

Johannes Bronkhorst: Review of

Willem Bollée: *The Story of Paesi (Paesi-kahāṇyaṃ)*. Soul and body in ancient India: a dialogue on materialism. Text, translation, notes and glossary. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz. 2002. (Beiträge zur Kenntnis südasiatischer Sprachen und Literaturen, 8.) ISBN: 3-447-04555-8. IX, 368 pp.

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The story of Paesi is known to Indologists from Ernst Leumann's long contribution in 1885 — called “Beziehungen der Jaina-Literatur zu andern Literaturkreisen Indiens” — to the *Actes du sixième congrès international des orientalistes* (Leide: E. J. Brill, pp. 469-564; reprint in *Kleine Schriften*, ed. Nalini Balbir, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1998, pp. 29-124). We learn from it that the story of Paesi in Jaina literature corresponds to the story of Pāyāsi which occurs in the Buddhist *Dīgha Nikāya* (DN II. 316 ff.). Leumann briefly presented the two stories in his article, followed by a discussion in which he pointed out that the story of Paesi/Pāyāsi is the only long legend which Buddhist and Jaina literature have in common, and that it is one of the rare examples of a lively dialogue that has reached a degree of sophistication which distinguishes it from the simple dialogues of earlier days.¹

Bollée justifies his book with the following words (p. VII): “[Leumann] had to use this text in MS form, but it was printed still in the 19th century whereas a romanized edition of the Rāyapaseṇīyasutta is not yet available. To fill at least half this gap, such a version of the story of Paesi, the second part of the 2nd Uvanga, may be a small contribution to this revival of interest in the great Swiss scholar's pioneer work.” Bollée's book presents the text of the story (drawn from various editions of the Rāyapaseṇīya), along with an English translation and detailed notes. The notes draw upon Malayagiri's commentary, parallel passages in other texts, and on the secondary literature. The main work is followed by a detailed “Glossary of Selected Words” (pp. 223-305), an Index rerum (pp. 307-316), Quotations (p. 317), a Bibliography (pp. 319-355), while an Appendix contains the text and

¹ Leumann, op. cit. p. 527 (87): “Sie [i.e. diese Paesi-Pāyāsi-Sage] ist nicht nur, soweit man bis jetzt sehen kann, die einzige der buddhistischen und jainistischen Literatur gemeinsame grössere Sage, sondern ist auch eines der seltenen Musterstücke eines lebendig geführten Dialogs, in seiner vorliegenden Gestalt nicht einer aus der ältesten Zeit des Buddhismus oder Jainismus, wo die Dialoge noch ... in ursprünglicher Einfachheit und ohne künstliche Concinnität reproducirt wurden, sondern ein Dialog, wie er sich in der Tradition auf Indien's hiefür geeignetem Boden zu einem künstlich-typischen herausgebildet hat.” Cp. Bollée p. 1: “the legend of Paesi / Pāyāsi ... is probably the only larger legend common to Buddhist and Jaina literature [and] is one of the rare samples of a lively dialogue.”

translation of a portion of Haribhadra's Samarâicca-kahā, in which the *nāstika* Pingakesa is involved in a discussion with a Jaina teacher (pp. 357-368).

The introduction and the notes contain some interesting suggestions and observations that are not further elaborated. The introduction, for example, raises the following question: “The experimental search for the soul seems to be expected rather from a Greek than from an Indian. Could, therefore, a foreign name be hidden behind the *desī* words Paesi and Pāyāsi of whom a common etymology seems difficult?” Bollée could in this connection have drawn attention to his own conclusion on p. 138 to the extent that in Paesi's state the social order was apparently not that of brahminical Hinduism: the four classes here (pp. 136-137) enumerated are the *kṣatriya* class (*khattiya-parisā*), the householders' class (*gāhāvai-parisā*), the brahmin class (*māhaṇa-parisā*), and the class of renunciators (*isi-parisā*). Unless one assumes, with Bollée p. 138, that *vaiśyas* and *sūdras* are subsumed in the group of the householders, this enumeration gains interest in the light of the statement in the *Assalāyana Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* (MN II p. 149) that the system of four *varṇas* does not exist among the Yonas and Kambojas. [Note however that in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (DN II p. 141) the Buddha points out that wise *khattiya* (*khattiya-paṇḍitā*), wise brahmins (*brāhmaṇa-paṇḍitā*) and wise householders (*gahapati-paṇḍitā*) will look after his relics (*sarīra-pūjaṃ karissantī*); if we add the monks, who should **not** look after the relics, we end up with a similar division of four types of people that characterizes the social order in Paesi's state.]

Among other noteworthy observations the following may be mentioned. P. 47 has an interesting remark about the use of mantras in Jainism, pointing out that standard studies — most notably Harvey Alper's *Understanding Mantras* (Delhi, 1991) — do not deal with Jaina mantras. P. 48 comments on the increasing loss in Jainism of interest for other schools of thought and observes: “the *puvvas* which may have recorded the tenets of other sects / schools objecting to Jainism will not have been ‘forgotten’ groundlessly, but the disappearance of the *puvvas* may be considered also symptomatic for the loss of interest in the greater tradition of Jainism as was shown early by the Digambaras and the fact that the version of important old texts such as Uttarajjhāyā handed down to us is based on one single exemplar. The laymen on their part seem to have largely replaced the religion of the monks and nuns by a ritual of their own, a development which the renunciators may have favoured by not participating in the temple cult.” Footnote 427 on p. 71 has: “The practice in Indian texts of mostly suppressing exact references and author names (*eke, anye, uktaṃ ca*), so irritating for us, may be based on a rule of etiquette forbidding one to name older

authorities”.² Pp. 109-110 contain a number of references from Jaina and Hindu sources pertaining to the significance of wearing wet clothes. On p. 128 we learn — with a reference to D. Darling, *Zen Physics*, New York 1996 — that “such experiments” (determining the difference of weight of people before and after death is no doubt meant) were sporadically even carried out over the past century (which one?), with negative results. A detailed discussion of a list of social skills (*kalā*) fills pp. 192-208.

Paesi, we must conclude from the title of this book, was a materialist. Indeed, on p. 21 we find the following translation: “He was a materialist, very impious, ...” This and what follows translates a very long list of adjectives, so that it is not immediately clear which word is translated ‘materialist’. Judging by the order in which the adjectives appear, ‘materialist’ translates *a-dhammie* (according to the glossary this corresponds to Pāli *a-dhammika*). Bollée apparently had some doubts about this translation, for on p. 25, in a note on *A-dhammie*, he states: “My translation (which one? JB) is a less-than-ideal solution, because Paesi accepts a hereafter ..., speaks of his late grandmother as a divine being ...” Moreover, on p. 80 he translates the same word as ‘wicked’.

The question whether Paesi accepts a hereafter deserves closer attention. According to Bollée, Paesi’s acceptance of a hereafter finds expression in § 750 (pp. 98-101) and he speaks of his grandmother as a divine being in § 752 (pp. 105-107). This appears to be mistaken. Consider § 750, as translated by Bollée (p. 99-100):

Thereupon prince Paesi spoke thus to Kesi (...): “If, Venerable Sir, this is the belief (...) of you Jain monks, that the soul and the body are different and not identical — now it is a fact that my grandfather just here in the town of Seyaviyā was a materialist (...) up to: nor in practice properly dealt with the burden of taxation of his own state. After acquiring a good deal of evil, very impure karman as you would say, he died after some time and reached the status of a being suffering in various hells. Of this grandfather I became the grandson, cherished, loved, liked, pleasing, charming, very firm (?), reliable, appreciated, much thought of, beloved, (precious like) a box of jewels, dear (as) his life, causing happiness in his heart, (an attractive person) as is rarely heard of, much less seen like the flower of the glomerata fig.

Now, if this my grandfather would come back to me and say: “Well, grandson, I was your grandfather. In this same town of Seyaviyā I was a materialist (etc. ...) up to: nor did I in practice properly deal with the burden of taxation.

² Olle Qvarnström (in Wagle and Qvarnström, *Approaches to Jaina Studies*, Toronto 1999, p. 187 n. 69) speaks, while referring to Bühler and Parpola, of an “‘pan-Indian etiquette’ forbidding **direct criticism** against doctrines propounded by older teachers” (my emphasis).

Consequently I accumulated a good deal of very impure unwholesome karma and got into hells. Therefore you, grandson, do not become a materialist (... as above) up to: nor deal in practice improperly with the burden of taxation; otherwise you will accumulate in just the same way a good deal of evil karma.”

If, therefore, my grandfather would come and speak thus to me, then I might believe, put my faith in, approve of (the teaching of the Jains) that the soul and the body are different, (but) as my grandfather has not come to me and spoken that way, my declared opinion is well established, Venerable Sir, that the soul and the body are identical.”

The first of the three paragraphs of this passage puts words in the mouth of prince Paesi which suggest that he actually believed that his grandfather had suffered, or was suffering, in various hells. The second paragraph suggests the opposite, viz., that Paesi needs the direct testimony of his grandfather in order to believe this. The third paragraph confirms that — since no such testimony has been forthcoming — Paesi does not believe something. This something is here specified as the Jaina position according to which the soul and the body are different, but the context almost obliges us to identify this position with the belief that Paesi's grandfather was, or is, in hell. Paesi's own opinion — that the soul and the body are identical — cannot but imply that his grandfather is **not** in hell. In other words, this passage provides no reason to think that Paesi accepts a hereafter. The confusion is the result of the peculiar way in which Paesi presents his position in the passage thus translated: the first paragraph admits that according to Jaina doctrine his grandfather should be in hell, and is not intended to give his own point of view. Bollée apparently missed this (cp. p. 100: “It is remarkable that Paesi professes here, and further on, faith in a hereafter”).

There is more. The first paragraph contains the expression ‘as you would say’ (*tubbhaṃ vattavvayāe*; cp. glossary under *vattavvayā = vaktavyatā*). In Bollée's translation this expression merely qualifies the phrase *very impure karman* (“After acquiring a good deal of evil, very impure karman as you would say, ...”). It can however be construed with the whole sentence, which then becomes: “As you would say, after acquiring a good deal of evil, very impure karman, he died after some time and reached the status of a being suffering in various hells” (*se ṇaṃ tubbhaṃ vattavvayāe su-bahuṃ pāva-kammaṃ kalikalusaṃ samajjīṇittā kāla-māse kālaṃ kiccā annayaresu naraesu neraiyattāe uvavanne*). This is also the way Leumann understood it.³ Read in this way, the paragraph contains no hint that Paesi professes faith in a hereafter.

³ Leumann p. 511 (71): “Ich hatte einen gottlosen, bösen und sein Land nicht richtig verwaltenden Grossvater, der nach deiner Theorie (*tubbhaṃ vattavvayāe*) für seine bösen Werke nach dem Tode in eine Hölle gelangt ist”.

Exactly the same line of reasoning can be applied to § 752, where presumably Paesi speaks of his late grandmother as a divine being. Here too this position is in conflict with the immediately following paragraphs, and here too the expression ‘as you would say’ (here: *tujjhaṃ vattavvayāe*) can be construed with the whole sentence: “As you would say, she accumulated a good deal of wholesome karma, died after some time and reached the status of a deity / was reborn as a deity in one of the heavens.”⁴

So what can or should be said about Paesi's materialism? Bollée (p. 10) complains that our handbooks of Indian philosophy hardly take any notice of it, this, he adds, because it is no regular doctrine. He mentions in this connection the works by Erich Frauwallner, S. Dasgupta, and D. Chattopadhyaya; only Walter Ruben took notice of the Jaina sources, basing himself on Leumann. Bollée then continues (p. 10-11): “Yet materialism is not only as old as philosophy, it is as actual as ever for modern brain research, which may have started in 1882 with the examination of L. Gambetta's brain by Duval and became spectacular in the case of V. Lenin in 1925. It takes the soul, consciousness, the concept of ‘I’ or spirit to be emergent attributes of brain functions. How mental processes can arise from these is a question discussed in many studies in the cognitive sciences. Paesi would have enjoyed reading, if he could have understood it, that ‘there is not the slightest bit of credible evidence to suggest that there is more to your self, to the feeling of being you, than a stunningly complex pattern of chemical and electrical activity among your neurons. No soul (...) no disembodied intelligence that can conveniently bail out when the brain finally crashes to its doom. If science is right, then you and I are just the transitory mental states of the brain’ or could have satisfied his curiosity without killing his criminal subjects if he could have attended Professor Dörner's laboratory experiments in Bamberg with his sensible and intelligent machine ‘James’ or read his books and those of many others in this field.”

Paesi might indeed have been delighted to read some of the books on brain research that flood the market in our time. Unfortunately there were no such books around in his time. Nor are we entitled, on the basis of the story of Paesi / Pāyāsi, to conclude that this king did some kind of early brain research. Paesi's position is overwhelmingly negative. He

⁴ So Leumann p. 512 (72): “Ich hatte nämlich eine recht fromme Grossmutter, die nach deiner Theorie für ihre guten Werke nach dem Tode in eine Götterwelt gelangt ist”. Note that Paesi is depicted, here and elsewhere, as being aware of Jaina doctrine. This is strange (for he has not yet been converted), but explains various other statements that are attributed to him. Statements like “*āsava* cannot actually very well mean ‘inflow of karma’ here because Paesi does not know of the Jain theory of karma yet” (Bollée p. 148) seem to miss this point.

just does not believe those who maintain that there is a soul different from the body.⁵ All his experiments have as shared aim to show the inexistence of any such separate soul. Nowhere does Paesi show any interest in the question how a living being without separate soul could function, much less how a body (or a brain) can all by itself give rise to consciousness. The story of Paesi is therefore primarily of interest because it shows that there were people who felt sceptical with regard to the teachings of religion. It does not show that these people had a serious alternative to those traditional teachings.

The book could have been more reader-friendly. Readers who wish to understand the numerous abbreviations used, for example, find on p. IX, under ‘Abbreviations’, the following remark: “These are the same as in Monier Williams for Sanskrit texts, as in the Critical Pali Dictionary for Pali texts and as in Bollée, *Bṛhat-Kalpa-Niryukti* for Ardha-Māgadhī and Prakrit scriptures.” A number of supplementary abbreviations are added on the same page, while for the sigla of texts used one has to turn to pp. 12-14.

Apart from such minor shortcomings, both historians of thought and philologists will be happy to use this book, which will further facilitate access to Jaina canonical literature.

⁵ This scepticism takes, of course, a different form in the Buddhist version. Cp. Leumann p. 471 (31): “[Pāyāsi] hatte den verwerflichen Glauben, dass es kein Jenseits, keine Wiedergeburt und keine Vergeltung der guten und schlechten Werke gebe.” The fact that Pāyāsi’s experiments subsequently concentrate on the existence of the soul (Leumann p. 478 ff. (38 ff.); DN II. 333 f.; the Pāli word is *jīva*) merely confirms that the story of Paesi / Pāyāsi has not originated in Buddhist circles.