

Considerations on the Narrative Structure of the *Mahābhārata*

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1

It is a well-known fact that the *Mahābhārata* [*Mbh*] in its present shape is constructed on quite an elaborate system of discourse. In almost every section of the great epic one finds several different narrators speaking coincidentally. It lies beyond the scope of our ability to examine this elaborate system in its every aspect. In the present study we shall rather focus on the constitution of the narrative frameworks which extend over the entire main part of the epic.

In the current text of the *Mbh* one recognizes two different levels of narration as regards the main story of the epic. One is the discourse of Bard Ugraśravas, which makes up the outermost, larger framework of narration, while this framework encapsulates the inner and smaller one represented by the recital of Vyāsa's original epic by one of his pupils named Vaiśaṃpāyana.¹ Almost since the very start of modern research on the great epic its double narration has been engaging the attention of scholars. To the best of our knowledge, however, there has never been undertaken any full-scale exploration into the origin and character of the double structure of narration in the *Mbh*, although we occasionally come across incidental remarks on the subject when perusing academic publications by epic scholars.² In the present article we take up this subject and attempt to offer some reasonable solutions to the problems posed by the narrative constitution of the *Mbh*. In this attempt we have to conduct a careful analysis of the relevant passages of the *Mbh*, especially those from the introductory part of the First Book entitled *Ādiparvan*.³ For the sake of convenience, the first six sub-divisions of the *Parvan* may be listed as follows:

- I. *Ādiparvan*
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| 1. <i>Anukramaṇīparvan</i> | (<i>Mbh</i> I,1) |
| 2. <i>Parvasaṃgrahap.</i> | (I,2) |
| 3. <i>Pauṣyap.</i> | (I,3) |
| 4. <i>Paulomap.</i> | (I,4–12) |
| 5. <i>Āstīkap.</i> | (I,13–53) |
| 6. <i>Ādivaṃśāvatarāṇap.</i> | (I,54–61) |
| ⋮ | |

¹ There are thus three different levels of narration within the epic, if we take into account the original composition by Vyāsa. Cf. Brockington 1998, p.28.

² Mangel's work, indeed, deals with several aspects of the narrative constitution of the *Mbh*; but she does not present any explicit opinion about the text-historical formation of the double structure. Apparently she views the matter from angle different from ours.

³ The citations of *Mbh*-verses are made from the Critical Edition.

First of all, we have to trace the broad outlines of Vaiśampāyana's recital of Vyāsa's original epic, which constitutes the inner narrative framework of the main corpus. It is towards the beginning of the *Ādivaṃśāvataranaparvan* that Vaiśampāyana launches his long recitation. The first chapter of this sub-*Parvan* (*Mbh* I,54) opens with the scene of Vyāsa's paying a visit to the king Janamejaya, who has already had himself consecrated for the performance of the snake-sacrifice (*sarpasatra*). In the presence of priests and kings assembled in the sacrificial site, Janamejaya first pays due homage to Vyāsa and then expresses his earnest wish to learn from the sage about all the deeds of the Kurus and the Pāṇḍavas, especially about the fierce battle fought by them. Vyāsa himself does not take on the task of relating the grand story, but entrusts it to his pupil Vaiśampāyana who is sitting nearby, ordaining him to recite the whole story as he has formerly learnt it from his teacher. Obeying this instruction, Vaiśampāyana instantly starts his recital of the whole epic, which is designated as "*itihāsam purātanam*" in *Mbh* I,54,23.

It is this very recital by Vaiśampāyana which encloses the whole main part of the *Mbh*. In other words, Vyāsa's own narration of his composition is missing in the entire text of the epic, as Mangels has confirmed as a result of her analysis of the text-transmission of the *Mbh* as presented in the *Ādīparvan*.⁴ Vaiśampāyana's taking over of the role of narrator from his teacher described in this introductory scene can be looked upon by us as an ingenious device invented by an early, if not the original, compiler of the *Mbh*. As for the absence of Vyāsa's own narration in the epic, we can find a reason for this in the fact that the sage directly participates in the action of the main story. Were the first-person narration employed for those scenes in which Vyāsa plays the role of adviser for or arbitrator between the main characters, then the dramatic effects of their depiction would be reduced by a considerable degree.

First of all, Vaiśampāyana gives a brief summary of the train of events concerning the royal feud and its consequences. Subsequently he relates the circumstances under which Vyāsa composed the *Mbh*, comprising 100,000 *ślokas*, extolling at the same time the unparalleled greatness of the epic as well as the enormous merits one acquires by reciting it or listening to its recitation.

In the present text of the *Mbh*, it is only after these preliminaries that Vaiśampāyana enters into his main discourse. He starts his long history of the Bhārata clan with an account of the deeds of Vasu Uparicara. In this story Uparicara is represented as the progenitor of Satyavatī, who gives birth to Vyāsa and thus becomes the real great-grandmother of both the Kaurava and the Pāṇḍava princes. It deserves our special notice that the main part of the epic does not begin with any story about one of the direct ancestors of the Bhārata princes such as Pūru, Yayāti, Bharata or Kuru, but with an account of the ancient king of Cedi who is only

⁴ Cf. Mangels pp.38–44.

loosely related to the royal lineage of the Kuru country.

During the long recital by Vaiśampāyana, king Janamejaya occasionally interpolates some comments or questions. The whole main corpus of the epic can, therefore, be regarded as a dialogue between the king and the disciple of Vyāsa. This dialogue lasts almost without interruption from I,55 through the entire main part up to XVIII,5,25. In the text of the Critical Edition, this continuity of the dialogue is broken only once. The sole interruption occurs in the 42nd–43rd chapters of the 15th Book called *Āśramavāsikaparvan*. In chapters 40–41 Vaiśampāyana relates how Vyāsa invoked by dint of his supernatural abilities the spirits of the dead Kaurava princes in front of their parents and widows on the banks of the Gaṅgā. The subsequent two chapters depict the scene of Janamejaya’s reunion with Parikṣit. Having just listened to the miraculous story, Janamejaya is overwhelmed with an irresistible desire to see his own deceased father, and this desire of the king is instantly fulfilled by Vyāsa, who is still present at the recital of his own epic by Vaiśampāyana. The role of narrator of this episodic event during the snake-sacrifice cannot be assigned to anyone else but the Bard Ugrasravas. Below we shall take up these two chapters again as a subject for our further examination.

3

Vaiśampāyana’s recital of Vyāsa’s epic, which we have just surveyed in its broadest outline, is encapsulated as a whole in the outermost narrative framework provided by the discourse of the Bard (*sūta*) Ugrasravas in the presence of Śaunaka and his fellow ascetics in the Naimiṣa forest.

In order that we may comprehend the fundamental character of the double narration, as well as the text-historical process of its formation, we shall now take a look at those sections of the *Mbh* in which the Bard makes his appearance as the direct narrator.

The present text of the *Mbh* opens with the scene of Ugrasravas’ arrival in the Naimiṣa forest, where Śaunaka and his fellow seers have been engaged in a sacrificial session (*satra*), lasting for twelve years (I,1,1–2). Having been received cordially by the sages and asked by one of them about his recent activities, the Bard answers that he has attended the recital of Vyāsa’s epic by Vaiśampāyana on the occasion of Janamejaya’s snake-sacrifice and then made a pilgrimage to the holy place of Samantapañcaka, where a battle had once been fought between the Kurus and the Pāṇḍavas (3–14).

Within the second chapter, called *Parvasamgrahaparvan*, however, there occurs an abrupt change of speakers so that the dialogistic setting of the sub-*Parvan* from verse 29 onward is thrown into utter confusion. As I have demonstrated in the article “The Formation of the *Anukramaṇī*- and the *Parvasamgrahaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*,” this disorder is brought about by a thoughtless rearrangement of verse-groups undertaken by a redactor who transferred the list of 100 *Parvans* together with a few verses adjacent to it (I,2,29–71)

from a totally different context into their present position within the second sub-*Parvan*.⁵ By excluding these 43 verses from the second chapter, one can restore the integrity of Ugraśravas' discourse, which then runs from the 20th verse of the *Anukramaṇī-* up to the end of the *Parvasaṃgrahaparvan* without any interruption other than the questions posed from time to time by the audience in I,2,1 & 13–14.

In the *Anukramaṇīparvan* the Bard gives an account of the origin and transmission of the *Mbh*, referring to the existence of its several different recensions as well as its summary (*saṃkṣepa*) and list of contents (*anukramaṇi*). In the latter half of this chapter he quotes a long text of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's lamentations at the tidings of the defeat of his own scions. This first sub-*Parvan* is immediately followed by the *Parvasaṃgrahaparvan*, which in its present form mainly consists of the list of 100 minor *Parvans*⁶ and the summary of all 18 Books of the *Mbh* and the Supplements (*Khilas*) to the *Mbh*.

In the article mentioned above I tried to figure out the intricate process of textual arrangement and alteration which the first two sub-*Parvans* underwent in their gradual formation. This is not the place to dwell upon details of my theory. Let it suffice to say that the *Parvasaṃgrahaparvan*, which originally began with the passage introductory to Ugraśravas' long speech (I,1,1–14), was composed earlier than the *Anukramaṇīparvan*, and that this first sub-*Parvan* had once lain outside Ugraśravas' discourse⁷ and was transferred only at a late date by some redactor to its present position after the introductory passage.

The *Pauṣyaparvan* has a quite unique position among those sections which precede Vaiśaṃpāyana's recital. The greater part of this third sub-*Parvan* consists of prose sentences. This fact suggests that the chapter had originally existed as an independent text. The real hero of the story is a young brahmin called Uttāṅka rather than the king Pauṣya. The whole story ends abruptly with the scene of Uttāṅka's instigating Janamejaya to revenge himself on Takṣaka, the king of cobras, for the death of his father Parikṣit by celebrating the snake-sacrifice. No matter in what milieu the narrative material of the *Pauṣyaparvan* might have originated, as a component of the First Book it scarcely fulfills any purpose other than that of furnishing a prelude to the story of Janamejaya's performance of the *sarpasatra* as dealt with at length in the *Āstīkaparvan*.

In the present text of the *Mbh* the whole *Pauṣyaparvan* finds itself incorporated into the discourse of Ugraśravas, as is indicated by the prose formula at the beginning "*sūta uvāca.*" Apart from this brief sentence, however, the text of the sub-*Parvan* does not betray any formal connection at all to the speech of the Bard. We suspect that it was almost mechanically taken

⁵ Cf. Tsuchida pp.26–28.

⁶ The list of 100 minor *Parvans* (I,2,34–69), which now finds itself within the *Parvasaṃgrahaparvan*, must originally have belonged to the *Anukramaṇīparvan*. Cf. Tsuchida pp.24–26.

⁷ At this stage there must have been the third over-all narrative framework which encompassed the main contents of the original *Anukramaṇīparvan*. In I,2,29,70 there still remain a few vestiges of this short-lived framework, constituted of the discourse held by an unknown narrator in the presence of a single interlocutor. Cf. Tsuchida pp.27–28.

over from some different context and thrust into the *Ādīparvan* at a certain stage after the establishment of Ugraśravas' discourse as the overall framework.

4

Every reader of the *Mbh* is perplexed to find that the First Book contains two distinct introductions, each located in a different place. The narrative of Ugraśravas' visit to the ascetics in the Naimiṣa forest, with which the entire epic starts, is repeated at the beginning of the fourth subsection, entitled *Paulomaparvan*. In the opening prose passage (I,4,1–3) of this subsection we find once again depicted the scene of Ugraśravas' arrival at the Naimiṣa forest and his exchange of greetings with its denizens. This passage is followed by the verses in which the seers ask the Bard to tell his stories only in the presence of their venerable chieftain Śaunaka. Upon the arrival of the latter the Bard enters into a long talk with him.

In the three preceding sub-*Parvans* Ugraśravas' speech has been addressed to the entire assembly of sages, but from the *Paulomaparvan* onward it is carried on in the form of a dialogue between a pair of partners. Śaunaka alone plays the part of interlocutor to Ugraśravas, while all the other seers remain as a mere passive audience. This dialogue, beginning at I,5,1, continues without any interruption right up to the very end of the entire corpus, i.e. XVIII,5,54.

Both of the two introductions start with the description of Ugraśravas' arrival. As mentioned above, the second introduction at the outset of the fourth chapter begins with a prose passage (I,4,1–3). As for the first introduction, it is the opening sentence (I,1,1) alone that is composed in prose. It is worthy of our notice that both of the prose sentences at the beginning of the two introductions coincide almost verbatim with each other. It is hardly necessary to point out that the double introduction we have just surveyed only disturbs the narrative coherence within the *Ādīparvan*. This incoherence cannot but be the outcome of some text-historical process in which several different redactors of the epic participated. The general resemblance between the two introductions, especially the verbal coincidence between the two prose passages, rules out the possibility that the two preambles came into being in total independence from each other. As for their chronological order, priority is to be given to the second introduction. There is little doubt that the first introduction was composed after the model of the second, and not the other way around. As remarked above, the first introduction, viz. I,1,1–14, was originally composed by the compiler of the *Parvasaṃgrahaparvan* as the preamble to his summary of the 18 Books and only later placed by some other redactor before the main part of the *Anukramaṇīparvan*. The reference to the *Pauloma* as the chapter relating at length the history of *Bhṛguvaṃśa* we find in I,2,72 leaves us in no doubt that the author of the *Parvasaṃgrahaparvan* had full knowledge of the *Paulomaparvan* as a component of the First Book. So when he wanted to provide his own text with a proper narrative setting he had only to extend the pre-existing framework of Ugraśravas' discourse he had found in the *Paulomaparvan* backward as far as the beginning of his composition. In adapting the

opening passage of the *Paulomaparvan* to his own setting, he recast the prose text in verse form, except the first sentence, which he took over almost intact from his model.

As for the *Pauṣyaparvan*, which now lies between the second and the fourth sub-*Parvans*, it is most probable that its insertion was undertaken by the compiler of the *Parvasaṃgrahaparvan*. In the present text of the epic, we indeed find the entire contents of the *Pauṣyaparvan* put into the mouth of Ugraśravas. But, as already observed above, the incorporation of this sub-*Parvan* into the discourse of the Bard was made only in a quite perfunctory manner. We can hardly imagine that there ever existed a version of the *Mbh* which began with the *Pauṣyaparvan* provided with no other indication of the narrative setting than a single prose sentence at the outset, “*sūta uvāca.*”

On the other hand, the compiler of the *Parvasaṃgrahaparvan* presents the *Pauṣya* as a component of the *Ādīparvan*. In a verse within his exposition of the First Book, i.e. I,2,72, we find the *Pauṣya* registered as the textual unit which immediately precedes the *Pauloma*. It is, therefore, almost impossible for us to suppose that the intrusion of the story about Utañka, Takṣaka and Pauṣya into the great epic took place either before or after the consolidation of the *Parvasaṃgrahaparvan*. Perhaps the compiler of this sub-*Parvan* thought of providing a supplement to the main story of Janamejaya’s snake-sacrifice by making use of a pre-existing prose text he had at his disposal. In his attempt at adapting it to his own narrative setting he had only to add the brief sentence at the outset of this inserted text.⁸ As a consequence of our observations, it turns out that Ugraśravas’ discourse, which continues throughout the whole main corpus of the epic, originally started with the second introduction at the beginning of the fourth sub-*Parvan*, while another discourse by the same Bard, which begins with the first introduction and now encompasses all the sub-*Parvans* prior to the fourth one, is to be regarded as nothing else but a secondary extension of the original framework by the hand of the compiler of the *Parvasaṃgrahaparvan*. He extended the framework of Ugraśravas’ discourse backward to the beginning of his own text. Obviously it was the same compiler who composed the passage in the first introduction. With this textual manipulation he aimed to provide the *Parvasaṃgrahaparvan* with its own narrative framework.

The double introduction has attracted the attention of epic scholars since early times. M. Mehta, for instance, has tried to trace the redactory process as a result of which the double introduction came into being. Although his theory is unacceptable on several important points, he is essentially right in supposing the former existence of a version of the *Mbh* which began with the second introduction.⁹ On the other hand, we cannot agree with Mehta in regarding the whole process as a conflation of two co-existing redactions.¹⁰ Apparently he is preoccupied with Sukthankar’s idea of the “archetypal redaction.” It was rather the enlargement of a single redaction that brought about the duplication of an introductory passage.

⁸ Cf. Tsuchida pp.17, 23.

⁹ Cf. Mehta p.549.

¹⁰ Cf. Mehta p.550.

5

The dialogue between Ugraśravas and Śaunaka starts immediately after the initial passage of the *Paulomaparvan* and continues without any kind of interruption until the end of the whole *Mbh*. This fourth sub-*Parvan* is entirely devoted to the history of the Bhārgavas. First of all, the Bard gives a genealogical account of Bhṛḡu and his descendants at the request of Śaunaka, who also belongs to the same clan of brahmins. He then proceeds to relate at full length the stories about particular members of the clan, viz. Bhṛḡu and Ruru.

Towards the end of the Ruru story, a sage called Sahasrapad, who has just been liberated by the hero from his figure as a lizard (*duṇḍubha*), preaches to the young brahmin on the importance of non-injury, making a brief mention of Āstīka, who once saved the serpents from slaughter by king Janamejaya. To the youth, now eager to know more about Āstīka, the sage only replies that he shall some day hear the entire story at an assembly of brahmins, and then disappears suddenly. After roaming about in the forest in vain search of the vanished sage, Ruru finally returns home and then hears the whole story about Āstīka's deeds from the mouth of his own father Pramati.

The reference to Āstīka made in the closing passage of the Ruru story just surveyed is practically the sole link that joins the *Pauloma-* to the *Āstīkaparvan*. Apart from this reference, the tales of the Bhārgavas told in the *Paulomaparvan* do not show any immediate connection to the contents of the *Āstīkaparvan*.

No less puzzling is the abrupt and absurd ending of the Ruru story with which the whole sub-*Parvan* is concluded. The narration of the Āstīka story by Pramati referred to at the end of the *Paulomaparvan* is never spoken of again in the *Āstīkaparvan*, except in a few spurious lines found in some manuscripts and vulgar editions.¹¹ In this sub-*Parvan* Ugraśravas transmits the whole *Itihāsa* of Āstīka, originally composed by Vyāsa, without any kind of mediation by Pramati, as he had once learnt it from his own father Lomahaṛṣaṇa.¹² Moreover, one notices a curious inconsistency even within the concluding part of the sub-*Parvan* in that Ruru learns the whole story of Āstīka from his own father and not at an assembly of brahmins as the sage prophesied. Apparently this prophecy does not come true at all, for this motif of Sahasrapad's prediction is not taken up again either within the *Āstīkaparvan* or anywhere else in the entire *Mbh*. We have no means of detecting the real cause of this confusing state of affairs. Perhaps we might imagine that there once existed several versions of the Āstīka story side by side, each told against a different narrative background.

6

The *Āstīkaparvan* starts with Śaunaka's questions as to why king Janamejaya resolved to annihilate all the serpents on earth and how Āstīka rescued them from the danger of death in

¹¹ Cf. Sukthankar p.231.467*.

¹² See *Mbh* I,13,6–8.

the sacrificial burning. In response to these questions, the Bard relates the sequence of events culminating in Janamejaya's celebration of the snake-sacrifice for the purpose of avenging the death of his father, as well as the deeds of Āstīka, the son born to a brahmin ascetic and a serpent princess, who finally succeeds in stopping the sacrifice by asking a boon from the king.

Like most of the other parts of the great epic, this sub-*Parvan* contains several episodic narratives. They are, however, so skillfully integrated into the main story that the text as a whole presents a closed unity. The story of Āstīka is, indeed, designated by Ugraśravas as *Ākhyāna*¹³ and *Itihāsa*,¹⁴ and the Bard concludes it with the statement that one who has recited or listened to the *Ākhyāna* of Āstīka from its beginning shall nowhere encounter any danger from snakes.¹⁵ The presence of such a *phalaśruti*-like passage towards the end of the sub-*Parvan* suggests that the story had once existed as a separate *Ākhyāna* or *Itihāsa* used for public recitation before it was incorporated into the *Mbh* at some late stage of its textual expansion.

The text of the *Āstīkaparvan* continues for a further 10 verses (I,53,27–36). This final passage of the subsection consists of the interval-dialogue between Śaunaka and Ugraśravas. In the present text of the *Mbh* it is this dialogue which bridges the transition from the Āstīka story to Vaiśampāyana's recital of the great epic.

In this passage Śaunaka first expresses his satisfaction at having learnt the Bhārgava genealogy as well as the marvellous deeds of Āstīka and then voices his wish to hear the *Mbh* from Ugraśravas. To this request the Bard gives his joyful assent and in the first chapter of the following sub-*Parvan*, entitled *Ādivaṃśāvatarāṇaparvan* (I,54), describes the circumstances under which Vyāsa ordered his disciple Vaiśampāyana to recite the ancient *Itihāsa* before king Janamejaya and other participants of the sacrificial session. Vaiśampāyana launches into his long recital at once. But it is only in the fourth chapter of the sub-*Parvan* that he enters into the main course of the epic narrative, which begins with the acts of the ancient king Vasu Uparicara (I,57).

Although the narration by Vaiśampāyana is occasionally brought to a pause by Janamejaya's exclamations of wonder or his questions to the narrator, the dialogue as such continues almost without interruption till it ends in the final chapter of the Last Book. It is, therefore, not until the concluding part of this final chapter that Ugraśravas appears again in the text as the narrator of the outermost framework, if we disregard the afore-mentioned two chapters of the 15th Book.

In the first half of the last chapter Janamejaya poses questions about the final destiny of Bhīṣma, Droṇa and other prominent figures (1–5), and in answering the questions Vaiśampāyana gives an account of the heavenly lives each of them enjoyed after their demise

¹³ *Mbh* I,13,4,8; 53,26.

¹⁴ *Mbh* I,13,6.

¹⁵ *Mbh*I,53,26.

(7–24). In the subsequent verse he concludes his entire recital of the epic with the following sentence:

*etat te sarvam ākhyātaṃ vistareṇa mahādyute/
kurūṇāṃ caritaṃ kṛtsnaṃ pāṇḍavānāṃ ca bhārata// (Mbh XVIII,5,25)*

I have now told you in detail, O great-splendoured scion of Bharata, every act of both the Kurus and Pāṇḍavas.

The rest of the chapter, comprising 29 verses, is occupied with the concluding part of Ugraśravas' discourse. After relating how Janamejaya finished his sacrifice, gratified Āstika and the officiant priests and then returned from Takṣaśilā to his own residence in Hāstinapura (26–29), the Bard once more declares that he has now told everything that Vaiśampāyana narrated at the command of Vyāsa to Janamejaya at his snake–sacrifice (30). The remaining 24 verses are devoted to Ugraśravas' expounding on the origin and transmission of Vyāsa's epic as well as on the enormous merits one acquires by listening to or reciting the text of the *Mbh*.

7

We have already noticed that in the text of the Critical Edition the dialogue between Vaiśampāyana and Janamejaya is only once interrupted by the intrusion of chapters 42–43 of the *Āśramavāsikaparvan*. In this Book it is related how the old king Dhṛtarāṣṭra in the 15th year after the great battle retires from the royal residence into a forest, accompanied by his own wife, his brother's wife, the widows of the dead Kaurava princes and some of his closest friends, and how they pass their last years with fasting and penance till they meet their death in the conflagration which one day breaks out in their sylvan abode.

One of the significant incidents which occur during the last years of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's life is the reunion of the old ascetic with his own dead sons, realized through the supernatural power of Vyāsa. This incident is narrated in detail in chapters 36–44, constituting the subsection called *Putradarśanaparvan*. Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Gāndhārī and the widows of the Kaurava princes have never been free from inconsolable grief since the death of their sons and husbands on the battlefield. When Vyāsa drops in on them in the forest, they bewail their bitter fate and appeal to him for support and sympathy. At his instruction they all proceed to the banks of the Gaṅgā, and after having performed the due rites there the sage, by dint of his yogic power, invokes the spirits of the dead princes, who emerge from the water in resplendent attire. Meeting again with each other, both the living and the dead pass the night in utmost felicity. After the disappearance of the princes at daybreak, their widows plunge into the water of the river in order to be reunited with their husbands for ever in the celestial world.

The passage describing the felicitous life in the heavenly abodes with which the widows are rewarded for their voluntary suicide, viz. XV,41,17–23, is almost immediately followed by verses which enumerate the merits one acquires by reciting or listening to the story of

family reunion. As Belvalkar remarks, the presence of these *phalaśruti*-like verses indicates that the *Putradarśanaparvan* is a very late addition to the *Āśramavāsikaparvan*.¹⁶ On the basis of this evidence we might, indeed, suppose that the *Putradarśana* was inserted into the corpus of the *Mbh* at a certain stage of its enlargement. But this insertion cannot have been so late as Belvalkar apparently assumes, for in the *Parvasaṃgrahaparvan* we find two verses¹⁷ which unmistakably show that the author of the summary of the 18 Books was already acquainted with “the unsurpassed miracle wrought by the grace of the sage Kṛṣṇa” (*ṛṣeḥ prasādāt kṛṣṇasya dṛṣtvāścaryam anuttamam*). The *Putradarśana* is, further, registered as the 94th item in the list of the 100 minor *Parvans*.¹⁸ Belvalkar’s argument for the lateness of this sub-*Parvan* on the basis of the shift in narrative level cannot be applied to the entire *Putradarśana*, but is valid only for chapters XV,42–43.

It is just after the *phalaśruti*-like passage that Ugraśravas emerges again as the narrator after his long absence from the surface of the text. Chapter 42, which begins with the prose-sentence “*sūta uvāca*”, is devoted to a lengthy philosophical discourse Vaiśampāyana holds in response to a question by Janamejaya about the reappearance of dead bodies. In a subsequent chapter the Bard relates how the king, deeply moved by the story of the family reunion, entreats Vyāsa to show him his own father again. The sage realizes this wish of the king instantly by invoking the spirit of Parikṣit by his supernatural abilities.

The shift in narrative level from Vaiśampāyana’s recital to Ugraśravas’ discourse we observe in chapters XV,42–43 is easily understood by us to have been necessitated by the nature of their contents since the incident which occurs simultaneously with Vaiśampāyana’s recital at the sacrificial site cannot be narrated by the reciter himself as a past event, but is required to be put into the mouth of a different narrator, who, in this case, cannot be anyone else but the Bard Ugraśravas.

The latter half of chapter 43 is of no small significance, because it contains a brief talk which Janamejaya holds with Āstika. From this passage we know that the young brahmin, even after having liberated the serpents from the danger of death, has still been present at the sacrificial assembly, listening to the recital of the epic by Vaiśampāyana.

At the end of the same chapter the disciple of Vyāsa, urged by the king to tell the rest of the story about Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s forest life, resumes his long rehearsal, which has been interrupted awhile by the incident of Parikṣit’s resurrection.

In the text of the Critical Edition the *Putradarśanaparvan* is concluded with chapter 44, which relates Yudhiṣṭhira’s return from the hermitage to Hāstinapura. The afore-mentioned *phalaśruti*-like verses suggest that the essential part of the sub-*Parvan* concludes with the 41st chapter. The last sentence of the *phalaśruti* at the end of the chapter runs:

¹⁶ Cf. Belvalkar p.155.

¹⁷ *Mbh*I,2,214–215.

¹⁸ *Mbh*I,2,67.

adhyātmayogayuktāś ca dhṛtimantaś ca mānavāḥ|
śrutvā parva tv idaṃ nityam avāpsyanti parāṃ gatim|| (Mbh XV,41,28)

Those human beings, concentrated on the inner self and endowed with steadfastness, who listen to this *Parvan*, shall certainly attain to the highest goal.

By the word “*parvan*” in this verse we are to understand the series of chapters ending with the 41st. It cannot include the two subsequent chapters in which the Bard relates the appearance of Parikṣit before his son. Most probably these two chapters were later inserted into their present position after the main part of the *Putradarśanaparvan* by some redactor who thought of adding the episode of Parikṣit’s resurrection to the climactic scene of the family reunion of the Kauravas.¹⁹ As for the narrator of this episode, the redactor had no alternative but to put it into the mouth of Ugrāśravas. The second half of chapter 43 indicates that he was already familiar with the narrative contents of the *Āstīkaparvan*.²⁰

8

We have already conducted a basic analysis of the constitution of the two narrative frameworks which cover the entire main portion of the *Mbh*. They are, namely, Vaiśampāyana’s recital of Vyāsa’s epic before Janamejaya (V) interspersed with comments and questions by the latter and Ugrāśravas’ discourse of the *Mbh* (U), which encompasses the entire text recited by Vaiśampāyana. The discourse of the Bard is to be further divided into two parts: Ugrāśravas’ speech to the brahmin ascetics assembled in the Naimiṣa forest, which is not particularly addressed to their chieftain Śaunaka (U-1), and the long recitation of the stories about the Bhārgavas and Āstīka as well as of the main corpus of the great epic, which takes the form of a dialogue between the Bard and Śaunaka (U-2). Hereafter the signs V, U, U-1 and U-2 will denote the narrative frameworks just mentioned as well as the epic versions provided with the respective frameworks.

On the basis of the investigations made so far, we shall now examine more closely how the matter stands with the double narrative structure of the *Mbh*. At least, we have to find

¹⁹ We do not know whether or not the copy of the great epic which served as the model for the author of the *BhM* had already contained the episode of Vyāsa’s invocation of Parikṣit during Vaiśampāyana’s recital. At any rate Kṣemendra does not make any allusion to this incident in his epitome of the *Putradarśanaparvan* (*BhM* 15,54–57).

²⁰ Chapter 44, which depicts the quite important scene of the Pāṇḍava princes bidding last farewell to their uncle and their own mother, cannot be by any means discarded as mere later insertion. On the other hand, the sequence of the three minor *Parvans*, i.e. *Āśramavāsa*, *Putradarśana* and *Nāradāgamana* is attested in a verse within the list of 100 *Parvans*, viz. I,2,67. Chapter 44 is, as it were, suspending between the *Putradarśana*- and the *Nāradāgamana**parvan*. We can hardly imagine that the *Nāradāgamana* originally began with the scene of Yudhiṣṭhira’s return to the capital, because the chapter still has some link to the foregoing ones by alluding to the miraculous event in the hermitage (44,2). In view of these facts we cannot but assign the chapter to the *Putradarśanaparvan*, as it is actually the case in the printed editions of the *Mbh*. In this sub-*Parvan* the *phalaśruti* was placed not at its conclusion but at the end of the chapters depicting the climactic scene of reappearance of the Kaurava princes. Otherwise, the dramatic effect of narration would have been reduced to a remarkable degree.

an answer to the question of how framework V is historically related to framework U-2. The relationship between the two frameworks must be a historical one. And to come straight to the conclusion, framework V should take precedence over the other with regard to chronological order.

The double structure must have come into being either by combining two pre-existing frameworks or as the result of a text-historical process in which a new framework was grafted onto or incorporated into the older one. Any other alternative for the origin of the structure is hardly conceivable, for the hypothesis that the double structure was originally devised by one single poet or compiler at a certain time is quite untenable. If such simultaneity of both frameworks had ever been the case, the two narrative levels would then have interacted with each other with much greater frequency than we actually observe in the present text.²¹ In reality, mutual reference to different narrative levels does not occur so often as one would expect within the extant text of the *Mbh*. In the main portion of the epic we can scarcely attest any interplay between the two narrative levels. The double structure is far from presenting such an organic unity as the creation of a single author is expected to present²². Ugraśravas' appearance as narrator is virtually confined to the prologue and the epilogue to the epic recital by Vaiśampāyana. In the text of the Critical Edition, at least, the shift between the two levels does not take place anywhere else but in XV,42–43, the chapters which have already proved to be a mere later insertion.

The essential integrity of the dialogue between Vaiśampāyana and Janamejaya renders it quite probable that there was once a *Mbh* version which was provided with no other major framework than that designated by us as V. As observed above, the dialogue continues throughout the whole main corpus almost without interruption.

Less certain is the former existence of a version having framework U-2 as its sole major narrative setting. Ugraśravas' narratorship as such can hardly be held to have originated in the personal invention of a single poet or compiler. The traditional idea about him and Lomahaṛṣaṇa as the *sūtas* who handed down the *Itihāsas* and the *Purāṇas* seems to have almost as long a history as the epic itself.²³ We can well conjecture that to those ancient rhapsodists who orally transmitted the *Bhārata* epic both Lomahaṛṣaṇa and Ugraśravas were already quite familiar as the names of the mythological founders of their own profession. Moreover, from some verses, such as I,1,50–51,61–62; 56,13; 57,73–75; and XVIII,5,41–

²¹ In the so-called Battle Books (VI–IX) one finds the alteration between the narrative levels realized in certain degree. In these Books it is Saṃjaya who narrates the entire battle-scenes before Dhṛtarāṣṭra. At the beginning and the end of each of these Books there takes place the shift from the outer to the inner narrative framework and vice versa. Saṃjaya's narration constitutes the inner framework, while the outer one consists of the dialogue between Vaiśampāyana and Janamejaya.

²² The text of the *Mbh* does not present any such organic system of self-referentiality as Malinar apparently thinks. Cf. Malinar pp.467–469. As for the double narrative construction of the epic, we would not be gravely mistaken in regarding it as having come into existence as the result of clumsy patchwork.

²³ Cf. *Mbh* I,5,1;13,6–8.

42, it can be inferred that before the final consolidation of the *Mbh* there existed several redactions of the epic side by side, each different in size and contents.²⁴ In view of such a state of affairs, we cannot entirely exclude the possibility that there had once been a redaction of the *Bhārata* epic in which Ugraśravas alone told the whole main story without having any such intermediary as Vaiśampāyana between Vyāsa and himself. We have, however, no substantial clue, still less any solid evidence for the former existence of such a redaction.

The question as to whether or not such a redaction once really existed does not affect our present inquiry very much, for our above survey of frameworks U-1 and U-2 leaves no room for doubt that both of the frameworks presuppose the existence of the text of Vaiśampāyana's recital. As regards contents, at least, both frameworks are totally dependent on the dialogue between Vaiśampāyana and Janamejaya.

Further, as already suggested above, framework U-1 is nothing more than a later extension of U-2, and the appearance of Ugraśravas and Śaunaka as narrator and interlocutor within framework U-2 is restricted to the prologue and the epilogue to the main part provided with framework V. The number of verses constituting the epilogue amounts to less than 30, and what one finds in these verses is nothing but a brief conclusion to the *Mbh*, whereas the prologue covers all the stories related in the *Pauloma-* and the *Āstīkparvan*. It goes almost without saying that these two sub-*Parvans* attained their present shape only as the result of a gradual and intricate process of enlargement. One can, nevertheless, fully grasp what the original compiler of the prologue intended to present with his compilation. His main purpose was to narrate Janamejaya's celebration of the *sarpasatra* and other events which finally converge on the start of Vaiśampāyana's recital of the epic. Most probably it was this very compiler of the prologue who elaborated framework U-2 in order to put his own genesis of the *Mbh* into the mouth of some authoritative narrator. To the question of whether this compiler ever consulted any other independent version U, now lost, or whether he simply followed the current tradition of Ugraśravas' narratorship of the epic and purāṇic texts one cannot give any exact answer, though the latter supposition seems more plausible than the former.

The compilers, indeed, who laid out frameworks U-1 and U-2 must have been still quite well-acquainted with the ancient bardic tradition. But there is no need at all for us to think that they also belonged to the same class of *sūta* as Ugraśravas, Lomahaṛṣaṇa and Saṃjaya. Most probably the epic texts they handled in their compilatory activities had already been transmitted in written form. It would thus be futile to look for any direct vestige of the oral tradition in the frame-construction of the present *Mbh*.

9

From the results of our above investigations into the narrative scheme of the *Mbh* we must inevitably conclude that there formerly existed at least two different versions of the epic and

²⁴ Cf. also *Āśvalāyanagṛhyasūtra* 3,4,4. This *sūtra* refers to such promulgators of Vyāsa's epic as Sumantu, Jaimini, Vaiśampāyana and Pāila as well as to the *Bhārata* and the *Mahābhārata*.

one of them directly started with the inauguration of Vaiśampāyana's recital while the other began with the initial passage of the present *Paulomaparvan*. These conclusions seem to be reinforced by the statement made in a verse of the *Anukramaṇīparvan* (I,1,50). The verse reads:

*manvādi bhārataṃ kecid āstīkādi tathāpare/
tathoparicarādy anye viprāḥ samyag adhīyate// (Mbh I,1,50)*

There are brahmins who learn the *Bhārata* [epic] from [the account on] Manu onward; others who learn it from [the tale of] Āstīka onward; others who learn it from [the story of] Uparicara onward.²⁵

As to the exact interpretation of the verse, there is no complete agreement among epic scholars.

Malinar, for instance, seems to regard the verse as reflecting "the different starting points of an epic recitation."²⁶ In our opinion, however, the most natural interpretation of I,1,50 is that it alludes to three distinct versions of the *Bhārata* epic which once existed side by side. In the following these will be referred to as M, Ā and Upa respectively.

Among these three redactions, it is redaction Ā that corresponds to what we have designated as version U-2. In the extant text of the *Mbh* Ugraśravas launches his dialogue with Śaunaka not at the start of the *Āstīka*- but immediately after the opening passage of the *Paulomaparvan*. However, the tale of Ruru told in the latter half of the *Paulomaparvan* can be looked upon as the section preliminary to the main story related in the *Āstīkaparvan*. It would thus be more or less correct to say that Ugraśravas' dialogue with Śaunaka begins with the story of Āstīka.

On the other hand, as will be discussed below, we suspect that the main components of the *Paulomaparvan* were later inserted into the *Āstīkaparvan*, which had originally begun with the passage introducing the dialogue between Ugraśravas and Śaunaka.

Among modern scholars of the *Mbh* it was Christian Lassen who first took up verse I,1,50 as evidence for the former existence of three redactions of the epic.²⁷

Although we cannot follow all of his rather complex arguments,²⁸ he is essentially right in believing that there was once a redaction of the *Mbh* which opened with the story of Āstīka's deeds and Janamejaya's celebration of the snake-sacrifice. Apparently he considers Ugraśravas' rehearsal of the epic on the occasion of Śaunaka's sacrifice to have been a historical reality; according to his theory, it was with the Āstīka redaction that the rehearsal was

²⁵ Buitenen's translation of the verse is essentially the same as ours, while Ganguli and Dutt interpret the verse differently. According to the Indian translators the verse does not speak of three but of four different groups of brahmins.

²⁶ Cf. Malinar p.469.

²⁷ Cf. Lassen pp.495-501.

²⁸ For a brief survey of Lassen's theory on the text-history of the *Mbh*. Cf. Brockington p.43.

incorporated for the first time²⁹. As for the expression “*manvādī*” in the same verse, Lassen infers therefrom the existence of the redaction which began with I,70,³⁰ the chapter which contains the genealogy from Dakṣa Prajāpati-Manu Vaivasvata down to the sons of Yayāti. This interpretation of “*manvādī*” does not stand on any firm ground because we cannot attribute such great antiquity to the chapters of the Yayāti cycle (I,70–88) as Lassen does. With all these inadequacies Lassen’s theory should be evaluated as the first important step in text-historical research on the *Mbh*. It is as a continuation of Lassen’s basic study that we are to carry on our investigations concerning the formation of the narrative structure of the epic.

The three beginnings of the *Bhārata* alluded to in I,1,50 are connected by A. Holtzmann Jun. with the three narrators of the epic, viz. Ugraśravas, Vaiśampāyana and Saṃjaya. According to his theory, redactions Upa and Ā correspond respectively to those versions in which Vaiśampāyana and Ugraśravas play the role of main narrator, while redaction M is identified as Books VI–IX, in which Saṃjaya reports to his blind master about the fierce battles fought on the field of Kurukṣetra.³¹ Obviously he believes in the former existence of an old epic version consisting of these four Battle Books. This identification of version M as *Mbh* VI–IX is not acceptable to us because we can hardly regard the first Battle Book as beginning with an account of Manu.³² In the *Bhīṣmaparvan* it is only after a detailed discourse on cosmology that Saṃjaya begins depicting the scenes of the battlefield. Within the discourse Saṃjaya does indeed once mention the name of Manu,³³ but this section of cosmology does not contain any genealogical account in which Manu occupies the initial position. The beginning of the epic versions alluded to by the word “*manvādī*” is to be sought in a totally different context.

It would seem to be far more plausible to assume that “*manvādī*” refers to the cosmogonical passage in the first chapter (*Anukramaṇīparvan*) of the present *Mbh*. In this chapter Ugraśravas briefly relates the history of the cosmos (I,1,27–45) before giving an exposition of the origin and transmission of the epic. It is in verse 30 that the Bard calls the supreme divine being who was first born from the primordial egg by such names as Brahman, Sthānu, Manu, Ka and Parameṣṭhin. Further, in verse 41 he mentions Mahya as the last-born son of Vivasvat, and in the subsequent verses this Mahya is represented as the common ancestor of all the eminent royal clans on earth, including the Kurus and the Yadus as well as the lines of Yayāti and Ikṣvāku. According to this verse, Mahya is none other than the mythical founder of kingship known by the name of Manu Vaivasvata.

It is in reference to the same verse that Nīlakaṇṭha construes “*manvādī*” as the *Bhārata* epic beginning with [the account of] Manu who was also called Vaivasvata Mahya (*divaḥ*

²⁹ Cf. Lassen p.500.

³⁰ Cf. Lassen p.496.

³¹ Cf. Holtzmann p.153.

³² It is in the second sub-*Parvan* of the VI Book, entitled *Bhūmīparvan*, that Saṃjaya displays his profound knowledge of cosmology. This sub-*Parvan* is immediately followed by the *Bhagavadgītā*.

³³ *Mbh* VI,7,43.

putro vaivasvatamahyasaṃjñō manus tadādīti tatvam...). At the same time he cites a different interpretation of the expression. According to the commentator, “Easterners” (*prāñcaḥ*) hold the view that the word in verse I,1,50 refers to either of the two mantras usually placed before the entire *Mbh* text, i.e. either “*nārāyaṇaṃ namaskṛtya...*” or “*oṃ namo bhagavate vāsudevāya...*” This interpretation of “Easterners” is out of the question since neither Nārāyaṇa nor Vāsudeva can be identified as Manu³⁴.

There remains uncertainty as to what is exactly meant by “*manvādī*” in I,1,50. We have for the present no alternative but to deem Nīlakaṇṭha’s interpretation to be correct in its essentials. Insofar as we follow this interpretation, we have to identify redaction M as the epic text which the compiler of the *Anukramaṇīparvan* completed by adding the initial chapter of his own composition. Being almost as extensive as the epic text we now have, this redaction seems to have been provided not only with framework U-2, but also with U-1.

Meanwhile, another redaction designated as Upa had certainly no other framework than that of Vaiśaṃpāyana’s recital. From our analysis of frameworks U-1 and U-2 it is apparent that both serve little more than secondary functions within the narrative structure of the *Mbh*. Obviously they were both created for the mere purpose of supplying the prologue part of the epic with an authoritative narrator.

As a matter of form, the dialogue between Śaunaka and Ugraśravas continues to the very end of the whole *Mbh*. Lively exchanges of questions and answers between them are, however, virtually confined to the *Āstīkaparvan*.

In the Critical Edition, at least, the verbal exchange between them after the end of the last chapter of the sub-*Parvan* (I,53) is never resumed in the remainder of the entire text. And, apart from II,46,4; XV,42–43, it is not until the final chapter (XVIII,5) that the Bard appears again on the surface of the text.

The last section of the *Āstīkaparvan* is immediately followed by the preamble to Vaiśaṃpāyana’s recital of the epic, which makes up the first chapter of the *Ādivaṃśāvatarāṇaparvan* (I,54). The prose-formula “*sūta uvāca*” placed at the outset of this chapter is undoubtedly a mere later addition. Originally the preamble must have been put into the mouth of an anonymous over-all narrator of version V.

Under these circumstances it cannot but be concluded that the sub-sections of the *Ādīparvan* from chapter 54 onward constituted the integral part of version V, i.e. the redaction of the epic which had not yet been provided with narrative frameworks U-1 and U-2, although for the time being we cannot take it for granted that the text of this older version originally started with exactly the same preamble as we see now in chapter I,54.

The contents of the first four chapters of the *Ādivaṃśāvatarāṇaparvan* can be outlined as follows. The chapter titles we find in the colophons of the vulgate editions are given in

³⁴ In the Petersburg-lexicon one finds “Spruch, Gebet, Zauberformel” registered as meaning of the word “*manu*”. The compilers of the lexicon does not hold this meaning to be applicable to the word in *Mbh*I,1,50.

parentheses:

- chapter I,54 (*Kathābandha*): relates how Vaiśampāyana launched his long recital of the epic at the behest of Vyāsa on the occasion of Janamejaya's snake-sacrifice.
- 55 (*Bhāratasūtra*): gives a synopsis of the main story of the feud between the Kurus and the Pāṇḍavas.
- 56 (*Bhārataprasāṃsā*): expounds the origin and the greatness of the *Mbh*.
- 57 (*Vyāsādyutpatti*): relates the stories about the deeds of king Uparicara and the birth of the sage Vyāsa.

Vaiśampāyana's long historical account of the Bhārata lineage begins with the deeds of the ancient king Vasu Uparicara, who is represented as a grandfather of Vyāsa, i.e. one of the common ancestors of both the Kurus and the Pāṇḍavas. Vaiśampāyana does not directly enter into a recounting of the deeds of Uparicara. As the above synopsis shows, the story of the king is preceded by the fairly long texts of the *Bhāratasūtra* and *Bhārataprasāṃsā*. These two chapters are, however, to be regarded as preliminaries to the history of the Bhārata clan,³⁵ while the *Kathābandha* as the preamble to the whole recital cannot be dispensed with at any cost. The precedence of these three chapters to the Uparicara story should not dissuade us from supposing that a certain epic version starting with chapters I,54–57 is meant by *uparicarādi* in I,1,50. It is most likely that redaction Upa alluded to in the verse was identical with or at least closely related to the *Mbh* text we designate as version V.

10

Now, it merits our special attention that the preamble to Vaiśampāyana's recital does not fit in with the long story of Janamejaya's snake-sacrifice related in the *Āstīkaparvan*. Incongruencies and discontinuity between these two texts are too conspicuous to escape our notice, although they both deal with the same sacrificial session undertaken by Janamejaya.

It is the brahmin youth Āstīka who plays the most prominent role in the sub-*Parvan* named after himself. This important figure, however, is totally absent from the scene described in chapter I,54. The absence of Āstīka is not limited to this preamble, and is attestable throughout the entire text of the dialogue between Vaiśampāyana and Janamejaya. Among the chapters after I,54, it is only in XV,43 and XVIII,5 that one finds any explicit reference to Āstīka's presence at the sacrificial site of Janamejaya. Both of these two chapters belong to those parts of the *Mbh* text which lie outside framework V and in which Ugraśravas appears as the direct narrator. This state of affairs makes it clear that it was none other than the creator of framework U-2 or the compiler of redaction Ā who first introduced Āstīka as a narrative character into the *Mbh*.

³⁵ Brockington (pp.135–136) indicates that there are a number of verses in common between I,1 and I,54–56 and that XVIII,5 repeats several verses from I,56. It might be suspected that chapter I,56 was inserted at a late date into its present position.

On the basis of comprehensive researches into Vedic passages about *satra*, Minkowski lays stress on its close association with the recitation of bardic texts.³⁶ As regards the *Āstīkaparvan*, however, the recital of the epic hardly fits in with its general context, which is made up of the sequence of events leading to Janamejaya's slaughter of serpents and Āstīka's saving them from death. Obviously the author of the Āstīka story that served as the original model for the compiler of the sub-*Parvan* did not pay any attention to the recitation of the epic as a constituent element of the *sarpasatra*. Among the participants (*sadasyas*) in Janamejaya's *sarpasatra* listed in I,48,7–10, one finds, indeed, Vyāsa accompanied by his son and pupils. But except in the final passage of the interval-dialogue (I,53,27–36), which is undoubtedly a redactorial addition, the sub-*Parvan* does not contain any reference to the recital of his epic before Janamejaya³⁷.

We can well imagine that several different versions of the story about Janamejaya's snake-sacrifice had once been current among epic poets. Some versions contained the motif of Āstīka's saving the snakes from the sacrificial fire, while others had no link whatever to this motif. It was apparently one of the versions having no Āstīka motif that the compiler of redaction Upa selected as he composed the preamble to the epic recital. As for the juxtaposition of the *Āstīkaparvan* and the preamble to Vaiśampāyana's recital, it is most likely that each text represents a different tradition within the Janamejaya cycle of stories. This difference caused the discontinuity between the two successive texts in the present *Mbh*.

The start of the preamble chapter looks somewhat strange. The first verse runs:

*śrutvā tu sarpasatrāya dīkṣitaṃ janamejayam/
abhyāgacchad ṛṣir vidvān kṛṣṇadvaipāyanas tadā* // (*Mbh* I,54,1)

Having heard that Janamejaya had already been consecrated for the snake-sacrifice, the learned sage Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana [Vyāsa] betook himself [to the place of sacrifice].

Without any preliminary remark about Janamejaya's *sarpasatra*, the narrator directly proceeds to tell of Vyāsa's arrival at the sacrificial site. This abruptness is not a little puzzling to us. It even arouses our doubts as to whether the verse could really have occupied the initial position in version V, as we have already inferred from the results of our investigations. It is above all the particle *tu* in the first *pāda* of the verse which makes it quite difficult for us to understand the narrative context in which the verse stands. Because the essential function of *tu* is to give some adversative nuance to a statement, it is unusual, though not quite impossible, that a narrative should begin with such a sentence containing the particle as in the verse

³⁶ Indeed, the compilers of versions V and U-2 must have both been well-versed in *satra* and the *śrauta*-ritualism at large. But we can hardly detect such structural parallelism as Minkowski assumes to exist between the ritual of *satra* and the narrative system of the great epic.

³⁷ *R̥gveda-Khila* 2,1 (Scheftelowitz pp.70–71), a magical formula against snakebite, referring to Āstīka's utterance at the end of Janamejaya's sacrifice, suggests the antiquity of the story of Āstīka. On the other hand, the formula does not betray any link to the recital of itihāsic texts. It seems that the story was only later brought into association with Vyāsa's great epic.

just quoted. On the other hand, the sentence cannot be connected to the foregoing verses at the conclusion of chapter I,53, in which Ugraśravas declares his willingness to rehearse the whole *Mbh*. If we were ever to suppose a continuity between these two passages, we would still face the same difficulty about the particle *tu*.

In view of this state of affairs, it does not seem all that unlikely that the sentence we find now in the initial position in the preamble was originally preceded by several other verses, which were deleted afterwards by a redactor, most probably by the redactor of version U-2.

Similar considerations appear to have been made by K. K. Shastree in his attempt at restoring the text of the opening passage of the *Jaya-Saṃhitā*. According to the Indian scholar, the epic of Vyāsa in its most original form was composed of 88,000 verses.³⁸ He undertook to reconstruct the text of this oldest version of the *Mbh*, to which he gave the title of *Jaya-saṃhitā*.³⁹

Here we need not dwell on the method of textual reconstruction adopted by Shastree because the validity of his theory as well as the value of his reconstructed text is not of direct concern for our present inquiries. There is, nonetheless, one point on which we can fully agree with Shastree. He is certainly right in thinking that there once existed a version of the epic which began with chapter I,54.⁴⁰

The text of the initial passage of the *Jaya-saṃhitā* as Shastree presents it in his book runs as follows:

janamejayaḥ [pauravo rājā] pārikṣitaḥ [kila]
kurukṣetre dīrghasatram upāste bhrātṛbhiḥ saha// 1
bhrātāras tasya [te tatra rājānaṃ tam upāsate]
śrutāsena ugraseno bhīmasena it trayāḥ// 2 [*Mbh* I,3,1]
śrutvā taṃ dīrghasatrāya dīkṣitaṃ janamejayam
abhyāgacchad ṛṣir vidvān kṛṣṇadvaiṇāyanaś tadā// 3 [*Mbh* I,54,1]
janamejayasya rājāṣeḥ sa tad yajñasadas tadā
viveśa śiṣyāiḥ sahito vedavedāṅgapāragaiḥ// 4 [*Mbh* I,54,7]⁴¹

The rest of the first chapter of the *Jaya-saṃhitā* consists of the verses subsequent to I,54,7. In his attempt at restoring the introductory passage of the allegedly oldest version of the epic, Shastree has taken the first sentences from the *Pauṣyaparvan* and placed their versified text before I,54,1.

At the same time he has changed the reading “*sarpasatrāya*” in the first *pāda* of the verse to “*dīrghasatrāya*” in his forced efforts to adapt the preamble to the context of the *Pauṣyaparvan*. Such tampering with the transmitted text as Shastree has dared to do is too arbitrary to gain any approval of ours. As discussed above, the *Pauṣyaparvan* in its oldest form

³⁸ Cf. Shastree pp.21–22.

³⁹ Cf. Shastree p.21.

⁴⁰ Cf. Shastree p.12.

⁴¹ Cf. Shastree p.1(text-part).

seems to have been an independent text in prose. The *dīrghasatra* described in the opening passage of this sub-*Parvan* cannot by any means be identified as the sacrificial session during which Vyāsa's epic was recited by his pupil.

We can, nevertheless, follow Shastree's thinking up to a point in that he deems it unnatural that an old version of the epic should have started quite abruptly with I,54,1. As Shastree surmises, the verse must have originally been preceded by several other verses. It is, however, beyond our ability to restore these lost verses in such a way as Shastree has tried to do. What we can infer with certainty from the scene depicted in the preamble chapter is that these verses must have contained some preliminary remarks about Janamejaya's performance of or preparation for the snake-sacrifice and that these remarks had to be deleted by a redactor for the reason that they sharply contradicted the story of the *sarpasatra* as related in the *Āstīkaparvan*. It is then not unreasonable for us to assume that the redactor who undertook the deletion of the verses was none other than the original compiler of the *Āstīkaparvan* who first introduced Ugraśravas as the general narrator for the purpose of furnishing his own text with a solid framework of narration. Taking into account the alterations which chapter I,54 must have undergone at the hands of later redactors, we are still allowed to consider the chapter to have once constituted the initial part of the old epic redaction we designate as V.

11

As we have already ascertained, the *Paulomaparvan* is only quite loosely linked to the *Āstīkaparvan* in regard to both contents and construction. Between these two sub-*Parvans* priority should be given to the *Āstīkaparvan*, because the tale of Ruru told in the *Paulomaparvan* presupposes the story about the deeds of Āstīka at the snake-sacrifice. There is no doubt as to the essentially supplementary character of this sub-*Parvan*. We can, therefore, hold it highly probable that the *Paulomaparvan* was incorporated into the bulk of the *Mbh* after the *Āstīkaparvan* had already established itself as a component of the same epic. This incorporation must have taken place at a fairly early stage; at the latest, it must have been carried out before the formation of the *Parvasaṃgrahaparvan*, which gives the title of *Pauloma* as a component of the *Ādīparvan*.⁴²

Anyhow, it is very likely that at a certain stage of enlargement of the *Mbh* the *Āstīkaparvan*, still unpreceded by the *Paulomaparvan*, made up the opening section of the entire epic. It is quite inconceivable that at this stage the *Āstīkaparvan* was not yet furnished with the narrative framework of Ugraśravas' dialogue with Śaunaka. That is to say, the *Āstīkaparvan* in its oldest form must have begun with the introductory passage which in the present text of the *Mbh* occupies the initial position in the *Paulomaparvan*. In other words, we should suppose that the *Paulomaparvan* was not simply placed before the *Āstīkaparvan*, but inserted between the introductory passage and the main portion of the *Āstīkaparvan*.

⁴² *Mbh* I,2,72. We find [*pau*]lomaṃ registered in the list of *Mbh-parvans* contained in the Spitzer manuscript. Cf. Schlingloff p.336.

In order to elucidate the text-historical process of incorporation of the *Pauloma-* into the *Āstīkaparvan* we shall now make a brief survey of relevant passages from the two sub-*Parvans*. The present text of the *Paulomaparvan* starts with chapter I,4, which makes up the second introduction to the *Mbh*. In this chapter Ugraśravas, on his arrival at the Naimiṣa forest, is asked by the ascetics to pay obeisance to their chieftain Śaunaka. The Bard then approaches Śaunaka and enters into a long dialogue with him, which continues until the end of the whole epic. The last verse of the chapter runs:

*ṛtvikṣv atha sadasyeṣu sa vai gṛhapatis tataḥ/
upaviṣṭeṣūpaviṣṭaḥ śaunako' thābravīd idam// (Mbh I,4,11)*

After taking his seat among the participants [of the sacrificial session who act as] officiant priests, Śaunaka spoke [to Ugraśravas] as follows.

In the subsequent three verses at the start of chapter I,5 Śaunaka expresses to the Bard his wish to learn the lineage of the Bhārgava clan to which the sage belongs. In response to this request of the sage, the Bard gives a genealogical account about Śaunaka's ancestors and then relates at length the stories of its particular members Bhṛgu and Ruru in the rest of the sub-*Parvan*, which concludes with chapter 12. These eight chapters, viz. I,5–12, exclusively deal with the history of the Bhārgava clan. Owing to this peculiarity in respect of narrative contents, they are clearly marked off from surrounding chapters, forming a separate unit within the First Book.

In contrast to the *Pauloma* portion, the story of Āstīka as related in I,13,1–53,26 does not show any close association with the Bhārgava cycle of stories. In 27,35, indeed, the Bard addresses his interlocutor as Bhṛgunandana, and in 48,5 he makes mention of a brahmin called Caṇḍabhārgava, who plays the role of *hotṛ*-priest during the sacrificial session. But these casual references to Bhṛgu/Bhārgava cannot be taken by us as reflecting any intrinsic connection to the stories related in the *Paulomaparvan*.

Apparently the *Āstīkaparvan* had consisted of chapters I,4,13–53 until the eight Bhārgava chapters, viz. 5–12, were thrust into it. We might suppose that in the older version of the *Āstīkaparvan*, before the insertion of the Bhārgava chapters, Śaunaka began his dialogue with Ugraśravas by directly asking questions about Janamejaya's sacrifice and Āstīka's deliverance of the snakes, for the final verse of chapter I,4 cited shortly before links up quite naturally with the opening passage of the present *Āstīkaparvan*. The verses of this passage run as follows:

*śaunaka uvāca/
kimarthaṃ rājāsārdūlaḥ sa rājā janamejayah/
sarpasatreṇa sarpānāṃ gato'ntaṃ tad vadasva me// (Mbh I,13,1)
āstīkaś ca dvijaśreṣṭhaḥ kimarthaṃ japatāṃ varaḥ/
mokṣayāmāsa bhujagān dīptāt tasmād dhutāśanāt// (2)
kasya putraḥ sa rājāsīt sarpasatraṃ ya āharat/*

sa ca dvijātipravarah kasya putro vadasva me// (3)

sūta uvāca/

mahad ākhyānam āstīkaṃ yatraitat procyate dvija/

sarvam etad aśeṣeṇa śṛṇu me vadatāṃ vara// (4)

Śaunaka said:

Why did king Janamejaya, a tigerlike king, become one who annihilated the snakes with the snake-sacrifice? Tell me that!

And why did the most prominent brahmin Āstīka, the best of the mumblers of prayers, liberate the snakes from the blazing fire [of the sacrifice]? And tell me whose son was the king that performed the snake sacrifice? And whose son was the most eminent brahmin?

The Bard said:

Listen to my relating the great story of Āstīka, O brahmin, in which all of these events have been expounded completely, O best of interlocutors!

The Āstīka story ends at I,53,26. The rest of chapter 53 consists of ten verses which immediately precede the preamble to Vaiśampāyana's recital of the epic. The first verse of this passage runs:

śaunaka uvāca/

bhṛguvamśāt prabhrty eva tvayā me kathitaṃ mahat/

ākhyānam akhilaṃ tāta saute prīto'smi tena te// (Mbh I,53,27)

Śaunaka said: Son of the Bard, you have told the entire great story, from the lineage of Bhṛgu onward. I am pleased with you, my dear.

This statement of Śaunaka's is followed by questions and answers about Vyāsa's recital of his own epic at the sacrificial session of Janamejaya. In verses 32–34 Śaunaka entreats the Bard to rehearse the whole text of the *Mbh* recited by Vyāsa during the pauses in the sacrifice. The whole passage is concluded with verses 35–36, in which the Bard expresses his willing consent to the request of the sage.

This intermediary passage between the *Āstīka-ākhyāna* and the main epic recited by Vaiśampāyana is quite important and indispensable for effecting a smooth shift in narrative levels from U-2 to V. The passage must, therefore, have been composed by the very redactor who first added the Āstīka story to the epic version designated by us as V. As already observed, the *Pauloma* portion was in all likelihood only later inserted by some other person than the redactor who added the Āstīka story to the bulk of the *Mbh*. All the more strange is the reference to *Bhṛguvamśa* made in verse 27 just quoted, because the genealogy of the Bhārgavas presented in chapter I,5 should belong to the *Pauloma* portion. We can get out of this difficulty only by supposing that originally the passage did not consist of more than verses 32–36. Indeed, verses 27–31 are in a sense superfluous, because they do not differ very much from the subsequent five verses with regard to their main purport, which consists of Śaunaka's request to Ugraśravas for his rehearsal of the *Mbh* and the consent of the latter to

do this. So, with some reservations, we might for the present regard verses 27–31 as having been added to the passage with or after the incorporation of the *Paulomaparvan* into the *Mbh*.

Another puzzle posed by the passage concluding chapter I,53 is its total silence about Vaiśampāyana, who in the subsequent chapter accepts the important role of reciting the epic. In this passage both Śaunaka and Ugraśravas seem to take it for granted that Vyāsa himself recited the *Bhārata* epic at Janamejaya’s sacrifice. We cannot offer any reasonable explanation for this incongruity between two pieces of text, viz. I,53,27–36 and 54. At any rate, this very discrepancy indicates that each of these two pieces came into being at a different level of the text-historical development of the *Mbh*.

Insofar as formal structure is concerned, the greater part of the present *Mbh*, viz. from I,4 through to XVIII,5, is emboxed within narrative framework U-2.

The appearance of Ugraśravas as narrator is, however, confined to those chapters which lie outside framework V.⁴³ Examining all these chapters, we notice that not only the *Āstīkaparvan*, but also XV,43 and XVIII,5 contain special references to Āstīka, who is there represented as still attending Janamejaya’s recital of the epic even after his act of saving the snakes from the sacrificial fire. In XV,43,12–16 Āstīka makes some comment on Vyāsa’s miraculous power he has just witnessed, while his deliverance of the snakes is spoken of once again in XVIII,5,27. These special reference to the brahmin-youth made in both XV,43 and XVIII,5 hint at the close association between framework U-2 and the story of Āstīka.

Moreover, from verses I,47,13–16 & 53,12–13 we infer that the author of the *Āstīkaparvan* felt some familiarity or sympathy with the bardic class. When a portent foreshadowing the failure of Janamejaya’s sacrifice has become visible, a *sūta* called Lohitākṣa prophesies that the sacrifice will not be concluded, a brahmin being the cause. These verses are highly intriguing because they reveal that the *sūtas*, usually represented as bards or charioteers, could also pursue the profession of architecture and land-measurement.⁴⁴ According to I,47,14–15, Lohitākṣa, well-versed in both purāṇic lore and architecture, has been engaged in measuring the sacrificial ground in the capacity of master builder (*sthapati*) and superintendent (*sūtradhāra*). In two verses towards the end of the Āstīka story it is told that the bard receives from the king a high reward for his fulfilled prophesy. The significant role Lohitākṣa plays during the *sarpasatra* can be taken to reflect the high regard in which *sūtas*, as well their cultural tradition, were held by the author of the *Āstīkaparvan*. Viewed

⁴³ An exception is found in *Mbh*II,46,4, which runs: *sūta uvāca/ evam uktas tadā rājñā vyāsaśiṣyaḥ pratāpavān/ ācacaḥṣe yathāvr̥ttam tat sarvaṃ sarvavedavit/*. It is almost certain that the prose-sentence “*sūta uvāca*” was added to the verse only after the establishment of framework U-2. We cannot agree with Minkowski when he says that “the presence of Ugraśravas is felt throughout the epic” (p.405). There exists no integral correlation between different levels of narration within the *Mbh*.

⁴⁴ In Vedic texts the *sūta* is often mentioned side by side with the *grāmaṇī*. Unlike in the epics, the characteristics of the *sūta* as bard and charioteer are scarcely represented in Vedic sources. In the older times the primary office to be performed by him seems to have been that of royal herald. Cf. Macdonell and Keith II, pp.462–467; Rau pp.108–109.

against this background, it is quite natural that the main story of this sub-*Parvan* should have been put into the mouth of Ugraśravas, who, like his father Lomahaṣṣa, belongs to the same social class as Lohitākṣa.

Since its original plan, framework U-2 must have been inseparably connected with the story of Āstīka. It is thus within this story alone that one finds lively exchanges of words between Śaunaka and Ugraśravas, whereas in other parts of the *Mbh* Śaunaka seldom appears as the interlocutor of the Bard.⁴⁵ Our analysis of the *Pauloma-* and *Āstīkaparvan* has already rendered it almost indubitable that the second introduction to the *Mbh*, viz. I,4, had not occupied such an initial position in the *Paulomaparvan* as we see in the present text of the epic, but originally constituted the opening chapter of the *Āstīkaparvan*. In support of these considerations we are now in a position to reaffirm the theory already presented above that framework U-2, together with the second introduction, was initially designed by the compiler of the *Āstīkaparvan* with the intention of creating a narrative setting suited to his own compilation. It was this very compiler of the *Āstīkaparvan* who, by enlarging and altering the pre-existing version V, brought into being the new redaction alluded to in I,1,50 with the word “*āstīkādi*”, while the older version used by the same compiler as the basis of his own compilation corresponds to another redaction referred to in the verse with “*uparīcarādi*”. As discussed above, a few verses introductory to I,54, the chapter of preamble to redaction Upa, seem to have been deleted by the compiler of the *Āstīkaparvan*. We might conjecture that the same author undertook similar changes and retouches at other places in his attempt to adapt it to the new narrative framework of his own creation. As for the redaction mentioned with “*manvādi*”, there still remains a certain ambiguity, although this redaction certainly was already provided with framework U-1, which had been created by the compiler of the *Parvasaṃgrahaparvan*.

12

The discourse of Ugraśravas assumes such vast proportions as to enclose in itself almost all the parts of the current *Mbh*. So it appears at first sight as if its original concept were derived from some grand-scale redactory plan that comprehended the entirety of the epic. From our inquiries, however, it has turned out that neither framework U-1 nor U-2 was of such a comprehensive nature. Both of them were laid out for the purpose of fulfilling some specific and marginal needs that did not practically concern any part other than the prologue to the main corpus of the epic. This fact is of utmost importance for our further study of the textual development of the *Mbh*.

In conclusion to our inquiries into the narrative structure of the *Mbh*, we do not propound any new idea. Our present study has rather the character of reconfirming and developing the theory which Christian Lassen already put forward in the middle of the 19th century.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ In XVIII,5,44 the interlocutor is addressed by the Bard as Śaunaka.

⁴⁶ The Supplements (*Khilas*) to the *Mbh* are already provided with both frameworks V and U-2. On the basis of our investigations on the narrative structure of the *Mbh* we may throw some new light on the

ABBREVIATIONS AND TEXTS

- Āśvalāyanagṛhyasūtra* Indische Hausregeln, herausgegeben von A.F.Stenzler. I Āçvalāyana. Leipzig 1864.
- Bhāratamañjarī* [BhM] The Bhāratamañjarī of Kṣemendra. Edited by M.P.Śivadatta and K.P.Parab. Bombay 1898 (Delhi 1954).
- Mahābhārata* [Mbh] The Mahābhārata for the first time critically edited by Vishnu S.Sukthankar 19vols. Poona 1933–1959.
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formation of the *Harivaṃśa*. The study in the *Khilas* undertaken from this viewpoint is to be reserved for another opportunity.

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マハーバーラタ叙述構造の考察

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大叙事詩 Mahābhārata の叙述構造はきはめて複雑であるが、主要部全体の語りの枠組みとなつてゐるものは

V: sarpasatra 祭場における Vaiśampāyana と Janamejaya 王との對話
(Mbh I,54-XVIII,5)

U-1: Naimiṣa 林における Ugraśravas と聖仙達との對話 (I,1-3)

U-2: 同林における Ugraśravas と Śaunaka の對話 (I,4-XVIII,5)

の三者である。

これらの語りの枠組は同時に構想されたものではなく、V, U-2, U-1 の順に成立し、それぞれが異なる傳本の叙述の枠組となるものである。

Mbh I,1,50 では Uparicara 説話、Āstika 説話、Manu の叙述で始まる三傳本の存在が暗示されている。これらのうち Uparicara 傳本と Āstika 傳本がそれぞれ V 傳本と U-2 傳本に対応することは明かである。Manu の叙述で始まる傳本の確定は難しいが、この傳本がすでに U-1 といふ枠組を具へてゐたことはほとんど疑ひない。

事實上 Uparicara 説話から始まる V 傳本の初章は Mbh I,54 であつたが、現行テキストでは冒頭数詩節が削除されてをり、U-2 傳本の編者がこの削除を行つたと考へられる。

U-2 といふ語りの枠組は現行 Mbh の大部分を包攝するものである。Āstika 傳本の編者がみづからの編作になる Āstika 物語を V 傳本すなはち Uparicara 傳本に添加するとき、添加される部分の語りの枠組が必要となり、Ugraśravas の語りといふ新たな枠組が設けられ、同様に Parvasaṃgrahaparvan の編者が Āstika 傳本にさらに Parvasaṃgraha を添加するとき、既存の枠組 U-2 が延長改変されて U-1 が成立したものと思はれる。このやうに考へてはじめて、現行 Mbh の二つの異なる導入部 (I,1,1 et seq.; I,4,1 et seq.) の並存が理解される。

Ugraśravas の語りの枠組は Mbh 全体を見わたす壮大な構想のもとに造られたかのごとくに見えるが、実際は全篇のごく一部を占める Āstikaparvan のために設けられたものすぎない。

第二の導入部は、現行テキストでは Paulomaparvan の冒頭部となつてゐるが、本来は Āstikaparvan の冒頭部をなしてゐたと考へられる。

如上の考察は Christian Lassen の Mbh I,1,50 の解釋と大綱において一致する。本論文は Mbh の叙述構成についての新知見を開陳するものといふよりはむしろ、すでに十九世紀中葉に Lassen が提示した見解を再確認しさらに補足し布衍するといふ性格をもつものである。