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**ON THE GROWTH AND COMPOSITION  
OF THE SANSKRIT EPICS AND PURĀṆAS**

**RELATIONSHIP TO KĀVYA, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT**

Proceedings of the Fifth Dubrovnik International Conference

on the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas

August 2008



Edited by Ivan Andrijačić and Sven Sellmer

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# **On the Growth and Composition of the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas**

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General Editor  
**Mislav Ježić**  
Fellow of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts (Zagreb)

JOHANNES BRONKHORST

## Āśramas, Agrahāras, and Monasteries\*

Readers of Kālidāsa's *Abhijñānaśakuntala* will remember the scene in which King Duṣyanta, in hot pursuit of a deer, is stopped by the following words (in the translation of Michael Coulson): "No, no Your Majesty! Don't kill him, he's a deer of the hermitage." (*bho bho rājan āśramamṛgo 'yaṃ na hantavyo na hantavyaḥ*). It turns out that Duṣyanta, without realizing it, has come close to the *āśrama*, here translated hermitage, of Kaṇva where, we learn from these words, deer cannot be killed. The King is subsequently invited to visit the *āśrama*, and he does not fail to recognize the signs:

Those grains of wild rice beneath the trees must have dropped from fledgling mouths  
in parrots' nests,

While the oily stones here and there must have been used for crushing ingudī nuts.

The deer are so trustful their pace doesn't alter at the noise of our approach,

And on the paths from the pool clothes made of bark have dripped long trails of  
water. (tr. Coulson)

Āśramas obey different rules of behaviour than other parts of the kingdom, rules which even the king must obey. Yet an *āśrama*, too, needs the protection of the king. This is clear from the compliment which Duṣyanta receives from one of its inhabitants: "By seeing how the ascetics' holy rites are free of all hindrance, you will realize how much your bow-scarred arm protects."

Āśramas of this kind, i.e. places inhabited by ascetically inclined Brahmins, are a common feature of Brahmanical literature. They are frequently mentioned in the two Sanskrit epics—the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*—and in more recent Brahmanical literature, but not in the Vedic Saṃhitās, Brāhmaṇas and early Upaniṣads.<sup>1</sup> This raises the question: how, when and why did this institution arise? Is it true that "[m]ost of even the largest āśrama-s ... began as a simple dwelling of a sādhu who had ceased travelling and settled, frequently after many years of pilgrimage to holy

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1 "In the older Vedic literature the word *āśrama* in the sense of a hermitage seldom occurs. Virtually the only example of the word in a *śruti*-text is an *āśrama* called *Vasiṣṭhaśilā* in *Gopathabrāhmaṇa* 1,2,8." (Tsuchida, 1991: 79–80; similarly Olivelle, 1993: 18).

places throughout the Indian subcontinent”<sup>2</sup>? This article will explore an alternative possibility.<sup>3</sup>

Romila Thapar (2005: 164) makes the following observation about Kālidāsa’s play: “The *āśrama* of the Kaṇvas carries traces of a new incipient institution which was to develop into the *agrahāras* of post-Gupta times, institutions which changed the socio-economic landscape. Tax-free land was donated by the king for settlement by brāhmaṇas which could be in areas already under cultivation or newly opened to cultivation. These were to become powerful nuclei and networks of brahmanical culture.”

Thapar’s remark suggests that two initially different institutions started influencing each other at the time of Kālidāsa, that people began to think of *āśramas* as being similar to *agrahāras* at that time even though they were originally different from each other. But is this correct? Were *āśramas* and *agrahāras* originally different institutions that subsequently came to influence each other, or were they rather, right from the beginning, two aspects of one and the same institution? Or is the historical situation perhaps more complex than either of these two possibilities?

At first sight the *Arthaśāstra* appears to support the view that two different institutions are involved. In its chapter on the settlement of the countryside this text states:<sup>4</sup> “He should grant [lands] to priests, preceptors, chaplains (*purohita*) and Brahmins learned in the Vedas [as] gifts to Brahmins (*brahmadeya*), exempt from fines and taxes, with inheritance passing on to corresponding heirs, [and] to heads of departments, accountants and others, and to *gopas*, *sthānikas*, elephant-trainers, physicians, horse-trainers and couriers, [lands] without the right of sale or mortgage.” This passage speaks about *brahmadeyas*, a term which is close in meaning to *agrahāra* and is sometimes compounded with it in the early sources (*brahmadeyāgrahāra*; see below). Another passage of the *Arthaśāstra* speaks about land to be given to ascetics (*tapasvin*):<sup>5</sup> “On land unsuitable for agriculture, he should allot pastures for cattle. And he should grant to ascetics wildernesses (*araṇya*) for Veda-study and soma-sacrifices, with safety promised to [everything] immovable and movable in them, one *goruta* at the most.”

2 Clark, 2006: 29.

3 Witzel (2006: 476 n. 57) wonders “whether the forest idylls of the [*Mahābhārata*] (such as that of Śakuntalā and her stepfather Kaṇva) are, in reality, a copy of the Jaina practice of establishing ascetic’s dwellings (or caves) in the south”. We will see below that there may be an element of truth in this supposition.

4 *Arthaśāstra* 2,1.7: *ṛtvigācāryapurohitaśrotriyebhyo brahmadeyāny adaṇḍakarāṇy abhirūpadāyādakāni prayacchet, adhyakṣasamkhyāyakādibhyo gopasthānikānikasthacikitsakāśvadamakajaṅghākārikebhyas ca vikriyādhānavarjāni*. Ed., tr. Kangle.

5 *Arthaśāstra* 2,2.1–2: *akṛṣyāyām bhūmau paśubhyo vivītāni prayacchet | pradiṣṭābhayasthāvaramānyāni ca brahmasomānyāni tapasvibhyo gorutaparāṇi prayacchet ||* Ed., tr. Kangle. This is the beginning of the *Prakaraṇa* called *Bhūmicchidrāpidhāna*, on which see Hinüber, 2005: 491 ff.

As said above, two different forms of land grants seem to be spoken about in these passages, which might be characterized, respectively, as rewards for past (and perhaps on-going) services, and as support for future religious practices. The *āśrama* in Kālidāsa's play apparently belongs to the second category.

The *Arthaśāstra*, too, speaks of *āśramas* in the sense of "hermitage". They may need adjudication in the royal court (1,19.29), they figure in a list of isolated places (2,35.14), in conquered territory they must be honoured (13,5.11). Here, too, one's first impression is that these *āśramas* should be connected with the second category of donated land.

But let us not jump to conclusions. Brahmins can be the beneficiaries of both kinds of land grants. Indeed, given that Veda-study and soma-sacrifices are Brahmanical activities, we must assume that Brahmins were the ones that would primarily profit from the second kind of land grant; they are also explicitly and prominently mentioned in connection with the first kind. If we now confine our attention to the Brahmin recipients of both kinds of grants, we have to ask what difference it would make to receive one or the other of the two. The Brahmins listed to receive the first kind of land grant are priests (*ṛtvij*), preceptors (*ācārya*), chaplains (*purohita*) and Brahmins learned in the Vedas (*śrotriya*). All of these are presumably involved in Vedic study and Vedic ritual. It goes almost without saying that, from the point of view of the *Arthaśāstra*, they will continue these activities if and when they decide to retire to the land that has been granted to them. Like the ascetics, they too will be involved in Veda-study and sacrifices, whether soma-sacrifices or other kinds. It follows that, at least in theory, the end result of the two kinds of land grants to Brahmins is very similar in the two cases, for both types of Brahmins are expected to continue carrying out their ritual activities and Veda studies.

The Buddhist canon, too, distinguishes Brahmins who have received a *brahmadeya* (*brahmadeyya* in Pāli) from those who live in *āśramas* (Pāli *assama*): the former are often depicted as being rich, the latter as ascetics.<sup>6</sup> However, the opposition may have to be taken with a grain of salt, as it was apparently already by the composers and editors of the Buddhist suttas. Tsuchida, describing the ascetic Keṇiya, is led to observe (1991: 82): "we must admit that the Keṇiya depicted in the Sela-sutta exhibits several features which do not fit with the image of a hermit. For instance, one who was capable of giving a feast for one thousand two hundred and fifty monks all at the same time could hardly have been found even among the *mahāsāla*-Brahmins, [not] to say anything of the hermits." Tsuchida attributes these features to the narrator's exaggeration or even caricaturization, "which blurs to no small extent the

6 Tsuchida, 1991. On pp. 56–57 Tsuchida gives a list of *brahmadeyas* figuring in the Nikāya texts; see also Wagle, 1966: 18–19. Note that the mention of these two kinds of Brahmins in the Buddhist canon does not necessarily imply that they existed already at the time of the Buddha.

essential difference between Keṇiya and those wealthy Brahmins living in villages”. This may be correct, but the exaggeration may have to be explained by the fact that the narrator knew that there was a continuity between these two kinds of Brahmins, and therefore that the difference between them was not all that essential. Both, at any rate, were preoccupied with Vedic ritual in various forms, and with the transmission of Vedic texts.<sup>7</sup>

The importance of ritual activities and Veda studies in the case of recipients of *agrahāras* is confirmed by inscriptional evidence from various periods. A copper-plate from Gujarat, dated 812 CE, specifies that a local ruler donates a village to a number of Brahmins “for the increase of the religious merit of my parents and of myself; for the sake of acquiring a reward in this world and in the next; [and] for maintaining the *bali*, the *caru*, the *vaiśvadeva*, the *agnihotra*, the sacrificial rites, etc.”<sup>8</sup> *Bali*, to cite Apte’s dictionary, is the offering of a portion of the daily meal of rice, grain, ghee &c. to all creatures, *caru* the oblation of rice or barley boiled for presentation to the gods and the manes, *vaiśvadeva* an offering to all deities.<sup>9</sup> The maintenance of the *bali*, *caru*, *vaiśvadeva*, *agnihotra* and other rites is a frequent theme in inscriptions. It is, for example, the reason for the gift of a village to a Brahmin recorded on copper-plates from Baroda dated 609 or 610 CE.<sup>10</sup> Another inscription on copper-plates from Gujarat, this one dated 910–911 CE, concerns the gift of a village to a Brahmin “in order [to enable the donee to perform] the *bali*, *caruka* and *vaiśvadeva*”.<sup>11</sup> Sometimes a village is donated to a Brahmin “who keeps alive the sacred fire (*āhitāgni*),... knows the whole Veda, [and] delights in the six duties [enjoined on Brahmins].”<sup>12</sup> An inscription from around 540 CE makes reference to a grant to several Brahmins for enabling them to offer the five *mahāyajñas*, i.e., *bali*, *caru*, *vaiśvadeva*, *agnihotra* and *havana*.<sup>13</sup> The five *mahāyajñas* are specified

7 Perhaps a distinction can be made between recipients that live on the land or in the village which they receive, and those who don’t. The inscriptional evidence sometimes suggests that a donee lives somewhere different from the village which he receives, as in the case of a fifth-century inscription from Gujarat, in which the Brahmin *Naṇasvāmin*, residing in Kāpura, receives “the village *Kaṇīyas-Taḍākāsārikā* included in this same district” (*atraiva viṣayāntargata-Kaṇīyas-Taḍākāsārikā-gramo*; E. Hultzsch in EpInd 10 [1909–10], pp. 53–54).

8 J. F. Fleet in EpInd 3 (1894–95), pp. 53–58.

9 For details, see Mylius, 1995, s.v. *bali*, *caru* and *vaiśvadeva*.

10 F. Kielhorn in EpInd 6 (1900–01), 294–300.

11 E. Hultzsch in EpInd 1 (1892), 52–58.

12 F. Kielhorn in EpInd 6 (1900–01), 18 ff.

13 Sten Konow in EpInd 10 p. 74: *bali-caru-vaiśvadevāgnihotra-havana-pañca-mahāyajña-kriyotsarpaṇārtham*. Konow translates (p. 76): “for the maintenance of the five great sacrifices, (viz.) *bali*, *caru*, *vaiśvadeva*, *agnihotra* (and) *havana*, and of (other) rites”. Kane, HistDh II, 2 p. 854, referring to this passage, interprets it differently, saying “for enabling them to offer *bali*, *caru*, *vaiśvadeva*, *agnihotra* and the five *mahāyajñas*”. Virtually the same expression occurs also elsewhere, for example in an inscription from 736 CE (G. V. Acharya in EpInd 23

in the *Mānavadharmasāstra* in the following manner: “The sacrifice to the Veda is teaching; the sacrifice to ancestors is the quenching libation; the sacrifice to gods is the burnt offering; the sacrifice to beings is the Bali offering; and the sacrifice to humans is the honouring of guests.”<sup>14</sup> Providing for the expenses of the five great sacrifices, i.e., the five *mahāyajñas*, is a common purpose of donations.<sup>15</sup> We find it in a copper-plate inscription from Bengal dated 488 CE and elsewhere.<sup>16</sup> The village Cūkuṭṭūr was donated in the fifth century CE to seventy-four Brahmins for the purpose of Vedic study, performing sacrifice and teaching.<sup>17</sup> The Cambay plates of Govinda IV, dating from 930 CE, contain a long specification of the purposes for which the village Kevaṅja is granted to a Brahmin called Nāgamārya: “for the purpose of (maintaining) the *bali*, *caru*, *vaiśvadeva* and *atithitarpaṇa*; for the performance of the optional, indispensable and occasional rites; for the performance of the *śrāddha* and sacrificial ceremonies such as the *darśapūrṇamāsa*, *cāturmāsya*, *aṣṭakā* and *āgrayaṇa* (rites) and the fortnightly (*śrāddhas*); for the purpose of preparing the *caru*, *puroḍāśa*, *sthālīpāka* and so forth; for the purpose of (granting) priestly fees and gifts in connection with *homa*, *niyama*, the study of one’s own Veda, and religious service; for the purpose of (providing) accessory assistance for the rites concerning *rājasūya* and the seven forms of the soma sacrifice such as the *vājapeya*, *agniśtoma* and so forth; for the purpose of (offering) garments, ornaments, entertainment, gifts, sacrificial fees, etc. to the various priests, such as Maitrāvaruṇa, Adhvaryu, Hotṛ, Brāhmaṇacchaṁsin, Grāvastut and Agnidh; and for the purpose of (supplying) the requisite materials for preparing *sattra*, *prapā*, *pratiśraya*, *vṛṣotsarga*, reservoirs, wells, tanks, orchards, temples, etc.”<sup>18</sup> Most inscriptions are not quite

[1935–36], p. 152 lines 36–37: *bali-caru-vaiśvadevāgnihotrātithi-pañca-mahāyajñādi-kriyot-sarpaṇārtham*; Acharya translates [pp. 154–55]: “for the purpose of performing the five great sacrifices, viz., *bali*, *caru*, *vaiśvadeva*, *agnihotra* and *atithi*”). Cf. Njammasch, 2001: 289.

- 14 ManuSm 3,70: *adhyāpanam brahmayajñam pitryajñas tu tarpaṇam | homo daivo balir bhauto nṛyajño tithipūjanam* ||. Ed. tr. Olivelle. Nalinikanta Bhattasali in EpInd 18 (1925–26), p. 78 n. 9 observes: “Of these [five great sacrifices specified in the *Mānava Dharmasāstra*], the 2nd, 3rd and 4th (which are equivalent to *caru*, *bali* and *sattra*) appear to have been the most important, and the term *bali-caru-sattra-pravartanam* (i.e. establishment of *bali*, *caru* and *sattra*) came to mean the establishment of a householder.”
- 15 See, e.g., H. H. Dhruva in EpInd 2 (1894), p. 22; Datta, 1989: 92. The fact that the *mahāyajñas*, unlike *śrauta* rites, are for the benefit of virtually all inhabitants of the universe (“the Creator, the ancient sages, the Manes, the whole universe with myriads of creatures of various grades of intelligence”; Kane, HistDh II, 1 p. 697) may explain to at least some extent this popularity.
- 16 N. G. Majumdar in EpInd 23 (1935–36), 52 ff.
- 17 Chauhan, 2004: 89, with a reference to K. V. Ramesh, *Inscriptions of the Western Gaṅgas*, Delhi 1984, p. 23.
- 18 D. R. Bhandarkar in EpInd 7 (1902–03), pp. 26–47.

as specific as this, but we may assume that it gives expression to the purpose that is behind many if not most other donations of land to Brahmins.<sup>19</sup>

An inscription from the end of the seventh century CE and originally put up in the north-west of the subcontinent records the erection of a building for Brahmins familiar with the three Vedas; the way in which the place is described—“where the quarters of the heavens are deafened by the noise of the constant explanation of Vedic lore” (*saṃtatavedavyākhyānaghoṣabhadhirīkṛtadinmukha*)—shows that its donor, a certain Harivarman, intended to further promote this activity.<sup>20</sup> A pillar inscription from Mysore that may be assigned to the first half of the sixth century CE tells us that a king had a great tank made at a spot “which is ever praised with auspicious recitations of sacred texts by Brahmin students solely devoted to manifold vows, sacrifices and initiatory rites” (*vividha-niyama-homa-dīkṣā-parair brāhmaṇai snā-takai stūyamāne sadā mantra-vādais śubhaiḥ*).<sup>21</sup> It seems implied that the pious act of the king is meant to encourage these Brahmins to continue these activities. An inscription from the area of Baroda dated in the middle of the twelfth century CE recalls the fact that King Kumārapāla ordered that ramparts be built for the city of Nagara-Ānandapura; the benefit is mutual, for “there the Brahmins ... protect the king and the realm and guard them by sacrifices that ward off evil and cause prosperity”.<sup>22</sup> A copper-plate inscription from the south, dated in the beginning of the sixth century CE, renews the gift of a village to eight Brahmins “who are engaged in performing and helping others to perform sacrifices, in study and in teaching, and in making and receiving gifts”.<sup>23</sup> The link between sacrifices and the well-being of political power is clear from an inscription from the eighth century CE which mentions a Mahārāja Mādhavarman “who washed off the stains of the world by his ablutions after eleven *aśvamedha* sacrifices, who celebrated thousands of sacrifices, who by a *sarvamedha* sacrifice obtained the supreme dominion over all beings, who celebrated a hundred thousand *bahusuvarṇa*, *pauṇḍarīka*, *puruṣamedha*, *vājapeya*, *yūdhya* (?), *ṣoḍaśin*, *rājasūya*, *prādhirājya*, *prājāpatya* and various other large and important excellent [sacrifices], who by the celebration of excellent sacrifices attained to firmly established supremacy”.<sup>24</sup> A copper-plate inscription in Prakrit from the Telugu country “to be assigned to a much earlier period” than the eighth century CE records the donation of a village to two Brahmins “for conferring on ourselves

19 Cp. Lubin, 2005: 95: “The recipient’s qualification for such patronage, wherever it was mentioned, was his training in textual recitation and the application of *mantras* in ritual performances, or expertise in a learned discipline such as grammar, logic, law, astrology, or poetics. The authority of the brahmin was thus explicitly justified, in principle anyway, by his mastery of sacred knowledge.”

20 F. Kielhorn in EpInd 1 (1892), pp. 179–184.

21 F. Kielhorn in EpInd 8 (1905–06), pp. 24–36.

22 Vajeshanker G. Ojhā in EpInd 1 (1892), pp. 293–305.

23 G. V. Srinivasa Rao in EpInd 24 (1937–38), pp. 47–52.

24 F. Kielhorn in EpInd 4 (1896–97), pp. 193–198.

victory [in war] and for increasing [our] merit, length of life, and power”.<sup>25</sup> Other copper-plates in Prakrit, these ones dating from around the year 100 CE, state confidently: “Fortune, wealth, power and victory were given [by the donees to the king as a reward for the grant].”<sup>26</sup> The Junagadh Rock inscription of Skandagupta from the middle of the fifth century CE expresses the wish that a certain city “may become prosperous, full of inhabitants, cleansed from sin by prayers (*brahman*) sung by many hundreds of Brahmins”.<sup>27</sup> A stone inscription from Sirpur to be dated in the 8th or 9th century CE states clear conditions with regard to the descendants of the twelve Brahmins who receive a share in the villages there specified: “Their sons and grandsons [who succeed them] should be such as offer sacrifice to fire and know the six supplements of the Vedas, who are not addicted to gambling, prostitutes and such other [bad associations], who have their mouths clean and who are not servants. If one does not answer to this description, [he should be abandoned]; also one who dies sonless—in their places must be appointed other Brahmins possessing the foregoing qualifications”.<sup>28</sup>

Gifts of land to Brahmins, as these and other inscriptions suggest, were not merely rewards for services rendered in the past but also spiritual investments for the future.<sup>29</sup> Their purpose—to cite Burton Stein (1980: 146)—was “to provide a reliable source of support to Brahmins for the pursuit of their sacral responsibilities”. The benefit was mutual and concerned the donor as much as the donee. This implied that donors would look for Brahmins who could be considered the best investments.<sup>30</sup> Theoretically it also meant that Brahmins would not accept donations of land from unworthy kings. We do not know how many Brahmins actually refused a land grant for this reason, but we do know that Kalhaṇa’s *Rājataranṅinī* (1,307) looks down upon the Brahmins from Gandhāra for this very reason: they did accept *agrahāras* from a worthless king.

Note that the sacral responsibilities of the Brahmins usually concerned rites they could carry out on their own. Grants of land or villages are rarely associated with the Brahmins’ participation in solemn Vedic rituals. Kings sometimes boast of having performed major sacrifices such as the *aśvamedha*, but these are not the sacrifices which Brahmins perform in their *agrahāras*. This would normally not even be pos-

25 E. Hultzsch in EpInd 6 (1900–01), pp. 84–89.

26 E. Hultzsch in EpInd 6 (1900–01), pp. 315–319.

27 Fleet, 1887 (CII 3), pp. 56–65.

28 Rai Bahadur Hira Lal in EpInd 11 (1911–12), pp. 184–201.

29 Honouring Brahmins—as ManuSm 7,82–83 reminds us—is an inexhaustible treasure (*akṣayo nidhiḥ*), which neither thief nor enemy can steal, and which never perishes.

30 A late copper-plate inscription speaks of Brahmins who are “fit to receive land-grants” (*bhūdānapātrabhūta*); Gopinatha Rao in EpInd 18 (1925–26), p. 167 l. 62–63. Cp. ManuSm 7,86. Already some Dharma-Sūtras (*Gautamadharmasūtra* 11,11; *Vasiṣṭhadharmasūtra* 1,44) point out that the king takes a share of the merits of Brahmins, or a sixth part of their sacrifices and good works.



sible, for such solemn rites require Brahmins from various Vedas, plus of course a *yajamāna*, preferably the king himself. Solemn rites were performed by some rulers, but they are not normally the reason why *agrahāras* were given. Land or villages were not given in order to secure the presence of Brahmins who might then perform the major Vedic sacrifices. There are some indications that suggest that Brahmins invited to participate in a Vedic sacrifice might afterwards return home.<sup>31</sup> Such invitations and visits were not in need of official deeds, and would therefore not leave traces in the epigraphic record.

The donors—in the case of land grants very often kings, queens or others close to the centres of political power—were keen to emphasize their generosity; surviving inscriptions, which typically represent their point of view, deal exhaustively with this side of the transaction. Inscriptions, to be sure, were not normally composed by kings and other power brokers themselves, but they were very often composed for them and in their name.

The Brahmin donees had other concerns. For them it was vital to show that land gifts were good spiritual investments. They did so by depicting the life in Brahmin settlements as being profoundly religious, with an emphasis on all those activities (ascetic practices, Vedic sacrifices) which were held to benefit rulers that supported them and their kingdoms. Where kings blew their own trumpets in the inscriptions composed on their behalf, the Brahmins used the literature for which they were responsible to exalt the concentration of religious energy in what they called *āśramas*, depicted as places of great peace and intense religious activity.<sup>32</sup> The literature for which Brahmins were responsible is, of course, what we habitually refer to as classical Sanskrit literature, including the Sanskrit epics.<sup>33</sup>

Seen in this way, it is at least possible that the references to *agrahāras* which we find mentioned primarily in inscriptions, and those to *āśramas* which are so frequent in classical Sanskrit literature, concern one and the same historical institution, or better perhaps: two different institutions with considerable overlap. *Agrahāras* were

31 Datta, 1989: 84 f; 92.

32 Cp. Malamoud, 2005: 173: “Le ‘bois d’ascétisme’ est, dans l’Inde, la forme simple et parfaite de l’Utopie.”

33 Occasionally the voice of a donee finds expression in an inscription. The Śaiva ascetic named Prabodhaśiva, for example, created an *āśrama* in the second half of the tenth century which is described as follows (R. D. Banerji in EpInd 21 [1931–32], p. 152): “At night, this hermitage (*āśrama*) causes to the people the semblance of lightning on account of the phosphorescence of plants (growing near it), resembling lightning, (that) of clouds on account of the (dark) bees flying at the sides of mountain peaks, (that of thunder) on account of roars of lions causing the skies to echo (and that of showers) on account of the air being cooled by the sprays of the waters of the Śoṇa. In this place herds of monkeys kiss the cubs of lions, the young one of a deer sucks at the breast of the lioness; so other (lower animals), who are (natural) enemies, take leave of their antipathy; indeed, in forests devoted to austerities (*tapovana*) the minds of all become peaceful.”

donated to Brahmins because their donors expected their occupants to live more or less in accordance with life as it was presumably lived in *āśramas*, and Brahmins depicted *āśramas* in this particular manner at least in part in order to entice their rulers to create such settlements, or more of them.

All this is, for the time being, just a hypothesis which has to be tested. Consider the following challenge it has to face. Thapar's formulation "new incipient institution which was to develop into the *agrahāras* of post-Gupta times" suggests that the forerunners of the *agrahāras* of post-Gupta times were still a new phenomenon at the time of Kālidāsa, and as yet non-existent at the time of the Sanskrit epics. In other words, it suggests that *āśramas* existed well before the institution associated with the name *agrahāras* came about. Is this correct?

An inspection of the available evidence shows that nothing is less certain. We have seen that the Sanskrit epics are among the earliest sources that use the term *āśrama* to refer to places where ascetically inclined Brahmins reside.<sup>34</sup> Well, the *Mahābhārata* is also among the earliest sources that use the term *agrahāra*.<sup>35</sup> It is used several times in books 3 and 15, at least once in a passage that shows that its meaning corresponds to later usage: Bhīma, the father of Damayantī, promises to give as *agrahāra* a village the size of a town to the Brahmin who will find his son-in-law Nala.<sup>36</sup> Book 15 uses the compound *brahmadeyāgrahāra*.<sup>37</sup> It is of course possible that the word *agrahāra* only occurs in later strata of the *Mahābhārata*, but this is hardly evidence that the institution did not exist before; it is rather surprising that it is mentioned at all in this text.

What is more, there is further evidence that shows that land grants were known from an early date onward, both from the *Mahābhārata* and from other, presumably earlier texts. Least valuable in this respect is the section on the donation of land (*bhūmidāna*) in the *Anuśāsanaparvan* (MBh 13,61); we may legitimately suspect this section of being relatively late. We read here that "nothing is superior to the giving of land" (v. 4) and other laudatory remarks. Donations of land are also mentioned elsewhere in the *Mahābhārata*, regularly in other sections of the *Anuśāsanaparvan*, but also in the first book (MBh 1,57.26; where it is a source of purification) and in the *Śāntiparvan* (at MBh 12,36.16 it is once again a means of purification). Accord-

34 The mention of an *āśrama* in the *Gopatha-Brāhmaṇa* (see note 1, above) is not in conflict with this observation. The *Gopatha-Brāhmaṇa*, which belongs to the *Atharvaveda*, appears to be "a secondary treatise in the style of such a work" and is, moreover, more recent than the *Śrautasūtra* of that Veda (i.e., the *Vaitāna-Sūtra*; see Gonda, 1975: 355–356), which in its turn presupposes its *Gr̥hyasūtra* (the *Kauśika-Sūtra*; see Oldenberg, 1892: xxx–xxxī, with p. xxxī n. 1; Gonda, 1977: 545, 614).

35 We have already seen that the Pāli Buddhist canon speaks about both *āśramas* and *brahmadeyas*.

36 MBh 3,65.1–3: *agrahāraṃ ca dāsyāmi grāmaṃ nagarasaṃmitam*. See further MBh 3,222.43 (unusually explained by Nīlakaṇṭha and van Buitenen).

37 MBh 15,2.2; 15,16.15; 15,19.11.

ing to the *Anuśāsanaparvan*, “whatever sin a man may commit when in straitened circumstances, he is purified therefrom by making a gift of only as much land as is equal to *gocarma*”.<sup>38</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa* states that the giver of land (*bhūmida*) attains the highest destiny (*paramā gati*; v. 35), the one also attained by heroes and good people as a result of Vedic study (*svādhyāya*) and asceticism (*tapas*) (Rm 2,58.37).

Other ancient texts confirm that land grants were known from an early time onward. Several passages in Vedic and its auxiliary literature contain references to land grants.<sup>39</sup> Consider the following passage from the *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa* (13,7.1.13; tr. Eggeling): “Now as to the sacrificial fees: whatever there is towards the middle of the kingdom other than the property of the Brāhmaṇa, but including land and men, of that the eastern quarter belongs to the Hotṛ, the southern to the Brahman, the western to the Adhvaryu, and the northern to the Udgātṛ; and the Hotṛkas share this along with them.” The same passage also contains the following protest (*Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa* 13,7.1.15; tr. Eggeling): “It was Kaśyapa who officiated in his sacrifice, and it was concerning this that the Earth<sup>40</sup> also sang the stanza: ‘No mortal must give me away; thou wast foolish, Viśvakarman Bhauvana: she (the earth) will sink into the midst of the water; vain is this thy promise unto Kaśyapa.’”. The same protesting verse, slightly modified, is again put in the mouth of the earth (*bhūmi*) at *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 39,8 (8,21), once again in connection with Viśvakarman Bhauvana.<sup>41</sup> But whether in the form of protest or not, these passages testify to the fact that land grants existed and were known to them. A passage in the *Chāndogya-Upaniṣad* (4,2) is also of interest. It tells the story of Jānaśruti Pautrāyaṇa, a generous donor who wishes to be instructed by a certain Raikva. He offers him “six hundred cows, a gold necklace, and a carriage drawn by a she-mule” (tr. Olivelle), but Raikva is not interested. Only when a wife and the village in which he lives are added to the list does he agree.

[A word should be added about passages in Vedic and para-Vedic literature that refer to a sacrificer “who desires a village”. The expression *grāmakāma* occurs in various Saṃhitās of the Black Yajurveda (TaittS; MS; KāṭhS; see VWC I, 2 p. 1266), in a number of Brāhmaṇas (VWC II, 1 p. 613) and *Śrautasūtras* (VWC IV, 2 p. 1028). Rau (1957: 59) observes that those desirous of a village probably feel entitled that a village be given as a fiefdom to them (“Wo immer unsere Quellen für einen *grāmakāma* bestimmte Opfer vorschreiben, denken sie wahrscheinlich zunächst an eine Person, die vom König ein Dorf als Lehen zu erhalten sich gerechtfertigt glaubt“). Bodewitz (1990: 227 n. 2), citing Rau, comments: “This may apply in the case of

38 Kane, HistDh II, 2 p. 859, with a reference to MBh 13,61.16 and other texts.

39 Cp. Chauhan, 2004: 79; Thaplyal, 2004: 233 ff.

40 Eggeling explains: “Or, the ground, which Viśvakarman Bhauvana gave away as sacrificial fee”.

41 Śabara’s *Bhāṣya* still maintains that land cannot be given away, only the share of its produce that the “owner” may be entitled to; Kane II, 2, pp. 865–66.

[the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*], where the economic profit is of central importance, but in [the *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa*] the leadership of the *grāma*, to be regarded as a ‘Schar wandernder Viehzüchter’ (Rau, 1957: 53) or a clan, seems to be meant.” Whatever the historically correct interpretation in each text and context, the frequent occurrence of this term in Vedic and para-Vedic literature may have contributed in later times to giving a solid foundation to the aspirations of those who wished to become recipients of a village as *agrahāra*. Indeed, the ninth century author Jayanta Bhaṭṭa reports that his grandfather, wishing a village, performed the *sāṃgrahaṇī* sacrifice; as a result he obtained the village Gauramūlaka.<sup>42]</sup>

Some *Dharmasūtras* present further material. The *Āpastambadharmasūtra* (2,26.1) stipulates: “If [a king] gives land (*kṣetra*) and wealth to Brahmins according to their worth without depriving his own dependents, he will win eternal worlds.” (tr. Olivelle). The *Gautamadharmasūtra* (19,16) enumerates land (*bhūmi*) in a list of gifts: “Gold, cow, garment, horse, land, sesame seeds, ghee, and food—these are the gifts.” (tr. Olivelle). The *Vasiṣṭhadharmasūtra* (28,16) specifies: “A man who gives gifts of gold, land, or cows obtains an eternal reward.” (tr. Olivelle). And again (29,19): “Three, they say, are super-gifts: cows, land (*prthivī*), and knowledge. The gift of knowledge is superior to all gifts and surpasses even those super-gifts.” (tr. Olivelle). The *Śāṅkhāyanagrhyasūtra* (1,14.13–14), *Kauṣītakagrhyasūtra* (1,8.33–34) and the *Pāraskaragrhyasūtra* (1,8.15–16) state: “A cow is the optional gift to be given by a Brahmin, a village by a *Rājanya* ...” (tr. Oldenberg). The *Gobhilaḥgrhyasūtra* (4,8.14–16) describes an oblation of butter made with the mouth while repeating a certain mantra with the mind, then adds: “If (that oblation of butter) catches fire, twelve villages (will be his). If smoke arises, at least three.”<sup>43</sup>

These passages show that there is no reason to think that *agrahāras*—or rather the institution of giving land to Brahmins, under whatever name<sup>44</sup>—are a more recent institution than the *āśramas*, the “hermitages” where pious Brahmins dedicate themselves to their religious duties. Chronological considerations do not oblige us to abandon the hypothesis that these two expressions refer to overlapping institutions—in some cases perhaps even one single institution seen from two different angles—rather than to two altogether different ones.

The two different angles can easily be specified. Broadly speaking, the word *āśrama* is used from the perspective of the Brahmin recipient (or of him who wishes

42 “My own grandfather, desiring a village, performed the *sāṃgrahaṇī* sacrifice. Immediately after the completion of the sacrifice he obtained the village of Gauramūlaka.” (tr. Dezső, as cited in Kataoka, 2007: 314 n. 5.) François Voegeli draws in this connection my attention to TaittS 2,3.9.2: *vaiśvadevīm sāṃgrahaṇīm nirvaped grāmakāmaḥ*. See further Caland, 1908: 106 f.

43 GobhGS 4,8.15–16: *jvalantyām dvādaśa grāmāḥ | dhūme tryavarārdhyāḥ* |. Tr. Oldenberg.

44 Other frequently employed expressions are *brahmadeya* and *brahmadāya*. In later sources *brahmadeya* and *agrahāra* do not always mean quite the same; see Stein, 1980: 145.

to become a recipient), *agrahāra* from the perspective of the donor, often a royal donor. Prima facie, much pleads in favour of this distinction. The word *āśrama* is omnipresent in Brahmanical literature from a certain date onward, *agrahāra* is primarily used in inscriptions made on behalf of donors.<sup>45</sup> Only rarely are these perspectives interchanged, as in Aśvaghōṣa's *Buddhacarita* 2,12: "And by constructing there gardens, temples, *āśramas*, wells, water-halls, lotus-ponds and groves, they showed their devotion to *dharma*, as if they had seen Paradise before their eyes." (tr. Johnston, modified). Here, exceptionally, *āśramas* are described as having been provided by donors. In the *Sutasoma-Jātaka* which is chapter 31 of Āryaśūra's *Jātakamālā* a prince announces to have established (*niveśita*) hermitages (*āśramapa-da*) beside other things.<sup>46</sup> More typically descriptions of *āśramas* do not mention donors, or even the fact that they have donors: *āśramas* are simply there, presumably created by their virtuous inhabitants themselves.<sup>47</sup>

What do inscriptions tell us about the time when land gifts to Brahmins became current? Already the Hāthīgumphā Inscription of King Khāravēla of Kālīṅga, which appears to belong to the middle of the first century BCE,<sup>48</sup> records that Khāravēla gave *parihāra* to Brahmins (*bamaṇānam jātiṃ parihāraṃ dadāti*; Kant, 1971/2000: 15, tr. p. 28; Jayaswal & Banerji, 1933: 79, 88). *Parihāra* ("exemptions"), according to Olivelle (2005: 303 n. 7,201), refers "to tax holidays of varying lengths granted to Brahmins and other significant individuals of ... conquered lands". Freedom from taxation is one of the principal characteristics of the *agrahāras*. It seems therefore permissible to assume that already Khāravēla, though himself a Jaina, gave *agrahāras* or similar gifts to Brahmins. [It may be significant that this fact is mentioned in a passage in which it is recorded that Khāravēla had been close to (had conquered?) Rājagṛha and perhaps Mathurā. This might suggest that Khāravēla came in contact with Brahmins in regions to the west of his homeland Kālīṅga. In other words, the wording of the inscription allows us to consider the possibility that the presence of Brahmins in Kālīṅga at that time was still feeble or even non-existent.]<sup>49</sup>

45 Cp. EDS s.v. *agrahāra*. Texts like the *Rājataranṅinī*, which already by its title reveals itself as a history of kings, are exceptions, for obvious reasons.

46 Jm(V) p. 228 l. 11–12.

47 Yaroslav Vassilkov points out to me (private communication) that there is at least one instance in the MBh (9,51.5) where a female ascetic establishes (or builds) an *āśrama* for herself (*kr̥t-vāśramam*).

48 Kulke & Rothermund, 1998: 95. For arguments in support of this date, see Sircar, 1951: 215 f. Dates as early as 172 BCE have been proposed, but may have to be abandoned. Cf. Kumar, 1999: 901.

49 This would of course necessitate a loose interpretation of Aśoka's statement (thirteenth Rock Edict) to the effect that there are Śramaṇas and Brahmins everywhere in his kingdom, except among the Greeks.

Gifts to Brahmins are also mentioned in the Nānāghāt inscriptions presented and discussed by G. Bühler.<sup>50</sup> These too may date from the middle of the first century BCE (Ray, 1986: 36 f., 212) and appear to have been ordered by the widowed queen of King Sātakarṇi. We learn from them that sacrifices had been performed and what and how much had been given by way of sacrificial fee to the Brahmins involved. The inscriptions are damaged, but enough remains to see that the remuneration had been generous: numerous cows, coins, water pots, elephants, and much else. Most interesting for our purposes is the mention of one excellent village (*gamavaro*) and again one village (*gāmo*) amongst the things donated.<sup>51</sup> This means that our first inscriptional sources that enumerate gifts to Brahmins mention, among those gifts, twice the gift of a village. This confirms the idea that donations of land—including villages, i.e., inhabited land—are already part of the remuneration of Brahmins in our earliest surviving relevant inscriptional sources. They are a frequent element in slightly more recent inscriptions, too. King Nahapāna, for example, gave sixteen villages to gods and Brahmins (*devatābhyaḥ brāhmaṇebhyaś ca*) according to inscriptions in Nasik and Karle dating from the first century CE.<sup>52</sup>

Note in passing that the relationship between land and inhabited villages is close: inhabited villages can provide the manpower to work the land. This is particularly clear from two inscription in Nasik that concern a gift of land donated by King Sātakarṇi Gautamīputra, dating from around the year 100 CE (Ray, 1986: 38). The first inscription stipulates that a field of 200 *nivartanas* is given to certain ascetics. The second inscription refers back to the first one and states: “We have formerly given a field in the village of Kakhaḍī to the ascetics (and) mendicants who live here on the mount Triraśmi in the cave that is our meritorious gift; and that field is not (now) tilled, and that village is no (longer) inhabited.” To compensate for this loss, another field is given to the same ascetics and mendicants.<sup>53</sup> This may be generalized in the sense that the gift of what seems to be mere land may often have implied that people living on or near that land—in a “village”—were obliged to work on it.<sup>54</sup> So

50 Cp. Lüders, 1912/1973: 121 no. 1112.

51 Burgess, 1883: 59 ff. The transcript of no. I (10) has *gamavaro*, that of no. II (1) has *gāmo*. See also Sircar, 1965: p. 194 l. 10–11 and p. 196 (Sanskrit). Sircar dates this inscription in the second half of the first century BCE. The translation “village” for *gāma* is used, “not in its strict English sense but, as Baden-Powell used it in his well-known work on land tenure in India, to mean “a group of landholdings aggregated in one place” (Gunawardana, 1979: 55, with a reference to B. H. Baden-Powell, *Land Systems of British India*, Oxford, 1896, Vol. I, p. 21).

52 Burgess, 1881: 99–101; Ray, 1986: 38, 212. For a list of such donations, see Ray, 1986: 221 ff.

53 Burgess, 1881: 104 ff; E. Senart in *EpInd* 8 (1905–06), 71 ff.

54 Compare this with the following remark by Oskar von Hinüber (2007: 186–87): “one of the rules given in the collection of *ācāras* ‘customary law’, in an *ācārasthitipātra* ‘a vessel for the continuity of customary law’ . . . , enumerated in a contract between a king Viṣṇuṣeṇa and the merchants at *Lohātakaḡrāma* located probably in Gujarat, shows that peasants certainly were

when another inscription from Nasik states that a field is given to a cave, with the specification that “from this field [accrues] the providing of clothes for the ascetic [living there]”, we can be sure that the ascetic living in the cave is not supposed to till the land in order to buy clothes;<sup>55</sup> it is rather local villagers that are expected to work on the land and put the benefit at the disposal of the ascetic.<sup>56</sup> An inscription from the middle of the fourth century CE concerns, among other things, a grant of land to a Brahmin, specifying the name of the family-men (*kuṭumbin*) by whom the pieces of land are ploughed.<sup>57</sup> It is in this connection interesting to recall that the *Mānavadharmasāstra* includes the person who lives from agriculture (*kṛṣijīvin*) in its list of people to be avoided (3,165–166). Brahmins, we are tempted to conclude from this, should not themselves till the land they have been granted.<sup>58</sup>

This does not mean that no Brahmins ever tilled the soil with their own hands.<sup>59</sup> An interesting counterexample may be constituted by the Ghugrāhāti copper-plate inscription, presumably dating from the end of the sixth century CE. Its main content is summarized in the following manner:<sup>60</sup> “Supratīka Svāmī, a Brahman, approached the District Court [...] and applied for a piece of waste land of that locality for settling himself on it. The Elders and the men of experience decided to give him the piece of land free of any consideration, and after authorising Keśava, Nayanāga and others to mature the transaction on their behalf gave the piece of land to Supratīka Svāmī. The transaction was ratified by the District Court by the issue of a copper-plate deed.” Supratīka Svāmī wants this land, the inscription specifies, “for the establishment of *bali*, *caru* and *sattra*, (thus) getting it to be of use to a Brahmin”. The Elders and others give it to him on the basis of the following consideration: “The land, which is full of pits and which is infested with wild beasts, is unprofitable to the king both as regards revenue and religious merit (*dharmārthanīṣphalā*). That land, if made capable of being used, does bring revenue and merit (*arthadharmakṛt*) to the king himself.”<sup>61</sup> Here one gains the impression that the donee himself is going to work on the land. It is perhaps significant that this donation is not called *agrahāra*

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not free: no. 24 (line 10 of the inscription) *varṣāsu svaviṣayāt bījārtham āgatakakarṣakāḥ svāminā na grāhyāḥ* ‘Those peasants, who came here from their area during the rains to buy seeds, must not be apprehended (and thus prevented from buying) by (their) owner’.”

55 EpInd 8 (1905–06), 77.

56 On the question whether Brahmins themselves *ever* cultivated the land that was granted to them, see below.

57 D. B. Diskalkar in EpInd 21 (1931–32), p. 181.

58 The circumstance that there are books in Sanskrit on agriculture (*kṛṣiśāstra*) shows that Brahmins were interested in agriculture, but does not by itself constitute compelling evidence that they practised it with their own hands; see Wojtilla, 2006.

59 See Ritschl, 1980; Gupta, 1983: 40 f; Njammasch, 2001: 298 f; Virkus, 2004: 44 f.

60 Nalinikanta Bhattasali in EpInd 18 (1925–26), pp. 75–76.

61 Most frequently, “land-grants are not made in the intention to increase the agricultural area, but, as stated in the documents, to make merit. Then often fields already under cultivation are donated, and not *khila* land. .... seen in the proper perspective in time and space, perhaps hard-

or *brahmadeya* in the inscription and that it is not exempted from taxes (the king is going to derive revenue from it). The very fact that the donee is recorded to have asked for it is remarkable and rare.<sup>62</sup>

Often the donation of a village is presented as follows: the taxes and other income which the king would customarily receive from that village should now be handed over to the donee. This is sometimes explicitly stated, as in a Gupta copper-plate inscription from 493–94 AD, which records the gift of a village to a Brahmin; the inhabitants of the village receive the following command: “You yourselves shall render to him (i.e., to the Brahmin) the offering of the tribute of the customary royalties and taxes, and shall be obedient to [his] commands.”<sup>63</sup> Another copper-plate inscription, some twenty years later, adds “gold etc.” to the items to be rendered to the donees.<sup>64</sup>

The gift of a village may also cover cases where a village that is largely or even exclusively inhabited by Brahmins is freed from all taxes. The *parihāra* given by King Khāravala of Kāliṅga to Brahmins (see above) may be of this nature. There are reasons to believe that Brahmins often clustered together in villages. Passages belonging to the earliest layers of the Buddhist canon use the expression *brāhmaṇa-gāma* to refer to them.<sup>65</sup> However, a Brahmin village (*brāhmaṇa-gāma*) is not to be confused with a *brahmadeyya*. The introduction of the *Ambaṭṭha-Sutta* shows this. It speaks of the Brahmin village called Icchānaṅkala, where the Buddha is visited by Ambaṭṭha. Ambaṭṭha lives somewhere else, viz., in a place called Ukkaṭṭha which is a *brahmadeyya*, a royal gift (*rājadāya*) given by King Pasenadi of Kosala. Apparently the Brahmin village Icchānaṅkala is not itself a royal gift, a *brahmadeyya*.<sup>66</sup> The introduction to the *Kūṭadanta-Sutta*, on the other hand, shows that a Brahmin village *can* be a royal gift and a *brahmadeyya*, for the village Khānumata is here described in both ways.<sup>67</sup> It seems likely that passages that refer to *brahmadeyyas* are relatively late in the Buddhist canon.<sup>68</sup>

Our reflections so far have led us to the following. There are good reasons to think that the *āśramas* that we find so often depicted in Brahmanical literature cor-

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ly any ruler contributed substantially to the enlargement of land under cultivation.” (Hinüber, 2007: 192 n. 38)

62 A fifteenth century copper-plate inscription records that a certain Vīraṅgārya, apparently a Brahmin, asked for a village in the following words: “Oh! King Virūpākṣa! grant us the village situated there named Somalāpura.” It appears that this Vīraṅgārya subsequently distributed it among Brahmins. See K. V. Subrahmanya Aiyar in EpInd 17 (1923–24), pp. 193–204.

63 Fleet, 1887 (CII 3), pp. 117–120.

64 Fleet, 1887 (CII 3), pp. 125–129.

65 See O. v. Hinüber, “Hoary past and hazy memories: tracing the history of early Buddhist texts” (presidential address delivered at the XVth Congress of the International Association of Buddhist Studies”, Atlanta, 2008).

66 DN I p. 87.

67 DN I p. 127.

68 Bronkhorst 2007: 353 ff (Appendix VI); McGovern 2013: § IV.4.3.



respond to an idealized vision as to what Brahmanical settlements looked like or should look like. Their idealized depiction also had political purposes, among them to induce kings and those near them to grant land to Brahmins. These idealized depictions could fulfil this aim if they convinced those in power that by creating such settlements they could harness Brahmanical power and use it for their own benefit. The long-term success of this Brahmanical initiative was great. We have already seen that *agrahāras* changed the socio-economic landscape in post-Gupta times. But the initiative to try to induce rulers to part with land (or rather, the benefits to be derived from it) had been taken many centuries earlier; the Sanskrit epics contain perhaps the earliest expressions of the ideal of the *āśrama*, i.e., the ideal which induced rulers to part with land in favour of Brahmins. Let us look at a concrete example.

The *Rāmāyaṇa* tells us that Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā come to the *āśrama* of the *muni* Bharadvāja, situated at or near the confluence of the Gaṅgā and the Yamunā.<sup>69</sup> Bharadvāja is described as being surrounded by deer, birds and *munis* (Rm 2,48.17: *mṛgapakṣibhir āśīno munibhiḥ ca samantataḥ*), no doubt an indication of the peaceful treatment accorded also to animals. Bharadvāja is further said to have performed the *agnihotra* (v. 11: *hutāgnihotra*), as we might expect from the chief inhabitant of an *āśrama*. However, we then learn that there are people from town and countryside nearby (v. 22: *ita āsannaḥ paurajānapado janaḥ*) who might come and disturb the *āśrama* out of curiosity to see Rāma and his companions. To preserve the peace, Rāma decides to stay somewhere else, along with his brother and wife.

So far there is little in the description that might make us suspect the great powers that are associated with the chief inhabitant of the *āśrama*, Bharadvāja. This becomes clear later on in the story (Rm 2,84 ff.). Bharata is determined to find Rāma, his older brother, in the hope of taking him back to the capital so as to accept the kingship. Bharata, too, arrives at Bharadvāja's *āśrama*, but unlike Rāma he is accompanied by a large army. Knowing how to behave, he leaves the army behind when approaching the *āśrama*, takes off his arms, and enters alone with his ministers. Bharadvāja is, once again, hospitable, and insists on offering hospitality to the whole army as well, in spite of protestations by Bharata. In order to do so, he invokes a number of gods and other supernatural beings, and the result is amazing. The soldiers receive their best meal ever, including meat and alcoholic beverages, but not only that. There are pleasures for all the senses, including music and, perhaps more importantly, beautiful damsels, fifteen for each man. Not surprisingly, the soldiers have the time of their lives, and express their intention never to return to the capital, nor to move on, saying: "This is heaven."

It is not necessary to dwell in detail on the delights which Bharata, his officers and his soldiers receive, for the duration of one night, in the *āśrama* of Bharadvāja. It is

<sup>69</sup> Bharadvāja's *āśrama* may be depicted in a sculpture at Bharhut; see Mookerji, 1947: illustration facing p. 344.

clear to everyone, including Bharata's own soldiers, that this is better than anything they can expect from the king. It also shows that this humble Brahmin in his *āśrama* can compete, if he so wishes, with anything the king might have on offer, and will win this competition hands down. Bharadvāja, by being a religious Brahmin, disposes of unsuspected powers, and the king, any king, is well advised to stay on good terms with him. What is more, by encouraging outstanding Brahmins to dedicate themselves to religious practices in appropriate surroundings—read: *āśramas*—a king creates a spiritual powerhouse that can supplement his own worldly powers.

For the *Mahābhārata* we can refer to Monika Shee's study of *tapas* and *tapasvin* in the narrative portions of this epic (1986). She dedicates several pages (1986: 305–315) to the characteristics of *āśramas*. She emphasizes their idyllic nature, and the double perfection found in them: the perfection of nature in the *āśramas*, and the perfection of its inhabitants. This double perfection, and the sacredness of the place in general, may account for the fact that here wild animals are no threat to each other, that there are flowers around the year, and that beauty and loveliness characterize the *āśrama* throughout. The *Mahābhārata* leaves no doubt as to the fearful power of ascetically inclined Brahmins. It is not surprising that kings could be persuaded that the peace of the *āśrama* makes it the safest place for these potentially terrifying beings to live in. One passage adds that there are no *āśramas* during the evil times at the end of the Yuga.<sup>70</sup>

The power of Brahmins, and the care kings should take not to offend them, is a theme that occurs also in later texts.<sup>71</sup> The following passage from the *Mānavadharmasāstra* says it all:<sup>72</sup>

Even in the face of the deepest adversity, he must never anger Brahmins; for when they are angered, they will destroy him instantly along with his army and conveyances. They made the fire a consumer of everything, the ocean undrinkable, and the moon to wane and wax—who would not be destroyed when he angers these? When angered, they could create other worlds and other guardians of the world, they could convert gods into non-gods—who would prosper when he injures these? The worlds and the gods always exist by taking refuge in them, and their wealth is the Veda—who would injure them if he wishes to live?

70 MBh 3,186.43: *āśramā ... na bhavanti yugakṣaye.*

71 A useful collection of passages dealing with the Brahmins' "weapons of virtue", both in the epics and in more recent literature, is provided by Minoru Hara (2007: 613–618).

72 ManuSm 9.313–316:

*parām apy āpadam prāpto brāhmaṇān na prakopayet |*  
*te hy enaṃ kupitā hanyuḥ sadyaḥ sabalavāhanam || 313 ||*  
*yaiḥ kṛtaṃ sarvabhakṣo 'gnir apeyaś ca mahodadhīḥ |*  
*kṣayī cāpyāyitaś cenduḥ ko na naśyet prakopya tān || 314 ||*  
*lokān anyān sṛjeyur ye lokapālāṃś ca kopitāḥ |*  
*devān kuryur adevāṃś ca kaḥ kṣīṇvaṃś tān samṛdhnuyāt || 315 ||*  
*yān samāśritya tiṣṭhanti lokā devāś ca sarvadā |*  
*brahma caiva dhanam yeṣāṃ ko hiṃsyāt tāñ jīṣviṣuḥ || 316 || (Tr. Olivelle).*

Indeed, when it comes to it, the Brahmin does not need the king:<sup>73</sup>

A Brahmin who knows the Law shall not inform the king about any matter; solely with his own power should he chastise men who do him harm. Between the king's power and his own, his own power is far more potent. A twice-born, therefore, should punish enemies solely with his own power, and make use of vedic texts of Atharva-Āṅgīrasa—that is indisputable. Clearly, speech is the Brahmin's weapon; with that a twice-born should strike down his enemies.

Where did the idea of Brahmanical *āśramas* come from? If the theory here presented as to the link between *āśramas* and land grants is accepted, at least a partial answer to this question may be found. The Vedic Brahmins were not the only ones to receive land grants in early India. It is possible that they were not the first ones either. The chronological positions with respect to Pāṇini of the Vedic texts that show awareness of land grants—the *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa*, the *Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa* and the *Chāndogya-Upaniṣad*—remain uncertain.<sup>74</sup> Well, Pāṇini may have lived some fifty years after the death of the Buddha, and Buddhist literature reports that Anāthapiṇḍika put at the Buddha's disposal a park in Śrāvastī called Jetavana.<sup>75</sup> The canonical account does not say that this park was given to the Buddha or to his community of followers, but this may be a relatively minor detail. The gift of the Veṇuvana by King Bimbisāra is presented as a straightforward donation to the Buddha and his community of monks, and terminates with the Buddha's permission to his monks to accept such gifts.<sup>76</sup> It is more than likely that these stories from the Vinaya do not date back to the time of the Buddha, but they are relatively old.<sup>77</sup> The earliest gift of an immovable object recorded in an inscription is the donation of a cave to the Ājīvikas by emperor Aśoka.<sup>78</sup> Another inscription of Aśoka declares the village Lummini, where the Buddha

73 ManuSm 11,31–33:

*na brāhmaṇo vedayīta kiṃcid rājani dharmavit |  
svavīryeṇaiva tāñ chiṣyān mānavān apakāriṇaḥ || 31 ||  
svavīryād rājavīryāc ca svavīryaṃ balavattaram |  
tasmāt svenaiva vīryeṇa nigrhṇīyād arīn dvijaḥ || 32 ||  
śrutīr atharvāṅgīrasīḥ kuryād ity avicāritam |  
vāk śastraṃ vai brāhmaṇasya tena hanyād arīn dvijaḥ || 33 ||* (Tr. Olivelle).

74 See Bronkhorst 2007: 192 ff.

75 Vin II p. 158 f. This is the place where the Buddha, according to tradition, passed most often the rainy season; see Bareau, 1993: 21.

76 Vin I p. 39; Bareau, 1963: 336–339.

77 See on this Schopen, 2006: 317: “If the compilers of the various Vinayas considered it ‘highly important’ to regulate the lives of their monks so as to give no cause for complaint to the laity, and if considerations of this sort could only have assumed high importance after Buddhist groups had permanently settled down, then, since the latter almost certainly did not occur until well after Aśoka, it would be obvious that all the Vinayas that we have are late, precisely as both Wassilieff and Lévi have suggested a hundred years ago.” Bareau (1993: 32) states, with regard to the story of this meeting of the Buddha and King Bimbisāra: “Sa réalité historique est ... plus que douteuse ...”

78 Bloch, 1950: 156.

was born, free of taxes;<sup>79</sup> this is what might be called a donation of a village, even if the donees in this particular case appear to be the inhabitants of the village itself.<sup>80</sup>

It seems, then, that the Brahmins of the centuries preceding the Common Era had to compete for favours from the rich and powerful. One of the areas in which this competition found expression was the suitability to receive presents, including presents of land and villages. The Buddhists, Jains and Ājīvikas were obvious and rewarding recipients for such generosity, for they needed shelter for their monks, whether in the form of caves or in some other form.<sup>81</sup> Note that a shelter by itself is of limited use, for its inhabitants have to eat. The gifts of caves (or of other forms of shelter) could therefore be accompanied by the gift of one or more villages. An inscription from Karle indicates, as a matter of fact, that the son-in-law of King Nahapāna, whom we encountered earlier and situated in the first century CE, gave a village “for the support of the ascetics living in the caves at Valūraka (= Karle) without any distinction of sect or origin, for all who would keep the *varṣa* (there).”<sup>82</sup> Various other gifts of villages for the inhabitants of caves are recorded in inscriptions from the same area and approximately the same time. A cave inscription from Nasik, for example, concerns the gift of the cave and “grants to this meritorious donation (viz., the cave) the village Pisājipadaka”.<sup>83</sup> The Brahmins were at a disadvantage in this respect, unless they too created—at least in name, perhaps also in reality—communities of ascetics dedicated to the religious life, Brahmanical fashion. The *āśrama* (whether only literary fiction or real, and whether or not it continued an already existing institution) may have been their response.<sup>84</sup>

79 Bloch, 1950: 157; G. Bühler in EpInd 5 (1898–99), 4 ff.

80 Schopen (2006: 316) sees in the fact that this gift is not granted to a monastery, or even to a monastic group, evidence that Aśoka did not know anything about Buddhist monasteries, which may indeed not yet have existed at that time. Ray (1989: 444) states: “One of the striking features of Junnar is that for the first time there is epigraphic mention of the donation of land to monastic establishments, dated to the first century AD.” See further below. Land grants were already given to Buddhist monasteries in Sri Lanka in the latter part of the second century BCE, according to Gunawardana (1979: 53 f.); cp. Xinru Liu, 1988: 106–07.

81 Cp. Lubin, 2005: 80: “Ritualist brahmins do not appear to have established monastic or scholarly centers comparable to those of the Buddhists. What institutions did brahmin priests and scholars develop that allowed them to carry on and eventually to attain equal success in many of the domains where Buddhism was successful?” Part of the answer to this question may well be: *āśramas/agrahāras*. The expression *āśrama-vihāra* to refer to a Buddhist monastery is attested in an inscription from the Gupta period; see Chatterjee, 1999: 239–40; Chakraborti, 1978: 31. An inscription from Nālandā, moreover, mentions the expression *agrahāra* where one should perhaps have expected *vihāra*; see Sastri, 1942: 83. On the idyllic side of Buddhist monasteries, see Schopen, 2006a.

82 E. Senart in EpInd 7 (1902–03), p. 57 ff.

83 E. Senart in EpInd 8 (1905–06), pp. 59–65.

84 The existence, many centuries later, of a Buddhist monastery in East Bengal called *āśrama-vihāra* (Barua, 1969: 179) suggests that the Buddhists were well aware of the parallelism of the two institutions.

Timothy Lubin states, in a recent article (2005: 82): “Brahmins did gather to meet in assemblies called *pariṣad*, *samsad*, or *sabhā* to decide questions of ritual or social *dharma*, and to serve as a local court of law. But the development of durable, large-scale Brahmanical institutions lagged behind that of Buddhist monasteries. When it came, it took the form of brahmin settlements on endowed, tax-free lands (*agrahāras*) and royally sponsored temples.” At the conclusion of this article we may think that, if Brahmanical institutions lagged behind, this was not for lack of trying.

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### Abbreviations:

BORI	Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona
BST	Buddhist Sanskrit Texts, Darbhanga
CII	Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum
DN	Dīgha-Nikāya (PTS, see Rhys Davids & Carpenter)
EDS	An Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Sanskrit on Historical Principles, ed. A. M. Ghatage etc., vol. 1 ff., Poona, 1976 ff.
EpInd	Epigraphia Indica
GobhGS	Gobhila-Gṛhya-Sūtra



Jm(V)	Āryaśūra, Jātakamālā, ed. P. L. Vaidya, Darbhanga 1959 (BST 21)
Kane, HistDh	Pandurang Vaman Kane, History of Dharmasāstra, second edition, Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 5 vols., 1968–1977
KāṭhS	Kāṭhaka-Saṃhitā
MS	Maitrāyaṇī-Saṃhitā
MBh	Mahābhārata, MBh[-CE]
PBr	Pañcaviṃśa-Brāhmaṇa
Rm	Rāmāyaṇa, Rm[-CE]
TaittB	Taittarīya-Brāhmaṇa
TaittS	Taittirīya-Saṃhitā
Vin	Vinaya-Piṭaka (PTS, see Oldenberg 1879–1883)
VWCA	Vedic Word Concordance, by Vishva Bandhu, 5 vols., Hoshiarpur: V.V.R. Institute, 1955–1965.