

Introduction

Under the heading *Origins of Christianity* I shall post texts intended to afford a deeper understanding of the origins of Christianity beyond the information supplied by Laurency in *The Philosopher's Stone* (chapter 3.20 *Religion at the Stage of Civilization*) and *Knowledge of Life One* (the essays *Gnostics* and *Gnostic Symbols*).

Any student of Laurency knows that the Gospel narratives are not reliable descriptions of the life of the historical Jeshu, but symbolic tales intended to describe the path of the disciple to human perfection. Laurency furthermore points out that the saviour figure of the Gospels has numerous analogies or parallels to other similar figures:

“The manifest poverty and lack of detail of the gospels, particularly strange if any biography had been intended, should have clarified the fact of the matter to acute minds, especially since there are in the gospels numerous parallels to the lives of earlier avatars.” *Knowledge of Life One* 2.5.17

In his book, *Den Jesus som aldrig funnits* (The Jesus Who Never Was, 2005, ISBN 91-631-7399-9, website: www.vimi.se), Roger Viklund makes a very full presentation of these Jesus parallels (op. cit., pp. 165-217). On pp. 214f he writes: “A probably pre-Christian, little known Sanskrit text is *The Story of Gautama, the Progenitor of Ikshvaku*, which is found in the Sanghabhedavastu [of the Mulasarvastivadins, added by me]. Here we are faced with a strange parallel to the crucifixion scene in the gospels.” In a note he mentions that I have translated this text, the same translation that I have now posted on this website under the heading *The Story of Gautama, the Progenitor of Ikshvaku*. Anyone familiar with the gospel legend of the crucifixion of Jesus must be amazed at the many and striking parallels to it there are in *The Story of Gautama, the Progenitor of Ikshvaku*, parallels which Roger Viklund enumerates in his book. I am very grateful to my friends, Christian Lindtner, Ph.D., the renowned Buddhologist, who first called my attention to the Sanskrit text, and to Giuseppe Orazi, who procured the Sanskrit original text for me.

I also add the text of my address to an international seminar held in Sweden in 2003, where these matters were discussed on the occasion of the publication of a book by Dr Lindtner.

Jesus in Comparative Light and the book “The Secret of Christ” by Christian Lindtner

An address by Lars Adelskog at the International Seminar “The Sanskrit and Buddhist Sources of the New Testament”, Klavrestroem, Sweden, September 11, 2003 (final version).

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When Mr Haegglund asked me, last autumn, to translate Christian Lindtner’s book into Swedish, it was a great honour for me, and it is an even greater honour and a joy for me to address you, honoured guests, on this occasion, where the same book is presented to the world.

Jesus Christ is the central figure of the Western civilisation, just as Muhammad is the central figure of the Arab civilisation, and Confucius, of the Chinese civilisation. These are trite observations. However, whereas we are quite positive that Muhammad and Confucius were historical figures, we are not in a position to say with certainty that Jesus Christ, as portrayed in the Gospels, ever existed.

Indeed, quite a number of scholars have come to the conclusion that Jesus is a mythical figure, no more real in any historical sense than Hercules or Dionysus, Sherlock Holmes or Donald Duck. This view – fascinating and exciting to some people, shocking and offensive to others – has been gaining ground in the last few decades, with British scholar George A. Wells as its most renowned protagonist. His theses, laid down in his books, *The Jesus of the Early Christians* (1971), *The Historical Evidence for Jesus* (1982), and *Did Jesus Exist?* (1988), have proved very hard to refute, even for accomplished Bible scholars.

This revisionist school of Jesus research, if I may so call it, takes its stand on three basic facts:

(1) The complete absence of historical evidence for Jesus outside the New Testament. Contemporary authors, who ought to have heard and then written about him, if he was such a remarkable figure as the Gospels intimate, are silent.

(2) The complete, or almost complete, lack of originality of the teachings of Jesus as given in the Gospels. Essentially everything taught is found in the Old Testament, contemporary rabbinic literature, or so-called paganism, Hellenistic wisdom literature, pagan cults, etc.

(3) The many features that Jesus of the Gospels shares with several so-called pagan saviour gods, or godlike men, such as Asclepius, Hercules, Dionysus, Mithras, Krishna, and, of course, Gautama the Buddha.

I shall dwell at some length on this last point.

These common features, or similarities, embrace so many essential aspects of the Jesus figure, his birth, his life, his actions, and his death, and often do so in such a striking manner, that you easily get the impression that Jesus of the Gospels, the new saviour god, is little more than a rehash of the older pagan saviour gods.

We know that early Christian apologists were quite embarrassed by these similarities. Justin the Martyr, for instance, writing in the middle of the second century, tried to save the new religion from accusations of plagiarism by asserting that the Devil was the one responsible for making pagan replicas of the one true saviour. However, since all those pagan saviours lived long before Jesus, the Devil must have anticipated God's plans and made his replicas even before the original was born!

Let us study these pagan saviours somewhat. I presume you all know the Gospels in detail, so as to immediately recognize the various similarities as I account for them. In making this account, I am very much indebted to my friend and compatriot Roger Viklund, who diligently brought very much of the extant material together and summarized it admirably in his short essay, *The Jesus Parallels*.

Asclepius

Asclepius was, according to Greek mythology, the father of medicine. His mother, Princess Koronis, was a virgin who gave birth to a son by the god Apollo. Pausanias, writing in the first century, says that Koronis gave birth to Asclepius when travelling to Epidaurus. Dazzling light encompassed the child and warned a shepherd, who was the first to arrive on the spot, not to touch him.

The cult of Asclepius existed in Greece as early as in the sixth century B.C. He was regarded as a god that healed and saved people. He wrought numerous healing miracles by touching the sick. Sometimes he did this by reaching out his hand, sometimes by putting his hand on the sick person, or pressing his finger into the diseased body-part. In most cases, it was required that the sick person believed in order to be healed.

According to inscriptions from Epidaurus and other testimonials, Asclepius healed all sorts of sick people, paralytics, the dumb and the blind. He could heal people at distance as well. After being healed, sick people went away carrying their beds.

Moreover, Asclepius raised people from the dead. In the tales told about the six people he called back to life we learn that many witnesses were present, that non-believers assumed that the ones raised to life were only apparently dead, that the ones raised to life were given something to eat.

Asclepius also wrought miracles involving the elements of nature, stilling storms, for instance.

Hercules

The cult of Hercules was flourishing as early as in the sixth century B.C. From the very beginning, Hercules was looked upon as the son of god and the redeemer of mankind. As time went by, the tales told of his life were expanded and even more idealised by the Stoics, and others. At the beginning of the Christian era, the faith of Hercules was spread in large parts of the Mediterranean area, Greece, Syria, and Rome.

A young virgin, Alcmene, is married to an earthly man, Amphitryon. He does not touch his wife, however, until the great god Zeus has impregnated her, so that she can give birth to a son, half-man, half-god, while still remaining a virgin. This son is Hercules. He is born, not in Amphitryon's town Mycenae, but in Thebae, while his earthly parents are travelling. Nevertheless, he will be called Hercules of Mycenae, just as Jesus was called Jesus of Nazareth, though he was not born there. The two consonants of Thebae, th-b, are the same as the first two consonants in Bethlehem, b-th.

The divine consort of Zeus, Hera, learns about the birth of a son to her philandering husband, is enraged with jealousy, and attempts to kill Hercules. In order to avoid persecution, Alcmena hides her infant son in a remote place, to fetch him later to his home.

Before Hercules begins his public activity, he dwells a long time alone. During this time he is being tried with temptations, which he overcomes, however. The god Hermes takes him up on a high mountain where he shows him the realms of kings and tyrants.

Hercules must fulfill a mission his father has given him, a mission of suffering, and he proves eventually to be an obedient son. The mission is confirmed by way of prophecy, in the case of Hercules a prophecy by the oracle, in the case of Jesus a prophesy from the book of Isaiah (Luke 4:16ff.). Hercules is called the Saviour.

Hercules is able to walk on water, but his true feat is to overcome death, a death leading to life eternal. His wife Deianeira causes his death by accident, is overcome by horror and remorse, and hangs herself. The dead body of Hercules is burnt on the mountain Oeta.

When Hercules is dying, both his mother and his most beloved disciple, Hylas, are present. Compare John 19:25f. Before dying, Hercules calls to his heavenly father: "I pray unto thee, take my spirit up to the stars... Behold, my father is calling me and is opening the heavens. I am coming, father." As he gives up his spirit, he says, "It is consummated." His death is accompanied by an earthquake and an eclipse of the sun. After his death, Hercules is resurrected and cries, "Do not sorrow, mother... after this I go up into heaven," which he does later. Even the Gospel story that the most beloved disciple took care of the saviour's mother (John 19:26f) is found in the Hercules legend.

Jesus revisionists say that materials borrowed from the Hercules cult are found especially in the Gospel of John. The idea of the Logos (the "Word"), so important in John's Christology, is borrowed from the Stoics and existed in the Hercules cult. When John writes (3:17): "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved", this should be seen in the light of what Cornutus wrote in the first century: "For the Logos is not there to harm or to punish, but to save."

Dionysus

Dionysus was the god of wine. He was seen as a bringer of peace but also as a god that suffered, died and was resurrected from the dead. The cult of Dionysus had a significant influence in Greece as early as in the seventh century B.C. In the centuries that followed, the cult spread over great portions of the Mediterranean area. For instance, in Rome in 186 B.C. there were seven thousand followers.

Dionysus was one more instance of a saviour that had a divine father and a human mother. His father was the great god Zeus, his mother the earthly woman Semele. We are familiar with the picture of the Jesus child lying in a manger wrapped in swaddling clothes. As divine children, Zeus as well as Hermes, are portrayed in swaddling clothes. And at the great festivals in the honour of Dionysus, his idol was carried about in a manger. Dionysus was regarded as a physician that healed the sick, and as the son of God in human form, and he possessed the ability to foresee the future.

Dionysus was known as "the Lord, the Child of God, the Son of God in human shape, and the True God". The followers of the cult of Dionysus knew of purification and the transformation of sorrow into joy. Like Jesus Dionysus was portrayed riding upon an ass and journeying aboard a ship, and he was also connected with dried figs.

The tree of Dionysus is not the fig tree, however, but the vine, since he was the god of wine. He was even called "The Vine." Why does the author of the Gospel of John call Jesus the "true vine" (John 15:1)? Is it not as a piece of intentional polemics against Dionysus and his cult? In *The Bacchantes* (142), Euripides testifies that when Dionysus appears the landscape abounds with wine. According to several sources that all are somewhat older than or contemporary with the Gospels, Dionysus turns water and other things into wine.

In John 6:53 we read: "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." This is an obvious borrowing from the myth and cult of Dionysus. According to the myth, as recounted by Diodorus Siculus, the Titans dismembered the little Dionysus child and boiled his body-parts. However, Demeter collected the body-parts and restored Dionysus to life, so that "he experienced a new birth as though it were his first one". (Diodorus Siculus, *Biblio-theca Histo-ri-ca*, 3:62) In the Dionysus cult, the devoted made it a sacramental act to tear apart a piece of meat and eat it raw.

Dionysus was a crucified god, and he was worshipped as such before the Christian era. The wine on the cross is a well-known motive, and Dionysus was the wine. There is a picture of him on a vase (about 400 B.C.) where he is hanging on a cross (a tree) above an altar table with vessels of wine. Dionysus was not merely a crucified god, but also a crucifying one. He crucified his competitor Lycurgus from Thrace.

Mitra, Mithra, Mithras

In ancient India there was a cult of a god Mitra, as we know from the Vedas. In ancient Persia there was a similar cult of a god Mithra, documented in the Avesta. In both these cases the god is a personification of the sun, and in all likelihood it is the same god. This cult can be traced back several thousand years before the Christian era.

In the Roman Empire there arose, in the second century B.C. at the latest, a mystery cult of the saviour Mithras. Roman sources allege that the Mithras cult came from Persia. Many present-day scholars doubt that despite the god's name and many other similarities, this cult was in any direct way connected with the Indo-Aryan cult of Mitra/Mithra.

Let's concentrate on the Roman cult of Mithras. Since this was a mystery religion, the teaching was kept secret to the profane, and that is the reason why our knowledge of the cult is so scant. The little we do know about it is based on archeological remains and to some extent on the surviving writings of critics. By all accounts, the Roman cult of Mithras was a very extensive movement and, as such, a rival to the early Christian Church. When Christianity was made a State religion, at the end of the fourth century, the Mithras cult was suppressed, its followers were persecuted, the temples were destroyed, and Christian churches were erected upon the ruins. If the Mithraic Church ever possessed any writings, they have not survived to our time.

According to a myth antedating Christianity, Mithras was born on the darkest day of the year, the 25th of December, the same day as the Christian Church, in the fourth century, appointed the birthday of Jesus. Mithras was believed to have been born in or from a rock, and so he was called the "Rock-Born." Consequently, he was worshipped in caves or in temples built to resemble caves. According to early Christian beliefs, Jesus was born in a cave. This belief is attested by Justin the Martyr, Origen, and the apocryphal Gospel according to James. Rock is a very important Christian symbol. Jesus renames his foremost disciple, Simon, calling him Petros, Greek for "rock." In his First Epistle to the Corinthians (10:4), Paul calls Christ "Rock".

When Mithras is born, he, or possibly the rock, radiates a divine light. This light leads shepherds to the place of birth, where they give Mithras fruit and their flocks. Old monuments are preserved that show how the newborn infant is worshipped by shepherds.

Mithras was a god that suffered, a god of truth, and the light of the world. He wrought miracles such as producing water from a rock. Mithras killed a bull, and at a last supper he and Helios ate the bull's meat and drank his blood. Thereupon, Mithras went up into heaven.

Christian critics often say that there is no evidence for assuming that Mithras was a god that died and was resurrected. In almost all mystery religions, however, the initiates underwent a symbolic death and rebirth. That this was the case with the Mithras cult as well can be inferred from the Chronicles of Emperor Commodus (reigned 180-192), where it says that "he [Commodus] sullied the Mithras mysteries with a real manslaughter, when something of that kind is done or pronounced there in order to create terror." That is: he really killed instead of participating in an enactment. Also, Tertullian states that "a picture of a resurrection" was used in the ceremonies surrounding the Roman Mithras. If both a ritual death and a ritual resurrection were enacted in the cult of Mithras, it is hard to draw any other conclusion than that they believed that Mithras died and was resurrected.

We have stayed for a while in the ancient Mediterranean world. Now let's move to ancient India. The two foremost religious cult figures there are Krishna and the Buddha.

Krishna

Krishna is considered to be the eighth avatara or incarnation of the god Vishnu. Vishnu is the middle person in the Hindu trinity of supreme gods, just as Christ is the middle person in the Christian trinity of gods. The idea of avatara is the incarnation of the supreme godhead in human form for the uplift and saving of mankind. Even Krishna's name is strongly reminiscent of Christos, although meaning "black" in Sanskrit. However, it is an exclusively modern idea that a translation should convey the meaning only, and not the sounds or number of syllables of the original. The ancients thought otherwise.

Krishna's mother Devaki was of royal birth and was later worshipped as a virgin. Krishna's birth is miraculous, and he is praised by a choir of devas, or angels. Krishna is not merely the eighth avatara but also the eighth son of Devaki, eight apparently being an important number.

Kamsa is an important personage in the tales about Krishna. He was Krishna's uncle, a king and a very cruel tyrant. The wise man Narada warns Kamsa that the new-born son of Devaki will dethrone him. He therefore decides to kill all her sons as soon as they are born. He succeeds with the first seven ones. When Krishna is born, however, his father manages to smuggle the boy away from his home and hand him over to a cowherd and so make him escape the wrath of Kamsa. When Kamsa discovers that the boy has disappeared, he orders the killing of a multitude of new-born boys in the hope of killing Krishna as well. Patanjali, writing in the last century before the Christian era, considered this legend very old.

Krishna grows up among cowherds. He possesses great powers and works miracles. He destroys demons, and heals cripples, paralytics, and blind people. He raises the daughter of King Angashuna, Kalavati, from the dead. Krishna says to the king: "Why do you cry? Don't you see that she is asleep. Kalavati, rise and walk", whereupon Kalavati rises and walks. Krishna washes the feet of the Brahmins. Krishna's character is love (prema).

Krishna is accidentally shot with an arrow from a hunter's bow. The arrow nails him to a tree, where he dies, that is, he is crucified in the sense of "being nailed at a tree". Paul in his Epistle to the Galatians 3:13 refers to "hanging on a tree." Overcome with deep remorse, the hunter begs the dying god to forgive him, whereupon Krishna says: "Go, hunter, through my grace, to heaven, the abode of the gods...". Then Krishna descends to hell, liberates the dead, and goes subsequently up into heaven (svarga).

Now we come to the so-called pagan god or godlike man that is the most important to our debate here these days, namely

The Buddha

Buddhism was known in Rome as early as in the second century before the Christian era. It is, therefore, not far-fetched to assume that elements of the Buddha legend were known in the Western world at that time or somewhat later. Buddhism was a religion of quite another calibre than all the aforementioned "pagan cults." It was a scripture religion with a strong appeal to emotional devotees and rational intellectuals alike, a religion driven by powerful expansionist forces in human shape: zealous missionaries, talented scholars surrounded by devoted pupils, and ingenious translators. Such a movement was bound to reach the West and influence it with its ideas, in some way or other.

I shall now summarize some of the salient points of resemblance between Siddhartha Gautama the Buddha and Christ.

Siddhartha Gautama was born about 560 B.C. Just as Jesus he dwelled as a spiritual being in heaven before his birth. He incarnated voluntarily in order to save the world. His mother was Queen Maya, a name that is reminiscent of Mary (Maryam, Miryam). Maya was later regarded as a virgin. She was believed to have been impregnated by a divine being in the shape of a white elephant that penetrated her through her right side. The birth of Siddhartha is therefore to be regarded as a virgin birth and Queen Maya's consort King Suddhodana as Siddhartha's stepfather only, just as Joseph was Jesus' stepfather. The Father of the Church Jerome (*Contra Jovinianum*, 1:42) says that the Buddha was born through the side of a virgin. The Buddha was therefore regarded as the Son of God (devaputra). Siddhartha is not born in the royal palace at Kapilavastu but while his mother is on a travel. An angel (deva) announces that the child is holy and a future redeemer. The child radiates a dazzling light and receives homage from heaven. Wise men recognize in him the signs of a god or superman (mahapurisa). He is sought after in wide areas and receives veneration. As a little boy he is revered by an old wise man, Asita, like Jesus was revered by Symeon. In the Gospel according to Luke (2:25-34) we read:

"...there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout... and it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, ..., then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel... this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel..."

Now compare this with what is said in the Suttanipata (689f) of the encounter of Siddhartha and Asita:

“The long-haired wise man looked upon the child, and with a great joy he took him up... a man who now, filled with pleasure, raised his voice and said: This one is unique, the most prominent human being! In the same moment the hermit remembered that he would soon die – and this made him so sad that he began to cry ... This boy will attain the perfect awakening, he who sees what is the most pure will set the wheel of the law in motion out of compassion for the salvation of the many; and his teaching will be spread afar.”

Even as a young boy Siddhartha is very wise, he is revered in the temple, and at school he proves to master all spoken and written languages. When travelling in company with adults, they lose him, and when they finally find him again, he is in deep meditation (Lalitavistara 8, 10, 11).

Even the baptism of Jesus in Jordan and his temptation in the desert have their direct parallels. Siddhartha bathes in the river Nairanjana, then sits down under a tree and experiences an inner awakening that causes a great joy in heaven. “And Jesus, when he was baptized, went straightway out of the water: and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:16f)

After a long fast Siddhartha is tempted by Mara, the Evil One, who promises to make him a world emperor, if he renounces becoming a world saviour. Just as Jesus, the Buddha resists the temptation, and he is praised as a conqueror by gods and animals, just as angels came and ministered to Jesus.

When Siddhartha begins his mission he is about 30 years old. His first disciples are cowherds, and like Jesus he has twelve chief disciples of whom Ananda is the most beloved one. His two first disciples are brothers, and he finds them sitting under a fig tree. According to John 1:48, Jesus finds his disciple Nathanael under a fig tree.

Just as John the Baptist sends out two of his disciples to ask whether Jesus is the awaited one, Pokkharasati sends out Ambattha to learn whether samana Gotama really is the Buddha. The Buddha is transfigured in the sight of his disciples, so that his body radiates a dazzling light. And he sends out his disciples into the world to preach his message.

Also the message of the Buddha has some strong resemblances to the message of Jesus, such as “Look upon yourself rather than blame others.” The Buddha accepts an invitation to eat in the house of a prostitute, for which he is criticized by the prominent people of the town. The Buddha preaches using parables. He uses a language of rich imagery such as light and darkness, sun and rain, fertility and infertility.

Here are some samples of his ethical teachings taken from Dhammapada, Majjhimanikaya, Udanavarga, and Saddharmapundarika: “Think of others as of yourself. Conquer hatred with love, evil with good. If anyone would strike you with his hand, with a stick or cut you with a knife, you should restrain yourself and say no evil. It is easier to see the faults of another than those of oneself. The big cloud rains upon all, on high and low. The sun and the moon light up the whole world, both him that does good and him that does evil, both the high and the low.”

The Buddha possesses great powers and works miracles. He knows the thoughts and deeds of others in beforehand. He heals the sick, makes the blind see again, makes the deaf hear, the lame and the paralytic well again, and restores reason to the deranged, and casts out demons. Together with his disciple Mogallana

the Buddha feeds five hundred monks with bread baked from dough for one bread only. The Buddha walks on water, appears and disappears at will, walks through walls, and stills storms.

In Nidanakatha, a noble virgin says, when seeing The Buddha: “Verily, that mother is blessed who has given birth to a man like this one” Luke (11:27) tells about a woman who praises the mother of Jesus, saying: “Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast suckled.” Neither the Buddha nor Jesus acknowledges the praise, however.

In his teaching, the Buddha opposes traditional rigid laws, rebukes intolerance, dogmatism, ritualism, and priestly hypocrisy. He censors the unquestioning adherence to the Vedas and excoriates the bloody sacrifices of the Brahmins. Voluntarily he leads a life of utmost simplicity as a beggar – a life of renunciation – and mixes mostly with the lowly in society. The people call him prophet, master, lord. There is also a traitor, Devadatta, who tries to kill him but fails and meets a deplorable end. The Buddha turns a robber from his evil ways and makes him his devotee. The Buddha eats a last meal, dies, and attains nirvana. His death is presaged by a great earthquake and a thunderstorm. After his death, the Buddha appears to his disciples.

There is also an episode strongly and strangely reminiscent of Peter’s threefold denial of his Master. Three months before the Buddha will enter into nirvana, he tells his most beloved disciple, Ananda, when they are alone, that whoever has developed and practised the four great powers (iddhi) could remain in the same birth, should he so desire it, for that portion of the aeon which has yet to run, and, since he, the Buddha, has developed these same powers, he could stay on in his present existence to continue his work of salvation. The Buddha repeats two more times this implicit appeal to Ananda to beseech him to stay on, but the venerable Ananda does not grasp the underlying intention. “So far was his heart possessed by Mara, the Evil One”, says the Mahaparinibbanasutta (III.5). At last, Ananda grasps what he should have said, but then it is too late.

Now to

The Book by Christian Lindtner

This book is probably the most consistent – some people would say extreme – Jesus revisionist book ever written. Its title, “The Secret of Christ – The New Testament is the Buddha’s Testament”, is provocative, and intentionally so, I presume. Dr Lindtner is not content merely to assert that the “Gospels give no reason for talking about any ‘historical Jesus’”. The same is true of the other persons and places mentioned in the Gospels. They are all fictitious.” Neither is he comfortable with some moderately revisionist standpoint, such as “the Gospels evince some Buddhist influence”. No, his approach is much more radical. He says: “Christianity is, in all essentials, an imitation of Buddhism. It is the matter of a very skilful imitation but also a very remarkable, free, and distorted imitation. A pirated edition or a piece of plagiarism, so to speak, for the New Testament, on which Christianity is based, was created by Buddhist missionaries.”

What of the objection, say, that this cannot be the case, since there is in the New Testament no trace of any central Buddhist tenet such as The Four Aryan Truths, The Aryan Eightfold Path, The Twelve Nidanas, or the Greater and Lesser Precepts? Superficially, this objection makes sense, and if we were superficialists, we would use such reasoning to defeat Dr Lindtner’s disturbing and outrageous thesis. Dr Lindtner was proved wrong, the debate is concluded, and our calm is restored, thank goodness!

However, Dr Lindtner never said that the New Testament was an imitation of Theravada Buddhism, the older, intellectual Buddhism, which indeed stresses the correct understanding of the content of the doctrine as a necessary condition of individual salvation. Says Dr Lindtner:

“The New Testament is propaganda written, not for the old, but for the new Buddhism, also known as Mahayana, the new and populist vessel. The New Testament is a popular Maha-yana that primarily addressed itself to the Jews.”

“Popular” and “populism” are the key-words here. Every student of the history of religion knows that no faith can become a mass movement if it confines itself to teaching an intellectual message the understanding of which requires the exertion of your reason. No, a mass religion must have a strong emotional appeal, must promise a quick salvation by means that do not require intellectual exertion, the belief in a saviour, for instance. Says Dr Lindtner:

“A sharp distinction is made between understanding the Tathagata and believing in the Tathagata.

We live in the end-time. If people can be made to believe in the Tathagata, they will be saved from all misery and be healed from all disease.

Tathagata is like a loving father, his disciples are his children.

Now, in order to save all his little boys, Tathagata makes use of all manner of tactical stratagems and tricks. Mahayana wants to trick people into believing something they do not grasp by their intellect and their reason. The Tathagata lies and tells stories, he works miracles and appears in all sorts of disguise. He plays on words, he threatens the proud with hell and entices the humble with promises of heaven. He uses parables and metaphors, tells riddles and utters magical words that will have a protective effect.”

This is a fair description of how the Tathagata, the Buddha, actually appears in a Mahayana sutra of central significance, namely the Lotus Sutra, the Saddharmapundarika.

Dr Lindtner says that “The Gospels, headed by Matthew, must have issued from that person or those persons who are described in the tenth chapter of the Lotus sutra, or Law-Flower Sutra, as it is variously called. That chapter is entitled ‘The Dharma Preacher’.” According to his thesis, this is the very key to our understanding how the New Testament is propaganda for populist Mahayana. Listen, for instance, to these excerpts from a widely spread and much revered Chinese translation of the Saddharmapundarika, tenth chapter:

“King of Healing! If there be any people who ask you what sort of living beings will become Buddhas in future worlds, you should tell them that these are the people who will certainly become Buddhas in those worlds. Wherefore? If my good sons and good daughters receive and keep, read and recite, or expound, and copy even a single word in the Law-Flower Sutra, ... , these people should be looked up to by all the worlds; and just as you pay homage to Tathagatas, so should you pay homage to them... How much more those who are perfectly able to receive, keep, and in every way pay homage to it! ... If these good sons and daughters, after my extinction, should be able, *even by stealth*, to preach to one person but one word of the Law-Flower Sutra, know, these people are Tathagata-mesengers sent by the Tathagatas, to perform Tathagata-deeds. How much more so those who in great assemblies widely preach it to others!”

The key words in these excerpts are, I think, **even a single word in the Law-Flower Sutra** and **even by stealth**. This is the reason why we do not find any trace of the Four Aryan Truths, or The Twelve Nidanas

in the New Testament. The Buddha is present nevertheless, by single words, and by stealth. And it is not a matter of some isolated word here and there, but, as Dr Lindtner says a propos the Gospel of Matthew:

“In principle, it is possible to trace almost every word and sentence back to Sanskrit. Rather early it became clear to me that almost every word and sentence in Matthew was supported by the original Sanskrit texts. Matthew rendered now the sense, now the external shape of the words, now the number of syllables of the words or sentences. If the two texts, the Sanskrit and the Greek, were read aloud at the same time at the same pace, it often appeared that the rhythms coincided. Some times either the one or the other, seldom all parts at the same time. He cut the originals in small pieces, glued them together again, often the one part on the other, combined boundlessly; he reversed the original order of sequence. Viewed as a whole, his gospel is a mosaic. Therefore, it must be our task to “restore” his text, so that the original reappears in the light of day. To understand Matthew means, first and foremost, to understand how he worked using a pair of scissors, glue, and an abacus.”

This is a daring thesis, to say the least. It is daring also because its author knows that it cannot count on being able to claim, in the beginning at least, a wide hearing. Because the thesis requires rather unique skills in the people to be won for it beyond a shallow fascination. To understand and follow Dr Lindtner’s reasoning on a deeper level than that of his popular book, you have to be familiar not only with the Greek New Testament but also with the Sanskrit Mahayana sutras. New Testament scholars and Grecians seldom know any Sanskrit, and Sanskritists and Buddhologists are seldom proficient in the Greek New Testament. Therefore, a serious obstacle, if not *the* serious obstacle, to a wider recognition of Dr Lindtner’s thesis lies in the compartmentalization of scholarship. However, this is an obstacle that will probably be overcome with time, as more and more scholars with interdisciplinary skills set about exploring this new and fascinating area of research – The New Testament as Mahayana Buddhism in disguise – and so doing beat up the lonely path trodden by one man into a wide highway for comfortable traffic. Dr Lindtner has promised to publish a comparative reader for self-study and university use that will contain 108 examples of direct translation from Sanskrit into Greek. Work of that kind is, I think, the one and only way to victory. If his thesis is true, as I am very much inclined to believe, then it will prove itself, not by some few examples of fascinating but – the critics will say – inconclusive analogies and similarities, but by examples of Sanskrit-Greek translations that are so striking and so many as to defy the laws of chance.

Thank you very much.

The Story of Gautama, the Progenitor of Ikshvaku

From the Gilgit Manuscript of the Sanghabhedavastu, being the 17th and Last Section of the Vinaya of the Mulasarvastivadin. Translation from Sanskrit by Lars Adelskog.

Resumé of the events leading up to this story and told in the first chapters of the Section: *On a visit to his home town of Kapilavastu, Gautama the Buddha is very reverently received by his clansmen, the Gautamas, who ask him to tell the earliest history of the clan. The Buddha refrains from doing so, considering that other spiritual teachers could perceive something of the sort as self-praise. Instead, the Buddha asks one of his foremost disciples, Mahamaudgalyayana, to tell the story. Mahamaudgalyayana goes into deep meditation and looks back into the distant past. Thereupon he tells a long story (that is largely to be found in the Aggaññasutta of the Dighanikaya of the Pali Canon) how in the beginning human beings led very long lives as beings of light among the Abhasvara Devas, sustaining themselves on nothing but thought and joy, but later gradually fell into a sensuous and physical existence of an increasingly coarser description, whereupon the struggle for existence began with sexual lust, the desire for possessions, hatred, lies, and crime, so that those primeval men had to appoint a leader to administer justice between them, the first king, Mahajanasammata (which means the "one approved of by the great multitude"). The Gautamas are descendants of Mahajanasammata through countless intervening generations. Thus Mahamaudgalyayana is the story-teller:*

King Karna ("Ear"), o Gautamas, had two (sons), Gautama and Bharadvaja. Of these two, Gautama was one who rejoiced in living withdrawn from action, whereas Bharadvaja rejoiced in (the prospect of) ruling the kingdom. He (Gautama) saw how his father ruled the kingdom, somewhat justly (actually, with dharma), somewhat unjustly (with adharma). He thought: "I shall as well become king after my father, I shall as well rule the kingdom somewhat justly, somewhat unjustly, whereupon I shall become a denizen of hell. Perhaps the time is up for me to wander forth from home into homelessness." Having reached this realization he approached King Karna, prostrated himself before him and announced: "Daddy, permit me to wander forth with faith from home into homelessness!" He (the king) said: "Son, this (kingdom) for whose sake (bloody) sacrifices are offered, libations are poured, penance is done, this kingdom has fallen into your hand (onto your palm). After me you will be the king. Why do you want to wander forth?" He (Gautama) said: "Daddy, it is not possible for me to rule the kingdom somewhat justly, somewhat unjustly. Permit me therefore to wander forth." Knowing his son to be unyieldingly stubborn, he then gave his permission.

At this very time, there lived in a certain hermitage a rishi by the name of Krishnadvaipayana (which means Black Dvaipayana). Then Prince Karna, with the King's permission, glad, content, delighted, inebriated with joy, and in the best frame of mind, went to Rishi Krishnadvaipayana, approached him in a disciplined manner, prostrated himself before him and said: (I) have the intention of wandering forth, initiate me into the monkhood. He (K.) initiated him (G.) into the monkhood. Rishi Krishnadvaipayana subsisted on fruits, roots, and water (only). He (G.) became known by the name of Rishi Gautama. (Thus) the name Rishi Gautama came about.

After some time, however, King Karna passed away. Prince Bharadvaja was invested with royal power and authority and ruled the kingdom he had inherited from his father. After some (more) time Rishi Gautama said to his teacher: "Master, I cannot sustain myself on plants from the wood (alone). I shall go down to the outskirts of the village." He (the teacher) answered: "Very well, son. Whether the rishi lives in the village or in the wood, he must guard his senses in every way. Go to the vicinity of Potala(ka), build a hut out of branches and leaves and make it your dwelling." Yes, Master," said Rishi Gautama and built a hut out of branches and leaves and settled down (there).

At that very time there lived in Potalaka a harlot (actually: a woman who earned her living from her body or beauty) by the name of Bhadra, and also a rogue by the name of Mrinala. He had (fine) clothes and jewellery sent (to her) in order have intercourse (with her). She put on these clothes and jewellery and was about to go away (to see Mrinala). But another man appeared bringing five hundred karshapanas. (He said:) "Bhadra, come, have intercourse with me!" She thought: "If I go (with him), I shall receive five hundred karshapanas. And it would be inconsiderate to refuse one (customer) who has come to (my) house to go elsewhere." She told her servant girl: "Go to Mrinala and say: Madam says: I am not ready yet, I will come later." And she went away and told him. He (the new customer), too, was a busy person. He had intercourse with her and went away in the first night-watch already. She thought: "There is plenty of time, I shall manage to gratify him (M.) as well." Once again she told her servant girl: "Go to Mrinala and say: Madam is ready, tell her to which park she should go." She went away and told him. He said: "Now your mistress is not ready, now she is ready." The servant girl was at loggerheads with her, (and) she explained it all: "Esteemed sir, it (was) not that she (was) not ready. Nay, even more. She has had intercourse with another man in your clothes and jewellery." Whatever state of obsession with sensual pleasure he had been in was gone. (Instead,) a state of obsession with destruction arose (in him). Being full of wrath he said: "Girl, go to Bhadra and say: 'Mrinala says: Go out to that park!' She went and told Bhadra.

Thereupon she went out to the park. Mrinala the rogue said to her: "Is this what befits you, to have intercourse with another man in my clothes and jewellery?" She said: "Esteemed sir, it is my fault. However, the female sex always makes mistakes. Forgive me! Then, enraged, he drew his sword and took away her life. Then the servant girl screamed very loud: "Madam has been murdered! Madam has been murdered!" A crowd of people heard (her screams) and came running from all directions up to the hermitage where Gautama lived.

Then Mrinala the rogue was terrified, threw the blood-stained sword before Gautama and merged in the big crowd. And when the the big crowd saw the blood-stained sword they said: "It was that monk who killed Bhadra." Then they surrounded Rishi Gautama and said, enraged: "Hey you, monk, you carry the rishi flag but commit a deed like this!" He said: "What deed?" They said: "You had intercourse with Bhadra and then took away her life."

He said calmly: "I did not do that." Although he spoke calmly, the big crowd pinioned his arms firmly with a rope, brought him before the king, and said: "Your Majesty, this monk had intercourse with Bhadra and took away her life." Kings are not apt to investigate (legal cases) properly. He (the king) said: "If it is so (as you say), go! Fix him on a stake. I have (herewith) delivered this monk to you."

Thereupon they hung a garland of oleanders around the mendicant's neck, surrounded him with (a police unit of) blue-clad men with drawn swords, announced (his crime and judgement) at road and street crossings and in places of proclamation, drove him out (of the city) through the southern city-gate, and fixed him on a stake while still alive.

That teacher of his, Krishnadvaipayana, arrived after a while at his hermitage, but when, some time after his arrival, he did not see (Gautama), he began to seek (him) here and there, until he saw (him) fixed on

the stake. Sobbing, with his eyes full of tears, and speaking haltingly because of his pity and grief, he asked: “Alas, son, what is this?” He (G.) answered, sobbing as well and despondent because of the injuries and pains inflicted on his vital organs, “Master, (it is because of my past) deeds. What else could it be (that makes me suffer this)?” He (K.) said: “Son, you are not hurt or injured?” (G. answered:) “Dad, I am injured in body but not in mind.”

“Son, how should (I) know (it)? “Master, I will fulfil your request. Listen! As true as it is, as truly as (I) said that I am injured in body but not in mind, as true is it, as truly (do I) say that the black colour of the skin of the Master will be gold-coloured.” That great spirit (G.) had a well-developed will-power. Immediately after he had said this, the black skin of Rishi Krishna-dvaipayana disappeared (and) a gold-coloured one appeared (instead). Soon a rumour was abroad that Black Dvaipayana (Krishnadvaipayana) had become Golden Dvaipayana (Suvarna-dvaipayana). His (name became) Suvarnadvaipayana. (Thus) the name Suvarna-dvaipayana came about. He was utterly astonished.

Thereupon Rishi Gautama said: “Master, when I have left this existence, what will my destiny be? What rebirth, what future (shall I have)?” He (S.) answered: “Son, the Brahmins use to say, ‘The man who has no son will not face a (good) destiny.’ Have you begotten any off-spring?” (G. answered:) “Master, I am just a young man without experience of women’s ways. Although my father tried to persuade me with a view to (having me participate in the government of) the kingdom, I became a monk. How could I have any offspring?” (S. said:) “Son, if it is so, you should (instead) recall your experience of previous (sexual) pleasure.” (G. answered:) “Master, right now severe pains are overwhelming me, vital organs have been pierced, my joints have been loosened, and my mind is preoccupied with (approaching) death. How could I recall my experience of previous (sexual) pleasure?” His master had acquired the five superhuman faculties. By means of magical power he created a great downpour, the rain-drops fell on his (G.:s) body. Thanks to the contact of the cool, wet wind, his pain was alleviated. He began to remember experience of previous (sexual) pleasure. While and because he recollected the passion of sexual intercourse, two drops of semen mixed with blood fell (on the ground). Four things are inconceivable: the idea of a soul, the idea of the world, the idea of the ripening of the deeds of sentient creatures (i.e. karma), and the range of the buddha power of the buddhas. The two drops of semen manifested themselves (“were transformed into”) as two eggs. When the sun rose and heated them with its rays, they cracked. Two princes were born.

Not far away there was a sugar cane plantation (ikshuvata). The two (young princes) entered it. Thereupon the sunrays became even more brilliant. Rishi Gautama was burnt by the sunrays and passed away. Then Rishi Suvarnadvaipayana arrived. He saw that (G.) had passed away. Close to the stake he saw the two cracked eggs, the eggshells (kapalani, plural of kapala, which means eggshell as well as cranium) lay (there). He walked hither and thither in the sugar cane plantation until he saw the two princes and began to ponder “Whose sons are these?” He realized that they were Rishi Gautama’s. Then he was overwhelmed with love. He brought them to his hermitage, gave them drink, gave them food, and brought them up. He also undertook the ceremony of giving them names. “They were born when the sun was rising and were heated by the sunrays. Therefore (they are said to be of) the solar clan.” (Thus) did the name solar clan (*suryagotra*) come about. They were the sons of Rishi Gautama, Gautamas. (Thus) did the second name, Gautamas, come about. They issued from his own body (*anga* means body). (Thus) did the third name, Angirasas, come about. Since they were taken from a sugar cane plantation (ikshuvata), they were ikshvakas. (Thus) did the fourth name, Ikshvakas, come about.

After some time King Bharadvaja passed away without (leaving) any sons. The ministers assembled and began to deliberate. (They said:) “Gentlemen, whom should we now anoint a king?” Some of them said: “His brother, Gautama, became a monk among the rishis. According to the rules of succession, this kingdom is his. Him we should anoint.” They finished their deliberation and went away to Rishi

Suvarnadvaipayana. When they had arrived, they prostrated themselves before him and said, “Great Rishi, where has Gautama gone?” He answered: “It was you who had him killed!” “Great Rishi, we do not even recall what he looked like. How could we (then) have had him killed?”

(S. said:) “I will help you to remember.” “Splendid.” When he had made them remember, they said: “Great Rishi, if it is so (as you say), his name shall not be mentioned any more. He was an evil-doer, he shall not be praised.” (S.:) “What evil deed did he do?” (They answered:) “This and that.” (S.:) “He was no evil-doer. It was an innocent, a harmless man that you had killed.” (The ministers:) “How so?” He (then) told them in detail as it was. They were saddened and said: “Great Rishi, if it is so, we are the evil-doers, not he.” They also made an announcement to that effect.

And the two boys went up to the rishi. The ministers said: “Great rishi, whose are those boys?” He said: “His own ones.” (The ministers:) “How did they come about? What are their names? He told them this from the beginning (and) in detail. When the ministers heard this, they were utterly astonished. Having asked permission from the rishi, they anointed the elder prince king. He passed away, however, without (leaving) a son. Then the other, the younger one, was anointed king. His name was King Ikshvaku (Ikshvakuraja). (Thus) the name Ikshvakuraja came about. O Gautamas! Thanks to the fact that King Ikshvaku had sons and grandsons, nephews and grandnephews, there were again in the city of Potalaka one hundred hundreds (that is: ten thousand) of Ikshvaku kings.

(The above is a translation of a part of the Sanskrit text, *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Sanghabhedavastu*, being the 17th and last section of the Vinaya of the Mulasarvastivadin, Part I, edited by Raniero Gnoli with the assistance of T. Venkatacharya, Roma, Istituto italiano per il medio ed estremo oriente 1977.)

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