

AUTHORITY AND ORALITY IN THE MAHĀYĀNA

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Summary

The Mahāyāna sūtras, acknowledged by scholars to have been composed centuries after the death of the Buddha, almost invariably begin with the stock phrase, “thus did I hear,” thereby maintaining the conceit of orality. The paper explores the role of this orality as it figures in strategies of authority for the Mahāyāna sūtras in Indian Buddhism. The paper considers at some length recent scholarship (notably that of Richard Gombrich) on the question of when Buddhist texts were first written down, in light of the widely read but highly problematic theories of orality put forth by Walter Ong and Jack Goody. The paper next compares the positions on speech (and by extension, orality) in the Mīmāṃsaka view of the Vedas and in the Buddhist view of the word of the Buddha. Although Buddhist scholastics devoted a great deal of energy to attacking the Mīmāṃsaka position of the eternal nature of the Vedas as sound and although scholars have tended to regard the Hindu and Buddhist positions as antithetical, there are significant unacknowledged affinities between the Mīmāṃsaka and Buddhist positions which help explain why the Mahāyāna sūtras begin, “thus did I hear.” The paper concludes with a discussion of the possible significance of writing in the rise of the diverse association of cults of the book which we have come to call the Mahāyāna.

By being transmitted via so many spokesmen, the Saddharma ran the greatest of dangers. From the beginning, it should have been enclosed in a code of authentic writings, recognised by all the members of the Community unanimously; however, the Buddhists only belatedly perceived the necessity of a codification of the Dharma; moreover, the oral transmission of the Doctrine rendered such a task, if not impossible, at least very difficult.

Étienne Lamotte

It may seem surprising that as late as the eleventh century, Indian commentators still felt compelled to discuss the referent of the “I” of “thus did I hear” (*evaṃ mayā śrutam*) at the beginning of Mahāyāna sūtras. Perhaps they were simply performing their roles as commentators in explaining the meaning of every word. Still, one might expect that by that date there would at least have been some agreement among them. But a survey of seven Pāla dynasty commentaries on the *Heart Sūtra*, for example, (the most commented upon of Indian Mahāyāna sūtras based upon what is preserved in the Tibetan canon) displays a wide range of opinion

on the issue. Some of the commentators make a remark only in passing as they gloss the terms of the sūtra, but others dwell on the question of the qualifications of the rapporteur (*saṃgūṭikartṛ*) and on what it means to have heard (*śruta*).

What is at stake in the identification of the rapporteur? To claim that the rapporteur is Vajrapāṇi or Mañjuśrī or Samantabhadra, or to say it is Ānanda, or to leave the rapporteur unnamed is to add another voice to one of the most persistent choruses in Indian Mahāyāna literature, the defense of the Mahāyāna sūtras as the word of the Buddha. We find “proofs” of the authenticity of the Mahāyāna in the works of major and minor śāstra authors, as early as Nāgārjuna in the second century¹ in his *Ratnāvalī* and as late as Abhayākara-gupta in the twelfth century in probably the last major Buddhist śāstra composed in India, the *Munimatālaṃkāra*. In the intervening millennium, we find Asaṅga, in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, listing the repudiation of the *bodhisattvapīṭaka* as one of four major transgressions (*pārājayika*) of the bodhisattva vow;² in the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* we find much of the first chapter devoted to the proof that the Mahāyāna is the word of the Buddha;³ and in the *Tarkajvāla*, Bhāvaviveka devotes a large portion of the fourth chapter to a defense of the Mahāyāna, but only after listing the charges brought against it by the śrāvakas: the Mahāyāna sūtras were not included in either the original or subsequent compilations of the *tripīṭaka*; by teaching that the Tathāgata is permanent, the Mahāyāna contradicts the dictum that all conditioned phenomena are impermanent; because the Mahāyāna teaches that the *tathāgatagarbha* is all pervasive, it does not relinquish the belief in self; because the Mahāyāna teaches that the Buddha did not pass into nirvāṇa, it suggests that nirvāṇa is not the final state of peace; the Mahāyāna contains prophecies that the great śrāvakas will become buddhas; the Mahāyāna belittles the arhats; the Mahāyāna praises bodhisattvas above the Buddha; the Mahāyāna perverts the entire teaching by claiming that Śākyamuni was an emanation; the statement in the Mahāyāna sūtras that the Buddha was constantly in meditative absorption (*samāhita*) is infeasible; by teaching that great sins can be completely absolved, the Mahāyāna teaches that actions have no effects, contradicting the law of karma. Therefore, they conclude, “the Buddha did not set forth the Mahāyāna; it was

created by beings who were certainly demonic in order to deceive the obtuse and mislead those with evil minds.’’⁴

Thus, to address the question of who heard the *Heart Sūtra* is to seek to rebut these charges, and each answer implies a different point. To say that the rapporteur is Mañjuśrī or Vajrapāṇi is to imply that the Mahāyāna sūtras are secret teachings not intended for śrāvakas and thus purposefully delivered in their absence; Ānanda is not the rapporteur because he was not there to hear the sūtras. To say that the rapporteur was Ānanda is to attempt incorporation, that just as the Nikāyas were heard and reported by Śākyaṃuni’s attendant, so also were the Mahāyāna sūtras. And to say that the rapporteur was Ānanda, but that he was empowered by the Buddha to perform the task and that, even then, he merely heard but did not understand what he would later report, is to attempt to have it both ways, preserving the Mahāyāna as the most profound of teachings, beyond the ken of śrāvakas, but still to be counted among the discourses heard in the physical presence of Śākyamuni. Finally, to leave the rapporteur unnamed is to allow sūtras to be heard by anyone with the qualifications of faith, for as the *Samādhirāja* says, “When the Buddha, the *dharmarāja*, the proclaimer of all doctrines, the *muni* appears, the refrain that phenomena do not exist arises from the grass, bushes, trees, plants, stones, and mountains.’’⁵

Strategies of Legitimation

In pursuing the question of the authenticity of the Mahāyāna further, we may move away from the texts for the moment, to consider recent theories of the origins of the Mahāyāna, by positing two admittedly rather amorphous periods of Indian Mahāyāna, the period of the sūtras and the period of the śāstras. The first, following the work of scholars like Schopen and Rawlinson, would be placed around the beginning of the Common Era, with the rise of a disparate collection of cults centered around newly composed texts and their charismatic expositors, the *dharmabhāṇaka*. Some of these texts, like the *Lotus*, in addition to proclaiming their own unique potency as the means to salvation, would also promote the veneration of stūpas. Others, like much of the early *prajñāpāramitā*

corpus, would proclaim their superiority to stūpas, declaring themselves to be substitutes for the body and speech of the Buddha, equally worthy of veneration and equally efficacious in result.

The commentaries on the *Heart Sūtra* fall into the latter phase of Indian Mahāyāna, the period of the śāstras, that period in which there seems to have been, rather than a relatively disconnected collection of cults of the book, a self-conscious scholastic entity that thought of itself as the Mahāyāna and which devoted a good deal of energy to surveying what was by then a rather large corpus of such books and then attempting, through a variety of hermeneutical machinations, to craft the myriad doctrines contained there into a system. In short, it is in this latter period that the sūtras, which seem at first to have been recited and worshipped, became the object also of scholastic reflection.

There are obvious problems with such a typology. For example, we have one of the key scholastic defenders of the Mahāyāna, Nāgārjuna, writing in its defense during the period of the composition of the sūtras. Indeed, he sought to provide a schematic overview of Mahāyāna practice by compiling a compendium of quotations from sixty-eight Mahāyāna sūtras, the *Sūtrasamuccaya*. That a single author had that many works available to him in the second century indicates the literary energies of their anonymous authors. And the period of the śāstras is no less ambiguous, with sūtras being composed in this period which attempt to deal with apparent contradictions among the Mahāyāna sūtras, the most famous case being the *Samdhinirmocana*. Indeed, one of the sūtras that Nāgārjuna cites in his *Sūtrasamuccaya*, the *Laṅkāvatāra*, in an apparently interpolated passage, contains a retrospective prophecy of Nāgārjuna's birth, hailing him as a defender of the Mahāyāna.⁶

But it would be a mistake to suppose that the apparent unsystematic milieu of the period of the sūtras implies that the authors of those sūtras were unaware or unconcerned with the question of the legitimation of their compositions. In the *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā*, for example, there are repeated warnings to regard as demonic those who would dispute that the perfection of wisdom is the word of the Buddha. The *Lotus* takes up the more difficult question of why, if the *bodhisattvayāna* is indeed the most sublime path and buddhahood the highest goal, did the Bud-

dha teach the *śrāvakayāna* leading to the nirvāṇa of the arhat? The claim to primacy of the earlier tradition is usurped by the Mahāyāna by explaining that what the Buddha had taught before was in fact a lie, that there is no such thing as the path of the arhat, no such thing as nirvāṇa. There is only the Mahāyāna, which the Buddha intentionally misrepresents out of his compassionate understanding that there are many among his disciples who are incapable of assimilating so far-reaching a vision.

It remained, however, for the *Lotus* to account for those disciples of the Buddha who are reported in the Nikāyas to have become arhats, to have passed into nirvāṇa. What of their attainment? In an ingenious device found also in other Mahāyāna sūtras, the great heroes of the Hīnayāna are drafted into the Mahāyāna by the Buddha's prophecies that even they will surpass the trifling goal of nirvāṇa and go on to follow the Mahāyāna path to eventual buddhahood. The first such prophecy in the *Lotus* is for the wisest of the early disciples, Śāriputra. Afterwards, hundreds of arhats tacitly denounce their own path by rather indecorously clamoring for prophecies that they also will become buddhas someday, requests that the Buddha happily obliges. The Mahāyāna sūtras thus respond to challenges to their own authenticity by appropriation. Śāriputra, the monk renowned in the Hīnayāna as the wisest of the Buddha's disciples is transformed into a stock character in the Mahāyāna sūtras, one who is oblivious to the higher teaching. When his ignorance is revealed to him, he desires to learn more, coming to denounce as parochial the wisdom that he had once deemed supreme. Thus, the champion of the Hīnayāna is shown to reject it and embrace that which many adherents of the earlier tradition judged to be spurious.

The early history of the dharma, already highly mythologized into a sacred history, was fictionalized further in the Mahāyāna sūtras, creating eventually another sacred history; to legitimate these newly appearing texts, their authors claimed the principal figures of the earlier collection, indeed its very codifiers (Śāriputra, Maudgalyāyana, Kāśyapa, Subhūti) as converts to the Buddha's true (but previously unrevealed) teaching and as central characters in its drama.⁷ In doing so they added the theme of reconciliation which we associate with comedy to the standard romantic emplot-

ment of the Buddhist path narrative. What we have, then, is a case of revisionist myth presented as revisionist history. The early story of Gautama Buddha and his disciples that we find preserved in the Pāli suttas, already accepted as an historical account by the “pre-Mahāyāna” traditions, is radically rewritten in the *Lotus* in such a way as to glorify the *Lotus* itself as the record of what really happened. Such rewriting recurs throughout the history of the Buddhist tradition in the perpetual attempt to recount “what the Buddha taught.” At the same time, this rewriting in a certain sense displaces what was for the Mahāyāna a problematic question, the question of origins, by introducing a different frame of reference in which tales lead back not to events, but to other tales.⁸

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the development of strategies of legitimation in Indian Buddhism coincided with the rise of the Mahāyāna. Criteria to be employed in determining what should be counted as *buddhavacana* seem to have been developed well before the appearance of the Mahāyāna sūtras. Even the earliest formulations do not suggest that the dharma is limited to what was spoken by the Buddha. The Mahāsaṃghikas and Mūlasarvāstivādins counted both what the Buddha himself said as well as discourses delivered by a disciple of the Buddha and certified by him as being true. In the Pāli Vinaya, the dharma is what is proclaimed by the Buddha, by śrāvakas, by sages (*ṛṣi*) such as Āraka, and by gods such as Indra. To this list of four, the Sarvāstivādin Vinaya adds the category of spontaneously born beings (*upapāduka*).⁹ A second set of criteria considered not the speaker but what was said. These are the four *mahāpadeśa*, much discussed by others,¹⁰ which appear as early as the *Dīghanikāya* (II.123) and as late as Prajñākaramati’s commentary on the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (commenting on IX.42). Tests are provided for determining whether the words that a monk reports to have heard from one of four authorities are the teaching of the Buddha: the words (1) of the Buddha, (2) of a community (*saṃgha*) of elders, (3) of a smaller group of learned elders, and (4) of a single learned monk. When someone claims to have heard a teaching directly from one of these four sources, the saṃgha may determine whether it is the word of the Buddha by seeing whether it fits into the sūtras (*sutte oranti*) and is in agreement with the vinaya (*vinaye sandissanti*). If it does, it is

to be accepted, if it does not, it is to be rejected. The Sanskrit versions, both Hīnayāna (in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*¹¹) and Mahāyāna add a third criterion to conformity with the sūtras and with the vinaya: that the words not go against the way things are (*dharmatām na vilomayati*).¹² It is unclear precisely what is added by this third criterion, since it would appear inappropriate for a doctrine to be in accordance with the sūtras and the vinaya, yet contradict the *dharmatā*. As a strategy for determining textual authority the *mahāpadeśa* is highly conservative, effectively sanctioning only those doctrines and practices which are already accepted. It appears to be the product of a community simultaneously lamenting the loss of teachings already forgotten and hence seeking to discover and preserve whatever still remained, while at the same time remaining wary of the introduction of innovation. If such criteria were actually enforced, it is difficult to imagine how a sect apparently as deviant as the Vatsiputrīya ever established itself. But even a considerable laxity in criteria would seem insufficient to account for whatever sparked the explosion of texts that would become the Mahāyāna sūtras.

Before considering that question, however, let us briefly survey the criteria for textual authenticity developed by the Mahāyāna. The long argument in the *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra* has already been delineated in a recent article by Ronald Davidson.¹³ Here, we will mention only what is sometimes read as a licentious Mahāyāna rhetorical twist on the innocuous statement in Aśoka's rock edict at Bhairāt, "All that the bhagavan Buddha has spoken is well spoken" (*E kechi bhāṃte bhagavatā budhena bhāṣite sarve se subhāṣita*).¹⁴ The twist is the statement from the *Adhyāśayasañcodanasūtra*, "All which is well-spoken, Maitreya, is spoken by the Buddha" (*yat kiṃcinmaitreya subhāṣitam sarvaṃ tadbuddhabhāṣitam*).¹⁵ This chiasmatic reversal would seem to remove all restrictions from admission into *buddhavacana*; but the sūtra, not unexpectedly, qualifies the meaning of *subhāṣita*, of what it means to be well-spoken. All inspired speech should be known to be the word of the Buddha if it is meaningful and not meaningless, if it is principled and not unprincipled, if it brings about the extinction and not the increase of the afflictions, and if it sets forth the qualities and benefits of nirvāṇa and not the qualities and benefits of saṃsāra.¹⁶

There is ostensibly nothing new or controversial here¹⁷ when compared to the *mahāpadeśa*. There are, however, two significant shifts in emphasis. First, unlike the four *mahāpadeśa*, we find in the four criteria above no concern whatsoever with the source of the doctrine; it need not be heard directly from a *saṃgha* or a learned monk. Second, again unlike the four *mahāpadeśa*, the words are not judged to be the word of the Buddha based on their conformity with already accepted statements but based instead on their function: to destroy the afflictions and lead to *nirvāṇa*, certainly the most traditional of Buddhist aims, but in the absence of an omniscient arbiter, the Buddha, impossible to judge. Mahāyāna exegetes are eager to point out that the mere fact that the Hīnayāna schools dispute the authenticity of the Mahāyāna sūtras signifies nothing since the eighteen śrāvaka sects cannot even agree among themselves as to which discourses should be accepted as the word of the Buddha. They then shift to the question of the function of the sūtras, claiming that it is the Mahāyāna sūtras that more effectively set forth the path to buddhahood for all beings, a goal, of course, that is set forth only in the Mahāyāna sūtras.¹⁸ But if there is no Buddha and everything is permitted, why do the commentators continue to cogitate over the identity of the rapporteur? The attempt to address that question requires us to return first to the deferred question: what took place that sparked the explosion of texts that would become the Mahāyāna sūtras?

The Question of Orality

In a recent article,¹⁹ Richard Gombrich has speculated that the rise of the Mahāyāna is due to the use of writing. The *Lotus Sūtra* recommends enshrining books in stūpas, as one would a relic, and Gregory Schopen has postulated the presence of a “cult of the book” in the early Mahāyāna, noting the common references in the *prajñāpāramitā* corpus to the merit to be accrued through copying, reciting, and venerating the book.²⁰ To claim that the rise of the Mahāyāna can be attributed to the new technology of writing is, of course, to also claim that prior to this moment in Buddhist history, the Nikāyas were preserved orally, and the bulk of Gombrich’s article is devoted to showing that this was indeed the case.

The first reference to the *tipiṭaka* and its commentary being committed to writing occurs in the *Dīpavaṃsa* in which it is stated that during the reign of Vaṭṭagāmanī Abhaya (29-17 B.C.E.) the monks who remembered the canon wrote it down, so that it might long endure.²¹ In arguing against the existence of a written recension of the Nikāyas prior to this date, Gombrich (expanding on an argument made in an article by Lance Cousins²²) speculates that the Buddha's words were crafted into oral texts designed with the aim of mnemonic preservation, employing techniques such as redundancy, versification, and the arrangement of works according to length, all methods known to the monks from the Vedas. The saṃgha was organized toward the task of preservation, with the four Nikāyas representing four traditions of memorization; we find reference, for example, to the Dīghabhāṇakas and the Majjhimbhāṇakas. In addition to the "oral" quality of the Pāli suttas, Gombrich notes that the few references to writing in the Vinaya are to writing as a means of message sending and public notification (such as the wanted poster described in Vinaya I.43) but never as a means of preserving the suttas. Gombrich concludes, following Oldenberg and Rhys Davids, that had the inscription of the suttas been an activity of the saṃgha, there would have been some mention of it in the Vinaya.²³

Two lines of argument, not unrelated to each other, require scrutiny here. One is the claim that the Buddhist canon meets the criteria set for what has come to be called "oral literature" and second, that the Buddhist oral canon was modeled on the Vedas. Gombrich's argument for the oral quality of the Pāli suttas develops a position put forth by Lance Cousins. Cousins, based on his reading of Albert Lord's analysis of tape-recorded performances by Serbian epic singers,²⁴ argues that the Pāli Nikāyas and Abhidhamma are oral literature. Upon comparing recorded versions, Lord found considerable variation among songs, even those performed by the same singer. Thus Cousins accounts for variations (such as in names of speakers and locales) that occur among the various versions of the Nikāyas by arguing that the discourses of the Buddha were preserved solely in the monks' memories, to be recited publicly for edification and entertainment. He finds further support for his view in the presence of mnemonic formulae and in

the fact that the same episode will often appear in separate texts within the Pāli collection.

That Buddhist monks recited sūtras is not at issue, the question instead is whether the sūtras are the end products of an oral society. A great deal of scholarship has appeared on oral cultures since the work of Milman Parry on the Homeric epics during the 1920's and even since the publication of Lord's work in 1960, much of it usefully summarized by Walter Ong in his 1982 work, *Orality and Literacy*.²⁵

Ong provides a laundry list of nine characteristics of oral culture. (1) The works of oral cultures are additive rather than subordinate in that they are marked by pragmatics, such as simple grammatical constructions linked by identical conjunctions, whereas written structures place greater emphasis on the organization of the discourse itself without concern for the needs of the speaker, employing subordinate clauses rather than conjunctions. (2) The works of oral societies tend to be aggregative rather than analytic, employing a variety of mnemonic aids such as epithets, formulae, and stock phrases, often lacking the sense of individual words as discrete units. (3) Such works are highly redundant, repeating what has been said in order to allow the often distracted listener to follow the narrative.

From these more or less formal observations about orality, Ong next moves to characterizations of oral societies, noting that (4) they are conservative or traditionalist, in that they inhibit intellectual experimentation and speculation. (5) They conceptualize knowledge, in his phrase, "close to the human lifeworld," in that they lack elaborate analytic categories that would structure knowledge apart from lived experience. And in a statement that should set off an alarm in the brain of any student of Buddhism, he declares that, "An oral culture has no vehicle so neutral as a list."²⁶ It is instead literate cultures that devise lists, outside the context of human action. (6) The works of oral cultures are agonistically toned, marked by exaggerated vituperation and extravagant praise and descriptions of what otherwise might be termed graphic violence, thereby situating knowledge within a context of struggle. Writing, on the other hand, "fosters abstractions that disengage knowledge from the arena where human beings

struggle with one another.”²⁷ The remaining characteristics are so many variations on what is by now a familiar theme. (7) Orality is empathetic and participatory, bringing about a close communal identification with the known. (8) It is homeostatic in that it remains concerned with the present, allowing memories of what has been irrelevant to fade from communal consciousness. (9) Finally, it is situational rather than abstract, unavoidably using concepts but again within situational frames of reference which are “minimally abstract.” For this last point he draws on the research of the famous Soviet neurologist A. R. Luria among Russian peasants in the 1930’s, noting that illiterates lack articulate self-analysis because it requires “a demolition of situational thinking.”²⁸ For Ong, then, oral cultures are fixed and formulaic, while writing frees the mind for original and abstract thought, a fact (if it indeed be a fact), that Ong seems to report with a certain nostalgic regret.

In his discussion of what he calls the psychodynamics of orality, Ong makes inevitable mention of the claims to orality concerning the Vedas. However, his comments are made in passing and amount to the cautious observation that the traditional assertions that works of such length were orally composed and retained verbatim over many centuries in an oral society and thus by purely oral means cannot be taken at face value, asking such questions as whether what was retained was the original composition by the author or some later and revised version.²⁹

A more sustained analysis of the claim to Vedic orality has been made by the anthropologist Jack Goody, who devotes a chapter to the issue in his 1987 work, *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral*.³⁰ He argues that the Vedas are not the product of an oral society based on the discrepancies he discerns between the Vedas and the verified products of oral societies. For example, unlike other cases of oral recitation, such as the Serbian epics studied by Lord, in which the work is maintained by illiterate or semi-literate singers, we find in India the responsibility for the oral tradition confined to a literate caste of specialists. Investigators have also found little evidence of long poems among oral cultures; hence the extreme length of the Vedic corpus also weighs against its orality. The claims to invariant transmission are also reason for suspicion

when compared to the considerable variation noted between tape-recorded performances of a single work among oral societies where it is not a poem that is transmitted, but rather its substance and technique.³¹ S. Dow has gone so far as to declare, “Verbatim oral transmission of a poem composed orally and not written down is unknown.”³² Instead, Goody sees the Veda as a written tradition passed down, for the most part, by oral means. The brahmins’ storied verbatim recall serves as evidence of the existence of writing because a fixed text can be copied and consulted for correction in ways that an oral text cannot. The graphic device of the table used to organize the Sanskrit alphabet, the highly abstract formulae found in Pāṇini, and even the *kramaṣāṭha* (ab, bc, cd), the *jaṭāpāṭha* (ab, ba, ab, bc, ab, bc, cb, bd, cd) and *ghanpāṭha* (ab, ba, abc, cba, abc) texts described by Staal in *Nambudiri Veda Recitation* all point, says Goody, to a level of schematization and abstraction impossible without writing; the Vedas are what he calls parallel products of a literate society.³³

Having argued that the Vedas represent an originally written tradition, Goody must account for the strong claims to the contrary, both by the conservators of the Vedas themselves and their western counterparts. The written Veda would have been preserved orally because of the great difficulty of making and maintaining manuscripts. It would also have been in the brahmins’ interests to restrict the instruction of the Veda to the oral medium; as he puts it, “by retaining control over the process of transmission, we render our jobs more secure.”³⁴ This is a variation on the familiar “greedy brahman” theory, by which access to the sacred formulae is jealously guarded in order to maintain a monopoly on the fees charged for the performance of rites, a charge that dates back at least to the Cārvākas.³⁵ Goody offers no thoughts on why, if the Vedas are indeed the product of a written tradition, the claim to their oral nature has so long been accepted by western Sanskritists.

One such Sanskritist, Harry Falk, has reviewed Goody’s argument and demonstrated the ways in which Goody has misread and misrepresented a limited group of secondary sources in order to make his case for the written origin of the Vedas, all in an effort to support the thesis that motivates so much of his work: that there

is a universal link between writing and “scientific thinking.” That we are unable to conceive of the development of a system as abstract as Pāṇini’s without writing is no proof of Pāṇini’s use of writing; as Falk notes, “this is our fault and not Pāṇini’s.”³⁶ Frits Staal concedes the role of a written text at some point in the history of the Indian epics, a genre of literature that more closely fits Goody’s thesis. But for Staal the Vedas are something quite apart, conveyed secretly with an insistence on formal accuracy to the exclusion of meaning, apparently a unique achievement in human history.³⁷

It is not necessary to reproduce Falk’s and Staal’s refutations of Goody here. A summary of the argument for the oral origin of the Vedas will suffice. The four Saṃhitās are generally thought to have reached their present form by 1000 B.C.E. The possession of writing by foreign traders may have been known at the time of the Buddha in northwest India, where its use was limited to commercial matters. Its alien and hence polluting nature is evidenced in the *Aitareya Āraṇyaka* (5.5.3) which states that the disciple, “should not learn [i.e., recite the Veda] when he has eaten flesh, or seen blood, or a dead body, or done what is unlawful, ... or had intercourse, or written, or obliterated writing.”³⁸ The earliest archaeological evidence of writing in India in an Indian language, after the still undeciphered Harappan seals, are the inscriptions of the rock edicts of Aśoka in Brahmī script, dated circa 258 B.C.E. The Greek ambassador Megasthenes found no evidence of writing among his hosts at the Maurya court in Patna around 300 B.C.E.³⁹ Although Indologists continue to debate how long before Aśoka the Brahmī script was developed,⁴⁰ there is general consensus that the Vedas, long revered as *vāc*, *śabda*, and *śrūti*, were composed orally and then preserved as sound through elaborate oral mnemotechnics, assiduously maintaining the form with little concern for the content.⁴¹

Human Authorship and Uncreated Speech

This fixation on the word was elaborated into the famous Mīmāṃsā doctrine of the Veda as eternal and uncreated speech. In seeing the Veda as *śabdapramāṇa*, they argue that were the injunc-

tions in the Vedas dependent on an author, they would be subject to error because humans are subject to error. However, because they do not emanate from a person and are not subject to variations of time, place, and person, instead producing understanding of their own meaning, they are infallible.⁴² The Vedas are also eternal because there is no record of their authorship or their composition. Rather, their order has always been established and they are always repeated in the same form. Kumāriḷa says in his *Ślokavārttika*, “The idea in the mind of every speaker is always that, ‘I am uttering words that have been used by other persons’; this in itself makes them eternal.”⁴³ Thus, the Vedas are like the sun that reliably provides light for the entire world. Any who do not accept this fact are as owls, blinded by the light by which all others see.⁴⁴

By owls, the Mīmāṃsā mean the Buddhists, and indeed none of the *tīrthika darśanas* seems to have provoked such spleen among the Bauddhas as did Mīmāṃsā and its doctrine of the eternal, uncreated Veda. For example, the eighth century Yogācāra-Mādhyaṃika scholar Śāntaraḷita devotes almost half of his massive compendium and refutation of non-Buddhist doctrines, the *Tattvasaṃgraha*, to Mīmāṃsā, with 845 ślokas given over just to the issue of the Vedas as an uncreated and eternal source of knowledge. In his attack on this position, Śāntaraḷita initially concedes the uncreated nature of the Vedas in order to argue that the truth or falsity of a text is to be judged entirely on the basis of the truth or falsity of its author: a person controlled by desire and hatred speaks falsely, a person endowed with wisdom and compassion speaks truly. Because the Vedas lack an author, the claim that they are true simply cannot be proven.⁴⁵ Furthermore, the Vedas do not possess the capacity to provide knowledge without being explained by persons; persons who, because the Mīmāṃsakas deny the possibility of enlightenment, may be fallible and thus provide faulty explanations. Therefore, even though the Vedas may be uncreated, this provides no support whatsoever about the claim that they are infallible.⁴⁶

But in the end, Śāntaraḷita wants to argue that the Vedas are authored works. If they were eternal and unchanging, all the words would exist at the same moment, they would pervade space, and would always remain unmanifest. However, because the words of

the Veda appear in ordered sequence, over specific moments of time, and are manifested through particularities of speech, they must have a cause, an author.⁴⁷ The fact that the Vedas are difficult to pronounce and difficult to understand is no proof of their uncreated nature. That they set forth techniques for curing poison proves nothing; such cures are found in other texts as well. Further proof of their human authorship is their prescription of perverted sexual practices and animal sacrifice.⁴⁸

Of course, Śāntarākṣita cannot stop with this refutation but must eventually go on to demonstrate that although the Vedas are not a valid source of knowledge, the word of the Buddha is. In order to do this, he must establish the possibility of a person achieving omniscience, something which Mīmāṃsā rejects.⁴⁹ He begins with the logical point that the mere fact that the Mīmāṃsakas have never perceived an omniscient person does not establish that it is impossible that such a person exists; indeed the omniscient person can only be apprehended by another omniscient person.⁵⁰ From here, the argument becomes predictable: an omniscient person is to be judged by his or her knowledge of the truth. Apparently reversing the position he used against Mīmāṃsā, Śāntarākṣita claims here that the Buddha is omniscient not because of who he was but because of what he taught, *anātman*, a doctrine unique among all teachings.⁵¹ What follows is a fairly standard Mahāyāna litany of the qualities of the Buddha and his extraordinary pedagogical skills: that he teaches the dharma without the slightest operation of thought, like a wheel set in motion;⁵² that he is not subject to the faults of mortal beings because he is beyond saṃsāra and thus immortal;⁵³ that the scriptures attributed to him need not have been actually spoken by him but sometimes even emanate from walls. Hence, he is not to be regarded as the author of the sūtras, but they are rather set forth under his supervision.⁵⁴ Finally, he comprehends everything that exists in a single instant, without the necessity that he knows them sequentially, unless that is his wish.⁵⁵

Despite or perhaps because of the stridency of the Buddhist attack, the long-held assumption that the Mīmāṃsakas and the Buddhists stand at the antipodes on the question of the nature of scripture requires reexamination. Stcherbatsky may, in fact, have been wrong when he wrote in *Buddhist Logic* that, “There is hardly

a single point in philosophy in which both these systems would not represent the one just the reverse of the other.”⁵⁶ Both would claim that their scriptures are infallible because they are not the product of human authorship, but rather that they embody a truth that exists without being contingent on human agency. In fact, in the *Samyuktāgama*, the Buddha says, “I did not create the twelvefold dependent origination nor was it created by anyone else,”⁵⁷ and the Vaibhāṣikas assert that the words of the Buddha are *apauruṣeya*, not of human origin.⁵⁸ Whether the Buddhists hold the word of the Buddha to be sound or a conditioning factor, they hold them to be impermanent and here, at least verbally, would differ with Mīmāṃsā. However, when the Mīmāṃsakas describe the Vedas as eternal, they explain that this means that they have no beginning in the sense of having no author and they have no end in that they are not destroyed,⁵⁹ just as the oft-cited passage from the *Samyutta Nikāya* (II.25) states that whether or not the tathāgatas arise, the nature of dharmas remains the same. Both employ identical arguments against those who would deny the infallibility of their scriptures: the Mīmāṃsakas argue that someone who has no connection with the Veda (that is, who is not entitled to study it) and is hostile to it could never be truthful about the infallibility of the Veda.⁶⁰ Śāntarākṣita says that it is impossible for ignorant beings like the Mīmāṃsakas to draw any conclusions about the possibility of omniscience.⁶¹ And finally both speak of the sounds being heard without the need to understand the meaning.

The rhetorical affinities between the Mīmāṃsakas and the Buddhists in their description of scripture are thus clearly present. From another perspective, however, they appear to be quite different: when the Mīmāṃsakas speak of the eternal and unauthored nature of the Vedas, they are speaking of a self-identical sound, whereas when the Buddhists speak of the eternal nature of dharmas as dependently arisen, they are speaking of a self-identical reality; it may be that what we are dealing with is an issue of form versus content. Staal explains:

There is no tradition [among the brāhmins] for the preservation of the meaning [of the Veda], a concern regarded as a mere individualistic pastime. The brāhmins’ task is more noble: to preserve the sound for posterity, maintain it in its purity, and keep it from contamination by outsiders. Thus it is saved

from the unchecked spread and vulgarization which attaches to the written word.⁶²

A more materialist purpose for the preservation of sound is offered by Falk, who notes that, “a priest gets paid for participating in sacrifices. The oral instruction is not a transfer of meaning but a transfer of tools without which the future priest would not be able to practise and earn his livelihood.”⁶³

The Buddhists, on the other hand, seem more concerned with meaning, if we are to draw the usual conclusion from the famous account of the Buddha forbidding two brahman converts from rendering his teaching in *chandās*, warning that to do so would constitute an infraction of the Vinaya, that each disciple was instead to teach the word of the Buddha in his own dialect. The term *chandās* has been widely interpreted, but it seems to mean a method of chanting employed for the Vedas which involved melody (*sāman*) and prolonged intonation (*āyatasvara*).⁶⁴ What might this distinction, that the śrotriyas were concerned with the precise preservation of the sounds of the Vedas while the śrāvakas were concerned with the preservation of the meaning of the Buddha’s word in the vernacular, imply about the issue of committing the Vedas and the sūtras to writing?

Speech and Writing

Regardless of one’s position on when the writing took place, of whether Goody is right or wrong (and the available evidence points strongly in the direction of his being wrong), it is highly probable that the existence of writing was known to both monks or brahmins by the time of Aśoka, and perhaps a century earlier. The possible significance of the notions of convertibility and totalization suggested by the coincidence in India during the fourth and third centuries B.C.E. of this use of the Brahmī script, the establishment of the Mauryan empire, the minting of coins, and the delineation of the Abhidharma remains to be explored. The question to which we now turn is why the societies of priests, both Vedic and Buddhist, seem to have rejected the use of writing for the preservation of their knowledge until the late dates that have come down to us (late first century B.C.E. in the case of the Buddhists, as late as the eighth

century in the case of the brahmans), whether they, like the utopian society described in *Tao te ching*, “knew writing but returned to the use of the knotted rope,” or were like King Thamus of Thebes, who, as Plato recounts in the *Phaedrus*, refused the gift of writing from the god Theuth saying: “If men learn this, it will implant forgetfulness in their souls; they will cease to exercise memory because they rely on that which is written, calling things to remembrance no longer from within themselves, but by means of external marks.” Socrates concurs, but for other reasons: “And once a thing is placed in writing, the composition, whatever it may be, drifts all over the place, getting into the hands not only of those who understand it, but equally those who have no business with it; it doesn’t know how to address the right people, and not address the wrong.”⁶⁵ Lao Tzu seems to long for a return to an oral culture with no need for writing and the displacements it introduces, where all that is needed is a knotted rope for counting things. Plato sees writing as a dangerous technology, capable of inducing the loss of knowledge and the rise of chaos.

The dangers of writing in the case of Vedas are obvious. For a tradition that bases itself on the power of the word (in an increasingly unintelligible language, Vedic), that power being invested in those who can intone it, the introduction of writing breaks the unbroken lineage of authenticity of the recital and repetition of the word, disrupts the self-perpetuation both of truth and society where authority is passed from father to son. Writing permits the absence of the speaker and the sound and, as Socrates warns, allows dissemination of knowledge among those from whom it should be restricted.

Writing here is not only a technology in its more narrow sense (as used by Goody) of a mechanism that leads to new intellectual practices and hence new ways of producing consciousness in society, as important as this is in the Indian context. Writing is also a technology in the wider sense, as a more amorphous, pervasively deployed, institutional practice. It is in this wider sense that Derida would argue that even if the Vedas were not committed to palm leaf they were already written. If writing is seen as “the durable institution of a sign,” as a means for recording speech so that it can be repeated in the absence of the original speaker and

without knowledge of the speaker's intention, then all linguistic signs are a form of writing.⁶⁶ And it is indeed the very fact of its repeatability that Mīmāṃsā put forth as a proof for the eternal nature of the Veda. But there seems to be something else at stake, for in the case of the Veda, we do not find speech standing at a remove from self-present truth, from which writing is yet a further deviation, but rather the sound is itself the truth. The relation of word and meaning is not a matter of convention; the signifying power of the word is eternal, innately conveying its meaning. No arbitrariness of the sign here, where language is claimed not to operate through difference. The identity of speech and truth, of spoken word and meaning, serves to make writing even more suspicious. There is all the more reason for the brahmins to regard writing as a poison.

The Buddhist case is somewhat different. Given the reported wish of the Buddha that his word be disseminated in the vernacular and the apparent Buddhist rejection of caste restrictions, one might wonder what caused the Buddhists to refrain (according to their records) from committing the sūtras to writing for at least four centuries after the Buddha's death. An ideology of the self-presence of speech again provides one possible direction, which points back to the myth of the Buddha's enlightenment, something described as so profound that he only belatedly, and at the urging of Brahmā, decided to speak at all. The dharma, as we have seen, was represented not as something that he created but something which he found, the ancient city at the end of the ancient path through the great forest.⁶⁷ His discovery of this truth provided him with the authority to speak, and all subsequent teachings were repetitions of what had been heard from him. Thus, the *Heart Sūtra* commentators specify that what was heard by the rapporteur was simply the words; the form was received but the content was not understood because that content remains the pristine possession of the absent Buddha. The notion of origin from an uncreated truth is as much at play here as it is with the Vedas, so too the power of lineage, of hearing from the teacher what he heard from his teacher, often couched in the rhetoric of father and son, of inheritance and birth-right, traced back ultimately to the Buddha. It is this line of legitimation that accounts for the obsession with genealogy which

one encounters, for example, in Ch'an and Zen and throughout Tibetan Buddhism. Thus, we find in many texts, both Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna, the so-called four reliances: "Rely on the dharma, not on the person. Rely on the meaning, not on the letter. Rely on the definitive meaning, not on the provisional meaning. Rely on knowledge (*jñāna*); not on [ordinary] consciousness (*vijñāna*)." ⁶⁸ In each opposed pair, the former is the privileged term, the latter is the debased counterpart. Writing stands even further removed, the re-presentation of the word detached from the voice of the lineage. It is to signal participation in that lineage that the sūtras begin, "*evaṃ mayā śrutam.*"

Whether or not the Vedas and sūtras were written down before the tradition reports that they were, we have sufficient reason to suspect why writing would have remained hidden. For it would seem that what Derrida discerned in the history of metaphysics in the west also pertains to India, where writing also was, "a debased, lateralized, repressed, displaced theme, yet exercising a permanent and obsessive pressure from the place where it remains held in check. A feared writing must be cancelled because it erases the presence of the self-same [*propre*] within speech." ⁶⁹ If writing was poison for the brahmans, it was chemotherapy for the Nikāya Buddhists, accepted only in order to postpone the demise of the dharma; the *Dīpavaṃsa* reports that the monks in Sri Lanka first had the tipiṭaka written down when they saw the decay (*hāni*) of sentient beings. ⁷⁰ Yet the brahmans and the Buddhists seem to be repulsed by two distinguishable dangers of writing. The aversion of the brahmans derives from a recognition of the danger discerned by Plato, where writing leads to uncontrolled diffusion and dispersion of the word, out of the memory and into the world. Thus, the unintelligible sounds of the Veda must be precisely preserved in the mind. The Buddhists, on the other hand, hail the dispersion of the dharma in the vernacular, relying not on the word but on the meaning, despite the concern with monastic maintenance of the *buddhavacana* suggested by the *mahāpadeśas*. They thus seem closer to the Romantic view of writing which we associate with Rousseau, in which the written word is the dead letter, removed from the self-presence of enlightenment and its already inadequate reflection in speech.

All of which makes the virtual explosion of texts by which we mark the rise of the Mahāyāna all the more intriguing, a “movement,” which despite its prodigious literature never moved beyond the minority during its millennium in India. It is probably premature to provide a narrative “explanation” of the origin of the Mahāyāna, if such will ever be possible. Yet lacking a linear tale to tell, there are certain suggestions to be made. One can begin by observing that the Mahāyāna sūtras have many of the qualities of the Nikāyas - redundancy, stock phrases, reliance on lists, the very features that lead Cousins and Gombrich to judge the Nikāyas to be oral. The Mahāyāna sūtras differ from the earlier works, however, in their self-consciousness and often exaltation of their own status as texts, as physical objects, with many works being devoted almost entirely to descriptions of benefits to be gained by reciting, copying, and worshipping them.⁷¹ If, as Schopen has suggested, the early Mahāyāna should be viewed as a group of distinct revivalist movements, often centered around a single text, which cannot be easily traced directly from an existing school (e.g. Mahāsaṃghika) or group (monk or lay), then the importance of the writing of the sūtras may have less to do with what the sūtras say than with what they do. Like the Vedas, the form may have been more important than the content, but unlike the Vedas it was not the verbal form so much as the physical form that was the key. The animosity expressed toward the stūpa cult that Schopen has pointed out in many of the earliest Mahāyāna sūtras and the repeated presence of the phrase *sa pṛthivīpradeśas caityabhūto bhavet* (“that spot of earth [where the sūtra is set forth] becomes a truly sacred place”), suggest that what these early movements wanted was not so much new teachings as new centers for worship. Just as the *bodhimaṇḍa* in Bodhgāyā is a sacred place because it is the site of the Buddha’s enlightenment, so wherever the perfection of wisdom is set forth also becomes a sacred place because the perfection of wisdom is the cause of the Buddha’s enlightenment.⁷² With stūpas under the control of more established groups, the new groups required a cultic focal point. The book could then function as a substitute for the absent founder, fulfilling the desire for restored presence, physically standing for his speech, manifest as the body of his teaching, a dharmakāya. Sūtras may have been written (down)

before, but here was a new reason for their writing. While writing might be condemned as derivative and displaced from the animation of speech (and, in this sense, dead), these dead letters could be also valued precisely because they were dead, the leftover, dispersed (and dispersable) remnants of the living Buddha, suitable for framing in a stūpa, as the *Lotus* recommends. What had made books dangerous is what makes them appealing: they are dead. In order for the supplement to function as a substitute, it must resemble what it replaces; the new sūtras must begin, “*evaṃ mayā śrutam.*”

The moment of origin may be unimaginable, as Derrida claims. Even the attempt at imagination creates a certain sense of shame, of violation, of transgression. In his recent work, *Homer and the Origin of the Greek Alphabet*, B.B. Powell postulates that an ancient Greek, his name now lost, was so moved by Homer’s recitation that he invented the Greek alphabet for the very purpose of preserving the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The reviewer in *TLS* identified the many problems with such a theory, but refrained from cruelly spoiling what was at least a lovely thought by not pointing out that this would have required Homer to dictate the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* twice (and both times very slowly); once for the recording of the works and again to insure that the transcription (which only the transcriber could read) was correct.⁷³ A similar sense of dis-ease attends our imagination of an unknown Indian writing down the Veda or the *Vajracchedikā*. The Mahāyāna seems to have remained ambivalent about the word, continuing to produce sūtras but making it a minor transgression of the bodhisattva vow to divert support from meditators to those who only recite sūtras. The question of the identity of the rapporteur, then, is the question of where authority should lie: in what is written, or in the testimony as to what had been heard. If there is to be resolution, it would seem to come in the moment that is so difficult to imagine, when a monk puts stylus to palm leaf and penned the words, *evaṃ mayā śrutam eksasmin samaye bhagavān rājagrhe viharati sma ...*

In the temple called Rokuharamitsuji in Kyoto there is a famous statue of the Heian monk Kuya (903-972), an eccentric devotee of Amitābha. The statue depicts Kuya dressed in rags, with a gong suspended around his neck, carrying a hammer in one hand and a

staff topped with antlers in the other. His mouth is open and from it protrudes a wire to which are attached what appear to be six lingams. On closer inspection, they are seen to be six identical standing buddhas, one for each of the syllables: *Na-mu-a-mi-da-butsu* (Homage to Amitābha Buddha). Here speech does not pass immediately into silence, but instead is always material and is already silent, preserved behind glass, for us to see.

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¹ For a discussion of Nāgārjuna's dates, see David Seyfort Ruegg, "Towards a Chronology of the Madhyamaka School," in L.A. Hercus, et al., ed., *Indological and Buddhist Studies* (Canberra: Faculty of Asian Studies, 1982), pp. 505-530.

² The śīla chapter of Asaṅga's *Bodhisattvabhūmi* has been translated by Mark Tatz in a volume entitled, *Asaṅga's Chapter on Ethics with the Commentary of Tsong-kha-pa* (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1986). The relevant passage occurs on page 64. For the Sanskrit, see Nalinaksha Dutt, *Bodhisattvabhūmi* (Patna: Jayaswal, 1966), p. 112.

³ For the Sanskrit, see Swami Dwarika Das Shastri, ed., *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra by Arya Asaṅga* (Vārānasi: Bauddha Bhārati, 1985).

⁴ Translated from the Tibetan; sDe dge edition of the bstan 'gyur, Toh. 3856, dBu ma, Vol. dza, 155b6-156a7.

⁵ Louis de la Vallée Poussin, ed., *Mūlamadhyamakakārikas de Nāgārjuna avec la Prasannapadā Commentaire de Candrakīrti* (Osnabrück: Biblio Verlag, 1970), p. 367.

⁶ On the possible identity of this Nāgāhvaya, see David Seyfort Ruegg, *The Literature of the Madhyamaka School of Philosophy in India* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1981), pp. 56-57.

⁷ These elaborate strategies of legitimation that abound in the Mahāyāna sūtras suggest that the authors of these texts hoped to convey the impression that the events recounted in the sūtras were "historical" to the extent that historical personages known to have been disciples of the Buddha are given central roles. This weighs against Graeme MacQueen's claim that "It takes little reflection to realize that when the early Mahāyānists defend their sūtras as *buddhavacana* they do not mean by this that these texts are speech of the 'historical Buddha.'" Indeed, sūtras like the *Lotus* as well as the *prajñāpāramitā* corpus attempt to legitimate their claim to being *buddhavacana* by adopting a wider historical perspective, both toward the past and toward the future, than was acknowledged by the earlier tradition. Such a perspective is not, therefore, "transhistorical," as MacQueen suggests but remains very much obsessed with history, as evidenced by the "historical" figures, such as Śāriputra and Subhūti, who populate the Mahāyāna sūtras. MacQueen's point appears in his article, "Inspired Speech in Early Mahāyāna Buddhism II," *Religion* 12 (1982), pp. 49-65.

⁸ This point is drawn from Peter Brook's discussion of Freud's Wolf Man case. See his *Reading for the Plot* (New York: Random House, 1984, p. 277).

⁹ See Étienne Lamotte, "La Critique d'authenticité dans le Bouddhisme," in *India Antiqua* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1947). Here and throughout, I cite Sara Boin Webb's translation, "The Assessment of Textual Authenticity in Buddhism," *Buddhist Studies Review*, 1 (1984), pp. 4-15. The relevant passage occurs on p. 6.

¹⁰ See, for example, Lamotte, pp. 9-13; Ronald M. Davidson, "An Introduction to the Standards of Scriptural Authenticity in Indian Buddhism" in Robert Bushwell, ed., *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), pp. 300-303; Steven Collins, "On the Very Idea of the Pali Canon," *Journal of the Pali Text Society*, XV (1990), pp. 109-110, note 18; and Lance Cousins, "Pali Oral Literature" in Philip Denwood and Alexander Piatigorsky, ed., *Buddhist Studies: Ancient and Modern* (London: Curzon Press, 1983), pp. 2-3.

¹¹ See P. Pradhan, ed., *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu* (Patna: Jayaswal Research Institute, 1975), p. 466.

¹² See Lamotte, p. 11 and Walpola Rahula, "Wrong Notions of *Dhammatā* (*Dharmatā*)," in Lance Cousins et al., ed., *Buddhist Studies in Honour of I.B. Horner* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1974), pp. 181-191.

¹³ See Davidson, pp. 309-312.

¹⁴ See Lamotte, p. 5.

¹⁵ Cited in Prajñākaramati's commentary to the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. See P.L. Vaidya, ed., *Bodhicaryāvatāra of Śāntideva with the Commentary Pañjikā of Prajñākaramati*, Buddhist Sanskrit Texts—No. 12 (Darbhanga, India: The Mithila Institute, 1960), p. 205, lines 14-15. See also David Snellgrove, "Notes on the *Adhyāyasamcodanasūtra*," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 21 (1958), pp. 620-623. It is important to note that the phrase "whatever is well-spoken is spoken by the Buddha" also occurs in the Pāli canon at Aṅguttara Nikāya A IV, 162-166. See Steven Collins, "On the Very Idea of the Pali Canon," pp. 94-95.

¹⁶ See Vaidya, ed., *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, p. 205, lines 10-12 and Davidson, p. 310.

¹⁷ Davidson (p. 310) notes the presence of the first two in the *Mahāvagga*. The last two are quite similar to what appears in the *Nettiprakaraṇa*, see Lamotte, p. 13.

¹⁸ See Davidson, p. 312 and *Bodhicaryāvatāra* IX.42-56 (Vaidya, ed., pp. 204-212). Regarding *Bodhicaryāvatāra* IX.45a, Davidson remarks that Śāntideva defines "the doctrine of the Buddha as that which has its basis in the condition of a fully ordained monk" (p. 312). However, a reading of Prajñākaramati's commentary suggests that Śāntideva is defining *bhikṣu* in a very limited and polemical sense here, as an arhat who has understood the Mādhyamika emptiness; see Vaidya, ed., pp. 206-207. For a discussion of the positions of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti on the need for śrāvakas to understand the Mādhyamika emptiness in order to become arhats, see Donald S. Lopez, Jr., "Do Śrāvakas Understand Emptiness?," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 16 (1988), 65-105.

¹⁹ Richard F. Gombrich, "How the Mahāyāna Began" in Tadeusz Skorupski, ed., *The Buddhist Forum*, vol. 1 (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1990), pp. 21-30.

²⁰ Gregory Schopen, "The phrase 'sa pṛthivīpradeśaś caityabhūto bhavet' in the Vajracchedikā: Notes on the Cult of the Book in the Mahāyāna," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 17 (1975).

²¹ K.R. Norman, *Pāli Literature* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1983), pp. 10-11. For a very useful discussion of the possible circumstances leading to this event, see Collins, "On the Very Idea of the Pali Canon," pp. 96-99.

²² See Cousins and K.R. Norman, "The Pāli Language and Scriptures" in Tadeusz Skorupski, ed., *The Buddhist Heritage* (Tring: Institute of Buddhist Studies, 1989). For a useful demonstration of the persistence of the oral in Theravāda, see Steven Collins, "Notes on Some Oral Aspects of Pāli Literature," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 35 (1992), pp. 121-135.

²³ Gombrich, pp. 27-28.

²⁴ Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960). For a useful survey of scholarship on the orality issue as it pertains to Homer, see Hugh Lloyd-Jones, "Becoming Homer," *The New York Review of Books*, vol. XXXIX, no. 5 (March 5, 1992), pp. 52-57.

²⁵ Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1982).

²⁶ Ong, p. 42.

²⁷ Ong, pp. 43-44.

²⁸ Ong, p. 54.

²⁹ Ong, p. 66.

³⁰ Jack Goody, *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

³¹ Goody, p. 84.

³² S. Dow, cited by Goody, p. 82.

³³ Goody, p. 188.

³⁴ Goody, p. 119.

³⁵ See Richard P. Hayes, "The Question of Doctrinalism in the Buddhist Epistemologists," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 52, no. 4 (1984), p. 651.

³⁶ See Harry Falk, "Goodies for India: Literacy, Orality, and Vedic Culture," in Wolfgang Raible, ed., *Erscheinungsformen kultureller Prozesse* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1990), pp. 103-120. The passage cited here occurs on p. 110. I am grateful to Steven Collins for both alerting me to the existence of this article and kindly providing me with a photocopy. For another critique of Goody, see John Halverson, "Goody and the Implosion of the Literacy Thesis," *Man*, n. s. 27 (1992), pp. 301-317.

³⁷ See Frits Staal, *The Fidelity of Oral Tradition and the Origins of Science*, Mededelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie Van Wetenschappen, Afd. Letterkunde, Nieuwe Reeks, Deel 49, No. 8 (Amsterdam/Oxford/New York: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1986).

³⁸ A.B. Keith, ed. and trans., *The Aitareya Āraṇyaka* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), pp. 301-302.

³⁹ See Falk, p. 105. On the date of the Buddha's death and its relation to Aśoka's ascension to the throne, see Hirakawa Akira, *A History of Indian Buddhism from Śākyamuni to Early Mahāyāna*, trans. and ed. by Paul Groner (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), pp. 22-23 and Heinz Bechert, "The Date of the Buddha Reconsidered," *Indologica Taurinensia* 10 (1982), pp. 29-36.

⁴⁰ Some Sanskritists, such as Falk, hold that the errors, variants, and development of punctuation present in the rock edicts point to a script only newly invented. He thus concludes that "anyone able to distinguish facts from fiction would come to the conclusion that writing in India practised by Indians in Indian scripts can not be much older than 258 B.C." (p. 105). However, other distinguished scholars have reached different conclusions. K.R. Norman finds in the same variations in the Aśokan inscriptions evidence that the script had been in existence in the form that we know it for some time prior to Aśoka, not later than the end of the fourth century B.C.E. See K.R. Norman, "The Development of

Writing in India and its Effects upon the Pāli Canon," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens*, 36, Supplementband (1992), pp. 239-249. J. Bronkhorst has suggested that the Padapāṭha of the Ṛgveda was written down at the time of its composition, not later than the sixth century B.C.E. See his "Some Observations on the Padapāṭha of the Ṛgveda," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 24 (1982), pp. 181-189.

For sources on the question of the origins of writing in India, see William A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 199, note 3. See also Oskar von Hinüber, *Der Beginn der Schrift und frühe Schriftlichkeit in Indien*, Abhandlungen der Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse 11 (Mainz: Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, 1990).

⁴¹ See Frits Staal, "The Concept of Scripture in the Indian Tradition" in Mark Juergensmeyer and N. Gerald Barrier, ed., *Sikh Studies: Comparative Perspectives on a Changing Tradition* (Berkeley: Graduate Theological Union, 1979), pp. 121-124.

⁴² *Tattvasaṃgraha* ślokaś 2346-2350. For the Sanskrit, see Dvārikādāsa Śāstri, ed., *Tattvasaṃgraha*, 2 vols. (Varanasi: Bauddha Bharati, 1968). This edition also contains Kamalaśīla's *Tattvasaṃgrahapañjikā*. For an English translation of both works, described by their translator as "rather disappointing; it is purely and almost entirely polemical", see Ganganatha Jha, trans., *The Tattvasaṃgraha of Śāntarakṣita with the Commentary of Kamalaśīla*, 2 vols., reprint edition (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986).

⁴³ Cited in *Tattvasaṃgraha* 2291, see also 2286-2288.

⁴⁴ *Tattvasaṃgraha* 2351.

⁴⁵ *Tattvasaṃgraha* 2351-2357. It is noteworthy that, following strategies used by both Āryadeva at *Catuḥśataka* XII.5 and Dharmakīrti in the *svārthanumāna* chapter of the *Pramānavārttika*, Śāntarakṣita rejects this very argument in his subsequent proof of the omniscience of the Buddha, where he claims that the teachings of the Buddha are infallible because their teacher is compassionate, but that the teacher is infallible because the teaching is true.

⁴⁶ *Tattvasaṃgraha* 2365-2378, 2394-2397.

⁴⁷ *Tattvasaṃgraha* 2421-2422.

⁴⁸ *Tattvasaṃgraha* 2787-2789.

⁴⁹ For their refutation of omniscience in general and of the Buddha in particular, see *Tattvasaṃgraha* 3128-3261.

⁵⁰ *Tattvasaṃgraha* 3268-3276.

⁵¹ *Tattvasaṃgraha* 3322-3344.

⁵² *Tattvasaṃgraha* 3368-3369.

⁵³ *Tattvasaṃgraha* 3550-3551.

⁵⁴ *Tattvasaṃgraha* 3606-3611.

⁵⁵ *Tattvasaṃgraha* 3627-3629.

⁵⁶ F. Th. Stcherbatsky, *Buddhist Logic*, Vol. 1 (New York: Dover Publications, 1962), p. 23.

⁵⁷ See Étienne Lamotte, *Le Traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse de Nāgārjuna*, Tome 5, (Louvain: Institut Orientaliste, 1980), p. 2191.

⁵⁸ See Padmanabh S. Jaini, "The Vaiśhāṣika Theory of Words and Meanings," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 22 (1959), p. 107.

⁵⁹ *Tattvasaṃgraha* 2103.

⁶⁰ *Tattvasaṃgraha* 2088-2095.

⁶¹ *Tattvasaṃgraha* 3394-3396.

⁶² Staal, "The Concept of Scripture in the Indian Tradition," p. 122.

⁶³ Falk, p. 118.

⁶⁴ Vinaya II, 139, 14-16. For a discussion of the story and its variants in other Vinaya texts, as well as a survey of opinion on the meaning of *chandas*, see Étienne Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism: From the Origins to the Śaka Era*, trans. by Sara Webb-Boin (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1988), pp. 552-556.

⁶⁵ Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, ed., *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, Bollingen Series LXXI (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 520-521.

⁶⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 44.

⁶⁷ *SN XII.65*.

⁶⁸ On the four reliances (*catuḥpratisarāna*), see Étienne Lamotte, "The Assessment of Textual Interpretation in Buddhism" in Donald S. Lopez, Jr., ed., *Buddhist Hermeneutics* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988), pp. 11-27.

⁶⁹ Derrida, p. 270.

⁷⁰ Cited by Collins, "The Very Idea of the Pali Canon," p. 97.

⁷¹ Gregory Schopen, "The phrase 'sa pṛthivīpradeśaś caityabhūto bhavet' in the Vajracchedikā: Notes on the Cult of the Book in the Mahāyāna," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 17 (1975), p. 159.

⁷² Schopen, pp. 172-173.

⁷³ Barry B. Powell, *Homer and the Origin of the Greek Alphabet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), reviewed by J.T. Hooker in *TLS*, June 14, 1991 (No. 4602), p. 29.