

NOTES ON THE ENLARGED TEXT OF THE
MAHĀVAMSA, EXTANT IN A KAMBODJAN
MANUSCRIPT.

BY

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I wish to call the attention of my fellow-workers in the field of Pāli scholarship, and chiefly of those who are concerned with the historical or quasi-historical Records of which the Sinhalese are so justly proud, to a work that seems to have escaped their notice. I believe myself entitled to speak so, because no mention of it occurs in the papers that have hitherto appeared on subjects more or less closely related to it.

Turnour, while dealing with the Mahāvamsa in his "Introductory Essay" (1837), betrays no knowledge of a poem which, although essentially of the same kind, is almost twice as large as the received text. Nor does Oldenberg in his lucid Introduction to the Dīpav. (1879); though this matter, indeed, scarcely comes within the scope of his remarks. Lastly Snyder has written a dissertation on "Der Commentar u. die Textüberlieferung des Mahāvamsa" (Berlin 1891), where he examined the relationship which the two principal groups of MSS. hold to each other. Unfortunately, as to the Kambodjan lineage, he only could refer to several readings which the editors of a new edition of the Mahāvamsa, published at Colombo in 1883, had put in the foot-notes.

Kambodjan MSS., in fact, are very rare at least in Europe. Sinhalese and Burmese MSS. of the Mahāvamsa are to be found there in great number, but no Kambodjan ones. For the only MS. in Kambodjan characters, registered under the designation "Mahāvamsa" in the Catalogue of the Bibliothèque Nationale, contains in reality a voluminous

work which pretends to be composed by a monk of the name of Moggallāna. It bears the same title as Mahānāma's poem and consists of the same number of chapters or paricchēdas as are met with in the original Mahāvamsa. But whereas the sum total of stanzas in the latter work is nearly 2900, they come up to about double that number in Moggallāna's bulky work. As regards literary master-ship, the former is superior to the latter. There are many passages in the enlarged text which on account of their clumsiness render their understanding difficult, and often remind us of the contorted style of the paraphractical portions of our Pāli Commentaries. Now it is a matter of fact, which I shall point out presently, that Moggallāna has drawn for his work on the Mahāvamsa-Ṭīkā, surnamed Vamsatthapakāsīnī.

So far then from regarding the Mahāvamsa of our Kambodjan MS. as capable of darkening the Mahāvamsa which we know from Turnour's edition, we shall find that the latter can but win through a comparison with the former. On the other hand, if we are not likely disposed to over-appreciate the enlarged Mahāvamsa, we must take care lest we should err in an opposite direction. I may, therefore, be permitted to refer to a few points which seem most appropriate for a sound estimation of this recently discovered text.

At the very outset I may briefly state that Moggallāna, whom a colophon to our MS. proclaims to be the author of the text under discussion, was a native of Ceylon, or at least living there. Thus, e. g., by the words "tasmim dīpe" (in that island), at the beginning of the fourteenth Canto of his poem, he seems to intimate that he wrote in Ceylon. Yet I confess that this evidence alone is not wholly conclusive. Moreover, the writer of the Kambodjan MS. must have used a Sinhalese pattern, because he sometimes mistakes t for n, and vice versâ. These letters are difficult to distinguish in Sinhalese, whereas they are quite dissimilar in Kambodjan. Such mistakes being met with not only in verses which are taken from the received

text, but also in such ones as occur in the additions, it is impossible to assume that the copyist did not glance at a Sinhalese MS., save incidentally. His transcript must have been made throughout after a Sinhalese MS., or after a Kambodjan one which goes back to a Sinhalese one. Still, I believe that we have to look for better information from Ceylon, and, in my opinion, we need not abandon all hope to receive one day further MSS. of our text from some Sinhalese or Burmese Vihāra.

If we now turn to the work itself, we have to bear in mind that, as regards the substance, Moggallāna's poem is identical with that of Mahānāma. But, while adopting title, divisions, and a great many verses, from the Mahāvamsa, it left comparatively few portions of the older work unaltered. In most cases, smaller or greater changes have taken place; slokas or parts of them have been dropped, or replaced by others; not to speak of numerous insertions. Nevertheless, it would be unwise to omit consulting Moggallāna's work for any new edition of the Mahāvamsa. At present, it is true, only one Kambodjan MS. is at our disposal; and, of course, we ought not to lose sight of this fact. But neither do I maintain that we possess standard readings, as it were, in the text as handed down by Moggallāna, nor do I deny that we have to dismiss many readings as worthless which are supported by him.

If, e. g., in Canto XIII versus finem the Kambodjan MS. substitutes "tattha" (there) instead of "pilu", the meaning of which must be "rocky", we understand at once, why it does so. Sober reasoning, I think, will always have to decide to which reading we have to give the preference, by whatever MS. or group of MSS. it be borne out. The Commentary too will prove useful in many respects, but experience teaches us that not seldom, where assistance is most necessary, Commentaries have nothing to tell us.

In a similar perplexed condition we are placed regarding Mahāvamsa, Canto X, śloka 90 and the preceding one. Here the Kambodjan MS. alone enables us to discard a reading that has puzzled even the last translator of the Mahāvamsa,

Mr. Vijesinha, and to propose an interpretation of the two ślokas which, though conjectural, cannot, in my opinion, be termed farfetched.

According to the Colombo-edition of 1883 the ślokas in question run thus:—

mahāsusānaghātakam pacchimam rājiniṃ tathā
Vesavaṇṇassa nigrodham Vyādhadevassa tālakam,
so nam sabhāgavatthañ ca pabhedagharam eva ca
etāni pacchimadvāra-disābhāge nivesayi.

In the second pāda of the second stanza our MS. has “mahejjāghara” (with a double palatal followed by a long a-vowel), i. e. mahā+ijjā (skr. ijyā)+ghara, “house of the great sacrifice”, not “mahejaghara” (with a single palatal followed by a short a-vowel), which is the reading of one Mandalay MS., nor “pabhedaghara”, rendered by Turnour “palace distributed into many apartments”, and left untranslated by Vijesinha.

“Pabhedaghara” appears to be an old error. It cannot, however, have sprung from the likeness of the characters, since the dentals and palatals are represented differently in all scripts that are employed for Pāli texts. I believe, there is but one explanation left us. “Pabheda” was put instead of “mahejjā” when the latter word had grown unintelligible. But the compound “pabheda-ghara” or “pabheda-vatthu” (in Canto XVII, v. 30) remained as obscure as ever. Hence it came that the Commentator was wise enough to keep silence. For while commenting on Canto X, where the word occurs for the first time, he omits the passage entirely. Afterwards when commenting on Canto XVII, he informs us that maheja (with a short a-vowel and one palatal dropped) is the name of a yakkha.

I am of opinion, that mahejjāghara is a name for the house or hut, situated outside the town, where the so-called dhuvana-rite used to be performed. As we learn from a monograph on “Die altindischen Todten- u. Bestattungsgebräuche” (pp. 135sq.) by Professor Caland, this ceremony was optional, and therefore a king—Paṇḍukābhaya

in our case—might have erected an edifice, destined for its performance, with the view of his own demise. In the first pāda of the same stanza we are told that Paṇḍukābhaya provided also a “sabhāgavatthu” (not °vattha!), i. e. “a ground shared by all”, for the use of the common folk to burn the dead bodies there, or to throw them away to rot.

This interpretation is warranted by the strict correspondence which exists between the first pāda in our stanza and the first pāda in that which precedes it. The “ground shared by all” (sabhāgavatthu) in the former corresponds to the “great cemetery and place of execution” (mahāsusānaghātana, not °ghātaka) in the latter. Then also a correspondence between the second pādas in both stanzas is likely to be supposed. In other words, “mahejjāghara” (house of the great sacrifice) is to be referred to the same locality as “pacchimā rājini” of the preceding stanza.

But, since it is difficult to understand what is meant by “the western Rājini”, according to Vijesinha’s translation, or “to the westward of the palace”, according to Turnour, I am inclined to read “rajani” (the night) instead of rājini (the feminine of rāja), and I render “pacchimā rajani” by “the last night”. The correspondence between the two pādas of both stanzas then becomes as complete as possible, and I think, the terms „house of the great sacrifice” and “the last night” derive their meaning from two different stages of one and the same rite. A prior stage is referred to by “the last night”, for, before undergoing the dhuvana-rite, the principal wife of the defunct is three times requested to concede a sojourn for the dead, and after having refused it twice, she finally concedes it, saying “for one night”, this one night being, of course, the last night. At a posterior stage of the same ceremony a sacrifice with the omentum of a cow is performed for the dead, and so the name “house of the great sacrifice” is by no means nonsensical. And again, how many allusions, open and secret, to Brāhmanical and

other popular usages are traceable in our Pāli books, the occurrence of which serves to corroborate the opinion I advanced.

I must beg pardon for having so long dwelt upon this curious passage where two blunders have been carried along into two editions. The reason why I have chosen this example was to show in a very persuasive manner that the MS. of the Mahāvamsa which the author of the enlarged text made use of, preserves, in certain cases, better readings than the majority of the MSS. of the Mahāvamsa in our libraries.

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It now remains to consider how our work arrived at its present dimensions, and whence the additions, which it embraces, came.

Are they the natural outcome of the imagination of a poet to whose workmanship they might bear evidence? No. For even the greatest ability in applying poetical colouring cannot account for the many verses that have been added to those of the received text. But the author of the enlarged Mahāvamsa was not a particularly gifted poet. Never did he dare to cut himself loose from his sources, and so much was he addicted to them that he thought to have reached his aim if he had succeeded by casting prose texts into verse or by recasting preexistent verses.

Amongst the works the contents of which Moggallāna incorporated into his poem the Commentary on the Mahāvamsa takes a prominent place. All the various historical excursuses to be found there, e. g. that which describes the end of the Nandas, form part of the enlarged work, of course put into ślokas, good and bad. Besides, many explanations of passages in the Mahāvamsa which the Commentator gives, were welcome also to Moggallāna, whenever he tried to embellish the narrative of the original.

Secondly, it was the Buddhavamsa that inspired our

poet while he was writing the history of the former Buddhas which opens his poem. It is undoubtedly the longest interpolation in the whole work, extending over about 500 ślokas.

A further source is the Thūpavamsa, as is explicitly stated in a colophon to the Kambodjan MS. Since we know that the history of a great number of dāgobas has been embodied in the Mahāvamsa, we cannot be surprised to learn that the author of the enlarged text looked out for more news about them than he found in the received text, and the only book answering his purposes was the Thūpavamsa. Unfortunately, an edition of this text is still missing, and on the other hand, I have not found the leisure as yet for a thorough examination of our work with regard to the mode and measure of its dependence on the Thūpavamsa. I deem it sufficient for the present, to trace such texts in Moggallāna's poem as are better at hand in printed editions, in the first place the Mahāvamsa Ṭikā, published at Colombo in 1895, and in the second place, the Buddhavamsa in Morris' edition for the P. T. S. 1882.

An instructive example, which exhibits better than anything else the strong tendency of our work to expand, is the versified story of the Tittirajātaka (in Fausböll's edition, vol. III, pp. 64sqq.). On a slight signal, given by the words—

“Thero bodhesi rājānam vatvā Tittirajātakam”

the versemaking apparatus sets into function.

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In conclusion, I subjoin a threefold remark, wish, or hope, whichever the reader may prefer.

The first regards a question which, at present, is much ventilated among Indianists, viz. the question about the origin and development of the Epic. It has been last discussed by Professor Hopkins in his book on the Great Epic of India. Hopkins mentions there (p. 384, n. 3) the

Vṛddha-Viṣṇu-Purāna which, according to Mr. Gierson, contains large additions to the well-known text of the Viṣṇu-Purāna. Now it is quite true that this example is apt to illustrate the growth of Sanskrit popular poems. But I doubt, if, in the case of the Viṣṇu-Purāna, we are able to follow step by step the traces of the development of the earlier text into the huge masses of the later one; whereas we find no difficulty at all in doing so with the Mahāvamsa during its transformation into the enlarged work which I have spoken of. Therefore I venture to recommend the present example to the consideration of scholars who endeavour to solve the Epic question.

A second remark concerns the Kambodjan MS. upon which my observations are based. It is very carelessly written by one who shows himself but imperfectly acquainted with the Pāli language. One feels oneself constantly tempted to make corrections, and in some places, in fact, somebody, who has gone through the MS. before me, had tried to correct it with ink. To my guessing, we have here to recognize the hand of the late Professor Léon Feer, and I avail myself of the opportunity to render homage to his noble memory as of a scholar and gentleman who will be regretted with sincere sorrow by all those that knew him, or were helped by his extensive learning, when they had to use Indian MSS. at the Bibliothèque Nationale.

My third remark applies to the readers of our Journal. They will be glad to hear that Professor Geiger of Erlangen is engaged in researches into the Ceylonese Chronicles, and perhaps also they will be indulgent enough to allow me to express here a wish with regard to the Mahāvamsa.

A new edition by a European scholar being since long a desideratum, it will not be too much to demand some care and assistance in favour of a work, not unimportant from a comparative standpoint on account of the many tales preserved in it. I mention only the parallels to the

story of Odysseus and Kirkē, of Alexander's war-horse Bukephalos, of the Christian saint Eustach and the deer.

Truly, there is no other work more worthy of the patronage of the Government of that beautiful island which is said to be, and really is, the pearl of the British Indian Empire.
