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Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe

Encounters, Notions, and Comparative Perspectives

Edited by

Volkhard Krech
Marion Steinicke



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DID THE BUDDHA EMERGE FROM A BRAHMANIC
ENVIRONMENT? THE EARLY BUDDHIST EVALUATION
OF “NOBLE BRAHMINS” AND THE “IDEOLOGICAL SYSTEM”
OF BRAHMANISM

Jens Schlieter

In the following paper – a response to Patrick Olivelle’s rich presentation of the religious dynamics of Brahmanism and other traditions in early India¹ – I will focus on the general conviction, shared, as it seems, by Olivelle, that early Buddhism can be seen as an answer to Brahmanism. More or less, early Buddhism is widely conceived of as an ascetic, ethically rigorous reformist movement in a Brahmanic environment. Although there seems to be sufficient evidence that (at least a certain number of) Brahmins were present in the early Buddhist environment, it was perhaps not the case that Brahmanism formed the major background tradition for the historical Buddha and the early Buddhist communities.² Actually, for more than a century now Buddhologists and Indologists have been puzzled by the fact that there are no close links between the teachings of the Vedas, and especially of those Upaniṣads acknowledged to be pre-Buddhist, and Buddhist teachings.³ Étienne Lamotte observed that Magadha, one “kingdom”, or area, which counts as one of the central territories which the Buddha peregrinated and in which he taught, “was not completely ary-

¹ “Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe. Encounters, Notions, and Comparative Perspectives” (Conference of the IKGf “Dynamics in the History of Religions”, Bochum, Oct. 15–17, 2008), see this volume above p. 117.

² The knowledge of the life and teachings of the Buddha is, more or less exclusively, conveyed through Buddhist texts. However, some sources are older than others. Without touching upon the difficult question of the authenticity of the “teachings of the Buddha”, I will refer – in a simplified manner – to this older stratum of sources as “early Buddhist teachings”.

³ Hermann Oldenberg already characterized the situation with the following words: “Was der Erforscher dieser Gedankenentwicklungen besonders lebhaft vermisst, wäre als ein Sichzusammenordnen der der brahmanischen und buddhistischen Traditionen [...] in einem gemeinsamen Rahmen zu beschreiben, als Vorhandensein einer Kontinuität datierbarer Verbindungsglieder [...]. Wo der Buddhismus in die Erscheinung tritt, hebt sich unvermittelt gleichsam ein Vorhang an einer Stelle, die früher ausserhalb des Gesichtskreises lag” (Oldenberg, Hermann, *Die Lehre der Upanishaden und die Anfänge des Buddhismus*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1915, 289).

anized, but simply crossed by bands of renegade Āryans named *vrātya* who did not follow the vedic rites”.⁴ Despite the fact that the degree of prevalence of Brahmins and Brahmanic teachings at the time of the Buddha might be open for discussion, most scholars of Buddhism are convinced that Brahmins were an important impact factor for the Buddha and his teachings. The evidence for this claim seems to be quite obvious, because, as Buddhist sources narrate, Brahmins crossed the Buddha’s way quite frequently and formed, again according to the sources, a large group among his converted followers. Yet, one may ask – as a thought experiment – how early Buddhist accounts of Brahmins and their cosmological and philosophical teachings, their social status, ritual procedures etc. will have to be re-evaluated if Brahmins were at that time *not* a predominant cultural force. As Buddhist texts were transmitted orally for at least 150 years, and the canonical scriptures were finalized even later, a significant amount of the Buddhist depictions of Brahmins and the ‘ideological system of Brahmanism’ might have been conceptualized and inserted at a much later date. These descriptions may, therefore, reflect a situational change of Brahmanic predominance that evolved in the meantime. One may be tempted to argue that this kind of ‘polemical’ literature is the result of a – possibly inferior? – discourse position of Buddhists that became true in the subsequent historical period.

Even if one may not be able to prove sufficiently that this dynamic and complex scenario is, on the whole, a plausible reconstruction, it may nevertheless be useful. It could help to shed some new light on certain – more or less odd – facts of early Buddhist accounts of Brahmins and Brahmanism.

Most interestingly, the current conception of the Brahmanic background of early Buddhism, and the largely polemical encounter between Buddhists and Brahmins, seems to be primarily informed by Buddhist dogmatic, historiographic and hagiographic literature. If, as we assume, the strong opposition to Brahmanic ideas were dated back (or “retrojected”) to the time of the Buddha and his early followers, one should take into account that Buddhist discourse was largely

⁴ Lamotte, Étienne, *History of Indian Buddhism. From the Origins to the Śaka Era*, Louvain-la-Neuve 1988 [= orig.: *Histoire du Bouddhisme Indien*, Louvain 1958], 5; compare Erdosy, George, “The Prelude to Urbanisation: Ethnicity and the Rise of Late Vedic Chiefdoms”, in: Frank Raymond Allchin, *The Archeology of Early Historic South Asia. The Emergence of Cities and States*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995, 91.

borne by monastic specialists (and not individual ascetic adepts or lay followers). Monks, as seems obvious, have certain social and political interests, because their maintenance by lay followers⁵ is always immediately in danger if political circumstances change. As a matter of fact, the earliest Buddhist textual sources we can get hold of reach back into an era where monastic communities were already firmly established. The formation of Buddhism as a tradition should not only be regarded as a process of an initial separation, followed by an inner differentiation in schools (that is, of course, what Buddhist historiography, e. g., of the schisms, and doxographical literature would like to suggest). In addition, it seemed to be a bundle of processes consisting of special arrangements with leading elites of political power, ongoing contacts with Brahmanic thought and practices, and the assimilation of various local folk traditions, respectively.

1. *The Localisation of the “Āryan Range” as an Indicator for the Prevalence of “Brahmanic Culture” in Magadha*

Patrick Olivelle marks two ideological cornerstones of the Vedic world: “the supremacy of the *Brāhmaṇa* articulated in the *varṇa* system and the centrality of the married householder”. These cornerstones were challenged by wandering ascetics of Buddhism, Jainism and others – rejecting family and procreation, abandonment of Vedic ritual activities; generating new teachings of *karma*, suffering, and absolute freedom.

For sure, there seems to be abundant evidence that these mendicants formed the earliest stage of Buddhist followers – the Buddha, Gautama Siddhārtha, being one of them.

But was the Vedic culture at large, relying on oral, and later written Sanskrit sources, the culture that was predominant in the greater region of Magadha at the time of the Buddha (4th c. BCE)? Let me now turn to Bronkhorst’s recent observations.⁶ As is well known, it is still very difficult to get an overview of early Indian history. Historical dates of events, dynasties and texts are still subject to endless debates and speculation. Anyhow, it seems to be more or less clear

⁵ Compare Chakravarti, Uma, *The Social Dimension of Early Buddhism*, Delhi/Oxford: Oxford University Press 1987, 69–84.

⁶ Bronkhorst, Johannes, *Greater Magadha. Studies in the Culture of Early India*, Leiden/Boston: Brill 2007.

that Vedic-Sanskritic culture is connected to Indo-Aryan invaders to North-West India. It seems that they were not able to dominate the Indian sub-continent at once, but were, in the first millennium BC, slowly progressing to the East. In several texts from the respective time frame, the last three to four hundred years of the pre-Christian era, a word is given for the “living sphere”; the “range of the habitat” of the Aryas, the “*āryāvarta*” (i. e. *āryāṇām āvartaḥ*).

The Āryas are clearly depicted as the high-ranking, noble followers of the Vedic-Brahmanic Sanskrit-Culture; “*ārya*”, in other words, are “distinguished by a set of ideas”⁷ and a certain language, but not by ethnicity.⁸ Some sources allude that the territory of the “*āryāvarta*” had an Eastern limit; it did not extend beyond the confluence (*prayāga*) of the rivers Gaṅgā and Yamunā.⁹ Patañjali’s *Mahābhāṣya*, an important commentary to the oldest extant Indian grammar, states: “Which is the land of the Āryas? It is the region to the east where the Sarasvatī disappears (*ādarśa*), west of the Kālaka forest, south of the Himalayas, and north of the Pāriyātra mountains”.¹⁰ Bronkhorst concludes his analysis: “According to the passages [...] the region east of the confluence of the Gaṅgā and the Yamunā was not considered Brahmanical territory at the time of Patañjali”.¹¹ Indeed, “[t]he fact that ‘easterners’ (*prācyas*) in general, and Magadhans in particular, were regarded with disapproval by Late Vedic seers shows that the spread of new values had not transcended the Ganga-Yamuna Doab in the 6th century BC”.¹²

In later sources of the second or third century CE, however, things seem to have changed, and Brahmins incorporated the region of (Greater) Magadha in the “*āryāvarta*” or “*madhyadeśa*”-region; they looked at it now “as *their* land”.¹³ If we concede that all the single steps of this conclusion are correct, then it may imply that in the second century BCE Brahmanic Sanskrit culture (as a “cultural category” in the sense of Erdosy) was not dominant in the region of Magadha. If this assumption is correct, it will most likely be the case for the preceding centuries (6th to 2nd century BCE). So, one may assume that

⁷ Erdosy 1995, 90.

⁸ Lopez, Donald S. Jr., *Buddhism and Science. A Guide for the Perplexed*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2008, 78–83.

⁹ Today Ganges and Yumna; the *prayāg* – one of the ancient pilgrimage sites of India – is located near the modern city of Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh.

¹⁰ *Mahā-bh* I. 475 1. 3; III. 174. 1. 7–8; cited in Bronkhorst 2007, 1.

¹¹ Bronkhorst 2007, 2.

¹² Erdosy 1995, 91.

¹³ Bronkhorst 2007, 2.

Brahmanic culture was not widely spread in (Greater) Magadha at the time the Buddha and his early followers stayed there (4th c. BCE).

Interestingly, some Buddhist texts display a certain difference between “āryan” and “non-āryan” language¹⁴: “It is important to note, however, that the Buddha appears also to accept the widely held connotation of āryan as referring to those who have language, or at least proper language.”¹⁵ This characterisation of different languages and respective cultures seems to be an essential feature of the Jina Mahāvāra and the early Jaina tradition, too. As the Jain sources describe, Mahāvāra, who spoke *Ardhamagadhī*, taught to “Non-Aryans” (*anārya*) and to “Aryans”, speaking automatically in their mother-tongue.¹⁶

To substantiate his observation about the “range of the Ārya”, Bronkhorst refers to a second category of information, namely, the political history of the Ganges valley east of the confluence with the Yamunā. More precisely of interest in our context is information on the religious groups or teachers that were supported by the local rulers in the respective area. The early kings of Magadha, Bimbisāra and Ajātaśatru seem to have supported the Jaina and the Buddhists. Then the Nanda, on the other hand (ruled around 360–320 BCE), supported exclusively the Jaina; the preceding Maurya emperors, Candragupta Maurya and his son Bindusāra (ca. 293–268 BCE), again the Jaina, and the Ājīvika, the “materialists”. Aśoka, again, supported mainly the Buddhists. An eminent shift can be noted in the following dynasty of emperors, the Śuṅga: “It is only with the Śuṅgas, who were Brahmins themselves, that Brahmins may have begun to occupy the place in society which they thought was rightfully theirs. This happened around 185 BCE”.¹⁷

¹⁴ Deshpande, Madhav M., “What to do with the *Anāryas*: Dharmic Discourses of Inclusion and Exclusion”, in: Bronkhorst, Johannes/Deshpande, Madhav M. (eds.), *Aryan and Non-Aryan in South Asia: Evidence, Interpretation and Ideology*, Cambridge: Harvard Oriental Series 1999, 121 [with references].

¹⁵ Lopez 2008, 83.

¹⁶ Compare Deshpande 1999, 116.

¹⁷ Bronkhorst 2007, 3. Because the historical circumstances will be of some importance, a quotation from Robert DeCaroli may be added: “Although the brahmins were also heavily involved in the acculturation of remote people, unlike the Buddhists they posed a political threat. This potential political rivalry from the brahmins was actualized in the emergence of the Śunga Dynasty (185–173 BCE), who were low-ranking brahmins by caste [Reference given: *Thapar, Romila; A History of India*. Vol. 1 of 2. Baltimore: Penguin Books 1966, 151–153]. Although the date of this political shift is subject to debate the sequence of events is established. And, given the probable caste affiliations of the Śunga kings, it is not surprising that Puśyamitra, the first of the Śunga

This observation fits perfectly well with the other findings. If we additionally take into consideration that according to the revised, “short” chronology of the Buddha he may have died in the 4th century, we may be able to conclude that a Brahmanic preponderance in the Eastern Ganges plain, where the Buddha taught, was not very significant (a closer look to the sources, which is not possible to undertake here, might provide the result that the North- and South-Eastern Mahājanapadas [“great realms”, i. e. countries or regional kingdoms] of Kosala, Sakiya, and Kāśī with its capital Bārāṇasī, modern Benares, were more advanced in the process of “brahmanization” than the Mahājanapadas of Magadha, Vajjī and Malla).

To emphasize this point: If this holds true, the early Buddhist movement cannot be regarded as a “protest movement” against a Vedic-Brahmanic source culture. Early Buddhism could not be construed as essentially a counter-reaction against a Brahmanist system, simply because at that time Brahmanism – as an organized system – was not there.

Since Bronkhorst is mainly interested in the origin of the doctrine of rebirth and karmic retribution, his over-all conclusion pertains to the religious background of pre-Buddhist, and even pre-Jainist “Greater Magadha”. The ideology of rebirth and a moral interpretation of *karma*, may form an even elder tradition that predated Jainism, Buddhism, and Brahmanism in that area alike. According to his assumption the idea of karma and rebirth was invented by this unknown tradition that did not survive as an independent strand but merged into the three other traditions. A second conclusion is drawn in respect to the relative chronology of the late Vedic texts, namely, the Upaniṣads. If the Buddha did not adopt the ideas of *karma* and rebirth from Upaniṣadic sources, because these, as part of the Brahmanic-sanskritic discourse, were not known to him, it should be safe to conclude that these sources do not predate the Buddha, but are dependent on him, that is, later.

rulers, focused his religious patronage almost exclusively on Vedic sacrifices. The Buddhist texts attribute harsh and fanatical persecutions to Puśyāmītra, whom they claim sought to destroy Buddhism. It is possible, however, that he simply ignored the saṃgha and that contemporary monks saw this withdrawal of long-standing royal support as the death knell of the order” (DeCaroli, Robert, *Haunting the Buddha. Indian Popular Religions and the Formation of Buddhism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004, 33).

2. *Single Brahmins and the “Brahmanic System”: Two Different Categories in the Buddhist Accounts?*

However, Bronkhorst did not expand the implications that these findings may have in regard to the history of early Buddhist accounts of Brahmanism. I will try to highlight in just a few words some of the possible implications and will thereafter return to the question of the dynamics of inter-religious contacts. To repeat – and extend – the hypothesis: (a) there is quite good evidence that in the early parts of Buddhist canonical sources, such as the Sutra-collections, only few religious ideas or practices are mentioned that can be traced to Vedic origin.¹⁸ If (b) the intensive encounter of Buddhism and Brahmanic society happened to take place some centuries later, many of those passages in the Buddhist texts that consist of elaborate descriptions of Brahmins, their rites and myths, their ideology and philosophy, might be – in terms of text transmission – of secondary nature. The motive for these amendments may (c) consist of a deliberate or even non-intentional move to inscribe the recent conflict into the traditional accounts that were passed on to them. Even the intimate connection between the Buddha and the “warrior-caste” (*khattiya*), as well as the astoundingly high esteem of the Khattiyas displayed in early Buddhist sources, and possibly the local construction of a “khattiya-caste” as such may be part of a reaction against the Brahmins depiction of themselves as first in rank.

The full-fledged “Brahmanic system” may tentatively be defined by the following elements: (1) the vision of a hierarchical stratified society, (2) Brahmins as the supreme hereditary caste/class in the system; (3) the ideology of a graded system of (im)purities restricting class transgression; (4) the centrality of sacrifice for the well-being of the individual and, more important, the social community (cf. A I.155); (5) Brahmins as the exclusive media for the transmission of the sacred Vedic (lingual) tradition.

Due to the fact that Buddhist texts were initially composed and transmitted orally, the time frame of the beginning of their written fixation – around the first century BCE – might coincide with the assumed “aryanization” and “sanskritization”. If those descriptions reflect a later constellation of Buddhists and Brahmins, the Buddhist

¹⁸ Compare Bronkhorst 2007, 207–218.

depiction of the “Brahmanic system” might, consequently, be construed as a reaction against an invading Brahmanic tradition that had – only recently – began challenging the established position of Buddhists in society. Moreover, if at the time of the encounter Buddhists were already organized in larger monastic communities (*saṅghas*), supported with food and financed by a wealthy lay community, the recent spread of the “Brahma-kṣātra alliance”¹⁹ challenge might have been envisioned by the Buddhists as a danger to their subsistence: especially in a situation where the Brahmins would successfully proceed to establish strong relationships with the royal powers.

To speculate, however, a little further, one could even imagine that monastic Buddhists not only construed the “bad” – i. e., the greedy Brahmin striving for power – but also the “good” Brahmin, i. e. those Brahmins who already lived in Magadha in earlier times – but only in small numbers and far from the cities and royal centres. Those Brahmins were “good” and “noble” exactly because they lived in consonance with ascetic ideals and, furthermore, were far from being able to form royal alliances against the Buddhists. It is highly significant that many passages in the early texts try to show that the Buddhist worldview far better suits royal purposes than the Brahmanic worldview (e. g., the uselessness and costs of Brahmanic sacrifices), while the same texts express that the ruling emperors have the highest regard for the Buddhist view, if they are not Buddhists themselves. Moreover, Buddhist texts protest against the idea of the (bloody) Brahmanic sacrifice. For those Brahmins, however, who wish to sacrifice and want to gain a real return from sacrifice, Buddhist texts offer the recommendation of donating directly to true ascetics, i. e. Buddhist monks (see, for example, Sn 462 ff.).

But can we indeed produce sufficient evidence for the claim that early Buddhist sources display two different depictions of Aryans and Brahmins? Certainly, Buddhist accounts of Brahmins, and the Buddhist use of the Sanskrit term “*ārya*” (Pāli: *ariya*), show a significant polarity between the “good Brahmins”, who possess self-control and a restrained mind (e. g. Sn 284), the “*samaṇa-brāhmaṇa*”, “ascetics and Brahmins”, i. e. those Brahmins who live as ascetics and teachers, and the “bad Brahmins”, i. e. those living “today” – greedy, worldly, hypocritical, enmeshed in passion, sense pleasures, etc. The affirmative

¹⁹ Olivelle 2010, see this volume above p. 117.

Buddhist usage of the compound “*samaṇa-brāhmaṇa*” clearly points to a “continuity and symbiotic co-ordination or complementary”²⁰ between the two. However, in the *Samaññaphala-Sutta* the term *samaṇa-brāhmaṇa* is applied to the six ‘heretical teachers’, too.²¹ In this context, it seems to denote ascetics in general, and the Buddha, the “*samaṇa* Gotama”, being an accomplished example of those ascetic mendicants. In almost the same positive sense the term “*ariya*” is used in Buddhist texts as a general qualification of nobleness, goodness and moral pureness: the Buddhist truth, the way to liberation, the anthropological quality of advanced practitioners and so on are likewise qualified as “*ariya*”.

Yet, according to Deshpande, the Buddhists were “clearly aware of the different associations of terms like ‘Ārya’”.²² The Brahmin’s claim to be ‘Aryan’ by birth – in a superior class – is heavily criticised in Buddhist texts (e. g., in the *Assalāyanasutta*, M II.147 ff.).²³ Here, “*ariya*” as well as “*brāhmaṇa*” denotes the systematic legitimization of the members belonging – in their own view – to the highest, superior caste. Buddhist texts, which place the warrior-caste (of the *khattiya*) on top of the scale,²⁴ criticise this claim – Brahmins created the caste system (four *varṇa*) for their own purpose, i. e. to legitimize the supremacy of the Brahmins in a hierarchical society (to be found, e. g., in the “Puruṣa hymn”, Ṛg-Veda 10.90).²⁵ Further points of criticism of the “Brahmanic system” include the position of Brahmins held in society should not be based upon the accidental fact of being born as Brahmin, but on moral excellence (Skt. *brahmacārya*); to perform bloody sacrifices is useless, unethical, and a waste of expensive and

²⁰ Ruegg, David Seyfort, *The Symbiosis of Buddhism with Brahmanism, Hinduism in South Asia and of Buddhism with ‘Local Cults’ in Tibet and the Himalayan Region*, Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften 2008, 5.

²¹ See additionally Franke, Otto, *Dīghanikāya. Das Buch der Langen Texte des Buddhistischen Kanons. In Auswahl übersetzt*, Göttingen 1913, 304 ff.; Ruegg 2008, 5 f.

²² Deshpande 1999, 119.

²³ Pāli sources are indicated according to the abbreviation system of the Pali Text Society (PTS).

²⁴ Buddhist texts know of a second – and unique – classification system of castes, which is threefold: *khattiya*, *brāhmaṇa*, and *gahapati* (householder) (compare Chakravarti 1987, 98 f.); significantly, however, the fourfold division “is associated most often with situations in which the Buddha converses with a *brāhmaṇa*,” (ibid.).

²⁵ Interestingly, in Buddhist accounts the Brahmin is born from the mouth of Brahmā, whereas in the Puruṣa-hymn the Brahmin is born from the mouth of the primordial giant Puruṣa (compare Bronkhorst 2007, 213). This – as well as other slight differences between Vedic and Buddhist sources – may add further plausibility to the hypothesis presented here.

important resources (see below); the Brahmins in former times possessed no wealth, but nowadays are owners of chariots, horses, cattle etc.; the gods (*deva*) of the Vedic-Brahmanic pantheon do not possess the qualities ascribed to them, for instance, the ability to create the world; the succession row of tradition bears no guarantee for truth (“simile of blind Brahmins”), and so on.

To provide an example in order to illustrate this interpretation, we may turn to the Suttanipāta, parts of which belong to the oldest stratum of Pāli Buddhist texts. One small text therein, the “Good conduct of the Brahmin”, or “Brahmanical Lore”, *Brāhmaṇa-dhammika-Sutta* (I.7, Sn 284–315; = K I. 311–314), relates the following event. One day some old Brahmins were approaching the Buddha and asked him if the Brahmins today would still live up to their high moral standards. The Buddha replies that the sages today no longer stick to their former duties. The text continues:

[284] “The seers of old had fully restrained selves, (and) were austere. [T]hey practiced for their own welfare.

[285] The brahmans had no cattle, no gold, no wealth. They had study as their wealth and grain. [...]

[295] Having asked for rice, a bed, clothes, and butter and oil, having collected them properly, from that they performed the sacrifice. [T]hey did not kill cows. [...]

[298] [...] As long as (the lore) existed in the world, this race prospered in happiness.

[299] (But) there was a change in them. Seeing little by little the splendour of the king, and women adorned,

[300] and chariots yoked to thoroughbreds, well-made, with variegated coverings, dwellings and houses evenly proportioned and (well) laid-out,

[301] (and) great human wealth, surrounded by herds of cows, [...] the brahmans coveted this.

[302] Having composed hymns for this purpose, they then went up to Okkāka.²⁶ ‘You have much wealth and grain. Sacrifice, (for) your property is much. [...]

[303] And then the king, lord of warriors, induced by the brahmans, having performed these sacrifices, the *assamedha*, the *purisamedha*, the *sammāpsa*, the *vācapeyya*, (and) the *niraggala*, gave wealth to the brahmans:

²⁶ Okkāka = a mythical king; eventually of the Śākya-dynasty, the clan of the Buddha. Compare Tsuchida, Ryutaro, “Die Genealogie des Buddha und seiner Vorfahren”, in: Bechert, Heinz (ed.), *The Dating of the Historical Buddha 1*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1991, 121.

[304] cows, and a bed, and clothes, and adorned women, and chariots [...].

[305] [...] and dwellings [...]

[306] And they, receiving wealth there, found pleasure in hoarding it up. Overcome by desire, their craving increased the more. Having composed hymns for this purpose, they then went up to Okkāka again. [...]

[308] And then the king, the lord of warriors, induced by the brahmins, had many hundreds of thousands of cows killed in a sacrifice.

[309] Not by their feet, [...] nor by anything (else) had the cows harmed (anyone). [...]

[310] And then the devas, and the fathers, Inda, asuras and rakkhasas cried out: “(This) is injustice”, when the knife fell on the cows (Translation by Norman).²⁷

In this account a strong opposition between the Brahmins of former times and those of today is drawn.²⁸ The main criterion for the difference is possession of wealth, or, more precisely, interest in the possession of wealth.²⁹ Those who lived as non-wealthy ascetics were not interested in the accumulation of wealth. The text portrays the encounter of Brahmins with rich kings of the “warrior”-caste (Pāli: *khattiya*) as the initial situation in which the Brahmins became interested in prosperity. To achieve this, they invented the ideology of sacrificial duties and put into practice the performance of bloody sacrifices to fulfil the newly generated “need” of others. Namely, the king and the upper classes had to pay for the sacrifice-services offered by organized Brahmins. In effect, only thereafter did the promoted, wealthy Brahmins move to houses in the city and documented their new status by various means.³⁰ Finally, according to this account further consequences arose from the major alteration in Brahmins: the falling apart of justice and morals, a split of the castes, origin of diseases, etc. (Sn 311–315). Judged on the passage above, the theory of a division between “good” Brahmins who lived quite ascetically and non-organized – and, most relevantly – posed no threat to the emerging Buddhist monastic institutions, and “bad” Brahmins finds further support. However, according to this text the “original sin” of Brah-

²⁷ Norman, Kenneth Roy, *The Group of Discourses (Sutta-Nipāta)*, Vol. I, London, Boston: Pali Text Society 1984, 49–51.

²⁸ Compare the fivefold scheme of Brahmins in *Doṇabrāhmaṇa Sutta*, A III.223 ff.

²⁹ Compare Norman, 1984, Sn 620; Sn 628–630.

³⁰ Accordingly, Buddhist texts describe that Brahmins themselves, e. g. Vassakara, an “important official of Magadha” (Chakravarti 1987, 40), praised a householder’s skill in business (see *ibid.*).

mins happened as early as the time of the mythical ancestor Okkāka. But this follows the logic of the context, because in some Suttas of the cited work, the Suttanipāta, the Buddha himself is already portrayed as a critic of the ambient “Brahmanic system”. Therefore, the establishment of the “Brahmanic system” must predate the Buddha.

3. Conclusion

Given that the interpretation outlined above bears some plausibility: What does it say about the dynamics of religious encounters and the formation of religious traditions? First, religious traditions in a formative phase, where neutral interaction slowly changes toward competition and political as well as economic rivalry, will seldom produce reliable descriptions of those phases. In the first formative phase a “new” tradition may be composed entirely of hybrid identities (or “converts”); its actors are part of both “traditions” – their ancestral background *and* the new one. Substantial criticism, in such a situation, is neither seen from the Buddhist, nor the Brahmins side. But economic progress, religious institutionalization, and the origination (or creation) of a supportive laity are certainly effective incentives for professional religious actors. Now, in this phase, they may feel obliged to display dissent. And, as a consequent move in this phase, they work out details of a polemic critique, like the anti-Brahmanist cited above. In the eyes of his followers, however, this critique must have been already part of the Buddha’s teaching, according to the general logic of religious traditions that “if a particular idea had become accepted, one could scarcely imagine that it had not been preached by the Buddha himself”.³¹ This critique will be even more persuasive if the roots of the other’s degeneration (an “obvious fact” of the Buddhist author’s recent environment) can be identified in a distant past. Only then it is highly plausible that proponents of the other tradition will not be able to improve by the following day – an important, albeit “discursive”, reinsurance for organized monastic Buddhists who had become used to living with continuous economic and political support.

³¹ Vetter, Tilmann, *The Ideas and Meditative Practices of Early Buddhism*, Leiden, New York: Brill 1988, viii.