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A NOTE ON ANĀTMAN IN THE WORK OF E. LAMOTTE

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In his *Histoire du Bouddhisme indien*, E. Lamotte honestly examined the question of *anātman* in early Buddhism. He took it up again in the fourth volume of his *Traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse*. In the latter work, Lamotte does not agree with Oldenberg, Frauwallner, and myself (p. 2005). But his criticism is a model of elegant scholarship¹.

So far as I can see, Lamotte's argumentation is vitiated by the fact that he does not make a clear distinction — along with the majority of Buddhist scholars of our time — between the Upaniṣadic *ātman* and the *ātmans* of other systems such as Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, Mīmāṃsā, Sāṃkhya, and Jainism. The specificity of the Upaniṣadic *ātman* was, however, already pointed out by Śaṅkara in *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* I, 1, 4.

The following passage from the *Traité* (p. 1995) is really confusing:

“... la notion d'Ātman que les bouddhistes combattent est celle d'une entité permanente (*nitya*), stable (*dhruva*), éternelle (*śāśvata*), immuable (*avipariṇāmadharman*) que les ignorants attribuent au grand Brahman (*D. I*, p. 18-19), à certaines divinités (*D. I*, p. 19-20), à eux-mêmes ou à d'autres (*M. I*, p. 8, 135, 137; *S. III*, p. 98-99, 183); cette notion est étroitement apparentée à celle du Brahman-Ātman des Upaniṣad et du Vedānta.

“Le Buddha l'écarte résolument et déclare: *Natthi nicco dhuvo sassato avipariṇāmadhammo* (*S. III*, p. 144)”.

I do not believe that the texts cited have anything to do with the Upaniṣadic doctrine of *ātman-brahman*. The last quote, from the *Samyutta-Nikāya*, is significant: the text condemns, not the belief in a timeless Absolute, which is “permanent”, “stable”, “eternal”, “immutable”, but the conception of a psychophysical individuality possessing all these qualities: *n' atthi kho, bhikkhu, kiñci rūpaṃ yaṃ rūpaṃ niccaṃ*

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¹ Lamotte's observations have given rise to a controversy between Professors Frits Staal and J. W. de Jong: see *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie: Revue de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient*, Section de Kyoto, 1 (1985) and 3 (1987).

dhuvam sassatam avipariṇāmadhammam sassatisamam tath' eva ṭhassati. (Similarly with the other *khandas*, *vedanā*, etc.).

The problem exists in Buddhism, and it cannot be easily dispensed with, when we take into account the tension between *ātman* and *anātman* in Mahāyāna texts. (There were two interesting papers on this subject in this conference itself). It is, therefore, good that discussions on the subject, sometimes from new points of view, are going on².

There is one point upon which Professor Lamotte did not touch: the association between *ātman* and *brahman* in the Pali Canon. It is not enough to say — as it is often done — that the term *brahman* in these texts means something different from what it means in the Upaniṣads (as, e.g., in Sāṃkhya, it is used to designate the *pradhāna*). The contexts in which the term is used are important, and a study of the *Aṭṭhakathās* and the *Ṭīkās* has led me to believe that the authors of these commentaries were annoyed by the occurrence of this term in the Buddhist texts. In their eagerness to isolate Buddhism from the Brahmanical tradition, they sought to obscure the original meaning of this important term; but through their various attempts can be discerned — so it seems to me — this original meaning, which is the same as in the Upaniṣads³.

In a letter dated October 27, 1979, Professor Lamotte spoke to me, in a different connection, of “les progrès considérables accomplis par la science”. The little that is said in this note is said in that spirit.

² See J. Pérez-Remón, *Self and Non-Self in Early Buddhism*, The Hague, Mouton Publishers (*Religion and Reason* 22), 1980; S. Collins, *Selfless Persons. Imagery and Thought in Theravāda Buddhism*, Cambridge University Press, 1982; C. Oetke, “Ich” und das Ich, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GmbH (*Alt- und Neu-Indische Studien*, herausgegeben vom Seminar für Kultur und Geschichte Indiens an der Universität Hamburg), 1988. — Despite an apparently identical standpoint, there is a gulf of difference between Pérez-Remón’s approach and mine — a difference which, unfortunately, has often been missed by scholars. The Spanish scholar, moreover, does not seem to have been aware of *L’Ātman-Brahman dans le Bouddhisme ancien*, Publ. EFEO, 90, Paris, 1973, while writing his book.

³ “Some Thoughts on *ātman-brahman* in Early Buddhism”, *Dr. B.M. Barua Birth Centenary Commemoration Volume*, 1989 (Calcutta: Bauddha Dharmankur Sabha), pp. 63-83.

ON THE ĀTMAN THEORY IN THE MAHĀPARINIRVĀNASŪTRA

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Mahāparinirvānasūtra of Mahāyāna (MPS) is one of the sūtras which expound the *tathāgatagarbha-vāda*, as well as *Tathāgatagarbhasūtra*, *Śrīmālāsūtra* and so on, in the Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism. This sūtra expounds the ātman clearly and admires it highly, although Buddhism has been asserting the *anātman-vāda*. The sūtra is characterized by its ātman theory. Then, how and why can the ātman be explained in the sūtra? And what is the ātman the sūtra asserts? This paper is intended to approach these problems according to the explanation of the sūtra.

At first, as to the text of the sūtra, there are four Chinese translation and two Tibetan ones. The Sanskrit text does not remain except in fragments. Concerning the four Chinese texts, the first text consists of 40 volumes and was translated by Tan-wu-chen [Taisho. No. 374]. The second is a revised edition of the first one, and consists of 36 volumes [Taisho. No. 375]. The third consists of 6 volumes, and was translated by Fa-xian for the first time in China at the beginning of the fifth century [Taisho. No. 376]. The fourth one consists of only 2 volumes, and it contains the last part of the sūtra. This text was translated by Jñānabhadra during the Tang Dynasty [Taisho No. 377]. As to the two Tibetan texts, one is the retranslation from the first and the fourth Chinese texts [Peking ed. No. 787]. So this is not so important as a material for study. The other corresponds to the third Chinese text which has 6 volumes [Peking ed. No. 788].

Regarding the Sanskrit text, as mentioned above, it is unknown, and at the present only eight folios of manuscripts are known to exist. Their contents are all included in the third Chinese text and also in the part of volume 1-10 of the first Chinese text¹. According to this fact, conversely, on the formation of the sūtra, it is supposed that the contents of the sūtra included in the third Chinese text and in the part of volumes 1-10 of the first Chinese, was exactly composed in Indian

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¹ Kazunobu Matsuda: *Sanskrit Fragments of the Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvānasūtra* pp. 12-15. (Studia Tibetica no. 14 Toyo Bunko, Tokyo 1988).