

A NOTE ON PATAÑJALI AND THE BUDDHISTS

By

JOHANNES BRONKHORST

Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya* on P. 1. 3. 1 mentions "sciences which have something auspicious in the beginning, in the middle and in the end" (*maṅgalādīni maṅgalamadyāni maṅgalāntāni sāstrāni*). In my *Three Problems pertaining to the Mahābhāṣya* (Bronkhorst, 1987 : esp. p. 12.) I have had occasion to draw attention to the difficulties of interpretation which this phrase brings about. *Mahābhāṣya* itself is not stated to have something auspicious in the beginning, in the middle and in the end. In the case of the vārttikas, the "something auspicious in the beginning" is, according to Patañjali, the use of the word *siddhe* in one of the first of them. This vārttika does not, however, appear to be the first vārttika in the *Mahābhāṣya*, as I have pointed out.¹ The "something auspicious in the beginning" in Pāṇini's Aṣṭādhyāyī is the word *vṛddhi* in P. 1. 1. 1 (*vṛddhir ād aic*). The "something auspicious in the middle" in this text is the presence of *bhū-* (instead of *bhv-*) in P. 1. 3. 1 (*bhūvādayo dhātavaḥ*). But P. 1. 3. 1 is not, of course, anywhere near the middle of the Aṣṭādhyāyī. The "something auspicious in the end" remains unspecified in the *Mahābhāṣya*. Some commentators propose the use of *udaya* in P. 8. 4. 67, which is not the very end of the Aṣṭādhyāyī. It is far from certain that Patañjali had anything specific in mind for the "something auspicious in the end". The question is therefore: whence did Patañjali get the notion of "sciences which have something auspicious in the beginning, in the middle and in the end"?

Later on in my *Three Problems to the Mahābhāṣya* (Bronkhorst, 1987 : 56f.) I had occasion to draw attention to some close parallels between certain notions in the *Mahābhāṣya* and some ideas current among the Buddhists of that period. I ventured the hypothesis, which could be supported with various arguments, that Patañjali may have been indebted to Buddhism, and was perhaps acquainted with the Sarvāstivāda school of this religion. This allows us to look at Buddhist texts for the possible source of Patañjali's notion of "sciences which have something auspicious in the beginning, in the middle and in the end".

¹ A. Wexler does not share this point of view. For a discussion of his criticism, see the appendix below.

The Buddhist texts that have come down to us do indeed contain a very similar notion. The Dharma, i. e. the truth preached by the Buddha, is here described as "auspicious in the beginning, in the middle and in the end", in Pāli: *ādikalyāṇa, majjhekalyāṇa, pariyosānakalyāṇa*, in Sanskrit: *ādau kalyāṇa, madhye kalyāṇa, paryavasāne kalyāṇa*. We find this expression very frequently in the Pāli Buddhist texts, especially in the Vinaya and Sutta Piṭakas.² The expression has been preserved in Sanskrit in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra*, the *Daśottarasūtra*, the *Nidānasamyukta*, and elsewhere.³ Several of these texts in Sanskrit belonged most probably to the Sarvāstivādins.⁴

It is of course not possible to prove that Patañjali adapted the Buddhist notion of the Dharma as "auspicious in the beginning, in the middle and in the end" to arrive at his notion of "sciences which have something auspicious in the beginning, in the middle and in the end". It constitutes however a possibility. As such it might be considered to add some weight, if ever so little, to the arguments produced earlier in support of Buddhist influence on Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*.

In this connection it will be appropriate to draw once again attention to another case, where Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya* and early Buddhist literature contain very similar passages.⁵ *Mbh* II p. 120, l. 20-21 (on P. 3. 2. 115) contains the following sentences⁶:

"Alternatively, there are people who do not perceive the present. For example: Śākaṭāyana from among the grammarians, while sitting at [the side of] the carriage-road, did not perceive a group of carts that passed by."

Buddhist literature contains a similar episode in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra* and its parallels. Here a certain Ārāḍa Kālāma is stated to have had such an experience, or rather non-experience. He described the event in the following words⁷:

² See the *Pāli Tipiṭakam Concordance*, part VI, by F. L. Woodward and E. M. Hare, London: Pāli Text Society, 1954, p. 316, s. v. *ādikalyāṇa*, for references to the Pāli canon.

³ See the *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch der buddhistischen Texte aus den Turfan-Funden* (ed. Heinz Bechert), 4. Lieferung, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1981, p. 249-50, s. v. *ādī*.

⁴ Hünber, 1985: 69-70, 71-73 (*Nidānasamyukta*; *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*); Pāṇḍika, 1985: 185, with reference to an article by J. W. de Jong (*Daśottarasūtra*).

⁵ See Bronkhorst, 1993: 79, with n. 3.

⁶ *Mbh* II p. 120, l. 20-23: *athavā bhavati vai kaścid api varṣamānākāṣaṇaṁ nopalabhate | tad yathā | vaiyākaraṇānām śākaṭāyano rathamārge āsīnaḥ śākaṭasārtham yāntām nopalebhe |*

⁷ *MPS* 28. 18: *samjñi evāham ... samjño jūgrā nāśrayaṁ pañcānām kakaṭa-śatānām vyatikramamāṇānām śabdāṁ |*

"Even though conscious and awake I did not hear the sound of five hundred carts passing by."

It is of course tempting to assume that Patañjali was acquainted with the Sarvāstivāda *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*. This alone might then be held to account both for his story about Śākaṭāyana and for his mention of "sciences which have something auspicious in the beginning, in the middle and in the end". This conclusion should not, however, be drawn rashly. The story of Śākaṭāyana in particular has some aspects which might be held to plead against direct borrowing from the Buddhist *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*.

It is not impossible that the story of Ārāḍa Kālāma is not a Buddhist invention. Ārāḍa Kālāma is presented as a non-Buddhist teacher, and this may very well be correct. It is therefore conceivable that similar stories were current in non-Buddhist circles, and Patañjali may therefore have heard some such story from non-Buddhists.

The name Śākaṭāyana poses another problem. It means "descendant of Śakaṭa" (by P. 4. 1. 99). But *śakaṭa* is also the word for 'cart' used in Patañjali's remark. This may not be coincidence. A more or less floating story about carts may have been attributed to Śākaṭāyana because of his name. If that is true, it is harder to believe that Patañjali was here influenced by the episode about Ārāḍa Kālāma in the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*. Unless, of course we assume that Patañjali made up the story about Śākaṭāyana under the influence of the Buddhist texts with which he supposedly was acquainted.

A third case to be considered is constituted by the following two phrases in the *Mahābhāṣya*: *guṇasamdrāvo dravyam* (*Mbh* II p. 336 l. 26) and *guṇasamudāyo dravyam* (*Mbh* II p. 200 l. 13f.), which do not appear to express the opinion of Patañjali. The notion of material objects as collections of qualities existed both in Sarvāstivāda and in Sāṃkhya.⁸ Since there are no indications whatsoever that Patañjali was acquainted with the Sāṃkhya philosophy, we are, once again, confronted with an indication that he may have been influenced by the Sarvāstivādins.

If the cases just discussed cannot prove beyond doubt that Patañjali himself knew this or that Buddhist text, or any Buddhist text for that matter, they do lend support to the view that Patañjali underwent, perhaps indirectly, Buddhist influence. Together with the evidence presented in my *Three Problems pertaining to the Mahābhāṣya*, they allow us, as it seems to me, to consider Buddhist influence on Patañjali a probable proposition.

⁸ Bronkhorst, 1994: esp. p. 317 f.

Appendix

In my *Three Problems pertaining to the Mahābhāṣya* I mentioned the traditional tendency in our discipline, which sometimes leads to the result that theories formulated in the 19th century have come to be accepted as facts, whereas equally strong but more recently formulated theories may be looked upon as reproachable speculation (p. 1). Now it appears that Professor Albrecht Wezler has taken it upon himself to illustrate this observation (Wezler, 1994: 174–175 n. 3).

As is well known, Kielhorn had proposed a criterion for identifying prose vārttikas; sentences which are accompanied by an explanation which usually repeats their words, are vārttikas.⁹ In this connection I made the following observation (p. 3–4):¹⁰ “Of ... interest in this context is Kielhorn’s habit of adding an explanation (which in these cases is identical with the vārttikas) where he thought that a certain phrase was a vārttika, thus staying in agreement with his own criterion... (follow some instances)... In all these cases Kielhorn has himself created the evidence on which his criterion is based! Of course, Kielhorn has a theory to explain why many of his manuscripts do not treat presumed vārttikas as such: since the comment in the Bhāṣya is in these cases identical with the vārttika, scribes did not bother to repeat this; they added a figure 2, in which place later a stop came, which in its turn disappeared altogether from many manuscripts. This example shows, I think, very clearly the way of working of one of our illustrious predecessors in the last century. Kielhorn did not just report what he found in his manuscripts. On the contrary, he formulated a theory about the authorship of the different parts of his text, and on the basis of this theory he subsequently felt entitled to go to the extent of deviating from his manuscripts in some cases.”

⁹ Kielhorn, 1876.

¹⁰ I use this occasion to express my regrets about the numerous misprints which mar *Three Problems pertaining to the Mahābhāṣya*; no proofs were ever sent to me. I also would like to express my agreement with Wezler’s observation (1994: 182 n. 32) concerning my work on Āhnika 1 of Bhartṛhari’s *Mahābhāṣyadīpikā*, which the title page describes as “critically edited by Johannes Bronkhorst”. Wezler raises the question: “Would not ‘(critically) reconstructed’ have been a more precise — and honest — designation of the work actually done?” Unfortunately I had no voice in the shaping of the title page. I have tried to somewhat rectify the wrong impression thus created in the first lines of my preface to this work: “This so-called ‘critical edition’... is no more, and can be no more, than an attempt to make sense of an often unintelligible text, handed down in one incomplete manuscript”. I regret to see that these words have gone unnoticed.

I do not believe anyone could possibly disagree with this observation.⁴ Kielhorn was careful enough to inform us in his notes of what exactly he found in his manuscripts, thus giving us an insight into his working procedure. Explicit reflections in his preface furthermore discuss and try to justify it. Nor do I in any way disagree with this procedure. I am a great admirer of Kielhorn, and when I refer to him as “one of our illustrious predecessors,” I truly mean it.

In spite of this, Wezler comments on this passage in the following manner: “As for Bronkhorst..., the manner he treats Kielhorn is quite unfair, to say the least. To accuse him of having, in certain cases of determining vārttikas, ‘himself created the evidence on which his criterion is based’..., stands the facts on their heads. Anybody who has worked with, or even himself prepared the critical edition of a text in which vārttikas are embedded (no matter whether formulated by the author himself or representing the work of another author) is familiar with the problem whether at particular places one is to assume a vārttika in spite of the absence of the usual subsequent paraphrase/ commentary/ explanation or not. And Kielhorn, in the cases referred to by Bronkhorst, quite clearly states what the readings of the mss. are, i. e. that he thought an emendation necessary.”

A major misunderstanding must underlie these remarks. To begin with, how can I treat Kielhorn unfairly, even accuse him, in a passage in which I praise him? I have no difficulty whatever with Kielhorn’s method, and find it rather an example of good and thorough scholarship. But apparently Wezler looks upon the use of theory as a weakness, which one should try to avoid. The result is that he tries to hide the theoretical aspect of philological work, and present the outcome as fact. Yet his own words betray that even the most painstaking editor of a text in which vārttikas are embedded, sometimes has to assume a vārttika. Assuming is not fact, but theory. And a good assumption is still not fact, but is good theory. Modifying the quip one sometimes hears, to the extent that nothing is more practical than a good theory, one might say that nothing is as factual as a good theory. But a theory is a theory. And there is no way to change a phrase which Kielhorn did not find in his manuscripts but yet added in his edition, into a fact as far as the manuscript evidence is concerned. Such phrases were added, created, by Kielhorn, whether one likes it or not. And theories always go beyond the evidence, because such is their nature. When, therefore, Wezler thinks that, in general, only new or more evidence calls for a new theory, he seems to imply that the same amount of evidence can accommodate only one theory, which is contrary to the very nature of theories.

Let me repeat once more here, to avoid any misunderstanding which this discussion might create, that I have no problems with Kielhorn's criterion for identifying vārttikas. In this respect I am therefore in full agreement with Wezler. Our disagreement concerns the application of this criterion. As it so happens, Kielhorn's criterion would identify as vārttikas three statements that precede what is traditionally held to be the first vārttika.¹¹ There is, moreover, independent evidence that two of these three statements were not composed by Patañjali: one of them he did not correctly understand, the other one he attributes to an (or the) Ācārya. Wezler does not, if I understand him correctly, contest these observations. He concludes from them, that these last two vārttika-like statements may have been composed by one or more persons different from both Patañjali and Kātyāyana. With regard to the third statement which is treated like a vārttika —and which happens to be the very first line of the *Mahābhāṣya*: *atha śabdānuśāsanam* —Wezler (p. 173–174 n. 2) admits that there is a problem, then offers a solution which is “as simple as plausible”: “Patañjali starts his critical examination and explanation of Pāṇini's rules and of Kātyāyana's Vārttika on them by repeating or quoting ... the very first words by which the study of grammar had much earlier been announced as a subject of instruction to those students whom Patañjali himself (really or fictitiously) turns to now that they have gained a good grounding, i. e. know the Aṣṭādhyāyī and the Vārttika by heart and understand much of what is said in the two works.”

These justifications for not ascribing the statements concerned to Kātyāyana may look a bit *ad hoc* to those who have not already decided beforehand to agree with Wezler's position. The real reason, I believe, why Wezler looked so hard for alternative explanations, is that the first vārttika recognised by him begins with the word *siddhe*, and that Patañjali explains the purpose of this word as *maṅgalārtham* “for the sake of something auspicious”. Patañjali then adds that sciences that have something auspicious in the beginning (*maṅgalādīni sāstrāṇi*) prosper. Pace Wezler, I do think that Patañjali is to be taken seriously as regards his contention that *siddhe* is *maṅgalārtha*. What I am less convinced of, is that Patañjali's beginning refers necessarily to the very first word, in this case of Kātyāyana's Vārttika.

¹¹ Cp. Kielhorn, 1876 : 26 : “... wherever in the *Mahābhāṣya* we meet with a paraphrased statement, of which Patañjali does not tell us explicitly that it belongs to another or to others, or of which the context does not prove clearly and beyond doubt that it is a quotation from the work of another, we shall regard ourselves as bound to assume that such statement is Kātyāyana's, or in other words, that it is a Vārttika or part of one.”

The reason for this doubt is simple: Patañjali refers in a similar context to the “middle” and the “end” of the Aṣṭādhyāyī, and we have seen that this presumed middle is far removed from the real middle, and that the so-called end is not at the very end. It may here be added, that *atha* (in *atha śabdānuśāsanam*) is a perfectly respectable beginning for any work.

Summing up, Wezler makes some proposals which I would be the last to claim cannot be right. I do insist, however, that these proposals constitute just a theory, and not a particularly convincing one at that. When, then, Wezler asks the rhetorical question “what is the use of formulating alleged new theories?”, all he does is illustrate my observation, repeated at the beginning of this appendix, to the extent that for some contemporary scholars theories formulated in the 19th century have come to be accepted as facts, whereas equally strong, but more recently formulated theories are looked upon as reproachable speculation.

Reference

- Bronkhorst, Johannes (1987) : *Three Problems pertaining to the Mahābhāṣya*, Poona : Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute. (Post-graduate and Research Department Series no. 30; “Pandit Shripad Shastri Deodhar Memorial Lectures” [Third series].)
- Bronkhorst, Johannes (1993) : *The Two Traditions of Meditation in Ancient India*. Second, revised edition. Delhi : Motilal Banarsidass.
- Bronkhorst, Johannes (1994) : “The qualities of Sāṅkhya.” *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens* 38 (Orbis Indicus; Festschrift G. Oberhammer), 309–322.
- Hinüber, Oskar von (1985) : “Die Bestimmung der Schulzugehörigkeit buddhistischer Texte nach sprachlichen Kriterien.” In : *Zur Schulzugehörigkeit von Werken der Hīnayāna-Literatur*, Erster Teil, hrsg. Heinz Bechert. Göttingen : Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. (Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, Philologisch-historische Klasse, Dritte Folge, Nr. 149.) Pp. 57–75.
- Kielhorn, Franz (1876) : *Kātyāyana and Patañjali : Their relationship to each other, and to Pāṇini*. Bombay. Reprinted : Kleine Schriften I (Wiesbaden : Franz Steiner, 1969), pp. 1–64.
- Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* = *Das Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, Text in Sanskrit und Tibetisch, verglichen mit dem Pāli nebst einer Übersetzung der chinesischen Entsprechung im Vinaya der Mūlasarvāstivādins, auf Grund

von Turfan-Handschriften herausgegeben und bearbeitet von Ernst Waldschmidt. (Originally published in 1950-51.) Reprint : Rinsen Book, Kyoto, 1986.

Pāsādika, Bhikkhu (1985) : “ Über die Schulzugehörigkeit der Kanon-Zitate im Abhidharmakośabhāṣya.” In : *Zur Schulzugehörigkeit von Werken der Hīnayāna-Literatur*, Erster Teil, hrsg. Heinz Bechert. Göttingen : Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. (Abhandlungen der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, Philologisch-historische Klasse, Dritte Folge, Nr. 149.) Pp. 180-190.

Patañjali : *Vyākaraṇa-Mahābhāṣya*. Ed. F. Kielhorn. 3 vols. Third edition by K. V. Abhyankar. Poona : Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute. 1962-1972.

Wezler, Albrecht (1994) : “ Once again on Patañjali's definition of a word (Studies in Patañjali's Mahābhāṣya). ” *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens* 38 (Festschrift G. Oberhammer), 173-189.

Woodward, F. L., and Hare, E. M. (1954), *Pāli Tipiṭakam Concordance*, part VI. London : Pāli Text Society.

Abbreviations

Mbh Mahābhāṣya of Patañjali

MPS Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra

P. Pāṇinian sūtra