

in the narrative about the dog, he is said to violate his own advice or principles, though the main point seems to be, again, that he was not perfect, he had to work to control his human nature, and he cared—in this case, about his sister. As with the authentic and textually unproblematic narratives in general, this one also has a concluding statement by Pyrrho explaining the event in the context of his philosophy.

However, although the narrative does seem to have been originally as authentic as the others,¹⁴⁴ something happened to the text very early in Antiquity, so that the two surviving versions give significantly different concluding statements, one of which (the longer version in *Aristocles*) seems to support Pyrrho and the other (the shorter version in *Diogenes Laertius*) to criticize him. Although Brunschwig has argued cogently in favor of the former,¹⁴⁵ in fact the texts of both accounts are problematic and unclear, as concluded by Bett.¹⁴⁶ They must therefore be set aside until or unless someone is able to solve this problem.

¹⁴⁴ I.e., excluding the fake “careless Pyrrho” story in *Antigonus*, which evidently derives from the same source drawn on by *Aristotle* (or more likely by an *Aristotelian* of his school) for the argument in his *Metaphysics* discussed above in this chapter.

¹⁴⁵ Brunschwig (1992).

¹⁴⁶ See Bett (2000: 66n9).

CHAPTER 2

No Differentiations

THE EARLIEST ATTESTED FORMS OF BUDDHISM

The earliest attested philosophical-religious system that is both historically datable and clearly recognizable as a form of Buddhism is Early Pyrrhonism, the teachings and practices of Pyrrho of Elis and Timon of Phlius, as shown in Chapter One. Its central features correspond exactly to some of the central features of the traditional putatively “early” form of Buddhism presented in Pali canonical texts. However, the latter tradition of Buddhism also contains many elements—beliefs, institutions, devotional practices, and so on—which developed at the earliest in the Saka-Kushan period, three centuries after Pyrrho. They spread throughout the ancestors of the attested forms of Buddhism,¹ creating Normative Buddhism.

The elements that are attested only from approximately the Saka-Kushan period on—the exact time remains to be established—are far from trivial. They include the *Saṅgha*, the community of monks; the idea of the *bhikkṣu* ‘monk’ per se, as well as of the *bhikkṣunī* ‘nun’; the *vihāra* or monastery;² the *Vinaya*, or Buddhist monastic code;³ worship of the

¹ It appears that they had less influence on the highly divergent sect of *Devadatta*, traces of which still existed in Hsüan Tsang’s day (Lamotte 1988: 517). Perhaps other forms of Pre-Normative Buddhism also survived long enough to be recorded in the Kushan period or afterward.

² Beckwith (2014).

³ All

Buddha,⁴ development of the idea of reincarnations of the Buddha, both human and godlike; *abhidharma* or “Buddhist scholasticism”, and many others. They are now considered to be essential elements of traditional Buddhism, yet there is no historically sound evidence that they existed at all⁵ (and some evidence that they did not yet exist) until long after the visit of Pyrrho in 330–325 BC and that of Megasthenes in 305–304 BC. The lateness of the development of devotion for the Buddha and Buddha incarnations, as well as reverence for the Buddha’s teachings (the *Dharma*) and the community of monks (the *Saṅgha*), means that the invention of the *Triratna* (“Three Jewels”) formula is even later (perhaps as a “popular” substitute for the difficult *Trilakṣaṇa* “Three Characteristics” formula, which is phonetically similar).

While “genuinely Early” Buddhism (or Pre-Normative Buddhism) is attested earliest and best in Early Pyrrhonism, it is also attested in the travel account of the Greek ambassador Megasthenes, a Seleucid envoy sent from Alexandria in Arachosia (today’s Kandahar) to the court of Candragupta Maurya to negotiate a treaty that was agreed on in 305–304 BC, only twenty years after Pyrrho’s departure from India. The fragments of Megasthenes’ lost book *Indica*, which are preserved as quotations in other works (most importantly Strabo’s *Geography*), include his report on the “Indian” *philosophoi* ‘religious-philosophical teachers and practitioners’, which include not just the distinction between Brahmanists and Buddhists but a half dozen other religious-philosophical groups or “sects”. Megasthenes emphasizes some aspects typical of a travel account, so he provides information that confirms and supplements the picture of Pre-Normative Buddhism presented by Early Pyrrhonism. Unfortunately, the explicit categorizations and many of the details in his remarkable account have been treated extremely cavalierly, at best, in the scholarly literature.

⁴ It is now believed that he was first venerated as *Bodhisattva* “the one with a mind set on enlightenment”, the Buddha before he achieved enlightenment (Schopen 2005). *Amṛtibhā*, the Buddha “Measureless Light”, is said to have originally been a monk, Dharmakāra, who took the Bodhisattva vow (Halkias 2012: 16). He and related figures venerated as “Buddhas” dwelling in their respective Heavens might also be dated to this period, but see below.

THE ATTESTED EARLY INDIAN SECTS

Because of the existence of fragmentary reports by members of Alexander’s retinue, the fragments of Megasthenes, and still other sources (including some in Chinese), Pyrrho’s teachings and practices are thus not the only datable attestations of Early Buddhism that are known. It seems to have been quite overlooked that the sources describe a *number* of philosophical-religious systems, some of which are clearly related to the type of Buddhism reflected in Early Pyrrhonism. Others may be characterized as Buddhist, but different from Pyrrhonism, and several are non-Buddhist. The five Buddhist varieties are as follows:

1. Early Pyrrhonism (Greek testimonies): things have no inherent self-identity (no differentiations), they are unstable, and they are unfixed (*Trilakṣaṇa*); both perceptions (induction) and views (deduction) are unreliable; rejection of difference between absolute Truth and absolute Lying; “no views”; passionlessness; undisturbedness, calm; yoga; celibacy; wandering; piety (*eusebeia*).
2. The Śramaṇas (Megasthenes’ account in Strabo): yoga; celibacy; piety and holiness; special knowledge about the *causes* of things; women study with them too, but without sex; there are two distinct lifestyles: Forest-dwellers and Town-dwelling “Physicians”; they are called *Śramaṇas* ‘Buddhist practitioners’.⁶ Megasthenes further describes a third group of Śramaṇas, “others, diviners and charmers experienced with the rites and customs for the dead, who beg as mendicants in the villages and towns” and teach about karma and rebirth.⁷

⁶ See the discussion below in this chapter.

⁷ Megasthenes says (Strabo XV, 1, 60) they repeat “common sayings about the after-world . . . to promote piety (*eusebeia*) and holiness” among the people. Note that *eusebeia* ‘piety, holiness, reverence’ is regularly used to translate *Dharma* in the fragments of the Greek version of the Major Inscriptions attributed to Aśoka, and Megasthenes was from Alexandria in Arachosia (now Kandahar), where the fragments of the Greek translations were found, so it is quite possible that it corresponds to *Dharma* here, too. See Halkias (2013: 85–89). Megasthenes explicitly says “Hades”, which in itself would be unclear because it refers to the shady world of the afterlife, neither Heaven nor Hell. However, this remark in the Greek sources corresponds perfectly to the comments about Heaven in the Mauryan inscriptions; its intention is clearly identical, and the conclusion must be the same: some Buddhists by this time believed in karma and karmically determined

3. Early Taoism: no differentiations; perceptions are like dreams; karma; philosophers attain tranquility; the *Tao* “way” corresponds exactly to the *Dharma*, the “way” of early Normative Buddhist texts; founding teacher, “Laotzu”, named *Gautama.⁸
4. The *Dharma* (Greek *eusebeia* ‘piety, holiness’) of the Mauryan king Devānāpriya Priyadarśi (fl. 272–261 BC, traditionally referred to as “Aśoka”),⁹ accumulate good karma in order to win next life in Heaven; bad karma suggested to lead to the opposite; gods mentioned but no God; best to renounce possessions; obey parents and elders; honor Śramaṇas, Brāhmaṇas, and practitioners of other (unnamed) sects; no killing of animals (an anti-Brahmanist measure); ruler’s *Dharma* inspired by visit to Saṃbodhi (Bodhgayā), where the Buddha was enlightened.
5. Pre-Pure Land (accounts in Strabo from Megasthenes): no differentiations; perceptions are like dreams; karma; philosophers discipline themselves to prepare for death; they are reborn to the true, happy life (probably in Heaven, but where exactly is unstated).

The sect of Calanus, the Indian “Gymnosophist” or “naked wise man” best known to the Greeks and most described in Greek sources, is a non-Buddhist sect. Strabo refers to them as the Γυμνῆται *Gymnetae* “the naked ones”.¹⁰ The sect is similar in some ways to the Pre-Pure Land sect described in Megasthenes.¹¹

⁸ See Chapter Three. “Tao” and “Taoism” are also spelled “Dao” and “Daoism”.

⁹ See the detailed discussion in Chapter Three.

¹⁰ Strabo XV, 1, 70.

¹¹ Most of this capsule description is supported by accounts in the Alexander histories, but Strabo, who calls them the *Gymnetae*, has a specific item on them: “The Gymnetae, as their name imports, are naked and live chiefly in the open air, practising fortitude for the space of thirty-seven years; this I have before mentioned; women live in their society, but without cohabitation. The Gymnetae are held in singular estimation.” (Strabo XV, 1, 70, translation by Hamilton and Falconer, from Perseus online). Strabo also notes, on the authority of Nearchus, that “[t]he Brachmanes engage in public affairs, and attend the kings as counsellors; the rest are occupied in the study of nature. Calanus belonged to the latter class. Women study philosophy with them, and all lead an austere life.”

(Strabo XV, 1, 66). Some remarks about them stem from Onesicritus, whom Alexander supposedly sent to talk to the *gymnosophistai* ‘naked wise men’. Although much of what is attributed to Onesicritus is suspect (see Appendix B), and a careful examination of the sources is needed, one part of his account reported by Strabo (XV, 1, 65) agrees with other accounts and with the actual history of Calanus: “Disease of the body they regard as most disgraceful, and he who apprehends it, after preparing a pyre, destroys himself

6. Gymnetae: go naked; believe disease in the body is bad; practice physical yoga; beg for food; women study with them; believe in karma; study nature; practitioners expect to be reborn to a better and purer life; believers commit suicide by funeral pyre.¹²

This sect is clearly distinguishable from Buddhism in several specific ways: the Gymnetae go completely naked; they commit suicide by burning themselves to death,¹³ and they are not called *Śramaṇas* in any ancient account.¹⁴ According to Arrian, Calanus had “philosophy students” among the companions of Alexander, including even Lysimachus, who is explicitly named as having been one of these students.¹⁵

The Brāhmaṇas or “Brahmanists” constitute a well-known non-Buddhist sect. Described at some length by Megasthenes, and also mentioned (and regulated) in the Mauryan inscriptions, it contrasts sharply with the other sects:

7. Brāhmaṇas: followers are born householders (wealthy landlords), who receive an aristocratic upbringing; for thirty-seven years¹⁶ they remain unmarried, frugal, vegetarian,¹⁷ and celibate; after the thirty-seven years they retire to their estates, have many wives and children, eat meat, wear jewelry, and so on; they try to prevent their wives from learning philosophy; they believe God created the universe and

¹² Although other methods are mentioned (see above in this chapter), all actual instances reported by the Greeks are of self-immolation.

¹³ On Chinese monks, including early Pure Land monks, committing suicide by self-immolation, see Keown (1996: 9n2) and Kleine (2006: 167n1). However, Georgios Halkias (p.c., 2013) astutely remarks, “A few instances of the Chinese interpreting the *Lotus Sūtra*, who were also Pure Land practitioners, does not make self-immolation a feature of Pure Land Buddhism.” This issue thus needs to be reexamined carefully. In any case, it is quite clear that the sect of Calanus was not Buddhist, nor was the similar sect described by Megasthenes.

¹⁴ Modern scholars have often referred to them as Śramaṇas (in one or another spelling), but no ancient writer does. See Endnote iv.

¹⁵ Arrian, *Anabasis* VII, 3:3-4.

¹⁶ Strabo reports on the authority of Megasthenes that Calanus said “he had completed the forty years of discipline which he had promised to observe” when he joined Alexander’s court (Strabo XV, 1, 61), translation by Hamilton and Falconer (Perseus online). However, Calanus belonged to the Gymnetae sect, and despite remarks in the Greek sources he was hardly a normal Brahmanist. Strabo adds that “Alexander made

regulates it and pervades the whole of it; they believe the soul is immortal and judged in Hades.¹⁸

This Brahmanism also contrasts sharply with the very late form of it that is known from very late sources, nearly all of them medieval or later. Scholars who specialize in ancient Indian philosophies or religions have founded their beliefs exclusively on these late sources. Because of them they claim that the Greek sources, which are at least a half millennium older than the earliest Indian sources (the Major Inscriptions of the Mauryas scarcely tell us anything about Early Brahmanism except for the practice of ritual sacrifice of animals), describe someone else, not Brahmanists. Since the fallacy behind their assumptions is evidently not obvious, it must be stated in plain words here: Megasthenes describes what may be called "Early Brahmanism". By contrast, late sources describe "Late Brahmanism". Some of the key features of the Early Brahmanist system are belief in one universal creator God, belief that the soul is immortal and judged in the world of the afterlife, and therefore belief in karma and rebirth.

Although Vedic religion is generally thought to be the ancestor of Brahmanism, these Early Brahmanist beliefs are unknown in the Rig Veda. But they are core beliefs of Early Zoroastrianism, which we know was introduced to Central Asia and northwest India by the Achaemenid Persians. Unlike the Buddha, the Brahmanists did not reject the Zoroastrian ideas, they accepted them.

The long Achaemenid rule over Gandhāra ensured that there were Zoroastrians in the region at least during the early and middle period:

8. Early Zoroastrianism. Overly attested practice: the custom of exposing dead human corpses to wild animals; covertly attested beliefs (as rejected in Early Buddhism or accepted in Early Brahmanism): a Heavenly God who created the world; the Truth versus the Lie; humans have an immortal soul; good or bad karma determines rebirth in Heaven or Hell.

The non-Buddhist sects are better known than any of the Buddhist sects. The simple reason seems to be that the Greeks were fascinated

by the naked ascetics of the Gymnetae sect, and somewhat interested in the Brāhmaṇas, whose thought they considered to be somewhat like their own tradition. Leaving aside the Zoroastrians, the Greeks also had much more personal contact with the Brāhmaṇas than with any of the others, with the sole, outstanding exception of the Gymnetae, the sect of Calanus; though of course Pyrrho's contact with his Buddhist teacher must have been quite intensive for him to have learned Early Buddhism so well. While Megasthenes' description of the early beliefs and way of life of the Brāhmaṇas is our best source of information on Early Brahmanism of any kind,¹⁹ the Gymnetae are better described because the Greeks were interested in them, sought them out, and had the closest interaction with them both in India and back home. Unfortunately, they are nevertheless one of the most poorly known sects doctrinally. They are discussed further below.

Attested Early Buddhism according to Megasthenes

The best known of the Buddhist systems is that of the *Śramanas*,²⁰ whose practices and beliefs, like those of Early Pyrrhonism, belong solidly to Pre-Normative Buddhism. They are described most extensively in the Greek account by Megasthenes in his book, *Indica*. Though it is lost, the geographer Strabo preserves passages culled from it in his *Geography*. Unfortunately, the version of *Indica* that Strabo used seems already to have been interpolated and expanded by others, so that the text does not always distinguish clearly between passages owing to Megasthenes or to other authors Strabo cites. In addition, the typical Hellenistic-period preference for light, chatty, titillating stories adversely affected Strabo's selection from and treatment of Megasthenes' work. To make

¹⁸ In this case, *Hades* means simply "the afterworld" or "the afterlife", neither positive

¹⁹ For the scholarly literature on the Greek accounts of India, see the volumes by Karttunen (1989; 1997), which, however, contain many doubtful identifications. He says, for example, that the Sarmanes of Strabo were generic ascetics: "There used to be a lively discussion about the exact nature of the Sarmanes, whether they were Buddhist or Brahmanist, but now it seems clear that the word referred to wandering monks in general, including different groups" (Karttunen 1997: 58). This conclusion should raise questions about the recent scholarship upon which Karttunen's remark is based. See the detailed discussion of this issue below in this chapter. The bibliographical value of Karttunen's two volumes is undoubted, but very scant attention is paid in them to Megasthenes' account of the Indian thinkers.

matters worse, in the medieval process of scribal copying and transmission of ancient Greek texts, material on foreign nations—especially proper names—typically suffered the most corruption.²¹ Nevertheless, although the received version of Strabo is not perfect,²² it preserves part of the earliest *dated* eyewitness account of Indian philosophical-religious practices and ideas by far. It is therefore incalculably more important than any of the other texts traditionally considered to represent or reflect Early Buddhism.²³

Most importantly, Pyrrho learned a form of Early Buddhism in 330–325 BC, when he was in Bactria and Gandhāra with the court of Alexander the Great. Because some knowledge of Early Buddhism reached China via Bactria no later than the beginning of the third century BC,²⁴ the Buddha's teachings and practice must have been known in Bactria, through which country Buddhists had to travel to reach China, and therefore they must already have spread throughout Gandhāra, the country located southeast of Bactria in what is now eastern Afghanistan and northwestern Pakistan.

Megasthenes stresses that the Śramaṇas were divided into two basic forms of practice: the “rural” Śramaṇas, who lived out in the open, and whom he calls the *Hylōbioi* ‘Forest-dwellers’, and the “urban” Śramaṇas, whom he calls the *Iatrikoi* ‘physicians, healers’. Little attention has been paid to this bifurcation, which could have originated only when Buddhism spread outside the South Asian monsoon zone, allowing the more ascetically inclined Śramaṇas to live in the open

²¹ For example, the word *Sarmat(ēs)* is always misspelled “*Garmat(ēs)*” in Strabo. The mistake was made in or before the earliest extant Strabo manuscript, but is not an ancient error because the correct spelling is found in all other sources, most importantly in Clement of Alexandria, whose account depends ultimately on Megasthenes. Clement (*Stromateis* 1, xv, 71, 3–5) gives the form correctly with *S*. See Stählin (1906: 2:45–46). The textual error, remarked already in the nineteenth century by McCrindle (1877: 98, note), perhaps goes back to a medieval manuscript in which the initial *S*—written *C* in ancient Greek—was misread as the similar Greek *I* *Γ*, due to ligature with the following *α*.

²² For perfection, see Chapter Four.

²³ It must be noted that Indologists in particular are wont to discount Greek sources on early India, referring to all the above-noted problems. However, the same problems, and much worse ones, affect Indian sources, which are mostly a *millennium* or more younger, have never been properly edited, and consist largely of fantasy.

²⁴ *See Chapter Three*

all year round. This division, originally, is specifically and exclusively characteristic of Buddhism.²⁵

In the Pali Canon, in Buddhist sutras thought to have been composed before the appearance of what is traditionally known as the Mahāyāna, there is a standard background story against which the Buddha's lifetime and teachings are portrayed. We see mostly a quiet world of agriculture, towns, and estates of the wealthy who offered Buddha and his followers shelter and food during the monsoon season, when it is necessary to take shelter in India.

Such a temporary shelter is called an *dāṇa*.²⁶ Individuals who practiced Buddhism, including Buddha and his followers, were called *Śramaṇas*, a term that specifically and exclusively meant ‘Buddhist practitioners’.²⁷

Similarly, although the specifically Buddhist word *bodhi* ‘awakening, enlightenment’ occurs in the Major Inscriptions of the Mauryas (early third century BC),²⁸ and the Buddha's personal name Gautama is attested in Chinese sources, no references to the epithet *Buddha* are attested in dated or datable sources before the Saka-Kushan period, when many other names, terms, and features of Normative Buddhism also appear, including the term *saṃgha* ‘the community of Buddhist monks’, *bhikṣu* ‘monk’ and *bhikṣuṇī* ‘nun’, and the fully developed *vihāra* ‘monastery’.²⁹ After careful consideration of the archaeological and literary evidence Schopen says,

²⁵ Beckwith (forthcoming-a). Examples of non-Buddhist practitioners following similar practices, such as in the *Taittiriya Āraṇyaka*, are patently late and have nothing to do with traditional Brahmanism; they are modeled on Buddhism. See Bronkhorst (1986), who demonstrates conclusively that the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (the only supposed “Vedic” text in which the term *śramaṇa* is not used specifically to mean ‘Buddhist practitioner’) imitates Buddhism and dates to well after the time of the Buddha.

²⁶ One dedicated to Buddhist use eventually came to be called a *saṃghaṭṭana*, but this happened only after the development of the *saṃgha*, which means after the Major Inscriptions of the Mauryas (q.v. Chapter Three and Appendix C).

²⁷ See the detailed discussion below in this chapter.

²⁸ See Chapter Three and Appendix C.

²⁹ Schopen (2004: 74–79); see Dutt (1962) for the respective archaeological plans, and cf. Beckwith (2012c and 2014) for the Central Asian origin of the *vihāra* plan. The Kushans' own word for the monastery-college must have been Aramaic *dērā* (not Sanskrit *vihāra* or a Prakrit form of it), which term is attested for certain in China in the mid-second century AD but could well have been there already from the first century

Marshall, again, noted some time ago that the *vihāra* that Lamotte seems to have had in mind, the ordered “quadrangular, high-walled monastery or *vihāra* . . . seems to have made its appearance in the *sanghārāmas* of the northwest during the first century A.D., and thence to have found its way southward and eastward to the rest of India.” . . . The standardized, ordered *vihāra*, then, began to appear almost everywhere in the archaeological record just before and just after the beginning of the Common Era. . . . Marshall explained the observable change in type and construction of the *vihāra* by saying, in part, that the wide acceptance of the standard form “was probably due in large measure to the changing character of the [Buddhist] church, which was everywhere tending to substitute regular, settled monasticism for the wandering life.”³⁰

As ascetics,³¹ the Śramaṇas owned little more than a simple robe and a few other necessities. Thus did Gautama Śākaṃmi,³² ‘sage of the Scythians’, wander, meditating and searching for answers, before his “awakening”. He may well have met others doing the same thing, and studied with some of them, but we have *no remotely credible evidence* that he knew anything about Jains, Ājīvikas, or other non-Brahmanist sects. The traditional view, which actually accepts this problematic notion as dogma, has not been seriously questioned for a long time. Yet these sects are unattested in any dated or datable Pre-Normative Buddhist sources. It is because their teachings needed to be refuted and rejected by *much later* Buddhists that they eventually appeared in the written Buddhist tradition, but in works that are patently late doctrinally, full of magic and other forms of fantasy, and unreliable in every other way. Chronological incongruities reveal that the putatively “early” forms of

what eventually became identifiably Jain, Ājīvika, and so on, did not yet exist as such anywhere near the time of the Buddha, but took on recognizable forms only much later due to heavy influence from Normative Buddhism, therefore no earlier than the Saka-Kushan period.

After Gautama became *Buddha* ‘the Awakened One’, he wandered the same region for many years during the dry season, teaching and gradually acquiring a substantial following and a number of permanently donated *ārāṃas* for use in the monsoon season, according to the Normative Buddhist accounts. After his death, Buddhist practitioners continued to do the same thing, wandering and acquiring new *ārāṃas* further and further afield. Archaeological finds show that these were quite primitive, temporary affairs.³³ Moreover, since the monsoons seem to have been a determining factor in the eventual development of the traditional bifurcation in Buddhism between the “rustic” and the “urban” Śramaṇas, the division could not have occurred before Buddhism spread over the Hindu Kush into western (Central Asian) Gandhāra, where there were and are no monsoons. In any case, the development of the bifurcation must have happened before the visit of Megasthenes in the late fourth century BC. The fact that some Buddhist thought made its way to China from Bactria by the late fourth to early third centuries BC confirms this. One assumes that this bifurcation did not spread southeastward into India itself before the appearance of the *vihāra* in the Kushan period. Since Megasthenes describes premonastic Śramaṇas who were already divided into the two types, his description undoubtedly applies to Gandhāra, the northeastern neighbor of his political home, Arachosia (now southern Afghanistan).

THE ACCOUNT OF MEGASTHENES

The earliest and richest eyewitness report on the ancient religious-philosophical beliefs of Gandhāra, and perhaps as far east as Magadha, is that of Megasthenes, dated to 305–304 BC. Megasthenes is most

³⁰ Schopen (2004: 79), quoting Marshall (1951: 1:233, 320, 324). Schopen (2004: 77) also notes, “Even considerably after Aśoka, however, there are no references to *vihāras*. In none of the hundreds of donative records from Bhārhut, Sāncī, and Pauni does the term occur.” See now Beckwith (2014).

³¹ The Major Inscriptions of the Mauryas regularly refer to “ascetics, religious mendicants”, but the term used is *paravṛjita-* (variously spelled; literally “one who has gone forth”); they never use for that purpose the word *śramaṇa-*, which the inscriptions repeatedly, explicitly, tell us is a term for members of a particular sect, in contradistinction to the one other named sect, the *Brāhmanas* “Brahmins”. See further in Chapter Three and Appendix C.

³² This epithet (better known in later Sanskrit guise as *Śākyamuni*) is attested only from the Saka-Kushan period on, the earliest examples to date having been found in the

³³ Schopen (2004: 74–80).

³⁴ Except (partly) for Megasthenes, the Greeks were familiar only with the northwestern Indian region, eastern Gandhāra, but they referred to the entire subcontinent as “India”. Unfortunately, the fragments of Megasthenes in Strabo do not tell us which

familiar with the northwest, so he must have spent much of his time in Gandhāra. He does describe ancient Pāṭaliputra (Greek *Palinbothra* ~ *Palibothra*, modern Patna, in ancient Magadha, now the province of Bihār) accurately and in some detail, so it is accepted that he did travel across northern India as far as Magadha, but it is also clear from his description and from archaeology that the city seems to have been newly and rapidly built by Candragupta. At the time of Megasthenes' visit it had wooden stockades and seems to have been primarily a military camp, since most of his comments about it refer to the military and related political topics. He says nothing about *philosophoi* "philosophers" there. His account of the latter transparently describes exactly the same people noted by the companions of Alexander, revealing that he undoubtedly got his information in the same place—Taxila. Like other ancient Greek writers, Strabo quotes only indirectly (*oratio obliqua*), no doubt also modernizing the language of his source, though he usually does tell us the name of the author he is quoting. However, as noted above, the grammar of *oratio obliqua* in Greek clearly and explicitly marks a passage as a quotation, even if it is technically an "indirect" quotation.³⁵ In this particular case, textual analysis shows that Strabo collected his information about the "Indian" *philosophoi* 'religious-philosophical practitioners' from different parts of Megasthenes and then strung the bits together mechanically one after the other, usually (but not always) in sections explicitly marked by Strabo's own introductory or concluding words. It is clear that in at least one instance—a short passage containing two quoted sentences—some material has been wrongly placed by him in the *Brāhmanas* section. This is clear from the contents of the statements and the peculiar division of the text following them. As a result, the correct attribution or attributions of that short section must be established on the basis of its content.

Megasthenes' account of the *philosophoi* 'philosophical-religious practitioners' of India divides them, explicitly, into two sects:³⁶ the

³⁵ The variation in prose quotations among different ancient authors is due primarily to the fact that they did not have the modern idea of quoting *identically*, except when they quoted poetry.

³⁶ Strabo xv, 1 (Jones 1930: 7:104–105; Radt 2005, 2009). The material Strabo presents from Megasthenes also describes several other kinds of practitioners. It deserves

Βραχμῆνες *Brachmanes*, corresponding to Sanskrit (plural) *Brāhmanā* 'Brahmanists',³⁷ and the Σαρμῆνες *Sarmānes*, corresponding to Northwestern Prakrit and Sanskrit *Śramaṇā* ~ Pali *Samaṇā* 'Buddhists'.^{38vi} Strabo quotes Megasthenes:

He says that the most honored of the Sarmānes are called the Forest-dwellers (ὕλοφιοι), who live in the woods on leaves and tree-fruits, wearing clothes of tree-bark, abstaining from sex and wine. (He says) that they confer³⁹ with the kings, who through messengers inquire (from the Forest-dwellers) about the causes of things, and through them they [the kings] honor and pray to the divine one (τὸ θεῖον). (He says) that next in honor after the Forest-dwellers are the Physicians (ιατρικοί), philosophers concerned about Man, (who are) frugal, but do not live in the wild, and eat rice and barley that is offered to them by all from whom they beg and who invite them into their homes. (He says) that they are able to cause people to beget many children, both male and female, by use of drugs; but (that) their medical treatment is accomplished mostly through food, not through medicines; and (that), of their medicines, the most esteemed are their ointments and plasters, while the others contain much that is evil. (He says) that both these and the others practice endurance, both of pain and of immobility, such that they remain in a single position, unmoved, all day long. (He says) that there are also others, diviners and charmers experienced with the rites and customs for the dead, who beg as mendicants in the villages and towns; but though some of them are more elegant and refined than these, they do not abstain from (using) as many of the common sayings about Hades as seem best for promoting piety (εὐσεβείαν)⁴⁰ and holiness. (He says) that women also study philosophy with some of them, but they abstain from sex.⁴¹

³⁷ Megasthenes' description makes it certain that his *Brachmanes* are the ancient *Brāhmanas*, although it is important to examine the way quotations from his lost *Indica* have been assembled by Strabo, who did not always get it right. On the *Pramāne*, see Endnote v.

³⁸ As previously noted, in manuscripts of Strabo the name Σαρμῆνες *Sarmānes* is written Ἰσχυῆνες *Garmānes*, long ago recognized as a copying mistake due to the similarity of ancient Co- (modern Σα-) to Ισ- because Clement of Alexandria and all other ancient texts have Σαρμῆνες or Σαμῆνες for this word. See Endnote vi.

³⁹ Radt (2009: 8:198).

⁴⁰ In the Greek fragments of the Thirteenth Rock Edit from Kandahar, the Greek word εὐσεβεία "piety" translates the Indic word *Dharma* (Pali *Dhamma*).

⁴¹ Strabo xv, 1, 60: τοὺς δὲ Σαρμῆνας τοὺς μὲν ἐν τῇ τοῦ Ἰνδοῦ ὁδοῦ ἐνοῦν

'God' per se, but rather 'the divine one' or the like.⁴⁵ The Physicians, by contrast, were "philosophers of Man", and performed the good work of healing the sick and helping people conceive children, though Megasthenes adds the comment that many of the Physicians' medicaments "contain much that is evil". As a whole, then, the text presents the picture of a more ascetic, noble, virtuous, and idealistic rustic group, the Forest-dwellers, and a less ascetic and less noble, but more practical and helpful, urban group, the Physicians.

The distinctions Megasthenes notes between the two different types of early Śramaṇas coincide with their presentation in traditional Buddhist literary accounts, in which precisely the same two types are contrasted in the same way.⁴⁶ Most especially, he calls the "rustic" variety the *Hylobioi* 'Forest-dwellers', an exact calque translation of the Indic equivalent, *Aranyavāsīn* 'Forest-dweller'.⁴⁷ The higher ethical valuation of this variety, a consistent theme throughout the text, replicates the same valuation in Early Buddhist texts. Tambiah stresses the pervasiveness and importance in southern Buddhism of the "celebrated differentiation between the village dwellers ([Pali] *gāmaṇvāsīn*) and the forest dwellers ([Pali] *ārāṇṇavāsīn*). Forest dwelling emphasizes living apart from society and having minimal transactions with laity, while village/town dwelling implies regular interaction, as for instance ensues from teaching laymen the doctrine, performing rites for them,"⁴⁸ and so forth. "Throughout the history of the Buddhist polities of Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand, one grand division of the *saṅgha*—that between monastic fraternities and/or communities labeled as forest dwellers on the one hand and as town/village dwellers on the other hand—has persisted . . ."⁴⁹ In Sri Lanka there was a formal "constitutional" division of the *saṅgha* into two moieties, the *Āraṇṇīkas* or *ārāṇṇavāsīn* 'Forest-dwellers' and the *gāmaṇvāsīn* 'Town-dwellers'. However, the Sinhalese

chronicles "do not mention the *Āraṇṇīkas* before the tenth century, and references to them in other sources are rare."⁵⁰ Why does this bifurcation appear so late in Sri Lanka, and by extension, in Southeast Asia, to which Ceylonese Buddhism spread in the Middle Ages? Surely the reason is that Sri Lanka is in the monsoon zone, and year-round living in the forest would require the Forest-dwellers to live in sheltered dwellings of some kind for at least part of the year, which would have made them identical to the Town-dwellers—and in fact, that is precisely what happened; both types lived in *vihāras*. The logical explanation is that the bifurcation arose in a non-monsoon zone, and only later spread southward into the monsoon zone, where the ecological distinction could not be maintained.⁵¹

According to the putatively early accounts in the Pali Canon, Buddha himself was a wandering rustic ascetic, and he definitely won the high ground as far as virtue and enlightenment are concerned. Nevertheless, despite the difference in lifestyle (and perhaps partly in religious practice), which eventually developed after his time, the *teachings* of the two types of Śramaṇas, both in Megasthenes and in the later Pali accounts, are not known to have differed in any substantial way.

Attested Early Brahmanism according to Megasthenes

Megasthenes clearly distinguishes the Śramaṇas from the Brāhmanas, though he does not compare the two sects explicitly item by item.⁵² Instead, he does it implicitly. At the very beginning of his discussion of Indian religious-philosophical practitioners, Strabo says, "Megasthenes makes another division in his discussion of the philosophers, asserting that there are two kinds of them, one kind called Brachmanes and the other Sarmanes; [and] that the Brachmanes, however, enjoy fairer repute, for they are more in agreement in their dogmas."⁵³ It is notable

⁴⁵ As noted above, it is quite possible that this refers to reverence for the Buddha, which becomes fully attested with the mention of Saṃbodhi (Bodhigayā) in the Major Inscriptions of the Mauryas, q.v. Chapter Three and Appendix C.

⁴⁶ On *Aranyavāsīn* 'Forest-dweller' and *Gāmaṇvāsīn* 'Town-dweller' in early Buddhist texts, and especially attitudes toward the former in the Vinaya and early Mahayana works, see Schopen (2004; 2005).

⁴⁷ That is, the Greek is a literal translation corresponding part by part to the Indic equivalent.

⁵⁰ Tambiah (1984: 56–57).

⁵¹ Further study of this subject is needed by specialists in early Sri Lankan Buddhism.

⁵² The Brāhmanas are in general not relevant to the present investigation, but they are presented by Megasthenes partly in contrast to the Śramaṇas, and their sect, like Buddhism, formed partly in reaction to Zoroastrianism, so they are discussed briefly here. The scholarship on this material has hitherto been devoted to finding ways to ignore it and its significance for understanding actual Early Brahmanism. The scholarly fantasy preferred by most modern scholars is based on the same kind of very late works that have

that the section in Strabo on the Śramaṇas does not have a subsection specifically devoted to their ideas—a major omission in an account of a sect of “philosophers” who, Megasthenes explicitly remarks, were disunited in their views, and thus less esteemed than the more “united” Brāhmanas. In addition, again unlike the section on the Brāhmanas, the section on the Śramaṇas does not end with an explicit concluding statement by Strabo saying something like, “This is what Megasthenes says about the Sarmanes.” These and other problems suggest that Strabo’s collection of quotations from Megasthenes, at least in part, does not represent their original arrangement in the *Indica*.

After telling us that the Brāhmanas, unlike the Śramaṇas, are more or less in agreement on their teachings, he says that the Brāhmanas practice a kind of “temporary” asceticism for thirty-seven years.⁵⁴ Though he says nothing about them doing physical yoga or any other demanding practices, he describes these “philosophers” as “leading a frugal life, lying on straw mattresses and skins, abstaining from animal food⁵⁵ and from sex”, and talking “earnestly” about philosophical matters. Although during this period the Brāhmanas do not eat meat or

⁵⁴ Strabo xv, 1, 59. The number 37 is repeated later in Strabo, in the account of Indian *philosophoi* taken from “other writers”, where he says “37 years, as I mentioned before” (Strabo xv, 1, 70). As noted above, Megasthenes (in Strabo) quotes Calanus as saying he had practiced asceticism for the required period of 40 years, but he clearly belonged to a different sect than the Brāhmanas, the mainstream Brahmanists. There is no explanation for the discrepancy. The Greeks had plenty of contact with them, and there is no reason to doubt the basic veracity of their reports. Of course, Megasthenes and the companions of Alexander who mention the Indian *philosophoi* do not describe all such groups wherever they existed in India, at all periods, including all Brāhmanas. If a scientific approach to early Indian history were conceivable here, the matter would be treated in exactly the reverse order. Megasthenes gives us a sober, fantasy-free first-person narrative account of some Brāhmanas that is at least half a millennium earlier than any account in any Indian source.

⁵⁵ The fact that they lie on “skins” indicates that they were not strict vegetarians, or that their vegetarianism did not have anything to do with *ahimsā* ‘not hurting (living beings)’, or that they were hypocrites about it, or possibly all three. The account of the *Pramaṇa* in Strabo says the mountain-dwellers wear clothes made of deer skin, a classic Brahmanist trait and an indication that they were, in fact, Brahmanists, not Buddhists. Moreover, the Major Inscriptions of the Mauryan period specifically prohibit the killing of most animals—despite the fact that animal sacrifice was a religious necessity for Brahmins in Antiquity—and stress at some length that the law was an innovation of the

have sexual relations with women, they retain their possessions (which are by implication considerable), and after their thirty-seven years they abandon the restrictions: “They retire, each man to his own possessions, where they live more freely and under less restraint,” they eat meat, and they marry as many wives as possible, with the aim of having many children. They also wear adornments of gold. Megasthenes briefly describes some of the beliefs of the Brāhmanas about the natural world, metaphysics, and ontology, among which the most significant are their beliefs about the immortality of the soul, the judgement in the afterworld (“Hades”), and so on.⁵⁶ Finally, the Brāhmanas are a strictly male group, both during their ascetic training and afterward: “The Brachmanes do not communicate their philosophy to their wives, for fear they should divulge to the profane, if they became depraved, anything which ought to be concealed or lest they should abandon their husbands in case they [the wives] became good (philosophers) themselves.”⁵⁷

The Śramaṇas, unlike the Brāhmanas, are described as permanent ascetics. Much more importantly, again unlike the Brāhmanas, there are two different kinds of Śramaṇas.⁵⁸ As discussed above, this dichotomy is solidly attested throughout the history of Buddhism. It is undoubtedly to this division—as well as the one between these Śramaṇas and the “other” kind of Śramaṇas expert in funeral rites—that Megasthenes refers in his remark that the Śramaṇas are less united in their beliefs than the Brāhmanas. Although according to Megasthenes both Brāhmanas and Śramaṇas live frugally, the Brāhmanas do not wander, beg, or live in the wilderness. Their inherited land and other wealth is more than sufficient to pay for their upper-class upbringing, their many wives and children, and their gold jewelry, and to support them

⁵⁶ Strabo xv, 1, 59, translations from Jones (1930: 7:1.03).

⁵⁷ Strabo xv, 1, 59, translation by Hamilton and Falconer (Perseus online). It is interesting that Megasthenes should mention this. The ancient Greeks were at least as androcentric as most human societies, and seem to have thought highly of the Brāhmanas (in any case, they thought better of them than they did of the Śramaṇas), so this practice should presumably have been heartily approved by him. Instead, he goes out of his way to give a lengthy explanation of why the Brāhmanas do not share their philosophy with their wives. Accordingly, Megasthenes’ account is rather critical of the Brāhmanas in this respect.

⁵⁸ Cf. Beckwith (forthcoming-a)

in a life of ease before, during, and after their thirty-seven years. This contrasts very sharply with the Śramaṇas, who all live frugally, deriving their livelihood from nature (for those who live outside, in the forests) or from other people (for those who live inside, in towns). His remark that even the more elegant and refined among the “other” kind of Śramaṇas “do not refrain from using as many of the common sayings about Hades as seen best for promoting piety and holiness” suggests that unlike many Buddhist lay believers and also unlike the Brāhmanas, at least some Śramaṇas did not *themselves* believe in “Hades”,⁵⁹ and therefore did not believe in karma and rebirth. Finally, he explicitly says that the Brāhmanas exclude their married women from their “philosophical” studies, unlike the Śramaṇas: “Women, as well as men, study philosophy with some of them [the Śramaṇas], and the women also [like the men] abstain from sex.” Although he says nothing about the Brāhmanas’ relationships with women other than their wives, it would appear that for the Brāhmanas, women *are* wives, and they attempt to acquire as many of them as possible. By contrast, the Śramaṇas are unmarried and celibate lifelong, and include both men and women aspirants.

The Pre-Pure Land Sect according to Megasthenes

Strabo does not include a separate section about the Śramaṇas’ views, and says very little about their ideas in the section he explicitly marks as devoted to the Śramaṇas. This contrasts with the preceding section on the Brāhmanas, which contains two subsections, the first on the lives of the Brāhmanas and the second on their views. He does have two subsections on the Śramaṇas, but they are about the two subtypes’ practices, not about their ideas.

However, as noted above, his Brāhmanas section is problematic because one subsection of it contains views that are diametrically opposed to well-known basic Brahmanist views, *including those given by Megasthenes himself* in his section on the Brāhmanas. The subsection is therefore intrusive in that section, and must have been wrongly placed there, by whom is unknown, though surely not by Megasthenes. The misplacement probably occurred because the first topic *seems* to follow

the topic of the immediately preceding sentence in the genuinely Brahmanical section before it, while the second intrusive sentence also *seems* to follow that section’s apparent contrast of pleasure and pain, life and death.

The intrusive section shows specific textual signs of having been put there by mistake. It is immediately followed by a completely unexpected new finite verb, where Strabo tells us that he (Megasthenes) says what “they” say about nature, including well-known Brahmanical teachings, the subject matter of which perfectly follows the material *preceding* the evidently intrusive sentences, which are glaringly out of place. If the problematic sentences were not intrusive, there would have been no reason not to continue the laundry list of Brahmanical things to the very end of the section on Brahmanism, without this odd comment. It seems that Strabo (or an interpolator) introduced the problematic section and then felt the need to tell readers it was still the same list.⁶⁰ The preceding clearly Brahmanist subsection ends with the comment that the Brāhmanas “despise pleasure and pain as well as life and death.”

The first sentence of the intrusive section says essentially the opposite: the unmentioned practitioners consider “this life to be like that of babes still in the womb and death to be birth [therefore, *rebirth*] into the true, happy life”. The second sentence says, “There is nothing absolutely good or bad that happens to people, otherwise some would not be annoyed and others pleased by the same things—which are, after all, just dreamlike impressions—and the same individuals would not sometimes be annoyed and at other times change and be pleased by the very same things.”⁶¹ Precisely this idea is also prominent in the teachings of Pyrrho, who denied there was any “absolute” difference between good and bad, just and unjust, in human life.⁶² This is a logical inference from his teaching of *adiaphora*—Buddha’s *anātmā*—namely,

⁵⁹ Radt (2009) seems not to have noticed this particular problem, since he says nothing about it.

⁶⁰ Strabo xv, 1, 59 (text from Radt 2005: 4:208): ἀγαθὸν δὲ ἢ κακὸν μηδὲν εἶναι τῶν σπουδαίωντων ἀνθρώποις, οὐ γὰρ ἔν τοις αὐτοῖς τοὺς μὲν ἀχθεσθαι τοὺς δὲ χαίρειν ἐνυπνιόδεις ὑπολήψεις ἔχοντας καὶ τοὺς αὐτοὺς τοῖς αὐτοῖς, τότε μὲν ἀχθεσθαι τότε δ’ αὖ χαίρειν μετὰβαλλομένους.

⁶¹ The text uses the Greek word.

that “things” (including people) do not have inherent self-identities, flatly contradicting one of the central doctrines of Brahmanism, which teaches that everything *does* have its own immortal *ātman* “inherent self-identity; soul,”⁶³ as Megasthenes tells us twice. The intrusive passage thus cannot possibly represent an Early Brahmanist view. Quite to the contrary, the idea that “things” are unstable, unfixed, dreamlike impressions is specifically, famously Buddhist.

The Buddhist idea of *anātmā* ~ *adiaphora* is expressed in this peculiar way, by denial of opposites, not only in the earliest dated testimonies to Buddhist beliefs—Pyrrho, Megasthenes, and Early Taoist texts—but in what are considered to be some of the earliest texts in the Pali Canon as well.⁶⁴ Significantly, the ideas are also found in the very earliest preserved texts of the Pure Land school of Buddhism, which seems to have developed in Bactria and Gandhāra, right where both Pyrrho and Megasthenes learned about Buddhism. For example, in the *Pratyupanna Saṃādhi Sūtra*, the earliest known Pure Land work, which was first translated into Chinese by Lokakṣema, a Kushan monk,⁶⁵ between AD 178 and 189,⁶⁶ the Buddha presents negating antilogies.⁶⁷ They are introduced by his rhetorical question, “On what sort of things does one do mental concentration?”⁶⁸ Among the many things listed are a number of antilogies, including “not forsaking the people of the ten quarters [of the world]: saving the lives of the people of the ten quarters”⁶⁹ and “regarding the people of the ten quarters as one’s own : regarding the people of the ten quarters as not one’s own.”⁷⁰ An item toward the end the list is “everything being non-dual.”⁷¹ A slightly later

version of the text gives a long list of antilogies in the same chapter, such as “Do not think of loveliness, do not think of ugliness; do not think of evil, do not think of good.”⁷²

This suggests an identification also for the *first* sentence in the intrusive (non-Brahmanist) sentence of Megasthenes’ account, which says, “They converse more about death than anything else, for they believe that the life here is, as it were, that of a babe still in the womb, and that death, to those who have devoted themselves to philosophy, is birth into the true life, that is, the happy life; and that they therefore discipline themselves most of all to be ready for death.”⁷³ This again sounds like Pure Land Buddhism, a branch of Mahayana that is practically theistic in all but name and technical doctrinal details, with a monotheistic God, typically called Amitābha—he can differ in name and attributes from text to text, but is *functionally* the same nevertheless—and a Heavenly paradise, in which the faithful who devoutly recite his name (or occasionally something else) are reborn. Although in recent decades there has been much resistance to studying the origins of this system, it was formerly thought that it originated in Central Asia (or at least somewhere in Central Eurasia), and represents a mixture of Buddhist and other beliefs.⁷⁴ This remains the most likely answer.⁷⁵ Megasthenes’ account attests to the existence of a “Pre-Pure Land” complex

⁶³ Cf. D’Amato (2009: 42): “We might understand . . . the tendency toward emphasizing the efficacy of removing all views whatsoever, as an extension of the fundamental Buddhist doctrine of *anātmā*—the absence of self.”

⁶⁴ Gómez (1976).

⁶⁵ More precisely, a Śramaṇa (沙門); see Nattier (2008: 73n165). For an English translation, see Harrison (1998).

⁶⁶ Nattier (2008: 73), q.v. for discussion of his name.

⁶⁷ In his chapter 2, on “Practice.”

⁶⁸ *Taiśhō* 418, 12.0904b26: 何等爲定意。

⁶⁹ *Taiśhō* 418, 12.0904c03-04: 不捨十方人活十方人。 Translation by Harrison (1998: 15).

⁷⁰ *Taiśhō* 418, 12.0904c04-05: 十方人計爲是我所 十方人計爲非我所。 Translation by Harrison (1998: 15), substituting colons for his semicolons.

⁷¹ *Taiśhō* 418, 12.0904c26-27: 一切不二。 Translation by Harrison (1998: 17).

of ideas in 305–304 BC, half a millennium before full-blown Pure Land per se is attested in any written text. When it is finally attested in a Buddhist text—in the second century AD—it is in a “Mahayana” work translated into Chinese from Gāndhārī Prakrit by a Kushan monk.

Although it might seem odd that Megasthenes’ description of this non-Brahmanist sect is preserved in the section of Strabo on the Brāhmaṇas, the Greeks’ interests might explain its location and the apparent identification with Brahmanism. As remarked above, the Greeks were somewhat more interested in Brahmanism (with which they evidently sympathized, perhaps due to some shared ancestral beliefs) and in the Gymnetae, the sect of naked Indian philosophers represented most famously by Calanus, who committed suicide by funeral pyre in front of them in 323 BC. The location of the two sentences on the non-Brahmanist sect in Strabo’s subsection on Brahmanism then makes sense, from the point of view of Greek interests,⁷⁶ even though analysis of its key ideas points to a Pre-Pure Land sect of Buddhism⁷⁷ and specifically rules out identification with the Gymnetae.

To summarize the Pre-Pure Land sect, its followers believe in rebirth, karma, the illusory or dream-like nature of existence, and *anāman* ‘no inherent self-identity’. They discipline themselves to prepare for death, which is for them the most important thing, because those who prepare themselves properly (“philosophers”) are *reborn* to the true, happy life. Based on the very similar beliefs in inscriptions by the Mauryan king Devānāmpriya Priyadarśi, who specifically and repeatedly mentions that those who have accumulated good merit will go to Heaven, this passage in Megasthenes refers to the practitioners’ belief in rebirth in Heaven. It is supported further by Megasthenes’ remark about some of the Śramaṇas using their simpler followers’ belief in Heaven and Hell to “encourage” them to be pious, as discussed above. Belief in *anāman* and in rebirth at the same time (as well as in anything being “true” or “happy”) is obviously problematic philosophically.

⁷⁶ However, since the intrusive passage appears to have been moved there from somewhere else in the *Indica*, it seems probable that Megasthenes did not indicate the sectarian affiliation of the people described in it.

⁷⁷ Because Strabo’s text tells us so little about them, it is not possible to say more than

Compared to the Brāhmaṇas, the Śramaṇas struck the Greeks as odd, if not alien. The fact that they are given their own subsection, evidently by Megasthenes himself, suggests that the Śramaṇas were at least as numerous as the Brāhmaṇas—as explicitly suggested by the usage in the Major Inscriptions of the Mauryas a few decades after Megasthenes.⁷⁸ It is significant that the followers of the suicide cult (Gymnetae) are never called Śramaṇas ‘Buddhists’, despite scholars’ frequent, erroneous claims to that effect,⁷⁹ and the relatively full description of Śramaṇa daily life given in a late Greek source is very clearly of garden-variety Normative Buddhism, not of a Pure Land-type sect.⁸⁰

In any event, Buddha’s teaching of *anāman*, Pyrrho’s *adiaphora*—expressed commonly as the idea that there is no “difference” between x and y—is recorded also in Megasthenes, as well as in the earliest texts of the Pure Land and Madhyamika traditions. It is a non-Brahmanist view, and at the same time a fundamentally Buddhist view. The fact that Aristotle (or, more likely, one of his students) argues about a similar idea in his *Metaphysics*, despite his apparent misunderstanding of it, probably indicates that it was known in Greece by the time of Pyrrho’s return from Central Asia and India, or shortly beforehand. News of the spectacular self-immolation of Calanus would have reached Greece before the death of Aristotle in 322 BC, very likely via eyewitnesses to the event, no doubt bringing with it some representations of Indian ideas, while at about the same time the “philosophy” students of Calanus—who were present at his public suicide—must have brought with them some information about Indian views as well, including perhaps the very idea that Aristotle or one of his students felt compelled to argue about in the *Metaphysics*.⁸¹

⁷⁸ See Chapter Three.

⁷⁹ The Indian envoy “Zarnanocheegas” or “Zarnanus”, who committed suicide in Athens in the first century AD (Strabo XV, 1, 73), is no exception. See Endnote iv.

⁸⁰ The Indian ambassador Dandamis (whose name appears in many highly divergent spellings), who was sent to the Roman emperor Elagabalus (r. 218–222), met Bardaisan (Bardesanes) of Edessa, who is believed to have gotten his excellent description of life in a Buddhist monastery (Beckwith 2014) from him. It is preserved in Porphyry, *De abstinentia* (Patillon and Segonds 1995: 3: xxxviii–xlii, 28–30); cf. below. Note that this Dandamis is to be distinguished from the earlier Indian Mandanis (also sometimes called “Dandamis”), who lived at the time of Alexander.

⁸¹ *See the Introduction in Chapter One and 3.1.1.1.*