A possible deliberate *Mahābhārata*-echo
in the imagery of the *Buddhacarita* compounded-*rūpaka*s[1]

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Abstract

The main focus of the paper is to tentatively document traces of hypertextuality between the *Buddhacarita* and the *Mahābhārata*, under the assumption that Aśvaghoṣa probably knew this latter work, albeit non-definitive version of it. The selected methodological approach is a comparison between Bc and MBh in-compound-*rūpaka*s. Indeed, since it is plausible that he benefited from an erudite court audience, Aśvaghoṣa is here assumed to take for granted that even indirect hints at MBh passages would be promptly understood. Therefore, he sometimes re-uses *Mahābhārata* expressions, and merely changes the word-order or replaces a single constituent in the matching figurative phrases or compounds, and sometimes plays with the MBh *rūpaka*s in a more complex way.

On the basis of the survey and analysis of all the Bc's *rūpaka*s and their supposed inspirational MBh source, the present inquiry tries to show how the singled-out cross-references are not only aimed at building a generic sophisticated literary pattern for his *mahākāvya* and his learned audience, but they are also intentionally targeted at evoking Epic heroic imagery as clues for the kingly commitment the author attributes to Buddha.

Key Words – Aśvaghoṣa; Buddhacarita; hypertextuality; Mahābhārata; *rūpaka*

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[1] My sincere gratitude goes to the anonymous Reviewers, whose comments helped me to sharpen my argumentations. The Bc text, as well as the single *samastarūpaka*s' occurrences, are drawn from Johnston's 1936 edition, whereas the MBh text is from the BORI edition. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.

1. Premise

When Cowell published the first critical edition of *Buddhacarita* (1894), the contextual similarities between the *Buddhacarita* (henceforth Bc) and the *Rāmāyaṇa* were manifest, prompting many hypotheses concerning an almost certain intertextual relationship between the two. Unfortunately, this did not arouse any interest in finding affinities with the *Mahābhārata* (henceforth MBh). In the later 1936 text edition, Johnston originally argued that not all of the MBh were unknown to Aśvaghoṣa even if some legends to which Aśvaghoṣa referred paralleled the ones found in the MBh, though not in the version «we now have it» (1936: xlvii). He further argued that MBh phrasal similarities and parallels were more easily to be found in *Saundarananda* than in Bc. Although the MBh has never been acknowledged as a canonical source of Bc[2], in the last decade other scholars have begun to consider the above-mentioned intertextual relationship mainly from the perspective of the Brahmanical motives included in the Bc and how Aśvaghoṣa deals with them. In particular, Hiltebeitel (2006; 2011) led the way by suggesting a new reading of the Brahmanical background as portrayed in the Bc – which Bronkhorst also recognised as «pervaded by brahmanical ideas and customs» (2011: 154). Moreover, Olivelle (2008; 2019) devoted special attention to interpreting Aśvaghoṣa's «arguments against some central theological positions of Brahmanism» (2019: 257) – namely *trivarga, āśrama* system and *kāma*.

From the perspective of socio-cultural interpretation, Hiltebeitel (2006) took into account Tokunaga's statement on Byodo's philosophical comparison between MBh and Bc in order to postulate Aśvaghoṣa's familiarity with *Mokṣadharma* and *Śānti Parvan* – as Brockington (1998: 483) also suggests[3] – or their possible influence in the composition of Bc. Lastly, after lengthy and multifaceted research on Aśvaghoṣa's canonical sources, Eltschinger (2018) focused on the depiction of the character of Śuddhodhana, so that a resemblance is established between the chieftain of the Śākya and the orthodox portrayal of kingship and *kṣatriyadharma*, precisely envisioned in *Śānti Parvan*.

Bearing in mind such a *status quaestionis*, my aim is to make a fresh attempt at combining both the cultural-historical and rhetorical point of view in reading Aśvaghoṣa's work. To the best of my knowledge, there has been no previous attempt to carry out a Bc/MBh textual and, at the same time, cultural comparison despite both the early postulated dependence of *sargabandha*s on the *itihāsa* genre[4] and the classification of Aśvaghoṣa's writing style as something in between Epic and Kāvya literary forms (Lienhard 1984: 167). Scholars indeed tend to exclude the possibility that Aśvaghoṣa could have been acquainted with even a non-definitive MBh version, to which he could have referred not only for philosophical and theological arguments (Olivelle 2019), but also as a model of inspiring poetry.

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[2] Regarding Aśvaghoṣa's being unfamiliar with the MBh *as we know it*, e.g. Passi (2011: 224-40) maintains: «[…] non sembra ipotizzabile una conoscenza da parte del poeta [= Aśvaghoṣa] del Mahābhārata nella sua forma attuale; troppi sono i riferimenti mitologici in cui leggende bhāratiane vengono presentate con delle varianti notevoli rispetto alla tradizione pervenutaci […] Vi sono naturalmente numerosi confronti e passi paralleli, i quali in sé dimostrano una notevole dimestichezza con materiale epico – se vogliamo anche col nucleo base del "Mahabharata" – ma non provano incontrovertibilmente che questo avesse già assunto un aspetto definitivo prima del 200 d.C.».

[3] See Hiltebeitel (2006: 268): «I am […] encouraged by Tokunaga on this point, on which John Brockington is both more succinct and more extensive: Aśvaghoṣa "definitely draws on the Śantiparvan" (1998, 483). I agree with both Tokunaga and Brockington. I also find very attractive Tokunaga's demonstration that Cantos 9 and 10 of the Buddhacarita involve a reading of (Tokunaga says "are based on") the first "forty-five or so chapters in narrative form of the extant Śantiparvan" (ibid.)».

[4] I refer in particular to Lienhard's statement (1984: 163): «[…] this sort of poetry [= *sargabandha*] was […] a continuation of the epos which, however, was gradually transformed into the strictly applied form of metrical mahākāvya due to the influence of short poetry. The extensive extemporization of epic poetry, which obeyed less strict linguistic and aesthetic criteria, were replaced by the more elaborate detail of the consciously poetic long poem whose technique and aesthetic standards were directly derived from those of the short poem». See also Boccali (1999, 2008); Peterson (2003); Sudyka (2011).

By contrast, I believe that the author might have re-used some specific metaphorical identifications along with other literary images found in the MBh, and, thus, I chose to approach the hypothesis of intertextuality from a specific *alaṃkara* point of view, which especially focuses on the Bc *samasta-rūpaka*s, i.e. on its compound-metaphorical identifications[5]. In order to do this, I chose to apply Genette's structuralist category of hypertextuality (1982) as a general framework on which to establish my inquiry, to better highlight the conjectured intertextual relationship between the Bc and MBh, which henceforth will be respectively labelled as hypertext (= Bc) and hypotext (= MBh). Of course, the hypotext should be sufficiently widespread – at the age of composition of the former – to be taken as a literary model. Therefore, I will recall first all the data available on the MBh chronology. As is well known, both Vaidya (1905: 14) and Yardi (1986: 128) took into account Dio Chrysostomo's (40-120 C.E.) testimony as evidence of MBh's circulation in South India in the first half of the first century C.E. Hiltebeitel (2001: 18) maintains that the MBh «was composed between the mid-second century B.C. and the year zero» (2001: 18). These chronologies dovetail with an early dating of Aśvaghoṣa for the first century C.E., such as that proposed both by Johnston and by Hiltebeitel (2006: 234), and even more closely with Eltschinger's (2013a), i.e. with the first and the second century C.E. (see also Salomon 2015).

Nonetheless, I need to explicitly mention my awareness of the caution which is called for in applying structuralist terminology, especially since Genette's expressly advanced the hypertextuality theory for critical literature relating to the analysis of the parodistic genre, and restricted its field of action to literary products whose hypertextuality is extensively declared or at least alluded to[6]. I merely hazard to take into account the possibility that – on the basis of a systematic survey of Bc *rūpaka*s – something comparable to that which Genette elsewhere highlighted in his inquiries could be recognized, i.e. a textual link of dependence of the Bc on the MBh. Indeed, recurring MBh phrases re-used in a clever manner in the Bc – such as *sūkṣma*/*dharma-* studied e.g. in Pontillo (2013a) – should have assured a learned intertextual play interlacing the Poet and his audience made up of connoisseurs. Aśvaghoṣa's well-educated court[7], in my opinion, should have been able to appreciate the sophisticated network of re-use the author was submitting to its attention[8]. The relevant ingenious aim might have consisted in fostering Buddha as a soteriological figure which overcomes the Brahmanical ideology, but as a renovated figure of prince and king[9], by resorting to a specific epic milieu characterised by *kṣatriya* ethics – as represented in *Rāmāyaṇa* and MBh. Indeed, within such a heroic substratum, he apparently sketches the portrayal of Buddha's father (Pontillo 2013a: 173-174; 185-186; Eltschinger 2018) and indirectly places the Buddha himself. Thus, I tried to verify if a comparable cultural directionality affected the Bc metaphors.

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[5] As for just such a technical distinction between *samasta-* and *a-samasta-rūpaka* see Gerow (1971: 239-243); Pontillo (2013b: 26); Candotti and Pontillo (2017: 353). In particular, Daṇḍin emphasises the opposition between compounded (*samasta-*) and uncompounded (*vyasta-*) *rūpakas*, and he analyses the former as endocentric compounds (namely *tatpuruṣa*s of the *karmadhāraya* type).

[6] «J'aborderai donc ici, sauf exception, l'hypertextualité par son versant le plus ensoleillé: celui où la dérivation de l'hypotexte à l'hypertexte est à la fois massive (toute une oeuvre B dérivant de toute une oeuvre A) et déclarée, d'une manière plus ou moins officielle» (Genette 1982: 16).

[7] That Aśvaghoṣa was familiar with the courtly milieu is consistent with Bc's affiliation to the *mahākāvya* genre itself and with studies on the genre itself as a court-epic, i.e. Peterson (2003: 11): «the *mahākāvya* highlights the king's public, socially active role […] Aśvaghoṣa […] presented the princely sage's life on the model of a military career, the hero's martial exploits […] Certainly, the life of the Buddha is a perfectly suitable theme for a heroic *mahākāvya*. […] the heroic atmosphere and symbolism of the royal milieu pervade his later history as the Buddha […]».

[8] I refer to «the concept of adaptive re-use as a hermeneutical tool» (Freschi and Maas 2017: 20).

[9] See Tzohar (2019) and Olivelle (2019).

1.1 Methodological criteria used in the analysis and classification of the Bc imagery[10]

Here I preliminarily classified the total amount of 52 passages including *samastarūpaka*s or other compounds involving a comparison singled out within the hypertext, by grouping them as follows, according to the semantic area to which the standard of comparison (*upamāna*) belongs[11]:

5	Bc 1.15 *siṃha|gati-*; Bc 2.34 *indriya|aśva-*; Bc 5.84 *siṃha|nāda-*; Bc 7.2 *mṛga|ajira-*; Bc 11.62 *prajā|mṛga-*	FAUNA
7	Bc 1.66 *kula|pravāla-*; Bc 11.62 *bhāgya|vana-*; Bc 3.19 *mukha|paṅkaja-*; Bc 4.36 *padma|locana-* and *padma|vaktra-*; Bc 12.111 *locana|utpala-*; Bc 12.118 *cāṣa|paṅkti-*	FLORA[12]
9	Bc 1.69 *moha|tamas-*; Bc 1.73 *rāga|agni-* and *dharma|vṛṣṭi-*; Bc 2.37 *guṇa|ambu-*; Bc 2.40 *deya|ambu-*; Bc 5.40 *aśru|pāta-*; Bc 7.56 *jñeya|arṇava-*; Bc 9.13 *nayana|ambu|varṣa-*; Bc 9.24 *śoka|ambhas-*	NATURAL ELEMENTS
3 (*samastavastu-viṣayarūpaka*s)[13]	B1.70: *upamāna* (*duḥkha|arṇava-*) + 4 *upameya*s (i.e. *vyādhi|vikīrṇa|phena-*, *jarā|taraṅga-*, *maraṇa|ugra|vega-*, *jñāna|mahā|plava-*)	
	Bc 1.71: *upamāna* (*dharma|nadī-*) + 4 *upameya*s (i.e. *prajña|ambu|vega-*, *sthira|śīla|vapra-*, *samādhi|śīta-*; *vrata|cakravāka-*)	
	Bc 13.65: *upamāna* (*jñāna|druma-*) + 5 *upameya*s (i.e. *kṣamā|śiphā-*, *dhairya|vigāḍha|mūla-*, *cāritra|puṣpa-*, *smṛti|buddhi|śākhā-*, *dharma|phala|pradātṛ-*)	
6	Bc 1.74 *tṛṣṇā|argala-*; Bc 5.9 *sthiti|mārga-*; Bc 7.6 *ikṣvāku|kula|pradīpa-*; Bc 9.1 *bāṣpa|pratoda|abhihita-*; Bc 12.9 *jñāna|plava-*; Bc 13.63 *jñāna|pradīpa-*	HUMAN EVERYDAY LIFE
9	Bc 1.74 *saddharma|tāḍa-*; Bc 2.40 *vṛtta|paraśvadha-*; Bc 9.13 *śoka|śalya-*; Bc 11.57 *saṃsāra|śara-*; Bc 11.62 *jarā|āyudha-* and *vyādhi|vikīrṇa|sāyaka-*; Bc 13.4 *niścaya|varma-*, *sattva|āyudha-* and *buddhi|śara-*	MILITARY SEMANTIC AREA

Table 1

Twelve out of these 52 passages were excluded from the present analysis, simply because no matching attestation was found in the hypotext[14]. Moreover, a group of 5 *samastarūpaka*s can be set aside, where one constituent occurs in both the passages compared, but the other one is completely different, since the partial lexical coincidence of the hypertext with the hypotext I singled out did not

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[10] I chose to use the vertical bar as a tool to mark the combination of compound's constituents, independently of *sandhi*.

[11] The present collection meets the exigency of listing all the instances of Aśvaghoṣa's *rūpaka*s highlighted by Boccali and Pontillo (2010: 117), as far as Bc is concerned.

[12] Some of these standards of comparison are frequently used in later *Kāvya*.

[13] These three efficacious passages show how a noteworthy mastery in the use of the *samastavastuviṣayarūpaka* was already achieved before Daṇḍin and Bhāmaha's systematisation, but also long before Kālidāsa, namely before the traditional chronological boundaries in which later Kāvya will be consecrated as a movement historically defined. Cf. Boccali (1999: 262): «This poetic usage is already extremely frequent in the *Mahābhārata*. At the beginning of kāvya literature it is significantly employed by Aśvaghoṣa […]». In Pontillo (2009) these figures have even been connected with several *samastavastuviṣayarūpaka*s involved in ritual, exegetic and speculative contexts of Vedic *Brāhmaṇa*s and *Upaniṣad*s.

[14] i.e. **Bc 1.71** *prajña\|ambu\|vega-* and **Bc 1.71** *vrata\|cakravāka-* (notwithstanding that *cakravāka* occurs 13 total times in the MBh) along with all the compounded *rūpaka*s belonging to the military semantic area (cf. Table 1).

ultimately impart any additional sense to the hypertext passage, and the respective combinations do not seem to be semantically linked. Not always do the MBh passages here compared include a *karmadhāraya* compound, i.e. a veritable *samastarūpaka.*

Bc 1.66 *kula*/***pravāla***- 'the sprout of [my] family'	MBh 6.37.2[15] *viṣaya*/***pravāla***- 'sprouts [which are] the objects of senses'
Bc 1.71 *dharma*/***nadī***- 'the river [which is] Dharma'	MBh 3.108.2; 3.110.1; 3.155.85; 13.2.18; 18.3.26, 39 *deva*/***nadī***- 'the god(s)' river'
Bc 1.71 *sthira*/***śīla***/*vapra*-, '[whose] banks [are indeed] firm conduct'	MBh 12.133.11[16] *śīladṛḍhāyudha*- 'weapon [whose] shape is strong'[17]
Bc 1.71 *samādhi*/***śīta***- '[whose] cold water is concentration'	MBh 13.130.10[18] *śīta*/*yoga*- 'practice of resistance to cold'
Bc 2.40 *deya*/***ambu***- 'waters [which are indeed his] gifts'	MBh 13.66.17 *jaladāna*- 'water-offering'

Table 2

Furthermore, sometimes the MBh-matching *samastarūpaka*s are not widespread enough throughout the poem to be recognised as formulaic expressions, and are quite generic, so that a direct link with the hypertext cannot be established, such as the *dhyāna*/*mārga*- 'path of meditation' in MBh 12.46.2 which we cannot demonstrate was alluded to by Bc 5.9 *sthiti*/*mārga*- 'the path that leads to the firmness of mind' (Cowell, 1894: 50)[19], even though the context seems to be comparable.

On the other hand, there are some compounded-*rūpaka*s which cannot be ignored if our purpose is truly to achieve a deep, literary-oriented comprehension of the Bc imagery. First of all, we need to pay strict attention to a few Bc compounds involving a figurative expression matching one of the MBh, whose contextual situation matches that of their assumed hypotext – so that a first self-evident and elementary level of affinity can be assumed. For example, *aśru*/*pāta*- 'floods of tears' (tr. Johnston 1936) found in Bc 5.40 in the sense of tears identified with floods, occurs 6 times in the MBh, once out of compound (MBh 12.323.13), twice referred to Death personified (MBh 12.250.37; 12.250.41), once to the daughter of Uttaṅka's preceptor (MBh 14.55.13) and twice in a more extended compound, namely *āśrupātakalila*- 'covered with floods of tears' (MBh 11.1.35) and *aśrupātapariklinna*- '[made] excessively moist by a flood of tears' (MBh 12.149.66)[20]. This could constitute an exception: here the hypotext employs a more refined figurative form than the hypertext, whereas Aśvaghoṣa generally seems to enhance the hypotext's *rūpaka*. What is more noteworthy is that everywhere in the MBh the emphasised, almost hyperbolic, 'floods of tears' represent a dramatic detail in a key episode in the plot, exactly as in the Bc narrative development.

More often, a second level of textual correspondence seems to have been adopted in the Bc *samastarūpaka*s, decidedly more complex, but far more fascinating. Some synonyms of the original constituents of the hypotext replace them in the hypertext, such as in Bc 1.73, where the *karmadhāraya* compound *raga*/*agni*- 'fire [which is indeed] passion' seems to re-use *krodha*/*agni* of

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[15] In the hypotext there is a *samastavastuviṣayarūpaka*, where the *upamāna* is the Aśvatta tree.

[16] Even though in the hypotext, there is also a second coincidence, because *śīla* is combined with a synonym of *sthira*, used in the hypertext, namely *dṛḍha*-, the final sense is of 'form/shape' rather than 'conduct', because the subject of comparison is a weapon.

[17] Cf. Fitzgerald's translation (2004): 'you carry hard weapons'.

[18] *śītayogo 'gniyogaś ca cartavyo dharmabuddhibhiḥ*, 'They whose mind is fixed on the Dharma, have to practice their resistance to cold and to fire.'

[19] 'The state of mental stillness' which is the relevant Olivelle (2008) translation perhaps sounds far from the etymological sense of *sthiti*, which seems to suggest a spatial *vertical* immobility (lit. 'something standing upright or firmly') rather than a horizontal peaceful motionless.

[20] Cf. Fitzgerald's translation (2004): 'soaked with your tears'.

MBh 1.69.28 with a simple variation. This might be considered a universal rather than a specific MBh image, but it is a fact that *krodha/agni* occurs 17 times in the MBh[21] with a homogeneous sense. Intriguingly, *dharma-vṛṣṭi-* 'the rain [which is] Dharma' of Bc 1.73 might be a lexically simplified but theoretically more elaborate version of the *dvandva* compound *yogakṣema/suvṛṣṭi-* used in MBh 12.139.9 (i.e. in a MBh passage classified as «original Bharata» according to Yardi (1986: vii):

Bc 1.73 *vidahyamānāya janāya loke |* *rāgāgnināyaṃ viṣayendhanena |* *prahlādam ādhāsyati dharmavṛṣṭyā |* *vṛṣṭyā mahāmegha ivātapānte ||73||*	MBh 12.139.9 *rājamūlā mahārāja yogakṣemasuvṛṣṭayaḥ |* *prajāsu vyādhayaś caiva maraṇaṃ ca bhayāni ca ||*
'Upon men in this world who are being scorched by the fire which is their passion, whose fuel is the objects of the senses, He will pour relief with the rain which is his dharma, like a rain cloud pouring down rain, at the end of the summer heat' (tr. Olivelle 2008 modified)	'O great King, people's securing their property and a country's having good rains depend upon the king: so too the occurrence of diseases, death and dangers among beings' (tr. Fitzgerald 2004)

Table 3

As a consequence, the parallel (coordinative) mention of two features of the same material welfare (*yogakṣema-* and *vṛṣṭi-* in a *dvandva*-compound) assured by a political authority in the MBh passage – according to very ancient Brahmanically-oriented imagery[22] – might have somehow been superseded by the linguistic combination and identification (in a *karmadhāraya*-compound) between *dharma-* and *vṛṣṭi-* as conceived by Aśvaghoṣa, i.e. between the spiritual well-being envisioned as rain and the universal religiously-oriented authority which is of course the Buddhist Dharma, which is its ultimate origin.

Against the same assumed inspirational background and a comparable rhetoric strategy, we might also have to interpret the *samastarūpaka tṛṣṇā/argala-* 'bolt [which is indeed] thirst', i.e. desire, avidity, used in Bc 1.74. It might have been a sophisticated hint of a specific model, i.e. *svarga/argala-* 'heaven's bolt' only occurring once in the MBh (14.93.69), but close to the renowned and repeated image conveyed by the compound *svargadvāra-*[23], with a significant dramatic reversal of the meaning. Thus, it should be quite easily obtained by replacing the spiritual end, i.e. the heaven (*svarga*), with the origin of all evil, i.e. the *tṛṣṇā*. The resulting Bc 1.74 meaning, i.e. the statement according to which Buddha will be able to 'burst the door (*dvāra*) whose bolt is thirst' (tr. Olivelle 2008), is also fruit of this evocation of the contrarily difficult act of seeing where the access to heaven is for human beings, who are victims of delusion (*moha*), according to MBh 14.93.69.

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[21] MBh 1.171.18; 3.195.26; 3.197.25; 4.57.14; 7.16.13; 7.93.35; 7.112.42; 8.24.86; 12.330.61 (and in a *pada* expunged from the Crit. Ed. = 671*.2 after 1.69.28). Instead, it occurs uncompounded in MBh 1.96.28; 1.171.21; 5.164.11; 6.50.63; 6.99.8; 8.65.40; 12.177.21 (and in 1810*.5 after 1.176.13). Both these compounds *raga/agni-* and *dharma/vṛṣṭi-* are commonly translated as mere *tatpuruṣa*s, as 'fire of passion'/ 'fire of the passions' and 'rain of [his] Dharma'/'rain of the Law' (see Johnston 1936: 15; Schotsman 1995: 16; Olivelle 2008: 27) instead of as *karmadhāraya-tatpuruṣa*s. Nevertheless, the complexity of the Bc homology entails the specific identification of the compared wholes, on the one hand fire and passion, on the other rain and Dharma, whose parts, i.e. respectively, fuel and object of the senses and rain-cloud and Buddha's giving relief to the human beings are involved at the same time, so that an overarching figurative equation is clearly drawn, namely [rain-water : fire = Dharma : passion].

[22] This is well documented in *Nir.* 2.10 as clearly explained by Benedetti (2016: 185 fn.19). As for the use of the compound *yogakṣema-* in the MBh context, see Neri and Pontillo (2019: 52 fn.71).

[23] *svargadvāra* is very often attested to in the hypotext, see e.g. MBh 2.51.13; 5.118.21; 5.119.11; 5.132.29; 6.24.32; 12.100.69; 12.263.45; 12.351.3; 14.93.69.

In some other passages, the constituents of an uncompounded (*a-samasta*) metaphorical identification occurring in the MBh are combined in a compound metaphor (*samasta-rūpaka*) by Aśvaghoṣa. For instance, the *samastarūpaka* occurring in Bc 2.34 *indriya|aśva-* 'the horses [which are] the power of the senses' hints at a well-known philosophical metaphor – mentioned, for example, in *Kaṭha-Upaniṣad* 3.4, *Śvetaśvātara-Upaniṣad* 2.9, and *Maitrāyaṇīya-Upaniṣad* 2.3 always out of compound – comparing faculties of senses to horses. Nonetheless, the first passage employs *haya-* instead of *aśva-*, the second one merely hints at this image by means of a wagon out of control, and the third one focuses on the chariot and all its parts instead of on the horse, while precisely the same two nouns of the Bc passage are used in MBh 14.50.3, out of compound[24].

Perhaps even the compound occurring in Bc 12.1 *ikṣvāku|candrama-* 'that moon of [the] Ikṣvāku [-lineage]' referred to the founder of the Buddha's dynasty might sophistically hint at the phrase *ikṣvākoḥ sūryaputrasya*, used in MBh 12.192.2, to introduce the edifying story of the dispute among Time, Death, king Ikṣvāku and a wise Brahmin[25], recently linked by Brodbeck (2011: 128; 145) to the so-called *Mahābhārata* «switching from lunar to solar ancestry». In the Pūraṇic genealogies – as well as in both the Epics and in the Vedic sources (see Witzel 2005), Ikṣvāku is always referred to as a descendent of the solar line. Thapar (1991: 34) states that the Buddha's presence in the *Sūryavaṃśa* «was an attempt to subordinate the descent of the Buddha by incorporating it into the line of Rāma». In light of this, one could suggest that Aśvaghoṣa adhered to a cultural heritage which envisioned Buddha's dynasty as a lunar lineage opposed to the solar lineage and that he was interested in emphasising this detail.

Now, I shall solely focus on some specific Bc passages, selected through the process explained above.

2. The imagery of sovereignty

2.1. *siṃhanāda-* 'lion's roar'

Consider the following well-known *śloka* from Bc 5, where Aśvaghoṣa describes in detail the choice young Siddhārta has finally made to renounce life in the palace and defy his call to duty as heir. Here, the Buddha becomes aware of his destiny:

> Bc 5.84
> *atha sa vimalapaṅkajāyatākṣaḥ puram avalokya* **nanāda siṃhanādam** |
> *jananamaraṇayor adṛṣṭapāro na puram ahaṃ kapilāhvayaṃ praveṣṭā* ||
> 'Once he looked towards the city, he, whose long eyes [are indeed] stainless lotuses, roared a lion's roar: "I will not enter the city named after Kapila, until after I have seen the shores of birth and death"'.

Here we have an etymological figure based on the verbal base *nad-* 'to sound, to roar' combining a verbal form with a coradical derivative noun *nāda-* 'roar', which is the second constituent of a *tatpuruṣa* compound meaning 'lion's roar'. Thus, the verse does not involve a genuine *samastarūpaka* but the identification of the agent of the action of roaring with the lion is, however, assured by such a compound. In the Pāli Canon, *sīhanāda* conveying the sense of a «proud claim by the Arahat to a

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[24] **indriyāṇi** *mano yuṅkte* **sadaśvān** *iva sārathiḥ | indriyāṇi mano buddhiṃ kṣetrajño yuñjate sadā* || 'The mind always ties down the senses like a charioteer [ties down] good horses, the mind always ties down the senses and the intellect [ties down] the soul'.

[25] *atrāpy udāharantīmam itihāsaṃ purātanam |* **ikṣvākoḥ sūryaputrasya** *yadvṛttaṃ brāhmaṇasya ca* || 'And here they tell – as an example – this ancient tale of Ikṣvāku, son of Sūrya and the deeds of a brahmin'.

dignity and veneration» (Rhys Davids 1969: 208) is also well documented[26], nonetheless, it is used to underscore an averred superiority of the Buddhist ascetics over those ascetics who merely practiced physical self-mortification. And this is not the case as far as Siddhārtha in Bc 5 is concerned, when he is starting on his ascetic way with an extremely trying self-mortification phase included. He is not yet a true renunciant[27]. More in general, as regards the assumption according to which Aśvaghoṣa might have relied on the *Pāli Canon*, Churn Law (1931: 198) suggested that the *Suttanipāta*'s «scheme of anthology does not seem to have been carried into effect before the 2nd century B.C.», but that perhaps the *Vatthugāthā* section of *Nālakasutta* (Sn III 679-698), might have served «as a historical model to the Buddhacarita» (1931: 175). Of course, both the Canon and MBh's circulating background culture could have played the principal role as inspirational sources for the author, but we cannot guess which influenced Aśvaghoṣa to a larger extent. Unfortunately, we are not even sure about the repertory of sources he could rely on during his time (Eltschinger 2013a, 2013b, 2019). Nonetheless, because the *terminus ante quem* of both the MBh (150 B.C.E. according to Hiltebeitel) and the *Tipiṭaka* is considered to be the 2nd century B.C.E.[28], the hypothesis of a textual influence of the Canon on Bc comparative figures proves groundless.

By contrast, as Olivelle (2004) and Hiltebeitel (2006, 2011) pointed out, it is not uncommon to find reiterated usages of typically epic regal symbolism in Buddhist literature. The MBh often employs the same compound *siṃhanāda-* (175 total occurrences, which according to my statistical analysis, are found mostly in MBh VII: 35.4%; VI: 22.3%; VIII: 16.6% and IX: 14.3%) exclusively in battlefield scenes as a war cry combined with the same cognate verb *nanāda*, employed as a formula (30 total occurrences, whose higher frequency is registered also in MBh VI/VII: 33.3%; VIII: 13.3% and IX: 16.7%). Thus, since the lion, *siṃha-*, is as a rule a traditional symbol of the kingly power[29] in the MBh, *de facto* embodying kingship par excellence, the lion image chosen by Aśvaghoṣa to depict the Buddha while he is giving up with his role of prince is consistent with the lion image employed in the MBh more than the one in the Canon. Below are four cases in which the formula occurs:

> MBh 6.49.27
> *pātayām āsa samare **siṃhanādaṃ nanāda** ca |*
> *tato 'pareṇa bhallena hastāc cāpam athācchinat ||*
> 'He [Droṇa] flied [there] and uttered a lion's roar in the battlefield. Then, he ripped the bow from his hand by means of another arrow'.

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[26] During the International Seminar on Nature in Indian Literature, Art, Myth and Ritual (Prague, September 27th-29th, 2018) when the paper was first presented, two Scholars raised some doubts about the hypertextuality of the literary context of the compounds involving bodily features of the Buddha (i.e. *siṃhagati-*, *siṃhanāda-*). They suggested that because they might have been included in the *Lakkhaṇasutta*, which contains the standard list of Buddha's auspicious marks (*lakṣaṇa*s), Aśvaghoṣa would not have necessarily been influenced by the MBh in his use of these figures. Indeed, the Pāli lexicon (Rhys Davids-Stede 1921-1925) does not even provide attestation for *sīhagati* in any section of the Pāli Canon, and, as for *sīhanāda*, it provides several *loci* (A ii.33; M i.71; D i.161, 175; S ii.27, 55; J 119; Miln 22; DhA ii.43, 178; VbhA 398; SnA 163, 203) – and Walshe (1995: 638) points out other occurrences of *sīhanāda* in the *Dīgha Nikāya* (8.22; 16.1.16; 24.2.6ff; 25.1ff; 26.1ff; 28.1) – but none of them occur in the *Lakkhaṇasutta*. In fact, in the *Lakkhaṇasutta* (D xxx.1.2, ed. Carpenter, 1960: 144), the only two standard expressions referred to the Buddha, in which we find the lion involved as a constituent are respectively *sīha|pubbaddha|kāyo* 'his lion-like body' and *sīha|hanu* 'his lion jaw'. Therefore, the *Lakkhaṇasutta* does not seem to have been a direct inspirational source for these Bc figures.

[27] As for Aśvaghoṣa's depiction of Buddha's renunciation, see Tzohar (2019: 325).

[28] See *Brill's Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, Vol. I (2015: 39): «The first roughly datable references to *Tipiṭaka* are, however, found in the Bharhut inscriptions dating from the 2nd century B.C.E.».

[29] Concerning earlier motifs of lion kingship symbolism, see Gokhale (1974) and Irwin (1983) regarding Aśoka's pillars, Gariboldi (2004) for some examples of the symbolism in Sasanian coins and Vassilkov (2015) for Vedic antecedents, which could constitute one of the backgrounds for the main cultural heritage.

MBh 6.84.10
babhūva sarvasainyānāṃ ghorarūpo bhayānakaḥ |
tathaiva pāṇḍavā hṛṣṭāḥ **siṃhanādam athānadan** *||*
'Fear took on a frightful appearance amongst the soldiers, then the Pāṇḍavas, thrilled uttered a lion's roar'.

MBh 8.43.9
nadantaḥ siṃhanādāṃś *ca dhamantaś cāpi vārijān |*
balavanto maheṣvāsā vidhunvanto dhanūṃṣi ca ||
'Roaring lion-roars and blowing the conch-shells, the mighty archers were also shaking their bows'.

MBh 6.97.48
tato 'pareṇa bhallena mādhavasya dhvajottamam |
ciccheda samare drauṇiḥ siṃhanādaṃ nanāda ca ||
'Therefore, Droṇa's son uttered a lion's roar and sliced off that excellent emblem of the descendant of Madhu in the battlefield by means of another arrow'.

We can observe how the formula refers to characters traditionally recognised as ascetic warriors (Droṇa, the Pāṇḍavas, Yudhiṣṭhira and Aśvatthāman), rhetorically weaving a complex homology between the powerful image of the lion's roar and the chieftain's war-cry. The first impression is that Aśvaghoṣa might simply have re-used the formula with the intent of amusing his audience, presumably well-versed in brahmins and warriors' customs and well-aware of the epic models he is referring to. But if we go deeper into the interpretation, taking into account the referred-to context from MBh, we realise that Aśvaghoṣa might have been trying to establish a more structured link between the ascetic imagery connected with the Buddha and the epic background of war, combining both the Buddhist and the ascetic-warrior background imageries of lion-roar. The percentage of both the *rūpaka* and the formula (35%) is higher in correspondence to books VI and VII, associated with renowned high-profile characters iconic of the warrior-ascetic type, whereas it is almost absent in the first and the last five *Parvan*s and far lower in *Parvan*s seven through nine (14-16%). Aśvaghoṣa, in my opinion, combined the testified usage of the formula in the epic context with the new Bc context in order to intentionally depict the Buddha himself as an ascetic warrior.

2.2. *siṃhagati*- 'lion's gait'

The selected passage of the hypertext is located at the beginning of the first canto, concluding the introductory narration regarding the miraculous conditions of the Buddha's incarnation and birth. Once again, a *tatpuruṣa* compound hints at an identification between Buddha and a lion, namely between Buddha's and a lion's gait:

Bc 1.15
bodhāya jāto 'smi jagaddhitārtham antyā bhavotpattir iyaṃ mameti |
caturdiśaṃ **siṃhagatir** *vilokya vāṇīṃ ca bhavyārthakarīm uvāca ||*
'Having observed the four directions, he, whose gait is that of a lion, uttered auspicious words for the future: "Destined to enlightenment, I was born for the world's well-being. This is my last birth"'.

The compound occurs 13 times in the hypotext (most frequently in MBh I/V: 27.8% and VI: 16.7%), variously expressed with a third member. It is employed respectively to describe Kṛṣṇa (5.135.23), the Pāṇḍavas generally (1.186.10), Bhīma (2.68.23; 3.157.26; 6.93.22), Arjuna (1.179.9; 7.59.16),

Yudhiṣṭhira (1.180.20), Karṇa (12.1.19) and other warriors[30]. The first passage below is drawn from an *adhyāya* focused on the celebrations for the choice of Draupadī's future groom, whereas the second one is set in the aftermath of the Pāṇḍavas' loss of the dice game, where Duryodhana mocks Bhīma's gait.

> MBh 1.180.20
> *yo 'sau purastāt kamalāyatākṣas tanur **mahāsiṃhagatir** vinītaḥ |*
> *gauraḥ pralambojjvalacārughoṇo viniḥsṛtaḥ so 'cyuta dharmarājaḥ ||*
> 'And the one with the eyes like lotus petals, slender and modest, with a lion's walk, fair-skinned, with an aquiline, shining nose, who earlier left must have been King Dharma'. (tr. Van Buitenen 1973)

> MBh 2.68.23
> *vaiśaṃpāyana uvāca |*
> *tasya rājā **siṃhagateḥ** sakhelaṃ duryodhano bhīmasenasya harṣāt |*
> *gatiṃ svagatyānucakāra mando nirgacchatāṃ pāṇḍavānāṃ sabhāyāḥ ||*
> 'Vaiśaṃpāyana said: "As the Pāṇḍavas left the assembly hall, Duryodhana stupidly imitated. He a king, in a playful and frolicsome spirit, Bhīma's lion-strides with his own gait"'. (tr. Van Buitenen 1975)

Whereas *siṃhanāda-/sīhanāda-* conveys an established imagery in the Pāli Canon (see fn.26), even though it does not seem the direct inspirational source for the Bc passage involving this compound, *siṃhagati-* has no counterpart in the Canon, which suggests ultimately that Aśvaghoṣa could have independently drawn most of the lion imagery from the epic. Moreover, the hypothesis is corroborated by the fact that the subjects whose gait is identified with that of a lion are indeed prominent characters, renown as ascetic warriors.

2.3. *mṛgājira-* 'Arena of deer'

Among the several figurative speaking passages relying on regal animal symbolism I analysed in the Bc, I have isolated another example regarding the *tatpuruṣa* compound *mṛgājira-* related to the group of hermits which the Buddha encountered, when he decided to lead a *brahmacārin* life. The well-known passage envisions Śākyamuni as winning the debate on crucial issues between him and a Brahmin.

> Bc 7.2
> *sa rājasūnur mṛgarājagāmī **mṛgājiraṃ** tan mṛgavat praviṣṭaḥ |*
> *lakṣmīviyukto 'pi śarīralakṣmyā cakṣūṃsi sarvāśramiṇāṃ jahāra ||*
> 'The king's son, who moves as the king of beasts, after entering that arena of deer as a deer indeed, although deprived of the royal splendour, caught the eyes of all the hermits by the means of the splendour of his figure'.

Here there are two selected MBh passages containing two *upamā*s which I have connected to the hypertext, not because of a precise compound correspondence (as was the case for *siṃhanāda-* in the previous example) but owing to a shared interpretative imagery of a winner/non-winner duality:

> MBh 7.3.13
> *adya prabhṛti saṃkruddhā vyāghrā iva **mṛgakṣayam** |*
> *pāṇḍavā bharataśreṣṭha kariṣyanti kurukṣayam ||*

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[30] *siṃhavikrāntagati-* 'lion's wide strides gait' MBh 1.186.10; *siṃharṣabhagati-* 'gait of a bull and of a lion' MBh 3.157.26; 7.59.16 (and, said of Śaṃtanu, in a passage expunged from Pune's Critical Ed.= 964*.1 after 1.94.14c); *siṃhakhelagati-* 'lion's trembling gait' MBh 5.135.23; 5.154.18 said of Balarāma; 6.93.22; 12.1.19 (and in 1840*.1 after 1.179.9).

'O foremost of the Bharatas, from today onward, the sons of Pāṇḍu greatly enraged, will do to the Kuru race what tigers do to the deer's race'.

In the literary context in which this first *upamā* appears, the great slaughter between the factions took place. Karṇa is speaking to a heavily wounded Bhīṣma about the tide of war against the Kaurava, depicting a vivid scene of an envisaged victory, in which the tigers chasing the deer are *upamāna*s for the Pāṇḍavas, and the Kauravas respectively.

> MBh 8.58.18
> *mahāvane **mṛgagaṇā** dāvāgnigrasitā yathā |*
> *kuravaḥ paryavartanta nirdagdhāḥ savyasācinā ||*
> 'The descendants of the Kuru flew off in all directions, burnt up by Savyasācin, as if they were herds of deer swallowed by the fire in a large forest'.

This second *upamā* is located in a section concerning the aftermath of the battle. Here Sañjaya is narrating how Arjuna burnt Dhṛtaraṣṭra's sons to death, and again the image of the routed faction is envisioned through the analogy with deer – this time, herds of them – cornered in a burning forest.

By presenting these cross-references, I wish to advance the hypothesis by which Aśvaghoṣa could have employed this metaphorical identification to hint at the fact that the hermits that Buddha encounters are vulnerable to his ideas. Although *mṛgājira-* 'arena of deers' is not the same as *mṛgakṣaya-*, 'house, abode of deers' and it is completely different from *mṛgagaṇa-* 'herd of deers', what is relevant here is the fact that Aśvaghoṣa describes the Buddha as he enters, walking (*-gāmin*) like the *mṛgarāja*, the king of beasts – this suggests that he can enter like a king, because later on, he will indeed come out as a winner. In the MBh there are 6 occurrences (MBh 4.16.7; 5.118.10; 12.112.21, 48, 55; 12.121.15) of the lexicalised compound *mṛgarāja-*, however, in one instance it is employed as a *upamāna* for Bhīma:

> MBh 4.16.7
> *sā lateva mahāśālaṃ phullaṃ gomatitīrajam |*
> *bāhubhyāṃ parirabhyainaṃ prābodhayad aninditā |*
> *siṃhaṃ suptaṃ vane durge **mṛgarāja**vadhūr iva ||*
> 'Like a creeping plant around a great tree in blossom born on the bank of the *Gomatī* river, that virtuous woman (Draupadī) with [her] arms clasping [around] him, woke [him] up, like the female of the king of beasts in the unattainable forest [wakes up] the sleeping lion'.

The association hermit-deer is a recurrent image (Olivelle 2011: 94), however, I think that the co-existence in the same verse with the term *mṛgarāja-* is a subtle hint at the superior nature incarnated by the Buddha, who is not merely a common hermit. This metaphorical identification employed by Aśvaghoṣa is an efficient means of reminding his audience of the common epic war framework where the image of deer assailed by tigers is traditionally associated with the adverse faction. Again, I cannot presume what Aśvaghoṣa actually had in mind, but by providing these cross-references I want to show how the MBh instances can be included when considering plausible literary sources the author drew from. Indeed, I consider the lexical choice of *ajira-* 'arena' as being a specific hint at the contest which is going to take place there later between the hermits and the Buddha himself. If confirmed, this all ultimately could result in a subtle hypertextuality between the kingly depiction of the Buddha as a *primus inter pares* in the group of hermits, as a *mṛgarāja-*, and the ancient *kṣatriya* heroic context of the MBh (Malinar 2007: 38).

3. Hypertextuality of *samastavastuviṣayarūpaka*s

3.1. *duḥkhārṇava-* 'ocean of sorrow' / *jñānaplava-* 'boat of knowledge'

Now let us consider the cross-references that have been singled out with respect to the renowned *śloka* focused on the *samastavastuviṣayarūpaka* of the ocean of sorrow. Here, the seer Asita addresses the prophecies regarding the fate of Śuddhodhana's son:

> Bc 1.70
> *duḥkhārṇavād vyādhivikīrṇaphenāj jarātaraṅgān maraṇogravegāt |*
> *uttārayiṣyaty ayam uhyamānam ārtaṃ jagaj jñānamahāplavena ||*
> 'With the powerful boat of knowledge, he will rescue the world, oppressed and carried away, from a sea of sorrow, whose scattered foam is the sickness, whose waves are old age, whose dreadful stream is death'.

I shall not dwell on the established references regarding the *duḥkhārṇava-* compound and its variants such as *śokasagara-* which are found in the MBh, to which Pontillo and Rossi devoted a section of an inquiry on the ocean imagery in Sanskrit and Pāli sources (2003), and which is also the focus of a chapter of Boccali and Pontillo (2010). What is relevant here is to inquire whether a prior usage of the metaphor regarding the act of crossing the ocean with the boat of knowledge (*jñānaplava-*) exists or not in the MBh, in order to acknowledge the latter as a reliable source of the Bc. In the hypotext, *plava-* occurs in *samastarūpaka*s conveying the idea of something as a means to overcome a particular condition of danger such as *dharmaplava-* (1.69.19), *putraplava-* (5.116.7), and *vedayajñaplava-* (12.227.14).

As a matter of fact, three cross-references can be selected because there is the image of knowledge as a means of safety, even employed in a similar context. In MBh 8.49.116, Yudhiṣṭhira is asking Kṛṣṇa for advice about his previous argument with Arjuna regarding the decision to kill Karṇa or not, since Bhīma's life is at stake. After speaking to Kṛṣṇa, he thanks him for having granted them his *buddhi* as their *plava*, because his wisdom helped them to safely survive within an ocean of grief:

> MBh 8.49.116
> *tvad**buddhiplavam** āsādya duḥkhaśokārṇavād vayam |*
> *samuttīrṇāḥ sahāmātyāḥ sanāthāḥ sma tvayācyuta ||*
> 'O Acyuta! Since we received the raft of your intelligence, we have crossed over the ocean of grief and remorse together with our ministers and allies'.

It seems that Aśvaghoṣa may hint at this precise quote from MBh from both a literary and a rhetorical point of view. Indeed, the Bc *śloka* reiterates the same metaphorical identification only to extend it in a more complex one, i.e. the *samastavastuviṣayarūpaka*. Given this premise, the poet seems to have the hypotext in mind, and we can see that not only has he taken it into account, but that he has also taken it further. Whereas Yudhiṣṭhira metaphorically identifies Kṛṣṇa's *buddhi* as the only means that can assure him and his brothers the skills to overcome an obstacle, Asita strengthens this concept. He declares that not only does Śuddhodhana's son embody the knowledge that can get through the *duḥkhārṇava*, but also states that he will indeed be celebrated as the one who can genuinely overcome the *duḥkha* itself and all the elements that cause it: sickness (*vyādhi*), old age (*jarā*) and death (*maraṇa*). Eltschinger, interestingly points out (2018: 321-331) how the age of Śuddhodhana is hailed as incredibly peaceful and devoid of deleterious events – this is a distinctive characteristic of MBh rulers in the golden age as well. Viewing it from this perspective, we may say that the Buddha should represent the culmination of such a golden age, thereby, according to this interpretation, Aśvaghoṣa might have wanted to give substance to eschatological themes that recur in major sections of the epic such as the *Bhagavadgīta*, as shown by the following example:

MBh 6.26.36
api cedasi pāpebhyaḥ sarvebhyaḥ pāpakṛttamaḥ |
sarvaṃ jñānaplavenaiva vṛjinaṃ saṃtariṣyasi ||
'[The Holy one said:] 'If you were also the greatest sinner amongst all sinful men, you would (still) cross over the whole ocean of your sin by means of the boat of Knowledge»'''.

Another quote refers to a chapter in which a discussion about knowledge takes place between Vyāsa and his son Śuka regarding the possibility of avoiding birth and death. Vyāsa says that being devoted to knowledge – being *dhīra* – is the primary state to obtain in order to be able to acknowledge *śānti*:

MBh 12.229.1
*vyāsa uvāca | atha **jñānaplavaṃ** dhīro gṛhītvā śāntim āsthitaḥ |*
unmajjaṃśca nimajjaṃśca jñānam evābhisaṃśrayet ||
'Vyāsa said: "After catching the raft of Knowledge, dwelling on peace, the wise man, who is [incessantly] emerging and sinking, should resort to Knowledge"'.

The idea expressed here is similar to the one conveyed in the Bc, so that one could be justified in thinking that the hints at hypertextuality are broadly reliable.

3.1.1. *maraṇogravega- 'Death [which] is the fearsome [ocean's] stream'*

The last observation to be made on Bc 1.70 concerns the metaphorical identification of death (*maraṇa*) as the fearsome tides (*ugravega*) of the ocean.

MBh 8.67.17
[16: *ādatta pārtho 'ñjalikaṃ*]
marmacchidaṃ śoṇitamāṃsadigdhaṃ vaiśvānarārkapratimaṃ mahārham |
narāśvanāgāsuharaṃ tryaratniṃ ṣaḍvājam añjogatim ugravegam ||
'[Arjuna (Pṛthā's son) seized an *añjalika* arrow], which was capable of cutting through the joints, covered with flesh and blood, similar to the fire or to the sun, powerful, grasping men, horses and elephants, three arms long, endowed with the strength of six, very fast, provided with a terrible impetus'.

The compound is regularly used in the MBh[31] as a trait of exceptional weapons (such as Arjuna's arrow in the above-mentioned quote) which can be qualified as an instrument of death. But what is truly interesting is the employment of a metaphor in another passage from the hypotext, namely a *samastavastuviṣayarūpaka* which identifies the lifetime with a runaway horse:

MBh. 12.309.24-5
avyaktaprakṛtir ayaṃ kalāśarīraḥ sūkṣmātmā kṣaṇatruṭiśo nimeṣa romā |
ṛtvāsyaḥ samabalaśuklakṛṣṇanetro māṃsāṅgo dravati vayo hayo narāṇām ||24||
*taṃ dṛṣṭvā prasṛtam ajasram **ugravegaṃ** gacchantaṃ satatam ihāvyapekṣamāṇam |*
cakṣus te yadi na parapraṇetṛṇeyaṃ dharme te bhavatu manaḥ paraṃ niśamya ||25||
'The body of a minute is this unmanifest nature: his essence is subtle [made of] instants and the smallest units of time, the blinking of an eye is its hair. Seasons are its mouth, [the two halves of the lunar month] the bright one and the dark one form its two equally powerful eyes, months are its limbs, this winged horse flies among men. After seeing this, endowed perpetually with a terrible impetus, continually moving forward and looking forward to be here, if your eye does not lead you elsewhere, let your mind be put on the Dharma, after extinguishing everything else!'

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[31] MBh 6.55.107; 6.55.118; 6.59.29; 8.17.11; 8.60.4; 8.65.2, 36; 8.66.36; 8-9; 9.16.9, 40; 9.19.13.

Of course, I cannot prove that Aśvaghoṣa might have intentionally overturned a metaphorical identification connected to the idea of life into one involving the idea of death. It must also be said that in the hypotext the *samastarūpaka* is, in one instance, co-referent of an animal (the horse) and, in the other, co-referent of an inanimate object (the arrow), but it is quite likely his well-educated audience would have been able to grasp the subtle implication of *maraṇogravega-*.

There are some attestations in the hypotext, of old age and death combined in metaphorical identifications with the ocean:

> MBh 12.228.7
> *taraty eva mahādurgaṃ **jarāmaraṇasāgaram*** /
> 'Indeed, he overcomes the ocean of old age and death [which is] very difficult to be crossed, in such manner'.

> MBh 6.35.8
> *indriyārtheṣu vairāgyam anahaṃkāra eva ca* |
> *janma**mṛtyujarāvyādhi**duḥkhadoṣānudarśanam* ||
> 'The consideration for birth, death, old age, sickness, sorrow and guilt [results in] aversion towards the objects of sense and so is absence of self-conceit'.

> MBh 12.9.33
> *janma**mṛtyujarāvyādhi**vedanābhir upadrutam* |
> *asāram imam asvantaṃ saṃsāraṃ tyajataḥ sukham* ||
> 'Happy is he who abandons this worthless rebirth which is overwhelmed with birth, death, decay, disease, and pain, and which will come to no good end'. (tr. Fitzgerald 2004)

These occurrences might suggest that Aśvaghoṣa could have drawn the imagery of soteriological ideas conveyed by metaphorical identifications of overcoming the final stages of life precisely from the assumed hypotext. Once again, a statistical analysis helps us to better highlight the frequency of these compounds. The highest value regards the occurrence of *jñānaplava-* in the *Śanti Parvan* (75%), the book, which both Johnston and Hiltebeitel have assumed Aśvaghoṣa plausibly knew. More recently Eltschinger (2018: 317) replied to this evaluation, by maintaining that «the closest parallels to Aśvaghoṣa's Śuddhodana are definitively to be found in the Śāntiparvan of the MBh», but:

> This is certainly not to say that Aśvaghoṣa knew this section of the MBh, and even less so in the form in which it has come down to us. For the core of the political theory spelt out in MBh 12 […] One can thus easily imagine that Aśvaghoṣa and the compiler(s) of MBh 12.1–128 drew on (a) common source(s). (Eltschinger 2018: 317)

Awaiting broader studies on the matter, it can be said that these data represent a further step in taking into serious consideration the hypothesis that the MBh – and in particular the twelfth book – can be viewed as an inspirational source for the Bc, along with others of which we no longer have any trace.

3.2. *jñānadruma-* 'Tree [which is] knowledge'

This stanza is located in the Canto which depicts the Buddha's victory over Māra. In this particular case a *samastavastuviṣayarūpaka* is played, where the Buddha is ultimately the *upamāna* for a growing tree, itself identified with the knowledge:

> Bc 13.65
> *kṣamāśipho dhairyavigāḍhamūlaś cāritrapuṣpaḥ smṛtibuddhiśākhaḥ* |
> ***jñānadrumo** dharmaphalapradātā notpāṭanaṃ hy arhati vardhamānaḥ* ||

'The tree of knowledge, whose fibres are patience, whose roots are plunged into firmness, whose flowers are good conduct, whose branches are *smṛti* and *buddhi*, which bears fruits which are Dharma, indeed must not be eradicated while it is growing'.

The hypotext gives an account of a *samastavastuviṣayopama* where the *upamāna*s are respectively the Pāṇḍavas and the Kaurava, both compared with a tree:

> MBh 1.1.65-6
> *duryodhano manyumayo **mahādrumaḥ** skandhaḥ karṇaḥ śakunis tasya śākhāḥ |*
> *duḥśāsanaḥ puṣpaphale samṛddhe mūlaṃ rājā dhṛtarāṣṭro 'manīṣī ||65||*
> *yudhiṣṭhiro dharmamayo mahādrumaḥ skandho 'rjuno bhīmaseno 'sya śākhāḥ |*
> *mādrīsutau puṣpaphale samṛddhe mūlaṃ kṛṣṇo brahma ca brāhmaṇāśca ||66||*
> 'Duryodhana, the one filled with resentment is the great tree, Karṇa its trunk, Śakuni its branches, Duḥśāsana its flourishing flowers and fruits, the fool King Dhṛtarāṣṭra its roots. Yudhiṣṭhira, the one filled with virtue is the great tree, Arjuna its trunk, Bhīmasena its branches, the two sons of Mādrī the flourishing flowers and fruits, Kṛṣṇa, the Brahman and the brahmans, its roots'.

The following occurrence regards instead an uncompounded *rūpaka* where the conduct (*cāritra*) of Duryodhana is compared to a tree partially uprooted (*chinna-*):

> MBh 5.71.22
> *īṣatkāryo vadhastasya yasya **cāritram** īdṛśam |*
> *praskambhanapratistabdhaś **chinnamūla** iva **drumaḥ** ||*
> 'It takes a little to kill one who behaves like that – a tree with its roots cut and precariously balanced on the base of its trunk!' (tr. Van Buitenen 1978)

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of such MBh imagery in the weaving of the texture in the above-mentioned Bc figure.

3.2.1. *dharmaphala- 'Fruit [which is] Dharma'*

Bc 13.65 *dharmaphala-* deserves separate mention. In the hypertext, it is compounded with *pradātṛ-* as an *upapadasamāsa* referred to the *jñānadruma-*, Johnston (1936: 63) and Olivelle (2008: 395) interpret it as a *tatpuruṣa* compound. However, given that a complex metaphorical identification is made and the former compounds are tied by a predicative relation and share the same substratum (*samānādhikaraṇa*, cf. A 2.1.49), I endorse Cowell's reading (1894: 146) and propose to read *dharmaphala-* in *dharmaphalapradātṛ* as a *karmadhāraya* ('which bears fruits *which are* Dharma'). In the MBh *dharmaphala-* occurs 25 times (MBh XII: 40.9%; I: 22.7%) as a *tatpuruṣa* compound always in sections regarding *kṣatriya* or householder's duties, as well as merits granted to he who undertakes ascetic life[32]. By re-proposing Cowell's reading, I want to highlight Aśvaghoṣa's intention of playing with an audience accustomed to an interpretation of *dharmaphala-* as a *tatpuruṣa* compound, proving him to be a skillfull poet who seems to have a conscious command of his literary sources. Moreover, in one instance, the compound also occurs as an *upapadasamāsa* with the final root/noun *-da-* 'giver' in the MBh:

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[32] MBh 1.13.21; 1.101.26; 1.116.23 (and Appendix 52.30 after 1.88.12); 3.32.2-5; 3.186.44 *adharmaphala-*; 3.81.56; 5.143.7; 12.7.4; 12.47.32; 12.76.21; 12.116.21; 12.184.6; 12.132.2; 12.211.41; 12.259.35; 12.263.26; 13.128.58; 13.129.41; 13.131.15; 14.94.23.

MBh 1.111.31[33]
apatyaṃ **dharmaphaladaṃ** *śreṣṭhaṃ vindanti sādhavaḥ |*
ātmaśukrād api pṛthe manuḥ svāyambhuvo 'bravīt ||
'"The strict find offspring the first granter of the fruits of the Law, even if born outside one's own seed", Pṛthā, quoth Manu Svāyaṃbhuva'. (tr. Van Buitenen 1973)

4. *Samastarūpaka*s whose reading entails a deeper level of interpretation

4.1. *mohatamas*- 'Illusion [which] is darkness'

Finally, I shall focus on two passages in which Aśvaghoṣa seems to re-use MBh sentences, but simply by changing the word-order or by replacing a single constituent in an otherwise perfectly matching figurative compound.

> Bc 1.69
> *vihāya rājyaṃ viṣayeṣv anāsthas tīvraiḥ prayatnair adhigamya tattvam |*
> *jagaty ayaṃ mohatamo nihantuṃ jvaliṣyati jñānamayo hi sūryaḥ //*
> 'Indifferent to the objects of senses, leaving behind the kingdom, after having discovered the essence through intense efforts, this sun which is knowledge indeed, will shine forth in the world to destroy the darkness of illusion'.

The *śloka* is the last of a well-structured climax in which Asita the seer has made his prophecy regarding the destiny of Śuddhodhana's child. There is a clear antithesis between the last word in the *pada*, *sūrya* – *upamāna* for the Buddha – and the previous *rūpaka mohatamas* as a declared *tatpuruṣa* compound.

> MBh 3.160.21-2
> *yatayas tatra gacchanti bhaktyā nārāyaṇaṃ harim |*
> *pareṇa tapasā yuktā bhāvitāḥ karmabhiḥ śubhaiḥ ||21||*
> *yogasiddhā mahātmānas tamomohavivarjitāḥ |*
> *tatra gatvā punar nemaṃ lokam āyānti bhārata ||22||*
> 'Ascetics go there to Nārāyaṇa Hari through their devotion, yoked with the utmost austerity and perfected by their holy deeds. Great-spirited, perfected by Yoga, devoid of darkness and delusion, they go there and no more return to this world, Bhārata'. (tr. Van Buitenen 1975)

The MBh passage quoted here is located in a chapter where the Pāṇḍavas undergo various trials during the time spent on the forest. They were accompanied by the *purohita* Dhaumya who, while showing them Mount Meru, tells them about the sacred abode of Nārāyaṇa. The sentence alludes to a particular condition to be achieved in order to prevent them returning (*na āyānti*) to this world (*imam lokam*), that is, they have to be free from (*vivarjitāḥ*) *tamas* and *moha*. Once again, we have the same *rūpaka* whose constituents are however in reverse order and in a *dvandva* compound rather than a *tatpuruṣa* one. The context similarity relies on aiming in both cases at achieving a final and essential state of liberation. From a rhetorical point of view, it could be stated that Aśvaghoṣa may have made a pun to better highlight the discussion on *mokṣa* and present the Buddhist answer to it, compared to the Brahmanic one reflected in the MBh, opposing a Buddhist subtraction to a Brahmanic addition. Olivelle recently highlighted (2019: 268) the weight of the role of theological disputes in the Bc, as well in the *Saundarananda*:

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[33] *dharmaphaladam* also occurs in MBh 1181*.4 after 1.111.17.

[…] Aśvaghoṣa argues for the Buddha's message of liberation from within the framework of Brahmanical or Vedic theology. His *Apologia* is […] a narrowly and finely reasoned theological argument focused on the conversion of his fellow Brahmins and, perhaps, as a justification, an *Apologia*, for his own conversion.

In the light of this statement, it could be said that Aśvaghoṣa employed this metaphorical identification in order to reflect on the doctrine regarding giving up worldly pleasure as a soteriological means, establishing a link with the MBh source[34], which was eventually known to the audience he was addressing.

4.2. *bāṣpapratodābhihata-* 'Spurred by the goad of tears'

The final sophisticated reference concerns Aśvaghoṣa's hinting at a very specific context. The *tatpuruṣa* in the Bc *śloka* reproduces exactly the same expression contained in the MBh sentence except for the first constituent of the compound: *vākya-* 'words' is replaced with *baṣpa-* 'tears'.

> Bc 9.1
> *tatas tadā mantripurohitau tau bāṣpapratodābhihatau nṛpeṇa |*
> *viddhau sadaśvāv iva sarvayatnāt sauhārdaśīghraṃ yayatur vanaṃ tat ||*
> 'Then, the king's counsellor and the chaplain headed quickly to the forest out of friendship, struck by the whip of tears for the king ['s situation], incited with every effort like two good horses'.

> Cf. MBh 142*.4-5 after 1.2.156
> *<vākyapratodābhihato yatra kṛṣṇena pāṇḍavaḥ |*
> *gāṇḍīvadhanvā samare sarvaśastrabhṛtāṃ varaḥ ||>*
> 'There, the Pāṇḍava who has *gāṇḍīva* for [his] bow, is smitten by Kṛṣṇa with the whip of words, the best of all the weapon-bearers in battle'.

Aśvaghoṣa paints a very sharp image in the hypertext. The *rūpaka* alludes to the sorrow caused by the *loss* of the prince, because he renounced his legacy. In the hypotext Arjuna is the one who is suffering, spurred on by the whip of Kṛṣṇa's words. We thus have a contextual similarity of intense suffering supported by a matching figurative compound.

5. Conclusions

5.1. Future research perspectives

Lastly, at the end of this survey, I shall limit myself to mentioning two categories of Bc metaphorical identifications that will be the object of future inquiries, but which could be useful in accounting for the complexity of the hypertextual dynamics that the Bc entails. The first category concerns metaphorical identifications that can be classified as belonging to the military semantic area, according to one constituent of the compound (cf. Table 1). For instance, Bc 11.62 *jarāyudha-* 'with old age for [his] weapon' is quoted by Boccali and Pontillo (2010: 118) as a useful example of cases that can be considered as complex metaphors, even though it does not fall within «categories established by Daṇḍin, Udbhaṭa and Rudraṭa» because «the principal relationship is expressed by an

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[34] I am grateful to the reviewer who brought to my attention that in RV 10.162.6 there is an occurrence of the word *tamas* with the verb root *muh-*: *yás tvā svápnena **támasā mohayitvā́** nipádyate | mohayitvā́ nipádyate | prajā́ṃ yás te jíghāṃsati tám itó nāśayāmasi || tám itó nāśayāmasi ||* 'Who, having stupefied you with sleep, with darkness, goes down on you, who intends to smite your offspring, that one we banish from here' (tr. Jamison-Brereton, 2014: 1644). This comparable ṚV phrase could reinforce the hypothesis of an intentional wordplay perhaps with more than one hypotext.

upamā […] but each of the two subordinate relationships is a *rūpaka*» (2010: 117-118). To be sure, a broader study of all these military metaphorical identifications compared to the potential occurrences and cross-references in the hypotext, could ultimately result in giving substance to the hypothesis of Aśvaghoṣa's intentional depiction of the Buddha as an ascetic warrior.

The second category regards instead those metaphorical identifications that can be classified as belonging to that which later in time will become the prototypical *rūpaka* of the lover's face (*mukha-*, *vaktra-*) with the lotus (*paṅkaja-*, *ambhoja-*, *padma-*), i.e. Bc 3.19 and 4.36.

Bc 3.19
vātāyanebhyas tu viniḥsṛtāni parasparāyāsitakuṇḍalāni |
*strīṇāṃ virejur **mukhapaṅkajāni** |*
saktāni harmyeṣv iva paṅkajāni ||
'But the lotus-faces of the women, emerging from the windows and mutually setting their earrings in perpetual commotion, seemed like lotuses stuck on to the pavilions'. (tr. Johnston, 1936)

Bc 4.36
*kācit padmavanād etya sapadmā **padmalocanā** |*
***padmavaktrasya** pārśve 'sya padmaśrīr iva tasthuṣī ||*
'Another lotus-eyed[35] damsel came from a lotus-bed with a lotus and stood by the side of the lotus-faced prince as if she were Padmaśrī'. (tr. Johnston, 1936)

It is noteworthy that in the hypotext there are attestations of the compounded-*rūpaka*s however much they do not refer to the beloved women, but exceptionally related to warrior's faces, i.e. MBh 3.44.31-2. Other occurrences can be found, even though employed as similes, i.e. MBh 3.186.87 *padmanibhalocanaḥ*; MBh 2.58.36 *padmavad vaktraṃ* and MBh 13.11.3 *padmasamānavaktrām*.

Other occurrences recur in *loci* expunged from the MBh Critical Edition, i.e. 1833*.4 after 1.178.17[36]; 1943*.1 after 1.192.15[37]; 263*.1 after 1.16.6[38]. Of course, one wonders what the directionality in the journey of these images was. And I cannot exclude that the later Kāvya imagery influenced these passages, which have been classified as interpolations to be expunged.

5.2. Is the hypertextuality theory plausible?

In the end, the collected data shown here can lead to a first order of assumptions, concerning three fundamental guidelines or, let us say, paradigms to which the author would (intentionally) refer:

1.   The re-use of expressions attested as formulas in the hypotext (Bc 5.84 *nanāda siṃhanādam* [§2.1]) or epithets traditionally attributed to characters of high morals, to intentionally qualify the Buddha in continuity with the great heroes of MBh (Bc 1.15 *siṃhagati-* [§2.2]);

2.   Wordplays with the audience by means of erudite puns hinting at the hypotext (Bc 9.1 *bāṣpapratodābhihatau* / MBh 1.2.156 *vākyapratodābhihato* [§4.2]), or by operating a metathesis of the head of the compound, with shifts of meaning on a conceptual level (Bc 1.69 *mohatamas* / MBh 3.160.22 *tamomoha* [§4.1]);

3.   The reprocessing of the *samastavastuviṣayarūpaka* of the hypotext which are adapted in the hypertext, or complex metaphorical identifications, already high-lighted in the main constituents (Bc 1.70 *duḥkhārṇava-*; Bc 13.65 *jñānadruma-* [§3]) especially by expanding and refining them in a poetic way, in conformity with Kāvya style.

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[35] Occurs in Bc 12.118 as a synonym (i.e. *cāṣapaṅktaya-*).
[36] *<evaṃ karṇe vinirdhūte dhanuṣānye nṛpottamāḥ | cakṣurbhir api nāpaśyan vinamra**mukhapaṅkajāḥ** |>*
[37] *<mukhāni dhārtarāṣṭrāṇāṃ dṛṣṭvā kṣattā mudānvitaḥ | vikasaddhṛn**mukhāmbhojaḥ** padmaṃ dṛṣṭveva bhāskaram>*
[38] *<acodayad ameyātmā phaṇīndraṃ **padmalocanaḥ**>* /

On the basis of this preliminary inquiry into the intertextuality of Bc compounded-*rūpaka*s, I consider that Aśvaghoṣa's awareness of MBh sources can be a reliable working hypothesis. In particular, *Parvan* I, V-IX and XII are eligible as the books from which Aśvaghoṣa could have drawn most as Johnston first stated, followed by Hiltebeitel. Such data are even confirmed in terms of Aśvaghoṣa's *rūpaka*s' and the selection of other figurative passages. The large spectrum of selected figurative cross-references should force us to reconsider the exclusion of the MBh as a crucial literary model of the *mahākāvya* Bc.

From a technical point of view, in the context of the contemporary debate about the origin of the *arthālaṃkara*s (see e.g. Bronner's monograph on the origin of *śleṣa* [2010]), I believe that the results of the present first step of research, essentially targeted on the Bc re-use of the MBh *samastarūpaka*s, may help in establishing how far the *arthālaṃkara* story had developed during Aśvaghoṣa's lifetime. The number of *samastarūpaka*s I singled out in the Bc clearly confirms that a mature stage of a complex usage of *rūpaka*s in Kāvya poetry is already documented at the beginning of the Kāvya literature. Indeed, as emphasized in Sudyka's statement on the origin of *sargabandha*[39], Kāvya poetry must unavoidably respect the *arthālaṃkara* rules. It is therefore reasonable that some considerations of metaphorical identification – perhaps not yet systematic – must have paved the way for the works of Daṇḍin and Bhāmaha and perhaps for the *Naṭyaśāstra* of Bharata, as well.

On the other hand, from a content perspective, the hypertextual relation postulated here could beg the question as to whether or not Aśvaghoṣa might have intentionally referred to the MBh to poetically mould a particular image of the Buddha as an ascetic warrior. Viewed from the perspective of a historical-cultural reconstruction, the complexity of literary and rhetorical-technical strategies adopted by Aśvaghoṣa, through the echoing, or rather, the mention of metaphorical identifications from MBh, seems to demonstrate at least an intentional resonance of the cultural substratum of Epic poetry and special attention paid to the figure of the ascetic-warrior in a Buddhist frame (see above §2). Such an assumed intentionality – as already proposed in Pontillo (2013a) – might have been aimed at displaying an attainable dialogue – not an aprioristic refusal – between the legacy of Vedic and Brahmanic culture and the soteriological way embodied by Buddhism.

Index of Passages

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[39] «The origin of the *sargabhanda,* although indebted to the Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa tradition […] is strongly connected to the origin and development of Kāvya literature itself» (Sudyka 2011: 31-32).

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