

## ON THE ORIGINS OF THE 32 MARKS OF A GREAT MAN<sup>1</sup>

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Scholars have long been fascinated, and frustrated, by the 32 marks of a Great Man. The 32 marks have played a significant role in the development of the legend of the Buddha's life, especially insofar as the Buddha is said to have been destined, as a "Great Man" (*mahāpuruṣa*) possessing these marks, to become either a world-conquering monarch (*cakravartin*) or a Buddha.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, the idea of the 32 marks has had an influence on Buddhist iconography, or may even, as some have suggested, have been influenced by iconographic constraints (Coomaraswamy 1927: 302–303). Nevertheless, the origins of the idea of the 32 marks of a Great Man are obscure. Given its prominence in the fully developed story of the Buddha's life, the theme of the 32 marks has been

<sup>1</sup> This article was written, accepted for publication, and revised before the release of Kenneth Zysk's *The Indian System of Human Marks*. The author of this article did not have access to this new publication, which represents an important advance in the study of Indian physiognomy, until the copy-editing phase. While it was therefore not possible to fully incorporate Zysk's research into this article, note has been made of relevant advances found in Zysk's book and points where Zysk has independently come to conclusions parallel to those found here. I would like to thank two anonymous reviewers for their critical comments on an earlier draft of this article.

<sup>2</sup> The story is found, albeit not always in this form, in all four of the major 'biographies' of the Buddha. In the Pali tradition, the *Nidānakathā* (PTS pp. 55–56; Jayawickrama 2002, 74–75) recounts that eight Brahmans predicted these two possible outcomes based on the marks of the baby *bodhisatta*; the youngest of them, however, predicted that he would certainly become a Buddha. In the *Lalitavistara* (Dharmachakra Translation Committee 2013, 74–81), the sage Asita appears to interpret the marks, and although he thinks to himself that the marks indicate that he will become either a world-conquering monarch or a Buddha, he predicts the latter in speaking to the boy's father. According to the Mahāsāṅghika *Mahāvastu* (II.30–33; Jones 1952, 27–30), prognosticators predicted that the Bodhisattva would become a world-conquering monarch, but Asita instead predicted that he would become a Buddha. Finally, in Aśvaghōṣa's *Buddhacarita* (1.54–85; Johnston 1992, 12–18), Asita simply predicts that the child will become a Buddha.

mostly studied in the context of the later texts in which this fully developed story is found, and little work has been done on the development of the concept in the earliest Buddhist texts. Most frustrating of all, however, scholars have had little to no luck in identifying a Brahmanical source for the 32 marks of a Great Man, in spite of the fact that the Buddhist texts are nearly unanimous in stating that this is a Brahmanical concept found in the Vedas.<sup>3</sup>

In this article, I seek to rectify these deficiencies by (1) examining the development of the theme of the 32 marks in the early Buddhist tradition and (2) drawing attention to very clear parallels to the 32 marks found in a relatively late (6<sup>th</sup> century CE) work of Brahmanical Jyotiḥśāstra, the *Brhatsaṃhitā* of Varāhamihira, which have hitherto been overlooked. I begin by examining the development of the theme of the 32 marks in the early Buddhist tradition using an oral theoretical framework. I then review previous scholarly attempts to identify a Brahmanical source for the idea of the 32 marks, and following up on a suggestion made, but never fully developed, by Senart, I show that there are extensive parallels to the 32 marks and the concept of the “Great Man” in Varāhamihira’s *Brhatsaṃhitā*. Finally, I make an attempt to trace the history of the principles of divination found in the *Brhatsaṃhitā* given the meager evidence at our disposal. In the end, I argue that there is sufficient evidence to come to two conclusions. First, the concept of a Great Man with 32 marks, while likely as such to be a Buddhist creation, was indeed based on actual Brahmanical principles of divination. Second, while the Buddhist creation of the theme of the Buddha as a “Great Man” based on Brahmanical principles of divination is impossible to date exactly, it likely happened sometime in the first few centuries after the Buddha’s death as an important facet of Buddhism’s accommodation to the increasingly Brahmanical world in which it found itself.

<sup>3</sup> The greatest exception, in respect both to attention to the early Pali sources and to Brahmanical parallels, is Wimalaratana n.d., which explicates the Pali texts on the 32 marks through comparison to Brahmanical and Jain sources. See now also Zysk 2016, esp. ch. V.

### The 32 Marks in the Early Buddhist Tradition

Scholars have increasingly recognized the importance of oral theory, as developed by Milmann Parry and Albert Lord through comparison of the Homeric epics to living oral traditions of epic in the former Yugoslavia, to understanding the composition and dissemination of the early Buddhist literature, i.e., the ‘texts’ found in the Pali Canon and their counterparts preserved mostly in Chinese, but also Sanskrit and Tibetan.<sup>4</sup> It is well known that the early Buddhist texts were passed down orally for centuries by specialist monks known as *bhāṇakas*, perhaps written down as a whole only for the first time in the first century BCE in Sri Lanka, when a famine threatened to wipe out the *bhāṇaka* lineages.<sup>5</sup> The written versions of early Buddhist texts that come down to us preserve traces of their oral origins, particular in the guise of ‘formulas,’ fixed segments ranging from a few words to several paragraphs in length, that would have made it easier for the *bhāṇakas* to transmit their texts without the aid of writing. As in the epic literature studied by oral theorists, particular *sūtras* can also possess ‘themes,’ global literary tropes that transcend a particular formula but often make use of several particular formulas in a stereotyped way.

The advantage of studying early Buddhist literature through an oral theoretical framework is that it allows one to trace developments within the early Buddhist tradition by comparing different versions of a particular *sūtra* in Pali and usually Chinese, but also sometimes Tibetan or Sanskrit. Since many of the different versions of the early Buddhist *sūtras* come from different early Buddhist sects, they represent different lineages of

<sup>4</sup> The original formulation of oral theory by Parry and Lord is represented by Parry 1972 and Lord 1964. The application of oral theory to the early Buddhist texts was first suggested by Cousins 1983. It has been taken up by Gombrich 1988, Gethin 1992, Allon 1997a, Allon 1997b, and Anālayo 2011. It should be noted that Gombrich, Allon, and Anālayo apply the oral theory to the early Buddhist texts primarily in borrowing the concept of ‘formula,’ and do not agree with Cousins that there may have been an improvisational element involved comparable to the epic poetry studied by Parry and Lord. While I believe that the evidence points strongly in favor of Cousins’ original intuition, demonstrating so is beyond the scope of this paper and in any case ancillary to the argument being made here.

<sup>5</sup> On the *bhāṇaka*-tradition as described the Pali *Aṭṭhakathās*, see Adikaram 1946: 24–32, and Sodo n.d.: 123–9.

*bhāṇakas* in what once was a living oral tradition. Each written text of a Nikāya, Āgama, or individual *sūtra* that has come down to us can be understood as being like a ‘tape recording’ of a particular oral performance of this living oral tradition, in a particular time and place, and most importantly by a *bhāṇaka* who was trained within a particular lineage of the early Buddhist oral tradition.<sup>6</sup> We have, of course, a complete *Tripitaka* preserved only in the Pali version of the Theravādins. But we also have a complete version of the Dharmaguptaka *Dirghāgama* preserved in Chinese, an incomplete version of the Sarvāstivāda *Dirghāgama* preserved in Sanskrit, a complete version and two incomplete versions of the Sarvāstivāda *Samyuktāgama* preserved in Chinese, and a complete version of the (perhaps) Mahāsāṃghika *Ekottarikāgama* preserved in Chinese, plus numerous individual *sūtras* preserved in various languages.<sup>7</sup> By comparing these different versions, then, we can see what changes emerged in the various *bhāṇaka* traditions over time.

It should be emphasized that this is *not* the same as textual criticism. Textual criticism is either (‘lower’) the comparison of manuscripts of a single text to determine the reading found in the autograph manuscript or (‘higher’) the comparison of various critically reconstructed texts to determine which texts were used as sources for other texts. An oral tradition is simply not amenable to such approaches. It is amenable, however, to an investigation of the way in which oral formulas were preserved and deployed differently by different branches of the tradition in question. Oral formulas can be considered to be the DNA of oral literature. On the one hand, they are the building blocks of an oral tradition and as such may be deployed slightly differently with every ‘generation’ – i.e., every performance. On the other hand, the formulas themselves are fixed, insofar as they are memorized, so differences between versions of

<sup>6</sup> In the case of Āgamas and individual *sūtras* preserved in translations from Indic languages such as Chinese, it is of course possible that the translation was made from a text already written down long before in an Indic language, rather than ‘live’ directly from a *bhāṇaka*’s oral performance. Still, any written form of the early Buddhist literature must be traced back to some text that was written down on the basis of an oral performance of a *bhāṇaka*, or else written down by a *bhāṇaka* himself.

<sup>7</sup> On the sectarian affiliations of the Chinese Āgamas, see Egaku 1964. On the Sanskrit *Dirghāgama*, see, most recently, Hartmann and Wille 2014).

an oral formula found in different branches of an oral tradition indicate significant ‘mutations’ in the oral tradition’s basic DNA.

One particular ‘theme’ in the early Buddhist literature, namely the theme of the Brahman seeking the 32 “marks of a Great Man” (Skt. *mahāpuruṣalakṣaṇāni*, P. *mahāpurisalakkhaṇāni*) on the body of the Buddha, would serve as the basis for the idea that the Buddha possesses 32 marks of a “Great Man” throughout Buddhist history. I should emphasize that I make use of the term ‘theme’ instead of ‘formula’ here because the narrative trope in which a Brahman hears of the Buddha and decides to see if he really has the 32 marks is not conveyed in a single formula, but rather through a set of formulas that together can be said to comprise a ‘theme’ that governs a *sūtra*’s entire narrative structure.<sup>8</sup> Within the first four Nikāyas of the Theravāda tradition, only three *suttas* make use of this theme. Many other *suttas* refer to the *mahāpurisalakkhaṇāni*, but in most cases only in the form of a formula that is also found in the three *suttas* with the fully developed theme of a Brahman seeking the 32 marks of a Great Man on the body of the Buddha. There are three major formulas found in the three ‘themed’ *suttas* that are also found in other *suttas*: I will refer to these as the “Triple Veda” formula, the “Fame of Gotama” formula, and the “Two Paths of a Great Man” formula. In order to elucidate the relationship between the three fully-developed themed *suttas* and the broader early Buddhist tradition, I will investigate each of these three constitutive formulas in turn, followed by the themed *suttas* themselves.

### The “Triple Veda” Formula

Of those *suttas* that only make passing reference to the 32 marks, most do so in the form of the “Triple Veda” formula, which also plays an important role in the fully-developed themed *suttas*. This formula is generally used to introduce a Brahman interlocutor, and it does so by asserting, in some detail, that the Brahman in question is a master of the Triple

<sup>8</sup> The introduction of the *Pārāyaṇavagga*, book 5 of the *Suttanipāta*, also makes use of this theme, but not in the technical oral theoretical sense; it is written in verse and thus does not share the same formulaic structure found in the prose *suttas* of the first four Nikāyas.

Veda, along with a list of certain ancillary sciences that, as we shall see, vary somewhat from one version of the formula to another. In the Theravāda tradition, the formula is mostly fixed, and although there is some slight variation in the way the formula is incorporated into its broader context in a particular narrative, the following kernel is found word-for-word in all instances:

[The Brahman in question is] perfected in the three Vedas – together with their vocabularies and rituals, with their phonology and etymology, and the oral tradition (*itihāsa*) as a fifth – skilled in philology and grammar, not lacking in the Lokāyata and marks of a Great Man.<sup>9</sup>

This formula is found in a total of 11 *suttas*<sup>10</sup> in the Pali Canon; these can be found listed in Table 1.

Pali Sutta	Context	Chinese Parallel
DN 3: <i>Ambaṭṭha</i>	Introduction to <i>māṇava</i> Ambaṭṭha (I.88).	DĀ 20: Dharmaguptaka version, used to introduce Ambaṭṭha (T.1, 82).
DN 4: <i>Soṇadaṇḍa</i>	Brahmans' argument for why Soṇadaṇḍa is too good to go see Gotama (I.114).	DĀ 22: Dharmaguptaka version, used to introduce Soṇadaṇḍa (T.1, 94).
DN 5: <i>Kūṭadanta</i>	Brahmans' argument for why Kūṭadanta is too good to go see Gotama (I.129).	DĀ 23: Dharmaguptaka version, used to introduce Kūṭadanta (T.1, 96).
MN 91: <i>Brahmāyu</i>	Introduction to Brahman Brahmāyu (II.133).	MĀ 161: Sarvāstivāda version, used to introduce Brahmāyu (T.26, 685).
MN 92: <i>Sela</i>	Introduction to Brahman Sela (Sn. p. 105).	EĀ 49.6: Formula, if present at all, appears to be abbreviated as "He was very learned" (T.125, 798: 多有所知).
MN 93: <i>Assalāyana</i>	Introduction to <i>māṇava</i> Assalāyana (II.147).	MĀ 151: Sarvāstivāda version, used to introduce Assalāyana (T.26, 663).

<sup>9</sup> *tiṅṇaṃ vedānaṃ pāragū sanighaṇḍukeṭubhānaṃ sakkharappabhedānaṃ itihāsapañ-camānaṃ, padako, veyyākaraṇo, lokāyatamahāpurisalakkhaṇesu anavayo.*

<sup>10</sup> Not counting Sn. 3.7, which is the same as MN 92, the *Selasutta*. The formula is also found in some later texts, such as the *Niddesa* and the *Milindapañha*, which I have not listed here.

MN 95: <i>Caṅkī</i>	Brahmans' argument for why Caṅkī is too good to go see Gotama (II.165).	None, but there is a Sanskrit fragment containing the formula, close to the Sarvāstivāda version. <sup>11</sup>
MN 100: <i>Saṅgārava</i>	Introduction to <i>māṇava</i> Saṅgārava (II.210).	None.
AN 3.58: <i>Tikaṇṇa</i>	Explanation of <i>tevijja</i> (I.163).	Partial parallel to SĀ 884–5 (T.99, 223), which does not include formula.
AN 3.59: <i>Jāṇussoṇi</i>	Explanation of <i>tevijja</i> (I.166).	Partial parallel to SĀ 884–5, which does not include formula.
AN 5.192: <i>Doṇa</i>	Explanation of <i>tevijja</i> (III.223).	MĀ 158: Sarvāstivāda version, used by Doṇa to explain <i>trividya</i> (三明) (T.26, 680).
Sn. 3.7: <i>Sela</i>	Introduction to Brahman Sela (p. 105).	See MN 92.

Table 1. List of all instances of the “Triple Veda” formula in Pali *suttas*, together with description of context and Chinese parallels. Later Pali texts such as *Niddesa* and *Milindapañha* are not included.

The content of the “Triple Veda” formula is mostly straightforward. The first and most important point made is that the Brahman in question (whether actual or hypothetical) is a master of the Triple Veda. The reference here to only three Vedas, instead of four, is standard in the Pali Canon and is supported by the Dharmaguptaka version of the formula, which also refers to the “three parts of the old classics” (三部舊典). This version of the formula clearly dates to a time before the *Atharva* was fully accepted as a fourth Veda.<sup>12</sup> The Sarvāstivāda version, however, refers to four Vedas – or rather, in Chinese, to four “classics” (四典經) –

<sup>11</sup> Jens-Uwe Hartmann, “More Fragments of the Caṅgīsūtra,” in *Buddhist Manuscripts*, vol. 2, edited by Jens Braarvig (Oslo: Hermes Publishers, 2002), 10.

<sup>12</sup> The fact that early Indian texts, including the Pali Canon, refer to *three* rather than *four* Vedas makes clear that the designation of the *Atharva*, which was originally known simply as the *Atharvāṅgīrasa*, as a Veda is late. There is evidence that there was contestation over the *Atharva*'s Vedic status: Michael Witzel (1997: 278–9) has argued that the compilers of the *Atharva* used archaisms to bolster their collection's claim to Vedic status, and Ronald Inden (1992) argues that the *brahman* priest was originally considered a master of the Triple Veda, and only came to be associated with the *Atharva* when the latter became accepted as a fourth Veda.

and thus presumably, at least in the form it has come down to us, dates to a later time when the *Atharva* had been fully accepted as the fourth Veda. We can, in any case, be confident that the latter form is not original and rather represents an ‘updating’ of the formula in the latter-day oral tradition. Not only is the Pali Canon absolutely unanimous in speaking of three Vedas, but the concept of precisely three Vedas, or a “threefold knowledge” of the Brahmans, was used to construct the idea of a Buddhist threefold knowledge – i.e., knowledge of past lives, knowledge of the workings of *karma*, and knowledge of the destruction of the *āsavas* – that is found frequently in the early Buddhist *suttas*.<sup>13</sup> This theme must have been developed and diffused throughout the early Buddhist tradition prior to the elevation of the *Atharva* to the status of fourth Veda.

The Pali version of the formula adds that not only is the Brahman in question an expert in the three Vedas *per se*; he is also learned in a set of five auxiliary sciences that are associated with the three Vedas.<sup>14</sup> This is then followed, at least in the Pali version, by the final phrase, “not lacking in the Lokāyata and marks of a Great Man” (*lokāyatamahāpurisalakkhaṇesu anavayo*). Not all sectarian versions of the formula include this phrase, however. In the Sarvāstivāda version, found in several *sūtras* in the Chinese translation of the *Madhyamāgama*,<sup>15</sup> the formula simply ends with the listing of the five auxiliary sciences. No mention is made thereafter of the marks of a Great Man or anything else. Although it is possible

<sup>13</sup> *tevijja*: Vin. III.87, IV.24, II.161; MN 56, 71, 73, 91; SN 1.6.1.5, 1.7.1.8, 1.8.7, 1.8.9–10, 1.11.2.8; AN 3.59–60; Iti. 3.5.10; Sn. 3.9; Ther. 1.12.2, 2.1.5, 3.1, 4.8, 5.5, 20.1, 21.1; Therī. 4.1, 5.11–12, 7.1, 12.1, 13.2, 13.4–5; Apa. 1.1.3–1, 1.3.3, 1.9.4, 1.14.7, 1.40.3, 1.52.9, 2.3.7; also found in Jāt., Nidd., and Mil. *tisso vijjā*: Vin. III.91, IV.26, II.183; DN 33, 34; MN 86, 98, 145; SN 1.7.1.8, 4.1.9.5, 5.8.2.14; AN 3.59–60, 8.30, 10.102; Ud. 3.3; Pv. 4.1; Iti. 3.5.10; Sn. 3.9; Ther. 1.3.4, 1.6.5, 1.7.6, 1.11.7, 1.11.8, 1.12.7, 3.1–2, 4.1–2, 4.5, 4.9, 4.12, 5.1, 5.7, 6.6, 7.3, 8.3, 10.4, 13.1, 16.8–9; Therī. 2.4, 2.6, 4.1, 6.4, 7.2, 7.3, 8.1, 9.1, 13.3–4, 15.1; Apa. 1.1.3–1, 1.1.3–6, 1.1.3–10, 1.14.1, 1.23.1, 1.38.4, 1.39.1, 1.40.1, 1.40.10, 1.41.1, 1.41.5, 1.42.1, 1.43.1, 1.44.1, 1.44.8, 1.45.1, 1.46.1, 1.47.1, 1.48.1, 1.49.1, 1.50.1, 1.51.1, 1.52.1, 1.53.1, 1.54.1, 1.55.1, 1.55.7, 1.56.1, 2.1.1, 2.2.7, 2.3.1, 2.3.10, 2.4.1, 2.4.10; also found in Paṭis. and Mil.

<sup>14</sup> The association of these five sciences with the three Vedas is indicated by placing them in compounds that begin with *sa-* (“with”) and end with genitive plural endings, in agreement with the phrase *tiṇṇaṃ vedānaṃ*. This indicates that they are attributes of the three Vedas, of which the Brahman has “gone to the far shore” (*pāragū*), which I have translated more colloquially as “perfected in.”

<sup>15</sup> MĀ 63, 151, 158, 160, 161.

that the Chinese translator simply left this part of the formula out, this is unlikely since a Sanskrit version of the *Caṅkīsutta* also omits mention of the marks of a Great Man or the Lokāyata in this formula. In this version, after the five auxiliary sciences are mentioned, the Brahman is called a *padako* (also found in the Pali, where I translated it as “skilled in philology”) and said to be *vyākaraṇe anapayyaḥ* (“not lacking in grammar”) (Hartmann 2002: 10). This is nearly the same as the ending of the Pali version of the formula, except that the compound *lokāyatamahāpurisalakkhaṇesu* is omitted. Although our evidence is limited, it is likely that the Mahāsāṃghika tradition did not include a reference to the marks of a Great Man in its “Triple Veda” formula either, since it is absent in a version of the formula used in the *Mahāvastu*.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, the Theravāda tradition was not alone in including a reference at the very least to the marks of a Great Man. According to the Dharmaguptaka version preserved in Chinese, the Brahman is “also capable with respect to the marks of a Great Man, the practice of divination, and the sacrificial rituals.”<sup>17</sup> It is not clear what exactly the original Indic version said here, but it appears to have agreed with the Theravāda version at least in referring to the *mahāpurisalakkhaṇāni*. We thus have two Vibhajyavāda schools (Theravāda and Dharmaguptaka) that include reference to the 32 marks in the “Triple Veda” formula and two non-Vibhajyavāda schools (Sarvāstivāda and Mahāsāṃghika) that do not. This would indicate that it was added to the formula after the Vibhajyavāda-Sarvāstivāda split.<sup>18</sup>

### The “Fame of Gotama” Formula

The second formula that is found in the three *suttas* featuring the theme of a Brahman looking for the 32 marks on the body of the Buddha, but

<sup>16</sup> Mv. 2.77: *tasya rājño purohito brahmāyuh nāma trayāṇāṃ vedānāṃ pārago sanirghaṅthakaiṭabhānāṃ itihāsapamcamānāṃ akṣarapadavyākaraṇe analpako*; translated by Jones (1952: 74).

<sup>17</sup> 又能善於大人相法，瞻候吉凶，祭祀儀禮。This is the version found in DĀ 22, 23, and 29, which correspond to the *Soṇadaṇḍa-*, *Kūṭadanta-*, and *Lohiccasuttas*, respectively. In DĀ 20, which corresponds to the *Ambaṭṭhasutta*, the middle element of the list, 瞻候吉凶, which refers to the practice of divination, is omitted.

<sup>18</sup> For a basic overview of the filiation of the early Buddhist sects, see the work of André Bareau (2013[1955]), which has recently been translated into English by Sara Boin-Webb.

also dispersed widely elsewhere in the early Buddhist tradition, is what I call the “Fame of Gotama” formula. This formula, which describes the “fame” (*kittisadda*) of the *samaṇa* Gotama, is frequently used as a narrative device to introduce the Buddha’s presence in the area to an interlocutor and, by piquing the interlocutor’s interest, induce him to pay the Buddha a visit. In Pali, the formula, in its fullest form, is as follows:

Now, regarding the Venerable Gotama a good reputation has gone forth thus: “That Blessed One is worthy, fully Awakened, endowed with knowledge and conduct, well-gone, knower of the world, the unexcelled charioteer of people who are to be trained, instructor of gods and men, the Awakened, the Blessed One. Having realized for himself by higher knowledge, he declares this world with the gods, with the Māras, with the Brahmās; [he declares] the people with the *samaṇas* and Brahmans, with the gods and men. He preaches the *dhamma*, which is good in the beginning, good in the middle, good in the end, with meaning and articulation. He proclaims a wholly perfect, completely pure *brahmacariya*. Well indeed is it to see such worthies.”<sup>19</sup>

Sometimes, however, a shorter form of this formula, ending with “the Awakened, the Blessed One” (*buddho bhagavā*) is found. A list of all<sup>20</sup> instances of this formula, in both the short and the long form, can be found in Table 2.

<sup>19</sup> See, e.g., DN 3 (I.87-88): *taṃ kho pana bhavantam gotamam evam kalyāṇo kittisaddo abhuggato – iti pi so bhagavā arahaṃ sammāsambuddho vijjācaraṇasampanno sugato lokavidū anuttaro purisadammasārathi sathā devamanussānam buddho bhagavā. so imaṃ lokaṃ sadevakaṃ samārakaṃ sabrahmakaṃ sassamaṇabrāhmaṇim pajam sadevamanussaṃ sayam abhiññā sacchikatvā pavedeti. so dhammaṃ deseti ādikalyāṇam majjhakalyāṇam pariyoṣānakalyāṇam, sāttham sabyañjanaṃ. kevalaparipuṇṇam parisuddham brahmacariyam pakāseti. sādhu kho pana tathārūpānam arahataṃ dassanam hotī ti.*

<sup>20</sup> Parts of this formula, in particular the list of epithets *iti pi so ... buddho bhagavā* that begins the description of the Buddha in the full version – which, incidentally, is commonly memorized and used as a *mantra*/prayer in Theravāda Buddhist countries such as Thailand – are found in a wider variety of texts than I have listed in Table 2. I have only included, as instances of what I call the “Fame of Gotama” formula, those cases that begin with the introduction *taṃ kho pana bhavantam gotamam evam kalyāṇo kittisaddo abhuggato*, since only these cases make use of the description of the Buddha that follows as a report of the “reputation” or “fame” of the *samaṇa* Gotama.

<b>Pali <i>Sutta</i> or Other Text</b>	<b>Full or Short Version?</b>	<b>Encounter with a Brahman?</b>
Vin. III.1	Full	Yes
Vin. I.35	Full	No
Vin. I.242	Full	No
Vin. I.245	Full	Yes ( <i>a jaṭila</i> )
DN 2: I.49	Short	No
DN 3: I.87-88	Full	Yes
DN 4: I.111	Full	Yes
DN 5: I.127-128	Full	Yes
DN 6: I.150	Full	Yes
DN 12: I.224-225	Full	Yes
DN 13: I.236	Short	Yes
MN 41: I.285	Full	Yes
MN 42: I.291	Full	Yes
MN 60: I.401	Full	Yes
MN 75: I.502	Short	Yes
MN 82: II.55	Full	Yes
MN 91: II.133	Full	Yes
MN 92 (=Sn. 3.7 below)	Full	Yes
MN 95: II. 164	Full	Yes
MN 98 (=Sn. 3.9 below)	Short	Yes
MN 140: III.238	Short	No
MN 150: III.291	Full	Yes
SN 5.11.1.7: V.352	Full	Yes
AN 3.63: I.180	Full	Yes
AN 3.65: I.188	Full	No
AN 5.30: III.30	Full	Yes
AN 6.42: III.341	Full	Yes
AN 8.86: IV.341	Full	Yes
Sn. 3.7: p. 103	Full	Yes
Sn. 3.9: p. 116	Short	Yes

Table 2. A list of all instances of the full or short form of the “Fame of Gotama” formula in the Pali Canon.

For our purposes, there are two interesting things to note about the “Fame of Gotama” formula. The first is that it is strongly correlated with Brahmins. That is, the interlocutor who is prompted to seek the Buddha after hearing of the “Fame of Gotama” is in the vast majority of cases not just anyone, but specifically a Brahmin. The second interesting thing to note is that the “Fame of Gotama” formula makes no reference whatsoever to the 32 marks of a Great Man. This is remarkable because (1) knowledge of the 32 marks of a Great Man is so strongly associated in the early Buddhist tradition with Brahmins and (2) the very nature of the “Fame of Gotama” formula as a litany of the Buddha’s remarkable attributes seems to beg for reference to his exceptional anatomical features. Indeed, none of the *suttas* that include the “Fame of Gotama” formula make any reference to the 32 marks of a Great Man, except in the form of the “Triple Veda” formula when the latter is used to introduce a Brahmin interlocutor. But as we have seen, there is compelling evidence that reference to the 32 marks was added to the “Triple Veda” formula by the Vibhajjavāda branch of the early Buddhist tradition after its split with the Sarvāstivāda. This suggests that the “Fame of Gotama” formula and (originally) the “Triple Veda” formula, together with a fairly extensive genre of *suttas* featuring encounters between the Buddha and Brahmins, were formulated without reference to, or perhaps any knowledge of, the theme of seeking the 32 marks of a Great Man.

### **The “Two Paths of a Great Man” Formula**

The theme of a Brahmin seeking the 32 marks on the body of the Buddha makes use of the “Triple Veda” and “Fame of Gotama” formulas. These formulas, however, were not sufficient to construct this theme, insofar as they made no reference (or originally so in the case of the “Triple Veda” formula) to the 32 marks of a Great Man. For this a new formula was needed, one that I will call the “Two Paths of a Great Man” formula. This formula begins with an introductory phrase that varies with the context but ends by referring in some way to the marks of a Great Man, continuing

...endowed with which a Great Man has only two courses, no other. If he dwells in a house, he becomes a wheel-turning king, a righteous *dharmakī*ng, conqueror of the four directions, one who has attained the security of

his country, endowed with seven treasures. He has these seven treasures: the treasure of the wheel, the treasure of elephants, the treasure of horses, the treasure of women, the treasure of householders, the treasure of advisers, just these seven. And he has over a thousand sons, who are brave, heroic, crushing the armies of others. He dwells having conquered this earth bounded by the ocean, not with the rod, not with the sword, (but) with *dhamma*. But if he goes forth from the house into homelessness, he becomes a Worthy, a Perfectly Awakened One, who has drawn away the veil of the world.<sup>21</sup>

This formula thus explains in detail that a person possessing the 32 marks will either, if he remains a householder, become a *cakkavatti* (Skt. *cakravartin*) monarch, or else, if he goes forth into homelessness, become a Buddha. Unlike the (original) “Triple Veda” and “Fame of Gotama” formulas, which do not refer to the 32 marks and are found widely dispersed in *suttas* that are otherwise ignorant of this concept, the “Two Paths of a Great Man” formula is intrinsically tied to the concept of a Great Man and is found *only* in the three *suttas* bearing the theme of a Brahman seeking the 32 marks and two other closely related *suttas*.

Before turning to the three ‘themed’ *suttas*, let us look briefly at the two other places where the “Two Paths of a Great Man” formula is found. The first is the *Mahāpadānsutta* (DN 14: II.16), in which this formula is placed on the lips of fortune-telling Brahmans (*nemitte brāhmaṇe*) who are called to prognosticate on the prince Vipassī before he becomes a Buddha, i.e., one of the Buddhas of past eras that are described by the current Buddha (Sakyamuni) in this *sutta*. I do not classify this *sutta* as bearing the theme of a Brahman seeking the 32 marks because the Brahmans who predict that Vipassī will become a Buddha are invited to divine the *bodhisatta*’s future, rather than seeking it out themselves, and because

<sup>21</sup> As found in DN 3 (I.88-89), 14 (II.16), 30 (III.142); MN 91 (II.134); Sn. 3.7 (PTS p. 106): *yehi samannāgatassa mahāpurisassa dveva gatiyo bhavanti anaññā. sace agāraṃ ajjhāvasati, rājā hoti cakkavattī dhammiko dhammarājā cāturato vijitāvī janapadatthāvāriyappatto sattaratanasamannāgato. tassimāni sattaratanāni bhavanti. seyyathidaṃ – cakkaratanaṃ hathiratanāṃ assaratanaṃ mañiratanāṃ itthiratanāṃ gahapatiratanāṃ pariñāyakaratanāṃ eva sattamaṃ. parosahassaṃ kho panassa puttā bhavanti sūrā vīraṅgarūpā parasenappamaddanā. so imaṃ pathaviṃ sāgarapariyantam adañḍena asatthena dhammena abhivijīya ajjhāvasati. sace kho pana agārasmā anagāriyaṃ pabbajati, araham hoti sammāsambuddho loke vivaṭṭachado.*

this event only takes the form of a small episode in a very long story, rather than a controlling ‘theme.’ Still, the way in which the formula is used in the *Mahāpadānasutta*, which would serve as the basis for the later biographies of the Buddha, is clearly parallel to its usage in contexts in which Brahmans seek the 32 marks on the Buddha as an adult.

The “Two Paths of a Great Man” formula is also found at the beginning of the *Lakkhaṇasutta* (DN 30), in which the Buddha describes to his monks the 32 marks and (at least in the Theravāda version) the *karmic* actions that lead to them.<sup>22</sup> As Bhikkhu Sujāto has shown, the *Lakkhaṇasutta* is among ten *sūtras* that were apparently traded between the *Dīgha/Dīrgha* and *Majjhima/Madhyama* collections by either the Theravāda or the Sarvāstivāda tradition, and the version preserved in the Sarvāstivāda *Madhyamāgama* (MĀ 59) is much shorter than the Theravāda version and could possibly be the more original version.<sup>23</sup> In the shorter, Chinese version, the Buddha simply overhears the monks talking about the 32 marks using the words of the “two paths of a Great Man” formula and tells them what the 32 marks are; no mention is made of Brahmans at all as purveyors of this tradition. What this means is unclear. Perhaps the proto-*Lakkhaṇasutta* served as the blueprint for the concept of the 32 marks, which was then borrowed to apply to a theme in which Brahmans possess this knowledge and seek the marks on the Buddha. On the other hand, it may have been created simply to explain what the 32 marks are, since this is not explained in the *sūtras* in which Brahmans seek them.

<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, the *Lakkhaṇasutta* is the only place in the early Buddhist tradition, at least as far as I am aware, where knowledge of the 32 marks is not explicitly associated with Brahmans. In the Pali version, the Buddha does concede, after naming the 32 marks, that they are known by “outsider *ṛṣis*” (*bāhirakāpi isayo*), but these non-Buddhists do not know the *karmic* roots of each of the 32 marks. This serves as a segue into the rest of the *sutta*, in which the Buddha describes in great detail the meritorious deeds he performed to acquire each of the marks. Neither the concession that “outsider *ṛṣis*” know the marks nor the explanation of the meritorious deeds that lead to them are found in the Sarvāstivāda version, which is found not in the *Dīrghāgama*, but in the *Madhyamāgama* (MĀ 59).

<sup>23</sup> Sujāto has in fact suggested that it may have been the Theravādins who moved the *Lakkhaṇasutta* to the *Dīghanikāya*, and added a considerable amount of material to it in the process to make it appropriately “long” for its new home (2012: 98–99).

### **The Theme of a Brahman Seeking the 32 Marks of a Great Man on the Buddha**

Now that we have examined the “Triple Veda,” “Fame of Gotama,” and “Two Paths of a Great Man” formulas in the broader contexts, let us finally turn to the three *suttas* within the Theravāda tradition that *do* make use of the theme of the Brahman looking for the 32 marks. The three are the *Ambaṭṭhasutta* (DN 3), the *Brahmāyusutta* (MN 91), and the *Selasutta* (MN 92). Of these three, the *Ambaṭṭha-* and *Brahmāyusuttas* follow a very similar pattern, while the *Selasutta* makes use of the 32-marks theme in a slightly different way. In both of the former two *suttas*, there are *two* Brahman interlocutors, namely a Brahman teacher and his student (*māṇava*). The teacher (in the case of the *Ambaṭṭhasutta*, Pokkharasāti, and in the case of the *Brahmāyusutta*, Brahmāyu) hears of the presence of the Buddha through the “Fame of Gotama” formula and then asks his student (Ambaṭṭha and Uttara, respectively) to go and find out whether the reputation Gotama has earned is true. So far, the story in these two *suttas* follows the same pattern as many other *suttas* in which a Brahman’s interest in meeting the Buddha is piqued by the “Fame of Gotama” formula, except that here there are two Brahmans instead of one. This slight difference turns out to be significant, though, since the student then asks his teacher how he can find out whether the reputation imputed to Gotama by the “Fame of Gotama” formula is true, and the teacher explains, using the “Two Paths of a Great Man” formula, that there are 32 marks of a Great Man, and that one who possesses these marks can only become either a *cakkavatti* monarch or a Buddha. Note that this aspect of the 32-marks theme is what allows the 32 marks to become a topic for discussion in the first place. It is the “Fame of Gotama” formula that makes the Brahman teacher aware of the Buddha’s presence and motivates him to send his student to him, but there is no mention of the 32 marks in that formula. The student’s request for further clarification on how to tell if the Buddha’s reputation is well-earned provides the narrative opportunity for the 32 marks to be introduced – they are to be used, in the context of this narrative theme, as an outward sign that Gotama is indeed a Buddha, as his reputation suggests.

At some point during the student’s meeting with the Buddha, the student sees and is able to confirm that the Buddha has at least 30 of the

32 marks. Two, however, are not immediately visible to him – a long tongue and a “sheathed” penis – and the Buddha must demonstrate these specially to him – the former by licking every part of his face, and the latter through an apparently magical feat that allows the Brahman student to see his penis. The student then returns to his teacher and reports what he has seen, and the teacher decides to go see for himself. The process is then repeated: The Brahman sees 30 of the 32 marks unassisted, and the Buddha must demonstrate the remaining two to him.

The *Selasutta* is slightly different from the other two *suttas* that make use of this theme in that it involves only one Brahman interlocutor, Sela. There is another interlocutor in the *sutta*, namely Keṇiya, a *jaṭila* who is apparently a follower of Sela, but Keṇiya serves primarily to introduce Sela to the Buddha and shows no interest in the Buddha’s 32 marks himself. Instead, Sela becomes aware of the Buddha’s presence when he sees Keṇiya preparing a large meal for him. Keṇiya describes the Buddha to Sela using the words of the “Fame of Gotama” formula, and this prompts Sela to simply think to himself, in the words of the “Two Paths of a Great Man” formula, that if the “Fame of Gotama” is true, then the Buddha must have the 32 marks. Sela does not send anyone on his behalf first, but instead immediately goes to see for himself. Nevertheless, the structural pattern in the use of the “Fame of Gotama” and “Two Paths of a Great Man” formulas is the same as in the *Ambaṭṭha-* and *Brahmāyusuttas*. The “Fame of Gotama” formula is used to announce the Buddha’s presence and rouse the Brahman’s interest in seeing him, but the “Two Paths of a Great Man” formula must be introduced as well to specifically prompt the Brahman’s search for the 32 marks. As in the other two *suttas*, Sela at first only sees 30 marks and must be shown the other two.

To summarize, then, the early Buddhist tradition includes a mere three *sūtras* that employ the theme of Brahmins searching for the 32 marks on the body of the Buddha. This theme is based on three formulas, two of which are found widely elsewhere in *sūtras* in which the Buddha encounters Brahmins and one of which is mostly confined to these three themed *sūtras*. One of the formulas that is shared with other *sūtras* in which the Buddha encounters Brahmins – namely, the “Fame of Gotama” formula – makes no mention of the 32 marks. Indeed, in order to introduce

the concept of the 32 marks, those *sūtras* that do deploy the theme must resort to a narrative device to do so. That is, they introduce a completely new formula, the “Two Paths of a Great Man,” which a Brahman either uses to explain to his student how to know whether the Buddha is worthy of his reputation (*Ambaṭṭha-* and *Brahmāyusuttas*), or else thinks to himself after hearing of the “Fame of Gotama” (*Selasutta*). While in the Theravāda and Dharmaguptaka traditions, the other formula that is found both in these three *sūtras* and elsewhere, the “Triple Veda” formula, does refer in passing to knowledge of the 32 marks, the Sarvāstivāda (and probably also the Mahāsāṃghika) version does not. This would suggest that the Vibhajyavāda tradition added a reference to the 32 marks to the “Triple Veda” formula under the influence of the three themed *sūtras*. We can thus see quite clearly how an oral theoretical analysis differs markedly from ordinary textual analysis. What we find is not a simple linear process of later texts borrowing from earlier ones, but a non-linear process in which a new theme in the oral tradition (a Brahman seeking the 32 marks on the Buddha’s body) can borrow from and add to the formulas of an existing theme (a Brahman simply seeking out the Buddha), and that new theme then colors one of the common formulas from which it drew (the “Triple Veda” formula).

### **The Search for a Brahmanical List of 32 Marks**

As we have seen, with the exception of the *Lakkhaṇasutta*, and particularly its Chinese parallel, the early Buddhist tradition is unanimous in associating knowledge of the 32 marks with Brahmans. Moreover, the 32 marks are almost always brought up in a context where Brahmans are introduced as interlocutors in order to serve as a foil against which to construct Buddhist identity. Within that context, knowledge of the 32 marks serves as a marker of the Brahmans’ identity as ‘other’ to the Buddhists, while simultaneously their recognition of the marks in the Buddha serves as a polemical trope in which the greatness of one’s own leader is certified by one’s opponents. The association of the 32 marks with Brahmans, it must be emphasized, is close to the point of near exclusivity. As already discussed, most references to the 32 marks in the Pali Canon are found within the “Triple Veda” formula, wherein knowledge

of the marks is named, along with knowledge of the Vedas, five auxiliary Vedic sciences, and Lokāyata, as a sign of the learnedness of a particular Brahman. As if this were not clear enough, the “Two Paths of a Great Man” formula, as it is deployed in the 32-marks theme, begins with the explicit statement that “there are 32 characteristics in our *mantras* with which a Great Man [is] endowed.”<sup>24</sup> The use of the very specific term “in our *mantras*” (P. *mantesu*) here would appear to imply not only that Brahmans prided themselves on knowing the 32 marks of a Great Man, but that they derived them *from the Vedas*.

The only problem is that no one has been able to identify a list of “32 marks of a Great Man” in the Vedas. This, it would appear, is a very old problem, dating back to long before the advent of modern scholarship. In his commentary on the *Brahmāyusutta* in the *Majjhimanikāya*, Buddhaghosa writes,

Here, “in the *mantras*” means in the Vedas. Having heard that a Tathāgata will arise, the Suddhāvāsa gods in preparation put the characteristics into the Vedas and, in the guise of Brahmans, teach in the Veda, “These are called the Buddha-*mantras*,” thinking, “Thus, influential beings will recognize the Tathāgata.” In this way, the characteristics of a Great Man came into the Vedas in the past. But when the Tathāgata passed into *parinibbāna*, they gradually disappeared, and so now they aren’t there.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, it appears that as early as the fifth century, even one of the greatest Buddhist scholars in all of history was unable to find any justification for the claim that the Brahmans had a list of 32 marks of a Great Man in the Vedas, and thus had to invent a story about *mantras* being temporarily interpolated into the Vedas by gods masquerading as Brahmans in order to explain the claim made by the “Two Paths of a Great Man” formula.

Modern scholars have similarly grappled with the problem of the 32 marks and have also been unable to identify an unambiguous source

<sup>24</sup> Found at, e.g., MN 91 (II.134): *amhākaṃ mantesu dvattiṃsamahāpurisalakkhaṇāni, yehi samannāgatassa mahāpurisassa...*

<sup>25</sup> *tattha mantesuṭi vedesu. tathāgato kira uppajjissatīti paṭikacceva suddhāvāsā devā vedesu lakkhaṇāni pakkhipivā “buddhamantā nāma ete”ti brāhmaṇavesena vede vācenti “tadanusāreṇa mahesakkhā sattā tathāgataṃ jānissantī”ti. tena pubbe vedesu mahāpurisalakkhaṇāni āgacchanti. parinibbute pana tathāgate anukkamena antaradhāyanti, tena etarahi natthi.* Cited by Powers (2009: 18).

for the list of 32 marks in the Vedas, or any other Brahmanical text for that matter.<sup>26</sup> Rhys Davids commented in a footnote in his translation of the *Dīghanikāya* that “[n]o such list has been found ... [a]nd the inference from both our passages is that the knowledge is scattered through the Brahman texts” (Rhys Davids 1899: 110, n. 2; cited by Powers 2009: 17). Much of the modern scholarship since Rhys Davids has, indeed, been focused on parallels to particular marks, or the idea of auspicious bodily signs or of a “Great Man” in general in the Brahmanical literature, though not with a great deal of success. A useful synopsis of this scholarship has been provided recently by John Powers, who also adds some of his own findings from various Vedic and non-Vedic Brahmanical texts (2009: 16–19).

Surprisingly, however, Powers does not mention in this synopsis one of the earliest and most extensive discussions of the problem of the 32 marks, which was provided by Emile Senart in his 1875 *Essai sur la Légende du Buddha*. This omission is understandable, however, given that Senart’s *Essai* is associated primarily with his theory of the origins of the Buddha’s biography in an ancient solar myth, a theory that fell into disfavor around the turn of the twentieth century with the ascension of the ‘historicist’ school of Hermann Oldenberg and T. W. Rhys Davids (Reynolds and Hallisey 1989: 31), thus banishing the *Essai* as a whole to relative obscurity. Senart discusses the 32 marks in Chapter Two of his *Essai*, and although his findings overall are certainly dated – his use of various Brahmanical and Buddhist sources is limited by what was available to him and a rather limited sense of their chronological relationship to one another, and the evidence he presents is marshaled in defense of his broader thesis that the Buddha’s biography has its origins in a solar myth – Senart nonetheless provides in this chapter an extensive and detailed discussion of what evidence *does* exist for ideas relating to the 32 marks in the Brahmanical traditions, which I believe has yet to be truly surpassed.

<sup>26</sup> See now, however, Zysk 2016, who finds references to at least the general concept of 32 marks of a Great Man in the *Kāśīkaṇḍa* of the *Skandapurāṇa* (pp. 21–22), 33 marks of a Great Man in the *Bhaviṣyapurāṇa* (p. 90), and 32 marks of a Great Man in the Tamil *Sāṃdrikā Lakṣaṇam* (p. 116).

The most important Brahmanical source that Senart cites in this chapter is the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* of Varāhamihira. That certain parallels to the 32 marks can be found in this 6<sup>th</sup> century work on divination was noted briefly by Rhys Davids in his introduction to the *Lakkhaṇasutta* (1899: 135), and it has also been mentioned by more recent scholars, including Powers (2009: 255, n. 77), but to my knowledge Senart was the first to recognize this fact and one of the only to discuss the parallels to the 32 marks found in that text in any detail (1875: 134–5).<sup>27</sup> Given that the parallels to the 32 marks found in the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* are the most extensive that anyone has ever identified in any one place, it behooves us to discuss them here in some detail.

### Parallels to the 32 Marks in the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*

Two chapters in the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* (68–69)<sup>28</sup> are relevant to the search for actual evidence of something like the 32 marks within the Brahmanical tradition. The first of these, ch. 68, which is entitled “Characteristics of Men” (*puruṣalakṣaṇam*), is dedicated to physiognomy. As such, it does not deal with the concept of a “Great Man,” much less does it give a list of 32 characteristics thereof; rather, it discusses in general what the characteristics of various parts of a person’s body portend about his future. In most cases, a particular body part is addressed in a single verse, which summarizes all the possible characteristics that body part can have and what kind of person will have each of those possible characteristics. Thus, for example, the following verse addresses the possible characteristics of a person’s knees and what they portend:

One with fleshless knees dies abroad; with small [knees people have] good fortune; with monstrous [knees people are] poor.

<sup>27</sup> Senart emphasizes the many marks from the Buddhist list of 32 that are *not* found in Varāhamihira and only mentions the wheels on the soles of the feet and the large tongue as possible parallels. In the following pages (136–139), he discusses the five types of *mahāpuruṣas* discussed by Varāhamihira, but does not seem to notice the particular parallels to the Buddhist concept in the *mahāpuruṣa* of the Bhadra class.

<sup>28</sup> In this article, I make use of the edition and numbering scheme of Bhat (1982). Note that this numbering scheme differs from that followed by Pingree (1981, 73–74) in his overview of Jyotiḥśāstra.

Moreover, with low [knees people] are subdued by women, and with fleshy [knees people attain] kingship; with large [knees people have] long life.<sup>29</sup>

As can be seen from this example, Varāhamihira's concern in this chapter on divination is not with describing the characteristics of one particular kind of person, great or otherwise, but with explaining how one can make a prediction about any person based on the character of a particular body part, in this case the knees.

Although this particular verse does not contain any information that is parallel in any way to the 32 marks listed in the early Buddhist tradition (none of which has anything to do with the knees), I have identified 16 marks of a Great Man, as listed in the early Buddhist tradition, that have possible parallels in chapter 68 of the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*.<sup>30</sup> These can be found listed in Table 3. Interestingly, most of these parallels – 10 out of the 16 – involve kings. That is, when discussing a particular body part, the attributes of that body part that parallel in some way one of the 32 marks of a Great Man listed in the early Buddhist tradition in most cases happen to be those attributes that Varāhamihira claims portend kingship. In the few cases where the attribute that is parallel to a mark of a Great Man is *not* associated with kingship, it is instead associated with long life, auspiciousness, or in one case enjoyment. The general association of attributes that parallel various marks of a Great Man with kingship,<sup>31</sup> however, is, I think, significant, and is easy to understand if there is indeed a historical relationship between the 32 marks and Varāhamihira's chapter on physiognomy. As we know from the “two paths of a Great Man” formula, the Buddha was, because of his 32 marks, destined from birth to become, if not a Buddha, then a world-conquering *cakkavatti* monarch. Indeed, because of this two-sided destiny, the person

<sup>29</sup> BS 68.3: *nirmāṃsajānur mriyate pravāse saubhāgyam alpāir vikaṭair daridrāḥ / strīnirjitās caiva bhavanti nimnāi rājyaṃ samāṃsaiś ca mahadbhir āyuh ||*

<sup>30</sup> During the final editing phase for this article, Zysk (2016: 164-166, 195-205) published work that also identifies parallels between the 32 marks of the Buddha and Brahmanical texts, most especially the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*. While we are largely similar in the parallels we identify, there are some differences.

<sup>31</sup> Zysk (2016: 21) argues that Indian physiognomy as a general field of knowledge was originally intended specifically for *ṣatriyas*.

Table 3. A list of all 32 marks of a Great Man, along with parallels found in ch. 68–9 of Varāhamihira's 6<sup>th</sup> century *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*. The Pali versions of the marks are taken from DN 30, the *Lakkhaṇasutta*. The Sanskrit versions are taken from the entry on *lakṣaṇa* in Edgerton (1953: 458–460). The translations in column three are based on the Pali, with significant deviations in the Sanskrit noted in parentheses.

<i>Mahāpurusa-lakṣaṇaṃ</i> (Pali)	<i>Mahāpurusa-lakṣaṇaṃ</i> (Sanskrit)	Characteristic of a Great Man	BS Parallel	Relevant Portion of Verse	Translation	Comments
<i>suppaṭṭhiṭhapādo</i>	<i>supraṭṭiṣṭhitapāda</i>	Well-established feet.				
<i>heṭṭhā kho pana tassa bhoto gotamassa pādatalesu cakkāni jātāni sahasārāni sanemikāni sanābhikāni sabbākāraparipūrāni</i>	<i>adhasat pādatalayoṣ cakre jāte sahasāre sanābhike sanemike sarvākāraparipūrṇe</i>	Underneath the soles of the feet of the Ven. Gotama arise thousand-spoked wheels complete in all aspects with rim and hub.	69.17	<i>halamusalagaḍāsī-śaṅkhacakraśvīpa-makarāḍjara-thāṅkiṅghri-hastatḥ</i>	Feet and hands marked by a plough, pestle, club, sword, conch, <b>wheel</b> , elephant, crocodile, lotus, or chariot.	Refers specifically to the Mahāpurusa of the <i>bhadra</i> class.
<i>āyatapaṇḍhi</i>	<i>āyatapādapāṇḍhi</i>	Outstretched heels.				
<i>diḅhaṅguli</i>	<i>diḅhāṅguli</i>	Long fingers.	68.36	<i>hasṅāṅgulayo diḅhās cirāyuṣām</i>	Those with long life have long fingers.	
<i>mudutalunahathapādo</i>	<i>mṛdutaruṇa-hastapāda</i>	Soft and tender hands and feet.	68.2	<i>mṛdūtalanu ... carāṇau manujēśvarasya</i>	The feet of a Lord of Men ... are soft-soled.	
<i>jālahaththapādo</i>	<i>jālahastapāda</i>	Netted hands and feet.	68.2	<i>śiṣṭāṅgulī ... carāṇau manujēśvarasya</i>	The feet of a Lord of Men ... have connected toes.	The Pali/Skt. for this mark is obscure, but has traditionally been interpreted as referring to webbed fingers and toes. This interpretation would appear to be supported by BS 68.2.

<i>Mahāpurisa-lakṣaṇam</i> (Pali)	<i>Mahāpurusa-lakṣaṇam</i> (Sanskrit)	Characteristic of a Great Man	BS Parallel	Relevant Portion of Verse	Translation	Comments
<i>ussaṅkhaṇḍo</i>	<i>ucchaṅkhaṇḍa</i>	"Over-shell" feet (?).	68.2 (?)	<i>kārmamatau ... caraṇau manijēvarasya</i>	The feet of a Lord of Men are ... curved up like a tortoise.	Both the Pali/Skt. for this mark and the Sanskrit for the possible parallel are obscure. It is possible that both refer to arched feet.
<i>enijaṅgho</i>	<i>aiṅgyajaṅgha</i>	Lower leg of an antelope.				
<i>thitako ... anonamanto ubhoḥi pāṇitātehi jaṇṇukāni parimasati parimajjati</i>	<i>sītānavanatapra-lambabāhu</i>	Standing, without bending, he rubs and strokes his knees with the palms of both his hands. (The Skt. appears abbreviated or garbled.)	68.35	<i>ājānavatambināu ... bāhū pīrīhivīsānām</i>	The arms of Lords of the Earth ... hang down to the knees.	
<i>kosohitanavathagayho</i>	<i>kośopagatanavastigayha</i>	That which is hidden by clothing (i.e., the genitals) is enclosed by a sheath (i.e., the foreskin). (Skt. has <i>vastī</i> instead of <i>vastra</i> , which may mean either the end of a skirt or the pelvis/abdomen.)	68.8	<i>kośanigāḍhair bhūpā</i>	Those with [a penis] concealed by a sheath (i.e., foreskin) [become] kings.	The full context of this verse makes it clear that <i>kośa</i> ("sheath") refers to the foreskin. See also BS 69.16 on the Mahāpurusa of the <i>bhadra</i> class.

<i>Mahāpurisa-lakṣaṇaṇ</i> (Pali)	<i>Mahāpurusa-lakṣaṇaṇ</i> (Sanskrit)	Characteristic of a Great Man	BS Parallel	Relevant Portion of Verse	Translation	Comments
<i>suvaṇṇavaṇṇo ... kañcānasannibhat-taco</i>	<i>suvaṇṇavarṇa</i>	Golden-colored ... with skin resembling gold.	68.102	<i>dyuṭimān varṇaḥ srigdhaḥ kṣitipānām</i>	Kings have a bright, shining complexion.	Unlike the Buddhist description of the mark, the BS parallel does not compare the skin specifically to gold.
<i>sukhumacchavi ... sukhumattā chaviyā rajojallam kāye na upalimpati</i>	<i>sūkṣmachavi</i>	Fine skin ... dirt and perspiration do not stick to the skin due to its fineness.	68.102	<i>varṇaḥ ... śuddhaḥ śubhato</i>	A clean ... complexion is auspicious.	
<i>ekekalomo ... ekekāni lomāni lomakāpesu jātāni</i>	<i>ekaikaroma</i>	One body-hair grows per pore.	68.5	<i>romaikaikam kāpake pārthivānām</i>	Kings have a single body-hair per pore.	See also BS 69.16 on the Mahāpurusa of the <i>bhadra</i> class.
<i>uddhaggalomo ... uddhaggāni lomāni jātāni nīlāni añjanavaṇṇāni kuṇḍalāvāṭṭāni dakkhināvāṭṭakajātāni</i>	<i>ūrdhvāgaroma</i>	With bristling body-hairs ... the bristling body-hairs grow indigo, the color of collyrium, turning like rings, they grow turning to the right.	68.26	<i>pradakṣiṇāvartaro-mabhir bhūpāḥ</i>	With body-hair curling to the right [people become] kings.	See also BS 69.16 on the Mahāpurusa of the <i>bhadra</i> class.
<i>brahmajugatto</i>	<i>brhadjugaṭtra</i>	Straight body of Brahmā (Skt.: "straight, tall body")				
<i>sattussado</i>	<i>saptotsada</i>	Seven protuberances (?).				

<i>Mahāpurisa-lakkhaṇaṃ</i> (Pali)	<i>Mahāpurusa-lakṣaṇaṃ</i> (Sanskrit)	Characteristic of a Great Man	BS Parallel	Relevant Portion of Verse	Translation	Comments
<i>sīhappubbaddhakāyo</i>	<i>sīhappūvārādhakāya</i>	The front half of a lion.	68.18	<i>sīhakatīr manujendrah</i>	One with the hips/buttocks of a lion [becomes] a Lord of Men.	The verse here is parallel only in comparing a person to a lion; the part of the body so compared is different.
<i>cītantaramso</i>	<i>cītāntarāmsa</i>	Heaped chest (lit., “between the shoulders”).	68.27	<i>hṛdayaṃ samunnataṃ pṛthu ... māmsalaṃ ca nṛpatīnām</i>	Lords of Men have a heart that is raised up, broad, ... and muscular.	This parallel is valid only if <i>antarāmsa</i> in Pali ( <i>antarāmsa</i> in Skt.) refers to the chest and not, as sometimes interpreted, to the upper back.
<i>nigrodha- parimaṇḍalo ... yāvatakv assa kāyo tāvatakv assa byāmo, yāvatakv assa byāmo tāvatakv assa kāyo</i>	<i>nyagrodha- parimaṇḍala</i>	Round like a Banyan tree ... his body is as tall as the length of his outstretched arms; his outstretched arms are as long as his body is tall.	69.13	<i>bhujayugala- pramitāh samucchrayo śya</i>	His height is the measure of his two arms.	Refers specifically to the Mahāpurusa of the <i>bhadra</i> class.
<i>samaṇṭakkhandho</i>	<i>susanyttaskandha</i>	Back/shoulders even and round. (Skt. simply describes the shoulders as “very full” or “rounded.”)				
<i>rasaggasaggi</i>	<i>rasarasāgra</i>	Extremely refined sense of taste.				
<i>sīhahanu</i>	<i>sīhahanu</i>	Jaw of a lion.				

<i>Mahāpurisa-lakkhaṇaṇ</i> (Pali)	<i>Mahāpurusa-lakṣaṇaṇ</i> (Sanskrit)	Characteristic of a Great Man	BS Parallel	Relevant Portion of Verse	Translation	Comments
<i>cattāḷisadanto</i>	<i>cātvarīṃśaddanta</i>	40 teeth.				
<i>samadanto</i>	<i>samadanta</i>	Even teeth.	68.52	<i>daśanāḥ ... samās ... śubhāḥ</i>	Even ... teeth ... are auspicious.	
<i>aviraḷadanto</i>	<i>aviraḷadanta</i>	Teeth without gaps.	68.52	<i>ghanās ... daśanāḥ ... śubhāḥ</i>	Compact ... teeth ... are auspicious.	
<i>susukkadāho</i>	<i>sūsukladamaṣṭra or -danta</i>	Very white (canine?) teeth.	68.52	<i>suśīṣyadamaṣṭrāḥ ... śubhāḥ</i>	Very sharp canine teeth ... are auspicious.	This parallel verse makes one wonder if the Pali <i>susukka</i> and Skt. <i>sūsūkḷa</i> ("very white") is a mistake. Note that the Pali here says <i>dāṭha</i> (paralleled by <i>damaṣṭra</i> in some Skt Buddhist texts) instead of <i>danta</i> —but why single out the canine teeth as white?
<i>paḥṭṭajīvo</i>	<i>prabhūtajīva</i>	Large tongue.	68.53	<i>jihvā ... dīrghā ... bhoginī jīveyā</i>	Those with long ... tongues should be known as enjoyers.	
<i>brahmassaro ... karavikabhāṇī</i>	<i>brahmasvara</i>	With the voice of Brahmā ... speaking like a cuckoo bird.				
<i>abhinānetto</i>	<i>abhinānetra</i>	Deep indigo eyes.				BS 68.64–7 discusses eyes, but lacks any clear parallels to this mark.

Mahāpurisa- lakṣaṇam (Pali)	Mahāpurusa- lakṣaṇam (Sanskrit)	Characteristic of a Great Man	BS Parallel	Relevant Portion of Verse	Translation	Comments
<i>gopakhumo</i>	<i>gopakṣma</i>	Eyelashes of an ox.				
<i>uṇṇā kho panaassa bhoto gotamassa</i>	<i>ūrṇā bhṛavāntare</i>	Ven. Gotama has white hair growing between the eyebrows				
<i>bhamukantare jātā odāṭā mudutūlasan- nibhā</i>	<i>mṛdūtūlasannibhā</i>	resembling soft cotton.				
<i>Uṇṇīsāsīso</i>	<i>uṣṇīsāsīṣa</i>	Turban-headed (?).				BS 68.79–80 discusses head-shapes, but does not mention an <i>uṣṇīṣa</i> shape. Kings have heads like parasols ( <i>chatra</i> ) and people with long life have heads like skulls ( <i>kapoti</i> ).

of the Buddha has long been associated with kingship in numerous contexts throughout history.

Some of the parallels I have identified are fairly clear and unproblematic. For example, one of the 32 marks of a Great Man is long fingers, and according to BS 68.36, long fingers portend long life. Likewise, the marks of soft and tender hands/feet, arms that stretch down to the knees, only one hair per pore, hair that curls to the right, even teeth, and a long/large tongue all have relatively unambiguous parallels in Chapter 68 of the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*. Other potential parallels, however, are less clear. According to the early Buddhist tradition, a Great Man has golden skin that is so fine that nothing sticks to it. Varāhamihira, on the other hand, speaks only of skin that is “bright” (*dyutimān*) and “shining” (*snigdha*), without comparing it to gold, and says that a “clean” or “pure” (*śuddha*) complexion is auspicious. In another case, there is a significant parallel in that the early Buddhist tradition and Varāhamihira both compare the body to a lion, but they do so in reference to different parts of the body. One of the 32 marks of a Great Man is having the “front half of the body” (*pubbaddhakāya*) – presumably referring to the torso – of a lion, while Varāhamihira says that a person whose hips/buttocks (*kaṭi*) are like a lion’s will become a king.

Other parallels are problematic mostly because the Pali of the early Buddhist list of 32 marks and/or the Sanskrit of the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* is obscure. The exact meaning of the Pali *jālahatthapāda* (“netted hands and feet”) has long been debated, but it typically is understood as referring to what we would refer to idiomatically in English as “webbed” fingers and toes. This interpretation would appear to be corroborated by BS 68.2, which refers to “connected” (*śliṣṭa*) toes. The mark immediately following this one describes feet using the obscure word *ussaṅkha* – possibly derived from the *upasarga ut-* and the word *saṅkha* for conch – and has sometimes been taken to refer to an arch in the shape of the foot. This may also be parallel to BS 68.2, which, using a slightly different metaphor, refers to feet that are “curved up” (*unnata*) like a tortoise (*kūrma*). Another mark later in the list of 32 refers to a full “between the shoulders” region (*antaraṃsa*). This is sometimes taken to refer to the space between the shoulder blades, but it can also refer to the chest, in which case it would be parallel to BS 68.27, which says that kings have a heart

that is “raised up, broad, ... and muscular” (*samunnataṃ pṛthu ... māṃsalam ca*).

Teeth figure prominently as the subject of four marks of a Great Man – they should be 40 in number and even, plus have two other attributes whose meaning is less clear. Varāhamihira makes no mention of people with 40 teeth – which is not surprising since it is eight more than the normal number in an adult’s mouth – but he does refer to various attributes of teeth as auspicious in BS 68.52. One of these attributes is “even” (*sama*), the same word used in the second of the four marks of a Great Man that pertain to teeth. The third of these four marks says that the Great Man’s teeth are *aviraḷa*, which means “not sparse” or “not thin.” Nāṇamoli and Bodhi translate this as referring to teeth that are “without gaps” (1995: 746), and indeed Varāhamihira describes auspicious teeth as being *ghana*, or “compact.” The last of the four marks relating to teeth is somewhat irregular in that, instead of using the word *danta* for teeth, it uses the word *dāṭhā*,<sup>32</sup> which properly speaking does not mean “teeth” in general, but rather “tusks,” or in the context of a human mouth, the cuspids (canine teeth). These are then described as *susukka*, which can only mean “very white.” This would make sense if what was being described were the Great Man’s teeth in general, but it is somewhat odd that specifically his *canine teeth* are described as white – after all, what is so great about having a mouth full of mostly yellow teeth, with only the four canines being white? BS 68.52 suggests a solution, however: Near the end of the verse, it comments specifically on the cuspids (*daṃṣṭrāḥ*), saying that it is auspicious for them to be, not very white, but *very sharp* (*suṭīkṣṇa*). This certainly makes more sense in the context – sharpness is a quality that is associated, within the context of the human mouth, specifically with the canine teeth to the exclusion of all others, while whiteness is certainly a quality that one would desire in all teeth, or at least as many as possible. It is difficult not to wonder if perhaps Varāhamihira has preserved here an

<sup>32</sup> At least this is the case in the Pali list. As Edgerton (1953: 459) notes, some Sanskrit Buddhist texts use the equivalent Sanskrit word *daṃṣṭra*, while others have *danta* as in the other marks associated with teeth.

auspicious characteristic of teeth – sharp cuspids – that has become garbled in the early Buddhist tradition.

One final mark of a Great Man warrants a discussion here – namely, the well-known “sheath” that covers the Buddha’s genitals. Ordinarily, this is the word that is used in translations, since this is the literal meaning of *kosa*, but this, I believe, gives the mistaken impression that what is being referred to here is something unusual or foreign to ordinary human anatomy. In fact, the entire compound used to describe this mark is, not surprisingly, full of euphemisms, and *kosa* is just one of them. The full compound (*kosohitavatthaguyho*) literally means “that which is hidden by clothing is enclosed by a sheath.” “That which is hidden by clothing” (*vatthaguyha*)<sup>33</sup> is a euphemism for the penis – this much translations have made clear, sometimes with the similarly euphemistic “male organ” – but “sheath” (*kosa*) is a euphemism as well, namely for the foreskin. The parallel I have identified in the *Brhatsamhitā*, in fact, uses exactly the same euphemism, spelled *kośa* in Sanskrit. The full context of the verse, however, makes it abundantly clear that it is the foreskin that is being referred to:

Those with [a penis] concealed by the “sheath” [become] kings; those with a long and split one [become] totally bereft of possessions;  
those with a straight, round penis and those with a “tail” that has numerous light veins become wealthy.<sup>34</sup>

Within the context of this verse, the parallel to the mark of a Great Man is found, as in so many cases, in the attributes said to portend kingship. Because this verse discusses *other* types of penises, however, we can see what is distinctive about the “penis concealed by the sheath.” The type of penis Varāhamihira discusses next – that of a person destined

<sup>33</sup> Edgerton (1953: 459), however, gives *vastiguhyā* as the most common equivalent given for this phrase in Buddhist Sanskrit texts, rather than *vastraguhyā*, which would be the actual equivalent of the Pali. He remarks that *vattha* in Pali might actually be a mistake for *vatti*. The word *vasti* refers to the pelvis or genital region; thus, *vastiguhyā* is “that which is hidden by the pelvis.” This is still a euphemism for the penis, so the correct reading, *vasti* or *vastra*, makes little difference.

<sup>34</sup> BS 68.8: *kośanigūḍhair bhūpā dūrghair bhagnaiś ca vittaparihīnāḥ / rjvurṛtaśephaso laghuśirālaśiśnās ca dhanavantah* // Quotation marks do not translate *iti*, but rather are used to indicate euphemisms.

to poverty – is said to be long and *split*. Clearly what must be being referred to here is the quality of the foreskin. In the case of a person destined to kingship, the foreskin completely covers the penis. In the case of a person destined to indigence, however, the foreskin does not cover the penis well – it is “split.” The Buddha, then, does not have some sort of inborn “chastity belt” or other abnormal “sheath,” as is sometimes suggested; rather, he simply has a “kingly” foreskin – namely, one that completely covers his penis.

The next chapter of the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*, Chapter 69, is entitled *Pañca-mahāpuruṣa-lakṣaṇam*, or “The characteristics of the five Great Men.” Given such a title, this chapter has attracted the attention of scholars studying the 32 Buddhist marks since Senart, but most have emphasized the differences between the ideas presented in this chapter and the concept of the Great Man in the early Buddhist tradition. In this chapter, Varāhamihira discusses not one, but five different types of “Great Man,” each of which is associated astrologically with a particular planet. Dwelling on this admittedly not insignificant difference, however, scholars have overlooked the fact that one of the five types of “Great Man” in particular stands out from the other four in bearing striking similarities to the Great Man described in the early Buddhist tradition, and even to the Buddha himself. This is the Great Man of the *bhadra* type, which is associated with the planet Mercury (*budha*) and is described in verses 13–19 of BS 69.

Within the description of the Great Man of the *bhadra* class, several parallels to the marks of a Great Man in the early Buddhist tradition are found, including two that were not already found in Chapter 68. According to verse 16 of Chapter 69, the Great Man has “head-hairs that grow singly (i.e., one to a pore), are black, and are curled, and ‘that which is hidden’ (i.e., the penis) is completely concealed like that of a horse or elephant.”<sup>35</sup> Although this verse speaks of head-hairs being dark, curled, and one to a pore, while the corresponding marks of a Great Man given in the Buddhist tradition describe only body-hairs in these terms, it seems likely that the latter is a result of the narrative context, in which the Brahman interlocutor could not possibly see anything about the Buddha’s

<sup>35</sup> BS 69.16cd: *śiroruhās caikajakṛṣṇakuñcitās turaṅganāgopamaguhyagūḍhatā*.

head-hair because it would have been shaved off. Indeed, there is nothing in the early Buddhist tradition, at least in the Theravāda version, to indicate that the Buddha had anything other than a completely shaven head like his monks, and the 32 marks of a Great Man correspondingly have nothing to say about the hairs of the head. Nevertheless, we can safely assume, I believe, that there is a parallelism between the head-hairs and body-hairs. As we have already seen, Chapter 68 of the *Brhatsaṃhitā* describes the body-hairs in similar terms – in particular, as growing one to a pore and being curled – and although the early Buddhist oral tradition clearly regarded the Buddha as shaven-headed, and thus his head-hairs as irrelevant, it appears that the later *artistic* tradition did not. In other words, the parallelism between the body-hairs and head-hairs found in the *Brhatsaṃhitā* may explain why artists typically came to depict the Buddha as having a head full of many tight, individual curls of hair.<sup>36</sup>

As for the description of the *bhadra*-class Great Man's genitals, we find an additional detail here that was not found in verse 8 of Chapter 68. That is, the “concealed” penis is compared to that of a horse or elephant. This, again, reinforces the conclusion that the “sheath” referred to both in the list of 32 marks and in BS 68 must be the foreskin, since horses and elephants have “concealed” penises only insofar as they are well-covered by their foreskins. Interestingly, as Bhikkhu Anālayo (2011: 532) has pointed out, the Sarvāstivāda version of the list of 32 marks, preserved in the Chinese translation of the *Madhyamāgama*, also compares the Buddha's penis to that of a horse. This gives additional support to our hypothesis that there is a connection between the Great Man described in the early Buddhist tradition and Varāhamihira's *bhadra*-class Great Man.

The description of the Great Man of the *bhadra* class in BS 69 also contains two additional parallels to marks of a Great Man as described in the early Buddhist tradition that are not found at all in Chapter 68. According to verse 13, a Great Man of the *bhadra* class has a “height [that is] the measure of his two arms” (*bhujayugalapramitaḥ samucchrayo*).

<sup>36</sup> On the history of Western scholars' confusion over the Buddha's hair, as well as a traditional Buddhist explanation (that the Buddha never shaved, but simply cut his hair roughly with a sword when he left the palace), see Lopez (2005: 13–36).

This clearly parallels the mark of a Great Man in the Buddhist tradition that states that “his body is as tall as the length of his outstretched arms” (*yāvatakv assa kāyo tāvatakv assa byāmo*). In addition, one of the marks of a Great Man in the Buddhist tradition is that he has thousand-spoked wheels on the soles of his feet. Nothing of this sort is mentioned in Chapter 68 of the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*, but in the description of the *bhadra*-class Great Man in Chapter 69, we find a parallel of sorts in that a Great Man of this type is said to have the palms of his hands and the soles of his feet marked with any of a number of shapes, one of which is a wheel (*cakra*).<sup>37</sup>

In addition to these parallels to specific marks of a Great Man as described in the early Buddhist tradition, this description of the *bhadra*-class Great Man has other interesting details that parallel the story of the Buddha. In verses 14–15 of Chapter 69, Varāhamihira lists a number of general attributes of a Great Man of this class. While most of these attributes refer to his physical perfection and acute intelligence, Varāhamihira also mentions that this type of Great Man is a *yogī*, which would obviously be appropriate for the Buddha since he is also considered a *yogī* by the Buddhist tradition. In addition, in verse 18, he writes that he becomes a “king of the middle country” (*madhyadeśanṛpatir*). This by itself is not of great significance because all of the five types of Great Men described in this chapter are said to be destined to become rulers of one part of the world or another. After saying that the *bhadra*-class Great Man becomes a king of the middle country, however, Varāhamihira adds that if he has the proper dimensions,<sup>38</sup> he becomes “Lord of the whole earth” (*sakalāvanināthaḥ*). This is, of course, parallel to the “Two Paths of a Great Man” formula, which states that a Great Man, if he remains a householder, will become a world-conquering *cakkavatti*

<sup>37</sup> BS 69.17: *halamusalagadāsīsāṅkhacakraadvipamakarābjarathāṅkitāṅghrihastah*. The complete list of possible figures named here is plough, pestle, club, sword, conch, wheel, elephant, crocodile, lotus, or chariot.

<sup>38</sup> The Sanskrit here is obscure: *yadi puṣṭās tryādayo śya*, which means something like, “If his dimensions are ‘three ...,’” with the word *ādi* indicating an ellipsis. Presumably Varāhamihira is referring back to verse 7, where he describes in detail the “dimensions” (i.e., height and span of two outstretched arms) of each of the classes of Great Man as three digits greater than that of the previous. Bhat therefore translates this portion of v. 18 as “if his height and extent of outstretched arms be each 105 digits ...” (1982: vol. 2, 652).

monarch, and it is given as a possibility within the context of ch. 69 of the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* only for a *bhadra*-class Great Man, and not for any of the other four. Finally, in verse 19, Varāhamihira writes that the *bhadra*-class Great Man lives for 80 years.<sup>39</sup> In this chapter, Varāhamihira assigns a different life-span to each class of Great Man, and the *bhadra*-class alone has a life-span of exactly 80 years – which of course is the same age the Buddhist tradition holds the Buddha to have been when he died.

Thus, to summarize, half of the 32 marks of a Great Man listed in the early Buddhist tradition have parallels in Varāhamihira's discussion of physiognomy in Chapter 68 of his *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*, and most of those are associated by the latter with kingship. In addition, in Chapter 69 of the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*, Varāhamihira describes five different types of "Great Men" (*mahāpuruṣa*), and one of these types in particular, the *bhadra*, has a number of attributes that are parallel to particular marks of a Great Man as described in the Buddhist tradition, as well as others that parallel aspects of the Buddha's own life. Given this large number of correspondences, it seems quite clear that there is a historical relationship between the Buddhist list of 32 marks of a Great Man and the Brahmanical science of physiognomy as described by Varāhamihira. Although it is possible that the Buddhists themselves created the specific concept of 32 marks, it is clear that they did not invent the concept of a "Great Man," and they did not create at least most of the individual marks in the list, but rather borrowed them from actual Brahmanical physiognomy.

### Tracing the History of Brahmanical Physiognomy

There is, of course, only one remaining problem with the parallelism between the list of 32 marks and the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*: The latter was not written until the *sixth century CE*. This is, at the very least, *nine centuries* after the death of the Buddha, and certainly quite a bit later than the

<sup>39</sup> BS 69.19: *bhuktvā samyag vasudhām śauryeṇoparjitām aśīty abdaḥ | tīrthe prāṇāms tyaktvā bhadro devālayam yāti //* "Having rightly enjoyed (i.e., ruled) the earth, which he has gained with valor, for eighty years, the *Bhadra* abandons his breaths at a ford and goes to the abode of the gods."

theme of the 32 marks of a Great Man in the early Buddhist tradition.<sup>40</sup> This raises the obvious question: What were Varāhamihira's sources, and how far back can we trace the physiognomical ideas we have been examining here in those sources? According to David Pingree in his volume on *Jyotiḥśāstra*, works on divination in India, including the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*, which became the classic work of the genre, are for the most part derived from the *Gargasamhitā*, which was probably written in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE or the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE. Unfortunately, this text, which is the earliest extant treatise on divination in India, has not been published in full, although the recent publication of a portion of the Garga Saṃhitā pertaining to human physiognomy offers the possibility of better understanding the development of the ideas on physiognomy that preceded Varāhamihira's relatively late work.<sup>41</sup>

According to the early Buddhist tradition, as we have already seen, the Brahmans supposedly derived the entire concept "from their *mantras*" – i.e., from the Vedas – and modern scholars have attempted, with varying success, to identify parallels to the marks in the Vedas (Powers 2009: 17). One obvious source for the concept of a "Great Man" (*mahāpuruṣa*) would be the Vedic myth of the cosmic man (*puruṣa*), and indeed Eugène Burnouf is said to have suggested that the *puruṣa* of the *Puruṣasūkta* in the *R̥gveda* (10.90) was the source of the concept, but as Powers has pointed out, the description of *puruṣa* in this hymn "bears no resemblance to the physical attributes of the Buddha as described in the Pāli canon" (2009: 17).<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Even the most skeptical reconstruction of the chronology of early Buddhist literature must accept that the contents of the Pali Canon were fixed by the time of Buddhaghosa, who lived a century before Varāhamihira. In addition, the Sarvāstivādin *Madhyamāgama*, which contains, e.g., a version of the *Brahmāyusutta*, was translated into Chinese even earlier, at the very end of the fourth century.

<sup>41</sup> A cursory survey of the treatment of human physiognomy in the relevant portion of the *Gargasamhitā* translated by Zysk (2016: 226-263), however, would seem to reveal a less developed physiognomical system than that of the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*. Zysk himself, in identifying parallels to the 32 marks of the Buddha (2016: 195-205), in spite of having access to this portion of the *Gargasamhitā*, finds the closest parallel to items in the Buddhist list, as I do, in the late *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*.

<sup>42</sup> Unfortunately, Powers does not provide a citation here, so I am not sure where Burnouf suggested that the *Puruṣasūkta* was the source of the concept of the *mahāpuruṣa*.

Once again, Senart provides what is likely the most useful suggestion in this regard. He points to *another*, less well-known Vedic hymn on *puruṣa*, which is found in the *Atharvaveda* (10.2). Although there are not many clear parallels to the 32 marks of a Great Man described in the Buddhist tradition in this hymn, the hymn does, especially in its first half, discuss the *puruṣa* in fairly minute anatomical detail, and so it is conceivable that certain ideas on physiognomy, and in particular the anatomy of a Great Man, could have been derived from a creative reading of this text. The most obvious parallel I have found in the text is in verse 7, in which it is said that he has a “full tongue” (*jihvám ... purūcīm*). Likewise, verse 4 asks, “Which and how many gods were they who heaped up the breast (and) neck of man?”<sup>43</sup> The verb used here for “heap up” is *-ci-*, and one of the 32 marks in the Buddhist tradition uses the past passive participle of this verb (*cita*) to describe the *antaraṃsa*, which I have already argued probably refers to the chest. Finally, verse 6 asks, “Who bored out the seven apertures (i.e., mouth, eyes, ears, and nostrils) in his head?”<sup>44</sup> It is possible that this bears some relationship to the obscure Pali phrase *sattussada*, although this has usually been interpreted as referring to seven *protuberances*, rather than seven *apertures*. In any case, further study of AVŚ 10.2 in comparison with both the Buddhist list of 32 marks and the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* may yield other possible examples of ways in which this text may have been exegetized by later Brahman interpreters to produce lists of auspicious anatomical features.

## Conclusion

Applying a full account of the history of Indian physiognomy to the question of the dating of the theme of the 32 marks of a Great Man in the early Buddhist tradition remains an important desideratum for future research. On the one hand, although the one source that has the most convincing parallels to the list of 32 marks, the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*, is quite late, we can be quite confident that the list of 32 marks is older, since both Buddhaghosa’s commentary on the relevant Pali texts and the Chinese

<sup>43</sup> AVŚ 10.2.4ab: *kāti devāḥ katamé tá āsan yá úro grīvāś cikyūḥ pūruṣasya*.

<sup>44</sup> AVŚ 10.2.6a: *kāḥ sapta khāni ví tatarā śīrṣāṇi*.

translations of parallels from other Buddhist sectarian traditions predate Varāhamihira. On the other hand, the one known source used by Varāhamihira, the *Gargasamhitā*, is only about six centuries older, bringing us back only to the turn of the era, but it treats human physiognomy somewhat differently from Varāhamihira, who more closely parallels the Buddhist list.

Regardless of the dating of the theme of the 32 marks of a Great Man in the early Buddhist tradition, however, we can be fairly confident of why such a theme would have arisen sometime after the ascendancy of Buddhism in the mid- to late-first millennium BCE. As many scholars have recently shown, Brahmanism was in a state of crisis following the non-Brahmanical regimes of the Nandas and the Mauryas, and much of what came to characterize Classical Hinduism was developed in response to the perceived threat posed by Jains, Buddhists, and other non-Brahmanical traditions (Fitzgerald 2001, Hildebeitel 2005, Lubin 2005, Olivelle 2006, Bronkhorst 2011). Bronkhorst in particular has argued that Brahmans dealt with this threat in part by “colonizing the past,” i.e., writing themselves into a history that was in fact non-Brahmanical, and as their power increased, this narrative became hegemonic to the point of being accepted even by Buddhists (2011: 65–74, 153–170). Likewise, scholars have been pointing to the contestation that took place between Buddhists, Jains, and Brahmans in the late-first millennium BCE in order to attract lay and royal patronage (Bailey and Mabbett 2003, Gombrich 2007, Black 2009, Freiburger 2009, Bronkhorst 2011).

In this context of fierce sectarian competition and increasing Brahmanical hegemony, it is easy to understand how the concept of the 32 marks of a Great Man would have arisen. As we saw at the beginning of this article, the theme of a Brahman looking for the 32 marks on the body of the Buddha was developed using oral formulas that were already being widely used in *sūtras* featuring encounters between the Buddha and Brahmans. Brahmans marketed themselves as advisors to kings and developed elaborate systems of knowledge, including the *Jyotiḥśāstra*, to make themselves attractive as such. With the theme of the search for the 32 marks of a Great Man, the Buddhists used these Brahmanical claims to special expertise in divination and royal counsel, as well as to a position of supremacy throughout history, against them. For with the theme

of the 32 marks of a Great Man, Brahmans are allowed to play an outsized role in a period of Indian history when in fact they likely were overshadowed by other groups, and they are granted a special ability to recognize a future king through divination, but they ironically end up using this ability to identify the Buddha, the very chief of their rivals himself.

### Abbreviations

AN	<i>Aṅguttaranikāya</i>
Apa.	<i>Apadāna</i>
AVŚ	<i>Atharvaveda</i> , Śaunaka recension
BS	<i>Brhatsaṃhitā</i>
DĀ	<i>Dīrghāgama</i>
DN	<i>Dīghanikāya</i>
EĀ	<i>Ekottarikāgama</i>
Iti.	<i>Itivuttaka</i>
Jāt.	<i>Jātaka</i>
MĀ	<i>Madhyamāgama</i>
Mil.	<i>Milindapañha</i>
MN	<i>Majjhimanikāya</i>
Mv.	<i>Mahāvastu</i>
Nidd.	<i>Niddesa</i>
Paṭis.	<i>Paṭisambhidāmagga</i>
Pv.	<i>Petavatthu</i>
SĀ	<i>Saṃyuktāgama</i>
Sn.	<i>Suttanipāta</i>
SN	<i>Saṃyuttanikāya</i>
Ther.	<i>Theragāthā</i>
Therī.	<i>Therīgāthā</i>
Ud.	<i>Udāna</i>
Vin.	<i>Vinaya</i>

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#### ABSTRACT

This article examines the early development of the theme of the ‘32 Marks of a Great Man’ in the Buddhist tradition. The first part of the article examines the emergence of this theme in the early Buddhist oral tradition, preserved in the *sūtras* of various surviving versions of the *Tripitaka*. The second part of the article then demonstrates that there are numerous parallels between the Buddhist list of 32 marks and ideas recorded in the chapters on physiognomy and ‘Great Men’ in the 6<sup>th</sup> century *Bṛhatsamhitā* of Varāhamihira. These parallels strongly suggest that, as the Buddhist texts suggest, there is indeed a relationship between the Buddhist concept of ‘32 Marks’ and Brahmanical physiognomy, although the historical development of that relationship is still poorly understood.