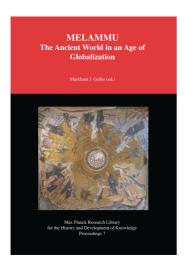Max Planck Research Library for the History and Development of Knowledge

Proceedings 7

Tzvi Abusch and Emily West:

The Tale of the Wild Man and the Courtesan in India and Mesopotamia: The Seductions of Ṛśyaśṛnga in the Mahābhārata and Enkidu in the Epic of Gilgamesh

Chapter 4
The Tale of the Wild Man and the Courtesan in India and Mesopotamia: The Seductions of Ṛśyaśṛnga in the Mahābhārata and Enkidu in the Epic of Gilgamesh

Tzvi Abusch and Emily West

Abstract

The seduction of Enkidu in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* bears strong resemblances to the Sanskrit account of the seduction of Ṛśyaśṛnga as it appears in *Mahābhārata* 3.110–113. This paper attempts to understand the relationship of the Babylonian and the Indian accounts, and to trace the stages of development of the Sanskrit tale. The paper concludes that the tale most likely originated in Mesopotamia and migrated to the Indian subcontinent, and that the Indic version of the tale found in the Mahābhārata is the oldest extant version found in India.[1]

4.1 Introduction

Elsewhere, the Akkadian account of the seduction of Enkidu by the courtesan in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* has been subjected to a detailed analysis and its stages of development traced (Abusch 2005). The preserved versions, but especially a reconstructed earlier version that centered solely on the wild man and the courtesan and did not include the hunter, show strong resemblances to the Sanskrit story of the seduction of Ṛśyaśṛnga as it is found in the *Mahābhārata* and, to a lesser degree, as it occurs in other compositions. Like Enkidu (in Tablets I–II of the Standard Babylonian version and the Pennsylvania Tablets of the Old Babylonian version),[2] Ṛśyaśṛnga is an unworldly innocent with animal characteristics

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[1] Versions of this paper were read to the American Oriental Society, San Antonio, in 2007 and to the Melammu conference in Sophia, Bulgaria, in 2008. Please note throughout that due to a difficulty in obtaining proper fonts, diacritics on the Sanskrit velar *n* and the Akkadian uvular *h* have been omitted throughout the paper.

[2] We wish to call attention to two works which we were not able to incorporate into our argument. One is Y.V. Vas[s]ilkov, "Zemledel'českij mif v drevneindijskom epose: Skazanie o Riš'jašringe," an article which we were unable to obtain. The other is Daniel E. Fleming and Sara J. Milstein, *The Buried Foundation of the Gilgamesh Epic: The Akkadian Huwawa Narrative* (Brill, Leiden 2010),

who, as a result of a crisis in the civilized world, must be tamed and civilized by a prostitute and brought to the city to take a position of power beside the king. The strong resemblance of the Ṛśyaśṛṅga account to the Enkidu story has been previously noticed. Some scholars have even suggested the dependence of the Indian versions upon the Near Eastern account.[3]

Throughout the last century there have been scholars who have regarded the remarkable similarity between the two episodes as ample justification for the belief in a connection between the two tales. But in some scholarly circles, parallels are viewed with skepticism, and the existence of any form of connection may even be denied. We therefore feel it is necessary to revisit the topic of the relationship of the Babylonian and the Indian accounts. To this end, we will first describe the two tales and set out a précis of our understanding of the development of the Ṛśyaśṛṅga tale. This will be followed by several detailed treatments: 1) an identification and explication of points of similarity between the Enkidu and Ṛśyaśṛṅga tales; 2) an analysis of the many variants of the Ṛśyaśṛṅga tale that may be found throughout the literature of India, evaluating the various narratives for evidence regarding the development of these variants to determine which of them may represent the earliest phase of the tale; and 3) a reconstruction of the stages of development of the *Mahābhārata* tale itself, which we believe to be the earliest recorded Indic version. Finally, we set out our understanding of the re-

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which appeared only after we submitted this paper. We should mention, however, two aspects of their discussion that are relevant to the present work: the first is their argument that a distinction be drawn between the Enkidu of the OB Penn tablet // SB tablets I–II (who is a wild man), on the one hand, and the Enkidu of the Huwawa episode of the OB Yale tablet // SB tablets III ff. (who is a herdsman), on the other. This distinction, which we find persuasive, does not affect our present argument, for our wild man corresponds in the main to the character of the wild man found in that part of the epic that comes before the Huwawa episode. Furthermore, in composing our study we were already aware of some of the tensions between the parts, see (Abusch 2005, 430–433). The second is their contention that the superimposition of the story of the wild man and prostitute (found in the Penn tablet) upon the story of the prostitute and the herdsman (found in the Yale tablet) is responsible for the creation of the first part of the OB epic. For the significance of this point for our argument, see below fn. 53.

[3] This opinion was first expressed by Jensen (1913, 528): "Edvard Lehmann hat Greßmann auf die Analogie zwischen der indischen Geschichte von *Ṛśyaśṛṅga* und der "Hierodulen"-Episode des *Gilgamesch*-Epos aufmerksam gemacht und Greßmann erwähnt dies auf Seite 95 seines Buchs. Weder Lehmann noch Greßmann denken natürlich an mehr als eine bloße Analogie, obwohl die Analogie zwischen beiden Episoden schon allein für sich eine historische Abhängigkeit doch wohl mehr als nahelegt. Greßmann's Anmerkung mußte mich nun aber dazu veranlassen, die *Ṛśyaśṛṅga*-Geschichte ins Auge zu fassen. Und das Ergebnis war: Auch die indische *Rāmā- yaṇa*-Sage, durch die *Ṛśyaśṛṅga*-Geschichte eröffnet, geht in der Hauptsache letztlich auf das *Gilgamesch*-Epos mit der "Hierodulen"-Episode in seinem Anfangsteil zurück, ebenso aber vor allem diejenigen Stücke des *Mahābhārata*, die diesem mit dem *Rāmāyaṇa* gemein sind." See also, e.g., (Albright 1920, 331): "But it is very probable that our story goes back eventually to a Mesopotamian origin; in no other case that I have seen is the likelihood so great." (Williams 1925–1926, vol. 1, 30–31; Schlinghoff 1971, 58–60 (our thanks to Oskar von Hinüber for this reference); Schlinghoff 1973, 303–305; Panaino 2001, 152–153, 170.) Also cf. (Abusch 2005, 425 n.23).

lationship of the Indian and the Mesopotamian tales. We hope to contribute to an understanding of the Sanskrit tale and its evolution and to explore the cultural and historical implications of a connection between the Near Eastern and Indian tales.

4.2   The Story of Enkidu

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* is an ancient Mesopotamian account of the deeds and struggles of Gilgamesh, a king of the city-state Uruk in the land of Sumer. This Akkadian epic was probably originally composed during (but certainly no later than) the Old Babylonian period, some time around the eighteenth century BCE; the later standard version comes to us in a twelve-tablet format.[4]

The epic recounts how Gilgamesh, king of Uruk, exhausts his subjects by his unceasing demands upon them to participate in a constant round of activities. The people complain to the gods, who realize that Gilgamesh's enormous energy must find a different channel. To relieve the people, the gods create Enkidu, a wild man whose strength is equal to that of Gilgamesh, to serve as a companion who can be Gilgamesh's equal and companion in the various activities that he is driven to undertake. Enkidu is humanized by a prostitute, who then acculturates him and leads him to Uruk. There, Enkidu prevents Gilgamesh from participating in a wedding ritual. Gilgamesh and Enkidu then do battle and, as a result, become fast friends. The two friends undertake adventures (most notably, and originally, an expedition against Huwawa in the Cedar Forest) that cause them to run up against the will of the gods. The gods decide that Enkidu must bear the punishment for the friends' acts of hubris. Enkidu dies, but Gilgamesh cannot accept the death. He is devastated by Enkidu's death, both because of the grievous loss of his dearest friend and because he now fears his own death mightily. He leaves Uruk and travels the world in search of immortality. In the twelve-tablet version, Gilgamesh's quest is defined as a search for the secret of immortality held by Utnapishtim, the hero who survived the Flood and was granted immortality by the gods. When Gilgamesh reaches Utnapishtim, the latter disabuses him of his illusion, demonstrating by story (the account of the Flood) and by action (a test of Gilgamesh's ability to remain awake, a test that he fails) that immortality is no longer attainable, even by Gilgamesh. Tablet XI ends with Gilgamesh's return

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[4]The transcriptions of the Akkadian text of the Old Babylonian (OB) and Standard Babylonian (SB) versions of the Gilgamesh epic are based upon the transliterated text in (George 2003); the translations are his as well.

to Uruk, whereupon he signals his acceptance of reality by pointing out to the boatman the architectural wonders of the city that he had built.[5]

The tale of the wild man and courtesan is known in both Old Babylonian and Standard Babylonian versions.[6] The episode as told in the first tablet of the Standard Babylonian version runs as follows: In response to the complaint of the people of Uruk against Gilgamesh, the gods create Enkidu, a powerful wild man, to engage Gilgamesh and thereby provide relief to the populace. He roams with the animals and feeds with them. He frustrates a hunter's attempts to catch animals. The hunter's father advises him to go to Uruk and to take a courtesan from there to seduce the wild man, thereby causing the animals to reject him. The hunter goes to Uruk and is given the same advice by Gilgamesh. He then leads the courtesan Shamhat to the wild. Upon the appearance of Enkidu, he tells the courtesan what steps to take in order to seduce Enkidu. She successfully carries out her mission. They have intercourse for a week; afterwards Enkidu tries to return to the animals, but they reject him. He returns to the courtesan, who advises him to accompany her to civilization. She leads him to Uruk, where he and Gilgamesh meet and become fast friends.

Unfortunately, this episode is only partially preserved in the Old Babylonian version. But even so, we can establish that in that version the wild man did not attempt to rejoin the animals after his sexual encounter with the courtesan[7]; for in that version, after their lovemaking, the courtesan asks Enkidu why he wants to go back to nature, and in fact he does not. It is not the animals that reject Enkidu; rather, it is Enkidu who immediately turns his back on nature as a consequence of his experience with an urbane woman. He rejected the natural world in favor of civilization, for lovemaking caused him to forget the place of his birth. Animals are unimportant in this early recension, as is apparently the hunter, if he even appears (Abusch 2005, 422–425). The absence of the hunter in the earliest forms of the tale is important and will be referred to again later.

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[5] Tablet XII contains the end of a different account of Enkidu's death. On an errand for Gilgamesh, Enkidu descends into the netherworld. He is seized by the netherworld and cannot escape death; he returns only as a shade in order to describe to Gilgamesh the state of the dead.

[6] The episode is now also known from a tablet provisionally dated to the beginning of the Middle Babylonian period; see (George 2007, for the dating see p. 63).

[7] As far as we can see, nothing in the new "Middle Babylonian" version (cited above, fn. 6) contradicts this statement.

4.3   The Tale of Ṛśyaśṛnga in the *Mahābhārata*

We will now discuss the tale as it occurs in the *Mahābhārata*, in the epic's third section, the "Book of the Forest Teachings."[8] This book details part of the thirteen-year period of exile undergone by the heroes of the epic, the five Pāṇḍava princes and their joint wife, Draupadī. Having lost their kingdom through treachery at the dicing table, they leave their palace, allies, and children behind and resign themselves to a period of forest-dwelling asceticism. Exile is a devastating blow, but the heroes spend comparatively little time in recrimination. They turn instead to spiritual betterment, most notably in the form of a tour of various sacred bathing areas (*tīrthas*), and the epic itself turns to "the manifold narratives to which their sojourn in the forest gives occasion" (van Buitenen 1973–1975, vol. 2, 174). As the heroes make their tour, they are regaled with the stories associated with each *tīrtha*.

One of these is the "Story of Ṛśyaśṛnga," narrated at *MBh.* 3.110–113.[9] The tale runs essentially as follows: A fearsome ascetic, Vibhāṇḍaka, is bathing in a lake when the sight of a celestial nymph causes him to spontaneously ejaculate. The semen is consumed by a doe that subsequently gives birth to a human son. The boy, Ṛśyaśṛnga, is born with an antelope horn in the middle of his forehead and is raised in the hermitage. The young ascetic's innocent life is disrupted when King Lomapāda of Anga commits unspecified atrocities that result in the desertion of his Brahmins (including his *purohita*, the household priest) and in a subsequent falling out with the gods. On the advice of a different brahmin, Lomapāda decides to bring Ṛśyaśṛnga to the court as his new *purohita*. Devising a plan to have the youth seduced by prostitutes, he finds a procuress willing to undertake the scheme and sends her to the hermitage on an elaborately equipped barge. When Vibhāṇḍaka leaves the hermitage to gather food, the procuress sends in an attractively-dressed courtesan, who is mistaken by the boy for a fellow ascetic. Ṛśyaśṛnga is so unworldly that he does not even understand that the prostitute is a woman but is enchanted by her very different "ascetical practices" and by the delicious food and liquor with which she plies him. The innocent boy quickly falls desperately in love with her, but she slips away to her barge before Vibhāṇḍaka comes home. Upon his return, Vibhāṇḍaka gives Ṛśyaśṛnga stern warnings against women. But when the courtesan makes a second visit, the boy begs to go away with her. The prostitutes take Ṛśyaśṛnga away on their barge

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[8]In regards to the *Mahābhārata*, all passages cited here are from the Critical Edition (Sukthankar 1942), and all translations are EBW's. In regard to the composition of the epic, we concur with others that the epic was assembled slowly over an extended period, roughly between 400 BCE and 400 CE; see (van Buitenen 1973–1975, vol. 1, xxv) or (Brockington 2003, 116).

[9]A complete translation of the Ṛśyaśṛnga episode may be found in (van Buitenen 1973–1975, vol. 2, 431–441).

and deliver him to the king, who installs him in the royal harem and gives him his daughter Śāntā in marriage. When the father discovers that his son has decamped to the palace, he follows the boy with the intention of burning the king and all his subjects by means of the power of his austerities. King Lomapāda, however, is able to avert disaster by instructing the herdsmen along Vibhāṇḍaka's path to plow up the roads in order to obstruct his progress and to inform him that all the lands and herds along the way now belong to Ṛśyaśṛnga. By the time Vibhāṇḍaka reaches the city and meets his new daughter-in-law, he is pleased and malleable, and the tale ends happily for all concerned.

The above re-telling, however, only describes the central portion of the tale as it occurs in the epic. This central portion is that part found at *MBh*. 3.110.30– 113.10 and is hereafter referred to as the "body" of the piece.[10] Appended to the front of the tale is a brief preamble (*MBh*. 3.110.1–10) in which the narrator, Lomaśa, attempts to loosely summarize the story and the eldest Pāṇḍava brother, Yudhiṣṭhira, responds with a set of leading questions. The relationship of the preamble to the rest of the *Mahābhārata*'s narrative will be discussed below in Section 4.10, "Internal Analysis of the *Mahābhārata*'s Ṛśyaśṛnga Account."

4.4   Anomalies in the Tale of Ṛśyaśṛnga

At the end of the nineteenth century, Heinrich Lüders (1897) attempted to explain a number of puzzling anomalies in the "Story of Ṛśyaśṛnga," as narrated at *MBh*. 3.110–113. The "body" of the narrative, as we have sketched it out above, is quite straightforward, but a closer study of the body in conjunction with the preamble reveals a number of irregularities and contradictions; body and preamble simply do not seem to refer to the same story. Lüders carefully analyzed various versions of the tale for comparison and concluded that the discrepancies in the *Mahābhārata* were the result of a series of editorial re-workings performed to align the *Mahābhārata*'s version with certain other variants. Though the preamble introduces a number of details or motifs that do not agree with the body of the tale, Lüders emphasized one particular issue: where the body describes Ṛśyaśṛnga's seduction by the prostitute and subsequent marriage to a princess, the preamble states quite clearly that it was the princess who first seduced him and makes no mention of a prostitute. To solve the problem of this contradiction, Lüders envisioned a three-stage process of development (Lüders 1897, 13–15) in which:

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[10]It is the narrative contained in the body of the *Mahābhārata*'s tale of Ṛśyaśṛnga to which we refer whenever we discuss the *Mahābhārata*'s version in general terms. See below, Section 4.11. "Narrative Layers in the *Mahābhārata*," for our division and characterization of the sections of the final text.

1. The *Mahābhārata* originally had a version which featured princess Śāntā as the seductress;
2. The Bengali Recension of the *Padma-Purāṇa* added the role of the prostitute in order to spare an innocent princess from the shame of being a seductress;
3. Finally, a later redactor of the *Mahābhārata*, familiar with the *Padma-Purāṇa*'s version, altered the body of the *Mahābhārata,* but neglected to change the opening verses.

While this solution has apparently been accepted by some,[11] others have felt that the idea is unnecessarily cumbersome and that Lüders' reasoning is unsound at a number of points.[12]

While we concur with Lüders on the importance of the preamble/body textual problem, we do not accept his conclusions regarding the story's developmental trajectory. Lüders regarded the identity of the seductress as the primary key to understanding the evolution of the tale, a bias which, in our view, severely limited his ability to take other even more significant disparities between preamble and body into account, disparities regarding, *inter alia*, the power of Ṛśyaśṛnga, the righteousness of King Lomapāda, the god Indra's fear of Ṛśyaśṛnga, the nature of Ṛśyaśṛnga's actions in ending the drought, whether Ṛśyaśṛnga "lived as a deer," and details of his conception (each of these points will be discussed in detail below). While the preamble addresses some motifs not utterly dissimilar to those in the body of the tale, it is our contention that the preamble was initially created for a different story about a character named Ṛśyaśṛnga.[13] This figure, Ṛśyaśṛnga, the son of Vibhāṇḍaka, is known from quite early Hindu sources, including the *Jaiminīya-Upaniṣad-Brāhmaṇa* (III, 40), the *Vaṃśabrāhmaṇa* (2), and the *Ārṣeyabrāhmaṇa* (VI, 5).[14] In our view, the form of the Ṛśyaśṛnga tale that originally occupied this spot in the *Mahābhārata* was a standard variation of the myriad of tales concerning the irascible *ṛṣis* ("seers," ascetic holy men) and their conflicts with kings and gods. A vestige of this tale remains at the beginning and end of the Ṛśyaśṛnga story that is found in the epic, in the accounts of Ṛśyaśṛnga's conception and of Vibhāṇḍaka's appeased wrath. But the body of

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[11]Cf., e.g., (Winternitz 1962, 351–353).

[12]Dahlmann disagreed strongly with Lüders' method for tracing the history of the story (Dahlmann 1899, 283–287). Later scholars who present arguments against Lüders' conclusions about the nature of the original story include (Panaino 2001; Pauly 1987–1988; Schlinghoff 1973; Williams 1925–1926, 34).

[13]Thus we agree with Lüders regarding the originality of the preamble; however, in contrast to Lüders who sees the *Mahābhārata* tale as essentially a coherent whole which underwent a few contradictory revisions, we maintain that the present body of the tale (*MBh.* 3.110.30–113.10) is a later addition.

[14]These are listed at (Lüders 1897, 1) as well.

the tale is, in our opinion, a transplant or borrowing that derives from outside the subcontinent, and it is this possibility that we would like to explore here.

We believe that at some early point in history the Mesopotamian tale of Enkidu (or, more precisely, the Mesopotamian tale of a wild man and courtesan) passed into India and began to circulate in a Hindu milieu. Perhaps because of Enkidu's animal characteristics and his association with antelope, the story was eventually attached to the pre-existing character of Ṛśyaśṛnga and incorporated into the *Mahābhārata*, though with some contradictions remaining between the transplanted tale and the pre-existing preamble to which it was attached. Eventually this new composite tale, whether directly from the *Mahābhārata* or at some remove, began a second life in India, where the long-standing tradition of oral composition and verbatim preservation and recitation allowed wide circulation of stories without the use of written texts. The story was apparently able to circulate widely and underwent various modifications as it was taken up by different religious and cultural communities. Thus, in later versions, numerous variations were introduced, regarding the number of seductions in the tale, the nature of the crisis at the center of the plot, the name and nature of Ṛśyaśṛnga himself, and the nature of the transformation that seduction effects upon him.[15]

Our solution to the mystery of the mismatched preamble differs, therefore, from that of Lüders. Whereas we believe that the present tale of Ṛśyaśṛnga was created by the superimposition of a Near Eastern borrowing upon an earlier Indian story with native sub-continental or Indo-European roots, he envisioned a multi-step process of revision and redaction. First, we do not think that his line of argumentation takes account of the dramatic similarity of the *Mahābhārata* to the Enkidu tale, which similarity others have found so compelling as well.[16] Moreover, it seems to us that a redactor setting out to harmonize the *Mahābhārata* with the *Padma-Purāṇa* would have also re-written our preamble to bring it in line with the body of the tale. Lüders' redactor is mainly concerned with harmonizing; our redactor, on the other hand, is mainly concerned with bringing in new material— for him, harmonization would have been a secondary goal. Furthermore, while we agree with Lüders that a princess was probably the love interest in the earliest tale to occupy this spot in the *Mahābhārata*, we do not subscribe to the view that the original princess played a role functionally equivalent to that of the prostitute

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[15]The Ṛśyaśṛnga tale as it occurs in the *Mahābhārata* may not be the direct progenitor of other variants of the tale in India, but we believe it to be the earliest version of the tale of the seduction of the wild man in India for two reasons: First, because the other tales all contain elements that appear to be alterations of the *Mahābhārata's* version, and second, the *Mahābhārata* contains the evidence of superimposition. For further analysis of the variations in the tales see (West 2010).

[16]In 1897, when Lüders published "Die Saga von Ṛśyaśṛnga," the story of Enkidu and the prostitute might not yet have been widely known, but the story had been translated and re-told, for example, in (Jeremias 1891, 16–18).

in the *Mahābhārata*'s tale; rather, in that tale she was simply a young woman with whom Ṛśyaśṛnga fell in love. This and other more detailed pieces of evidence will be examined below in context, beginning with our assessment of the shared features of the Indian and Mesopotamian tales.

4.5   Parallel Elements in the Stories of Enkidu and Ṛśyaśṛnga

We note the following fourteen parallel elements in the two texts. These elements suggest the existence of a relationship between the two episodes. While many tales may share common elements and themes, these stories are composed of nearly identical sets of motifs that form the fundamental building blocks of both tales. Even more significant is the fact that this set of motifs is a heterogeneous collection in that the individual motifs generally do not lead inevitably to the ones which follow them. Thus, their appearance *en masse* in two otherwise-unrelated traditions strains the likelihood of coincidence.

4.5.1   The Wild Man's Miraculous Birth

Both wild men are the product of miraculous births, and both births are "typical" within their respective canons. Enkidu is created by Aruru from a pinch of clay, just as the first humans were created. Ṛśyaśṛnga is conceived when the hermit Vibhāṇḍaka has a spontaneous ejaculation at the sight of Urvaśī, a prominent celestial nymph (*apsaras*), and the ejaculate is consumed by a doe that becomes pregnant with Vibhāṇḍaka's child. These two types of birth are thus functionally equivalent, for in Indian literature an ascetic's spontaneous ejaculation is a common mechanism employed to mark out a birth as unusual or auspicious[17] and would be a natural substitution for a motif of birth by divine creation imported from another tradition.

4.5.2   The Wild Man has an Animal Appearance

Both wild men are represented as being a combination of animal and human and as having a connection to wild deer.[18] Enkidu's animal nature is reflected in his

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[17]See, for example, the similar conceptions of Satyavatī (*MBh.* 1.57), Agastya and Vasiṣṭha (*Matsya Purāṇa* 61, 20–32), Droṇa (*MBh.* 1.121), and Kṛpa (*MBh.* 1.120).

[18]In this section, we refer to Ṛśyaśṛnga's animal characteristics as they are portrayed in the body of the tale, not to the use of *mṛgabhūtasya* in the preamble at 3.110.8. As stated in Section 4.10.5, "Ṛśyaśṛnga's Life as a Deer," we believe the use of *mṛgabhūtasya* in the preamble relates to the class of tales within the *Mahābhārata* in which an *ṛṣi* assumes, or appears to assume, deer-form. *Ṛṣis* with animal characteristics such as those exhibited by Ṛśyaśṛnga in the body of his tale are not a standard type in the epic (cf. *MBh.* 1.109), supporting the idea that his animal-*ṛṣi* character is largely a borrowing from elsewhere.

hairiness and in the fact that he lives with the gazelle herds and protects them. Using excessive hairiness as the defining characteristic of a wild man would be problematic within the *Mahābhārata* tradition, at least as a distinguishing trait, for long matted hair is a standard characteristic of many holy men,[19] as is suggested by the name of the ascetic who escorts them around the sacred fords and narrates the story to them (Lomaśa, "Hairy") and by the description of Vibhāṇḍaka at *MBh.* 3.111.19, as "covered with hair to his nail-tips" (*praveṣṭito romabhirā nakhāgrāt*).[20] Instead, Ṛśyaśṛṅga's animal origin is exhibited by the antelope horn he wears on his head, *tasya ṛśyaśṛṅgam śirasi* (*MBh.* 3.110.17).[21]

4.5.3 The Plot Precipitated by the Actions of a Hubristic King

Though they are a part of the natural world, the wild men are actually linked to the human social order. In both narratives, the wild man's very existence, certainly his role, is necessitated by a crisis brought about by offenses on the part of the king. Both stories preserve a similar ambiguity regarding the king's character and manner of rule. The significance of this parallel is deepened by the fact that both kings are eventually rehabilitated.

4.5.4 The King's Offenses are Unclear and Possibly Sexual

In both narratives, the nature of the king's misdeeds is obscure. As noted above, in the Sanskrit, we are told that *tena kāmaḥ kṛto mithyā brāhmaṇebhya iti śrutiḥ*, "the report is that [Lomapāda] improperly forced his desires on the brahmins" (*MBh.* 3.110.20), an ambiguous statement that could be understood to have sexual overtones. *Kāma*, "desire" has obvious and well-known sexual overtones, but it is also frequently used in more innocent contexts, especially with the verbal root *kṛ-*. Similarly, the adverb *mithyā* (wrongly, improperly) in itself is not necessarily sexual, but the *mith-* root from which it is derived carries a wide variety of aggressive and sexual connotations. The combination of the *mith-* root and *kāma* in such proximity suggests that the two may (at least at one point) have added up to

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[19]Cf., e.g., the terrifying matted hair of Vyāsa at *MBh.* 1.100.5.

[20]Williams also finds Vibhāṇḍaka's hairiness provocative, and reaches conclusions similar to ours: "That there should be *two* beast-men, father and son, in this legend seems at first peculiar. They may indicate a coalescing of two traditions, or rather the development of an original story of the seduction of a partly beast-like hero of fertility into a legend containing two hermits." (Williams 1925–1926, 33)

[21]Remnants of the motif of hairiness may exist elsewhere in the tale, however. The name of the Sanskrit story's king, Lomapāda, "he whose feet are covered in body hair," is somewhat suggestive, though certainly not definitive. We observe here, in anticipation of later discussion, that nearly all of these references to animal characteristics are lost in other versions of the tale.

more than the sum of their parts, with the implication that the king may have sexually mistreated his priests. Such an action would be close to unthinkable within the *Mahābhārata*. The text is willing to discuss many questionable acts, but male rape is outside its pale. We suggest that *MBh*. 3.110.20 either attempts to blur or gloss over a piece of the story that the editors felt they were unable to report fully but were reluctant to omit entirely, or, more likely, preserves a faint linguistic vestige of the story's past.

The account of Gilgamesh's offense is equally cloudy. Is it simply that he is demanding of his subjects that they devote themselves completely to his athletic or building activities or is he making excessive sexual demands on them? It is likely that this ambiguity reflects a development in the text: apparently the description of Gilgamesh's "oppression" of his people in the epic is modeled on the Sumerian "Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Netherworld," where Gilgamesh and his people seem to be fully engaged in athletic activities[22]; subsequently, in the epic the situation was changed to one where Gilgamesh's demands were no longer athletic but seem to have been sexual. But this new orientation—at least in our presently fragmented text—has not yet been articulated clearly.

4.5.5   The King's Offenses Require the Intervention of the Gods

In both tales, the king's actions have cosmic repercussions. Lomapāda's misbehavior angers the gods and causes them to withhold the rains, leading to the suffering of his people. As for Gilgamesh, his tyranny becomes oppressive to the point that his people cry out to the gods; thus, the gods become involved and ask Aruru to create Enkidu.

4.5.6   The Wild Man is an Innocent

In direct contrast to the king, the wild man is innocence personified. Not only is he ignorant of sexual matters, he is entirely without political consciousness. Enkidu lives among the animal herds and is completely unfamiliar with fundamental characteristics of human life:

> [*š*]*u''ur šārta kalu zumrišu*
> *uppuš pēretu kīma sinništi*
> *itqī[!23] pērtišu uhtannabā kīma* ^{d}*Nissaba*

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[22]For the athletic activities in "Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Netherworld," cf., e.g., (Klein 2002, 187–201). These activities are no longer evident in the Akkadian, where instead such lines as SB tablet I 76–77 suggest that his demands are sexual. This would agree with the nature of the situation that occasioned the encounter and battle of Gilgamesh and Enkidu (SB tablet II 100–115, OB P cols. iv–vi).

[23]Text: *itiq*; cf. I 60.

lā īde nišī u mātamma
lubušti labiš kīma ^{d}Šakkan
itti ṣabâtimma ikkala šammī
itti būli mašqâ itepper
itti nammaššê mê iṭâb[24] libbašu
(*Gilgamesh* SB tablet I 105–112[25])

All his body is matted with hair,
he is adorned with tresses like a woman:
The locks of his hair grow as thickly as Nissaba's,
he knows not at all a people nor even a country.
He was clad in a garment like Šakkan's,
feeding on grass with the very gazelles.
Jostling at the water-hole with the herd,
he enjoys the water with the animals.

Similarly, Ṛśyaśṛnga lives a simple existence in the forest. The text mainly emphasizes his state of perfect and uncompromised celibacy:

na tena dṛṣṭapūrvo 'nyaḥ pitur anyatra mānuṣaḥ
tasmāt tasya mano nityaṃ brahmacarye 'bhavan nṛpa.
(*MBh.* 3.110.18)

He had never before seen any other person than his father
and because of this, his mind was always that of a *brahmacarin*, Oh
King.

Ṛśyaśṛnga's innocence is so profound that he is not even aware that the courtesan is female: his subsequent lengthy description of her to Vibhāṇḍaka presumes, to comic effect, that she is male:

dvau cāsya piṇḍāvadhareṇa kaṇṭham
majātaromau sumanoharau ca.
vilagnamadhyaśca sa nābhideśe
kaṭiśca tasyātikṛtapramāṇā.
(*MBh.* 3.112.3–4)

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[24]Others *iṭīb*. Von Soden and Röllig (1991, p.18* s. 293) retracted the value *ṭàb* for DAB, which von Soden had earlier based on our text; however, because of the durative forms in the preceding lines, we believe that von Soden (1959, p.222, and p. 58 s. 293, of the original *Syllabar*) was right to have read *iṭâb* in our passage, in spite of the variant *i-ṭi-bu* in the parallel lines SB tablet I 173 and 177. Note that in the translation we have replaced George's "enjoyed" with "enjoy."

[25]Cf. (George 2003, 545).

And he had two round globes below his throat,
hairless and charming.
And he was slender-waisted in the region of his navel,
and his hips were exaggerated in size.

4.5.7   The King Arranges for a Courtesan to Seduce the Wild Man

The hallmark of both tales, the sexual seduction of the wild man by the cour-
tesan, is carried out at the suggestion of the beleaguered kings. In both cases,
the creature's transformation from animal to human is accomplished by means of
arousing his sexual interest. In the Ṛśyaśṛnga story, the courtesan knows her task
is accomplished when she sees that he has been *vikṛtam* (transfigured, changed)
by her attentions (*MBh.* 3.111.17). In the epic of Gilgamesh, the wild man is dra-
matically changed by the sexual encounter - in the SB version, the change is both
physical and mental: "Enkidu was diminished, his running was not as before, but
he had *reason*, he [was] wide of understanding";[26] in the OB version, his defini-
tion of his place in the world has changed: "The two of them were making love
together, he forgot the wild where he was born."[27]

4.5.8   The Seduction Occurs Adjacent to Water

Both seduction scenes take place beside a body of water. Enkidu is first spotted by
the hunter, and later seduced by Shamhat, at the water-hole to which he accompa-
nies the herds. In the *Mahābhārata*, Vibhāṇḍaka's hermitage is on the shore of a
great lake (*mahāhrada*, possibly the lake's proper name, 3.110.12, 13), in which
he is bathing when Ṛśyaśṛnga is conceived. The seduction of Ṛśyaśṛnga by the
prostitute (*veśyā*) takes place there. Moreover, a barge specially equipped for the
prostitutes serves as a blind from which the *veśyā* approaches her quarry and on
which she carries him off.

4.5.9   The Transformation is Cultural as Well as Sexual

Once existentially transformed, Enkidu is then led to a camp of shepherds where
he is introduced to the ways of human society:

akalam iškunū maharšu
iptēqma inaṭṭal u ippallas
ul īde ᵈEnkidu akalam ana akālim

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[26]SB tablet I 201–202: *umtaṭṭu ᵈEnk[idu u]l kī ša pāni lasānšu / u šū īši ṭ[ēma r]apaš hasīsa* (George
2003, 551).
[27]OB P col. ii 46–47: *ur[ta'']amū kilallūn / ṣēram imtaši ašar iwwaldu* (George 2003, 175).

> *šikaram ana šatêm lā lummud*
> *harīmtum pīša īpušamma*
> *issaqqaram ana ^dEnkidu*
> *akul aklam ^dEnkidu simat balāṭim*
> *šikaram šiti šīmti māti*
> *īkul aklam ^dEnkidu adi šebêšu*
> *šikaram ištiam sebe assammī<<m>>*
> *ittapšar kabtatum inangu*
> *īliṣ libbašuma pānūšu ittamrū*
> *ultappit gallābum šu''uram pagaršu*
> *šamnam iptašašma awīliš īwi*
> *ilbaš libšam kīma muti ibašši*
> *ilqe kakkašu lābī ugerre*
> (*Gilg. OB P col. iii 87–112*[28])

> They put bread before him,
> he *watched intently*, gazing and staring.
> Enkidu did not know how to eat bread,
> how to drink ale he had never been shown.
> The harlot opened her mouth,
> saying to Enkidu:
> "Eat the bread, Enkidu, the thing proper to life;
> drink the ale, the lot of the land."
> Enkidu ate the bread until he was sated,
> he drank the ale, seven jugs (full).
> His mood became free, he was singing,
> his heart became merry and his face shone bright.
> The barber treated his body so hairy,
> he anointed himself with oil and became a man.
> He put on a garment, becoming like a warrior,
> he took up his weapon to do battle with the lions.

Just as Shamhat cares for Enkidu, so the prostitute offers Ṛśyaśṛnga food (*bhakṣān mahārhān*, *MBh.* 3.111.13), alcohol (*pānāni cāgryāṇi*, *MBh.* 3.111.14), and fine clothing (*citrāṇi vasāṃsi ca bhānumanti*, *MBh.* 3.11.14),[29] as well as sex, completing his transformation from animal to human. But while the Gilgamesh

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[28]Cf. (George 2003, 177).

[29]Shamhat provides clothing for Enkidu by dividing her garments in two and sharing them with Enkidu. The greater preparations made for the capture of Ṛśyaśṛnga obviate the need for a similar action on the part of the *veśyā*, as the barge has been equipped to provide for him. We do, however, find the motif of the divided garment elsewhere in the *Mahābhārata*, and in close textual proximity to the story of Ṛśyaśṛnga. Immediately preceding the Pāṇḍavas' decision to tour the sacred fords,

story makes the culture/ nature contrast explicit—Enkidu does not even know *how* to eat bread or drink ale—Ṛśyaśṛnga's story conveys this through a stylized exchange which is part of the seduction. In Gilgamesh the food is a symbol of transformation and acculturation but not a part of the seduction itself. But in both cases, the action is not merely seduction and entrapment; it is the awakening of a human consciousness within an animal.

4.5.10 The Wild Man is Taken Willingly

Though the purpose of the mission in both texts is to capture the wild man, in both stories the creature himself is more than willing to be taken away to the city following his consciousness-raising encounter with the woman. So Enkidu in SB tablet I 205ff. // OB P col. ii 51ff.; Ṛśyaśṛnga begs the *veśyā* to take him away with her when she returns after her three-day absence (*MBh.* 3.113.7). Both wild men express enthusiasm for the human life to which they have been exposed, and both are eager to learn more.

4.5.11 The Wild Man's Transformation Sparks Alienation from his Former Life

After his awakening to human consciousness, Enkidu is rejected by the herd he lived with, at least in the SB version. Ṛśyaśṛnga's interest in the prostitute ignites the wrath of his father, Vibhāṇḍaka, who lectures his son on the dangers of succumbing to feminine wiles (*MBh.* 3.113.1–4).

4.5.12 Interaction with Herdsmen Marks the Transition from Country to City

Enkidu and Shamhat spend time with herdsmen after his seduction but before his departure for Uruk. Ṛśyaśṛnga himself does not do so, for he is taken straight to the city on the barge and installed in the harem. However, Vibhāṇḍaka does interact with the herdsmen when he himself goes to the city looking for his son. Instead of Ṛśyaśṛnga, it is the father, Vibhāṇḍaka, who is fed and housed by the herdsmen (*MBh.* 113.16–18). The simple reassignment of a motif or action from one character to another is a common practice within the evolution of narrative. In the tale of Ṛśyaśṛnga, the herdsman have been carefully coached by King

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they listen to a recitation of the story of Nala, another king who lost his kingdom through addiction to dicing. Eventually, reduced to nakedness, Nala must share the single garment of his wife, Damayantī (*MBh.* 3.59.1–5). Initially, the two wrap themselves in it together. But Nala's story takes an even more tragic turn when he secretly cuts the garment in two after Damayantī falls asleep and then abandons her in the forest (*MBh.* 3.59.12–26).

Lomapāda to inform the angry father that all their lands and herds belong to his son, a ruse designed, as used in "Puss-in-Boots," to induce good humor and pliability in the character being so deceived. This portion of the tale has a decidedly Indo-European flavor, and there is no equivalent section in the story of Enkidu. It is our reading, therefore, that while the visit to the herdsmen probably originated with the Near Eastern tale, the coaching of the herdsmen either originated with the pre-existing tale, or was a modification made to the borrowed Near Eastern story after it was included in the epic.

4.5.13 City/Country Dichotomy Echoes King/Wild Man Dichotomy

At its heart, the tale of the wild man and courtesan is about the union of opposites: male and female, animal and human, rural and urban, wild man and king, natural innocence and royal misconduct. In the epic of Gilgamesh the dichotomies are made explicit; in the case of the Sanskrit version, less so, though of course the union of opposites is a mainstay of Hindu thought. The Ṛśyaśṛnga story is not as overtly pious in theme or content as many of the other tales from the sacred fords, but perhaps its inclusion in this section indicates that it may have been these themes of dichotomy that resonated with the composers and compilers of the Indian epic.

4.5.14 The Wild Man and the King Complete One Another

Enkidu becomes Gilgamesh's dearest companion and counterpart, and Ṛśyaśṛnga becomes Lomapāda's *purohita*, his household priest and intercessor to the gods, a more formal, but equally indispensable role.[30]

As Ṛśyaśṛnga's story comes to a close, its similarity to Enkidu's decreases. The narrative reverts to the earlier story, roughly as introduced in the preamble: Ṛśyaśṛnga is married to Śāntā, forgiven by his father, and ordered to return to the hermitage with his bride when he has "granted the king all the favors he asks" (*MBh.* 3.113.21). The tale closes with references to six iconic mythological marriages (*MBh.* 3.113.22–24).

4.6 Summary of the Comparison of the Two Narratives

In view of the overwhelming number of shared motifs, there can be little doubt that the two stories are related.[31] Furthermore, in our view, acceptance of the relationship leads inexorably to the conclusion that the Near Eastern tale is the older.

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[30] Schlinghoff identifies a Jain reflex of the tale in which the wild man is actually the king's long-lost brother (Schlinghoff 1973, 302–305.)

[31] See above fn. 2 for a selected list of scholars who support this conclusion.

Certainly the age of the Gilgamesh epic suggests this initially, but other factors support it as well. The idea that the tale of the wild man and the courtesan is an Indo-European story that made its way to the Near East seems unlikely, as there are no other identifiable Indo-European reflexes of the tale (at least, none that are known to us). Thus, while it is not reasonable to suppose that the shared tale originated in India and was carried over to Mesopotamia, it does seem more than reasonable to assume that the shared tale originated in Mesopotamia.

Our case is strengthened by a recent analysis of the Enkidu episode (Abusch 2005), for that analysis suggests that earlier versions of the Enkidu story may have resembled the story of a seduced Indian hermit even more closely than do the later versions. Although a hunter plays a role in the present episode in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, it is likely that a form of the episode of the wild man and courtesan existed independently of the epic and did not contain the hunter. Critical analysis suggests that originally the main characters in the episode were the courtesan and the wild man and that the courtesan seduced Enkidu without any involvement on the part of the hunter; the hunter was not part of the original tale, but was added to the text at a later stage of its development (Abusch 2005, 425–428; 2008). The reconstructed version involving only the wild man and the courtesan almost certainly took form separate from and independent of the larger Gilgamesh epic and would likely have been the form of the episode when it was first incorporated into the Gilgamesh epic (Abusch 2005, 428–429). Only after that episode was introduced into the Akkadian epic would the hunter have been added. Given the form of the Indian story, the present Ṛśyaśṛnga story would agree even more with a Mesopotamian version without a hunter than with the standard version of the epic.[32] Certainly, the putative existence of a version without the hunter strengthens the evidence from parallelism and our contention of relationship. But, all the same, we should reiterate that even if the reconstruction of a version without a hunter turns out to be mistaken, the agreements with the standard version suffice for our argument.

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[32] As an aside, we may mention that the dependence of the secondary layer of the Ṛśyaśṛnga story on a Mesopotamian prototype thus also provides further—though perhaps circular—proof of the existence of a form of the wild man-courtesan account without a hunter in Mesopotamia. Here, we may also note that the fact that the capture of the wild man by the courtesan is carried out at the suggestion of the king in both stories further supports the notion that the hunter was not part of the original Near Eastern story and that the hunter's father's suggestion was a duplication of Gilgamesh's idea that he take along a courtesan and not the original source of the plan. That the suggestion originated with Gilgamesh and was then carried over to the hunter's father, see (Abusch 2005, 425–428, 432–433 n. 45).

4.7   Description of the Various Indic Versions of the Tale

There is, however, one obstacle to this otherwise straightforward identification of a parallel: the *Mahābhārata*'s version of the story is only one of many Indian variants, and other versions of the tale are far less similar to the story of Enkidu. The compositional date for these variants cannot be conclusively determined, for the texts were composed within broad and overlapping time periods (see fn. 8, above) and endlessly revised and edited. Generations of retellings of various tales resulted in a complex web of borrowings, influences, and counter-influences among various pieces of Indian literature. The oral preservation of narratives and the eventual commission of narratives to text are processes governed by the need to employ those narratives for new religious or ideological purposes; every re-telling will preserve hallmarks of the tale, but it will also update the story in ways that serve the narrator's own ends. In the case of the tale of Ṛśyaśṛnga, we believe that analysis of the differences among the various versions offers a number of clues to each one's place in the tale's developmental trajectory, and we will now proceed to discuss these variants.

The story has been productive in India, and variants are found in both Hindu and Buddhist sources. In Hindu versions a prostitute seduces the innocent youth, while in the Buddhist sources princesses and a celestial nymph play the role of seductress. Extant versions of the tale in Sanskrit and Pali include the following:[33]

Mahābhārata, 3.110–113

As related above. At just over 100 verses, this is the longest of the Sanskrit versions; in this Hindu version of the tale a prostitute figures as the primary seductress in the body of the tale.

Rāmāyaṇa, I, 8–10

This Hindu version, also in Sanskrit, is roughly equivalent to that found in the *Mahābhārata*, though much abbreviated. Its sole deviation from the *Mahābhārata*, other than minor omissions, is that a group of prostitutes carries out the seduction. The interest value of this version is minimal since it is only told in order to establish the *bona fides* of Ṛśyaśṛnga, who is called in to officiate at a horse sacrifice for Rāma's father, Daśaratha. It is quite short, just under 50 verses.

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[33] Two additional sources make brief mentions of Ṛśyaśṛnga, placing him as one element in a list of unusual births: the *Skanda Purāṇa* (III.iii.19.65) and the *Buddhacarita* of Aśvaghoṣa (IV: 19).

The Bengali Recension of the *Padma Purāṇa*

This third Sanskrit Hindu version differs from the *Mahābhārata* at only a few points: Ṛśyaśṛnga's mother is an enchanted princess in the form of a deer; the ruse of the herdsmen is not employed, instead Ṛśyaśṛnga himself goes out to implore his father not to destroy the city. At 78 verses, this is not quite as rich and detailed as the *Mahābhārata's* version, but is longer than the *Rāmāyaṇa's*.

The *Mahāvastu's Jātaka of Nalinī*

In this Sanskrit Buddhist version the king's dilemma is the lack of an heir, rather than a conflict involving his priests. Accordingly, he sends his daughter Nalinī to "Ekaśṛinga" to entice the boy into love and marriage; afterwards, it is revealed that the two have been married for a thousand previous lives. However, they have no sexual contact before the solemnizing of the union. In spite of his name, Ekaśṛinga lacks a corresponding animal characteristic, though this is the only Sanskrit version in which the character interacts with animals after his birth, and it even contains a speaking role for Ekaśṛinga's mother, the doe.

Naḷinikā-Jātaka, no. 526, Bk. XVIII of the Jātakas

In this Pali Buddhist version it is the innocent king who has been unwittingly embroiled in conflict between the gods and the holy man (the exact opposite of the *Mahābhārata*'s version). The holy man is now called Isisinga, and the god Sakka, threatened by his powerful meditations, causes a drought. When the king prays for a means of resolution to ease the suffering of his people, he is told that the boy must be seduced by the king's daughter Naḷinikā. She accomplishes this by impersonating another type of ascetic. When Isisinga's father discovers that he has been compromised, he explains to the boy how to resume the path of righteousness. There is no departure for the city, no anger of the father, and no marriage.

Alambusā-Jātaka, no. 523, Bk. XVII of the Jātakas

This second Pali Buddhist version contains a second story in which the powerful asceticisms of Isisinga have again caused celestial havoc. This time Sakka himself sends the nymph Alambusā to disrupt these austerities, but the seduction, though a short-term success in that it puts Isisinga into a coma-like sleep for three years, ultimately fails when he wakes and recalls his father's advice about women. The nymph departs, chastened, and reports back to Sakka who thanks her graciously.

The story is similar to the *Mahābhārata*'s tale of Viśvāmitra and Menakā,[34] and may well owe more to that tradition than to the Ṛśyaśṛnga story.

The variants, though diverging widely in some respects, conform to certain observable trends of type and presentation, many of which involve motifs found elsewhere in Indian literature. It is therefore necessary to address the variants with an eye to understanding their relationship to one another and establishing a possible chronology of the story's evolution. The transformations, and therefore the versions which contain them, can be plotted along a gradient which moves from the unusual (in an Indic context) to the typical; in our estimation, the nature of the alterations provides valuable clues as to the direction of change.

4.8   Assessment of the Relative Ages of the Variants of the Tale

The issue of priority among the versions was, of course, the primary focus of Lüders' 1897 study, which study has stood as the flashpoint of the discussion on chronology for some time. Lüders concluded, as discussed above, that the *Mahābhārata*'s story originally employed a princess as the seductress,[35] but was revised to reflect the Bengali Recension of the *Padma-Purāṇa*, which was, in his view, the originator of the prostitute-variation. Moreover, though he considered the existing Buddhist versions to have a "jüngere und schlechtere Form" (Lüders 1897, 126) of the tale than the Hindu versions, Lüders thought that they preserved an earlier element of the story, specifically: the princess as seductress. It is our contention that the prostitute is the original seductress in the tale, and that the character of the seductress is only one among a number of important factors in determining the priority of the versions. We will now address some of the transformations observable in the versions and their implications regarding the history and development of the narrative in India, with reference to Lüders' arguments where applicable.

4.8.1   The Nature of the Seductress

The seduction of the youth is performed by one or more prostitutes in the *Rāmāyaṇa,* in the Bengali Recension of the *Padma Purana*, and in the

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[34] As told to Duḥṣanta by Śakuntalā at *MBh.* 1.65.20–66.10.

[35] Others who disagree about the nature of the original seductress include (Pauly 1987–1988, 304–305): "Though Lüders has shown that two of the brahmanical versions of the legend (in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*) have substituted a courtesan for the princess of their own earlier versions, it cannot be taken for granted that a courtesan was not originally the seductress in the story. The two versions existed along with each other for a long time, and our texts do not permit us to decide which of the two versions is original in this respect." (Panaino 2001, 151 n.20; Schlinghoff 1973, 302–303; Williams 1925–1926, vol. 1, 34.)

Mahābhārata,[36] but by the princess Naḷinikā in the *Naḷinikā Jātaka* and in the *Mahāvastu*'s *Nalinīka Jātaka*. In Lüders' analysis, as noted above, the princess is the original seductress, and the prostitute a later revision first introduced by the Bengali Recension of the *Padma-Purāṇa* and subsequently copied by the epic tales. Even if this sequence were not militated against by numerous other points to be discussed below, Lüders' reading, in and of itself, would still be untenable. On the basis of our reading of the tale in the *Mahābhārata* and the other variants, we feel that a prostitute must have been the original seductress. The alteration of a common motif (princesses abound in the *Mahābhārata*) to one less common (prostitutes) is simply not consonant with the standard trends of oral literature. The addition of a prostitute, in particular, is also in no way in character with the *Mahābhārata* as a whole; there is, in fact, only one other use of the word (*veśyā*) in the entire epic.[37] The use of a prostitute as the seductress thus seems to be a motif equally foreign to both Hindu and Buddhist traditions and unlikely to have been a later revision. Logically, the idea of a story independently evolving away from culturally accepted norms to become nearly identical with a foreign story (without the direct influence of that story) is not credible; the reverse is far more likely. Lüders' analysis also does not take account of (and even fails to allude to) the nymph-as-seductress of the *Alambusā Jātaka*, whose very existence provides strong evidence that the Buddhist versions were willing to tolerate more flexibility than the Hindu. Finally, the several name changes that the female protagonist undergoes (Śāntā, Nalinī, Naḷinikā, Alambusā) support the idea that her role was very much in flux.

4.8.2   The Number of Seductions in the Tale

Lüders regarded the identity of the seductress as the key to understanding the evolution of the tale, a bias which, in our view, severely limits his ability to take other even more significant variations (such as the number of seductions) into account. There are three distinct acts which might be termed "seductions" in the *Mahābhārata* and *Padma-Purāṇa*: 1) Vibhāṇḍaka is seduced by the sight of the celestial nymph; 2) Ṛśyaśṛnga is seduced by the prostitute; and 3) Princess Śāntā marries Ṛśyaśṛnga (this will be discussed at length under Section 4.10, "Internal Analysis of the *Mahābhārata*'s Ṛśyaśṛnga Account"). This multiplicity of seductions contrasts sharply with the presence of only one seduction in the other versions, a seduction structurally equivalent to Ṛśyaśṛnga's seduction by the prostitute. This

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[36]We remind the reader once again that when we talk of the tale of Ṛśyaśṛnga in the *Mahābhārata* in our comparison of the Indian variants we are referring to the body of the *Mahābhārata* tale at *MBh.* 110.30–113.10.

[37]This occurs at *MBh.* 3.231.10: *śakaṭāpaṇaveśyāś ca yānayugyaṃ ca sarvaśaḥ*, a description of the camp-followers of an army.

superabundance suggests that the tale is a compound, the product (as we believe) of the combination, via borrowing, of two tales into one story, a combination created by the superimposition of one upon the other.

The first of the *Mahābhārata* and *Padma-Purāṇa*'s seductions is brought about by Vibhāṇḍaka's arousal and ejaculation at the sight of the celestial nymph Urvaśī. This version of the conception of the boy has been omitted in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and carefully de-sexualized in the three Buddhist versions: the production of the father's semen is either explained away as the result of a rich meal, as in the *Mahāvastu*, or not explained at all, as in the *Jātakas*. Significantly, this form of seduction (arousal at the sight of a nymph) is not so very different from the seduction of Isisinga in the *Alambusā Jātaka*, in which Alambusā is sent by the god Sakka to disrupt Isisinga's meditations.

The tale's second seduction, the primary narrative element of the tale, is that performed in the Hindu versions by the prostitute (*Mahābhārata* and *Padma-Purāṇa*) or prostitutes (*Rāmāyaṇa*). In the Buddhist versions, the prostitute has been removed: in the *Mahāvastu*, her role is taken over by the princess who marries Ṛśyaśṛṅga; the *Naḷinikā* and *Alambusā Jātakas* go one step further and omit the marriage entirely and replace the seducing prostitute with, respectively, a princess and a nymph.

Our assessment of the *Alambusā* and *Naḷinikā Jātaka* versions, therefore, is that the *Mahābhārata*'s seductions of father (by nymph) and son (by prostitute/ princess) were first conflated, and then split into separate stories. The two *Jātaka* tales clearly reference one another without providing any evidence of a shared temporal sequence, essentially acknowledging that they are two halves of a previous whole, with no attempt made to reconcile the different versions. This reinforces the idea that during the period of the composition of the *Jātakas* the tale was being revised for a new milieu and changing mores.

4.8.3 The Name of the Wild Man

The changing name of the wild man (Ṛśyaśṛṅga, Ekaśṛṅga, Isisinga) should be taken into account in the evaluation of priority. It is true that inexplicable name changes are not that uncommon in Indian literature, but, in this instance, the change in the wild man's name is, in our estimation, a critical issue in determining the time sequence of the tales. The name of Ṛśyaśṛṅga (lit. "antelope-horn"), son of Vibhāṇḍaka, appears (though not in association with the specific narrative we have here) in quite early Hindu sources—the *Jaiminīya-Upaniṣad-Brāhmaṇa* (III, 40), the *Vaṃśabrāhmaṇa* (2), and the *Ārṣeyabrāhmaṇa* (VI, 5)—which almost certainly pre-date the earliest Buddhist occurrences of the character. Thus, it is likely that "Ṛśyaśṛṅga" was the earliest name of the character to whom the

story was attached in India, and accordingly that the versions of the story in which the character's name is Ṛśyaśṛnga have the greater claim on being the original versions as well.

Further evidence that the Buddhist versions reflect later developments lies in the fact that the main character's name does not remain static, but alters over time, becoming "Ekaśṛnga" (lit. "one-horn") in the *Mahāvastu*, and "Isisinga" (lit. "seer-horn") in the *Naḷinikā* and *Alambusā Jātakas*. Finally, in the *Digha Nikāya* Commentary (ii.370) and the Bharhut Tope, we find yet another version of the name: "Migasingi," the Pali version of Mṛgaśṛnga, "deer-horn."

The "Isisinga" form is of particular interest to us, as it actually reflects a misunderstanding of the meaning of the original Sanskrit name, no doubt arising from the similarity of the words for "seer" (*ṛṣi*), and "antelope" (*ṛśya*). In Pali, Sanskrit's vocalic *ṛ* becomes *i* in word-initial position, both *ś* and *ṣ* become *s*, and *sy* goes to *ss*. Thus, the expected result from *Ṛśyaśṛnga* would be *Issasinga*, but the tales give us "Isisinga"; that is, *ṛśya* (antelope) is changed to *ṛṣi*, and his name is no longer "antelope-horn" but "seer-horn." While it is within the realm of possibility that the reverse of this proposed sequence occurred, namely, that the names Ekaśṛnga and/or Isisinga arose in legend or folktale earlier than the name Ṛśyaśṛnga, and that it is Ṛśyaśṛnga that is therefore either the corrupted form of the name or an unrelated character assimilated to the others on the basis of similarity in the names, our proposed sequence seems to be a better reading of the evidence.

4.8.4   The Nature of the Crisis

In the *Mahābhārata*, the *Padma-Purāṇa*, and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, as in *Gilgamesh*, it is offensive on the part of the king that require that the wild man be seduced and brought to the town. The Buddhist versions, however, have transformed the crisis in such a way as to exonerate the king. In the *Mahāvastu*, for example, the problem is the king's lack of a son, and the king himself has committed no wrong. In the *Naḷinikā Jātaka*, the king is a benevolent character, and the adversarial role has been transferred to the god Sakka, who, intimidated by Isisinga's flawless virtue, conceives of a plan to disrupt the *ṛṣi's* asceticism. The jealous god causes a three-year drought, and when the people suffer, the king arranges the seduction of the ascetic to appease the god. The *Alambusā Jātaka* eliminates both the king and the conflict; Sakka alone arranges the disruption of Isisinga's meditations.

4.8.5   The Wild Man's Animal Characteristics

The texts' attention to the wild man's animal characteristics also varies. The three versions which utilize prostitutes also mention that Ṛśyaśṛnga possesses a horn

that gives him his name, while the horn goes unmentioned in the three Buddhist versions (though it seems to be present in some of the relevant Buddhist art depicting the tale).[38] The epic and puranic versions also contain a reference to hairiness through the king's name, Lomapāda or Romapada, "He whose feet are covered in body hair," though only the *Mahābhārata* describes Vibhāṇḍaka as hairy as well.

4.8.6   The Nature of the Wild Man's Transformation

Perhaps the most compelling evidence for the direction of the tales' evolution lies in the shifting presentation of the transformation that the boy undergoes as a result of the seduction. In the *Mahābhārata*, the seductive powers of women may be an unwelcome distraction from the acquisition of spiritual potency, but they do not cause spiritual corruption. Ṛśyaśṛnga's awakening is not a fall from grace: ignorance is changed to understanding, not to bitterness or regret. In the *Mahābhārata*, *Rāmāyaṇa*, and *Padma-Purāṇa*, the only negative consequence of Ṛśyaśṛnga's awakening is a sort of generational conflict with his father, and the seduction does absolutely nothing to compromise Ṛśyaśṛnga's virtue. In the *Mahāvastu*, we are in something of a middle ground: the piece is primarily a love story, the *ṛṣi's* spiritual powers are of no importance because he is merely being recruited as a son and heir, and while the seduction causes him no spiritual setbacks, it is also not a physical seduction. In the *Jātakas*, on the other hand, consonant with a greater emphasis on the ascetic lifestyle as more rule-bound and result-oriented, the seduction has become an act of deliberate corruption and damaging sabotage.[39] This is particularly true in the *Alambusā Jātaka*, while in the *Naḷinikā Jātaka* the overall effect is softened somewhat by the altruistic motives of the princess. If the tale had originated in a Buddhist milieu, it seems unreasonable to imagine that a redactor would have replaced the harsh moral lessons of the *Jātakas* with the spiritually positive outcomes of the seduction of Ṛśyaśṛnga found in the *Mahābhārata*.

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[38]See (Schlinghoff 1973, 305–306) for examples.

[39]Albright (Albright 1920, 330) also asserts that the corruptive power of the seduction is a Buddhist contribution to the tale: "The hermit relates the experience to his father, who admonishes him, and draws him back to his ascetic career; the last is naturally a Buddhistic modification, quite foreign to the original tale."

4.9   Summary and Conclusions Regarding the Chronology of the Ṛśyaśṛnga Story

The motif of the tempted or besotted ascetic occurs in many forms in Indian liter-ature,[40] and clearly commanded considerable interest from audiences and com-posers alike, making this tale a magnet for revisions and variations on this theme. On the basis of our assessment of the variations noted above, but especially the form of the name, we conclude that the existing Ṛśyaśṛnga story in the *Mahāb-hārata* is the oldest Indic version of the tale and the others are later variations. The Buddhist versions appear to have evolved by reverting to stereotypical story patterns, especially regarding the king's character, the seductress, and the na-ture of the change wrought in Ṛśyaśṛnga. What we have attempted to display by means of this analysis of the variations in the tale is that the tale in the *Mahāb-hārata* is the closest one to an "original" Indic version and that the other versions are derivative. Accordingly we believe that the Rsyasrnga tale presently found in the *Mahābhārata* is the oldest Indic version of the tale of the wild man and the courtesan.

4.10   Internal Analysis of the *Mahābhārata*'s Ṛśyaśṛnga Account

Finally, we must turn to one more issue with which Lüders' analysis was also concerned, that is, the issue of the preamble-body disconnect, and then to an analysis of the relationship between *Mahābhārata's* preamble and the versions of the story. Thus far, in discussing the *Mahābhārata's* narrative, we have treated only the central portion of the tale as it is found there (essentially that part found at *MBh.* 3.110.30–113.10, and referred to in this article as the "body" of the piece).[41] As stated above, appended to the front of the tale is a brief preamble (*MBh.* 3.110.1–10) in which the narrator, Lomaśa, loosely summarizes the story and the eldest Pāṇḍava brother, Yudhiṣṭhira, responds with a set of leading questions. The "body" of the narrative, as we have discussed it above, is quite straightforward, but a closer study of the body in conjunction with the preamble indicates that the body and preamble do not match and points to the existence of a number of irregularities and contradictions. Whereas Lüders saw these discrepancies as the result of a series of editorial re-workings designed to harmonize an original *Mahābhārata* version featuring a princess with the Bengali recension of the *Padma-Purāṇa*, we consider them to be the result

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[40]In the *Mahābhārata* alone we have Viśvāmitra (1.65–66), Cyavana (3.122), Sunda and Upasunda (1.201–204), Triśiras (5.9). In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, cf. Māṇḍakarṇi 3,11. The motif is particularly fasci-nating because it can be associated with a variety of positive or negative outcomes for ṛṣi, temptress, and any potential offspring.

[41]See Section 4.11 "Narrative Layers in the *Mahābhārata*," for an explanation of our terminology.

of a borrowing from an external source. Thus we do not agree with Lüders'
conclusions; moreover, while we concur with Lüders on the importance of
several of the textual problems he identified (Lüders 1897, 88–92), we feel that
he did not take account of several significant issues. Let us now examine the
preamble itself. It runs as follows:

> lomaśa uvāca
> eṣā devanadī puṇyā kauśikī bharataṛṣabha
> viśvāmitrāśramo ramyo eṣa cātra prakāśate 1
> āśramaś caiva puṇyāravyaḥ kāśyapasya mahātmanaḥ
> ṛśyaśṛṅgaḥ suto yasya tapasvī saṃyatendriyaḥ 2
> tapaso yaḥ prabhāvena varṣyāmāsa vāsavam
> anāvṛṣṭaryāṃ bhayādyasya vavarṣa balavṛtrahā 3
> mṛgyāṃ jātaḥ sa tejasvī kāśyapasya sutaḥ prabhuḥ
> viṣaye lomapādasya yaś cakārādbhutaṃ mahat. 4
> nivartiteṣu sasyeṣu yasmai śāntāṃ dadau nṛpaḥ
> lomapādo duhitaraṃ sāvitrīṃ savitā yathā 5
> yudhiṣṭhīra uvāca
> ṛśyaśṛṅgaḥ kathaṃ mṛgyām utpannaḥ kāśyapātmajaḥ
> viruddhe yonisaṃsarge kathaṃ ca tapasā yutaḥ. 6
> kimarthaṃ ca bhayāc chakras tasya bālasya dhīmataḥ
> anāvṛṣṭaryāṃ pravṛttāyāṃ vavarṣa balavṛtrahā. 7
> kathaṃ rupā ca śāntābhūd rājaputrī yatavratā
> lobhayāmāsa yā ceto mṛgabhūtasya tasya vai. 8
> lomapādaś ca rājarṣir yadāśrūyata dhārmikaḥ
> kathaṃ vai viṣaye tasya nāvarṣatpākaśāsanaḥ. 9
> etan me bhagavan sarvaṃ vistareṇa yathātatham
> vaktum arhasi śuśrūṣor ṛśyaśṛṅgasya ceṣṭitam. 10
> (MBh. 3.110.1–10)

Lomaśa said:
1. This, O Bull of the Bhāratas is the divine sacred river Kauśikī;
and here shines forth the charming hermitage of Viśvāmitra,
2. And also, O Great-Souled One, the hermitage called Puṇyā, of
Kāśyapa's son, Ṛśyaśṛṅga, powerful, and of controlled senses,
3. Who, by the power of his *tapas*, caused Vāsava to rain
in a drought; from fear of him the slayer of Bala and Vṛtra rained.
4. That *ṛṣi* was conceived upon a deer, the powerful son of Kāśyapa.
He performed this great wonder in the kingdom of Lomapāda.
5. When the crops had been restored, the king gave Śāntā to him—
Lomapāda [gave] his daughter as Savitṛ did Sāvitri.

Yudhiṣṭhīra said:
6. How was Ṛśyaśṛnga, the son of Kāśyapa, born from the deer
in prohibited sexual congress, and how was he engaged with *tapas*?
7. Why, out of fear of the boy, endowed with wisdom, did Śakra,
the slayer of Bala and Vṛtra, rain in the ongoing drought?
8. How great was the beauty of the strict-vowed princess Śāntā,
she who seduced his consciousness, when indeed he was living as a
deer?
9. It has been heard that Lomapāda was a dharmic royal *ṛṣi*—
Why indeed did the Chastiser of Pāka not rain in his kingdom?
10. Lord, all of this to me carefully as it happened
you ought to tell; I want to hear the ways of Ṛśyaśṛnga.

In contrast to the body of the story, the tale anticipated by this preamble is
one in which Lomapāda is a law-abiding king, both Ṛśyaśṛnga and Śāntā play ac-
tive roles, the gods involve themselves, and fear generated by Ṛśyaśṛnga's powers
is a critical element. All of the above hallmarks of the preamble are absent from
the body of the story in the *Mahābhārata*. Introductory question-and-answer ex-
changes are not uncommon in the beginning of an embedded narrative, but they
are typically restricted to a few pertinent (and accurate) questions about the nature
of the tale to come or about some background information not handled in the body
of the story.[42] In this case, the exchange in the preamble is not only especially
long and detailed, but is also unusual in that it contains material that inaccurately
represents, or even contradicts, the storyline of the body. Elements found in the
preamble that do not agree with the story are as follows.

4.10.1   Ṛśyaśṛnga Was Extremely Powerful (*śl.* 2, 3)

The body of the tale contains no suggestion of Ṛśyaśṛnga's power whatsoever. If
anyone in the tale generates fear, it is Vibhāṇḍaka, not the harmless and gentle
Ṛśyaśṛnga. *Śl.* 6 of the preamble also asks "how was he engaged with *tapas*?"
another issue that is never really adequately addressed by the tale.

4.10.2   Indra Was Afraid of Ṛśyaśṛnga

Indra's fear is expressed twice in the preamble, in *śl.* 3 (Indra rained "out of fear
of [Ṛśyaśṛnga]") and *śl.* 7, Yudhiṣṭhira's second question ("Why did Śakra, slayer

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[42]Cf. the various other preambular statements attached to the front of stories in this section: *Agastya*
3.94.2–3; *The Meeting of the Vṛṣṇis and Pāṇḍavas* 3.119.1–2; *Cyavana* 3.121.20–25; *Māndhātar*
3.125.23, 126.1–4; *Jantu* 3.127.1; *Aṣṭāvakra* 3.132.1–5; *Bharadvāja* 3.135.9–11. None of these ex-
ceed five verses, and none contain material that contradicts the story about to be told.

of Bala and Vṛtra, out of fear of the wise boy, rain in the ongoing drought?").[43]
These statements anticipate a tale that describes some form of interaction or an
ongoing relationship between Ṛśyaśṛnga and Indra. However, no mention is made
of Indra's fear of the boy in the body of the tale, where Indra's role is nearly
nonexistent (only one verse at *MBh.* 3.113.10).

4.10.3   Ṛśyaśṛnga's Power Ended the Drought

Śloka 3 of the preamble specifically says that it was "by the power of
[Ṛśyaśṛnga's] *tapas* he caused Vāsava [Indra] to rain." This does not ac-
cord with *MBh.* 3.113.10, in the body of the tale, where there is no further
mentions of Indra's fear, and no actions on the boy's part are ever narrated. Indra
simply sends the rain as soon as Ṛśyaśṛnga has been installed in the women's
quarters. Similarly, the preamble's assertion in *śl.* 4 that Ṛśyaśṛnga "performed a
great wonder," also suggests more activity on the boy's part than merely being
abducted and locked up as a kind of talisman.

Ṛśyaśṛnga's apparently passive role in the bringing of the rains also ties in
with a general imbalance in the import of the drought as it is presented in the
preamble and in the body. Though the drought is the central issue of the preamble
and looms large in the opening of the tale, by the conclusion of the narrative it
has been largely replaced by the issue of the pacification of the irate *ṛṣi*, and the
actual account of its resolution at *MBh.* 3.113.10 occupies only half a verse.[44]

4.10.4   Antelope/Deer Alteration

Ṛśyaśṛnga's name, "Antelope-Horn," raises an interesting issue in respect to a
slight irregularity regarding the narrative's use of the words *mṛga* "deer" and *ṛṣya*
"male antelope." The terms are to some degree interchangeable in Sanskrit (that
is, all *ṛṣyas* are *mṛgas*, but not all *mṛgas* are *ṛṣyas*), but their use in this story is
sharply delineated. *Ṛṣya*, the more specific term, is used only in the character's
name and in the explanation of the name at *MBh.* 3.110.17: *tasya Ṛśyaśṛngam sir-
asi*, "on his head was an antelope horn." Every reference to the doe that bore him
understandably employs the far more common *mṛga* (3.110.4, 6, 14, 16). Thus

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[43]Note also that the Indra's relationship to the drought and rain is also constructed differently in the
MBh. preamble than it is in the Buddhist versions that contain a drought; in the Buddhist tales the
drought, not the rain, is caused by Indra's fear of the ascetic's powers, whereas the *MBh.* preamble
claims that Indra sends the drought as punishment for the king's lack of sacrifices and rains out of fear
of Ṛśyaśṛnga.

[44]Schlinghoff (1973, 304–305), too, felt that the drought and its resolution seem extraneous to the
tale; in order to provide a motivation for the abduction, he adduces the Jain tale of Valkalacīrin, which
he believes to be cognate with the Ṛśyaśṛnga story and which features a wild man seduced and brought
to the city by prostitutes because he is the king's long lost brother.

far, the irregularity may simply be an issue of venery and reflect the alteration of the terms for buck and doe. Less clear, however, is 3.110.8 in the opening summary, where ṛśyaśṛnga himself is referred to as a *mṛga*:

> *kathaṃ rupā ca śāntābhūd rājaputrī yatavratā.*
> *lobhayāmāsa yā ceto mṛgabhūtasya tasya vai.*
> (*MBh.* 3.110.8)

> How great was the beauty of the strict-vowed princess Śāntā,
> she who seduced his consciousness when indeed he was living as a
> *mṛga*?

But the alteration of terms is only one facet of the difficulties we encounter in 3.110.8, and below we continue a discussion of this problematic verse.

4.10.5   Ṛśyaśṛnga's Life as a Deer

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     While the body of the Sanskrit tale reports in detail that Ṛśyaśṛnga, though horned, lives in the style of an ascetic, *MBh.* 3.110.8, claims that Ṛśyaśṛnga was seduced, literally "while his being was that of a deer," (*mṛgabhūtasya*[45] *tasya vai*), in apparent contradiction to the rest of the narrative. Elsewhere, the story never indicates that Ṛśyaśṛnga lived in either the form or the manner of a deer; rather, it emphatically states that he lived as an ascetic, though possessed of an antelope's horn. Thus, we read this reference to his life "while his being was that of a deer" as an indication that these opening questions were originally intended to accompany either a story in which an ascetic lives in the *manner* of a deer (*mṛgacāriṇī),* as Yayāti's daughter Mādhavī does at *MBh.* 5.118.7 and 5.119.20, 24, or, perhaps, in the *form* of a deer (*mṛgo bhūtvā,* "having become a deer"), as is the form of the ṛṣi who curses Pāṇḍu for killing him as he mates with his doe at *MBh.* 1.109.[46] The suggestion that Ṛśyaśṛnga lived in deer-shape grounds the

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[45]Mss Ś₁, K₁, and K₂ read *mṛgarūpasya*, "in the form of a deer," a variant equally far removed from the actual content of the body of the tale.

[46]In a similar passage at *MBh.* 3.139.1–10, an unwitting son sees his ascetic father wrapped in a black antelope skin walking at night in the hermitage and, mistaking him for an actual antelope, kills him with an arrow. There are profound and widespread associations between *ṛṣis* and antelope/deer, from their propensity to assume deer form to the black antelope skins that formed part of the standard accoutrements of a *ṛṣi* (as in *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 1:1:4:11: "He now takes the black antelope skin, for completeness of the sacrifice. For once upon a time the sacrifice escaped the gods, and having become a black antelope roamed about. The gods having thereupon found it and stripped it of its skin, they brought it (the skin) away with them"). This issue of *ṛṣis* living as deer may perhaps even be one of the details that precipitated the adoption and modification of the tale; the transplanted wild man character may very well have fallen into the role of an *ṛṣi* because of this longstanding association between *ṛṣis* and antelopes.

preamble of the tale in story-patterns found elsewhere in the epic, heightening the contrast between preamble and body.

4.10.6 Princess Śāntā Was the Seductress

Another crux to be found in the introduction to the story regards the seduction of Ṛśyaśṛnga. *MBh.* 3.110.8 suggests that it was the princess Śāntā who first lured the ascetic: "she who seduced his consciousness."[47] This is, of course, the line that led Lüders to his conclusion that the *Mahābhārata* had originally contained a version closer to that of the *Mahāvastu* or the *Naḷinikā Jātaka*. However, the rest of the tale is emphatic in its assertion that the seduction was performed by the nameless *veśyā* ("courtesan") who first appears when she is selected by the procuress:

> *tato duhitaraṃ veśyā samādhāyetikṛtyatām*
> *dṛṣṭvāntaraṃ kāśyapasya prāhiṇodbuddhisaṃmatām*
> *sā tatra gatvā kuśalā taponityasya saṃnidhau*
> *āshramaṃ taṃ samāsādya dadarśa tam ṛṣeḥ sutam*
> (*MBh.* 3.111.5–6)

> Then the [chief] *veśyā*, having considered what needed to be done,
> seeing the departure of Kāśyapa, dispatched her daughter known for
> her intelligence.
> The clever girl, having gone there, to the vicinity of the ascetic,
> having entered the hermitage, she saw the *Ṛṣi's* son.

The contradiction between 3.110.8 and 3.111.5–6 cannot be resolved. It forms a significant crux and provides clear evidence of a disconnect between the preamble and the body of the episode.[48] The seduction by the prostitute takes up the bulk of the story and is, in fact, the entire point of the tale. The preamble's attribution of the seduction to Princess Śāntā cannot be reconciled with the rest of the text. Indeed, within the context of *Mahābhārata* as a whole, the seduction by the *veśyā* is a glaring anomaly. However, the *Mahābhārata* does have many stories of princesses who take an active role in finding husbands or who cause men to fall in love with them through more demure behavior. It may well be that in an earlier phase of the development of this tale, Princess Śāntā seduces his heart in a manner not unlike that in which Śakuntalā seduces Duḥṣanta's (*MBh.*1.65–66), Sukanyā Cyavana's (*MBh.* 3.122–123), or Sāvitrī Satyavan's (*MBh.* 3.277–

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[47]Buitenen (1973–1975, vol. 2, 443) renders *cetas* here with the more contextually conventional "heart," but "consciousness" is the more common meaning.
[48]As noted earlier, Lüders (1897, 100) recognized the difficulties presented by this verse.

283), making the alleged seduction simply another slightly unusual *svayamvara* (bridegroom-choice).

4.10.7   Lomapāda Was a Just King (*śl.* 9)

Though Lomapāda has apparently redeemed himself by the end of the tale, disrespectful treatment of Brahmins is a serious crime. As discussed above in Section 4.5, "Parallel Elements in the Stories of Enkidu and Ṛśyaśṛnga," the body of the narrative even contains a faint suggestion that the king's mistreatment of his priests was of a sexual nature.

4.10.8   Vibhāṇḍaka Had Intercourse with the Deer

Śl. 6 has Yudhiṣṭhira ask "How was Ṛśyaśṛnga, the son of Kāśyapa, born from the deer in prohibited sexual congress?" Every other version of the tale is scrupulous in eliminating any possible suggestion of sexual contact between Vibhāṇḍaka and the deer; and in the body of this version the deer is impregnated by the accidental ingestion of semen, rather than via sexual contact. However, the phenomenon of ascetics in deer form engaging in sexual activity is far from unknown (as described above in Section 4.10.5) and may well have been a part of the *Mahābhārata*'s tale in an earlier phase of this narrative's development.

4.10.9   The Desertion of the Brahmins

The Sanskrit story contains an interesting crux at the point of the narrative when the king's problem is discussed. At *MBh.* 3.110.20, the brahmins desert Lomapāda in response to his behavior. Among those who have deserted the king, so the next verse reveals, is the royal *purohita*, the absence of whose sacrifices angers the gods and causes them to withhold the monsoon so that the people suffer. Lomapāda's reaction to the brahmins' abandonment is to consult brahmins, and this second group of priests assists him in formulating a plan. One of their number advises him to capture Ṛśyaśṛnga, and the king accepts the suggestion and begins to make amends for his previous misdeeds:

> etacchrutvā vaco rājan kṛtvā niṣkṛtim ātmanaḥ
> sa gatvā punar āgacchat prasanneṣu dvijātiṣu
> rājānam āgatam dṛṣṭvā pratisaṃjagṛhuḥ prajāḥ
> (*MBh.* 3.110.27)

> Upon hearing these words the king performed expiation for himself,
> Having gone away again, he returned when the brahmins were satis-

fied,
Having seen the king returned, the subjects took him back.

The presence of two sets of brahmins seems excessive. Where does the second group of Brahmins come from? To be sure, nothing in the narrative is irresolvable, but it is unnecessarily cumbersome as it stands.[49] Moreover, though *MBh.* 110.21 refers to the subjects' misery, it does not anticipate the suggestion at *MBh.* 3.110.27f. that the subjects may actually have been on the brink of rebellion as well.

Prominent among the above irregularities are a number of elements that are portrayed differently in the preamble and in the body of the story (dharmic Lomapāda/unjust Lomapāda, dynamic Ṛśyaśṛnga/passive Ṛśyaśṛnga, *mṛga/ṛśya*, living as a deer/living as a brahmacārin, Princess Śāntā/nameless courtesan), with the result that the summary not only fails to accurately foreshadow the contents of the narrative, but actually contradicts them.

In our opinion, the issue of the preamble's difficulties is also connected to a similar awkwardness at the ending of the tale. While the body forms a seamless whole with no internal contradictions, after *MBh.* 3.113.11 the ending of the episode undergoes another puzzling shift. Ṛśyaśṛnga is whisked off to the harem, and the focus shifts to Vibhāṇḍaka's journey to the city and the abatement of his wrath. We are never given any particulars about the resolution of the drought or Ṛśyaśṛnga's role in stopping it, issues that are rather important in the Buddhist versions.

4.11   Narrative Layers in the *Mahābhārata*

We believe that the best way to explain these discrepancies is to assume that the present text is made up of two accounts, the later superimposed upon the earlier. In our reconstruction, the story of a wild man seduced by a prostitute at the command of a scandal-embroiled king has been grafted onto a pre-existing tale, whose remnants we see in the preamble: the story of a powerful ascetic and his conflict with Indra. From the conclusion of the current story, we may also infer that this ascetic, or his son, marries a princess and produces a male child. We therefore analyze the structure of the existing story in the *Mahābhārata* as follows:

110.1–15 Preamble and Opening

This section includes the opening questions plus the establishment of the locus of the tale and is a vestige of the original Indian tale in the *Mahābhārata*. It contains

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[49]As Lüders (1897, 90) remarks: "Wie kann der König die Brahmanen um Rat fragen, von denen eben gesagt ist, daß sie ihn im Zorn verlassen haben!"

no reference to any of the motifs found in the wild man/prostitute story that we identify with the body of the tale. The converse of this is also true: aside from the necessary details of Ṛśyaśṛnga's parentage, the only parts of the story that the preamble anticipates correctly are those that occur at the ending of the tale.

110.16–29 First Transitional Area

Here, the two narrative layers are spliced together, resulting in minor redundancies: the two sets of Brahmins, as well as the uncertainty as to whether the subjects are also in revolt.

110.30–113.10 Body

Here, the story of a wild man who is seduced by a prostitute has been incorporated and adapted to its new cultural milieu. This adaptation includes, for example, a more stylized scene of seduction, and the conversion of the wild man into an ascetic, as well as the humorous presentation of Ṛśyaśṛnga as charmingly ignorant of human gender.

113.11–113.18 Second Transitional Area

Here, the visit to the herdsmen (which originated in the body) and the father's wrath (which came from the original underlying tale) are combined, and the father visits the herdsmen instead of his son.

113.19–113.24 Ending

Here, the text retains the climax and resolution of the original underlying tale—the marriage to the princess—now attached to the story of the wild man and the courtesan.

The suggestion that the body of the Ṛśyaśṛnga story is a borrowing is also generally supported by the context in which the tale is found in the *Mahābhārata*, the section referred to as the *Tour of the Sacred Fords* (*Tīrthayātrāparvan*). A number of the tales found in this section are Vedic in origin;[50] others appear to be folktales or local legends.[51] The opportunity for the exchange of stories and information has always been an attractive feature of pilgrimage sites; the *Tour* is thus a logical clearinghouse for a wide variety of borrowings or accretions.

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[50] E.g., Agastya (*MBh.* 3.94–108), Sukanyā (*MBh.* 3.121–125).
[51] E.g., the irascibility of Mt. Ṛṣabha (*MBh.* 3.109).

Situating the tales at the fords is likely a tacit acknowledgement of their varying provenances; we shall later revisit the issue of what might constitute acceptable sources for borrowing.

4.12   The Relationship of the Preamble to Other Versions of the Tale

We cannot leave this part of our discussion of the Ṛśyaśṛnga tale and take up the question of borrowing before raising and discussing the issue of whether or not the preamble might simply reflect other versions of the Ṛśyaśṛnga story, which, as we have seen, in some cases stray quite profoundly from the tale as it is found in the body of the *Mahābhārata's* version. If so, this might contradict our results and suggest that these other versions are earlier.

    In fact, some of the elements in the preamble are quite reminiscent of those in the other tales. For example, the assertions in *śl.* 2–3 that Ṛśyaśṛnga was extremely powerful would be an accurate description of the character as he appears in the *Naḷinikā and Alambusā Jātakas*. The preamble's statement that the princess was the seductress is appropriate to both the *Mahāvastu* and the *Naḷinikā Jātaka*, excepting that her name in the other versions is not Śāntā, but Naḷinī or Naḷinikā. Also, the assertion that Lomapāda was a just king, in *śl.* 9, is far more descriptive of the kings in the Buddhist versions (the *Mahāvastu* and the *Naḷinikā Jātaka*) than it is of Lomapāda.

    However, other elements featured in the preamble are equally out of place in the other versions, including the idea that Ṛśyaśṛnga's power was somehow directly instrumental in ending the drought: *śl.* 3 declares that "from fear of him the slayer of Bala and Vṛtra rained," which is at odds with the *Naḷinikā Jātaka's* account, in which it is the *breaking* of Ṛśyaśṛnga's power that satisfies the god; and the *Mahāvastu* and the *Alambusā Jātaka* contain no drought at all. The statement that Ṛśyaśṛnga was seduced "while his being was that of a deer," is also not found in any of the other versions of the tale, nor is the idea that Vibhāṇḍaka may have had intercourse with the deer; in fact, every other version of the tale is careful to explain away any possibility of sexual contact between ascetic and deer (both these issues were discussed in greater detail above under "Internal Analysis of the *Mahābhārata's* Ṛśyaśṛnga Account").

    Therefore, in view of the fact that every narrative element shared between the Buddhist versions and the preamble is a fairly common and typical motif of Indic literature, we feel that the resemblances are best explained as a consequence of the assimilation by the Buddhist derivatives to other typical Indian tales and the absorption of those typical features. That is, their evolution caused them to become less, rather than more, unique: the Buddhist versions of the tale took on

a semblance of uniformity with the typical Indian tale that formed the original preamble version.

4.13   Origins and Transmission of the Tale

Especially in view of the absence (as far as we know) of an Indo-European or earlier Indic version of a wild man prostitute story, the composite nature of the Ṛśyaśṛnga story and its present location in the *Mahābhārata* (a tale-within-a-tale in the storehouse of disconnected material) suggest that the body of the present Ṛśyaśṛnga story is a borrowing. In view of, first, our conclusion that the Ṛśyaśṛnga story drew its wild man-courtesan layer from elsewhere and second, the obvious relationship of the accounts in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, it is evident that the wild man account in the *Mahābhārata* derives─though perhaps at some remove─from a Mesopotamian source. In fact, there are other episodes in the "Tour of the Sacred Fords" with possible Near Eastern relations,[52] and it may be that their proximity to one another is evidence of their common Near Eastern background.

The Mesopotamian source of the Ṛśyaśṛnga tale is probably some form of the Enkidu story known from the Epic of Gilgamesh. But the form is not yet certain, for while it is possible that both the Ṛśyaśṛnga and the Enkidu stories derive from a common Near Eastern ancestor, the Indian tale may derive from a form of the Epic of Gilgamesh itself. But given the absence of a hunter both in the Ṛśyaśṛnga tale and in the original form of the Mesopotamian wild man tale, it is likely that the Ṛśyaśṛnga story derives from an independent story of the Wild Man and the Prostitute that existed either prior to the latter's incorporation into the Epic of Gilgamesh or that continued to circulate alongside the epic after the incorporation. Of course, there is no objection to assuming that it derived from the epic itself after the tale was incorporated into it, but then this derivation would likely have taken place before the hunter became part of the epic.

Two final questions remain to be addressed: first, when was the story incorporated into the *Mahābhārata*, and second, how and when was the story transmitted from the Near East to India? The following sections will treat these issues separately.

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[52]Matsya (*MBh.* 3.185), which has pronounced similarities to the Mesopotamian Flood story, and the "Colloquy of the Brahmin and the Hunter" (*MBh.* 3.198–206), which resembles a great deal of Near Eastern wisdom literature.

4.14   The Tale's Incorporation into the *Mahābhārata*

We have already discussed at length the evidence that we perceive for the existence of "layers" in the Indian tale. Whatever the time period of the tale's introduction to India, our reconstruction of the story's layering supports the idea of a late addition of the Near Eastern overlay onto the pre-existing story in the *Mahābhārata*.[53]

As was noted earlier in Section 4.11, "Narrative Layers in the *Mahābhārata*," a number of the tales found in this section of the *Mahābhārata* are Vedic, though others appear to be folktales or local legends; by situating the tales at a pilgrimage site, the compilers may have been acknowledging the varied sources of their material. But, though the tales may range widely in origin, it seems likely that at the time of their adoption all of them must have already circulated in Hindu society for quite some time; inclusion in the epic supports this, and a conceit of the *Tīrthayātrāparvan* is that its stories are equivalent to the Vedas in merit. The populist-yet-conservative ethos of the book is expressed in repeated assertions that the merit of bathing at the fords and of hearing their associated tales is accessible to those unable to afford expensive sacrifices. Thus, folktales would be a logical and acceptable vehicle for relaying the merit that can be awarded to a pilgrim, but obvious borrowings from abroad would seem unlikely to have been deemed acceptable to the compilers of the section. This suggests that a Near Eastern tale would have had to have circulated in India for some time before it would have been considered eligible for inclusion in the epic. On the face of it, this supports an earlier date for the borrowing, but whether this

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[53]See below under "Mode and Time of Transmission" for chronological parameters. Fleming and Milstein (*The Buried Foundation of the Gilgamesh Epic*) contend that the story of Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and Huwawa is the nucleus around which the OB epic of Gilgamesh was created. They think that the prostitute was used in the original Huwawa narrative to bring Enkidu to Gilgamesh in Uruk; but this Enkidu was a herdsman and not a wild man, and therefore no process of humanization and acculturation was involved. Upon this earlier narrative was imposed the new construction that we find in the OB epic. This new construction that highlighted Enkidu the wild man and Shamhat the prostitute who humanizes him involved (among other things) the introduction of the tale of seduction and acculturation presently preserved in the OB Penn tablet. As for the harlot, though she originally served in the Akkadian Huwawa narrative to bring Enkidu to Gilgamesh, her role underwent a major expansion with the creation of the OB epic and the imposition of the new Enkidu character upon the older one. We find Fleming and Milstein's argument convincing. More to the point, we believe that their argument supports our argument, and ours theirs, for we have argued that the *Mahābhārata* version underwent a similar transformation and that the wild man and prostitute were superimposed upon an earlier tale of a sage, king, and princess. Accordingly, parallel developments seem to have taken place in both the Mesopotamian and Indian spheres. While this may be only an interesting coincidence, the fact that literary developments along the same lines took place in this story in both Mesopotamia and India is generally supportive of the developments we have posited.

process of being absorbed and accepted by Hindu culture would have been the work of decades or of centuries remains unclear.[54]

4.15   Mode and Time of Transmission

The matter of the tale's arrival on the subcontinent is a thorny one. While it is possible that a folktale version simply diffused from West to East in a slow overland crawl, more direct contact may also be suggested. Two broad possible periods for transmission between Mesopotamia and India suggest themselves, the first sometime roughly between 2400–1700 BCE, and the second from 500 BCE–200 CE.[55] We will explore both scenarios, beginning with the later one.

4.15.1   Later Scenario: Approximately 500 BCE–200 CE

This scenario carries the advantage of allowing ample opportunity for the story to move from the Near East to India; for the period from the Achaemenid domination of Gandhara to the final phases of the assemblage of the *Mahābhārata* provides a generous span of time during which there was plenty of documented contact and political interaction between the two cultural areas.[56] On the surface, this appears to be the more reasonable choice, though the specifics of the transmission must then remain at the level of broad and rough conjecture. But we should note that this scenario carries hidden pitfalls. As discussed above in the section treating the story's incorporation into the *Mahābhārata*, one difficulty is the identification of a path and timetable that might bring the story to India early enough for it to become properly Hinduized.

To our minds, however, a more serious obstacle to transmission within this time period is the issue of the figure of the hunter in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. As discussed above (Section 4.6, "Summary of the Comparison of the Two Narratives"), we believe the absence of a hunter in the Indian version strongly suggests that the Indian tale was drawn either from a free-standing folktale without a hunter or from the Gilgamesh Epic prior to the inclusion of the hunter. Therefore, we are

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[54]It is the hope of the authors that closer examination of the other possible Near Eastern borrowings from "The Tour of the Sacred Fords" (as described in fn. 52) may shed further light on this matter.

[55]As noted above (fn. 7), the *Mahābhārata* seems to have been assembled and edited between the fourth century BCE and the fourth century CE. Here, we have chosen the date 200 CE as a *terminus ante quem* for the entry of the tale into India, on the basis of the evidence of the *Physiologus* (Schlinghoff 1973, 301), for that Greek text was composed circa 200 CE, and it already incorporates elements borrowed from our Indian story. Hence, the last date for the entry of the tale into India cannot be later than 200 CE, though of course the tale could have entered the *Mahābhārata* even later than it was taken up by the *Physiologus*.

[56]For contact and borrowing during the first millennium BCE, see, e.g., (Pingree 1998, 127–128, 130–132).

somewhat uneasy about deriving the Indian tale directly from the Near Eastern epic during this later period.

Written versions of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* are known from numerous first millennium BCE copies, but there is no reason to believe that a version of the epic without the hunter existed during that millennium. There remains the possibility that the tale of the wild man and the courtesan may perhaps have been transmitted even during the first millenium BCE as an independent tale, for, to be passed to India sometime after the middle of the Sixth Century BCE, the tale of the wild man and the courtesan would have had to have continued to circulate in the Near East. Unfortunately, we have no direct evidence that such an independent tale circulated either orally or in writing during the first millenium BCE. Perhaps it did not, for had the story remained in circulation during the first millenium BCE, it seems probable that it would have resurfaced at some point in Near Eastern literature, if not in a Greek or Latin borrowing or in an aggregative source such as Herodotus or Athenaeus.[57] It is therefore possible that the tale passed out of circulation at all points west of the Indus Valley, at least until the Indic variant resurfaced in the West as the Unicorn legend.[58]

These two factors (the absence of a hunter figure in the Indian version and the lack of evidence that the tale without a hunter was still in circulation in the Near East) make us wonder about this later time-frame for transmission. However, given the speculative nature of this part of our reconstruction, these difficulties are not of the magnitude to invalidate this later time-frame. But these difficulties do exist, and there is also an argument to be made for an earlier transmission of the tale.

4.15.2 Earlier Scenario: 2400–1700 BCE

Contact between Mesopotamia and the civilizations of the Indus Valley at Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro, and similar sites is well-documented during the latter part of the third millennium and into the Old Babylonian period.[59] Since an early

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[57]But note that Moran (1991, 121–127) makes a case that a passage in Ovid may reflect the ancient Near Eastern tale's central philosophical idea of sexual love as a civilizing/humanizing force. According to Moran, Ovid's description of primitive man and his humanization derives from an earlier tradition of acculturation through sex in which the participants are a man and his wife, rather than a man or wild man and a prostitute. The tale of Enkidu and the prostitute may well have had its roots in similar Near Eastern tales of the civilizing of early man (cf. Abusch 2005, 429).

[58]See, e.g., (van Buitenen 1973–1975, vol. 2, 188–1939; Schlinghoff 1971, 51–64; Panaino 2001).

[59]See, e.g., (Parpola 1993, 57–64), who gives a general survey of comparable elements in the two societies; cf. also (Dalley 1998, 14–15): "Contact deduced from goods found within Mesopotamia has been traced in the form of etched carnelian beads, stamp and cylinder seals featuring elephants and characteristically Indian cattle. There are no *bullae* of clay impressed with cylinder seals from the Indus, or terracotta cone mosaics, and it appears as if the contact between the two regions was

form of the Mesopotamian tale of the wild man and the courtesan would have existed prior to the composition of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* in the Old Babylonian period, the borrowing may have occurred while the Indus Valley civilization still flourished, some time between 2400–1700 BCE, thus perhaps even prior to the composition of the Old Babylonian version of the epic. Merchants, or even traveling storytellers, could have introduced the story into the Indus Valley, and the fact that the two cultures seemed to have been receptive to one another's influence on at least some levels[60] increases the likelihood that the tale would have been embraced and preserved.[61]

Though the advanced level of society represented at Harappa and Mohenjo-daro eventually went into decline, folktale is known for its remarkable durability in the face of cultural and political upheaval. The tale may well have enjoyed its own life on Indian soil for well over a millennium before being incorporated into the great epic.

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both later in time and of a kind different from that which is traceable in Egypt and along the upper Euphrates. It seems to have lasted from around 2500 BCE until the Indus cities were destroyed after some 700 years of splendor, with textual evidence from the cities of lower Mesopotamia in particular revealing that textiles and foodstuffs flowed eastwards. Just as happened earlier, some of the ideas and skills of Mesopotamian society were adopted in an area which had already become quite cultured, but the resulting development looked very different from the form it took elsewhere."

[60] For example, Akkadian-style cylinder seals with Akkadian-style carving have been found in the Indus Valley, and the two cultures were avid trade partners. The archeologist W. A. Fairservis believed that a seal showing a male figure overpowering two tigers reflected a Gilgamesh motif imported from Mesopotamia (Fairservis 1971, 275). Note again the quote from Dalley, above.

[61] This hypothesis may even be supported by material evidence. It is difficult to resist the temptation to connect the tale's theme of the horned *brahmacarin* with the famous Indus Valley seals depicting horned and ithyphallic figures seated as if in meditation (such as DK 12050 from Mohenjo-daro, currently in the Islamabad Museum, NMP 50.296). Another seal depicts the meditating figure surrounded by an assortment of wild beasts, much as Enkidu was prior to his awakening to human consciousness (the "Proto-Shiva Seal," M-304A, National Museum, New Delhi). A similar figure, and another with a similar headdress but bearing the body of a tiger, appears in several other contexts as well. All the above seals are discussed and pictured in (Aruz 2003, 402–408). Although these figures all have what appear to be two or more horns, the "unicorn," a single-horned bull-like animal, is also popular, appearing on a total of 1,156 seals, more than half of all seals found. Our single-horned *ṛṣi* may represent a later conflation of these two distinctive motifs of the Indus civilization. It is important to acknowledge here that if the presence of such motifs in the Indus Valley can be used in support of the hypothesis that Indus Valley culture was the conduit of transmission from West to East, then it is equally possible that the tale originated in the Indus Valley and the role of the traveling merchants was to transmit it from East to West. Nevertheless, the only argument in favor of this is logical deduction. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, we continue to favor the theory that the tale originated in the Ancient Near East on the basis of its entrenched position in *Gilgamesh*.

4.16   Conclusion

In summary: the tale of the wild man seduced by the courtesan originated in the Ancient Near East and eventually became an integral part of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. Through contact between the Near East and India, the story passed into the Indian subcontinent. Once established as oral narrative, the story circulated in India, perhaps even for centuries. As a folktale, it might easily resurface at a pilgrimage site and thereafter be deemed worthy of inclusion in the subcontinent's great epic within the corpus of legends that makes up the "Tour of the Sacred Fords." Having been thoroughly adapted to a Indian cultural and literary milieu, it was taken up by the *Mahābhārata*; but, rather than taking an independent place in the epic, it was introduced as a sort of overlay upon another story about an ascetic who lives as a deer, this one culminating in marriage to a princess and a mollified father. However, the combined version retained the structure of the tale of the wild man and his seduction by the prostitute. Of course, the integration of the two tales was not entirely seamless, but passable enough to escape further revision.

Our explanation for the similarities between the wild man tale in the epic of Gilgamesh and the *Mahābhārata* is speculative, but it is in fact, the simplest explanation of the evidence that we have. Hypotheses based upon the contact of civilizations are tricky, but such contact, where discernible, is of enormous significance for the history of cultural development. And it is surely edifying, especially for scholars like ourselves who specialize in the study of individual cultures, to witness the transformations that may take place when cultures borrow and adapt materials from each other.

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