

Johannes Bronkhorst

johannes.bronkhorst@unil.ch

The *Mahābhāṣya* and its history

(appeared in: *Ujjwala-Śāstra-Vaibhavam: Professor Ujjwala Jha Commemoration Volume*. Ed. Arun Ranjan Mishra & Anagha Joshi. Delhi: Shivalik Prakashan. 2023. ISBN: 978-93-91214-44-9. Pp. 12-26.)

I

It is almost impossible to exaggerate the importance of Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*.¹ It is, of course, the text that has the highest authority in the grammatical tradition of Pāṇini, a higher authority than Pāṇini's grammar itself. The text was considered extremely difficult, as testified by the following popular saying: *mahābhāṣyaṃ vā pāṭhanīyaṃ mahārājyaṃ vā pālanīyaṃ* "One can either teach the *Mahābhāṣya* or rule a great realm."²

Also outside the grammatical tradition it held a position of authority. Few competent Sanskrit authors during the last so many centuries were not thoroughly acquainted with it and underwent its influence. Those who mastered the *Mahābhāṣya* were held in high esteem in Brahmanical society. This is unexpectedly confirmed by a Jesuit missionary, Calmette, who wrote in 1733 that those who studied the *Mahābhāṣya* were considered the most excellent scholars.³

Another foreign visitor who mentioned the *Mahābhāṣya* is Yijing, a Buddhist pilgrim from China who visited South Asia at the end of the seventh century and left us an account of Buddhism in India and Southeast Asia. Since part of this account has been studied by John Brough — in an article called "I-ching on the Sanskrit grammarians" (1973) — it is appropriate to begin this Brough lecture with it.

¹ For a recent short overview of the *Mahābhāṣya* tradition, see Sulich-Cowley 2022: 9-19.

² Scharfe 1977: 152. I do not know why Scharfe translates: "Either read the *Mahābhāṣya* or rule a large kingdom."

³ He wrote this about the Veda: "Ce qu'il y a de merveilleux, c'est que la plupart de ceux qui en sont les dépositaires, n'en comprennent pas le sens; car il est écrit dans une langue très ancienne, et le *samousseroutam*, qui est aussi familier aux savans que le latin l'est parmi nous, n'y atteint pas encore, s'il n'est aidé, tant pour les pensées que pour les mots, d'un commentaire qu'ils appellent *Maha Bachiam* (le grand commentaire). Ceux qui font leur étude de cette dernière sorte de livre, sont parmi eux les savans du premier ordre. Tandis que les autres Brames font le salut, ceux-ci leur donnent la bénédiction." (*Lettres Édifiantes et Curieuses, Mémoires des Indes*, Tome septième, Lyon 1819, p. 506)

As will be clear from the title of his article, Brough studied the chapter of Yijing's book that deals with the Sanskrit grammarians. At first sight, this chapter contains some strange claims, some of these about the *Mahābhāṣya*. We will see that these at first sight strange claims help us to obtain a better understanding of the history of that text.

We learn from Brough's article (1973: [141] 255 f.; cf. Takakusu 1896: 175 f.) that Yijing mentions in this chapter a work that he calls '*Vṛttisūtra*' and ascribes to Jayāditya. This work consists of 18,000 *ślokas* and "supplements its *sūtra*-text, and discusses in detail numerous (possible) interpretations. (...) It discusses fully the (grammatical) usages current in the world, and investigates the rules of (the language addressed to) the gods". The *Vṛttisūtra* is commented upon in the *Cūrṇi*. The *Cūrṇi*, which contains 24,000 *ślokas*, "is a work of the learned Patañjala. This, again, cites the former *Sūtras*". The *Cūrṇi* is in its turn commented upon in the '*Bhartṛharisāstra*'.

Yijing's account is clearly confused. *Cūrṇi* is another name for Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*; this much is correct, also in Yijing's account. However, Yijing refers to a *Vṛttisūtra* that was composed by Jayāditya. Since Jayāditya is the (or a) author of the *Kāśikāvṛtti*, a commentary on Pāṇini's *sūtras*, one would think that *Vṛttisūtra* is another name for *Kāśikāvṛtti*. This, however, conflicts with Yijing's claim that the *Vṛttisūtra* is commented upon in the *Cūrṇi*. The *Cūrṇi*, i.e., the *Mahābhāṣya*, comments on the short nominal phrases called *vārttikas*. The assumption that perhaps *Vṛttisūtra* is another name for these *vārttikas* does not work either, because Yijing ascribes to the *Vṛttisūtra* a length of 18,000 *ślokas* and to the *Cūrṇi* a length of 24,000 *ślokas*; this means that the two texts are of comparable length. In reality the total length of the *vārttikas* is a small fraction of the length of the *Mahābhāṣya*. In short, Yijing's information is confused and unreliable. But it is not uninteresting.

It appears that Yijing had obtained information about the *Mahābhāṣya* from an informant who did not know something that we all know today, viz., that Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya* consists of short nominal phrases called *vārttikas* composed by a certain Kātyāyana, and of everything else; this everything else was composed by Patañjali. Somehow Yijing's informant knew, or believed, that two authors were involved, but he did not have our present understanding of who was responsible for what, attributing far too much to the author different from Patañjali (now known by the name Kātyāyana).⁴

⁴ Bronkhorst 1983.

It turns out that similar misunderstandings concerning the authorship of the *Mahābhāṣya* were widespread at the time of Yijing and before him.⁵ Our present understanding of the structure of the *Mahābhāṣya* came later. The first author who shows an awareness of the real state of affairs appears to be Kaiyaṭa, who lived around the year 1000 CE. Full clarity did not come until Franz Kielhorn, whose detailed researches at the end of the nineteenth century appear to have solved the problem once and for all (apart perhaps from some minor details). Some centuries before Kaiyaṭa, readers looked upon the *Mahābhāṣya* as a text composed in a peculiar style, in which short nominal phrases are followed by slightly more elaborate explanatory phrases. For us modern readers, to say it once more, the short nominal phrases are the *vārttikas* of Kātyāyana, while the paraphrases are part of Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*. Readers at the time of Yijing understood this differently. They looked upon the presence of short nominal phrases followed by paraphrases as a stylistic feature of the text, a feature that some imitated. We find it in a number of texts, including the *Yuktidīpikā*, the *Nyāyabhāṣya* and parts of the *Nyāyamañjarī*; also the lost Vaiśeṣika text called *Kaṭandī* had adopted this style, it appears.⁶ Some of these texts are called *Vārttika*; this term here designates the texts as a whole, not just parts of them. Examples are the *Tattvārthavārttika* and the *Rājavārttika* (the latter being another name for the *Yuktidīpikā*).

It appears, then, that in some respects we know today more about the *Mahābhāṣya* than those who studied it some fifteen centuries ago. Perhaps this is not surprising. Bhartṛhari's *Vākyapadīya* — or more precisely: the commentary (*Vṛtti*) on the *Vākyapadīya* that may or may not have been composed by Bhartṛhari — contains a number of verses that appear to mention a revival by Candra and others of the *Mahābhāṣya*, whose oral tradition had only survived in Kashmir.⁷ It seems that the *Mahābhāṣya* was not studied intensively during the period concerned. This changed when some grammarians — Candra and Bhartṛhari can be mentioned by name — revived the intensive study of the *Mahābhāṣya*. We do not know how long it took their efforts to become successful.

Neglect of the *Mahābhāṣya* did not mean neglect of the study of Pāṇini's grammar. I have had various occasions — most recently at the

⁵ Bronkhorst 1990.

⁶ Bronkhorst 1992.

⁷ Bronkhorst 1983: 391-398; 2008.

Mahāmahopādhyāyamahotsava in honour of Jim Benson, in Oxford now more than three years ago — to draw attention to textual passages that show that there were grammarians in the Pāṇinian tradition who did not feel bound by the *Mahābhāṣya*.⁸ Some of these grammarians lived before Candra and Bhartṛhari, others after them. It is not clear when the grammatical tradition that felt free from the constraints of the *Mahābhāṣya* came to an end, or even whether it has completely come to an end at all. This is not a topic I wish to explore today.⁹

II

Let us now turn to another issue. Having seen that the Pāṇinian tradition did not always follow the *Mahābhāṣya*, the question arises whether and to what extent the *Mahābhāṣya* faithfully represents Pāṇini's grammar.¹⁰ Is the *Mahābhāṣya* merely an elaboration of issues that arise in studying Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, or does it pursue some other goals, different from Pāṇini's? In other words: Is the *Mahābhāṣya* a reliable instrument to understand the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* as it had been conceived of by Pāṇini, or does it pursue goals that were foreign to Pāṇini's way of thinking?

I will not discuss the question whether Patañjali knew the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* exactly in the form in which Pāṇini had composed it. Contrary to what has been claimed by some scholars, there is no reason to think he did not.¹¹ That is to say, to the best of our knowledge Patañjali knew Pāṇini's grammar in its original form, accents and all. Moreover, the distance in time between the two grammarians was not particularly long, perhaps two centuries, so we would expect Patañjali to interpret Pāṇini's grammar as it had been intended by Pāṇini.

However, much had changed between the two. Even though Patañjali thought that Pāṇini had lived under the Mauryas,¹² it seems more likely that he had lived earlier, before the creation of the Maurya Empire. Patañjali, on the other hand, lived after its collapse. Society had been deeply affected by the rule of the Mauryas and by the invasions that preceded and followed it. One result was that Patañjali thought of

⁸ Bronkhorst 2022. See further Bronkhorst 2009; 2014.

⁹ See Bronkhorst 1983; 2008a.

¹⁰ For ease of exposition, I will not distinguish between Kātyāyana and Patañjali in what follows.

¹¹ Bronkhorst 2016: 459-464.

¹² Falk 1994: 326-327.

Sanskrit differently from Pāṇini; unlike Pāṇini, he thought of Sanskrit as an — or rather: the — eternal language.¹³ Indeed, he states in so many words that both words and speech sounds are eternal.¹⁴ A consequence of this presumed fact, according to Patañjali, is that the traditional understanding of a Pāṇinian derivative has to be modified. In a Pāṇinian derivation elements are added and substituted. Verbal elements that we might call morphemes (verbal roots, nominal stems, suffixes, etc.) are joined so as to arrive at words and sentences. Patañjali proposes instead a derivation in which whole words succeed each other.¹⁵ Interestingly, already Kātyāyana had pointed out that "the status of *sthānin* 'original' and *ādeśa* 'substitute' cannot be justified, because [words] are *nitya* 'permanent'."¹⁶ Notionally, the difference between Pāṇini and Patañjali is most radical. It is further noteworthy that Patañjali thinks of the derivational process as being of a mental nature: notions succeed each other.¹⁷

The *Mahābhāṣya* does not stop here. Apart from imposing what we may call ontological restrictions on derivations, it also imposes a linearity that is absent from Pāṇini's grammar. Consider the derivations of *bhavati* "he/she/it is" and *bhavatu* "he/she/it must be". First *bhavati*:

bhū

bhū + laṭ

bhū + ti

bhū + a + ti

bho + a + ti

bhav + a + ti

¹³ See Bronkhorst forthcoming.

¹⁴ *Mahābhāṣya* I p. 18 l. 14-15 (on Śivasūtra 1 vt. 12).

¹⁵ *Mahābhāṣya* I p. 75 l. 8-14 (on P. 1.1.20 vt. 5).

¹⁶ P. 1.1.56 vt. 12: *anupapannaṃ sthānyādeśatvaṃ nityatvāt*. Tr. Joshi & Roodbergen 1990: 76.

¹⁷ *Mahābhāṣya* I p. 137, l. 13-14 & 23-26: *kim idaṃ kāryavipariṇāmād iti/ kāryā buddhiḥ sā vipariṇamyate/ ... evam ihāpy astir asmā aviśeṣeṇopadiṣṭaḥ/ tasya sarvatrāstibuddhiḥ prasaktā/ so 'ster bhūr bhavatiṭy astibuddhyā bhavatibuddhiṃ pratipadyate/ tataḥ sa paśyati buddhyāstīm cāpakṣyamāṇaṃ bhavatiṃ cādhyāmanam/ nitya eva ca svasmin viśaye 'stir nityo bhavatiṭr buddhis tv asya vipariṇamyate/*. "What is this transformation of the effect (mentioned in a *vārttika*)? The word 'effect' refers to concepts (*buddhi*). It is the concept that is transformed [and not the linguistic unit itself]. ... [Referring to the suppletion of the root *as* by *bhū* taught by P. 2.4.52 (*aster bhūḥ*), Patañjali continues:] Here [initially] the root *as* is taught without any specification. Thus, he [= the user of the grammar] came to think that *as* occurs everywhere. Through P. 2.4.52, he comes to think of *bhū* instead of *as* [in certain specific contexts]. In its own context, the root *as* is [actually] permanent, and so is the root *bhū* permanent [in its own context]. However, [through Pāṇini's rule of suppletion] his [= student's] notion (*buddhi*) is transformed." Tr. Deshpande 1997: 103.

The derivation of *bhavatu* is almost identical:

bhū

bhū + loṭ

bhū + ti

bhū + a + ti

bho + a + ti

bhav + a + ti

bhav + a + tu

Here final *ti* is replaced with *tu* because of the element *loṭ* that occurs earlier on in the derivation.

This last example illustrates that in Pāṇini's grammar steps at the end of a derivation can be conditioned by elements that occur at its beginning. Interestingly, this is not to the liking of Patañjali. He does not, to be sure, discuss the derivation of *bhavatu*, but he does show at numerous occasions that in his opinion each step in a derivation should be determined by the immediately preceding stage, not by an earlier one, nor indeed by a subsequent one. In the derivation of *bhavati*, each succeeding step is determined by the immediately preceding stage. The insertion of *a* in *bhū + a + ti*, for example, is determined by the immediately preceding stage *bhū + ti*; and the step to *bho + a + ti* is determined by *bhū + a + ti*; also, *bhav + a + ti* is determined by its immediately preceding stage. The derivation of *bhavatu*, on the other hand, shows that this principle is not universally valid in Pāṇini's grammar. Moreover, there are situations where knowledge of a following stage is required.

As stated above, this is not to the liking of Patañjali. An important part of his *Mahābhāṣya* deals with such, from his point of view, problematic cases, and tries to show — we would say by hook or by crook — that these derivations are linear after all; that is to say, each next step is completely determined by the immediately preceding stage. These discussions are among the most technical and complex found in the *Mahābhāṣya*, a text that is in any case notorious for its difficulty. It would be completely out of place to look at these discussions in this lecture. I have considered them in detail

elsewhere, and you are most welcome to look at them at your leisure.¹⁸ All I ask for at present is that you take my word for it that Patañjali tries to impose a linear ordering on Pāṇinian derivations that does not always fit.

III

What inspired Patañjali to adopt this altogether different approach to Pāṇini's grammar? Morphemes are its building blocks, but Patañjali ignores them to a remarkable extent. Words and speech sounds, he states, are eternal, but what about morphemes? Patañjali does not include them among the items that are eternal, and strictly speaking he does not even have place for them in derivations. Recall that derivations, as envisaged by Patañjali, are successions of notions of whole words, and that no elements (which includes morphemes) are strictly speaking added or substituted. And why does Patañjali insist that derivations must be linear? At first sight all this seems incomprehensible.

A solution may be found if we consider that Patañjali's innovations have two sides. On the one hand, he brings in ontological considerations by stating that words and speech sounds are eternally existing things. Pāṇini's grammar is not concerned with ontology, it never raises the question what exists and what not. Patañjali does, and comes to the conclusion that strictly speaking only two linguistic entities really exist: words and speech sounds.

On the other hand, Patañjali appears to maintain that mental processes are sequences of mental moments each of which is completely determined by the immediately preceding one. Patañjali does not, to be sure, speak about mental processes in general. He does however claim that grammatical derivations are mental processes, i.e. sequences of mental stages, and that each following step in a grammatical derivation is determined by the immediately preceding stage.

Summing up, Patañjali introduces ontological considerations into grammar, with a special place reserved for words and speech sounds as really existing entities; and he assumes that mental processes (or at any rate the ones corresponding to grammatical derivations) are linear. He imposes these ideas onto Pāṇini's grammar, which was not in need of them and could fare very well without them. Why?

¹⁸ See Bronkhorst 2004; 2016: 323-360.

Recall, at this point, that much had changed between Pāṇini and Patañjali. Some of these changes were of a political nature, others were cultural or religious. There is no reason to believe that Pāṇini had ever heard of Buddhism, but less than two hundred years later, the very region where he had lived, Gandhāra, had become a Buddhist centre of the greatest importance, no doubt with the support of the Maurya rulers (emperor Aśoka had become a Buddhist lay follower himself). Gandhāra's importance in the Buddhist world is accentuated by the intellectual developments that originated there and subsequently spread to other centres of Buddhism in South Asia and influenced even non-Buddhist schools of thought.¹⁹

Well, the Abhidharma developed in Gandhāra and surroundings ("Greater Gandhāra") can at bottom be described as being an ontology. Unlike Theravāda Abhidhamma, the Abhidharma of Greater Gandhāra (often associated with the Sarvāstivāda school of thought) looked upon the lists of dharmas that the Buddhist tradition had preserved as elements of existence, the ultimate constituents of all that exists. It had adjusted its lists of dharmas to its needs (or so it seems) and had included some that correspond to words and speech sounds (but none that correspond to morphemes!). Moreover, it looked upon events in the world, including the mind, as sequences of momentary dharmas that succeed each other in accordance with the rules of dependent origination, each subsequent dharma being completely determined by the immediately preceding one.²⁰

There is no need to say more. The parallel between Patañjali's innovations and the fundamental tenets of Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma is stunning. Closer study of Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya* has brought to light further features that are most easily explained as due to Buddhist influence. When we recall that Patañjali, in all probability, lived and worked in Kashmir, a region close to Gandhāra and sometimes considered part of Greater Gandhāra, this influence become less surprising than it appears at first sight.

It appears, then, that the *Mahābhāṣya*, far from preserving and continuing the tradition that had been created by Pāṇini, modified this tradition to a considerable extent, at least in part under the influence of the newly created philosophy of Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma.

Patañjali's views:	Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma ontology:
--------------------	-----------------------------------

¹⁹ Bronkhorst 2000; 2002; 2016a; 2018.

²⁰ This way of thinking is reminiscent of the causal determinism proposed by Laplace in the 18th century.

Words and speech sounds are eternal entities	Words and speech sounds are momentary entities (dharmas)
Morphemes are neglected	Morphemes are neglected
A grammatical derivation is a succession of notions of whole words	All events (including mental events) are successions of momentary dharmas
Each next step in a derivation is fully determined by the immediately preceding one	Each subsequent dharma is fully determined by the immediately preceding one

IV

I wish to say a few more words about the political landscape in which Patañjali lived and worked, a landscape totally different from the one in which Pāṇini had lived and worked. Patañjali lived and worked under the Śuṅgas, who had created a kingdom after the collapse of the Maurya Empire that covered part of the latter's territory. In this kingdom they tried to introduce (perhaps reintroduce) Brahmanism, which had suffered under Maurya rule. Recall that Gandhāra had been a centre of Brahmanical culture before the Mauryas (Pāṇini had lived there) but reappeared after the disappearance of the Maurya Empire as a centre of Buddhist culture with no indications that many Brahmins remained. The *Mahābhāṣya* contains elements that illustrate these changes. I am referring to his reference to the region he calls Āryāvarta "the land of the Āryas".²¹

The *Mahābhāṣya* gives twice, in identical terms, a description of this region:

Which is the land of the Āryas? It is the region to the east of where the Sarasvatī disappears (*ādarśa*), west of the Kālaka forest, south of the Himalayas, and north of the Pāriyātra mountains.²²

The passage occurs in two altogether different contexts, under P. 2.4.10 and under P. 6.3.109. P. 2.4.10 reads:

²¹ See Bronkhorst 2021.

²² Mahā-bh I p. 475 l. 3 (on P. 2.4.10); III p. 174 l. 7-8 (on P. 6.3.109): *kaḥ punar āryāvartaḥ/ prāg ādarśāt pratyak kālakavanād dakṣiṇena himavantam uttareṇa pāriyātram/*

śūdrāṇām anivasitānām

A dvandva compound (*dvandvaḥ*, from *sūtra* 2) of Śūdras that are not expelled (*aniravasita*) is singular (*ekavacanam*, from *sūtra* 1)

The *Kāśikā* gives the examples *takṣāyaskāram* "a carpenter and a blacksmith" and *rajakatantuvāyam* "a washerman and a weaver".

Patañjali raises the question from which region the Śūdras concerned are not expelled, and he first suggests that they are not expelled from Āryāvarta. This however would give rise to difficulties, for in that case a number of compounds would not be possible; one of these is *śakayavanam* "the Scythians and the Greeks". In other words, the Scythians and the Greeks *were* expelled from Āryāvarta at the time of Patañjali.

The second occurrence of the description of Āryāvarta, under P. 6.3.109, is part of a discussion of who are *śiṣṭas*, "linguistic élites". It reads, in Deshpande's (1993: 97) translation:

Who are the *śiṣṭas*?

They are the grammarians.

How is it?

The linguistic behavior of the élites presupposes the science of grammar, and the grammarians know the science of grammar. [Therefore, the grammarians must be the élites.]

But, if the behavior of the élites presupposes the science of grammar, and if grammar presupposes the behavior of the élites, then this argument becomes circular. Circular arguments are not acceptable.

Then we define *śiṣṭas* by their place of residence and their way of life. That way of life is found only in the region of Āryāvarta.

What is this Āryāvarta?

It lies to the east of [where the river Sarasvatī] disappears [in modern Rajasthan], to the west of the Kālaka forest [near modern Allahabad], to the south of the Himālayas, and to the north of the Vindhya. Those Brāhmaṇas who live in this Āryāvarta, the land of the Āryas, who store just a basketful of grain, who are not greedy, and who without any motive have attained the highest wisdom in some branch of learning, they are the *śiṣṭas*.

If these *śiṣṭas* are the decisive standard for correctness of language, then what is the function of Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī*?

Pāṇini's grammar aims at helping one recognize these linguistic élites.

How can the linguistic élites be recognized by means of Pāṇini's grammar?

A student of Pāṇini's grammar observes another person who has never studied that grammar but who uses constructions taught in that grammar. He [i.e. the student of Pāṇini's grammar] thinks that it must be either divine grace or some innate nature that this person who does not study Pāṇini's grammar still uses constructions taught in it. Perhaps he may know even other usages [which are deemed to be correct but are not taught by Pāṇini]. This way Pāṇini's grammar aims at helping one recognize the élite speakers of Sanskrit [= *śiṣṭas*].²³

Deshpande expresses surprise that the region of Āryāvarta "does not extend to cover even Pāṇini's birthplace of Śalātura, or even his Udīcyā region."²⁴ This observation reminds us that Pāṇini's birthplace and other regions, though thoroughly Brahmanical at the time of Pāṇini, had undergone major changes by the time of Patañjali. Gandhāra in particular (which is where Pāṇini had lived) had become virtually emptied of Brahmins, partly as a result of invasions by Scythians and Greeks, precisely the populations that were expelled (*niravasita*) from Āryāvarta according to the passage from the *Mahābhāṣya* considered above.²⁵ Political developments clearly had played a role in defining the boundaries of Patañjali's Āryāvarta.

This raises a crucial question. Was Āryāvarta itself a political entity? Did its boundaries as described by Patañjali coincide with the boundaries of one of the political entities that existed at his time?

²³ *ke punaḥ śiṣṭāḥ/ vaiyākaraṇāḥ/ kuta etat/ sāstrapūrvikā hi śiṣṭir vaiyākaraṇās ca sāstrajñāḥ/ yadi tarhi sāstrapūrvikā śiṣṭiḥ śiṣṭipūrvakaṃ ca sāstram tad itaretarāśrayaṃ bhavati/ itaretarāśrayāṇi ca na prakalpante/ evaṃ tarhi nivāsata ācārataś ca/ sa cācāra āryāvarta eva/ kaḥ punar āryāvartaḥ/ prāg ādarśāt pratyak kālakavanād dakṣiṇena himavantam uttaraṇa pāriyātram/ etasminn āryanivāse ye brāhmaṇāḥ kumbhīdhānyā alolupā agrhyamāṇakāraṇāḥ kiṃcid antareṇa kasyāścid vidyāyāḥ pāraḡās tatrābhavantaḥ śiṣṭāḥ// yadi tarhi śiṣṭāḥ śabdeṣu pramāṇaṃ kim aṣṭādhyāyā kriyate/ śiṣṭajñānārthāṣṭādhyāyī/ kathaṃ punar aṣṭādhyāyā śiṣṭāḥ śakyā vijñātum/ aṣṭādhyāyīm adhīyāno 'nyam paśyaty anadhīyānam ye 'tra vihitāḥ śabdās tān prayuñjānam/ sa paśyati/ nūnam asya daivānugrahaḥ svabhāvo vā yo 'yaṃ na cāṣṭādhyāyīm adhīte ye cātra vihitāḥ śabdās tāṃś ca prayuñkte/ ayaṃ nūnam anyān api jānāti/ evaṃ eṣā śiṣṭajñānārthāṣṭādhyāyī//*

²⁴ See also Deshpande 2019: 12 (with map).

²⁵ See Bronkhorst 2016: 17-33.

This question automatically leads to the next one. Patañjali mentions the Śuṅga ruler Puṣyamitra, in whose sacrificial activities he was or had been involved. We know that Puṣyamitra, unlike his Maurya predecessors and probably most of his contemporaries, supported the Brahmanical tradition and, no doubt, the cultivation of its language, Sanskrit. Is it possible that Patañjali's Āryāvarta coincides with the geographical extent of the Śuṅga kingdom?

What do we know about the extent of the Śuṅga Empire? The sources are obscure, but link Puṣyamitra and his successors to a variety of regions of northern India, roughly from Kashmir to Pāṭaliputra and Vidiśā.²⁶ Patañjali's Āryāvarta easily fits into this area but appears to be smaller than the Śuṅga Empire at its largest. It seems fair to conclude that it represents the part of that empire where Puṣyamitra and his successors had succeeded in imposing the Brahmanical order of society, with at its top Brahmins "who store just a basketful of grain, who are not greedy, and who without any motive have attained the highest wisdom in some branch of learning".

Perhaps the preceding observations are superfluous. Perhaps it goes without saying that a country where Brahmins speak faultless Sanskrit and successfully engage in their practices is a country that is ruled by rulers who are sympathetic to their cause. Rulers before Patañjali — among them the Mauryas — and rulers contemporary with him — among them Greeks and Scythians — were not sympathetic to their cause. Puṣyamitra and some of his successors were. Āryāvarta must therefore almost inevitably be thought of as part of their empire. In spite of this almost self-evident link, historians of Indian thought do not always make the connection.

It is intriguing that Patañjali's Āryāvarta does not extend eastward all the way to Pāṭaliputra, which must have been part of the Śuṅga Empire at some time. An example in the *Mahābhāṣya* suggests that one could freely travel from where Patañjali lived (perhaps Kashmir) to that city.²⁷ Yet Brahmanical predominance appears not to have reached that far at his time, in spite of royal encouragement.

One further remark before we leave Āryāvarta. The description of this region we find in the *Mahābhāṣya* also occurs, in exactly the same form, in certain Dharmasūtras: the *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra* (1.2.9-17) and the *Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra* (1.8-16). The proposed identification of Āryāvarta with the realm of the Śuṅgas implies that these

²⁶ Lamotte 1958: 388-395 & 424-431 / 1988: 353-360 & 386-392.

²⁷ Bronkhorst 2016: 42-46, which also gives reasons for assuming that Patañjali composed his *Mahābhāṣya* in Kashmir.

Dharmasūtras cannot date back to a period before the Śuṅgas, and are therefore post-Maurya. This is hardly a new finding. Olivelle (2012: 119) has come to a similar conclusion on the basis of different considerations.

V

Our reflections so far put the history of the *Mahābhāṣya* in a perspective that is different from the usual one. Far from containing the authoritative interpretation of Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, we now see that it imposed upon this grammar an interpretation that had been heavily influenced by ideas that were completely foreign to Pāṇini's thought, ideas that did not even exist in Pāṇini's time. Most modern scholars, whether traditional or critical, have been trained to look at Pāṇini's grammar through the glasses of the *Mahābhāṣya*, and are therefore barely aware that these are coloured glasses.

Interestingly, the *Mahābhāṣya* did not initially have the total success that we might have expected. We have seen that some five centuries after its composition, its study needed to be saved from oblivion, and we may seriously ask whether it had been any better before that time. It appears that the commentary that Bhartṛhari wrote on it was the first commentary it ever received, and this was some six centuries after its composition. We know from various fragments that there were grammarians in the Pāṇinian tradition who did not feel bound by its arguments and conclusions, and that even after its so-called revival certain grammarians preferred to remain independent of the *Mahābhāṣya*. Considering the influence that non-Pāṇinian ideas had exerted on Patañjali's text, this is perhaps not surprising.

VI

The story of the *Mahābhāṣya* and its interpretation has a tail in our days. We saw that a Pāṇinian derivation, as interpreted in the *Mahābhāṣya*, is a linear process, in which distinct states succeed each other without being influenced by any but the immediately preceding state. This has inspired computer-literate people to consider the possibility of computerizing Pāṇini's grammar; some compare it with a Turing machine, a hypothetical computing device that performs its function in a sequence of discrete steps.

This particular take on Pāṇini's grammar started, perhaps, with an article published by Murray Fowler in 1965, and it continues until today.

The results so far, it appears, are not very convincing. To quote Jan Houben (2009: 18): "In spite of several elaborate and sophisticated attempts in this direction, it seems we are still far from a comprehensive and convincing endresult." Houben said this in 2009. And yet, Sanskrit Computational Linguistics has now become a topic of continued academic interest with, for example, regular symposia: six have been held so far, the last one in October 2019 (see Huet, Kulkarni & Scharf 2009; Kulkarni & Huet 2009; Kulkarni & Dangarikar 2013; Huet & Kulkarni 2018); the forthcoming World Sanskrit Conference will have a Computational Sanskrit and Digital Humanities Section.²⁸ I realize, of course, that Sanskrit Computational Linguistics is not exclusively, or even primarily, concerned with computerizing Pāṇini.

Where computers and computerization are concerned, I admit being completely out of my depth. I do wonder, however, whether and to what extent those who try to computerize Pāṇini's grammar are, in a way, repeating what Patañjali tried to do more than two thousand years ago. In the case of Patañjali, he tried to impose an understanding on Pāṇini's grammar that was in some respects foreign to it. I do not know whether Pāṇini's modern computer aficionados are doing the same, but it may be a question well worth asking.

References:

- Balbir, Nalini & Bautze, Joachim K. (ed.)(1994): *Festschrift Klaus Bruhn*. Reinbek: Verlag für Orientalistische Fachpublikationen.
- Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra*. See Olivelle 2000.
- Bronkhorst, Johannes (1983): "On the history of Pāṇinian grammar in the early centuries following Patañjali." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 11, 357-412.
- Bronkhorst, Johannes (1990): "Vārttika." *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens* 34, 123-146.
- Bronkhorst, Johannes (1992): "The Vaiśeṣika vākya and bhāṣya." *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 72-73 [for the years 1991 and 1992 (Amṛtamahotsava (1917-1992) Volume)], pp. 145-169
- Bronkhorst, Johannes (2000): "Abhidharma and Jainism." *Abhidharma and Indian Thought. Essays in honor of Professor Doctor Junsho Kato on his sixtieth birthday*. Ed. Committee for the Felicitation of Professor Doctor Junsho Kato's Sixtieth Birthday, Nagoya. Tokyo: Shuju-sha. Pp. 598-581 ([13]-[30]).

²⁸ <https://www.wsc2021.com.au/computational-and-digital-humanities/> (last accessed 17.9.2022).

- Bronkhorst, Johannes (2002): "A note on the Caraka Saṃhitā and Buddhism." *Early Buddhism and Abhidharma Thought: In Honor of Doctor Hajime Sakurabe on His Seventy-seventh Birthday*. Kyoto: Heirakuji Shoten. Pp. 115-121.
- Bronkhorst, Johannes (2004): *From Pāṇini to Patañjali: the search for linearity*. Pune: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.
- Bronkhorst, Johannes (2008): "A note on Kashmir and orthodox Pāṇinian grammar." *Linguistic Traditions of Kashmir*. Essays in memory of paṇḍit Dinanath Yaksha. Ed. Mrinal Kaul and Ashok Aklujkar. New Delhi: D. K. Printworld. Pp. 271-280.
- Bronkhorst, Johannes (2008a): "Udbhaṭa, a grammarian and a Cārvāka." *Linguistic Traditions of Kashmir*. Essays in memory of paṇḍit Dinanath Yaksha. Ed. Mrinal Kaul and Ashok Aklujkar. New Delhi: D. K. Printworld. Pp. 281-299.
- Bronkhorst, Johannes (2009): "Critique et transmission textuelles dans la tradition pāṇinéenne." *Écrire et transmettre en Inde classique*. Ed. Gérard Colas & Gerdi Gerschheimer. Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient. (Études thématiques, 23.) Pp. 269-286.
- Bronkhorst, Johannes (2014): "Deviant voices in the history of Pāṇinian grammar." *Bulletin d'Études indiennes* 32, 47-53
- Bronkhorst, Johannes (2016): *How the Brahmins Won: From Alexander to the Guptas*. Leiden – Boston: Brill. (Handbook of Oriental Studies 2/30.)
- Bronkhorst, Johannes (2016a): "Abhidharma and Indian thinking." *Text, History, and Philosophy: Abhidharma across Buddhist scholastic traditions*. Ed. Bart Dessein & Weijen Teng. Leiden – Boston: Brill. (Brill's Indological Library, 50.) Pp. 29-46.
- Bronkhorst, Johannes (2018): "Abhidharma in early Mahāyāna." *Setting Out on the Great Way. Essays on Early Mahāyāna Buddhism*. Ed. Paul Harrison. Sheffield (UK) & Bristol (USA): Equinox. Pp. 119-140.
- Bronkhorst, Johannes (2021): "Patañjali's Āryāvarta = Śuṅga realm?" *Academia Letters*, Article 291, February 2021. <https://doi.org/10.20935/AL291>.
- Bronkhorst, Johannes (2022): "Does Pāṇinian grammar have (a) history?" To appear in a Felicitation Volume.
- Bronkhorst, Johannes (forthcoming): "When and why did the Veda become eternal?" Proceedings of the 7th International Vedic Workshop (Dubrovnik, August 19-24, 2019).
- Brough, John (1973). "I-ching on the Sanskrit grammarians." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 36, 248-60. Reprint: Brough 1996: 410-422.
- Brough, John (1996): *Collected Papers*. Edited by Minoru Hara and J. C. Wright. University of London: School of Oriental and African Studies.
- Deshpande, Madhav M. (1993): "The changing notion of *śiṣṭa* from Patañjali to Bhartṛhari." AS 47, 95-115. Reprint: *Bhartṛhari, Philosopher and Grammarian. Proceedings of the First International Conference on Bhartṛhari* (University of Poona, January 6-8, 1992). Ed. Saroja Bhate and Johannes Bronkhorst. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass. 1994. Pp. 95-115.
- Deshpande, Madhav M. (1997): "Building blocks or useful fictions: changing view of morphology in ancient Indian thought." *India and Beyond: Aspects of Literature, Meaning, Ritual and Thought*. Essays in Honour of Frits Staal. Ed. Dick van der Meij. London & New York: Kegan Paul International / Leiden & Amsterdam: International Institute for Asian Studies. Pp. 71-127.
- Deshpande, Madhav M. (2019): *From Pāṇini to Patañjali and Beyond. Development of religious motifs in Sanskrit grammar*. 26th J. Gonda Lecture 2018. Amsterdam: Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences. 2019.

- Falk, Harry (1994): "Von Götterfiguren und menschlichen Göttern." = Balbir & Bautze 1994: 313-331.
- Fowler, Murray (1965): "How ordered are Pāṇini's rules?" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 85, 44-47
- Houben, Jan E. M. (2009): "Pāṇini's grammar and its computerization: A construction grammar approach." = Kulkarni & Huet 2009: 6-25.
- Huet, Gérard; Kulkarni, Amba & Scharf, Peter (ed.)(2009): *Sanskrit Computational Linguistics*. First and Second International Symposia, Rocquencourt, France, October 29-31, 2007 - Providence, RI, USA, May 15-17, 2008. Revised selected and invited papers. Berlin etc.: Springer.
- Huet, Gérard & Kulkarni, Amba (2018): *Computational Sanskrit & Digital Humanities*. Selected papers presented at the 17th World Sanskrit Conference, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, 9-13 July 2018. New Delhi: D K Publishers.
- Kielhorn, Franz (1876a): *Kātyāyana and Patañjali: Their Relation to Each Other and to Pāṇini*. Bombay (= *Kleine Schriften*, hrsg. v. W. Rau. Wiesbaden, 1969, I/1-64).
- Kielhorn, Franz (1876b): "On the Mahābhāṣya." *Indian Antiquary* 5, pp. 241-51 (= *Kleine Schriften* I/169-79).
- Kielhorn, Franz (ed.)(1880-85): *The Vyākaraṇa-Mahābhāṣya of Patañjali*. 3 volumes. Third edition revised by K. V. Abhyankar. Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1962-72.
- Kulkarni, Amba & Huet, Gérard (ed.)(2009): *Sanskrit Computational Linguistics*. Third International Symposium, Hyderabad, India, January 15-17, 2009. New York: Springer.
- Kulkarni, Malhar & Dangarikar, Chaitali (ed.)(2013): *Recent Researches in Sanskrit Computational Linguistics*. Fifth International Symposium Proceedings, 4-6 January 2013, IIT Bombay, India. New Delhi: D. K. Printworld.
- Lamotte, Étienne (1958): *Histoire du bouddhisme indien. Des origines à l'ère Śaka*. Louvain: Institut Orientaliste. (Bibliothèque du Muséon, 43.)
- Lamotte, Étienne (1988): *History of Indian Buddhism. From the origins to the Śaka Era*. Translated from the French by Sara Webb-Boin. Louvain-la-Neuve: Institut Orientaliste. (Publications de l'Institut Orientaliste de Louvain, 36.)
- Olivelle, Patrick (2000): *Dharmasūtras. The Law Codes of Āpastamba, Gautama, Baudhāyana, and Vasiṣṭha*. Annotated text and translation. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Olivelle, Patrick (2012): "Patañjali and the beginnings of Dharmaśāstra: an alternate social history of early Dharmasūtra production." *Aux abords de la clairière: Études indiennes et comparées en l'honneur de Charles Malamoud*. Ed. Silvia D'Intino & Caterina Guenzi. Turnhout: Brepols. (Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études, Sciences Religieuses, 154.) Pp. 117-133.
- Scharfe, Hartmut (1977): *Grammatical Literature*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz. (A History of Indian Literature vol. V, fasc. 2.)
- Sulich-Cowley, Małgorzata (2022): *The Principle of Suspension (Asiddhatva) in Pāṇinian Grammar. Translation and analysis of the Mahābhāṣya section ad Tripādī (A. 8.2.1-8.4.68) in the Aṣṭādhyāyī*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publications.
- Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra*. See Olivelle 2000.

Abbreviations:

Mahā-bh P. Patañjali, (Vyākaraṇa-)Mahābhāṣya, ed. F. Kielhorn, Bombay 1880-1885
Pāṇinian sūtra