⁹ In the Lañkeśvara Cave, the stories are depicted in two separate panels. Śiva transfixes Andhaka with his long *sūla* while Cāmuṇḍā is seated with a dagger in her hand.

²⁶ Ibid.: I.46.75-84a (vol. 2, pp. 642–43).

²⁷ Ibid.: I.46. 846-93a (vol. 2, pp. 643–44).

²⁸ *Devī Māhātmya*: 8.40-62 (pp. 66–67). Here the bloodthirsty *mātrkās* fight against the *asuras* (above, Chapter III), but no mention is made of Andhaka. All the *asuras* are slain.

²⁹ See this panel described by Soundara Rajan (1981: 172–73; pl. LXXXXVIII).

The nearby *yajñasālā* is the litmus paper of the Andhaka myth, and a rather peculiar place. Alongside the three walls of the rectangular hall, due perhaps to the patronage of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa queens, identified in the three female figures — two-handed and without vehicles — represented on the eastern wall,³⁰ we find Śiva as Kāla along with Kālī, Gaṇeśa, and the *mātrkā*s. Kāla is seated and holds a hand and a foot on the corpses of two *asuras* under the impassive gaze of the goddesses to his left, Aparājītā and Durgā (Fig. 9).³¹ The *asuras* are not armed, as we would expect them to be; they are disarmed and naked. This detail contextualises the myth and reveals their true identity:³² they are naked because they are deprived of the cloth of the Vedas. The hairdo of one of the *asuras*, made in small curls, is apparently remindful of the Buddha hairdo of the late and post-Gupta period; the other *asura* shows an *uṣṇīṣā* and long ears. The *yajñasālā* may be interpreted (if we want to approach with caution the problem raised by the existence of a similar secluded room and by the iconographies) as the stone rendition of the temporary structure erected outside the temple where the *asuras*/heretics were or had been executed, or else it can be the real place where special *yajñas* were performed.

During the seventh and early eighth century, the latest and most ambitious Buddhist rock-cut monuments of western Deccan had been made precisely at Ellora,³³ a tangible sign of the renewed presence of the heretics in the region. Early royal Brahmanical patronage had declined during the second decade of the seventh century, and local patronage was probably

³⁰ S.K. Panikkar (1988: 305).

³¹ The identification of the *mātrkā* between Kāla and Durgā is uncertain, but see *ibid.*: 304–305.

³² A de-historicised interpretation of the Andhaka myth such as that provided by O’Flaherty (1981: 190–92), who emphasises Andhaka’s lust (which he uses to weaken Śiva), turns paradoxically into a reductionist operation.

³³ On the Buddhist caves of Ellora see Malandra (1997); cf. also Huntington (1985: 268–74).



Fig. 9 - Ellora, Kailāsanātha Temple. Detail of *yajñasālā* with dead, naked *asuras*.

responsible for the Buddhist phase to begin.³⁴ It reached its peak by the later years of the century with the creation of the Do Thal and Tin Thal caves. Buddhism had probably remained popular in the Ellora-Aurangabad region since the days of the religious and architectural revival at Ajanta, and it can be further maintained that in the seventh and early eighth century the Buddhists succeeded in carving out a space in the large territory between present-day Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh up to Orissa,³⁵ in the attempt to unite with Magadha and the North-East.

³⁴ In this, I follow Spink (1967: 22).

³⁵ Cf. Malandra (1997: 91).

Rāṣṭrakūṭa power was established on firm orthodox bases by Dantidurga. The initial part of the Samangarh inscription and other epigraphs allude to Viṣṇu and Brahmā and mention Hara.³⁶ Dantidurga's uncle and successor, Kīṣṇa I (c. AD 756-72) was the creator of the Kailāsa temple, arguably planned and begun by Dantidurga.³⁷ The eradication of heresy, judging from the iconographical programme of the Dasāvātāra Cave and the Kailāsa temple as well as from the decision to occupy an area already taken up by the Buddhists, was one of the main objectives of the dynasty. On the capital of a pillar in Cave 15 we can still see a seated Buddha and, below, a panel depicting a *pūrṇaghāṭa* and devotees.³⁸ Rock-cut monuments were dug starting from the top of the rock formation, and it is clear that the Buddhists were obliged to interrupt their project: excavations had not yet reached the level of the court, which made the creation of the present pavilion possible. It is here that we find Dantidurga's inscription. The enormous amount of violence implicit in the iconographies of Ellora, and the unparalleled assertiveness of the monuments erected by the Rāṣṭrakūṭas rule out that they "peacefully assumed control of the region around Ellora".³⁹ Śiva's transmutation into his *vāma* aspects of Kāla and Bhairava and his association with the *mātrkāś*, shown by the skulls that he wears as trophies in his fight against Andhaka, points to a situation similar to that observed in eighth-century Bhubaneswar.

³⁶ See the Samangarh plates in *IA* 11 (1882, J.F. Fleet): 108–15.

³⁷ Huntington (1985: 341).

³⁸ I am grateful to Claudine Bautze-Picron for reporting to me this important detail, which would otherwise have escaped me. See the carving on <http://www.elloracaves.org/index.php> [Cave 15]. Cave 27, too, was begun as a Buddhist excavation (cf. Spink 1967b: 13, n. 8).

³⁹ Malandra (1997: 61). To this author we owe a thorough study of the Buddhist caves; she has emphasised the aspects of continuity between the Buddhist and the second Brahmanical phase of Ellora, but her conclusions point to the opposite: "Ellora's latest Buddhist caves should be seen as early Rāṣṭrakūṭa-period monuments, although there is neither evidence nor need to assume that they were directly sponsored by the Rāṣṭrakūṭa themselves." (ibid.: 61–62).

The Śiva myths end with the dance of the God, who triumphs over his many enemies. Some aspects of the dance, usually overshadowed by an excess of symbolical interpretations, are worth considering. The dance is briefly mentioned in the *Vāmana Purāṇa* after the God's exploit against Andhaka: Śiva has purified himself, has been immersed in meditation, and finally, holding a lance, has started dancing, with the *gaṇas* and the gods who begin to dance with him. Then, "having danced to the utmost of his desire, he again made up his mind for battle with the demons".⁴⁰ Śiva's dance is, therefore, strictly associated with his wars against the *asuras*, and his two most famous dances make this point clear.

In the *tāṇḍava* dance, pertaining to the tamasic aspect of the God, he appears as Bhairava or Vīrabhadra, the forms he assumes in association with the *mātrkāś*. This dance is performed in cemeteries and burning grounds, and it is at Ellora, Elephanta and Bhubaneswar that, as first observed by T.A. Gopinatha Rao, it found a sculptural rendition.⁴¹ The *Liṅga Purāṇa* clarifies the connection between Śiva, the goddess(es) and the *asuras*. The set is, precisely, the cremation ground, "full of corpses and ghosts", and here Kālī, who has killed the *asura* Dārūka, starts dancing "in the midst of ghosts, happily along with *yoginīs*" after seeing Śiva's *tāṇḍava* dance at dusk.⁴² Considering the context, in both Bhubaneswar and Ellora,⁴³ the meaning of the dance cannot escape us: the God rejoices because the heretics have been exterminated. We will see below the role played by Cāmuṇḍā/Kālī in central and north-eastern India, when she takes Śiva's place.

⁴⁰ *Vāmana Purāṇa*: 43.74 (p. 381).

⁴¹ Rao, T.A. Gopinatha (1914-16, II: 234).

⁴² *Liṅga Purāṇa*: 106.15-28 (vol. 2, pp. 580-81).

⁴³ For Elephanta, a Sivaite complex equally due to Rāṣṭrakūṭa patronage, the reader is referred to Collins (1991).

The meaning of Śiva as Naṭarāja becomes clear in context. The great temple at Tillai/Chidambaram, a privileged place in the meditation and predication of the Nāyaṇmār, was already famous in the days of Campantar.⁴⁴ Māṇikkavācakar defeated the Buddhists there, and there he died. It is not inappropriate to bring back to the eighth and ninth century the popularity of the Naṭarāja cult that became so widespread with the Cōḷas. It was at Chidambaram that, according to tradition, the *Tēvāram* was discovered, and when we consider the role played by the Tamil saints in the extirpation of heresy, we must conclude that Śiva's final dance seals up the relatively — in the South — short period during which all efforts were channelled into silencing the heretics by expropriating their lands and free activities. Later tradition lost interest in past events and actualised Śiva's enemies. In the *Kōyil Purāṇam*, the *ṛṣis* whom Śiva meets in the forest of Tillai are identified with the Mimāṃsakas,⁴⁵ and Muyalaka, the malignant dwarf created by the heretic sages upon whom the God presses his foot breaking his back before starting his dance, is in turn identified with the Apasmārapuruṣa on which the dancing God stands. The fight against the *śramaṇas* was now a thing of the past. The force of the myth lies in its faculty of being continuously reinterpreted and allegorised, but in the prostrate, miserable *asura* trampled by the Naṭarāja we recognise, in the first place, the Buddhists and Jains of the preceding centuries.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Rao, T.A. Gopinatha (1914-16, 11: 229-30).

⁴⁵ Ibid. II: 235. The *Kōyil Purāṇam* is the Tamil version of the *Cidambara Māhātmya*, and is attributed to Umāpati, an exponent of the Śaiva Siddhānta School (see D. Smith 1996: esp. 31 ff.).

⁴⁶ On Śiva Naṭarāja the reader may be referred to Sivaramamurti's profusely illustrated book (Sivaramamurti 1974), but he shall not find anything that has been discussed here. As regards A.K. Coomaraswamy's paper in *The Dance of Śiva: Fourteen Indian Essays*, published for the first time in New York in 1918, it is mostly a plagiarism of the first part of a chapter of T.A. Gopinatha Rao's learned book (vol. 2: 231 ff.).

In Chapter II we briefly discussed the context in which the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* was seemingly created. One among the several layers of meaning discernible in the poem is likely to allude to the defeat of the heretics. We cannot subscribe to J. T. Wheeler's apodictic statement reported in Chapter I on the identification *tout court* of the *rākṣasas* with the Buddhists: this is a contention that needs good arguments to be taken into consideration. Verifying this hypothesis in relation to the Vālmīki poem is difficult at the present state of our knowledge, but an analysis of the Bhāgavata construal of the story in relation to the composition of the first and seventh *kāṇḍas* is more rewarding: here Rāvaṇa is a *brahmarākṣasa* said to have obtained a boon of invulnerability by Brahmā⁴⁷ in the same way as the *asuras* do in Purāṇic literature, beginning with Hiraṇyakaśipu. There is an attempt at unifying all the forces opposing the orthodox, and in the early middle age the poem took a meaning (which, with reasonable certainty, it preserved henceforth for quite a long time) that is possible to retrieve.

Vimalasūri's *Paumacariyam*, a Jain work composed in Gupta or post-Gupta time, is a programmatic rewriting of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.⁴⁸ The evidence that it provides on the political lineages of the Vindhya region and on the conflicts caused by the colonisation of previously unexploited territories have been analysed by Thapar,⁴⁹ but the work has more to say. Vimalasūri's *pratirāmāyaṇa* makes sense only if we take it as a radical protest and defense against an epic tradition that had been given an increasingly unacceptable interpretation by the Bhāgavatas, arguably accompanied by pressure and violence. Situations and statements in the *Paumacariyam* cannot be construed as being only functional to emerging lineages and standard political operations but go deeper into the heart of

⁴⁷ *Rāmāyaṇa*, Uttara Kāṇḍa: 10 (pp. 1246–49).

⁴⁸ What follows is based on Narasimhachar (1939); U.P. Shah (1983); Kulkarni (1990); Thapar (2000: 647–78).

⁴⁹ Thapar (2000: 660 ff.).

Indian history. Vālmīki is accused by Vimalasūri of having written lies and absurdities, and in the *Paumacariyam* the brāhmaṇas are the heretics and expounders of false scriptures (*kusāstravādins*) who have acquired pre-eminence through fraud. Significantly, Rāvaṇa, a handsome and pious Jain, is a protector of Jain temples (which, we must assume, needed protection). This work, with its strong critique, reverses the Brahmanical allegations against those responsible for the collapse of society in the Kali Age, and Vimalasūri's positions should be examined in this perspective.

Vimalasūri rejects the idea that the *rākṣasas*, led by Rāvaṇa, are inferior beings who have the habit of eating meat and drinking blood and marrow; they are, on the contrary, highly civilised beings adhering to the vow of *ahiṃsā*. The Vidyādhara of Laṅkā, Rāvaṇa's dynasty, were named *rākṣasas* after a famous Vidyādhara: Vimalasūri radically changed this part of the story, transforming the *rākṣasas* into pious people practising *ahiṃsā* because of what we read at the beginning of the work, when Śreṇika, the king of Magadha, says: "How could Rāvaṇa and other Rākṣasas *who were good Jainas* [my emphasis], eat and drink human flesh and blood without any disgust and compunction? Oh! The *Rāmāyaṇa* that has been written is false and foul and distorted [...]"⁵⁰ From this passage it appears that at the time of Vimalasūri the *rākṣasas* of Vālmīki were identified with the heretics, like the *asuras* and *daityas*, and that Vimalasūri, instead of uselessly disproving the arguments of the orthodox one by one, decided — unwilling to give up a touching story that had become extremely popular — to write a counter-*Rāmāyaṇa*, attributing an entirely different nature to Rāvaṇa and his followers.

The Buddhists are identified with the *rākṣasas*, too. In a Tibetan version of Rāma's story found in Dunhuang, and there-

⁵⁰ Cf. Narasimhachar (1939: 579 [*Paumacariyam*: II, 112-14]).

fore composed between AD 787 and 848, Lañkāpura is situated in the midst of the ocean,⁵¹ and it is there that the *rākṣasas* lived. This is why Somadeva contends that the fault with the South is that it borders on the *rākṣasas*.⁵²

The oral tradition, still lingering about in the nineteenth century, also points to the identification of the *rākṣasas* with the *śramaṇas*. J.A.C. Boswell, describing the Undavalli Caves in Guntur district, reports that the chief tradition of Palnad “relates to the wars between the Devatas and Rākshasas”, and that “the country is spoken of as the land of the Rākshasas”, the term “being commonly used to designate the Buddhists”.⁵³ It also designated the Jains, as shown by the lore of the village of Bahāyūdāma “just across the Krishna”, taking its name from one “of the Rākshasa leaders”. In fact, “[t]he cave temples are always pointed out as remains of the Rākshasas, and the people continuously speak of Rākshasas and Jainas in connection with each other”.⁵⁴

Rāvaṇa evolved as the enemy of Rāma’s righteous rule, and making him the leader of the heretics and the enemy of the eternal law of the gods gives the extent of the obsessive climate of medieval India. The gods are now those assembled on Mount Kailāsa presided over by Śiva, and the transformation of the leader of the *rākṣasas* into a powerful *asura* takes place. In this attempt of the Sivaites at appropriating an extremely popular story that the Bhāgavatas had made their own at a much earlier date the object of Rāvaṇa’s fury is not Rāma,

⁵¹ de Jong (1983: 164).

⁵² *Kathāsaritsāgara*: III, 4, 55-59 (vol. 1, p. 151). Although it is possible that Lañkā was identified with a region in the Vindhya to serve political aims (we have seen how frequent was the manipulation of facts, not to say of myths), it certainly was, *in primis* and at least from the early middle ages, the name of the island in the Indian Ocean: see the Mahānāman inscription (above, Chapter III, n. 11). On the location of Rāvaṇa’s Lañkā and the bizarre opinions of many historians on the matter, see V.V. Mirashi (1975: 205–19).

⁵³ *IA I* (1872, I.A.C. Boswell, ed. Jas. Burgess): 153.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*: 154.

but Śiva, and in fact, once again at Elephanta and Ellora, we witness Rāvaṇa's attack at the mountain of the gods.⁵⁵ His threat is real, to the point that the Kailāsa is made to quake from its very foundations. *Rākṣasas* and *asuras* jeopardise the Brahmanical order of society in exactly the same way.

THE MASSACRE OF THE KṢATRIYAS AND THE BATTLE OF BODHGAYĀ

In Vishnuite circles, the attitude towards the Buddhists was often ambiguous and dictated by the circumstances. We have seen this in the story of Vāmana and Bali, and we see it to a greater degree with the attempt at incorporating, in places, the surviving Buddhists. For truth, the priestly attempt at making the Buddha an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu denying the Buddha any separate identity and legitimacy never gained popularity. Kumārila did not admit that the Buddha was an *avatāra*,⁵⁶ and Francis Buchanan reports that Vishnuite brāhmaṇas, and probably any brāhmaṇa in Madurai, never worshipped this *avatāra*, nor was Viṣṇu ever invoked by the name or in the form of Buddha.⁵⁷

Circumstances were the most varied, however. The Narasiṃha *avatāra* shows the primary role played by the Bhāgavatas in the battle against the *asuras* also after the Guptas.

⁵⁵ For Elephanta, see the iconographical analysis provided by Collins (1991: 41 ff.); at Ellora, Rāvaṇa is depicted several times; cf. e.g. Soundara Rajan (1981: pls. XXV A, LI B, CIII B).

⁵⁶ Cf. Kane (1930-62, II: 721-22; V, 914, 924, 993, 1025).

⁵⁷ Buchanan (1807, I: 144). The explanation provided to Buchanan is worth reporting, because it reveals the deep contempt that the brāhmaṇas continued to nourish towards Buddhism long after its disappearance: in a version of the Tripura myth where Viṣṇu, not Śiva, conquers the triple town, the God "took upon himself the form of a beautiful young man, and became *Budha Avatāra*. Entering then into the cities, he danced naked before the women, and inspired them with loose desires; so that the fortress, being no longer defended by the shield of purity, soon fell a prey to the angels" who had asked the god to take action. The story is known from a number of sources in Tamiḷakam.

The images from the seventh to the ninth century present us a terrifying god: he does not simply kill Hiranyakaśipu and his brother, but disembowels them. The Purāṇic narratives emphasise the God's role expanding and detailing the story.⁵⁸ Two other Viṣṇu *avatāras* deserve our attention, Paraśurāma and Kalki, both seldom represented as independent deities,⁵⁹ and generally depicted only in the *avatāra* stele. Their role as destroyers of the heretics was limited in space and time (Paraśurāma is an *āveśāvātāra*, or temporary descent of Viṣṇu), but their stepping in the game were crucial.

Regarding Paraśurāma, it would be misleading to consider him as one and the same being as the Bhārgava Rāma of the *Mahābhārata*, exterminator of Arjuna Kṛtavīrya (in the Vana Parvan) or of his sons (in the Śānti Parvan) and of the whole race of the kṣatriyas against whom he carries out twenty-one mortal attacks.⁶⁰ In the *Mahābhārata*, the hero has no axe to fight against the kṣatriyas, he is not known as Paraśurāma, and he is not considered an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu.⁶¹ Only in the late formative stages of the epic Bhārgava Rāma acquires the characteristics he possesses in the Purāṇic literature, which tries to bring the epic into line with the later tradition.⁶² Purāṇic Brahmanism actualised the myth and regarded Rāma as a divine manifestation whose purpose was to clear the earth of the oppressive kṣatriyas of the present day,⁶³ not of those of a distant past: we know that kṣatriya kings supporting Buddhism

⁵⁸ For an expanded version of the myth, see *Padma Purāṇa*: I.45 (vol. 2, pp. 623–36).

⁵⁹ Independent images of Paraśurāma are not lacking in the South; see Champakalakshmi (1981: 115–16).

⁶⁰ See Paraśurāma's exploits against the kṣatriyas in *Mahābhārata*, Vana Parvan, section 116 (vol. 3, pp. 249–50); Śānti Parvan, section 49 (vol. 8, p. 99). For the twenty-one massacres, see *Aśvamedha Parvan*, section 29 (vol. 12, pp. 51–52).

⁶¹ R. Goldman (1972).

⁶² *Ibid.*: 164.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

had been ruling as late as the time of Xuanzang,⁶⁴ and there were still many. Śiva's involvement, a later addition to the *Mahābhārata*,⁶⁵ allows Paraśurāma's education and training to be construed as an episode of the *devāsura* war, and helps us to clarify who the kṣatriyas whom he exterminates may have been. The story finds its natural place in the Purāṇas, which deal with it at length, as for instance the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*.⁶⁶ In the *Padma Purāṇa*, it is Viṣṇu who gives Rāma the axe and other weapons,⁶⁷ specifying that his mission is to kill "the wicked great kings" who "cause a burden to the earth".⁶⁸ In this case, the identification of the kṣatriyas with the *asuras* and the unrightful kings becomes quite explicit.

If Paraśurāma superimposes on Bhārgava Rāma blurring the latter's identity and becoming the actor of a different play, we need to rediscuss a question that seemed to have been already settled. The best known scenario of Paraśurāma's exploits is early medieval Kerala, and in fact are recounted in the *Kēralōtpatti* and in a number of other medieval and late medieval accounts. The role of Paraśurāma, that is, of the brāhmaṇas in arms, in establishing the new agrarian order in that region, has been denied on the ground that the God's exploits are associated with places in Saurashtra, Gujarat and Maharashtra. These "legends" would allude to settlements of brāhmaṇas of the Kāśyapa and Bhārgava clans on the western coast of the Deccan and to their migration further south; with regard to Kerala, however, we would simply be in the presence of the migration of a myth with no bearing on the

⁶⁴ See for instance the kings of South Kosala (*Xiyuji* a: X; vol. 2, p. 209) and that of Valabhī (ibid.: XI; vol. 2, p. 267).

⁶⁵ R. Goldman (1972: 159–60).

⁶⁶ *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* 2.3.25.38–47 (vol. 2, pp. 613–14). In this Purāṇa Śiva provides Rāma with a chariot, two quivers of arrows, a bow and a coat of mail, but not with an axe.

⁶⁷ *Padma Purāṇa*: VI.241.42–44 (vol. 9, p. 3218).

⁶⁸ Ibid.: VI.241.40–41 (vol. 9, p. 3218).

actual situation in that country.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, the Purāṇic Paraśurāma acts quite differently from the Bhārgava hero, and in a different context, and the traditions handed down in Kerala to this regard have the aspect of a restructured myth, being evidence of a new, different series of events. The Purāṇic identification of the kṣatriyas with the *asuras* and the adharmic kings of the present day points to a recasting of Paraśurāma's story in, approximately, an eighth-century context. The massacre of the kṣatriyas and the ensuing distribution of lands to the brāhmaṇas palpably alludes to the elimination of the *rājās* who still supported the heretics and the adharmic society.

The Malayalam manuscripts of the Mackenzie collection that deal with the myth report that Paraśurāma “formed the country and located therein the Brahmans, in sixty-four villages” and the Brahmans introduced King Cēramāṇ Perumāḷ,⁷⁰ under whose rule, as we have seen in Chapter I, the Buddhists were expelled from the country after having their tongues cut at the end of a debate. Another account of the same story specifies that Paraśurāma — projected in the distance of myth — did not establish any images or fanes, which were erected later on by Cēramāṇ Perumāḷ and the brāhmaṇas.⁷¹ This recasting of the myth amounts to a quite accurate account of how the brāhmaṇas settled in the region. Finally, the section of a Tamil manuscript book on the “Jainas of Tondamandalam” specifies that the kṣatriyas exterminated by Paraśurāma were Jains,⁷² thus providing further evidence that the post-*Mahābhārata* version of the Paraśurāma myth is a variant of the *devāsura* war — the target here being not the apostate brāhmaṇas, but the petty kings that must be removed.

⁶⁹ Narayanan & Veluthat (1986: 257).

⁷⁰ *Mackenzie Manuscripts* 2: 490.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*: 493.

⁷² *Mackenzie Manuscripts, Suppl.*: 73.

The *Kalki Purāṇa*, classed among the *upapurāṇas*, is a little known text in both India and the West. It is a late, patched work, its *post quem* being the beginning of the eighteenth century.⁷³ In some parts of the work, the matter dealt with has hardly anything to do with the Kalki *avatāra*, as for instance the insert with the story of Rāma,⁷⁴ the battle against the *asura* Sumbha,⁷⁵ and several other passages. However, this Purāṇa includes a narrative that overtly points to the Buddhists as the enemies whom Viṣṇu's last *avatāra*, Kalki — he who makes the filth disappear from the world — has descended on earth to destroy.⁷⁶

The Purāṇa opens with a description of the evils of the Kali Age, when the brāhmaṇas have become perverted (the usual allusion to apostate brāhmaṇas) and the śūdras make business appropriating other people's richness.⁷⁷ The text clearly identifies the Kali Age — at the end of which Kalki appears to establish a permanent social order — with the age of Buddhist hegemony in medieval Magadha. To put an end to it, Viṣṇu is born in human form at Śambhala,⁷⁸ performs his duty of young brāhmaṇa, and then marries Padmā, Śiva's daughter, who gives him two sons.

At this point an extraordinary piece of narrative begins. Kalki is ready to leave with his army for the town of Kīkaṭa,⁷⁹ which, from both the Purāṇic literature and the inscription found by Ch. Wilkins in 1788, is identifiable with Bodhgayā

⁷³ Hazra in *Upapurāṇas*, I: 308.

⁷⁴ *Kalki Purāṇa*: III.iii.23-30 (pp. 95–101).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*: III.vi.44-49 (pp. 112–13).

⁷⁶ Granoff (1984: 299) has defined this work a "pseudo-biography", but I am not sure that this definition conveys its historical meaning.

⁷⁷ *Kalki Purāṇa*: I.i.23-30 (p. 25). The description continues at length until the end of the first *aṃśa*.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*: I.ii.4. (p. 27).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*: II.vi.40 (p. 76).

and its region.⁸⁰ The text speaks of two Buddhist centres where the opposition to Vedic *dharma* was concentrated and, at the same time, of a town whose activities were associated with the world of the dead — an allusion to Gayā. Its depraved inhabitants had abandoned the traditional rites and only cared for material goods, women, food and drink. As soon as the Buddhists heard about the coming of Kalki, they left the town at the head of their armies.⁸¹ In the ensuing battle, at first Kalki is knocked down and brought away unconscious by his companions, but after recovering his senses, he kills thousands of Buddhists and enemies, and meets at last the Buddhist leader of the army, with whom he has a short dialogue. After a hand-to-hand struggle, Kalki breaks his back, and the defeated chief rolls down into a nearby pond.⁸² The battle continues, however, because Śuddhodana, the brother of the dead leader, is ready to attack Kalki's army. He is knocked down by a companion of Kalki, but picks himself up and goes seeking the Goddess Māyā for help.⁸³ At this point there is an interesting passage: the Buddhists draw up again in battle order behind the goddess accompanied by “millions of outcastes”.⁸⁴

This is one of those rare occurrences where the social implications of the anti-Buddhist struggle are overtly admitted. A little below in the text, the Buddhists are said to be black skinned, including Śuddhodana,⁸⁵ something that again brings us on the right interpretive track. In the inscriptions of the Pāla kings, otherwise so similar to those of the other Indian

⁸⁰ For Wilkins's inscription, see Chapter I. The *Padma Purāṇa* (I.11.64; vol. 1, p. 100) says that “The holy Gayā is in the Kīkaṭa country.”

⁸¹ *Kalki Purāṇa*: II.vi.41-45 (p. 76). The text has “The Buddhists and Jains”, but it is clear from the narrative that here Jains is a synonym of Buddhists.

⁸² *Ibid.*: II.vii. 1-27 (pp. 77-79).

⁸³ *Ibid.*: II.vii.28-36 (pp. 79-80).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*: II.vii.36-38 (p. 80).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*: III.i.3 (p. 85).

rulers, there are details that take us by surprise. In the Nālandā copper-plate of Devapāla AD 794-829,⁸⁶ the most powerful of the Pāla kings, the enumeration of the people assembled in the villages of the Rājagṛha and Gayā districts that formed the object of the endowment registered in the charter closes with “the *Mēdas*, the *Andhrakas* and the *Chāṇḍālas*”.⁸⁷ The Bhagalpur copper-plate inscription of Nārāyaṇapāla (c. AD 854-930), who defines himself a “staunch Buddhist”⁸⁸ and, at the same time — for the reasons discussed in relation to Harṣavardhana — maintains to have built “thousands of temples” of Śiva, includes the “Brāhmaṇas upto Meḍas, Āndhras and Caṇḍālas” among the people he favours,⁸⁹ Meḍas and Āndhras being untouchable natives.⁹⁰ We cannot but think of these people when we read of the black Śuddhodana who momentarily leaves the battlefield to summon Māyā and the outcastes.

Proceeding with the narrative, we discover that Māyā was none other than Lakṣmī,⁹¹ and the Buddhists are massacred.⁹² The wives of the dead men, beautiful and courageous though depraved, after seeing the bodies of their husbands thrown here and there like pieces of wood, decide at first to continue the battle, not convinced by the speech of Kalki who would like them to surrender and become part of his folk.⁹³ But suddenly the weapons of their husbands — the swords, the arrows —

⁸⁶ These are the dates provided by R. Sanyal, but other dates have been proposed (AD 800-840 according to S.C. Bhattacharya 2005-6: 65). The reader shall find a thorough discussion on the intricate question of Pāla chronology, favoured by the finding of several new inscribed plates in these last decades, in R. Sanyal (2014: 175 ff.).

⁸⁷ *EI* 17 (1923-24, Hirananda Shastri): 310-27, v. 32-33 and p. 325.

⁸⁸ *paramasaugata*; see Mukherji & Maity (1967: 167, 174: 1. 28).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*: 1. 37, pp. 168, 175.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*: 182.

⁹¹ *Kalki Purāṇa*: II.vii.43 (p. 80).

⁹² *Ibid.*: III.i.1-10 (pp. 85-86).

⁹³ *Ibid.*: III.i.14-26 (pp. 86-87).

start talking with the voice of the dead, who recognise in Kalki the Lord. Hearing the weapons to talk in these terms, the womenfolk abandon all their illusions and ask the protection of the resplendent God, who receives them among his devotees.⁹⁴

It is difficult for us to say to which event(s) the narrative alludes in particular. There are a few realistic details, as for instance the allusion to the existence of two centres of anti-Brahmanical propaganda and of two Buddhist armies, even though the text describes a single battlefield. The two Buddhist centres of learning are arguably two of the Buddhist “universities” of Magadha, and we know, as documented by a passage from a Nālandā inscription, that the army of the orthodox Senas attacked the monasteries (that of Paharpur in this case):

In the illustrious Sōmapura there was the ascetic Karuṇaśrīmitra, so called on account of his compassionate disposition, abundance of merits, and his efforts towards the welfare and happiness of living beings; who, when his house was burning, (*being*) set on fire by the approaching army of Vaṅgāla, attached (*himself*) to the pair of lotus feet of the Buddha, (*and*) went to heaven.⁹⁵

In our case, a battle took place probably at Vikramaśīla in Bihar: as we will see in the next chapter, the monastery was appropriated by the orthodox sometime in the twelfth century — an episode of a more general fight for the control of the region.

The events narrated in the *Kalki Purāṇa* may actually refer to the Sena period, when what remained of Pāla power collapsed. Other scenarios are possible. Bodhgāyā was the re-

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*: III.i.27-41 (pp. 87–88).

⁹⁵ *EI* 21 (1931-32, N.G. Majumdar): v. 2-3. Somapura is identified with Paharpur in present-day Bangladesh. Whatever the relationship between the house of Karuṇaśrīmitra and the monastery, it must have been in its close vicinity. It is not easy to give a standardised description of Vajrayāna monasteries and of the monks’ lifestyle; cf. n. 262 below and in Chapter VI.

peated target of anti-Buddhist attacks arguably to coincide with the establishment of Gayā as the place *par excellence* of *śrāddha* rituals. The first to appropriate the site had been the Sivaites, who had probably occupied it even before Śaśānka.⁹⁶ These attempts continued also under Pāla rule: in the 26th year of Dharmapāla (c. AD 790 or later) a *caturmukhalin-ga* was installed by one Keśava at Campaśa, to the south of the Mahābodhi Temple, “for the benefit of the descendants of *snātakas* residing at Mahābodhi”.⁹⁷ In the ninth century the Bhāgavatas-Pañcarātras gained control on Gayākṣetra, as is shown by the commencement of iconographical production in Gayā proper.⁹⁸ The story of Gayāsura killed by Viṣṇu’s mace that we have repeatedly mentioned, is an example of the attacks carried out by the Vishnuites, and Viṣṇu Gadādhara, first mentioned in an inscription of Viśvāditya Viśvarūpa, exponent of a Brahmanical family ruling over Gayā datable to AD 1058,⁹⁹ confirms the frightful nature of the God. At Gayā, according to the *Vāmana Purāṇa*, a king called Gayā performed an *aśvamedha*, a *naramedha* and a *mahāmedha*, and these rituals appear associated with the installment of the God in the Gadādhara Temple: with his “sharp axe” he had hewn “the tree of great sin”,¹⁰⁰ with allusion to the Bodhi Tree in nearby Bodhgayā. Whether the rulers of Gayā were of a low-class Brahmanical order, and thus identifiable with the Gayāvāla brāhmaṇas who made their living on gifts made on

⁹⁶ See Appendix 1.

⁹⁷ Barua (1931-34, I: 231); Mukherji & Maity (1967: 110–14). The *snātakas* are erudite brāhmaṇas of Sivaite orientation.

⁹⁸ There are neither images nor shrines earlier than the eighth-ninth century in Gayā (Asher 1988: 74–75).

⁹⁹ R.D. Banerji (1915: 78, v. 9); D.C. Sircar in *EI* 36 (1964-65): 81–94, v. 9.

¹⁰⁰ *Vāmana Purāṇa*: 50.15 (pp. 424–25). The text speaks of these sacrifices having been performed a hundred and even a thousand of times. The mention of a *naramedha*, a human sacrifice, deserves some serious thinking in the light of what we will discuss in the next section.

the occasion of the *śrāddha* rituals, or brāhmaṇas of higher social standing, remains uncertain.¹⁰¹ what is clear is that the Pāla kings had no full control of all their territories. Southern Magadha was the object of constant warfare and changed hands several times, as for instance at the time of the Gurjara-Pratihāra invasion of the north-eastern regions at the time of Bhoja I (AD 836-85): the region was to remain under orthodox control for some time.¹⁰²

Both the described scenarios fit the narrative of the *Kalki Purāna*, which expressly mentions the Buddhists calling the outcastes to arms. This was the policy that the followers of Vajrayāna adopted from the eighth century — from when Buddhism could no longer count on the urban and trading bourgeoisie that had formed its backbone. It is also possible that the text combines the traditions of events that took place in different places and at a different time.

The memory of the conflict in which the fate of Bodhgayā was at stake survived in the oral tradition, gathered by Colonel Mackenzie's Jain *paṇḍita* during the Colonel's visit to Gayā in March 1821. It clearly reflects the point of view of the brāhmaṇas:

¹⁰¹ D.C. Sircar in *EI* 36 (1964-65): 83-84; R. Chatterjee (1965). The Vishnuite appropriation of the Mahābodhi Temple goes probably back to this period (see Appendix 1).

¹⁰² Not for so long a period as maintained in the past, however, due to the recent identification of Mahendrapāla, formerly identified with the Gurjara-Pratihāra king, with the elder son of Devapāla. On the new identification, see G. Bhattacharya (2000: 407 ff, 431 ff.) and the comments provided by S.C. Bhattacharya (2005-6) who has re-edited the Jagjibanpur inscription. According to a provisional chronology, Mahendrapāla reigned between AD 829 and 844 (R. Sanyal) or c. AD 840 and 856 (S.C. Bhattacharya). Warfare affected Magadha even later than the time of Bhoja. An incident connected with Atīṣa, which took place in AD 1041, is worth recalling. Karṇa, son of the Kalacuri king Gāṅgeya and future monarch, waged war against Magadha, then ruled by Nayapāla. Karṇa's troops sacked some Buddhist establishments and killed four ordained monks and an *upāsaka*. The state of war and the attacks ceased after a treaty was signed thanks to the good offices of Atīṣa (*Atīṣa New Biography*: 97 ff.; Mirashi 1955: xcixcii).

South-west of the temple of Saraswatī is a ruined city of the Bauddhas, with the remains of an ancient fort. It is said, that in former times, when the Bauddhas had possession of the country, they destroyed the old city of Gayā, and established another city called Bauddha Gayā, of which these are the vestiges; they erected here a large Bauddhālayam or temple of Buddha, with nine storeys, making the height of the temple 108 feet. [...]

During the government of the Bauddhas, having destroyed old Gayā, and broken the images of all the temples of the Hindus, they carried the Gayāwālā Brahmans to their new city, or Bauddha Gayā and put them in confinement, to compel them to transfer all the ceremonies of pilgrimage to the latter place. In this way some of the Gayāwālās were destroyed; but some escaped in distant countries. The Bauddhas established themselves, and ruled here for about 700 years in the Vikramaśaka. [...]

[...] When the government of the Bauddhas had ceased, all the Gayāwālās that survived returned to the former Gayā and repopled it. Travellers then resorted to the ancient Gayā; and the city of the Bauddhas was deserted, and overrun with jungle. At last a Bairāgi, who arrived at the ruined city of Bauddha Gayā, found the dilapidated temple, and he took up his abode there.¹⁰³

This tradition derives in part from the *Gayā Māhātmya* and conforms to the generally accepted but unsupported opinion that in antiquity Gayā played the same role as major *pitṛtīrtha*¹⁰⁴ as it did in medieval and modern times. It cannot be doubted that Gayā was an important place in ancient Magadha: Śākyamuni would not otherwise have chosen it as the site of his Awakening. Yet the hypothesis that Gayā acquired the role that is still its own as a result of the establishment of the holiest among all Buddhist places cannot be easily discarded. The evidence provided by Benimadhab Barua in support of

¹⁰³ *IA* 31(1902): 73–74. The “Extracts from the Journal of Colonel Mackenzie’s Pandit on His Route from Calcutta to Gaya in 1820” (pp. 65–75) were edited by Jas. Burgess.

¹⁰⁴ On *śrāddha* rituals, see Kane (1930-62, IV: 334 ff.).

the thesis that Gayā was, *ab origine*, a Vishnuite *tīrtha* is not convincing.¹⁰⁵ The reassessment of the evidence made by Debjani Paul is also marred by inconsistencies, even if we give the weight it deserves to the argument that neither archaeology and art history nor the epigraphic evidence mean that much when we deal with immaterial culture (the *śrāddha* rituals).¹⁰⁶

That funeral rites are a crucial issue in the acquisition of hegemonic power over society and that *śrāddhas* were not only an effective, but a recurrent means for establishing Brahmanical supremacy, can be seen from the creation of other *śrāddha* centres pretending direct affiliation with Gayā. This is the case of Jajpur in Utkala, which became the regional *śrāddha* centre when the Somavāṁśīs dispossessed the former

¹⁰⁵ Barua's contention is that the *Gayā Māhātmya* distinguishes three stages of manifestation of the existence of Viṣṇu, the earliest (when rocky hills and peaks were venerated) and the second (the period of *liṅgas* and *Viṣṇupadas*) preceding the stage testified by the iconographical production (Barua 1931-34, I: 57 ff.) — the only one of which we have the necessary evidence. Leaving aside all other considerations, the worship of hierophanies and symbols are not, *per se*, a sign of an early chronology (in India they have continued to exist, and in great number, alongside a major iconic production). One of the passages of the Vana Parvan quoted by Barua mentions the God with the trident and the practice of besmearing oneself with ashes (*ibid.*: 70–74; cf. v. 91-92) — a Pāśupata practice. Several points of Barua's work were criticised by Kane (1930-62, IV: 649 ff.).

¹⁰⁶ Debjani Paul's thesis is that Gayā as a *pitṛtīrtha* was not a creation of the Bhāgavatas, but the result of an early, conscious speculation on Rgvedic Viṣṇu. The large, single human footprint in the Viṣṇupada Temple to the west of the river Phalgu would reflect the original Trivikrama myth, untouched by Purāṇic updating. It is a fascinating idea, and one I am not averse to. The point, however, is not whether Gayā is an early *tīrtha*, but if it always was a privileged place for both Vishnuite worship and *śrāddhas* or else became the centre of the rituals of the dead only later in history and, in this case, why this happened. Some of Paul's statements are not consistent: the *padas* on the Padana Hill due north of Mumbai would be Rāma's footprints, and if Rāma's footprints were venerated as early as the first century AD, "that of Viṣṇu must have been in worship from a much earlier time" (D. Paul 1985: 140). At Gayā, the gap in the evidence between the early settlement and the medieval town, the lack of any Gupta remains and the fact that the place was a "complete waste" at the time of Faxian's visit (*Faxian* b: 53) cannot be ascribed "to both human and natural devastations" as for instance fatal earthquakes (Paul 1985: 133). The latter argument (derived from Kane 1930-62, IV: 650; cf. also Jacques in his introduction to *Gayā Māhātmya*: XXV) is aporetic; earthquakes, contrary to what these authors think, are an excellent source for the archaeologist, since destruction implies abandonment and reuse, i.e. a large amount of evidence.

Buddhist Bhauma sovereigns.¹⁰⁷ The battle of Gayā indicates that it was worth fighting for the sake of *śrāddhas*,¹⁰⁸ and that it was so profitable that it was worth exporting the model. *Śrāddhas* are strictly related to the birth of sons destined to ensuring a male descendant who can perform them after the death of one's own father. This creates a birth-death circularity within the family system that perfectly fits the Brahmanical system.

The Gayāsura myth, if we give credit to the testimony of “[t]he only person of the sect of the Buddhas” met by Francis Buchanan at Gayā in the winter of 1811-12, always appeared to the Buddhists as a fabrication of the *brāhmaṇas*. It is quite possible that Rajendralala Mitra's interpretation of the Gayāsura myth, which appears at first purely euhemeristic, is based on a tradition handed down to the few Buddhists still surviving in Bodhgayā at the time.¹⁰⁹

ON THE FAULT LINE

BHAIRAVA, THE GODDESS, THE *YOGINĪS*

It has been observed that if Indian art could be valued anew, without taking account of the heavy load of symbolism accumulated in the course of time mainly through later interpretations of Brahmanical and Buddhist texts and of modern scholarship, “its violent and sometimes outright aggressive character would become terribly apparent”.¹¹⁰ Karel R. van Kooij has shown that the iconographical representations of terrifying and bloody scenes are modelled on real bat-

¹⁰⁷ The rituals take place where the navel of the dead Gayāsura is supposed to be located. See above, Chapters I and IV.

¹⁰⁸ The question of the control of funeral rites in relation to the fortunes of Buddhism would deserve a careful study, and not only in relation to India. Here Buddhism lost its battle, as also happened in China, whereas in countries with weaker opponents, the Buddhists succeeded in controlling the world of the dead. In Japan, for instance, they still keep their positions.

¹⁰⁹ For Buchanan and R. Mitra, see Chapter I.

¹¹⁰ van Kooij (1993: 379).

tlefield behaviour, and are not the remnants of what is labelled as “primitive” society or tribal culture. For these aggressive iconographies to be created, high patronage and complex theorisation were required, and considering them the result of subaltern cultures is nothing but an easy escape from the real question. The cruelties of which warriors are capable at the end of heavy combat, when — as noted by van Kooij — they “start dancing on the battlefield, trampling their enemies under their feet, ripping open their bellies and drinking their blood”, are those we have observed in Śiva who starts dancing after slaying the *asuras*, in Narasiṃha ripping open the belly of Hiranyakaśipu, in the goddesses drinking the blood of the vanquished enemies, etc.

It is more difficult for me to agree with van Kooij when he connects violent warfare with the rise of city culture. The rise of Indian cities in the third-second century BC certainly implied violence, as violence had characterised the rise of the earlier chiefdoms or *janapadas*, but the emergence of the violent Brahmanical gods is not connected with the rise of cities in a proper sense but with the establishment of *tīrthas* and the transformation into *tīrthas* of former manufacturing and trading towns. Van Kooij’s scenario becomes true and reveals all its drama if we speak of temple towns replacing the old, decaying cities of a de-urbanised country. This is exactly the scenario of late ancient and medieval India, when the brāhmaṇas, slowly but painstakingly, persevered in establishing their power.

As already observed, Orissa and the adjoining regions of Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh are privileged vantage points. Here the logic of the battlefield appears with gruesome evidence from the eighth century onwards, and an additional analysis of the sources at our disposal (especially the iconographical sources, which are the most explicit) should persuade us that the battlefield in question was where Brahmanical power was at stake. The first attempt of the Pāsupatas at establishing Bhubaneswar as a *tīrtha* probably goes back to the

time of Śaśānka, who conquered Utkala and Koṅgoda (northern and southern Orissa) at the beginning of the seventh century.¹¹¹ The *Ekāmra Purāṇa*, a work of the Agamic Pāśupatas,¹¹² preserves the information about the conquest of the country by Śaśānka, of whom it speaks in glowing terms,¹¹³ and credits the king of Gauḍa with having made Lord Tribhuvaneśvara the presiding deity of the place.¹¹⁴ What is more important for us is that Chapters 25-32 of this work describe the dreadful war waged by Śiva against the *asura* Hiranyākṣya on the bank of the river Gandhavatī for the control of Ekāmra. The Gandhavatī corresponds to the Gangua River, which flows near Bhubaneswar-Ekāmra. Hiranyākṣya, advised by Śukra, had tried to stop the *yajña* that the gods wanted to perform on the bank of the river, and at first he and his *asura* followers had succeeded in defeating the gods. Only Śiva's intervention caused the final defeat of Hiranyākṣya's army.¹¹⁵ Krishna Chandra Panigrahi, a scholar whose unbiased ability to weigh up historical-religious facts was sharpened by a deep knowledge of Brahmanical tradition, observed that the *devāsura* at Ekāmra mirrored "a conflict between the Saivas and the Buddhists", and that the text, as "a Saiva work, would have certainly liked to term the Buddhists as demons and the followers of Śiva as gods." A village near Khandagiri, Panigrahi further noted, bears the name of Jagamara [Jāgamarā], meaning "the place where the *jāga* or sacrifice was destroyed", and that Jagasara [Jāgasarā], another village "about five miles from this place", means "the place

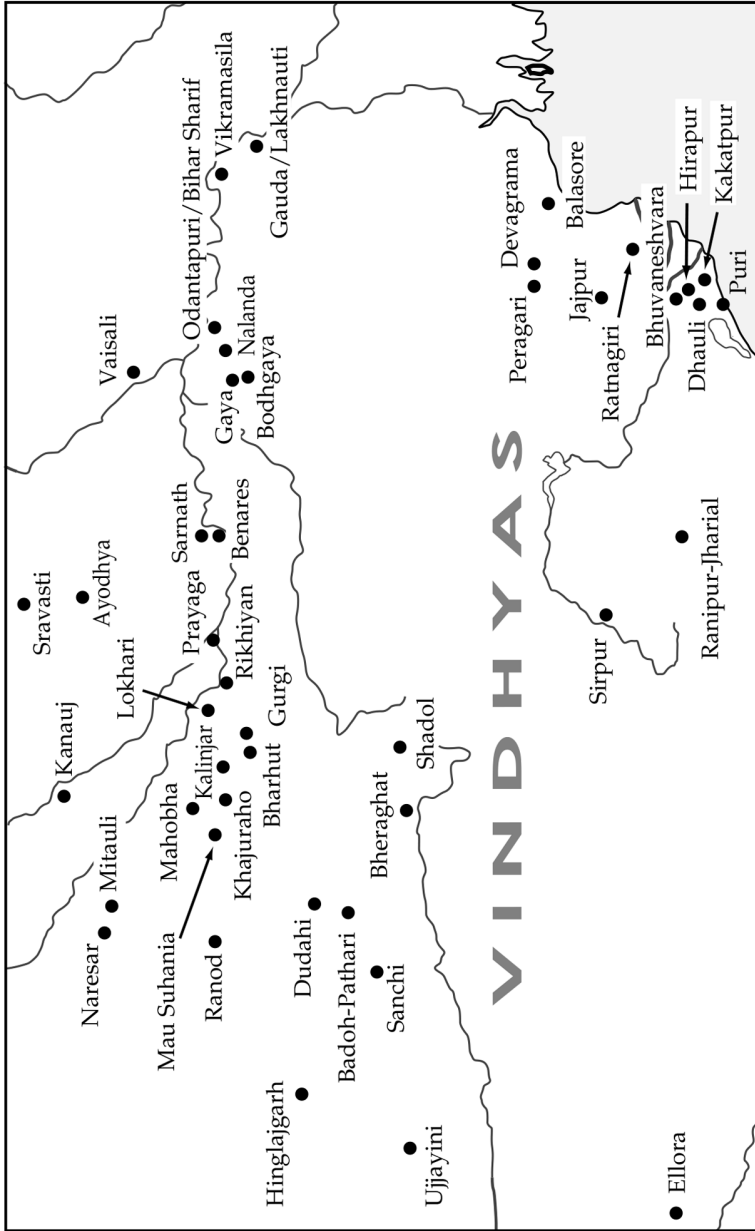
¹¹¹ Panigrahi (1981: 39). We know from the epigraphic sources that in AD 619 Śaśānka was the overlord of Koṅgoda, which he probably held until his death. It was only in AD 643, a few years before his death, that Harṣavardhana undertook his expedition to the region.

¹¹² Hazra (1951: 70). The work is assignable to the tenth-eleventh century according to Hazra (*ibid.*: 75), but Panigrahi (1961: 22) considers it not earlier than the fourteenth century.

¹¹³ *Id.* (1981: 114 ff.); Hazra (1951: 73-74).

¹¹⁴ Panigrahi (1961: 31, 219).

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*: 215; cf. also Hazra (1951: 73).



Map 3. Northern and eastern slopes of the Vindhyas, eighth century to thirteenth century.

where the *jāga* or sacrifice was completed".¹¹⁶ The conflict is to be seen as having taken place between groups of neo-Brahmanical settlers even more determined to impose the new order in that, as Pāśupatas, they were probably seeking full acceptance, and social sectors, of which Buddhism was the natural catalyser, which were opposed to the colonisation of their territories.

The *Ekāmra Purāṇa* assigns a role also to Parvatī, who in the Ekāmravana kills the demons Kīrti and Vāsa who wanted to enjoy her person.¹¹⁷ The Goddess, like Durgā Mahiṣamardini, was important in seventh-eighth century Bhubaneswar, as we see from her images in the Parasurāmeśvara Temple and in several other eighth-century temples,¹¹⁸ but it is Cāmuṇḍā who, with Bhairava, emerges as the embodiment of battlefield. The *Agni Purāṇa* provides a number of impressive invocations to address Cāmuṇḍā in order to obtain victory in battle,¹¹⁹ and in the *Kālikā Purāṇa* she is worshipped, as we will see below, with bloody rituals during the new moon night at the time of the great autumn festival, which besides celebrating the harvest, marks the beginning of the military campaign after the rains.

Cāmuṇḍā bears the *khatvāṅga* and the skull, as well as a garland made up of the skulls of the enemies she has killed. In addition, like the victorious Śiva, she wraps herself up in an elephant skin.¹²⁰ Looking at the images of the Goddess scattered all over Orissa, we identify two models as regards the bodies that she tramples.

¹¹⁶ Panigrahi (1961: 215). Jagamara is just to the east of Khandagiri.

¹¹⁷ Hazra (1951: 73).

¹¹⁸ For the Vaitāl Deul, see above, Chapter IV; see the images of Mahiṣamardinī in the Uttareśvara and Mohinī temples on the bank of the Bindusarovara (Donaldson 2002, III: figs. 81–83).

¹¹⁹ "[...] *Om phat om*. Pierce open. *Om*. Cut with the trident. *Om*. Kill with the mace. *Om*. Strike with the stick. *Om*. Cut with the disc. *Om*. Break with the spear. Stake with the teeth"; etc. (*Agni Purāṇa* 135.1; quoted passage on vol. 2, p. 399).

¹²⁰ "[...] One who is clad in the hide of an elephant! One who is besmeared with flesh! One whose terrific tongue is licking!"; etc. (ibid.: 135; p. 398).

1. In a number of cases, the corpse is that of a naked man. Warriors are never naked in Brahmanical art,¹²¹ and the naked bodies depicted in the Cāmuṇḍā stele have nothing in common with the idealised naked warriors — both vanquishers and vanquished — of classical and Renaissance art. Their nudity is that of the naked *asuras* killed by Bhairava and the *mātrkās* in the *yajñasālā* of the Kailāsanātha Temple of Ellora. Once again, the dead men are naked because they had not worn the triple cloth of the Veda. Iconographies bring to the fore the importance of this point, which remains implicit in the texts. The nakedness of the heretics (not necessarily men of religion) is emphasised, here as at Ellora, by bringing their genitals into focus, notably so in later images, dating to the period when the mutual fury of the opposing forces, aggravated by the destabilising Muslim presence, reached its climax. The late tenth-early eleventh century stela in the dilapidated Bhīmeśvarī Temple at Peragari, a village in the Mayurbhanj district, shows the dead enemy with upraised penis — the target of a jackal waiting for corpses (Fig. 10).¹²² The now broken stela is divided into two parts, almost equal in size, the upper one with Cāmuṇḍā seated displaying the elephant skin, the lower one with the very large image of the dead man (in keeping with the recommendations of the *Agni Purāṇa*, which prescribes a corpse of immense size as *vāhana* of the

¹²¹ See for instance the friezes with the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* scenes stretched across the *mandapas* of the Pāpanātha Temple at Pattadakal and in other eighth-century Cālukya temples (cf. e.g. the iconographical documentation accompanying Wechsler 1994).

¹²² It is usually maintained that a change in the iconography of Cāmuṇḍā takes place when the corpse replaces the owl as her *vāhana*. The owl, however, is a bird of prey, and in fact is often represented with other animals of prey (dogs, jackals, wild pigs, etc.) devouring the corpse (see for instance Donaldson 2002, III: figs. 257, 261, etc.). The early Cāmuṇḍā stele are allusive, not as explicit as later ones, but their meaning is the same. In the image of Cāmuṇḍā in the *garbhagrha* of the Vaitāl Deul, it is a dog which starts feeding on the corpse, while the owl is perched nearby (ibid.: fig. 249).

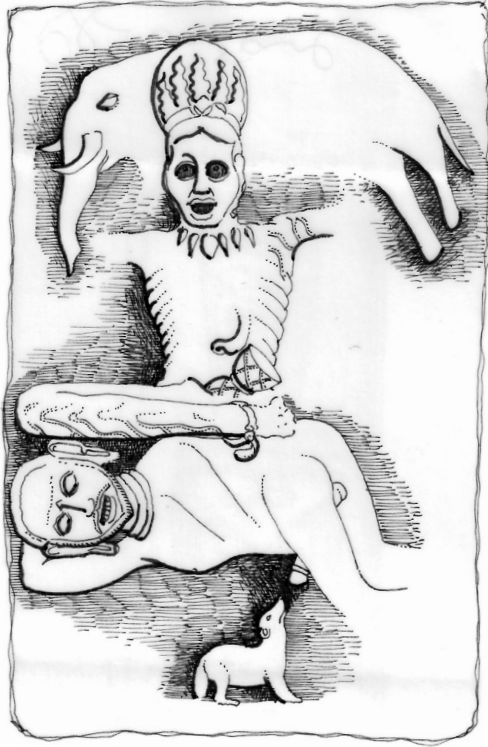


Fig. 10 - Cāmuṇḍā on dead, naked *asura*. Peragari, Orissa.

goddess).¹²³ He has a short beard, moustache, and bulging eyes, suggesting an *asura*, but “his hair is closely cropped or shaved, producing a nearly bald effect, and his ears are elongated in the manner of a Buddhist deity”.¹²⁴ His erect penis and the animal’s muzzle lie along an axis at the centre of the lower part of the relief, and this detail captures the eye of the observer. A similar effect has been looked for in the late eleventh-century stela in the Dhakulei Ṭhakurānī Temple of Pratapnagari (Cuttack district), even though here

¹²³ de Mallmann (1963: 153).

¹²⁴ Donaldson (1991: 123).

the lower part of the scene occupies less than one-fourth of the stela, and the intended message is less clear.¹²⁵ How can we interpret this message? The penis is not affected by the rigor mortis (which starts a few hours after death), but since the corpse is laid face down, the blood flowing to it results in an erection. This is the very moment that these iconographies malignantly depict, significantly adding the detail of the jackal that is on the verge of seizing the penis with its teeth. These images intend to clarify that the *asuras* are really dead, perhaps also alluding to the immodest behaviour imputed to the Buddhists.

2. In the second model, the dead body is that of a warrior, as shown in certain cases by the short sword in the sheath that he wears slipped into the waist belt.¹²⁶ In some cases, as in a late tenth-century stela from Devagrama on the Sona River in Balasore district, the dead man is a richly clothed personage wearing a necklace and bracelets, and with a flamboyant hairdo, easily identifiable as a native *rājā* (Fig. 11).¹²⁷ Long, often curly hair, characterise the “tribal”, unorthodox kings,¹²⁸ and one inevitably thinks of the Śabara general in the *Kādambarī*, who had “a mass of hair whose ends urled and which hung over his shoulders”.¹²⁹ In other cases, the princely status of the dead men, or of the men asking for mercy, is indicated by the pointed headgear.¹³⁰

¹²⁵ Id. (2002, III: fig. 264).

¹²⁶ See, for instance, the eighth/ninth-century stela published by Donaldson (2002, III: figs. 257, 258, 260). One of them is in the Kālikā Temple in Bhubaneswar, another in the temple of Bhagavatī at Banpur (Khorda district).

¹²⁷ Ibid.: fig. 274.

¹²⁸ Several examples can be found in Donaldson, one being that of the Mahiṣāsura killed by Durgā in a stela from Kanheivindha in Balasore district (ibid.: fig. 115; also, Pani 1988: pl. 9).

¹²⁹ *Kādambarī*: 55 (p. 38).

¹³⁰ See the Cāmuṇḍā stela from the Kapoteśvara temple at Nathuavara (Cuttack district) and from the Kālī Temple at Śomeśvara, Ranipur-Jhariāl, as well as the Bhairava stela from the Kapilas Hill, Dhenkanal district. (Donaldson 2002, III: figs. 266, 293).

Thanks to the parallelism of the iconographies, we can interpret these princely figures as those of local *rājās* supporting Buddhism. We know of several minor rulers who adhered to Buddhism in Orissa: at an undetermined date, one Nāgeśa, son of “king” Jaleruha, was converted to Buddhism, and the brāhmaṇa minister of one king Indrabala became a Tantric Buddhist.¹³¹ King Indrabala, in turn, was converted into a Tantric Buddhist by Nāgeśa.¹³² One king Muñja attained the position of *vidyādhara siddha* together with one thousand followers.¹³³ Broadening the perspective to Bengal, we see in action the same mechanism. In the *dPag bsam lion bzang* we read of the Candra “tribal” kings who embraced the cause of Buddhism. Prakāśa Candra became a convert to Tantric Buddhism,¹³⁴ and the first king of the lineage, Hari Candra, embraced Buddhism with one thousand followers and, like his Orissan peer, obtained the position of *vidyādhara siddha*.¹³⁵ One Sundara Hatsi reigned over various tribes of the Nangata hills and established Buddhism,¹³⁶ and in the Chittagong hills, Vāvāla Sundara, a king of the Chakama tribe, also became devoted to Buddhism.¹³⁷ It is interesting for us to note that in Orissa in the revival of the Maḥiṣamardinī iconographies of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Maḥiṣa, in accord with the textual developments noticed above in this chapter, is depicted as a prince.¹³⁸

¹³¹ *dPag bsam lion bzang*: I. 94 (Index: liv–lv).

¹³² *Ibid.*: I.94 (Index: cxl).

¹³³ *Ibid.*: I.87 (Index: lxxxv).

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*: I.115 (Index: liiii).

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*: I.65, 84 (Index: lxx, cxxxv).

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*: I.123 (Index: lvii, cxxviii).

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*: I.123 (Index: lxx).

¹³⁸ Donaldson (2002, III: figs. 107–11).

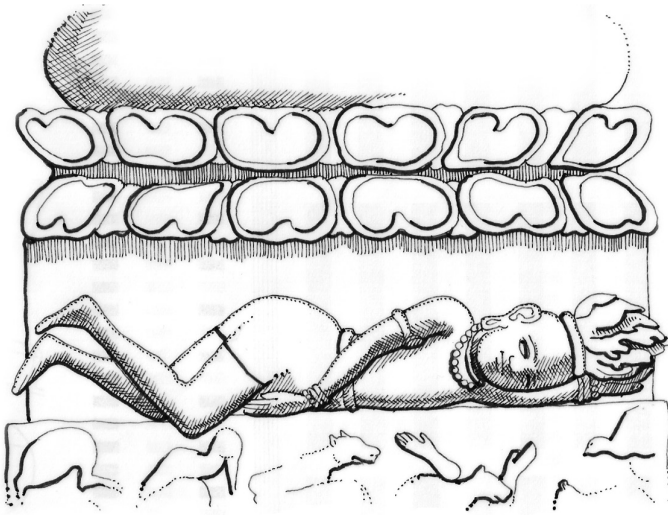


Fig. 11 - Lower part of Cāmuṇḍā stela showing a dead tribal *rājā*.
Devagrama, Orissa.

The fight to eradicate the men of religion (the naked *asuras*) is one and the same with the struggle to eradicate the non-brahmanised chiefs who were ready to support them.

The *Agni Purāṇa* describes a series of eight female goddesses (*ambāṣṭaka*, or octad of mothers) — not to be confused with the *sapta* or *astamātrkās* — who are a hypostasis of Cāmuṇḍā, as is shown by the qualification of *śmaśanajā* and *raudrā* they are given.¹³⁹ This octad, indicating the control of the Goddess over the eight directions of space, can be considered, in turn, as the unit generating the sixty-four *yoginīs*, mentioned for the first time, as far as the textual evidence is concerned, in the *Agni Purāṇa*.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ de Mallmann (1963: 154–55).

¹⁴⁰ *Agni Purāṇa*: 52 (vol. 1, pp. 138–39), 146.3-21 (vol. 2, pp. 420–23). According to de Mallmann (1963: 181), the passage of *Agni Purāṇa* 52, where the goddesses are led by Vīrabhadra and encircle Bhairava, reveals a cosmological and astral influence, whereas the later passage of *Agni Purāṇa* 146 witnesses that a Tantric conception had already taken place.

Their temples were built throughout the territory stretching from eastern Rajasthan to Orissa (Map 3), and their cult was connected to royalty.¹⁴¹ This brings us back to Cāmuṇḍā, whose close connection to kingship is implicit in her role as goddess of the battlefield. It has been observed that the trampling motif in Indian and Tibetan art is always associated with the theme of victory and war, whether in a mythological or theological framework, and that the gods and goddesses so represented “are meant to protect royal dynasties, royal cities or the warrior class”.¹⁴² However, I do not think that we can consider the battlefield — endemic as warfare was in medieval India — as a unifying factor for explaining sets of monuments and iconographies that remain different one from the other, though seemingly related by gruesome effects. We need rather to clarify which wars are represented in the different situations.

The succession one/eight/sixty-four, from Cāmuṇḍā to the octad of *mātrkāś* to the sixty-four *yoginīs*,¹⁴³ and the related variants of the rituals, may be understood as an expansion and diversification of the power of the Goddess. In all likelihood, the *yoginīs* are related to the radicalisation of the conflict between Brahmanical and anti-Brahmanical forces ignited by the rise of Pāla power. The goddesses depicted in the earliest of the *yoginīs* enclosures, that of Hirapur in the vicinity of Bhubaneswar,¹⁴⁴ share many of the features of Cāmuṇḍā and Bhairava examined above. Some *yoginīs* trample on corpses,¹⁴⁵ and others are dancing or standing on severed

¹⁴¹ Dehejia (1986: 85–86). The evidence is particularly convincing in relation to the temple of Bheraghat, arguably built by the Kalacuri king Yuvarāja I (AD 915–45) near Tripuri, the capital town of the dynasty (ibid.: 138–39).

¹⁴² van Kooij (1999: 267).

¹⁴³ There are variants, such as the eighty-one *yoginīs* temple at Bheraghat (this number is envisaged in the *Matottara Tantra*; see Dehejia 1986: 51) and the forty-two *yoginīs* temple at Dudahi (ibid.: 51–52, 141–42).

¹⁴⁴ Dehejia (1986: 95 ff.). The Hirapur temple is dated on stylistic ground to around AD 900.

¹⁴⁵ Donaldson (2002, III: figs. 461, 462, 475).

heads.¹⁴⁶ The latter can be taken only rarely as evidence of the self-immolation of warriors to Bhairava or the Goddess.¹⁴⁷ The Bhairava depicted in the Vaitāl Deul (Fig. 6) is clearly responsible for the death of the man whose head, modelled on that of the Buddha, lies on his left: Bhairava has just severed it with the knife he holds in his right hand. In the lower part of the relief there would be no animal feeding on limbs if the two severed heads on the tripod were those of two heroic self-immolated warriors. The nude female deity in the Kiñcakeśvarī Temple at Khiching who holds a severed head with her lowered left arm, has clearly cut it herself with the sword that she holds raised up with her right hand.¹⁴⁸

That the severed heads are those of very peculiar enemies is shown in two stele, one doubtfully from Orissa, the other from Bihar. In the eleventh-century relief with Bhairava (Fig. 12), the four-armed, dancing God bears rosary, *damaru*, *triśūla* and plays *vīnā*. He wears snakes as wristlets, armlets and necklace, and additional serpents are visible in his hair. He is dancing on five severed heads that — whatever the doctrinal interpretations in Sivaite terms (five are the skulls of the God’s rosary) — are not simply “skull-like”¹⁴⁹ but iconographically identifiable with those of Buddhist monks, their heads shaved as prescribed. The *vīnā* that the God is playing is arguably made with one of the skulls: the reader probably remembers that W. Taylor wondered about the “enigmatic meaning” of the skull of the *asura* used for the head of Śiva’s *vīnā* (Chapter I). The five shaven heads are piled up to suggest a larger number of victims than those actually depicted, and we cannot help but think of a butchery of the type mentioned by Īśvara Dāsa at a later time

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.: figs. 454–456, 477.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. van Kooij (1999: 266 ff.).

¹⁴⁸ Donaldson (2002, III: fig. 442).

¹⁴⁹ I follow the description given by Donaldson (2002, I: 454). The relief is kept in the Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena (California, USA).

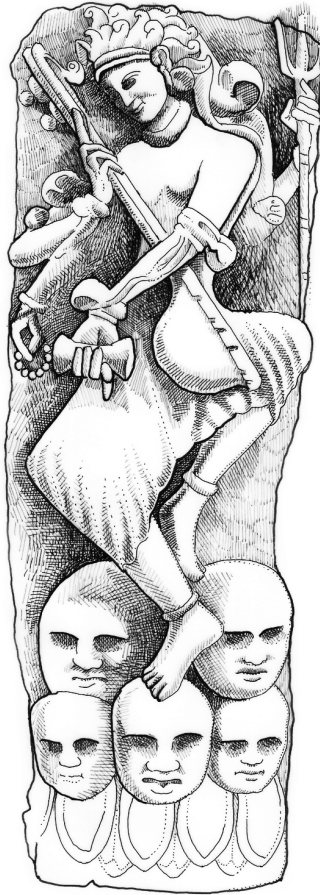


Fig. 12 - Bhairava dancing on severed heads of Buddhist monks. Orissa (?).

(see Chapter VI). It was not only a question of the adversaries of *varṇāśramadharmā* hegemonised by Buddhism being killed in battle, but of the members of the *saṃgha* being decimated on occasions. For iconographies to be so explicit and renounce their semantic ambiguity, we must be facing a final showdown where the cards are on the table. Metaphorical transpositions

were no longer believable. This is what the Buddhists would do in turn in developing the iconographies of the Vajrayāna.

The same can be said of the stela from Bihar representing Cāmuṇḍā (Fig. 13).¹⁵⁰ The Goddess is sitting on a lotus seat under a pipal tree, and her destructive power is amplified by her having ten arms. She is recognisable not only by her skeletal aspect, but also by the elephant skin she holds with her two upper arms. Her main offensive weapons are a sword and a long spear. Around her neck is not hanging a garland of skulls but a string to which the heads she has just severed (twelve in number) are appended by the hair. The lotus seat on which she is seated rests on a dead man, easily recognisable as that of the Buddha from his face, showing *ūrṇā*, long ears and the creases in the neck. The body is nude (which the Buddha never is), to show his status of heretic. Several severed heads hang from the tree under which the Goddess is seated, and a few others in the basin at the centre of the lower part of the stela, together with amputated legs and arms. All the heads in the basin show an *uṣṇīṣa*, while the others, including the one depicted upside down, wear a short beard. On both sides of the basin, the animals of prey are feeding on corpses, strongly foreshortened. The arms of the corpse on the right are amputated, and it is attacked by two jackals and a vulture that has just started eating the penis of the dead man.¹⁵¹ Cāmuṇḍā's owl stands on the stretched right palm of the corpse lying to the left of the basin. The stela is, at the same time, a first-hand documentation of what happened in places after the tenth century and a symbolic funeral of Buddhism: the Buddha lies dead, and Cāmuṇḍā sits under the pipal tree, the symbol of Awakening and of antinomial society.

¹⁵⁰ New Delhi, National Museum, inv. no. 63.939. See photo on p. 2.

¹⁵¹ Here we do not have a paradigmatic stand as at Peragari, because our attention does not immediately focus on a corpse (there are several of them).



Fig. 13 - Cāmuṇḍā seated on dead Buddha. Bihar.

The presence of severed heads and human limbs in association with vessels in the images of Bhairava and Cāmuṇḍā suggests that the victims were ritually killed and their limbs severed for their blood to be offered to the deities. These *balidānas* are associated with the *vāmācāra* or *vāmabhava*, the “left method” by which even the Brahmanical deities can be worshipped when they assume, as in our case, their heterodox “left” shapes.¹⁵² The *sādhakas* or adepts belonged to such groups as the Kāpālikas and Bhairavas,¹⁵³ and in a Cāmuṇḍā stela, in fact, we see a Kāpālika, bearded and naked, who has just killed a tribal.¹⁵⁴ The important point to remember, however, is that brāhmaṇas, normally only associated with the *dakṣinabhāva* or performance of the five *mahāyajñas*, could take part, though only once and through others, in the heterodox form of worship such as the offering of intoxicating liquors.¹⁵⁵ This detail discloses how interdependent were, in actual reality, the representatives of Purāṇic Brahmanism and those very groups that the Purāṇas condemned, as is also apparent from many of the Purāṇic passages that we have quoted and from the very existence of extremely fine works such as the Cāmuṇḍā stela, implying high patronage. Van Kooij adds the “Dāmaras” to the list of heterodox *sādhakas*, and landlords are probably meant,¹⁵⁶ arguably interested in cleansing the region from social and religious disturbances.

Regarding the *balidāna* offered to the Goddess, the study of the material contained in the *Kālikā Purāṇa*, which has allowed us to provide the above comments, is of particular interest.

¹⁵² van Kooij (1972: 8–9).

¹⁵³ Ibid.: 9.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. the lower part of the stela from Kalamishri (some 20 km east of Cuttack) in Donaldson (2002, III: fig. 261).

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.: 29.

¹⁵⁶ Sircar (1971: 300, on the authority of the *Rājatarāṅgiṇī*); *dāmaras* (not *dāmaras*) are mentioned as a people in the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*: 14.30 (cf. id. 1967: 98, n. 20).

The work is datable to the mid-ninth century,¹⁵⁷ and the rituals that it describes are consistent with the questions discussed here, although this *Purāṇa* may not be directly related to them. Different rules for the containers of the sacrificial blood are listed: a king, for instance, is required to use metal and clay containers that, when filled with human blood, are to be placed in front of the Goddess.¹⁵⁸ For the human sacrifice or *mahābala* the prescriptions, understandably, multiply.¹⁵⁹ An interesting detail of the ritual is the consecration of *khadga*, the sword by which the victim is beheaded, and its being called *dharmapāla*, protector of *dharma*.¹⁶⁰ This epithet attributed to the *khadga* goes back to the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*,¹⁶¹ which sheds more light on the meaning of iconographies showing gods and goddesses armed with this weapon, starting from the early Skanda examples. Much remains to be investigated in this direction in order to understand, for example, the difference between *khadga* and the butcher knife used by Bhairava and sometimes preferred by Cāmuṇḍā. A frightening image of this Goddess in the Dasāśvamedha Ghāṭ at Jajpur keeps the knife raised with her upper right hand, while holding by the hair the head she has just cut with her lower left hand. She is seated on a naked *asura* in *añjalimudrā* seeking grace.¹⁶²

As already observed, the Buddhists had succeeded in carving out a space in the large territory between present-day Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh up to Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh and Orissa in the attempt to unite with Magadha

¹⁵⁷ See B.N. Shastri's in *Kālikā Purāṇa*: vol. 1, pp. 66–67, at the end of a detailed discussion.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Chisato Maeda's précis of the sacrifice (Maeda 2007: 254, with corrections to B.N. Shastri and van Kooij's translations).

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*: 255–56.

¹⁶⁰ *Kālikā Purāṇa*: I.55.17a (vol. 2, p. 663).

¹⁶¹ B.N. Shastri in *Kālikā Purāṇa*: 1, pp. 61–62.

¹⁶² See this image in Donaldson (2002, III: fig. 442).

and Bengal, the Buddhist strongholds. It was in the regions of the central and eastern Vindhyas, on the northern slope of the mountains towards the plain, that the temples of the *yoginīs* started being built from the late ninth century onwards. They dotted the landscape (see Map 3) from Hinglajgarh in easternmost Rajasthan to Hirapur in the vicinity of Bhubaneswar, passing through the region of Gwalior-Lalitpur (Naresar, Mitauli and Dudahi), Bundelkhand and Baghelkhand (Khajuraho, Gurgi, Mau Suhania and, in the southernmost reaches of present-day Uttar Pradesh, Lokhari and Rikhiyan), and the territory stretching from Jabalpur (Bheraghat and Shahdol) to innermost Orissa (Ranipur-Jharia).¹⁶³ The evidence suggesting the existence of temples of the *yoginīs* in Bengal¹⁶⁴ is of particular interest, because they make us understand that the Pāla territories were being increasingly eroded in favour of the enemies of the religion of Dharma.¹⁶⁵

The sanctuaries of the murderous goddesses should be seen in relation to the new stance that Vajrayāna Buddhism took on the violent attempts at suppressing the religion. The *siddha* movement and the organisation of assemblies and rituals in the form of *gaṇacakras* and other group-oriented religious practices,¹⁶⁶ which needed no permanent places of worship, were a strong response to the forced abandonment of monasteries and temples. In truth, Buddhist sanctuaries

¹⁶³ The reader is referred to Dehejia (1986) for a description of the principal temples. Dehejia's study makes use preliminarily to explanations at the symbolic level yielding sometimes to misleading generalisations ("The circle is of great importance in the Buddhist world", p. 40; etc.), but remains an invaluable reference work. See also Das (1981). For Hirapur and Ranipur-Jharia, see Donaldson (2002, II: 661 ff., 665 ff.; III: figs. 452–523, 524–549).

¹⁶⁴ Dehejia (1986: 79).

¹⁶⁵ See the images of Cāmuṇḍā clustering in the Dinajpur region and in the adjoining districts of Rajshahi, Naogaon and Bogra (Melzer 2008-9: 142). Images of the Goddess cluster also in present-day Begusarai district of Bihar, north of the Ganges (Sahai 1985-86).

¹⁶⁶ On the latter, see Shizuka (2007: xii, 403–404).

were still present throughout the whole Vindhya region: traces of Buddhism are observable in the places where the *yoginī* enclosures arise or at a short distance from them.¹⁶⁷ A careful assessment of the chronology of the Buddhist remains would be of great help for understanding how Buddhist and Brahmanical India interfaced in this region. Suffice it here to recall the two major sites of Sanchi and Bharhut, which we do not generally associate with later Buddhism, but which lasted until the twelfth century.¹⁶⁸ The temple at Bharhut, in particular, which underwent reconstruction in about AD 1100, displayed Vajrayāna iconographies showing the subjugation of Brahmanical deities,¹⁶⁹ a sign that the Buddhists had not given up and, when circumstances allowed it, reacted vigorously.¹⁷⁰ Late Bharhut may be described as a Buddhist stronghold surrounded by inimical forces.

¹⁶⁷ Hirapur is located near Dhauri, which continued to be an important Buddhist site even in later times (see the next chapter). At Bheraghat a “[f]igure of Dharmma, a 4-armed female [...] with a small figure of Buddha in the head-dress” is mentioned by Cunningham among the sculptures he saw in the temple built at a later date within the enclosure (*ASIR* 9: 62); for Khajuraho, see the section below. Buddhist icons have surfaced from several sites around Vidiśā, either transformed into Sivaite or Jain places of worship in the eighth century; see for instance the Buddhist stela from Badoh-Pathari made known by Casile (2009: 197 and pl. 78, 1).

¹⁶⁸ The lack of interest for the late phases of archaeological sites, often recalled in these pages, has affected, in particular, the sanctuaries whose early monuments have magnetised the attention of researchers. The sole preoccupation of Alfred Foucher in his study of Sanchi’s late production was that “the latest of the images at the local museum offer[ed] us nothing really tāntric” (Marshall & Foucher 1940, I: 255). Even less interested was Foucher in the “statuettes”, some of which depicting Śiva, Durgā and Gaṇeśa, because their fragments were mostly “useless from an iconographical point of view.” The process by which the site was abandoned by the Buddhists and occupied, in part, by Hindu devotees, escaped him entirely, others being his main interests. See Marshall’s description of the late monuments of Sanchi in *ibid.*, I: 72 ff.

¹⁶⁹ *ASIR* 9 (A. Cunningham): 3.

¹⁷⁰ It has been recently confirmed that “[s]cultural remains recorded in photographs of the site, taken during Cunningham’s excavation, many of which have been preserved in the modern village of Bharhut, include both Buddhist and Brahmanical carvings”: this would indicate that “at least by the Kalachuri period the site was being used by both Buddhist and Brahmanical religious groups (Hawkes 2006, I: 77). There probably were two Buddhist temples at Bharhut, one near to the stūpa, and the other on the summit of the hill (*ibid.*: 76, 84).

The focus here is on the organised reaction against the recruitment of untouchables and “tribals” by the Buddhists in a territory that represents the fault line of Indian medieval history, reserving us to concentrate on what has been called non-institutional Buddhism below.

In the Vindhyas, the *maṇḍalas* of the *yoginīs* seem to overlie very closely in both chronological and geographical terms to the activities of the *siddhas*, and this can hardly be a coincidence. The severed heads of the iconographies are those of the followers of the early *siddhas*, whose ritual circles were imitated and replaced not only by parallel rituals but by solidly built temples erected thanks to the patronage of local rulers determined to put an end to social anarchy and impose Brahmanical social order by extreme means. The two phenomena are diachronic, not synchronic, at least in their early developmental stage, and that they both largely drew on the “tribal substrate” is not a reason to consider them interchangeable, nor is it particularly meaningful in terms of political history. It is obvious that, in a given place, even competing systems make use of largely similar means. The fact that Sivaite *tantras* came into evidence sometime in the ninth to tenth centuries,¹⁷¹ while canonical as well as exegetical references to tribal and outcaste people are frequent in esoteric Buddhist texts from the beginning,¹⁷² also points to a precise chronology of the events. The Kaula *cakras* of the *yoginīs*¹⁷³ are modelled on the *gaṇacakras* and betray the determination to replace the Buddhists in the control of the native populations. The distinctiveness of the temples of the *yoginīs* is that they are open-air enclosures, either quadrangular in plan as at Kha-

¹⁷¹ Davidson (2002: 206).

¹⁷² Ibid.: 226 (see the *loci* cited by the author in n. 205).

¹⁷³ The reader is referred to Dehejia (1986: 31 ff.) and, for a general evaluation of the *Kaula Tantras*, to Dyczkowski (1988: 59 ff.).

juraho and Mau Suhania near Chhatarpur¹⁷⁴ or more often circular, unlike any other class of Indian temples. Their *mandala*-shaped aspect, usually resorted to as an explanation for their existence, is too generic a feature, and helps to explain at most that we are dealing with sacred places where ritual activities were performed. In accord with the dictate of the texts that Bhairava be at the centre of the circle of the *yoginīs*,¹⁷⁵ shrines or round pavilions rose at the centre of the enclosures, housing an image of the God and his retinue.¹⁷⁶ Vidya Dehejia has contended that only already dead human beings were offered to the goddesses (*sava sādhanā*), and that the ritual killing of humans was excluded.¹⁷⁷ But procuring “beautiful” corpses “not injured in any way, and not defaced or marked in any manner”, and even “still sweet-smelling”¹⁷⁸ was hardly a feasible thing. It is preferable not to rely upon normative textual dictates to provide an explanation for the early, elusive *yoginīs* enclosures,¹⁷⁹ which owed their existence to the special relationship between Śiva and the Goddess(es) discussed above: at Ranipur-Jharial, for example, the circle was presided over by Śiva as Natarāja and by Cāmuṇḍā dancing on a corpse.¹⁸⁰ The enclosures appear *prima facie* as developments of earlier spaces such as the *yajñasālā* of Ellora, this being perhaps the reason why the earliest ones are quadrangular in plan. The enclosures appear as ritualised *assommoirs* where special op-

¹⁷⁴ For the temple of Khajuraho, see Deva (1990, I: 25–29; map and elevations in vol. 2) and D. Desai (1996: 81 ff.). For the identification of the remains at Mau Suhania, cf. *ibid.*: 85–87.

¹⁷⁵ Dehejia (1986: 35).

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*: 40. For Khajuraho, cf. D. Desai (1996: 86–90).

¹⁷⁷ Dehejia (1886: 59).

¹⁷⁸ According to the requirements (for what they are worth) of the *Matottara Tantra*; cf. *ibid.*: 59.

¹⁷⁹ Different layers of meaning in the sets of *yoginīs* sculptures are observable. See for instance the naked, but also the dressed male figures subjugated by the *yoginīs* in the later sculptural production: they are not dead, and seem rather to ask to be pardoned (see the two stele from Hinglajgarh and the princely figures from Shahdol in *ibid.*: 154, 155 and 163, 167, respectively).

¹⁸⁰ Donaldson (2002, II: 670).

ponents were got rid of, it being otherwise difficult to account for their isolated location and special iconographical features.

Inimical armies were defeated in battle, and both soldiers and military commanders were killed, but the logic underlying the battlefield is different in that it presupposes openly conducted operations. The battlefield was sacralised, but was under everybody's gaze: there was no need for secrecy, quite the opposite. But different wars were also waged, more similar to guerrilla wars, whose military chiefs and political leaders had to be suppressed according to different procedures. Early enclosures point to *yajñas* that amplified the specialised slaughtering of heretics and their supportive *rājās* that we have seen performed by Bhairava and Cāmuṇḍā. The holy terror that the local people still show for the remains of the *yoginī* temples is nothing but a memory of what was performed there,¹⁸¹ and cannot be explained by the memory of the ordinary battlefield, bloody though this may have been.¹⁸²

PACIFIED KINGDOMS

The Candella kingdom may be taken as the epitome of the *pax brahmanica* in northern India. The sources at our disposal, both scriptural and iconographical, allow us to recreate a context where all the enemies of the Brahmanical society had been defeated and the new orthodoxy — born out from the synthesis of Vedic thought and of the Pañcarātra and Śaiva Siddhānta systems — could display all its effects.

¹⁸¹ Dehejia (1986: ix), referring to the deep sense of fear and awe inspired by these places, remarks that secrecy was kept to such an extent that “the very existence of the Yoginī temple at Hirapur became public knowledge only as recently as the year 1953.”

¹⁸² Later enclosures, or later use of early ones, may have served a wider range of operations. From the epigraphic evidence of twelfth-century South India, we learn that the *yoginīs* are gratified “with draughts of blood out of the skull of Kalapāla”, a local king who died in battle at the time of the early conquests (AD 1115) of the Hoysala king Viṣṇuvardhana. Cf. *EC* 5 (Hassan district): no. 58, dated AD 1117, from Belur district (pp. 56–58 of the English transl., cf. p. 57).

Jejākabhukti (later known as Bundelkhand) had seen the establishment of orthodox Gupta power like the other regions of central and northern India, but the discovery made by Cunningham at Khajuraho of the pedestal of “a colossal draped figure” inscribed with the Buddhist formula, which he dated to the seventh century,¹⁸³ indicates that Buddhism had regained ground. If the kingdom of Zhizhituo mentioned by Xuanzang¹⁸⁴ is to be identified with Jejākabhukti,¹⁸⁵ this must have happened at the time of Harṣavardhana: the kingdom was Buddhist only on behalf of his king, a brāhmaṇa who firmly believed in the Three Jewels, while the majority of its inhabitants were unbelievers, and only a few honoured the Buddhist Dharma. There were “several tens” of monasteries, but the priests were few, whereas the *deva* temples, about ten in number, were frequented by some thousand followers. The situation depicted by Xuanzang points to the typical capacity of Harṣavardhana of shifting the balance of power in his favour even in the presence of adverse social and religious conditions. The Buddha image now in the site museum is a late eighth or early ninth-century work,¹⁸⁶ and its presence, along with a few other scattered fragments assignable to Buddhist monuments,¹⁸⁷ suggests that the region of Khajuraho was included in those territories of central and upper Deccan that the Buddhists had managed, after the seventh century, to make, in part, their own. Their presence was significant in the region at the time of the early Pāla rulers, and until the ninth century there is no visible trace of other religious groups, although the presence of Sivaïtes is to be assumed.

¹⁸³ *ASIR* 2 (A. Cunningham): 414.

¹⁸⁴ *Xiyuji* a: XI (vol. 2: 271 [*Chi-ki-to*]).

¹⁸⁵ *ASIR* 2 (A. Cunningham): 412–13.

¹⁸⁶ The Buddha head appears as having been wantonly defaced (Agarwal 1964: 211–12). See the image in D. Desai (1996: 22, fig. 20; 2014). The date of the sculpture, judging from the Buddhist creed inscribed on the pedestal, can be approximately fixed around AD 800, and in any case not later than AD 850 (id. 2014: 676).

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*: 672–73.

It was around AD 900 that at Khajuraho a temple of the sixty-four *yoginīs* was built,¹⁸⁸ which introduces us into a new scenario. Its presence suggests that a *devāsura* war had been fought. The memory of the events related to the brahmanisation of the region in which the Candellas, as rulers subordinate to the Pratihāras, had played a leading role was well present to the new independent dynasty when, from the tenth century onwards, the temples of Khajuraho were constructed. On the high plinth (*vedībāndha*) of the Kandarīya Mahādeva Temple, built in the second quarter of the eleventh century,¹⁸⁹ open out nine niches that, being placed at eye level, the devotees could observe from close up when circumambulating the temple. Proceeding clockwise from the *ardhamanḍapa*, they display the images of Gaṇeśa, the *saptamātrkās* and Vīrabhadra, whom we have seen directly connected with the extirpation of heresy since Gupta times and, in a visually terrifying way, in the *yajñasālā* of Ellora. The *saptamātrkās* include a ferocious Cāmuṇḍā dancing on a corpse. These images are the symbolic base upon which the temple, with its complex theological conceptualisation, stands: without the war waged against the opponents of orthodoxy, the erection of the temple would not have been possible.

Not only the Sivaites, but also the Bhāgavatas-Pañcarātras contributed to the religious cleansing of Jeḷākabhukti, as is apparent from the dedicatory inscription of the Lakṣmaṇa Temple, built in the first half of the tenth century during the reign of King Yaśovarman (*c.* AD 925-50) and consecrated under Dhaṅga in AD 954. The inscription opens invoking protection upon Vāsudeva, whose breast is “marked with scars by the swords of the Daityas”:¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ Agarwal (1964: 91); the temple dates to the second half of the ninth century according to Deva (1990, I: 26).

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.: 147–48. D. Desai (1996: 43; 2000: 53) suggests that it was built by King Vidyādhara after repelling the attacks of Maḥmūd of Ghazni.

¹⁹⁰ The temple was erected by King Dhaṅga’s father Yaśovarman (*EI* 1, 1892, F. Kielhorn: 122–35, v. 3); see the inscription re-edited by Sircar (1983b: 258–67).

May that Vaikuṅṭha protect you, who, frightening the whole world with his roaring, as boar and as man-lion, slew the three chiefs Asuras, Kapila and the rest, (*who were*) terrible in the world, (*and who*) possessed one body which by the boon of Brahman enjoyed freedom from fear (*and*) could be destroyed (*only*) by (*Vaikuṅṭha*) having assumed those forms.¹⁹¹

Both Vāsudeva and Vaikuṅṭha (a form of Viṣṇu developed by the Bhāgavatas-Pañcarātras that by this time had acquired the complex, esoteric nature of the highest personal God) are considered under their aspect of destroyers of the *daityas/asuras*. They acted according to the mechanisms that we know from the Purāṇic literature. To make the point clear, the story of Trivikrama and Bali is also recalled at the beginning of the inscription.¹⁹² If we look at the Candella temples from this perspective, the interpretation of the architectural and iconographical world of Khajuraho (in particular of the Lakṣmaṇa and Kandarīya Mahādeva temples) proposed by Devangana Desai¹⁹³ becomes even more meaningful. The Pañcarātra and Śaiva Siddhānta systems, which made them symbols of cosmic order on earth,¹⁹⁴ are the leading forces of Brahmanical normalisation.

Kṛṣṇa Miśra's *Prabodha Candrodāya*, or *The Rise of the Moon of Awakening*,¹⁹⁵ is a mine of information, and is quite explicit. This morality play in six acts was composed at the

¹⁹¹ *EI* 1 (1892, F. Kielhorn): 122–35, v. 1. Kāpila was a demon eventually assimilated by Viṣṇu in his tetracephalic aspect of Vaikuṅṭha (de Mallmann 1963: 21).

¹⁹² *EI* 1 (1892, F. Kielhorn): 122–35: v. 2. D. Desai (1996: 104) is aware of the emphasis on Vaikuṅṭha as Daityāri, but has no further elaborated on this point.

¹⁹³ D. Desai (1984; 1996); her short guidebook to Khajuraho is also useful (id.: 2000). To explain the religious milieu of Khajuraho, Desai (esp. 1996) has emphasised the role played by the twilight language (*sandhyābhāṣa*), similar to that used by Kṛṣṇa Miśra in his *Prabodha Candrodāya*, and by sculptural puns (*śleṣa*).

¹⁹⁴ D. Desai (1996: 53 ff., 57 ff., 151–52).

¹⁹⁵ I follow Sita K. Nambiar, to whose introduction to the play I refer the reader (cf. *Prabodha Candrodāya*: 2–3).

Candella court between AD 1050 and 1116,¹⁹⁶ and more precisely during the reign of King Kīrtivarman (c. AD 1070-98), for whom it was staged at the instance of Śrī Gopāla, his military commander in the war against the Cedis.¹⁹⁷ The play depicts the pacified situation reached after a religious war. For the achievement of peace, the different forces of Brahmanism, unified and hierarchised in the perspective of the Advaita Vedānta, are explicitly declared to have jointly fought. In fact, the *śāstras* “born from the Vedas, though they are opposed to each other internally, unite together to overthrow the non-believers (in the Vedas) and protect the Vedas”.¹⁹⁸ Śraddhā (Faith), one of the main characters of the play, recalls the past, separate wars, and makes them appear as what they really were — one and the same generalised conflict. In the context where the play was composed, there were no reasons to conceal the real identity of the annihilated adversaries. It was addressed to a small, sophisticated circle of people who perfectly knew the sequence of events. There was no need to allegorise historical facts for the benefit of a large audience of devotees as in the case of the Purāṇas. Thus Faith, after evoking the battlefield, tells plainly what was the consequence of the defeat for the survivors:

There the rivers of abundant blood as their waters flew, whose mud was pieces of flesh (lying) in plenty, were covered with wretched birds; the huge elephants which were shattered by the arrows and were scattered (here and there) formed the rocks, and stopped their speed, whose ear-ornaments were the umbrellas fallen here and there that looked like haṁsa birds.

In that great and fierce battle, the materialist who is opposed to both the parties (the Vaidika and Advaitika) was placed in the

¹⁹⁶ See Hultzsch in *EI* 1 (1892): 218.

¹⁹⁷ S.K. Mitra (1977: 99, 179).

¹⁹⁸ *Prabodha Candrodaya*: V.9 (p. 125).

front by the heretics and was killed in the conflict (between two armies). The other anti-Vedic schools were destroyed by the flow of the ocean of Vedic thoughts. The Buddhists entered the almost barbarous countries of Sindhus, Gāndhāras, Pārasīkas, Māgadhas, Andhras, Hūṇas, Vaṅgas, Kaliṅgas etc. The heretic Digambaras (Jaina), Kāpālikas and others live hidden in the Pāñcālas, Mālavas, Ābhīras and Āvarta near the ocean, which (countries) abound in illiterates. The logic of the anti-Vedic schools shattered by the Mimāṃsā accompanied by Nyāya had the same fate of the (heretic) śāstras.¹⁹⁹

Once discounted the propagandistic emphasis of what is expounded by Faith, it is interesting for us to note that besides the Buddhists, the Kāpālikas were also proscribed: by the late eleventh century they had already accomplished their task, and could be declared *personae non gratae*. In the play, their past role is recalled by the lines of the Kāpālika who threatens to kill the Digambara Jain, accused of insulting Śiva by calling him a magician: “I shall please the wife of Bharga (Śiva) with the blood springing out in thick foaming streams of bubbles from the throat which is cut with this frightful sword, along with the host of ghosts called by the booming sound of the Ḍamaru”.²⁰⁰

These words depict the social-religious dynamics described in the preceding section and in Chapter IV, the *modus operandi* of the Kāpālikas (and possibly of other *vāma* groups) being obviously known to Kṛṣṇa Mīśra. He treats them better than the Buddhists and the Digambaras, but the climate had

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.: V.10-11 (p. 127). Regarding the less familiar names, Pārasīka is Persia, the land of the Ābhīras corresponds to the south-eastern part of Gujarat, and Āvarta corresponds to Saurashtra. As to the Hūṇas, Punjab is probably meant (cf. Sircar 1971: 108). Buddha Prakash has discussed the matter at length, emphasising the fact that after Harṣavardhana the Hūṇas set up a number of principalities that played a notable part in history (Prakash 1965: 170); however, he identified them with the former rulers of Kābul and Zābul, which recent research has shown were of Turkish origin.

²⁰⁰ *Prabodha Candrodāya*: III.15 (p. 79).

changed, and Śraddhā, in fact, declares, “I abhor the sight of battles full of violence”, and wants to leave Benares, the place of the battlefield.²⁰¹ There were deeper implications in the decision of jettisoning the Kāpālikas. The butchers whom they recruited to carry out the religious cleansing must have come from the most unclean and unruly sectors of society, something that could no longer be tolerated in a successfully reformed society where even the lowest of the low had to conform to a strict code of behaviour.

Some of the erotic reliefs on the temples of Khajuraho are to be understood as mocking scenes depicting the Digambara Kṣapaṇika monks,²⁰² ridiculed by the sophisticated Candella intelligentsia. It is difficult to know the precise reason that brought about the expulsion of the Digambaras from the kingdom. The temple of Pārśvanātha (originally dedicated to Ādinātha) is contemporaneous with the Lakṣmaṇa Temple,²⁰³ whose construction was initiated by Yaśovarman in about AD 950,²⁰⁴ and the Ādinātha Temple belongs to the group of developed temples, being thus dated to around the mid-eleventh century.²⁰⁵ The place that the Brahmanical deities have in the iconographical programme of these Jain temples is too central for them to be considered ancillary presences.²⁰⁶ The Jains living in Khajuraho between *c.* AD 950 and 1050 were a community integrated willy-nilly within Brahmanical order,

²⁰¹ Ibid.: V.3 (p. 119).

²⁰² D. Desai (1996: 51–52).

²⁰³ Deva (1990: 57–58).

²⁰⁴ D. Desai (1996: 99).

²⁰⁵ Deva (1990: 192–93, 210). D. Desai (1996: 34) dates it to *c.* AD 1075.

²⁰⁶ Id. (2000: 73) says that “It is still unclear” why the Pārśvanātha Temple “contains images of Krishna, Rama, Balarama, Vishnu, and Shiva on its exterior wall”, and K.K. Shah (1988: 170) has noted the absence of episodes associated with the Tīrthaṅkaras and the “repetition” of Brahmanical iconography. Images of Sarasvatī and Lakṣmī are found inside the temple, in the *antarāla* (Deva 1990: 63; the reader shall find a detailed description of the temple iconography in *ibid.*: 65 ff.). Images of Brahmanical gods are also found in the temple of Ādinātha (*ibid.*: 214 ff.).

having not only accepted the normalisation of society and *varṇabheda* but the control of *Jainadharmā* and temple service, according to a process that we will discuss in the next chapter. The fact that Cunningham found the Buddha image mentioned above “lying amongst the ruins” outside the Ghaṇṭāi Temple, a ruined Jain building roughly contemporary with the temple of Pārśvanātha,²⁰⁷ may suggest that the Digambaras erected it on the site of a former Buddhist establishment, after actively taking part in its destruction as was happening elsewhere.²⁰⁸ Something, however, must have happened after AD 1050 for Kṛṣṇa Mīśra to include the Digambaras among the enemies of Brahmanical order, but we have no clue on the reasons why the pact between the two parties, always in jeopardy, was eventually broken. We can only argue that it was during Kīrtivarman’s reign that the expulsion of the Jains took place.

A relief on the Devī Jagadambā Temple, originally dedicated to Viṣṇu and built between AD 1000 and 1025, deserves a comment (Fig. 14). According to an untenable theory advanced by Alain Daniélou, it would represent a king greeting a monk in a most friendly (and, we may add, unusual) way, ascribing it to a set of iconographies revealing Indian tolerance towards homosexual behaviour.²⁰⁹ The bearded man is better identified as a Kāpālīka ascetic, raising his right hand to hit a naked ascetic, who is asking for mercy and is ready to convert. The ascetic is usually considered to be a Digambara Jain, but at the beginning of the eleventh century the Digambaras were still part of the religious scene, and it is possible that he is a Buddhist, because of the virtual nakedness of all *śramaṇas*, who are all *nagdas* – deprived of the protection of the Veda.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.: 250–51. At first, Cunningham (*ASIR* 2: 414) thought that this Jain temple was a Buddhist building.

²⁰⁸ See above, Chapter IV and below, Chapter VI.

²⁰⁹ Daniélou (1973: 73–74).

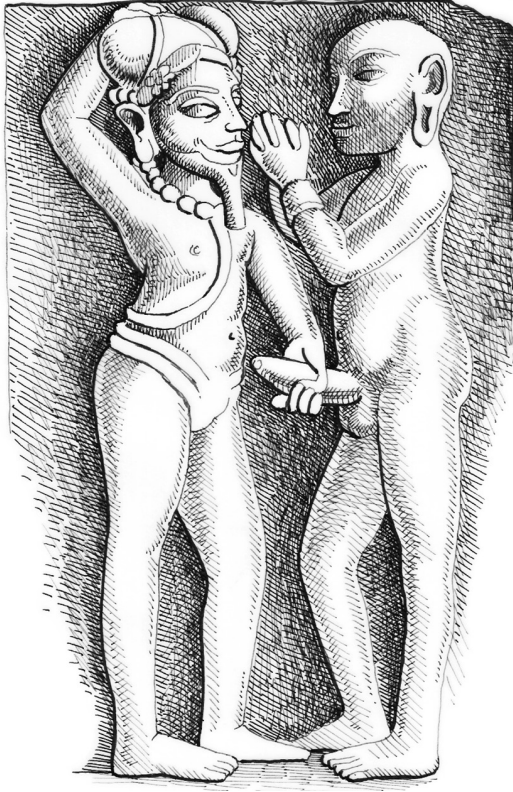


Fig. 14 - A Kapālika mocking and threatening a naked ascetic in the Devī Jagadambā Temple, Khajuraho.

Threat and mockery go together in this relief,²¹⁰ which reveals the various levels through which normalisation was reached: the Jains and the Buddhists were killed or obliged to convert, and the Kāpālikas were, in turn, mocked and got rid of.

²¹⁰ Ascetics performing various sexual acts are mockingly represented at Khajuraho and elsewhere (D. Desai 1985: 77–79), but we are unable to identify the ascetics represented in the various contexts.

The main target of Kṛṣṇa Mīśra are the Buddhists. Right after the passage mentioned above, Viṣṇubhakti asks Śraddhā news of Mahāmoha, the delusion through which Viṣṇu has generated heresy:

Faith: Goddess, it is not known where Great Delusion has hidden himself along with the Obstacles of Yoga.

Delusion of Viṣṇu: If so the great danger is still there. He should be destroyed. A wise person desiring lasting good will not be careless and leave behind remnants of fire, debt and enemy.²¹¹

Moha, significantly, has made Benares his capital, and has explained to one of his sons and accomplices, Dambha (Deceit), that “the city named Vārāṇasī is the best place in the world to attain liberation”, and that he must go there “and try to obstruct the path of the liberation of all the four castes”.²¹² Deceit explains in turn to Ahaṃkāra (Egoism) that “Vārāṇasī is the birth place of knowledge and spiritual awakening”, and that this is why Mati (Reason), who wants to destroy Moha’s family, “wishes to stay there permanently”.²¹³ Moha, that is, the pretended Buddha, has made Benares, that is to say, Isipatana, the place of false awakening. Therefore, King Viveka (Discrimination) fights against Moha with the assistance of the orthodox *darśanas*.

In Act III, the Buddhist *bhikṣu* presents himself as follows:

How good is the religion of the Buddha where there is (sensual) enjoyment as well as liberation. For—(living in) beautiful houses, (possessing) prostitutes who are to their liking, (having) food of their taste at any time they desire, (sleeping on) soft beds, they who meditate with faith (on Buddha) spend the nights bright with moon light, with happiness derived from sporting with young women offering their bodies.²¹⁴

²¹¹ *Prabodha Candrodāya*: V.11 (p. 129).

²¹² *Ibid.*: II.1 (p. 27).

²¹³ *Ibid.*: II.12 (p. 37).

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*: III.9 (pp. 70–71).

The *bhikṣu* is even ready to accept the doctrine of the Kāpālikas for the sake of sexual pleasure, proving himself the most debased among the representatives of the three systems criticised by the author:

How often have I ardently embraced widows with swelling breasts, pressing their big breasts with my arms with great passion! but by the Buddhas I swear a hundred times that nowhere have I attained such pleasure as derived from the embrace of big swelling bosom of this Kāpāliṇī.

Excellent is the practice of the Kāpālika. Praiseworthy is the Soma Siddhānta. Wonderful is this religion. Oh good sir, we have forsaken the doctrine of Buddha completely. We have accepted the doctrine of Parameśvara. Therefore, you are my teacher and I am your disciple. Initiate me into the teachings of Parameśvara.²¹⁵

This caricature of what are perhaps householder monks echoes and amplifies the old accusations of immoral behaviour. The *bhikṣu* of the play (whether a monk or a priest) is the personification of the whole Buddhist community, which is condemned en bloc. We know that in the eleventh century a Buddhist community was living within the Candella territory, at Mahobā, the cradle of the dynasty and one of its capital towns.²¹⁶ The Buddhist stele found near the Kirat Sagar, now kept in the State Museum in Lucknow, are dated on epigraphic basis to the eleventh-twelfth century,²¹⁷ and may be considered as creations of the community that was obliged to quit. Judging from an exceptional, sixty-four-armed image of Cāmuṇḍā, as

²¹⁵ Ibid.: III.18-19 (pp. 82–83). On the term *Soma Siddhānta* applied to the doctrine of the Kāpālikas, see Lorenzen (1972: 82–83).

²¹⁶ A tradition regarding the origin of the Candellas is preserved in the *Mahobā Khaṇḍ*, for which see S.K. Mitra (1977: 14 ff.). Mahobā was surveyed by Cunningham (*ASIR* 2: 439–59; *ASIR* 21: 70–74), and still awaits proper investigation.

²¹⁷ K.N. Dikshit (1921:1). The inscription on the pedestal of Siṃhanāda Avalokiteśvara refers to Chītnaka, son of the painter Sātana, as the donor, and the Tārā inscription mentions another relative of Sātana's. The image of Padmapāṇi bears no inscription (ibid.: 2–3). Cf. also S.K. Mitra (1977: 203–204).

well as from the other numerous rock-cut images of the Goddess observable at Mahobā,²¹⁸ the departure of the heretics did not take place peacefully. Other Buddhist communities were present in the kingdom. We have mentioned Bharhut in the section above, and groups of Buddhists were still living in the Gopeśvara Hills in Datia district and in Damoh district.²¹⁹ That the Buddhists fled to Magadha, Vaṅga, Kāliṅga and Āndhra is credible (although by the end of the eleventh century only a few Buddhist strongholds remained in the two latter regions), but that they would take refuge in Sind and Gandhāra can only be understood either as having found there a temporary shelter before moving to more suitable places²²⁰ or, more probably, because these two regions kept, to Kṛṣṇa Miśra's eyes, the strong Buddhist identity that once had been theirs.

We have mentioned the war waged by the Candellas against the Cedis. We are often unable to search beyond military history, but some scattered information help us in getting a deeper insight on the social dynamics of the region during this period. The Rewa inscription of Malayasiṃha (a "feudatory" of the Kalacuris-Cedis) of the end of the twelfth century testifies that this *rājā* supported Buddhism.²²¹ The policy followed by the local chiefs was apparently not always coincidental with those of the "central" power, and a thorough survey of the archaeological evidence could throw more light into the stratifications of the history of medieval India also in relation

²¹⁸ K.K. Shah (1988: 66; fig. 13). See the image of the sixty-four armed Goddess, of which only the upper part is preserved, also in id. (1977). It would deserve a careful study.

²¹⁹ Id. (1988: 166, 168).

²²⁰ In Sind, the early region of India conquered by the Muslims, some Buddhist communities survived until the tenth century (van Lohuizen-de Leuw 1975). Gandhāra, as we have seen in Chapter III, had turned into an orthodox kingdom even before the Śāhī rule, and at the time of Kṛṣṇa Miśra was overrun by the Muslims, opposed by the Hindū Śāhīs.

²²¹ *EI* 19 (1927-28, R.D. Banerji): 295-99. It is difficult to think of feudal relationships in a proper sense between rulers who supported different religious beliefs.

to the issue “feudalism”. In the above-mentioned inscription of Yaśovarman of AD 954, which opens with the mention of the war against the *asuras*, there is a passage about the Candella prince Rāhila, father of Harṣa (the real founder of Candella power), who ruled in the second half of the ninth century.²²² We read that Rāhila was

[...] never tired, at the sacrifice of battle, where the terribly wielded sword was the ladle, where the oblation of clarified butter was made with streaming blood, where the twanging of the bow-string was the exclamation *vashaṭ*, (*and*) at which exasperated warriors marching in order were the priests, successful with his counsels (as with sacred hymns) sacrificed, like beasts, the adversaries in the fire of enmity, made to blaze up by the wind of his unappeased anger.²²³

Here warfare is viewed in terms of the performance of sacrifice, and the passage has been taken as further evidence of the strict orthodox policy followed by the Candellas: the literal likeness between the priestly and princely sacrifices “fully drives home the hold of Vedic rituals on the upper classes”.²²⁴ It was approximately at the time of Rāhila that the temple of the sixty-four *yoginīs* of Khajuraho was built, and we wonder about the real nature of a battlefield being made “sacred” and the kind of war waged by Rāhila.

The radical change that the *pax brahmanica* brought to the Indian landscape is best illustrated by the new geography that was created. The Purāṇas and the appended *māhātmyas* provide ample evidence of *kṣetras* presided over by a Brahmanical deity. The process of renaming every corner of India was as long as different were the events that led to the final control of the brāhmaṇas over the subcontinent. The new names given to regions, provinces, towns, neighbourhoods

²²² See what is known on this ruler in S.K. Mitra (1977: 33).

²²³ *EI* 1 (1892, F. Kielhorn): 122–35: v. 17.

²²⁴ K.K. Shah (1988: 131). With the Candellas, Vedic scholars were welcomed in Jeṅākabhukti with unprecedented favour.

and crossroads accomplished the task of cleansing the past, whose memory either disappeared or was distorted. What the Purāṇas do not tell us, or narrate only indirectly, is that the new toponyms replaced, one after the other, the place names of the geographical horizon of the open society. The establishment of a new geography is by no means unique to India, but here it was carried out with a radicalism that has few parallels. Buddhist geography was cancelled, and to such a degree that, despite the enormous efforts made in the last two centuries to retrieve the early place names, to date we are still ignorant of the ancient names of many Buddhist sites and are unable to identify on the terrain many places recorded in the texts. The Brahmanical occupation of the whole country did not simply come to be a substitution and appropriation of past realities, but implied the reset of all the other histories of India: the power and importance of medieval Brahmanical myths lie here.

THE BUDDHIST REACTION

The *Guhyasamāja Tantra* is regarded as the earliest *tantra* and the revered source of all the subsequent esoteric scriptures of the Buddhists. Its date has been the object of much debate among scholars,²²⁵ but the second half of the eighth century is now generally acknowledged as the period of its composition.²²⁶ The aim of this *tantra* is declared in the first chapter: no one can succeed in obtaining perfection through processes that are

²²⁵ Benutosh Bhattacharya put forward a number of reasons suggesting a date to the third, or one not later than the fourth century, pointing to Asaṅga as the author of the text (B. Bhattacharya 1931: xxxiv ff.). The latter attribution was questioned by Alex Wayman, who, however, was also in favour of a fourth-century date (Wayman 1977: 99). The German translator of the work, Peter Gāng, suggested a date from the third to the seventh century (cf. *Guhyasamāja Tantra*: 101). Tucci, however, maintained that only a date between the end of the seventh and the eighth century is possible (see below n. 241).

²²⁶ Davidson (2002: 198, 217).

difficult and painful; but one can succeed easily through the satisfaction of all desires.²²⁷ In the fifth chapter, the Bhagavān Mahāvairocana declares that outcastes, workers and similar people find perfection in this *yāna*. This means of salvation is likewise for those who do not respect the life of the others, who delight in telling falsehood, who steal other people's property, who continuously take recourse to sensual pleasures, and who feed on excrements and urine. It is the *yogin* lusting after his mother, sisters and daughters who attains the greatest perfection.²²⁸

These statements may have intended to be paradoxical,²²⁹ but they may be better interpreted as having been made on purpose by the followers of the Vajrayāna, who made their own the insults of the *tīrthikas* transforming them into a weapon, as if to say: we are murderers? Well, yes, that's right: here we are... In any case, the attack on social institutions and commonly accepted behaviours contained in these and other passages of the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*, is radical. In this text, the society appears *prima facie* as an entirely collapsed, broken-up entity, or, better to say, the text appears as something that actively brings about the collapse of the society: the addressees of the initiates are the murderers, thieves, liars, immoral and incestuous persons, the defamers. At the same time, the metaphors and the rituals created to make them the protagonists of the Buddhist survival strategy are plunged in an astonishing, dazzling light, which lends the text a de-historicised character that has made a symbolical interpretation possible, assuring the fortune of the Vajrayāna outside India. The *Guhyasamāja Tantra* appropriates, magnifies, and extols the social subjects that Brahmanical texts had been reviling as responsible for the dreadful situation

²²⁷ *Guhyasamāja Tantra*: I (p. 42).

²²⁸ *Ibid.*: V (pp. 133–34).

²²⁹ Cf. Gnoli in *Nāropā*: 30.

of the Kali Age. Even the bodhisattvas attending the *saṃgiti* where the Bhagavān explains the new “secret” doctrine are scandalised, and to such a degree that they fall down motionless from the shock: only when, at the instance of the Tathāgatas, they are touched by the light emanating from the Sublime Being, they are reanimated and take their seats again.²³⁰ The shocked bodhisattvas represent the Mahāyāna elite of Buddhist monasticism that was invited to adjust to a strategy to which they found difficult to adhere, but that, in the new situation, the Buddhist masters — unable to respond to the reorganised, differentiated Brahmanical elites — could no longer refuse. The efforts of reorganisation and defense of the religion of Dharma attempted by the great intellectuals of the Mahāyāna who continued to face dialectically the *tīrthikas*, and carried out, at a different level, by the many *saṃghas* that had compromised with the Brahmanical organisation of society, had failed, and to such a degree that Buddhism seemed to be near to a dead end. As it was, Buddhism did not seem to be able to attract new social interlocutors. Hence the third set in motion of the Wheel of the Law.

For such a text as the *Guhyasamāja* to be written, conditions of social strain and a desperate will to react — although kept “secret” (*guhya*) — must be assumed, and these conditions are those of extreme hardships described in this and in the preceding chapter. In many parts of India the monasteries had been, and still were, the target of attacks; many had been destroyed, appropriated, or had been forcibly deserted; even where Buddhism still held its positions, violence was always possible. This situation could not but generate a general lack of confidence in the political and social praxis adopted in the past, and a stronger response towards the wicked world.²³¹ We

²³⁰ *Guhyasamāja Tantra*: V (p. 134).

²³¹ I make my own, adapting his words to this context, a statement by Tucci (1958: 282).

must carefully consider the political perspective of the late eighth and early ninth century: it is the period of the great Pāla emperors, which makes us understand that the response of the Vajrayāna was political, perfectly rational and well-coordinated, capable of uniting the various, weakened bits of Indian Buddhism once the resistance to the new formulation of the doctrine, of which the author of the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* was well aware, was overcome.

Two survival strategies were implemented. The first, which we will discuss in the next chapter and awaits investigation, was to give full legitimacy to the social mimetism of the already existing married clergy, entrusted with the administration of *samskāras*. The Buddhist priesthood paralleled that of the *tīrthikas* and of the Jains. It could no longer be looked down upon, but was called to participate in the common cause. The second survival strategy was based on the interdependence of non-institutional Buddhism, as it has been called,²³² and the monasteries of north-eastern India.

In the hostile territories, the *siddhas* developed a model of social presence that did not require a permanent residence. The locations where they performed their rituals and imparted their teaching could hardly be the object of aggressions. As already mentioned, they were out-of-the-way places, at the far edge of the inhabited areas, and the *gaṇacakras* and other ritual groups assembled at night. These settings were not merely bizarre, witchy locations, a folkloric scenario, but a necessity and a strategic choice. By the eighth century Buddhist recruitment in the upper castes must have turned extremely difficult in large parts of the country. The social origin of the eighty-four *siddhas*, for all the inadequateness of the sample, mirrors the impasse. The support of the commoners, and their contribution to restock the ranks of the *samgha* had equally

²³² Davidson (2002: esp. the last three chapters).

faded away for the radically changed economic situation. The opening to the lowest segments of society was a necessity.

In the eighth century, the political resistance against caste brāhmaṇas had concentrated in the North-East. Gopāla, founder of the Pāla dynasty in AD 741,²³³ was a śūdra according to the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, and rose to power when “the people [were] miserable with the Brahmins”.²³⁴ He was not the first low-caste king to rule in India: when it was in their interest, the brāhmaṇas had no difficulty in clean up dubious social origins, but the case was different here. The expression *kāmakarī* found in the initial verse of Pāla inscriptions — an eulogy of both Buddha and Gopāla, indicates those who do not acknowledge any control and act wilfully.²³⁵ This, however, does not so much refer to local unruly chiefs, but to the *tīrthikas* who fomented them. By that time, the constant presence of the Tibetans strongly conditioned the political events in north-eastern India: they probably played an important role in placing a Buddhist king on the throne.²³⁶ From a geo-strategic standpoint, we have a powerful Buddhist block similar to that created by Harṣavardhana, although its centre of gravity, testifying to a further withdrawal from the rest of India, was more to the east, in Magadha and Bengal, and included the trans-Himalayan and trans-delta countries.²³⁷

As mentioned above, the rise of the new strategy of the Vajrayāna should be seen in the perspective of a renewed confidence fuelled by the existence of a strong political power that was giving hope for the future. With Dharmapāla (AD 762-94) and Devapāla (AD 794-829), but also with the

²³³ R. Sanyal (2014: 180).

²³⁴ *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*: [53], v. 883-84 (cf. § 49 on p. 72).

²³⁵ R.C. Majumdar (1943: 102–103).

²³⁶ *Ibid.*: 125, n. 2.

²³⁷ The north-western wing of this block, formed by the Buddhist kingdoms of western Central Asia, soon collapsed after the retreat of the Tang from Xinjiang in the second half of the eighth century. See below.

latter's successors,²³⁸ it seemed that the whole of northern India, and even parts of the south, could be restored to the religion of Dharma. A *caitya* was seemingly built on the ashes of Devapāla, whom the Buddhists must have honoured as a real *cakravartin*.²³⁹ The activism of the early *siddhas*, their apparent ubiquity and interrelationship with the monasteries finds an explanation in this new political scenario: they could be active in the hostile periphery because they had a strong point of reference in a powerful state severally threatening the Brahmanical kingdoms. The appearance of Tantric images since as early a date as the ninth century in leading monasteries, as for instance the stela with Aparājītā at Nālandā,²⁴⁰ can be explained only by the presence of a conscious, "institutional" patronage.

There is a strong discrepancy between the great number of texts testifying to the activity of the *siddhas* and the material traces of their presence, which until the tenth century are non-existent. The widely accepted opinion that it was in Uḍḍiyāna that the *siddhas* first appeared and the earliest Vajrayāna texts composed,²⁴¹ is not documented by the material evidence. At the iconographical level, too, there is no evidence of the early responses elaborated in the texts against Brahmanical abuse.²⁴²

²³⁸ For the chronology, I follow R. Sanyal (above, n. 86), but other dates have been proposed; see e.g. S.C. Bhattacharya (2005-6: 65).

²³⁹ Maitreya (1987: 81).

²⁴⁰ See e.g. Saraswati (1977: LXVIII and related photos); B. N. Misra (1998, vol. 2: 151, 171) discusses the chronology suggested by Saraswati, but mentions another Aparājītā image from Bihar datable to the ninth century.

²⁴¹ Gnoli in *Nāropā*: 26, 50. In particular, the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* would have been composed there (Tucci 1949: 212 ff.); according to Tucci, "[t]here is only one point on which the traditions agree: namely that the *Guhyasamāja* was revealed to king Indrabhūti in Uḍḍiyāna; the meaning of this, for us, is that the *Guhyasamāja* was elaborated in the Swat Valley, in or about the epoch of this personage, which seems to be, more or less, the end of the VIIth and the beginning of the VIIIth century AD" (p. 213). On king Indrabhūti, see briefly below.

²⁴² Tucci (1958: 284, 323) already wondered why no artistic manifestations reflected the presence of Vajrayāna Buddhism in Swat.

The iconographies that would develop from the ninth/tenth century onwards define yet another situation — one where the Muslim presence kindled new hopes.

Attention has been called on the *Sarvatathāgatātattva Saṃgraha*, an esoteric Buddhist text codified in the eighth century where we find the story of the subjugation of Maheśvara, perhaps “the most influential myth of esoteric Buddhism”.²⁴³ Vajrapāṇi, the master of mysteries,²⁴⁴ warns the *tathāgatas* against the existence of criminals such as Maheśvara and other gods. Summoned by a *mantra*, they appear on Mount Sumeru, where Maheśvara displays his wreath and cruelty in the form of Mahābhairava — the reader knows why — and is annihilated by Vajrapāṇi, with whom the other gods take refuge. Brought back from the dead, Maheśvara again opposes Vajrapāṇi’s attempt at subduing him, until when, dragged stark naked with his consort Umā and stepped on by the bodhisattva, abandons his form of Mahādeva and is reborn: like the other gods, he enters the *maṇḍala* with another name.²⁴⁵ A text of the Cakrasaṃvara cycle, the *Guhyagarbhatattvaviniścaya*, introduces Heruka who “seizes Maheśvara and his entire retinue, rips out their internal organs, hacks their limbs to pieces, eats their flesh, drinks their blood, and makes ritual ornaments from their bones”.²⁴⁶ After having been digested and excreted into an ocean of muck, Maheśvara and the other gods are revived and accepted into the *maṇḍala*. An escalation is observable: in the first case, the power of the *mantras* is sufficient to subdue Śiva and the other gods, while in the second Heruka makes Narasiṃha’s technique his own for dismembering his opponents. We face different situations

²⁴³ Davidson (1991: 200).

²⁴⁴ On Vajrapāṇi in the context of Vajrayāna Buddhism, see Lamotte (1966: 149 ff.).

²⁴⁵ Cf. the passage translated into English by Davidson (1991: 200–202). For a de-contextualised description of the “myth” of the subjugation of Maheśvara, see Iyanaga (1985).

²⁴⁶ Davidson (1991: 203).

here, the latter one worsened by the increasingly complicated game of the late eleventh and twelfth century.

As an example of the early Vajrayāna strategy aimed at subduing the Brahmanical gods at the level of monastic Buddhism, mention should be made of the sanctuary of Tapa Sardar near Ghazni in south-eastern Afghanistan. The sanctuary was entirely rebuilt according to a much modified plan towards the end of the seventh century after a big fire had caused extensive damages in AD 671-72, when the territory from Bost and al-Rukhaj up to Kābul was overrun by the Muslims.²⁴⁷ Its reconstruction was possible thanks to the patronage of the rulers of Zābulistān, the *eltābars* of Ghazni Khuras and his son and successor Alkhis, whose safety, like that of the other rulers of the Buddhist kingdoms of western Central Asia and Kashmir, depended on Tang protection.²⁴⁸ The period of Tang hegemony can be circumscribed between the reign of Empress Wu Zhao (reigning from AD 690 to 705, actually a break in Tang rule), and the withdrawal of the Tang to China proper after the mid-eighth century. In the newly erected sanctuary, a series of chapels opened around the main stūpa. In Chapel 23, an image of a goddess modelled on the eight-armed

²⁴⁷ Kuwayama (2002: 181–82); Verardi & Paparatti (2005: 432). The *tapa* is a natural stronghold near the desolate pass of Dahana-ye Sher barring the southern route towards Wardak and Kābul-Kāpīsi and towards Logar, and has a commanding position. It was probably selected by ‘Ubayd Allāh, as a military outpost, as often happened later and up to the present (Verardi 2010: 231–32).

²⁴⁸ Verardi & Paparatti (2005: 434 ff.). As in Semireche and Kashmir, they probably counted on the presence of political and religious staff of Han origin or Han obedience, something that is mirrored by the surprising physiognomic change affecting the sculptural production, which displays distinct Chinese features (ibid.: 432–33, 438–40). In Kashmir, the prime minister of Lalitāditya Muktāpīḍa, Caṅkuṇa, was a Chinese officer sent by Emperor Xuangzong as an adviser to King Candrāpīḍa (AD 715–25). He was a Sino-Tokharian, and a fervent Buddhist (*Rājatarāṅgiṇī*: IV. 211 ff.). Lalitāditya’s extraordinary career might not have been possible without Chinese political and military advice and support. When in the 740s the Tibetans put Kashmir with its back against the wall, he pleaded for Chinese assistance. Conversely, the stability and power of Kashmir were crucial for the Chinese struggle against the Arabs and the Tibetans. Lalitāditya, a supporter of Brahmanism, was one of those Indian rulers heavily exposed to diverging political-religious pressure.

Durgā Mahiṣamardinī was added on a sidewall²⁴⁹ after the end of Tang hegemony (Figs. 15a, b). By the mid-eighth century, a Kābul shah and ruler of Uḍḍiyāna, Śrī Śāhī Khimḡāla or Khimḡila had become a supporter of the Brahmanical religion; in AD 765 he had an image of Gaṇeśa made in Gardez, in Logar.²⁵⁰ In this region, the Sakāwand temple, mentioned in several Muslim sources, which attracted Hindu worshippers “from the most remote parts of Hindustan”,²⁵¹ was probably already in existence.²⁵² The Durgā image of Tapa Sardar points to the reaction of the Buddhists to the new state of things: the goddess, subjugated, is now at the service of Buddhism with a different name. We ignore the steps taken by the Vajrayānists in the North-West, but we should convince ourselves that here as elsewhere the various stages of Vajrayāna symbolisation and ritualisation had political and social motivations. With the Durgā of Tapa Sardar we are at the beginning of the process that caused the Brahmanical gods to be miserably subjugated: here the image was simply — but meaningfully — placed in front of an already existing statue of the Bejewelled Buddha, the king of the Dharma Kingdom to which now she also belonged.²⁵³

²⁴⁹ The finds from this chapel are published in Taddei & Verardi (1978: 47 ff.).

²⁵⁰ Kuwayama (2002: 257).

²⁵¹ *Muslim Historians*: 172; cf. Rahman (1979: 12–13). There is a fort in the present-day Sakawand village, near Baraki Barak, on the route connecting Logar to Wardak, and the site is perhaps to be identified with the Sakāwand of the sources. This part of Logar (Baraki Barak, Pul-i Alam, Charkh) is extremely lush, and suitable to be transformed into an agrarian *kṣetra*.

²⁵² The temple was destroyed by the Muslims towards the end of the ninth century (ibid.), when the region was under the rule of the Hindū Śāhīs. In Logar, no trace of the “Chinese phase” is observable in the huge site of Kafir Kot (at a short distance from Ghazni as the crow flies), consisting of a town and a series of monasteries (Verardi 2007a: 239 ff.). The site seems to have been abandoned by the late seventh century, perhaps in connection with the change of religious policy of the Turki Śāhīs in the region.

²⁵³ The huge image, made of clay, of which several fragments were found during the excavations, was situated in Chaper 23, which was completely destroyed in 2001 by the Taliban, who did not spare the other chapels all around the Main Stūpa. At present, the Durgā head is kept in the Kabul Museum.



Figure 15a

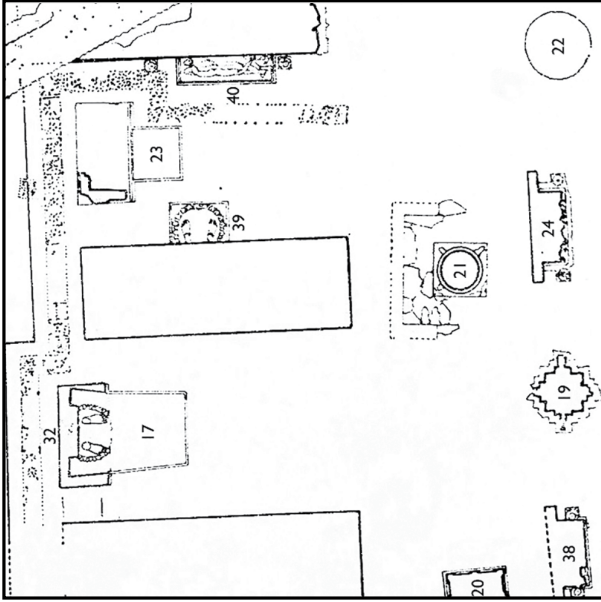


Figure 15b

Fig. 15a - Tapa Sardar, Ghazni. Head of subjugated Durgā slid near pedestal of Bejewelled Buddha.
 Fig. 15b - Tapa Sardar, Ghazni. Detail of plan of upper terrace with Chapel 23:

- 23. Throne with seated Buddha (already lost at the time of the excavations).
- 39. Pedestal of Bejewelled Buddha.
- 40. Pedestal of Durgā image preserving slain Mahiṣāsura.

A similar case, to remain on the mountains barring India to the North-West, is that of the goddess Lakṣaṇā at Bharmour in the upper Ravi region of Chamba. The eighth-century bronze is *prima facie* that of Mahiṣamardinī, but the deity has acquired the characteristics of an esoteric Buddhist goddess, whose temple the Buddhist inhabitants of the region still regard as a shrine of Vajravārāhī.²⁵⁴

The early *siddhas*, documented in the first decades of the eighth century,²⁵⁵ originated and were especially active in apparently de-structured territories. Uḍḍiyāna, a short distance from Zābulistān, is a case in point. This region found itself at the periphery of the Śāhī agrarian state centred on Udabhāṇḍapura (present-day Hund) on the right bank of the Indus in Gandhāra, although, as mentioned, the orthodox considered it one of the major Sivaite *pīthas*.²⁵⁶ The main stūpa of the sanctuary of Butkara, near Saidu Sharif, was enlarged and reconstructed several times. The fifth stūpa, built at the end of the seventh or the beginning of the eighth century, passed through intensive changes mirrored by three phases, its appearance growing ever shabbier and its workmanship coarser. After becoming “a very poor affair”, it perhaps crumbled wholly or in part and was abandoned, and its life ended in the tenth century.²⁵⁷ The excavations at Butkara were extremely accurate, yet the attention paid to the desertion phases was lesser than that devoted to the Gandharan period, and possible clues on the elusive presence of Vajrayāna

²⁵⁴ Handa (1994: 209–11; pl. 50). For the late Buddhist phase in eastern Afghanistan, Gandhāra and Uḍḍiyāna, see Verardi (2011).

²⁵⁵ Davidson (2002: 170, 203).

²⁵⁶ Above, Chapter III. This may indicate that the suppression of the Buddhists was particularly difficult in this region. We lack an analysis of the modalities according to which the *pīthas* were established and of the reasons why they are hierarchised, in relation to places, in major and minor *pīthas*.

²⁵⁷ Faccenna (1980-81, I: 126–27, 173).

ascetics are not available.²⁵⁸ Should we imagine a setting for Padmasambhava, King Indrabhūti (arguably a “tribal” *rājā* finding representation in Buddhism) and the early *siddhas*, as well as for the author of the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*, we should think of a landscape with residual monastic presence and tiny communities up in the valley to which the new teachings were imparted. As conjectured by Giuseppe Tucci, the effigies of the symbols utilised by the *siddhas* may have been painted on the walls of chapels and temples closed to all but the initiates, as is still the custom in Tibet.²⁵⁹

The composition of many important texts is accounted for by the continuous exchange of spiritual and material experiences between the *siddhas* and the north-eastern monasteries. In the 32nd year of his reign, Dharmapāla begun his northern India campaign, and conquered or overran Punjab and the North-West (*Yavana* and *Gandhāra*).²⁶⁰ This opened a channel of communication between regions that were in the process of being brahmanised and the eastern Gangetic territories, and the distance between institutional and non-institutional Buddhism became negligible. The *siddhas* do not seem to differ from the ordained monks, who were the first to turn non-institutional. The earliest *siddha* was Saraha, to whom the *Dohākośa* is attributed: he was a monk at Nālandā towards

²⁵⁸ The last phase of a given site is the first to be brought to light (the excavator may leave some parts of the upper deposit unexcavated for later controls). The archaeologists who start working *in terra incognita* may find themselves faced with evidence difficult to evaluate before the levels that interest them more are reached. An excavation is always problem-oriented, whether explicitly or not, and the excavations in Swat had as their principal aim that of unearthing early Gandharan buildings and sculptures. No relevant information has come from the levels of the small habitation area near the sanctuary, stratigraphically related to the fifth reconstruction of the stūpa (ibid. IV: esp. 736–37).

²⁵⁹ Tucci (1958: 284). In Swat, where after AD 700 the human environment was not as favourable as in Tibet, we should only think of chapels and temples built of perishable material or of abandoned monasteries.

²⁶⁰ Banerji (1915: 50–51). The Khalimpur inscription was published by F. Kielhorn (*ET* 4, 1896–97: 243–54; cf. v. 21). Dharmapāla defines himself a “devout worshipper of Sugata”.

the end of the eighth century, and took a new name after he started living as an arrow-maker in the company of a girl of that profession. Rāhulabhadra, before espousing the cause of the lower classes and become a *siddha*, had been a *bhikṣu*, a pupil of Haribhadra, who had been, in turn, a pupil of Śāntarakṣita.²⁶¹ There is evidence showing that *saṃgha* members participated in *gaṇacakras*, and *bhikṣus* and *śramaṇeras* also took the role of the *gaṇayaka* presiding over the gathering, being preferred over laymen. Abhayākara Gupta, abbot of the Vikramaśilā monastery, recognised that the *gaṇacakra* was an authentic method for attaining enlightenment.²⁶²

It is all too obvious that it took a long time for the shocked bodhisattvas of the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* to recover, and we are dealing, in fact, with a centuries-long process. Some bodhisattvas never recovered, that is, never agreed with the changes introduced by the new doctrine.

Attention has been called to Sirpur (Śrīpura) in South Kośala, in the Upper Mahanadi Valley (Raipur district of Chhattisgarh): an image of Vajrasattva and the epigraphic evidence on the use of *mantras* suggest the early involvement with *siddha* traditions.²⁶³ The history of Buddhism at Sirpur should be seen within a complex mechanism of antagonism and destruction. The main temple with the attached monastery built by the monk Ānandaprabhu during the reign of Mahāśivagupta Bālārjuna is reported to have been appropriated later on by the Sivaites, who carried out extensive repairs and changes.

²⁶¹ Prakash (1965: 265–66), drawing on Rāhula Sāṅkṛtyāyana's introduction to the *Dohākośa* (Patna 1957, in Hindi). See Kurtis R. Schaffer's recent assessment of Saraha's life based on the Tibetan literary tradition in *Dohākośa*: 49 ff.

²⁶² Shizuka (2007: 402–405, English summary of chapters 6–8; 2008: 192–93). The author discusses, in particular, the evidence from the eighth section of the *Samvarodaya Tantra*, and further argues that *maṭhas* or shrines for Tantric gatherings existed in monastic compounds to allow Vajrayāna *bhikṣus* to meet and not be hindered by their religious opponents in the monastery (id. 2007: 405, English summary of chapter 9).

²⁶³ Davidson (2002: 276).

Other smaller monasteries were to fall to the same fate.²⁶⁴ The chronology of the events is uncertain, because the absolute chronology of the Pāṇḍuvaṃśī kings, as we have seen in Chapter III, is not well established. Things are even more difficult to disentangle because there are two Brahmanical temples at Sirpur, those of Lakṣmaṇa and of Rāma, attributed by some to the same chronological horizon as the Buddhist buildings.²⁶⁵ The inscription of queen Vāsaṭā, mother of Bālārjuna, who had the Lakṣmaṇa Temple built, provides us with an unexpected picture of the events. It opens with an invocation to Puruṣottama, and then extols the exploits of Narasiṃha, whose nails are told to have torn through the mass of dark clouds and revealed the stars, “like a lion who, having overcome that storehouse of darkness, — the elephant, jumps about scattering brilliant pearls” torn from his temples.²⁶⁶ We already know the meaning of these words, alluding to the confiscation of the wealth of Buddhist sanctuaries. The text further clarifies the events, describing the God’s fight with Hiraṇyakaśipu. Here we see Narasiṃha stealing Śiva’s job:

As if bearing the jaws like a beautiful conch and the tongue like a sword, with the face burning like the discus (*and*) with the eyebrows (*as if carrying*) the mace, this form of Vishnu born for devouring, like sins, the demons, presented the appearance of the god of death.²⁶⁷

The inscription points to the Bhāgavatas as early adversaries of the Buddhist community in the Sirpur territory, and

²⁶⁴ *IAR* (1954-55: 24, 26; 1955-56: 27); Ghosh (1989, II: 411); M.G. Dikshit’s reconstruction of the events in *IAR* and other publications has been criticised by S.L. Katare (1959) in the name of the “complete harmony that prevailed between the various religions” (p. 7). The absence of a final excavation report prevents me from further investigating the matter.

²⁶⁵ Meister, Dhaky & Deva (1988: 235–36); A.M. Shastri (1985).

²⁶⁶ *EI* 11(1911-12): 184–201, v. 1 (the last words are integrations of Rai Bahadur Hira Lal, editor and translator of the text).

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*: v.3.

in fact Queen Vāsaṭā claims to have been the shelter of the four *varṇas* and to have checked the spread of the sins characteristic of the Kali Age.²⁶⁸ It is a scenario that we have seen recurring with great frequency. Then the Bhāgavatas (to whom *siddha* identity owes much)²⁶⁹ seem to disappear from the scene. Vāsaṭā's son, Bālārjuna, made endowments to Śiva temples,²⁷⁰ but a donation of a village to the monks of the small monastery of Taraḍaṃśaka is also recorded,²⁷¹ not considering the fact that he allowed Ānandaprabhu to build a monastery in the capital. He resorted to that balanced policy which satisfied the Sivaites and the Buddhists alike: the former enjoyed the explicit protection of the king; for the Buddhists, Śiva was nothing but a *deva*. The changed religious situation due to the stepping down of the Bhāgavatas and the policy followed by Bālārjuna would be consistent with the eighth-century scenario that saw, in a region bordering the present-day district of Raipur, the rise of Pāla power, and a late chronology for Bālārjuna seems thus more likely. The Buddhist sculptural production, which includes the well-known bronzes,²⁷² is attributed to the eighth century. A short time after the reign of Bālārjuna the Buddhist-Sivaite compromise came to an end: the large amount of Sivaite plaques found in the upper levels of the main monastery and of other *vihāras* points to the occupation of the complex by Sivaite ascetics, even though it is not clear whether this event is marked by an interface of destruction or by desertion layers or by both things.

In South Kośala, the *siddhas* were probably present both in the late seventh and early eighth century, when the

²⁶⁸ Ibid.: v.18-19.

²⁶⁹ Gnoli in his introduction to *Nāropā* maintains that Vishnuite influence on the *siddhas* is greater than that of the Sivaites (p. 50).

²⁷⁰ Cf. Singh Deo (1987: 153-54).

²⁷¹ *EI* 23 (1935-36, V.V. Mirashi): 113-22 (Mallar plate). Mallar is located in the Bilaspur district.

²⁷² M.G. Dikshit (1955-57); Śarmā & Śarmā (1994).

Buddhists tried to create a corridor between central Deccan and Magadha, as well as much later, when the Sivaites took a firm root in the region. The temples of the *yoginīs*, as we have seen, were eventually built to oppose their activities in the frame of a generalised guerrilla warfare.

In the map of the probable sites of *siddha* activity provided by Ronald M. Davidson,²⁷³ we see them concentrated in the middle and lower Ganges plains and Orissa, with small pockets in other areas, notably so in Kashmir and in the mountains of Punjab, as well as in the Godavari and Krishna deltas. The map probably depicts a late phase, because the presence of the *siddhas* shrank in the hostile territories after the weakening of Pāla power outside Bihar-Bengal, and tended to concentrate in the North-East where the final game was played out. It may be of interest to note that Dhanyakaṭaka, where the Buddha was said to have revealed the new doctrine to the king of Śambhala and where Buddhism survived until the fourteenth century,²⁷⁴ was part of the territories overrun by Dharmapāla. Other sites can be added to the list, as for instance Panhale Kaji (ancient Prañālaka) in southern Konkan, where the Vajrayāna *siddhas* dwelling in a group of caves between the tenth and the twelfth century were later supplanted by the Nātha *siddhas*, who adapted the caves to the Brahmanical faith.²⁷⁵

²⁷³ Donaldson (2002: map 4 on p. 314).

²⁷⁴ We know of repairs carried out at Amaravati as late as AD 1344 (Knox 1992: 16). In the tenth century, a Śiva temple was built a few hundred meters from the stūpa (ibid.: 15–16), and when the latter fell into disuse, small shrines were constructed with reused materials. The documentation is scanty because of the loss of Walter Elliot's papers (ibid.: 227–29), and it is not clear which sort of shrines they were. They may have been connected to the activities of the *siddhas*.

²⁷⁵ M.N. Deshpande (1986). This author remarks how the intellectual and iconographical traditions of eastern India became increasingly manifest in western Deccan, where Vajrayāna activity intensified, and not only in the well-known site of Kanheri, but at Kondivte and Mahad (ibid.: 16). At Panhale, an image of Mahācaṇḍarosana (a form of Acala), closely resembling an analogous image from Ratnagiri, is notable (ibid.: 46–50). Deshpande's analysis fits the scenario that we have tried to outline, where the Vajrayāna is largely dependent on the political fortunes of the Pālas.

In the myth of the subjugation of Maheśvara by Heruka, violence becomes openly part of the Buddhist defense strategy. The symbolisation and ritualisation of the stages of this process, testified to by a large number of texts and iconographies, should not lead us to believe that it was limited to symbolic actions, an all too common mistake. The *maṇḍala* is the conceptualisation of a physical, territorial space where the brāhmaṇas and their allies must be reduced to impotence for the Buddhists to survive and recreate that Dharma Kingdom that lies at the root of political Buddhism. The *Guhyasamāja Tantra* explicitly invites concentration on the three-pronged *vajra* “that paralyzes all the non-Buddhist teachers” projecting it on the head of the enemy, which shall not prevail against the *buddhasainya*, the Buddha’s army.²⁷⁶ As regards Vajrapāṇi, if his task was to reinforce the law and prevent the Maheśvaras of the world from overwhelming the monasteries at the symbolical level,²⁷⁷ new followers of Buddhism existed who could protect them in actual reality. Violence is explicitly recognised as having a value, as in the case of the Buddhist *yogī* Viromaṇi, who greatly enhanced the cause of Tantric Buddhism by suppressing the *tīrthikas*.²⁷⁸

We wonder whether the Buddhists waited until the eighth century and favourable political conditions to respond to threats. They certainly encouraged the resistance of the social groups endangered by the occupation of lands and of the harassed traders community: in an inscription from Baijnath, we read that those alone can be considered true merchants whose wealth is lent to Śiva, the others being

²⁷⁶ Here I follow the translation of the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* XIII.67-68 provided by Davidson (2002: 193–94); cf. *Guhyasamāja Tantra*, p. 196.

²⁷⁷ Davidson (2002: 197). Davidson sees clearly that the attacks on the Buddhist monasteries, especially by the Sivaites, were real, and in his *Indian Esoteric Buddhism* upholds this opinion in a number of occasions (cf. for instance pp. 191–94).

²⁷⁸ *dPag bsam ljon bzang*: I.111 (Index: lxxii).

“miserable traders” who fill their pockets and “run to and fro somewhere in the nearest country”.²⁷⁹ Physical reaction against outer attacks may have started at an early date, but here we enter an unexplored territory, the few sources being either indirect or disputed. The tradition of martial arts and fighting bodhisattvas of Eastern Asia is thought to date back to Bodhidharma, who would have introduced them in the early sixth century after leaving India. The earliest sources on this misty figure are the *Memoir on the Buddhist Monasteries in Luoyang* (*Luoyang qiuelan ji*), composed by Yang Xuanzhi in AD 557-60,²⁸⁰ according to which he was a blue-eyed Iranian (that is, a Buddhist monk of western Central Asia), and the more authoritative *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Xu Gaoseng Zhuan*),²⁸¹ written in AD 645 by Daoxuan, who revised the text in AD 667. According to this biography, which draws from the *Damolun*, a treatise ascribed to Bodhidharma himself,²⁸² he was a brāhmaṇa from South India who arrived in China by sea and settled in Luoyang, where his teaching was not well received: he was left with only two disciples, Huike and Daoyu. The association of Bodhidharma with the Shaolin monastery, where he is said to have practised wall contemplation (*biguan*) for nine years, thus establishing Chan Buddhism in China, is far from being certain. The generally accepted theory according to which martial arts were developed by Buddhist monks in India before being transmitted to China along with the other features of Buddhist teaching is also doubtful.²⁸³ There is no patent evidence supporting the hypothesis that in the fifth century or earlier some form of military discipline had

²⁷⁹ *EI* 1 (1892, G. Bühler): 97–118, l. 30. Baijnath is located in Himachal Pradesh.

²⁸⁰ *Luoyang qiuelan ji*, in *Taishō* 2092.51.999-1022. For this work, see Chapter III.

²⁸¹ *Xu Gaoseng Zhuan*, in *Taishō* 2060.50.425a-707a.

²⁸² For both a translation of the *Damolun* and Bernard Faure’s précis on Bodhidharma, the reader is referred to *Damolun* (1986).

²⁸³ McFarlane (1995: 195–96).

developed in Indian Buddhist monasteries, and yet the silence of the sources should not prevent us from investigating the question a little further especially knowing what happened in Sivaite *maṭhas*, where military exercises were practiced.

Śākyamuni, as a young kṣatriya, had practiced the exercises typical of his *varṇa*,²⁸⁴ and although the scriptures condemn any form of physical violence,²⁸⁵ a docetist interpretation of the Buddha results in considering every act of his life as an example to follow on occasions, and consider physical dexterity as complementary to spiritual training. The theory of skilful means (*upāya*) helped, in turn, to justify the behaviour of monks subject to difficult circumstances. The *Upāyakauśalya Sūtra* recounts the story of the compassionate captain of a ship (the Lord himself in a previous life) who, knowing that the merchants on board were about to be killed by a robber, decided to deliberately slay the failed criminal with a spear, “with great compassion and skill in means”, to avoid the murder and save the thug from hell. For this good action, *saṃsāra* was curtailed for him by one hundred thousand eons.²⁸⁶ Stewart McFarlane, discussing certain aspects of East Asian Buddhism, has quoted a passage of Asaṅga’s *Bodhisattvabhūmi* where the bodhisattva is ready to be reborn in hell for killing those potentially responsible for the slaying of innocent beings. The text continues as follows:

So too is the Bodhisattva where there are kings or great ministers who are excessively cruel and have no compassion for beings, intent on causing pain to others. Since he has the power, he makes them fall from command of the kingdom, where they cause so much demerit. [...] If there are thieves and bandits who take the property

²⁸⁴ Archery was a popular game played by young Śākyas, as shown by the story of Siddhārtha’s arrow causing a spring to rush forth (cf. e.g. *Lalitavistara*: XII, pp. 147–49; *Life of the Buddha*: 19).

²⁸⁵ See Demiéville (1973: 261 ff.); McFarlane (1995: 195–96).

²⁸⁶ *Upāyakauśalya Sūtra*: 132–135 (pp. 73–74).

of others, or the property of the Saṅgha or a *stūpa*, making it their own to enjoy, the Bodhisattva takes it from them [...]. So he takes it and returns it to the Saṅgha or to the *stūpa*. By this means, the Bodhisattva, though taking what is not given, does not have a bad rebirth, indeed much merit is produced.²⁸⁷

Who were the unworthy rulers against whom the Buddhist community, led by the bodhisattva, is urged to take action? Aśaṅga lived in the fourth century, and the target could be no other than the Guptas and the local chiefs who oppressed the religion. The “thieves and bandits” seizing the property of the monasteries and destroying the stūpas in order to grab the gold of the reliquaries (the lions’ pearls of the preceding chapter) authorised reaction. If skilful means deploy a range of methods for the salvation of the multitude,²⁸⁸ they are even more justified for saving the religion.²⁸⁹ There are examples in the late *pāramitā* literature where he who kills will attain Awakening. The translators and commentators of Amoghavajra’s *Prajñāpāramitānaya Sūtra* had difficulties in explaining a passage introducing the idea of the permissibility of killing,²⁹⁰ thus inaugurating a symbolic interpretive approach that has not only permeated non-Indian Buddhist traditions but also modern scholarship. The incident that occurred in Tibet in AD 842 may throw light on how Buddhist monks could act. King gLang dar ma, who followed an anti-Buddhist policy, had ordered all the monasteries to be closed and the monks to disrobe. A monk, dPal gyi rdo je, concealing his bow and arrow in the sleeves of his cloak, presented him-

²⁸⁷ McFarlane (1995: 194), quoting from Unrai Wogihara’s edition of the text (Tokyo 1930-36, 165-7).

²⁸⁸ Pye (1978: 4).

²⁸⁹ It is now admitted that stories like that reported above and those discussed in Chapter III have provided the basis for Mahāyāna Buddhist participation in violence (P. Williams 2008: 152), although Williams gives examples exclusively taken from contemporary history.

²⁹⁰ Matsunaga (2008: 152–53).

self before the king and killed him²⁹¹ according to the *drag las* (*abhicāra*) ritual.²⁹²

Krodha Vighnāntaka images make an early appearance as attendants of bodhisattvas in the iconographies. The earliest known examples of Buddhist wrathful deities are from Caves 6 and 7 at Aurangabad, and are datable to the second half of the sixth century. Other early examples, datable to the seventh century, are from Ellora and Sarnath.²⁹³ The risk of arranging the evidence ex-post, in a sort of evolutionary chain, is always very high, but the early emergence of deities having the visible task of defending the bodhisattvas from outside dangers is something that deserves the greatest attention:²⁹⁴ by that time, an enormous amount of violence had already been exercised upon the *śramaṇas*.

In China, seditions, rebellions and *jacqueries* stirred up or inspired by the Buddhists were numerous.²⁹⁵ It was not uncommon, when central power weakened, to see monks descended from the common people form armed bands. As early as AD 445, a number of bows, arrows, lances and bucklers were discovered in a monastery in Chang'an,²⁹⁶ which may mean either that the monks took active part in the revolt or that the monastery was used as a depot by external rebels. Similar events may have occurred also in those parts of India where political chaos reigned. In India, the aggressive affirmation of the *buddhasainya* is observable in Vajrayāna literature, and the armed defence of Dharma appears to be a major concern of

²⁹¹ Shakabpa (2010, I: 112–13; 163–64).

²⁹² Ruegg (1981: 223). The episode, played down by Kapstein (2000: 11–12), is considered a fabrication by Yamaguchi (1996); even for Waddell (1934: 34), “the incident forms a part of the modern Lāmaist masquerade.”

²⁹³ Linrothe (1999: esp. 33–37).

²⁹⁴ The reader is referred to Linrothe's study (note above) for the ample documentation provided, even though the author restricts his analysis to the realm of symbols.

²⁹⁵ Demiéville (1973: 271).

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

the *siddha* literature.²⁹⁷ When the hopes raised by the Muslims who had started crushing the orthodox rulers vanished, and the struggle for survival became fiercer than ever, Buddhist texts do not hesitate to speak out, putting aside much of the symbolic apparatus. We read in the *Hevajra Tantra* how we must expect to behave. Procedures are rather simplified:

Such slaying is done from compassion, after one has supplicated one's *guru* and master (and is directed against) those who bring harm to the doctrine or injure one's *guru* or other buddhas.

One should imagine such a one as a victim face-downwards, vomiting blood and trembling with his hair unloosed. One should then imagine a needle of fire as entering his rear, and the seed-syllable of fire in his heart. By envisaging him thus, one slays him in that instant, for in this rite there is no need of oblations or a performance of a sequence of gestures [...].²⁹⁸

It is not certain that esoteric ritual gatherings originated from tribal practices, and Tantric visualisation techniques, too, do not have any connection with them,²⁹⁹ even though, or just because, the Buddhists had a long, natural familiarity with the lower castes and the natives. Regarding the attitude of even the more remote “tribals” towards a Buddhists-led society, few stories give us the sense of the attitude of the “tribals” than that of Harṣavardhana in search of his sister who asks and obtains their help. According to the *Harṣacarita*, the king entered the Vindhya forest, where he roamed for many days until he met Vyāghraketu, son of the tributary chief of the forest Śarabhaketu. He was accompanied by the nephew of Bhūkampa, a high military leader of the Śabarās and the lord of all the village chiefs of that part of the Vindhya range, Nirghāta by name. And before Harṣa, Nirghāta “laid his head on the ground and made his obeisance

²⁹⁷ Davidson (2002: 194).

²⁹⁸ *Hevajra Tantra*: II.ix.3-6 (vol. 1, pp. 116-17).

²⁹⁹ Donaldson (2002: 129).

and offered the partridge and hare as his present”.³⁰⁰ The reader certainly remembers the tattooed personages emerging, so to say, from the forest, sculpted on the *vedikā* of the stūpa at Bharhut mentioned in Chapter II, appearing to us, despite their attire, as sharers in the new doctrine. In the early centuries BC/AD, and in many parts of India even later (in Tamil Nadu, for instance), the Buddhists and the representatives of other *śramaṇa* groups not only stood for the natives, but *were* the natives, even though the intellectuals of the *saṃghas*, initially arrived from afar, were often of high caste. The natives had no conflicting economic interests with those of the monastic groups, as was to happen with the arrival of the brāhmaṇas-settlers.

Some Gandharan reliefs, too, bring us into the little explored universe of the interrelationships between the Buddhist monastic elite and the natives. A relief can be recalled that displays two Nāga princes who, at the head of two separate groups, throw something out of the basket held by their wives onto an incense burner, while an apparently wild dance is performed all around to the sound of wind and percussion instruments.³⁰¹ Nor had the recommendations of the *Vinaya* to be always applied, as shown by several other music and dance scenes attested in Gandhāra.³⁰² Regarding the orgiastic festivals of early Gandhāra, they have been considered rationalised representations of the pleasures waiting the devotees in the most accessible heavens of the *cakravāla* cosmology.³⁰³

³⁰⁰ *Harṣacarita*: VIII.261 (p. 232).

³⁰¹ See it in Kurita (1988-90, II: 509). The relief is 81 cm long, but is far too low (12 cm) in proportion to have served as the base of an image. This is also excluded by the lower mouldings, which also rules out the possibility that it was a stair-riser. The relief decorated perhaps the lower part of a square-based stūpa.

³⁰² We read in the *Cūlavagga* that once the *bhikkhus* went to a festival in Rājagrha where there was music with dancing and singing, incurring the criticism of the people. The Lord said, “Monks, you should not go to see dancing or singing or music. Whosoever should go, there is an offence of wrong-doing” (*Cūlavagga*: V.2.6; p. 145).

³⁰³ Carter (1992: 57–58).

It is more difficult to explain the scenes on the Buner stair-raiser reliefs, which would represent sacred dance dramas, “part of a dionysiac or bacchic celebration” during which “the emblematic chest, the holy container, is brought on stage as focus for the dramatic action”.³⁰⁴ The *yakṣa/guhyaka* Vajrapāṇi, the constant companion of the Gandharan Buddha is a figure difficult to set in place.³⁰⁵ From the one hand, we must avoid projecting his later characteristics into an early set of iconographies, but, from the other, we cannot help noticing that the functions he seems to fulfil are not mentioned in the canonical texts. We do not know who, in Gandhāra, endorsed Vajrapāṇi’s presence in the narrative reliefs, and why, but it involves iconographical choices and is too sophisticated to be due to players other than the most educated and innovative representatives of the *saṃghas*.³⁰⁶ We have seen how much there is still to dig in the history of Indian Buddhism, particularly with regard to the centuries separating the most developed and even erratic forms of the Small Vehicle and early Mahāyāna from the early reacting Vajrayāna, but whatever choices were made, they were rational and well-considered, the result of the conditions that the different Buddhist communities had to face.

³⁰⁴ B. Goldman (1978: 194, 196). This interpretation has never been questioned, probably because its implications have not been well understood.

³⁰⁵ The early Gandharan representations showing Vajrapāṇi as protector of the Buddha go back to the first century AD. On Vajrapāṇi, I confine myself to refer the reader to Lamotte (1966).

³⁰⁶ There are more questions left open in Gandhāra, whose social and religious panorama is more varied than we usually believe. Giuseppe Tucci published an early ritual object that he referred to a Śivaite milieu. It is a three-sided stand with a cavity depicting a young man raising his hands, in the act of masturbating and, in the last scene, in a state of rest. Tucci interpreted it as either pertaining to a ritual performed by the follower of the *akulavīra* method or as an *arghyapātra* that was first filled with alcoholic substances and next with *kunḍagolaka*, i.e. the male and female fluids, which were consumed by the initiate. We are, however, in the first or second century AD (Tucci 1968). We know that Sivaism had an early grip on society from Kuṣāṇa coinage (above, Chapter II) and that it was fully structured at the time of Xuanzang’s journey. One of Xuanzang’s *deva* temples in Kapiśi is that unearthed at Tapa Śkandar (Kuwayama 2002: 165).

CHAPTER VI

Tīrthikas and Turuṣkas

THE HOUSEHOLDER MONKS

When discussing Indian Buddhism we never associate it, despite all its segmentations, with a married clergy. Even when we discuss the Vajrayāna, the emphasis is on *siddhas* and the doctrinal transformation that took place in the large monasteries of north-eastern India, where the monks continued to live in a community, as is apparent, *prima facie*, from the monasteries provided with rows of individual cells.¹ This is, I think, a serious mistake in judgment. In mediaeval India there were numerous Buddhist communities under the guidance of a married clergy, and Newār Buddhism stands as a fossil guide, as it were, for us to understand a crucial development of the religion. The habit of considering Nepal as a separate entity from the rest of north-eastern India (something that can be done, to a degree, only from the thirteenth-fourteenth century onwards) misrepresents the real religious-historical situation. Moreover, while scholars have been able to offer a depiction

¹ We have seen that this did not prevent them, or some of them, to live in a sort of concubinage outside the monastery walls (Chapter V, n. 262). The most spectacular among the late monasteries of Bengal is Paharpur/Somapura in Bangladesh excavated by K.N. Dikshit (1938); below in this chapter we will discuss some evidence regarding Nālandā, Odantapurī and Vikramaśīla.

of contemporary Newār Buddhism,² the attempt at interpreting it diachronically and investigating its origin is still at an initial stage.

As is known, Newār Buddhism structures itself around two classes of householder monks, the Vajrācāryas and the Śākyaas, both of which undergo a monastic initiation, through which they become members of the monasteries run by their fathers. The Vajrācāryas also undergo the rite of consecration as Tantric masters, which confers on them a higher status. Only the Vajrācāryas, who in Newār society form a caste parallel to that of the brāhmaṇas, are entitled to act as temple priests and guardians of the public deities. The intricate stratification of Newār Buddhism (here simplified to the extreme), is the litmus paper of the complex, dramatic history of medieval Buddhism *tout court*. In the Śākya householder monks (the *śākyabhikṣus*) we recognise the householder bodhisattvas who were mentioned in Chapter III, with ranks reinforced by the monks who were obliged to disrobe in the eighth century as a consequence of the attempt at eradicating Buddhism from the Valley, and in the Vajrācāryas — this would explain their higher status — a probable product of the Vajrayāna of the great monasteries. The interaction of two priesthoods sharing the same characteristic of married life and consequent hereditary functions and ownership of the *vihāras* (the *bāhās* and *bahīs*) but having a different origin, and their existence side by side with the Brahmanical institutions within a restricted territory explain the conundrum of Newār Buddhism and, to a

² The fascination with the Newār organisation of society and with rituals have caused a number of studies to be written in the last few decades. Toffin (1984) and Lienhard (e.g. 1989) have provided many useful insights. A comprehensive study is that of Gellner (1992; also 2001: 106–33), and Locke (1985) provides much precious information on the structure and nature of Newār Buddhism in the effort to go back in time to its very formation; Locke (1980), though mainly focused on the cult of Avalokiteśvara-Matsyendranāth, is also recommended.

large extent, the intricacy of its rituals. This form of Buddhism is not a later deterioration of the Buddhism of the great eastern monasteries, and there are reasons to believe that Newār Buddhism has been supported by householder monks since its inception,³ thus being a tradition having its origin in the transformation slowly affecting the *saṃghas* and in the duress of Indian history. There is an interesting passage in the *Bhāṣā Vamśāvalī* on the compromise that was eventually reached in the Valley (here, as usual, Śāṅkara is held responsible for these developments):

Afterwards, Śāṅkarācārya went to Vajra Yoginī in order to extirpate in the like manner her worship and followers. A debate ensued, but in the end it was settled by mutual agreement of both the religionists that henceforth both mārgas or sects should have equal access to the temple and can offer goat sacrifices. From that day the Śaiva, the Vaiṣṇava and the Tāntrica sects became powerful, and their principles and rites came to have much influence over the practices of even the Buddhists, so that the Bandyas or orthodox Buddhamārgīs were appointed to discharge their duties in the temple of the Devīs, where without the killing of the goats the deity is not pleased, though this is quite contrary to the tenets of the Bandyas.⁴

Despite these adjustments, if we trust the few scholars who between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century visited Nepal with cognizance of the case, the Buddhist priests were subject to the ire of the brāhmaṇas, and were considered *anācaraṇīya*.⁵ Sylvain Lévi wrote that

³ Locke (1985: 6, 483–84) has also reacted against the “semantic or theological bias” of most modern writers as regards *vihāra* as a term and as an institution in Newār Buddhism, which constitutes a real *saṃgha*.

⁴ *History of Nepal* b: 39.

⁵ H. Shastri in Vasu (1911: 19). Shastri further observed that since not all the descendants of the married clergy could find sufficient work as priests, they took “to such arts and callings as would bring respectable wages without hard manual labour”, and were now goldsmiths, carpenters and painters. See also Lévi (1905-8, I: 226).

at the time of his sojourn Buddhism was dying in the Valley.⁶ Only the opening of the country in the early 1950s reversed the trend, even though Newār Buddhism had to face the challenge of other forms of the religion — that brought by the Tibetan refugees from the 1960s onwards and the one that has come with the revival of Theravāda Buddhism.

Regarding the rest of India, we mentioned in Chapter III the testimonies of both the *Rājataranṅiṇī* and Xuanzang on the early existence of a married clergy. It can be added that in the late Tang period, some of the monks and nuns of Dunhuang, known as Sanzhong, had their own family and lived a normal family life. They were not the like of the fake monks of Han China, but real monks who joined and even took charge of the rituals. Their social-religious identity was officially accepted by local rulers and local *saṃghas*.⁷ Considering the geographical position of Dunhuang and its early history, it is likely that this family-centred organisation of the *saṃghas* had filtered from India.

⁶ “J’ai fait des bouddhistes du Népal une triste expérience. De la rue je vois ou j’entrevois par la porte basse, dans la cour rectangulaire d’une maison, une façon de stūpa. C’est ici un vihāra, cela promets des pandits, des moines, une bibliothèque. Allez-y voir. Les vihāras d’ici servent de logement à des pères de famille entourés de leur progéniture et qui y exercent un métier ou n’y font rien du tout. Ils ne savent rien que les seuls noms des neuf *dharmas* népalais. [...] Le bouddhisme se meurt ici; stūpas et caityas se rencontrent partout encore, mais à l’intérieur de la ville ils sont abandonnés et à demi ruinés” (ibid. II: 325). (“I had a sad experience of the Buddhists of Nepal. From the street, I see or perceive through the low door, in the rectangular courtyard of a house, the form of a stūpa. There is a vihāra here, and this for me means pundits, monks, and a library. Let us go and see. But here the vihāras serve the purpose of accommodating family men surrounded by their offspring and there carrying out their job, or doing nothing at all. All they know are the names of the nine Nepalese *dharmas*. [...] Buddhism is dying here; stūpas and caityas are still everywhere, but inside the city they are abandoned and half ruined”). It is not clear why Lévi expected a doctrinal discussion from the residents of a *bahī* of which he had just caught a glimpse, his conceitedness becoming open racism in the following lines on the Tibetans, and yet the sense of abandonment and desolation conveyed by his description sounds convincing.

⁷ Hao (1998: 74–96).

Once the existence of the phenomenon is admitted, it shall be probably possible to obtain more evidence from the existing sources. The Vajrayāna ratified this situation, although we lack at present any sort of information about the doctrinal apparatus brought into play in, presumably, the eighth-ninth century. The fulminations against this state of affairs that great Mahāyāna monks such as Xuanzang could still throw in the seventh century, had no more reasons to exist. We learn from Tāranātha that family lineages of Tantric masters were established in Kashmir. The famous Ratnavajra, son of a brāhmaṇa converted to Buddhism after having been defeated in a debate, was succeeded by his son Mahājana, and the latter by his own son Sajjana.⁸ Ratnavajra was probably born in AD 940; Mahājana was a collaborator of Mar pa's, and Sajjana, in turn, had a son, Sukṣmajana.⁹ In the *dPag bsam ljon bzang* we read of a Buddhist master, Maitripa, who had kept a wife,¹⁰ and of Hadu, a householder monk who lived by ploughing.¹¹

In twelfth-century Bengal the masses were almost entirely left in the hands of the Buddhist priests, both married and unmarried, the former probably predominating in number,¹² despite the presence of important monasteries. Scholars of pre-Independence and pre-Partition Bengal considered the Vajrayāna as having been the form of religion of the middle class and the married Buddhist clergy.¹³ Modern Bengal still bears testimony of past events and of relatively recent transformations. The priests of the Kaivartas have been considered

⁸ *Tāranātha*: 117B-119A (pp. 301–302). That Ratnavajra was the son of Haribhadra is disputed (Naudou 1980: 168).

⁹ *Tāranātha*: 118B-119A (p. 302).

¹⁰ *dPag bsam ljon bzang*: I.119 (Index: xlvii).

¹¹ *Ibid.*: I.98 (Index: cxxxiv).

¹² H. Shastri (1911: 4).

¹³ *Ibid.*: 13.

the descendants of the Buddhist married clergy,¹⁴ and other social groups such as the Karas the descendants of the learned and married Buddhist priests.¹⁵

In eastern India, the Buddhists and the Pāla rulers had understood the advantage that a married clergy could be to hold control over society, and the patronage of large monasteries went hand in hand with the strengthening of the secular clergy. The brāhmaṇas could be defied on their own ground, and the reason why it took so long to eradicate Buddhism in this part of India is probably that, thanks to the presence of household-monks, it had taken root socially as it had never done before in any other part of the country. Here Buddhism survived the destruction and abandonment of the monasteries that took place under the Senas. A married clergy meant living side by side with the common people in every village in the attempt at opposing, to the extent possible, the rigid caste system of the brāhmaṇas or interpreting it at one's own advantage. By the mid-twelfth century, when King Vallālasena (*c.* 1158-79) took a census of the descendants of the five progenitors of the Rāḍhiya and Vārendra brāhmaṇas who had initially come to Bengal from Kanauj, he found only eight hundred families in all. They lived mostly on grants of lands made to them by the *rājās*, or by fees for services rendered to the state. They rarely interfered with other people's religion, and we know of defections from but of no additions to their ranks.¹⁶ Clearly, brāhmaṇas from other regions of India had also moved to both Vārendra and Rāḍha and to other parts of Bengal as well,¹⁷ but their grip on society was not as firm and universal as it was in the Deccan and in other parts of the North.

¹⁴ Ibid.: 15.

¹⁵ Ibid.: 18.

¹⁶ Ibid.: 3-4.

¹⁷ Majumdar (1943: 579 ff.).

The archaeological evidence, too, should be carefully weighed up. The planimetry of the Vajrayāna monastery at Adi Badri in Himachal Pradesh, dating to the tenth-twelfth century, shielded by a rectangular enclosure, does not correspond to those of traditional monasteries: the size of the cells — if they are all such — varies, and it is not easy to explain their disposition.¹⁸ Even more difficult is to appraise the numerous, late Buddhist establishments situated in the territories where the Buddhists, after the destruction of monastic life, had long since become a small minority, and which are known to us thanks to the epigraphic material.¹⁹ In a Western Cālukya inscription dated AD 1021, Akkādevī, elder sister of King Jayasimha III, is praised for having practised the religious observances prescribed by the rituals of Jina, Buddha, Ananta (that is, Viṣṇu) and Rudra.²⁰ The three systems were thus placed at the same level and regarded as being interchangeable. This can only be explained assuming that they were structured in the same way in relation to the mechanisms of the *varṇa* state, whatever mental reservations the Buddhist priests might have had. In AD 1065, at Balligāve (Belgami in Shimoga district, not far from Banavasi), the *daṇḍanāyaka* Rūpabhaṭṭayya recorded the erection of the Jayantipura Bauddha *vihāra* and the land grants for the worship of Tārā Bhagavatī, Keśava, Lokeśvara and Buddhadeva with their attendant gods, and for the distribution of food to the *yoginīs*, *kuśalīs* and *samnyāsīs*.²¹

¹⁸ On Adi Badri, see *IA* 2002-3, pp. 97-117 (for the Vajrayāna monastery, cf. p. 104; plan in Fig. 28). An accurate analysis of the finds in the rooms/cells, meagre as they may be, could give some indications on their actual function and use.

¹⁹ The reader shall find the evidence regarding the surviving Buddhist communities in the South and in other Indian regions in R.C. Mitra (1981).

²⁰ *IA* 18 (1889, J.F. Fleet): 270-75, l. 18-19. Cf. R.C. Mitra (1981: 108).

²¹ *EC* 7/1 (Shimoga district 1): 112, 197-98. B. Lewis Rice saw the temple site, from where he retrieved the image of Tārā (ibid.: 20 and pl. between pp. 20-21 in the Introduction). See other Buddhist images at http://dsal.uchicago.edu/images/aiis/aiis_search.html?depth=Get+Details&id=18278, Belgami, nos. 72, 77-79.

A Telugu-Cōḍa chieftain of Nellore, feudatory of Rājarāja III Cōḷa (AD 1216-43) refers in an inscription to the merchant community and to the Buddhapaḷḷi of Kāñcīpuram.²² In the last case, we do not know which deities were worshipped and which rituals were performed, but the situation was probably similar to the preceding examples. If, in places, Buddhism was accepted as part of the established religious order, it was because it had restructured itself as a subaltern system. The Dambal inscription of AD 1095-96 reports that two *vihāras*, of the Buddha and Tārā Devī, had been built by the merchant guilds of Dharmavoḷal (Dambal) and Lakkiguṇḍi (Lakkundi), respectively. The donations of the Cālukya queen Lakṣmadevī were destined, among other things, to provide food and clothes for the *bhikṣus*, and for the support of the *pujārī*.²³ The queen hoped that those who preserved that act of religion “obtain[ed] the reward of fashioning the horns and hoofs of a thousand tawny-coloured cows from gold and silver, and giving them [...] to a thousand Brāhmaṇs, well versed in the four *Vēdas*”.²⁴ This points to an entirely brahmanised context. We also wonder what the “Heruka temple”, whose site Budhagupta, the *guru* of Tāranātha, saw in Rajasthan in the sixteenth century,²⁵ may have been like.

No research work on this aspect of Indian Buddhism has been carried out, but it may be conjectured that, as suggested in Chapter III, it had grown despite the Mahāyāna attempt at re-founding the religion on a new, firmer basis.

²² Cf. R.C. Mitra (1981: 116).

²³ *IA* 10 (1881, J.F. Fleet): 19–21. Fleet translates “bhikshugal” with “religious mendicants”; he probably explains too much, assuming that *bhikṣus* must necessarily have been celibate, mendicant monks.

²⁴ *Ibid.*: 22–25.

²⁵ Tucci (1971*b*: 310).

It is possible to understand these developments by turning to the changes that took place in medieval Jainism. In the preceding chapters, we have mentioned only in passing the persecutions and intimidations suffered by the Jain communities at the hands of the orthodox. Much should be added, since the social reverses caused by these persecutions, leading ultimately “to the all but complete obscuration of all traces of Jainism” are very often recorded in local traditions, such as for instance in the Āndhra-Karnāṭa region.²⁶ Jainism survived in India, however,²⁷ and it is in the different destiny of Jainism that Buddhism’s later history finds, in part, an explanation.

The Jains, like the Buddhists, had constantly to confront the orthodox. They succeeded in handling the task of perpetuating their faith and retaining the spirit of their tradition through compromise, even during the most calamitous circumstances,²⁸ preserving, among other things, all the texts — something that Indian Buddhism could not do (where this happened, as in Nepal, it was because the *saṃgha* disguised itself socially and was not overwhelmed by the political extremism advocated by the Vajrayāna south of the mountains). The Digambaras, for instance, organised their community along the lines of the caste system and introduced new sets of *kriyās*. All worldly practices were accepted as long as there was no loss of pure insight and violation of the *vratas*. The first point was particularly difficult to accept, but was formalised in the *Ādipurāṇa* of Jinasena (c. AD 770-850), where Ṛṣabhanātha appears as the Jina

²⁶ Ramaswamy Ayyangar & Seshagiri Rao (1922, I: 31).

²⁷ See Granoff (2000) for a plurality of literary examples on their position as an oppressed religious minority.

²⁸ This sketchy reconstruction of later Jain history follows Jaini (1979: 285 ff.) and takes into account the contributions of a few other scholars cited below. A detailed knowledge of the events as they progressed over time and of the transformation of medieval Jainism shall be available only when learned Jains resolve to disclose that portion of Jain history that is still in darkness.

who instituted caste division responding to the lawlessness and disorder of the world, a sort of Jain Brahṁā. His son Bharata introduced the notion of hereditary Jaina brāhmaṇas, entrusted with the care of temples and the performance of elaborate rituals. As regards the *upādhyes* (*upādhyāyas*), they are said to have developed out of a group of laymen or of brāhmaṇas converted to Jainism, but represent most probably an adaptation to the model of Brahmanical priesthood. In any case, the system became almost as rigid as that of the *tīrthikas*. The śūdras were excluded from taking part to higher religious functions, even though, in opposition to orthodox practice, they could perform a number of *saṁskāras*.

Crucial rituals such as marriage were celebrated by brāhmaṇas, and this, as already mentioned in Chapter III, endangered the very survival of the communities organised around *śramaṇa* groups. Jinasena's integration of Brahmanical *saṁskāras* into the Jain system safeguarded its autonomy. The only *saṁskāra* with which the Jains could not accommodate was *śrāddha*, since the food offering to the spirit of the dead meant sacrificing animals.²⁹ The use of the five ritual elements, apparently identical to that of the *tīrthikas*, was markedly different from the doctrinal point of view; in the *pūjā*, for instance, no deity was (and is) really present. The Jains tried to keep their distance from Brahmanical beliefs and organisation of society, resorting to a number of subtle doctrinal distinctions, which were ultimately capable of preserving their identity. This, however, obliged them to create a system parallel to the Brahmanical system centred on temples and rituals. The governing bodies of the Jain

²⁹ An early nineteenth-century report on Jain customs written by Alexander Walker, attests to the fact that in Gujarat the "Shrimala Bramans" performing the marriage rites for the Jains, also performed "the ceremonies of Shrad for the Shravacas who employ them" (Bender 1976: 119).

communities were, for the Digambaras, the *bhaṭṭāarakas* and for the Śvetāmbaras the *caityavāsīs*. We can form an idea of the extent to which Jain institutions were integrated within the Brahmanical world from certain recurrent expressions used by local rulers in granting villages to the new Jain temples. I limit myself to recalling two short inscriptions from the Coorg district, dated to AD 888 and 978, respectively. In both cases, the expression to which the rulers resort is the same used in relation to grants made to the orthodox: who destroys the gift “destroys Bāraṇāsī, a thousand Brāhmins and a thousand tawny cows, and is guilty of the five great sins”.³⁰

Jain conformism caused ancient rivalries to surface, and the Jains became instrumental in the destruction of the last Buddhist strongholds in the Deccan when northern India started being affected by the violent Vajrayāna survival strategy based on the support of the low castes and outcastes. The Jains held tight to the positions they had conquered, and did not embark on risky adventures. Fearing for themselves, they were more Catholic than the Pope on occasions, not only charging the Buddhists with accusation of heresy but throwing on them the blame for stirring up social revolt.³¹ We have seen a few examples of anti-Buddhist exploits carried out by the Jains in Chapter IV. The need they felt to recollect the ancient triumphs over the Buddhists, those of Haribhadra and Akaḷaṅka (of which we know the usual outcome) were equalled by the then contemporary triumphs, obtained either by the Jain *gurus* or by sympathetic kings like Jayasimhadeva II of the

³⁰ EC I (Coorg Inscriptions): no. 2 from Biliur (pp. 52–53, 31), no. 4 from Peggur (pp. 53, 32). The reference is to the revised edition of the work due to B.L. Rice, corresponding to ASI, New Imperial Series 39 (Madras 1914).

³¹ H.H. Wilson, as seen in Chapter I, noted that the overthrow of the Buddhists coincided with the highest pitch of power and prosperity attained by the Jains.

Western Cālukyas.³² I limit myself to resorting to the words of R.C. Mitra:

In an inscription of 1036 AD, the Cālukya king Jayasimhadeva is called “a fierce and powerful tiger to all evil speakers and a submarine fire to the Bauddha Ocean” and in a later record of 1136 AD his Guru Vādirājendra is remembered as one to whom “Sugata lost his reputation for omniscience and Lokāyata was blinded by the destruction of the system he had erected.” The inscription of 1077 AD extols a Jain Guru Vādisirmha at whose entrance into the hall of debate “even Buddha becomes unenlightened”. [...] In another inscription of 1077 AD the Jain Guru Ajitasena who was patronised by Vikrama Sāntaradeva (a subordinate of Hoysala Tribhuvanamalla) is qualified as the submarine fire in drying up the Bauddha doctrine. In the Mudgere 22 inscription of 1129 AD Gaṇḍa-Vimuktasiddhāntadeva, whose lay disciple was a feudatory of Hoysala Tribhuvanamalla, is explicitly called “an enemy to the water-lilies, the Śākyas and the cause of destruction of the moonlight, the Cārvākas, and the opener of the lotuses, the excellent Bhavyas or Jains.”

[...] In 1145 AD Śubhakīrtideva was described as the thunderbolt to the mountains, the Bauddhas who had been inflated by excessive pride which was humiliated by the Jain disputant. The inscription 63 (39) Sravana Belgola of 1163 AD is in commemoration of Devakīrti Paṇḍitadeva, the illustrious *Mahāmaṇḍalācārya* who was the destroyer of the rutting elephant, the indomitable Bauddhas, by the deep and terrific roar of the lion, his unrestrained voice. The inscription No. 64 (40) of the same year qualifies Devacandra-munipa as another thunderbolt to the mountain, the Bauddhas. In 1176 AD, Udayacandra Paṇḍita is called the wild fire to the forest, the Bauddhas, and another Jain scholar Damānandin

³² According to HCIP 5: 434, Vāgbhaṭa wrote his *Neminirvāṇa* at the time and under the protection of this king, who reigned between AD 1015 and 1043. Vāgbhaṭa writes that there are only three gems in the world, namely, Aṇahilapura city, King Jayasimhadeva, and his Śrīkalaśa elephant.

is, like Bhavadeva Bhaṭṭa of Bengal, described as the Agastya to the ocean that is the Bauddhas.³³

In reconstructing Jain medieval history there is a grey area regarding not so much the Digambara *bhaṭṭārakas*, celibate clerics engaged in a quasi-householder lifestyle,³⁴ but the ultimate meaning of the continual, revealing debate over whether Mahāvīra had always been a celibate (the position of the Digambaras) or had married (as maintained by the Śvetāmbaras). The discussion can hardly have been only purely theoretical, being rather stirred up by serious social reasons connected to the strained conditions to which the two main branches of Jainism and their subdivisions were subjected. A survey of the modern Jain community sheds some light on the way Jainism restructured itself. The *upādhyes* are temple priests who can give up their profession and become laymen. Conversely, laymen can become priests. The village priests (*grāmopādhyes*) are married, and in their families the office of priest is hereditary. They meet their religious and caste obligations to the *dharmādhikārī*, a higher priest who practices an ascetic life.³⁵ We see in place a strategy aimed at preserving the main tenets of the religion in a situation where one is obliged to capitulate before the reality principle.³⁶

³³ R.C. Mitra (1981: 113–14); the references are to *EC* 7 (Shimoga district, AD 1036 inscription), *EC* 5 (Hassan district, AD 1136 inscription), *EC* 8 (for the two inscriptions of AD 1077, Shimoga district), *EC* 6 (Kadur district, AD 1129 inscription), *EC* 2 (Sravana Belgola, first and rev. ed.). Mudigere is located near Chikmagalur. Agastya is the mythical missionary and coloniser of the regions situated to the south of the Vindhya identified with the Vedic seer.

³⁴ Sanghavi (1980: 320); Dundas (2002: 123–24).

³⁵ Sanghavi (1980: 99). On the function of the *upādhyāyas* as teachers and their position in the hierarchy see *EJ* 5: 1173; 21: 5668 (what interests us here is touched upon only indirectly).

³⁶ The adoption of an inclusive paradigm still prevents clarity on a number of crucial questions. P. Dundas writes, for instance, that “[...] we may discover that, on closer examination, categories and reifications such as ‘Jainism’ and ‘Hinduism’ melt away and, in the end, we find ourselves confronting a socio-religious continuum which can only be described as ‘South Asian.’” (*EJ* 6: 1534). This, however, amounts to a renewed form of uncritical exoticism.

One of the main reasons why the Buddhist householder monks disappeared from India lies in the fact that, contrary to Jainism, Buddhism had expanded its presence outside India: the Himalayan valleys and Tibet, in particular, represented an easy way out and a place that gave the illusion of a transitory exile. The householder monks, squeezed between the brāhmaṇas, the Muslims and the Jains, threw in the sponge, and either were assimilated or fled as the Vinaya monks and the *siddhas* had done before them, leaving the common people to their fate.

The still living traditions of Tibet, Korea and Japan, which is impossible for me to discuss as would be necessary, should be put in relation to the model established by the lineages of Indian householder monks. It is significant that the “white *saṃgha*” of the rNying ma pa, the sNgags pa, are entitled to perform the rites of passage, exorcisms and divinations for their communities according to the teachings transmitted through family lineages. The rNying ma pa were not involved in the monastic reform promoted by Atīśa, and only to a limited degree in the general reorganisation of Tibetan Buddhism,³⁷ and continued to represent an earlier Buddhist tradition dating to the eighth century,³⁸ the epoch when the existence of a Buddhist married clergy was, in all likelihood, an established fact in India. Other Tibetan lineages, such as the Sa skya ’khon, reflect a compromise between the tradition of the married priesthood and Vinaya ordination, and

³⁷ Atīśa maintained that Tantric practices were incompatible with *brahmācārya*, and therefore also with the life of the *bhikṣus*, and acted accordingly (cf. *Atīśa New Biography* 49, p. 427). This is probably to be read against the background of the canonisation of Tibetan Buddhism and of the marginalisation of the old schools whose scriptures lacked the legitimacy traced to Indian Sanskrit texts. Davidson (2005: 108 ff.) has questioned the extent of Atīśa’s influence in Tibet, especially from the mid-eleventh century onwards.

³⁸ Snellgrove (1987: 397). On other non-celibate priestly lineages in Tibet, see Samuel (1995: esp. 288–89).

allow marriage for the lineage-holders. We cannot explain these facts by resorting to the trite argument of local conditions, which are of course real, but should be seen as growing from other, primary roots. Similar explanations are particularly weak with regard to Tibetan Buddhism, which has made all the received traditions its own, trying to mediate incompatibilities.

Newār, Tibetan, Korean and Japanese Buddhist traditions, to which we may also add Balinese Buddhism, where lineages of married monks have always existed, may be compared to the lands that continue to emerge after the sinking of a continent. Their legitimacy, at least historically, is much greater than is usually believed.

SOCIAL AND SEXUAL INSUBORDINATION

Edward Conze, in his *Buddhist Thought in India*³⁹ refused to discuss Tantric Buddhism. He contended that two kinds of Buddhism existed, that of the monks and that, more and more predominant, of the laymen. Tantrism would have originated within the latter, in which Conze declared himself not to be interested. The *Hevajra Tantra* was for him “of slight literary merit, composed by members of the lower classes, who knew Sanskrit only imperfectly”; this *tantra* attempted “to combine the lofty Mādhyamika-Yogācāra philosophy with the magical and orgiastic rites current in Indian villages living on the level of the Old Stone Age”.⁴⁰ It is all water under the bridge now, and if we cite Conze, it is because he was one of the first scholars to comprehend the structural link existing between Buddhism

³⁹ Conze (1983). The book was first published in 1962.

⁴⁰ The rational content of Tantric meditations — Conze contended — is negligible; Tantric texts are written in a code and cannot be understood in the absence of the *guru*; the secrecy of the doctrines is an impassable barrier; finally, with the *tantras*, “the tribal imaginations of the Hindu race re-assert themselves”, and only a thorough knowledge of the Brahmanical scriptures would allow us to understand the mythological figures occurring everywhere (ibid.: 270–73).

and the doctrines of the Gnostics,⁴¹ which, in principle, would have made him better qualified than any other to address the matter in a more balanced way. However, he did not question the historical occurrences that caused the *tantras* to be composed, thus missing the point: an antinomical doctrine can change up to be, at least apparently, unrecognisable because, being impossible for it to develop its potential, it remains anchored to a destiny of social opposition or to irrelevance. Indian history as it unfolded from Gupta times onwards progressively cornered Buddhism, either in a subaltern role or in a role of violent social revolt doomed to failure.

The history of the lowermost castes and the untouchables in early historical and medieval India has not attracted sufficient attention.⁴² In general, what we know of the subaltern classes, not to speak of the lowermost social groups, depends on sources that do not mention, or mention only incidentally, or overtly refuse to record their life, yet modern scholars have devoted a considerable number of studies to slavery in the Greek and Roman world and to the peasant world of ancient and medieval China. Indian written sources are much richer than any others in this regard and subaltern groups are

⁴¹ Above, Chapter II. Going back to times earlier than Conze's, it is to be regretted that the history of India has mostly been written by English scholars adhering to the upper class ideology of their country and by brāhmanas. The moral code of both brāhmanas and Englishmen regarding the universe of sex was the least appropriate to give an unprejudiced appraisal of the social behaviour, past and present, of the classes escaping Brahmanical control. I will not dwell upon English prudery (half true, half imaginary), since the literature existing on the subject is redundant. From people who thought or let others believe that crossing the Channel was a plunge into sin we could not expect a trustworthy description of the habits of Indian lower social groups. The English, we read in the records, often deemed the brāhmanas oleaginous, deceitful and greedy, but beyond criticism as far as sexual moral was concerned. Scholars like H.H. Wilson and M. Monier-Williams, on account of their religious convictions, not only censored the Indian life of their time, but India's past. Wilson's reaction to B.H. Hodgson's reports from Kathmandu and his final verdict on degenerated Buddhism (Chapter I) mirrors his fears not less than his disgust for the behaviour of English lower classes, whose members would not have been shocked at all crossing the Channel. The creation of "Tantrism", a term implying reprehensible sexual behaviour, took place in this cultural context.

⁴² A major work remains R.S. Sharma (1980), but it does not cover the middle age.

not always silent. Archaeology would be a crucial source of information, since the mass of subordinate people — the large majority of the population — have inevitably left traces of their activities, but historical archaeologists seem to be at a loss to interpret the huge amount of “minor” finds coming from sites of habitation and connect them with the activities of the elite groups. They are regarded as products of contexts with which they do not empathise.⁴³ The problem is even more serious for the epoch dealt with in this book, because medieval archaeology in a proper sense barely exists in India.⁴⁴

Modern historians have also examined the attempts of the subaltern classes to change their condition, and such events as the revolts of the helots in Sparta, the servile wars in second-first century BC Italy, or the social revolts in medieval Europe have been the object of a vast literature.⁴⁵ The social

⁴³ Archaeological finds in India often tell an entirely different story than that narrated in the texts, and it is extremely difficult to make the two types of sources meet. The finds consist mainly of small terracotta objects, some cultic (animal figurines, for instance) and others pertaining to the sphere of the relations of production (the so-called “pottery discs”, the counters made out of reworked potsherds in the shape of geometrical figures, etc.). The former have not been studied as components of complex assemblages, and so their meaning escapes us. See an attempt at interpreting them in Verardi (2007b: 192 ff.); regarding the latter, see the author’s discussion in *ibid.*: 235 ff.

⁴⁴ As regards the medieval monuments restored by the Archaeological Survey, they convey a sense of unreality, set as they are in luscious gardens strongly contrasting with the present and, presumably, past human landscape, standing out in a fabulous, a-historical perspective trimming down cultural differences and cancelling contexts.

⁴⁵ In Graeco-Roman antiquity slavery was generally considered an accidental and not a natural condition, a notable exception being Aristotle (see Ellen Meiskins Wood in Settis: 618). Slaves were by no means untouchables, though their fate could vary widely (from that of the slaves sent *ad metalla* to that of rich and influential freedmen). Even in Sparta, the helots, who were the physical target of Spartan warring aristocrats, enjoyed some rights and were freed on occasions (Spartans lived in constant terror of Helot uprisings, however; Baltrusch 2002: 30; Ducat 1990: 129 ff. for the Helots’ revolts). For the Roman world, I refer the reader to Bradley (1989) and Grünewald (1999). A vast, specific literature exists on Spartacus, who in modern Europe became a symbol of resistance and social redemption even before Karl Marx. The revolt led by him against the Roman Republic involved the uprising of peasants and of the slaves-shepherds of the Apennines (the reader may be referred to Schiavone 2011). Cohn (2006) provides a panorama of the revolts in medieval Europe, including the radical, proletarian revolt of the Ciompi in fourteenth-century Florence.

conditions of the insurgents and the historical contexts vary, but a common destiny of strict subordination, lack or denial of rights and lack of representation binds them together. Similar concerns are still rare in India because of a preconception that holds back research: the brāhmaṇas would have created a social system where the conflict rate was extremely low, though at the price of reinforcing the caste system and creating the barrier of untouchability.⁴⁶ We are in front of an ideological taboo paralleling that of the religious tolerance that would have reduced religious conflicts to a minimum. Orientalism welded up to Brahmanical ideology has created the umpteenth Indian mirage. Even modern scholars of Muslim India, in criticising the biased idea of an egalitarian Islam, seem to think that the weaker sections of Indian society had no consciousness of their condition.⁴⁷ These assumptions should be questioned, especially with regard to the medieval period.

There are recognised exceptions. The first is the revolt of the Kaivartas in Vārendra (North Bengal), which took place in the 1060s. A part of the Kaivartas⁴⁸ were boatmen-peasants deprived of their plots of land given as service tenure and were subject to heavy taxes. Under the guidance of their chief Dibboka, they initiated a revolt, routing the army hastily organised by the Pāla king Mahipāla II. Although the peasants fought naked with bows and arrows riding buffaloes, Mahipāla was slain and the Kaivartas established their head-

⁴⁶ This construct owes much, I think, to Ashok Rudra, who at the end of a paper in which he criticised the very concept of Indian feudalism, interpreted the history of medieval India as being characterised by ideology rather than violence (Rudra 1981: 2144–5). I would suggest that it was characterised by both.

⁴⁷ See e.g. Eaton (2009: 193 ff.). One of Eaton's polemical targets is what he calls the Protestant vision underlying the concept of conversion. While it is true that the history of India has been and, outside the Subcontinent, is mostly written by Protestant scholars, the concept of "conversion" is much older than any Protestant reform movement, being at the very root of Christianity (St. Paul).

⁴⁸ For the difficulties met in defining the Kaivartas historically see N. Dutt (1933: 533–34).

quarter in a suburb of Gauḍa, one of the Pāla capitals. It was destroyed when Rāmapāla assembled a new army and crossed the Ganges.⁴⁹ R.S. Sharma has maintained that the peasant dimension of the Kaivarta problem has been overlooked, while other scholars have denied that it was a revolt of the Kaivarta caste.⁵⁰ That the revolt took an organised form with the participation of different social groups remains an event of considerable interest, even when the particular, decentralised structure of the Pāla state is taken into account. In northern India, the fragmentation of political power was almost complete in the eleventh century,⁵¹ and we must expect revolts to have been frequent. Politically fragmented areas characterised several other regions in the preceding centuries — Orissa, for example.

Social unrest and revolts occurred also after the establishment of a firm Brahmanical rule.⁵² The case of the Vīraśaivas or Liṅgāyatas is well known. In twelfth-century Deccan, the Vīraśaivas rejected the authority of the Vedas, developing a fierce hostility against the brāhmaṇas from whose conception of family and society they significantly distanced in such issues as child-marriage and treatment of widows (who were allowed

⁴⁹ *Rāmacarita*: II, 9-11 (pp. 211-13); cf. also H. Shastri (1910: 13-14). The name of the “capital” of the rebels was Damara, corresponding to present-day Damanagar (cf. R.D. Banerji 1915: 91). The revolt has been discussed by R.S. Sharma (1965: 268; 1988: 9 ff.) and Maitreya (1987: passim). This author has highlighted the dense presence of hidden references and allusions present in the *Rāmacarita*, now clarified by Sylvain Brocquet in his recent edition and translation of the work. Brocquet (in *Rāmacarita*: 30) sees very well that “le *Rāmacarita* donne à lire de l’histoire déguisée en mythologie” (“the *Rāmacarita* makes us read history disguised in mythology”): the text is not meant to make facts known to a recipient that ignores them; their knowledge is, rather, presupposed. If this interpretive principle, singled out and followed by Brocquet, were applied to other works, as for instance to the Purāṇas, our knowledge of Indian history would be immensely greater.

⁵⁰ R.S. Sharma (1988: 9); Maitreya (1987: esp. 37, n. 1; 46).

⁵¹ R.S. Sharma (1988: 156). Bengal-Bihar was split up into about ten principalities at the time of the Kaivarta revolt.

⁵² See the examples given in *ibid.*

to remarry), and founded their movement on the guru-disciple relationship.⁵³ This radical movement was joined by artisans and members of the service castes (washermen, barbers, potters, weavers, carpenters, tanners and cremation ground watchmen) as well as by people with unrespectable professions (burglars, prostitutes, and pimps).⁵⁴ For all his willingness to accept people of the lowest layers of society, Basava (AD 1106-68) was highly critical of their “unclean” habits, and the new adepts were requested to radically change their life: a non-vegetarian diet and liquor-drinking was considered not to be in accordance with the path of the *linga*.⁵⁵ Basava gave his imprint to the sect and kept it in check, channelling the social anger of the adepts against the Jains and Buddhists.⁵⁶ An inscription of AD 1184 describes the Mahāmandaleśvara Vīrapuruṣadeva, a subordinate of Vīra Someśvara IV (the last king of the Western Cālukyas) as a forest-fire of the Jain religion, “a destroyer of the Bauddha religion”, “a demolisher of

⁵³ For the Vīraśaivas, the reader is referred to E.P. Rice (1921: 52 ff.), Schouten (1991), on which see the detailed, perhaps too severe review by Zydenbos (1997), and Nandi (2000).

⁵⁴ I take this list from V. Narayana Rao and G.H. Roghair’s introduction to the translation of the *Basavapurāṇamu* (p. 9), where these people act as protagonists.

⁵⁵ Schouten (1991: 39–41).

⁵⁶ Basava was the brāhmaṇa prime minister of the Kalacuri king Bijjala, a supporter of the Jains, who ascended the throne in AD 1156. In the *Basavapurāṇamu*, a Telugu work of the thirteenth century written by the Vīraśaiva devotee Pāṅkuriki Somanātha, a convert from Buddhism, Sāṅkhyatoṇḍa, complains of having been born in a polluted house (that of his Buddhist parents) and wishes Śiva to destroy “the three antivedic traditions, Jaina, Buddhist and Cārvāka”, something that eventually becomes true (*Basavapurāṇamu*: VI, pp. 205–206). That the story derives from the *Periya Purāṇam* (39, 3639 ff.; cf. vol. 2, pp. 339 ff.), where the name of the devotee is, significantly, Cākkiyaṅār, adds to the evident brahmanisation of the text. On the brahmanisation of Vīraśaivism, see the introduction to *Basavapurāṇamu*, pp. 15 ff. and Schouten (1991: 40 ff.). Nandi (2000: 470) contends that it would be naïve to suppose that the Vīraśaivas and the Jains, expressions of the same class of traders and merchants, “attacked one another merely from a sense of religious rivalry”, but religious identity was, and is, a powerful means of division and hatred when duly channelled, irrespective of class identity. Religion *is* politics. This is increasingly less understood by modern, secularised scholars. For the forced conversion from Jainism to Vīraśaivism, see Zydenbos (1997: 530).

Jaina *basadis*”, and “establisher of the Śivaliṅga-siṃhāsana.” He is further stated to have destroyed several *samayas* in a number of places, almost all identified.⁵⁷ Kings could hardly escape the pressure of the violence exerted upon the Jains by Vīraśaiṅva saints such as Ekānta Rāmāyā, who, after performing a miracle, had a Jain shrine destroyed and the Jains forcibly converted.⁵⁸ In the *Paṇḍitārādhyā Caritra* of Pāḷkuriki Somanātha (the author of the *Basavapuraṇamu*) we read that at the end of the debate between Paṇḍitārādhyā and a Buddhist dialectician, the disciples of the former killed the monk.⁵⁹

If the scenario that we have disclosed in the preceding chapters has any historical validity, it appears that between the eighth and the twelfth century the strongest opposition to the *varṇa* state society and the most serious revolts, of both the peasant world and the non-caste groups, were hegemonised by the Buddhists. Historians have been unable to enter this perspective because they are convinced that Buddhism turned into a sort of theistic religion, and because they have remained prisoners of the commonplaces on the Vajrayāna. Here we lack the level of analysis that has been devoted to early Buddhism and the useful distinctions that have helped us to rescue it from Weber’s constructs. The Vajrayāna does not represent the (re)emergence of a “substrate”, the nature of which remains unspecified; it is, rather, a question of a large mass of people extraneous and hostile to Brahmanical rules in

⁵⁷ *ASIAR* 1929-30 (Hirananda Sastri): 171. The destroyed *samayas* were at Pariyaḷige, Aṇḷevāḍa (Anhilvad in Gujarat), Uṇukallu (Unkal, in the suburbs of Hubli), Sampagāḍi (Sampagaon in Belgaum district), Ibbalūru (Ablur in Dharwar district?), Māruḍige (Maradigi, Dharwar), Aṇampūr (Alampur, near Kurnool), Karahāḍa (Karad, Satara district), Kembhāvi and Bammakūru.

⁵⁸ See Ablur Inscription E (c. AD 1200) in *EI* 5 (1898-99, J.F. Fleet): 237-60, cf. l. 43-50.

⁵⁹ Cf. Hiremath (1994: 89), who mentions (without giving any reference) a Kannada version of this Telugu work.

which the Buddhists, or a part of them, found representation and to which gave a chance. It is impossible to quantify their number, but those who resisted brahmanisation in the still “free” territories and those who had nothing to lose in the disputed regions on the fault line must have been very numerous. We can imagine their reaction when the armies raised by the orthodox kings started being defeated by the Muslims, one battle after the next, and the situation of law and order started to disintegrate.

When we read in the *Sekoddeśa* that there is no greater sin than the lack of concupiscence, that non-concupiscence is to be avoided because from it originates sorrow, and from the latter originates death,⁶⁰ we are clearly in front of a total rejection of *nómos* and to a call for open social rebellion. The *siddhas* and the Vajrayāna monks, consciously or unconsciously, utilised sex as a most powerful instrument to introduce social anarchy and revolt. We have the tendency to believe that the disruptive consequences of the non-observance of sexual norms have been weighed up only by the moderns, but it is certainly not so. The example *a contrariis* of the brāhmaṇas opposing the sexual (im)morality of the outsiders is there to prove it. An extreme case in medieval India was that of the Nīlāmbaras, the Buddhist “blue-clad” ascetics, so-called because they would unite sexually with a woman under a cloak of blue colour.⁶¹ They were expelled from Kashmir by King Śaṅkaravarman (c. AD 883-902), which probably indicates that they did not take much care to keep their sexual activity secret. The orthodox Jayantabhaṭṭa censured their behaviour as antisocial maintaining that a religious tradition is valid when it is supported by a large majority of people, is accepted by the learned, and is free from any eccentricity and actions

⁶⁰ *Sekoddeśa*: 135, 138-39 (pp. 146-47); cf. *Nāropā*: pp. 124-25.

⁶¹ For a tradition regarding the early origin of the blue robes in connection to the moral lassitude of a Saṃmitīya monk, see Śāṅkṛtyāyana (1934: 216).

unbecoming.⁶² Several Buddhist masters would have agreed with Jayantabhaṭṭa on censoring the Nīlāmbaras and the literal interpretation of the Tantric texts,⁶³ but would have continued to not subscribe to the introduction or the reinforcement of the *varṇa* state society.

The process which eventually led to the formulation of the Cakrasaṃvara and Kālacakra cycles reached its climax in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries,⁶⁴ when overt sexual iconographies complemented the iconographies showing the new Buddhist deities trampling on Brahmanical gods. An early example is the ninth-tenth century image of Saṃvara in *yuganaddha* from Nālandā, and mention can be made of a later six-headed and sixteenth-armed image of Hevajra with Nairātmyā from Paharpur⁶⁵ and of a less known, diminutive Hevajra-Nairātmyā stela from Murshidabad datable to the eleventh-twelfth century.⁶⁶ A small bronze image of Saṃvara embracing Vajravārahī probably from Orissa can equally be mentioned.⁶⁷ It is difficult to say how many images of this type went lost when monastic life collapsed, especially

⁶² Ruegg (1981: 221–22). The *Purātanaprabandha Saṃgraha*, cited as evidence by Ruegg, is a thirteenth-century work according to which it was Bhoja, king of Mālava, and not Śaṅkaravarman of Kashmir, who expelled and killed the Nīlāpatas (as the Nīlāmbaras are called in this text). When they were asked if they were hale and hearty, they replied, “How can a wearer of blue clothes be happy unless all the inmates of the world are turned into women, all the mountains are turned into heaps of meat and all the rivers are turned into currents of wine” (Prakash 1965: 319). They claimed to act as Ardhanārīśvara, and when Bhoja’s daughter asked for advice, they told her to eat and drink, since “the past never returns”, the body being “a mere aggregate of elements” (ibid.).

⁶³ Cf. Ruegg (1981).

⁶⁴ The Kālacakra cycle was developed in north-western India, as testified by Bhadrabodhi (cf. Gnoli in *Nāropā*: 15); on its structural link with the *Guyhasamāja Tantra*, see Tucci (1971c: 339).

⁶⁵ K.N. Dikshit (1938: 55; pl. XXXVIIIc); Saraswati (1977: LXII; fig. 175).

⁶⁶ D. Mitra (1997-98: 381–82; fig. 1 on p. 391). See also the fragmentary image of Hevajra and consort from eastern India now in the Newark Museum (Linrothe 1999: 270).

⁶⁷ Ibid.: 288.

metal images kept in secret shrines.⁶⁸ Metal is melted down for reuse, and if metal images were as numerous as in modern Buddhist temples and sanctuaries, their loss can be compared, in number, with the loss of scriptures.

The *siddhas* and, in part, the Vajrayāna monks, addressed outcastes, “tribals”, and women, and this was a call to arms. Abhayadatta’s *Lives of the Eighty-four Siddhas*, written in the late eleventh or early twelfth century and known to us thanks to a Tibetan translation, makes extraordinary reading if we focus on the social ambience depicted: the stories are set in small towns and villages, along rivers, on the seashore and in the jungle. We are also transported to the outskirts of small settlements, such as the neighbourhood of a cemetery where packs of wolves howling at night frighten Śalipa,⁶⁹ and in taverns, like that where the tavern-girl waits on Virūpa with a glass of wine and a plate of rice.⁷⁰ In the humble feminine universe, we meet fish-market women, as in the story of Lūyipa,⁷¹ wine-selling women, as in the story of Ṭeṅgipa,⁷² girls who are the object of unjustified gossiping,⁷³ prostitutes who go to the banks of the Ganges to bathe.⁷⁴ We read of people as poor as Khandipa, who made his clothes by collecting scraps from the garbage piles and patching them together,⁷⁵ and we catch a glimpse of an entire world, reading about Tilopa stuffing himself at a wedding and, not yet replete, morally obliging his disciple Nāropa to steal a pot full of food when

⁶⁸ Bronze images were usually melted down, and those that have reached us are mainly from hoards (Kurkihar in Bihar, Achutrajpur in Orissa, Sirpur, and a few others).

⁶⁹ *Caturaśītisiddhapravṛtti*: 96–97.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*: 29.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*: 24.

⁷² *Ibid.*: 122.

⁷³ *Ibid.*: 211–12.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*: 257.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*: 106–107.

the guests of the householder were not paying attention.⁷⁶ All the people whom we meet in the text drink wine willingly,⁷⁷ to mark the distance of their world from that of the *jātis* under Brahmanical control. There are stories where social destitution couples with illness and old age. Kucipa, a low-caste man working in the fields has a neck tumor,⁷⁸ Rāhula, himself low-caste, is old and unable to control his bodily functions;⁷⁹ and yet they are initiated by the *yogins*.

The low and outcaste people had — as is obvious but, as said above, not always understood — a clear perception of their condition. In the story of Ḍombipa, set in Magadha, a group of low-caste singers come to the capital, offering to sing and dance for the king. When he asks for the young daughter of a singer, the latter says, “We are of low caste, denigrated and shunned by other classes of people”.⁸⁰ These groups, coming into contact with the Vajrayāna Buddhists realised that their behaviour and way of life, far from being in contrast with the requirements of a high system, were accepted and promoted as part of its doctrine. For the eighth-century Sivaite of Tamiḷakam, the inclusion of a handful of low casters and outcastes among the Nāyaṅmār had been sufficient to extend

⁷⁶ Ibid.: 94–95.

⁷⁷ The weaver Kāṅhapa buys food and wine for five pennies; Nāropa’s family is one of wine-sellers; “Have you been drinking wine?” asks the *guru* to a servant; etc. (ibid.: 83, 93 and 229, respectively).

⁷⁸ Ibid.: 131–33.

⁷⁹ Ibid.: 163.

⁸⁰ Ibid.: 34. In some cases we observe individual revolts of the low casters and outcastes against the rich and powerful. Dharmasvāmin reports an interesting story. When crossing a river near Nālandā, he risked being swept away by the current. Seeing “a man of dark complexion” on the bank, he asked him to take him to safety, but the man did not help him, claiming to be “of low caste”. Dharmasvāmin explains “that it was improper for a man of low caste to touch with his hands to people of high caste” (*Dharmasvāmin*: VII; p. 85). Dharmasvāmin was a Tibetan, and therefore a *mleccha*, which, however, must have not be evident to the man with the dark skin, who saw him travel with a retinue. When the opportunity presented itself, the outcastes could take their revenge.

their social base and bring the situation under political control, violence having preventively eliminated and paralysed the opponents, and as regards the Vīraśaivas, we have seen that the low-caste proselytes were requested to change their life radically (with Cenna Basava, the śūdras had to wait twelve years to be initiated).⁸¹ The situation was entirely different in the Vajrayāna, since the have-nots, structured by the *siddhas* and, to an increasing extent, by the Vajrayāna monks, were accepted *as they were*, becoming the protagonists of the political scene, which in fact the *siddhas* strongly influenced.⁸² It is obvious, however, that even a text such as the *Caturaśītisiddhapravṛtti* is the product of Buddhist intellectuals, whose structuring presence is visible everywhere.

The early *siddhas* have been compared, from the phenomenological point of view, to ascetics such as the Kāpālikas. The social landscape would also have been the same.⁸³ The excommunication fulminated against the Kāpālikas by the *smārta* and *śrauta* brāhmaṇas in a number of works would also lead us to consider the two phenomena close to each other. However, phenomenological aspects may conceal deep divergences in the goals, and we should avoid what we may call the phenomenological trap.⁸⁴ The Kāpālikas certainly proselytised in the lower social groups, but the height of their fortune coincided with the recruitment of thugs to carry out the religious cleansing epitomised by the exploits of their gods, Bhairava, Cāmuṇḍā and the Mothers. We could call their

⁸¹ Schouten (1991: 42–43).

⁸² Davidson (2002: 171). Davidson's chapter on "Siddhas and the 'Religious Landscape'" (pp. 169 ff.) is a strongly recommended reading. Here and there, as already done in the preceding chapter, we are complementing Davidson's book with some additional information.

⁸³ Ibid: 203 ff.

⁸⁴ There are analogies with the case of the Buddhist and Upaniṣadic ascetics, on whose alleged similarities see Chapter II.

presence, in classical Marxist terms, a contradiction within the Brahmanical world; *smārta* and *śrauta* brāhmaṇas needed them, and we could say in simpler terms that one may need the executioner, but avoids socialising with him. The recruits of the Kāpālikas represented social groups destined to be incorporated in the *varṇāśramadharmā* at the lowest possible level. Conversely, the Buddhist *siddhas*, with the support of the monasteries, based their project on the possibility of transforming the natives and the outcastes into the new lay devotees, who would then continue to carry out their usual lives. The dwelling of a *siddha*, a shrine, and when possible a monastery to which they were allowed access, would give them the possibility of representing themselves as Buddhists, upgrading their identity without changing their lives.

The eruption onto the scene of the mass of people to whom the Vajrayāna gave a new identity and a cause to fight for provoked a tightening of Brahmanical sanctions. Significantly, women and wine drinkers came under attack, as we learn from the later Kali Age literature (which we must keep distinct from the early one, whose target, as we have seen in Chapter III, was the trading community). The *Bṛhannārādīya Purāṇa* includes the following statements:

A twice-born man who, being invited by a Śūdra, takes his meal, is known as a drinker of wine and thrown outside (the pale of) all (Śrauta and Smārta) Dharma [14.39].

One who salutes a Liṅga or even an image of Viṣṇu worshipped by women, lives in Raurava hell with a crore of his generations up to the end of a *kalpa* [14.58].

Neither women nor those not invested with the sacred thread, nor the Śūdras, O lord of men, have the right of touching (an image of) Viṣṇu or Śaṃkara [14.60].

There is no atonement for those who ... have association with Śūdra women, (and) nourish their body with food received from Śūdras, ... [14.66-67].⁸⁵

The *Brhaddharma Purāṇa*, a work particularly useful for the reconstruction of the social and religious history of Bengal,⁸⁶ describes the Kali Age of its time. It is interesting to note that the *pāṣaṇḍas* are said to have created “their own gods by dint of their own intellect” and preach “their own faiths with a spirit of rivalry”, something that perfectly depicts the plethora of the new Vajrayāna gods. In addition, the text remarks that the *yavanas* have become powerful, so that the gods have left this earth, which will “be crowded only by Mlecchas”,⁸⁷ a usual refrain. However, here the text alludes to the Muslims, whose presence appears inextricably connected with the misdeeds of the Buddhists.

In his poem *Narottama Vilāsa* (“The Life of Narottama”, a famous Vishnuite saint of sixteenth-century Bengal), Narahari Cakravarti describes the horrors of Tantrism:

Who can count their crimes? The blood of goats and buffaloes stain each house. Many of them hold in one hand the heads of men severed from the body and in another a sword and dance in frightful ecstasy. If any body falls in their way, he is sure to meet with death at their hands. There is no way to avoid the frightful doom — not even if he be a Brahmin. All of them are addicted to meat and wine and are lost to all sense of sexual morality.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ *Upapurāṇas*, I: 324–25. I have corrected a misprint in 14.60. Then, the early warnings against socialising with Buddhist people are reiterated: “The Bauddhas are called Pāsaṇḍins, because they decry the Vedas. So, a twice-born man, if he has (any) regard for the Vedas, must not look at them. (One acquires sin), in case one enters the house of a Bauddha knowingly or unknowingly. There is no escape (from sin), (if one does so) knowingly. This is the decision of Śāstras” [14.69-71] (*ibid.*: 326–27).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, II: 488–89, 550.

⁸⁷ *Brhannāradya Purāṇa*: III.19, in *ibid.* II: 550–51.

⁸⁸ *Narottama Vilāsa*: VII (see D.C. Sen 1911, II: 412, with Bengali text). An English version of the poem by Dravida Das is available at the website <http://www.salagram.net/parishad7.htm>

The passage, and the whole poem, betrays the intention to close with the era of carnage that in Bihar-Bengal accompanied and followed the arrival of the Muslims. Even Visnuism had turned to disallowed strategies, although Tantric initiation among the brāhmaṇas was regarded as a subsidiary initiation designed more for women and śūdras, who had no claim to Vedic initiation. Differently from the earlier, competing Sivaite strategy, it was a strategy of social recovery contemporaneous with the disappearance of Buddhism.⁸⁹

As shown in the previous chapter, violence was no longer a taboo for the Buddhists: it was part of their strategy, together with sexual unruliness and a conscious resorting to social revolt. It is a mistake to consider the incitements to revolt contained in the texts and the manifestations of violence in both texts and iconographies as purely symbolic. They are literal or metaphorical, not symbolic. As metaphors, texts and iconographies, through the analogical process, transfer the violence committed by the Buddhists on the *tīrthikas* to those carried out on the Brahmanical gods by the new Buddhist deities. That a symbolic interpretation started developing at an early stage is not particularly significant, because it was largely the work of trans-Himalayan Buddhists who had to adapt the received tradition to a context where there were no *tīrthikas*. The Vajrayāna was considered part of the true teaching of the Buddha, and neither texts nor images could be changed: they could be interpreted, however. These interpretations have their own legitimacy, and so deep and influential as to have generated an entire symbolic universe, extending from Tibet to Japan, but we should distinguish between Indian Buddhism and the violent world where it developed and the forms that it took when it was received outside India.

⁸⁹ H. Shastri (1911: 11).

In contrast to the non-monastic, compromising developments of other forms of the religion, the Vajrayāna movement recovered the antinomial stance of early Buddhism. Only by understanding this can we pick-up the threads of the troubled path of Indian Buddhism. In a situation that could not be more different from that described in Chapter II, we discover an unexpected continuity, something of which the brāhmaṇas had been and were aware.

This said, though conscious of being remote, privileged observers, we are baffled in front of the lack of realism of the political project of the Vajrayāna and of its chances of success. The Buddhists had failed to carry out the transformation of India in the centuries when their social presence and weight were massive, the centuries identified by their opponents as the “Kali Age”. Now their presence was significant only in the north-eastern part of the country, and they could not count any longer on a middle class enough strong to support them and on a regular army. No revolutions with the *Lumpenproletariat*, we know. The Buddhists could have not come out winners from the conflict even if the odd man out, Islam, had not entered the scene.

SIND AS A TEST

The death of Harṣavardhana — if we can hypostatise in the biography of a single, albeit central, personage the crisis of a whole historical period — marks a divide also in the history of Sind, as elsewhere in northern India. A Buddhist dynasty had ruled the kingdom until the 640s. Its history has been reconstructed on the basis of the *Fathnāma-yi Sind*, or *Chachnāma*, of Xuanzang’s travelogue, and of the information contained in a few other, later sources such as the *Tuḥfat al-kirām*.⁹⁰ The metropolitan region (Xuanzang’s *Xinduo*)

⁹⁰ The reader is referred to Lambrick (1973: 136 ff.; 155 ff.).

was the territory around Brahmaṇābād, where the majority of the followers of Buddhism lived. The other region of Sind where the Buddhist population was predominant was Budhīya, whose main towns were Qandābīl (Gandaya) in the north and Sīwistān (Sehwan) in the south. The śūdra king mentioned by Xuanzang⁹¹ was Sīhara (Sahira II) of the Sīharsī dynasty,⁹² who fell in battle against the Arabs in AD 643.⁹³ The establishment of the Brahmanical dynasty of Yayyati [Yayāti]/Jajja/Chach⁹⁴ fits very well into the picture of the second half of seventh-century India. In Sind the Buddhists lost their political status and were removed from their posts, with the exception of the *śamanī* ruler of Armābil (Bela), a friend of Yayāti's, and of Buddharakṣita (Bhandarkū/Buddha Rakū/Butt Raku *śamanī*), a friend of the former ruler Agham Lohānā and minister of King Dāhir in Brahmaṇābād at the beginning of the eighth century.⁹⁵

The *Fathnāma-yi Sind* describes a long standoff between Yayāti and the Buddhists, who did not give in. The new brāhmaṇa ruler had threatened to kill Buddharakṣita: “If I succeed in taking this fort, I shall seize the Samanī, take off his skin, give it to low-caste people to cover drums with it and to beat them till it was torn to pieces”.⁹⁶ He was informed that the monk had “attained sublimity and perfection”, and that

⁹¹ *Xiyuji* a: XI (vol. 2: 272).

⁹² Maclean (1989: 6).

⁹³ Lambrick (1973: 150–51).

⁹⁴ Cf. N.A. Baloch's notes to *Fathnāma-yi Sind* a (p. 33).

⁹⁵ Dani (1979: 58–59, 60–61) argues that they might be the same person; on a possible scribal error preventing us from clarifying the identity of Buddharakṣita see Maclean (1989: 51). Armābil is identified with Bela in Las Bela district (Baluchistan). In the conglomerate cliffs at Gondrani (Shahr-e Rogan), 15 km or so to the north north-west of Bela, there is a group of Buddhist caves, later transformed into dwellings, typically giving onto a river valley, the Purali Valley. They are mentioned in *Gazetteer Baluchistan* (p. 189). The ruler of this region was, according to the *Fathnāma-yi Sind*, a *śamanī*, perhaps the descendant of the governor of Harṣavardhana (Dani 1979: 60).

⁹⁶ *Fathnāma-yi Sind* b: 33–34.

“in magic and enchantments” he was so clever as to submit men to his will; by means of his talismans, he could provide himself with all he wanted. Thus Yayāti, when the war waged to conquer Brahmanābād came to a stalemate, decided to begin negotiations, still warning his men, “when I have done speaking and look towards you, you should draw your swords and sever his head from his body”.⁹⁷

Candra, who succeeded his brother Yayāti in AD 671, presumably undertook a much more decided action against the Buddhists. The *Fathnāma-yi Sind* reports that “[h]e strengthened and promulgated the religion of monks (*nasik*) and hermits (*rāhib*)”, but from the statements that follow it appears that Brahmanical ascetics, probably the Pāsupatas, and not Buddhist monks, are alluded to, and that a fierce war was waged: “He brought many people together with his sword, and made them turn back to his faith”. The impression that he carried out a religious normalisation is strengthened by the fact that “[h]e received many letters from the chiefs of Hind”.⁹⁸ It is the epoch of Kumāriḷa Bhaṭṭa and Appar, when kings were under the increasing pressure of both *vaidikas* and theistic brāhmaṇas. King Candra was known as a devotee who spent “his whole time with other devotees in his temple in the study of religion”.⁹⁹ The excavations at Banbhore, identified with the port town of Debal/Daybul, besides bringing to light an early eighth-century mosque (the oldest in the subcontinent),

⁹⁷ Ibid.: 34–35. Things went in an entirely different way, however; the monk not only had his life spared, but the brāhmaṇa had to comply with his requests. Questioned on his behaviour, Yayāti confessed that, sitting with the monk, he could see no signs of magic or jugglery, but that he had a horrible and ghastly apparition: “Its eyes were fiery and full of anger, its lips thick, and its teeth pointed like spears. It had rods in its hands, sharp and piercing like a diamond (and it waved them), as if it was about to strike some person with them. I saw it and felt afraid, and I dared not speak to it so has to be heard by you” (ibid.: 36). The weapon held by the ghost is reminiscent of a *vajra*, and this, together with his behaviour, may point to the existence of some already developed means of defence.

⁹⁸ Ibid.: 39.

⁹⁹ Ibid.: 39–40. On Candra, cf. Lambrick (1973: 175–77).

affected the pre-Muslim levels. They revealed the presence of a *śivaliṅga in situ* and of a *liṅga* and a few carved architectural features reused in the area of the mosque,¹⁰⁰ which appears to have been built on the place of a Sivaite temple. In Sind historical excavations have come to a complete stop¹⁰¹ and no further evidence is available, but the picture, though partial, is a familiar one: Sind was a Buddhist kingdom dotted with large stūpas and monasteries,¹⁰² where the presence of the Sivaite was limited,¹⁰³ and where the Brahmanical offensive commenced in the second half of the seventh century. Here, however, with the arrival of the Arabs, the Buddhists unexpectedly came up trumps.

Muḥammad b. Qāṣim started his rapid conquest of Sind in AD 711, winning one battle after the other. After occupying Debal, he conquered Nīrūn (Hyderabad), Sīwistān and Rāor (Rāwar), and then Brahmaṇābād, Alōr (Rohri) and Multān (in Punjab). The Buddhists decided to collaborate and submit.¹⁰⁴ The minister Buddharakṣita advised King Dāhir against organising the defence of Debal. As long as the king was alive, he argued, no enemy could live in peace, while a dead king would mean the end of the kingdom. His advice, he insisted, rested on the fact that the king should be safe and the kingdom

¹⁰⁰ F.A. Khan (1964: 53; pls. XVI B, XVII). On the mosque, see Ashfaque (1969). Banbhore/Debal is located to the east of Karachi, on the route to Thatta. On its identification with Debal, see Ghafur (1966).

¹⁰¹ All interest in the field of historical archaeology ceased in Sind in the early 1920s after the discovery of Harappa and Mohenjo Daro. Since then, but for a few sporadic studies, little or no attention has been paid to the early historical and medieval period.

¹⁰² The reader must still refer to Cousens (1929), but there is a number of chronological questions that are open. To give an example, Cousens dated the stūpa of Mirpur Khas to the fourth century (p. 96), but a late fifth century date for the panels that once decorated it is more reasonable (Huntington 1985: 205). Van Lohuizen-de Leeuw (1975: 162–64) attributed them to the sixth century.

¹⁰³ Xuanzang states that at the time of his visit there were over thirty *deva* temples in Sind against several hundred monasteries with ten thousand monks (*Xiyuji a: XI*; vol. 2: 272).

¹⁰⁴ Maclean (1989: 51); see below.

secured.¹⁰⁵ Was Buddharaḥṣita suggesting a guerrilla strategy instead of a risky open battle? Did he aim, if we accept the identification of Debal with Banbhore, at cutting down the power of the Pāśupatas, who had taken foot in the area?¹⁰⁶ Dāhir, who had also heard of the brave Arab ‘Ilāfī soldiers,¹⁰⁷ followed Buddharaḥṣita’s advice. At Nīrūnkōṭ, Buddharaḥṣita surrendered to Muḥammad b. Qāšim on the terms given in a letter from al-Hajjāj, the governor of Iraq who had decided on the expedition: he opened the gates of the fort and welcomed Muḥammad with presents and provisions for his soldiers. Regardless of this, Muḥammad b. Qāšim ordered a mosque to be built “in the place of the idol-temple of Budh”.¹⁰⁸ Buddharaḥṣita accompanied Muḥammad b. Qāšim to Mauj, identified with Lakhi (to the north-west of Sukkur, on the right bank of the Indus).¹⁰⁹ Here the officer appointed by Bajhara/Bachehrā, cousin of King Dāhir and governor of Sīwistān, was a *šamanī*,¹¹⁰ while Bajhara himself was in charge of the fort.¹¹¹ The *šamanīs* sent him the following message:

We people are a priestly class, our religion is peace and our creed is good will (to all). According to our faith, fighting and slaughtering are not allowable. We will never be in favour of shedding blood [...]. We have come to know that Amīr Hajjāj, under the order of the Khalīfah, instructed them to grant pardon to those who ask

¹⁰⁵ Dani (1979: 61–62).

¹⁰⁶ According to al-Balādhurī, there was a huge stūpa in Debal (ibid.: 63), and in this case, the identification of the ancient port town with Banbhore would be difficult, since no evidence of Buddhist monuments has come from the excavations; if al-Balādhurī is right, Buddharaḥṣita may have tried to protect an important Buddhist site. Dāhir wrote to Muḥammad b. Qāšim: “You have conquered a place which is the home of traders and artisans”, not a strong fort (ibid.: 62–63), and the *Fathnāma-yi Sind* associates traders and artisans with the Buddhists (ibid.: 57; see below).

¹⁰⁷ Dani (1979: 62).

¹⁰⁸ *Fathnāma-yi Sind* b: 92.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. N.A. Baloch’s notes to *Fathnāma-yi Sind* a (p. 77).

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Dani (1979: 64).

for it. So when an opportunity offers, and when we consider it expedient, we shall enter into a solemn treaty and binding covenant with them. The Arabs are said to be faithful to their words. Whatever they say they act up to and do not deviate from.¹¹²

Bajhara did not comply and the fight commenced. Then the monks sent a message to Muḥammad b. Qāṣim who, certain of the Buddhist support, ordered the assault until when Bajhara was obliged to leave. The message was this:

All the people, whether agriculturists, artisans, merchants or other common folk, have left Bachehrā's side and do not (now) acknowledge allegiance to him, and Bachehrā has not sufficient men and material of war, and can never stand against you in an open field, or in a struggle with you.¹¹³

The ruler of Budhiya, where Bajhara had fled, was Kāka, son of a *śamanī* whose ancestors had migrated from the Au-daṇḍa Vihāra in Bihar,¹¹⁴ that is, Odantapurī.¹¹⁵ He opposed the plan of a night attack on the Arab forces on the pretext that "seers and hermits" had read in their books that the country would be conquered by the army of Islam. The night attack failed, and Kāka reached the Arab camp, where Muḥammad b. Qāṣim offered him a robe of honour. After that, Kāka sided with the Arabs to curb the resistance of "those who remained stubborn and disobedient".¹¹⁶

The final battle for the conquest of Nīrūnkōṭ and Brahmanābād was a long and bloody one. At least six thousand soldiers were beheaded, whereas the prisoners "who belonged to the classes of artisans, traders and common folk were let

¹¹² *Faḥnāma-yi Sind* b: 93.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Dani (1979: 65).

¹¹⁵ Cf. Harbans Mukhia in *Tāranātha*: 442; *Ṭabaqāt-i-Nāṣirī*, I: 491.

¹¹⁶ *Faḥnāma-yi Sind* b: 96–97.

alone”.¹¹⁷ The evidence is rather confusing, and we are in doubt whether the thousand men “with their heads and beards clean shaved” who approached Muḥammad b. Qāṣim to ask permission to continue worshipping their “idols” after being given the status of *dhimmīs*, were Buddhist monks or brāhmaṇas in mourning for the death of their king.¹¹⁸ The text has *brahman*, but speaks invariably of their institutions as *khāna-yi buddha*, *butkhāna-yi buddha* and *‘imārat-yi buddha*.¹¹⁹ Moreover, when after the conquest the “brāhmaṇas” complained about the fact that “the keepers of idol-houses and temples became poor and needy, as they depended for their living on the gifts and charities of the people, and the people, through fear of the Mussalman soldiery, did not continue their offerings”,¹²⁰ Muḥammad b. Qāṣim allowed them “to go about begging at the doors of houses, with a copper bowl, and collecting corn in it, and to utilise such corn in any way they liked”.¹²¹ Buddhist monks are alluded to here. The *śamanīs* and their Jāṭ followers of Musthal/Manhal in the neighbourhood of Sāwand(ar)ī, identified with Thul Mir Rukan,¹²² were also given full assurance regarding the liberty of leading their usual life if they paid the due taxes. The *śamanīs* Bavād and Budhinī were appointed as officers-in-charge of the local population.¹²³

It thus appears that whenever the Buddhists were in a position to condition the course of political events or take autonomous decisions, they considered the Arabs a better alternative to the Brahmanical rulers, for all the limitations

¹¹⁷ Ibid.: 164.

¹¹⁸ *Faḥnāma-yi Sind* b: 164. We will see below that other Muslim sources, too, describe the Buddhist monks as “shaven-head Brahmins”.

¹¹⁹ Dani (1979: 66).

¹²⁰ *Faḥnāma-yi Sind* b: 167–68.

¹²¹ Ibid.: 169.

¹²² See the stūpa in this locality described by Cousens (1929: 98–99).

¹²³ *Faḥnāma-yi Sind* b: 173.

and costs that the freedom granted by the Arabs implied. Something serious must have happened for the Buddhists to change their position with respect to the recent past (King Sīhara, as we have seen, seems to have died fighting the Arabs in AD 643). This can only have been the duress and strain to which they had been subjected during the rule of the new dynasty of brāhmaṇa kings. Any interpretation of the events deriving from a modern, “national” approach to history is out of the question: we have seen that Indian society was not only segmented but vertically split at the highest political level and at the level of the intelligentsia.

The best analysis of the relations between the Arabs and the Buddhists and of the merging of the latter into the trade community of Islam has been provided by Derryl N. Maclean. He has shown that in the primary sources Buddhist communities are mentioned without exception in terms of collaboration, and that there is not one example of an individual Buddhist or a group of Buddhists who did not collaborate. Conversely, Hindu communities rarely collaborated until after the conquest of Brahmanābād, and even then only sparingly.¹²⁴ Collaboration reveals those socioeconomic features of Buddhism that we have described in Chapter II: the Arab sources mention the Sindhi Buddhists either in a list with merchants and artisans or in connection with trade. The Buddhists were waiting for some action that would improve their fortunes,¹²⁵ although, in the actual reality, they were held in a dramatic grip. On the other hand, the brāhmaṇas received their primary support, as expected, from rural areas,¹²⁶ and in fact, in keeping with their rural origins, the brāhmaṇa kings of Sind had shown

¹²⁴ Maclean (1989: 51–52). Maclean subscribes to the hypothesis that the shaven-headed monks of Brahmanābād were brāhmaṇas, but I consider this interpretation unlikely.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*: 67.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*: 60.

little understanding of regulated inter-regional commerce.¹²⁷

The Buddhists used their financial expertise for the benefit of the Arabs,¹²⁸ but their expectations of the revival of inter-regional trade and of the mercantile sector of the Sindhi economy were only partly fulfilled, although the capital generated in Arab Sind was substantial.¹²⁹ The point is that, although both Arab conquest and settlement did not imply conversion but, rather, submission, the Buddhists were *dhimmīs*, second-class citizens and followers of an inferior religion.¹³⁰ The Buddhist merchants found it increasingly difficult to compete with Muslim merchants on an equal footing in the revived commerce, and there was a negative change in their share of the accumulation of surpluses. Within a relatively short time, the Arabs not only gained their own expertise in eastern commerce, but displaced the Buddhists as the dominant urban, mercantile class, settling in the existing cities and enlarging them, and building new cities such as Maṣūra. Unequal competition also meant the decline of the Buddhists ability to process the articles of inter-regional trade, which was to the advantage of the Arabs.¹³¹

The turning point was, once again, the Tang retreat from Central Asia, which gradually passed under the control of the Arabs, allowing them to re-structure trade, progressively cutting out all competitors. With their long experience, the Buddhists countered the growing hegemony of the Arabs in the west at those places where their institutions were still safe

¹²⁷ Ibid.: 65.

¹²⁸ Ibid.: 58.

¹²⁹ Ibid.: 68.

¹³⁰ Ibid.: 49–50. Yohanan Friedman (1977: 331–32) has interpreted the obligation imposed by ‘Imrān b. Mūsā, appointed to the governorship of Sind in AD 835/36, on non-Muslim Jāts that they each be accompanied by a dog, as a way of humiliating *dhimmīs*. There was the precedent of Muḥammad b. Qāṣim, who had confirmed that very obligation, introduced by the brāhmaṇa rulers.

¹³¹ Maclean (1989: 70 ff.).

and their economic activities not discriminated, as in the cis- and trans-Himalayan block formed by north-eastern India and Tibet and, in a spectacular way, in easternmost India and south-eastern Asia up to Cambodia and Java. This extraordinary success of the Buddhists at the height of Pāla rule¹³² cannot hide the fact that their pushing northwards and eastwards marked, as already noted, a departure from the Indian scene. East of the Indus and up to the territories under Pāla rule or influence, the Buddhists were no longer free to carry out their traditional work, or even to live freely. They were squeezed by a pincer movement whose actors — the Muslims in the West and the *tīrthikas* in India — acted independently of each other to meet later on a compromise that meant the end of the religion of Dharma.

The political and economic dynamics observed in eighth-century Sind are probably the same as those that were at work in other regions of western India where the Muslims started their armed advance. The *rtbyl* (*eltābir*, a Turkish title) of Zābulistān and Kābul, two of the Buddhist kingdoms of western Central Asia under Tang protection, fought against the Arabs throughout the seventh and eighth century, succeeding, to a certain degree, to defer their advance, already hampered by political difficulties within the Muslim front.¹³³ Yet

¹³² The enthusiastic support given to Buddhism by the rulers of easternmost India as early as the end of the seventh century can be appreciated reading Yijing's description of Somaṭata and his king; cf. *Eminent Monks* b: 84–86. Only later, their success started being undermined even in these regions by the competition of the Arabs, who would gain the upper hand in the trade between India and China in the tenth century; cf. T. Sen (2003: 166–68).

¹³³ The recurrent expeditions against the Buddhist kingdoms south of the Hindu-kush and the resistance of the latter, starting with the AD 656–57 campaign of 'Abd al-Raḥmān, who was the first to capture Kābul, are best recounted in the *Tārikh-i Sīstān*: esp. 67 ff., 75 ff., 84 ff., 122 ff. Here we find the term *zumbīl*, a misreading of *rtbyl/eltābir* used until recently in the literature.

the roads were frequently blocked, as is also witnessed by Chinese pilgrims.¹³⁴ When, by the mid-eighth century, the Turkī Ṣāhīs of Kābul had to grant more and more concessions to the Sivaites, the Buddhists are likely to have experienced a period of duress. No written records exist, unlike in Sind and north-eastern India, which might have helped us to decipher the situation, but archaeology provides us with some important clues.

In the upper Arghandab Valley, just south of the Lake of Nawor, in the districts of Qarabagh-e Ghazni and Jaghuri, there are several groups of Buddhist caves. They started being excavated at the foot of the mountain barrier off the great southern Hindukush route in order to redirect trade. The earliest caves are datable to the second half of the seventh century, when, because of the continuous Arab raids, there must have been the conviction that the normal route would not be practicable for quite a long period but, at the same time, with the sense that the investment would pay off. The latest caves that were excavated, of imposing dimensions and all unfinished, are datable to the ninth century. By that time, the new dynasty of the Hindū Ṣāhīs, ruling in Kābul, represented a barrier to the east and south, preventing the Zabulite merchant community from moving freely to Wardak, Logar and Kābul. The Upper Arghandab route, through which Bamīyan could be reached, acquired an even greater importance.¹³⁵ When, however, at the end of the tenth century, the battle between Sabuktigīn and Jayapāla that took place between Ghazni and Lamghan¹³⁶ put an end to the Ṣāhī rule, the Buddhists had already given up their attempt at carving out an autonomous space for themselves. There is apparently

¹³⁴ See *Eminent Monks* b apropos of Xuan Zhao (p. 15).

¹³⁵ On these groups of caves and the historical problems involved, see Verardi & Paparatti (2004).

¹³⁶ Rahman (1979: 136 ff.).

no trace of them south of the Hindukush after AD 860.¹³⁷ By that time, the Arabs had created a new network of trade routes through present-day Afghanistan that connected Sind and Multan to Central Asia skipping brahmanised Gandhāra, and the Buddhist merchant community had started to give in.

It is important to clarify the set of events that in western India brought monastic life to an end and shed light on the behaviour of Buddhist monks as a social group. From Sind, the monks started moving to other parts of Buddhist South Asia, especially to north-eastern India,¹³⁸ a slow process that lasted about three centuries.¹³⁹ In south-eastern Afghanistan, they dissolved earlier because of the strengthening of Ṣāhī rule. With the exception of the rock sanctuaries of the mountain route and a few other pockets, the last Buddhist sanctuaries came to an end with the “Chinese phase” described in the preceding chapter.¹⁴⁰ At Tapa Sardar, a later phase is attested when, some time after AD 750, the Durgā-shaped goddess described in Chapter V was added to one of the chapels (Figs. 15a, b). The first to benefit from the collapse of Tang hegemony in the region were the Hindu Ṣāhīs, not the Muslims.¹⁴¹ The mountain region of the Upper Arghandab re-

¹³⁷ This is the latest possible date for the caves of Tapa Zaytun, planned on an unprecedented scale and left unfinished. AD 860 marks the beginning of the military operations of Yaq’ūb b. Laith, which in a very short time put an end to the uncertainties of two centuries of only partial successes of the Islamic forces in a large part of present-day Afghanistan. Easternmost Hindukush remained the western boundary of the Ṣāhī kingdom until the end of the tenth century.

¹³⁸ Maclean (1989: 54).

¹³⁹ Several finds from Buddhist Sind are datable to the ninth-tenth century (cf. van Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1975).

¹⁴⁰ Recent excavations at Tepe Narenj near Kābul, carried out by the Afghan Institute of Archaeology, attests to the late survival of Buddhism in this area, too. See G. Fussman’s observations on the site in Fussman, Murad & Ollivier (2008 : 92–93). In this sanctuary, no “Chinese phase” has been observed.

¹⁴¹ In previous occasions I have maintained that the sanctuary was abandoned on the arrival of Ibrahim b. Jibril in AD 795 cf. i.e. Verardi & Papatatti (2005: 441–42), but it is an assumption depending on the received paradigm that there were only two historical players in medieval North-West and that the Buddhists of eastern Afghanistan were driven away by the Muslims.

mained one of the few places where for some time the Buddhists could survive as a religious community, and not just only as a trading community.

THE GAME OF THE *TĪRTHIKAS*

In Madhyadeśa and in eastern India, the series of events set in motion by the arrival of the Muslims and their gradual territorial conquests initially took place according to the lines observed in Sind, but there was soon a dramatic crescendo that brought things to a very different finale. We can distinguish three phases, set in a loose chronological sequence according to circumstances and geographical areas:

First phase. For long, from the time of the inroads made by Maḥmūd of Ghazni, the orthodox kings fought against the Turuṣkas convinced that they would be able, soon or later, to defeat and drive them out of the country. The Buddhists tried, in places, to benefit from the situation weakening the orthodox front: they stirred up the lower classes to jeopardise the Brahmanical control over society, and sided with the Muslims in a number of cases. Social unrest reached its peak in the twelfth century.

Second phase. The *tīrthikas* realised that they would never defeat the Turuṣkas in battle and that it was a glaring blunder to allow the Buddhists to be their only interlocutors. From then on, their efforts were aimed at separating the two parties and striking hard at the weakest, better-known party, the Buddhists. They pursued their objective with the greatest determination, writing, particularly in Bihar, a most obscure and appalling page in history, a sort of implosion of Indian history, the consequences of which are felt to these days.

Third phase. The political compromise between the orthodox powers and the Turuṣkas allowed the former to survive and reorganise (in Mithilā, for instance) while the invaders could settle in other parts of northern India. The strategy adopted by the *tīrthikas* once they understood the ineffectiveness of any armed policy against the Muslims, was perfectly rational. Only coming to terms with them would allow them to retain an operational political space. Getting rid of their Indian adversaries and re-establishing an acceptable level of social order was a prerequisite for them to play the defensive-conservative role that would characterise them in the following centuries.

As observed by Buddha Prakash, one of the few historians who has given a credible if incomplete account of the events, the “spectacular establishment of Muslim rule in northern and eastern India” was largely due to the “atmosphere of rancour and rivalry, acquisitiveness and aggrandisement, in religion and politics [...]”.¹⁴² In Magadha, on the eve of the Muslim invasion, “political instability was aggravated by the religious antagonism between the Buddhists and the non-Buddhists, the sectarian rivalries between the sects of the Buddhists, untouchability and caste-rivalry, and priestcraft and exactions and demands of the temple priests from the lower classes”.¹⁴³

In the twelfth century, evidence of a significant Buddhist presence in the middle Ganges plain is provided by the religious policy followed by the Gāhaḍavālas, who ruled over the region from Benares. They stood as champions of Brahmanism from the very beginning,¹⁴⁴ and the majority of their

¹⁴² Prakash (1965: 215).

¹⁴³ CHB II/1: 32.

¹⁴⁴ Niyogi (1959: 200).

grants record *brāhmadānas*.¹⁴⁵ The western part of their territories had been lost for the Buddhists for a long time. The Chinese pilgrim Jiye, who left China for India in AD 964 with a group of three hundred monks, reports that at Kanauj there were plenty of stūpas and temples, but there were neither monks nor nuns.¹⁴⁶ Yet, in AD 1128-29 King Govindacandra, gratified by the *mahāpandita* Śākyarakṣita from Utkala and his disciple Vāgīśvararakṣita from the Cōḷa country, donated six villages to the community of *śākyabhikṣus* of the Jetavana at Śrāvastī.¹⁴⁷ The mention of the *śākyabhikṣus* would suggest it to be a community of householder monks: the royal donation would make sense in this perspective.

In AD 1119-20, one of Govindacandra's subordinate rulers, a member of the Vāstavaya family, had a dwelling for the Buddhist ascetics erected at Jāvṛṣa/Ajāvṛṣa,¹⁴⁸ identified with Śrāvastī, where the inscription attesting to the donation was found.¹⁴⁹ Two of Govindacandra's four queens were Buddhist. The first was Kumāradevī, who depicted herself as “the streak of the moon among the stars” in the king's harem and donated a *vihāra* to the *sthavīra* of the Buddhist community of Sarnath to honour the Dharmacakra Jina, whose image was also restored by her “in accordance to the way in which he existed in the days of Dharmāśōka”.¹⁵⁰ The other Buddhist

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.: 203–204; cf. the list of the Gāhaḍavāla inscriptions, pp. 245 ff.

¹⁴⁶ *Jiye*: 256.

¹⁴⁷ *EI* 11 (1911-12, D.R. Sahni): 20–26.

¹⁴⁸ *IA* 17 (1888, F. Kielhorn): 61–64; cf. I. 15-16; Niyogi (1959: 258).

¹⁴⁹ F. Kielhorn reports that William Hoey had found the inscription in the Jetavana mound, “in the ruins of an essentially Buddhist building with monastic cells”. It is difficult to say what the building was like (“an *essentially* Buddhist building”, my emphasis, is subject to a number of speculations; we are reminded of the *vihāra* built by Queen Yūkadevī in Kashmir; cf. Chapter III); in the inscription we read that the dwelling was *vihāravidhinā*, “after the manner of convents”.

¹⁵⁰ *EI* (1907-8, S. Konow): 319–28, v. 20-23, on whose meaning see discussion on p. 320. In the case of Kumāradevī, we cannot think of her as paying homage to a form of Śiva that had assimilated the Buddha, such as Amṛteśvara, who bestowed “the reward of liberation upon women” (Sanderson 2004: 254), because the Queen was an avowed Buddhist and refers explicitly to the Jina.

queen was Vāsantadevī.¹⁵¹ Neither of the two Buddhist queens is described as having been endowed with all the royal prerogatives (as *paṭṭamahādevī* or *samastarājaparakriyopetā*), while each of the two Hindu queens received this honour,¹⁵² but finding here and at this date the division of tasks between the ruler and his queens that we first met at Nagarjunakonda is interesting, although it has probably to do with subaltern Buddhist groups: the Buddhist queens supported the *śākya-bhiksus* seen as a pendant of the Brahmanical priests and of *pujārīs*.

Govindracandra faced an extremely difficult situation. He was exposed, from the west, to the attacks by the Muslim rulers of Punjab, to whom he paid tribute¹⁵³ and to those of the hardliner Senas from the east. The social sectors controlled by the Buddhists were, arguably, not negligible in places, and it was in Govindracandra's interest to maintain social order and halt the spreading of the most intransigent wing of the Vajrayāna. His successor Jayacandra (c. AD 1170-93) found himself in a serious impasse, and opted for a policy strongly supportive of the Buddhist communities. The penultimate king of the Gāhaḍavāla dynasty had been called "a worshipper of Kṛṣṇa" on the day of his installation as *yuvarāja*,¹⁵⁴ but the Bodhgayā inscription of AD 1185 is a eulogy of the *siddha* Śrīmitra, his *dīkṣāguru*. The *siddha* had had the merit to guide "the rulers of earth addicted to the wrong path" and make them "renowned for the worship of Śrīghana", i.e. the Buddha, and had "restored the discipline and recovered the numerous collection of lost scriptures and others of the same

¹⁵¹ Ibid.: 321.

¹⁵² Niyogi (1959: 199).

¹⁵³ HCIP 5: 51.

¹⁵⁴ *EI* 4 (1896-97, F. Kielhorn): 117-20, 1.19.

kind, belonging to the illustrious site of the Mahābodhi”.¹⁵⁵ Jayacandra owned a white elephant, an animal laden with precise symbolism in Buddhism, which eventually became a possession of Shihāb al-Dīn Ghūrī.¹⁵⁶ All the forces in the field were converging towards Magadha, and the impending clash with the Senas drove Jayacandra towards Buddhism in the attempt to find support among its followers in the region that was becoming the magnet attracting all the contradictions of India.

The forces set in motion by the Vajrayāna were important enough, and Jayacandra seems to have decided to count on them. His praise of Śrīmitra and his mentioning the recovery of lost scriptures (in all likelihood, new militant texts passed off as ancient), reveals a real involvement and does not seem due to episodic circumstances. Jayacandra was accused of having invited or assisted Shihāb al-Dīn Ghūrī against Pṛthvirāja III, the powerful Cāhamāna king of Ajmer and Delhi (unless it was a minister of the Pṛthvirāja who betrayed his master).¹⁵⁷ The state of uncertainty and confusion fell to the level of intrigue and personal interest. Subhāgadevī, a concubine of Jayacandra’s, hatched a plot to invite the Muslims to invade Kanauj in order to favour her own son in the dynastic rush.¹⁵⁸ In the end, Jayacandra’s defeat at the hands of Lakṣmaṇasena¹⁵⁹ marked a turning point in the history of the region.

¹⁵⁵ N. Sanyal (1929: cf. in particular l. 7, 11; see also Niyogi 1959: 198, 210, 260). Śrīmitra (Mitrāyogi or Jagan Mitrānanda) is the author of a letter (*Candrārājalekha*) addressed to Jayacandra (cf. Sāṅkṛtyāyana 1934: 227). His works were translated into Tibetan, where he is known as *bsTan pa gsal ba’i sgron me*.

¹⁵⁶ Niyogi (1959: 198).

¹⁵⁷ Prakash (1965: 196).

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*: 198. Subhāgadevī came to greet the conqueror, but Shihāb al-Dīn “despised her, spat on her face and handed her over to a man of low caste for being killed” (*ibid.*: 199; Prakash quotes a Prakrit work, the *Purātanaprabandha Samgraha*).

¹⁵⁹ HCIP 5: 54.

The collapse of the Pāla state at the hands of the Senas, of the Karṇāṭas of Mithilā and, to a degree, of the Gāhaḍavālas, meant the collapse of Indian Buddhism. The last Pāla king Govindapāla had been overthrown in Gayā by either Vallālasena or the Gāhaḍavāla king Vijayacandra (c. 1155-70)¹⁶⁰ in an action the details of which are perhaps those narrated in the *Kalki Purāṇa* (Chapter V). As already said, the Buddhists were numerous in the region. Tāranātha reports that whereas after the death of Dharmapāla the majority of the kingdoms of northern India had seen the growth of *tīrthikas* and *mlecchas*, “[i]n Magadha the Buddhists were greater in number than before, because of the increase of the *saṃgha*-s and *yogī*-s”.¹⁶¹ The destiny of Buddhism would have been different if hardliners such as the Senas and Karṇāṭas had not prevailed, but it would have been impossible for these dynasties — after finding a compromise solution with the Turuṣkas — to consolidate their power without planning a radical extirpation of Buddhism.

While the Muslims were advancing towards the middle and eastern Ganges Valley, the concern of the Senas was to establish *varṇāśramadharmā*. As an example, we see how Vallālasena (c. 1158-79) upgraded the Kaivarta fishermen to the status of *śūdras* in exchange for their traditional job (they became, arguably, peasants) and how, conversely, he refused to accede to their demands to be further promoted socially allotting the degraded Vyāsokta brāhmaṇas as their priests.¹⁶² The lay devotees of the merchant class apparently drew upon themselves the wrath of the king.¹⁶³ Vallabha Āḍhya, a Buddhist and the richest merchant and banker of Bengal, leader

¹⁶⁰ CHB 1/2: 272.

¹⁶¹ *Tāranātha*: 123B (p. 314). Magadha, for Tāranātha, naturally means south Bihar, the idea of “Greater Magadha” being entirely lost; Tirhut or Mithilā (North Bihar), however, is mentioned among the kingdoms where the number of *tīrthikas* had increased.

¹⁶² Cf. Risley (1891, I: 377).

¹⁶³ See Vedāntaśāstri (1956: 73).

of the Sonār-Vaniās who had always financed Vallālasena, refused to continue to do so when the latter showed the intention to march against Magadha: this caused the Vaniās to be forcibly expelled. Those who remained in Bengal were degraded: brāhmaṇas were prohibited from teaching them and officiating for them.¹⁶⁴ The Senas began a radical administrative-territorial overhaul of the conquered territories, with emphasis on *patakas* (new land units) and the “camps of victory” established within each *grāma*,¹⁶⁵ which may be seen as instrumental in the creation of an efficient caste agrarian society. The largest concentration of the new administrative centres is found in the *nāvya* or navigable sector of Vaṅga and the Khādi contiguous to the estuarine mouth of the Bay of Bengal,¹⁶⁶ which may be construed as the determined attempt at readdressing trade according to the interests of the new rulers.

Tāranātha provides us with the following information, rather confusedly referred to as the time of the “four Sena kings”:

Then came the Turuṣka king called the Moon in the region of Antaravedi in-between the Gaṅgā and the Yamunā. Some of the monks acted as messengers for this king. As a result, the petty Turuṣka rulers of Bhaṅgala and other places united, ran over the whole of Magadha and massacred many ordained monks in Odantapurī. They destroyed this and also Vikramaśīla.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ H. Shastri (1911: 21–22). Vallālasena is reported to have been a follower of the Vajrayāna initially, and to have become a staunch Sivaite later in his life.

¹⁶⁵ R. Sanyal (2008-9: 101; 2014: 199-201).

¹⁶⁶ Id. (2008-9: 102; 2014: 201).

¹⁶⁷ *Tāranātha*: 125B (p. 319). According to other translations of this passage, King Candra acted “with the help of some Bhikṣus, who were the king’s messengers”; also, more explicitly, “Some monks helped him acting as spy”. Cf. Prakash (1965: 203).

Antaravedī, “the area within the sacrificial ground”, is the region bounded by the Ganges in the north, the Yamunā in the south, Kurukṣetra in the west and Prayāga/Allahabad in the east,¹⁶⁸ and Bhaṃgala corresponds to east Bengal and the adjacent regions.¹⁶⁹ The Turuṣka king Candra is identifiable with Quṭb al-Dīn Aybak, since in the Turkic languages Aybeg (‘Aibak in Arabic) means “Lord of the Moon”.¹⁷⁰ Quṭb al-Dīn, founder of the “Slave dynasty”, helped his master Muḥammad Ghūrī and captured several cities, including Delhi; two years later he conquered Kanauj and Benares by defeating Jayacandra Gāhaḍavāla, and in 1202 he besieged the fortress of Kalinjar in the Candella territory, and then took possession of Mahobā.¹⁷¹ The Turuṣka kings of Bhaṃgala have been identified with the chiefs of small trading communities of Persian origin settled in the Gangetic ports and deltaic regions tolerated by the Senas as allies ready to attack the Buddhists of Magadha in concert with them and the Turuṣkas.¹⁷²

Regarding the monasteries of Odantapurī and Vikramaśīla, Tāranātha provides us with an additional piece of information:

During the time of these four Senas, the number of *tīrthika*-s went on increasing even in Magadha. There also came many Persian followers of the *mleccha* view. To protect Odantapurī and Vikramaśīla, the king even converted these partially into fortresses and stationed some soldiers there.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Sircar (1971: 303).

¹⁶⁹ S.C. Sarkar, quoted in Harbans Mukhia’s note to *Tāranātha* (p. 444).

¹⁷⁰ Prakash (1965: 203–204). Mukhia hesitates, wrongly I think, between Quṭb al-Dīn Aybak and Muḥammad Ghūrī (cf. *Tāranātha*: 442). The latter marched beyond the Punjab in 1190–91, and in 1192 his troops defeated Pṛthvirāja III, who was put to death, thus laying the foundation of Muslim power in northern India.

¹⁷¹ These events are very well known, and I refer for brevity to Majumdar, Raychaudhuri & Datta (1967: 270–71).

¹⁷² Harbans Mukhia’s note to *Tāranātha* (pp. 443–44).

¹⁷³ *Tāranātha*: 125A (p. 318).

The four Sena kings were Lavasena, Kāśasena, Mañitasena and Rāthikasena.¹⁷⁴ Given that they succeeded Lakṣmaṇasena (AD 1185-1206),¹⁷⁵ they ruled locally when the two monasteries were no longer in existence.¹⁷⁶ It was probably the last Pāla king Govindapāla, who had been ruling over the region, who took the measures mentioned by Tāranātha, since Odantapurī had been one of the Pāla capitals:¹⁷⁷ the place had withstood the repeated onslaughts of Vallālasena.¹⁷⁸ Other measures aimed at defending the site may have been taken at the time of Lakṣmaṇasena by the local Chinda rulers, of which something shall be said below.

The relationship between Govindapāla's fortified camp and the monastery is not clear,¹⁷⁹ but the latter was probably included within the defenses. The Muslims attacked it, as narrated in a famous passage of the *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī*:

Having been honoured with such notice and favour [by Sultān Quṭb al-Dīn] he [Bakhtyār-i Khaljī] led a force towards Bihār, and ravaged that territory.

He used to carry his depredations into those parts and that country until he organised an attack upon the fortified city of Bihār. Trustworthy persons have related on this wise, that he advanced to the gateway of the fortress of Bihār with two hundred horsemen in defensive armour, and suddenly attacked the place. There were two brothers of Farghānah, men of learning, one Nizām-ud-Dīn, the other Ṣamṣām-ud-Dīn (by name), in the service of Muḥammad-i-Bakht-yār; and the author of this book met with at Lakṣanawati in the year 641 H., and this account is from him. These two wise

¹⁷⁴ On the later Sena kings, see Majumdar (1943: 248–50).

¹⁷⁵ For Lakṣmaṇasena's dates, I follow CHB II/1: 31.

¹⁷⁶ Bakhtyār b. Khaljī conquered the Sena capital in Bengal in AD 1204 (Eaton 1993: 32–33), and Odantapurī was the first stronghold of which he took possession. See below.

¹⁷⁷ M.M. Ali (1406 H/1985, I A: 50).

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ M.M. Ali (ibid.) maintains that Odantapurī was “dominated by a Buddhist monastery”.

brothers were soldiers among that band of holy warriors when they reached the gateway of the fortress and began the attack, at which time Muḥammad-i-Bakht-yār, by the force of his intrepidity, threw himself into the postern of the gateway of the place, and they captured the fortress, and acquired great booty. The greater number of the inhabitants of that place were Brahmans, and the whole of those Brahmans had their heads shaven; and they were all slain. There were a great number of books there; and, when all these books came under the observation of the Musalmāns, they summoned a number of Hindūs that they might give them information respecting the import of those books; but the whole of the Hindūs had been killed. On becoming acquainted (with the contents of those books), it was found that the whole of that fortress and city was a college, and in the Hindūi tongue, they call a college Bihār.¹⁸⁰

The Muslims seem to have been unaware of the real nature of the fortified monastery, and seem to have been genuinely upset when they discovered the truth. The episode — a trap prepared at the expense of the Buddhists — was arguably part of the Sena strategy. In fact, if we credit Minhāj with the fortress being without armed forces (as was discovered), we must necessarily think that the Turuṣkas were directed to a place that at the time was not defended. Minhāj's concern to explain to his readers that Bakhtyār-i Khaljī was not responsible for a massacre that had manifestly aroused horror and protests is palpable. The gravity of the destruction of the Odantapurī library far exceeds, to make a modern example, that of the library of the Leuven University, *furore teutonico diruta* in 1914, because fraud is added to the savageries of war. While the latter are generally recognised and denounced, the former continues, undetected, its destructive action.

¹⁸⁰ *Ṭabaḳāt-i-Nāṣirī*, I: 551–52. Lakḥaṇavatī (Lakhnauti) corresponds to Gauḍa/Gaur and, *lato sensu*, to western Bengal. Though Truschke (2018: 418–19) advises great caution in accepting the narrative of the *Ṭabaḳāt-i-Nāṣirī*, the episode in question is so particular that it is not easy to think of a literary fabrication.

The *dPag bsam ljon bzang* (whose first part deals with the rise, progress, and downfall of Buddhism in India) reports that the destruction of the Ratnodadhi Library at Nālandā was also a deliberate action of the *tīrthikas*. The Ratnodadhi was a nine-storeyed building where the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* and the Tantric works were preserved. The damages inflicted by the Turuṣka raids on the temples and *caityas* of the monastic town had been repaired by Muditabhadra, and a new temple had been erected by Kukuṭa Siddha, minister of “the king of Magadha”. During a sermon delivered there, two young novices threw in disdain washing water on two indigent *tīrthika* mendicants who had appeared in the place. The latter had spent twelve years propitiating the sun, and eventually had performed a *yajña*, after which they threw live embers and ashes from the sacrificial pit into the monastic buildings. This produced a great conflagration that consumed the Ratnodadhi.¹⁸¹ That two *tīrthikas* alone could cause a devastating fire is not, in itself, incredible (arson is the easiest of crimes), but it is unlikely that they spent twelve years preparing a solitary attack. We must set the story in the right perspective, which is better done, to the extent possible, in the light of the archaeological evidence.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ *dPag bsam ljon bzang*: I. 92, quoted by Vidyabhusana (1920: 516). I read in the index under the heading “Kakuta Sidha”: “While a religious sermon was being delivered in the temple that he had erected in Nālandā, a few young monks threw washing water at two *Tīrthika* beggars. The beggars being angry, set fire on the three shrines of Dharmagaṇja, the Buddhist University of Nālandā, viz. – Ratna Sāgara, Ratna Rañjaka including the nine-storeyed temple called Ratnodadhi which contained the library of sacred books” (Index: i).

¹⁸² The site is too large and complex to allow for even a simple presentation of the questions left open by the excavations carried out from the winter 1915-16 throughout the 1920s. The methodological flaws and the rush in bringing the ruins to light have seriously jeopardised the possibility to reassess the evidence. In no case the opinion should be accepted according to which in the twelfth century the monastic town was flourishing as it did between the seventh and the ninth century. Only Indian and British scholars, who have at their disposal all the documentation, are in a position to re-examine the evidence. Access to archives is limited for other scholars, and that to storehouses in India practically impossible. Excavations have been recently resumed in the area, with interesting results. See, for instance, Saran & al. (2008), who have identified the site of Juafardih with Kulika, the birthplace of Maudgalyāyana.

Behind Monasteries 7 and 8, on the eastern row of *vihāras*, rises a Brahmanical temple, probably Sivaite,¹⁸³ clearly out of place with respect to the general layout of the monastic town, juxtaposed as it is “in a somewhat hostile position and facing the opposite direction towards east, as against the monasteries facing west”.¹⁸⁴ Moreover, the temple was entirely built with huge dressed stone, unlike the Buddhist buildings, which were all made of backed bricks. The intent of emphasising the distance separating the temple from the Buddhist buildings from the architectural and sculptural point of view is evident.¹⁸⁵ The temple was first built around the mid-seventh century, as shown by the reliefs that decorate it.¹⁸⁶ It was rebuilt two centuries later, and the old reliefs were reinstalled in the new building. This is consistent with the political history of Magadha, where the situation, for the Buddhists, came to a head after the death of Harṣavardhana, and which fell in the hands of the *tīrthikas* after the weakening of the Pālas in the second half of the ninth century. Monastery 1, the first of the eastern row of *vihāras*, was reconstructed nine times, in particular after the devastating fire that occurred in the ninth century.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ Deva & Agrawala (1950); see some of the images in B.N. Misra (1998, II: 71 ff.).

¹⁸⁴ D.R. Patil (1963: 328). Several other scholars have made this observation.

¹⁸⁵ A similar case is that of the Turkī and Hindū Śāhī marble production in south-eastern Afghanistan, which breaks completely and *pour cause* with the Buddhist coroplastic art tradition.

¹⁸⁶ Deva (1980: 83).

¹⁸⁷ The best presentation of the phases of this building is by Page (1923: 8–13) and Kuraishī (1931: 70–77). J.A. Page and M. H. Kuraishī were superintendents of the Central Circle of the Archaeological Survey of India, and contributed with reports on the ongoing excavations in the ASIAR throughout the 1920s. Page was a conscientious archaeologist, well aware of the problems posed by the site’s stratigraphy and periodisation. He was unable to tackle them because the documentation at his disposal when he took office was defective (Page 1923: 13–14). The earliest, brief excavation reports by D.B. Spooner were published by the Asiatic Society in Kolkata, and some others appeared in the *Annual Reports of the Archaeological Survey of India, Eastern and Central Circle*.

The stratigraphic relations between the two phases of the Sivaite temple and the structural phases of Monasteries 7 and 8 are not known, even less so their relations with the phases of Monastery 1, the best documented. Thus we lack the detailed evidence, which it would have been probably possible to recover, for understanding what may have happened.¹⁸⁸

Besides the evidence from Temple 2, several seals have come to light mentioning some *agrahāras* and bearing Brahmanical symbols.¹⁸⁹ It has been contended that the site was not exclusively Buddhist,¹⁹⁰ but it is preferable to say that the monastic town went through periods of crisis and setbacks. The “sequence of occupation and destruction, desertion and re-habilitation” that have been observed, for instance, in Monasteries 1 and 4,¹⁹¹ points to a complex history of destruction, abandonment and reoccupation. The chronology of the site, especially from the second half of the ninth century onwards, is poorly understood, and prevents us from suggesting a more precise correlation with political-religious events. Even the evidence provided by Cunningham regarding the wanton destruction of stūpas (see Chapter I) is

¹⁸⁸ One of the main problems we face for understanding the stratigraphy of the site and, consequently, its chronology, is that the layers observed within each monastery and temple were not put in mutual relationship, the only partial exception being the “Devapāla level”, which is mentioned in some reports. The seventh-century temple is roughly contemporary with Ādityasena and the Apsad temple near Wazirganj, east of Gayā, on which cf. Asher (1980: 53).

¹⁸⁹ H. Sastri (1942: 28, 83). Sastri suggested that that the temple could be a Sūrya Temple (ibid.: 8, 83).

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ *ASIAR* 1921-22 (J.A. Page): 20 (Monastery 1); 1922-23 (id.): 106–107. The circumstance that the remains of Nālandā were composed of “a sequence of structures erected one upon the other after intervals of ruin and desertion” greatly complicated the measures taken for their preservation (*ASIAR* 1923-24, id: 23). No temporary preservation measures were taken at the time, and the restoration and partial reconstruction of the structures followed each excavation campaign. This prevented even conscientious archaeologists such as Page from re-examining the whole site at the very end of the work, which often came, as at Nālandā, after several years from the first excavation campaign. Gathering up all the threads became impossible.

set in a chronological limbo. We face the usual problem of the scanty attention paid to the upper layers and to the last desertion phases of archaeological sites (corresponding to the early work carried out on the field). What we can say is that after the death of Harṣavardhana the monasteries were abandoned and that the Pāsupatas occupied the site. The rise of the Pālas in the mid-eighth century meant the resurgence of Nālandā, which, especially with Dharmapāla and Devapāla reached the peak of its fortune. The second half of the ninth century, when the Sivaites rebuilt their temple, was again a difficult period for the monastic community. One of the layers of ashes in Monastery 1 and the evidence of fire in other parts of the site are the result of unknown events that took place in about that time. We do not know when the monasteries that Dharmasvāmin found empty in 1234-35 (only two of them “were in a serviceable condition” at the time of his visit) were deserted,¹⁹² and one of the upper layers of ashes found in the excavation can be tentatively related to the fire lit by the *tīrthikas* that destroyed the Ratnodadhi. The existence within the monastic town of a Brahmanical brick temple datable to the twelfth century¹⁹³ would suggest that the presence of the two *tīrthikas* who attracted the wrath of the Buddhist novices was not random.

If Odantapurī and Vikramaśīla outgrew Nālandā, this may have depended on their safer position. Although Tāranātha maintains that the origin of Odantapurī owed nothing “to the grace of any king or minister”,¹⁹⁴ it is difficult to explain its extraordinary growth and popularity on the exclusive basis of patronage from below, although the question of patronage may find an explanation in the fact that under Pāla rule, the

¹⁹² On Dharmasvāmin’s testimony, see below in this section.

¹⁹³ See DSAL-IIAS, Nalanda, Accession Nos. 38124-29.

¹⁹⁴ *Tāranātha*: 103B (p. 264). According to the Lama, the monastery was founded at the time of Gopāla (c. AD 750-70) or Devapāla.

central authorities by way of permanent endowments endorsed the constructions of Buddhist religious institutions made by administrative officers of the rank of mostly army chiefs and subordinates.¹⁹⁵ Odantapurī is located at a very short distance from Nālandā, and the site, as already said, was a Pāla stronghold, where the court used to encamp.¹⁹⁶ The place was almost certainly well protected, and Bakhtyār-i Khaljī's option to establish its military outpost there depended on its known, favourable position.

Here comes the case of the attack on Vikramaśīla, the great centre of Vajrayāna learning founded by King Dharmapāla identified with the site of Antichak, situated in the Bhagalpur district of Bihar on the right bank of the Ganges.¹⁹⁷ It is commonly but groundlessly maintained that, like Odantapurī, it was attacked, and even destroyed, by Bakhtyār-i Khaljī: a *lectio facilior* of the events has been given, *in primis*, by Tāranātha and other Tibetan historians. Bakhtyār never passed through the place in his march from Bihar Sharif towards Nadiya in Bengal, where Lakṣmaṇasena resided at the time. To avoid

¹⁹⁵ R. Sanyal (2014: 186). Odantapurī served as a model for the construction of the bSam yas monastery, the first in Tibet. Odantapurī was famous for the initiation into the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*, and this may have created the tradition that its establishment owed nothing to high patronage.

¹⁹⁶ From the Guptas onwards, Indian dynasties did not have a real capital. The latter was one and the same thing with the seat of the Court, which was always on the move because of the continuous warfare. This state of affairs caused a number of "capitals" to be built, though rarely recognisable as such from the point of view of monumental remains.

¹⁹⁷ Excavations have been in progress at Antichak, first identified with Vikramaśīla by Nundolal Dey (1909), since the early 1960s. From 1971-72 onwards the works, previously entrusted to the University of Patna, were carried out by the Archaeological Survey of India. A report of the excavations has been published in 2011 by B.S. Verma, who shows the traditional reticence and misunderstanding about the dynamics of destruction of the Buddhist monasteries of eastern India. B.S. Verma (2011: 17) writes that "[t]he introduction of *tantra* and the worship of large number of gods and goddesses in this new form of Buddhism narrowed down the gulf between Buddhism and Hinduism and it did not take long time for the Buddhists to transfer their allegiance wholly to the Hindu gods and goddesses [...]." Here reference is made to the progress reports published on *IAR* from the 1971-72 to the 1981-82 issue.

the Sena forces posted to intercept him, he took the Jharkhand route and then passed through Birbhum, thus following a southern route to fool his enemies.¹⁹⁸

The destruction of the Buddhist monastery was due to very different causes. Excavating the third-phase structures of the monastery, “represented by shoddy walls constructed of stone rubble and bricks”, it became apparent that

[c]uriously enough a few Buddhist deities like Mahakala and Goddess Tara were found to have been used as building material for the construction of the walls. A number of sculptures both of the Brahmanical and Buddhist deities were recovered from the excavation. The former include Mahishasuramardini, Chamunda, Uma-Mahesvara, Vishnu, Seshasayi Vishnu, Manasa, Yama, Ganesa and Surya, while the latter consisted of mutilated Avalokitesvara, Bodhisattva-Padmapani and goddess Tara [...].¹⁹⁹

A big fire destroyed the monastery,²⁰⁰ the Buddhist images were broken into pieces and used as building material, and a Brahmanical temple was built on the interfaced ruins, to be later abandoned. The Buddhist images were found “kept flat upside down in the masonry” to raise the height of the new walls, which points to “an element of hatred and vengeance” against Buddhism: “[r]eligious rivalry was one of the fundamental causes of the destruction of the University [...]”.²⁰¹ It is to be remarked that before the final attack on the monastery, other attempts had already taken place to destroy it. An inscription on a pillar stump refers to the fact

¹⁹⁸ Chaudhary (1978: 217–18); on Bakhtyār’s Jharkhand route see also Majumdar (1943: 32, 223).

¹⁹⁹ *IAR* 1974-75: 7. Cf. also Verma (2001: 304).

²⁰⁰ *IAR* 1971-72: 4.

²⁰¹ Chaudhary (1978: 229–30). Others have continued to blame Bakhtyār-i Khaljī and the followers of Islam for it (Prasad 1987: 89–90). Even specialists of Muslim history of India, while rightly trying to restore the truth of facts, continue to mechanically accept the vulgate (cf. Eaton 2000: table 10.1).

that a local chief, Sahura of Campā, had dispelled a planned attack by “the rulers of Baṅga”²⁰² — evidently, the Senas. If we have a better knowledge of what really happened at Antichak, it is because excavations, though far from satisfactory, have been more accurate than those carried out in other monastic sites until the 1930s. More attention than usual was paid to the site’s later phases and to the desertion phases, a rewarding strategy. Vikramaśīla is not an isolated case, however. Isipatana/Sarnath, analysed in Appendix 2, is another case in point.

When the *tīrthikas* started using the Muslims to get rid of the Buddhists, the latter found themselves in a fight on two fronts. We read in *Tāranātha* some instances of Buddhists taking action against the Turuṣkas by making use of magic. Riripa, a disciple of Nāropa, performed a magical rite on the street somewhere to the west of Benares when the Gar log army (the army of the Turuṣkas) materialised: “When the Gar-log-s reached there, they saw only dead bodies and the ruins full of stones and wood and the soil upturned. So they went back”.²⁰³ Riripa “made big offerings to Cakrasaṃvara” when “Vikramasīla was once attacked by the Turuṣka army”, so that the latter was struck by terrible thunder four times. This killed their

²⁰² Verma (2001, II: 303). Verma maintains, from the one side, that “the destruction of the monastery was completed by a planned attack by some outer elements” — here he seems to point to the Senas of Bengal — and from the other recalls that the Tibetan sources report that “the Turks destroyed the monastery and constructed a fort there” (pp. 303–304). The Tibetans (see *Tāranātha* above in the text) ended up accepting the manipulated version of the events provided by the *tīrthikas*. A case like that of Odantapurī was probably not isolated and, once an understanding was reached with the *tīrthikas*, the Muslims contributed directly to the destruction of other sites.

²⁰³ *Tāranātha*: 120B (p. 306). This would have happened at the time of King Nayapāla (AD 1038–55; AD 1022–37 according to R. Sanyal), when the Pāla kingdom was indeed shaken to its very foundations (Majumdar 1943: 480) — not, in any case, on account of the Muslims.

chief and many brave soldiers and thus they were repelled.²⁰⁴ That the Buddhists had to fight on two fronts is clear from the fact that the same Riripa is said to have defeated in debate “eight *tīrthika* rivals”: “six of them [he] turned dumb and two blind”, though later on he released them.²⁰⁵

Līlāvajra, a *vajrācārya* from Vikramaśīla, on hearing the rumour of an impending Turuṣka invasion, defeated the soldiers by drawing the *Yamāricakra*. “After reaching Magadha — Tāranātha reports — the soldiers became dumb and inactive and remained so for a long time. Thus they were turned away”.²⁰⁶ The Lama further says that Līlāvajra’s fifth successor, Kamalarakṣita, was about to hold a *gaṇacakra* when he “encountered the minister of the Turuṣka king of Karṇa of the west, who was then proceeding to invade Magadha with five hundred Turuṣkas”.²⁰⁷ The latter “plundered the material for *sādhanā*, but when he came near the *ācārya* and his attendants,

[Kamalarakṣita] became angry and threw at them an earthen pitcher full of charmed water. Immediately was generated a terrible storm and black men were seen emerging from it and striking the Turuṣkas with daggers in hand. The minister himself vomited blood and died and the others were afflicted with various diseases. Excepting one, none of them returned to their country.²⁰⁸

From what Tāranātha reports immediately after (“This made both the *tīrthika*-s and Turuṣkas terror-stricken”), we realise once again that the Buddhists were fighting on two fronts, something that they would not be able to stand for long.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.: 121 A (p. 307).

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.: 127B (p. 328).

²⁰⁷ Ibid. Karṇa (*Karna) is a re-Sanskritisation of the Prakrit *Kannara* (Sircar 1971: 309), a term used for the Senas, whose origins were in Karnataka.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.: 128A (p. 328).

In fact, the *yogis* started to secede, and in the case reported by Tāranātha, they seceded to the *tīrthikas*:

At that time, most of the *yogī* followers of Gaurakṣa were fools and, driven by the greed for money and honour offered by the *tīrthika* kings, became the followers of Īśvara. They used to say, ‘We are not opposed even to the Turuṣkas.’ Only a few of them belonging to the Naṭeśvarī-varga remained insiders.²⁰⁹

The Gaurakṣa/Gorakṣa of the text is probably the ninth of the eighty-four *siddhas*;²¹⁰ the secession took place at the time of the “four Sena kings”.

When Dharmasvāmin, who went to India from Nepal against the advice of his companion scholars,²¹¹ arrived in Magadha, destruction was almost complete. Between 1234 and 1235, he sojourned at Nālandā, where only two monasteries, as said above, “were in a serviceable condition”.²¹² Before reaching there, he stopped at Bodhgayā, and the account of his short stay throws light on the real situation:

[...] the place was deserted and only four monks were found staying (in the Vihāra). One (of them) said, “It is not good! All have fled from fear of the Turushka soldiery”. They blocked up the door in front of the Mahābodhi image with bricks and plastered it. Near it they placed another image as a substitute. They also plastered the outside door (of the temple). On its surface they drew the image of Maheśvara in order to protect it from non-Buddhists. The monks said, “We five do not dare to remain here and shall have to flee.”²¹³

The monks decided to remain for the night, but “[h]ad the Turushkas come, they would not have known it”. What requires

²⁰⁹ *Tāranātha*: 125B-126A (p. 320).

²¹⁰ I think that Prakash (1965: 211) was wrong in identifying the *yogīs* with the followers of Gorakhnāth and in considering them as connivers in the sack of the Buddhist establishments. Not on this evidence.

²¹¹ *Dharmasvāmin*: III (p. 57).

²¹² *Ibid.*: X (p. 91).

²¹³ *Ibid.*: V (p. 64).

an explanation in Dharmasvāmin's account is that the monks, for all their fear of Muslim attacks, felt safer camouflaging the Buddhist temple as a temple of Śiva. Why did they? The only plausible explanation is that by so doing they hoped to be spared in the event of a Turuṣka assault. The strategy of the *tīrthikas*, reversing the early alliance system, had been successful: their temples were now spared and the Turuṣkas were encouraged to attack the establishments of the Buddhists, arguably indicated as an immoral, treacherous lot.

Another example of the Indian contradictions and of the treacherous schemes that were being planned is the inconclusive attack, recorded by Dharmasvāmin, that the Muslims made against what remained of Nālandā from their newly built outpost of Odantapurī/Bihar Sharif. There was no comprehensible reason for the Muslims to organise an attack, since no commandant of a fortress could afford the luxury of engaging three hundred men to attack what was already a marginal religious centre. In any case, the commander would have left his men free to sack the monastery to pay them back with the loot. Yet, Dharmasvāmin reports that when "suddenly some three hundred Turushka soldiers appeared, armed and ready for battle", the monks hid themselves, and the soldiers went back, keeping prisoner only two lay supporters of the Abbot "for several days".²¹⁴ The residents of the monastery had been informed that the Turuṣkas would soon come to kill them. The Muslim commander of Bihar Sharif had summoned a lay relative of the Abbot, Jayadeva, and had detained him and other members of his family, but Jayadeva succeeded in sending the following message to the monastery:

The Brāhmaṇa lay-supporter wishes to tell the Guru and disciples, that he had been detained by the officer who said that he, (Jayadeva),

²¹⁴ Ibid.: X (p. 94).

had honoured numerous monks attending on the Guru. Now they shall surely kill the Guru and his disciples. Flee!²¹⁵

The most likely explanation of this apparently strange story is that the commander of Bihar Sharif, though encouraged (by whom is an easy guess) to assault the residents of Nālandā, gave the game away so that the Buddhists could save themselves. He knew Jayadeva to be a friend of the monks, as his words prove, and let him free to warn them. Moreover, when the soldiers arrived in the monastic town, they did not make any real search and went back.

Moving down from Nepal to the plains and returning home, Dharmasvāmin passed through Tirhut (Tīrabhukti) and its capital Simraongarh (near Birganj in the central Nepalese Tarai). As underlined by A.S. Altekar, the kingdom of Mithilā, ruled at the time by the young King Rāmasiṃha of the Karṇāṭa house, kept its independence thanks to the alliance that his father, Narasiṃha, had made with Sulṭān Ghiyāth al-Dīn 'Iwaz, to whom he paid tribute. Narasiṃha helped the Sultan to capture the whole of South Bihar, the heart of Buddhist India. It was not by chance that Muḥammad Bakhtyār-i Khaljī in his expedition to Bengal had taken the southern route, submitting parts of Purnea and sparing the kingdom of Mithilā.²¹⁶

In this region, doctrinal controversies had continued to take place at the highest level. Nyāya commentators such as Vācaspati Miśra (ninth century) and Udayana (the tenth-century author of the *Ātmatattvaviveka*, a thorough confutation of Buddhist doctrines) still felt the urge to carry out a critique of Buddhist positions.²¹⁷ Nor could the virtual extinction

²¹⁵ Ibid.: X (p. 93).

²¹⁶ A.S. Altekar's introduction to *Dharmasvāmin*: xiv. Narasiṃhadeva used to go to Kanauj with his uncle Malladeva and fought for Ghiyāth al-Dīn after the death of Jayacandra (Chaudhary 1970: 238).

²¹⁷ On these two philosophers see Vidyabhusana (1920: 133–47) and D. Bhattacharya (1987: 1–11 and passim and 143 ff., respectively). Mention has already been made of Udayana in Chapter IV.

of Buddhism in the early thirteenth century shake off the traditional hatred of the Maithili scholars for the apostates, and the brāhmaṇas “treated the Buddhists, and not the Muslims, as their worst enemies” as late as the fourteenth century.²¹⁸ Jyotirīśvara Kaviśekharācārya, the learned minister of King Harisimhadeva (AD 1279-1325),²¹⁹ denounced the Buddhists as “degraded and dangerous” in his *Varṇaratnākara*, and applauded Udayana’s stand against them as “pleasant and commendable”.²²⁰ Mithilā’s “national” poet Vidyāpati, in the second tale of his *Puruṣaparīkṣā*, accounts for the alliance between ‘Ala al-Dīn Khaljī (AD 1296-1316) and Sakrasimha/Śaktisimha.²²¹ One of Vidyāpati’s early poems is dedicated to Sulṭān Ghiyāth al-Dīn A‘zam of Bengal, who extended patronage to him,²²² and this most famous among Maithili intellectuals considered the Sharqī ruler of Jaunpur Ibrāhīm Shāh (AD 1402-40), to whom he paid a visit, second only to God, and his capital a second Amarāvātī or Indrapurī. He persuaded him to organise a military expedition to put an end to the chaotic conditions still prevailing in Mithilā.²²³

Upendra Thakur mentions an obscure episode that is worth recording, since it is evidence of the radical enmity that the *tīrthikas* nourished against the Saugatas. After the

²¹⁸ Thakur (1964: 125).

²¹⁹ On the death year of Harisimhadeva, see Petech (1984: 115–16).

²²⁰ Cf. *ibid.* Thakur quotes a passage (p. 39) from the *Varṇaratnākara*, ed. S.K. Chatterji & B. Misra (Bibliotheca Indica 262), The Asiatic Society, Calcutta 1940.

²²¹ This king, who succeeded Ramasimha II on the throne of Mithilā, helped ‘Alā-al-dīn in the momentous conquest of Ranthambor in Rajasthan, which fell in 1301 (Chaudhary (1970: 45; 243–45). Chaudhary’s chronology of the Kaṇṇāta kings has been corrected by Petech (1984: 207–12). Vidyāpati (c. 1352-1448) is the well-known poet and writer who gave a substantial contribution to the development of the north-eastern Indian languages. He wrote the *Puruṣaparīkṣā* under the orders of King Śivasimha, mentioned above in the text. Chaudhary (1970: 230 ff.) has clarified the importance of this work as a source of history.

²²² CHB, II/1: 377.

²²³ Chaudhary (1970: 71; 1976: 51).

death of Śivasimha (the most famous king of the Oinavāra family that ruled over Mithilā in the first half of the fifteenth century), a local ruler of northern Mithilā, Purāditya of Raj Banauli, massacred the Buddhists and their patron, King Arjuna of Saptari,²²⁴ a region now in the eastern Nepalese Tarai.²²⁵ Despite the deluge of “national” (*lege* “Brahmanical”) literature stating the opposite, the relationships between the Muslim rulers and the territories under Brahmanical rule of post-conquest India were often good.²²⁶ Only later on did conditions change.

THE SIMHALA MONKS

The thirteenth-century dynasty of rulers with names ending in *-sena* holding power in Gayā may not be related to the Sena dynasty. They can perhaps be identified, allowing for some discrepancies from Tāranātha’s account, with the representatives of the Chinda family, known to have ruled locally as early as the tenth or eleventh century. The territory over which they ruled was known as Pīṭhī, from Vajrāsana Pīthā, namely Bodhgayā.²²⁷ That they acknowledged the suzerainty of the Muslims²²⁸ is more than a hypothesis: one of the Chinda rulers, Buddhasena, known to Tāranātha, was the ruling *rājā*

²²⁴ Thakur (1964: 125–26). Thakur mentions the episode also in the first edition (1956) of his *History of Mithila* on p. 374, but has expunged it in the second revised edition of 1988, in keeping with his drawing near to nationalist, if not fundamentalist, positions. On Śivasimha, cf. Thakur (1988: 247 ff.); Chaudhary (1970: 72 ff.).

²²⁵ Cf. Chaudhary (1970: 75–76).

²²⁶ As recognised by some authors, though not with the necessary readiness to grasp the political importance of some of the information at our disposal; see e.g. K.L. Srivastava (1980: 136 ff.).

²²⁷ On the Senas of Pīṭhī, see Ray (1931-36, I: 383); R.C. Majumdar (1943: 259–61); CHB: 1/2: 275.

²²⁸ Ray (1931-36, I: 383).

at the time of Dharmasvāmin's journey.²²⁹ His son Jayasena is known for having granted a village to the Siṃhala monk Maṅgalasvāmin for the maintenance of the Vajrāsana and his attached residence in AD 1283.²³⁰ At that time Maṅgalasvāmin was thus the abbot in-charge of the holy place.

The Siṃhala monks had been associated with the Vajrāsana for a long time: in the *Da Tang Xiyu qiu fa gao seng zhuan*, Yijing maintains that the Vajrāsana and the Mahābodhi temple “had been erected by the king of Ceylon”, and that “[i]n olden days the monks coming from Ceylon always remained in this Temple”:²³¹ the reader probably remembers the story that associates Bodhgayā with Laṅkā as early as the time of Samudragupta (Chapter III). The monastery had probably grown as a centre of Theravāda learning since the sojourn at the Vajrāsana of Buddhaghōṣa and Dharmapāla in the fifth century and at the time of Mahānāman.²³² The *saṃghārāma* of Laṅkā was an important one, rising just to the west of the Mahābodhi Temple,²³³ and from Xuanzang's description we know as it looked like in the first half of the seventh century.²³⁴

The question of the role played in the thirteenth century by the Siṃhala monks in the very centre of Buddhist spiritual power and of their relationship with the Sena rulers and other Indian kings is difficult to answer. In AD 1150-51, the *bhaṭṭa*

²²⁹ *Dharmasvāmin*: V (pp. 64–65); X (p. 90).

²³⁰ *IA* 48 (1919, N.G. Majumdar): 43–48. Some of the questions raised by the inscription have been discussed by Majumdar (1943: 259–60) and H.N. Ansari in *CHB*, II/ 1: 79–80, among others. The relationship between “the Sena kings” and the *rājā(s)* of Gayā remains unclear; a certain Vanarāja held power in Gayā in 1268 (*ibid.* 78, and esp. n. 131, pp. 101–102).

²³¹ *Eminent Monks* b: 51.

²³² Tourmier (2014) has shown that Mahānāman positions himself as the heir of a lineage devoted to the transmission of the teachings received from Mahākāśyapa. On the complicate question of this and the other Dharmapālas, see Cousins (1972).

²³³ Cunningham (1892: 42 ff. and pl. 20); Barua (1931-34, II: 32 ff.).

²³⁴ *Xiyuji* a: VIII (vol. 2: 133).

Dāmodara had erected a shrine with an image of the Buddha with the assent of Aśokacalla, *rājā* of the Khasa country in the Sapādalakṣa Hills in Punjab. Provisions were made for the offerings, entrusted to the members of the Siṃhala monks' assembly.²³⁵ As late as AD 1286, the Tibetan monk Grub thob O rgyan was in Bodhgayā, where he repaired the northern side of the temple, bestowing all the donations he received upon the Mahābodhi. At the time, there were five hundred *yogīs* with him, and during the work he remained with them to the north of the temple. The other three sides of the temple were repaired by three other persons, one of whom acted on behalf of the king of Laṅkā.²³⁶ One of the last Theravādin monks who taught at Bodhgayā seems to have been the Laṅkān Ānandaśrī towards the end of the thirteenth century, before he went to Tibet, where he translated Pāli texts into Tibetan.²³⁷ The learning centre of the Siṃhalas did not favour the Buddhist masters with a different doctrinal orientation, even though a Tibetan *lo tsa ba*, Sangs-rgyas grags, had succeeded in holding the Vajrāsana throne.²³⁸ What is striking in all this is the virtual disappearance from the scene of the *Indian* Buddhists.

²³⁵ The inscription recording these events was first made known by Cunningham (1892: 78–79), and then re-edited by V.V. Vinavinoda (*EI* 12, 1913-14: 27–30, which includes the inscription of Aśokacalla's brother).

²³⁶ *Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga 'ston*, II: p. 915, 14. The monk is reported to have stayed three years in Bodhgayā, to have gone back to Tibet and have returned to Bodhgayā; the episode is mentioned in relation to his second sojourn. I thank Christoph Cüppers for providing me with the translation of this passage.

²³⁷ On Ānandaśrī as translator, see Skilling (1993: 86 ff.).

²³⁸ Sangs rgyas grags "was a [lineage-] holder of all *tantra* divisions. Since he had the highest realisation, his insight was even higher as that of [his teacher] Abhaya. He became the abbot of Bodhgayā and Nāleṅdra and took great care there of students from Tibet. He himself translated the great commentary to the *Kālacakra* and gave instructions into it. In short, he was a Tibetan who occupied the Dharma throne of Bodhgayā and his deeds for liberation are unconceivable [by us]." (Sangpo Khetun 1973-90, IV: 280; thanks are due to Christoph Cüppers for providing me with the translation from the Tibetan). We know that he was one of the translators of the *Kālacakra* from the *Blue Annals* (X.39b-40a, vol. 2, p. 837).

Tāranātha maintains that at the time of the Sena kings, “[t]he Māhāyanīs did not have any special importance in Vajrāsana, though some of the *yogi-s* and Māhāyanīs continued to preach there”,²³⁹ and with regard to the dominance exercised by the Siṃhalas, he reports on an episode that he attributes to the time of Dharmapāla, but which is arguably later:

In a temple of Vajrāsana there was then a large silver-image of Heruka and many treatises on Tantra. Some of the Śrāvaka Sendhava-s of Siṅga island and other places said that these were composed by Māra. So they burnt these and smashed the image into pieces and used the pieces as ordinary money.²⁴⁰

At the time of Dharmasvāmin’s visit, the hostility towards the followers of both the Mahāyāna and the Vajrayāna was palpable:

When the Guru Dharmasvāmin visited the Vajrāsana-Saṅgha-Vihāra carrying an Indian manuscript of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-Prajñāpāramitā*, the keeper, a Śrāvaka, enquired, “What book is it?” The Dharmasvāmin answered that it was the *Prajñāpāramitā*. The Śrāvaka said, “You seem to be a good monk, but this carrying on your back of a Mahāyāna book is not good. Throw it into the river!” He had to hide it.²⁴¹

Bodhgayā seems to have been appropriated by the Siṃhala monks. Inside the three great gates giving access to the Mahābodhi Temple and the Vajrāsana, only the sacristans could sleep. The point is that there were “three hundred sacristans native of Ceylon, who belong[ed] to the Śrāvaka school; others

²³⁹ *Tāranātha*: 125A (pp. 348-49).

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*: 109A (p. 279).

²⁴¹ *Dharmasvāmin*: V (pp. 73-74). The Tibetan monk takes revenge for this behaviour reporting the story of a Śrāvaka teacher who, being carried away by a river, resorted to Tārā, the bodhisattva invoked by the Mahāyānists to save people: duly invoked, Tārā appeared and saved him (*ibid.*: 75).

(schools) ha[d] no such right".²⁴² The influence gained by the *śrāvakas* in the course of time had certainly its good reasons, but the exclusion of Indian Buddhists from the control of the Vajrāsana is surprising, and we cannot explain it only in terms of inter-Buddhist rivalry. Foreign monks could hardly get the better of their Indian doctrinal opponents without enjoying strong political support. The more reasonable explanation is that, once the site was cleansed of the Indian opponents of orthodox rule, the Siṃhala monks were granted the privilege of being the only authorised keepers of the Vajrāsana. They had no following in India and were not a threat at the social level. They were probably also under the menace of being sent back to their island. Who could not be intimidated or stopped by the Sinhalese monks and their protectors were the Sivaites: in the fourteenth century they would remain the masters of the field.

THE LAST BUDDHISTS OF ORISSA AND BENGAL

Images of Heruka, rare though they are, appear in the tenth-eleventh century at Sarnath, Nālandā and in Bengal,²⁴³ and those of Trailokyavijaya trampling on Śiva and Pārvatī, of Aparājitā and Parṇaśavarī defeating Gaṇeśa, as well as that of Saṃvara are documented from the same period onwards. Parṇaśavarī, an emanation of Amoghasiddhi and a healing goddess, appears in Bengal as having been attacked by Gaṇeśa, now prostrated at the bottom of the stela with a sword and a shield.²⁴⁴ We

²⁴² Ibid.: 73.

²⁴³ For Sarnath and Nālandā, see Saraswati (1977: LVIX–LX; figs. 171, 172); for Bengal, see Bhattasali (1929: 35–37; pl. XII). At Sarnath another image of Heruka, datable to the twelfth century, is notable because it is unfinished — a menace defused in time and a good indicator of the opposing forces acting on the field. See this image at DSAL-IIAS, Sarnath, Accession no. 5809.

²⁴⁴ On this goddess see especially Bhattasali (1929: 58–61); for her healing powers, see also M. Shaw (2006: 188–202).

are not accustomed to associate Gaṇeśa with violence, but the reader will remember his presence in the *yajñasālā* of Ellora (Fig. 9): the Buddhists knew better. Parṇasavarī was associated with the notorious Śabara tribals, which confirms the way by which the Buddhists proselytised. The lineage of the Candra kings, mentioned in the previous chapter, exemplifies, in easternmost India, the line of resistance against Brahmanical dominance. Connections with a local god can be assumed for Saṃvara,²⁴⁵ whom a stela from thirteenth-century Orissa shows trampling on Śiva and Cāmuṇḍā, thus disclosing the Goddess's responsibility in the elimination of the Buddhists.²⁴⁶ Cāmuṇḍā holds a *kartrī* in her right hand, the very instrument that she holds in an Orissa stela mentioned in Chapter V and by Bhairava in the *garbhagr̥ha* of the Vaitāl Deul in Bhubaneswar (Fig. 6) — hardly a coincidence. Cāmuṇḍā appears, significantly, as a member of Māra's army.²⁴⁷ Of great interest are the ferocious, naked *devīs* surrounding Heruka/Hevajra in the *pañcadāka* and other *maṇḍalas* described in the *Nispaññayogāvalī* and in the *Sādhanamālā*, notably so the outcastes Dombī and Cāṇḍālī. The latter wears a garland and a crown of skulls and dances on the prostrated Nirṛti,²⁴⁸

²⁴⁵ Davidson (2002: 214).

²⁴⁶ See a similar, much earlier image from Ratnagiri published in D. Mitra (1981-83, II: 429-30; pl. CCCXXVIII A) and reproduced by Davidson (2002: 215, fig. 13).

²⁴⁷ The large fragment of a mid-twelfth century stela from Lakhi Sarai in Bangladesh depicting the awakening of the Buddha, vividly shows Cāmuṇḍā and Brahmā as members of Māra's army; Brahmā, as one of the "four Māras", dominates the scene, running angrily away (Bautze-Picron 1996: 125-27, figs. 18-22).

²⁴⁸ The reader is referred to B. Bhattacharyya (1958: esp. 309 ff.), to whom the publication of both the *Nispaññayogāvalī* and the *Sādhanamālā* in the Gaekwad Oriental Series are due. Cf. also de Mallmann (1975: 136-37 for Cāṇḍālī; 159-60 for Dombī). The spectacular group of sculptures photographed by Alexander von Stael-Holstein in winter 1926-27 in the Baoxianglu temple in the garden of the Cining Palace in the Forbidden City in Beijing and published by Clark (1937) best exemplify the *maṇḍalas* and *sādhanas* described in the texts. The circle of Gaurī is also mentioned in the *Hevajra Tantra* (I.viii.14), where Cāṇḍālī is given an important role (ibid.: I.i.31 and Snellgrove's comment in the Introduction, pp. 36-37).

the daughter (or consort) of Adharma abusively inhabiting the *aśvattha* tree — which reminds us of the Cāmuṇḍā of Fig. 13.

The explosion of these new iconographies in north-eastern India in such late a period requires an explanation. Texts could be written and rituals performed thanks to the sole intellectual and organisational skill of the learned Buddhists, but patronage and resources were needed to paint, sculpt or fuse images and build shrines. We must assume that in eastern India the Buddhist laymen were convinced that there were still good chances for the religion of Dharma to survive and prosper and for financial investment to be repaid. This conviction, which we may consider misguided, depended on their judgment of the political events of the moment. It would seem that, besides counting on the support of new followers, the men of religion and the lay elite considered the Muslim attacks on Brahmanical power an opportunity for creating or widening the Buddhist political-religious space.

The control of western Bengal opened the road to Orissa to the Muslims. Rājarāja III of the Eastern Gaṅga dynasty (AD 1198-1211/12) was paralysed by the first inroads of the Turuṣkas into Jājnagar/Jajpur in Utkala, prized for its elephants. Military reaction started with his son Anaṅgabhīma III (AD 1211/12-38), when the kingdom was already paying tribute to Ghyāth al-Dīn ‘Iwaz.²⁴⁹ Muslim power was not to be firmly established in Orissa until as late as 1568, when it was annexed by the Karrānī Sultans of Bengal.²⁵⁰ Orissa was, once again, and for different reasons, on the fault line, but the final eradication of the Buddhist communities was the exclusive concern of the native ruling elite.

²⁴⁹ Neither R.D. Banerji (1930-31: 255–56; 258 ff.) nor Rajaguru (1968-72, I: 47 ff.) give any credit to this statement of the *Ṭabaḳāt-i-Nāṣirī*: XX.viii (vol. 1, pp. 587–88), but they are probably wrong. On Anaṅgabhīma III, see Kulke (1993: 17–32).

²⁵⁰ M.M. Ali (1406 H/1985, I A: 244–46); Eaton (1993: 140–41).

There are both literary and archaeological sources documenting the blows struck upon Buddhism, although their fragmentary and debatable nature often makes the sequence of the events and their chronology uncertain. Much evidence comes from the Prachi Valley, the alluvial plain south-east of Bhubaneswar, where Buddhism had exercised an overwhelming influence during the Bhaumakara rule.²⁵¹ The non-systematic way with which the evidence has been collected makes its classification and interpretation tentative, and much work would be needed to render it unquestionable.²⁵² It seems correct, however, to affirm that in the Prachi Valley the majority of the Buddhist buildings were either abandoned or destroyed, and that the number of Brahmanical shrines springing up almost everywhere were built on or near them. As early as the 1950s, N.K. Sahu noticed that “most of the Buddhist images in this region have been badly damaged and mutilated”.²⁵³ Destruction and appropriation took place under the rule of both the Somavaṃśīs and Eastern Gaṅgas. Later events, also testified by the literary evidence, are particularly relevant because they bear on the latest Vajrayāna phase of Indian Buddhism.

Some of the best evidence comes from the architectural peculiarities of the Pūrṇeśvara stone temple of Bhillideuli, a village near Kakatpur in the valley of the Kadua, a tributary of the Prachi river. It was built in the early twelfth century²⁵⁴ on a Buddhist brick *vihāra*, a portion of which was spared to serve as

²⁵¹ P.K. Ray (1975: 52); Tripathy (1988: 53).

²⁵² The evidence is found in Tripathy (1988). The flaws of the work and its lack of academic paraphernalia should not prevent scholars from considering it a useful source of information in certain cases. The Prachi Valley and the adjoining areas have been the object of a thorough survey by Thomas E. Donaldson aimed at retrieving the architectural and iconographical evidence (see Donaldson 1985, esp. I: 371 ff. 438 ff.; II: 682 ff.; 2001: 79 ff.; 2002: esp. I, 138 ff., 163 f.).

²⁵³ Sahu (1958: 215).

²⁵⁴ Donaldson (1985, I: 371).

a temple *maṇḍapa*. The two small temples of Kedāreśvara and Kanteśvara were also constructed making use of the Buddhist structures.²⁵⁵ In the same locality, a *liṅga* appears to have been shaped by chiselling out a *stūpa*,²⁵⁶ according to a practice that we have seen well documented in Gayā and Nepal. At Pitapara, near Madhava in Puri district, the Aṅgeśvara Temple seems equally to have been built on Buddhist remains, as is shown by a road section yielding bricks and a Buddhist image.²⁵⁷ The village is supposedly named after the Indian *siddha* who first obtained the Kālacakra in Śambhala,²⁵⁸ and the twelfth-century Brahmanical temple would thus have replaced a Vajrayāna shrine. A similar case is that of the Someśvara Temple in the Sauma or Dahikhia village near Kakatpur,²⁵⁹ where an image identified as Tārodbhava Kurukullā is worshipped as the Goddess Lalitā. In the *Prācī Māhātmya*,²⁶⁰ the place is associated with the victory of Viṣṇu, armed with the *sudarśana cakra* given to him by Someśvara, over the powerful *daitya* Namuci who threatened the existence of the *devas*.²⁶¹ This is an interesting case of the great Purāṇic allegories being adapted to a local reality. Evidence of a late Buddhist presence comes from Belpada. The village god is a Buddhist male deity trampling on Śiva who lies recumbent on the ground with his

²⁵⁵ Tripathy (1988: 297, 300). The identification of these structures as those pertaining to the Kuruma monastery, on which see D. Mitra (1978: 21, n. 2), is not correct. Cf. Donaldson (2001: 83).

²⁵⁶ Tripathy (1988: 150).

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*: 323-24. This temple has been described by Donaldson (1985, 11: 682-83).

²⁵⁸ Tripathy (1988: 323). Tāranātha knows him as Piṭo *ācārya* (*Tāranātha*: 113B, p. 289), the *Blue Annals* (X. 4b; vol. 2, p. 761) as Piṇḍopa. For more details, see the translator's note in *Tāranātha*, p. 289.

²⁵⁹ Donaldson (1985, I: 438-39) describes the images, datable to the late eleventh and twelfth century, now part of the modern brick structure.

²⁶⁰ On the Oriya and Sanskrit versions of this *Māhātmya*, see Tripathy (1988: 259 ff.).

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*: 402-403. The literary references to the *sudarśana cakra* can be found in W.E. Begley (1973: 7 ff., 23 ff.). Donaldson (2002: 696) dates the Someśvara Temple to the eleventh century.

head raised by his left hand.²⁶² The Dakṣiṇeśvara Temple at Bagalpur, rising on the ruins of a Buddhist temple, as shown by the numerous Buddhist images preserved in its precincts, may not have been built on the remains of a Bhaumakara sanctuary, but on a later establishment.²⁶³ Unfortunately, we do not have the plans of these buildings, and cannot know whether they accommodated celibate or householder monks.

The large number of Buddhist images preserved by the Agikhia Maṭha at the Agni Tīrtha in the Sohagpur village, greatly praised in the *Prācī Māhātmya*, show the former affiliation of this building with Buddhism. An accidental digging brought to light a stūpa on which a shrine of Sudarśana was erected. This and other *maṭhas*, such as the Kuṇḍhei Maṭha near Bajapur and the Taila Matha near Madhava, where Buddhist images are also observable, belong to the Rāmānuja *sampradāya* and were built on former Buddhist buildings.²⁶⁴

A similar situation, also documented by the written sources, is observable also elsewhere in the vicinity of Bhubaneswar, as for instance in the region of low hills crossed by the Daya river and honeycombed with Buddhist caves. The best-known site in the area is Dhauli, with the famous Aśoka inscription and the unfinished rock-cut image of an elephant, symbolising the Buddha.²⁶⁵ Buddhist remains are numerous at Aragarh/Airagarh, and include a two-storeyed, flat-roofed

²⁶² Tripathy (1988: 156). That the Buddhist deity raises his right hand in the attitude of administering a slap is rather doubtful.

²⁶³ Ibid.: 249. Tripathy considers the numerous Buddhist images observable at the site as belonging to the Bhaumakara period, but Donaldson (2001: 85) assigns the image of a crowned Buddha in the temple compound to the tenth century.

²⁶⁴ Tripathy (1988: 187–88). Further evidence comes from Kopari in Balasore district, whose ruins were seen in 1871 by John Beames: “These ruins exhibit the traces of an ancient Buddhist temple, and *vihāra* or monastery [...]. The Buddhist temple appears to have been destroyed and its materials used to erect a Brahmanical temple dedicated to Shiva [...]. Later than these supervened the present Vishnu worship, now the prevailing type of Hinduism in Orissa [...]”; see Beames (1871: 248). Cf. Pani (1988: 252).

²⁶⁵ See Mohapatra (1986, I: 99–102) for the other remains at the site.

temple on the hill top and late Vajrayāna images.²⁶⁶ As in the Prachi Valley, a panorama of mutilated images is observable. A story from the *Mādalāpāñji*, a chronicle of the temple of Puri with a complex textual history,²⁶⁷ resorts to the usual repertory as far as the dynamic of the confrontation between the *tīrthikas* and the Buddhists are concerned, but is credibly set in this area. The episode took place at the time of the Gaṅga king Rājarāja II (AD 1171-94), known to the *Mādalāpāñji* as Madana Mahādeva:

Buddhist monks were residing in eightyfour caves, excavated by them on the Aragada and Dhauli hills in Pāraṅga *daṇḍpāṭa*. They claimed omniscience. One day the queens of the king (also) said that they were omniscient. Hearing this, the king said that Brahmins were superior to the Buddhists and Brahmins should be put to a test in order to ascertain who were omniscient and whose words were true.²⁶⁸

The snake-in-the-pot ordeal was performed by order of the king, and the *tīrthikas* turned out to be the winners. According to a version of the story, “[...] the king attempted to smash the heads of the Buddhists to death. But at this moment the Buddhists cursed the king and (then) entered the forest after leaving the caves”.²⁶⁹ According to another recension, “this king built [the] Alāranātha. He killed the Buddhists. This king was engaged in the construction of the *Baḍa Deaula*”.²⁷⁰

We know from Tāranātha that doctrinal debates between *tīrthikas* and Buddhists were still common at a late period,²⁷¹

²⁶⁶ Ibid. I: 30–32; Panda (2007: 21–22).

²⁶⁷ Kulke (1993: 136–58, 159–91).

²⁶⁸ *Mādalāpāñji*: 34 (first *pāñji*).

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.: 35 (third *pāñji*). The *Baḍa Deaula* is the temple of Jagannāth in Puri; on the Alāranātha temple at Brahmagiri, south-east of Puri, see Mohapatra (1986, I: 84–85).

²⁷¹ Above in this chapter, and *Tāranātha*: 116B (p. 287), 118B (p. 301), 121A (p. 307); etc.

but there are aspects that are still in an area of shade. In the *mukhaśālā* of the Lakṣmī Temple within the Puruṣottama-Jagannātha Temple compound in Puri, datable to the twelfth century like the main shrine, there is a painting showing how a Visnuite theologian converts a Buddhist monk into Visnuism at the point of his dagger.²⁷² It is difficult to establish which event is alluded to, and the time when it took place,²⁷³ but the forced conversion is probably connected to the struggle for power that led to the construction of the temple of Puri on the ruins of Buddhism, and perhaps on those of an actual Buddhist temple.²⁷⁴ A forced conversion is attributed to Caitanya Mahāprabhu (AD 1486-1534), whose preaching was to shape the religious world of eastern India well into modern times. Several works were devoted to the narration of his life and deeds. The most famous is the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, composed by Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmi (AD 1528-1615/20),²⁷⁵ where the following story is reported:

On hearing of His scholarship the skeptics came to Him, boastfully bringing their pupils with them. In a lonely forest a very learned Buddhist professor held forth dogmatically on the nine doctrines of his church before the Master. Though the Buddhists are unfit to be talked to or even to be looked at, yet the Master argued with him to lower his pride. The very Buddhist philosophy of nine tenets, though rich in logical reasoning, was torn to pieces by the Master's vigorous logic. The great philosophers were all vanquished; the

²⁷² Tripathy (1988: 188).

²⁷³ Tripathy puts the painting in relation to the presence at Puri in the twelfth century of the four great Vishnuite saints Rāmānuja, Viṣṇusvāmi, Nimbārka and Mādhavācārya (ibid.). The dates of Rāmānuja (c. 1077-1147) would fit the picture, as would the sojourn in Puri of Viṣṇusvāmi in the later decades of the twelfth century, when he established a *maṭha* (Rath 1987: 97-98). Mādhavācārya lived much later, however, and the chronology of Nimbārka is uncertain.

²⁷⁴ The question was raised by several authors in the nineteenth century (see e.g. R. Mitra 1875-80, II: 176 ff.), and has been entirely dropped by modern researchers. It would certainly deserve to be discussed again.

²⁷⁵ I follow Dimock and Stewart in their introduction to *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* a: 26-32.

audience tittered; the Buddhists felt shame and alarm. Knowing that the master was a Vaishnav, the Buddhists retired and hatched a wicked plot. They placed before the Master a plate of unclean rice, describing it as Vishnu *prasād*. But just then a huge bird swooped down and carried off the plate in its beak! The rice falling on the bodies of the Buddhists was [openly] rendered impure; the plate fell down slanting on the Buddhist professor's head, cutting it open, and throwing him down in a fit. His disciples lifted up their voices in lamentation, and sought the Master's feet imploring Him, "Thou art God incarnate! O forgive us! Out of Thy grace revive our teacher." The Master replied, "Cry out, all of you, Krishna's name. Pour the word loudly into your teacher's ears, and he will recover." They did it, the professor rose up and began to chant *Hari! Hari!* He did reverence to the Master saluting Him as Krishna, to the wonder of all. After this playful act the son of Shachi vanished; none could see him.²⁷⁶

Not differently from the story of Campantar at Būta-mānkalam mentioned in Chapter IV, the conversion takes place as a consequence of an act of intimidation, in this case a wounding. The place, the time, and the religious convictions of the converter are different, but the modes of forced conversions remain the same. We do not know where the episode attributed to the Vishnuite saint took place. Caitanya went to preach in South India, where he is reported to have made many converts among the Buddhists and the Jains. True though it is that Buddhist communities survived in Tamil Nadu,²⁷⁷ it is more probable that the episode reflects some event that took place at the time of the Gajapati king Pratāparudra (c. AD 1497-1540).

²⁷⁶ *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* b: II. 9. 47-63 (p. 106); the translator, Jadunath Sarkar, follows the Gaudīya Maṭha edition (Calcutta 1926-27). The "skeptics" of the text are the *pāṣaṇḍīs*. I make use of Sarkar's translation because of the caveats at quoting long passages from the Harvard translation; the reader will find the passage in *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* a: Madhya Lilā, 9.40-57 (pp. 464-65).

²⁷⁷ Nagapattinam, as already seen (Chapter IV, n. 150), survived as a Buddhist site until the fifteenth century and beyond (cf. Ramachandran 1954: 18-19).

The attacks against the Buddhists carried out by the Sivaites through the Somavaṃśī rulers and by the Vishnuites through the Gaṅga kings were largely effective. Yet in Orissa, if we have to judge from the length of the conflict, the opposition of the Vajrayānists was almost as effective. Miserable as it may look, the reconstruction of the main stūpa of Ratnagiri — one of the largest monasteries in the forest hills of the Cuttack district — took place long after the thirteenth century,²⁷⁸ and some Buddhist groups survived, especially in Utkala, until they succumbed to the new Vishnuite wave roused exactly by Caitanya and the other reformers of the sixteenth century. In 1510, Caitanya, whose family was original from Jajpur, set out for Puri, where he was to reside for a very long time.²⁷⁹ He greatly influenced Pratāparudra, to whose reign the facts narrated in the *Caitanya Bhāgavata* of Īśvara Dāsa²⁸⁰ are likely, once again, to refer. This Bengali work, written towards the end of the sixteenth century, reports that out of seven hundred Buddhist monks, six hundred and sixteen were put to death by a “Kēśarī king”.²⁸¹ The remainder asked for protection from Padmāvati, whom we know to have been, in the reality, Pratāparudra’s queen. The king sided with the brāhmaṇas, and the usual trial of the snake in the jar took place. “Thirty two of the Buddhists were clubbed to death and the surviving few fled to Bānki and took shelter in the caves of the Mahāparvata

²⁷⁸ D. Mitra (1981-83, I: 41).

²⁷⁹ See Caitanya’s life summarised by D.C. Sen (1911, I: 414 ff.); see also Dimock and Stewart in *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* a: 10 ff.

²⁸⁰ It is a Bengali work of the early seventeenth century, very important for the study of neo-Vishnuism. According to P. Mukherjee (1940: 87–89), Īśvara Dāsa “shows a wonderful capacity of gathering information, however absurd they might be”, but “there is nevertheless a basis of hard fact in his statements”. The manuscript of this work is very rare, and Bibekananda Banerji, whom I thank for having tried to find a copy, was unable to find any, either in the collection of manuscripts of the Asiatic Society or elsewhere in Kolkata.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*: 53; Mahtab (1947: 63–64).

hill.”²⁸² The leader of the Buddhist was Vīrasimha, the greatest *siddha* of his times,²⁸³ and the story, recounted in Chapter 53 of the *Caitanya Bhāgavata*, has been rendered by Prabhat Mukherjee as follows:

One day the queen Pādmavatī went to offer worship to the image [of Narasimha]. At the temple she met Vīra Siṃha. She overheard his philosophical expositions and began to weep. “Why dost thou weep”, questioned the Buddhist leader. “Hast thou mercy upon me” replied the queen, “and let me serve thee.” But the Brahmins were loath to tolerate the ascendancy of Vīra Siṃha. Forthwith they repaired to the king’s palace and reported, “There is a Buddhist Brahmin, heterodox in his conduct. The chief queen hath received religious instruction from such a person.” Hearing this, the king became angry. He reprimanded his wife for her action but Pādmavatī held her ground.²⁸⁴

Eventually Vīrasimha yielded to the spiritual power of Caitanya, acknowledging him as the embodiment of the Buddha and casting himself at the feet of the Master.²⁸⁵ Pratāparudra’s persecution against the Buddhists makes sense only assuming that there were Buddhist groups that could still stir social protest locally, although religious hatred can explain the suppression of even insignificant minorities when new-formed elites are anxious to establish their power, as was the case of the Caitanya brāhmaṇas.

Jayānanda Dāsa’s *Caitanyamaṅgala* provides evidence of the uprooting of the Buddhists (called *yavanas*) living in the Piralya village in Navadvīpa/Nabadwip, the “nine islands” on the Hooghly to the north of Kolkata where Caitanya’s

²⁸² P. Mukherjee (1940: 53); cf. also Mahtab (1947: 63–64) and Panigrahi (1981: 234). Banki is located in the Cuttack district, and there is still a thick forest to the south of it.

²⁸³ P. Mukherjee (1940: 62); Sahu (1958: 178–79).

²⁸⁴ P. Mukherjee (1940: 61).

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*: 62, with reference to *Śūnya Saṃhitā* XI.

birthplace, Minapur/Mayapur, is located. Such a piece of information probably represents only the tip of the iceberg of what happened in Bengal.²⁸⁶

Nagendranath Vasu made an interesting attempt at identifying the social identity of the sixteenth-century Buddhists of Mayurbhanj, pointing to the Bāthuris (or Bāhuris/Bāuris, or Bātulas) as the “tribals” who, in consequence of Pratāparudra’s blow, took refuge in the impregnable hilly area of the region and slowly gave up their ancient beliefs adapting themselves to the new religious reality.²⁸⁷ The images found at Similipal and Adipurgarh, where they ruled, include Prajñāpāramitā and Aśokāntā Māra, and a *Bātula Mahātāntra* has been attributed to them.²⁸⁸ They were legitimised to represent their former Buddhist kinfolk thanks to a compromise with the orthodox sanctioned by a myth based on a pun between *śaṅkha* (Viṣṇu’s weapon) and *saṃgha*. Viṣṇu killed Saṃghāsura but gave the *śaṅkha* to the elder member of the community to the detriment of those who had opposed his intervention.²⁸⁹

Although Mukundadeva (AD 1560-68), the last independent king of Orissa,²⁹⁰ seems to have supported the Buddhists who were still living in his territories,²⁹¹ the game was up. By fair means or foul, the social groups left without a voice were incorporated into the main stream of

²⁸⁶ *Piralyā grāmete vasye yatek yavane/Ucchanna karilā Navadyīper brāhmaṇe// (Caitanyamaṅgala: 14.11-12)*. Bibekananda Banerji kindly transliterated for me the text from Bengali. On the reliability of this work, see the different opinions of D.C. Sen (1911, I: 471–77) and P. Mukherjee (1940: 114–15).

²⁸⁷ Vasu (1911: cxvi ff.).

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.* cxxv, cxxxiv. Adipurgarh or Adipura corresponds to Edapura, where the queen of King Rāmapāla had a temple built for the *ācārya* Abhayākara Gupta (Sahu 1958: 170–71). Similipal (Vasu’s Simlipala/Simlipada) must be a village in the Similipal hills of Mayurbhanj district.

²⁸⁹ Vasu (1911: cxx–cxxi). This is the interpretation I give of the rather confused evidence provided by the author.

²⁹⁰ On this king, see R.D. Banerji (1930-31, I: 341 ff.); Panigrahi (1981: 182–84).

²⁹¹ *dPag bsam ljon bzang*: I.123 (Index: lxxxxv); cf. Vasu (1911: cxxi–cxxii, clxv).

Brahmanical India. In Bengal, two thousand five hundred *bhikṣus* and *bhikṣuṇīs* assembled at Khaddaha/Khardaha, now in the northern periphery of Kolkata, surrendered themselves to Vīracandra Prabhu, a disciple of Caitanya's.²⁹² The contemptuous title of *naḍā naḍau*, "the shaved couple", reserved to them, was later applied to the lower members of Vishnuite society, the so-called Sahajīyā Vaiṣṇavas,²⁹³ converted from Buddhism against their will.

The process leading to the forced merging of the Buddhists into the hegemonic neo-Visnuism of Bengal and Orissa is outside the scope of this work, which aims only at documenting how even the final dissolution of Buddhism in the sixteenth century was not a "natural" phenomenon, but a process largely conditioned by political pressure and religious violence. Haraprasad Shastri, one of those Bengali intellectuals who knew a number of texts little known or little utilised by Indologists,²⁹⁴ maintained that the brāhmaṇas were not slow to take advantage of the fact that for the Muslims all the Indians were "Hindus", making it appear "that the Buddhists did not exist"²⁹⁵ — an inescapable point for them, as we have seen several times. As had happened in Magadha, "[a]ll the intellectual followers of Buddhism were either massacred or compelled to fly away from the country".²⁹⁶ The Dharmites, or followers of the Dharma cult, were persecuted by caste Hindus and used to rejoice when the latter were

²⁹² D.C. Sen (1917: 36). Sen reports an anecdote which makes us understand how strong, a century ago, still was the perception that the end of Buddhism was a recent and painful event: "A distinguished European friend of mine once went to Khaddaha [...] to the place where these people had assembled, and referred to the spot as marking the death of Buddhism in Bengal; for here the last vestige of Buddhistic powers surrendered itself and was incorporated with Vaisnavism." (ibid.).

²⁹³ D.C. Sen (1911, I: 45).

²⁹⁴ They include the *Śūnya Purāṇa* and the *Dharmamaṅgalas*.

²⁹⁵ H. Shastri (1911: 14).

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

abused by the Muslims: these had been sent by the Lord to save the Dharmites of Bengal from the hands of the orthodox.²⁹⁷

A considerable proportion of the people who had found representation in Buddhism turned to Islam. I can make my own the words of Ambedkar quoted in Chapter I, even though I do not believe in the social thaumaturgical power of Islam. It is not by chance that in modern, undivided India, the majority of the Muslims were concentrated in those regions where the process of brahmanisation had not been completed by the time of the Muslim conquest: the West and the North-East.²⁹⁸ The recent historiographical trend according to which the Muslim conquest brought little or no change in the structure of Indian society, though partly justified by the recurrent claim that all the evils of India arise from Islam and, conversely, that Islam was an instrument of social redemption and justice, tends to project the past into the boundaries of the present-day Republic of India. The Muslim conquest remains an epoch-making event, which irreversibly transformed a relevant part of the Indian world: towns were founded or reshaped — from Peshawar to Delhi — whose very layout unmistakably associates them to the Muslim oecumene, and in the western

²⁹⁷ Das Gupta (1969: 266).

²⁹⁸ The point is well understood by Eaton (2009: 194), who, however, draws wrong conclusions maintaining that “having never been fully integrated into a Brahmin-ordered society, there was no logical way that peoples of these areas could have sought escape from an oppressive Hindu social order”. Of course, there was, since people knew very well what was going to happen to them with the establishment of *varṇāśramadharmā*. Islam was little known, but was one way out. Eaton misses the point because he entangles himself in the piddling matter of what is conversion, what is religion, what is change (here, I think, there is a methodological problem): once one has accepted some of the strongly identifying features of Islam such as circumcision, one starts representing himself as a Muslim and *being* a Muslim (Hindus, or “Hindus” if one prefers, would also consider you such). Naturally, grey areas exist, but they can be better explored resorting to the concept of subaltern culture. Subaltern classes have only partial access to the higher formulations of the systems of which they are part, hence their nebulous position at times. On the other hand, syncretism is the borrowing from another religion that the upper representatives of a given system consciously implement for political reasons; it is a typical operation from above.

part of the subcontinent the peasant population was to follow. Only in Bengal could the Vishnuites contain the phenomenon of the shift of the population towards Islam by adopting a *Realpolitik* that reversed many of the principles advocated by the Vishnuite religious elite for centuries.

In the sixteenth century, the process of assimilation, by either the Hindus or the Muslims, came to a successful end. It was up to the British, a couple of centuries later, to catch the echo of still recent events and start unearthing the relics of a deceased world. Of Indian Buddhism, otherwise, we would have said that *etiam periere ruinae*.

Appendices

APPENDIX 1

The Brahmanical Temple of Bodhgayā

After the Buddha attained Awakening under a pipal tree near Gayā, the site became a place of worship. In the course of time, a throne (the *vajrāsana*) was set under the tree and an open pavilion (the *bodhigarha* or Bodhi-tree shrine) was built around the tree and the throne. However, at a given moment, the *bodhigarha* was replaced by a tall brick temple (Fig. 16), whose construction implied the uprooting of the tree. The temple underwent many alterations, until when, in 1880, it was completely restored.¹ Despite the fact that the documentary evidence comes only from pre-1880 drawings and photographs² and from a limited number of descriptions and reports,³ doubts can be raised on the answers given until now to these questions: when was the brick temple built? Why? By whom was it rebuilt and altered?

THE *BODHIGHARA*

It is reasonable to think that Aśoka had the throne placed under the tree and a column erected (Fig. 17). A “replanted fragmentary pillar”, perhaps a fragment of the column of

¹ The temple was rebuilt on the basis of a stone model found by Cunningham during the excavation (Cunningham 1892: 25; pl. XVI).

² Published by Losty (1991).

³ Buchanan (1936, I: esp. 149 ff.); R. Mitra (1864, 1878); *ASIR* 1 (A. Cunningham): 4–12; *ASIR* 3 (id.): 79–105; Cunningham (1892).

Aśoka, is mentioned by S.P. Gupta.⁴ While excavating the strata under the western buttresses of the temple, Alexander Cunningham found a sandstone slab (V2 in Cunningham's plan),⁵ and attributed it to the time of Aśoka (see it in Fig. 18).⁶ According to Cunningham, this slab was the cover-slab of the *vajrāsana*.⁶ But where was the *vajrāsana* originally located? Cunningham found another sandstone slab in situ (1), sided by "two Perse-politan pillar bases" (P1 and P2) when he excavated the cella of the temple,⁷ it being, according to him, the base of the *vajrāsana*.⁸ This shows that the tree and the throne were exactly located where the temple was later built, causing the uprooting of the tree and the removal of the cover-slab of the *vajrāsana*. At some point between the third and the first centuries BC, an open pavilion was built around the throne and the tree. This *bodhigharā* is represented on the Prasenajit Pillar in the Bharhut railing, carved at the beginning of the first century BC.⁹

The restitution of the *bodhigarha* proposed by Cunningham¹⁰ has been criticised by several authors.¹¹ In Cunningham's opinion, Walls F1, F2, F3, discovered under the solid basement of the temple, "mark[ed] the lines of plinth of the Railing which surrounded Asoka's Temple".¹² However, these walls are different from each other. Cunningham says that F1 was found "at a distance of 3½ feet [1 m] inside the mass of the basement"¹³ of the temple, while F2 was found "at a distance of only 1 foot 2 inches [35 cm] inside the mass of

⁴ S.P. Gupta (1980: 26).

⁵ Cunningham (1892: pl. XI).

⁶ Cunningham (1892: 19).

⁷ Cunningham (1892: 4–5, pl. II).

⁸ *Ibid.*: 19.

⁹ Cunningham (1879: pl. XIII, outer face).

¹⁰ Cunningham (1892: pl. II)

¹¹ Myer (1958: 280–81); Malandra (1988: 14–16).

¹² Cunningham (1892: 5).

¹³ *Ibid.*: 7.

the present basement”.¹⁴ Moreover, while F1 and F3 are at 7,9 m from the centre of throne, F2 is located farther. For these reasons, Walls F1, F2, F3 cannot be regarded as the plinths of one and the same railing.

Other remains of architectural features pertaining to buildings more ancient than the brick temple are: eleven “Persepolitan pillar bases”, which run along the “Buddha’s walk”;¹⁵ a female figure of Kuṣāṇa type that decorates an octagonal shaft belonging, says Cunningham, to one of the pillar bases;¹⁶ many sandstone uprights and crossbars, datable to the first century BC/AD.¹⁷ These uprights and crossbars were not found in situ, but were discovered in the veranda of the Mahant’s residence, in the rubbish mounds in the vicinity of the site, or reused in a second railing set around the brick temple at a later date.¹⁸ This means that the original shrine underwent many alterations and that its architectural features were thrown away or reused to build new monuments.

The few architectural features of the *bodhigbara* that survived in situ (Cover-slab V2, Sandstone throne-base, pillar bases P1 and P2, Walls F1, F2, F3, Step S, Buddha’s walk) belong to different periods, and consequently the original plan of the shrine cannot be identified. The distance between the centre of the throne and the threshold stone (Step S) is *c.* 6 m, the sacred space of the temple being thus at least 12 m² large. Walls F1, F2, F3 and the Buddha’s walk are outside this area and are likely to be later additions. Probably, between the third century BC and the second-third century AD, the *bodhigarha*

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.: 8–10.

¹⁶ Ibidem: pl. IV. For similar sculptures dated to the Kuṣāṇa period, see Asher & Spink (1989).

¹⁷ Cunningham (1892: 11); R. Mitra (1878: 72); Myer (1958: 288); Malandra (1988: 16).

¹⁸ R. Mitra (1878: 72–73).

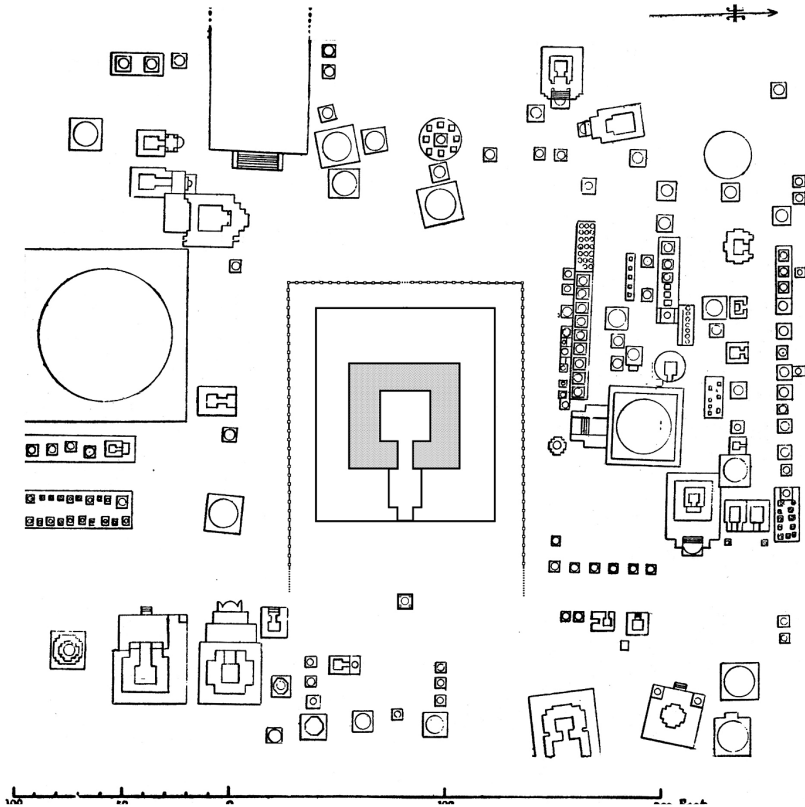
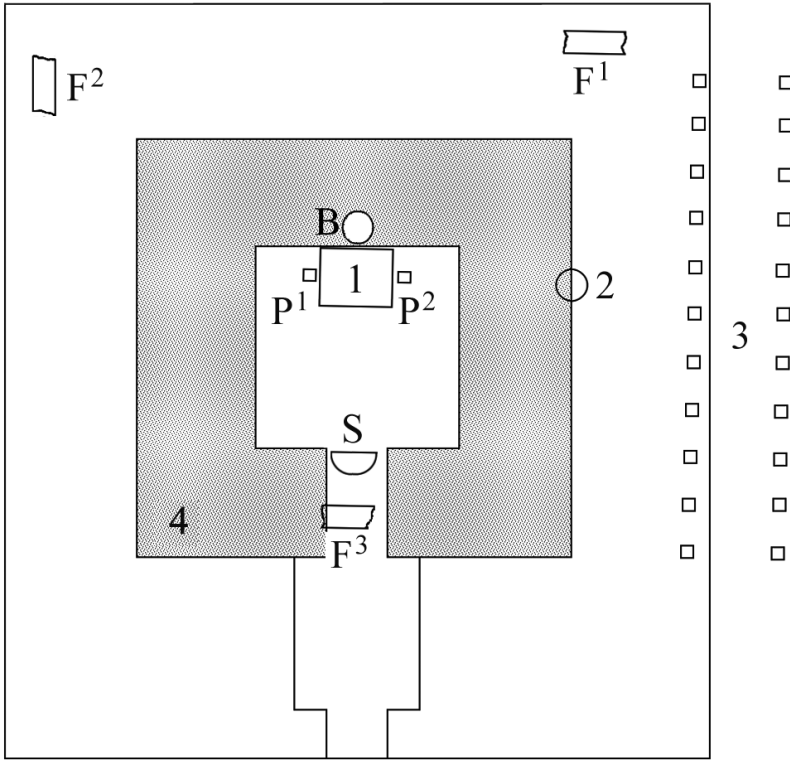


Fig. 16 - Bodhgayā. Plan.

was enlarged by means of new pillared structures without altering the original layout of the sanctuary.

RESTORATION OF THE *BODHIGARHA*

The archaeological evidence shows that the throne was restored. Cunningham says that it was plastered (the plaster contained small fragments of coral, sapphire, crystal, pearl



- | | | | |
|----|-------------|---|---------------|
| B | Bodhi Tree | 1 | Throne |
| P1 | Pillar base | 2 | Asoka Pillar |
| P2 | Pillar base | 3 | Buddha's walk |
| S | Moonstone | 4 | Temple |
| F1 | Wall | | |
| F2 | Wall | | |
| F3 | Wall | | |

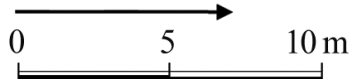


Fig. 17 - Bodhgayā. Architectural features of the *bodhighara*.

and ivory bound together with lime) and maintains that this plastered throne was associated with “a ball of stiff earth or

clay”,¹⁹ which on being broken yielded relics and “impressions in thin gold [...] of a gold coin of Huvishka”.²⁰ He dated this restoration to the Kuṣāṇa period,²¹ but the clay sealing of the Huvishka coin gives us only the *terminus post quem*: the restoration can be later than Kuṣāṇa times.

An inscription on a sandstone coping stone, only partly preserved, mentions new plaster and paint for the *vajrāsana-vṛhad-gandhakuṭi*, the great perfumed hall that enshrined the diamond throne.²² It is generally believed that the renovations alluded to in the inscription included the construction of the brick temple.²³ This interpretation implies that the coping stone belonged to the “upper beam of the stone railing around the temple”.²⁴ However, the railing around the brick temple was made by reused architectural fragments taken from monuments destroyed at an earlier date. When the railing was set up, a new floor was also laid, reusing architectural elements among which there was the coping stone.²⁵ It is thus more plausible that the inscription refers to the restoration of the *bodhigarha* and not to the construction of the temple. Asher dates the inscription to the Gupta period,²⁶ and it is reasonable to think that the restoration of the *bodhigarha* took place in the fourth-fifth century and was carried out either by the monks from Lankā after king Meghavarna complied with the requests of Samudragupta and offered him precious stones to obtain permission for the monks to reside at Bodhgayā or by their successors.

¹⁹ Cunningham (1892: 20).

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid: 21.

²² Malandra (1988: 17); see also Cunningham (1892: 22–23); Barua (1931–34, II: 71); Myer (1958: 291).

²³ Cunningham (1892: 22); Malandra (1988: 17); Myer (1958: 291).

²⁴ Ibid: 291.

²⁵ *ASIR* 3 (A. Cunningham): 98, pl. XXIX; see below.

²⁶ Asher (1980: 28).

THE BRICK TEMPLE

The brick temple that was built as a substitute of the *bodhighara* meant the removal of the Bodhi tree and, apparently, the separation of the latter from the throne of the Awakening that had always been at its feet.

According to Cunningham, the construction of the brick temple was contemporaneous with the restoration of the throne. Prudence R. Myer, among others, has accepted Cunningham's opinion maintaining that "it seems probable that the renovation and enlargement of the throne coincided with a drastic rebuilding which replaced the open pillared Bodhi-tree shrine with a tall tower-like structure, most likely of brick".²⁷ Myer attributes the temple to the Kuṣāṇa period on the basis of the Kumrahar plaque, whose inscription in *kharoṣṭhī* script was dated to the Kuṣāṇa period by Sten Konow.²⁸ According to Myer, "[w]hatever the identity of the temple represented on the plaque [...] it is probable that the Kushāna temple at Bodh-Gayā was of a very similar type".²⁹ However, the temple is characterised by a very high corbelled, triangular opening or window above the door,³⁰ whereas the temple depicted on the plaque displays only a large, arched doorway, being thus smaller than the temple of Bodhgayā. Myer also resorts to the travelogue of Faxian for dating the temple to the Kuṣāṇa period, referring to the term "tower" in Samuel Beal's translation.³¹ But no mention is made of a temple-tower in the

²⁷ Myer (1958: 283).

²⁸ Konow (1926). Sten Konow, like Vincent Smith, did not believe the plaque to represent the temple of Bodhgayā. Similar doubts have been expressed more recently by B.N. Mukherjee (1984-85), who has noticed the existence of a second inscription; it is in *brāhmī*, and dates to the first century AD.

²⁹ Myer (1958: 284).

³⁰ Well visible in a pencil drawing by Thomas and William Daniell dated March 1790 (British Library Online Gallery, Shelfmark: WD1727).

³¹ Myer (1958: 283); Malandra (1988: 17) resorts to the same argument to date the temple to the Gupta period.

text: Faxian's towers are the stūpas that the pilgrim says were erected in memory of various events of the Buddha's life.³² Therefore, the temple was built *after* Faxian's visit in AD 404.

A crucial point is that the construction of the brick temple implied the removal of the Bodhi tree and its separation from the throne (Fig. 18). How has this fact — a rather difficult fact to accept in a Buddhist perspective — been explained? According to Geri H. Malandra, the “[r]elocation of the tree may have not been problematic since [...] it was the *vajrasana* (adamantine or diamond seat), not the tree, that was intended to be the exact centre of the *bodhimanda*, place of the enlightenment”.³³ But is it really so? And was there really a throne in the cella of the temple?

When Cunningham excavated the temple cella, he identified four floors (Aśoka floor, plaster floor, sandstone floor, granite floor) and three thrones (from the bottom: sandstone throne, plastered throne, basalt throne).³⁴ In the section and prospect that he published,³⁵ the sandstone throne rests upon the Aśoka floor of the *bodhighara* and the plastered throne rests upon the plaster floor. Cunningham believed that the plastered throne pertained to the brick temple, his opinion — not based on stratigraphic data — voicing the feeling that “the plaster-faced Throne was lengthened at the northern end by 19 inches [48.26 cm] so as to place it exactly in the middle of the present Chamber” (i.e. the cella of the temple).³⁶

However, the size of the cella is not so certain. For Cunningham, “the original cella of the Buddha Gaya temple was

³² *Faxian a*: 126-32 (p. 555). Faxian adds that there were three monasteries.

³³ Malandra (1988: 14). Myer (1958: 286) simply says that “the temple ceased to be a *Bodhi-ghara* and became a *Vajrāsana-gandhakuṭi*, or Diamond-throne Temple, centering around the altar-throne.”

³⁴ Cunningham (1892: pl.VI).

³⁵ *Ibid.*: pl.VI.

³⁶ *Ibid.*: 5.

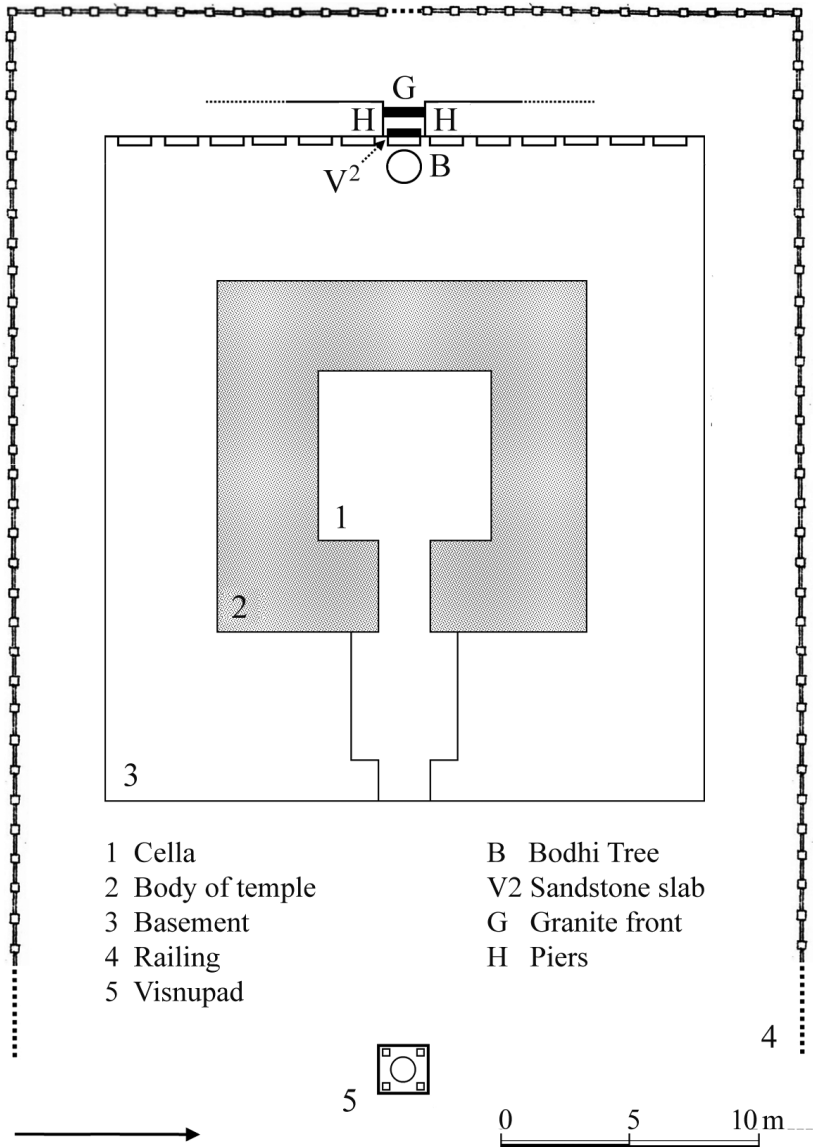


Fig. 18 - Bodhgayā. Schematic plan of Brahmanical Temple at the time of Vishnuite restoration.

nearly square”,³⁷ its side being “20 feet 4 inches [6.2 m]”,³⁸ but Rajendra Mitra maintains that “repeated measurements showed the results to be different from what General Cunningham had arrived at”.³⁹ According to him, the cella was “originally a cube of about 22 feet [6.7 m]”,⁴⁰ and it can be added that the *bodhighara* has a slightly south-eastern orientation, while the brick temple has an eastern orientation, and that the sandstone throne has the same orientation as the *bodhighara*.⁴¹ The “plaster-faced Throne” does not appear in any of the plans provided by Cunningham, nor, consequently, is its relationship with the cella of the temple clear. If the throne was simply re-plastered, it is reasonable to think that it kept its original orientation and that the re-plastering was part of the restoration of the *bodhighara* made in the fourth century, not of the construction of the temple.

What about the stratigraphic position of the sandstone floor? Cunningham says that when he removed the plaster facing of the throne, he found the ball of clay with the relics resting “on the upper plastered floor”⁴² and “just below the sandstone floor”.⁴³ Therefore, the sandstone floor is later than the plastered throne, and if it is later, there was no throne associated with it, because the basalt throne (the last one) stood on the granite floor.⁴⁴ It would seem that there was no throne in the cella of the temple with which both the sandstone and

³⁷ *ASIR* 3 (A. Cunningham): 84. Cunningham explains that the width of the cella was reduced, later on, to 13 feet, “supposing that, when the vaulted roof was added to the chamber, a new wall, 3½ feet thick, was built against the north and south sides to carry the vault.” (ibid.).

³⁸ Ibid.: 83.

³⁹ R. Mitra (1878: 76).

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ See Cunningham (1892: pl. II).

⁴² Ibid.: 20.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.: 4.

the granite floors are associated until when the basalt throne, a “large pedestal of black basalt”,⁴⁵ was installed.

The literary sources testify to the same fact. In his account of Bodhgayā, Xuanzang does not say that the *vajrāsana* was in the cella. He saw the *vajrāsana* under the tree, which was behind the temple, within an enclosure:⁴⁶ inside the temple there was a statue of the Buddha, not a throne.⁴⁷ As is known, Xuanzang recounts how some time before his visit, probably around AD 600, king Śaśānka uprooted the tree and ordered the statue of the Buddha in the cella to be replaced by an image of Maheśvara. No mention is made of a throne inside the temple: a Buddha image was standing there before Śaśānka’s intervention. The throne was, apparently, *outside* the temple. Myer tries to explain this fact saying that “[t]he builders of the new brick temple very probably made explicit the function of the altar as Throne or Buddha-seat by installing an actual image of the Buddha”,⁴⁸ but there is the additional problem of the sandstone slab found by Cunningham outside the temple just where the tree must have been replanted by the Buddhists (V2 in Fig. 18) when they repositioned it in an attempt to recreate the original setting. According to Myer, the cover-slab “was removed from an earlier position, possibly within the old *Bodhi-garha*, and installed beneath the tree, where it served to complete the traditional relationship between Tree and Throne even though the altar-throne within the temple was identified as the true Vajrāsana.”⁴⁹

⁴⁵ *ASIR* 3 (A. Cunningham): 83.

⁴⁶ *Xiyuji* a: VIII (vol. 2, pp. 115–16): “In the middle of the enclosure surrounding the *Bôdhi*-tree is the diamond-throne.”

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*: vol. 2, p. 122.

⁴⁸ Myer (1958: 286).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

These somewhat convoluted explanations show the difficulty in explaining actions that are actually incomprehensible: building a brick temple and uprooting a tree (presumably a very large one), replanting the tree in a rather awkward position behind the new building, placing the throne both under the tree and in the cella, installing a statue in the cella in order to explain the meaning of the throne; etc. The simplest of all questions has not been posed: why was a temple built? Why had it become necessary for the Buddhists to replace the *bodhighara* with a temple? Did they really build it? The question has not been posed because no one has questioned the nature of the temple. Was it really Buddhist?

We can reconstruct its shape on the basis of the plan published by Cunningham in 1871,⁵⁰ which is closer to the actual aspect of the temple before the restoration of 1880 than the two plans that Cunningham published later on. In the plan published in 1873,⁵¹ there is a stairway in the southeast corner, which never existed.⁵² In the plan published in 1892,⁵³ the temple is smaller and the railing is more distant from it: it is in the position that it was given to it in 1880. In the 1892 plan, there are also the four-pillared portico and the four towers built in 1880. According to the 1871 plan, the basement had a width of about 23.7 m,⁵⁴ and the body of the temple was *c.* 14.3 x 14.3 m large.⁵⁵ As already seen, the square cella, according to R. Mitra, was *c.* 6.7 x 6.7 m.⁵⁶ The access to it was

⁵⁰ *ASIR* 1 (A. Cunningham): pl. IV.

⁵¹ *ASIR* 3 (A. Cunningham): pl. XXV.

⁵² R. Mitra (1878: 64).

⁵³ Cunningham (1892: pl. XI).

⁵⁴ Cunningham mentions the existence of a basement only when he speaks of Walls F1, F2, F3, etc. "under the basement of the present Temple" (*ibid.*: 5). We can establish the width of the basement from the 1871 plan, whereas the original length is more difficult to determine because of the additions to the basement made in the course of time both on the eastern and western sides.

⁵⁵ *ASIR* 1 (A. Cunningham): 5; *ASIR* 3 (*id.*): 81.

⁵⁶ R. Mitra (1878: 76).

through a narrow room or corridor, preceded by a larger room. Cunningham says that there was also a portico, to which a “facing was added to carry the vaulted arch”.⁵⁷ Since the doorway was also modified, we do not know how it was in the beginning.⁵⁸

A building very similar to the temple of Bodhgayā is, along with the temple at Konch,⁵⁹ the temple of Bhitargaon, generally dated to the fifth century.⁶⁰ Its plan includes a porch, an *ardhamaṇḍapa* or ante-room, a passage and the sanctum. The sanctum (4.62 m²) has a pointed ceiling, built of bricks laid in corbelled courses, and its height, measured from the centre of the ceiling and the floor is 7.59 m. The body of the temple measures 10.74 x 12.43 m, and the *śikhara* is 9.81 m high.⁶¹ The temple of Bhitargaon is Sivaite: the cella, accessed through a series of rooms, as is typical of Brahmanical temples, housed a *liṅga*. The temple of Bodhgayā is larger than that of Bhitargaon, but has the same plan. When was it built? Could have it been a Sivaite temple in origin?

At the time of Xuanzang’s visit (AD 637), the temple was in existence and, as reported by the pilgrim, it already existed at the time of Śaśānka at the beginning of the seventh century. Therefore, it must have been built between AD 405 (after Faxian) and AD 600 (before Śaśānka), during the same period that saw the construction of the temple of Bhitargaon. If the brick temple of Bodhgayā was originally a Brahmanical temple, we can explain why the throne has been found outside it: the Buddhists, after taking again possession of

⁵⁷ *ASIR* 3 (A. Cunningham): 82.

⁵⁸ Losty (1991: 238, 241).

⁵⁹ R. Mitra (1878: 78).

⁶⁰ Zaheer (1981); Michell (1977: 96); Huntington (1985: 213–14); Harle (1986: 116). Myer (1958: 285, n. 45) dates it to the sixth century.

⁶¹ Zaheer (1981); see also the temple described by Meister, Dhaky & Deva (1988: 36–37).

Bodhgayā, replanted the tree behind the temple and placed the old cover-slab of the *vajrāsana* under the tree, on a new base.⁶² They also adorned the western side of the basement with thirteen niches where they installed Buddhist statues.⁶³ The reconversion of the temple also meant setting up an image of the Buddha in the cella. At the beginning of the seventh century, Śaśāṅka did nothing else than re-establishing the Sivaite cult in Bodhgayā, causing the tree to be cut and the image in the cella be replaced. At the time of Xuanzang's visit and under Pāla rule,⁶⁴ the site was again under Buddhist control. However, a four-faced image of Mahādeva⁶⁵ points to the presence of *tīrthikas* in Bodhgayā in the eight century and suggests how contrasted was the struggle for the control of the site.

THE VISHNUITE RESTORATION OF THE TEMPLE

A railing was set around the temple (Fig. 17), made of uprights of different periods and materials: sandstone uprights of the first century BC/AD, an upright with a female figure of the Kuṣāṇa period⁶⁶ and many granite uprights dated to the fifth-sixth century AD. It is generally believed that the latter were expressly made when the railing was set around the temple, as an addition to the old sandstone uprights, whose number was not sufficient to complete the circle,⁶⁷ and consequently the

⁶² Cunningham (1892: 20).

⁶³ Ibid.: 18–19.

⁶⁴ Cunningham says that “the whole mass of sculpture that now exists being of the medieval period, during the flourishing rule of the Pāla kings.” (ibid.: 54).

⁶⁵ Ibid.: 63–64. P.R. Myer (1958: 297) says that “by the late eight century part of the Bodh-Gayā area was already given over to the devotees of Maheśvara (Śiva).”

⁶⁶ *ASIR* 3 (A. Cunningham): 89; Cunningham (1892: 12, pl.VII). For similar sculptures from Mathurā, cf. Huntington (1985: 156).

⁶⁷ Myer (1958: 288); Malandra (1988: 19).

placing of the railing is dated to the fifth-sixth century AD.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, it seems illogical that the granite uprights were not made of the same size as the sandstone uprights and that, because of their different size, the railing was laid in a rather uneven way.⁶⁹ It is more probable that both the sandstone and the granite uprights were taken from the dismantled monuments of Bodhgayā and reused.

A photograph published by Barua⁷⁰ shows one of the sandstone uprights whose decorated medallion was drilled to create the socket hole where a crossbar had to be inserted. This indicates, in addition, that the railing was not set up by the Buddhists, who would have not defaced the image or symbol depicted in the medallion. It is probable that the railing was set in place all around the temple to separate it from the large area crowded with Buddhist shrines and votive stūpas in order to create an empty, “clean” space around the building (Fig. 16). R. Mitra maintains that this area was paved with bricks on the south, the west and the north, and with flags of granite on the east, and that it was “perfectly clear”.⁷¹ To the north and south, the railing is 4.5 m distant from the temple basement (1871 plan), but on the western side, it is at a distance of 4.5 m from Piers H and the granite front of squared stone G,⁷² which cover the *vajrāsana* and the niches containing Buddhist sculptures (Fig. 18).⁷³ On the eastern side, the railing has not been traced. Here, the granite floor was found up to a distance of 10 m from the temple door.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ *ASIR* 3 (A. Cunningham): 90; R. Mitra (1878: 72).

⁷⁰ Barua (1931-34, II: fig. 19).

⁷¹ R. Mitra (1878: 75).

⁷² See the 1892 plan (Cunningham 1892: pl. XI) for Piers H and Granite Front G, and the 1871 plan (*ASIR* 1: pl. IV) for the original position of the railing.

⁷³ Cunningham (1892: 25).

⁷⁴ *ASIR* 1 (A. Cunningham): pl. IV; *ASIR* 3 (id.): 87.

The granite floor, laid in the cella of the temple as well as in the area in front of it, was made, in part, of architectural fragments originally belonging to the *bodhigarha*: for example, three sandstone “coping stones”⁷⁵ and a “Persepolitan base [...] placed upside down so as to present its broad flat bottom as a part of the pavement”.⁷⁶ A fourth coping stone of the same type as those reused in the granite floor was reused, “split into two slabs”,⁷⁷ in the roof of the pavilion that protects a stone bearing two footprints carved on its upper surface. Was it a Viṣṇupad or a Buddhapad? The first hypothesis is more credible because Cunningham explains that the “round stone which formerly stood in front of the Temple with the feet of Vishnu sculptured on its face [...] was originally the hemispherical dome of a Stûpa”.⁷⁸ R. Mitra says that the pavilion, that is, the railing, “was improvised with stones which originally belonged to other temples”⁷⁹ and that “the foot-marks in question are of Hindu origin, and were put up by the Hindus to reduce the place and its old associations to the service of their creed”.⁸⁰

The Viṣṇupad, the granite floor and the railing, made of reused materials, were probably executed in the same period to which the re-decoration of the *śikhara* is also attributable. The *śikhara* was drastically reshaped, the new tower design being “clearly related to the early Hindu temples”,⁸¹ which shows that the “re-builders at Bodh-Gayā were working under

⁷⁵ Ibid.: 98.

⁷⁶ Cunningham (1892: 5).

⁷⁷ *ASIR* 3 (A. Cunningham): 98.

⁷⁸ Cunningham (1892: 56–7). The Viṣṇupad has been dated to the fourteen century because it bears an inscription dated AD 1308 (ibid.), but the latter can be later than the artefact.

⁷⁹ R. Mitra (1878: 100).

⁸⁰ Id. (1864: 181); R. Mitra (1878: 100) also says that “[t]he carvings are said to be impressions of Buddha’s feet, and bear certain marks or symbols, which, however, are not character[is]tic of a Buddha.”

⁸¹ Myer (1958: 292).

strong Hindu influence”.⁸² Believing that the restoration was a Buddhist work, Myer tries to explain this fact invoking “a synthesis of strong local traditions [...] with current architectural tendencies”.⁸³ The reuse of Buddhist architectural fragments, betraying “an element of hatred and vengeance”⁸⁴ (for example, reutilising them in the floor or defacing their decoration) as at Sarnath and Vikramaśīla, shows instead that it was not carried out by the Buddhists.

Vishnuite and Sivaite sculptures have been found all over the site (Viṣṇu, Umāmaheśvara, Gaṇeśa, etc.).⁸⁵ They have been dated from the eight to the eleventh century AD. The restoration of the temple goes probably back to the late ninth century, when Pāla power weakened, and much remains to be investigated on the alternating hegemony exercised on the site not simply by Buddhists and *tīrthikas*, but by Vishnuites and Sivaites.

THE BURMESE

There is evidence that the temple underwent important changes characterised by the use of basalt and vaulted structures. According to Cunningham, the use of basalt became common from the tenth-eleventh century onwards.⁸⁶ It was used on the western side of the temple, where a “massive addition was made to the buttress, forming a great niche in the middle [...]”.

⁸² Ibid.: 293.

⁸³ Ibid..

⁸⁴ Chaudhary (1978: 229).

⁸⁵ See Huntington Archive, <http://www.huntingtonarchive.osu.edu/> (photographs taken in the temple compound and in the site museum). Some sculptures were drawn by D’Oyly in 1824 (Losty 1991: fig. 9), and were seen by Buchanan in 1827 (see Buchanan 1936, I: 152; 155 ff.), Cunningham (*ASIR* 3: 105) and R. Mitra (1878: 99–100).

⁸⁶ A. Cunningham (1892: 25).

The west facing of this work formed a grand entrance of richly carved basalt”.⁸⁷ This is perhaps an attempt to re-establish the worship of the tree, rooted behind the temple. It was probably in this period that the basalt pedestal or throne was placed on the granite floor inside the cella.⁸⁸ The construction of vaulted structures is probably coeval.⁸⁹ According to Myer, vaults of this type are “very common in Burma during the period of Pagān domination”.⁹⁰ In the cella, the walls supporting the vault stood on the granite floor, reducing its width to 3.9 m.⁹¹ The basalt throne is exactly of the same size.

R. Mitra upholds that “the vaulted roof of the first storey is leveled on the top, and made the floor of a second-storey room, which, like the first, is oblong and covered by a vaulted roof”.⁹² The “second-storey room” was reachable through a great vaulted porch,⁹³ in which two stairs on both sides led to a “terrace”, 4 m broad.⁹⁴ What was the use of the “second-storey room”? According to Mitra, there was a brick throne similar to the basalt throne in the cella below.⁹⁵ However, the “second-storey room” was not reachable when Mitra visited the site, due to the collapse of the porch. Francis Buchanan reports that: “[s]everal of the people [...] remember the porch standing, and have frequently been in the chambers [...]. The middle chamber has a throne, but the image has been removed”.⁹⁶ According to Myer, it was not a room, but a “broad vaulted

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*: 25, pl. XI: E.

⁸⁸ Cunningham (*ASIR* 3 : 100); R. Mitra (1878: 71). Cf. the works carried out at the site in the thirteenth century; above, Chapter VI.

⁸⁹ These structures have been described by R. Mitra (*ibid.*: 82, 83, 85).

⁹⁰ Myer (1958: 296).

⁹¹ Cunningham (1892: 81–82).

⁹² R. Mitra (1878: 85).

⁹³ Losty (1991: fig. 2).

⁹⁴ R. Mitra (1878: 85, 87–91); Buchanan (1936, I: 154).

⁹⁵ R. Mitra (1878: 83).

⁹⁶ Buchanan (1936, I: 154).

arch projecting from the face of the tower [that] presumably formed part of a large niche or shallow chamber on the upper level”.⁹⁷ Climbing up to the terrace was necessary in order to reach the tree behind the temple.⁹⁸ Mitra explains that “as earth and rubbish accumulated round the original tree, people from time to time built raised terraces and covered up its roots, so that the tree in a manner rose with the rise of the ground-level”.⁹⁹ When Cunningham visited the site, the terrace from which the tree sprung was at the same level as the upper floor of the temple.¹⁰⁰

A Burmese inscription records the restoration of the temple, which was completed in AD 1298.¹⁰¹ The presence of Buddhist devotees at the site in the late thirteenth-early fourteenth century is perhaps witnessed by “rudely carved figures kneeling in adoration after the manner of the Burmese *Shiko*”¹⁰² carved on the granite floor “both inside the temple and in the court-yard outside”.¹⁰³ These works may represent the last attempt to reconvert the temple to the Buddhist faith. After that, the site was abandoned, until it became property of the Sivaite Mahants.

⁹⁷ Myer (1958: 296).

⁹⁸ On the terrace there was “a fine walk round the temple, leading [...] to a large area behind, on which is planted a celebrated pipal tree” (Buchanan 1936, I: 153).

⁹⁹ R. Mitra (1864: 174–75); id. (1878: 92–93).

¹⁰⁰ *ASIR* 3 (A. Cunningham): 80.

¹⁰¹ On the inscription, see Luce (1976: 41–42).

¹⁰² *ASIR* 1 (A. Cunningham): 9.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

APPENDIX 2

Sarnath: A Reassessment of the Archaeological Evidence

The place where the Buddha preached his first sermon, the Deer Park at Isipatana, became one of the main centres of Buddhist worship. The destruction of Sarnath is generally ascribed to the Muslim invaders, but the archaeological evidence suggests that around the mid-twelfth century the Buddhists were forced to leave and that an imposing Sivaite temple was erected on the site. Other discontinuities are observable in the site's history, and here a general reassessment of the evidence is presented.

THE EXCAVATIONS

The discovery of Sarnath goes back to the end of the eighteenth century, when the site became a source of building materials. In 1794, the so-called Jagat Singh stūpa (now known to the visitors as Dharmarājīka) was brought to light (Fig. 19), allowing the ruins to be identified as those of a Buddhist sanctuary.¹ This discovery did not stop the exploitation of the ruins: “all portable antiquities were removed by the excavators, and the exposed ruins and carved stones were left an easy prey

¹ *AsRes* 5 (1798): 131–32. See Chapter I.

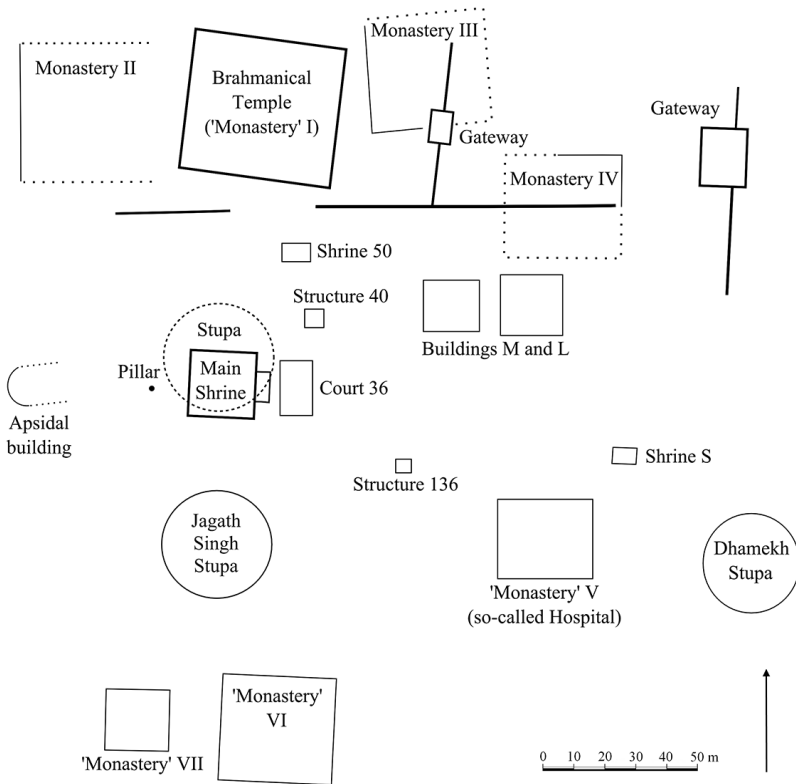


Fig. 19 - Sarnath. General plan.

to those in search of building materials”.² The last large-scale robbing took place at the end of the nineteenth century, when the construction of the railway “created a great demand for bricks and stones, to be broken up for railway ballast”.³ Documented excavations had started in 1835, when Alexander Cunningham brought to light a number of buildings, including

² *ASIAR* 1904-5 (F.O. Oertel): 64.

³ *Ibid.*

three stūpas (Jagat Singh, Dhamekh and Chaukhandi), the so-called Monastery L and Temple M.⁴ In 1851, Markham Kittoe resumed Cunningham's work and explored the areas to the north of the Jagat Singh and Dhamekh stūpas. He also started excavating the so-called Monasteries V (or Hospital) and VI.⁵ After Kittoe's death, the work was continued by Edward Thomas.⁶

In November 1900, a watchman was appointed to the site and some years later major excavations were undertaken by Frederick Oscar Oertel, who continued the excavation of the three main stūpas and started that of the Main Shrine. He discovered the remains of the Aśoka pillar, the lion capital, and the foundations of Building R (also known as stūpa 22).⁷ When John Marshall took charge of the excavations, at first resumed Kittoe and Oertel's works, bringing to light a great number of small shrines and stūpas around the Main Shrine; then he started the excavation of the northern area, which had been less affected by previous works. He brought to light four buildings, identified as monasteries (nos. I-IV), and two gateways.⁸ In November 1914, Harold Hargreaves resumed the excavation of the Main Shrine and the surrounding area. One of his major achievements was the discovery of an apsidal building, located to the west of the Aśoka pillar.⁹ The last important excavations, during which various areas were exposed and restorations made, were carried out under Daya Ram Sahni's supervision. Sahni wrote only brief reports on the work done.¹⁰

⁴ *ASIR* 1 (A. Cunningham): pls. XXXII–XXXIII.

⁵ Kittoe's work was never published; some of his observations are mentioned in *ibid.*: 116, 124–26, 128.

⁶ Thomas (1854).

⁷ *ASIR* 1904-5 (F.O. Oertel): 59–104.

⁸ *ASIR* 1906-7: 68-101 (J.H. Marshall & S. Konow); 1907-8 (*id.*):43–80.

⁹ *ASIR* 1914-15 (H. Hargreaves): 97–131.

¹⁰ *ASIR* 1916-17 (D.R. Sahni): 14–15; 1917-18 (*id.*): 5–6; 1918-19 (*id.*): 4–5; 1919-20 (*id.*): 26–27.

At Sarnath, a considerable part of the field works were carried out before the introduction of the stratigraphic method, and consequently the archaeological strata were not clearly identified and recorded. Structures pertaining to different periods appear side by side in the plans, as if belonging to one and the same horizon. Although the majority of the monuments have not been dated with precision, it is possible, nevertheless, to identify the main phases of the site, from Aśoka to the Gāhaḍavāla dynasty in the twelfth century.

THE EARLY SANCTUARY

The main structures of the Mauryan and Kuṣāṇa periods are the Aśoka pillar and the Jagat Singh (Dharmarājikā) stūpa. What was probably another stūpa was located where the Main Shrine was later built.¹¹ In fact, during the excavation of the Main Shrine, a “solid mass of brickwork” consisting of “odd and even ornamented bricks” was discovered at – 0.70 m below the floor. The structure had been dismantled, “brick by brick, layer by layer” to a depth of – 2.75 m, “when only earth was found”.¹² The same solid mass of brickwork was also found north of the Main Shrine, at a depth of – 0.30 m from the walking level.¹³ As this mass of brickwork was located near the Aśoka pillar, it is reasonable to identify it with the remains of the stūpa built by Aśoka. Thus the early monumental phase of Isipatana would show the same characteristics of many other Aśokan sites, constituted by a stūpa and a pillar standing nearby. Another important shrine belonging to an early period

¹¹ The Main Shrine “marked the site of some more ancient structure” (*ASIAR* 1914-15, H. Hargreaves: 105).

¹² *Ibid.*: 105.

¹³ *Ibid.*: 106.

is the apsidal building,¹⁴ whose entrance faced the Aśoka pillar.

Near the apsidal building (which soon “fell into decay”),¹⁵ Hargreaves discovered an area packed with stone fragments ranging “from Maurya times to the 1st Century B.C.”¹⁶ In his opinion, “some of the monuments [...] had undoubtedly been wilfully destroyed while others, especially railing pillars, had clearly suffered the ravage of fire”.¹⁷ According to Hargreaves, the stone fragments were reused as filling material to level the ground during the Gupta period.¹⁸

Three Brahmanical sculptures, now in the site museum, are datable to the Gupta age, providing evidence that the followers of the neo-Brahmanical movements had established themselves in Sarnath. One of the sculptures (the exact finding spot is unknown) represents Viṣṇu with Gadadevī and Cakrapuruṣa and can be dated to the fifth century.¹⁹ The other sculptures were discovered in the so-called Hospital: a small female figure representing an *ayudhapuruṣa* of Viṣṇu and the Dwarf *avatāra*.²⁰ During the excavation of the “Hospital”, the remains of two distinct buildings came to light, one on the ruins of the other. The first was dated “to the early Gupta

¹⁴ The structure was ascribed to the “Late Maurya period” as its “foundations [we] re only 1’9” [53.34 cm] above the Maurya level and no earlier remains exist[ed] beneath” (ibid.: 109). These stratigraphic observations are rudimental, and the building is most probably a later structure.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.: 111, pls. LXV–LXIX.

¹⁷ Ibid.: 111.

¹⁸ However, Hargreaves says that the deposition “may not necessarily synchronize with the destruction of the monuments” (ibid.).

¹⁹ See this sculpture in DSAL-IIAS: see under Sarnath, Accession no. 1753. Compare with the Viṣṇu image from Unchdih in the Allahabad Museum, dated to the early fifth century (P. Chandra 1970: 97–98, no. 223; pl. LXXX); Harle (1974: 46; fig. 61) attributes it to the mid-fifth century.

²⁰ They are included in Sahni’s catalogue (1914: Bh19 and Bh17 entries on pp. 167–68); Sahni suggested a medieval chronology. Bh19 can be seen in DSAL-IIAS, Sarnath, Accession no. 1754.

period”:²¹ it is “a quadrangle” (c. 18 x 14 m) bound to the east, west and south by low parapets, on which stood a row of pillars. The northern portion of the monument, devoid of columns, was not excavated. The function of the building has not been ascertained and Marshall only observed that “the building was not the ordinary type of monastery”.²²

A similar case is that of Court 36 (c. 14 x 8 m), which “cannot be earlier than the fourth or fifth century”.²³ The entrance was in the middle of the east wall, while a projection in the form of a solid platform was present in the west wall. The south, east and north walls “were furnished on the outside with a stone railing comprising 74 uprights and 108 cross-bars [...]. In order to secure the rails in position against the face of the wall, the interstices between the uprights and the cross-bars were filled in with brickwork”.²⁴ According to Marshall, “it is obvious [...] that the railing [...] originally surrounded some earlier building and was shifted here at a later date”.²⁵ The railing, formed by plain uprights and crossbars, had arguably encircled the Aśoka stūpa,²⁶ which was behind the court. Fencing a court by means of the dismantled elements of a stūpa railing is hardly something that can be ascribed to the Buddhists.

A small structure in brickwork (no. 136 in Sahni’s plan),²⁷ located between the so-called Hospital and Court 36, was probably a Brahmanical shrine. Unlike the Buddhist votive stūpas (which display a square or cross-shaped base), it consisted of a central square body with four smaller square

²¹ *ASIAR* 1907-8 (J.H. Marshall & S. Konow): 62.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *ASIAR* 1906-7 (J.H. Marshall & S. Konow): 79.

²⁴ *Ibid.*: 78–79.

²⁵ *Ibid.*: 79.

²⁶ “[T]he few parts of the railing so far discovered are quite plain, but its age is determined by the Mauryan inscription on the cope-stone.” (*ibid.*).

²⁷ Sahni (1923: 22); see also DSAL-IIAS, Sarnath, Accession nos. 25645, 25652.

projections at each corner. In plan, it is strongly reminiscent of the Dasavatāra temple at Deogarh,²⁸ though much smaller in size.

Towards the end of the Gupta period, the site was again occupied by the Buddhists. An intense building activity and a great artistic output characterise this phase, during which some of the best sculptures ever made in India were produced. Small votive stūpas and shrines, several of which rebuilt more than once, mushroomed around the Aśoka pillar and the Jagat Singh/Dharmarājikā stūpa.²⁹ The damaged Buddhist structures underwent some repairs: the monolithic *harmikā* originally surrounding the umbrella of the Aśoka stūpa, for example, had been probably thrown down when the monument was destroyed in the Gupta period to build Court 36.³⁰ Sometime later, the *harmikā* was repaired with bricks and used to encircle a small stūpa, which was located just south of the Aśoka stūpa.³¹

The area around the Dhamekh stūpa³² was also crowded with votive shrines.³³ To the north of the Dhamekh stūpa, monuments nos. 71-80 have been attributed to the long period going from the Gupta epoch to the eleventh or twelfth century AD.³⁴

²⁸ Gottfried Williams (1982: 130–36).

²⁹ *ASIAR* 1904-5 (F.O. Oertel): 71; 1906-7 (J.H. Marshall & S. Konow): 70, 73, 78, 80. The Jagat Singh/Dharmarājikā stūpa also underwent several reconstructions (*ASIAR* 1907-8, id.: 65).

³⁰ According to Sahni (1923: 21), the *harmikā* “was thrown down by a violent earthquake”. K. Kumar (1985-86: 12) says instead that it was destroyed “by accidental damage or deliberate vandalism which perhaps took place in the wake of the Hun invasions”.

³¹ It was discovered by Oertel, “built up in the foundation and wall of the south chapel” in the Main Shrine (*ASIAR* 1904-5: 67–68). K. Kumar (1985-86: 12) says that “the railing [...] was repaired with bricks. It is interesting to note that even today a brick carved in the late Gupta style is visible in the western arm”.

³² The Dhamekh stūpa has long been dated to Gupta times, but is instead a seventh-century work; cf. Gottfried Williams (1982: 168–69).

³³ They were brought to light by Kittoe and subsequently destroyed (*ASIAR* 1907-8, J.H. Marshall & S. Konow): 59.

³⁴ *Ibid.*: 60.

There were three monasteries (nos. II, III and IV) in the northern area³⁵ and two other edifices (nos. VI and VII) were built in the southern area.³⁶

A peculiar structure (no. 50 in Sahni's plan) displays a pillared hall that was built reusing the sculptured uprights of a railing.³⁷ Marshall observed that "the posts are sunk so far into the floor as to conceal part of their sculptured relief".³⁸ It appears, once again, that non-Buddhist occupants had appropriated the site, at least in part. Brahmanical temples with pillared *maṇḍapas* were already common in the eighth century AD,³⁹ and the building may belong to this epoch.⁴⁰ That groups of brāhmaṇas were present at Sarnath is shown by two Brahmanical sculptures attributable to the early medieval period.⁴¹

Summing up, we can say that the history of Sarnath in the early middle age is marked by discontinuities. The site was magnificently adorned during the Mauryan and Kuṣāṇa periods, but under the Guptas the major monuments were damaged or destroyed, and Brahmanical buildings (Court 36, Structure 136) were built in front of the Buddhist ones, presumably

³⁵ Ibid.: 54–59; *ASLAR* 1906-7 (id.): 85.

³⁶ Thomas (1854); Sahni (1923: 16–17); *ASLAR* 1917-18 (id.): 5. In Sahni's plan, Monastery VI (south of the stūpa) is given no. V and Monastery V (so-called Hospital) is given no. VI.

³⁷ *ASLAR* 1907-8 (J.H. Marshall & S. Konow): 69 and pl. XX.

³⁸ Ibid.: 70.

³⁹ Relatively large entrance *maṇḍapas* are already present in seventh-century temples, from Alampur to Saurashtra (Meister, Dhaky & Deva 1988: e.g. pls. 381, 658).

⁴⁰ The structure was found buried in ashes (*ASLAR* 1907-8, J.H. Marshall & S. Konow: 70). According to Sahni (1923: 28), the "heaps of ashes and charred wood [...] might be remnants of *Agni-hotras*, performed by adherents of the Brahmanical faith."

⁴¹ These are an image of Sarasvatī playing the lute (*ASLAR* 1904-5, F.O. Oertel: 86, fig. 9; Sahni 1914: 150, Bf27; DSAL-IIAS, Sarnath, Accession no. 5806) and an image of Agni (ibid., no. 5798; Huntington Archive, no. 1657; see at <http://www.huntingtonarchive.osu.edu/>). Some other Brahmanical sculptures (not illustrated) were inventoried by Sahni (1914): Bh6, Bh9, Bh10, Bh11 (medieval period); Bh5, Bh8, Bh18.

abandoned. After the Buddhist revival, the site appears to have been appropriated once again, and a small Brahmanical shrine (no. 50) to have been built in the area between the Mauryan stūpa and the monasteries.

THE LATE SANCTUARY

The last Buddhist monuments of Sarnath, probably built in the first half of the twelfth century, are Stūpa 22 and Buildings L and M. Large Stūpa 22 (R in Oertel's plan) was built on high ground in the area of the apsidal temple.⁴² Buildings L and M (Oertel's plan)⁴³ stand on the same high ground to the south of Monastery IV.⁴⁴ Building M (a temple, according to the excavator) has a cross-shaped plan and was decorated with statues and bas-reliefs. A few meters to the north, in a small detached room at a depth of –1 m below the walking level, “about 60 statues and bas-reliefs in an upright position all packed closely together”⁴⁵ were discovered. These sculptures had been probably carried to Sarnath and momentarily stored before being set in place,⁴⁶ but the work was stopped due to the insurgence of a new “time of persecution”:⁴⁷ in the same

⁴² The stūpa was dismantled to allow for the excavation of the lower strata (*ASIAR* 1904-5, F.O. Oertel: 70; *ASIAR* 1914-15, H. Hargreaves: 109).

⁴³ *ASIR* 1 (A. Cunningham): 120, pls. XXXII–XXXIII; *ASIAR* 1904-5 (F.A. Oertel): pl. XV. These buildings were dismantled between 1905 and 1907 and do not appear in the plans published by Marshall and Konow (*ASIAR* 1906-7: pl. XVII; *ASIAR* 1907-8: pl. XI).

⁴⁴ In the upper strata some walls were unearthed, pertaining to temporary habitations, which are typical of the desertion phases (*ASIR* 1, A. Cunningham: 122).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ A similar case is documented at Sanghol in Ludhiana district (Punjab) where 117 railing pieces manufactured in Mathurā were found piled near the main stūpa (S.P. Gupta 1985: 19, 23). It is hardly believable that the stūpa railing was dismantled to “preserv[e] the sculptural wealth from further destruction at the hands of the marauding invaders.”

⁴⁷ *ASIR* 1 (A. Cunningham): 123. The sculptures, left by Cunningham lying on the ground, were taken away and “thrown into the Barna river under the bridge, to check the cutting away of the bed between the arches.” (*ibid.*).

period, the buildings in the southern area (nos. V, VI and VII, identified as monasteries) were destroyed by fire. As regards the destruction of Monastery VI, “the conflagration had been so sudden and rapid as to force the monks to abandon their very food”.⁴⁸ Small Monastery VII “probably fell a prey to the same conflagration”.⁴⁹ The edifice built in the “8th-9th century” on the so-called Hospital (or Monastery V) was also set on fire.⁵⁰ While the southern area was abandoned, the central and northern areas underwent a complete reconstruction, attested to by two impressive buildings: the Main Shrine and the so-called Monastery I.

THE MAIN SHRINE

The Main Shrine⁵¹ was built on the Aśoka stūpa near the *dharmastambha*. The square body of the building (m 18.2 x 18.2) displays projecting bays (the chapels to the south, north and west and the entrance portico to the east), thus creating a *triratna* design. The impressive thickness of the walls (3 m.) was “evidently intended to carry a massive and lofty superstructure”⁵² and a large portion of the interior was later built up “possibly to help in upholding the roof”.⁵³ The shrine was built with reused materials: for example, late-fifth century doorjambs were reused in the doorway,⁵⁴ and the plinth was

⁴⁸ Ibid.: 128. Several inscribed miniature stūpas were found inside the building and were dated “between the 7th and the 10th century” (Thomas 1854: 474). Other uninscribed stūpas were discovered “mingled with the debris in the open court, generally at the level of the original surface, showing that their date is not later than that of the destruction of the building itself.” (ibidem: 475).

⁴⁹ Sahni (1923: 17).

⁵⁰ *ASIAR* 1907-8 (J.H. Marshall & S. Konow): 62; *ASIR* 1 (A. Cunningham): 125.

⁵¹ According to the excavator, it can “hardly be earlier than the eleventh century A.D.” (*ASIAR* 1914-15, H. Hargreaves: 97).

⁵² *ASIAR* 1904-5 (F.O. Oertel): 67.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Gottfried Williams (1982: pl. 99).

faced with ancient, irregularly set up stones. Only a headless Buddha image comes from this building: it was found in the south chapel, but was not “the original image in this shrine, as it look[ed] much too small for its position”.⁵⁵

Around the Main Shrine, a vast area was paved with a concrete floor made of reused stones, “some of [which] were mere undressed blocks, while others were elegantly carved”.⁵⁶ At a distance of 18 m from the eastern façade, the floor step abutted on a broad pathway, called Approach Way or Courtyard.⁵⁷ It was *c.* 90 m. long, paved with concrete and “enclosed in a brick wall on the north, south and east sides, the greater part of which ha[d] fallen down. The interior of the court was approached by a double stair-case in the middle of the east wall, which [was] built up with stone slabs of different periods”.⁵⁸

The court appears nearly free from structures: in the area to the south of the Main Shrine, Oertel noted some remains on the floor, but “nothing of importance”,⁵⁹ and near the Aśoka pillar, votive stūpas were found only below the floor.⁶⁰ In the northern area, the floor level was devoid of structural remains⁶¹ and, to the east of the Main Shrine, only a few structures have been associated with the concrete floor.⁶² Further east, Sahni excavated two rows of votive stūpas (nos. 82-104), without providing, unfortunately, any detailed information.⁶³ It is evident that the impressive building activity involving the

⁵⁵ *ASIAR* 1904-5 (F.O. Oertel): 67.

⁵⁶ *ASIAR* 1906-7 (J.H. Marshall & S. Konow): 77.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*: 76-77.

⁵⁸ Sahni (1923: 22).

⁵⁹ *ASIAR* 1904-5 (F.O. Oertel): 67.

⁶⁰ *ASIAR* 1906-7 (J.H. Marshall & S. Konow): 73.

⁶¹ *ASIAR* 1914-15 (H. Hargreaves): 106-7.

⁶² Small square plinths nos. 25, 26, 29, 31, 33, 34, 35 (*ASIAR* 1906-7, J.H. Marshall & S. Konow: 77-78).

⁶³ Sahni (1923: 23); *ASIAR* 1918-19 (D. R. Sahni): 5.

erection of votive stūpas and shrines that had characterised the post-Gupta and Pāla periods (with an interlude in the eighth century) broke off after the construction of the Main Shrine: only a few structures were erected in the vast court after the concrete floor was laid down. The Main Shrine, built above a stūpa, made of reused building materials taken from the Buddhist monuments and situated in a large empty courtyard, can be properly understood when we start considering it a Brahmanical temple.

THE SO-CALLED MONASTERY I

The so-called Monastery I, dating “from the 12th century A.D.”,⁶⁴ was actually built on earlier Buddhist monasteries. It is a walled compound subdivided into two courtyards, both accessible through huge gateways, provided with richly carved bastions of chiselled brick and stone combined. The outermost gateway does not seem to mark the limits of the compound, because “two parallel walls one on each side of the gateway stretch towards the east, indicating, no doubt, the existence of other courts beyond”.⁶⁵ In the western half of the first courtyard, an imposing building was excavated in 1907, when a portion of its massive elevated platform (“brick plinth”) was brought to light.⁶⁶ On the eastern side, the door-jambs of a large doorway were identified, placed at a distance of 8.8 m one from the other and “apparently occupied by a broad flight of steps leading up to the plinth”.⁶⁷ The platform was divided into “rows of chambers” by cross foundation walls. Marshall interpreted these “chambers” as a series of

⁶⁴ *ASIAR* 1907-8 (J.H. Marshall & S. Konow): 43.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*: 46.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*: 43.

⁶⁷ *ASIAR* 1906-7 (J.H. Marshall & S. Konow): 83.

rooms pertaining to a Buddhist monastery (Fig. 20, a).⁶⁸ It is evident, however, that they are not arranged in single rows. The bases of seven pillars indicate that this part of the building was a vast pillared hall, *c.* 10.6 m long, which must have had four or six pair of pillars supporting the roof.⁶⁹ At the western end, a small flight of steps gave access to a large quadrangle (*c.* 21 x 21 m) labelled as “courtyard” or “inner court”. According to Marshall, the floor of the courtyard was 1.8 m lower than the floor of the eastern hall,⁷⁰ but this is because the lower floor pertains to an earlier building on which “Monastery I” was built. The remains of the floor pertaining to it were probably mistakenly removed by the excavators during the clearing of the “vast array of massive stones”⁷¹ fallen on it. A brick well in the north-eastern corner is associated with the lower floor, because its low parapet was “about one foot above the level of the courtyard”.⁷² The identification of the building as a monastery, based on “its rows of chambers, its paved courtyard and its well”⁷³ is untenable: the “rows of chambers” are the foundations of a pillared hall, while the paved courtyard and the well clearly belong to an earlier edifice — most probably a real Buddhist monastery.

The “inner court” is provided with flights of steps also on the southern and northern sides, leading to the other parts of the building. The exposed walls of the southern and northern areas follow a plan similar to that of the eastern hall. In the area to the west of the “inner court”, a spacious floor was uncovered.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*: 82.

⁶⁹ The excavators recognised that “the central chamber of the eastern side may thus be supposed to have done duty as a hall” (*ibid.*: 83).

⁷⁰ Sahni (1923: 29). The excavators observed that the flights of steps “start[ed] from a slightly higher level been put in later” (*ASLAR* 1907-8, J.H. Marshall & S. Konow): 44.

⁷¹ *ASLAR* 1906-7 (*id.*): 83.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*: 82.

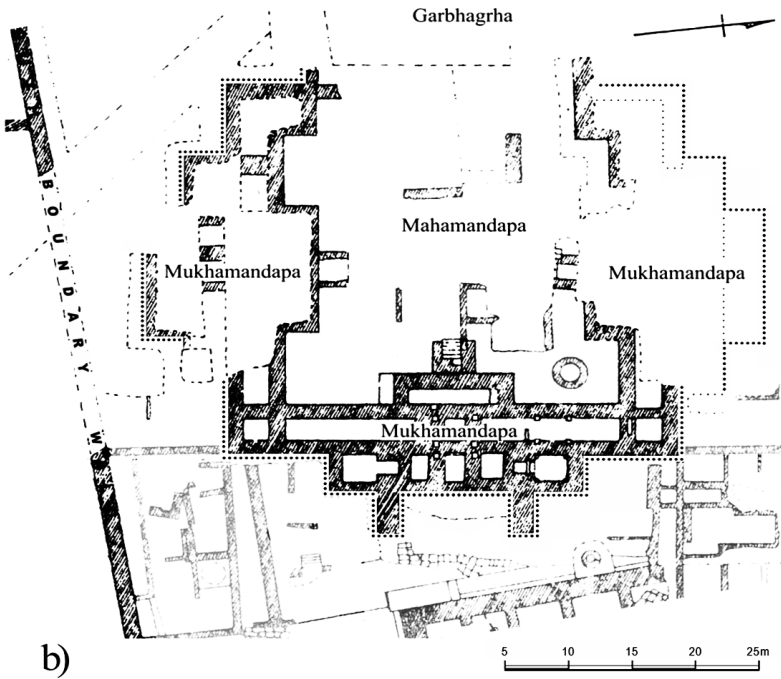
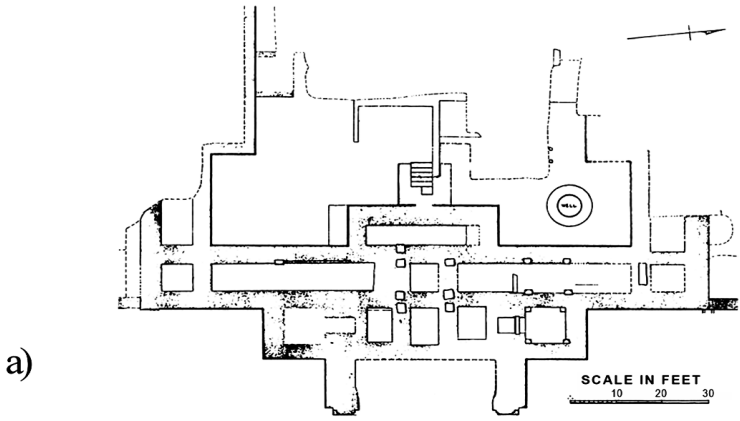


Fig. 20 - Sarnath. So-called Monastery I/Brahmanical Temple.
Based on *ASIAR* 1906-7, pl. XXIV, and *ASIAR* 1907-8, pl. XI.

According to the excavators, “near the middle of this floor is the stone base of a column *in situ*, carved in identically the same style as the column bases and other architectural members found on the eastern side of the monastery; and traces of another column also were found having existed to its south. These columns must have been intended to carry an architrave and roof, and we may assume therefore that there was a large pillared hall or portico on this side of the monastery”.⁷⁴ Marshall had the intention to complete the clearance of the building during the following season but never resumed the work.

Some years later, “Monastery I” started being called “Dharmacakra-Jinavihāra”,⁷⁵ with reference to the donation of a *vihāra* by Kumāradevī, the Buddhist wife of the Gāhaḍavāla king Govindacandra, recorded by an inscription found to the north of the Dhamekh stūpa.⁷⁶ The Kumāradevī hypothesis has been accepted by scholars,⁷⁷ despite the fact that the inscription is not associated with the monastery. Only recently the *dharmacakrajinavihāra* of the inscription has been identified with Building M, which rises near to the place where the inscription was discovered.⁷⁸ Scholars have never agreed on the nature of “Monastery I”, whether it is a monastery or a temple. H.W. Woodward Jr. believes it to be a monastery, even if he maintains that it “differs from a traditional one in having such a high basement and in not having cells in single, simple rows”⁷⁹ and is well aware of the similarity between “Monastery I” and the Duladeo temple at Khajuraho. Sahni observed that the building had “a curious plan which has not yet been noticed on

⁷⁴ *ASLAR* 1907-8 (J.H. Marshall & S. Konow): 44.

⁷⁵ Sahni (1923: 28).

⁷⁶ *ASLAR* 1907-08 (J.H. Marshall & S. Konow): 60, 76–80. Cf. also Chapter VI.

⁷⁷ See Woodward (1981: 11).

⁷⁸ Mani (2005-6).

⁷⁹ Woodward (1981: 12).

any other Buddhist site”,⁸⁰ and claimed that the structure was a temple, “(1) because in plan it differ[ed] essentially from the monasteries known to us [...], (2) the structural arrangement [wa]s such as to afford little room for actual residential cells, (3) no other monastery known to us [wa]s preceded by such extensive courts with elaborate gateways [...], and (4) builders of monasteries seldom lavished such exuberant ornament on their works”.⁸¹ Sahni’s remarks open a perspective that has not been sufficiently explored. There is no doubt that the building was a temple, but the analysis of the finds shows, in addition, that the temple was not Buddhist.

It has been observed that “all the stone-work employed in this building appears to have been expressly made for it, since is all carved and chiselled exactly in the same style”.⁸² Only a few pieces are inventoried and illustrated in the excavation reports and in Sahni’s catalogue,⁸³ but their peculiar “flat and stencil” decoration is easily identifiable: the main motifs are bands of scrollwork, pot-and-foilage, lotus petals, chess pattern and a motif with warriors alternating with lions.⁸⁴ Foliate and geometrical designs are common in both Buddhist and Brahmanical monuments, but many sculptures and architectural elements, which display a Brahmanical iconography, were also found.⁸⁵ Their presence has not been explained. Marshall and Konow mention some of these

⁸⁰ Sahni (1923: 29).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*: 32.

⁸² *ASIAR* 1906-7 (J.H. Marshall & S. Konow): 83.

⁸³ Sahni (1914: Df36-41, Df44, Dg32-34, Dg28, Di110-Di114, Di117, Di135-136, Di139-140, Di143-168, Dk34).

⁸⁴ Some other fragments, stored in the site museum, display the same decoration and probably pertain to “Monastery I” (DSAL-IIAS, Sarnath, Accession nos. 28773, 25811, 25637, 25638, 25639, 25640, 25983, 5849).

⁸⁵ Sahni (1914: Bh1, Bh2, Bh3, Bh7, Bh12, Bh13, Bh14, Bh15, Df34, Df42, Df48, Df49); *ASIAR* 1906-7: pl. XXIX, d; *ASIAR* 1907-08 (J.H. Marshall & S. Konow): 48, no. a48.

images without any comment;⁸⁶ Woodward does not make any reference to them at all. Sahni is the only scholar who has provided some information. Going through his catalogue, we see that Jamb Stone Df48 has “borders of musicians and lions attacked by warriors” to the sides of a central face showing a Brahmanical goddess.⁸⁷ The fragment “must have belonged to a Brahmanical temple at Sarnath”.⁸⁸ The same motif (“border of warriors alternating with lions”) decorates Door-jamb Df41, one of the architectural features ascribed to the “Buddhist Monastery I”.⁸⁹ The finding spot of Df41 is the same of Df48: the first outer court of the “Monastery”. Sahni maintains that they belong to different monuments: Df41 to a Buddhist temple (the so-called Monastery I) and Df48 to a Brahmanical temple (of which no trace would have remained). The impasse can be solved only identifying Monastery I with the “Brahmanical temple at Sarnath” and acknowledging the fact that the stratigraphies have been confused and overlapped. The above examples are not the only ones. In the site museum, several late medieval architectural fragments with Brahmanical figures display the decorative motifs and the peculiar “flat and stencil” style observable in the architectural fragments ascribed to the “Monastery”.⁹⁰

Only two Buddhas in *dharmacakramudrā* are stylistically compatible with Monastery I.⁹¹ However, they are not in contrast with the Brahmanical iconographic developments of

⁸⁶ Ibid.: 48, 52.

⁸⁷ Sahni (1914: 244).

⁸⁸ Ibid..

⁸⁹ Ibid.: 243; *ASIAR* 1906-7 (J.H. Marshall & S. Konow): pl. XXVI, 6.

⁹⁰ DSAL-IIAS, Sarnath, Accession nos. 5847, 5848 (lions-warriors motif, lotus medallion), 5802, 5841 (pot-and-foilage motif), 5838, 5842 (bands of scrollwork), 5840 (lotus medallion).

⁹¹ Ibid.: no. 5759 (find spot not documented); Dk4 (Sahni 1914: 266; *ASIAR* 1906-7, J.H. Marshall & S. Konow: 77, pl. XXIII, 8) from the area to the east of Main Shrine.

the period, because they may represent Śiva as a teacher, an iconography cast on Buddhist models already popular in the eighth century AD.⁹² It is not surprising to see the Sivaites appropriating the fundamental symbol of the site – the Buddha’s teaching – in their own temple at Sarnath. The name by which we know the place, derived from Sāraṅganātha or Lord of the Deer, may not allude to the Buddha but to Śiva, one of whose attributes is the deer.⁹³

As scholars have a priori excluded that the Brahmanical sculptures found in “Monastery I” had any relation to it, only a limited number of sculptures has been associated to it. Not that they are what we would expect to find in the monks’ quarters: Sahni mentions three female figures, Bf4 and Bf5, which “might be representations of the river goddesses Gangā and Yamunā”, and Bf6, which represents “Śrī or Lakshmi”.⁹⁴ These images fit better a Brahmanical temple, as noted by Sahni himself.⁹⁵ The Makara Gargoyle⁹⁶, attributed to “Monastery I”, is also typical of many Hindu temples.⁹⁷ The associated sculptures and architectural fragments show that “Monastery I”, built in the twelfth century AD, not only is a temple, as Sahni recognised, but a Brahmanical temple. As regards the sculptures and fragments actually recognisable as Buddhist found in the area, they span from the “Gupta style” period to the “10th-11th centuries”.⁹⁸ None of them (at least the illustrated ones)⁹⁹ has any stylistic relation with the architectural fragments of “Monastery I”. Moreover, they are all “injured”, “defaced”,

⁹² Cf. Donaldson (1999).

⁹³ We have seen him, in Kāncī, displacing the Buddha from his seat, the deer of the First Sermon lying below him under a tree (Chapter IV, Fig. 4).

⁹⁴ Sahni (1923: 32; 1914: 142; pl. XVI).

⁹⁵ Sahni (1914: 142).

⁹⁶ *ASLAR* 1906-7 (J.H. Marshall & S. Konow): 94, pl. XXVI, 2; Sahni (1914: Di110-Di114); DSAL-IIAS, Sarnath, Accession no. 5829.

⁹⁷ See for instance Donaldson (1985, II: figs. 2518–2519).

⁹⁸ *ASLAR* 1907-8 (J.H. Marshall & S. Konow): 47–53.

⁹⁹ Sahni (1914: Bc39, Bd11, De5, Df22, Df29, Dk53).

“damaged”, “disfigured”, “having the face cut away”, “head missing”, “faces peeled off”,¹⁰⁰ etc. It is probable that they were used by the Sivaites as building material, as happened at Vikramaśīla (Chapter VI).

The temple was probably built in the second half of the twelfth century. It has been suggested that the Gāhaḍavāla moved their capital from Kanauj to Benares so as to profit from the religious prestige connected with that town. Whereas Kanauj was a political capital, Benares had evolved into the holiest of *tīrthas*. Choosing Benares as the seat of their power, the Gāhaḍavāla proclaimed themselves as “protectors of the (North) Indian holy places” and at the same time promoted a “holy war” against the Muslim invaders.¹⁰¹ Many shrines and bathing places were built thanks to royal patronage, especially in the northern part of the city, at a very short distance from Sarnath.¹⁰² No donation to the Buddhists is recorded in Benares, where a large number of inscriptions attest to the donations made to the brāhmaṇas.¹⁰³ An inscription from Gangaikondacholapuram shows that a member of the Gāhaḍavāla family visited the new temple of the Cōlas with the purpose of making a grant.¹⁰⁴ It is probably not a coincidence that the Sarnath temple stands within a *prakāra* (c. 200 x 60 m) of about the same size as that of Gangaikondacholapuram (c. 180 x 100 m).¹⁰⁵ The entrance is filtered by two large *gopuras*, typical of Cōla temples. Marshall observed that “judging from the massiveness of its foundations, this gateway would seem

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.: Bb30, Bb40, Bb52 Bb120, Bb178, Bb186, Bb192, Bb213, Bb219, Bb227, Bb238, Bb271, Bc6, Bc12, Bc14, Bc24, Bc43, Bc119, Bc202, Bc206, Bd28, Bd32, Bd36, Bd44.

¹⁰¹ Bakker (1996: 38–39)

¹⁰² Ibid.: n. 32.

¹⁰³ Niyogi (1959: 243 ff.).

¹⁰⁴ *ASIAR* 1907-8 (J.H. Marshall & S. Konow): 228.

¹⁰⁵ The temple of Gangaikondacholapuram has been published by Pichard & al. (1994): see temple map in vol. 2, pl. 5.

to have something like a South India *gopuram* — an analogy which is reflected in the diminishing size of the gateways as one approaches the central building”.¹⁰⁶ For all its similarity with Cōla temple architecture, the decorative features of the Sarnath temple are closely related to the Candella art of Khajuraho, and especially to the temple of Duladeo, dated to *c.* AD 1100-1150.¹⁰⁷ The aim of the Gāhaḍavāla seems to have been that of reproducing the grandeur of South Indian temples preserving, at the same time, the stylistic features of the northern temples, probably due to skilled workers coming from Jejākbhukti.

The temple of Sarnath (Fig. 20, b) stood on a high platform, like the Khajuraho temples (1.70 m at Sarnath, 1.52 m the Duladeo temple). A large door (8.8 m) on the eastern side gave access to a long *mukhamāṇḍapa*. The *mahāmaṇḍapa* (the so-called “inner court”) is rather large (*c.* 21 x 21 m)¹⁰⁸ because it occupies the courtyard of the earlier monastery. As already said, what had remained of the original floor of the *mahāmaṇḍapa* seems to have been mistakenly removed during the excavations, and the evidence regarding the position of the roof-supporting pillars is consequently lost. Marshall, who was convinced that the “inner court” was the open-sky courtyard of a monastery,¹⁰⁹ stated at the same time that “ceiling slabs and other architectural members were found among the debris in the courtyard”.¹¹⁰ According to Sahni, a slab with a conventional lotus flower, lying on the floor of the inner court, was “employed as a roof slab”.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ *ASIAR* 1907-8 (J.H. Marshall & S. Konow): 45.

¹⁰⁷ Deva (1990: 240).

¹⁰⁸ The Duladeo *mahāmaṇḍapa* is much smaller: 5.60 x 5.60 m (ibid.: 244).

¹⁰⁹ *ASIAR* 1907-8 (J.H. Marshall & S. Konow): 43.

¹¹⁰ *ASIAR* 1906-7 (id.): 83; Sahni (1923: 29).

¹¹¹ Sahni (1914: 261; Di117). Later, Sahni (1923: 30) maintained that “the inner courtyard was open to the skies.”

On the northern and southern sides of the *mahāmaṇḍapa*, there were two *mukhamaṇḍapas*,¹¹² one leading to the Main Shrine, the other to the lake. The southern hall was excavated in part and its perimeter could be outlined, but the northern hall (probably identical to the southern one) was not excavated because the structure was damaged due to the sloping ground.¹¹³ A “great drain” (1.8 m deep, 1 m. wide), built on the ruins of the earlier Monastery II, was observed in the western area. It was probably connected to the unexcavated *garbhagrha* because it “appears to have carried off all the water” from the building.¹¹⁴ The drain was again excavated by Sahni, who assumed that it was a “subterranean passage [...] which led into a very small shrine”.¹¹⁵ As observed by Sahni himself, it would be a unique example in Indian architecture, either Buddhist or Hindu: in fact, only the “Mughal forts often contain secret passages”.¹¹⁶ The drain hypothesis is more likely and fits the requirements of a Brahmanical temple.¹¹⁷

BRAHMANISED SARNATH

The project undertaken by the rulers of Benares involved a complete transformation of the Buddhist sanctuary. It affected the central part of the site, with the stūpa of Aśoka as the first target of the works. The railing that encircled the stūpa and the *harmikā* had already been dismantled in the Gupta period, and now a Brahmanical temple (the Main Shrine) was built on the stūpa. The capital and the broken shaft of the Aśoka

¹¹² Cōla temples are often equipped with more than one entrance, the *mukhamaṇḍapas* having the the function of an entrance pavilion to a sacred space.

¹¹³ *ASIAR* 1907-8 (J.H. Marshall & S. Konow): 43.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*: 46.

¹¹⁵ Sahni (1923: 31).

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*: 31.

¹¹⁷ See for instance the medieval Śiva temple of Balikeśvara (District East Nimar, Madhya Pradesh) in which a covered drain built in bricks connected the sanctum to a circular *kunḍa*, receiving the *abhiṣeka* water (*IAR* 1987-88: 61).

pillar were found on the concrete terrace set around the Main Shrine,¹¹⁸ and it is probable that the pillar was split up in this period and turned perhaps into a *liṅga*.¹¹⁹ The Main Shrine and the associated large floor were built reusing the architectural fragments of the Buddhist edifices. The reused slabs are often placed upside down “with an element of hatred and vengeance”,¹²⁰ as observed at Vikramaśīla. A railing pillar of the “1st century B.C.”¹²¹ was used as a step in the stairs of the eastern entrance also in the temple of the “Monastery I” area, built with new building stones.

A wall, partly excavated by Sahni,¹²² was built to separate the court of the Main Shrine from the southern area, where the Buddhist buildings (so-called Monasteries V, VI, VII) were destroyed by fire. Another wall separated the central court from the northern one, but there is a large door¹²³ that connected the Main Shrine to the “Monastery I” temple. In the northern court, the innermost *gopuram* is on the same axis as the temple, while the outermost one is aligned with the Main Shrine. It is thus probable that the outermost *gopuram* gave access to both the northern and central courts. The other Buddhist structures still standing were converted into Brahmanical shrines. For example, an image of Tryambaka Śiva was discovered in Structure 40, situated on the way connecting the “Monastery I” temple to the Main Shrine.¹²⁴ A Sivaite image (neither dated nor published, but described as a two-armed Śiva image of

¹¹⁸ Sahni (1914: 31).

¹¹⁹ Many examples of Aśoka pillars used as *Śivalingas* are enumerated by S.P. Gupta (1980: 27). We do not know whether the lower portion of the Sarnath pillar remained visible after it was demolished.

¹²⁰ Chaudhary (1978: 229).

¹²¹ Sahni (1914: 213, Da32).

¹²² Id. (1923: 22).

¹²³ *ASLAR* 1907-8 (J.H. Marshall & S. Konow): 68.

¹²⁴ *ASLAR* 1906-7 (id.): 80–81, pl.XXIII,11; Sahni (1914: Bh4); DSAL-IIAS, Sarnath, Accession no. 5809. For Tryambaka as a form of the eleven Rudras, see Rao, T.N. Gopinatha (1914-16, II: 390).

the Tryambaka type) was found in the *garbhagrha* of a shrine in the south-eastern corner of the court of the Main Shrine (Shrine S in Fig. 19). Sahni maintained that it was Buddhist in origin and later “appropriated for Brahmanical purpose”.¹²⁵

The Brahmanical project at Sarnath was never brought to completion, as attested to by the finding of numerous unfinished carvings¹²⁶ and sculptures in the “Monastery I” temple area, among which the huge, unfinished image of Śiva¹²⁷ now in the site museum.

¹²⁵ *ASIR* 1916-17 (D. R. Sahni): 15. In relation to the “Saiva images”, Sahni says that they “show how completely the site of Sarnath must have been Brahmanized in later periods.”

¹²⁶ Marshall states that Monastery I “had not long been built when destruction overtook it”, and that “the discovery, to the west of the monastery, of a number of unfinished carvings of identically the same pattern as those belonging to the structure, suggests that the superstructure may not have been actually completed when ruin overwhelmed it.” (*ASIR* 1906-7, J.H. Marshall & S. Konow: 84).

¹²⁷ Sahni 1914: Bh1 pl. XVIII.

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This bibliography is ordered in three sections (*Data Archive, Texts, Modern Sources and Studies in History, Religion and Philosophy*), of which the first two are further divided in sub-sections. The articles published in some journals and collections (*The Indian Antiquary, Epigraphia Indica, Annual Reports of the Archaeological Survey of India*, and a few others) are not listed in the bibliography, but their authors and the year of publication are cited in the notes to the text. Only academic institutions (universities, museums, etc.), some difficult to track even with the help of the World Wide Web, are mentioned as publishers. Journals cited only once are not included in the list of abbreviations.

ABBREVIATIONS

- AA* *Artibus Asiae*. Dresden-Leipzig, Ascona-New York, Zürich.
- ABORI* *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*. Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona/Pune.
- AI* *Ancient India. Bulletin of the Archaeological Survey of India*, 1946-1962/63. New Delhi.
- AION* *Annali dell'Istituto Orientale di Napoli*. Napoli.
- AITMS* Ancient Indian Tradition & Mythology Series/Purāṇas in Translation. Delhi.
- ArsOr* *Ars Orientalis*. Washington.
- ArtBull* *The Art Bulletin. A Quarterly Published by the College Art Association of America*. New York.

- ArtsAs* *Arts asiatiques*. Paris.
- ASI Archaeological Survey of India. New Delhi.
- ASIAR* *Archaeological Survey of India. Annual Reports*. Calcutta, Delhi 1902-3 [1904]-1938/39 [1941].
- ASIR* *Archaeological Survey of India Reports*, eds. Alexander Cunningham & al. Simla, Calcutta, 1871-1885 (Index vol. 1887).
- AsRes* *Asiatic(k) Researches; or, Transactions of the Society Instituted in Bengal, for Inquiring into the History and Antiquities, the Arts, Sciences, and Literature, of Asia*. Calcutta 1788 [Jan. 1789]-1839.
- ASWIR* *Archaeological Survey of Western India Reports*. London 1874-1883.
- BSOAS* *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*. University of London.
- CHB* *The Comprehensive History of Bihar*, eds. Bindeshwari Prasad Sinha & al., 3 vols. in 6 tomes. K.P. Jayaswal Institute, Patna 1974-1987.
- CII* *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*. ASI, Oxford; New Delhi.
- DSAL-IIAS The Digital South Asian Library-American Institute of Indian Studies, Center for Art and Archaeology. <http://dsal.uchicago.edu/>
- EAP* *Encyclopedia of Asian Philosophy*, ed. Oliver Leaman. London 2001.
- EC* *Epigraphia Carnatica* (Mysore Archaeological Series), ed. B[enjamin] Lewis Rice. Bangalore, Mangalore 1886-1905. Rev. ed. B.L. Rice, Ramanujapuram Narasimhacar & al. Bangalore.
- EFEO Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient. Paris.
- EI* *Epigraphia Indica*, 1892-1977/78. Calcutta, New Delhi.

- EITA Encyclopedia of Indian Temples Architecture. New Delhi.
- EJ* *Encyclopedia of Jainism*, ed. Nagendra Kr. Singh, 30 vols. New Delhi 2001.
- EW* *East and West*. IsMEO/IsIAO, Rome 1950-2009.
- HCIP The History and Culture of the Indian People, vols. 2 (*The Age of Imperial Unity*, 1968⁴ [1951]), 4 (*The Age of Imperial Kanauj*, 1964² [1955]), 5 (*The Struggle for Empire*, 1966² [1957]), gen. ed. R[amesh] C[handra] Majumdar. Bombay.
- HistRel* *History of Religions*. University of Chicago.
- HJAS* *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*. Cambridge, Mass.
- IA* *The Indian Antiquary, A Journal of Oriental Research in Literature, Languages, Folklore, etc., etc.* Bombay 1872-1933.
- IAR* *Indian Archaeology. A Review*. ASI.
- IHQ* *The Indian Historical Quarterly*. Calcutta 1925-1963.
- IHR* *The Indian Historical Review*. New Delhi.
- IJJ* *Indo-Iranian Journal*. Leiden.
- IndTaur* *Indologica Taurinensia*. Torino 1973-2011.
- IsIAO Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, Roma.
- IsMEO Istituto Italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente, Roma. [Merged in the above].
- JAIH* *Journal of Ancient Indian History*. University of Calcutta.
- JAOS* *Journal of the American Oriental Society*. Ann Arbor.
- JASB* *The Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*. Calcutta 1832-1904.
- JBORS* *Journal of the Bihar [and Orissa] Research Society*. Patna 1915-1961.

- JIABS* *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies.* Madison, Lausanne.
- JIP* *Journal of Indian Philosophy.* Dordrecht.
- JISOA* *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art.* Calcutta 1933-2009.
- JOIB* *Journal of the Oriental Institute of Baroda.* Maharajah Sayajirao University, Baroda.
- JPTS* *Journal of the Pali Text Society.* London.
- JRAS* *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland.* London.
- JRASB* *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal.* Calcutta 1935-1950.
- LK* *Lalit Kalā. A Journal of Oriental Art, Chiefly Indian.* Lalit Kalā Akademi, New Delhi 1955-2005.
- MASI* *Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India.* Calcutta, New Delhi.
- MJLS* *Madras Journal of Literature and Science.* Madras Literary Society and Auxiliary of the Royal Asiatic Society, Madras 1833-1889/94.
- Numen* *Numen. International Review for the History of Religions.* Leiden.
- PA* *Pakistan Archaeology.* The Department of Archaeology and Museums, Karachi.
- PIFIP* *Publications de l'Institut Français d'Indologie, Pondichéry.*
- PIHC* *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress.*
- PTS* *The Pali Text Society.* London.
- SAA* *South Asian Archaeology. Proceedings of the International Conferences of South Asian Archaeologists in Western Europe.*

- SAS* *South Asian Studies*. The British Association for South Asian Studies, London.
- SBB* Sacred Books of the Buddhists. The Pali Text Society, London.
- SBE* Sacred Books of the East, Translated by Various Scholars and Edited by F. Max Müller (50 vols.). Oxford 1879-1910.
- SII* *South Indian Inscriptions*, ed. Eugen Hultzsch. Madras 1890-1903.
- SocSci* *Social Scientist*. New Delhi.
- SOR* Serie Orientale Roma. IsMEO/IsIAO, Roma.
- SRAA* *Silk Road Art and Archaeology*. Institute of Silk Road Studies, Kamakura 1990-2004.
- WSTB* Wiener Studien zur Tibetologie und Buddhismuskunde. Universität Wien.
- WZKSO* *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Süd- und Ostasiens und Archiv für indische Philosophie*. Universität Wien.

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