

CALANUS AND DANDAMIS:  
A GREEK SKETCH OF ANCIENT INDIAN THOUGHT

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*This paper discusses the Indian philosophers Calanus and Dandamis named in the Alexander histories. It proposes that these two philosophers represent a composite of Indian philosophy that is the result of a genuine effort by the philosopher companions of Alexander to come to terms with and understand Indian philosophy.*

*In the paper I compare data provided by Greek authors, notably Strabo, Arrian, and Plutarch, with Vedic sources, e.g. from the Dharmasūtra: in the text the latter sources are indicated as DS.A., DS.B., DS.G., and DS.V. (not to be confused with Diodorus Siculus, whose name is abridged as D.S.) relating to respectively the Āpastamba, the Baudhāyana, the Gautama, and the Vasiṣṭa Dharmasūtra.*

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## 1. Introduction

The true identity and meaning of Calanus and Dandamis, Indian philosophers referred to in the histories of Alexander, has long fascinated students of the history of philosophy. The two figures stand as the earliest reference in Greek philosophy to its Indian counterpart and probably the most solid reference as well. But Calanus and Dandamis are not figures from Indian philosophy itself as identifiable names within that tradition, but are figures which appear only referenced in the Alexander histories. They are reported to us in Arrian, Strabo and Plutarch<sup>1</sup>. Preserved within these sources are some primary accounts from observers within the company of Alexander himself, namely Onesicritus, Aristobolus and Nearchus. Additional information with regards to the pair is garnered also through Megasthenes who, although writing after the fact, fills out and supports the story provided by Alexander's companions<sup>2</sup>.

The picture of these two philosophers, associated with the asceticism of the Indian philosopher, generally identified with the figure of the 'gymnosophist' or naked philosopher is, it must be admitted, rather vague and generalized. Despite or perhaps because of the intrigue the two have generated, surprisingly few scholars have been tempted into looking for signs of knowledge of Indian philosophy in the Greek philosophical world post-Alexander from this source. Because of the relatively little information which is conveyed to us about their activities and beliefs, and its usefulness in corroborating the theories of the observers who give the accounts of these philosophers, it has been argued that they are either tropes and types useful for ideological propaganda from various schools of the contemporary periods (Cynics, Stoics, Epicureans and later Christians as well), not representing a true knowledge of Indian philosophy or worse, that they represent a failure to understand basic aspects of Indian thought which betray a fundamental and fatal ignorance of its basic principles by the Greeks<sup>3</sup>.

In this paper we will put forward the claim that Calanus and Dandamis can be identified with Indian philosophy, although with no particular philosopher or school, and do indeed represent a genuine knowledge and attempt at understanding of Indian philosophy by those in the company of Alexander. That is to say, they carry enough of the characteristics of actual contemporary Indian philosophy that we must accept them as being a Greek picture of Indian philosophy. In this paper we will first recount the conditions and reasons that motivated and made possible the acquisition of this knowledge. In particular we want to put an emphasis on the role played by individuals and philosophical principles and interests on both sides in both encouraging and yet limiting the acquisition of this knowledge. Second, having established the conditions for the acquisition of knowledge, we will look at what knowledge is actually represented in Calanus and Dandamis of

<sup>1</sup> Arr. *An.* 7.1.5-3.6; Str. 15.1.61-68; Plu. *Alex.* 65, 67.

<sup>2</sup> The bulk of the relevant account being given in Str. 15.1.39-60.

<sup>3</sup> The former argument has been made by Sedlar (1980, especially ch. X) amongst others; the latter opinion was put forward forcefully by Bosworth 1996, 93-97.

Indian philosophy. We will argue that the figures represent a composite picture of the brāhmanic thought which they encountered and show an effort to come to grips with the complex ideas of caste, reincarnation and the *āśramas* (cf. *infra*, par. 3.3).

## 2. Historico-philosophical methodology: philosophy as study

The methodology used to discuss this topic straddles the border between historical and philosophical investigation and necessarily so. The content of our subject forces us to move along this double path. What is at stake is *both* historical and philosophical. The question of the identity of the two Indian philosophers is a question of historical fact. Either they do or they do not represent Indian philosophers; either they do or do not represent an effort at knowledge of Indian philosophy by Greek philosophers. But this fact is of philosophical importance as well. If it stands as a fact then it gives us another view on ancient Greek and Indian philosophy which we previously did not have. If an encounter did occur that led to some genuine knowledge of Indian philosophy, then there is a new avenue to seeing and thinking the ideas of ancient Greek philosophy in living connection with Indian philosophy and vice versa. This would bring a new layer of interpretation, a new angle of approach to an already rich set of ideas.

Such a historical-philosophical method can open one to the charge of historicizing philosophy. Philosophy deals with ideas and logical entities which are supposed to be timeless; the happenstance of historical situation affects the history of philosophy but not the content of philosophy itself. Our intent is not to reduce philosophy to a historical process but to read it in its fullness within the place of its articulation and realization. This position can be outlined if not fully defended here. Philosophy is, amongst other things, a process of learning, an acquisition of knowledge that takes place over time and is conditioned by circumstance. We can say that philosophy is a study and study in two senses of the word. In the first sense, it is a study precisely as a process of learning, an effort towards a goal of knowledge that is on the way to wisdom but has not yet arrived. In the second sense we can speak of its products as being studies with the meaning of the work of an artist or painter. Philosophical knowledge is a study, a sketch proposed of the subject it is contemplating. The quality of the study depends on numerous factors from the skill of the artist to the clarity of the subject, but just as much seemingly trivial or chance factors: the mood of the artist, the mood of the subject, time allotted and so on. This does not take away from the universality of philosophy but recognizes that it is always instantiated, always an effort towards wisdom but not wisdom itself. When we study its products, we must not simply stare at the picture presented us, but must look into the process that brought it about, the circumstances of its creation, not as an addition to our own study but as a necessary element of comprehending the study.

It is as the product of a particular philosophical investigation that I believe we should view Calanus and Dandamis. They are a study, a best effort sketch of an effort at philosophical understanding by Greek philosophers of Indian philoso-

phy. This effort can be read at the level of its historical truth and it can be read again with regards to its achievement in attempting to grasp an idea, a concept. Before we can look at the content of the sketch, however, we must look at the conditions of its creation. It requires that we return to a historical situation and its particular imperatives as being the matrix of the possibility of this interaction whatsoever and, also, its limiting condition. Calanus and Dandamis represent a picture of Indian philosophy that was only made possible by the imperial wars of Alexander and his decision to pursue his conquests to the farthest reaches of the Persian empire and beyond. This war in itself would not have permitted the possibility of such a historic encounter. If a collection of Greek philosophers who were able and interested in engaging an alien philosophic tradition had not traveled with Alexander's entourage no such picture could have been created. Had Alexander's company been bereft of philosophers, there would have been no one with the interest and philosophical acumen able to take on the immensely difficult task of attempting to decode an entirely alien philosophical tradition. It further could not have happened if, in India, the company of Alexander did not find able and willing Indian interlocutors who were willing to enter into a philosophical dialogue with the Greek invaders. Had the Indian philosophers simply written off the Greeks as barbarian invaders, something they might perfectly well have done, no exchange of ideas could ever have gotten off the ground. All of these stand as necessary enabling but also limiting conditions of the possible picture of Indian philosophy represented by Calanus and Dandamis.

We propose to first investigate these conditions showing the interests of both the Greek and Indian interlocutors and how they structured the study that would take place. We can then investigate what content of Indian philosophy Calanus and Dandamis exhibit. From this we can examine the degree to which the philosopher companions of Alexander were able to draw an accurate sketch, a knowledgeable sketch of their Indian counterparts which would serve as a landmark of Indian philosophy within the Greek tradition from the end of the classical period and beyond.

### **2.1 Philosopher companions: the artists of an Indian icon**

Were we to have a picture of Calanus and Dandamis brought to us simply through the tales of the army of a marauding emperor, there would be little hope in recuperating anything of philosophical or even historical interest from their tales. The likely mythologizing story would indeed probably tell us more about the tellers of the tale than about their subject. Or, like much of the mythical information of men with heads of dogs or feet as large as umbrellas which has been preserved, we might catch a glimpse of the outsiders' impression of a fundamentally different and alien mythological world: an anthropologically fascinating tale. No, in order to even begin to believe that a philosophically relevant picture of Indian philosophy is present in the figures of Calanus and Dandamis, we must meet at least two preconditions with regards to our witnesses. First, we must have as witness to and even recorder of their ideas, Greeks of sufficient philosophical training to be able to capture not just the superficial but the fundamental meaning of

the Indian philosophers. Second, this witness or these witnesses must have the motivation to engage with and record their impressions of Indian philosophy. In this sense, the company of Alexander is almost an embarrassment of riches. In Alexander's company in India there were three philosophers and a fourth, who though he had just perished at the king's hand, would have had his followers spread throughout the camp to continue to represent his philosophical beliefs. This was an ample number of accomplished and trained philosophers who would have been able to undertake to understand and describe Indian philosophy. Although only one of these, Onesicritus, is an actual recorded source on Indian philosophy in the histories, their presence and their arguments would have provided the philosophical frame under which the Greeks encountered the Indians<sup>4</sup>. And indeed, both Anaxarchus and Pyrrho are both recorded as making reference to Indian philosophy throughout their remaining philosophical careers<sup>5</sup>. The fact that multiple philosophers were present in the campaign suggests the possibility that a spirit of rivalry and philosophical investigation was kept up rather than a sterile environment of flattery and propaganda<sup>6</sup>. Though we will necessarily have recourse then to the words of other historians in our accounts of Calanus and Dandamis, we will argue that the tone of these philosophers' arguments and interests were a guiding factor in the absorption of knowledge of Indian philosophy which is eventually disseminated in the histories through the image of the two gymnosophists.

In order to understand the sketch, one must understand the artist and while we cannot say that any one of the philosophers individually produced the sketch of Indian philosophy, it was necessarily through their ideas and possibly through their personal investigations that the knowledge of Calanus and Dandamis was brought back to Greece. We must, therefore, be clear on the basic training and positions of these philosophers. First, there was Callisthenes, nephew of Alexander and Aristotelian by training (Arr. *An.* 4.10.1). Callisthenes was engaged in the cam-

<sup>4</sup> Preserved in Strabo. Cf. *supra*, notes 1 and 2.

<sup>5</sup> Anaxarchus' would be rather short. Having made a life time enemy of the tyrant Nicocreon, he was executed by the same when forced to land in Cyprus (D.L. 9.59). Pyrrho would live rather longer and Diogenes Laertius would quote Ascanius of Abdera saying of him that his encounter with the gymnosophists "led him to adopt a most noble philosophy" (D.L. 9.61), illustrating this by relating his life of solitude to teachings he learned in India saying "He did this because he had heard an Indian reproach Anaxarchus" (D.L. 9.63). We can take it that Anaxarchus is referring back to a common experience of the Indian sang froid when in the same passage he is remembered for having praised Pyrrho for ignoring his pleas for help when the former fell in a slough (D.L. 9.63).

<sup>6</sup> The story of this environment is complicated with the role of each of the philosophers in turn being described as being critical and of being a flatterer. It would seem clear from this that what was considered to be 'in the king's favour' was a moving norm that benefited and hurt each of the philosophers as the fortunes of their philosophical positions ebbed and flowed according to the political situation of the king. Also later historians were no doubt tempted to call those figures whose ideas with which they disagreed flattery while praising as critical the ideas of figures closer to their own convictions.

paigns of Alexander as his official historian. Callisthenes is known to have supported Alexander at first, and helped build his reputation as a divine king<sup>7</sup>. He is likewise known for his rejection of Alexander's hubris and insistence on classical Greek visions of ethics late in the Persian campaigns (Arr. *An.* 4.10-11). Although executed before arriving in India, his ideas and vision were a force within the camp even after his death. Anaxarchus was an atomist whose role in the campaign was never particularly well specified. He eventually fits within the inner circle of Alexander and was famous for his speech to Alexander after the death of Cleitus the Black, telling him not to grieve, as he, Alexander, had become the law (Arr. *An.* 4.9.7; Plu. *Alex.* 52). Anaxarchus proposed an ethics which went beyond the conservative ethics of Democritus and suggested the ultimate malleability of the world, without condoning this condition. Onesicritus was a follower of Diogenes the Cynic (D.L. 6.75-76). He was hired on to the campaign likely for his practical skills. He played both the role of captain of Alexander's ship down the Indus and later an important role in the fleet of Nearchus that returned to Persia by way of the sea (Arr. *Ind.* 18.9; Plu. *Alex.* 66). He had the difficult role of attempting to apply the principles of cynicism to an age of kings and states rather than *poleis*. Finally, there was Pyrrho the Sceptic, a citizen of the Olympic city of Elis (D.L. 9.61). Though his skepticism is said to be a result of his travels in India, he no doubt already provided an additional skeptical voice to the entourage of Alexander.

Thus, it is easily established that the competence to understand and take up philosophical ideas existed within the camp of Alexander. But competence without interest is not enough. What must be proved is that the Greeks had reason to be interested in the philosophy of the Indians. These philosophers had traveled through many lands on campaign with the king and they were not known for gathering philosophical knowledge about the local inhabitants. At best ethnographic data and accounts of custom were gathered as perhaps, in one sense, a 'scientific' enterprise to understand the peoples they were conquering, perhaps also as a popular activity, a sort of teratology of customs for the amusement of a readership back home. What must be proven is that there was a genuine basis of interest powerful enough that it made it necessary for the philosopher companions of Alexander to take seriously the ideas of the Indian philosophers. That there were reasons of interest both practical and theoretical is clear.

The practical interest was urgent and could not be ignored. Alexander's army had marched far beyond anywhere that a Greek army had been before and where even Persian armies had only been infrequently. There was an urgent military need to understand India and its people, if they had any chance of surviving the expedition into India, much less to conquer it. India was unlike either Egypt or Persia with which Greece had long had different types of direct and indirect relations. Arriving in Egypt or Persia was exotic and interesting but there were nonetheless skills available within the Greek and native populations for managing both con-

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<sup>7</sup> This argument is made forcefully in Pearson 1960.



quest and the imposition of rule. There would have been translators, cultural advisors, mercantile relations and so on. None of this was available in India. The land was a legend and myth. Direct relations had never existed. Knowledge of their culture was non-existent. Further, India was not some minor tribe which could be subdued and reduced without taking an interest in its institutions and beliefs. If India was to be ruled, it had to be understood, its beliefs and behaviors canvassed and made sense of.

Of course, the military interest imposed practical conditions on the investigations of the Greeks. They were limited in the time and scope of their activity. We cannot expect from them the detailed analysis of the scholar of Indian philosophy. The aim and intent of their inquiry into Indian philosophy was not the precise understanding of the terminology and minutiae of different Indian philosophical schools. Their interest was a general understanding of the outlines of Indian philosophy for the practical purpose of interacting with it. They aimed at finding the universal forms of its articulation rather than its detailed elaboration.

The theoretical interest was clear as well. The philosophical period which these philosophers were living was an ending of one era and the beginning of another. Conche has called it the zero hour of philosophy (Conche 1994, 11). Alexander's rule had destabilized the conclusions of mature classical philosophy. Married to its doctrines through his tutelage under Aristotle, Alexander brought many of the ideals of late classical philosophy to their paradoxical conclusion. The basic presuppositions of philosophy had to be thought again. The ideal of the free individual, serving his own end, is transformed into the apotheosis of the Great King. This brazen act of commandeering the role of the divine threw into radical question the relation of man to the divine, and the normative role of the latter upon the former. The ideal of the free city-state is eclipsed by the freedom of the Greeks as such. The question of the reconstitution of a political identity post-*polis* is necessarily brought to the foreground. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the character of reason itself as a property of the Greek and the Greek mind is put into by Alexander's crusade to bring *logos* to the East. In the practical negotiation of the conquest of empire, the Hellenic identity of *logos* is put into doubt by the plurality of *logoi* of the conquered peoples. This destabilization is evidenced in the great debates which have been alluded to above. The fundamental issues of philosophy were opened again in the time of Alexander and the very nature of Indian philosophy which they would encounter spoke to these fundamental issues. The philosopher companions could not but have paid heed<sup>8</sup>.

On the Greek side, then, we have both the necessary minds and bodies to encounter and investigate Indian philosophy and the imperative to do so as well. A competitive atmosphere of philosophical investigation characterizes the camp of Alexander. The greatest strands of late classical and early Hellenistic philosophy are directly represented in the camp including Aristoteleanism, atomism,

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<sup>8</sup> I have given a brief discussion of this issue in Bruseker 2008.

cynicism and skepticism. Each sought to gather support to its cause in a rapidly changing environment, using new material to elaborate and defend their positions as it came along. The philosopher companions and their ideas were already predisposed to an investigation of Indian philosophy. The necessities of warfare made this inclination an imperative. Alexander's army could not have survived in India nor attempted to rule it without coming to terms with its powerful intellectual and spiritual traditions. The necessities of the mind in responding to the implications of Alexander's particular warfare made it furthermore an intellectual duty to investigate beyond the known and look at new ways of conceptualizing problematized intellectual categories such as self, freedom and knowledge.

## 2.2 *Brahmins and Kṣatriya: difficult subjects*

We have identified our artists then but this leaves an *equally* important element in the equation unanswered. Who were the subjects of these philosophical investigations? It is to look in vain to seek in The Alexander histories for an exact answer to this question. Whatever portrait is finally given of India is done in an impressionistic style coloured by the constraints of war and discord. The names of Calanus and Dandamis are not names from the Indian tradition nor do their descriptions give the name of a school of philosophy or a sect to which they belonged which would allow us to immediately pick out who they were. The only truly Indian name which we are given in transliteration is *Brahman* as βραχμάνας. Plutarch makes our task seem all the more daunting by pointing out that Calanus was named that way because he greeted everyone with that expression (Plu. *Alex.* 65). Clearly we are forced to move beyond the text and, on the basis of contemporary knowledge of ancient Indian philosophy, reconstruct who it was that the Greeks were attempting to understand and describe. It is crucial that we understand who the Indian philosophers were, to what school or sect they belonged because it was just as much they, by their behaviour and their decisions, who would shape the image of Indian philosophy by their presentation thereof to their would-be painters.

To begin with we must remark on the area of India to which Alexander had arrived. At his furthest, Alexander barely touched what we consider modern India, arriving only to the valley of the five rivers, the Punjab. Even according to a later *Dharmasūtra*, the Indus itself forms the dividing line between the place of the *Āryas*, the traditional Indian culture, and that of foreigners or *Mlecchas* (DS.V. 1.8-16; *Manu* 2.17-25). On this account Alexander barely entered ancient India either. The area to which Alexander arrived was peripheral to the philosophical florescence which had occurred in India starting from the 8th century BC with the first Upaniṣadic thinkers and continuing through the great philosophical revolutions of the 7th and 6th century BC in which the heterodox systems of Buddhism, Jainism, Ajivikism, materialism and other sects developed. All of these philosophical developments took place with their centre in the Ganges valley far to the East, a destination that would remain forever out of the reach of Alexander<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> For a brief recounting of this transition see Basham 1967, 37-39.



To put the region of the Punjab entirely outside of the circles of mainstream Indian philosophy and culture, however, is erroneous. The Punjab region was in fact the birthplace region of Vedic culture and we have no reason to doubt that the region remained brāhmaṇic into the 4th century when Alexander arrived<sup>10</sup>. What should be stated is that the North West of India was a periphery region of Indian philosophy such that the innovations of the Ganges valley were not so heavily felt. This does not mean that the evolution of Indian philosophy was not recorded there, but standing outside of the epicenter of the philosophical revolutions of the Ganges valley, we might expect to see either a more traditional brāhmaṇic cult or one that is just beginning to grapple with the issues emanating to the periphery<sup>11</sup>. It would not yet likely be a strong centre of heterodox belief. On this reading, the Indians with which the Greeks would have had most contact would have been first and foremost the ruling classes of India from the traditional brāhmaṇic culture, namely the *Kṣatriya* or warrior class and the *Brahmins*, the priestly caste<sup>12</sup>. There is no reason to imagine that the Greeks could not have encountered members of heterodox sects such as the Buddhists, but even if they had these would have been in the minority, exceptions to the rule. It was the dominant brāhmaṇic culture that was their major interlocutor and subject of study, and furthermore the dominant classes speaking from their privileged position. The Indians, we have every right to posit, encountered the Greeks as the Greeks encountered them, on a war footing. As such the immediate possibility of commercial relations was ruled out. In the short period in which Alexander and his philosopher companions spent in India, the chief focus was politics by other means: war. Thus we should not look for our interlocutor amongst the commercial (*Vaiśya*) or worker's (*Śūdra*) class with whom they would have had little reason to interact. It was the *Brahmins* and the *Kṣatriyas* with whom dialogue and interaction was begun and these two encountered the Greeks with their own domestic practical and theoretical interests. On the practical plane, these classes clearly intended to meet the Greek forces

<sup>10</sup> On the geographic location of the first Vedic hymns see Basham 1967, 32-33 and also Thapar 1966, 33.

<sup>11</sup> Thapar (1966, 53) argues that the areas outside the Ganges valley were predominantly republican and thus less orthodox. While this holds true for the direct periphery of the Ganges valley, republican tendencies in the North West are not strong. While the republic became heterodox paradoxically by sticking to older tribal customs and developing new political theories in face of consolidated Orthodoxy, the North West would seem to have simply remained outside of this dynamic remaining orthodox in the non-reformed sense of the word.

<sup>12</sup> Tarn (1966, 173) states that it is 'too early' to speak yet of castes in India but that the four 'colours' existed. We will use the term caste here while noting that the content of this concept was thinner at this period than its later developments and rigidification in Orthodox thought systems. It is certainly the case that caste played a central role in the articulation of brāhmaṇic life even when it was a more fluid principle.

such as to maintain their power in the region<sup>13</sup>. The Greek invasion was not necessarily a threat to the Indian political system at all. As a series of independent and warring kingdoms, the Indian political elite had no central power to be dislodged and overthrown. Controlling North West India meant controlling a series of internally factional kingdoms and republics whose interests were largely centered on one another rather than the enemy invader. This situation may be thought to parallel the situation in Greece before Alexander but there were important differences. The idea of unification, the fact of the effort of unification had not yet entered into Indian politics at this point. There was no tendency in this direction as had been established in Greece through the politics of leagues and no known discussion of it. To the contrary if the tradition of *Arthaśāstra* texts of military thought can be dated back to this period, they would stand as theory tending to disunity<sup>14</sup>. Alexander was unlikely to repeat his success in unifying Greece in India if for no other reason than the extreme distance of India from his lines of supply and the centre of his power. The Indian kings and Brahmans in interacting with Alexander can thus be seen to be making an effort at obtaining their own domestic political gains, rather than making a defense against the exterior aggression. From a theoretical perspective, the *Brahmins* would have encountered the Greeks in a defensive-offensive posture. The role of the *Brahmins* was the defense of the traditional Vedic life, in its contemporary interpretation. This involved at least the three following roles: the defense of caste, the defense of the *āśramas* (orders of life) and the articulation of the ascetic life. These formed the core interests of brāhmanic philosophical reflection. Their interest in encountering contending traditions was the continued defense and stabilization of the tradition through the inoculation of their structures of thought against foreign influence. The most basic institutions of brāhmanic culture, the *varnāśramadharmā*, were constructed with

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<sup>13</sup> There are numerous illustrations of the Brahmins encountering Alexander in a fight to the death (Arr. *An.* 6.7.4-6, 16.5, 17.2; D.S. 17.103). But the official interactions with India's higher castes did not always lead to simple bloodshed. Alexander's building of vassal-like relationships with the local kings Porus and Taxiles (Plu. *Alex.* 59-60; Arr. *An.* 5.19.2) show another side of these war interactions, one in which the diplomatic route eventually wins out. These encounters are worthy of a study in themselves for their similarity in tone to the types of relations and interactions advocated in the Indian political texts the *Arthaśāstra*.

<sup>14</sup> It is true that the actual *Arthaśāstras* have as a key notion the idea of the great king but this element can only be attested after Alexander and the Maurya dynasty which, interestingly, unified India not long after Alexander's invasion. The *Arthaśāstra* military texts which are highly developed must have had a tradition before this time which would suggest that their ideas continued in the *Arthaśāstra* with the additional element of the idea of a Maharaja. It is unclear whether the idea of Maharaja which is a copy of the Persian notion of King of kings should be said to have been brought to India by the Greeks or the Persians who had invaded before. A compromise position would be to say that clearly the title had been heard in India from the time of the invasion of Darius I but the true meaning of it in practice was only shown through Alexander and became a necessity of Indian political thought from hence forward. The text is associated with the author Kauṭilya who was supposed to have been advisor to Chandragupta and thus is potentially datable to 321-296 BC (*Shamasastri*, v).

the purpose of encountering the alien and making it domestic. The caste system allowed the incorporation of the indigenous Dāśa peoples into the Āryan world (Basham 1967, 138-145). The *āśramas* made possible the incorporation of ascetic practice, not indigenous to Vedic thought, into the orthodox core of brāhmanic belief<sup>15</sup>. We can imagine similar strategies being applied to the Greeks.

Aside from these interests, several philosophical investments would have shaped the brāhmanic approach to the Greek philosophers. The first is the importance of the oral tradition in Indian philosophy as opposed to the written text. Indian philosophy was not yet written<sup>16</sup> and therefore the doctrine was transmitted according to more or less strict rules from one generation to another. This lack of text put a heavy stress on the importance of the correct transmission of knowledge. Knowledge had to be transmitted by the appropriate teacher to the appropriate student. Therefore, the qualification of the Greek to hear their philosophy would have always been in doubt and under investigation. Second, the Indian tradition did not put an emphasis on earthly authorities as had developed in the Greek tradition. The major works of the *Upaniṣads*, for example, are all attributed to semi-mythical rather than historical figures. The importance of the thought is not identified with the individual, but in relation to the *Vedas* themselves. A scholarly search for authorities by the Greeks would have revealed to them very little of interest. Finally, the practice called in orthodoxy *adhikāra* and in Buddhism *upāyakauśalya* 'skill-in-means' of speaking to the level and the interest of one's interlocutor was common to all Indian philosophical schools. Indian philosophy begins with what is known and sought for by its interlocutor and attempts to turn this intention from a lower to a higher goal. It does not impose systems from the outside but probes the interest of the questioner, and attempts to bring about realization from the inside. It is rarely competitively dialectic and much more often didactically hermeneutic<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> See Basham 1967, 138, 248 for the standard view. For a comprehensive examination of the institution of *Āśrama* see Olivelle 1993. In this work Olivelle argues against the standard picture of *Āśrama* as a developmental ideology of the human being. Rather he views it as a system of alternative paths which are made hermeneutically acceptable to a religion originally based on the values of the householder. As with Tarn's warning on caste we should take from this that the later rigid system of *Āśrama* is not the one with which we have to deal with in earlier periods. All the same the *Āśrama* system is in effect, although a much more open and flexible version thereof than later history and theological law elaborates.

<sup>16</sup> Thapar (1966, 42) sees regular references to writing by 500 B.C., but as Basham (1967, 396-401) points out, there are no examples of Indian writing until Mauryan times. This being said, the development of the script had to have begun before that period, however, lack of its remains likely indicates its lesser importance until later periods.

<sup>17</sup> Halbfass (1991b, 51-83) explores the difference between the modern neo-Hindu reading *adhikāra* as an inclusive doctrine that sees plurality as a plurality of aptitudes with more exclusive traditional orthodox readings such as those of *Śaṅkara*. While the *adhikāra* of ancient orthodoxy cannot then be considered a practice entirely equivalent to skill in means, of which *Śaṅkara* is critical, it still remains a tool for the hermeneutic appropriation of difference through the finding of a place for novelty within traditional structure. *Śaṅkara* is clearly a later thinker but the tradition extends back to our period of brāhmanic thought.

Thus we can conclude with regards to the Indian philosophers that the Greeks encountered at the most general level that though they formed the subject of a portrait, they were not subjected. The Indian philosophers must have been from the brāhmaṇic and *Kṣatriya* classes and thus would have pursued the interests of these classes in their encounters with the Greeks. Far from passive objects of study, the *Brahmins* and *Kṣatriyas* were subjects in the full sense of the word, pursuing their own domestic agendas on a practical political level but also on the theoretical level, not silent objects of observation but participants in a dialogue with the Greeks in which their positions helped shape the understanding which the Greeks would come to with regards to their philosophy.

### 3. From process to content: Greek knowledge of Indian philosophy

What then, given these formative conditions, should we expect from the encounter of the companions of Alexander with the Indian philosophers? What would allow us to conclude that a genuine encounter occurred leading to knowledge and what would disabuse us of this belief? The standard that we should not hold our ancient Greek witnesses to is that of the scholar. Their aim and intention was not the gathering and exchanging of texts for the purpose of the scrutiny of doctrine and authority in the pursuit of disinterested knowledge. Furthermore, the nature of the Indian tradition forbade such an entry point. Its doctrines were transmitted orally, within the context of a lived life and ethical system. What we ought to expect is an account which gives an appropriate general picture of the universals of brāhmaṇic thought and practice, the basic elements of its articulation in North West India of the 4th century as conditioned by the interests of the contending philosophical traditions.

It is, in fact, just such a picture that we receive from the Greek sources as illustrated in the figures of Calanus and Dandamis. This pair is not meant to be the illustration of two particular philosophers but, rather they form a composite image of Indian philosophy as such. Calanus and Dandamis are literally a study of Indian philosophy, a sketch of its basic outlines, its forms, its tenets and contradictions, both seeming and real. It is for this reason that we find concentrated in these figures such an array of properties and characteristics. We find in them a representation of the caste system, the belief in reincarnation and a description of the orders of life (*āśrama*) particularly the order of the student and the ascetic orders. They are not complete and scientific accounts, but limited accounts negotiated according to the conditions we have described above. Indeed, given the formative and flexible stage of history of brāhmaṇic thought which they encountered, the inaccuracy may speak accurately to the still unsettled nature of its subject. The account of caste is limited to the understanding of *Brahmin-Kṣatriya* relations. The account of reincarnation deals principally with the circularity of time while not being ignorant of some concept of *Mokṣa* and other positions on the question of justice and retribution in brāhmaṇic reincarnation. Finally, the description of *āśramas* focuses on those *āśramas* that they encountered and negotiated with on a daily basis, the student and teacher relation, and the orders of

ascetics who devoted their lives to liberation. Individually, any one of these elements could be an educated guess, or a vague approximation of Indian philosophy, not indicating a serious effort to understand Indian philosophy. Collectively, they indicate an intense effort by the Greeks to come to an understanding of the scope and implication of brāhmanic philosophy. While this sketch does not offer a clear picture of Brāhmanism and is not educated in the details of its articulation nor cognizant of important alternative schools of philosophy or even the variation within the one tradition which they attempted to describe, it remains a genuine and valuable effort at understanding Indian philosophy that reveals both an effort to arrive at and an accomplishment of this end.

### 3.1 Caste

Since we do not hear the terminology of caste in Greek sources until Megasthenes, we could say that the camp of Alexander missed this element of Indian thought entirely. Yet though they fail to isolate the word and do not give us the complete set of terms for caste, their accounts show that they recognized the effect of caste in society, most especially by the reaction of the Indian philosophers to Alexander and his army. They saw a wholly different social order in which the relation of the holy to the worldly was overturned, where the king bowed to the priest and not the reverse. Understanding this dynamic was of crucial import in the practical negotiation of Indian politics and relations.

Alexander's army was brought face to face with the ethic of caste as soon as it descended into the valley of the Punjab. There on the open plains were a group of Indian ascetics. Arrian's depiction of the encounter is emblematic. Alexander's army, marching down into the plains hundreds of thousands strong, encounters on the way a group of ascetics who refuse to move for the oncoming hoard. Instead, they remain rooted to the spot, simply stamping their feet on the ground. Envoys are sent by Alexander to ask them what they are doing. They tell the envoys that they are stamping the earth because no man can own any more land than the piece of soil that will eventually cover his body. The Indian philosopher is seen to stand in a position outside of and yet superior to worldly power, both a critic and rejector of it (Arr. *An.* 7.1.5-6).

The principle being canvassed here is that of the brāhmanic relation between the castes and the priority particularly between the *Brahmin* and the *Kṣatriya*. The Indian ascetics in the Arrian passage have clearly identified the Greeks with the *Kṣatriya* class with Alexander as their king<sup>18</sup>. They were applying the rules of

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<sup>18</sup> We have of course to deduce from behaviours this recognition of the Greek as *Kṣatriya*. There is ample evidence from later literature, however, that the Greeks came almost universally to be considered of the warrior class solidifying this deduction. The Law Code of Manu (10.44) suggests that *Kṣatriyas* like the *Yavanas* have so fallen in their religious duties, by its time, that they have effectively become *Sudras*. It seems that the *Yavanas* were always considered an admixture of race or a falling. Gautama has them as the offspring of a *Brahmin* with a *Śūdra*, (DS.G. 4.21). This still recognizes them within the caste system however. For discussion see Narain 1957, 165; Tarn 1966, 173 and 101-102.

precedence as stated in the *Dharmasūtra*, “One must yield the way to people in vehicles, extremely old people, the sick, women, bath-graduates and kings; and a king to a vedic scholar” (DS.G. 6.24-25). With this identification the armies of Alexander gained rights and responsibilities within the Vedic ethical system on pain of following its dictates. The Greeks are not treated as barbarians (*Mllecha*) but given a caste designation. As *Mllecha*, they would have been beyond the pale, outside all possible interest to the Indian interlocutor<sup>19</sup>. By treating with Alexander and his army, the Indian philosophers acknowledge them. This is a recognition on the Indian side of their respect of the Greeks. They assign them the most logical caste for conquerors, the *Kṣatriya* or warrior class. Each caste, however, has its limits, responsibilities and its relation to the other. As the *Dharmasūtra* puts it, “There are four classes: *Brahmin*, *Kṣatriya*, *Vaiśya*, and *Śūdra*. Among these, each proceeding class is superior by birth to each subsequent” (DS.A. 1.4-5; DS.B. 1.18.2-6). In theory, the final authority in society is the *Brahmin*. The king, as chief *Kṣatriya*, is but a wielder of worldly power sanctified by Vedic ritual.

The picture that the *Dharmasūtras* give of the relation between classes is deceptive, however. The order of castes as described by the *Dharmasūtras* describes the ideal vision as given by the Brahmins, not that seen by the *Kṣatriya*. Vedic theory had always been characterized by a deep tension between the role of the King and the *Brahmin*. While the *Brahmin* has ultimate spiritual authority, the king wields it in practice. The king brings about results here in this world. So we have tense passages such as the following which reveal an unresolved contradiction:

“*The king rules over all except Brahmins. He should be correct in his actions and speech and trained in the triple Veda and logic. Let him be upright, keep his senses under control, surround himself with men of quality, and adopt sound policies... As he sits on a high seat, all except Brahmins should pay him homage seated at a lower level, and even Brahmins should honour him*” (DS.G. 11.1-8).

To what extent a *Brahmin* did or did not pay homage to a king was clearly a matter of practical finesse and negotiation within any given situation according, no doubt, to his actual power. It was part of the duty of the *Brahmin* to respect and support the king, but also to remain his spiritual superior. The king’s goals are worldly goals. They are the goals of his caste, the *Kṣatriya*. One’s ethical duty is only properly discharged when one fulfils the duties prescribed by one’s caste. The Greeks identified this behaviour in the rejection of the Indian philosophers to come to the king. In Onesicritus’ account we are told,

“...that he himself was sent to converse with these sophists... and that they did

<sup>19</sup> The passages in DS.B. 1.2.9-15 demarcating the Land of Āryas from the border regions shows the xenophobia of the *Brahmins*. Even travel outside of their land into this foreign territory was a sin of the feet. On the supreme reluctance to teach to any one other than a son or student see student section below (3.3.1).



*not visit other people when invited, but bade them to visit them if they wished to participate in anything they did or said*" (Str. 15.1.63).

They correctly identify the insistence of the *Brahmins* that the king come to them so as to maintain their independence and the goals of their own caste.

The caste system proves ambiguous, however, in the intersection between *Brahmin* and king and prescribes duties which leave the order of priority between the two castes unfixed. The danger in following a king then is allowing his ends to overcome the ends prescribed to the *Brahmin*, "The three classes shall abide by the instructions of the *Brahmin*. The *Brahmin* shall proclaim their duties (*dharma*), and the king shall govern them accordingly" (DS.V. 2.5; cf. DS.G. 1.18.7-8). It seems probable that this tension is being documented in the episode related to the figure of Calanus in which he decides to leave his compatriots to travel with Alexander. What is at issue in this episode is the ambiguity in the question of whether or not a *Brahmin* is willing to follow Alexander. In most versions of events Calanus joins Alexander's company against the express orders of Dandamis not to follow such a course of action (Str. 15.1.68). In Aristobolus' version the Calanus character follows the king for some time, teaching him, but at a certain point turns back saying that it is the duty of the student to follow the teacher and not the reverse (Str. 15.1.61). These contradictions in the accounts of the composite figure that Calanus presents need not mean inaccuracy in the Greek sources and attention only to superficials, but a documenting of an underlying philosophical tension in which the limits of worldly and religious power were being played out.

The term caste is not added to the Greek knowledge of Indian philosophy until after the time of Alexander but its function and the tension that it creates between worldly and spiritual power are correctly identified in practice. The whole system of caste applies to *Brahmins*, Warriors, Traders and Workers, but it is not surprising that the camp of Alexander would only pick up the top two tiers. It was not with the traders or the workers that they had to negotiate but with the priestly and warrior caste. It was this dynamic they had to uncover and which, in its outline, they did. The conception of the *Brahmin* ascetic puts him in an independent position to the king and yet still in relation to the king. This tension is captured by the Greek observers. They have not identified caste as such but they note the contradictory positions of the Indian philosophers in approaching and dealing with the king.

### 3.2 Reincarnation

Equally important a founding principle in orthodox brāhmaṇic philosophy is the concept of reincarnation and the system of punishment and reward derived therefrom. This conception is picked out in Onesicritus' account of a doctrine expounded by Calanus. Calanus tells Onesicritus an ethical tale about the cycle of abundance and lack. He says that in the beginning men were in a state of abundance and lived well and without trouble. They were proud and happy in this state.

‘Zeus’, however, hated this condition and appointed a life of toil to man, removing from him his abundance. The state of abundance is only regained again through the practice of self-control. With self-control, abundance and plenty is once more achieved. This abundance is always in danger though and threatened by a fall. It is the abundance itself, which is aimed at, that itself threatens the return of lack (Str. 15.1.64).

This tale points towards a circular conception of time to which the Indian philosophers were committed. The circularity of time is a mainstay of all philosophical systems in the post-Upaniṣad period. But it is important to recognize that reincarnation is not a concept proper to original Vedic thought but one which was appropriated into it from indigenous beliefs via the ascetic movement of heterodox and Upaniṣadic thinkers. This led to contending visions and appropriations of the concept within Vedic thought. The cyclical nature of time is recounted in the Laws of Manu in this way<sup>20</sup>,

*“The countless epochs of Manu, as also creation and dissolution ... the Supreme Lord does this again and again as a kind of sport. In the Kṛta age, the Law is whole, possessing all four feet; and so is truth... the law is stripped of one foot in each of the subsequent Ages; through theft, falsehood and fraud, the Law disappears a foot at a time. There is one set of Laws for men in the Kṛta Age, another in the Tretā, still another in the Dvāpara, and a different set in the Kali, in keeping with the progressive shortening taking place in each Age. Ascetic toil, they say, is supreme in the Kṛta Age; knowledge in Tretā; sacrifice in Dvāpara; and gift-giving alone in Kali” (Manu, 1.80-86).*

The essential features of the Manu story of time and that of Calanus agree. God is a capricious god, one who sports with the happiness of man. There is a time of wholeness and completeness in which things are as they should be and man lives a proper life. This wholeness, however, is broken and leads down into a wretched condition. The solution to this wretched condition is a particular practice that will restore or compensate for the broken aspects of the Law. The Calanus tale does not give us the details that Manu is able to provide but does provide us with a synthetic overview of the pattern.

The adoption of a system of cyclical time and reincarnation in orthodox Vedic thought was done as part of the construction of a system of ethical rewards and punishment, a conception of cosmic justice explicable in terms of consistent, rational causation. Every ethical event has its definite causal effects. Good actions return good results, bad actions the reverse. This cycle guarantees justice over the long run while not denying the appearance of injustice in the medium term. The

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<sup>20</sup> The Laws of Manu are later but better show all the details of the circle. We can find the circularity of time already strongly represented in the *Dharmasūtras*, especially Āpastamba and of course throughout the *Upaniṣads*. See DS.A. 2.2-7; 2.11.10-11; 2.21.13-15.

introduction of this conception of justice was accepted in all Vedic thought, where it fleshed out and expanded the more nebulous early conceptions of ṛta (natural/moral order). There was disagreement, however within orthodox thought as to the precise nature of this cycle between the view of the traditionalists and those of the ascetics.

In adopting the notion of reward and punishment in multiple lives, the school of Vedic thought that traditionally puts emphasis on the caste system and the continuous recreation of the just society of the Āryas, views reincarnation in a positive light. It is not a vicious circle of eternal reincarnation at which to despair and from which one seeks an exit. Rather, it is a sign of the health of the individual and society, an indication of their conformity to the ultimate Law and justice. So we find this positive interpretation of reincarnation in the *Dharmasūtra* of Āpas-tamba:

*“People of all classes enjoy supreme and boundless happiness when they follow the Laws specific to them. Then, upon a man’s return to earth, by virtue of his merits he obtains a high birth, a beautiful body, a fine complexion, strength, intelligence, wisdom, wealth, and an inclination to follow the Law. So going around like a wheel, he remains happy in both worlds. This is similar to the way the seeds of plants and trees, when they are sown on a well-ploughed field, increase their fruit. This example explains also the way the fruits of sins increase. (in reverse order)”* (DS.A. 2.2.2-5).

This vision and that given by Calanus are largely in agreement with regards to the question of reward and punishment. Through the practice of a particular act which is appropriate to one’s caste, one gains happiness and remains in a state of grace and abundance. The abundance given by one’s following of the Law leads to ever more abundance, so long as one continues to follow the Law. But, when this positive circle is broken, life is brought into a situation of lack and toil. One breaks the law and, in so breaking it, establishes the conditions for even greater toil and lack, resulting in even worse conditions for the possibility of upholding and maintaining the Law. Here the system of rewards and punishments is used as a positive inducement to fulfill and uphold the functions and practices of the caste system. Such is close to the account we see in Calanus but does not entirely fit. The nature of abundance itself is rendered doubtful and difficult in Calanus. It is not clear that the reward is truly a reward. Should we take it then that Calanus got it wrong?

The dissonance between Calanus’ account of rewards and punishments and that given in the *Dharmasūtra* above suggests that it relies more heavily on the ascetic point of view. In the ascetic Vedic reading of reincarnation, rebirth into a more glorious life is a small reward which is equally accompanied by pain and suffering. It is a radical new direction in ethical thinking that does not promote worldly good but a move beyond the worldly good to a closer and closer identification of the self with the ultimate, the *Ātman*. In this radical new ethic, we find the pos-

itive benefits of rebirth, even rebirth within a good family, and to a good life, strongly devalued, “Let there be a young man, a good young man, one who studies, very swift, very steadfast, very strong. Let the whole earth, filled with riches, be his. That is one human joy”<sup>21</sup>. Understanding reincarnation is to understand the self-giving of the ethical agent of his world to himself. The ethical agent gives birth to his own world, his own life of joy and suffering. Coming to an understanding of this self-giving it makes no sense to give to oneself any particular ethical life. The goal is no longer ‘a good life’ but the absolute life, the life of the perfectly good ethical agent. The goal is liberation from particular worlds and identification with that which is beyond pleasure and pain, the eternal divinity which founds the cycle as such.

The critique of the smallness and danger of simple rebirth into a ‘good life’ is given in Calanus’ account. There is a major ambiguity in the reward of Zeus to the righteous man. Though he practices self-control and is given abundance, his abundance is always threatened. He might at any time lose this abundance to the caprice of the divine. Moreover, and more fundamentally, it is in the nature of the abundance itself to tempt the individual away from the right path. Abundance is the reward for conformity with the Law, but the availability of this plenty tempts man away from the Law and into concern for the gain of abundance per se. Abundance produces attachment and hubris which leads to the fall. Even the traditionalist view recognized the danger of the ethical act becoming an act done not for the sake of itself but for the sake of the reward that it offered:

*“Let him not follow the Laws for the sake of worldly benefits, for then the Laws produce no fruit at harvest time. It is like this. A man plants a mango tree to get fruits, but in addition he obtains also shade and fragrance. In like manner, when a man follows the Law, he obtains, in addition, other benefits”* (DS.A. 20.1-3).

The ascetic view is even more pessimistic. From their position it is in the nature of a particular ethical life to fall. The practice of ethical life with the aim of producing something creates, necessarily, the condition of the want of the benefits rather than the fruits, the earthly reward rather than the ethical outcome. Only that life which is completely separate from this cycle of reward and punishment can be perfected:

*“Where one does not see another, does not hear another, does not know another that is abundance. Where one sees another, hears another, knows another that is smallness. Abundance is immortal: smallness is mortal”*<sup>22</sup>.

This vision of the life beyond duality, beyond the effects of punishment and reward, is captured in Calanus account even if the reason for it, the search for this

<sup>21</sup> See *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, II.8.1; See also *Bṛhadānyaka Upaniṣad*, IV.3.33.

<sup>22</sup> See *Chāndyoga Upaniṣad*, VII.24.1; V.18; DS.A., 1.22.7-8).

identity with *Ātman*, is in no way clearly picked out. This perfect life is the ideal of *Mokṣa/Mukti* or release which is basic to the Upaniṣadic appropriation of reincarnation. It is somewhat surprising then not to find it mentioned directly in Calanus' story. Were it not to appear at all within the Greek accounts, we would have to conclude that they missed a central point of the Vedic conception of time and its relation to the ethical life of man.

But the doctrine of *Mokṣa/Mukti* does appear and it does so in the arguments of Dandamis with Alexander. Dandamis is ordered under pain of death to present himself to the king. He rejects these summons and one of his key arguments is that he need fear no threat since on passing he would go to a purer place (Str. 15.1.68). While vague by itself, clearly this comment should be associated with an idea of the possibility of release from the cycle of reincarnation as such. Dandamis has already shown himself in this same story to be free from earthly needs, having reached self-sufficiency and self-mastery. A purer place could logically be only that which is beyond necessity as such. This is the definition of *Mokṣa/Mukti*.

It is fair criticism to say that the doctrine put in Calanus' mouth by Onesicritus is a vague account of the cyclical concept of time and reincarnation which, unlike most of the other observations on Indian life, is not substantiated again in other accounts. Yet we find an additional backing to the fact that reincarnation and cyclical time is meant here by Megasthenes' account of the *Brachmanes*. While Megasthenes clearly wrote later on and retrospectively, he writes with regards to the same categories of people. The group he identifies with "Brachmanes" is certainly the same group of people that the companions of Alexander were describing, the people who tarry in a grove outside the city and live a frugal life. Megasthenes fleshes out their conversation saying:

*"They converse more about death than anything else, for they believe that the life here is, as it were, that of a babe still in the womb, and that death, to those who have devoted themselves to philosophy, is birth into a true life, that is the happy life; and therefore that they discipline themselves most of all to be ready for death"* (Str. 15.1.59).

Finally, he explicitly compares their doctrines to those of Plato. He argues that they are weavers of myth like the great philosopher and that they concern themselves especially with the immortality of the soul and the question of judgment in Hades (Str. 15.1.59).

Onesicritus' account of Calanus' cyclical time is a first effort at describing and understanding the Indian and specifically brāhmaṇic conception of cyclical time. While it is all too short and lacking in specificity, it powerfully captures the major themes of this time and shows signs of having picked up on one side of a tense debate within Indian philosophy itself. Later evidence such as given by Megasthenes should be seen not just as providing greater knowledge, but as continuing the tradition of attempting to understanding Indian philosophy, on its own terms that was begun with the philosopher companions of Alexander.

### 3.3 *Āśrama* or orders of life

The doctrine of reincarnation which is told through Calanus already brings into play some of the observations which the Greeks made with regards to the system of *āśrama* or orders of life. An *āśrama* is an order of life for the *Brahmin*. Four orders are marked out: the student, the householder, the forest hermit and the renouncer. The *āśrama* system, like caste, was not originally a part of Vedic thinking. It was introduced as a means of providing a place to new paths in brāhmaṇic life and thought which had heretofore been based primarily on ideas which we can associate with the householder class, specifically the revolutions in thought brought about by the work of the late Vedic thinkers and mystics as particularly associated with the *Upaniṣads*. It attempted to fix a place in the brāhmaṇic world for the intellectual and spiritual revelation of Upaniṣadic thinkers and likewise served to counter the movement of heterodox groups such as the Buddhists, Jains and Ajivikas that posed an essential threat to the old order of Vedic thought and culture. It allowed, or was made to allow a liberalization of thought and the opening of new ways of living and thinking, while defending against the more radical non-orthodox groups. When the Greeks entered India, the *āśramas* were reasonably young, as they were probably first articulated in some form starting from the 5th century BC<sup>23</sup>. Radical Upaniṣadic and heterodox groups threatened to undermine the cohesion of Vedic society by rejecting the given values and forms of society entirely, in favour of an individualistic quest for truth and understanding of the divine. The old values of the householders and established power were superceded. The power of these new arguments and practices was such that they could not be ignored. Texts like the *Dharmasūtras* and later the *Laws of Manu* do not attempt to suppress the ascetic tendency or to deny it, but to fit it within the overall social structure of an orthodox Vedic society. They formalize relations that already existed, that of the student and the householder and find place for the moderate asceticism of the forest hermit and the radical asceticism of the world renouncer<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> Olivelle (1993, 71) places the upper limit in the 5th century and the lower limit in the 1st century BC. If we prove sufficiently that what is presented in Calanus and Dandamis is a reflection of *Āśramas* then we can come to a conclusion with regards to Indian history as well, saying that these more remote areas were already affected by these radical movements by the 4th century BC. This fits the picture of the rapid development of other heterodox sects in the North, especially the Bactrian regions in the following centuries.

<sup>24</sup> Here we give the generally accepted view of the role of the *Āśramas* in relation to heterodox sects. Recently Olivelle (1993, 94-99) has argued powerfully against this view, making the point that it was not likely the conservative elements of the old order but a liberal faction within it that brought about this change. The main evidence for this point is the strong opposition to the system that we see in the earliest orthodox texts in which it is found, the *Dharmasūtras*. This argument is well made but even if it stands I do not take it to alter the fundamental relation it produced between heterodox and orthodox positions. Whether it was liberals or conservatives within the orthodox tradition who were at the vanguard of this appropriation process, the final result is the same, the voluntary taking up and use of non-orthodox ideas within the orthodox system.



The articulation and definition of these orders of life was a major preoccupation of orthodox Brahminism such that we would expect to find, in any accurate observation of this thought, significant reference to the different orders and an understanding of their basic constitution. What we find in the Greek observations does not disappoint on this account. We find, once again, that they focus in on and are affected by those aspects of the *āśrama* system that accord with their interests, military and philosophical, and that their data is restricted by their sources. They are concerned with the *āśramas* which they meet on a practical basis. These were the student order and that of the ascetic orders, the forest hermit and the world renouncer. The sketch of the *āśramas* focuses on these orders no doubt for practical reasons.

As parties interested in brāhmaṇic thought, seemingly accepted into to the order of brāhmaṇic life on some level<sup>25</sup>, the Greeks that would learn of the *Veda* would have been treated as students of the *Veda*. If they wanted to learn the *Veda*, they certainly could not force the ideas from the Indian philosophers. They would have had to adhere to their codes of conduct and follow their directives. That is to say, they were treated as students. As such it is was in their very immediate and practical interest to understand the duties required of and the relationship established between the student and teacher. Were they to fail in this task they would be unable to acquire the knowledge of the teachings which they aimed at and thus it was necessary for themselves to indoctrinate themselves in the first order of Vedic life.

The other *āśramas* which the surviving accounts indicate were a constant source of interest were those of the forest hermit and world renouncer. It is at first somewhat surprising that the Greeks have so much to say about hermits and ascetics and so little about householders. Surely the householders as eldest and most traditional of *āśramas* were the ones with whom they would have sought practical discourse. But the householders really had no ideas to which the Greeks could relate. There is surely a philosophical core to the householder life but this core is not a doctrinal core but is expressed rather in habits and customs, most particularly in ritual. Such practices were far removed from Greek understandings and uses of philosophy. A type of reasoned account is what they sought for and this was to be found not in the life of the householder, a ritualistic and unquestioned life, but in that of the ascetic and hermit. It is in these orders that a philosophical discourse of higher order which the Greeks could somehow understand was taking place. They saw in the ascetics, if not in their practices then in their ideas, a discourse which had meaning to Greek philosophy and which bore great weight in understanding the country they were attempting to conquer. This natural focus of the Greeks on the ascetic orders would have been further aided by the availability of the ascetics for rational discourse. It was part of the lifestyle of the ascetic to engage in the sort of conversation that a curious foreigner might be inter-

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<sup>25</sup> See section on caste above (3.1).

ested in hearing. The householder was much too busy tending to his business and keeping the world running to entertain the questions of intrusive foreigners. Indeed, it could be argued that the occupation of the ascetics was in a certain way the dissemination of understanding of the *Veda*<sup>26</sup>.

It is striking that the Greeks managed to record traces of the *āśrama* system in their observations of Indian philosophy. While we have argued that the Greeks did not deal with the householders generally because of the alienness of their practices to the conceptions of philosophy of the companions, still we must point out the openness of the imagination and spirit which sought to understand a radically different starting point to philosophy without pre-judging or attacking it. Nowhere in the fragments do we get an impression of a sense of superiority or condescension towards the subject of their studies. There is a genuine interest to learn and to describe what has been learnt, to describe a way of life and another departure point for the philosophical life.

### 3.3.1 The student life

The period of studentship was the necessary starting point for all the orders of life. It was conceived of as a second birth. The original birth was the birth of the child into the world, while the second birth was that of the initiation into the knowledge of the *Veda*, thereby becoming a twice-born, one of the castes of *Brahmin*, *Kṣatriya* and *Vaiśya* (DS.G. 1.5-7). The period of studentship was the absolute primary prerequisite for the path into any of the other *āśramas*<sup>27</sup>. It brought one into the world of truth and understanding of the *Vedas*, allowing access to knowledge and a relation to the divine. It was the path by which all had to pass in order to enter and, potentially, surpass the circle of reincarnation. The *Veda* could not be taught to simply anyone. If the Greeks wished to learn anything of the *Veda* they would have to show themselves as proper students.

For this reason, it is specified, a father should teach Brahman to his eldest son or to a trustworthy student, not to anyone else at all, even if someone should give

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<sup>26</sup> We should not of course exaggerate this tendency. Yes, the ascetics spread the word of the *Veda* but not to just anyone. This was the job of the Buddhists, Jainists and other sects who did not recognize as clearly the importance of caste. The ascetics were more exclusive in taking on students. That being said, the notion of caste and who was worthy to be a student was fluid at this time. Though a *Brahmin* is preferred to hear the teaching of the *Veda*, in hard times a *Kṣatriya*, and even a *Vaiśya* may be taught as well. Thus a willing and interested student even if a *Yavana* might have a chance to learn the doctrines the ascetic preached.

<sup>27</sup> As Olivelle (1993, 78-79) points out it could also be the end point of all orders. There are in effect two studentships in the *āśrama* system. The one is the necessary training period passed through by all *Brahmins* in their Vedic learning process. This can be a phase passed through on the way to other orders. It can, on the other hand, be adopted as the end of one's Vedic occupation entirely. It is only later in the classical period that the *āśramas* are interpreted as stages of life which are passed through diachronically.

him this whole earth, surrounded by the waters, filled with riches: for this is greater than that<sup>28</sup>.

If the Greeks were to be accepted by the Brahmins as suitable candidates for discussion at any level of the *Veda*, they would have had to have understood the complex requirements of the Vedic studentship.

The student life was particularly well defined and characterized. It was regulated by a strict set of practices and activities which made the student particularly socially recognizable. As the *Gautama Dharmasūtra* puts it:

*“Restrictive rules come into force from the time a person is initiated. The rule of chastity has already been given. He shall put wood into the sacred fire, beg his food, speak the truth, bathe – only after the beard-shaving rite, according to some – and perform the twilight worship outside the village”* (DS.G. 2.6-10).

While the rules of the student life differ more or less between the *Dharmasūtras* certain characteristics are common. The student is made to beg for his food within the community, is committed to dressing and behaving in a certain fashion, is committed to a particular length of time of study and must engage in activities of austerity. The rules of studentship are particularly relevant to the student as he lives his life within the community, that is within the city limits. A clear aspect of the Dandamis and Calanus pair is the importance of their relation as master and student and the subordination this creates. Although all accounts introduce this aspect of the pair, Aristobolous’ account of the master and student in the city seems particularly accurate in describing the rules of studentship.

### 3.3.2 Alms collecting

We find in the *Dharmasūtras* the following on the act of collecting almsfood:

*“Morning and evening he shall go out to beg with a bowl, soliciting from those who are not degraded or heinous sinners, and bringing all he receives to his teacher”* (DS.A. 1.3.25).

*“Almsfood may be obtained from people of all classes, excepting heinous sinners and outcasts”* (DS.G. 3.35).

*“He should go around begging almsfood using the seven-syllabic formula... He should request alms food from people of all classes.. the people from whom the request is made should be Brahmins and so forth who are devoted to the occupations proper to their class”* (DS.B. 1.3.16-18”).

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<sup>28</sup> *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, 3.11.5-6; See also, *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 6.3.12 and *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣads*, 6.22.

Aristobolus describes the actions of alms collecting, inaccurately but in the right location. He has both the elder and younger philosopher collect alms which he interprets as the ability of the philosophers to go into the market place and take whatever merchandise they would like for free. In particular, he describes a practice of pouring sesame oil over the eyes of the alms seeker (Str. 15.1.61). While this particular practice is not described in the *Dharmasūtras*, it nevertheless fits well within the frame of its ethic of alms giving and receiving. The student is fed by the community and the provision of alms is an act which binds community and student. There are warnings against not sharing food with a student:

*“When women refuse a steadfast student, he robs them of their sacrifices, gifts, oblations, offspring, cattle, sacred learning, and food supply. One should never refuse a group of students come to beg, therefore, for among them there may be one who is like that and who keeps his vow”* (DS.A. 1.3.26).

We can see for this reason also why Onesicritus was led to believe that the philosophers had access to the whole of wealthy homes including the women’s quarters (Str. 15.1.65). The alms seeker typically asked for his ration from the female head of the household. The information is perhaps confused and garbled, but all the elements are there. The student must get food from the community, particularly from women and it is not possible or is indeed incorrect for women to refuse them this honor. That these acts are described in exaggerated terms no doubt has to do with the strangeness of the acts to the Greek observers; this does not mean that they have not identified, at least in part, the significance of these acts. There is a certain sensationalism to the account that the students may beg in the quarters of the wealthy and even in the women’s quarter, but it also shows an important point on social cohesion and balances of power.

We also glean another important piece of information from the instructions on alms food which reinforces what we have said earlier with regards to the Indian philosophers’ attitude towards the Greeks. Aristobolus’ account has the Indian philosophers seek food from the table of Alexander himself (Str. 15.1.61). Given this information we are once again confirmed that the Indians were treating Alexander not as a foreign barbarian but as a member of the caste system, as a *Kṣatriya* king. If Alexander was truly asked for food then he and the Greeks themselves were truly accepted within the community, since there is a prohibition against taking unclean food and food from people who are unworthy. We also see that the Greeks follow the role they are assigned within the community. They offer food to the ascetics and allow them to eat at their table, an honor that we can imagine was not extended to every passer-by and member of a ‘barbarian’ tribe.

### 3.3.3 Dress

Also highly stressed in the student code of conduct is the appropriate dress and hair style. What first seems to be confusion in Aristobolus’ account of the

philosophers in the market place turns out to be an element of the regulations of the order of studentship itself. We cannot ask the observer to be more accurate than the phenomenon which he is observing. Aristobolus' tells us that the elder philosopher had his head shaved, while the younger had long hair. While he has generally confused the relation between the elder and the younger, seeing them as performing similar activities, he properly gives the importance of their hair-style, shaved or very long. We read in the *Dharmasūtras*:

*"He shall have his hair matted; or, keeping just the topknot matted, let him shave the rest"* (DS.A. 1.2.31-32);

*"Students may shave their heads completely, wear their hair matted, or keep just the topknot matted"* (DS.G. 1.27);

*"He should wear all his hair matted, or just the topknot"* (DS.V. 7.11).

Once again, the details of the Greek account are incorrect but the attention to the key elements of the type is appropriate and accurate. This attention to the detail of dress might be dismissed as philosophically unimportant or as just part of the standard ethnographical detail that Greeks had come to be interested in and expected from their travel accounts. But while the oddity of the student's dress is certainly treated for this reason, we should not see it as the only reason for reporting these facts.

The question of dress has philosophical importance inasmuch as it indicates a commitment to a manner of life, an ethical standard not in theory but in practice. In this sense it is not a passing detail anymore than are the acts of Diogenes or Socrates passing details of their philosophy. Performance and practice based philosophy was necessarily recounted anecdotally and by example. Since we see the Greeks treating these philosophers as equals, we should not consider this a mere ethnography but rather a philosophical study of a practice of life. What is different between this and other ethnographic details of the Indians and those given with regards to other tribes that are visited, is that an explicit connection to philosophy is being made. These are not just strange habits of dress, but strange habits of dress that can give a right argument for their practice and meaning. It is not just the presentation of another *nomos*, but the presentation of the signs of another '*logos*'.

### 3.3.4 Length of study

The length of time of the studentship was also highly important. The study of the *Veda* was no easy task. It involved the complete memorization of the entire text and the appropriation of three or four *Vedas* in total. The Indian tradition thus had varying instructions on the length of time for study of the *Vedas*. Here we find a collection of opinions:

“A person should reside as a student in his teacher’s house for forty-eight years, or for three quarters of that time, or for half that time, or for one-quarter of that time; the minimum is twelve years” (DS.A. 1.2.11-16);

“To study a single Veda, he should live as a student for twelve years, and to study all the Vedas, twelve years each or until he has grasped them” (DS.G. 2.45-47);

“Forty eight years, according to ancient practice, is the period of studentship for studying the Veda; alternatively, twenty-four years, or twelve years per Veda, or at least one year for each book, or, given the uncertainty of life, until he has learned it” (DS.B. 1.3.1-5).

Again to demand accuracy from our observers on this matter would be to ask too much, since the sources themselves are divergent in their opinions. There is a common theme however. The basic period of study is twelve years and the ideal period of study is some multiple of twelve: 36 years for the study of the three Vedas, 48 for the four Vedas. Clearly, this unrealistic period of studentship encountered practical limits, and for this reason even the *Dharmasūtras* throw in the caveats, “until he has grasped them”, “given the uncertainty of life, until he has learned it,” and that “A man should establish his sacred fires (leave the studentship) while his hair is still black” (DS.B. 1.3.5).

Aristobolus therefore seems reasonably accurate in reporting that the elder philosopher who chose to follow Alexander had ‘served his forty years’ and was allowed to depart (Str. 15.1.61). It is perfectly imaginable that the student decided that after his forty years of study he would leave to join Alexander. In fact it makes sense of why Aristobolus calls him the elder, since he is elder in age, while in fact he remains in the order of studentship until meeting Alexander and for this reason still has his head shaved. It could be that Calanus was indeed elder in age to Dandamis, although Dandamis was the wiser for having attained higher spiritual accomplishment. In unattributed commentary by historians in Strabo, Aristobolus’ observation is made even more accurate when the naked *Pramnae* are described as practicing endurance for 37 years (Str. 15.1.70). It is clear that the observers understood this as another key element of lived Vedic philosophy.

In a way this is as close as the Greeks get to disclosing some knowledge of the Vedas. It is questionable whether they actually were let into an understanding of the basic works of Indian philosophy since this would likely have been reported. But they knew at least that the knowledge of the Indian philosophers was obtained through a process of study that required extremely long periods of time and dedication to accomplish. Since the teachings were still oral they would have had no textual referent from which to understand the basis of Indian thought in the Vedas. Picking out the period of study, however, is not all that inaccurate a measure, inasmuch as in some sense this is the way in which a Vedic student would have accounted for his study as well. He would have spoken of having finished the first



twelve years, or the first foot of study, the second twelve years, or the second foot etc. There was a sense not of memorizing a text, so much as coming to live the life of the Vedic word. This living of the word was an actual time span, a time in which one absorbed and became part of the word that one studied. This is not inconsequential to the *Veda*, a detail picked out, but a highly crucial clue. To understand the importance of the period of study is to show some understanding of the importance of the lived element of Vedic teaching, of the fact that the process of learning was a process of becoming the knowledge that one studied. This process of becoming the object of one's own knowledge was the student's philosophical accomplishment.

### 3.3.5 Austerities

The final key commitment of the student was to austerities related to his ritual existence with his master. We find the following descriptions of the student's responsibilities in austerity:

*“Controlling his speech, he should remain standing during the morning twilight worship from the time the stars are still visible until the sun comes into view, and remain seated during the evening from the time the sun is still visible until the stars come into view without ever gazing directly at the sun”* (DS.G. 2.11-12);

*“He should remain standing during the day and seated at night, and bathe three times a day”* (DS.V. 7.16).

Again, Aristobolus who describes his philosophers as coming from the market place, describes these features appropriately. He viewed the acts of austerity of the philosophers as a show for the king Alexander, but actually described with some hyperbole the daily acts of the student. We are told that the elder philosopher went to an open place and lay in the sun and rain continuously. The younger philosopher is said to have gone to an open place and held up a log while standing on one leg at a time for an entire day (Str. 15.1.61). Such acts of austerity were an everyday part of the student life which furthermore might have been supplemented by acts of austerity for the purpose of penance. While Aristobolus does not clearly understand these mechanisms, he nevertheless bundles the appropriate qualities and acts together with the appropriate actors.

The rules of conduct for the student were strict because the studentship was the only means of the correct transmission of Vedic knowledge from one generation to the next. If the student was to become the word of the *Veda* it was vitally important to ensure the correct transmission of this word, that the student became the right word. The rules of conduct served to reinforce the relation of the student to *guru*, the key mechanism of the transmission of knowledge. The life of the student was a period of training in the Vedic texts with a master or *guru*. This period inculcated into the student the basic values of Vedic life and gave him an intimate knowledge of the Vedic texts. He memorized them in their entirety through

a series of oral mnemonic devices, creating a mental landscape deeply painted in the colours of the traditional Vedic life. The second birth literally made a new person out of the student. It brought him into the living tradition of the oral knowledge of the *Vedas*. He became a link in the chain in the articulation and realization of the Law (*Dharma*) taught therein. His very person was transformed into a carrier and potential disseminator of this knowledge. The ascetic practices were imposed upon the student by the *guru* so as to bring form to this life, to transform the very principles by which the student lived. To be able to follow the austerities to the letter, to strictly carry out the will of the master was a sign of one's being shaped by the *Veda*, one's receptivity thereto. They were an external equivalent to the austerities that would be carried out by the mind in the absorption of the *Veda* through the systems of memorization.

The Greek sources show some appreciation of this fact in marking these acts of endurance as a key feature of the characters of Calanus and Dandamis. Again the depths of their knowledge of Indian philosophy did not extend to the point where they could have identified that the austerities were part of the process of training that helped them to memorize huge Vedic tracts. It does though show the commitment to a lived life of philosophy, that their philosophical principles entail a change not just of argumentation but a change of manners and habits and indeed of the body itself. Furthermore, this is not just an echo of cynic ideals simply foisted upon the picture of Calanus and Dandamis. The austerities are not practised individually but are related to the student-teacher relation. That is to say, this is not the iconoclastic austerity of the body, a Diogenes painted in Indian colours. It is recognizably enough a philosophical austerity, an austerity that has to do with argumentation and with adherence to a hierarchical system of values where the master's word bears great import. In this sense, the Greek observers accurately capture a distinctly Indian use of asceticism in the articulation of the philosophical life.

### 3.3.6 Devotion to *guru* and its limits

As we have begun to see, the period of studentship demanded absolute devotion to the teacher or *guru*. The teacher was described even as a surrogate mother or father in the student's birth into the life of the *Veda*:

*"The teacher is the person from whom a man gathers the Laws. He should never offend the teacher, for he gives birth to him by means of Vedic knowledge"* (DS.A. 1.1.14-16);

*"The teacher is said to be the father because he imparts the Veda"* (DS.V. 2.4);

This analogical relation of parent to son created a deep reverence of the student for the teacher. We see in the *Dharmasūtras* the devotion to the teacher that is demanded by the Law;

*“If he sees his teacher standing or sitting on a lower place of answering the call of nature, he should get up” (DS.G. 3.27);*

*“He should run after his teacher when he is running, walk behind him when he is walking, and stand by him when he is standing” (DS.B. 1.3.38);*

*“He should wait upon his teacher, walking behind him if he is walking, standing by if he is seated, and sitting if he is lying down” (DS.V. 7.12).*

This relation of dependency was a necessary outcome of the means of transmission of the Vedic knowledge. The key aim of the student was the memorization of the *Vedas*. The master was the living repository of this information. The key to a successful studentship was the pure transmission of the hymns of the *Veda* from master to student without alteration or error, a perfect reproduction of the original knowledge.

This meant that the authority of the master had to be considered absolute. The master was the original copy of this knowledge. There was no text against which to check his word. His word was knowledge. His master’s commands were absolute and to be followed to the letter. We see the student take as the locus of his knowledge the person of the teacher himself:

*“Clasping the teacher’s left hand – excluding the thumb – with his right, the pupil should address the teacher: ‘Teach, Sir!’ Focusing his eyes and mind on the teacher, the pupil should touch his vital organs (organs of perception) with Darbha grass, control his breath three times for fifteen morae each, and sit on a bed of grass with the tips of their blades pointing east. The five Calls should begin with Om and with ‘Truth’ ” (DS.G. 1.46-51).*

The very form of the description of Calanus and Dandamis as a teacher-student pair is an effort at capturing this dynamic. In each of the accounts we have the philosophers, this pair, named or not, returns. Its significance is obvious. It points to the authority system of student-teacher relation. The authority of the teacher is stressed as in the version of Arrian in which Dandamis forbids his students to follow Alexander (Arr. *An.* 7.2.2-3). It is implicit that his word will be obeyed. Aristobolous’s account has stripped the pair of their names and referred to them only as the elder and younger philosopher (Str. 15.1.61). This represents an attempt at a generalization of the pattern, and an effort to identify the relation as that between teachers and learners. There are in fact numerous passages in brāhmaṇic ethics which would agree with this assessment. We have for example the following exhortation in the *Dharmasūtras*:

*“Rising each day during the last watch of the night, he should stand before the teacher and extend to him the morning greeting: ‘I am so-and-so, sir!’, and, before the morning meal, to other very elderly persons living in the same village” (DS.A. 1.5.12-15).*

There is a clear association between wisdom and age such that the Greeks were led to assume that the elder was the master. But this was not always the case. Because of the extreme importance of the accurate transmission of the *Vedas*, the need for a check on the student-teacher relation was imperative. A teacher who had gone astray could not be allowed to lead his student astray as well. For that reason, limits on the authority of the age and wisdom of the teacher were placed:

*“People should be honored on account of wealth, relatives, occupation, birth, learning and age, but each succeeding one is more important than each preceding, but Vedic learning is the most important of all, because it is the source of the Law and because it is so stated in the Vedic text”* (DS.G. 7.20-25).

There are a whole series of passages that, despite the reverence for the teacher elsewhere recommended puts serious caveats on the range of power of the teacher. The teacher must be a true transmitter of knowledge, not only having the knowledge but applying it himself in his everyday life. If the teacher fails to live up to these standards then studentship with him is to be abandoned:

*“To perform the initiation, he should try to get a learned and steadfast man born in a family noted for Vedic learning, under whom he should complete his Vedic studies unless than man deviates from the Laws”* (DS.A. 1.1.12-13);

*“If the teacher breaks a rule through carelessness or deliberately, the student should point it out to him in private; and if the teacher persists, he should either perform those rites himself or make him desist”* (DS.A. 1.4.25-27);

*“When he (the student) is ordered to do something, he should go ahead and do just that. If the teacher is incompetent, however, he may live with another”* (DS.A. 1.7.25-26).

The Greek accounts generally acknowledge Dandamis as the eldest and wisest of his group. It is seen even in the above formulation that although the quality of being an elder with learning is the prerequisite for the position of teacher, age is not quality enough in itself. We have here then an explanation for the discrepancies seen in the absolute authority which the Greek observers imply of the master over the student. In Aristobolus’ account we either take Dandamis as a teacher, in which case he is lacking in the full qualities of wisdom necessary to be a teacher, or we treat him as an elder student in which case again, though he has age he is without wisdom. The rejection of Calanus in the other accounts, for failing to obey his teacher, places the lack of wisdom in the student. If the teacher is properly applying the law he must be followed but if, despite his age, he breaks the law, he in turn must be repudiated. Thus the accounts are finally consistent and give an image of the superiority but not infallibility of the elder-teacher figure.

The relationship between the student and teacher described in the *Dharmasūtras* must have been idealized compared with the reality. It should not be forgotten, however, that these works are attempts to formalize relationships that grew organically and by accretion within the Vedic tradition. There were no doubt often disputes between teacher and student on the basis of the correct interpretation of the *Veda*. In theory, the side in greater accordance with knowledge would win. That the Greek sources capture this shows not only their attention to the larger picture but the problems contained within it.

We can consider then the account of the student-master relationship, of the general life of the student and its rules of conducts as given in the Greek accounts as broadly representative. It is not replete with detail but it captures the essentials of the life of the student and its rules of alms collection, style of dress and habits, period of study and enactor of austerities. It captures the idea of the teacher as the elder source of knowledge who is object of his student's deep devotion to his knowledge. It also captures the possibility of the violation of this relation through deviance from the law and the necessity of the repudiation of the teacher or student in such an event.

### 3.4 The forest hermit and renouncer

We can note immediately with regards to the Greek understanding of the third and fourth orders of life, the forest hermit and the renouncer, that they did not understand the distinction between the two and didn't mark it. It can also be said that this is not surprising. For a first description of the philosophical practices and beliefs of the Brāhmaṇism which they encountered, the distinction was not essential. As with the particular rules of dress and the period of study of a student, we cannot ask more detail from the observer than the observed provided. The third and fourth orders of life are, even in the original Indian sources difficult to distinguish. They characterize two ascetic practices whose roots and ends are separate but interrelated. A quick review of these two figures before we see the Greeks' understanding of them is in order.

The forest hermit fits much better within the original householder conception of Vedic life. Indeed, the idea of the forest hermit as a sort of post-householder stage is much more compatible with the traditional householder ethics. The forest hermit is a continuation of the householder, once the householder has accomplished his duties in life. The householder builds homes, creates material things, engages in practical life and most importantly, lights the sacred fires and procreates. The lighting of the sacred fire is the ritual act which recreates Vedic life on a daily basis, intertwining the quotidian tasks of life with the holy writ of the divine. The householder makes his house holy by the sacred fire and brings into that house his children. When he has raised these children and sent them into the life of the *Veda* he has accomplished his duty as householder. The order of the forest hermit is now open to him. The forest hermit is a pious man, a believer in the *Veda* and in the orthodox life. He wishes for rebirth in a better world and wishes to purify himself for this rebirth. So he abandons his possessions and he

goes on a holy pilgrimage to the forest where he continues the Vedic ritual of the sacred fire, he worships the gods and the seers and receives guests should they come as he would have as a householder, but all this in utmost simplicity, disengaged from all the practical affairs of his former life. In this way, he aims to secure himself a life in a better world in his next life. The position of the forest hermit and the householder are the same as regards the question of reincarnation dealt with above. They accept the rewards of good *karma*; they aim for a better incarnation as an end goal.

The renouncer is a more radical form of life than all the others. It is a parallel practice to the heterodox practices of the Buddhists, Jainists, Ajivikas and other heterodox sects. It is a rejection of the traditional forms of society, since it has a more radical goal than those given by traditional Brāhmaṇism. Orthodoxy as we have seen, views reincarnation in a positive light. It is a vehicle for the growth of worlds, in itself a positive end. The renouncer sees in each world dichotomy, the pairing of pain and pleasure, love and hate. The goal of the renouncer is liberation from this cycle entirely. For this reason, the renouncer, when he quits society and goes into the wild, leaves behind not only shelter and protection but also most importantly Vedic ritual. He no longer lights the sacred fire and builds worlds. He rejects the positive task of society. How did it then come to be that this end was accepted into the brāhmaṇic life as a proper order and not anathematized? The world renouncer remains faithful to Brāhmaṇism because he leaves ritual behind but not the *Veda*. The *Veda* grounds his practice but now in no external forms. He makes of himself the sacred fire and ritual place. He does not renounce the *Veda* but the building of lower worlds. He sets his aim only on the highest god, the one Brahman.

While these finer distinctions existed within the *āśrama* system, the greater tendency is for similarity between the third and fourth order and the identity of appearance and goals, at least to a certain point. The key difference is attitudinal and has to do with the relation to the traditional values of orthodoxy. The renouncer is more radical than the forest worshipper in this sense but both in leaving their society and dedicating themselves exclusively to their spiritual efforts take up the same methods operate at a similarly fundamental level. Therefore once more we should not ask of our sources more accuracy than it was possible to give, but see whether or not they recorded the acts and commitments of these two orders in a manner that resembles the prescriptions of the law texts. They are not fully distinguished in works such as the *Dharmasūtras*, therefore they are not more likely to be so in our Greek sources.

As with the student, the lives of the third and fourth order are described in detail in the *Dharmasūtras*. Their life involves a commitment to the consumption of certain types of food, the adoption of certain kinds of dress and attitude, a certain location of practice and the ascetic goal of their practice. It is important when we look at each of these aspects of these orders that we understand their significance not simply as markers of the orders, but as markers of certain philosophical commitments. The ascetic orders were of interest to the Greeks not just as an example of



a mysterious ‘otherness’ of life, but as an example to a commitment to a wholly different philosophical paradigm.

The gymnosophists as they are often called, which include Calanus and Dandamis, are an attempt at representing this philosophical order and capturing its key elements. The result is less precise than we might like, but defines the major commitments of Upaniṣadic philosophy as practised by these orders. Their observations and what they record show us not only that they are recording the actions and behaviours of the Indian philosophers but also that they are coming to correct conclusions on the inner meaning of these acts.

### 3.4.1 Food

Only certain types of food are appropriate to the ascetic orders. The Indian sources are more or less consistent on what these are.

The forest hermit is to survive on “roots, fruits, leaves, and grasses, and finally on what he happens to find lying about. After that he should sustain himself on water, air, and space. Among these, each subsequent pursuit is more exceptional in terms of its reward” (DS.A. 2.22.2-5). The *Gautama Dharmasūtra* adds, “He may also avail himself of the flesh of animals killed by predators” (DS.G. 3.31). The *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra* further specifies just in case there was any doubt, “He shall refrain from eating what is grown in a village” (DS.B. 2.11.15).

The renouncer has a different diet. The staple of this diet is alms food which is to be collected, it is specified, after the meals of the villagers are done and which is the only reason for his entry into the community, “Let him enter a village only to obtain almsfood and go on his begging round late in the evening” (DS.G. 3.14-15). The later *Dharmasūtras* add in certain Jainist-type features such as the straining of water with a cloth (DS.B. 2.11.24). The attitude and style of the alms receiver is stressed in the *Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra*:

*“He should never try to get almsfood by interpreting portents or omens, by displaying his knowledge of astrology or somatomancy, by giving advice, or by participating in debates. Let him neither be disheartened when he does not receive nor elated when he does. Let him take only as much as would sustain his life, free from attachment even to the few articles in his possession”* (DS.V. 10.21-22).

The key element to both practices is clear. It is the reduction and the purification of food in the sacrificial act of consuming food. The aim is the non-attachment from food, the giving and receiving of food without expectation<sup>29</sup>. The forest her-

<sup>29</sup> Food has a deep philosophical significance in brāhmanic philosophy. All is food and everything can be consumed by everything else in the karmic cycle. Food is firmly linked to the question of reward and punishment. In preparing the food of the gods one does good actions which creates a world for oneself in which by the gods blessing one will have food as well. There is a reciprocal relation between the divine and man in the preparation and improvement of food such that the good deeds of man in preparing food for them predisposes the gods to open worlds of food to the worshipper. *E.g. Praśna Upaniṣad* II; *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 3.9-10.

mit eats only that food which is given in the world. The fruit of the world is taken as a primeval sacrifice which is given to the hermit for his practice. He refrains from all village food as this disconnects him from his direct relation to the gods through their gifts. The ascetic eats the food of the village but this is part of a humility, an acceptance of the same society that he would renounce. Even this renunciation he must finally renounce, for he has to look with indifference on all dichotomy if he is to attain identity with Brahman. In both cases, the outcome of the practice is a self-sufficiency or at least a sufficiency that is supported by a divine but natural power that buttresses the ascetic from the depredations of his fellow man. The ascetic, by strictly following his food practices, is put into a direct relation with the god or with himself that leaves him autonomous and self-sufficient.

The food selections of the gymnosophists and their arguments for them reveal that the Greeks very well understood not only the practice but the meaning of the gustatory choices of the ascetics. Aristobolus' account of the beggars in the market place which we saw in looking at the life of the student, no doubt confused the student life and the ascetic orders. Still, it did correctly portray the importance of the alms giving and receiving process. It is in Onesicritus, Arrian and Megasthenes who describe the arguments of Dandamis to Alexander, that we see the true understanding of this practice. Onesicritus' Dandamis teaches that the best mode of living is to eat frugal fare because the best house requires the least repairs (Str. 15.1.65). Megasthenes' and Arrian's Dandamis argues that he has in India all the food that he could need and thus has no need to fear Alexander (Str. 15.1.68; Arr. *An.* 7.2.3-4). The message of the austerity of food is clear and the reason as well. The fruit of the land is adequate to the needs of the gymnosophist. In reducing his needs to this level through his self-control he comes back to the original position of abundance.

The reading here is dual. It understands the external sign of a conscious choice of diet but it goes further and gives the reason. What is missing from the explanation is the argument that leads up to this choice, to this end which the ascetics put before themselves. In this way the description is stuck at the level of ethnography. But that in particular the Greek observers picked out the importance of diet in the practice of liberation theory is an important achievement.

### 3.4.2 Dress

The same theme of autonomy and freedom is repeated in the strictures on clothing put on the ascetic orders. The essence of the austerity of clothing is the forgoing of that which is inessential to the most direct relation with the divine. This plays on the theme of making use of that which is primarily given as the original sacrifice of the gods for man.

The forest hermit is restricted to "clothes made of materials from the wild" (DS.A. 2.22.1). These it is further specified can be made of bark or skin (DS.B. 2.11.15; DS.V. 9.1). His hairstyle is wild and matted (DS.B. 2.11.15; DS.G. 3.34; DS.V. 9.1).

The renouncer is made to wear discarded clothes or to be completely naked by *Āpastamba* (D.S.A. 2.21.11), to wear a cover for his genitals in *Gautama* (DS.G. 3.18) and to bear a simple piece of cloth in the *Baudhāyana* and *Vasiṣṭha* versions (DS.G. 2.11.19; DS.V. 10.9). The *Vasiṣṭha* version recognizes, as well, the possibility of wearing an antelope skin or a garment of grass (DS.V. 10.10). The renouncer's hair style is that of the shaven head or the wearing of a topknot (DS.G. 3.24; DS.V. 10.6).

Again the Greek sources properly pick up the style of dress and its purpose, while not entirely understanding, or at least explaining, the division between the ascetic orders. Onesicritus describes the Indian philosophers as naked (Str. 15.1.63). We should not let the description naked throw us off here. The Indian tradition itself uses the term naked without necessary meaning entirely naked. The importance of the term is in the emphasis on the uncovered, the unobstructed. It is a being of directness and non-division. Onesicritus picks this out beautifully with the term *gymnosophist*. Again in the description of the first encounter with Calanus, the latter is described as being naked (Str. 15.1.64) and even demanding that one who should hear the *Veda* would also be naked. Likewise the philosophers of the plain who commit their austerities in the open sun went naked (Arr. An. 7.1.5-6). The *gymnosophists* are described as justifying their practice by arguing that what the earth gives to each is that with which one must be content. The practice of naked austerity is a life resultant from this understanding. Finally, the wearing of no garment was part of Dandamis' argument (Str. 15.1.65) that the best life is lived by one who has the simplest house, that needs least repairs.

Again we have a dual reading. The obvious fact with regards to the *gymnosophists* was that they dressed differently than the Greeks. The interesting fact was that they communally dressed differently than the Greeks and did so for particular reasons. The association of the nakedness of the philosopher with his quest for autonomy and freedom, the most likely Greek terms for translating and understanding *Mokṣa*, indicates the effort of the Greeks to engage and find the reasons for this behaviour, the reason for the *gymnosophist* life.

### 3.4.3 Attitudes of silence

The attitudes of the ascetic classes were strictly defined within the frame of the goal of liberation of the self. In fact the forest hermit and renouncer paths have the same basic two tenets ascribed to them which are described in the formulaic phrase "He should live as a silent sage". The key attitude of the ascetic orders is this silence. The ascetic does not communicate irrelevant information. His interest is turned wholly inward and on the self. There is only one circumstance in which he breaks this vow. When he is spoken to with regards to Vedic subjects he may engage in conversation. The renouncer has an additional requirement above the forest hermit. The renouncer must carry out this attitude of silence not just in form but in substance. The silence represents a detachment from the world and the return to the inner world. The renouncer must exemplify this detachment in his very self. He must "control his speech, sight and actions" according to the

*Gautama* (DS.G. 3.17). He is to have no possessions and act “without hostility to any creature by violent word, thought, or deed” (DS.B. 2.11.23). In general he must live out the prescription “Let him take only as much as would sustain his life, free from attachment even to the fine articles in his possession” (DS.V. 10.22).

This vow of silence and willingness to speak only with regard to the *Veda* is described again and again in our Greek sources. The philosophers of the plains who stand in the way of Alexander’s army do not speak until spoken to and, then, limit their discourse to a philosophical level. Calanus and Dandamis in their various versions are the same. They observe their practices of austerity outside the village and can only be approached with regards to philosophical subjects (Arr. *An.* 7.2; Plu. *Alex.* 65). They reject the idea of traveling with Alexander for many reasons but in no small part because of their commitment to living this attitude of retreat which involves a commitment to the discourse only of philosophy. Again the characteristic is confirmed by Megasthenes who says of the *Brachmanes* that they live outside the city listening only to honest words and communicating with anyone who wants to talk to them (Str. 15.1.59).

The Greek texts display less understanding of the reasons for the silence of their subjects than they did of the practices of food and dress commitments. In their defense we should remark on the uniqueness of this phenomenon to the Greeks. That it is picked out indicates that they recognize the Indians using the practice of silence as a philosophical act. While this is not unknown in the Greek tradition and could be somehow accorded to different arguments therein, there is something quite alien in this practice for the Greeks. Philosophers such as Heraclitus might tell us not to speak to the masses who are confused, but he certainly would not advise against the abandonment of *logos* as a practice towards the accomplishment of truth. Parmenides may forbid all articulations but “it is” and yet he does want us to affirm at least this. Silence is not a philosophical practice that has strong roots in the Greek tradition. We are silent to some, but we speak with others. The brāhmanic ascetic practice is more drastic. Silence is practiced as a rule; speech is the exception. Speech can even be left behind. That this is recorded at all shows the degree to which the Greek observers of Calanus and Dandamis were willing to bend their conception of philosophical life in order to capture the practices that the gymnosophists were engaged in.

#### 3.4.4 Place

The actual place where the ascetic orders engaged in their practice was crucial as well. The place of practice was the space of the divine that they wished to bless and recreate through their ascetic practices. The householder performed the Bali sacrifice oblations for every part of his house in order to make it a sacred space, a space invested with the divine. The ascetics in turn were committed to blessing the place where they performed their practice to link it to the divine end that they sought. This place had to be suitable to the aim of attaining the highest worlds and

in the case of the renouncer the absolute identity of *Ātman* with Brahman. As with the question of food and dress, the demand was for simplicity, for the acceptance of that which is as given, the sacrifice of the god given back as an offering.

The *topos* of the forest hermit is the forest space beyond the city: “He should live as a silent sage with a single fire, but without house, shelter, or protection” (DS.A. 2.21.21). It is further underlined that as he is not to step on ploughed land (DS.G. 3.32-34; DS.B. 2.11.15; DS.V. 9.2-3). The place of his worship must be virgin territory. He is to be without house or shelter, but to exist in the clearing of forest itself. But there is one shelter left in the forest hermit’s existence. He lights and protects the hermit’s sacred fire<sup>30</sup>. He has reduced all of the sacred fires and rituals to this one fire, the last fire of sacrifice in the open of the given world.

The renouncer goes even beyond this austerity. The renouncer has no particular place whatsoever for his practice. His place of worship is the open itself be it forest or plain or desert. He may seek no shelter either for himself or for a fire (DS.A. 2.21.10; DS.G. 3.11; DS.B. 2.11.16; DS.V. 10.10-16). He is supposed to have internalized. The sacred fire makes his body itself the sacred fire, the medium of the communication between the devotee and the divine, the place of their meeting and identity (DS.B. 2.17.26; 1.14.18; 2.18.8; DS.A. 2.17.22).

The figures of the plains ascetics, Calanus and Dandamis, fit to this image, and more closely to the latter than the former. We have no mention of sacred fires from the sources, who undoubtedly would have noted it, had it been present. Thus they either encountered it infrequently or not at all. What they encounter is again and again the same. The philosophers are found in an open place, a distance from the city, where they live unprotected from the elements (Plu. *Alex.* 65; Arr. *An.* 7.1.5). During the most intense sun, they continue their ascetic practices without flinching (Str. 15.1.61). This is a clear picture of the place and relation to place prescribed for the ascetic orders. The place of their practice is fit to the notion of the simplicity of dress and of food, clearly understood as an extension of this practice. The ideas of the open space and the forest retreat are firmly tied to the gymnosophists as a part of the expression of their freedom. They are linked to the land, the land as provider and source of their freedom. This is precisely the spirit of the removal to these spaces in Vedic thought and is surely accurately captured by the Greek observers.

### 3.4.5 Goal

All of these external indications of the gymnosophists’ philosophy were recorded with such accuracy not for their interest in themselves, as sheer ethnographic bits of information, but as we have seen for the role they play in the articulation of a philosophical practice which is the subject of study of the Greek observers. We turn now finally to look at their appreciation of this goal proper.

<sup>30</sup> Confirmed in three of the four *Dharmasūtras* (DS.A. 2.21.21; DS.G. 3.27; DS.B. 2.11.15) with the exception of DS.V. 10.1, perhaps suggesting that here the forest hermit moves on to full renouncer status.

When we speak of this goal we will speak of the goal of the world-renouncers, the aim of *Mokṣa*. This represented the pinnacle of philosophical thinking on ethics in Indian thought and if the Greeks were aiming to recount the structure of Indian thought it was this final aim that would have interested them.

The goal of the ascetics is a goal based on a Vedism that has been transformed. This transformation is best seen in the sacrifice. The sacrifice of the householder recreated the primal sacrifice of the god for man and this world<sup>31</sup>. The daily act of lighting the ritual fire and offering oblations was a recreation of this event. In the ritual act the devotee attained identity with the god of the ritual, through the offering of a substance into the sacred fire. This act created anew the world for the believer. It recreated this world again and laid the foundation for gaining a better world in the future. It remains centered on the attainment of some world.

Upaniṣadic thinking radically reinterpreted the sacrifice, looking inwards to the meaning and the structure of the ritual act, to its essential elements. They reduced the ritual to the devotee, the oblation, the fire, the deity and the world. The devotee and the deity were the two poles of the sacrifice<sup>32</sup>. The devotee, the enactor of sacrifice is *Ātman*, self. The deity to which sacrifice is made is the one god in all gods, *Brahman*. The act of the sacrifice, the delivery of food into the fire is the means of attaining identity with the god. Each act of sacrifice gives to the devotee a world. That for which one prays, one receives. The Upaniṣadic thinkers argued that every particular world was incomplete, caught in dichotomy and contradiction<sup>33</sup>. The highest world is no world at all. It is the source of all possible worlds<sup>34</sup>. These thinkers thus transformed the aim of the ritual from gaining a world, a birth in a better life, to entering into all worlds through identity with the divine as such. The doctrines of the *Upaniṣads*, followed by the world renouncers, were not a rejection of the *Vedas* or the old gods. They retained their faith, but subjected it to a deep critique. They performed a transformation of the rituals from an external quest for power, glory and wealth to an internal quest for peace and understanding beyond dichotomy. A phrase from the *Upaniṣads* identifies the starting point for this investigation:

*“The self-existent pierced the openings of the senses so that they turn outwards; therefore man looks outwards, not inward into himself; some wise man, however, with his eyes closed and wishing for immortality, saw the self behind” (Kāṭha Upaniṣad 4.1).*

The starting point of the Upaniṣadic revelation is the discovery of the self, or

<sup>31</sup> For this sacrifice see for example *Rgveda* 10.90.

<sup>32</sup> For a summary reading of this transition see Renou 1953, 17-18.

<sup>33</sup> Some *Upaniṣads* actually compare the relative merits of worlds, showing that there is some merit in any world but these particular merits are miniscule in comparison to the ultimate world. See, for example, *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, 2.8.1; See also *Bṛhadānyaka Upaniṣad*, 4.3.33.

<sup>34</sup> The description of the *Kāṭha Upaniṣad*, V is particularly clear.



rather the quest for the self, through an inward turning. It turns the ritual of devotion back on itself. Who is the individual that gives offering? What is the individual? The devotee is not any one individual. The devotee is always and everywhere the same individual. The consciousness and directedness of the devotee is a single entity in all devotional acts. This new devotee they name the *Ātman*, or self. In every act, the ritual act being the paradigmatic act, there is but one actor. That actor is the pure directedness of a consciousness towards an end. In the ritual act this end is the creation of a world through the identification with the deity. As the consciousness is directed, so does it become. The consciousness that is devoted to the deity Indra, comes to a world of victory, that devoted to *Varuna*, to a world of justice and so on (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka*, 4.4.5).

The object of consciousness must then be sought. In ritual, this object is the deity. The deity is the entity towards which the devotee performs his sacrifice. He chooses the deity based upon the end that he wishes to obtain. Yet here again the deity is not finally plural. The *Upaniṣads* seek the deity as such, not the particular named deity, but that power by which all deities named in their manifold ways can come to be (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka*, 1.4.6). This pole of consciousness they term *Brahman*. *Brahman* is the one and complete divinity, the one true object of consciousness standing behind the many names. He is the support of the world as such in the way that the manifold gods are the support of each particular world. On the basis of these discoveries, the *Upaniṣads* famously reinterpret the identity of *Ātman* (self) with *Brahman* (the divine). This argument is based on the ontological reduction of the subjective and objective poles of the ritual act to their basic components. The devotee gains a world through worship of the deity that supports that world. Each of these worlds, however, is finite and limited. They will come and go. The Upaniṣadic thinkers aims to that which enables and makes possible this process as such, the two empty poles of the ritual act of creation. These are *Ātman* (self) and *Brahman* (divinity). At their barest moment there can be no distinction between *Ātman* and *Brahman*. When the *Ātman* as pure self identifies with *Brahman* as absolute divine source, it is given into the infinite possibility of world, not a particular world but the source of worlds.

Here is the position of *Mokṣa* or standing beyond the circle of birth and rebirth, right and wrong. It provides an ultimate ethical standard by which to place the demands of lower worlds in their place. Every world may have an ethical value, but they are not equally valuable. All intention is finally an intention towards the divine, but there are purer and more diluted version of this intention.

Based on this intellectual-religious revelation, the Upaniṣadic thinkers redefined the other elements of ritual and created the practices of yoga. The ritual of sacrifice was internalized. The devotee is no longer the individual as individual, but the individual as *Ātman*, as self as such. The deity is no particular deity but the source of all, the *Brahman*. The instruments of the sacrifice are no longer external but internal. The body itself becomes the sacred fire, the consumption of food, the sacrifice. The austerity of the body, the maintenance of posture, of concentration of mind, of discipline of eating, is the ritual act itself. The world renounc-

er aims at an identity with the divine by casting off all external attachment. He returns to the most basic elements of that which is given to him.

This is the picture that was available to be recorded by the Greeks yet it is right to question whether they got at all near to understanding this position. A detailed recording of such a position is not made. The terms are not recorded. Yet this does not mean the concept was not captured. The Greek strategy for drawing their sketch of Indian philosophy was a mixture of impressionism and realism. It tried to follow exactly what was there before it. It did not impose its own forms upon it, but attempted to let it speak even when its speech was silence or other methods alien to the Greek philosophical mind. But the realism of this picture was bound to fail to a certain extent and descend into impressionism. The Greeks lacked the tools to present a full realist portrait. They did not know the language and they had little time to fully analyze the thought. Attached to the picture of these externals, they affixed the words that were closest to what they believed they were witnessing. In a sense, the words and thoughts attributed to Calanus and Dandamis can be read like a Thucydidean speech, using the characteristic figure of tone and ideas, to convey a message which would otherwise be lost in details and obscurities. As they themselves argued, expressing their thoughts to the Greeks via translators was like trying to pass clean water through mud (Str. 15.1.64).

If we are to find anything near the sophistication of analysis of the ends of a philosophical life it can only be in the speeches of Calanus and Dandamis. There is one in particular that seems to carry the key messages that we are looking for. In the speech that Dandamis gives to Alexander on why he refuses the summons of the king there is strong evidence to suggest that we find a summary of the world-renouncer position and the doctrine of *Mokṣa*,

*“He is said to have replied that he was just as much a son of Zeus himself as Alexander was, and that he had no need of anything from Alexander, since he was contented with what he had; he perceived, moreover, that those who were wandering about with Alexander over all those countries and seas were none the better for it, and that there was no end to their many wanderings. He did not then desire anything that Alexander could give him, nor did he fear being kept out of anything of which Alexander might be possessed. While he lived, the land of India was all he needed, giving to him its fruits in their season; and when he died, he would merely be released from an uncomfortable companion, his body”* (Arr. An. 7.2.3-4).

In this account we finally find the doctrine of *Mokṣa* that was missing in the story of cyclical time told through the voice of Calanus. We have here the doctrinal description of the path of the ascetic and its aims.

The world renouncer rejects the goods of this material world, which can have no bearing upon his practice. They are unable to satisfy. This is the rejection of the incarnation into new worlds, the desire for reward for one’s ethical action.

Dandamis emphasizes his rejection of the king's path. The king aims to control the world, but not only is he far from this aim taken by itself, but the aim itself is flawed. He questions the gain that the followers of Alexander can receive through him. True gain is spiritual not to be had in the world but through our abstraction from it.

The special claim of Alexander to a relation to the divine is directly attacked. There can be no personal relation to or instantiation of the divine. Everyone is equally *Ātman*-Brahman. To be divine is to rule over not some particular world, but to attain to the root of worlding itself. The notion, therefore, of the divinity of Alexander is itself flawed and limited.

Dandamis counterposes the activity of Alexander to his own, the Brāhmanic ascetic path. Alexander cannot achieve satiety because he looks for gain in this world, through conquest and plunder. Dandamis can attain his aim for he has forgone all interest in material goods. His relation to the material is one of plenty, the plenty that we saw in the story of Calanus, but reinterpreted. He takes the basic foods of the land and nothing more as his subsistence. He makes absolutely no demands on the material world, only accepting what is offered to him. In this way he clears himself of material attachments and thus the entrapment of the goods of the world. He is able through this act of renouncing to attain to an identity with the divine.

Finally, we find the reference to the doctrine of *mokṣa*, in his assertion regarding the afterlife. We are told that he has no fear of death because upon passing from this earth he will lose only his body and move on to a purer place. We know already that the world renouncer has purified himself to the extent that is humanly possible through his ascetic practice. He has no worldly attachments whatsoever. He rejects entirely the example of earthly power that Alexander represents. The purer life he references can only be understood as a life outside the circle of birth and rebirth, a death not into new life and new body, but a death into the origin of worlding, into the identity with *Brahman*.

#### 4. Conclusion

This paper set out to examine the Indian philosophers Calanus and Dandamis who are represented in the Alexander histories to explore to what extent they could be seen as indicating a genuine knowledge of Indian philosophy acquired by the Greeks during the invasion of India. The two parties to this possible philosophical encounter were investigated to see their willingness and capability to engage in a serious philosophical dialogue that could have lead to a true exchange of knowledge under what were clearly difficult conditions. The Greek side shows itself as more than fit for the task with four philosophers travelling in the company of Alexander who had both theoretical and practical reasons for attempting to engage Indian philosophy and philosophers. The Indian side shows itself to be no less equipped for the task having a practical and theoretical interest in the defense of their lands and their ideas. Having shown the necessary prerequisite of apt and engaged thinkers was filled, we went on to examine what sort of knowledge of Indian philosophy is represented in the figure of Calanus and Dandamis.

The two Indian philosophers of the Alexander histories represent a quick and impressionistic sketch of a vital philosophical tradition with which the Greeks had little time to interact and get to know. The vagueness of the figures sketched was imposed by the briefness of the encounter and yet this very vagueness is not inaccurate but captures, in its way, the multifaced and conflicted tradition of brāhmaṇic philosophy that was plural in interpretation and in the midst of its own internally and externally motivated revolutions. Calanus and Dandamis portray the most important aspects of brāhmaṇic philosophic life: caste, reincarnation and the *āśramas*. The descriptions attached to them indicate not only the basic form and representations of these ideas and institutions but also some of the major tensions hidden within them. Perhaps most surprising and most powerfully illustrative of the interest of the Greeks in their Indian counterparts is the sensitivity towards the internal divisions and features of the brāhmaṇic philosophical life without reducing these differences either to the bizarre or to the overly familiar.

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