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# The Dating of the Historical Buddha Die Datierung des historischen Buddha

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## Research on the Date of the Buddha: South Asian Studies Published in Western Languages

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For more than a century now, Indian scholars have participated in the discussion about the dates of the Buddha. Buddhism as a practised religion more or less disappeared from India a long time ago, and therefore Indian interest in questions of Buddhist chronology was only roused by the investigations of European scholars like Max Müller, T.W. Rhys Davids, Wilhelm Geiger and others. Accordingly, most Indian scholars take the results of early Western research work as the starting point for developing their own theories. Not all their contributions are marked by the methods of critical research, and it is difficult at times to clearly differentiate articles which can still be considered scholarly from those which are either unscientific or written from the standpoint of a believer, be he Jain or Buddhist. There are some which are better not taken too seriously, but generally it can be observed that the treatment of questions of Buddhist history rather differs from the way in which some Indian scholars deal with other historical and semihistorical periods and events of their own past like, for instance, the age of the *R̄gveda* or the date of the *Mahābhārata* war. Again, this can be easily explained by the fact that Buddhism is absent from India and that Buddhist matters seem to have little direct bearing on Hindu culture and the Hindu conception of its own past. Therefore no urgent need is felt to search for indications which might help to date back to time immemorial the events connected with the establishment of Buddhism.

Apparently there are few exceptions, and most of these quite recent; their basic attitude is the acceptance of the historical view introduced by Western scholars combined with the wish to prove the correctness of Indian traditional chronology, thereby trying to secure a higher age for their own cultural inheritance. In the words of the most recent representative of this view, India's "great antiquity is proved by the *Vedas* and many other authentic works. Scholars, world over, accept it but they are eager to know about its correct chronology. ... One must thank the Western scholars because it was they who had started the process and applied so much of their energies to this task. The efforts should continue till the chronology of India, at least for the past 5, 6 thousands of years, notwithstanding modern tests is properly established. The date of the Buddha is one of the most important dates in it."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Shiram Sathe, *The Dates of the Buddha*, Pune, 1987, p. 168; cf. below, p. 40. – For a less

Such attempts apart, nearly all Indian scholars follow the generally accepted dating of Ásoka to the middle of the third century B.C., their respective views on his exact dates differing only within a few years of one another. Therefore, their margin for speculation is confined to the period between the death of the Buddha and the accession of Ásoka. Although later scholars sometimes know of E.J. Thomas' article, which did after all appear in an Indian Festschrift,<sup>2</sup> with no exception all of them base their calculations on sources advocating the long chronology, namely the Ceylonese chronicles, the so-called "Dotted Record" and Paul Bigandet's *The Life or Legend of Gaudama the Buddha of the Burmese*, a translation of the *Mālālamkāravatthu* (cf. the contribution of Heinz Braun, below, pp. 46–48), which evidently exercised a tremendous influence on many Indian scholars, having been quoted again and again up to the present. With the long chronology as their starting point, some try to confirm the traditional dating of 544/543, others to corroborate the corrected long chronology, and still others, with the help of more or less reasonable hypotheses, to advance new datings. Since none of the authors is able to present new facts, they all share the basically mathematical approach, that is, the attempt to reach new results by rearranging known dates and figures or by resorting to astronomical calculations. One more characteristic they hold in common is the unflinching trust they place in sources like the "Dotted Record" and Bigandet's *Life or Legend*. Despite the fact that as early as Max Müller objections were raised to the tradition of the "Dotted Record", none of the Indian scholars ever questions the reliability of its figure for the years passed since the Nirvāna.<sup>3</sup> The same applies to the Burmese chronicle composed in 1798 and translated by Bigandet, which is, whenever necessary, made use of as if it had been written at the time of the Buddha himself.

The following survey does not claim to be complete; surely there are other contributions which, however, have failed to attract any notice or were published in out-of-the-way sources. Every contribution is here cited which could be found and in which the date of the Buddha is not simply taken from other sources without comment. Works exclusively dealing with the dates of the Mahāvīra, although indirectly bearing on the dates of the Buddha, too, have been excluded for reasons of space and accessibility. Since most of the authors share a, to put it mildly, somewhat neglectful approach towards the results attained by their compatriots, hardly ever discussing any of the earlier contributions, it would be difficult to arrange them in a systematic order; the presentation, therefore, will be a chronological one.

<sup>1</sup> grateful native judgement on the European attempts at elucidating Indian history cf. O. Stein, "The Coronation of Candragupta Maurya", *Archiv Orientální* 1 (1929), p. 371, note 1.  
<sup>2</sup> "Theravādin and Sarvāstivādin Dates of the Nirvāna", *B. C. Law Volume*, Pt. 2, Poona, 1946, pp. 19–22.  
<sup>3</sup> Cf., however, the very different view taken by the Ceylonese scholar G. C. Mendis, "The Chronology of the Early Pāli Chronicles of Ceylon", *University of Ceylon Review* 5, No. 1, (1947), pp. 73–74.

The first Indian requiring mention and, to my knowledge, the only one whose contribution already appeared in the last century was Pandit Bhagwanlal Indraji. In his article "An Inscription at Gayā dated in the Year 1813 of Buddha's Nirvāna, with Two Others of the Same Period" which was published in the *Indian Antiquary* of December 1881,<sup>4</sup> he examines an inscription at Both Gayā which had already been referred to by Alexander Cunningham in 1861/62 and which he himself had had occasion to inspect during a visit to Gayā in May 1869. Indraji presents a transcription and a translation of the inscription and discusses its possible date. As the inscription and its different interpretations are dealt with in the paper of Cornelia Mallebrein (cf. below, pp. 344 ff.), here it may suffice to say that for Indraji the main interest of this inscription already lay in the date given for the Nirvāna, as he states at the beginning of his remarks (p. 344), and that he arrived at the conclusion that "the date of the Nirvāna assumed in it is 638 B.C." (p. 347). His careful wording avoids any judgement on the correctness of this date and thereby shows a self-restraint which did not always serve as the guiding principle of his fellow scholars still to come.

Only 22 years later, in May 1903, the next article appeared, again in the *Indian Antiquary* and this time written by P. C. Mukharji.<sup>5</sup> While writing a report on his excavations at Pāṭaliputra he came across the chronological divergence between Indian and Western sources, if Candragupta is to be equated with Sandracottus. "This difficulty induced me to study on my own lines and to find out for myself who really was the Sandracottus of the Greeks", he says (p. 227) and he starts with reviewing the dates of the Buddha. He mentions some of the dates calculated by European scholars, among them Westergaard, Kern and Rhys Davids, but refutes them with the intention of proving the correctness of the traditional date of the Parinirvāna. His arguments are based on Rockhill's *Life of the Buddha*, on Bigandet's *Life and Legend*, and on the *Dīpavamsa* and the *Mahāvamsa*. With the help of these sources he confirms the traditional date of 543 B.C., and consequently Candragupta is placed about 60 years too early to be identified with Sandracottus. Ásoka has to be advanced as well, as "there cannot be any doubt that Ásoka ascended the throne between 329 and 325 B.C." (p. 232), and therefore, according to Mukharji, Sandracottus is none other than Ásoka Maurya. Inscriptional evidence is brushed aside, since the author doubts "that the inscriptions, in which the Yōna Kings are mentioned, were ever published by Ásoka II." (p. 232).

As mentioned before, Indian scholars usually follow the accepted dating of Ásoka to the middle of the third century, and therefore P. C. Mukharji's theory remains rather isolated. No more than five years later, in 1908, a related article appeared in the *Indian Antiquary*, this time written by Gopala Aiyer,<sup>6</sup> who does not even mention the work of Mukharji. Convinced that

<sup>4</sup> IA 10 (1881), pp. 341–347.

<sup>5</sup> "An Independent Hindu View of Buddhist Chronology", IA 32 (1903), pp. 227–233.

<sup>6</sup> G. Aiyer, "The Date of the Buddha", IA 37 (1908), pp. 341–350.

"the date of Buddha's Nirvāna ... forms a significant landmark, at all events, in the history of India" (p. 342), Aiyer compares the different datings before him and attempts to find a date which is "in thorough accord with the materials available to us" (p. 342). He is well informed about the work of Western scholars and he knows the dates reached by Rhys Davids, Kern, Max Müller, Fleet, Oldenberg and V.A. Smith. As a starting point he reviews Mauryan chronology and proposes 273–231 B.C. as the dates for the reign of Aśoka and 269 as the year of the coronation. By adding the 218 years which according to the Ceylonese chronicles had elapsed between the death of the Buddha and the coronation of Aśoka, he comes to consider the Nirvāna to have taken place in 487 B.C. As a second argument in favour of his date he takes up the figure 256 given in one set of the Aśoka inscriptions about which he declares: "There can be no doubt that both Dr. Bühler and Dr. Fleet have correctly surmised that 256 is a date, and that it begins in the year of Buddha's death" (p. 346).<sup>7</sup> In order to make combined use of the figures 218 and 256 he furthermore argues that the inscription was composed by Aśoka almost on his deathbed (p. 346). According to his calculations Aśoka died in 231, and thus he has only to add the 256 years of the supposed Buddha Era to conveniently corroborate his Nirvāna date of 487, which he also finds confirmed by the "Dotted Record". There is one problem left, namely the fact that according to the Ceylonese chronicles the death of the Buddha would fall in the year 543 B.C., and he solves it by pointing out that the difference of 56 years stems from the erroneous belief that the Mauryan Era began with the Buddhist king Aśoka in 269 and not with Candragupta in 325 B.C.

Six years after Aiyer and again in the *Indian Antiquary*, Diwan Bahadur L.D. Swamikannu Pillai published his article on "The True and Exact Day of Buddha's Death",<sup>8</sup> which became rather influential among many later scholars. His aim is "to show that the true date of Buddha's death (Tuesday, 1 April, 478 B.C.), is deducible from the eight week-day dates cited in Bishop Bigandet's *Life of Gaudama* (*Trübner's Oriental Series*). The demonstration is accomplished by selecting five out of the many dates which have from time to time been associated with Buddha ... and testing the weekdays of the several occurrences with reference to each of these dates" (p. 197). This might sound rather complicated, but it is simply based on the fact that the biography translated by Bigandet mentions the weekdays and the respective constellations for the main events in the life of the Buddha. The five dates selected by Pillai range from 1027 B.C. to 478 B.C.; he excludes 544 as well as 543, because the resulting weekdays would be incompatible (544, for example, would give a Sunday as the day of the Buddha's death instead of the Tuesday supplied by Bigandet). Pillai discusses at

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of the different interpretations of the figure 256 cf. Heinz Bechert, "Die Lebenszeit des Buddha – das älteste feststehende Datum der indischen Geschichte?", *Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen*, Phil.-Hist. Kl., 1986, pp. 133–135.

<sup>8</sup> IA 43 (1914), pp. 197–204.

length the article by J.F. Fleet which evidently served as a stimulus for his own calculations. The dubiosity of the astronomical approach becomes evident if one considers the sources on which the calculations have to be based; they are far from being unanimous and the later they are the more precise they become.<sup>9</sup> Due to cultural heritage the Indian attitude towards and expectations with regard to the results to be gained with the help of astronomy are doubtlessly different from the Western perspective in such matters; the most serious objection, however, against Pillai's work does not involve his trust either in astronomy or in the reliability of details found in an extremely late chronicle, but his way of looking at thesis and proof, which is best expressed in his own words:

"The Eetzâna Era is no doubt, as observed by Dr. Fleet in *J.R.A.S.* 1912, p. 239, 'a late invention'; but it is, nevertheless, a true invention,  
 (a) because the dates expressed in that era are, *astronomically*, true dates;  
 and  
 (b) because they include, by implication, one *historically* true date, the  
 year, 478 B.C., of the death of Buddha" (p. 204).

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Only one year later Kashi Prasad Jayaswal tried to demonstrate the correctness of the traditional Theravâda chronology.<sup>10</sup> He knows of D.M. de Zilva Wickremasinghe's attempt to trace an era beginning in 483 B.C. in Ceylonese history and its refutation by E. Hultsch (cf. below) and he also knows of the discussion about the figure 256 in the Minor Rock Edict I and of its interpretation by F.W. Thomas. He himself starts with the presupposition that the period of 218 years refers to the time elapsed between the death of the Buddha and the accession of Candragupta (p. 97). Following the Jaina chronology, he places the accession in November 326/325 B.C. and therefore gets as the date of the Buddha's death the year 544 B.C. "which is to our agreeable surprise the traditional date of the Buddha's Nirvâna in Ceylon, Birma and Siam" (pp. 100 f.).

The next person to evaluate some of the results reached so far was the historian Hemchandra Raychaudhuri, whose *Political History of Ancient India*<sup>11</sup> deserves to be quoted for contrast's sake:

"Geiger's date [483 B.C.], however, is not recognised by reliable tradition. The same remark applies to the date (Tuesday, 1 April, 478 B.C.) preferred by L.D. Swami Kannu Pillai. The Cantonese date may, therefore, be accepted as a working hypothesis for the determination of the chronology of the early dynasties of Magadha" (p. 227).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> For a few general remarks on the problem of the astronomical calculations of Fleet, Pillai and Raja Rao see also André Bareau, "La date du Nirvâna", *Journal Asiatique* 241 (1953), pp. 56 f.

<sup>10</sup> "The Saisunaka and Maurya Chronology and the Date of the Buddha's Nirvana", *Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society* 1 (1915), pp. 67–116; cf. the contribution by Günter Grönbold, below, p. 389.

<sup>11</sup> Calcutta, 1953 (1st ed.: 1923).

<sup>12</sup> The expression "working hypothesis" here probably goes back to T.W. Rhys Davids

Basing himself on the "Dotted Record", he uses the date of 486 in a survey which is headed "Suggested Chronological Table (Approximate Dates)" (p. 228). Thus it is no surprise that his sober attitude won him "the admiration of Indian and foreign scholars alike", as B. K. Majumdar puts it, enumerating appreciative statements of scholars like W. Geiger, F. W. Thomas, A. L. Basham and others.<sup>13</sup>

It appears that the date of 487/486 B.C. was widely accepted in India at that time. Sita Nath Pradhan, for example, in his *Chronology of Ancient India*, written in 1927,<sup>14</sup> considers the statements in the Ceylonese chronicles about the 218 years between the death of the Buddha and the coronation of Ásoka to be substantially correct (p. 238). Taking 269 as the date of the coronation and using the information gained from the "Dotted Record", he accepts 487 B.C. as the year of the Nirvāṇa in a chapter which otherwise serves to pave the way for dating the Mahābhārata war to 1151 B.C. (p. 262).

Discussing the Minor Rock Edict I of Ásoka, at the end of his article published in 1930, D. R. Bhandarkar takes up the question of the figure 256 given in several versions of this edict.<sup>15</sup> In basic agreement with the interpretations proposed by G. Bühler and J. F. Fleet he is convinced that this figure denotes the number of years elapsed since a great event in the life of the Buddha.<sup>16</sup> According to him, Ásoka was crowned king in 264 B.C. and the inscription, referring to the twelfth year of Ásoka's reign, must correspond to ca. 252 B.C. Adding the figure 256 he obtains 508 B.C., which, however, cannot be connected with the death of the Buddha, since "Prof. Geiger has adduced some cogent reasons to show that this latter event almost certainly took place in 483 B.C." (p. 268). Therefore he turns to Bigandet's *Life or Legend of Gaudama* and finds that the Nirvāṇa took place 24 years after the enlightenment and 21 years before the Parinirvāṇa or death of the Buddha. Bhandarkar does not probe into this somewhat unusual kind of Nirvāṇa and accepts the strange tripartition, which, by the way, had also been quoted by P. C. Mukharji.<sup>17</sup> As a matter of fact, nothing like this is found in the book of Bigandet. In any case, Bhandarkar adds 483 and 21 and gets 504 B.C. as a result. This year comes close enough to the figure 508 calculated from the Minor Rock Edict that he feels it "well-nigh impossible to resist the temptation to say that Ásoka has dated this edict from the Nirvāṇa (not Parinirvāṇa) of Buddha which took place circa 508 B.C." (p. 268).

(*Cambridge History of India*, Vol. 1, ed. by E. J. Rapson, Cambridge, 1922, p. 172) and eventually seems to belong to Max Müller ("The True Date of the Buddha's Death" *IA* 13 [1884], p. 149).

<sup>13</sup> *Historians and Historiography in Modern India*, ed. by S. P. Sen, Calcutta, 1973, pp. 98–99.

<sup>14</sup> S. N. Pradhan, *Chronology of Ancient India, From the Time of the Rigvedic King Divodasa to Chandragupta Maurya, with Glimpses into the Political History of the Period*, Calcutta, 1927.

<sup>15</sup> "Sahasram-Rupnath-Brahmagiri-Maski Edict of Ásoka Reconsidered", *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 10 (1930), pp. 246–268.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. note 7.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. note 5; since Mukharji wishes to confirm the traditional Parinirvāṇa dating, he does not need to elaborate on this distinction.

In the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* of 1932, N. K. Bhattachari sets out to tackle "Maurya Chronology and Connected Problems".<sup>18</sup> He feels unsatisfied with the date established by his predecessors for the accession of Candragupta Maurya (322/321 B.C.) and examines the available evidence. In short, he finds the accession of Candragupta to have taken place in 313, and that of Ásoka in 264. The anointment therefore falls in the year 260, and the addition of the 218 years of the Ceylonese chronicles yields the year 478 as the date of the Nirvāṇa, which, incidentally, is the one also reached by Pillai, much to Bhattachari's satisfaction. His evaluation of Pillai's contribution is among the highlights of his article and should not be omitted here:

"When ... Dewan Bahadur L. D. Swamikannu Pillai, who was probably the greatest Indian authority in astronomico-chronological calculations, showed ... that the year 478 B.C. was the year that answered correctly to all astronomical calculations – we heave a sigh of relief at the thought that probably this knotty question has at last been solved! Astronomical calculations, when proper data are available, must be unfailing in their results; and the Dewan Bahadur put forward this date of 478 B.C. for the Nirvāṇa of Buddha with as much emphasis as he could command, after elaborate calculations to show that no other proposed date for the event agreed with the known astronomical data for the events of the Buddha's life – whereas this year agreed in all the particulars. I wonder why such a laborious piece of calculation from so great an astronomical authority has received so little recognition from western scholars?" (pp. 285 f.).

A similar amount of recognition was received by the next contribution, which is the only one written and published in Germany. It deals with the political history from 543 B.C. to 78 A.D., and according to the preface its author, Shantilal Shah, on 97 pages attempts "to reconstruct an unbroken picture of events in time order from what legends and anecdotes, traditions and literature, and inscriptions and coins supplied him".<sup>19</sup> He is among the very few to accept the longer and uncorrected chronology, and in doing so he must discredit the figure 218. According to him, if 218 were taken as trustworthy, there would be 66 years in surplus. These 66 years, however, have to be assigned to the dynasty of the New Nandas, to which the Jaina sources and the Purāṇas assign 88 years, but the Buddhist sources only 22. To reconcile all the sources, 543 has to be accepted as the date of the Buddha's Nirvāṇa and 527 as that of Mahāvīra.

In the same year, 1935, an article was published by Dhiren Bhattacharyya on the "True Dates of the Buddha and other Connected Epochs".<sup>20</sup> He finds fault with Swamikannu Pillai, whom he justly accuses of having shortened the Buddha's life span to "79 years as against the unanimous verdict of 80 years of all Buddhist chronicles" (p. 1). Pillai had been at

<sup>18</sup> Pp. 273–288.

<sup>19</sup> *The Traditional Chronology of the Jainas, An Outline of the Political Development of India from 543 B.C. to 78 A.D.*, Stuttgart, 1935 (Bonner Orientalistische Studien, Heft 9), Preface.

<sup>20</sup> *Journal of the Department of Letters* 27 (Calcutta, 1935), pp. 1–23.

a loss to find the suitable weekdays for Vaiśākhi Pūrṇimā in 558 and had simply shifted to 557 the year of the Buddha's birth. Having observed a few more mistakes in Pillai's reckoning, Mukhopadhyaya turns to proposing his own calculation, which is similarly based on astronomy and, different from Pillai, on the uncorrected longer chronology. We learn that the Buddha was born in 581 B.C., that he attained enlightenment or Nirvāṇa in 546, and that he reached his Parinirvāṇa on Tuesday, April 15, 501 B.C. Again we meet with the distinction between Nirvāṇa and Parinirvāṇa which is made whenever a date different from the longer or the corrected longer chronology is advanced. Mukhopadhyaya cites D. R. Bhandarkar, who "also ... accepts the distinction between the Nirvāṇa and the Parinirvāṇa of the Buddha" (p. 3), but otherwise credits a certain Mr. Curter with this ingenious solution, which, if properly pursued, can quickly double the possible dates to be calculated. Further on Mukhopadhyaya corrects the dates of the Mauryas and assumes an elapse of 224 years between the Parinirvāṇa and the accession of Aśoka, which accordingly took place on December 20, 277 B.C. – at about 10 o'clock p.m., to be precise.

Two years later, 1937, in his *History of Classical Sanskrit Literature*, M. Krishnamachariar devotes the greater part of his introduction to questions of chronology.<sup>21</sup> He attempts to reestablish the validity of the traditional Purāṇa chronology, based on the commencement of the Kaliyuga in 3201 B.C., and to refute the calculations of Western scholars which were based on the identification of Sandracottus with Candragupta Maurya. According to him, Candragupta reigned from 1535 to 1501 B.C. and Aśoka from 1473 to 1437 (§ 40, p. 1). The dates of the Buddha are of no particular interest to him, and he refers only in passing to the relevant calculations of Max Müller and V.A. Smith (§§ 58 f.), but he is mentioned here, because his dates for Candragupta and Aśoka have a direct bearing on the dates of the Buddha as well.

After Pillai and Mukhopadhyaya, the third one to place his trust on the weekdays mentioned in Bigandet's translation of the *Mālālampāravatthu* was M. Raja Rao, who in 1945 published his article "Burmese Records Corroborate the Puranic Date of Buddha's Birth".<sup>22</sup> As Heinz Braun discusses this contribution (below, p. 48), it may suffice here to note that Rao finds Tuesday, April 4, 576 B.C. to be the correct date of the Nirvāṇa, as it is "not only in harmony with both Purāṇic and Buddhistic traditions, but also in complete accord with the week-days assigned to events, a memory of which was carefully preserved by Burmese tradition for well over a millennium and a half. It is a truly remarkable feat of racial memory, worthy of the best Vedic traditions" (p. 396). Rao bases his new date on the observation that "98 solar years (Julian) constitute an exact cycle of the weekday and the day of the month of the Hindu luni-solar calendar" (p. 396). He therefore takes

<sup>21</sup> Repr. Delhi, 1974, §§ 33–98, pp. xlivi–cx.

<sup>22</sup> B. C. Law Volume, Part I, Calcutta, 1945, pp. 392–399.

the year 478 as calculated by Pillai, adds 98 years and gets 576 as a result which in his eyes is in better accord with the Purāṇic data.

The next person to be mentioned is B. M. Barua; his contribution, however, is directly connected with the view taken by the Ceylonese scholar G. C. Mendis and therefore will be discussed later.

It seems that the sometimes rather fanciful theories propounded by several scholars have left hardly any trace in general works on Indian history of that time. Two examples may be quoted. In the *History of India* by Narendra Krishna Sinha and Anil Chandra Banerjee, published in 1944 in Calcutta, one finds in the section dealing with Buddhism the short statement: "Some scholars hold that he [i.e. the Buddha] attained *Parinibbāna* in 483 B.C., while others prefer 543 B.C."<sup>23</sup> (p. 51). Similarly, Radha Kumud Mookerji, one of the contributors to the voluminous *History and Culture of the Indian People*,<sup>24</sup> simply reports the two different views based on the corrected and the uncorrected longer chronology, discusses the problem posed by the figure 218 and the *Dotted Record*, and in a footnote he even refers to the article by E.J. Thomas in which the latter presented the sources for the shorter chronology. He himself follows the date suggested by the "Dotted Record", but with great caution: "Although no finality attaches to this or any other conclusion, 486 B.C. may be accepted as a working hypothesis, and most scholars now place Buddha's death within a few years of this date" (p. 36). It is not by mere coincidence that the wording recalls Raychaudhuri's sober statement of 1923; as a matter of fact, in a footnote Mookerji refers to the *Political History of Ancient India*.

These rationalistic approaches did not succeed, however, in discouraging others from advancing new and less reasonable theories. There is, for instance, Prabodh Chandra Sengupta, who in 1947 wrote a book on Indian chronology.<sup>25</sup> In the chapter on Indian eras (pp. 217–221) he undertakes to settle the question which of the dates for the Nirvāṇa, 544 or 483 B.C., is the correct one. He has found two successive Suttas in the *Devaputta-Samyutta* of the *Samyuttanikāya*<sup>26</sup> which bear the titles *Candimā* and *Suriyo* and which describe an eclipse of the moon and of the sun respectively. He claims that the beginning phrase of the second Sutta, *tena kho pana samayena*, indicates a very short interval, namely a fortnight, between the two events. This alone would not be enough to establish their exact dates. According to Sengupta, "the *Devaputta Samyuttam* contains ten suttas in all" (p. 219) which is quite wrong, however, because this Samyutta is divided into three sections of ten Suttas each. In any case Sengupta confines himself to

<sup>23</sup> Ed. by R. C. Majumdar, Vol. II: *The Age of Imperial Unity*, Bombay, 1951, Chapter II: Rise of Magadhan Imperialism by R. K. Mookerji.

<sup>24</sup> *Ancient Indian Chronology, Illustrating Some of the Most Important Astronomical Methods*, Calcutta, 1947.

<sup>25</sup> The *Samyutta-Nikāya* of the *Sutta-Pitaka*, ed. by Léon Feer, London, 1884 (Pali Text Society), Vol. 1, pp. 50–51; for Sanskrit fragments corresponding to the *Candimā*-sutta cf. Ernst Waldschmidt, "Buddha Fixes the Disc of the Moon (*Candrasūtra*)", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 33 (1970), pp. 179–183.

the first ten, and in a somewhat arbitrary fashion equates their titles with the names of lunar months in order to determine the season of the event and finds by astronomical means that the only possible dates are December 29, 560 B.C., for the lunar eclipse and January 14, 559, for the solar eclipse. He concludes that "if the tradition of the eclipses is true and our interpretation of the month of their happening be correct, the year 483 B.C. for the Buddha's *Nirvāṇa* is inadmissible. Here the Ceylon-Burma tradition as to the *Nirvāṇa*-year, *viz.* 544 B.C., is really the true date of the great event" (p. 221).

By 1956 Sengupta had dismissed his last doubts. In this year, explicitly in connection with the 2500th anniversary of the *Nirvāṇa* according to the Theravāda tradition, he published an article on the "Dates of Principal Events in the Buddha's Life".<sup>26</sup> The rather scanty material on which he had based his first contribution is still the same, but this time he proceeds a step further:

"There can thus be no doubt that the *Nirvāṇa* of the Buddha happened in the year -544 A.C. (*i.e.* 545 B.C.). With this basis as a certainty it has been possible to find out five dates of principal events in the Buddha's life-time, as we shall see presently" (p. 125).

To mention only his date of the *Nirvāṇa*: it is April 22, 545 B.C. Sengupta refers to exactly one more scholar, namely W. Geiger, and one sentence is enough to discard the erring views of the latter:

"The astronomical examination presented above shows conclusively that the Ceylon-Burma tradition as to the *Mahāparinirvāṇa* of Gautama Buddha is the most accurate a tradition that has been faithfully and wonderfully recorded. I have seen the work of Geiger; his conclusions as to this date of the *Nirvāṇa* are indefinite and confusing" (p. 127).

Between the two contributions by Sengupta, a study of M. Govind Pai was published in 1952.<sup>27</sup> Pai concludes from a study of Asoka's inscriptions that the Minor Rock Edict I was set up between 248 and 240 B.C. He is convinced that the famous 256 refers to the *Parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha, which therefore took place between 504 and 496 B.C. Once again Bigandet's *Life or Legend* becomes the decisive means for calculating the exact year; with its help Pai finds that "Tuesday 15th April 501 B.C. is then the date of Buddha's *Parinirvāṇa* or decease" (p. 323). He either does not know of D. Mukhopadhyaya's contribution, which arrived at the same date in 1935 (cf. above), or does not think it worthwhile to mention him. The date leaves Pai with two problems, namely the 218 years of the Ceylonese chronicles which would place Asoka's coronation too early for him (a problem also faced by G. Aiyer in 1908, cf. above), and the traditional chronology of 544 B.C. He solves both of them quite elegantly, the first by raising the question

<sup>26</sup> *Indian Historical Quarterly* 32 (1956), pp. 124-128.

<sup>27</sup> "Date of Buddha's *Parinirvāṇa*", *Journal of the Oriental Institute* 1 (1951-1952), Baroda, 1952, pp. 317-328.

whether it could be possible that 218 is "a clerical error" (p. 324) for 228, and the second by explaining that the era of 544 is a younger substitution which erroneously starts from the Buddha's enlightenment (*Nirvāṇa*) and not from his death (*Parinirvāṇa*) and contains a little miscalculation of two years (according to him, the Buddha attained enlightenment in 546 B.C.).

It is generally accepted that the Buddha and the *Mahāvīra* were contemporaries, and thus the date of the Buddha's *Nirvāṇa* is closely related to that of the *Mahāvīra*'s. Therefore historians coming from a Jainist background, when examining the date of the *Mahāvīra*, usually examine the date of the Buddha as well. The contributions of Jyoti Prasad Jain and Muni Shri Nagrajjī, both in the beginning of the sixties, may serve as an example. In his chapter on "The Date of *Mahāvīra*'s *Nirvāṇa*", Jyoti Prasad Jain puts forward the theories of ten Indian scholars on this point and discusses their argumentation and its plausibility.<sup>28</sup> There are two, A. Santiraja Sastri (662 B.C. for the *Mahāvīra*) and K. P. Jayaswal (545 B.C. for the *Mahāvīra*, 544 for the Buddha), who advocate a date prior to 527 B.C., the year which the Jainas usually regard as the date of the *Nirvāṇa* of their founder. Five scholars are in favour of a later date, mainly to reconcile the corrected longer chronology of the Buddhists with the date of the *Mahāvīra*: S. V. Venkateswara (437 B.C. for the *Mahāvīra*), K. A. Nilakanta Sastri (467 B.C.), H. C. Raychaudhuri (486 or 478 B.C.), C. D. Chatterjee (486 B.C. for the *Mahāvīra*, 483 for the Buddha), and H. C. Seth (488 B.C.). Finally, J. P. Jain presents those scholars who maintain the date of 527 B.C., namely M. Govind Pai, J. K. Mukhtar, Professor Hiralal, and Muni Kalyanavijaya. Jain himself equally favours the year 527, which he believes to be definitely fixed and confirmed by internal as well as external evidence (p. 53). Besides, it should be mentioned that he also appears to be willing to accept the division between *Nirvāṇa* and *Parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha, which we have already met.

Around the same time Muni Shri Nagrajjī took up the question of the *Mahāvīra*'s *Nirvāṇa*.<sup>29</sup> Starting with Hermann Jacobi, he examines the views of several scholars, some of whom have also been discussed by J. P. Jain. Similarly, he compiles some of the traditional dates given for the *Nirvāṇa* of the Buddha and lists the opinions of several scholars, among them E. J. Thomas together with his reference to the shorter chronology (pp. 90-93). Since he apparently intends to establish the correctness of the traditional date of *Mahāvīra*,<sup>30</sup> he does not discuss Thomas' contribution and its implica-

<sup>28</sup> *The Jaina Sources of the History of Ancient India* (100 B.C.-A.D. 900), Delhi, 1964, pp. 32-54.

<sup>29</sup> *The Contemporaneity and the Chronology of Mahāvīra and Buddha*, ed. and transl. by Muni Shri Mahendra Kumarji 'Dviteeya', New Delhi, 1970, the preface of Nagrajjī being dated 1963.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. his preface: "According to the traditional *Nirvāṇa* era of *Mahāvīra*, 2500 years from *Mahāvīra*'s *Nirvāṇa* will be completed in 1974 A.D. Since no sect or sub-sect of Jainism has any differences regarding the date of the anniversary, it is essential on the part of the whole

tions for the Jaina chronology. He finally concludes that the Mahāvīra was 17 years older than the Buddha, that he reached Nirvāṇa 25 years earlier and that they lived 55 years as contemporaries.

"It has already been made clear that the chronology of Buddha is in itself quite uncertain. Also, it has been shown that the chronology of Mahāvīra in itself is almost unanimous and certain. Hence, on the basis of the unequivocal date of Mahāvīra, the above conclusion can be put in chronological terms. The date of Mahāvīra's *Nirvāṇa* is 527 B.C. Therefore, that of Buddha's *Nirvāṇa* should be 502 B.C." (p. 119).

Muni Nagrajjī, however, in a short contribution by Bhag Chandra Jain to the monthly *World Buddhism*,<sup>31</sup> is counted among those whose "conceptions do not carry weight as they do not take into account all the evidence" (p. 126). Jain lists a number of different dates based on the corrected longer chronology and their respective exponents. He is unable to agree with them and finds that "we can now conclude that the most probable date of the birth of the Buddha therefore is 624/623 BC ... Thus the date of the Buddha's Parinirvana may be decided at 544 BC" (p. 127). As with Muni Nagrajjī, it cannot be excluded that the author's main objective is to confirm the sacrosanct date handed down by a religious tradition.

In the year 1977 a book was published which was meant to provide the final breakthrough for a long known claim. Its author, Chakradhar Mahapatra, boldly endeavours to prove that in reality the Buddha was born in Orissa in a place named Kapileśvara.<sup>32</sup> His assertion is based on a stone inscription written in what looks like Aśokan Brāhmī and said to have been discovered in March 1928; it is more or less a duplicate of the Lumbini Pillar inscription.<sup>33</sup> There are a few differences, the most important of which lies in the fact "... that it contains the date on which Buddha breathed his last" (p. 29). The figure given is 240. Now, according to Mahapatra, Aśoka reigned from 269 to 232 B.C. and the inscription was installed 20 years after his accession to the throne, that is in 249. Therefore, we get 489 B.C. as the date of the Nirvāṇa. The same Buddha Era is mentioned again in another inscription of Aśoka (Minor Rock Edict I), this time giving the famous figure 256, which erroneously was taken by some scholars as referring to a number of days in a year. Understandably enough, the theory about the Buddha's birth in Orissa - which Mahapatra was not the first to propose - does not seem to have succeeded in attracting wider circles of scholars. The inscription has generally been considered spurious, and D.C. Sircar adduces

Jain community to celebrate this occasion in a systematic and well-organized manner" (p. xii).

<sup>31</sup> Vol. XXII, No. 5, December 1973, pp. 126–127.

<sup>32</sup> *The Real Birth Place of Buddha*, Cuttack, 1977.

<sup>33</sup> It was edited and discussed for the first time by S.N. Mitra, "The Lumbini-Pilgrimage Record in two Inscriptions", *Indian Historical Quarterly* 5 (1929), pp. 728–753. Mitra is convinced of the genuineness of the inscription and supposes it to have been transferred somehow from Lumbini to Kapileśvara.

a plausible explanation for its origination. He connects it with a facsimile of the Lumbini inscription published by V.A. Smith and tells us that "the same facsimile became widely known in Eastern India with its reproduction in Haraprasad Sastri's History of India (in Bengali) meant for school children and later in some other text books of the kind. There can hardly be any doubt that the people responsible for the Kapileśvara inscription copied it from the said facsimile not much earlier than 1928".<sup>34</sup>

In the beginning I have noted the rarity of attempts to push back the date of the Buddha into remote antiquity. There are, however, a few examples which should not be passed over in complete silence. At the beginning of the eighties the "Supreme Court Advocate and Indologist" V.G. Ramachandran wrote a booklet on the date of the Buddha.<sup>35</sup> It is not quite easy to report the exact date which he establishes for the Buddha, because one finds differing figures on different pages, but they all revolve around 1817 B.C. Somewhat better fixed are the dates for the Mahābhārata war, namely 3067 B.C., and for Aśoka, who reigned in 1472 B.C. These remarkable results are gained by the application of astronomy as an Indian speciality, and consequently Ramachandran's opinion of foreign methods is low: "It is lamentable that the History of India should suffer at the hands of Western scholars" (p. 36). Once more Bigandet's *The Life or Legend of Gaudama the Buddha of the Burmese* emerges, to which he dedicates a chapter (pp. 61–64). Evidently there have been others who follow a similar train of thoughts, as ample reference is made to various other contributions. The only author traceable by me is Deva Sahaya Triveda; according to Ramachandran (p. 71), he read a paper before the Indian History Congress in 1941 about "A New Date of Lord Buddha", proposing 1790 B.C. as the date of the Nirvāṇa. Surprisingly enough, in his thesis on *The Pre-Mauryan History of Bihar*, published 1953 in Banaras, Triveda states that Bimbisāra was converted by the Buddha in 587 B.C. (p. 107). In any case his audience was probably prepared for any eventuality when, apparently in 1968, he read another paper before the All India Oriental Conference in Varanasi on the date of Aśoka. According to a summary he informed the listeners that Aśoka ruled for 36 years from 1474 B.C. onwards; moreover – and travellers to Delhi will certainly appreciate this information – he would have us know that "Samudragupta was really great in war and peace and built the Viṣṇudhvaja or Qutub Minar at Mehrauli, Delhi, in 280 B.C."

Since then, the enthusiasm of Indian scholars for engaging in the controversial discussion has not weakened, as is demonstrated by another contribution which was published as recently as 1986.<sup>36</sup> The author, Rai Gyan Narain Prasad, introduces his article with the just statement that "the date

<sup>34</sup> D.C. Sircar, *Indian Epigraphy*, Delhi, 1965, p. 438.

<sup>35</sup> *Gauthama (sic!) the Buddha, The Date and Time*, Madras n.d. (ca. 1984).

<sup>36</sup> R.G.N. Prasad, "The Date of Buddha's Mahāparinirvāṇa", *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 67 (1986), pp. 77–88. A version of this paper was also read in 1985 at the 7th Conference of the International Association of Buddhist Studies in Bologna.

of the death of Buddha is an unsolved problem" (p.78). He intends to solve it by proving the soundness of the uncorrected longer chronology, in other words to establish the year 544 B.C. as the date of the Nirvāṇa. His theory amounts to the supposition that the 58 years of the leadership of a certain Chandavajī were crossed out in the Pāli list of Theras. This circumstance is reflected (1) in the list of Magadha kings as the reduction of the 80 years of Nanda kings into 22 years, (2) in the list of Ceylonese kings as a reduction of 70 years into 17 years between the kings Abhaya and Pañḍukābhaya, and (3) as the omission of 58 dots in the "Dotted Record". He obtains the necessary evidence from the Pāli chronicles, from epigraphy (inscription of Upatissa I) and from astronomy, in the latter case citing P.C. Sengupta's *Ancient Indian Chronology* and the two eclipses in the *Samyutta Nikāya* as his only source (cf. above).

In the same year, 1986, another attempt is made to place the death of the Buddha in the second millennium B.C. Its author, E. Vedavyas, is primarily concerned with the date of the Mahābhārata war, for which purpose he has to transpose a few other "milestones of Chronology", among them the date of the Buddha.<sup>37</sup> According to his opinion, "... a correct fixing of these dates will help to rectify the confusion and discrepancy which is needlessly imported into Indian Chronology by distorting the chronology given in the Puranas and the Mahabharata. By demonstrating the highly speculative and spurious nature of these dates, it will be possible to prove the need for a sound basis and for a scientific method, for testing and proving correct dates in ancient Hindu History." (p.222). Suffice it to say that he, by astronomical methods, calculates 1807 B.C. as the year of the Buddha's Nirvāṇa; more rewarding, perhaps, than a study of Vedavyas' results might be a study of the question why books like his still – or again? – seem to find a certain response in India.

In quite a different manner Shriram Sathe, the author of the most recent contribution,<sup>38</sup> throughout his booklet avoids openly stating his own conviction. According to his words, "in this book ... an effort is made to compile all the data for and against the different dates of the Buddha" (p.xiii). As might be expected, his survey of source materials, scholars and theories is far from being exhaustive. Although it includes many of the earlier Western attempts and mentions a number of Indian scholars, there is no reference to any of the contributions in which the short chronology is discussed. The latest quotation comes from the booklet by V.G. Ramachandran (cf. above), which is not by mere chance, as it seems; although Sathe never mentions the Buddha date which he thinks to be the most likely one, from parts of his epilogue (pp.161 ff.) which are evidently indebted to Ramachandran it becomes clear where his preferences lie (cf. especially his description of D.S. Triveda's appearance before the Indian History Congress in 1941, pp. 164 f.).

<sup>37</sup> *Astronomical Dating of the Mahabharata War*, Delhi, 1986, pp.223–229.

<sup>38</sup> *Dates of the Buddha*, Pune, 1987; cf. note 1.

As for the present, this has been the last Indian effort to tackle the subject. At this point mention should be made of two Nepalese contributions. In December 1979 Dinesh Raj Pant published an article in Nepali which also contained a short synopsis in English.<sup>39</sup> In sharp contrast to his Indian colleagues he presents new facts, but refrains from ardently supporting any new or old theories. Since this article is dealt with by Mahes Raj Pant, the brother of the author, I can simply refer to his paper (below, pp. 358–362). Probably in the same year, in a chapter on the "Correct Historical Dates Concerning Buddha", Bhuvan Lal Pradhan discussed the corrected and the uncorrected long chronology.<sup>40</sup> Basing himself on Ananda Kausalyayana's preface to his Hindi translation of the *Mahāvamsa*,<sup>41</sup> he is still of the opinion that an era beginning in 483 B.C. existed in Sri Lanka up to the 11th century, when it became superseded by the one starting in 543 B.C. "Hence, the dates of the Lord's birth and death which historians agree upon are none other than 563 B.C. and 483 B.C." (p. 100).

In general, scholars from the land in which the Buddha lived and died have not succeeded in exercising a lasting influence upon the discussion in the West. In this they differ considerably from their Ceylonese colleagues, and it remains to add a few remarks on the work of scholars from Sri Lanka; since it has been referred to several times in the article of H. Bechert,<sup>42</sup> here its description can be abbreviated.

In 1912 Don Martino de Zilva Wickremasinghe maintained that previous to the 11th century a Buddhist era beginning in 483 had been in use in Sri Lanka.<sup>43</sup> Due to a period of anarchy in the middle of the 11th century, this era became obsolete and was replaced by the one beginning in 544 B.C. He found his view confirmed by J.F. Fleet, who in 1909 had determined the same date of 483 from other sources. Wickremasinghe's thesis became widely known and was accepted by many scholars, among them Wilhelm Geiger, who considered it the final proof for his own calculation.

Wickremasinghe, Fleet and Geiger were also followed by John M. Senaveratne in accepting the year 483 B.C. as the date of the Buddha's Nirvāṇa.<sup>44</sup> "The correctness of Dr. Fleet's date is beyond question", he states (p.141) and then goes even further in his assumption than Wickremasinghe; this can best be illustrated by quoting his own words:

"My theory, then, amounts simply to this: The era reckoned from 483 B.C. remained, not up to the 11th century only, but up to the end of the

<sup>39</sup> D.R.Pant, *Bhagavān buddhako samayasambandhī paramparāmā thapa kurā*, Additional Remarks on the Traditions of the Date of Lord Buddha, Kathmandu, 1979.

<sup>40</sup> B.L.Pradhan, *Lumbini - Kapilawastu - Dewadaha*, Kathmandu, n.d. (circa 1979), pp.98–100.

<sup>41</sup> *Mahāvamsā*, transl. by Ānanda Kausalyayana, Prayāga, 2014.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. H. Bechert, "Die Lebenszeit des Buddha" (see note 7), pp. 135 f., 145 and 176.

<sup>43</sup> "Kiribat-Vehera Pillar Inscription", *Epigraphia Zeylanica* 1 (1904–1912), pp.153–161, esp. 156–158.

<sup>44</sup> "The Date of Buddha's Death and Ceylon Chronology", *Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 23, No. 67 (1914), pp. 141–273.

15th century, when the new tradition, – that the Buddha died in 544 B.C. – came in and soon ousted the old, creating no little confusion not so much during the transitional stage as in our own time" (p. 143).

Despite the fact that parts of his calculation were soon proved wrong,<sup>45</sup> Wickremasinghe tried to uphold his theory in a modified manner. In a contribution published in 1933 he makes use of data concerning Ceylonese history preserved in Chinese works in order to support the existence of an era beginning in 483, but acknowledges the existence of the era of 544 from at least the 7th century onwards.<sup>46</sup>

In 1946 Senerat Paranavitana discussed Wickremasinghe's theory in a short "Note on the Chronology" appended to his chapter on the History of Ceylon.<sup>47</sup> He sums up his results as follows:

"The question is not whether the *Parinirvāna* of the Buddha actually took place in 483 or 543 B.C., but whether a Buddhist era with 483 B.C. as its starting point was current in Ceylon at any period. The evidence available not only disproves the contention of Wickremasinghe, Geiger and others that such an era was in use during the period covered by this chapter, but establishes that dates were computed during this period in the traditional Buddhist era of Ceylon having 543 B.C. as its epoch" (p. 243).

Exactly the same result was reached in 1947 by the Ceylonese historian Garrett Champness Mendis, who examined the Ceylonese historical records for the time from the arrival of Vijaya, which is made to coincide with the day on which the Buddha died, up to the reign of Vatthagāmanī Abhaya, when records began to be kept.<sup>48</sup> He could demonstrate that with a very few exceptions the whole historiography of Ceylon is based on the era beginning in 544 B.C. These exceptions are all connected with the shorter chronology, and nowhere in the history of the island can an era beginning in 483 be traced.<sup>49</sup> As we have seen, E.J. Thomas' contribution did not exercise any influence on the work of later Indian scholars. Mendis, however, carefully considers the evidence adduced by Thomas only one year earlier and arrives at the same conclusion:

"Thus the day of the Parinibbāna in the Pāli Chronicles cannot be justified any more than the year" (p. 50)

and:

"Under these conditions it is not possible to begin the chronology of Ceylon from 544–3 B.C., the traditional Ceylon date for the Parinibbāna. It will place Asoka's consecration before Candragupta's meeting with Seleu-

<sup>45</sup> Cf. H. Bechert (see note 7), p. 135, note 26.

<sup>46</sup> "Ceylonese Chronology", *Epigraphia Zeylanica* 3 (1928 ff.), pp. 1–47.

<sup>47</sup> *A New History of the Indian People*, Vol. VI: *The Vākātaka-Gupta Age (Circa 200–550 A.D.)*, ed. by Ramesh Chandra Majumdar and Anant Sadashiv Altekar, Banaras, 1954 (1st ed., 1946, evidently with different page numbers), pp. 242–243.

<sup>48</sup> "The Chronology of the Early Pāli Chronicles" (see note 3), pp. 39–54.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. H. Bechert (see note 7), p. 136 and 176.

cus Nicator and when Alexander the Great was yet in India. Nor can it be started from 483 B.C. It has been shown that the 218 years given by the Ceylon chronicles for the period from the Parinibbāna to Asoka's consecration cannot be maintained, and that there is even better evidence for placing the Parinibbāna about 365 B.C., a 100 years before the consecration of Asoka" (p. 53).

Paranavitana's and Mendis's views provoked a rather heated reaction from B. M. Barua in the same year 1947.<sup>50</sup> Barua himself strongly advocates the corrected longer chronology and apparently detects nationalistic tendencies among those in favour of the year 544 B.C. The reader is left in no doubt about his opinion of the views of Mendis and Paranavitana, and it is instructive to compare Paranavitana's above remarks with the view imputed to him:

"The year of commencement of the Buddha Era (Buddha-varṣa) is still a disputed question as much of the history of Ceylon as of that of India. The question has been recently reopened by Dr. Paranavitana who stands for the correctness of the Buddhist traditional date of the Buddha's demise suggesting 544–43 B.C. as the year of commencement of the Buddha Era. The issue raised is combated by Dr. Mendis who argues alike against the era which started in 544–43 B.C. and that which started in 483. The general impression which is gaining ground in India is that Dr. Paranavitana is just a spokesman of the new-born national spirit or patriotic motive guiding the opinion of the modern Buddhist scholars of Ceylon. As against Dr. Mendis, it may be pointed out that he has neither availed himself of certain relevant data of chronology furnished by scholars other than those cited by him nor considered the question along with its certain side-issues deserving special attention. ... Dr. Mendis is apparently out to upset the views hitherto accepted as authoritative on the new scriptural authority of Dr. E. J. Thomas in whose opinion 'it is a mere euphemism to call it (proposed date) a working hypothesis. Any of the other dates would be equally workable as long as there are no other contemporary dates to contradict them'" (p. 62).

Further on Barua even states that Mendis "does not seem to realise ... that the whole of his argument moves in a vicious circle" (p. 62). All along the line, he does not seem to notice that Mendis solely tries to question the reliability of the historical tradition, not to arrive at any new dogma. Barua himself is more decided; he is convinced that the Sanskrit sources confounded Kālāsoka and Dharmāsoka and merged them into a single person, thereby having to shorten the period which elapsed between the Nirvāna and the accession of Asoka. Consequently, according to him, "the Buddhist traditional interval of 218 years is not only a probable and workable period but a very reasonable one. It fits in well with the year of commencement of

<sup>50</sup> "The Year of Commencement of the Buddha Era", *University of Ceylon Review* 5, No. 2 (1947), pp. 62–68.

the Buddha Era, 486 B.C. (975–489) as may be determined from the Chinese “dotted record” kept up in Canton up till A.D. 489” (p. 68). In his last paragraph, he once more turns to questions of nationality:

“I do not quite understand why the Buddhists of Ceylon should be so keen about 544–3 B.C. as the date of the Buddha’s demise. If they press for it, the Buddhists of India can contend alike for 638 B.C., the date suggested in the inscriptions of Aśokavalla, king of Sapadālakṣa”<sup>51</sup> (p. 68).

In the same number of the *University of Ceylon Review* a reply could be published by G.C. Mendis<sup>52</sup> in which he once more sums up his views and convincingly refutes the objections raised by Barua. He ends with the statement:

“There is no doubt that the evidence for the events referred to so far is far from satisfactory. But even what is available does not seem to be stronger for 483 B.C. than for 365 B.C. I may add that I have nowhere vouched for the accuracy of the latter date or drawn any conclusion from that alone” (p. 74).

In 1955 the modified theory of Wickremasinghe was also finally refuted by Senerat Paranavitana.<sup>53</sup> Referring to his corrections in the calculations proposed by Geiger and Wickremasinghe, he says:

“I have, therefore, felt it obligatory on me, in expiation of the sin of having upset the apple-carts of Sinhalese chronology of these two scholars, to put forward a chronological scheme to take their place, even though I am aware that, in doing so, I make myself open to the charge of making “confusion worse confounded”, and bewildering the student by a multiplicity of dates for the same event” (p. 87).

He then demonstrates that the Chinese synchronisms on which Wickremasinghe had tried to base his modified and rather elaborated view, are much easier explained if connected with an era beginning in 544/3 B.C. In a remarkably reasonable manner he discusses general questions of correlating events and deals with the period between Devānampiya Tissa and Dutṭhagāmanī on the one hand and that between Dutṭhagāmanī and Mahānāma, the king mentioned in a Chinese source, on the other. He finally concludes that “a Buddhist era with 483 B.C. as its starting point has thus to be discarded as a myth of the same category as the myths about a race of men called Yakṣas in Ceylon – myths which owe their origin to modern critique” (p. 94).

In 1960 S. Paranavitana once more reverted to the question of the Bud-

<sup>51</sup> A reference to the Gayā inscription (cf. above, note 4); the era mentioned in this inscription rather seems to be the one of the uncorrected long chronology, a circumstance which Barua, of course, was not aware of.

<sup>52</sup> “The Reply”, pp. 69–74.

<sup>53</sup> “Chronology of Ceylon Kings; Mahāsena – Mahinda V”, *Epigraphia Zeylanica* 5 (1955), pp. 86–111.

dhist eras.<sup>54</sup> He published a rock inscription of King Upatissa which not only gives the regnal year of the king, but also the number of 941 years elapsed since the Parinirvāna; this is the earliest inscription so far known in which a date is given in the Buddhist era. Upatissa is the predecessor of Mahānāma, who can be dated fairly well, because his embassy to China is mentioned in the Chinese sources. Taking all available evidence into account, Paranavitana computes the date given in the inscription as Tuesday, December 16, 396 A.C. This date concurs well with the figure given for the Buddhist era, if this era started in 544 B.C. Therefore, it becomes evident that already in the fourth century the Buddhist era in use was the one beginning in 544/3 B.C. Paranavitana warns, however, against drawing premature conclusions:

“Thus, the prevalence of the Buddhist era in Ceylon at the close of the fourth century A.C. by no means vouches for the accuracy of the date of the Buddha’s Parinirvāna that might be arrived at by the determination, from the data given in our record, that the year 941 from that event corresponds to 396 A.C.” (p. 148).

Finally, mention has to be made of a very recent Sinhalese publication, written by G.H. de Zoysa in the year “1986 After Christ” or “2370 After Buddha”.<sup>55</sup> His preference for the shorter chronology is already disclosed by a cover text which serves as a kind of subtitle: “A brief history of Sinhala-dipa upto the present day with special reference to early period as revealed under the Buddhist Era 384 BC and the critical study of the Mahawansa.” In defence of his own view, de Zoysa does not spare his imagined opponents:

“It appears that for the chronologically nonsensical 2500th Buddha Jayanti anniversary celebrations held in 1956 in Sri Lanka, Dr. Senarath Paranavithana a former Commissioner of Archaeology turning a blind eye to all these foregoing facts had prepared in 1955 a research paper supporting vehemently the 544 BC as the correct Buddhist Era. ... The learned Commissioner in supporting the Buddhist Era 544 BC also had admitted that Alexander the Great was a contemporary of Emperor Asoka and not of his grand father Chandragupta and that Pandukabhaya lived for 107 years, Mutasiva for about 140 years and Devanampiyatissa nearly 150 years!!!” (p. 206).

It is rather difficult not to suspect de Zoysa of having read the article of Paranavitana in undue haste. In any case, this may suffice to briefly illustrate his approach; his contribution is also dealt with by Petra Kieffer-Püllz, and for further details her paper should be referred to (cf. below, pp. 372–376).

<sup>54</sup> “New Light on the Buddhist Era in Ceylon and Early Sinhalese Chronology”, *University of Ceylon Review* 18 (1960), pp. 129–155.

<sup>55</sup> *Sinhala Aryans, 424 BC–1986 AC*, Anuradhapura, 1986.