

Herman Tiekens

The Mahābhārata after the Great Battle*

INTRODUCTION

The Mahābhārata's story after the battle is basically one of decline and disintegration, which ends with the complete (or rather, almost complete) disappearance of the victors of the battle, the Pāṇḍavas and their allies. At the end of the eighteenth book, the Svargārohaṇaparvan, the last survivors, the Pāṇḍavas, are seen to enter heaven. In this way they fulfil a strong wish expressed by their father at the beginning of the epic. After the realm had been divided between the Kaurava branch in Hāstinapura and the Pāṇḍava branch in Indraprastha and the latter had built a beautiful *sabhā*, or assembly hall,¹ there, Nārada arrived with a message from their father Pāṇḍu in heaven. Pāṇḍu, who had seen how King Hariścandra enjoyed himself at the side of Indra after he performed a royal consecration, or *rājasūya* sacrifice,² exhorts his sons to perform such a sacrifice so that they may enjoy heaven as well. This sacrifice eventually leads to the conflict between the Pāṇḍava and Kaurava cousins and to the great war.

The holocaust described at the end of the Mahābhārata had been predicted at the very beginning in 2.11.61-69³ as, so to speak, collateral damage of the *rājasūya*. Even so, the later books of the epic are often considered to form only a kind of appendix, having but a tenuous relationship with the preceding part. For instance, the Āśvamedhikaparvan

* I would like to express my gratitude to Jan C. Heesterman and the editors of this journal for their comments and suggestions regarding an earlier version of this article.

¹ For the translation of *sabhā* with "assembly hall", see J.A.B. van Buitenen, *The Mahābhārata. 2. The Book of the Assembly Hall – 3. The Book of the Forest*. Chicago 1975. However, in connection with what follows it is to be noted that the *sabhā* is also the place where the dice game as part of the royal consecration rite (*rājasūya*) takes place (see J.C. Heesterman, *The Ancient Indian Royal Consecration*. The Hague 1957, p. 148 and H. Falk, *Bruderschaft und Würfelspiel. Untersuchungen zur Entwicklungsgeschichte des vedischen Opfers*. Freiburg 1986, p. 84).

² For the *rājasūya* sacrifice, see Heesterman, op. cit. (n. 1), *passim*.

³ All references are to the Critical Edition from Poona.

(book 14) is considered to be a later addition to the main text based on the relatively small number of asterisked (that is, unauthentic) passages marked as such in the Critical Edition.⁴ The Āśramavāsikaparvan (15) is said to be “the first of a series of epilogues which in all probability were added to the main story significantly later”;⁵ the Mausala- (16), Mahāprasthānika- (17) and Svargārohaṇaparvans (18) are, again, regarded as late, their arrangement into separate books being secondary and for the sake of arriving at the number 18 for the total books.⁶ Symptomatic of this attitude towards the final books of the Mahābhārata is Hildebeitel’s non-inclusion of discussion of the Mausala-parvan – where Kṛṣṇa’s death is related – in his book on Kṛṣṇa in the epic.⁷

Unless one takes, as some scholars like to do, the *rājasūya* as a later interpolation in the epic,⁸ such threads as referred to above connecting the beginning and end of the epic testify to a grand design underlying the story as a whole. As to the nature of this grand design, basically two suggestions are available. According to the first, proposed by M. Biardeau, the Mahābhārata follows the pattern of the cyclical *pralaya* myth. In this myth the world is first desiccated, and then destroyed by fire; its ashes are collected in the waters on which Nārāyaṇa (Viṣṇu) rests. From these waters the world is created once more by Brahmā, after which everything starts all over again.⁹ Superficially, and especially on account of its cyclical nature, the application of the *pralaya* myth to the epic is attractive. However, as already shown by Hildebeitel, as soon as one turns to the details no clear picture emerges.¹⁰ In

⁴ J. Brockington, *The Sanskrit Epics*. Leiden 1998, p. 153.

⁵ J. Brockington, op. cit., p. 154.

⁶ J. Brockington, op. cit. (n. 4), p. 153.

⁷ A. Hildebeitel, *The Ritual of Battle*. Krishna in the Mahābhārata. New York 1990.

⁸ According to Th. Oberlies the *rājasūya* is a later interpolation inserted by Nārāyaṇa “theologians” (Die Ratschläge des Sehers Nārada. Ritual an und unter der Oberfläche des Mahābhārata. In: H.L.C. Tristram [ed.], *New Methods in the Research of Epic*. Tübingen 1998, p. 125-141). See also R. Söhnen-Thieme, On the Composition of the Dyūtaparvan in the Mahābhārata. In: M. Brockington – P. Schreiner (ed.), *Composing a Tradition: Concepts, Techniques and Relationships*. Proceedings of the First Dubrovnik International Conference on the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas August 1997. Zagreb 1999, p. 139-154, esp. p. 152.

⁹ M. Biardeau as summarized by Hildebeitel, op. cit. (n. 7), p. 309ff.

¹⁰ See Hildebeitel, op. cit., p. 310-311.

fact, as I see it, the *pralaya* myth is indeed present in the Mahābhārata but rather as a by-product of the epic story than as the source of it. Others have sought to explain the Mahābhārata against the background of sacrifice. However, in most cases this idea has been elaborated only for parts of the epic and hardly ever for the part after the battle. For instance, van Buitenen deals mainly with the *rājasūya* sacrifice in the Sabhāparvan.¹¹ Hildebeitel, who wants to compare the eschatological crisis of the epic with the destruction of the sacrifice of Dakṣa, elaborates upon this idea for the Sauptikaparvan only.¹² Gehrts, according to whom the story of the epic as a whole has been grafted onto the *rājasūya* sacrifice, does not deal specifically with the final parts of the epic.¹³ According to Mauss “the Mahābhārata is the story of a gigantic potlatch”.¹⁴ However, among the elements from the story mentioned by Mauss none belongs to the part after the battle. The same applies to the elements discussed by Held.¹⁵ The question therefore remains if, and if so, how the sacrificial paradigm accounts for the Mahābhārata as a whole including the final books.

One of the first questions to be asked in this connection is what actually happens after the great battle. As far as I see it, the turning point in the fate of the Pāṇḍavas and their allies occurs on the very last day of the battle (Śalyaparvan [9]). It happens when Yudhiṣṭhira puts the outcome of the war at risk, a war which had been successful thus far and is almost finished, by granting Duryodhana a duel with one of the Pāṇḍavas of his own choosing.¹⁶ Kṛṣṇa rebukes Yudhiṣṭhira, saying

¹¹ See J.A.B. van Buitenen, On the Structure of the Sabhāparvan of the Mahābhārata. In: J. Ensink – P. Gaeffke (ed.), *India Maior*. Congratulatory Volume Presented to J. Gonda. Leiden 1972, p. 68-84.

¹² See Hildebeitel, op. cit. (n. 7), p. 312ff.

¹³ See H. Gehrts, *Mahābhārata*. Das Geschehen und seine Bedeutung. Bonn 1975.

¹⁴ See M. Mauss, *The Gift*. The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies. Translated by W.D. Halls. London 1933, p. 55.

¹⁵ G.J. Held, *The Mahābhārata*. An Ethnological Study. Amsterdam 1935. Here mention may also be made of some recent studies by C.Z. Minkowski, in particular his “Janamajeya’s *sattra* and Ritual Structure”, published in *JAOS* 109 (1989) 401-420. In this article he deals mainly with the *sattra* sacrifice as instrumental in the origin of the narrative technique of the epic.

¹⁶ See 9.31.52e-53: *imam ekaṃ ca te kāmam vīra bhūyo dadāmy aham | 52 | pañcānāṃ pāṇḍaveyānāṃ yena yoddhum ihecchasi | taṃ hatvā vai bhavān rājā hato vā svargam āpnuhi | ṛte ca jīvītād vīra yuddhe kiṃ kurma te priyam | 53 |*.

that this is the beginning of another game of dice, the outcome of which by the nature of the game is unpredictable.¹⁷ Like the dice game, in the end the duel can only be won by one of the two parties using unfair means (*anyāyena* 9.57.17b), in this case, by Bhīma hitting Duryodhana below the waist.¹⁸ Before his death, however, Duryodhana asks Kṛpa to consecrate Āsvatthāman as leader of the Kaurava army (9.64.38-40). In a nightly raid on the Pāṇḍava camp, described in the Sauptikaparvan (10), Āsvatthāman kills all the Pāñcālas, including the sons of the Pāṇḍavas by Draupadī. In the aftermath of this incident the as yet unborn son of Abhimanyu is killed as well, which means that the line of the Pāṇḍavas becomes virtually extinct.¹⁹ After the funerary rites for the dead warriors related in the Strīparvan (11) and Bhīṣma's instruction in the Śānti- and Anuśāsanaparvans (12 and 13), the Pāṇḍavas organize a horse sacrifice (Āśvamedhikaparvan [14]) which, however, is far from successful. In any case, in the end, in the story of the mongoose with the gold-coloured head (14.92-93),²⁰ they are reproached for not going to the limit in giving away presents during the sacrifice. In the Āśramavāsikaparvan (15) the elder generation of the Kauravas (Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāndhārī) and that of the Pāṇḍavas (Kuntī) are said to meet their ends in a forest fire caused by their own sacrificial fires (*tenāgninā samāyuktaḥ svenaiva* [15.47.5ab] and *svenāgninā ... samāyuktaḥ* [7ab]). In the Mausalarparvan (16) the Yādavas kill themselves during a wild party on the bank of the River Yamunā, and Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva die. Finally, in the Mahāprasthānika- and Svargārohanaparvans (17 and 18) the Pāṇḍavas leave the world and reach heaven.²¹

As I will try to show, the incidents after the battle have all in various degrees of detail been cast into a sacrificial mold. We see the Pāñcālas (Sauptikaparvan), the Pāṇḍavas (Āśvamedhika-, Mahāprasthānikapar-

¹⁷ See 9.32.7: *tad idaṃ dyūtam ārabdham punar eva yathā purā | viśamaṃ śakuneś caiva tava caiva viśāṃ pate ||*.

¹⁸ Bhīma does so on the advice of Kṛṣṇa. The latter needed only to remind him of an old promise. After Duryodhana had shown his left thigh to Draupadī Bhīma pledged a solemn oath that he would kill Duryodhana by breaking this very thigh with a club (2.63.12-14). In 3.11.34 this oath is confirmed by Maitreya in the presence of Duryodhana.

¹⁹ These incidents will be treated more in detail below, p. 12f.

²⁰ The story of the mongoose will be dealt with below, p. 34.

²¹ For the Mausalarparvan, see below, p. 16ff. For the Mahāprasthānikaparvan, see below, p. 35f.

van) and Yādavas (Mausalaparvan) participating in sacrifices. These sacrifices appear to be concerned, implicitly or explicitly, with the attempt to get rid of the sin (*pāpa*) accumulated during the preceding battle.²² The sin is expiated by sacrificing oneself, or by offering oneself as a sacrificial victim. Something like the latter is also seen in the first part of the Mahābhārata, but at a certain point, beginning with the Mausalaparvan, the modality changes. The change seems to be punctuated by the teachings of the Anugītā, in exactly the same way the ethics of the battle were determined by the Bhagavadgītā. In fact, after the battle the situation changes in yet another way. Whereas in the first part of the epic the Pāṇḍavas, Yādavas and Pāñcālas work closely together, beginning with the Sauptikaparvan we see each of them operating on his own. Each of the former three allies, who collaborated so closely in the organisation of the *rājasūya* sacrifice, which according to Gehrts is underlying the great battle,²³ sets himself up as an individual sacrificial patron. As we will see, this development is also found, though on a smaller scale, in the Sauptikaparvan when Aśvatthāman, Kṛpa and Kṛtavarman, as soon as they have completed the killing of the Pāñcālas, split up.²⁴ What we also see here is a change of roles, namely Aśvatthāman, the “killer” of the first sacrifice of the Pāñcālas, becoming the victim of the next sacrifice. The situation closely resembles an archaic potlatch society such as described by Mauss in which rival groups try to outdo one another with collective sacrificial feasts. One of the problems of these sacrifices, apart from the self-destructive tendency inherent in the competition, was that they never ended, that is to say, every gift had to be reciprocated by a counter gift. Likewise, at the very end of the Mahābhārata, after the Pāṇḍavas have finally reached heaven by giving away their very lives, there is a residue, and this residue appears to agree with the very same conditions with which the epic had started. It appears that ultimately the Mahābhārata deals with, and is shaped by, the endless nature of the sacrificial cycle.

²² Thus, in order to get rid of *pāpa* Nārada advises Yudhiṣṭhira to perform an *aśvamedha*, or horse sacrifice; see 14.3.3: *ātmānaṃ manyase cātha pāpakarmāṇam antataḥ | śṛṇu tatra yathā pāpam apakṛṣyeta bhārata ||*, and 9ab: *yajasva vājimedhena vidhivad dakṣiṇāvataḥ |*. See also below, n. 102.

²³ See Gehrts, op. cit. (n. 13), *passim*.

²⁴ In the Śrauta ritual the *sattra* is likewise followed by (*soma*) sacrifices performed by the *sattrins* individually (see below, p. 39).

THE SAUPTIKAPARVAN

The incidents related in the Sauptikaparvan (10) take place during the night of the final, eighteenth day of the battle.²⁵ The battle is practically over. Duryodhana has been mortally wounded by Bhīma in a duel and is about to die: his death would have signaled the final victory of the Pāṇḍavas. However, at the very last moment, the tables are turned upon the Pāṇḍavas. The Pāṇḍavas experience a hair-breadth escape from being completely extinguished themselves.

It all starts in the preceding book, the Śalyaparvan (9), with Aśvatthāman asking Duryodhana to be allowed to take revenge for his father's treacherous murder by Dhṛṣṭadyumna (9.64.33-35). Duryodhana has him consecrated as general (64.36-40), which makes Aśvatthāman the Kaurava army's fifth leader in line, after Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Karṇa and Śalya.²⁶ The Sauptikaparvan opens with Aśvatthāman seeing how a single owl in a nightly attack manages to kill thousands of crows sleeping in a *nyagrodha* tree. Taking his cue from this scene, Aśvatthāman decides to attack the Pāṇḍava camp in the night, thus flaunting the *kṣatriya* code.²⁷ What he does not know is that the five Pāṇḍavas together with Sātyaki are no longer in the camp but are staying somewhere else along the river Oghavatī.²⁸ As told at the end of the Śalyaparvan, they were led away from the camp by Kṛṣṇa, who foresaw the coming massacre (9.61.35-37) and subsequently departed for Hāstinapura to inform Gāndhārī of her sons' death (61.38-40). Strangely enough, as soon as he arrived there he realized what Aśvatthāman's plans were, and immediately rushed back to the camp as if he had completely forgotten about the precautions he had already taken (62.66-73).

²⁵ The Sauptikaparvan is dealt with in great detail by J. Scheuer, *Śiva dans le Mahābhārata*. Paris 1982, p. 293-326. See also R. Katz, The Sauptika Episode in the Structure of the Mahābhārata. In: A. Sharma (ed.), *Essays on the Mahābhārata*. Leiden 1991, p. 130-149.

²⁶ There must be some kind of connection between the number of army leaders, with the fifth effecting a complete turn-over of the outcome of the war, and the five throws in the dice game (see Falk, op. cit. [n. 1], p. 118ff.)

²⁷ See 10.1.46c-f: *nyāyato yudhyamānasya prānatyāgo na saṃśayah | chadmanā tu bhavet siddhiḥ śatrūṇāṃ ca kṣayo mahān ||*. In the passage which follows this *śloka* the lawfulness of attacking one's enemy at night while he is sleeping is discussed.

²⁸ The number of survivors of the massacre is seven, namely the five Pāṇḍavas, Sātyaki and, of course, Kṛṣṇa. The same number is found in the *khāṇḍavadāha*

Upon entering the camp where the Pāñcālas are sleeping Aśvatthāman finds his path blocked by a huge being,²⁹ which is actually a form of Viṣṇu.³⁰ Unable to get past Viṣṇu he turns for help to Śiva (10.6.32). As soon as Aśvatthāman wants to enter the fire in order to offer himself to Śiva (7.50 and 52), this god appears in front of him (7.59). Śiva explains that he himself has refrained from killing the Pāñḍavas and their allies out of respect for Kṛṣṇa.³¹ It seems, however, that at the end of the great battle this respect has worn off.³² Śiva, who has come to know Aśvatthāman's qualities (a second element in the incidents at the gate of the camp was Śiva's test of Aśvatthāman), takes possession of him and provides him with a sword (7.64), thus fitting him for the coming battle.

After this, Aśvatthāman enters the camp. His first victim is Dhṛṣṭadyumna, Draupadī's brother and the killer of his father Droṇa. This warrior is surprised in his sleep and unable to offer any resistance.³³ He is slaughtered like a sacrificial victim, or *paśu* (*paśumāram amārayat*, 8.18d). The other warriors experience the same fate, and Aśvatthāman is compared to a *śamīṭṛ* (*śamīteva paśūn makhe*, 8.36d). While Aśvatthāman carries out his gruesome work inside the camp, his two allies, Kṛpa and Kṛtavarman, hover at the boundaries of the camp, killing those who

episode, which Takṣaka, his son Aśvasena, Maya and the four *śārṅgaka* birds survive. According to H. Gehrts this number seven would correspond to that of the priests in great sacrifices (op. cit. [n. 13], p. 237).

²⁹ See 10.6.3: *tatra bhūtaṃ mahākāyaṃ candrārkasadṛśadyutim | so 'paśyad dvāram āvṛtya tiṣṭhantaṃ lomahaṛṣanam ||*.

³⁰ The monster emits rays from which, in turn, hundreds of Hṛṣīkeśas bearing conches, *cakras* and clubs appear (10.6.9). Note that of Viṣṇu's four emblems the lotus is missing, according to Scheuer because the lotus is *śānta* and not *ugra* (op. cit. [n. 25], p. 303, n. 17). After Aśvatthāman has in vain tried to chase the monster away with his weapons he sees the sky peopled with Janārdanas (6.17).

³¹ See 10.7.62: *kurvātā tasya* (i.e. Kṛṣṇa) *saṃmānaṃ tvāṃ ca jijñāsatā mayā | pāñcālāḥ sahasā guptā māyās ca bahusāḥ kṛtāḥ ||*.

³² See 10.7.63: *kṛtas tasyaiṣa saṃmānaḥ pāñcālān rakṣatā mayā | abhibhūtās tu kālena naiṣāṃ adyāsti jīvitam ||*.

³³ See 10.8.17cd: *nīdrayā caiva pāñcālyo nāśakac ceṣṭitum tadā |*. In connection with the killing of the Pāñcālas while they were sleeping I would like to refer to a passage quoted by Scheuer concerning the procedure of the killing of the sacrificial victim (op. cit. [n. 25], p. 217, n. 22). As the *śamīṭṛ* announces the death of the sacrificial victim the *adhvaryu* priest orders that it be allowed to lie down for a moment on the ground: *saṃjñaptāḥ paśur iti prokte śetāṃ nu muhūrtam ity āhāsoma* (Kātyāyanaśrautasūtra 6.5.23; see J. Schwab, *Das altindische Thieropfer*. Erlangen 1886, p. 107).

try to escape.³⁴ They also light fires at three spots in the camp,³⁵ turning it into a veritable sacrificial arena. The massacre is thus described in terms of a sacrificial undertaking.³⁶

At daybreak *Aśvatthāman* has finished his job. All the *Pāñcālas* are dead, including the five sons which the *Pāñḍavas* had by *Draupadī*, the so-called *Draupadeyas*. It may be noted here that with *Aśvatthāman*'s unlawful nightly attack on the *Pāñcālas*, the *Pāñḍavas* are paid back in kind as it were, since in the great battle which preceded the *Pāñḍavas* likewise transgressed the *ksatriya* code, e.g., *Bhīma* hit *Duryodhana* below the waist in a club fight. *Aśvatthāman* leaves the camp and reports his ghastly work to *Duryodhana*, who thereupon dies happily (10.9.55).

After the nightly attack on the camp the three victorious allies split up. *Kṛtavarman*, who actually belongs to the same clan as *Kṛṣṇa*, retires to his own kingdom, where we will meet him again later at the *tīrthayātrā* described in the *Mausalaparvan*. *Kṛpa* goes off to *Hāstinapura*, and *Aśvatthāman* finds his way to *Vyāsa*'s *āśrama* on the bank of the *Ganges*.³⁷ There a second fight ensues between *Aśvatthāman*, on the one hand, and *Arjuna*, *Bhīma*, *Yudhiṣṭhira* and *Kṛṣṇa*, on the other, who have been sent after him by *Draupadī* to revenge her sons' deaths. Seeing *Arjuna* approaching, *Aśvatthāman* takes hold of a handful of grass (*iṣṭkā*) with his left hand. The grass turns into a deadly weapon.³⁸ From it issues a large fire which he directs at the *Pāñḍavas* in order to destroy them (*apāñḍavāya*).³⁹ *Arjuna* throws his *Brahmaśiraś* weapon in order

³⁴ See 10.8.5cd: *kṛpāś ca kṛtavarmā ca śibiradvāry atīṣṭhatām* ||; cp. 8.100: *tāms tu niṣpatatas trastāñ śibirāj jīvitaiṣiṇaḥ | kṛtavarmā kṛpāś caiva dvāradeśe nijaghnatuḥ* ||.

³⁵ See 10.8.103cd: *triṣu deśeṣu dadatuḥ śibirasya hutāśanam* ||.

³⁶ In this connection I would like to draw attention to Scheuer's discussion of the passages 10.7.5 and 7.11c-12 (op. cit. [n. 25], p. 305-307). In the first passage *Aśvatthāman* offers himself (*ātmopahāreṇa yakṣye*) to *Śiva* in order to gain access to the camp of the *Pāñcālas*. In the second one he promises that "if" (*ced* with the *Śāradā* version) he is able to overcome that hurdle he will make an offering to *Śiva* consisting of all beings. With the latter *Aśvatthāman* no doubt refers to the *Pāñcālas* which were to be killed by him.

³⁷ This information is supplied in the following book, the *Strīparvan* (11.10.20-21).

³⁸ See 10.13.17c-f: *jagrāha ca sa caīṣṭkām drauṇiḥ savyena pāñinā | sa tām āpadam āśādyā divyam astram udīrayat* ||.

³⁹ See 10.13.18cd: *apāñḍavāyeti ruṣā vyasṛjad dāruṇam vacaḥ* ||. Literally *apāñḍavāya* means "for the destruction of the *Pāñḍava*", i.e. *Bhīma*; see A. Hilde-

to neutralize Aśvatthāman's missile. Vyāsa and Nārada, who is also staying in the *āśrama*, intervene and ask the two warriors to recall their weapons. Arjuna manages to do so but Aśvatthāman is only able to deflect the course of his in the direction of the women, who include Uttarā, the pregnant wife of Arjuna's dead son Abhimanyu.⁴⁰ As a result the child is killed before being actually born. With this death the Pāṇḍava dynasty has virtually come to an end. However, Kṛṣṇa promises to revive the child when it is born, predicting that it will rule the earth for sixty years (10.16.13-15). At the end of the epic this child, called Parikṣit, is the only Pāṇḍava remaining behind on earth. He will father "Pārikṣita" Janamejaya, at whose sacrifice the Mahābhārata in its present form is supposed to have been recited.

Strangely enough the defeated Aśvatthāman is not killed, as was demanded by Draupadī. Instead, his crown is removed from his head and he is cursed by Kṛṣṇa, condemned to roam the world for three thousand years shunned by all people.⁴¹

As we have seen, the massacre of the Pāñcālas is cast in a sacrificial mold. Aśvatthāman, who comes bursting in on the sleeping Pāñcālas, is compared to a *samitr*, Dhṛṣṭadyumna is killed like a *paśu* and the place where it all happens is marked by three fires, thus resembling the sacrificial arena. Furthermore, in an explanation given by Kṛṣṇa, Aśvatthāman's appearance at the scene is compared to that of Śiva at the end of a sacrifice. Thus, in *adhyāya* 18, after Aśvatthāman has been sent away on a journey of three thousand years, Kṛṣṇa explains to the Pāṇḍavas that when the Devayuga had passed the gods performed a sacrifice but forgot to assign a share of the sacrifice to Śiva. Śiva disturbed the sacrifice which, like a deer, fled away into the sky. The gods lost their senses. Next Śiva mutilated the following three gods with the tip of his bow: Savitṛ, whose arms he broke, Bhaga, whose eyes he took out, and Pūṣan, whose teeth he shattered. However, with speech the

beitel, *Rethinking the Mahābhārata. A Reader's Guide to the Education of the Dharma King*. Chicago 2001, p. 62-63. See also 15.16: *viśṛṣṭam hi mayā divyam etad astraṃ durāsadam | apāṇḍavāyeti mune vahnitejo 'numantrya vai ||*.

⁴⁰ 10.15.31c-f: *ayaṃ maṅgīr ayaṃ cāham iṣṭkā nīpatiṣyati | garbheṣu pāṇḍaveyānām amoghaṃ caitad udyatam ||*.

⁴¹ See 10.16.10-12: *trīṇi varṣasahasrāṇi cariṣyasi mahīm imām | aprāpnuvan kvacit kāṃcīt saṃvidam jātu kenacit | 10 | nirjanān asahāyas tvaṃ deśān pravīcariṣyasi | bhavitrī na hi te kṣudra janamadhyeṣu saṃsthitih | 11 | pūyaṣoṇitagandhī ca durgakāntārasaṃśrayah | vicariṣyasi pāpātman sarvavyādhīsamānvitah |*.

gods broke the string of Śiva's bow and together with the sacrifice took refuge with Śiva. Thereupon Śiva threw his anger into the water, which was dried up by it. He healed the mutilations of Savitr, Bhaga and Pūṣan. After that everything became normal again and the gods decided in future to assign all offerings to Śiva as his part.⁴² Kṛṣṇa concludes his explanation by saying that when Śiva is quiet the world is normal and when he is not pleased the world is in turmoil,⁴³ and that it was not Aśvatthāman who killed the Pāñcālas, but Śiva.⁴⁴

On closer consideration, Aśvatthāman's intrusion into the camp and the destruction of the Pāñcālas carried out by him thus bears a close resemblance to the Dakṣa myth in which Śiva as an outsider enters upon his father-in-law's sacrifice, claiming a share of it.⁴⁵

At first the Pāñcāla camp is protected by Viṣṇu (= Kṛṣṇa), who prevents Aśvatthāman from entering. But in the end Viṣṇu is overruled by Śiva. In the night of the last day of the battle Kṛṣṇa's "protection" of the Pāñḍava party is no longer sufficient to keep Śiva at bay. As he explains himself, Śiva no longer feels constrained by his regard for Kṛṣṇa and takes possession of Aśvatthāman to destroy the Pāñcālas, including the Pāñḍavas' five sons by Draupadī. Kṛṣṇa, for his part, leads the Pāñḍavas and Sātyaki away from the camp where the Pāñcālas are left to fend for themselves. Apparently, at this point the alliance with the Pāñcālas, which was established and solemnized before the great battle with the marriage of the five Pāñḍavas to Draupadī, is dissolved. As already indicated (cf. above, p. 9), this is more than just an incident but is also met with in what follows, where we see former allies operating on their own, the Yādavas in the Mausalaparvan and the Pāñḍavas in the Āśvamedhikaparvan.

⁴² See 10.18.23: *tataḥ sarvam idaṃ svasthaṃ babhūva punar eva ha | sarvāṇi ca havīṃṣy asya devā bhāgam akalpayan ||*.

⁴³ See 10.18.24: *tasmin kruddhe bhavat sarvam asvasthaṃ bhavanaṃ vibho | prasanne ca punaḥ svasthaṃ sa prasanno 'sya vīryavān ||*.

⁴⁴ See 10.18.26bc: *na hi tad drauṇinā kṛtam | mahādevaprasādaḥ sa*.

⁴⁵ For the Dakṣa myth, see, e.g., K. Klostermaier, *The Original Dakṣa Saga*. In: A. Sharma (ed.), *Essays on the Mahābhārata*. Leiden 1991, p. 110-129. Note in this connection also the story related by Kṛṣṇa in the preceding *adhyāya*, which depicts an angry Śiva retiring from the world after he has been ignored in his capacity of creator. In *adhyāya* 17 Kṛṣṇa relates how Brahmā once asked Śiva to create people. Upon being asked this Śiva retired into the (primeval) waters and practised *tapas*. Brahmā, however, got tired of waiting and produced another creator who, however, was prepared to create only if there was no one born before him. Brahmā told him that Śiva practising *tapas* in the waters was just a pillar.

The motive behind Aśvatthāman's attack is revenge for the treacherous way in which his father was murdered. Droṇa was killed by Dhṛṣṭadyumna after he had cast down his weapons⁴⁶ when he had been tricked into believing that his son Aśvatthāman had died.⁴⁷ In a way the massacre in the Sauptikaparvan is about punishing the sinful or, looking at it from the other side, about the expiation of sin. What is particularly striking is the passive way in which the "culprit" Dhṛṣṭadyumna and the other Pāñcālas undergo their punishment. This passivity is implied in the very time of the attack, namely the night. The victims are caught while sleeping on their beds, unable to offer any resistance (see above, n. 33). This same element of passivity, of offering oneself without resistance, will return in what follows, but in different guises. As I will try to show, this element can also be observed, but again in a different form, in the first part of the Mahābhārata.

After the massacre Aśvatthāman retires to Vyāsa's *āśrama* on the bank of a river. There he is found by the Pāṇḍavas and Kṛṣṇa, who are sent after him by Draupadī to take revenge for the killing of their children. As we have seen, Aśvatthāman tries to drive away the Pāṇḍavas with a bunch of grass (*iṣīkā*; see above, p. 12). The use of grass as a weapon will also be met with in the Mausalaparvan (see below). However, it is also found in sacrifice, in which the two *adhvaryus*, the three singers, the *brahman* and the patron (seven altogether), while moving over to the *āstāva*, wave or throw bunches of grass. In this way, according to the accompanying *mantra*, the opponents are chased away.⁴⁸ It would seem that Aśvatthāman, after he has intruded upon the Pāñcālas' re-

Satisfied with the answer, the creator started to create people. However, the people were tormented by hunger and wanted to eat their own creator, Prajāpati. The latter ran for protection to Brahmā, asking him to arrange for food for the people, which Brahmā did. Finally, after some time Śiva emerged from the waters and saw that during his absence creation had started. He became angry. Brahmā tried to pacify him. Śiva asked himself what further business he had here on earth and retired to the mountain Muñjavat.

⁴⁶ See 7.165.33a-d: *evam uktas tato droṇo bhīmenotsṛjya tad dhanuḥ | sarvāṅy astrāṇi dharmātmā hātukāmo bhyabhāṣata |*. See also 35 where it is said that Droṇa practised *yoga*, abstaining from killing: *utsṛjya ca raṇe śāstram rathopasthe niveśya ca | abhayaṃ sarvabhūtānāṃ pradadau yogayuktavān ||*.

⁴⁷ See 7.165.32a: *sa cādya patitaḥ śete*.

⁴⁸ See W. Caland – V. Henry, *L'Agniṣṭoma*. Description complète de la forme normale du sacrifice de soma dans la culte védique. Tome premier. Paris 1906, § 134c; W. Caland (tr.), *Pañcaviṃśa-brāhmaṇa*. The Brāhmaṇa of Twenty Five Chapters. Calcutta 1931, p. 5 (1.3.3).

treat and taken their lives, is himself approached by people who claim his life.⁴⁹ Or, to use a term derived from the world of sacrifice, *Aśvatthāman*, the guest at the first sacrifice claiming a share of it from the host, has become host himself, and is pestered by guests claiming a share of his sacrifice. As we will see, in this short sequence of two “sacrifices” we have in a nutshell the very situation which the authors of the *Mahābhārata* tried to deal with.

THE MAUSALAPARVAN

The scene of the action of the *Mausalaparvan* (16)⁵⁰ opens with the three seers *Viśvāmitra*, *Kaṇva* and *Nārada* arriving in *Dvārakā* in the thirty-sixth year after the great battle. This threesome is confronted by a group of youths who show them *Kṛṣṇa*’s son *Sāmba* dressed up as a woman, making them believe that he is *Babhru*’s wife. The boys ask the seers what kind of child “she” will bring forth. Offended, they answer that she will produce a metal cudgel (*musala*) with which the three clans of the *Yādava* tribe, the *Vṛṣṇis*, *Andhakas* and *Bhojas*,⁵¹ will kill each other (2.9). *Balarāma* and *Kṛṣṇa* will escape from the massacre only to die somewhat later in other ways.⁵² When *Kṛṣṇa* is informed of the seers’ prophesy he acknowledges that this is the way things will go and refuses to interfere (2.12-13).

The next morning *Sāmba* indeed brings forth a cudgel, which King *Āhuka* orders pulverized and thrown into the ocean. At the same time *Āhuka* announces a complete ban on the consumption of alcohol in *Dvārakā*, probably in an attempt to reduce the risk of drunken fights. Nevertheless, *Kāla*, or “Death”, begins to haunt the town, and terrible portents occur. Its inhabitants, who have lost their fear of sin, also

⁴⁹ Note that after *Aśvatthāman*, *Kṛpa* and *Kṛtavarman* we have another threesome here, consisting of *Aśvatthāman* with *Vyāsa* and *Nārada*. For other such groups of three operating at a sacrifice, see below, p. 36ff.

⁵⁰ As far as I know there is no separate investigation available dedicated to the *Mausalaparvan*. See, however, H. Jacobi, *Die Jaina Legende von dem Untergange Dvāravatī’s und von dem Tode Kṛṣṇa’s*. *ZDMG* 42 (1888) 493-529, J. Scheuer, op. cit. (n. 25), p. 71-72, and A. Bigger, *Balarāma im Mahābhārata*. Wiesbaden 1998, p. 54-58.

⁵¹ For this enumeration of the *Yādava* tribes, see 16.2.1: *katham vinaṣṭā bhagavann andhakā vṛṣṇibhiḥ saha | paśyato vāsudevasya bhojās caiva mahārathāḥ ||*.

⁵² See 16.2.10: *samudraṃ yāsyati śrīmāṃs tyaktvā dehaṃ halāyudhaḥ | jarā kṛṣṇaṃ mahātmānaṃ śayānaṃ bhuvī bhetsyati ||*.

misbehave towards the brahmins. Kṛṣṇa realizes that the time of the fulfilment of Gāndhārī's curse has arrived (3.19). At the end of the Strīparvan (11.25.36-42) Gāndhārī, grieved by the loss of her sons, had cursed Kṛṣṇa, foretelling that all his clansmen would kill each other and that he himself would be killed in some abject way as well. Furthermore, all the women of his clan would suffer the same fate (widowhood) as the Bharata wives. Kṛṣṇa, "because he desires to make that (i.e., Gāndhārī's curse) come true" (*cikīrṣan satyam eva tat*, 16.3.21b), orders the people of Dvārakā to organize a *tīrthayātrā*.

In the meantime (4.1-5), strange things continue to happen in Dvārakā. The goddess Kālī (Durgā) roams the town, abducting women. Ornaments and weapons disappear. Kṛṣṇa loses control of his weapons. Before the Vṛṣṇis' very eyes his discus Vajranābha (*alias* Sudarśana), which he had earlier received from Agni, rises into the sky, and while the charioteer Dārūka looks on the horses drag Kṛṣṇa's chariot along the sky, coursing above the ocean. Finally, Kṛṣṇa's and Balarāma's banners are stolen by Apsarases who keep them raised in the sky day and night, telling the Vṛṣṇis and their clansmen to start on their *tīrthayātrā*.

The Vṛṣṇis, Andhakas and Bhojas leave town, taking with them great quantities of food and drink (4.6-8). They settle down at Prabhāsa where the river Sarasvatī flows into the ocean. There they start a *grande bouffe*.⁵³ In their drunkenness the participants give the food meant for brahmins to the monkeys, and are said to become extremely short-tempered (*tigmatejasām* 4.14d). Indeed it does not take long for a quarrel to start. It begins with Sātyaki "in the middle of the *pariṣad*" (4.16) accusing Kṛtavarman, who fought on the side of the Kauravas, of having killed people while they were sleeping (as told in the Sauptika-parvan). Sātyaki is supported in his accusations by Pradyumna, Kṛṣṇa's son with Rukmiṇī. Kṛtavarman, in his turn, accuses Sātyaki (*alias* Yuyudhāna) of having killed Bhūriśravas while the latter was undertaking a *prāya*, or fast.⁵⁴ Next, Sātyaki reminds Kṛṣṇa, who is already infuriated by Kṛtavarman's reference to the killing of Bhūriśravas in regard to which his advice was ignored, of the incident con-

⁵³ See 16.4.9: *tataḥ prabhāse nyavasan yathoddeśam yathāgṛham | prabhūtabhakṣya-peyās te sadārā yādavās tadā ||*, 4.14: *tatas tūryaśatākīrnam naṭanartakasamkulam | prāvartata mahāpānam prabhāse tigmatejasām ||*, and 4.31a: *te tu pānamadāviṣṭāh*.

⁵⁴ See 16.4.20. Sātyaki's outrage is described in Droṇaparvan (7), *adhyāya* 118.

nected with Satyabhāmā's father's Syamantaka jewel, which apparently involves yet another of Kṛtavarman's misdeeds.⁵⁵ Upon hearing this Satyabhāmā climbs crying onto Kṛṣṇa's lap. In front of Kṛṣṇa Sātyaki promises to kill Kṛtavarman, and proceeds to do so almost immediately. In vain Kṛṣṇa tries to prevent Sātyaki from killing others as well. At the same time he realizes that it is futile to try to prevent the coming massacre, because for the Yādavas the time has come (*jānan kālasya paryayam*, 4.30d = 42d). His son Pradyumna actually tries to do so, but is killed together with Sātyaki before Kṛṣṇa's very eyes.

At this point Kṛṣṇa is no longer able to stand aside. He grabs a handful of *eraka* grass that immediately turns into a cudgel with which he kills everyone who stands in front of him.⁵⁶ The miracle of the transformation of grass into a club repeats itself a thousand times. Every warrior taking hold of a bunch of *eraka* grass sees it turn into a club (4.36-39). In the ensuing club fight the members of the three clans beat each other to death, sons killing fathers and fathers killing sons. At a certain point Kṛṣṇa, holding back his own club for a moment (*musalaṃ sama-vaṣṭabhya tasthau*, 4.42cd) and looking on at the massacre, becomes even more enraged and kills off all of his people (*sa niḥśeṣaṃ tadā cakre*, 4.44c). In this gruesome work he is stopped by the two other persons besides himself who have survived the massacre, Babhru and Dāruka. They tell him that now that everything has been destroyed by him (*bhagavan saṃhṛtaṃ sarvaṃ tvayā bhūyistam acyuta*, 4.46ab), he should look for his brother Balarāma, who has not participated in the *tīrthayātrā*.

Having found his brother, Kṛṣṇa sends Dāruka off to inform Yudhiṣṭhira of the death of the Yādavas and to ask Arjuna to join him quickly. He asks Babhru to take care of the widowed wives of the Yādavas in Dvārakā and protect them against the Dasyus. However, Babhru is killed by a hunter with a cudgel, as a result of which Kṛṣṇa has to take care of the women himself. He takes leave of Balarāma and, having arrived at Dvārakā, hands over the women to his father Vasudeva, asking him to look after them until Arjuna arrives to take over. Kṛṣṇa himself cannot bear to see the town without his kinsmen and wants to

⁵⁵ See 16.4.22. As far as I have been able to determine, the incident of the Syamantaka jewel is not mentioned elsewhere in the Mahābhārata.

⁵⁶ See 16.4.34-35: *hataṃ dṛṣtvā tu śaineyam putraṃ ca yadunandanah | erakāṅgāṃ tadā muṣṭim kopāḥ jagrāha keśavaḥ | 34 | tad abhūn musalaṃ ghoram vajrakalpam ayomayam | jaghāna tena kṛṣṇas tān ye 'sya pramukhato bhavan | 35 |*.

join his elder brother in the woods again. He comforts the women, telling them that Arjuna will come soon (5.1-11).

After having returned to Balarāma, Kṛṣṇa sees that his brother, who had been practising *yoga* (*yogayuktasya*), has died, a snake coming out of his mouth (5.12). This snake disappears into the sea, where it is welcomed by the other snakes. Kṛṣṇa realizes that his time has come as well and lies down on the ground (*bhūmau tataḥ samviveśa*, 5.16d), checking his senses (*cakārendriyasaṁnirodham*, 5.18d). A hunter (with the female name Jarā), seeing Kṛṣṇa in his *yoga* sleep, mistakes him for a deer and kills him with an arrow that pierces his heel.⁵⁷ Kṛṣṇa ascends to heaven where he is welcomed by the other gods for having returned to his proper place (*sthānaṁ ... svam*, 5.23d).

Next (*adhyāya* 6) the scene shifts to the capital of the Pāṇḍavas, to Dārūka informing them of the killing of the Vṛṣṇis in the club fight. Arjuna immediately departs for Dvārakā, where he is welcomed by Kṛṣṇa's father Vasudeva (beginning of *adhyāya* 7). Vasudeva laments the fate of his sons, brothers and grandsons. However, he is not prepared to lay the blame on anyone in particular because the massacre was the outcome of a curse (*śāpo hy evātra kāraṇam*, 7.8d). His son Kṛṣṇa did not interfere because he realized that the end of the clan was near (7.13). Kṛṣṇa had taken leave of him saying that his counterpart⁵⁸ Arjuna would come soon. He had also said that Arjuna would perform the last rites for Vasudeva because by that time he himself and Balarāma would already have died. Furthermore, Kṛṣṇa predicted that upon Arjuna's arrival the town would be washed away by the sea.⁵⁹

Arjuna finds life unbearable without Kṛṣṇa (8.2). At the same time he realizes that Vasudeva is about to die. Therefore he promises to accompany the women and children of Dvārakā to Indraprastha, the old Pāṇḍava town in the Khāṇḍava forest, thereby rescuing them from the great deluge (8.5). The next day Vasudeva dies⁶⁰ and Arjuna performs

⁵⁷ See 16.5.19-20: *sa samniruddhendriyavānmanās tu śiśye mahāyogam upetya kṛṣṇaḥ | jarātha taṁ deśam upājagāma lubdhas tadānīm mṛgalipsur ugraḥ | 19 | sa keśavam yogayuktaṁ śayānaṁ mṛgāśaṅkī lubdhakaḥ sāyakena | jarāvidhyat pādatala tvarāvāms taṁ cābhūtas taj jighṛkṣur jagāma | 20 |*

⁵⁸ See 16.7.15ab: *yo 'haṁ tam arjunaṁ viddhi yo 'rjunaḥ so 'ham eva tu |*

⁵⁹ See 16.7.17: *imāṁ ca nagarīm sadyaḥ pratiyāte dhanamjaye | prākārātālako-petām samudraḥ plāvayisyati ||*

⁶⁰ See 16.8.15: *śvobhūte 'tha tataḥ saurir vasudevaḥ pratāpavān | yuktvātmānaṁ mahātejā jagāma gatim uttamām ||*

the last rites for him (8.19-25). Next, Arjuna performs the last rites for all those killed in the massacre (8.28-30) and for Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa (8.31-32). On the seventh day (after the massacre, after Arjuna's arrival or after the funeral, it is unclear which [8.320]) he leads the women and children out of the town, upon which, as predicted, the town is completely inundated (8.40).

Arjuna and the women march along rivers and across mountains. In Pañcanada (Pañjāb) they set up camp in a rich and prosperous region (8.43). There they are spotted by Dasyus who, seeing that they are dealing with widows, old men and children who are accompanied by only one warrior, attack them (8.44). At that moment Arjuna discovers that he can no longer rely on his weapons. He is not able to bend his bow (8.52), no longer "remembers" his missiles, which previously came forth at mere thought (53), loses the strength in his arms (54), and his arrows lose their speed and power (59). Arjuna is forced to look on while the women are robbed and kidnapped. Finally, and with significantly fewer women than he had departed with from Dvārakā, he arrives in ("descended into"; *avātarat*, 8.65d) Kurukṣetra. There he settles the group at three different places: the Bhoja women, or what is left of them, in Mārtikāvata with Hārdikya's (Kṛtavarma's) son as their king (8.67), another group of women, old people and children in Indraprastha with Vajra as their king (68 and 70), and a third group along the Sarasvatī river with Sātyaki's son as king (69). In Indraprastha Vajra cannot prevent some prominent women, including Rukmiṇī, from entering the fire in order to end their lives (8.71). Other women become wandering ascetics (*pravavrajuh*, 8.70d).⁶¹

In a nearby *āśrama* Arjuna meets Vyāsa (9.1). Arjuna informs him about what has happened and asks him what to do. The seer tells him not to grieve and to resign himself to what has happened. In fact, Kṛṣṇa could have prevented the disaster but chose not to do so because it had all been ordained.⁶² Having performed his task of setting free the world, Kṛṣṇa has now returned to heaven (9.29). Vyāsa tells Arjuna that for him too the time to depart from this world has arrived. Thereupon

⁶¹ While three different groups of people are distinguished here, in the Mahā-prasthānikaparvan of these three only the one of Vajra in Indraprastha is mentioned (17.1.8-9); see below, p. 45.

⁶² See 16.9.26: *bhavitavyaṃ tathā tad dhi diṣṭam etan mahātmanām | upekṣitaṃ ca kṛṣṇena śaktenāpi vyapohitam ||*.

Vyāsa gives a lecture on Kāla, or “Time” (9.32-36).⁶³ Everything here on earth is subject to Time. What is strong becomes weak, the lord becomes lorded over. There is a time of growth and a time of disintegration. Vyāsa comforts Arjuna, telling him that in due time he will get back his power and his weapons. With Arjuna going and informing Yudhiṣṭhira of all that has happened, the Mausalarparvan ends (9.38).

In the Mausalarparvan the alliance between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna (the Pāṇḍavas) comes to an end with the death of the former. Kṛṣṇa and the Pāṇḍavas met for the first time during Draupadī’s *svayamvara*, described in the Ādiparvan (1.178.8-10). Subsequently an alliance was formed between them with Arjuna marrying Kṛṣṇa’s sister Subhadrā (1.211-214). However, this alliance was solemnized only at the end of the Ādiparvan after Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna had successfully worked together to kill all living beings in the Khāṇḍava forest. In fact, there appears to be a close relationship between the episode of the burning of the Khāṇḍava forest and the Mausalarparvan, and of these two with the Sautikaparvan. In order to clarify this, I shall make a brief excursion into the *khāṇḍavadāha* episode.

THE BURNING OF THE KHĀṆḌAVA FOREST (1.214-225)⁶⁴

Verses prior to the episode of interest relate that Arjuna has kidnapped Subhadrā, gained Subhadrā’s clansmen’s consent to marry her and managed to overcome his senior wife Draupadī’s jealousy. The Vṛṣṇis arrive at the Pāṇḍava capital with wedding presents and Kṛṣṇa, as the king’s wife’s brother, chooses to stay behind with his sister. In the meantime, Subhadrā gives birth to Abhimanyu and Draupadī to the five Draupadeyas (1.211-213).

The Pāṇḍavas are said to have been victorious over many kings. However, when the hot season arrives, Arjuna suggests to Kṛṣṇa that they go and look for coolness in the water of the Yamunā.⁶⁵ Accompanied by

⁶³ For an investigation of such passages on Kāla, see Y. Vassilkov, *Kālavāda* (the Doctrine of Cyclical Time) in the Mahābhārata and the Concept of Heroic Didactics. In: Brockington – Schreiner (ed.), op. cit. (n. 8), p. 17-33.

⁶⁴ For an earlier investigation of this episode, see A. Hildebeitel, The Burning of the Forest Myth. In: B.L. Smith (ed.), *Hinduism. New Essays in the History of Religions*. Leiden 1982, p. 208-224.

⁶⁵ See 1.214.14: *tataḥ katipayāhasya bībhatsuḥ kṛṣṇam abravīt | uṣṇāni kṛṣṇa vartante gacchāmo yamunām prati ||*. What follows is set more particularly at the end of the hot season, just before the rains start.

their wives, they depart for the river where a wild feast takes place in the water; the party is considerably enlivened by the consumption of alcohol.⁶⁶ While this goes on, Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna retire to a quiet place nearby (*samīpe*, 214.26c) where they entertain each other with stories of past heroic exploits and erotic adventures (214.28). There they are approached by a huge red-coloured person who introduces himself as a voracious brahmin demanding to be fed. Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna ask him what food he wants so that they can procure it for him. At this point the brahmin reveals himself to be Fire (Agni), who does not eat normal food (*nāham annam bubhukṣe vai*, 215.5a) but wants fuel. However, he is frustrated in his search for food because the rain-god Indra protects the Khāṇḍava forest with all its animals from being burned since his friend Takṣaka is living there. Fire asks Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna to help him in his attempt to devour the forest with all its inhabitants by keeping away the rain clouds and preventing the animals from escaping from it.⁶⁷

As promised, Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna will assist Fire in his destructive aims. However, Arjuna complains that he and his companion lack the appropriate weapons. Fire arranges that they receive weapons from Varuṇa. At this point in the epic Arjuna acquires his famous Gāṇḍīva bow, his two inexhaustible quivers and his chariot with the monkey banner, and Kṛṣṇa his discus (Sudarśana) and club (the Kaumodakī) (215.12-216.27).

Thereupon Fire starts to burn the forest, making a noise like that of thunderous monsoon clouds. Animals are prevented from escaping from the conflagration by Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna who drive around the forest on their chariots.⁶⁸ However, the high flames disturb the gods in heaven, who turn to Indra with the request to extinguish the fire with rain. At Indra's first attempt the rain evaporates before it reaches the flames

⁶⁶ 1.214.17-25. Verse 19 mentions, besides *bhakṣya* and *bhojya*, *peya*. Verse 22 describes Draupadī and Subhadrā giving away priceless clothes and ornaments while being *madotkaṭe*. In verse 23 the women drink *varāsava*.

⁶⁷ See 1.215.11: *yuvām hy udakadhārās tā bhūtāni ca samantataḥ | uttamāstravidau samyak sarvato vārayiṣyathaḥ ||*.

⁶⁸ See 1.217.2-3: *yatra yatra hi dṛśyante prāṇīnaḥ khāṇḍavālayāḥ | palāyantas tatra tatra tau vīrau paryadhāvatām | 2 | chidram hi na prapaśyanti rathayor āśuwikramāt | āviddhāv iva dṛśyete rathīnau tau rathottamau | 3 |*. See also 217.11: *tāṃs tathotpatataḥ pārthaḥ śaraiḥ samchidya khaṇḍaśaḥ | dīpyamāne tataḥ prāśyat prahasan kṛṣṇavartmani ||*.

and then the rain is stopped by Arjuna with a shower of arrows (217.14-218.2).

It so happens that at the time of the conflagration Takṣaka is not present in the forest. Takṣaka's son Aśvasena, who is present, manages to escape with the help of Indra. At the end of the event he appears to be one of the few "persons" who has survived the massacre. After this a terrible fight takes place between the gods and snakes, on the one hand, and Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, on the other, in which the latter two appear to be invincible (219.9). At this point Indra's opposition is revealed to be part of a ploy to test our two heroes' strength. Indra is pleased by what he has seen and starts to praise Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna.⁶⁹ Next, a voice from heaven informs Indra that his friend Takṣaka is elsewhere and has thus survived the massacre. Having heard the same voice reveal that Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna are Nārāyaṇa and Nara, Indra retires to heaven (219.15-19).

Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna continue to keep the fire burning (*dāvaṃ dāhayāṃ āsatuh*, 219.22cd) and in this way provide Fire with the greatest satisfaction.⁷⁰ At a certain point Arjuna is approached by Maya, the brother of the demon Namuci, who asks for protection, which, in accordance with the warrior code, Arjuna has to grant him (219.35-39). With Takṣaka, his son Aśvasena and the four *śārṅgaka* birds Maya is the seventh survivor of the fire.⁷¹ When the forest is finally completely burned down Indra descends from heaven and allows Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna a wish. Arjuna asks for all kinds of weapons (225.9ab). Indra promises that he will get these weapons as soon as Śiva is satisfied with him (225.10-12), thus anticipating Arjuna's fight with that god in the form of a *kirāta* hunter. Kṛṣṇa for his part asks for eternal friendship with Arjuna, which Indra can grant him immediately.⁷² In this way Fire, after having

⁶⁹ See 1.219.11: *śatakratuś ca saṃprekṣya vimukhān devatāgaṇān | babhūvāvasthitāḥ prītaḥ praśaṃsan kṛṣṇapāṇḍavau ||*.

⁷⁰ See 1.219.34: *tāṃ sa kṛṣṇārjunakṛtāṃ sudhāṃ prāpya hutāśanaḥ | babhūva muditas tṛptāḥ parāṃ nirvṛttim āgataḥ ||*.

⁷¹ See 1.219.40: *tasmīn vane dahyamāne ṣaḍ agnir na dadāha ca | aśvasenaṃ mayam cāpi caturāḥ śārṅgakān iti ||*. Note that this *śloka* does not mention Takṣaka who indeed did not literally escape from the forest fire. The story of the four *śārṅgaka* birds is related in 1.220.1-225.4. For the meaning of the number seven of the survivors, see above, n. 28. Actually, in this case there is an eighth survivor, namely Aśvasena's mother.

⁷² See 1.225.13: *vāsudevo 'pi jagrāha prītiṃ pāṛthena śāśvatīm | dadau ca tasmai devendras taṃ varam prītimāṃs tadā ||*.

burned the forest for six days,⁷³ has become satiated and – on the seventh day (?) – dismisses the two heroes who, together with Maya, return to the riverbank. Here the Ādiparvan ends.

In the *khāṇḍavadāha* episode the bond between Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, who met earlier at Draupadī's *svayamvara* and became connected through marriage, is solemnly confirmed. Furthermore, it is in this episode that the two heroes receive the weapons for which they are known in the epic. The bond between Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa comes to a definite end in the Mausalarparvan when Kṛṣṇa dies. In this same *parvan* the two heroes lose control over their weapons (see above, p. 17/20). In this respect the story of the Mahābhārata has come full circle in the Mausalarparvan. But there are more correspondences (and also some contrasts). For instance, while in the *khāṇḍavadāha* episode Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa are driving back the creatures trying to escape from the conflagration, in the Mausalarparvan's story Arjuna is, at least at first sight, leading the victims away from the place of destruction. In the *khāṇḍavadāha* episode, the massacre takes place along the Yamunā, and in the Mausalarparvan the Yādavas kill each other at Prabhāsa where the Sarasvatī flows into the ocean. In both cases the incidents take place during a *grande bouffe*. In both the *khāṇḍavadāha* episode and the Mausalarparvan we see groups of three men working closely together: Agni, Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, and Kṛṣṇa, Dārūka and Babhru, respectively. In the *khāṇḍavadāha* episode the six days of fire are followed by a seventh on which boons are granted; the inundation of Dvārakā in the Mausalarparvan takes place on the seventh day. Finally, it should be noted that whereas in the *khāṇḍavadāha* episode fire is responsible for the destruction, in the Mausalarparvan Dvārakā is washed over by the ocean.

In addition to this, both the *khāṇḍavadāha* episode and the Mausalarparvan's story have correspondences with that of the Sauptikaparvan. The correspondences between the three are presented in the following overview. It should be noted that I have placed the corresponding items together, disregarding their chronological position in the stories concerned. I will return to some of the points below.

⁷³ *ahāni pañca caikaṃ ca* (1.225.15c). There are variant readings speaking of 10, 20 and 21 days.

<i>khāṇḍavadāha</i> episode	Sauptikaparvan		Mausalaparvan	
occurrence of massacre that takes place somewhere near (<i>samīpe</i>) the Yamunā	Aśvatthāman's stay in Vyāsa's <i>āśrama</i> at the Ganges		occurrence of massacre that takes place at Prabhāsa where the Sarasvatī flows into the ocean ⁷⁴	
<i>grande bouffe</i>			<i>tīrthayātrā</i> involving a <i>grande bouffe</i>	
bond between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna	dissolution of alliance of the Pāṇḍavas and Yādavas with the Pāñcālas		dissolution of bond between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna with the death of Kṛṣṇa	
Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna's driving of animals back into the fire	Kṛṣṇa's leading of the Pāṇḍavas and Sātyaki away from the place of the coming massacre	Kṛpa and Kṛtavarma's preventing victims from escaping	Arjuna's leading of women, old men and children away from Dvārakā which is to be flooded by the ocean	
Indra's testing of Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna	Śiva's satisfaction with Aśvatthāman's effort			
Agni, Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna	Aśvatthāman, Kṛpa and Kṛtavarma		Kṛṣṇa, Dāruka and Babhru	Arjuna
destruction by fire	immolation in sacrificial fire (implied)		destruction by water	
	grass turned into fiery missile		grass turned into club	
acquisition of weapons			loss of power and of weapons	
seven survivors	seven survivors			
six days of fire followed by a seventh on which boons are granted			inundation on the seventh day	
	<i>āśrama</i> of Vyāsa		<i>āśrama</i> of Vyāsa	

⁷⁴ It is not unlikely that the course which Arjuna takes next together with the women and children of the Yādavas and which ends in Kurukṣetra follows the Sarasvatī river.

As we have seen, the killing of the Pāñcālas in the Sauptikaparvan's narrative is compared to a sacrifice. In this respect the information given in the Mausalarparvan is even more explicit: the massacre takes place during a *tīrthayātrā*. The Mahābhārata refers to quite a number of *tīrthayātrās*, such as the one undertaken by Baladeva in 9.34-53.⁷⁵ Apart from that, several "journeys" are described in the epic which, though not explicitly identified as such, resemble *tīrthayātrās* or else are based on such (e.g., Arjuna's journey around India described in 1.206-213).⁷⁶ However, in order to fully understand what happens in the Mausalarparvan we have to go back to the Vedic (*yāt*)*sattra* or *vrātyastoma*, or rather, to the archaic world of the yearly raid underlying these sacrifices.⁷⁷

YĀTSATTRA AND TĪRTHAYĀTRĀ

The *yātsattra* is, as the name suggests, a variant of the *sattra* type of sacrifice. One of these *yātsattras*, the so-called *sarasvatīsattra*, entails a journey along the river Sarasvatī. The journey, which starts where the river disappears into the earth (Vinaśana), takes one upstream to the source at Plakṣa Prāsraṇa, that is, the spot where the Milky Way, the gateway to heaven, touches the earth, the ultimate goal of the *sarasvatīsattra* being heaven. From there one continues to the river Yamunā, where the "pilgrimage" is concluded by a final bath (*avabhytha*) in the river. After this the participants disappear from sight.⁷⁸ Another exam-

⁷⁵ For a list of the *tīrthayātrās* referred to in the Mahābhārata, see Y. Vassilkov, Indian Practice of Pilgrimage and the Growth of the *Mahābhārata* in the Light of New Epigraphical Sources. In: M. Brockington (ed.), *Stages and Transitions: Temporal and Historical Frameworks in Epic and Purāṇic Literature*. Proceedings of the Second Dubrovnik International Conference on the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas August 1999. Zagreb 2002, p. 133-156, esp. p. 137, and Th. Oberlies, Arjuna's Himmelreise und die Tīrthayātrā der Pāñdavas. Zur Struktur des Tīrthayātrāparvan des Mahābhārata. *AcOr* 56 (1995) 106-124.

⁷⁶ For the distinction between "real" *tīrthayātrās* and *tīrthayātrās* describing *digvijayas* or erotic quests, see A. Bigger, Wege und Umwege zum Himmel: die Pilgerfahrten im Mahābhārata. *JAs* 289 (2001) 160-161 and Vassilkov, op. cit., p. 136.

⁷⁷ As will become clear from what follows, for the characterization of the archaic world underlying the *śrauta* sacrifices I heavily rely on the relevant publications by Jan C. Heesterman, one of the few scholars who has investigated this topic in a detailed and consistent way. As will be seen, this scholar's interpretations fit the Mahābhārata neatly. Strictly speaking, this might only mean that I have found what I have been looking for. However, it might also suggest that Heesterman's interpretation of archaic Indian society is highly relevant.

⁷⁸ See M. Witzel, Sur le chemin du ciel. *BÉI* 2 (1984) 213-279 and Sh. Einoo, Is the *Sarasvatīsattra* the Vedic Pilgrimage? In: K. Kimura et al. (ed.), *Śūnyatā and*

ple is the *dr̥ṣadvatīsattra*. In this *sattra* the sacrificer must tend the cattle of his *guru* for one whole year. After having done this, he lights a fire at the place where the River Dr̥ṣadvatī joins (or rather disappears into) the Sarasvatī, a fire the *sattrin* tends for another year. Next he moves upriver on the right bank of the Dr̥ṣadvatī. The final destination is the Yamunā, in which the sacrificer takes the *avabhṛtha*.⁷⁹ The Vedic *yātsattra* seems to have survived in the *tīrthayātrā*, which is a journey along a number of *tīrthas* situated on the banks of the Sarasvatī. An example from the Mahābhārata is Baladeva's *tīrthayātrā*.⁸⁰

As mentioned above, the *yātsattra* is a variant of the "ordinary" *sattra*. The participants of the *sattra*, the *sattrins*, are related to the *vrātyas* of the *vrātyastomas*, on the one hand, and to the *dīkṣitas*, on the other. At the base of the classical *sattra*, *yātsattra* and *vrātyastoma* lies an older ritual.⁸¹ According to Heesterman, this older ritual involves a raiding expedition carried out by a band of aggressive warriors who, due to poverty, have combined forces around a leader, a *sthapati* or *grhapati*. Forming a band of true desperados, these warriors are prepared to kill or to be killed. The *vrātyastomas* seem to be reflexes of the feasts which took place at the beginning and end of such an expedition, on which occasion the *vrātyas* swore allegiance to each other and their leader.⁸² Another purpose of these sacrifices was to seek purification for the crimes committed during the raid.⁸³ Both functions, establishing the *vrātya* alliance and producing purification, involve the idea of the *ātma-dakṣiṇā*, that is, the willingness on the part of the sacrificer to give away everything he had acquired during the raid including, if necessary, his own life.⁸⁴ Thus, purification is established by giving away the spoils

Reality. Volume in memory of Professor Ejima Yasunori (CD-ROM Book). Tokyo 2000, p. 607-622.

⁷⁹ See J.C. Heesterman, Self-sacrifice in Vedic Ritual. In: S. Shaked – D. Shulman – G.G. Stroumsa (ed.), *Gilgul*. Essays on Transformation, Revolution and Permanence in the History of Religions Dedicated to R.J. Zwi Werblowsky. Leiden 1997, p. 93.

⁸⁰ See Bigger, op. cit. (n. 76).

⁸¹ See J.C. Heesterman, *Vrātya* and Sacrifice. *IJ* 6 (1962-1963) 1-37 and H. Falk, op. cit. (n. 1), p. 13-72.

⁸² See Heesterman, op. cit. (n. 81), p. 4-7.

⁸³ See Heesterman, op. cit. (n. 81), e.g., p. 11.

⁸⁴ See Heesterman, op. cit. (n. 79), p. 98. In fact, this idea of the sacrificer's being prepared to go to the limit applies to the *dakṣiṇā* in general. With it the sacrificer is considered to give away himself. See J.C. Heesterman, Reflections on the Significance of the *dakṣiṇā*. *IJ* 3 (1959) 241-246, esp. p. 243 (translation of

together with the special *vrātya* apparel to the *brahmabandhu*, the precursor of the Brahmin recipient of classical ritual.⁸⁵ By giving away all they have the *vrātyas* are said to “wipe off (their sin) on him to whom they give it”.⁸⁶ This assumes that the supposed raid was successful. But more often than not it was not successful. However, the desperate determination shown by the *vrātya* during the raid itself apparently sufficed as well. A case in point is Sthūra, a warrior who was killed on the place of the sacrifice (that is, in the course of the *sattra*) and who to the surprise of one of his *sattrins*, Dhruvagopa, was seen to enter heaven which, as indicated, was the goal of the whole undertaking. His new status seems to have had a positive effect on his followers.⁸⁷

As indicated, one of the functions underlying the *vrātyastoma* was to establish the *vrātya* alliance. This was apparently effected by the distribution of gifts (*dakṣiṇās*). It is interesting to note that in this respect there is no real distinction between the feast taking place at the beginning of the raid and the one taking place on the return of the *vrātyas*.⁸⁸ The feast at the end of the raid seems to be the same as the one celebrated at the beginning of the next raid. Furthermore, we seem to be dealing with yearly raiding expeditions. The costs of the alliances were high. The feasts involved the complete exhaustion of the patron who, as we have seen, is expected to give away everything he has (*ātmadakṣiṇā*). In this respect the following raiding expedition was simply a necessity if one wanted to be counted among the great again.

Apart from the necessity to pile raid upon raid the *vrātyas* seem to have been faced by the need to emulate, if not outdo, their more successful brethren. One of the aims of the *yātsattra* was to reach heaven.⁸⁹ The

Āpastambaśrautasūtra 13.6.4-6): “To the hotṛ he gives his voice, to the Brahman his mind (*manas*), to the adhvaryu his breath (*prāṇa*), to the udgātṛ his eye, to the hotrakas his hearing, to the camasādhvaryus his limbs, to the prasarpakas the hairs on his body and to the sadasya his trunk; for these parts of himself the dakṣiṇās are substituted”.

⁸⁵ See Heesterman, op. cit. (n. 81), p. 11 and 32-33.

⁸⁶ See J.C. Heesterman, p. 11, translating Pañcaviṃśabrahmaṇa 17.1.16.

⁸⁷ J.C. Heesterman, Die Sādhyas und der Kult des Feuers. *SIII* 20 (1996) 117-143, esp. p. 136-137, and op. cit. (n. 79), p. 100. The death of a *sattrin* is found included among the list of conditions on which a *sattra* may end; see H. Krick, *Das Ritual der Feuergründung*. Wien 1982, p. 497-498. For a slightly different enumeration, see Einoo, op. cit. (n. 78), p. 615.

⁸⁸ See Heesterman, op. cit. (n. 81), p. 6-7.

⁸⁹ See Heesterman, op. cit. (n. 81), p. 6.

ritual texts also speak of *daiva vrātyas* who were left behind when the gods (*devas*) went to heaven. However, eventually, after they had been supplied with the necessary tools, the *daiva vrātyas* managed to join the gods in heaven. According to Heesterman “[*d*]eva and *daivya vrātya* seem to be the two poles of the heaven-going process: *deva* stands for the successful completion, *daivya* for the aspiring to heaven.”⁹⁰ The aim of the “sacrifice” was achieved through giving away oneself, that is, giving away all one’s possessions or even, literally, dying (see the case of Sthūra referred to above, p. 28). Apparently the *vrātyas* were engaged in a fierce competition about who was the greatest magnate.

As pointed out above, the sacrificial feasts bracketing the yearly raids carried out by *vrātyas* are supposed to be the predecessors of the Śrauta ritual.⁹¹ In the ritual handbooks the *yātsattra*, the predecessor of the *tīrthayātrā*, has been normalized as a six-day rite,⁹² while the “ordinary” *sattra* has been standardized as a twelve-day Soma sacrifice. The term of six days is indeed met with in the Mausalaparvan’s narrative as well as the *khāṇḍavadāha* episode. Unfortunately, in the Mausalaparvan it is unclear which part of the story of the *tīrthayātrā* is included in the six days: from the mutual killing of the Yādavas up to the inundation of Dvārakā or from Arjuna’s arrival in that town and its inundation. In either case, the period of six days is followed by the inundation of Dvārakā on the seventh.⁹³ In the *khāṇḍavadāha* episode the six days specifically refer to the massacre carried out by Agni, Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna.

The *tīrthayātrā* of the Vṛṣṇis in the Mausalaparvan’s narrative indeed covers at least part of the course of the *sarasvatīsattra*, in particular if we include Arjuna’s expedition with the widows and children to Kurukṣetra that takes place after the mutual killing and inundation of Dvārakā. Whereas the Vedic journey starts at Vinaśana, that is, where the Sarasvatī disappears into the earth, the Vṛṣṇis start at Prabhāsa, that is, where the Sarasvatī⁹⁴ dissolves into the sea. From Prabhāsa it

⁹⁰ Heesterman, op. cit. (n. 81), p. 18.

⁹¹ See Heesterman, op. cit. (n. 81), p. 36.

⁹² See Heesterman, op. cit. (n. 81), p. 35.

⁹³ On the possible identification of the inundation of Dvārakā with the *avabhṛtha*, see below, p. 31f.

⁹⁴ Note, however, that the Sarasvatī disappearing into the sea at Prabhāsa is not the same as the Sarasvatī flowing through Kurukṣetra; see S.M. Bhardwaj, *Hindu Places of Pilgrimage in India. A Study in Cultural Geography*. Berkeley 1973, p. 47, esp. n. 13.

continues to Dvārakā and from there to Pañcanada, that is, the Pañjāb, where the five main rivers, including the Sarasvatī, flow.⁹⁵ Through Kurukṣetra they arrive in the neighbourhood of Indraprastha where the surviving Vṛṣṇis are finally settled. One of the clans is actually settled along the river Sarasvatī (16.8.69). In the *sarasvatīsattra* this is followed by the *avabhṛtha* in the river Yamunā. In the Mausalaparvan Arjuna's expedition ends before this in Kurukṣetra. However, as I will suggest below (p. 31f.), it is not unlikely that the *avabhṛtha* of the *sarasvatīsattra* is represented by the inundation of Dvārakā.

At the end of the *yātsattra* the participants disappear from the earth and ascend to heaven (or disappear from sight; see above, p. 26). Likewise, in the Mausalaparvan's narrative Kṛṣṇa decides to undertake the *tīrthayātrā* with the express purpose of making Gāndhārī's wish that the wives of the Yādavas become widows come true. The men indeed all die. They actually kill themselves after they start quarrelling. Their leader, Kṛṣṇa, too seems to die of his own accord: Kṛṣṇa is shot by a hunter without offering any resistance, lying in a deep *yoga* sleep. There is, in fact, some evidence which seems to link these "*ātmadakṣiṇās*" with the idea of purification or of atonement for sins, in this case, the sins committed by the Yādavas in the great battle. In the first place, there is Gāndhārī's curse, which explicitly presents the death of the Yādavas as punishment for having killed her sons. Secondly, as we have seen, the different clans start to quarrel by accusing one another of foul play during that same battle. We next see them killing each other. Thirdly, there is the club, or *musala*, which gave the *parvan* its name. It is an instrument that was used specifically for punishing criminals. A criminal was to present himself before the judge with a *musala*, that is, the instrument of his own coming execution.⁹⁶ In fact, the Yādavas, in the person of Sāmba, give birth to a club as punishment for having fooled some *ṛṣis*, and it is with clubs produced from grass that they kill each other.

How does the flight of Kṛṣṇa's weapons, which preceded the *tīrthayātrā* in the Mausalaparvan story, fit into all this? Actually, it should be noted that Kṛṣṇa is not the only one to lose his weapons. The same appears to have happened to Arjuna in the Mausalaparvan, for after he

⁹⁵ For a map showing the area of the northern part of the route, see Witzel, *op. cit.* (n. 78), p. 270.

⁹⁶ See J. Fezas, *Le voleur, le roi et la massue: expiation et châtement dans les textes normatifs sanskrits*. *BEI* 7-8 (1989-1990) 47-95.

has taken over from Kṛṣṇa he discovers that he can no longer avail himself of his weapons. In fact, we will see something similar in the final books when the Pāṇḍavas, before going up to heaven, dispose of their weapons (see below, p. 35). As they stand, these incidents seem to provide an explanation for the outcome of the subsequent event: the persons concerned die (Pāṇḍavas, Yādavas) or fail to defend themselves (Arjuna). At the same time, however, we miss the motive behind the disappearance or the removal of the weapons. It is tempting to link these incidents with the phase of the *vrātyastoma* in which the patron gives away the special *vrātya* apparel (see above, p. 27f.). What comes foremost to mind is that this refers to the weapons the *vrātya* carried during the raid which is underlying the sacrificial ritual. In this connection it should be noted that the implements of the *śrauta* ritual are often referred to as weapons (*āyudha*, *senā*).⁹⁷ If so, in the Mausala-parvan we would be presented with a sequence from the end of the *tīrthayātrā* before it actually started. Thus, in the Mausalaparvan the order of the different phases of the sacrifice would have been mixed up considerably. However, something similar may also be seen in what happens after the death of the male members of the Yādava tribe.⁹⁸ At this point the scene shifts to the wives and children (which appear to include some boys) in Dvārakā, a town which is about to be flooded by the sea. Arjuna leads the widows away from the town and, after a long, arduous march during which many women are kidnapped, settles the survivors in and around Indraprastha. Most likely the inundation of Dvārakā is a reflex of the *avabhṛtha*. As suggested by Heesterman, the *avabhṛtha* has the meaning of death as well as, at the same time, of birth.⁹⁹ Indeed, after the *avabhṛtha* a new generation makes its appearance and is established: Kṛtavarma's son, who is settled in Mārtikāvata, the Vṛṣṇi Aniruddha's son Vajra, who is settled in Indraprastha, and Sātyaki's son, who is settled on the bank of the Sārasvatī river. This would mean that Arjuna does not lead the widows and children away from the inundation, as implied here, but through it. As such, this seems to form

⁹⁷ See J.C. Heesterman, op. cit. (n. 81), p. 35.

⁹⁸ I do not want to go into the phenomenon observed here into any further detail. One of the arguments developed in this paper is that the Mahābhārata in its entirety deals with the world of sacrifice, which latter also provided the motive as well as the idiom of many a story. The various ways in which elements of sacrifices have been worked into the stories deserves an investigation of its own.

⁹⁹ See Heesterman, op. cit. (n. 1), p. 169-170.

the normal end of a *yātsattra*. However, afterwards everything seems to start all over again because the expedition taking place after the “*avabhṛtha*” and before the establishment of the three Yādava boys in their respective realms looks very much like another *yātsattra*. This applies to the route taken, which coincides with part of that of the *sarasvatīattra*. Another element which may be mentioned here is the kidnapping of the Yādava women by the Dasyus. It is reminiscent of one of the conditions, in addition to the death of the leader, under which a *sattra* may be completed, namely when the cattle acquired by the *sattrins* are plundered.¹⁰⁰

If the above interpretation is accepted, the Mausalaparvan, just like the Sauptikaparvan, would tell us the story of a sacrifice. Particularly, it presents us with the Yādavas operating as sacrificial patrons, independently of the Pāṇḍavas and Pāñcālas. After having cooperated with the latter two during the great battle, for their *tīrthayātrā* they formed their own group of three, consisting of the Vṛṣṇis, Andhakas and Bhojas. Kṛṣṇa operated as their *sthapati* or *gṛhapati*. The former ally Arjuna does appear, but only at the end when he substitutes for Kṛṣṇa and leads the surviving women and children to Indraprastha. The remark made in this context that Arjuna is identical to Kṛṣṇa is, however, probably to be taken literally.¹⁰¹ In the Mausalaparvan he acts like Kṛṣṇa. Thus, in the same way that Kṛṣṇa revives the heir of the Pāṇḍavas and secures the continuation of the line in the Āśvamedhikaparvan, Arjuna takes care of the children of the Yādavas and secures the continuation of their line in the Mausalaparvan.

YUDHIṢṬHIRA’S HORSE SACRIFICE (14) AND MAHĀPRASTHĀNA (17)

In order to atone for the sin (*pāpa*) incurred during the great battle Vyāsa advises the Pāṇḍavas to perform an *aśvamedha*.¹⁰² As it appears, the Pāṇḍavas’ *aśvamedha* is no success. They do not get rid of their sin and as a result do not manage to reach heaven. A second attempt to

¹⁰⁰ For literature and references, see above, n. 87.

¹⁰¹ See above, n. 58.

¹⁰² See 14.3.3 and 9ab, cited above, n. 22. For the capacity of the *aśvamedha* to remove sin, see Udyogaparvan, *adhyañya* 13, where on Viṣṇu’s advice Indra, burdened by the sin of having killed a brahmin (*brahmahatyā*), performs an *aśvamedha* which makes him *pūtapāpmā* (18) again, the sin being distributed among the trees, rivers, mountains and earth.

get rid of their sin which does succeed is described in the Mahāprasthānikaparvan (17). In fact, the undertaking of the *aśvamedha* is problematic from the start. The Pāṇḍavas are faced with two problems, the first of which is that they lacked a son and heir whose presence is required at the *aśvamedha*. At this point (14.65-68) Kṛṣṇa comes to rescue the Pāṇḍavas, and as becomes clear later, this is also the last time that he does so. He revives Arjuna's grandson Parikṣit, who had been born dead after having been killed in his mother Uttarā's womb by Aśvatthāman in the aftermath of the nightly attack on the Pāñcālas related in the Sauptikaparvan.

However, the absence of a son and heir is not the only problem facing the Pāṇḍavas. They have come out of the great battle completely impoverished. The treasury is empty and the country devastated. It is impossible for Yudhiṣṭhira, who is to a large extent himself responsible for this situation, to burden the people with taxes in order to be able to cover the costs of the horse sacrifice.¹⁰³ The same Vyāsa who had advised the Pāṇḍavas to perform the *aśvamedha* now advises them to go to the Himālayas and look for the gold left behind by the brahmins of King Marutta.¹⁰⁴ The Pāṇḍavas go to the Himālayas and bring back this gold (*adhyāya* 63-65), after which they start the sacrifice. However, at this point, when Kṛṣṇa is invited by Yudhiṣṭhira to undergo the initiation (*dīkṣā*) for the sacrifice,¹⁰⁵ he declines the honour. Kṛṣṇa promises to be available in case Yudhiṣṭhira needs him¹⁰⁶ but otherwise he is of the opinion that Arjuna is perfectly capable of performing the horse

¹⁰³ See 14.3.14: *svayaṃ vināśya pṛthivīm yajñārthe dvijasattama | karam āhārayiṣyāmi katham śokaparāyaṇān ||*.

¹⁰⁴ See 14.3.20: *vidyate draviṇaṃ pārtha girau himavati sthitam | utsṛṣṭaṃ brāhmaṇair yajñe maruttasya mahīpateḥ | tad ānayasva kaunteya paryāptaṃ tad bhaviṣyati ||*. In the story of Marutta's sacrifice (*adhyāya* 4-10) this king is described as distributing gold to the brahmins (10.33). From 64.11cd (*pṛthimān sa kuruśreṣṭhaḥ khānayām āsa taṃ nidhim*) it becomes clear that the gold has been buried. In the story nothing is said about the brahmins leaving the gold behind or burying it. The story is basically about the competition between Marutta and Indra regarding who is the greatest sacrificer. In addition to that they quarrel about their *purohitas*.

¹⁰⁵ See 14.70.21: *dīkṣayasva tvam ātmānaṃ tvam naḥ paramako guruḥ | tvayīṣṭavati dharmajña vipāpmā syām ahaṃ vibho | tvam hi yajñō 'kṣarah sarvas tvam dharmas tvam prajāpatih ||*.

¹⁰⁶ See 14.70.24c-f: *yunaktu no bhavān kārye yatra vāñchasi bhārata | satyaṃ te pratijānāmi sarvaṃ kartāsmi te 'nagha ||*.

sacrifice on his own (70.22-23). However, on this point Kṛṣṇa does not prove right. The sacrifice is no success. This becomes clear from the story of the mongoose.

After the sacrifice a mongoose appears, whose body is gold-coloured on one side.¹⁰⁷ The mongoose starts to belittle the Pāṇḍavas' sacrifice, which does not match the bowl of barley oats given away by a poor brahmin from Kurukṣetra who makes a living by gleaning the fields.¹⁰⁸ The Pāṇḍavas ask the animal why it belittles the sacrifice. It replies by relating how once a poor brahmin who had collected some barley by carefully searching the harvested fields gave it all away to a guest who had arrived at his house. The brahmin and his family were prepared to suffer hunger and even death for the sake of the guest. However, the guest happened to be God Dharma, who then led the whole brahmin family into heaven. It was by touching a small quantity of the barley left behind that the mongoose acquired a gold-coloured head (93.84). Since then he had visited many *tapovanas* and (royal) sacrifices in order to become gold-coloured all over his body. In that way he had arrived at the sacrifice organized by the Pāṇḍavas, but his body had still not become gold-coloured (93.87).¹⁰⁹ That is the reason, the mongoose says, why he disparages their sacrifice.

One of the implications of this story is that the liberality of the Pāṇḍavas at the horse sacrifice does not equal that of the poor brahmin, who was prepared to give away even his own life and that of his family. Moreover, while the brahmin and his family were led to heaven the Pāṇḍavas are still on earth. It is clear that the Pāṇḍavas' sacrifice did not succeed in what it was supposed to do.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ *nakulo rukmapārśvaḥ* (14.92.5ab). In 93.84ef it is the animal's head which is said to be gold-coloured: *vīprasya tapasā tasya śīro me kāñcanīkṛtam*. In 93.85 the mongoose speaks of one half of his body (*śarīrārdham*) again.

¹⁰⁸ 14.92.7 = 19: *saktuprasthena vo nāyaṃ yajñās tulyo narādhipāḥ | uñchavṛtter vadānyasya kurukṣetranivāsinaḥ ||*.

¹⁰⁹ The story of the mongoose seems to contain an implied comparison of the mongoose with the Pāṇḍavas. While the Pāṇḍavas had appropriated the leftovers from another man's sacrifice, the mongoose had acquired golden fur after it had touched someone else's (sacrificial) gifts. The mongoose subsequently wandered around the world to become completely gold-coloured. The Pāṇḍavas found themselves in a similar situation. In any case, it took them another thirty-six years to discover the right way to get rid of their sin.

¹¹⁰ In the mongoose story the brahmin, alias Dharma, praises the liberality of the poor brahmin (14.93.55-89). In it he makes a point of the fact that the gifts given away by the poor brahmin were acquired lawfully (e.g. 93.73: *na dharmāḥ*

The Pāṇḍavas' second attempt to get rid of their sin and reach heaven has, at least externally, a completely different character. As told in the Mahāprasthānikaparvan (17), when the Pāṇḍavas hear of the end of the Yādavas they decide that the time has come for them too to retire from the world.¹¹¹ Yudhiṣṭhira makes Yuyutsu king but places Parikṣit on the throne,¹¹² and then the Pāṇḍavas start on their journey to heaven. They are *yogayukta* (1.28a) and apparently have discarded all their weapons. In any case, at a certain point it appears that Arjuna has kept his, namely the Gāṇḍīva bow and the two inexhaustible quivers (1.32). However, when asked by Agni to throw them away, Arjuna casts them into the seas (1.40), giving them back to god Varuṇa from whom he had received them just before the burning of the Khāṇḍava forest (1.32-40). On their journey the Pāṇḍavas are accompanied by Draupadī and a dog,¹¹³ which later appears to be Dharma in disguise.

pr̥yate tāta dānair dattair mahāphalaiḥ | nyāyalabdhair yathā sūkṣmaiḥ śraddhā-pūtaiḥ sa tuṣyati ||). In the two following *adhyaṅgas* (94 and 95) stories are told dealing with sacrificial victims which had been acquired unlawfully (*anyāya*). In *adhyaṅga* 94 the story of Indra's sacrifice is told in connection with the question of why the mongoose criticizes Yudhiṣṭhira's *āsvamedha*. When Indra wanted to kill the sacrificial victim some *munis* interfered and suggested that he should sacrifice three year-old (i.e. completely lifeless) seeds instead. After a long debate the matter was put before King Vasu who, without properly considering the pros and cons, answered that one should offer whatever is available. However, this was clearly not the desired answer because King Vasu went to hell almost immediately. The correct answer was that whatever is given away during a sacrifice should have been acquired in the correct way (*nyāya*). In what follows it becomes clear that this involves especially non-violence, which means that the *munis* had won the day. The next *adhyaṅga* (95) establishes the power of the "vegetable" sacrifice in addition to the one involving the killing of animals. It describes the twelve-year sacrifice of the seer Agastya. Again, the keyword is *nyāya* (95.27d, 29a/d, 30a) which once more refers to non-violence (31). Given these stories it seems clear that the Pāṇḍavas' sacrifice was somehow considered "unlawful", apparently because the acquisition of the wealth distributed at the sacrifice had involved violence. While this is a point which does not play a role in the relevant passages in the Āsvamedhikaparvan it should be noted that when in the Mahāprasthānikaparvan the Pāṇḍavas do succeed in getting rid of their sin and go to heaven it is only after they have committed themselves to not using violence any longer by throwing away their weapons and undertaking *yoga* (see below).

¹¹¹ See 17.1.2: *śrutvaiva kauravo rājā vṛṣṇīnām kadanam mahat | prasthāne matim ādhāya vākyaṃ arjunam abravīt ||*.

¹¹² See 17.1.6-7: *tato yuyutsum ānāyya pravrajan dharmakāmāyā | rājyaṃ paridadau sarvaṃ vaiśyaputre yudhiṣṭhirah | 6 | abhiśicya svarājye tu taṃ rājānam parikṣitam | duḥkhārtas cābravīt rājā subhadraṃ pāṇḍavāgrajaḥ | 7 |*.

¹¹³ See 17.1.23ab: *bhrātarah pañca kṛṣṇā ca ṣaṣṭhī svā caiva saptamaḥ |*.

The mention of the dog is interesting. It is reminiscent of the *vrātyas* who are sometimes compared to dogs,¹¹⁴ suggesting that the “Great Departure” (*mahāprasthāna*) was indeed some kind of (*gyāt*)*sattra*. During the journey the Pāṇḍavas drop down one by one. In the present context it is interesting that for each of them a specific sin or transgression owing to which he or she has to die, is mentioned. The idea is that these sins are expiated by their deaths. Draupadī is said to collapse because she had shown a preference for Arjuna (2.6), Sahadeva because of pride he took in his wisdom (2.10), and Nakula for the pride in his beauty (2.16). Arjuna has to die because he considers himself a hero and prides himself on being the best bowman in the world, though he did not burn the enemy in one day as he had said he would (2.21-22). Finally, Bhīma drops dead because he ate too much (2.25). Yudhiṣṭhira appears to be an exception. Thus, while the others drop down halfway there, Yudhiṣṭhira is the only one who actually makes it alive and with his own human body intact to the entrance of heaven.¹¹⁵ In his case no sin is mentioned.¹¹⁶ He is faultless and goes straight to heaven, while the others, as it appears in the Svargārohaṇaparvan, have to temporarily stay in hell, until their sins are fully expiated (18.3.15-16). However, Yudhiṣṭhira is submitted to a final test. He is asked to abandon the dog before he is allowed to enter heaven. At first he refuses to leave behind a creature so devoted to him,¹¹⁷ but when he learns that the dog is Dharma in disguise, he feels free to abandon it, upon which he enters heaven with his own human body.¹¹⁸

THE ARCHAIC WORLD OF POTLATCH

Of all the kings fighting on the side of the Pāṇḍavas, the Pāṅcālas and Yādavas were special in that their bonds with the Pāṇḍavas were sealed by marriages. The alliances were formed before the Pāṇḍavas’ *rājasūya*,

¹¹⁴ See Falk, op. cit. (n. 1), p. 18-19 and *passim*.

¹¹⁵ See 17.3.6. (Indra to Yudhiṣṭhira): *nikṣīpya mānuṣaṃ dehaṃ gatās te bhara-tarṣabha | anena tvam śarīreṇa svargaṃ gantā na saṃśayam ||*.

¹¹⁶ In the Svargārohaṇaparvan, however, Indra gives Yudhiṣṭhira a vision of his brothers staying in hell. Indra explains to Yudhiṣṭhira that this gruesome vision is a punishment for his crime committed towards Droṇa when he confirmed to Droṇa the lie that his son, Aśvatthāman, was dead, after which Droṇa discarded his weapons and was killed.

¹¹⁷ See 17.3.11a: *bhaktatyāgaṃ prāhur atyantapāpam*.

¹¹⁸ See 17.3.21cd: *prāpto 'si bharateśvara divyāṃ gatim anuttamām ||*.

sustained the Pāṇḍavas throughout the period of exile and were instrumental in their victory in the great battle against the Kauravas. However, already before the end of the battle the three allies split up. After this we see them acting on their own.

The triad of the allies seems to have its origin in the world of sacrifice. In this connection I would like to add another triad to the ones already mentioned above (Kṛṣṇa – Dāruka – Bhabhru in the Mausalaparvan; Ásvatthāman – Kṛtavarman – Kṛpa in the Sauptikaparvan; and Agni – Kṛṣṇa – Arjuna in the *khāṇḍavadāha* episode), namely Savitṛ, Bhaga and Pūṣan in the myth of Śiva disturbing the sacrifice of the gods (see above, p. 13f.). The three seem to stand for the sacrificial patron and two of his assistants or, in the case of a *sattra*, for the *gr̥hapati* and two of his *sattrins*. If so, the number three must be symbolical, representing the second lowest number (after the number one) allowing no division into two. As such it may symbolize the indissoluble bond between the sacrificer and his assistants or between the *gr̥hapati* and his *co-sattrins*.

A similar trio is also met with at the time of the distribution of the *dakṣiṇā*. Thus, in the three-day Soma sacrifice a thousand cows are divided between Indra, Viṣṇu and the sacrificer (“ego”), between Indra, Soma and Yama, or between the Vasus, Rudras and Ādityas, each receiving an equal share of 333 cows.¹¹⁹ It should be noted that with the *dakṣiṇā* the donor also puts the donee under his obligation.¹²⁰ With the *dakṣiṇā* the *gr̥hapati* of the *sattra* assures himself of the donees’ cooperation in the next raiding campaign. As already suggested above (p. 28), there is, strictly speaking, no clear distinction, temporal and structural, between the festivities concluding the *sattra*, during which honour and wealth are distributed, and those organized at the start of the new raid, both of which are meant to form a bond between the participants. Immediately at the end of one *sattra* an appointment is, so to speak, made for the next *sattra*. In this connection the function of the thousandth cow, that is, the one left over after the division of the thousand cows into three equal parts of 333, is significant. It is said to be the germ from which a new set of a thousand cows originates.¹²¹ Thus, after the loot acquired in the course of the raiding expedition has

¹¹⁹ See Heesterman, op. cit. (n. 84), esp. p. 246.

¹²⁰ See Heesterman, op. cit. (n. 84), p. 242.

¹²¹ See Heesterman, op. cit. (n. 84), p. 247-248.

been distributed, the quest for wealth starts immediately all over again.

Here, I would like to turn to the massacre described in the *khāṇḍavadāha* episode. It is carried out by Agni assisted by Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa. Like the massacre depicted in the Mausalaparvan, it is part of a great feast taking place on the bank of a river. The *khāṇḍavadāha* episode opens with a brief description of Yudhiṣṭhira's dharmic rule (1.214.1-13). "Then, a few days later" (*tataḥ katipayāhasya*), Arjuna suggests to Kṛṣṇa that they go to the Yamunā as the hot season has arrived (1.214.14; see above, n. 65). Actually, the feast appears to have taken place just before the arrival of the rains, in this case, the rains released by Indra to quench the forest fire. The end of the hot season and the beginning of the rainy season were the period when travelling or raiding expeditions came to an end and the participants returned home and settled down. Indeed, for the Pāṇḍavas the feast marks the end of a long period during which they roamed around the world incognito and finally settled in Indraprastha and during which Arjuna was in exile for twelve years. During this period the Pāṇḍavas acquired their two allies, the Yādavas and Pāñcālas, whose assistance was to prove essential in the conflict that followed. The alliances were sanctioned by marriages. In this way the *khāṇḍavadāha* episode also anticipates, or marks the transition to, the escalation of the conflict between the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas, which resulted in the great battle. To mention just one more detail, in fact not an insignificant one: at the end of the episode the Pāṇḍavas are joined by Maya, who built the *sabhā* which was to raise the jealousy of the Kauravas. Given this context, it is tempting to see in the feast-cum-massacre depicted in the *khāṇḍavadāha* episode a reflex of such sacrificial feasts as were celebrated at the end and beginning of raiding expeditions. Note in this connection that the feast takes place at the bank of the Yamunā, the river in which the final ablutions of the *sarasvatīsaltra* were also performed. In fact, some of the women participating in the feast are actually said to be swimming in the river (*jale kāścīti*, 1.214.21a). The massacre may represent a communal meal or feast after a long period of adventurous travel, at which presents are distributed by the Pāṇḍavas to reward their co-travellers as well as to assure themselves of their future cooperation. In doing so they go to the limit in giving away practically everything they possess. It should be noted that the Khāṇḍava forest belonged to the Pāṇḍavas, Indraprastha being situated in it. The outcome of the feast is a strong bond between Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa and the acquisition by Arjuna of weapons

which make him practically invincible. After this the Pāṇḍavas are, so to speak, ready for the next round, their *rājasūya*.

After the *rājasūya* and the great battle which follows, or actually just before the end of the battle, the three allies each go their own way. Afterwards they operate separately, sometimes with new allies: the Pāñcālas in the Sauptikaparvan, the Yādavas (that is, the Vṛṣṇis, Andhakas and Bhojas) in the Mausalaparvan and the Pāṇḍavas in the Āśvamedhikaparvan. Exactly the same development, but on a minor scale, is met with in the Sauptikaparvan. First we see how Aśvatthāman with his two allies, Kṛpa and Kṛtavarman, carries out the killing of the Pāñcālas. After that each of the three partners goes his own way, the Mahābhārata focusing on Aśvatthāman's "sacrifice". At this sacrifice the Pāṇḍavas arrive as "opponents" whom, as we have seen, Aśvatthāman tries to drive away with grass. Apparently, besides reaching heaven, one of the more immediate, or concrete, aims of a person who participates in a sacrifice was to set himself up as an independent sacrificial patron and, as the case may be, to form new alliances. In fact, this particular development is known from the descriptions of the *sattra* sacrifice, the *dvādaśāha*, in the Śrautasūtras: after the *sattra* the *sattrins* go their own ways, choosing their own priests and undertaking their own sacrifices.¹²²

After the Pāṇḍavas have disturbed Aśvatthāman's sacrifice they organize their own sacrifice, the *aśvamedha*. Thus, we end up with a kind of chain in which the "opponent" claiming a "part" of the sacrifice (that is, the guest entitled to receive presents) of the first sacrifice becomes the "host" of the second, and so on. Something exactly like this can be observed in the first part of the Mahābhārata. What we see there is not just one *rājasūya* but at least two, namely one performed by the Pāṇḍavas which is followed by one organized by the Kauravas. In this

¹²² See Āpastambaśrautasūtra 21.13.5: *udavasānīyayayeṣṭvānyān ṛtvijo ṛtvā pṛṣṭhaśamanīyena yajante jyotiṣṭomenāgniṣṭomena sahasradakṣiṇena* (cp. Hiraṇyakeśiśrautasūtra 16.5.12: ... *nānā yajeran* and Baudhāyanaśrautasūtra 16.23 [= 269.9f.]: ... *ekaiko yajeta*) "Nach Beendigung der Ausziehungssiṣṭi erwählen sie (nl. die beim Dvādaśāha beteiligt Gewesenen) sich andere Opferpriester und verrichten jeder gesondert eine Jyotiṣṭoma-agniṣṭomafeier mit tausend Dakṣiṇās, die die Pṛṣṭhas beschwichtigen soll" (W. Caland, *Das Śrautasūtra des Āpastamba. Sechszehntes bis vierundzwanzigstes und einunddreissigstes Buch aus dem Sanskrit übersetzt*. Amsterdam 1928, p. 285).

connection a fact which is generally overlooked should be noted, that is, that the dice game described in the Sabhāparvan is not organized by the Pāṇḍavas but by the Kauravas. As shown by van Buitenen,¹²³ the dice game is part of the *rājasūya* but, again, it is not a *rājasūya* organized by the Pāṇḍavas but by the Kauravas. In any case, it takes place in a *sabhā*, “as beautiful as the one of the Pāṇḍavas” (*iyam sabhā tvatsabhātulyarūpā*, 2.52.7c) and built by Dhṛtarāṣṭra,¹²⁴ and the Kauravas are the ones who issue the invitation to the dice game (2.52.6-9). This seems to imply that we are dealing with a *rājasūya* organized by the Kauravas. If so, we may assume that it was organized, among other things, to retaliate for the humiliation the Kauravas had suffered at the Pāṇḍavas’ *rājasūya* and in particular for the humiliation which the Pāṇḍavas had inflicted upon them by showing off their incomparably rich and beautiful *sabhā* built by the heavenly architect Maya.

In order to understand the dramatic position of the dice game in the *sabhā* among all the other elements of the *rājasūya*, it should be noted that in this game the anointed king literally puts at stake everything which he may call his own. It is the occasion *par excellence* on which he is able to show his greatness by staking all he possesses. And this is precisely what the Mahābhārata seems to be about. What is evoked in the epic is the scene of a competitive, archaic potlatch society in which the different groups meeting at large communal gatherings try to outdo one another by giving away all their possessions without stint and without consideration of the consequences for themselves. In the Mahābhārata these ideas have found expression in various ways. In the first part of the epic (up to and including the great battle) they are found in the guise of a low regard evinced by both the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas for their possessions or the positions they have acquired. In the second part (beginning with the Sauptikaparvan) they are expressed by the heroes’ “voluntary” deaths. Thus, in the first part of the Mahābhārata, in the dice game, which we may assume is part of their *rājasūya*, the Kauravas put the outcome of this sacrificial ritual at stake. In the first round of the dice game the Kauravas win. However, they show themselves utterly disdainful of their victory and give the

¹²³ J.A.B. van Buitenen, op. cit. (n. 11).

¹²⁴ See 2.45.45-46: *ārtavākyaṃ tu tat tasya praṇayoktaṃ niśamya saḥ | dhṛtarāṣṭro ’bravīt preṣyān duryodhanamate sthitaḥ | 45 | sthūṇāsahasrair bṛhatīm śatadvārām sabhām mama | manoramām darśanīyām āśu kurvantu śilpinaḥ | 46 |*. Cp. 51.16-17.

Pāṇḍavas one more chance (2.66-72), one final throw of the dice in which the winner takes all and the loser has to go into exile.¹²⁵

Once Duryodhana has won he becomes ruler over both Hāstinapura and Indraprastha and the Pāṇḍavas have to go into exile. After having lived a life comparable to that of *sattrins* or *vrātyas* for altogether thirteen years the Pāṇḍavas return and claim their half of the kingdom. When the Kauravas refuse, the Pāṇḍavas challenge them to battle, a challenge the Kauravas, against the advice of their elders,¹²⁶ accept. The Kauravas suffer one defeat after another, using up no fewer than four generals. However, when the Pāṇḍavas have killed all the Kauravas except for Duryodhana and have victory almost in their pockets, they again put the outcome of the battle at risk. They allow Duryodhana a duel for which he may choose his opponent from among the Pāṇḍavas (see above, p. 7). In this duel the Pāṇḍavas again put the outcome of the battle at stake. Bhīma wins but the Pāṇḍavas are again careless in not dealing with Duryodhana once and for all. Though mortally wounded, the latter is able to appoint Aśvatthāman as (the fifth) leader of the army, who manages to kill not only all the Pāñcālas but also the Pāṇḍavas' children, which means that the line of the Pāṇḍavas has practically become extinct before their own deaths.

What we see here is a constant change of position between the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas, that is, first the Pāṇḍavas challenge the Kauravas, then the Kauravas challenge the Pāṇḍavas, and so on. The idea of potlatch may also explain why Yudhiṣṭhira could not refuse the invitation to the dice game or why Duryodhana had to accept the Pāṇḍavas' challenge to do battle for the possession of the realm. To refuse the invitation is

¹²⁵ In terms of the potlatch in the first sequence of the dice game the Pāṇḍavas actually win. In any case, by putting at stake all their possessions they show themselves the true *grands seigneurs*. In this respect they are outdone by the Kauravas in the second sequence. It is tempting to suggest that the first sequence is an echo of the game of dice organized by the Pāṇḍavas in their *sabhā*, the second one representing the Kauravas' retaliation or reciprocation. However, in the *agnyādhāna* two consecutive dice games take place as well (see Falk, op. cit. [n. 1], p. 135-136).

¹²⁶ According to Udyogaparvan (5), *adhyāyas* 122-124, the various elders of the Kauravas tell Kṛṣṇa of their futile efforts to persuade Duryodhana to share the realm with the Pāṇḍavas. The fact that the outcome of the battle between the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas is in the end decided by foul play seems to show that it was uncertain from the very beginning (see below, p. 43). The battle was a gamble.

to show that one is afraid to reciprocate or fears that one is unable to retaliate.¹²⁷

In fact, in the end the Pāṇḍavas are beaten by the Kauravas. For, as described in the Svargārohaṇaparvan, the very first person Yudhiṣṭhira sees in heaven is Duryodhana (18.1.4). It would seem that by having been killed, or rather by having offered themselves to be killed, the Kauravas outdo the Pāṇḍavas and reach heaven before them. In terms of the *vrātyas*, the Kauravas would be the *devas* and the Pāṇḍavas the *daiṅya vrātyas*, that is, those left behind on earth striving to reach heaven as well (see above, p. 29). The example of the Kauravas is followed by the Pāṇḍavas, Pāñcālas and Yādavas. However, while the Kauravas die “reluctantly”, that is, after a long and heroic fight, the three allies seem to die almost voluntarily. First, in the Sauptikaparvan, we see how the Pāñcālas are slaughtered while sleeping and unable to offer any resistance, and next, in the Mausalarparvan, how the Yādavas kill themselves.¹²⁸ The Pāṇḍavas, on their way to heaven as depicted in the Mahāprasthānikaparvan, literally throw away their weapons. Something similar is seen in the Mausalarparvan as well where it is related that Kṛṣṇa’s chariot and weapons fly away and Arjuna’s weapons refuse to appear when he thinks about them. With the narrative of the Mausalarparvan yet another new element seems to come in, namely *yoga*. Thus, in the Mausalarparvan Kṛṣṇa lies down in a *yoga* sleep offering no resistance against any potential attacker. Further, in the Pāṇḍavas’ second attempt to expiate their sins and reach heaven, depicted in the Mahāprasthānikaparvan, they are said to be *yogayukta*. In fact, the refusal to use weapons any longer may well be one of the practices covered by the term *yoga* here. While the contexts of the in-

¹²⁷ See Mauss, op. cit. (n. 14), p. 41. Alternatively, Yudhiṣṭhira could have said to Duryodhana that he was not allowed to play a game of dice because he (Duryodhana) did not “own the world” but he (Yudhiṣṭhira) did, that is, he could have pointed out that Duryodhana is gambling with another man’s property. This is literally what Indra said when he saw Śiva playing dice with Pārvatī (1.189.15: ... *mamedam tvam viddhi viśvam bhuvanam vaśe sthitam | īśo ’ham asmīti...*). However, after the *rājasūya* Yudhiṣṭhira had promised not to utter a harsh word to his “brothers” for thirteen years (see Sabhāparvan, Appendix I, 30, 38-68, a passage absent from the southern recension). It should be noted that Indra’s challenge of Śiva ends badly for Indra who was completely paralyzed by Śiva (1.189.16c: *saṁstambhito bhūd atha devarājah*).

¹²⁸ As noted above, p. 8, in the Āśramavāsikaparvan (15) Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Gāndhārī and Kuntī die in a forest fire caused by their own sacrificial fires.

stances just referred to are not very specific, I might in this connection refer to another instance in the Droṇaparvan where Droṇa, upon hearing that his son has been killed, throws away his weapons and, being *yogayuktavān*, “gives ‘no fear’ (*abhaya*) to all beings”.¹²⁹ After this Droṇa is killed by Dhṛṣṭadyumna (7.165.52).

What we see here is that in the course of the Mahābhārata the point at stake in the competition between the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas becomes ever more dramatic. The competition is at first about who possesses the most beautiful and expensive *sabhā*; after that it develops into a self-destructive attempt to outdo the opponent with ever greater stakes, culminating in an exile of thirteen years. At the end the death of the Kauravas, which takes place after a long heroic fight, can only be surpassed by voluntary death. In all these cases the persons or groups of persons concerned appear to show no interest in the outcome of their actions. This is self-evident in the case of the dice game with its in principle unpredictable outcome, as becomes clear from the fact that the final result is decided by foul play. The same applies to the battle, which is also decided by foul play with Bhīma hitting Duryodhana below the waist.¹³⁰ The difference between the first part of the Mahābhārata and the second part is that in the former the protagonists act or fight while in the latter they do not act or fight any longer; they have become veritable *yogins*.

In the first part of the Mahābhārata the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas, by acting with complete disregard for the outcome of their actions, carry out, as it were, the main teachings of Kṛṣṇa’s Bhagavadgītā. Here a question arises concerning the relation of the other treatise ascribed to Kṛṣṇa, namely the Anugītā (14.16-50), to the non-violence and *yoga* practices peculiar to the teachings and stories of the later parts of the epic.¹³¹ Before embarking upon the *aśvamedha* sacrifice Arjuna asks Kṛṣṇa to repeat what he had taught earlier in the Bhagavadgītā on the

¹²⁹ See 7.165.35, above, n. 46.

¹³⁰ See Held, op. cit. (n. 15), p. 304-305. The key-word in the dice game is *nikṛti* “deceit”. The term and its implications have been discussed in detail by D.D. Shulman (*Devana and Daiva*. In: A.W. van de Hoek et al. [ed.], *Ritual, State and History in South Asia*. Essays in Honour of J.C. Heesterman. Leiden 1992, p. 350-365). Shulman discusses in particular the question of how the game could be said to have been decided by deceit if so much in it depended on counting and knowledge.

¹³¹ I leave aside here the Śānti- and Anuśāsanaparvans which are taught not by Kṛṣṇa but Bhīṣma.

eve of the great battle. However, Kṛṣṇa comes up instead with the teachings of a certain *siddha*, which were transmitted to him by a brahmin (14.16-19). After that Kṛṣṇa repeats a *saṃvāda* between a brahmin and his wife (14.20-34) and one between a teacher and his pupil (14.35-50). Though it is impossible to present even a brief analysis of the Anugītā here, it is clear that non-violence,¹³² *yoga*¹³³ and other related topics do indeed form part of the teachings of this treatise. However, I am not yet able to make out whether the Anugītā teaches these topics as the only and exclusive path to salvation or just side by side with others. In any case, it is only during their *mahāprasthāna* that the Pāṇḍavas resort to non-violence and *yoga*. In this respect the *āsvamedha* performed immediately after the Anugītā is an “ordinary” sacrifice. On the other hand, the Pāṇḍavas do not achieve what they hoped to achieve with the *āsvamedha*, namely to get rid of their sins and go to heaven.¹³⁴ It is interesting that the Pāṇḍavas resort to the path of *yoga* only after their teacher Kṛṣṇa has done so himself in the wake of the massacre of the Yādavas. In fact, assuming that we are not dealing with a coincidence, we would be faced with a strange reversal here because in the case of the Bhagavadgītā Kṛṣṇa seems to be wary of putting his teachings, or at least some aspects of them, into practice. For instance, he is absent from the dice game, the epitome of disinterested action (which, however, takes place before the pronouncement of the Bhagavadgītā) and rebukes Yudhiṣṭhira when the latter allows Duryodhana to win back his kingdom in a duel with a Pāṇḍava of his own choosing (see above, n. 16). The situation becomes even more complex if one takes into account that in contrast to the Bhagavadgītā the teachings of the Anugītā are strictly speaking not Kṛṣṇa’s own; in the Anugītā he is merely passing on other people’s doctrines, namely, those of a certain *siddha* and other persons.

In the Mahābhārata the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas are caught in a self-destructive quest for honour and prestige. The participants find them-

¹³² Note the phrase *bhūtānām anukampārtham* in 14.16.16-17b: *mokṣadharmam samāśrītya kṛṣṇa yan mānupṛcchasi | bhūtānām anukampārtham yan mohacchedanam prabho | 16 | tat te 'haṃ saṃpravakṣyāmi yathāvan madhusūdana |*.

¹³³ See, e.g., 14.19.14-35, a passage which is introduced (14) as follows: *ataḥ paraṃ pravakṣyāmi yogaśāstram anuttamam*.

¹³⁴ As I have discussed above, n. 110, in two stories following the one concerning the mongoose, it is suggested that the problem of the *āsvamedha* might have been that the *dakṣiṇā* distributed at the sacrifice was acquired by way of violence.

selves in an ongoing cycle in which every feat of liberality has to be outdone by another even greater one. At the same time there is no gift that cannot be surpassed and no final winner. Even after one has given the greatest gift of all, namely one's own life, the cycle does not end; it just begins all over again. Thus, before the Pāṇḍavas take their final departure they hand over Hāstinapura to Yuyutsu, a bastard son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. They also place Parikṣit on the throne (see above, p. 35). In this way they create a situation similar to the one with which the Mahābhārata started, with the Kauravas as the legal heirs to the throne but the Pāṇḍavas the actual rulers. The other survivor besides Yuyutsu and Parikṣit explicitly mentioned in the Mahāprasthānikaparvan (17.1.8-9) is Vajra, who is appointed king in Indraprastha.¹³⁵ He belongs to the Yādava tribe, which we may assume will eventually produce a new Kṛṣṇa. Apparently, besides the presence of the Pāṇḍavas, Kauravas and Kṛṣṇa Śiva's presence will also be required, most likely in his role as the outsider who arrives at other people's sacrifices and claims a share of it. In any case, the fourth survivor – who is easily forgotten – is Aśvatthāman, who has been cursed to roam the world on his own for three thousand years but will no doubt make his re-appearance after this period.¹³⁶

The Mahābhārata presents us with an endless cycle of sacrifices in which exhaustion (after having "sacrificed" all possessions) alternates with concentration (after having received gifts). As there is no gift which cannot be surpassed, the necessity to give gifts, and to receive them, starts all over again after death. We have here a cycle similar to the one in the *pralaya* myth. In fact, as already indicated at the very beginning of this paper (p. 6f.), it would seem that the Mahābhārata is not determined by the *pralaya* myth but that this myth has its origin in the epic, in particular in the archaic world of potlatch depicted in it. The same might apply to the origin of some of the *yoga* practices depicted in the Mahābhārata. I refer here in particular to those cases where *kṣatriyas* cast down their weapons and refuse to resort to violence even in order to protect themselves or their dependents. These occur-

¹³⁵ At the end of the Mausalarparvan actually three Yādava survivors are mentioned, namely, besides Vajra, the sons of Kṛtavarman and Sātyaki respectively (see above, p. 20). Of these three Vajra is singled out here in the Mahāprasthānikaparvan.

¹³⁶ Admittedly, there are more survivors such as Uddhava or Takṣaka, but they do not play very important roles in the main story of the Mahābhārata.

rences seem to lead us back to the archaic world of the raiding expeditions of the *vrātyas* with their “shamanizing techniques”.¹³⁷

Finally, if we look at the Mahābhārata in its present form, it seems that its authors, at least according to the interpretation offered above, were dominated by the same, or similar, concerns as those of the Śrautasūtras. Like the latter they show an acute awareness of the violence inherent in large communal sacrificial feasts and the self-destructive tendencies exhibited by the participants, each one trying to outdo the other with an ever greater show of liberality.¹³⁸ Note in this connection the words Nārada pronounces after he has passed on Pāṇḍu’s exhortation to his sons to perform a *rājasūya*: “War follows in its wake, causing the destruction of the earth”.¹³⁹ It is tempting to conclude that the authors of the Mahābhārata belonged to the same milieu as the Śrautasūtra authors or stood in close contact with it. If so, this relationship would be the continuation of an association dating from an earlier period when bards were invited to, or dropped in on, sacrificial undertakings to recite old stories about the hosts’ ancestors and other topics.¹⁴⁰ This is the very period evoked at the beginning of the epic when Ugraśravas arrives at Śaunaka’s twelve-year sacrifice and repeats Vyāsa’s Mahābhārata as he had heard it being recited by Vaiśampāyana at Janamejaya’s snake sacrifice.¹⁴¹ This Janamejaya is the son of Parikṣit, who in turn was the son of Arjuna’s son Abhimanyu, born dead but revived by Kṛṣṇa.

¹³⁷ See Heesterman, op. cit. (n. 81), p. 36. See also J.W. Hauer, *Die Anfänge der Yogapraxis im alten Indien*. Eine Untersuchung über die Wurzeln der indischen Mystik nach Ṛgveda und Atharvaveda. Berlin 1922, p. 172-189.

¹³⁸ For the authors of the Śrautasūtras, see J.C. Heesterman’s most recent publication on the topic, *The Broken World of Sacrifice*. Chicago 1993, *passim*.

¹³⁹ *yuddham ca pṛsthagamanam pṛthivīkṣayakāraṅgam* | (2.11.69ab).

¹⁴⁰ Note in this connection that in the *pāriplava* of the *āsvamedha* the recitation of *itihāsas* is carried out by the Hotṛ; see S.Ch. Chakrabarti, A Study of the Pāriplava. *IJ* 32 (1989) 255-267.

¹⁴¹ Another well-known example is that of Kuśa and Lava making their appearance at their father Rāma’s *āsvamedha* in the Rāmāyaṇa.