Abhidharma in early Mahāyāna[1]

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There is a growing tendency among scholars to discard questions about the (single) origin of Mahāyāna as inappropriate. Schopen (1975: 181 [52]) was perhaps the first to suggest a multiple origin, offering "the assumption that since each [Mahāyāna] text placed itself at the center of its own cult, early Mahāyāna (from a sociological point of view), rather than being an identifiable single group, was in the beginning a loose federation of a number of distinct though related cults, all of the same pattern, but each associated with its specific text." He was soon followed by Harrison (1978: 35), who observed that Mahāyāna "was from the outset undeniably multi-faceted." Some thirty years after his first assumption, Schopen stated again (2004: 492): "it has become increasingly clear that Mahāyāna Buddhism was never one thing, but rather, it seems, a loosely bound bundle of many, and ⋯ could contain ⋯ contradictions,

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or at least antipodal elements." Silk (2002: 371) reminds us that "various early Mahāyāna sūtras express somewhat, and sometimes radically, different points of view, and often seem to have been written in response to diverse stimuli. For example, the tenor of such (apparently) early sūtras as the *Kaśyapaparivarta* and the *Rāṣṭrapālapaṛipṛcchā* on the one hand seems to have little in common with the logic and rhetoric behind the likewise putatively early *Pratyutpannasaṃmukhāvasthita*, *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* or *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka* on the other." Shimoda (2009: 7) suggests that "the Mahāyāna initially existed in the form of diverse phenomena to which the same name eventually began to be applied." Boucher (2008: xii) sums up recent work, saying: "Much of the recent scholarship on the early Mahāyāna points to a tradition that arose not as a single, well-defined, unitary movement, but from multiple trajectories emanating from and alongside Mainstream Buddhism." Sasaki (2009: 27) considers it "reasonable to assume that a multiplicity of originally discrete groups created a new style of Buddhism from their respective positions and produced their own scriptures and that with the passage of time these merged and intertwined to form as a whole the large current known as the Mahāyāna." He continues: "The Mahāyāna was a new Buddhist movement that should be regarded as a sort of social phenomenon that arose simultaneously in different places from several sources." Ruegg (2004: 33) emphasizes the geographic dimension: "The geographical spread of early Mahāyāna would appear to have been characterized by polycentric diffusion."[2] A decade before him, Harrison (1995: 56) called Mahāyāna

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2) Ruegg explains (p. 33-34): "From the start, an important part in the spread of Mahayana was no doubt played both by the Northwest of the Indian subcontinent and by the Āndhra country in south-central India, but presumably neither was the sole place of its origin. Bihar, Bengal and Nepal too were important centres

"a pan-Buddhist movement — or, better, a loose set of movements."

This paper does not intend to find fault with these new insights into early Mahāyāna. However, it wishes to draw attention to a factor that is habitually overlooked in this discussion, namely, the dependence of most early Mahāyāna texts on the scholastic developments that had taken place during the final centuries preceding the Common Era, in northwestern India.[3] This, as we will see, may have chronological and geographical consequences.[4]

Consider the following statement by Paul Williams (1989: 16): "It is sometimes thought that one of the characteristics of early Mahāyāna was a teaching of the emptiness of dharmas (*dharmaśūnyatā*) — a teaching that these constituents, too, lack inherent existence, are not ultimate realities, in the same way as our everyday world is not an ultimate reality for the Abhidharma. ⋯ As a characteristic of early Mahāyāna this is false." Williams then draws attention to some non-Mahāyāna texts — the *Lokānuvartana Sūtra* and the *Satyasiddhi Śāstra* of Harivarman — that teach

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of Mahayana. Sri Lanka also was involved in the history of the Mahayana ⋯"

3) An important exception is Harrison, 1978: 39–40: "[The philosophy of the Prajñaparamita] attacked the qualified realism of the prevalent Sarvastivadins and held that all dharmas ⋯ are essentially empty (śūnya) and devoid of objective reality or 'ownbeing' (svabhāva)." Walser's recent book (2005) appears to overlook the direct or indirect dependence of many Mahayana works on northwestern scholasticism.

4) Peter Skilling (2010: 6) rightly reminds us "that the monastics who practised Mahayana took Śravaka vows, and shared the same monasteries with their fellow ordinands. Above all, we should not forget that those who practised Mahayana accepted the Śravaka *Piṭakas*. They followed one or the other *vinaya*, they studied and recited *sūtras*, and they studied the *abhidharma*." The point to be made in this article is that, in order to study Sarvastivada Abhidharma, Sarvastivada Abhidharma must exist, and one must have access to it.

the emptiness of dharmas. In other words, Williams does not deny that the teaching of emptiness of dharmas is a characteristic of many early Mahāyāna works; he merely points out that the same teaching is also found in certain non-Mahāyāna works. David Seyfort Ruegg makes a similar observation (2004: 39): "The doctrine of the non-substantiality of phenomena (*dharmanairātmya / dharmaniḥsvabhāvatā*, i.e. *svabhāva-śūnyatā* 'Emptiness of self-existence') has very often been regarded as criterial, indeed diagnostic, for identifying a teaching or work as Mahāyānist. For this there may of course be a justification. But it has nevertheless to be recalled that by the authorities of the Madhyamaka school of Mahāyānist philosophy, it is regularly argued that not only the Mahāyānist but even the Śrāvakayānist Arhat must of necessity have an understanding (if only a somewhat limited one) of *dharmanairātmya*." Once again, Ruegg does not deny that the emptiness of dharmas is a teaching that is almost omnipresent in early Mahāyāna texts. Like Williams, he merely points out that it is not limited to these texts.

Neither Williams nor Ruegg mention what I consider most important: that the very question of the emptiness or otherwise of dharmas is based on the ontological schemes elaborated in Greater Gandhāra, perhaps by the Sarvāstivādins (but this is not certain). Numerous Buddhist texts, whether Mahāyāna or not, testify to the influence this ontology has come to exert on Buddhist thought all over India. However, this ontology had originally been limited to a geographical region, and may have taken a while before leaving this region.[5] The fact that Mahāyāna texts taught

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5) This initial geographical limitation is not unique to Sarvastivada Abhidharma, and may have characterized many innovations in Indian philosophy. For a study of the initial geographical limitation (to Mithila) and subsequent spread of Navya–Nyāya techniques, see Bronkhorst, Diaconescu & Kulkarni, forthcoming.

the emptiness of dharmas may not therefore signify that this is a typically or exclusively Mahāyāna position, but it does emphasize the dependence of much of Mahāyāna literature on developments that had begun in a small corner of northwestern India.[6) The question is, did the Mahāyāna texts concerned undergo this influence in Greater Gandhāra itself, or did they do so elsewhere, when the originally Gandharan ontology had spread to other parts of the subcontinent? The answer to this question cannot but lie in chronology: when did this Abhidharmic ontology leave Greater Gandhāra, and when were the earliest Mahāyāna texts composed that betray its influence? If these Mahāyāna texts were composed before Abhidharmic ontology left Greater Gandhāra, then these texts must have been composed in Greater Gandhāra.[7)

With this in mind, let us look at a recent article by Allon and Salomon(2010). These two authors argue that the earliest evidence of Mahāyāna that has reached us comes from Gandhāra: "three ⋯ manuscripts have ⋯ been discovered which testify to the existence of Mahayana literature in Gāndhārī ⋯ reaching back, apparently, into the formative period of the Mahayana itself" (p. 9). They conclude "that the Mahayana was already a significant, if perhaps still a minority presence in the earlier period of the Buddhist manuscripts in Gandhāra" (p. 12). Allon and Salomon raise the question whether "Gandhāra played a formative role in the emergence of Mahayana," and whether texts like the ones that

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6) So already Dessein, 2009: 53: "it appears that it was in the north that early Mahayanistic ideas were fitted into the framework of Sarvastivāda abhidharmic developments." Cp. Skilling, 2010: 17 n. 49: "In the *Bodhicaryavatara* (chap. 9, v. 41), a rhetorical opponent of the Mahayana questions the usefulness of the teaching of emptiness: it is the realization of the Four Truths of the Noble that leads to liberation — what use is emptiness?"

7) Perhaps Kaśmīra, too, should be taken into consideration; see below.

have survived "were originally composed in this region" (p. 17). They caution that these types of texts may have been available at other major Buddhist centers throughout the subcontinent during this period: "It is merely the subcontinental climate, which is so deleterious to the preservation of organic materials, that has denied us the evidence" (p. 17).

Allon and Salomon's caution is justified and appreciated. However, as observed above, the region of Greater Gandhāra did not only distinguish itself from other Buddhist regions through its climate, or through its exceptional aptitude to preserve manuscripts that could not survive elsewhere. The Buddhism of Greater Gandhāra distinguishes itself equally through the intellectual revolution that had taken place there during the centuries immediately preceding the Common Era. It is here that the modification and elaboration of Abhidharma took place that became the basis of virtually all forms of subcontinental Buddhism. Clearly Greater Gandhāra was not just one other Buddhist center. It may be justified to consider it the most important Buddhist center of the Indian subcontinent around the beginning of the Common Era.[8] The fact that it has a climate that is favorable to the preservation of organic materials may be looked upon as a fortunate extra.[9]

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8) See also Salomon, 1999: 178-180 ("Gandhāra as a Center of Buddhist Intellectual Activity").

9) Note that in subsequent centuries "palm leaf writing material came from the South", but "no southern scripts or (Buddhist) texts were found in the Turfan collections studied by Sander [1968: 25]." Houben & Rath therefore wonder (2012: 3 n. 6): "Can we conclude that southern Buddhist schools, if they had any independent existence, were not authoritative in the North?" Not yet aware of the Mahayana texts found in Gandhara, Houben & Rath (2012: 38 n. 62) suggest the southern parts of the Indian subcontinent as a possible or even likely area of origin of Mahayana ideas.

Consider now the following. Allon and Salomon draw attention to various early fragments of early Mahāyāna texts that have recently become available. The following passage in their article is of particular interest (p. 10):

> The so-called "split" collection of Gāndhārī manuscripts, which has not yet been published but which is being studied by Harry Falk, contains a manuscript with texts corresponding to the first (on the recto side) and fifth (verso) chapters of the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā. This scroll has been radiocarbon dated to a range of 23-43 CE (probability 14.3 percent) or 47-127 (probability 81.1 percent), and a date in the later first or early second century CE is consistent with its paleographic and linguistic characteristics. Therefore in this Gāndhārī Prajñāpāramitā manuscript we have the earliest firm dating for a Mahayana sutra manuscript in any language, as well as the earliest specific attestation of Mahayana literature in early Gandhāra.

Falk's article has meanwhile come out (2011) and studies, among other things, the manuscript referred to in this passage. We learn from it (p. 20) that "[a] comparison with the Chinese translation of Lokakṣema, dated 179/180, and the classical version as translated by Kumārajīva clearly shows a development from a simple to a more developed text. The Gāndhārī text looks archaic and is less verbose than what Lokakṣema translated. It can be shown that his version was already slightly inflated by the insertion of stock phrases, appositions and synonyms. The Sanskrit version, finally, expanded still further."

At the same time, certain copying blunders indicate that the Gandhāra manuscript was itself copied from another one which was written in

Kharoṣṭhī as well (Falk & Karashima, 2012: 22).

The special point to be emphasized is that the "Perfection of Wisdom," which is the subject matter of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*[10] in its surviving Sanskrit version, only makes sense against the background of the overhaul of Buddhist scholasticism that had taken place in Greater Gandhāra during the last centuries preceding the Common Era. It was in Greater Gandhāra, during this period, that Buddhist scholasticism developed an ontology centered around its lists of dharmas. Lists of dharmas had been drawn up before the scholastic revolution in Greater Gandhāra, and went on being drawn up elsewhere with the goal of preserving the teaching of the Buddha. But the Buddhists of Greater

Gandhāra were the first to use these lists of dharmas to construe an ontology, unheard of until then. They looked upon the dharmas as the only really existing things, rejecting the existence of entities that were made up of them. Indeed, these scholiasts may have been the first to call themselves *śūnyavādins*.[11] No effort was spared to systematize the ontological scheme developed in this manner, and the influence exerted by it on more recent forms of Buddhism in the subcontinent and beyond was to be immense. But initially this was a geographically limited phenomenon.[12] It may even be possible to approximately date the beginning of this intellectual revolution. I have argued in a number of publications that various literary and philosophical features of the grammarian Patañjali's *(Vyākaraṇa-) Mahābhāṣya* must be explained in the light of his acquaintance with the fundamentals of the newly developed

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10) The Gāndhārī text calls itself, in a colophon, just *Prajñāparamita*.
11) In their *Vijñānakāya* see Bronkhorst, 2009: 120, with a reference to La Vallée Poussin, 1925: 358-359. See further Salomon, 1999: 178.
12) See Bronkhorst, 1999; 2009: 81-114.

Abhidharma.[13] This would imply that the intellectual revolution in northwestern Buddhism had begun before the middle of the second century BCE. If it is furthermore correct to think, as I have argued elsewhere, that this intellectual revolution was inspired by the interaction between Buddhists and Indo-Greeks, it may be justified to situate the beginning of the new Abhidharma at a time following the renewed conquest of Gandhāra by the Indo-Greeks; this was in or around 185 BCE.[14] The foundations for the new Abhidharma may therefore have been laid toward the middle of the second century BCE.

It is not known for how long this form of Abhidharma remained confined to Greater Gandhāra. There is, as a matter of fact, reason to think that Kaśmīra was implicated in this development virtually from its beginning.[15] It is here that the three extant *Vibhāṣā* compendia were composed. The most recent of these three, the *Mahāvibhāṣā*, refers to the "former king, Kaniṣka, of Gandhāra."[16] Kaniṣka's realm appears to have begun in 127 CE.[17] The *Mahāvibhāṣā* is presumably younger than this, but not much. The other two *Vibhāṣās* are slightly older, and may therefore belong to the first century CE. However, indirect evidence pushes the date further back. Already the *Vibhāṣā* reports the bad treatment Buddhists underwent under Puṣyamitra, presumably in Kaśmīra.[18] Puṣyamitra was a ruler with whom the grammarian Patañjali was associated.

13) Bronkhorst, 1987: 43–71; 1994; 2002; 2004: esp. §§ 8–9.
14) See Salomon, 2005, which is based on an interpretation of the yavana era. For a different interpretation of this era, with references to the relevant literature, see Falk, 2012: 135–136. See further Salomon, 2012; Golzio, 2012: 142.
15) Indeed, the map given by Salomon (1999: 2) suggests that he includes Kaśmīra in "Greater Gandhāra"; Behrendt (2004: 16, 22) does so explicitly.
16) Willemen, Dessein & Cox, 1998: 232; Dessein, 2009: 44.
17) Falk, 2001; see further Golzio, 2008.
18) Lamotte, 1958: 424 ff.

There are reasons to think that Patañali himself lived in Kaśmīra in the middle of the second century BCE. Patañali betrays familiarity with a number of fundamental concepts of Sarvāstivāda scholasticism.[19]

This form of Abhidharma subsequently spread beyond Greater Gandhāra and Kaśmīra.[20] Perhaps Nāgārjuna is the first author from a different region and familiar with the new Abhidharma whose writings have been preserved.[21] Nāgārjuna's date appears to be the end of the second or the beginning of the third century CE.[22] Inscriptional evidence confirms that there were Sarvāstivādins in northern India outside Gandhāra from the first century CE onward.[23] In other words, the scholastic form of Abhidharma developed in Greater Gandhāra and Kaśmīra spread beyond this region at least from the first century CE on.[24]

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19) See note 12, above. On Patañjali's link to Kaśmīra, see Bronkhorst, forthcoming, with references to further literature. Note that the word Sarvāstivāda is here used in a general and imprecise manner; it is not at all certain that the early Abhidharma developments in northwestern India belonged to that school in particular.

20) The spread of Sarvastivada Abhidharma may have to be distinguished from the spread of the Sarvastivadins themselves. With regard to the latter, Schopen (2004a: 41 n. 34) draws attention to inscriptions referred to in Bareau, 1955: 36 (inscription of the 2nd cent. CE from "près de Peshawer, dans l'Ouest du Cachemire, à Mathurā et à Çrāvasti"), 131-132, and the sources there cited; Lamotte, 1958: 578 (earliest Sarvāstivāda inscription in Mathura, 1st cent. CE; cp. Konow, 1969: 30 ff.); Willemen et al., 1998: 103-104 (monastery at Kalawan with earliest mention in an inscription of the Sarvāstivādins, 77 CE according to Hirakawa, 1993: 233); Salomon, 1999: 200, 205 (according to Salomon, it is "likely that rayagaha- [in this inscribed potsherd] referred to a place of that name, presumably named after the original Rājagrha in Magadha, renowned in Buddhist tradition", p. 213).

21) The influence of the new Abhidharma on Jainism, too, may go back to an early date and a region different from Greater Gandhāra; see Bronkhorst, 2011: 130 ff.

22) Walser, 2002; 2005: 86.

23) See note 18, above.

The *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, as are other texts of the same genre,[25] is largely built on the scholastic achievements of Greater Gandhāra; it draws conclusions from these. One of its recurring themes is its emphasis that everything that is not a dharma does not exist. This is the inevitable corollary of the conviction that only dharmas really exist, but one that is rarely emphasized in the Abhidharma texts. The *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* goes further and claims that the dharmas themselves do not exist either, that they are empty (*śūnya*). Once again, all this only makes sense against the historical background of the Abhidharma elaborated in Greater Gandhāra. Another recurring theme concerns the beginning and end of dharmas. This is clearly the elaboration of a question with which the scholiasts of Greater Gandhāra were confronted: did they have to postulate the existence of a dharma called "beginning" (*jāti, utpatti*) in order to account for the fact that dharmas, being momentary, have a beginning in time? The scholiasts explored this possibility, and ended up with improbable dharmas such as "the beginning of beginning" (*jātijāti*). The position taken in numerous Mahāyāna texts is that dharmas have no beginning (and no end). This makes perfect sense among thinkers who are steeped in Gandharan scholasticism, but nowhere else.

Let us look at one passage from the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*. Without

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24) For the relative chronology of the earlier Abhidharma works, see Dessein, 1996. We should not forget, of course, that the grammarian Patañjali was already acquainted with the fundamental notions of the new Abhidharma soon after 150 BCE. Different signs point in the direction that Patañjali lived in Kaśmīra; see Bronkhorst, forthcoming.

25) Roger Wright kindly draws my attention to Conze's (1960: 11) mention of the Arapacana chapter of the *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* as evidence for its northwestern origin. There is indeed evidence to think that the Arapacana syllabary had its origin in Gandhāra (Salomon, 1990; Falk, 1993: 236–239).

the prior conviction that only dharmas exist, it is pointless to claim that something does not exist because it is not a dharma. Yet this is the point frequently made in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*. Consider the following passage, in the abbreviated translation of Edward Conze (1958: 1-2):

> Thereupon the Venerable Subhūti, by the Buddha's might, said to the Lord: The Lord has said, "make it clear now, Subhūti, to the bodhisattvas, the great beings, starting from perfect wisdom, how the bodhisattvas, the great beings go forth into perfect wisdom!" When one speaks of a 'bodhisattva', what dharma does that word 'bodhisattva' denote? I do not, O Lord, see that dharma 'bodhisattva', nor a dharma called 'perfection of wisdom.' Since I neither find, nor apprehend, nor see a dharma 'bodhisattva', nor a 'perfection of wisdom', what bodhisattva shall I instruct and admonish in what perfection of wisdom? And yet, O Lord, if, when this is pointed out, a bodhisattva's heart does not become cowed, nor stolid, does not despair nor despond, if he does not turn away or become dejected, does not tremble, is not frightened or terrified, it is just this bodhisattva, this great being who should be instructed in perfect wisdom.

Ontological issues like this, relating to the question whether this or that item is a dharma, or indeed whether dharmas themselves exist, fill the first chapter of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* one of the two chapters of which parts have been preserved on the manuscript from Gandhāra. Is this already true of the early manuscript from Gandhāra?

The edition of the manuscript from Gandhāra in a recent article by Falk & Karashima (2012: 32-35) shows that it already contains this passage

in essence. There is one major difference: the Gandhāra manuscript emphasizes that 'bodhisattva' is not a dharma, but does not say the same about the 'perfection of wisdom', as does the surviving Sanskrit text. The Chinese translation of Lokakṣema, too, is without this information about the 'perfection of wisdom'. This allowed Schmithausen (1977: 44 f.), some thirty-five years, ago to argue that our text originally only spoke of the non-existence of the bodhisattva, not of the non-existence of the "perfection of wisdom" (*Prajñāpāramitā*).[26] This is now confirmed by the Gandhāra manuscript.

This example should suffice to show that the manuscript from Gandhāra dealt with at least some of the philosophical issues that had been raised and developed in Greater Gandhāra.

Let us get to the main point. The Gāndhārī manuscript, or rather the text it contains, may conceivably have been composed when this kind of Abhidharma thought was still the exclusive property of Greater Gandhāra. If so, this text was itself composed in Greater Gandhāra, or indeed in Gandhāra proper,[27] and it becomes tempting to conclude

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26) Schmithausen (1977: 44 f.) concludes from this that the passage was enlarged, so as to include, beside the *pudgalanairatmya* that is behind the non-existence of a bodhisattva, also the Mahayanist *dharmanairatmya*, which is behind the non-existence of *Prajñāpāramitā*. This conclusion is doubtful. It is based on the assumption that *Prajñāpāramita* is a dharma. This assumption conflicts both with the wording of the passage under consideration – *tam apy aham bhagavan dharmam na samanupaśyami yad uta prajñāparamita nāma* "I do not, O Lord, see a dharma called 'perfection of wisdom'" – and, to the best of my knowledge, with the traditional lists of dharmas. It is true that *prajña* "wisdom" figures in those lists, but *prajñāpāramitā* does not. Just as the scholiasts distinguished between dharmas and their beginning, or birth (*jāti*), they would presumably distinguish between "wisdom" and the "perfection of wisdom"; the former exists (because it is a dharma), the latter does not (because it is not a dharma).

that the kind of Mahāyāna to which it gives expression began in that part of the subcontinent.

This tentative conclusion is in need of specification. What is being discussed is the kind of Mahāyāna that leans heavily on the scholastic developments initiated in Greater Gandhāra. This may signify that the kind of Mahāyāna that draws inspiration from the scholastic innovations of Greater Gandhāra might possibly have originated there. The same is not necessarily true of Mahāyāna in all of its forms. The bodhisattva ideal, after which Mahāyāna is also known as Bodhisattva-yāna,[28] may well exist without the scholastic ideas elaborated in Greater Gandhāra, and may indeed have existed without them.[29] This is the conclusion

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27) Cf. Falk & Karashima, 2012: 20: "It is hardly far-fetched to assume that this text had its origins in Gandhāra proper, that is in the Peshawar valley with its tributaries, including the adjoining region of Taxila." With respect to Bactria, Fussman (2011: 36), summing up a discussion, states: "On dira donc que la présence au moins occasionnelle de moines mahayanistes à Kara-Tepa et Fajaz-Tepa n'est pas exclu, qu'elle est même probable, mais qu'il n'existe aucun indice le démontrant." The *nikaya*-affiliation of these two monasteries was *mahāsaṅghika* (id., p. 35).

28) Note however Samuels, 1997; Appleton, 2010: 91-108.

29) Cf. Ruegg, 2004: 51: "no single philosophical doctrine and no single religious practice — not even the bodhisattva-ideal or the *svabhāva-śūnyata-* (*niḥsvabhāvata*) or *dharmanairātmya*-doctrine — can of and by itself be claimed to be the main religious or philosophical source of the Mahayana as a whole." Ruegg presumably includes the bodhisattva-ideal in this enumeration because this ideal also existed outside Mahayana; see the preceding note. Cp. Schopen, 2004: 493-494: "There is … a kind of general consensus that if there is a single defining characteristic of the Mahayana it is that for Mahayana the ultimate religious goal is no longer nirvana, but rather the attainment of full awakening or buddhahood by all. This goal in one form or another and, however nuanced, attenuated, or temporally postponed, characterizes virtually every form of Mahayana Buddhism that we know." Vetter (1994; 2001) argues "against the generally held notion that Mahayana and Prajñaparamita are identical, and for the thesis that the two came together at a certain moment in time, and

that one is tempted to draw from various passages in both Mahāyāna and Mainstream (Sarvāstivāda) texts collected by Fujita (2009). There were apparently Buddhists who pursued the goal of becoming Buddhas, i.e. they were bodhisattvas, and yet they did not follow many of the distinctive teachings that we find in most Mahāyāna texts.[30]

This is even true of a text that is usually considered a Mahāyāna text, presumably one of the oldest that has survived, the *Ugraparipṛcchāsūtra*.[31] Nattier (2003: 179 ff.) draws attention to what she calls "the absence of the rhetoric of absence itself." She explains, "the *Ugra* lacks anything that could be construed as a 'philosophy of emptiness.'" She concludes (p. 182): "It is tempting, therefore — and it may well be correct — to view the *Ugra* as representing a preliminary stage in the emergence of the bodhisattva vehicle, a phase centered on the project of 'constructing' ideas about the practices of the bodhisattva that preceded a later 'deconstructionist' — or better, dereifying — move."

It is clear from Nattier's remark that she is tempted to order the *Ugraparipṛcchāsūtra* chronologically. This tendency presents her with some difficulties, in that the *Ugraparipṛcchāsūtra* is not the only Mahāyāna Sūtra that ignores the "philosophy of emptiness": it shares this feature with the *Akṣobhyavyūha* and the *Sukhāvatīvyūha*, both of which seem

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yet did not always and everywhere remain united." (2001: 59)

30) See further Ruegg, 2004: 11 with note 15. Fujita's article relies heavily on Sarvāstivāda materials, but suggests that there may have been bodhisattvas also in other Nikāyas. The Sarvāstivādins, needless to add, were the very Buddhists who elaborated, or at any rate preserved, the scholastic ideas of Greater Gandhāra here under discussion. Williams's (1989: 26 ff.) discussion of the *Ajitasena Sūtra* may be of interest here.

31) Nattier (2003: 10) cautiously specifies that the *Ugraparipṛcchāsūtra* "should not ⋯ be called a 'Mahāyāna sūtra' — not, that is, without considerable qualification."

"unconcerned about any possible hazards of reification" (p. 180 f.). This is why she concludes (p. 182): " … it is clear that the move from affirmation to antireification did not proceed in one-way fashion. On the contrary, what we see in later literature is more like a series of zigzag developments, with each new idea about the bodhisattva path first asserted in positive (or 'constructionist') fashion, and then negated in subsequent texts." If one thinks only in chronologically linear terms, it may indeed be necessary to think of "zigzag developments," but there is of course no obligation to do so.[32] It is possible, perhaps even likely, that certain schools of Mahāyāna (if "school" is the term to use here) remained unaffected by the new Abhidharma, unlike most other Mahāyāna schools, yet survived beside them.

Schopen (2004: 495) speaks about "the notion that [Mahāyāna] was a reaction to a narrow scholasticism on the part of monastic, Hīnayāna, Buddhism"; he thinks that this notion should have seemed silly from the start. Such a view, he continues, was only even possible by completely ignoring most of Buddhist literature and putting undue emphasis on Abhidharma. Schopen's point is well taken, but overlooks the fact that most of the Mahāyāna texts have been profoundly influenced by Gandharan Abhidharma, whether directly or indirectly. A few examples must suffice to illustrate the point. Harrison (1990: xviii) says the following about the *Pratyutpannabuddhasaṃmukhāvasthitasamādhisūtra*: "what it is at pains to get across to its readers and hearers is the same attitude to phenomena that we find emphasised in the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature — namely, that all phenomena, or rather all dharmas … are empty (*śūnya*), that is, devoid

32) Drewes (2010: 62) — referring to Dantinne, 1991 (p. 43?) and Pagel , 2006 (p. 75) — points out that the *Ugraparipṛcchāsūtra* is not necessarily especially early.

of essence, independent existence or 'own-being' (*svabhāva*). Since this is so, there is nothing which can provide a basis for 'apprehension' or 'objectification' (*upalambha*), by which term is intended that process of the mind which seizes on the objects of experience as entities or existing things (*bhāva*), and regards them as possessing an independent and objective reality."[33] About the *Śūraṃgamasamādhisūtra*, Lamotte (1965/1998: 40-41) observed: "The essential aim of the [*Śūraṃgamasamādhisūtra*] is to inculcate into its listeners or readers the Pudgala- and Dharmanairātmya. Not only do beings not exist, but things are empty of self-nature, unarisen, undestroyed, originally calm and naturally abiding in Nirvāṇa, free of marks and in consequence inexpressible and unthinkable, the same and devoid of duality." Once again we are here confronted with the kind of thought that could only arise on the basis of Gandharan Abhidharma. About the *Ratnakūṭa* texts, Pagel (1995: 100) observes: "Like practically all other Mahāyāna sūtras, the Ratnakūṭa's bodhisattva texts operate within the gnoseologic parameter of Mahāyāna ontology. This is most ostensibly borne out by the frequency with which they draw connections with its axioms of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), sameness (*samatā*) and non-objectifiability (*anupalambha*) that most accept as the philosophic substratum for their exposition." The following passage from the *Kāśyapaparivarta* shows the preoccupation of this text, too, with the ontological status of dharmas:[34]

> This also, Kāśyapa, is the middle way, the regarding of dharmas in

33) See however Harrison, 1978: 55: "In its interpretation of a 'Mahayana-ised' form of *buddhānusmṛti* in terms of the doctrine of Śūnyata [the *Pratyutpanna-sūtra*] reveals tensions within the Mahāyāna."

34) *Kāśyapaparivarta*, ed. Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya, p. 25–26, § 63; tr. Frauwallner, 1969/2010: 178–179 (replacing factors with dharmas); cp. Weller, 1970: 122–123 [1201–1202].

accordance with truth: that one does not make the dharmas empty through emptiness but, rather, the dharmas themselves are empty; that one does not make the dharmas signless through the signless but, ather, the dharmas themselves are signless; ⋯ that one does not make the dharmas unarisen through non-arising, but, rather the dharmas themselves are unarisen; that one does not make the dharmas unborn through not being born, but, rather, the dharmas themselves are unborn; and that one does not make the dharmas essenceless through essencelessness (*asvabhāvatā*), but, rather, the dharmas themselves are essenceless.

Even Sūtras that lay less emphasis on "philosophy" often betray that they, too, accept ideas that are based on Gandharan scholasticism. The *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*, for example, lays relatively little emphasis on these ontological concerns,[35] but it is not, in its present form, without them. Consider the following passage, in which the Buddha criticizes the follower of the Śrāvakayāna:[36]

Therefore the follower of the Śrāvakayāna [who has cut his various

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35) Cf. Nattier, 2003: 181: "Even the Lotus Sūtra — widely read through the lens of 'emptiness' philosophy by both traditional East Asian *śunyata*, and in general seems more concerned with urging its listeners to have faith in their own future Buddhahood than in encouraging them to 'deconstruct' their concepts."

36) Saddharmap(V) p. 93 l. 9–15; Saddharmap(W) p. 127 l. 2–11: *tena śrāvakayānīyaḥ evam janati, evam ca vacam bhāṣate: na santy apare dharmā abhisaṃboddhavyāḥ/ nirvānaprapto 'smīti/ atha khalu tathāgatas tasmai dharmam deśayati/ yena sarvadharma na praptaḥ, kutas tasya nirvanam iti? tam bhagavan bodhau samādāpayati/ sa utpannabodhicitto na samsarasthito na nirvānaprapto bhavati/ so 'vabudhya traidhātukam daśasu dikṣu śūnyam nirmitopamam māyopamam svapnamaricipratiśrutkopamam lokam paśyati/ sa sarvadharmān anutpannān aniruddhan abaddhān amuktan atamondhakaran naprakaśan paśyati/.* Cp. Kotsuki, 2010: V.44 b.1–3 (p. 66–67); Mizufune, 2011: V.56 b.5 – 57a.1 (p. 81–82).

ties] thinks like this and speaks like this: "There are no other dharmas to be realized. I have reached Nirvāṇa."

Then the Tathāgata teaches him the Doctrine. He who has not attained all dharmas, how can Nirvāṇa belong to him? The Lord establishes him in enlightenment: He in whom the thought of enlightenment has arisen is not in Saṃsāra nor has he reached Nirvāṇa. Having understood, he sees the universe in all ten directions as being empty (*śūnya*), similar to something fabricated, similar to magic, similar to a dream, a mirage, and echo. He sees all dharmas as not having arisen, as not having come to an end, not bound and not loose, not dark and not bright.

Here the preoccupation with the ontological status of dharmas is evident, but it is not impossible that this portion is a late addition to the text.[37] The *Rāṣṭrapālaparipṛcchāsūtra*, too, concentrates on other issues than ontology, but reveals its ontological position in several passages, such as the following:[38]

Like a lion, [the Blesssed One] announces that all dharmas are without substratum and are empty ⋯ Just as a lion, roaring in a mountain cave, frightens prey here in the world, so too does the Lord of Men, resounding that [all dharmas] are empty and without substratum, frighten those adhering to heretical schools. ⋯ Focused on emptiness and signlessness, he considers all conditioned things to be like illusions.

37) Karashima, 2001: 172: "The portion in the Lotus Sutra where we can clearly see the influence of the *śūnyatā* thought system, is in the second half of the *Oṣadhī–parivarta* (V). Hence this verse portion, which is not found in Kumārajīva's translation, is thought to have been interpolated at a much later time." See further Vetter, 2001: 83 ff.

38) RP p. 2 l. 9; p. 3 l. 15–16 (tr. Boucher, 2008: 114–115). On the presence of old Āryaverses in this text, see Klaus, 2008.

According to Osto (2008: 19), "the *Gaṇḍavyūha*, while not specifically elaborating a Madhyamaka or Yogācāra position, contains passages that support aspects of both schools." What this means is that "all phenomena (dharmas) lack inherent existence or independent essence (*svabhāva*) and therefore are characterized by their emptiness (*śūnyatā*)" (p. 18).

It follows from our reflections that Gandharan influence may conceivably have modified an already existing preoccupation with the path to Buddha-hood. This earlier preoccupation with Buddha-hood might in that case not have originated in Greater Gandhāra. But even if this were to be the case, it could still be maintained that the elements in Mahāyāna that depend on the scholastic innovations of Greater Gandhāra — the ontological tendency, the interrogations about the existence of this or that dharma or about dharmas in general, the concern with emptiness, the wish to abolish conceptual constructs (*vikalpa*) — were introduced in that part of the subcontinent. It follows from the above that early Mahāyāna may have drawn inspiration from the intellectual revolution that had taken place in Greater Gandhāra. It is even possible that it underwent this influence, at least initially, in that very region.

Clearly this proposal does not necessarily tell us much about the origin or origins of Mahāyāna. It does tell us something about the geographical region in which it may have originated, or through which it passed in an early phase. It can therefore be combined with theories that do try to explain the origin of Mahāyāna. Consider, for example, Drewes's (2010a: 70; also 2011) suggestion "that early Indian Mahāyāna was, at root, a textual movement that developed in Buddhist preaching circles and centered on the production and use of Mahāyāna sūtras." Drewes specifies: "At some point, drawing on a range of ideas and theoretical perspectives

that had been developing for some time, and also developing many new ideas of their own, certain preachers began to compose a new type of text — sūtras containing profound teachings intended for bodhisattvas — which came to be commonly depicted as belonging to a new revelation that the Buddha arranged to take place five hundred years after his death." If we accept this theory, which I do not insist we must, we would like to know which were those "ideas and theoretical perspectives that had been developing for some time." The intellectual revolution that had taken place in Greater Gandhāra will then immediately come to mind as providing at least a part, an important part, of those ideas and theoretical perspectives.

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Abbreviations:

ARIRIAB	Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University
AS	Asiatische Studien, Études Asiatiques, Bern
ASP(Vaidya)	*Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, ed. P. L. Vaidya, Darbhanga 1960 (BST 4)
BBu	Bibliotheca Buddhica, St. Petersburg (Leningrad)
BST	Buddhist Sanskrit Texts, Darbhanga
EB	The Eastern Buddhist, Kyōto
IIJ	Indo-Iranian Journal, Den Haag, Dordrecht
KlSchr	Kleine Schriften [Glasenapp-Stiftung], Wiesbaden, Stuttgart
RP	*Rāṣṭrapālaparipṛcchā*, ed. L. Finot, Petersburg 1901 (BBu 2)
Saddharmap(V)	*Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*, ed. P. L. Vaidya, Darbhanga 1960 (BST 6)
Saddharmap(W)	*Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*, ed. U. Wogihara and C. Tsuchida, Tokyo, 1958
WZKS	Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens, Wien

요하네스 브롱코스트(Johannes Bronkhorst)는 라이덴 대학에서 박사학위를 받았으며, 현재 스위스 로잔대학교(Lausanne Univ.)의 명예교수이다. 초기불교 및 자이나 사상과 관련된 분야의 연구에 매진하고 있다. 주요 저서로는 *Theoretical Aspects of Panini's Grammar*(1980), *The Two Traditions of Meditation in Ancient India*(1986), *The Two Sources of Ancient Indian Asceticism*(1993) 등이 있으며, 이외에 다수의 논문이 있다.