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## The *Mahāvastu* and the *Vinayapiṭaka* of the Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravādins\*

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“This [i.e., the historical understanding of literary works] implies, in its very principle, that attention be paid to the manner by which are defined, in each historical setting, the categories used to designate, describe and classify discourses. To this end, we need to break with the projection presupposing our own concepts and criteria to be universal, and to consider these within their own history.”<sup>1</sup>

Eugène Burnouf, the great father of Indian Buddhist Studies, is the first Western scholar to have taken into account the *Mahāvastu*, a copy of which was part of the second load of manuscripts sent by Brian H. Hodgson from Kathmandu to the Société Asiatique. The manuscripts reached Paris for the assembly of the society on July 14<sup>th</sup> 1837, “a day which will be remembered for a long time among friends of Oriental studies,” to quote from Burnouf’s emphatic letter in response to Hodgson.<sup>2</sup> Burnouf’s cursory reading of the

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\* I am much honored to publish some of the results of my work on the *Mahāvastu* in the present journal, since my research on the Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravādin textual tradition benefited greatly from my stay at the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology, from February till May 2008, as a fellow sponsored by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science. Especially, I owe much to Prof. Seishi Karashima, who generously shared his time and immense knowledge with me. Most of the research on the issues addressed here was carried out in 2011, between Paris and Munich, thanks to the financial support of the Treilles Foundation. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 16th Congress of the International Association of Buddhist Studies in Taiwan: I thank the participants for their encouragement and comments. I am especially grateful to Prof. Cristina Scherrer-Schaub for her inspiring guidance and to Prof. Jonathan Silk for stimulating exchanges on the issue of historiography. Lastly, I am greatly thankful to Prof. Alexander von Rospatt for his comments on a draft of this paper, and for helping me to understand the records in Newārī found at the end of Ms. Sa, the oldest exemplar of the *Mahāvastu*. Needless to say, any errors that remain are my own.

<sup>1</sup> Chartier 1996: 10: « Celle-ci [i.e., la compréhension historique des documents] suppose, en son principe, qu’attention soit portée sur la manière dont, dans chaque configuration historique, sont définies les catégories pour désigner, décrire et classer les discours. Il faut pour cela rompre avec toute projection à l’universel des concepts et des critères qui sont les nôtres et les réinscrire dans leur propre histoire. »

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Feer 1899: 161. This load of sixty-four manuscripts, which Hodgson had copied especially for the society, caused the utmost impression upon its members. A catalogue of these manuscripts was established on the very same day, to be found in *Journal Asiatique*, 3<sup>rd</sup> series, vol. 4: 296–98. On the first load of twenty-four manuscripts, which had already reached Paris in April of the same year, see Yuyama 2000a:

*Mahāvastu* manuscript led him to find, in the title of the text, which is found at the beginning of the second prologue (*nidāna*), the name of a school unknown so far in its Indian form, namely the Mahāsāṃghika. Indeed, at the time, the name was found in Tibetan and Chinese sources, but its Indic antecedent was still controverted. Burnouf used this occurrence to establish it without a doubt, and he commented: “the indication alone contained in this title [...] in my eyes confers to it [i.e., to the text] a great value and an incontestable antiquity.”<sup>3</sup> Émile Senart, following the lead of Burnouf, thirty-three years after the publication of the *Introduction à l’histoire du buddhisme indien*, undertook the critical edition of the *Mahāvastu*.<sup>4</sup> The result of twenty years of painstaking editorial work is a true masterpiece, one of the landmarks of the philology of Buddhist texts.<sup>5</sup> If this massive and composite text at times shocked the readership of Senart’s edition because of the altered state of its language, and was often despised for being unwieldy and unappealing, few people actually doubted the initial judgment of Burnouf that the *Mahāvastu* is an important text for the study of Indian Buddhism. The bibliographies of studies of the text compiled over the past decades by Akira Yuyama are impressive,<sup>6</sup> while the fact that the *Mahāvastu* has been translated, partly or in full, in German and English,<sup>7</sup> but also in Bengālī and Hindī,<sup>8</sup> and recently in Thai and Japanese,<sup>9</sup> attests to the wide audience of the text. Incidentally, this contrasts with the very limited diffusion of this piece of Mahāsāṃghika literature at the time of Hodgson, when it was only known to Newar communities in the Kathmandu valley.

The general presentation of the *Mahāvastu* by Burnouf had a great impact on its reception by modern scholarship, and actually some of the flaws of his first evaluation have found their way into contemporary “common knowledge” of this text. The *Mahāvastu* was introduced to the Western reader as a “voluminous collection of legends pertaining to the religious life of Çākya,”<sup>10</sup> which is certainly an apt description. Burnouf

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61, and the catalogue in Hunter 1896, Appendix A, VIII. See also Yuyama 2001: xiii. On the constitution of the Sanskrit manuscript collection of the Société Asiatique, see the introduction to Jean Filliozat’s catalogue (1941–1942: 1–7). The *Mahāvastu* copy, later collated by Émile Senart under the label Ms. A, is still preserved in the holdings of the Société Asiatique, where I was able to consult it. Cf. *ibid.*: 13, no. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Burnouf 1844: 453: « Je n’en garde pas moins ce livre comme une des compilations les plus anciennes que nous ait conservées la collection du Népal; et l’indication seule qui est contenue dans ce titre [...] lui assure à mes yeux une grande valeur et une incontestable antiquité. » The English translation can be found in *id.* 2010: 423.

<sup>4</sup> See the report of the assembly of May 12<sup>th</sup>, 1877, in *Journal Asiatique*, 7<sup>th</sup> series, vol. 9: 506, commented in Yuyama 2001: xxx–xxxii.

<sup>5</sup> Senart 1882–1897. Jan Willem de Jong referred to this edition as “still one of the most important works in the field of Buddhist Studies.” Cf. de Jong 1976: 24.

<sup>6</sup> See especially Yuyama 1968, 2001: lv–lx, 2011, and his additional articles cited at p. 265 of the latter.

<sup>7</sup> For a survey of these translations, see Yuyama 2001: xxxiii–xxxiv, xxxvii–xxxix. The translations into German of parts of the first and second volumes of Senart’s edition, by Ernst Leumann and his talented pupils Shindō Shiraishi and Shōkō Watanabe, by far surpass the English translation by Jones (1949–1956).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Basak 1963–1968; Bagchi 1970.

<sup>9</sup> See respectively Samniang 2010 [translation of vol. 1 of Senart, together with a transcript of the Indic text in Thai script], and Hiraoka 2010.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Burnouf 1844: 452: « volumineux recueil de légendes relatives à la vie religieuse de Çākya. »

however overlooked that the title not only mentions the Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravādins, but also the section of the canon to which the *Mahāvastu* belongs, namely the *Vinayapiṭaka*.<sup>11</sup> This omission led him to state (1) that the *Mahāvastu* is not canonical,<sup>12</sup> and (2) that the Nepalese collection he surveyed did not contain any book pertaining to the *vinaya* class, but rather that the *avadānas* represented this genre of scriptures.<sup>13</sup>

While justifying his second claim, Burnouf acknowledged that, among the same load of manuscripts to which belonged the *Mahāvastu* volume, was found a text whose title page bears the word *vinaya*.<sup>14</sup> He however duly recognized that this text, labelled as *Vinayasūtra*, was actually a philosophical text, namely Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakavṛtti* or *Prasannapadā*. Other manuscripts of this *śāstra* bear a similar title<sup>15</sup> and we can speculate that Candrakīrti's treatise was confused, at some point in the late history of its transmission, with a text which deserves much better this title, the well-known compendium of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-Vinaya* attributed to Guṇaprabha (ca. 5–7<sup>th</sup> century).<sup>16</sup> To presume this confusion would imply that Guṇaprabha's *Vinayasūtra* was at some point transmitted to Nepal, and along with a text like the *Prasannapadā*.<sup>17</sup> Since the time of Burnouf, significant discoveries were made about the transmission in that region of textual traditions related to the *Vinaya* of the Mūlasarvāstivādins. There are, for instance, a few palm-leaves written in the so-called Gilgit/Bāmiyān Type II script (ca. 7<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> century) found by Cecil Bendall, among which fragments of their *Vinayavastu* and of a *Bhikṣuṇī-karmavācanā* were identified.<sup>18</sup> Another *Bhikṣuṇī-karmavācanā* attributed to the Mūlasarvāstivādins is preserved in an incomplete palm-leaf manuscript, which can be attributed to the 12<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>19</sup> Roughly in the same period, Kuladatta (ca. 11<sup>th</sup>–

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Compare *id.* 2010: 452. In this context, I prefer to render Fr. “recueil” as “collection,” instead of “anthology” as translated by Buffetrille and Lopez.

<sup>11</sup> This is not due to a lacuna in the copy he consulted, since the phrase *vinayapiṭakasya mahāvastuḥ ādi* is preserved in it. See Ms. A, fol. 2b, l. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Burnouf 1844: 629.

<sup>13</sup> *Op. cit.*: 37–40, 232.

<sup>14</sup> The title page of this Ms. bears, according to Burnouf, the indication *Vinayapatra*, while the catalogue of the manuscript published by the Société Asiatique calls it *Vinayasūtra(sūtra)*. Filliozat's catalogue does not mention this title page. Cf. « Catalogue des livres bouddhiques, écrits en sanscrit, que M. B. H. Hodgson a fait copier au Népal pour le compte de la Société Asiatique, et qui lui ont été présentés au conseil dans sa séance du 14 juillet 1837 », *Journal Asiatique*, 3<sup>rd</sup> series, vol. 4: 297; Burnouf 1844: 498; Filliozat 1941–1942: 12–13, no. 8.

<sup>15</sup> This is the case of at least another manuscript photographed by the NGMPP, and referred to in MacDonald 2008: 17–18. The title *Vinayasūtra* also appears in reference to Candrakīrti's work in Hodgson 1828: 431, that is, before he had the manuscript consulted by Burnouf copied for the Société Asiatique.

<sup>16</sup> On the possible dates of Guṇaprabha, see for instance Schopen 1994: 64–65.

<sup>17</sup> It might be worth noting in this regard that the extent *dBu med* manuscript of the *Vinayasūtra* (= Ms. B, according to Luo 2009) was transmitted together with, and maybe copied by the same person than, the *Prasannapadā*'s “commentary cum notes” (MacDonald 2008: 20) known as \**Lakṣaṇatikā*. Cf. Yonezawa 2004: 117–19.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Bendall 1903; Matsuda 1997. The affiliation of the *Bhikṣuṇī-karmavācanā* fragments to the Mūlasarvāstivādins has been contested by Schmidt 1994: 161–62.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Schmidt 1993; 1994.

13<sup>th</sup> century)<sup>20</sup> used a version of this *Vinaya* for the section dealing with *pravrajyā* of the seventh chapter of his *Kriyāsamgrahapañjikā*.<sup>21</sup> Incidentally, the next chapter of the same text draws materials from the *Prakīrṇakacaityalakṣaṇa* of the Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravādin master Bhadravyūha, for its description of the *stūpa*.<sup>22</sup> But there has been so far little textual evidence of the transmission of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-Vinaya* or, for that matter, of any other *Vinaya*, in later centuries.<sup>23</sup> It is therefore all the more significant that Guṇaprabha's *Vinayasūtra* is actually partly preserved in an incomplete paper manuscript, photographed by the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project (NGMPP). Both the beginning and the end of this manuscript are lacking in the microfilm, which caused difficulty in its identification and delayed the divulgation of its existence among scholars.<sup>24</sup> No less than forty-three folios are preserved, covering most part of the *Pravrajyāvastu* and approximately half of the *Poṣadhavastu*.<sup>25</sup> The manuscript written in Newārī script can be dated on palaeographical grounds to the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>26</sup> While being suggestive of the perpetuation of some *vinaya* transmission throughout the Malla period, this copy is however so heavily corrupt that it inevitably raises the question of the nature of the reception of this literature among Newar communities. The confusion of titles that incurred between Guṇaprabha and Candrakīrti's works also suggests the weakening of a clear-cut identity of *vinaya* texts at the time. We shall bear this in mind while turning back to the main object of the present discussion.

<sup>20</sup> On the complex issue of the date of Kuladatta, see Tanemura 2004: 5–12.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Tanemura 1997: 44–57; von Rospatt 2005: 204–207. Alexander von Rospatt remarks that the practice to cut the hair of the candidate in two steps prescribed by the *Kriyāsamgrahapañjikā* is found, among other texts, in the Tibetan translation of the *Pravrajyāvastu* and in Guṇaprabha's *Vinayasūtra*, while it is absent from the *Bhikṣukarmavākya* recovered from Gilgit.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Roth 1980b; 1997. See also Yuyama 2002.

<sup>23</sup> According to von Rospatt (2005: 206), the incorporation of the *pravrajyā* prescriptions within Kuladatta's text might indicate that “in the monastic milieu for which the *Kriyāsamgrahapañjikā* was written, the traditional *vinaya* was of little, if any, consequence, that is, with the exception of the ordination ceremony, which therefore was incorporated into the *Kriyāsamgrahapañjikā*.” He adds: “This would accord with the situation in contemporary Newar Buddhism where monasteries do not use (and probably not even own) *Vinaya* texts, but rather rely for the ordination ceremony [...] directly on the *pravrajyāvidhi* transmitted in the *Kriyāsamgrahapañjikā*.”

<sup>24</sup> The manuscript, photographed in 1983 by the NGMPP, was tentatively catalogued as “*Vinayagrantha?*” on the basis of a marginal note on the last preserved folio, written by a modern hand. In February 2010, while reviewing the NGMPP microfilms of texts related to the *Vinaya* at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, I was able to identify this manuscript. I later learnt that the same manuscript was also photographed by the Institute for Advanced Studies of World Religions (IASWR) in 1972 and that, after being wrongly identified, the cataloguers of this collection were finally able to identify the text properly. Cf. Luo 2011: 172.

<sup>25</sup> Luo (2011: 181), basing himself on the IASWR microfilm, refers to thirty-five folios only. The folios preserved in the NGMPP microfilm are the following: 3b–7, 9–21, 24–39, 41, 42 [wrongly numbered as 62, and therefore misplaced in the manuscript], and 59–65. These preserve a text corresponding to the *dBu med* manuscript of the *sūtra* transliterated by Yonezawa *et alii* (Ms. B) fols. 2a, l. 2–3b, l. 2 and Sāṅkrtyāyana's (S) edition, pp. 2, l. 15–5, l. 18; Ms. B, fols. 4a, l. 1–8b, l. 2 and S, pp. 6, l. 7–14, l. 28; Ms. B, fols. 9a, l. 5–15b, l. 3 and S, pp. 16, l. 15–31, l. 8; Ms. B, fols. 16a, l. 3–17a, l. 4 and S, pp. 32, l. 16–34, l. 12; Ms. B, fols. 25b, l. 2–29a, l. 2 and S, pp. 48, l. 16–54, l. 7.

<sup>26</sup> Luo's short description attributes a date to the copy, namely 1793, which seems to indicate that the last folio of the manuscript was still preserved when the IASWR team photographed it.

Émile Senart, in the introduction to his edition of the *Mahāvastu*, confesses to be surprised that his eminent predecessor missed the important mention of the *Vinayapiṭaka* in the text's title.<sup>27</sup> On the basis of the six copies he was able to gather, Senart edited it as follows:<sup>28</sup>

*āryamahāsāṃghikānāṃ lokottaravādināṃ madhyadeśikānāṃ pāṭhena  
vinayapiṭakasya mahāvastuye ādi ||*

In spite of the text's initial claim, however, most scholars considered the *Mahāvastu* to not represent in its full right a *vinaya* text, since few of its sections were explicitly concerned with monastic regulation.<sup>29</sup> The fact that, in the distinctively late manuscripts collated by Senart, the final colophon and many of the chapters' colophons call the text *Mahāvastu-Avadāna* led scholars to relate it to *avadāna* anthologies, composed mostly by extracting narrative materials from the *Vinaya*. We owe to Édouard Huber the expression of such a view that has been highly influential on later scholarship:

The compiler [of the *Divyāvadāna*] dealt with the *Vinayapiṭaka* of the Sarvāstivādins in a similar way that the author of the *Mahāvastu*—as I shall demonstrate one day—dealt with the *Vinayapiṭaka* of the Mahāsāṅghikas. But, unlike the latter, he did not have the good taste to name his source.<sup>30</sup>

The validity of such a comparison was criticized already by Hermann Oldenberg,<sup>31</sup> who however shared Huber's view that the *Mahāvastu* is a by-product of an earlier source. Being one of the major tenants of the British-German school that was still tempted at the time to understand the Pāli canon as close or identical to the original one,<sup>32</sup> Oldenberg agreed with Windisch and the Rhys-Davidses in presenting the *Mahāvastu* as based on the Pāli *Mahākhanda*, and as essentially a rewriting of this text.<sup>33</sup> John J.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Senart 1882–1897, vol. 1: iv; Barth 1899: 528, n. 4.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Senart 1882–1897, vol. 1: 2, ll. 13–14.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Barth 1899: 528–30; Rhys Davids & Rhys Davids 1910: 257; La Vallée Poussin 1915: 329a; Lin 1949: 299; Demiéville 1951: 252; Warder 1970: 52.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Huber 1906: 3: « Le compilateur [...] s'est conduit à l'égard du *Vinayapiṭaka* des Sarvāstivādin à peu près de la même manière que l'auteur du *Mahāvastu* — ainsi que nous nous réservons de le démontrer un jour — s'est comporté à l'égard du *Vinayapiṭaka* des Mahāsāṅghika: encore n'a-t-il pas eu, comme ce dernier, le bon esprit de nommer sa source. » Huber's *akālamaraṇa* in 1914 didn't allow him to sustain his theory.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Oldenberg 1912: 151–52: „Ohne die chinesischen Materialien benutzen zu können, möchte ich auf Grund der indischen den Unterschied hervorheben, der mit zwischen *Divyāvadāna* und *Mahāvastu* vorzuliegen scheint. Das erstere ist, wie eben bemerkt, eine Sammlung zum großen Teil aus dem *Vinaya*, aber auch aus andern Quellen ausgezogener disparater Erzählungen. Das letztere will, wie I, 2, 13 zeigt, selbst ein *Vinayawerk* sein. Und es ist — was man natürlich nach indischen Maßstäben verstehen muß — ein Ganzes.“ See also Regamey 1965: 179–80.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. de Jong 1976: 28.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Windisch 1909: 476–77; Rhys Davids & Rhys Davids 1910: 257; Oldenberg 1912: 133.

Jones was in turn heavily influenced by his teacher, Caroline A. F. Rhys-Davids, at whose request he undertook his translation.<sup>34</sup> Maybe because he too fully adopted her views on Buddhist scriptures, Jones translated in the above mentioned title the phrase *pāṭhena vinayapīṭakasya mahāvastuḥ ādi* as “[h]ere begins the *Mahāvastu*, which is based on the redaction of the *Vinayapīṭaka*...”<sup>35</sup> This translation is obviously in contradiction with the syntax of the phrase, since *pāṭhena* applies to what precedes, namely the name of the school, and the form *vinayapīṭakasya* should be taken as a partitive genitive, or genitive of attribution: it does not denote a source or a derivation. Hence, it is to be translated as “beginning of the *Mahāvastu* (literally: the “Great Chapter”)<sup>36</sup> of the *Vinayapīṭaka*, according to the recension of the Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravādins etc.”<sup>37</sup>

My purpose in reviewing some of the major contributions to the understanding of this text, from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is to draw the reader’s attention on the fact that these early works inevitably led to the constitution of a kind of vulgate, which has a lasting influence on the contemporary view on this text. We still find, among *vinaya* specialists, an echo of Burnouf’s affirmation that it is a non-canonical text.<sup>38</sup> In a recent survey of Mahāsāṃghika literature, we find expressed the idea that it is a by-product, whose composite nature blurred its initial *vinaya* status.<sup>39</sup> Lastly, we can trace in a number of contemporary contributions an echo of Huber’s initial statement, while narratologists tend to deal with the *Mahāvastu* in pretty much the same way as they do with the *Divyāvadāna*, two texts which are demonstrably of completely different origins and nature.<sup>40</sup> Besides the rather imprecise reading of the title of the text by influential scholars such as Burnouf and Jones, the presence of the epithet *avadāna* in the colophons of the manuscripts collated by Senart seems to have played a crucial role in the shaping of these related views. Taking into account the fact that, according to the

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. Jones 1949–1956, vol. 1: ix. On the scholarly milieu to which John Jones belonged and which influenced his understanding of the text he was translating, see Silk 2010.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Jones 1949–1956, vol. 1: 2 [All emphasis in the quotations are mine]. Ignoring the fact that Huber’s statement was problematic, Jones also took over his view, as he says (*id.*: xiii) that “the compilers indeed came very near achieving a mere collection of *avadānas* much resembling the collection made by the Sarvāstivādins and known as *Divyāvadāna*.”

<sup>36</sup> On the meaning of the word *vastu* in this context, see Oldenberg 1898: 645, n. 1; Windisch 1909: 474; Hirakawa 1999–2000<sup>2</sup>, vol. 2: 118; Yuyama 2000b: 535–36; 2001: xxiii–xxvi.

<sup>37</sup> On the reading *Madhyadeśika*, a corruption of *Madhyuddeśika*, see below.

<sup>38</sup> A significant example is Prebish’s *Survey of Vinaya Literature*, which classifies the *Mahāvastu* as “Non-canonical Vinaya Literature,” arguing for this that it is “actually an *avadāna*.” Cf. Prebish 1994: 64. The more rigorous overview by Yuyama, on which Prebish heavily relied (cf. de Jong 1998), classifies the *Mahāvastu* as “Miscellanea zum Vinaya der Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravādin,” which is much more apt. Cf. Yuyama 1979: 42.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Dessein 2008: 40–41: “It is a compilation of which the material shows to have been *derived* from the Lokottaravāda *Vinayapīṭaka*, and further also shows connections with a *Sūtrapīṭaka* that must have consisted of texts that are identical or at least very similar to Pāli texts and were reworked for the *Mahāvastu*.”

<sup>40</sup> Drawing probably on Jones’ reflection of Huber’s view, Rahula and Marciniak’s contributions to the study of the *Mahāvastu* repeat the very same analogy with the *Divyāvadāna*. Cf. Rahula 1978: 2–3; Marciniak 2010: 129. See also below, n. 71.

*editio princeps*, the text is called in two different ways, Kōgen Mizuno, Akira Hirakawa, and Akira Yuyama have argued that *Mahāvastu* tout court is most probably the original appellation of the text, and that the epithet *avadāna* was added in the process of its compilation.<sup>41</sup> The latter summarizes his understanding of this development as follows:<sup>42</sup>

In short, the *M[ahā]v[astu]* was most probably a *Vinaya* text *once upon a time* and the *M[ahā]v[astu-]Av[adāna]* is a narrative literature in a very wide sense within the framework of the *Vinaya* literature.

In the background of Yuyama's statement lies the view that the text's identity was altered in the process of its formation, because of having gathered so many materials connected with the great career of the historical Buddha, therefore expanding into what he calls "a treasure house of narrative literature." Accordingly, if I understood correctly this theory, the text *as it reached us* would therefore not anymore be, *stricto sensu*, a *vinaya* text, but a by-product related to the *Vinaya*, a collection of the *avadāna* genre.<sup>43</sup> This view, first expressed by Yuyama in an article published in Adelheid Mette's Festschrift, was reproduced in a slightly modified version within his introduction to the facsimile edition of two manuscripts.<sup>44</sup> This massive introduction to a most important publication benefits from Yuyama's immense bibliographical knowledge and presents a detailed overview of the manuscript tradition of the text. It also takes into consideration, though provisionally, the evidence found in the manuscripts he published.<sup>45</sup> Yuyama does not draw the necessary conclusions, however, from the fact that the epithet *avadāna* is—apart from distinctively late additions to the oldest copy—<sup>46</sup>completely absent from the titles and colophons of the manuscripts he reproduced in his book. In other words, the theory he presents in his introduction regarding the growth of the text and the evolution of its title, from *Mahāvastu* to *Mahāvastu-Avadāna*, is rendered obsolete by a close examination of the very data he published. Indeed, from the point of view of the earliest manuscript available, which, as I was able to establish, is the common ancestor of all the manuscripts recovered so far from the Kathmandu valley, the expression *Mahāvastu-Avadāna* is a ghost word. And from a historico-critical perspective, this designation, widely adopted in the publications on the subject, is inappropriate. The addition of this

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Mizuno 1964; Hirakawa 1999–2000<sup>2</sup>, vol. 2: 118.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Yuyama 2000b: 537 = 2001: xxvii.

<sup>43</sup> Compare the remarks of Oskar von Hinüber (1996: 19, § 36), about the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-Vinaya*: "Thus the law texts are slowly overgrown with stories, to such an extent that there is almost a change of the literary genre, from law book to *Avadāna*." See also Ruegg 1999: 209.

<sup>44</sup> The publication bears the date 2001, but it actually appeared only in March 2003, cf. Yuyama 2011: 266.

<sup>45</sup> See the paragraph added in Yuyama 2001: xxiii, § 2.3.6, absent from the 2000b article.

<sup>46</sup> A scribe wrote, in a modern Newārī hand which cannot predate the 19<sup>th</sup> century, ¶ *mahāvastu pustakam\** ¶ on the folio 1a of Ms Sa. Still a later hand added *śrīḥ* above the word *mahāvastu* and *avadāna* next to it. Within the records following the scribal colophon, on which we shall return later, the book is addressed as *śrīmahāvastu-avadāna pustaka* in a text dated N.S. 876 (= 1756 AD) and *mahāvastuka pustaka* in a second passage dated N.S. 1010. Cf. Ms. Sa, fol. 427b, ll. 2, 5.



epithet is indeed the product of a 17<sup>th</sup> century interpretation of the text in Nepal, when it was transmitted independently from the *Vinaya* to which it initially belonged.

I shall here try to demonstrate what might sound as a kind of a bold statement, by briefly outlining the history of the formation of the *Mahāvastu* in India,<sup>47</sup> before focusing on its transmission and reception in Nepal. The origins of the *Mahāvastu* are a knotty question, which must be connected to the issue of the formation of the Lokottaravāda as an autonomous school, transmitting a version (or: versions) of the *Vinaya* distinct from their root-*nikāya*, the Mahāsāṃghika. We do not have hard evidence, such as inscriptions, attesting to the emergence of the Lokottaravāda, even if, from a number of later mentions of this school, we can estimate that it was already in existence in the first centuries of our era. The Lokottaravādins seem to have kept intimate ties with the Mahāsāṃghikas proper, and the comparison of the surviving scriptures of these two groups makes it clear that the overall structure of their *Vinayapīṭaka* remained very similar. Mahāsāṃghika communities most probably transmitted a text functionally identical to the *Mahāvastu*, and from this the Lokottaravādin *Mahāvastu* would have sprung. We find embedded in the narrative frame of the *Mahāvastu sūtra* materials which parallel the earliest strata of the Pāli canon, and which also display some intimacy with collections of Gāndhārī narratives. The narrative cycle devoted to the foundation of the Saṃgha by the Buddha has also close connections with the twenty-four first sections of the Pāli *Mahākhandhaka*, as was shown long ago by Ernst Windisch (1909). However, to assume that in an Ur-form, the *Mahāvastu* was in all aspects similar to the *Mahākhandhaka* and, pursuing this unreachable original, to reorganize the internal structure of the Lokottaravādin text and discard the non-corresponding sections as “later additions” is problematic. It has been demonstrated by Shayne Clark (2004) that the structure of the *Mahāsāṃghika-Vinaya* is irreducible to that of the so-called “Old *Skandhaka*” inferred by Frauwallner. It would therefore be contradictory to understand the early history of the *Mahāvastu* in terms of derivation from a *Skandhaka*-type narrative. The way I propose to understand this text is rather as a companion to the Mahāsāṃghika *Bhikṣu-Prakīrṇaka*, with the initial *raison d’être* to offer a narrative background to some of the latter text’s categories, and in particular to the two first kinds of *upasampadā* listed therein, namely auto-ordination (*svāmam upasampadā*), and the ordination by the formula “Come, monk!” (*ehibhikṣukāya upasampadā*).<sup>48</sup> The question of the completion of the *Mahāvastu*, after several centuries of compiling and incorporating a mass of disparate materials, is also a delicate one. But there is evidence that some of the later strata were not composed and included in the wider text before the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. The *Mahāvastu* is mentioned as an autonomous text in sources dating from the late 6<sup>th</sup> century onward, starting from a well-known passage in the *Fó běnxíng jí jīng* / 佛本行集經 (T. 190). From this mention as well

<sup>47</sup> For a detailed study of this complex process, see Tournier 2012: 1–69.

<sup>48</sup> For a demonstration of this connexion, already suspected by Hirakawa (1999–2000<sup>2</sup>, vol. II: 97–118), see Tournier 2012: 54–59, 70–86.

as quotations in Candrakīrti's (ca. 600–650 AD)<sup>49</sup> *Prasannapadā* and Avalokitavrata's *Prajñāpradīpa-ṭīkā* (ca. 700 AD),<sup>50</sup> we can draw three important deductions for our concern: (1) the text was known to the Indian reader in the early medieval period as *Mahāvastu*, and never as *Mahāvastu-Avadāna*;<sup>51</sup> (2) its belonging to the *Vinayapīṭaka* and, therefore, its canonical status, was never doubted; (3) the contents of the collection were similar to those of the earliest known complete copy. Therefore, most probably the compilation process was closed by the 6<sup>th</sup> century. This scenario is naturally the outcome of a provisional evaluation, based on fragmentary evidence, which does not take into account the high probability that the *Mahāvastu* was transmitted in multiple recensions. If, as Kazunobu Matsuda suggests in recent publications, fragments of the *Mahāvastu* dating from the 5<sup>th</sup> century were indeed represented in the Schøyen collection,<sup>52</sup> these fragments could be of great importance to test the scenario I propose. We could therefore look for significant recensional variants between the *Mahāvastu* transmitted by the Mahāsāṃghika (or: Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravādin) communities settled in the Bāmiyān region and the version of the text that was transmitted in Nepal six centuries afterwards.

It is a *vinaya* text called *Mahāvastu* that is preserved in the earliest complete copy of the text, labelled as manuscript “Sa” by its editor Yuyama. The scribal colophon does not bear any date, but dates are found in the various post-colophons, written in markedly later hands. From the palaeography of the manuscript, written in a variety of old Newārī script, Yuyama infers a date from the 12<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>53</sup> This provisional date, which I tend to accept, means that manuscript Sa is approximately coeval with the other manuscripts of the Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravādin *Vinaya* in proto-Bengālī script, namely the *Bhikṣuṇī-Vinaya*, the *Abhisamācārikā* and the *Prātimokṣasūtra*. According to Gustav Roth, these manuscripts might have been copied in Magadha in mid-12<sup>th</sup> century, and found their way afterwards to the monasteries of Źa-lu Ri-phug and Źor in Tibet.<sup>54</sup> They not only share with manuscript Sa most of their phraseology, terminology and language, they also contain a similar claim to be part of the *Vinaya*, according to the recension of the school whose complete name is Ārya-Mahāsāṃghika Lokottaravādin Madhyuddeśika (or: Madhyoddeśika). As remarked already by Roth (1985), manuscript Sa preserves the genuine reading Madhyuddeśika also shared by the other texts of the school. It means, according to him, “those who recite [the *Prātimokṣasūtra*] through the medium of an intermediate type of language,”<sup>55</sup> an interpretation that has been much

<sup>49</sup> On Candrakīrti's date, see Ruegg 1981: 71.

<sup>50</sup> On the dates of this *śāstra* and its author, of probable Magadhan origins, see van der Kuijp 2006: 174–82. Candrakīrti and Avalokitavrata's references to and quotations from the *Mahāvastu* are studied in Tournier 2012: 234–45.

<sup>51</sup> The *Stūpalakṣaṇakārikāvivecana* also indicates this. Cf. Roth 1997: 218, § 18.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Matsuda 2009: 7–8; 2010: xxviii–xxix.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Yuyama 2001: xlvii–xlviii.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Roth 1970: xxi–xxiv; 1980a: 81–82.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Roth 1985: 133.

debated.<sup>56</sup> What is certain is that this epithet, pertaining to *vinaya* terminology, was later on corrupted into Madhyadeśika, “residents of Madhyadeśa,” in the process of manuscript transmission.<sup>57</sup> Considered together, the oldest manuscript of the *Mahāvastu* and the three others found in Tibet are suggestive of the state of the *Vinayapiṭaka* as it was transmitted in North India and Nepal in the 12<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century. We know from Tibetan sources such as Tārānātha’s history and ’Gos lo-tsa-ba’s *Blue Annals* that the Mahāsāṃghika and Lokottaravādin ordination lineages were still alive in this period in the region;<sup>58</sup> afterwards, we lose their tracks.

This extinction of the Lokottaravādin ordination lineage probably led to the end of the transmission of the parts of its *Vinayapiṭaka* concerned with monastic regulation. For what concerns manuscript Sa, we don’t know what happened to it during the centuries following its copy; it seems probable that it was forgotten in a storeroom. The manuscript bears no trace of use before the 18<sup>th</sup> century; it bears only corrections by the hand of its copyist in the process of writing, and no annotation. It seems therefore to have been little read with an attempt to clarify its contents in the centuries following its copy. And it was probably not copied either for a long time: most of the twenty-eight manuscripts<sup>59</sup> that have been recovered so far from Nepal are copies dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century. The second oldest manuscript after Sa is dated (Nepāla-)Samvat (N.S.) 777, corresponding to 1657 AD, and this copy, which I called Ta, is demonstrably an apograph of Sa.<sup>60</sup> There is therefore a gap of four to five centuries between the copy of Sa and its direct copy, which is considerable indeed. We should take into account such a gap to put into perspective the reception of the *Mahāvastu* at the end of the Malla period. My impression is that manuscript Sa was re-discovered by the copyist of Ta himself, named Jayamuni. This Jayamuni was not a mere scribe, but an important figure of the religious landscape of his time. He is known by the so-called “Buddhist-*vaṃśāvālī*” as the “great *paṇḍita* of [the] Mahābuddha[-vihāra],” the well-known (approximate) replication in Patan of the *śikhara* temple standing on the *bodhimāṇḍa* at Bodhgayā.<sup>61</sup> We learn from

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Yuyama 1980; 2001: xvi–xviii; Bechert & von Simson 1980: 187; de Jong 1985; Ruegg 1985; Vogel 1985; Tournier 2012: 31–36.

<sup>57</sup> The latter reading was accepted by Senart, which is understandable since his evidence was unanimous; what is puzzling is that, twenty-five years after Roth’s article, Hiraoka (2010: 2) persists in rendering Madhyadeśika into Japanese in his recent translation.

<sup>58</sup> See the references gathered in Roth 1970: xiv–xvi. The group of four *mahānikāyas* including the Mahāsāṃghika is also mentioned in the *Kriyāsaṃgrahaḥapañjikā*, in connection with the monastery’s *gaṇḍī*. Cf. Tanemura 1997: 41, ll. 3–8.

<sup>59</sup> This count is not definitive, but it is based on a survey carried out at European, Japanese, and Indian libraries, including copies of the IASWR and NGMPP microfilm collections. The results of this survey may be found in Tournier 2012: 337–72. It benefitted from the survey by Yuyama 2001: xxxix–lv.

<sup>60</sup> This manuscript has been microfilmed by the NGMPP, and bears the reel number B 98/14. I thank heartily Prof. Ryushō Wakahara from the Ryukoku University for first giving me access to a reproduction of this microfilm, as well as to the manuscript preserved in the University library and to three other manuscripts microfilmed by the NGMPP he had gathered over the years. Ms. Ta is the most significant of all of them for the history of the textual transmission in Nepal.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Wright 1877: 126. This temple belongs to the Uku bāhā (Skt. *Rudradevavarṇa-mahāvihāra*). Its construction was probably initiated in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, under the reign of Amaramalla (r. 1538–60), by

the same source two important facts about Jayamuni's career. First, he was trained in Sanskrit, as he undertook a travel to Vārāṇasī to learn grammar and other *vidyās* with *paṇḍitas*. Second, he is said to have brought back from India an important textual collection. This attests to his interest in collecting Buddhist texts, and it is likely that he got hold of Ms. Sa as well. However, its palaeography indicates that it was probably copied in Nepal—or at least by a scribe from that region—and therefore that it was more likely preserved there in the centuries following its copy, and retrieved by Jayamuni sometime during his life, to be added to his valuable textual collection. Maybe because he was particularly devoted to the figure of Mahābuddha, that is, the Buddha of the *vajrāsana*,<sup>62</sup> he highly valued the contents of the manuscript—“a voluminous collection of legends pertaining to the religious life of Çākya,” to recall Burnouf's words—enough to decide to copy it himself.

Learned as he was, Jayamuni did not behave as a slavish copyist, but he attempted very often to improve the text. This is done by correcting obvious copying mistakes of manuscript Sa, but also by frequently normalizing the syntax, and by sanskritizing some of the readings. Jayamuni also made mistakes, and over-corrected when confronted with a technical term or a Prākṛit word in manuscript Sa that he didn't understand. But in general, he was very faithful to the text preserved in Sa. For example, Ta preserves the correct reading *Madhyuddeśika*—as found in manuscript Sa—in the title of the text, unlike all the other eight manuscripts I have collated for my edition, and the six copies

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Jayamuni's ancestor, Abhayarāja. The latter undertook to erect the temple dedicated to the Mahābuddha after a visionary experience he had in Bodhgayā. Cf. *ibid.*: 123–24. On this temple, see also Locke 1985: 97–103 and Gutschow 1997: 308–15. A *thyāsaphu* document kept at the Mahābuddhavihāra and dated N.S. 774 records a donation by Jayamuni of golden fixtures for the processional chariot of Karuṇāmaya/Būgadyah. Cf. Locke 1980: 304–305; 1985: 101. This confirms the identity of the scribe of Ms. Ta with the religious figure referred to in the chronicle. Joel Tatelman surveyed a narrative circulating in medieval literary texts produced in Nepal, such as the *Bhadrakalpāvadāna*, the *Guṇakāraṇḍavyūha*, the *Mahajjātakamālā* and the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* (middle-length and long versions, according to the classification of von Rospatt 2009), involving teachings delivered by a *bodhisattva* called Jayaśrī to his disciple Jineśvari/°rī or Jinamuni, and located at the *bodhimaṇḍavihāra*. He remarks the curious echo of these narratives with the religious figures involved in the history of the Mahābuddhavihāra. Cf. Tatelman 1997: xii–xviii. On the date of the earliest witness of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* to record this narrative, see von Rospatt 2009: 56–57.

<sup>62</sup> This is evinced by the fact that liminal salutations found in the *incipit* and scribal colophon of ms. Ta are addressed to the Mahābuddha. Cf. Ms. Ta, fol. 1b, l. 1; fol. 238a, l. 14. This epithet of the Buddha is also found in the opening praises of texts composed in Nepal during the Malla period, like the *Guṇakāraṇḍavyūha*, the *Mahajjātakamālā* and the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* (middle-length version), three texts which share the above-mentioned narrative related to the *bodhimaṇḍavihāra*. Cf. Lokesh Chandra 1999: 1, str. 1; Hahn 1985: 3, str. 1; Shakya & Bajracharya 2001: 57, str. 1. A possible earlier occurrence of the epithet is found within the *Kalpadrūmāvadānamālā*. Cf. Speyer 19582: lxxxix, str. 468. The dating of the collection is however unsettled, and though some authors assigned it an early date, it could well have been composed in medieval Nepal, like many other *avadānamālās*. On this issue, see *ibid.*: xxi–xxxvii; de Jong 1968: 57–59; Tatelman 2000: 10; Tuladhar-Douglas 2006: 42–56. Ms. Sa ignores such an homage, but opens with a simpler salutation to the *buddhas* of the three times, in a way that is consistent with the late Lokottaravādin buddhology, admitting the plurality of present *buddhas*. Importantly, the opening homage to the Mahābuddha is also found in the eight other manuscripts I have collated for my edition of this section, as well as in all the copies considered by Senart. The insertion of this homage in the *incipit* should therefore most probably be attributed to the famous *ācārya* who was affiliated with the Mahābuddha temple, Jayamuni himself.

considered by Senart. Ta also follows the habit of manuscript Sa in always calling the text *Mahāvastu*. In the scribal colophon by the hand of Jayamuni following the final colophon of the text, however, it is called, for the first time in its recorded history, *Mahāvastu-Avadāna*.<sup>63</sup> This innovation had important consequences for the way the *Mahāvastu* was conceived afterwards, since it was transmitted to the later manuscript tradition.

Judging from the records found after the colophon of Sa, the manuscript changed ownership sometime between the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century: indeed, at least from N.S. 876 (1756) to N.S. 1010 (1890), it was kept at the Lokakīrtimahāvihāra<sup>64</sup> in Patan. In N.S. 876 and on a few later occasions the manuscript was used in ritual readings,<sup>65</sup> but there is little evidence that it was ever consulted to produce a newer copy of the text.<sup>66</sup> I have identified so far no direct copy of Sa other than Ta. For several reasons including probably Jayamuni's prestige as a great *paṇḍita* and the specifically ritual use of the older manuscript Sa, later copies of the *Mahāvastu* seem to have all relied on Ta, or on one of its descendants. All the copies I have been able to consult bear the marks of the textual revision by Jayamuni. In these copies we can trace, for instance, the diffusion of the epithet *avadāna*, from Jayamuni's scribal colophon, to the final colophons and the chapter colophons. The phraseology of these chapter colophons was actually revised in one later copy descending from Ta, in order to include in many cases the mention that the section in question belongs to the *Mahāvastu-Avadāna*. Even taking into account this revision, there is no single chapter that is called itself an *avadāna*.<sup>67</sup> Many textual genres are witnessed in these colophons, such as *jātaka*—the dominant genre of the *Mahāvastu*, as there are no less than forty-four<sup>68</sup> narratives called

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Ms. Ta, fol. 238a, l. 14.

<sup>64</sup> The same monastery is also referred to by the Newārī-cum-Sanskrit expression Nakavihāra (= New. Naka bahī). See Ms. Sa, fol. 427b, l. 1. It should be noted that the manuscript must have been kept in the area at least until the 1970s, when it was photographed by the NGMPP. Indeed, the prominent pandit Āśa Kajī Vajrācārya, in whose collection Mss. Sa and Sb were kept, lived in the vicinity of the Naka bahī. On this *vihāra*, see Locke 1985: 201.

<sup>65</sup> I understand this to be the meaning of New. *svādhyā* (< Skt. *svādhyāya*), used in five of the six records preserved in fols. 427b–428a of Ms. Sa. The first of these ritual readings was carried out in N.S. 876 by no less than nine *bhikṣus*.

<sup>66</sup> The only reference to writing is found in the passage written by the sixth hand I identified in this portion, dating probably from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This consists in one line that I understand as mentioning that a *vajrācārya*, whose name has been (intentionally?) erased later on, made a copy of this manuscript. Cf. Ms. Sa 428a, l. 1: [*pusta*]kaṃ *likhitam idaṃ 'yaṃ ... [va]jra*vajrācāryaḥ ||

<sup>67</sup> This fact seems to have been overlooked by scholars who, like John Strong, state that the *Mahāvastu* (2004: 491b) “embellishes many episodes of Śākyamuni's biography with *jātakas*, *avadānas* and other legends...” This, once again, might be rooted in one of Jones' approximations (1949–1956, vol. I: xii), and we find it repeated in Marciniak 2010: 129. Satoshi Hiraoka has himself remarked the absence of the term *avadāna* to label the stories of the *Mahāvastu*. He nevertheless asserts that this collection contains texts of the *avadāna* genre, as he proposes to rename as such six portions termed as *jātaka* or *pūrvayoga* in their colophons. Cf. Hiraoka 2002: 350–51 and n. 6.

<sup>68</sup> This is two more than what would be the count on the basis of Senart's edition. Indeed, the *Padumāvatijātaka* is only represented in Ms. Sa (fols. 325a, l. 3–327a, l. 4), while the *Rāhulajātaka* is called a *pūrvayoga* in the later copies. Cf. Senart 1882–1897, vol. III: 172, l. 5–175, l. 19 / Ms. Sa, fols.

this way—, but also, related to this class of scriptures, *pūrvayoga* and *parikalpa*, as well as *sūtra*, *gāthā*, *vyākaraṇa* and so forth.<sup>69</sup> The category of *avadāna* is therefore absent from the detailed taxonomy of the *Mahāvastu*, as it is from the rest of the Lokottaravādin *Vinaya*. Hence, to use this label to define the whole text shows an approximate appreciation of its contents. It is only in a very vague and untechnical sense of the word, that *avadāna* could be used to qualify a group of narratives of distinct types having in common their insistence on the acts' retribution, what Yuyama calls “a narrative literature in a very wide sense of the term.”<sup>70</sup> This classification is certainly foreign to the milieu of production of the *Mahāvastu*, and appeared only when the collection was disconnected from the rest of the Lokottaravādin scriptures. That the *Mahāvastu* came to be understood in such a way, together with the alteration of the very name of the school to which this text belonged (from Madhyuddeśika to Madhyadeśika), are significant markers of its loss of identity. In particular, the adjunction of the term *avadāna* in the colophons blurred the fact that the *Mahāvastu* used to be the “Great Chapter” of the Lokottaravādin *Vinaya*.

This shift is moreover revealing about the dynamics of “domestication”<sup>71</sup> of the narratives the text contained. The identification of this text as an *avadāna* anthology may indeed have ensured its fortune from the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century onward. This literary genre was very popular at the time, when existing collections of narratives served as source-materials for versified compositions, often bearing the title *avadānamālā*.<sup>72</sup> Also, being recognized as a reservoir of narratives, the limits of the *Mahāvastu* tended to loose their initial importance. Half of the eighteen manuscripts I was able to survey contain only a

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327b, l. 6–329a, l. 5.

<sup>69</sup> This enumeration might in turn be compared to the ninefold (*navavidha*) division of the Teaching (*śāsana*) transmitted by the Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravādins, which does not include the scriptural genre of *avadāna*. Cf. Senart 1882–1897, vol. I: 300, l. 21 / Ms. Sa, fol. 88a, l. 6; Roth 1970: 248–49, § 218; Abhisamācārika-Dharma Study Group 1998: 64, ll. 7–10.

<sup>70</sup> See also Feer 1891: xxix. La Vallée Poussin tried to make sense of the colophons, by tentatively understanding *Mahāvastu-Avadāna* as a *tatpuruṣa* compound, meaning “the narrative part of the *Mahāvastu*.” Cf. La Vallée Poussin 1915: 329a. Elsewhere in the same article, he however remarks with great insight that this compound is “open to suspicion” (*id.*: 328a).

<sup>71</sup> On this phenomenon, see Lewis 2000: 3–7, and chapters 2 and 3. The author seems ironically to have been victim of the very phenomenon he describes, as we find in his lines the strange statement that the “influential *Mahāvastu* and *Divyāvadāna* [...] are derived from the Sarvāstivādin *Vinayas*, indicating that the stories collected were so numerous and useful that they were eventually spun off into these narrative anthologies.” Cf. Lewis 2000: 202, n. 9. The author cites Lévi 1907 as his authority, but the article in question does not say a word about the *Mahāvastu*; the statement seems rather a distorted echo of Huber's above-mentioned view. Lewis and Tuladhar's recent book on the *Sugata Saurabha* (2010: 10) presents the *Mahāvastu* much more aptly.

<sup>72</sup> Joel Tatelman, the author of one of the most significant contributions to the study of this genre as a whole and of one of its representatives, the *Bhadrakalpāvadāna*, in particular, supposes that the latter text, centred on the narrative cycle of Śākyamuni's return to Kapilavastu, adapts several narratives from the *Mahāvastu*. Cf. Tatelman 1997: xix–xx, with n. 96. See also Chopra 1990: 20. While Tatelman's argument in favour of the reliance of the *Bhadrakalpāvadāna* on the *Mahāvastu* is not decisive, if we provisionally consider this scenario as reasonable, we should then evaluate the possibility that the *Bhadrakalpāvadāna* might have been composed later than it is proposed by the same author, who gives the estimate of *ca.* 1400–1600.

portion of the whole text: they can be interpreted as the result of conscious selection of textual portions that met the taste of the day. This appears clearly in the case of six manuscripts centred on the *Dīpaṃkaravastu*. One of these renames the text *Dīpaṃkarāvadāna*, and explicitly states in its colophon that it has been “extracted” (*uddhṛta*) from the *Mahāvastu-Avadāna*.<sup>73</sup> The circulation of such excerpts can be correlated with the great importance attributed to this past Buddha in the Kathmandu valley.<sup>74</sup> A more detailed study of these excerpts and the evaluation of the influence they may have had on the flourishing of the literature in vernacular<sup>75</sup> remains to be done. For what concerns us here, we have enough evidence to suggest that the twist in the conception of the text, which conduced to its being labelled an *avadāna*, did not happen in the process of incorporating narrative materials, as was thought by Yuyama and others. Rather, this “interpretative shift” was due to Jayamuni, and it facilitated the circulation of textual selections extracted from the whole collection in the Kathmandu valley. It was therefore instrumental in the late fortune and the popularisation of the *Mahāvastu* among Newar communities.

I hope to have shown that the seminal works of modern scholars that considered the *Mahāvastu* since Burnouf’s first assessment had a lasting influence on the way the text has been conceived until today. These great pioneers, not having access to the earliest exemplar of the *Mahāvastu*, discovered by the NGMPP and made widely accessible thanks to Akira Yuyama, relied on copies descending from its apograph, manuscript Ta, which were influenced by the interpretative endeavour of the latter’s learned copyist. To some extent, the scholarly reception of the text was therefore modelled on the way it was interpreted by the *paṇḍita* Jayamuni, who rediscovered the old manuscript Sa in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century and was a key link in the chain of diffusion of the text in the Kathmandu valley. As a document to the history of the Lokottaravādin school and its canonical scriptures before the disappearance of its ordination lineage, manuscript Sa is particularly precious, and should be the natural basis for a new, much needed, critical edition of the *Mahāvastu*. This, I would like to add, should be a collective task.

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<sup>73</sup> Cf. NGMPP, reel no. C 18/4, fol. 38a, l. 4. This manuscript is dated N.S. 1027.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Vergati 1982; Vaidya 1986: 73–83 (with due caution); Gellner 1992: 180–86.

<sup>75</sup> The *Mahāvastu* is purportedly one of the sources of Niṣṭhānanda Vajrācārya’s *Lalitavistara-sūtra* composed in Newārī and published in N.S. 1034 (1914 AD), well before Western scholarship made a significant impact on the Newar tradition. Cf. Shakya 1978: 6. Later on, this compilation was itself influential on Chittadhar Hṛdaya’s *Sugata Saurabha*. Cf. Lewis & Tuladhar 2010: 10–11.

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