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*The Transmission, Patronage, and Prestige
of Brahmanical Piety from the Mauryas to the Guptas**

1. Introduction

Aśoka's reign ushered in an era of major transformations in India's religious life. The 6th to 4th centuries BCE had witnessed, in the plains around the Ganges and Jumna rivers, the emergence of the first urban centers in South Asia since the Indus Valley Civilization. While the precise reasons and mechanisms for this development are not fully understood, it has long been taken for granted that it is not mere coincidence that it was accompanied by equally dramatic changes in the sphere of religion —especially the rise to prominence of ascetical movements. Although the precise origins of such movements are unknown, they appear on the scene in two species: one emerging from within the Brahmanical priestly religion that was already more than half a millennium old, and another comprising self-consciously anti-Brahmanical doctrines traced back to legendary teachers whose authority resided in their personal accomplishments (Gotama the Buddha, the 'Enlightened'; Mahāvīra the Jina, the 'Victor'). As this story is generally told, it is the Buddhists and the Jains who are in the limelight, bringing new ideas to an old world, challenging the cant and rigid orthodoxy of the brahmin priesthood, just as the early Christians were said to have exposed the hypocrisy

* This research was begun with an American Institute of Indian Studies fellowship funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities; further work was done during tenure of a Fulbright-Hays fellowship and an N.E.H. fellowship. The author also acknowledges a small grant from the American Academy of Religion and Washington and Lee University. Earlier versions of part of this material were presented in a workshop at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Oxford University in 2001, and at the 31st Conference on South Asia in Madison, Wisconsin in 2002. The comments of Himanshu Ray on the former occasion, and of Tom Trautmann and David Lorenzen on the latter, were of great help.

and superficiality of Pharisaic piety. And rather as the new Christian vision was embraced and established in the Roman Empire by Constantine, the emperor Aśoka Maurya proclaimed the Buddha's *dharma* to be the religion of this new world. Peripatetic mendicants (Buddhist, Jain, or other), having renounced the settled life of the village, rubbed shoulders with the traders and soldiers with whom they shared the highways. Their doctrines, dismissive of Brahmanical caste strictures and home- and caste-centered ceremonial obligations that would have been impractical for people who traveled frequently and who had to mix with strangers and transients in the towns, offered an alternative set of ideals vividly exemplified in the person of the mendicant himself. Veneration of mendicants, and by extension of their legendary models, Buddhas and Jinas, seemed to be a mode of piety congenial to the new cosmopolitan world. Accordingly, Buddhicized traders have been credited with carrying Indian culture beyond the Subcontinent, into Central and Southeast Asia.

Yet the Brahmanical tradition did not wither away. Sanskrit learning, the province of the traditional brahmin, entered an innovative phase. Works composed in this period and the immediately succeeding centuries —Pāṇini's grammar, along with the commentary of Patañjali; the core of the *Mahābhārata* epic— became the classics of later generations. By the early centuries of the Common Era, Sanskrit ceased simply to be a liturgical language of the Brahmin priest; it came to be widely accepted as the most impressive vehicle of refined discourse in the court and in the academy, the language of belles-lettres as well as of formal state pronouncements and legal records (at least those important enough to merit engraving on copper or stone).¹ It begins to appear in royal inscriptions (especially in their ornamental portions), and is adopted even by the initially anti-Brahmanical Buddhists and Jains. This adoption of what was essentially the cultural property of the brahmins, indeed, the liturgical language of a hereditary priesthood,² is powerful testimony to the effectiveness of the brahmins' methods of transmitting their texts and practices, and of making them appealing and authoritative to others.

This essay examines the mechanisms by which Brahmanical tradition reproduced itself,³ especially the regimens of discipline

¹ The broad outlines of this process have been sketched by Aklujkar 1996; Pollock 1996; 1995.

² The corpus of old Sanskrit texts is made up overwhelmingly of works belonging to the Vedic cult, or explicitly ancillary to it. Even if the epics contain a 'core' with roots prior to the Maurya period, the forms in which we possess them are surely post-Maurya, and in any case exhibit the clear traits of brahmin redaction (any Brahmanical doctrinal views), if not original authorship.

³ By 'Brahmanical tradition' I mean those forms of religion and social doctrine that were defined by brahmin authorities, generally in Sanskrit and generally represented as derived from and in accordance with the Veda or the pronouncements of the ṛṣis. The early Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava religions (e.g., the Pāśupata and the Pāñcarātra), insofar as they were shaped by brahmin authority, belong to this tradition.

(*vratas*) undertaken in tandem with text-study, and their role in establishing the knowledge of Sanskrit religious texts (and the use of Sanskrit more broadly) as an important criterion of piety and high social status. I argue that such regimens functioned as markers of belonging to the Brahmanical religion and ‘pure’ Ārya society, while also offering the ordinary householder a form of personal piety that promised all the rewards of the old priestly ‘high cult’. At the same time, disciplinary regimens provided a traditionally recognized framework for mendicant movements and new deity cults, which helped carry Brahmanical texts, ideals, and practices, via royal patronage, into new regions in India beyond the Ganges Valley and on into Southeast Asia. The second part of this essay will consider what early inscriptions can show us about how Brahmanical doctrine and practice were projected in the public sphere, noting instances in which particular subjects, texts, and especially disciplinary practices are cited, and observing that the grants and foundations recorded in these inscriptions helped spread the tradition and enhance its prestige. My remarks, intended only as a point of departure, will focus mainly on early grants from Orissa.

2. Modes of Transmission

The Brahmanical tradition, although it produced a mendicant ideology and practice, remained rooted in the rural setting. Whereas the anecdotes and parables of the Buddha in older accounts like those collected in the *Suttanipāta* are commonly set in the new cities (*nagara*),⁴ the Vedic literature up to the time of the *dharmasūtras* (3rd–1st c. BCE) hardly mentions them;⁵ the opposition between civilized sphere and its opposite is expressed in terms of *grāma* versus *araṇya* —the rural village settlement versus the wild regions. When Brahmanical texts deign

⁴ Biographical information extractable from the songs of the *Therīgāthā* and *Therīgāthā* has been used to argue that early monks and nuns came mainly from the cities, and from the brahmin and other high castes (Gokhale 1965 [quoted in Ray 1994: 124]). As with all social and political data extracted from Pāli literature, it cannot simply be accepted as representative of Mauryan-era realities (this is especially true for the much later commentary, on which Gokhale also relied). Moreover, we might expect the words attributed (correctly or not) to mendicants from socially prominent families to be better represented in the literature than others, so the social position of these figures can hardly be taken as indicative of broader demographic patterns in the early *saṅgha*. Moreover, there may have been a conscious impulse to appropriate the prestige of the brahmins by representing them as converts to Buddhism (a theme found throughout the literature). Even so, the prominence of the cities as the backdrop to Buddhism’s earliest surviving self-depictions suggests that the tradition saw them as its natural field of action.

⁵ The word *nagara* is not even found until the *Jaiminīyabrāhmaṇa* (1.11[.1], 1.247[.9], 1.257[.12], 2.397[.8], 2.410[.6], 2.424[.1]) and *Jaiminīyopaniṣadbrāhmaṇa* (3.40.1), where it is the basis of the personal name Nagarin. In the *Baudhāyanakarmāntasūtra* (*Baudhāyanasrautasūtra* 24.14) *nagara* is mentioned parallel to *grāma*. The sole occurrence of the term in the *grhyasūtras* is at *Mānavaghyasūtra*, 2.14.28 where the crossroads of a village, town (*nagara*), or market (*nigama*) is prescribed as the site for an expiatory offering to exorcise *Vināyaka* spirits that have possessed someone. As in the related

to take account of the urban environment (only in the last couple of centuries BCE), they regard the towns as posing severe difficulties to pious observance. For instance, the *Āpastambadharmasūtra* deems cities and trade centers as inappropriate for the study of the Veda: 'He [who is a Veda-reciter] should avoid entering towns' (*Āpastambadharmasūtra*, 1.11.32.21); 'He should refrain from reciting the Veda in market-towns (*nigameṣu*)' (*Āpastambadharmasūtra*, 1.3.9.4; similarly, *Vasiṣṭhadharmasūtra*, 13.11 ['in towns', *nagareṣu*]; *Gautamadharmasūtra*, 2.7.45 [16.45] mentions this as the view of 'some' authorities). The *dharmasūtras* class towns with casinos, fairs, cemeteries, and neighborhoods of *caṇḍālas*.⁶ Ritualist brahmins do not appear to have established monastic or scholarly centers comparable to those of the Buddhists.⁷ What institutions did brahmin priests and scholars develop that allowed them to carry on and eventually to attain equal success in many of the domains where Buddhism was successful?

The Vedic literature, a vast canon of liturgical and exegetical texts scrupulously preserved through rote memorization, is the earliest extant product of Brahmanical culture. Although these texts hardly ever contain references to datable historical events, a fairly persuasive relative chronology (at least for certain classes of texts, and within such classes, for some exemplars) has been proposed.⁸ The distribution in the texts of such data as place names has helped yield a reconstruction of the phases of settlement of Sanskrit-users (calling themselves Āryas) in South Asia, from the *R̥gveda* (centered mainly on the Panjab) to the Upaniṣads and ritual texts, which increasingly speak of the Ganges valley and other regions to the south.⁹

Overall, this literature concerns a complex sacrificial system that depended on reciprocal bonds between tribal chieftains (and other

Traiyaṃbaka *homa* for Rudra and Ambikā (who also receive offerings in the *Vināyakakalpa*), the crossroads is the place where inauspicious forces are addressed (*Baudhāyanaśrautasūtra*, 5.16-17). One difference in *Mānava* is the specific mention of urban crossroads as a potential offering-place.

⁶ On the other hand, in discussions of royal policy, the *rājan* and the *sūdras* are both enjoined to protect towns as well as villages (*Āpastambadharmasūtra*, 2.10.26.4-6); similarly, *Vasiṣṭhadharmasūtra*, 16.15 treats both locales on a par.

⁷ Aśoka speaks of 'giving to brahmins and monks' (*bāhmaṇasamaṇānaṃ* [...] *dāne* in the Girnar version of the 8th Rock Inscription) as his new royal policy, and he frequently praises generosity and respect toward these groups as a virtue. They are always mentioned in the same breath, and in either order indiscriminately, so that one has the impression that he did not make much distinction between them. We cannot even know for sure to whom these labels applied: did *brāhmaṇa* signify a caste member, a professional priest, or a mendicant in the Upaniṣadic mould? Did *śramaṇa* cover the latter, as well as the Buddhist and the Jain monk? But when particular acts of patronage are mentioned, it is almost always the Buddhists who are the beneficiaries.

⁸ For the earlier strata of the Vedic literature, see Witzel 1997a; for the *dharmasūtras* see Olivelle 2000: 4-10.

⁹ Witzel (1987; 1989) speaks of the 'widening of the geographical horizon' in the later Vedic texts (1987: 203); in spite of the deliberate insistence that the lands beyond the Madhyadeśa were unfit for brahmins, the prescription of rites of atonement for those who went abroad is in effect an admission that many did.

patrons of the Vedic cult) and the brahmin priests. The priests conferred power and prestige on their patrons, through their ritual deployment of mantras believed to invoke divine aid and other benefits. According to their own accounts, the brahmins' status was predicated upon their hereditary connection with the mystical source of divine knowledge, *brāhman*. Yet even Brahmanical texts acknowledge that, although it was conventionally so recognized, the hereditary connection alone was not really sufficient: scorn was heaped by brahmin and Buddhist authors alike on the 'one [merely] related to Brahmins' (*brahmabandhu*),¹⁰ or 'brahmin by birth [alone]' (*jātibrāhmaṇa*).¹¹ *Brāhman*—and true Brahmin status—had to be transmitted through a 'second birth' in the form of an initiation rite, known in the literature as *upanayana*, induction or introduction into the rule of *brahmacarya*, under the guidance of a master. This rule of conduct, to be adhered to scrupulously until the end of the period of study, is both a transforming *rite de passage* and an apprenticeship in priestcraft or scholarship.

If we contrast the institutional structures of the brahmins and the Buddhists, we must begin with the fundamental differences between the professional representative of each tradition. The highest Buddhist ideal was embodied in the monk, the imitator of the Buddha. Initiation into the *saṃgha* meant a break with the norms of secular society and a radical, permanent separation, with only ritualized and formal relations with the laity. In place of the old social linkages, the mendicant (*bhikṣu*) entered into a trans-local community, a network of collectives of mobile individuals. Considerations of family and place of origin were devalued (in principle at least). As far as the lay community was concerned, one monk was basically like any other (except perhaps in the case of charismatic eremites) (Ray 1994). Buddhist ideals were spread far and wide in the exemplary person of the monks themselves, while a canon of texts was compiled—according to traditional accounts, it was established in great synods—and in perhaps the last couple of centuries BCE began to circulate physically in the form of manuscripts. Although divergent schools of thought emerged, their exponents mingled in great, cosmopolitan monastic 'universities'.

By contrast, Brahmanical institutions were diffuse and intensely localized, at least prior to the early *dharma*-texts. Canonical texts and practices belonged to and defined individual lineages, each consisting of a particular division (*carāṇa*) of a particular branch (*śākhā*) of a particular priestly office that was a matter of heredity. Initiation into study meant a virtual adoption by an individual teacher. The diffusion of textual knowledge was dependent upon teacher-to-pupil lineages and texts themselves were treated as belonging to individual descent groups until Mauryan times at least. Thereafter, a pan-Ārya scholastic and literary tradition began to take shape (although the core Vedic

¹⁰ *Aitareyabrāhmaṇa*, 7.27; *Chāndogyopaniṣad*, 6.1.1. See, also, *Suttanipāta*, 2.7, v. 312.

¹¹ For the same sentiment in other terms, see, e.g., *Baudhāyanadharmasūtra*, 1.1.10.

texts continued to be treated as proprietary knowledge of individual lineages). The brahmin graduate could become a professional priest or scholar. As such he would depend for his livelihood on patronage that (like the *jajmānī* relations of India today) might become a long-term, even multigenerational, relationship. Some few were able to rise to positions of prestige and authority in the royal court (as *purohita* or in a wide variety of other offices); the most famous such figure was Kauṭilya, the legendary minister and advisor to Candragupta Maurya.

Brahmins did gather to meet in assemblies called *pariṣad*, *saṃsad*, or *sabhā* to decide questions of ritual or social *dharma*, and to serve as a local court of law. But the development of durable, large-scale Brahmanical institutions lagged behind that of Buddhist monasteries. When it came, it took the form of brahmin settlements on endowed, tax-free lands (*agrahāras*) and royally sponsored temples.

3. The Priestly Codes

While the high Vedic cult was being systematized, the simpler offerings that had long been made by a householder in a single fire—hence, the ‘domestic rites’ (*gṛhyāni karmāṇi*), or ‘simple worship’ or ‘worship with cooked food’ (*pākayajñah*)—continued to be governed only by custom. However, sometime during this period, the various Vedic schools began to compile codes for the *gṛhya* rites, by analogy with the *śrautasūtras*. Beginning with the *gṛhyasūtras*, and continuing in the *dharmasūtras*, the earliest formulations of a Brahmanical ‘*dharma*’ ostensibly based on the Veda, we find a progressive effort to establish Vedic knowledge and a simplified Vedic practice as the basis of a unified trans-regional Ārya culture. At the same time, the ritual modes for transmitting Vedic knowledge were adapted for use by sectarian movements that helped spread Brahmanical religious culture throughout South Asia and deep into Southeast Asia.

The *sūtra*-texts are extremely difficult to contextualize. The sequence of genres in the ritual code literature is clear enough (*śrautasūtras* → *gṛhyasūtras* → *dharmasūtras*); although the spans of time in which works in each of these genres were composed and redacted to take their current forms overlap considerably, there is no denying that there were no *gṛhyasūtras* until the *śrautasūtra* genre was already well known, since they explicitly presuppose the existence of the *śrautasūtras*.

Olivelle has proposed some concrete (if not completely decisive) criteria for dating the four old *dharmasūtras* to the period 3rd-1st centuries BCE.¹² The oldest strata of the *gṛhyasūtra* literature likely took

¹² Olivelle (2000), leaving out of account the *Vaikhānasadharmasūtra*, a much later work. More recently, he has tentatively suggested a slightly later, post-Maurya date-range based on the possibility that the Brahmanical adoption of ‘*dharma*’ as the overarching principle was influenced by Aśoka’s use of the concept in his royal policy (see Olivelle forthcoming).

shape during the preceding two or more centuries, that is, to the 5th (or 6th?) centuries through the 4th —in other words, to the period precisely during which the trade centers in the Ganges Valley were emerging and Buddhism was taking shape. In this period, Sanskrit texts were apparently being produced mainly in the north, and therefore in the urbanizing sphere. The *grhyasūtras* themselves rarely mention specific place names, but do note the diversity of domestic practices from place to place. One respect in which the intention of the authors of the *grhyasūtras* is clear is in their concern to bring to household practice some semblance of the consistency (within each Vedic school) of the *śrauta* cult.¹³ The comment near the beginning of the *Āśvalāyanagrhyasūtra* is well known: ‘Now various indeed are the *dharmas* of the (different) countries, and the *dharmas* of the (different) villages; one should observe them in the wedding. But we shall state what is common (to all)’ (*Āśvalāyanagrhyasūtra*, 1.7.1-2 [*atha khalūccāvaca janapadadharmā grāmadharmās ca tān vivāhe pratīyāt yat tu samānaṃ tad vaksyāmaḥ*]).¹⁴

4. The Marketing of Vedic Knowledge

Domestic (*grhya*) ritual had always maintained an independent character *vis-à-vis* the high, *vaitānika* cult of the *śrauta* priests, shaped by custom rather than a canonical rubric. Leaving aside the important question of what circumstances led to the promulgation of *śrauta* codes that prescribe the proper forms of the complex multi-fire rites, why might the priestly authors have considered it necessary, in a secondary stage, to codify the ceremonies outside the *śrauta* system as well?

Let us first consider what little we know about the historical context.¹⁵ In the 6th to 4th centuries BCE north India witnessed the dramatic growth of trading towns along rivers and, perhaps, near sources of iron ore. These towns generated wealth that made it possible for local rulers to consolidate larger realms; at the same time, the socially plural and occupationally more specialized cities required new socio-economic institutions (such as market-centers [*nigama*] and

¹³ Gonda shows how the *Yajurveda śrautasūtras* broadly agree on the order in which the rites are treated (Gonda 1977: 494).

¹⁴ Particular variant practices are cited in ss.15-16; see *Pāraskaragrhyasūtra*, 1.8.11 (authorizing local wedding traditions); *Baudhāyanadharmasūtra*, 1.2.1-8 for more extensive observations about regional differences and their controversial status. *Vasiṣṭhadharmasūtra*, 19.7-8 specifies that it is the duty of a king to ascertain ‘all the *dharmas* specific to various regions, castes, and families’, and to enforce them.

¹⁵ The following sketch sums up the picture provided by Erdosy (1988; 1995a; 1995b), although the dates he accepts for the Sanskrit texts he mentions are probably a bit too early. In particular, it has been shown (Trautmann 1971; Fussman 1987-1988) that the *Arthasāstra* cannot be treated as a record of the Maurya era, as Erdosy and Allchin (1995) are inclined to do. They also are too confident in regarding Pali texts as accurate depictions of the situation in Aśoka’s time.

guilds [*śrenī*]) and political structures. Meanwhile, the Brahmanical system was dependent upon the stable caste society of the village, and may have had difficulty adapting to the urban setting, where people of different regions mixed.

If the village patronage networks were disrupted by the growth of the urban polities, and if, as may more confidently be asserted, the Brahmanical priestly order was slow to adjust to the culture of the towns, the *grhyasūtras* might contain some hints of a response to these developments, even though the developments themselves are barely alluded to at all. It may well be that the composition of rules for domestic rites began before the socio-economic changes had made a great impact on village life. Still, there are signs that the genre came to embody the *Zeitgeist* of the period. A striking indication of this doctrinal shift is the often-expressed view that *grhya* rites were equivalent or superior to *śrauta* rites, and not simply pale shadows of them. Such arguments pick up themes heard also in the mystical reflections of the Āraṇyakas and Upaniṣads: the idea that all sins could be expunged by reciting a litany in the wilderness to the accompaniment of a series of ghee offerings in a single fire (*Taittirīyāraṇyaka*, 2), or that all the rewards of a pious *śrautin* life could be secured through the regular performance of a few simple ‘super-sacrifices’ (*mahāyajñas*). Claims for the sufficiency of *mantra*-recitation as a form of worship in itself paved the way for the *grhyasūtras*’ codification of a variety of regimens consisting of ascetic discipline, recitation, and perhaps simple *homās* to expiate sins and to fulfill wishes.

In any case, we find in the *grhyasūtras* several apparent novelties that are best understood in relation to one another (Lubin forthcoming). The first of these is the explicit statement that Veda study is not merely permissible for *kṣatriyas* and *vaiśyas* as well as brahmins, but that it is duty of all three upper estates of society: that recourse to the Veda marks them as Ārya.

5. *Brahmacarya* and Ārya Status

The study of the Veda was a sacramental activity governed by a regimen (*vrata*) of *brahmacarya*. A student must be accepted by a master whom he will serve obediently and with whom he will reside for (it is said) up to twelve years or more. During this period, he must remain sexually chaste, eat only food gathered as alms (which he in turn offers first to his master), tend the master’s fire unflinchingly, and serve him obediently. This regimen and the quite parallel consecration (*dīkṣā*) undertaken by the sponsor of a Soma sacrifice, are of great antiquity. The earliest references to the Veda student (at *R̥gveda*, 10.109.5, and in the Atharvan hymns, *Śaunakasamhitā*, 11.5 and *Paiṅgaladasamhitā*, 16.5) allude to elements of the rule of *brahmacarya*, and certain features of the initiation rite are discussed in the *Satapathabrāhmaṇa* (11.5.3.13-11.5.4.18). But the formal codification

in the *grhyasūtras* of the rules for initiation (*upanayana*) into this *vrata* exhibits a number of peculiarities. First there is the fact that although provisions are made for the initiation of *kṣatriyas* and *vaiśyas*, at many points (and in some *grhyasūtras*, throughout the discussion) the authors otherwise seem to assume that the initiate will be a brahmin.¹⁶ Of course, the class-name ‘*brāhmaṇa*’ indicates a special connection with *brahman* (the Vedic *logos*), and may once have been applied properly to those learned in *brahman*, or who had completed the period of *brahmacarya* (apprenticeship in recitation and priest-craft), only later being viewed as denoting a hereditary status. For example, the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* declares that, by means of the *upanayana*, ‘after three nights, he is born a brahmin’.

On the other hand, the (brahmin) authors of the *grhyasūtras* are at pains to show that the fact that initiation is allowed and enjoined for the two middle social classes does not efface the distinctions between them and the brahmins. Hence a series of regular distinctions is introduced, often in a virtually parenthetical way. In most of these cases, the brahmin option is the one that in other contexts is the single standard. For instance, when class-distinctions are made in the *grhyasūtras*, brahmin initiates are assigned the hide of a black antelope (*aineya*) to wear; in other sources, where no distinctions are mentioned, this is the standard hide.

Variations in the rules on the appropriate age for initiation indicate one of the developments in this process. From the *dharmaśūtras* onward, the standard formula applied is that brahmins should be initiated at eight, but not later than sixteen, years of age, *kṣatriyas* between eleven and twenty-two, and *vaiśyas* between twelve and twenty-four.¹⁷ As it happens, we can see that this pattern was introduced, hesitantly, in the *grhyasūtras*, where it is invoked inconsistently, and only in some schools.¹⁸ On the other hand, the code-makers had to contend with customary practice in prescribing a new univer-

¹⁶ Older references to *brahmacarya* presume a brahmin student, and there are only scattered allusions to non-brahmin Veda scholars (usually *kṣatriyas*).

¹⁷ The lower limits correspond to the three most common meters in the *R̥gveda* hymns (the *gāyatrī*, *triṣṭubh*, and *jagatī*); the upper limits are the lower ones doubled. Brahmins are thus expected to begin at the earliest age, which for a class of future priests and teachers may seem sensible enough.

¹⁸ Among these, *Mānava* does not make distinctions of class by age at all. Four *grhyasūtras* (*Kāthaka*, *Mānava*, *Hiranyakeśin*, *Jaimini*) prescribe age seven for the brahmin, rather than eight. Though most of the *grhyasūtras* recognize some sort of class distinctions, but *Kāthaka* gives 7, 9, 11 as the ages; *Hiranyakeśin* and *Jaimini* give 7, 11, 12 (*Jaimini* offering other options for the brahmin); *Vaikhānasa* gives a variety of options (for a brahmin student only), and age eight is not presented as standard. Even some of those who prescribe age eight for the brahmin, namely *Śāṅkhāyana*, *Kauṣītaki*, *Vārāha*, *Bhāradvāja*, allow options for the brahmin; *Baudhāyana*, *Pāraskara* allow options for any of the ages. In short, the 8, 11, 12 pattern is only partially adopted, with more consistency in regard to *kṣatriyas* and *vaiśyas*, doubtless because for initiates of these estates there was no separate custom already established that had to be accommodated in the new system. See Lubin (forthcoming) for more details, including a table. A monograph-length treatment of the question is in preparation.

sal standard for initiation of the children of brahmins, particularly what appears to be a preference in some schools for the age seven. For this purpose a peculiar accounting device was invoked to help smooth over the disruption caused by the new age-eight standard. In this context alone, several of the *grhyasūtras* that assign age eight to the brahmin choose to calculate the age beginning with conception (*garbhāṣṭame*) rather than with birth. In this manner, one could technically fulfill the age-eight requirement while continuing to initiate brahmin boys seven years after birth.

The metrically inspired age differentiation, like all the other differentiations by caste, seems to have been introduced in tandem with the notion that initiation should be standard for all three of the higher classes, an idea nowhere asserted in earlier strata of the literature. The implications of this rule are profound: even if (as is likely) long-term Vedic study remained primarily a brahmin endeavor, an ideal was projected of Ārya society as unified by a common devotion to Vedic learning and an increasingly homogenized domestic ceremonial system. Marginal groups who wished to be recognized as Ārya could 'prove' their belonging by being accepted as Vedic students and by Sanskritizing their religious practice.

Meanwhile, a radical simplification of Vedic ritual duties, which began in the *āranyaka*-stratum of the exegetical literature, is rubricated in the *grhyasūtras* as well: the doctrine of the 'five great sacrifices' (including recitation as an offering to the sages).¹⁹ The importance of recitation of the Veda as the marker of Ārya status is implied in the rule that brahmins 'should not officiate in a sacrifice offered by one who does not recite the Veda' (*ayājyo 'nadhīyānaḥ* [*Āpastambadharmasūtra*, 2.10.9]).

One other piece of evidence that the *vrata* was being promoted as the preeminent marker of religious identity is the *grhyasūtras*' inconsistency in ordering the sequence of rites in the life-cycle of an observant Ārya. These rites, the *saṃskāras* in the narrow sense of the word,²⁰ are always presented in chronological order according to the natural criterion of age. However, a chicken-or-egg dilemma arises here: Does the cycle begin with the marriage, the *saṃskāra* that institutes a Vedic household (*grha*) and obligates the head of household to begin a life-long series of rites? Or does it begin with the start of Veda-study?²¹

¹⁹ *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa*, 11.5.6.1-10; *Taittirīyāranyaka*, 2.10, 14; *Āśvalayanaghyasūtra*, 3.2.2; *Pāraskaragrhyasūtra*, 2.9.2-16; *Baudhāyanaghyasūtra*, 2.9.6, 14ff.; *Vaikhānasaghyasūtra*, 3.17, 4.17; *Gautamadharmasūtra*, 1.5.3, 8; 1.8.7; *Āpastambadharmasūtra*, 1.12.14-1.13.1; *Baudhāyanadharmasūtra*, 2.6.1; *Mānavadharmasāstra*, 3.81, 87-89; 4.21; *Viṣṇusmṛti*, 59.20 ff.; *Kūrmapurāṇa*, 2.18.

²⁰ Later works, beginning perhaps with the *Vaikhānasaghyasūtra*, expand this category to cover all the *grhya* rites.

²¹ This difference was noted by Kane 1974: 195; Olivelle (1993: 126-127) spelled out some of the implications of this shift by noting that the doctrine of the sequence of *āśramas* necessitated moving the *upanayana* to first position in the sequence of *saṃskāras*. However, the change of sequence, even if it is presupposed by the classical *āśrama* system,

Most *grhyasūtras* begin, often after providing general rules for *grhya* offerings, with marriage as the *saṃskāra* that creates an autonomous ritual agent (the *grhapati*, with his wife).²² The initiation and *brahmacarya* come in relation to the upbringing of sons. Yet in a few *sūtras* (viz., the *Bhāradvāja*, *Hiraṇyakeśin*, *Āgñiveśya*, *Jaiminīya*), the initiation is placed first, in accordance with the novel notion that it is the indispensable prerequisite for belonging to Ārya society and, by extension, the prerequisite for a Vedic marriage. Other *grhyasūtras*, like the *Mānava* and *Kāṭhaka*, seem to represent an intermediate situation, in which the rules of *brahmacarya* are presented first, while the rite of initiation (*upanayana*) remains lodged in the sequence of childhood rites! The impression that the initiation-first format is the later one is reinforced by the fact that all the *dharmasūtras*, and all the later *dharma*-literature, adopt this pattern. Thus, according to the older scheme, the ‘childhood *saṃskāras*’ were introduced as the responsibility of the householder to perform upon his offspring, and they thus followed logically and temporally from the marriage. In the new standard scheme, initiation into Veda study was set apart from childhood rites and marked the start of the process, becoming the prerequisite for marriage; the subject of the initiation shifted from being the child of the ritual agent to being the nascent ritual agent himself.

Since initiation with a teacher had even in the earliest references to the subject been described as a rebirth in a more perfect and holy state, later texts refer to these classes as the ‘twice-born’ (*dvija*). However, this term (or its variants *dvijāti* and *dvijanman*) does not begin to be used with the meaning ‘a member of one of the three higher *varṇas*’ until after the doctrine of obligatory study for all three upper *varṇas* had been advanced in the *grhyasūtras*. Prior to this time, it was used (when it was used at all) to refer to a brahmin.²³ However, in the *Gautamadharmasūtra* (2.1 [10]) we find the doctrine fully fledged in the discussion of the legitimate occupations of the four

appears to have been made even before the *āśrama* debate (which is completely absent in the *grhyasūtras*) had begun. Rather it was the rise in importance of the observance of *vratas* (which become the distinctive feature of three of the four *āśramas*) that was reflected in the change; the *āśrama* system was a further development.

²² Exceptional are the *Vārāha*, which begins with the birth rite (*jātakarma*), leaving the prebirth rites for treatment after the marriage, and the *Jaiminīya*, which begins with the rite for begetting a male child (*pumsavana*).

²³ I have not encountered the word *dvija* in this meaning in any *Śrautasūtra*, nor does it occur in any of the *grhyasūtras* except in the following few cases: *Baudhāyanaghyasūtra*, 2.9.14 = *Bhāradvāgaghyasūtra*, 3.15.3 (v. 7) = *Āgñiveśyaghyasūtra*, 2.6.5 (v. 7), one of a group of stanzas found almost identically in these three works, perhaps a late addition to them; other occurrences of *dvija*/*dvijāti* —in *Baudhāyanaghyaparibhāṣāsūtra* 1.1.24, 27; *Baudhāyanaghyasāeśasūtra*, 1.12.12; 1.21.2, 4; 1.22.5; 3.21.1; 4.4.3; 4.17.19; 5.2.10; *Pāraskaraghyasūtra*, *pariśiṣṭasāucasūtra* 2; *Āgñiveśyaghyasūtra*, 1.3.3 (six times); 1.3.5; *Vaiḥānasaḥgrhyasūtra*, 4.12; 5.8 (twice); 6.7— are probably no earlier than the *dharmasūtras*, given that they occur either in obviously late works (such as the *Āgñiveśya* and the *Vaiḥānasa*) or in later sections of the *sūtras* (viz., *pariśiṣṭas* of *Baudhāyana* and *Pāraskara*). Moreover, even in many of these cases, the word must be understood as a synonym for

estates, where *dvija* is a virtual synonym for *ārya*, and *sūdra* for *anārya*.²⁴ On the other hand, we are justified in wondering whether, in the context of a group of stanzas describing the capacity of learned brahmins to establish *dharma* in an assembly, the word *dvija* in *Baudhāyanadharmasūtra*, 1.1.13 could possibly be meant to include *kṣatriyas* and *vaiśyas*.

To sum up, the trends discernable in this ritual literature are the following. In the *grhyasūtras*, the claim is first made that study of the Veda is not merely available to but incumbent on *kṣatriyas* and *vaiśyas* as well as brahmins, with the corollary that initiation and the daily use of Vedic *mantras* become the defining mark of elite, Ārya status in a religiously and ethnically diverse society. The trend toward identifying initiation and *brahmacarya* (rather than marriage) as the starting point for constructing a framework for an orthoprax life of piety, and the multiplication of similar *vratas* as a framework for personal piety, were developments parallel with the rise of ascetical (*śramaṇa*) movements such as Buddhism.

The priestly canonization of household (*grhya*) ritual, with an accompanying emphasis on trans-regional standardization and the promotion of simplified forms of observance, made the prestige and alleged power of the Vedic cult accessible to a wider range of social and economic statuses. The most prominent instance of a simplified ritual format was the *pañca mahāyajñāḥ*. The legitimacy of this model was provided by expositions of it in the *āranyakas*; the *grhyasūtras* meanwhile inserted it into the ritual cycle. The prominence of this model is demonstrated by several copper-plate inscriptions recording the endowments or land-purchases intended to support the performance of the five *mahāyajñas*. For instance, in a fifth-century record from Bengal, we find the following petition (*vijñāpita*): 'Please give, according to the acknowledge (*anuvṛtta*) law ([*dharma*?-] *maryādā*) of the permanent endowments (*akṣayanīvī*) of unproductive [land] (*aprada*, scil. *kṣetra*), in order to promote the performance of my five Great Offerings'.²⁵ This and similar records show that land grants

'brahmin' rather than as a general label for the three upper *varṇas*. (The word *dvija* in *Baudhāyanagrhyasūtra*, 4.8.1 means 'bird') As regards the *dharmaśāstras*, *Āpastamba* does not use the word at all; *dvijāti* occurs five times in *Baudhāyanadharmasūtra*, four times in *Gautamadharmasūtra*; *Vasiṣṭhadharmasūtra* has *dvijāti* once and *dvija* 12 times. *Vaiḥānāsadharmasūtra* (= *Viṣṇusmṛti*, 8-10) has *dvijāti* twice, *dvija* thrice, and *dvijanman* twice. The term becomes even more common in the verse *smṛtis*. It is also found in *Ṛgvedakhila*, 4.2.6, 8; *Ṛgvedakhila*, 7.7.

²⁴ See *Gautamadharmasūtra*, 1.6.11: 'An Ārya, even if younger, [should be shown honor] by a *sūdra*' (*avarō 'py āryaḥ sūdreṇa*); 2.1.50: 'The *sūdra*, the fourth estate, has one birth (only)' (*sūdraś caturtho varṇa ekajātiḥ*). Likewise, *Baudhāyanadharmasūtra*, 1.5.10.20 prescribes Ārya personal habits for 'sūdras under the authority of Āryas' (*sūdrāṇām āryādhiṣṭhitānām*).

²⁵ Dāmodarpur (West Bengal) copper-plate inscription of Kumāragupta I, 128 GE (=446-447 CE): *arhatha mama pañcamahāyajña-pravarttanāyānuvṛttāpradākṣaya-nī[vī-dharma?]-maryādāyā dātum iti* (ll. 6-7); with uncertain letters underlined, and missing characters supplied in braces (e.g., see the grant cited in the next note) (*CII* 3²: 288-291).

were at least sometimes elicited by direct requests made by brahmins, who justified their petition by citing the Vedic rites that the grant would support.²⁶ Moreover, Śāstric stanzas are cited in many of these documents to attest to the inviolability of such endowments.²⁷

The shift toward universalization is virtually completed with the *Mānavadharmasāstra*, which was no longer understood as specially relevant to the Mānava division of the Black Yajur Vedins but on the contrary lay claim to recording divine knowledge applicable to all Āryas, and essential to the successful governance of a royal state.

6. Further Roles for the Vrata

With Veda study no longer simply the badge of brahmin status but that of Ārya status, and mantra recitation widely recognized as a leading act of piety in itself, the set of rules to be followed when reciting also took on a broader significance. In the *grhyasūtras* and later works, a large array of specialized *vratas* are defined, some for the study of special texts within a given *sākhā*, and others for the expiation of moral and ritual faults, or for the fulfillment of special desires. These are referred to, depending on the individual text, as *vratas* or *dikṣās*, or they are referred to by names of their own. Most of these are based to some degree on the general *vrata* of Veda-study (*brahmacarya*), and include some sort of initial rite (*upāyana*) parallel to the *upāyana* (or *upāyana*) of *brahmacarya*. Study or text-recitation is a part of some of these, but in others, the rules of ascetical discipline become the chief feature. A particularly rich source for early treatments of such practices was the *Yajurveda* tradition, which was in the vanguard in shaping late-Vedic piety. Space does not permit anything approaching a complete overview of these practices; a few examples will suffice.

Some of the practices that found a place in the *grhya*-codes were first introduced in the *Taittirīyāranyaka*. For example, the practice of private Veda recitation (*svādhyāya*) as a form of expiation is taught in *Taittirīyāranyaka*, 2.16-18. It is argued there that by acting as a priest in someone else's sacrifice and receiving fees (*dakṣiṇās*), one 'is drained, as it were, emptied out' (*ricyata iva vā eṣā prēvā ricyate yó yājáyati prāti vā grhñāti*). The text suggests a remedy for this sorry condition: 'without eating, he should thrice perform private recitation of the [entire] Veda'. As an alternative, one might simply recite the Sāvitrī verse continuously for three days and nights (*Taittirīyāranyaka*, 2.16.2). To perform such recitation, one should

²⁶ In the Dāmodarpur copper-plate inscription of Kumāragupta I, 124 GE (=442-443 CE), the request of a brahmin named Karpaṭika for a piece of idle land (*apṛada-aprahata-khila-kṣetra*), according to the 'law of endowment' (*nivīdharmā*), to be used for the performance of *agnihotra* rites (CII 3²: 282-287).

²⁷ See note 46 below.

go out into the wild, into the forest (*āraṇya*) (*Taittirīyāranya*, 2.17.1). We also find in this work the fullest form of the *kūṣmāṇḍa*-verses, which are prescribed for one who is impure (*āpūta*) especially on account of sexual transgressions like the releasing of semen elsewhere than in a woman (*yó 'yonau rétaḥ siñcātī*) (*Taittirīyāranya*, 2.8), a crime on a par with theft and even abortion (*bhrūṇahatyā*),²⁸ one of the most serious offences (*Taittirīyāranya*, 2.8.2).²⁹ The basic action of the regimen is the offering of libations while reciting the verses. 'He pursues a *dīkṣā* in proportion to his sin (*énaś*); the *dīkṣita* makes continual offerings with these (*kūṣmāṇḍa*-verses)' (*yāvad éno dīkṣā úpaiti dīkṣitá etaīḥ satatí juhōti* [*Taittirīyāranya*, 2.8.4]). The *dīkṣā* lasts for a year, at the end of which he is pure, but provision is made for shorter terms, which are all made equivalent to a year (*Taittirīyāranya*, 2.8.5-6). During this period he also must not eat meat, sleep with a woman, or sit on an elevated seat, and he should take care to avoid untruth. Just as in the Soma *dīkṣā*, a special diet (likewise called the *vrata*) is prescribed for this *kūṣmāṇḍadīkṣā*: hot milk for a brahmin, barley porridge for a *rājanya*, or a milk and grain mixture for a *vaiśya*. The text makes the parallel explicit: 'One should declare this (to be) the *vrata*-food also in the soma ceremony' (*átho saumyé 'py adhvará etád vratám brūyāt* [*Taittirīyāranya*, 2.8.9]).³⁰

The *Kāthakagrhyasūtra* is one of the few works of that class to include rules for the *kṛcchra* (the 'difficult' penance) and its variants, the *atikṛcchra*, *taptakṛcchra*, and *sāntapana*.³¹ Although not involving Veda-study, these require a mode of discipline otherwise very similar to that of the *aṣṭācatvāriṃśatsaṃmita*, including chastity, standing by day and sitting by night (or reclining only at night), wearing a hemp or goat's-hair garment, avoiding of honey, meat, salt, and *śrāddha*-foods, and conversation with impure persons (*Kāthakagrhyasūtra*, 5). In each of these regimens, a simple *vrata-upāyana* rite is performed as the start of each segment: the Vasus are invoked as *vratapatis* and offered a *sthālipāka* on the first three days, the Rudras on the second, the Ādityas on the third, and the Maruts and Aṅgirasas on the fourth (*Kāthakagrhyasūtra*, 8.1-2). In classical *dharmaśāstra*, a profusion of 'boutique' regimens such as the famous *cāndrāyaṇa* ('moon-course', in which the number of balls of food permitted waxed and waned with the moon) were taught, for the occasional use of householders

²⁸ Many commentators understand this term to mean *brahmahatyā*, murder of a (learned) brahmin; see Malamoud 1977: 74-77.

²⁹ This is a rare instance in an accented text of ritualized *mantra*-recitation by members of the second and third *varṇas*, with distinctions by class (as in the *grhyasūtras*).

³⁰ Malamoud (1977: 106; 171-172) translates this wrongly ("On doit prononcer aussi ce voeu dans la liturgie sômique") precisely because of the ambiguity inherent in the conventional gloss, 'vow' ('voeu'). See Lubin 2001. The *vrata* clearly is the milk-food mentioned in the preceding sentence (*Taittirīyāranya*, 2.8.8), as it is in the soma *dīkṣā*.

³¹ *Kāthakagrhyasūtra*, 5-6; briefly mentioned at *Baudhāyanagrhyasūtra*, 5.6.26. The *dharmaśāstras* routinely prescribe these rules.

or the routine use of professional ascetics, who would become, especially after the Guptas, some of the most prominent exponents of Brahmanical knowledge.

The Vedic *vrata* also was adapted for use by the new deity cults that sprang up from within or on the periphery of Vedic Brahmanism. The Pāśupata sect furnishes a striking example of a *vrata* adapted to serve as a sectarian initiation: the *pāśupatavrata* as prescribed in a *pariśiṣṭa* (supplement) to the *Atharvaveda* (*Atharvavedapariśiṣṭa*, 40).³² The initiation into this *vrata* is a variant of the *upanayana*, and the *vrata* itself is taken to be an extension of *brahmacarya*, following the study of other parts of the Veda. Just as in the *upanayana*, the preceptor presents to the tonsured disciple a belt of *muñja* grass and a wooden staff.³³ The initiate is taught a *gāyatrī* verse addressed to Rudra, and an Atharvan verse, *Śaunakasamhitā*, 7.87.1, is recited over him.³⁴ Fire offerings to Vratapati (Agni) and Rudra are made, followed by the initiate's bathing in the ashes, the most distinctive practice of the Pāśupatas (*Atharvavedapariśiṣṭa*, 40.3.3-9). A range of possible durations is given, as is common with Vedic study *vratas*, but it may be also adopted on a permanent basis (*naiṣṭikam*). One bound by the *vrata* is encouraged to reside in a shrine (*āyatana*) to Mahādeva. The reward is freedom from spiritual bondage, control over the senses, and communion (*sāyujya*) with Pāśupati (*Atharvavedapariśiṣṭa*, 40.6.14-16).

7. Summary: Rules of Discipline, Textual Study, and Cultural Self-Definition

The decision to expand the scope of Veda study by making it a common ideal for all male Āryas may have secured the social value of Sanskrit learning in a world being wooed by the austere charms of the heterodox movements. The immediate effect may have been to divide the territory. Buddhism initially won out in the urban zones, where traditional social and cultural structures were fragmentary and diluted. Meanwhile, Brahmanism reinvented itself in a form that

³² This *pariśiṣṭa* has been translated and commented upon by Bisschop and Griffiths (2003).

³³ The fact that the staff may be substituted by sword, club, or *khaṭvāṅga*, as well as the reference to the skull-bowl (*kapāla*, 40.6.5), indicates that this *pariśiṣṭa* was redacted by someone familiar with (or by an adherent of) the Lākula subsect of the Pāśupatas, a group commonly called Kāpālikas, and thus cannot be much earlier than the 4th c. CE. The oldest epigraphical references to the movement are from 355-356 (copper-plates from Bagh [Ramesh, Tewari 1990]) and 380-381 (Mathura pillar inscription [Bhandarkar 1931-1932]), which allow us to deduce that the Lakuliśa belonged perhaps to the early 2nd c. CE.

³⁴ *tat puruṣāya vidmahe mahādevāya dhīmahi | tan no rudraḥ pracodayāt: Atharvavedapariśiṣṭa*, 40.2.5 = *Maitrāyaṇīsamhitā*, 2.9.1:119.7-8; *Kāthakasamhitā*, 17.11: 253.20-21; *Taittirīyāraṇyaka*, 10.1.5, 46.1; similar is *Mahānārāyaṇopaniṣad*, 3.2 (3.1, 3, and 4 have variants), 17.4. Another version of this stanza is also given (40.2.6). That we owe this description of the rite to Pāśupatas belonging to the Śaunaka branch of the *Atharvaveda* can be seen in the use of *Śaunakasamhitā*, 7.87.1, which appears also in the *Atharvaśira-sopaniṣad* (7.1), another Atharvan Pāśupata text.

simultaneously provided a model of domestic piety and personal sanctification (in a range of degrees of ascetic rigor) that had, especially in rural society, much of the appeal that Buddhist piety had in the cities and along trade routes: namely, a code of self-discipline and direct personal access to the presumed power of sacred mantras. The new Brahmanism, called '*dharma*' (perhaps in imitation of Buddhist usage of the term),³⁵ also aimed at establishing an ecumenical set of standards that could serve to coordinate the separate traditions of the individual Vedic schools. This encouraged a degree of standardization across the ever wider and more ethnically diverse territory inhabited by brahmins. The reproductive mechanism of this tradition was the regimen of *brahmacarya*, which sanctified the teacher-pupil relation as a spiritual filiation, and ensured the preservation and expansion of the texts and practices of the various subtraditions. Although it was apparently not administered or regulated by any central seat of authority, this system created a strong, trans-regional web of individual teacher-to-student bonds that worked well in low-population-density areas with a relatively stable caste society. Once the idea of a universal *dharma* was accepted – that is, a sense of *dharma* as a unified vision of human action – Smārta Brahmanism was positioned to compete with the universal Buddhist vision in the new urban courts. At the same time, certain new religious movements adapted some of the structural features of the old Brahmanism to their own purposes, and in so doing, helped broaden the scope of what Brahmanical culture might include.

8. Patronage

We can gauge the eventual success of this *dharma* synthesis by tracking the increasing patronage of Brahmanism by post-Mauryan kings,³⁶ and the adoption, beginning at least by the middle of the 2nd

³⁵ Olivelle has recently proposed that early Buddhist teachings, and Aśoka's edicts in particular, were a catalyst in endowing the old Brahmanical term *dharma* (in the narrower sense of 'model or rule of ritual practice') with the broader significance, 'righteousness, piety' and by further extension, the doctrine embodying such piety (Olivelle forthcoming; see also the 'Concluding Postscript' of Olivelle 2004). Similarly, the use of the term *dāya-dharma* (the duty of giving, charity), which is common in the Buddhist literature, and appears in epigraphs recording Buddhist grants (e.g., Mathurā Buddhist image inscription of Huviṣka, year 51 [=128/129 CE?], recorded in Sanskritized Prakrit), reappears later in Brahmanical grants.

³⁶ Early inscriptions describing gifts to brahmins include a cave inscription (ca. 70-60 BCE) at Nānāghāt by the Śātavāhana king Śātakarṇi's widow, a patron of the Vedic cult (Ray 1986: 36-37; Dehejia 1972: 19). Later, royally sponsored Vedic sacrifices were commemorated with inscribed stone *yūpas* (posts to which animal victims were tethered); an early one from Kauśāmbī (early 2nd c. CE?) mentions the seven basic *soma* sacrifices by name, apparently sponsored by a royal minister (*mantrin*) Śivadatta who had received the grant of a village from the king. The same inscription records the endowment of a Śaiva institution for the support of mendicants (*carakair bhoktavyam*), invoking the grace of Maheśvara (Altekar in *EI* 24: 245-253).

century CE, of the brahmins' liturgical language as the preferred language of expression in inscriptions.³⁷ Sanskrit begins to appear in inscriptions only in the 1st century BCE (dating paleographically). Surviving examples include a brief record found at Ayodhyā, written by one Dhana [^{*}deva?] who, perhaps in a Brahmanical echo of Aśoka, styles himself *dharmarājan* (*sic*), and appears to trace his lineage to Puṣyamitra, founder of the Śuṅga dynasty (Sircar 1942: 96-97; Salomon 1998: 86-87). Another inscription of this period, found in multiple versions at Hāthibādā and Ghosunḍī, provides for the worship of the Vaiṣṇava deities Saṃkarṣaṇa and Vāsudeva. During the 1st century CE numerous short inscriptions in highly Sanskritized Prakrit were made around Mathura (Lüders 1961). These were mostly Brahmanical in orientation until the reign of the Kuṣāṇa king Kaniṣka (from 78 CE). Thereafter, grants to Buddhists become common in a slightly less Sanskritized Prakrit than is generally found in Brahmanical grants.

The first example of this is the famous Junāgaḍh inscription of the *mahākṣatrapa* Rudradāman (*EI* 8: 36-49). Inscribed on a rock alongside edicts of Aśoka, it commemorates Rudradāman's renovation of an artificial lake described as having been first constructed by Candragupta Maurya and improved by Aśoka and the Yavana king Tuṣāṣpha (line 8). This self-conscious claim to sustaining the legacy of the Mauryas is obvious, but there is a crucial difference: Rudradāman records this not in Prakrit, as Aśoka did, but in a Sanskrit prose typical of the classical style (many compounds, few finite verbs).³⁸ Moreover, he too presents himself as the upholder of *dharma*, in his case in the Brahmanical sense.³⁹ An (already stereotypical) allusion

³⁷ Sheldon Pollock emphasizes the fact that Sanskrit, which up to this point has been regarded primarily as the immutable language of religious expression, is being used in place of or side by side with vernaculars in a political context. Inscriptions constitute our first clear evidence of Sanskrit being recorded in writing, and it comes at virtually the same moment as the birth of *kāvya* (written, 'aestheticized' literary poetry, that is, literature per se), another feature of the courtly context (Pollock 1996; 1998: 10-19). In Pollock's view, Prakrits "[...] disappeared from the epigraphical record throughout India in the space of a century, [...] and retained only a residual status in the literary-cultural order", where "[...] under the influence of Sanskrit [they were] turned into cosmopolitan idioms [usable] anywhere within the Sanskrit cosmopolis" (Pollock 1998: 11). All this Pollock calls the creation of a 'Sanskrit Ecumene'. Such linguistic developments were part of the broader trends in state formation and royal policy that are in full swing by the 4th century, with the rise of the Gupta dynasty. Royal affiliations with the cults of Śiva and Viṣṇu are demonstrated in the minting of coins linking the king and the god; the erection and endowment of massive stone temples; and patronage of brahmins and ascetic groups. In this period the Purāṇas are compiled, comprising mythologies, Dharmaśāstric material, ritual prescriptions, and, significantly, royal genealogies that derive known royal lines from one or the other of the legendary lunar and solar dynasties.

³⁸ Kielhorn in *EI* 8: 39-40. The Sanskrit is correct by Pāṇinian standards, overall, despite inconsistent application of *sandhi* rules.

³⁹ Rudradāman is he 'whose strong attachment to *dharma* is given impulse by his correctly raising his hand [in pronouncing judgement?]' (*yathārtha-hastocchrayārjitorjita-dharmānurāgena* [*sic*] [ll. 12-13]). See *Mānavadharmasāstra*, 8.2; this is Kielhorn's conjecture in *EI* 8: 48.

to giving support to ‘cows and brahmins’ (an idea found, for example, in *Rāmāyaṇa*, 1.24.13, etc.) is there;⁴⁰ Kielhorn even sees, in a damaged portion, an allusion to the first three ‘aims of man’ as taught by Manu: *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma* (line 11). Perhaps the key detail that might throw light on Rudradāman’s motive in having this inscription composed in Sanskrit is the description of him as ‘having attained wide fame for mastering, remembering, fathoming, and practicing the great sciences of word-and-meaning, music, logic, and so forth’ (*śabdārthagāndharvanyādyānāṃ vidyānāṃ mahatīnāṃ pāraṇadhāraṇaviñānaprayogāvāptavipulakīrtinā* [l. 13]). The notion that expertise in the various branches of *vidyā* was the *dharma* of a *kṣatriya* directly reflects the influence of the Brahmanical doctrine of Sanskrit learning as a criterion of high *varṇa*.⁴¹ The fact that this Indo-Scythian ruler was one of the first to employ Sanskrit in a political forum suggests that this innovation was a calculated effort to demonstrate publicly the legitimacy of his rule by embracing the sacral authority of the brahmins. Likewise, Sanskrit inscriptions from Nagarjunakonda also seem to be related to the influence of the Western Kṣatrapas.⁴²

Thus, as was observed already by Sylvain Lévy in 1902, and more recently by Damsteegt and Salomon, the shift to using Sanskrit, the brahmins’ liturgical language, for the business of state was primarily the initiative of foreign rulers —Scythians and Kuṣāṇas— anxious to align themselves with a priestly class firmly rooted in Āryāvarta, the ‘Land of the Āryas’ (Lévy 1902: 117-119; Damsteegt 1978; Salomon 1998: 86-98). Once introduced by arrivistes, this policy was fully established as the royal standard by the imperial Guptas. The spirit of this policy is nicely crystalized in a verse from the Lakkhā Maṇḍal *praśasti* of the 7th or 8th c. (Dehra Dun district) in which one King Āryavarman is praised, in the Āryā meter, for his *āryavratatā*, his ‘Ārya piety’ (Salomon 1998: 276-280).

From this time onward, the granting of villages to individual brahmins and to groups of brahmins to support their holy practices and to earn merit (*punya*) for the donors becomes more common, both in the old Brahmanical heartland of the Madhyadeśa, but also in regions officially outside the bounds of Āryāvarta (e.g., Kalinga). These land-grants were usually reinforced by the quotation of stanzas that praised the giving of land as the best of gifts and threatened punishment in hell for those who interfered with such an endowment or took away the land from those endowed. These stanzas were identified in the

⁴⁰ This notion appears elsewhere in Gupta epigraphs, even where the donation is to Buddhists, as in the Sanchi stone inscription of Candragupta II, of the year 93 (*CI* 3²: l. 10 [*tad etatpravṛttaṃ ya uchindyāt sa gobrahmahatyayā samyukto bhavet pañcabhiś cānantaryair iti*]), where it is conjoined with a properly Buddhist category of sins, the *anantaryas*.

⁴¹ The term *varṇa* itself is used (l. 9).

⁴² Memorial pillar inscription from the time of King Rudra-Puruṣadatta, recording a Kṣatrapa alliance with the Ikṣvākus (*EI* 34: 20-22).

inscriptions as belonging to a text of 'dharma' or 'dharmaśāstra(s)'; often the source was identified more specifically as Vyāsa (e.g., the 'Vyāsaḡitā' or *Mahābhārata*) or Manu (e.g., *Mānavadharmasāstra*), or another of the sages.⁴³

The recipient's qualification for such patronage, wherever it was mentioned, was his training in textual recitation and the application of *mantras* in ritual performances, or expertise in a learned discipline such as grammar, logic, law, astrology, or poetics. The authority of the brahmin was thus explicitly justified, in principle anyway, by his mastery of sacred knowledge. Thus for example a copper plate of Samudragupta records his gift of two villages to a learned brahmin as an *agrahāra*: 'So you should listen to this Traividya [one who has studied three Vedas] and obey his commands' (*tad yuṣmābhir aṣya ca ttraividyasya śrotavyam ājñā ca kartavyā* [Il. 7-8]).⁴⁴ The plate styles Samudragupta 'sponsor of an *aśvamedha* rite' (*aśvamedhāharttuḡ*).

The regions corresponding to modern Orissa provide an interesting case of the phenomenon described here. The early inscriptions from this region, which lay beyond the pale of Āryāvarta, date from the beginning of the Gupta era. The local rulers, under Gupta influence (and suzerainty), began to record a long series of grants of villages to brahmins, using the Sanskrit language and a very consistent format.⁴⁵ The brahmins are generally identified by name, but also by *gotra* (brahmin clan; in practice, by clan-subdivision, *gotragana*), by *śākhā* ('branch' of the Veda, i.e. individual *mantra samhitā*) and/or *carāṇa*.⁴⁶ When the Śailodbhavas ascend the throne in central Orissa (seventh century), their records are so meticulous that they note a recipient's *pravara* (list of ancestors recited at the invocation to Agni in a Vedic sacrifice) as well as their *gotra*. In many cases, the donees are described as (*sa*)*brahmacārins*⁴⁷ or *chātrabrāhmaṇas* ('brahmin stu-

⁴³ In fact, although the *Mahābhārata* contains a long section on *bhūmidāna* (13.61), and although the *Mānavadharmasāstra* also contains similar material, most of these stanzas do not appear in either source. The names Vyāsa and Manu rather stand for *dharmaśāstra* in general, and the stanzas would seem to constitute a loose body of orally preserved individual maxims, most of which did not appear in any generally recognized compilation. This is evident from the fact that from one inscription to the next, even over a short period of time and in inscriptions of a single donor, the stanzas were recorded in varying forms and sequences. For an alphabetical list of most of these stanzas, see Sircar 1965, app. II: 170-201.

⁴⁴ *CII* 3²: 224-228 (n. 3); this is dated to the fifth year of his reign, although some doubts have been raised on the authenticity of the record.

⁴⁵ For convenience I refer here to Rajaguru's (1958: vol. 1, pt. 2) thorough compilation of early inscriptions from Orissa, although the pattern continues in later inscriptions (1958: vol. 2). Inscriptions are cited in the present article by their number in Rajaguru 1958.

⁴⁶ The term *carāṇa* is conventionally used to denote, within a *śākhā*, a subschool identified with the ritual *sūtra* which it follows. In the Orissa inscriptions, by contrast, it is a larger category than *śākhā*, and thus is virtually identical with 'Veda'. For instance, donees may be identified as belonging to the Chandoga *carāṇa* (i.e. the *Sāmaveda*) and the Kauthuma *śākhā* (nn. 36, 40); Vājasaneyin *carāṇa* (i.e. the *Suklayajurveda*) and Kāṇva *śākhā* (n. 44).

⁴⁷ In seven out of fifteen records of the Mātharas and Śrīrāma-Kāśyapas: nn. 3, 6, 8, 9, 11, 14, 15. It is sometimes a reference to prior studies rather than a description of the donee's current status.

dents')⁴⁸ in the course of stating their affiliations, or they are presented as teacher and student (*śiṣya*) (n. 43). In some cases, the scholarly credentials are spelled out at length. An inscription of Prṥthivī Mahārāja (n. 15) records a grant 'to Padmaśarman, a (former) Taittirīya student, belonging to the Bhṛgu *gotra*, who has complete knowledge of the Veda and Vedāṅgas, who delights in the six rituals, who observes the rules of moral restraint (*yama*), moral principle (*niyama*), and full-recitation, and who has discerned the farthest reaches of several sciences including *purāṇa*, *Rāmāyaṇa*, and *dharmasāstra*'.⁴⁹ A grant of the same king from three years earlier (n. 14) makes an even longer eulogy of the donee, a fellow-student of the Chandogas (*chandogasabrahmacāriṇe*), learned in 3000 subjects, author of twenty commentaries, the son of one who studied, taught, and commented on a thousand subjects, and grandson of one who was master of *śruti* and *smṛti* and whose mind had been purified by performance of the *agniṣṭoma* and other rites. Another record creates an *agrahāra* for a group of brahmins 'well-behaved and engaged in study' (*v[y]ttādhyayanavatām*), headed by a brahmin teacher (*brāhmaṇaupādhyāya*), from another *agrahāra*.⁵⁰

The stated motive for endowments to brahmins is usually to increase the donor's store of merit (*puṇyavṛddhi*), with attendant rewards for self and family in this life and the next. Behind this formula, however, is the assumption that patronage of Brahmanical ritual and Sanskrit erudition confirmed the donor as a legitimate receptacle of *kṣatra* (ruling power) in the eyes of rivals and of his own courtiers alike. But it was not necessarily enough simply to be a brahmin to merit such patronage. At least until the Guptas, grants to Buddhist and Jain monks and institutions were more common. Hence, in Brahmanical grants, the listing of Vedic affiliation, the mention of the recipient's qualifications in terms not merely of descent but of learning, scholarship, and Vedic ritual observance were essential to projecting brahmins as a 'good investment'.

Thus far, we have seen no evidence of members of other high castes engaging in study of the Veda or of other subjects, despite the injunctions in the codes that they could and should do so. This may in part be due to a lack of occasion for recording such practice in inscriptions: only Brahmins could teach or officiate as priests and were thus entitled to support through endowments. But this silence surely also reflects the fact that actual study by non-brahmins

⁴⁸ In two records from north Orissa: nn. 23, 27.

⁴⁹ *veda-vedaṅga-paraḡāya ṣaṭkarmmaniratāya yama-niyama-paraḡāyāya purāṇa-rāmāyaṇa-dharmasāstrady-aneka-vidyā-pāradarṣane bhṛgusagotrāya taittirīyasabrahmacāriṇe padmaśarmmaṇe* [retaining orthographical irregularities, such as the omission of some long vowels; uncertain letters underlined].

⁵⁰ This is mistranslated by Rajaguru, who wishes to emend to *vṛttādhyayanavatām*; this is impossible to reconcile with the plural genitives on either side of the compound (*nānāgotracaraṇānām* [...] *brāhmaṇānām*), which which it must agree.

remained a rare exception. The persuasiveness of the Ārya model was manifested mainly in the growing recognition of the value of supporting brahmins in these pursuits, and this recognition correlates with the proliferation of endowed brahmin settlements.

9. Political Factors in the Spread of Brahmin Communities

The migration and resettlement of brahmins all over South Asia and into much of Southeast Asia from the early historic period onward is a subject that is far from being well documented or understood.⁵¹ In broad terms however, it appears that those laying claim to social dominance or kingship in regions outside the Brahmanically defined heartland of Āryāvarta or Madhyadeśa made a policy of importing brahmins from areas within or near this central, 'pure' region and settling them on tax-free land. Settling brahmins in agriculturally underdeveloped lands might have acted as a mechanism for bringing them under the plow while simultaneously drawing them into the sphere of the 'civilized' world as conceived by Brahmanical tradition.⁵² Many inscriptions emphasize the brahmin recipients' extraordinary rights over the land and their own authority over the surrounding peasantry.⁵³ Kulke has pointed out that the brahmin officials of the court and the (more numerous) brahmins of the rural *agrahāras* formed a nexus that allowed an 'inner colonization' of the countryside by the king (Kulke 1978b). Meanwhile, brahmins were installed as priests in the new royal temples, where by composing *māhātmyas* and *sthala purāṇas* they helped assimilate the local (often tribal) deity to pan-Indian Sanskrit mythological and cultic norms. In this way, the king (often a scion of the dominant local tribe) could maintain the allegiance of his 'core constituency' while appropriating an Ārya cultural framework to unify and lend prestige to the state.⁵⁴ In such cults, non-brahmin tribal priests often

⁵¹ For use of inscriptions to track the spread of brahmin communities, see Witzel 1981; 1985; 1993; for Southeast Asia, see, esp., Bhattacharya 1961; Christie 1964; Coedès 1983; Kulke 1986 (a critical review of earlier scholarship).

⁵² The fact, frequently mentioned in land-grant records, that the land being bestowed is not agriculturally productive might imply the expectation that the recipient will make it productive; e.g., see notes 26 and 27 above. However it has also been argued that such settlements would only be possible in regions already agriculturally productive enough to support a village of non-agriculturalists (Stein 1967-1968).

⁵³ Injunctions to all parties to obey the brahmin donees and to respect the terms of the grant are routine in north India in this period. An early (ca. 5th c.) example from Pūḷāṅkuṛīci in the South likewise ordains the superior rights (*mīyāṭci*) of the brahmin titleholders over tenants (Veluthat 1993: 198).

⁵⁴ Kulke (1978b: 125-127) provides three excellent examples from 5th-6th c. Orissa of "[...] this early type of royal patronage of autochthonous deities": the hill temple of Ambikā Maṇināgeśvarī (for the inscriptions, see Rajaguru 1958: 120-123; 133-135 [nn. 23, 27]); the goddess Stambeśvarī patronized by Rāja Tuṣṭīkara (ca. 500) (Kalahandi copperplate; see Sircar in *EI* 30: 274 ff); and the Gaṅga kings' patronage of the Śābara (Saora) tribal god under the name Gokarṇasvāmin on Mahendragiri. See, also, Eschmann 1978.

retain special functions connected directly with the shrine image, while brahmin priests carry out the standard Brahmanical temple rites (a pattern that continues in the worship of Jagannātha at Puri). The temple brahmins included both those trained in Vedic recitation, and those who had taken Śaiva or Vaiṣṇava *dikṣā* and were thus qualified to perform temple *pūjā*.⁵⁵ The village *agrahāras* served as the training ground and source of manpower to staff the large urban temples and the court bureaucracy, as they continue to do today, especially in south India.⁵⁶

Likewise patronage from the royal courts, especially from the Gupta era forward, led to the construction and staffing of brahmin-controlled temple institutions, which especially in the South also became vehicles for investment (Stein 1960). Such temple institutions allowed the ruler to present himself publicly as the earthly counterpart and representative of the Lord of the Universe, a role dramatized by the cult of the *devarāja* ('divine king') in Southeast Asia.⁵⁷ When a new state was founded, brahmin priests could be called upon to 'confirm' the new ruler's *kṣatriya* lineage and to secure the blessings of a heavenly king.

10. *The Learned Brahmin Ruler*

A less common trope in the inscriptions is that of the brahmin dynasty, such as the Kadambas. An inscription on a pillar in front of the temple to Śiva Praṇaveśvara at Tāḷaḡuṇḍa in the Shimoga district of Karnataka, dating probably to the 6th century CE, depicts the royal family as brahmins turned conquerers.⁵⁸ After invoking Śiva, the second verse praises brahmins as 'gods on earth, best of the twice-born, speakers of the *Sāma*-, *R̥g*-, and *Yajur*-Vedas'.⁵⁹ The Kadamba lineage itself is described as 'a high twice-born family, [...] sons of a three-sage line in the Hārītī *pravara*, born in the *gotra* of Mānavya, foremost of

⁵⁵ The *dikṣā* of the Tantric sects differed fundamentally from any Vedic *vrata* or *dikṣā*, but it was parallel in the symbolism of divinization, in providing access to knowledge and qualification to practice, and in serving as a status-marker.

⁵⁶ 'Tantra' (i.e. temple ritual) specialists in the *manas* (brahmin family compounds) of Kerala today are often away from home for up to half the year serving in distant temples.

⁵⁷ One point of controversy has been the significance of the '*devarāja* cult'. Kulke (1978a) has made it clear that the *devarāja* per se was the deity as divine king, while the human king was understood as the god's human representative. Rather than being a god in human form, the king was at most said to embody a 'portion' (*aṃśa*) of the deity's nature. On the other hand, the title appears to be applied to the Gupta king Candragupta II in the Sanchi stone inscription of the year 93 (*mahārājādhirājaśrī-candraguptasya devarāja iti priyanāma [...] yetasya* [*CII* 3²: ll. 7-8]); the ambiguity of the referent of the title is caused by the loss of a few characters, which the editor proposes to restore as *priyanāmadheyam bhavaty etasya*. If the word *devarāja* indeed applies to the king, we must wonder what the cultic significance of it might be.

⁵⁸ Edited and translated by F. Kielhorn in *EI* 8: 24-36; re-edited by Sircar 1942: 450-455.

⁵⁹ *bhūsūrā dvijapraravās sāmargyajurovedāvādinah* (l. 1).

sages'.⁶⁰ This precise brahmin pedigree is then augmented with a list of the ritual observances and textual studies (vv. 5-8). The inscription portrays the family's rise to royal stature as the restoration of brahmins to their primordial superiority to *kṣatriyas* —a superiority lost only in the current decadent epoch: 'In this Kali Yuga, alas, brahminhood is feebler than the *kṣatriyahood*. Hence, if, even after fully serving the teacher's household and diligently studying one's branch of the Veda, perfection in *brahman* is subordinate to the king, what greater sorrow is there than this?'⁶¹ Thinking thus, Mayūśarman took up arms against the Pallava lords and won their recognition as a regional ruler. In this case, Vedic learning directly propels the family to worldly power, and justifies their possession of it.

In a less elaborate earlier record, the *mahārāja* Mātṛviṣṇu, a feudatory of the Gupta emperor Budhagupta, in sponsoring the erection of a flagpole for Lord Janārdana, advertises his status as 'the great-grandson of Indraviṣṇu, the brahmin sage, bull of the Maitrāyaṇīyas, who took delight in his ritual practice, worshipped with sacrifices, and had learned the recitation [of his Veda]'.⁶² In these and similar inscriptions, the claim to brahmin status is documented by referring to ritual observance and Vedic study, in the latter case, specifying the branch of the *Yajurveda* to which the king's progenitor belonged, and in which he trained (*adhīta*) in recitation (*svādhyāya*).

11. Conclusion

Between the Ganges urbanization and the end of the first millennium CE, the Brahmanical tradition adapted to dramatically changing social and economic situations, while expanding into new territories far beyond the old bounds of Āryāvarta. It was able to do this while maintaining a strong sense of continuity through its ability to project its idealized vision of a *varṇa* society under the religious

⁶⁰ *dvijakulaṃ prāṃśu [...] tryāśvartmahāritīputram ṛṣimukhyamānavyagotrajam* (l. 2). This should probably be understood to mean that they belonged to the Hārīta (or Hārīti) *gaṇa* of the Kevala Aṅgīras *gotra*, in whose *pravara* the ṛṣis Aṅgīras (or Māndhātṛ), Ambarīṣa, and Yuvānāśva are named (Brough 1953: 121-135). *ṛṣimukhyamānavyagotrajam*, rather than alluding to an actual *gotra* in the technical sense, may simply be meant to place the family in the brahmin class generally by referring to Manu, the prototypical Ārya. It is worth noting that the *Gotrapravaramaṅjarī* specifies, as a sort of afterthought, that *rājanyas* may adopt the *pravara* of their *purohita* or of their teacher, or 'if (a *rājanya*) makes the *pravara*-recitation according to his rank [*sārṣṭim*]', the sages Manu, Idā, and Purūravas should be mentioned (212-215). Thus, Manu might have been seen as a sage to be named for a king who lacked proper *pravara*. Is this, then, a suggestion that the Kadambas were not in fact true brahmins, and had adopted the Hārīta *gotra* and three-sage *pravara* from his *purohita*?

⁶¹ *kaliyuge 'sminn aho bata kṣatrāt pariṣlavā vipratā yataḥ || gurukulāni samyag āradhy śākhām adhītyāpi yatnataḥ brahmasiddhir yyadi nṛpādhinā kim ataḥ paraṃ dukkham ity ataḥ ||* (l. 4).

⁶² Eraṇ pillar inscription, 165 GE (=483-484 CE?): *svakarmābhīratasya kratuyājīnaḥ adhītasvādhyāyasya vipraśer mmaitrāyaṇīyavṛṣabhasyendravīṣṇoḥ prapautreṇa* (CII 3²: 339-341 [n. 39], ll. 4-5).

leadership of *dvijas*, men sanctified by sacred knowledge, and empowered to mediate that knowledge to others. Those who assent to the authority of that knowledge (the Veda) and of its mediators (learned, observant brahmins), and who in turn are qualified to be served ritually by such mediators —are thereby deemed Āryas.

The crucial ritual mechanism of this tradition, the *vrata* of *brahmacarya* (and the initiation that set it in motion), was doubly necessary in this process. First, it was the gateway to the knowledge sought by both the *mumukṣu*, the seeker after liberation, and the *bubhukṣu*, the seeker after earthly rewards. Second, because in itself it provided a general model of personal piety and stamped the observant with outward marks: the sacred thread of the orthodox householder and his ritualized use of *mantras*. Brahmins' reputation for learning —for which the feats of memory and erudition of even just a few served as proof— lent them the authority to assert themselves persuasively as arbiters of *dharma* in a world where they had many plausible rivals.

What is most distinctive of the tradition, perhaps, is that however far the brahmin priest was able to insinuate himself into the life of the urban courts, the tradition maintained a rural, parochial character, rooted in the village or even, in the case of the Brahmanical ascetic, in the *āśrama*, the monastic retreat, which never grew to the massive proportions and complexity of many of the Buddhist monasteries. This decentralized structure, with the scope it gave to the local *pariṣad*, might well be judged the reason for its persistence through a history that has seen many religions rise, and more than a few fall.

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