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SIMON BRODBECK

ON THE LINEAL SIGNIFICANCE
OF THE *RĀJASŪYA* IN THE *MAHĀBHĀRATA*

Abstract

The explicit purpose of Yudhiṣṭhira Pāṇḍava's *rājasūya* is to establish him as a *samrāj* (sovereign). But in the *Mahābhārata* the *rājasūya* and *samrāj* status are only circumstantially connected. Thus one might seek a more widely applicable account of the *rājasūya*'s function. On the basis of selected evidence from the *Mahābhārata*, this paper suggests a lineal interpretation of the *rājasūya* whereby this ritual shows a junior branch-line taking kingship from the senior branch in a competition between cousins and/or brothers. Thite's paper of 1972 shows that there is antipathy towards the *rājasūya* in old texts, and explains it by showing that the *rājasūya* involves violence against relatives. Seeking to refine Thite's suggestion, the present paper reviews family details of the four *rājasūya* performers in Janamejaya's *Ādiparvan* ancestry. In all four cases there is a lineal takeover by a junior branch. The proposition that the *rājasūya* might have such a generic lineal purpose is then monitored by reviewing the eleven instances in Janamejaya's ancestry where a junior branch takes over the line but there is no *rājasūya*. It is shown that such instances often involve the eldest son's voluntary renunciation, or some other explanation, such that the junior branch would not be usurping the kingship. These instances are consistent with the idea that the *rājasūya* would be a distinctive lineal takeover ritual. In conclusion, the paper discusses military and discursive aspects of junior-branch royal lineal takeover, and returns to the fact that Yudhiṣṭhira seems not to intend this to be the result of his *rājasūya*. Possible explanations

are discussed. The proposed interpretation of the *rājasūya* is one among several in the *Mahābhārata*, but it should be tested against more *rājasūya* instances, in the *Mahābhārata* and elsewhere.

Introduction

The *rājasūya* ritual¹ has been variously interpreted, as some kind of ‘ancient Indian royal consecration’² – which it certainly is. Falk suggested it was originally a rite of adoption.³ Jamison, while criticising Falk’s theory, has highlighted the importance of the *pratihita*, that is, the *yajamāna*’s (the sacrificer’s) ‘heir apparent’, with and for whom the *rājasūya*’s *yajamāna* establishes full royal lineal connections during the proceedings by ‘intertwining’ several names – in some texts just the names of father and son, but in other texts also the name of the son’s mother, or a name or names from the father’s ancestry.⁴

It is ... possible to see this part of the ceremony as the appointment and proclamation of the ‘heir apparent’, the king’s chosen successor among his sons. On such an occasion the ceremonial announcement of the son’s full name and ancestry would be entirely appropriate ... The ‘intertwining’ (vy-ati √saj) of the names of father, son, and, in some texts, mother simply strengthens the continuity of the line by interlocking the principals.⁵

¹ This paper was first presented at the Symposium on the Sanskrit Tradition in the Modern World, Manchester, 27 May 2011. I am grateful to the Arts and Humanities Research Council for funding, and for valuable comments and encouragement I thank Christopher Austin, Brian Black, James Hegarty, Alf Hildebeitel, Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, Valerie Roebuck, Jackie Suthren-Hirst, Lynn Thomas, and two anonymous reviewers.

² Jan C. Heesterman, *The Ancient Indian Royal Consecration: the Rājasūya Described According to the Yajus Texts and Annotated* (The Hague, 1957); cf. F. Albrecht Weber, *Über die Königsweihe, den Rājasūya* (Berlin, 1893).

³ Harry Falk, ‘Die Legende von Śunaḥśepa vor ihrem rituellen Hintergrund’ (*Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 134, 1984).

⁴ Stephanie W. Jamison, *Sacrificed Wife / Sacrificer’s Wife: Women, Ritual, and Hospitality in Ancient India* (New York, 1996), pp. 110–14.

⁵ Jamison, *Sacrificed Wife*, p. 113.

A *rājasūya* is no ordinary royal consecration; yet most formulations of its purpose have been vague or generic. For example, Heesterman writes that ‘it is to be performed by a king who wants to obtain access to heaven’.⁶ Heesterman concludes his study of the *rājasūya* in the Black Yajurveda texts by saying that ‘the *rājasūya* ... can be viewed as an encyclopaedic conglomerate of royal rites’⁷ – implying an encyclopaedic conglomerate of royal purposes. Falk emphasises the *rājasūya*’s variety of form within the extant literature, implying a history of adaptation ‘as a consequence of constant development and adjustment in changed external conditions’ (‘als Folge einer ständigen Weiterentwicklung und Anpassung an veränderte äußere Bedingungen’).⁸

The *rājasūya* is featured in the *Mahābhārata*,⁹ where Yudhiṣṭhira Pāṇḍava’s *rājasūya* is a major element of the plot. As van Buitenen has shown, the *Mahābhārata*’s *Sabhāparvan*, in which Yudhiṣṭhira’s *rājasūya* is narrated, is seemingly modelled on the *rājasūya* as the Vedic texts present it.¹⁰ Gehrts has further suggested that a larger section of the text – including the narration of the Kurukṣetra war – is modelled on the *rājasūya*.¹¹ This paper’s focus upon the *Mahābhārata* is warranted partly because of the importance of the *rājasūya* to the

⁶ Heesterman, *Royal Consecration*, p. 7.

⁷ Heesterman, *Royal Consecration*, p. 225.

⁸ Falk, ‘Legende von Śunaḥśepa’, p. 115.

⁹ [Mbh] Vishnu S. Sukthankar *et al.*, eds, *The Mahābhārata for the First Time Critically Edited* (Poona, 1933–71). The *Mahābhārata* includes the *Harivaṃśa* [Hv]; see Simon Brodbeck, ‘Analytic and Synthetic Approaches in Light of the Critical Edition of the *Mahābhārata* and *Harivaṃśa*’ (*Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 19.2, 2011); R. N. Dandekar, gen. ed., *The Harivaṃśa, the Khila or Supplement to the Mahābhārata: Text as Constituted in its Critical Edition* (Poona, 1976; = vol. 5 of *The Mahābhārata Text as Constituted in its Critical Edition*).

¹⁰ J. A. B. van Buitenen, ‘On the Structure of the *Sabhāparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*’ (in J. Ensink and P. Gaeffke, eds, *India Maior: Congratulatory Volume Presented to J. Gonda*, Leiden, 1972; reprinted in Ludo Rocher, ed., *Studies in Indian Literature and Philosophy: Collected Articles of J. A. B. van Buitenen*, Delhi, 1988); also J. A. B. van Buitenen, *The Mahābhārata*, vol. 2: 2. *The Book of the Assembly Hall*; 3. *The Book of the Forest* (Chicago, 1975), pp. 5–30.

¹¹ Heino Gehrts, *Mahābhārata: das Geschehen und seine Bedeutung* (Bonn, 1975), pp. 293–94; cf. Alf Hiltebeitel, review of Gehrts (*Erasmus* 29.3–4, 1977), p. 87.

Mahābhārata, and partly because despite it, previous studies of the *rājasūya* have ignored the full range of the *Mahābhārata* data. I suggest a new interpretation of the *rājasūya* on the basis of comparatively neglected evidence. This evidence supports Jamison's emphasis not on the fact of succession (which must occur regularly, because kings die), but on the passage of kingship to one particular individual rather than another.

Rājasūya and Sāmrajya

The explicit purpose of Yudhiṣṭhira's *rājasūya* within the *Mahābhārata* narrative, as far as Yudhiṣṭhira is concerned, is to establish him in Indraprastha as a special *type* of king:

through it Yudhiṣṭhira wishes to aspire to nothing less than universal sovereignty by becoming *samrāj*, an 'all-king' or 'emperor,' to whom all other princes of the land will be submissive. ... For the *rājasūya*, as it is presented in this book is not just the installation of a new king, it is the glorification of a king of kings. There can only be one such suzerain at the time.¹²

Thus, Kṛṣṇa says (Mbh 2.13), before the ritual can take place, the existing *samrāj*, Jarāsaṃdha, who is also Kṛṣṇa's enemy, must be deposed – and so he is (Mbh 2.18–22).¹³

The connection between Yudhiṣṭhira's *rājasūya* and his *samrāj* status (*sāmrajya*) is stated repeatedly (e.g. at Mbh 2.12.9–15, 19; 2.13.60–61; 2.30.23–24; 2.42.35–36, 51). But

¹² Van Buitenen, *Mahābhārata* vol. 2, p. 4; cf. van Buitenen, 'On the Structure', p. 71.

¹³ For the history between Jarāsaṃdha and Kṛṣṇa's people, see Mbh 2.12; Hv 25.15–16; Hv 80–85. See also John Brockington, 'Jarāsaṃdha of Māgadha (Mbh 2.15–22)' (in Mary Brockington, ed., *Stages and Transitions: Temporal and Historical Frameworks in Epic and Purāṇic Literature*, Zagreb, 2002), p. 73; Jonathan Geen, 'Kṛṣṇa and his Rivals in the Hindu and Jaina Traditions' (*Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 72.1, 2009), pp. 72–77. My discussion will suggest that Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva's interests may drive his representation of the ins and outs of the *rājasūya* to Yudhiṣṭhira.

van Buitenen correctly observes that ‘on strictly Vedic terms the *rājasūya* does not really bestow universal sovereignty, or *sāmrājya*’, and thus that ‘Yudhiṣṭhira’s *rājasūya* ... is a peculiar one’.¹⁴ Minkowski remarks that ‘it is a *rājasūya* with the intentions of sovereignty usually appropriate for an *Aśvamedha*’.¹⁵ If we survey the *Mahābhārata*’s *rājasūya* performers and also the people it mentions as possessing *sāmrājya*, the independence of *sāmrājya* and *rājasūya* in the *Mahābhārata* is evident. If the stated purpose of Yudhiṣṭhira’s *rājasūya* were an accepted norm for that rite in the *Mahābhārata*, we would expect those possessing *sāmrājya* to be *rājasūya* performers, and vice versa. Instead we find the details presented in Table 1. The table lists every person who is mentioned in the *Mahābhārata* as having been a *samrāj*, and every person who is mentioned as having performed the *rājasūya*.¹⁶

¹⁴ Van Buitenen, *Mahābhārata* vol. 2, pp. 11, 22. *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 9.3.4.8 says that ‘by performing the *Rāgasūya* one becomes king (*rāga*) and by the *Vāgapeya* emperor (*samrāj*)’ (trans. Julius Eggeling, *The Śatapatha–Brāhmaṇa according to the Text of the Mādhyandina School*, Delhi, 1972 [1882–1900]). Cf. Hermann Kulke, ‘The *Rājasūya*: a Paradigm of Early State Formation?’ (in A. W. van den Hoek, D. H. A. Kolff, and M. S. Oort, eds, *Ritual, State and History in South Asia: Essays in Honour of J. C. Heesterman*, Leiden, 1992), p. 195: ‘the legitimation of *rājya* rather than *sāmrājya* was the main purpose of the *rājasūya* rituals’.

¹⁵ Christopher Z. Minkowski, ‘The Interrupted Sacrifice and the Sanskrit Epics’ (*Journal of Indian Philosophy* 29.1–2, 2001), p. 183 n. 27.

¹⁶ For the present paper I consider the mention of a character’s *rājasūya* performance to be significant and not to be explained away (e.g. by appeal to a performer’s need to fill out the metre in real time), at least in the *Mahābhārata*. In the *Rāmāyaṇa* [Rām] the words *samrāj* and *sāmrājya* do not occur, but four *rājasūya* performers are mentioned: Daśaratha (Rām 4.5.5), and Rāvaṇa’s son Meghanāda (i.e. Indrajit; Rām 7.25.8), and Mitrawho thus became Varuṇaand Soma (Rām 7.74.5–6). Ramkrishna T. Vyas, gen. ed., *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa: Text as Constituted in its Critical Edition* (Baroda, 1992).

Table 1. *Sāmrājya* and *rājasūya* in the *Mahābhārata*.

<i>Samrāj</i> only	<i>Samrāj</i> and <i>rājasūya</i> performer	<i>rājasūya</i> performer only
Vasu Uparicara (1.57.28; 12.322.18; 12.324.31)	<u>Bharata</u> (2.14.11; a hundred <i>rājasūyas</i> , 12.29.42)	<u>Rcepu and brothers</u> (1.89.10)
Yayāti (1.70.29)		<u>Suhotra</u> (1.89.22)
Samvaraṇa (1.89.39)	Hariścandra (2.11.52–64; 2.49.21–22; 18.3.23–24; Hv 10.21–22; Hv 115.18)	Bhīma (Damayantī's father; 3.61.42)
Jarāsaṃdha (2.13.8; 2.14.13) ¹⁷		Soma (9.42.38–41; 9.50.1; Hv 20.22–27; Hv 115.16)
Kārtavīrya (2.14.11)	Māndhātṛ Yauvanāśva (2.14.11; a hundred <i>rājasūyas</i> , 12.29.84)	Varuṇa (9.48.11–14; Hv 115.17)
Marutta (2.14.11)		Pr̥thu (Hv 2.23; Hv 4.16)
Virāta (4.6.7; 4.19.25)	Bhagīratha (2.14.11; eight <i>rājasūyas</i> , 13.106.23)	
Kṛṣṇa (12.43.11; 13.143.10)	<u>Yudhisthira</u> (<i>passim</i>)	
Avikṣit (14.4.18)		Kāśyapa brahmin in the <i>kaliyuga</i> to come (Hv 115.41)
Samrāj himself (Hv 2.6)		

Perhaps some of the men in the first column of Table 1 performed the *rājasūya* but this is not mentioned; and/or perhaps some of the men in the third column attained *sāmrājya* but this is not mentioned. But regarding *samrājes*, Kṛṣṇa gives a limited list:

[Māndhātṛ] Yauvanāśva, having abolished taxes; Bhagīratha, on account of his powers of protection; Kārtavīrya, through discipline and strategy; Lord Bharata, on account of his might; and Marutta, by means of prosperity: those are the five *samrājes*, or so we've heard.

(*Mahābhārata* 2.14.11)¹⁸

¹⁷ Minkowski goes beyond the text when he says that 'Jarāsaṃdha is planning a *Rājasūya* of his own' (Minkowski, 'The Interrupted Sacrifice', p. 174). The reference is presumably to Jarāsaṃdha's planned sacrifice of a hundred kings to Śiva (Mbh 2.14.13–19).

¹⁸ *hitvā karān yauvanāśvaḥ pālanāc ca bhagīrathaḥ* |

Despite Yudhiṣṭhira's intentions, the connection between *sāmrājya* and *rājasūya* performance is not well marked in the *Mahābhārata*. Only five characters explicitly achieve both, and in three such cases (those of Bharata, Māndhātṛ, and Bhagīratha, i.e. the only three of the five that are mentioned in Kṛṣṇa's list of five *samrājes*) there is no stated connection between the two achievements. I will thus look beyond the idea that *rājasūyas* are performed in order to attain *sāmrājya*, and seek other suggestions of their purpose.

On the basis of the *Mahābhārata*'s *rājasūya* data I suggest a resumption of scholarly conversation about the *rājasūya*, because I see evidence in that data of a ritual meaning that has scarcely been discussed. Revisiting the *rājasūya* Indologically in the round is no business for a short paper, and I will have almost nothing to say about the *rājasūya* in Vedic texts (which has been the main focus of earlier scholarship on the rite); I am simply communicating specific research results that I think colleagues will find interesting and useful. Nor will I have anything to say about the process of the rite as the *Mahābhārata* presents it. For all that it would be interesting to revisit the text's description of the *rājasūya* ceremony in light of the results presented here, this paper has a closely delimited remit: to investigate the ritual's lineal effect.

Summary of Thite's 1972 Paper

A useful context and lead-in to what follows is presented by Ganesh Thite's paper entitled 'Antipathy to the Rājasūya: Why?', published in 1972.¹⁹ As its title suggests, that paper is intended to explain why there is recorded antipathy towards the *rājasūya*. It is in two parts: the first part collects evidence that there was such antipathy, and the second part attempts to account for it.

*kārtavīryas tapoyogād balāt tu bharato vibhuḥ |
rādhyā maruttas tān pañca samrāja iti śuśrumaḥ | Mbh 2.14.11 |*

¹⁹ Ganesh U. Thite, 'Antipathy to the Rājasūya: Why?' (*Sambodhi* 1.3, 1972).

Thite first reviews Vedic mentions of Varuṇa's *rājasūya* ('When Varuṇa was consecrated his valour went away', p. 43), and Vedic ritual remedies that claim to be able to return lost valour (p. 44). Thite's attention then turns to examples, mentioned in the 'epics' and Purāṇas, of *rājasūyas* that provoked great bloodshed, and to the suggestion therein that a *rājasūya* has 'evil consequences' – for which reason Rāma is dissuaded from undertaking it (pp. 44–48; Rām 7.74.12–14). Details are given of Nārada's warnings to Yudhiṣṭhira, before the latter's decision to undertake the rite, of its inherent dangers (Mbh 2.11.68–70); but Yudhiṣṭhira's other advisors recommended it (p. 49). Details are given of how Yudhiṣṭhira's *rājasūya* provoked Duryodhana's envy and led to the dicing match and the Kurukṣetra war (pp. 50–52). Duryodhana's proposal to perform a *rājasūya* while the Pāṇḍavas are in exile is mentioned, as is his performance of the *vaiṣṇava* ritual instead (pp. 52–53; Mbh 3.241–43). 'Thus the epics and purāṇas express antipathy towards the Rājasūya' (p. 53).

To explain this, Thite turns to the Yajurvedic texts: 'the *rājasūya* ... was to be performed for the sake of asserting and declaring the kingship' (p. 54), and it involved – or followed – the conquest of other kings (pp. 54–55). But this is also true of the *aśvamedha*; so what in particular about the *rājasūya* explains its reputation? Thite now mentions passages where the *yajamāna* demonstrates – and demands recognition of – his superiority over his relative, symbolically expressed by his appropriating the latter's cows and/or other possessions (pp. 55–57). 'In this way ... one's own relative is thought here to be one's foremost enemy. Therefore the ritual texts teach to overpower one's own relative' (p. 56). Thite quotes *Lāṭyāyana Śrautasūtra*: 'Weak relatives ... are to be plundered. ... Even though they are kṣatriyas, they will not deserve consecration henceforth' (pp. 56–57). He cites passages specifying the relative as the sacrificer's brother, and specifying that such relatives become 'followers and non-disputers'. The kingship established by the *rājasūya* 'is at the cost of other relatives who also might have claims for being kings. But not only the kingship is robbed from them, it is also ritually denied to them

even in the future' (p. 57). Because this outcome might be contested, war is possible, even likely; hence the bad reputation (p. 58).

In light of Thite's thesis, I will concentrate on the *rājasūya* in terms of intra-familial conflict, and specifically in terms of *rājasūya* performances within the *Mahābhārata*'s central royal patriline. This seems appropriate because, of all ancient Indian texts, the *Mahābhārata* is the one about intra-familial conflict, and because the *Mahābhārata* deals most especially – and in longitudinal detail – with the Bhārata kings. I will present a review of the genealogical details of the stated *rājasūya* performers in Janamejaya Bhārata's *Ādiparvan* ancestry (i.e. those underlined in Table 1), and I will show that in those cases, the *rājasūya* seems to mark generations where the patriline passes to a younger branch by dint of that branch's competitive self-assertion.²⁰

***Rājasūya* Performers in Janamejaya's *Ādiparvan* Ancestry**

Vaiśampāyana narrates two successive versions of the Bhārata line to Janamejaya in the *Ādiparvan*. Most of the details I discuss here are in the first version (Mbh 1.70, continuing in 1.89). The second version, narrated in prose (Mbh 1.90), gives few details of collateral lines, only exceptionally mentioning more than one son per generation; but towards the end, where it includes (as the first version did not) the generations of and immediately before the Pāṇḍavas, it spreads out to give collateral details.²¹ There is also a third version of Janamejaya's ancestry at *Harivaṃśa* 20.1–23.122. The *Harivaṃśa* version differs from the *Ādiparvan* versions in that it presents the line as descending from Soma, the moon, rather than from Vivasvat, the sun. This appears to be the 'old' way of tracing it (the

²⁰ Cf. Simon Brodbeck, *The Mahābhārata Patriline: Gender, Culture, and the Royal Hereditary* (Farnham, 2009), pp. 119–31, 137, 189–90.

²¹ For a full chart with the two *Ādiparvan* versions side by side, see Brodbeck, *Patriline*, pp. 24–27.

Harivaṃśaparvan is called *purāṇa* at Mbh 1.2.69).²² Because the section of Janamejaya's ancestry that includes Soma is absent from the *Ādiparvan* accounts, and because he is not presented as a human king, I do not discuss Soma's situation in this paper, even though he is said to have performed a *rājasūya* (Hv 20.22–27).

In Janamejaya's ancestry as related in the *Ādiparvan*, there are just four points at which *rājasūyas* are said to have been performed. In chronological order, the performers are: Ṛcepu and brothers; Bharata; Suhotra; and Yudhiṣṭhira. I will show that these four instances – of which Thite mentions only the last – coincide with junctures at which there are also details showing a junior branch prevailing over the senior branch and taking the line in apparent breach of primogeniture. A normative ideal of primogeniture seems to be presupposed by the *Mahābhārata*; as shown in detail in due course below, when the successor is not the eldest son, an explanation for this is almost always provided.²³

The several accounts of Janamejaya's ancestry differ in many details. Though I will mention the variant accounts in footnotes, my aim here is not to explain the apparent

²² See Simon Brodbeck, 'Solar and Lunar Lines in the *Mahābhārata*' (*Religions of South Asia* 5.1–2, 2012).

²³ For a broader discussion of exceptions to primogeniture in and behind Indian texts, see Richard Salomon, 'The Men who would be King: Reading between the Lines of Dynastic Genealogies in India and Beyond' (*Religions of South Asia* 5.1–2, 2012). In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Vasiṣṭha, *purohita* of the Ikṣvākus of Ayodhyā, presents primogeniture to Rāma as a rule:

ikṣvākūṇām hi sarveṣāṃ rājā bhavati pūrvajāḥ |
pūrvajenāvaraḥ putro jyeṣṭho rājye 'bhiṣicyate | Rām 2.102.30 |
sa rāghavāṇām kuladharmam ātmanaḥ
sanātanaṃ nāḍya vihātum arhasi |

'For among all the Ikṣvākus the first-born has always become the king. When the first-born is living, it is not a younger son but only the eldest who is consecrated for kingship. This is the age-old custom of your own house, the House of the Rāghavas, and you must not abandon it now' (trans. Sheldon I. Pollock, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki, an Epic of Ancient India. Volume II: Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, Princeton, 1986, p. 305). Notwithstanding the somewhat loose connection between *sāmrajya* and the *rājasūya* (see pp. 30–33 above), lineal takeover by a junior branch would give that branch something like *sāmrajya* within a patriline, so it is easy to see how the word might be used in such cases.

inconsistencies, or to establish any singular account or any relative textual chronologies, or to make any historical claims. The attempt to write political and/or textual history has been evident in previous studies of these genealogies,²⁴ but is beside the point here; I simply want to explore the correlation between generations in connection with which *rājasūyas* are mentioned, and generations in connection with which junior-branch takeover is evident. Though Vaiśampāyana presents his *Harivaṃśa* account of Janamejaya's ancestry as being 'older' than his *Ādiparvan* accounts, for present purposes that relative chronology can remain a feature of the story told by the text. Regarding the differences between the two *Ādiparvan* accounts, the streamlined nature of most of the second account could imply that the kinds of collateral details given in the first account (and towards the end of the second) might later be smoothed away in the telling; but additional arguments would be required if one were to claim that the first account is contained in an older piece of text.

1. Ṛcepu and brothers

Vaiśampāyana narrates this section of the line to Janamejaya as follows:

Born of Pūru by Pauṣṭī were three sons, great chariot-warriors: Pravīra, Īśvara, and Raudrāśva; and Pravīra made the line. From him there was Manasyu, his lordship, Śyenī's brave son – the blue-lotus-eyed guardian of the four-edged earth. And there were sons of Manasyu – Sauvīrī's three children: Subhrū, Saṃhanana, and Vāgmin, all of them great chariot-warrior braves.

²⁴ See e.g. F. E. Pargiter, *Ancient Indian Historical Tradition* (London, 1922), pp. 110–15; Willibald Kirfel, *Das Purāna Pañcalakṣaṇa: Versuch einer Textgeschichte* (Bonn, 1927), pp. 536–56; R. Morton Smith, *Dates and Dynasties in Earliest India: Translation and Justification of a Critical Text of the Purāna Dynasties* (ed. J. L. Shastri, Delhi, 1973), pp. 41–50, 259–337.

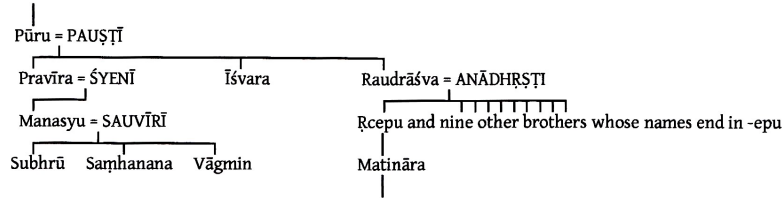
Raudrāśva had ten skilled archer sons from an *apsaras*, who were ritual patrons, brave, blessed with progeny, and of wide repute. They were all expert in every missile, they were all devoted to *dharma*: Ṛcepu, and then Kakṣepu, and heroic Kṛkaṇepu, and Sthaṇḍilepu and Vanepu, and great chariot-warrior Sthalepu, and Tejepu strong and wise, and Satyepu as bold as Indra, and Dharmepu, and the tenth, Saṃnatepu as bold as a god. They were Anādhṛṣṭi's children, my boy, and were performers of the *rājasūya* and the *aśvamedha*. And then from Ṛcepu there was the learned King Matināra, O king, and the four peerlessly bold sons of Matināra ...

(*Mahābhārata* 1.89.5a–11d)²⁵

And the line continues through Matināra's eldest son, and his, and his. The first generations after Pūru are thus as per Figure 1.

²⁵ *pravīreśvararaudrāśvās trayah putrā mahārathāḥ |
pūroḥ pauṣṭyām ajāyanta pravīras tatra vaṃśakṛt | Mbh 1.89.5 |
manasyur abhavat tasmāc chūrah śyenīsutaḥ prabhuh |
pṛthivyāś caturantāyā goptā rājīvalocanaḥ | 6 |
subhrūḥ saṃhanano vāgmī sauvīṛītanayās trayah |
manasyor abhavan putrāḥ śūrāḥ sarve mahārathāḥ | 7 |
raudrāśvasya maheśvāsā daśāpsarasi sūnavaḥ |
yajvāno jajñire śūrāḥ prajāvanto bahuśrutāḥ |
sarve sarvāstravidvāṃsaḥ sarve dharmaparāyaṇāḥ | 8 |
ṛcepur atha kakṣepuḥ kṛkaṇepuś ca vīryavān |
sthaṇḍilepur vanepuś ca sthalepuś ca mahārathaḥ | 9 |
tejepur balavān dhīmān satyepuś cendravikramaḥ |
dharmepuḥ saṃnatepuś ca daśamo devavikramaḥ |
anādhṛṣṭisutās tāta rājasūyāśvamedhinaḥ | 10 |
matināras tato rājā vidvāṃś carceputo bhavat |
matinārasutā rājāś catvāro mitavikramāḥ |*

In the prose version (at Mbh 1.90.11–24), Pūru's son is Janamejaya, there is no Ṛcepu, and between Pūru and Matināra only one son is mentioned per generation (though there are many more generations here than there are in the 1.89 version). The *Harivaṃśa* version (Hv 23.4–7) runs Pūru → Pravīra → Manasyu → Abhayada → Sudhanvan → Subāhu → Raudrāśva → ten sons (nine are listed Arṇeyu, Kṛkaneyu, Kakṣeyu, Sthaṇḍileyu, Saṃnateyu, Ṛceyu, Jaleyu, Sthaleyu, and Vaneyu) and ten daughters. Kakṣeyu's descendants are detailed, then the text returns to Ṛceyu (Hv 23.42), whose son is Matināra, and the line comes down from him.

Figure 1. Ṛcepu and brothers (Mbh 1.89.5–11).

It is stated that Pravīra succeeded Pūru, and that Manasyu was guardian of the earth. But in the next generation the king is not Manasyu's son Subhrū as one might expect, but Matināra, the son of Manasyu's junior-branch cousin. This paradigmatic irregularity coincides with the detail that Manasyu's dharmic cousins, Ṛcepu and company, performed the *rājasūya* and the *aśvamedha*. The *rājasūya* is much rarer than the *aśvamedha*, and can be connected to the junior-branch lineal takeover.²⁶

2. Bharata

Bharata's *rājasūyas* are mentioned by Bhīṣma at Mbh 12.29, where Bharata is one of the 16 kings whose glories were extolled by Nārada to Śrījaya when the latter was grieving for his dead son.²⁷ The relevant section of the passage describing Bharata is as follows:

Long ago Duṣanta's tremendously brilliant son Bharata offered rites of worship with a thousand Horse Sacrifices [*aśvamedhas*] and a hundred Royal Consecration Sacrifices [*rājasūyas*]. Among all the kings, none were able to imitate that great rite of Bharata's, as mortals

²⁶ The prose version mentions Matināra's twelve-year *satra* on the Sarasvatī, which could also be connected (Mbh 1.90.25–26).

²⁷ All the manuscripts used for the *Mahābhārata* critical edition apart from Ś1 and K0–6 feature a similar section of text also in the *Droṇaparvan* (Mbh 7.app8.327–872). There the narrator of the dialogue between Śrījaya and Nārada is Vyāsa, and the list of kings is slightly different, though it still includes Bharata (lines 730–62). For a translation of the *Droṇaparvan* version, see Vaughan Pilikian, *Mahābhārata Book Seven: Droṇa, Volume Two* (New York, 2009), pp. 11–61 (for Bharata, pp. 47–51).

cannot fly in the sky with their two arms. Having bound more than a thousand horses and having laid out a sacrificial area where there were thousands of lotuses, Bharata gave them to Kaṇva.

(*Mahābhārata* 12.29.42–44)²⁸

Bharata's *rājasūya* or *rājasūyas* are also recorded in the *Mahābhārata*'s southern recension, in the critical apparatus at Mbh 1.*624.7 and 1.*649, in connection with a prediction made by Indra and the gods at the time of Bharata's birth (and subsequently relayed by his mother to his father). In these southern recension references it might seem that the *rājasūya* will be the first royal rite that Bharata is to perform, since in both cases the word *rājasūya* is compounded with an immediately following *ādi*.²⁹

Vaiśampāyana presents Bharata's father Duṣṇanta as the eldest of five brothers,³⁰ and Bharata as the only son of Duṣṇanta, by his only wife, Śakuntalā. The sons and descendants of Duṣṇanta's brothers are not mentioned, so there

²⁸ Trans. James L. Fitzgerald, *The Mahābhārata*, vol. 7: 11. *The Book of the Women*; 12. *The Book of Peace, Part One* (Chicago, 2004), p. 230.

aśvamedhasahasreṇa rājasūyaśatena ca |
iṣṭavān sa mahātejā dauṣṇantir bharataḥ purā | Mbh 12.29.42 |
bharatasya mahat karma sarvarājasu pārthivāḥ |
khaṃ martyā iva bāhubhyāṃ nānugantum aśaknuvan | 43 |
paraṃ sahasrād yo baddhvā hayān vedīm vicitya ca |
sahasraṃ yatra padmānāṃ kaṇvāya bharato dadau | 44 |

The relevant lines of Mbh 7.app8 (loosely corresponding to Mbh 12.29.42) are as follows:

so 'śvamedhasahasreṇa rājasūyaśatena ca | Mbh 7.app8.745 |
punar tje mahāyajñaiḥ samāptavaradakṣiṇaiḥ | 746 |

²⁹ *āhartā vājimedhasya śatasamkhyasya pauravaḥ |* Mbh 1.*624.6 |
anekair api sāhasrai rājasūyādibhir makhaiḥ | 7 | ...

... *āhartā vājimedhasya śatasamkhyasya pauravaḥ |* Mbh 1.68.59ab (southern recension variant) |

rājasūyādikān anyān kratūn amitadakṣiṇān | Mbh 1.*649 |

For *rājasūya-ādi* compounds, see also Mbh 1.89.22 (n. 36 below).

³⁰ At Mbh 1.89.15 Duṣṇanta's younger brothers are named Śūra, Bhīma, Prapūrva, and Vasu. In the prose version Duṣṇanta is said to be the first of five, but the other four are not named (Mbh 1.90.29). In the *Harivaṃśa* version Duṣṇanta has only three younger brothers (Suḥṣanta, Pravīra, and Anagha; Hv 23.47).

is no immediate sign of Bharata's brothers or cousins here. Thus on the face of it there is not much opportunity to understand Bharata's *rājasūyas* in the context of lineal rivalry. But we will find that opportunity if we probe a little deeper; and that is what I do in the following paragraphs, beginning with the story of Śakuntalā told by Vaiśampāyana at Mbh 1.62–69.³¹

King Duṣṣanta, out hunting, contracts a *gāndharva* marriage³² with Kaṇva's adopted daughter Śakuntalā, and then goes home. Having promised that their son will be his successor (Mbh 1.67.15–18) and that he will send a royal escort to bring her to the court (Mbh 1.67.20), he fails immediately on the latter count. Nine years later, Śakuntalā, prompted by Kaṇva, brings Sarvadamana, her son by Duṣṣanta, to Duṣṣanta's court herself, and reminds him of their agreement; but Duṣṣanta denies the whole affair. As she is leaving, however, a heavenly voice publicly corroborates her version of events (Mbh 1.69.29–33); so she is accepted as Duṣṣanta's wife, and the son, renamed Bharata, becomes Duṣṣanta's heir, and later a great king.

I have discussed possible reasons for Duṣṣanta's attempted rejection of Śakuntalā elsewhere.³³ Here I focus on just one: that he already had an heir. This possibility is suggested by Śakuntalā's pre-nuptial condition. Why would she insist on her son being the heir unless she suspects that he will have a rival for that role? The only other time we see such a pre-nuptial agreement in the *Mahābhārata* when Satyavatī's fisherman father makes the same condition before giving his daughter in marriage to King Śamtanu (Mbh 1.94.51) the groom is known

³¹ For this story, see W. J. Johnson, trans., *Kālidāsa: the Recognition of Śakuntalā, a Play in Seven Acts; Śakuntalā in the Mahābhārata (Mahābhārata 1.62–9)* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 109–37.

³² 'When the girl and the groom have sex with each other voluntarily, that is the "Gāndharva" marriage based on sexual union and originating from love' (*Mānava Dharmaśāstra* 3.32, trans. Patrick Olivelle, *Manu's Code of Law: a Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, New York, 2005). Cf. Mbh 13.44.5; families are not involved.

³³ Simon Brodbeck, 'The Rejection of Śakuntalā in the *Mahābhārata*: Dynastic Considerations' (in Saswati Sengupta and Deepika Tandon, eds, *Revisiting Abhijñānaśakuntalam: Love, Lineage and Language in Kālidāsa's Nāṭaka*, Delhi, 2011).

already to have a son and heir (Mahāvratā Devavratā Bhīṣma, who vows celibacy so that Śamtanu may marry again). If Duḥśanta already had a son, this would explain his failure to send the promised royal escort to bring Śakuntalā to court, and it would also explain his reaction when she comes to court anyway. In Kālidāsa's (later) version of the story, Duḥśanta has two existing wives, but apparently no son;³⁴ nonetheless in the *Mahābhārata* the name Bharata deliberately evokes the story of elder brother Rāma Dāśaratha, in which Bharata is a younger brother whose mother tries to have him installed as heir (Rām 2.1–16; Mbh 3.261.1–28). The idea that Śakuntalā and Sarvadamaṇa Bharata are not Duḥśanta's only wife and son is thus implied in various ways. It is also stated in the manuscripts of the southern recension:

Janamejaya, indeed, was born to Duḥśanta, from
Lakṣmaṇā; and the son Bharata Dauḥśanti was from
Śakuntalā.

(*Mahābhārata* 1.*877)³⁵

These manuscripts do not specify that Bharata was the younger son, but the order of presentation suggests this.

Thus we might understand Bharata's *rājasūyas* in terms of his taking the line from an elder half-brother, with the southern manuscripts making explicit what is otherwise implicit. The usage of the *rājasūya* label for Bharata would then resemble its apparent usage in the case of Ṛcepu and brothers.³⁶ However, we must note the plurality of Bharata's alleged *rājasūyas*, his young age at the time (the '*rājasūya*' would seem to be conducted by his mother on his behalf) is also the case with Bharata Dāśaratha), and the fact that although Ṛcepu's *rājasūya*

³⁴ See Johnson, *Recognition of Śakuntalā*, pp. 53–54, 57, 68, 85.

³⁵ *duḥśantāḥ lakṣmaṇāyāṃ tu jajñe vai janamejayaḥ* | Mbh 1.*877.1 |
śakuntalāyāṃ bharato dauḥśantir abhavat sutah | 2 |

These lines are found in manuscripts T1–3, G1–7, and M1–8. Manuscripts M6–8 name Janamejaya's mother Lakṣmaṇā.

³⁶ There is also some scope for a *sāmrājya* interpretation of the *rājasūya* here, since Bharata is explicitly said to have been a *samrāj* (Mbh 2.14.11), and also, perhaps relatedly, a *cakravartin* (Mbh 1.67.29; 1.69.47).

marks cousin overtaking cousin, here it would seem to mark brother overtaking brother.

3. Suhotra

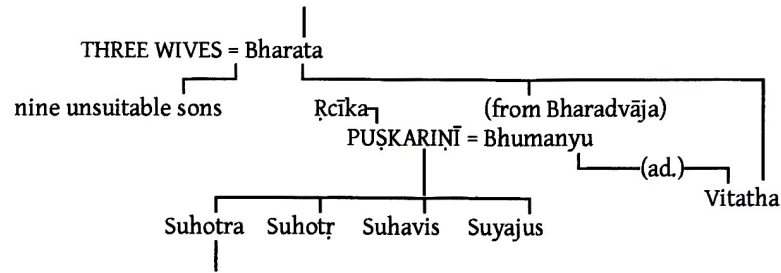
The succession after Bharata is presented as follows (these data are as per Figure 2):

King Bharata had nine sons from three wives, but he didn't think much of them; he said, 'They're nothing like me.' So Bharata sacrificed with great rites, O Bhārata, and from Bharadvāja he obtained a son called Bhumanyu. Then [Bharata] the delight of the Pauravas thought of himself as a man with a son; and he anointed Bhumanyu as king-in-waiting (*yuvarāja*), O supreme Bharata. Then [Bharata] the Indra of the earth had a futile (*vitatha*) son; and that son, who was called Vitatha, became Bhumanyu's son. Bhumanyu's sons by Ṛcika's [daughter] Puṣkariṇī were Suhotra, Suhotṛ, Suhavis, and Suyajus; and Suhotra, the eldest of those princes, became the king. He performed many *soma* rites: *rājasūya*, *aśvamedha*, and so on.

(*Mahābhārata* 1.89.17–22)³⁷

³⁷ *bharatas tistr̥ṣu str̥ṣu nava putrān ajījanat |*
nābhyanandata tān rājā nānurūpā mamety uta | Mbh 1.89.17 |
tato mahadbhiḥ kratubhir ījāno bharatas tadā |
lebhe putram bharadvājād bhumanyuṃ nāma bhārata | 18 |
tataḥ putriṇam ātmānaṃ jñātvā pauravanandanah |
bhumanyuṃ bharataśreṣṭha yauvarājye 'bhyāsecayat | 19 |
tatas tasya mahīndrasya vitathaḥ putrako 'bhavat |
tataḥ sa vitatho nāma bhumanyor abhavat sutaḥ | 20 |
suhotraś ca suhotā ca suhaviḥ suyajus tathā |
puṣkarīṇyām ṛcikasya bhumanyor abhavan sutāḥ | 21 |
teṣāṃ jyeṣṭhaḥ suhotras tu rājyam āpa mahīkṣitām |
rājasūyāśvamedhādyaiḥ so 'yajad bahubhiḥ savaiḥ | 22 |

The prose version mentions no brothers of Bhumanyu or Suhotra:
bharataḥ khalu kāśeyim upayeme sārvasenim sunandam nāma | tasyām asya jajñe
bhumanyuḥ | Mbh 1.90.34 |
bhumanyuḥ khalu dāśārḥim upayeme jayam nāma | tasyām asya jajñe suhotraḥ |
 35 |

Figure 2. Suhotra and Vitatha (Mbh 1.89.17–22).

There is implied competition between Suhotra and Vitatha: the last king's son and the last-but-one king's son. Vitatha's adoption by Bhumanyu seems designed to ensure that he is king after Bhumanyu; but there are obvious arguments in favour of both candidates. The success of Suhotra and his co-uterine brothers matches the success of Ṛcepu and *his* co-uterine brothers. The *rājasūya* seems to mark the success of the junior branch, as it does with Ṛcepu and with Bharata. Suhotra would be junior to Vitatha in a generational sense (as the latter's nephew), and Bhumanyu's paternity of Vitatha is mentioned before his paternity of Suhotra. Nonetheless, it is not explicitly stated which of the two is older.³⁸

The *Harivaṃśa* version mentions that Bharata's sons were ruined by the passion of their mothers:

bharatasya vinaṣṭeṣu tanayeṣu mahīpate |
mātṛñāṃ tāta kopena ... | Hv 23.50 |

It then relates the adoption, from Bharadvāja, of Vitatha, who here is the father of Suhotra and brothers (Hv 23.51–54).

³⁸ If one were to hypothesise that Bharadvāja were Bharata's elder (half-) brother, then Suhotra's branch would be senior in a longer sense. Such a hypothesis might be encouraged by these verses:

prathamenājyabhāgena pūjyate yo 'gnir adhvare |
agnis tasya bhāradvājaḥ prathamah putra ucyate | Mbh 3.209.5 |
paurnamāsyeṣu sarveṣu haviṣājyaṃ sruvodyatam |
bharato nāmataḥ so 'gnir dvitīyah śaṃyutaḥ sutah | 6 |

'The Bharadvāja fire, which is honoured with the first portion of ghee at the sacrifice, is said to be his [i.e. Śaṃyu's] first son. At all the lunar rites the ghee oblation is offered by ladle; that fire is called Bharata, and is a second son derived from Śaṃyu.'

4. Yudhiṣṭhira Pāṇḍava

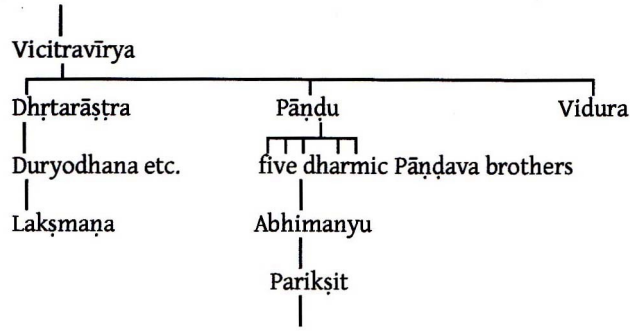
The Pāṇḍavas and their cousins – the sons of the blind regent Dhṛtarāṣṭra – competed for the ancestral estate ever since the Pāṇḍavas arrived in Hāstinapura as boys (Mbh 1.1.71–78; 1.117). As with Suhotra and Vitatha, the situation is exceptional and there are obvious arguments in favour of both candidates, Yudhiṣṭhira and Duryodhana. Attempting to forestall further conflict, the elders partition the kingdom (Mbh 1.195–99); but this solution is desired by neither party. Yudhiṣṭhira performs the *rājasūya* at the behest of his deceased father and various other advisors.³⁹ Pāṇḍu’s message to him, relayed by Nārada, is:

You are fit to conquer the earth. Your brothers stand at
your whim. Perform the supreme ritethe *rājasūya*!
(*Mahābhārata* 2.11.66)⁴⁰

The Pāṇḍava *rājasūya* prompts Duryodhana to arrange a dicing match, after which the Pāṇḍavas are exiled. But business is only concluded after the annihilation of the senior royal branch in the Kurukṣetra war; the line and estate pass to the junior branch, who then perform an *aśvamedha* (Mbh 14). The lineal scenario is as per Figure 3.

³⁹ Notably Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva, who argues that presiding over the killing of Jarāsaṃdha (apparently unrelated to Yudhiṣṭhira) is a vital preliminary step to Yudhiṣṭhira’s performance of the *rājasūya*. Given the political situation, and as it turns out, this deed is certainly advantageous. As van Buitenen says (‘On the Structure’, pp. 72–73): ‘That Jarāsaṃdha must be killed is not only because he is the present *samrāj en titre*, but because no “world conquest” would make any sense to the contemporaneous audience, well aware of the Magadhan hegemony, without the prior reduction of Magadha.’ See again Brockington, ‘Jarāsaṃdha of Magadha’ (n. 13 above). The Magadhan situation rather forces the notion of *sāmrajya* with respect to this particular *rājasūya* (and a local battle between cousins is expanded to involve warriors from all regions).

⁴⁰ *samartho 'si mahīm jetuṃ bhrātaras te vaśe sthitāḥ |*
rājasūyaṃ kratuśreṣṭham āharasveti bhārata | Mbh 2.11.66 |
The final vocative seems to be Nārada’s, standing outside Pāṇḍu’s reported speech.

Figure 3. The Dhṛtarāṣṭras and the Pāṇḍavas.

Minkowski has shown how Yudhiṣṭhira's *rājasūya* can be seen as an 'interrupted sacrifice' until it gains closure in the *aśvamedha* ('this Aśvamedha ... finally fulfills the pretensions to sovereignty that underly Yudhiṣṭhira's Rājasūya');⁴¹ and in those terms the *rājasūya* can mark the eventual lineal scenario, whereby the descendants of Vicitravīrya's eldest son lose the line. Since Duryodhana and his nobly born brothers, sons, and nephews are all killed, Dhṛtarāṣṭra will now depend, for his postmortem sustenance, upon riceballs offered by his concubinal non-*kṣatriya* son Yuyutsu and the latter's descendants;⁴² and Pāṇḍu, not Dhṛtarāṣṭra, will now be routinely commemorated as an ancestor of the Hāstinapura kings. We can thus appreciate why it was in Pāṇḍu's postmortem interest for his son to perform the *rājasūya*. After the Pāṇḍava victory, when Yudhiṣṭhira is ruler over the reunited kingdom, Pāṇḍu is

⁴¹ Minkowski, 'Interrupted Sacrifice', p. 175. We can imagine *aśvamedhas* being used as capstones for *rājasūyas* elsewhere, too; and this can help to explain why these two rites are often mentioned in close proximity. The *aśvamedha* provides 'a sound base for new power' (Petteri Koskikallio, 'Epic Descriptions of the Horse Sacrifice', in Cezary Galewicz *et al.*, eds, *International Conference on Sanskrit and Related Studies: Proceedings*, Cracow, 1995, p. 167).

⁴² This is anticipated by Yudhiṣṭhira when Yuyutsu switches sides just before the war:

tvayi piṇḍaś ca tantuś ca dhṛtarāṣṭrasya drśyate | Mbh 6.41.93cd |

'Dhṛtarāṣṭra's riceball and line of descent are seen in you.' For the riceball offerings and the *śrāddha* rite in general, see *Mānava Dharmasāstra* 3.122–285.

for the first time described, by Nārada, as residing in the presence of Indra (*balahantuḥ samīpataḥ*, Mbh 15.26.17; cf. 18.5.12). Previously, according to the same Nārada, he was in the *sabhā* of Yama (Mbh 2.8.22); so it seems that his location has changed as a result of the developments on earth since his death.

In the closing chapters of the *Mahābhārata*, Janamejaya addresses Vyāsa:

Having honoured the omniscient one, O lord, I ask about the cause of the destruction of the Kurus which I consider to be the *rājasūya*. Since the unstoppable warrior-princes have come to ruin and grief, I consider the *rājasūya* to have been arranged for the sake of war. ... Immediately after the difficult rite [was performed] by the noble Pāṇḍava, the Mahābhārata war was stacked up like a bonfire. Surely the root of the war that caused the destruction of the people was the great *rājasūya* sacrifice. Then why was it not prevented? For in the untameable *rājasūya* with its ritual aspects that are hard to accomplish, when one ritual aspect is done badly, the destruction of offspring is inevitable.

(*Harivaṃśa* 115.14–15, 19–21)⁴³

The ‘one ritual aspect done badly’ would presumably be the dicing match,⁴⁴ though the dicing is not part of Yudhiṣṭhira’s

⁴³ *anumānya tu sarvajñaṃ prcchāmi bhagavann aham |
hetuḥ kurūṇāṃ nāsasya rājasūyo mato mama | Hv 115.14 |
duḥsahānāṃ yathā dhvaṃso rājanyānāṃ upaplavaḥ |
rājasūyaṃ tathā manye yuddhārtham upakalpitaṃ | 15 | ...
... tato ‘nantaram āryeṇa pāṇḍavenāpi dustaraḥ |
mahābhāratasaṃhāraḥ sambhṛto ‘gnir iva kratuḥ | 19 |
tasya mūlaṃ hi yuddhasya lokakṣayakarasya ha |
rājasūyo mahāyajñāḥ kimarthaṃ na nivāritaḥ | 20 |
rājasūye hy asaṃhārye yajñāṅgaiś ca durāsadaih |
mithyāpranīte yajñāṅge prajānāṃ saṃkṣayo dhruvaḥ | 21 |*

⁴⁴ Nīlakaṇṭha commented on verse 21, focusing on the word *asaṃhārya* (describing the *rājasūya*): *asaṃhāryaḥ sarvāṅgopetaḥ kartum aśakyah* (‘untamable: impossible to do with all aspects’). See Ramachandrasekhari Kinjawadekar, ed., *Shrīman-Mahābhāratam Part VII: IXX Harivaṃshaparvan, with Bhārata Bhāwadeepa* by Neelakantha (Poona, 1936), p. 479. According to

rājasūya, it is, as van Buitenen stressed, a final part of the theoretical Vedic *rājasūya*.⁴⁵

Vyāsa's answer to Janamejaya's question is somewhat evasive. For our purposes it is notable that the Kurukṣetra war involved the destruction of all those who stood between the Pāṇḍavas and the ancestral line; and thus the fact that Janamejaya connects it directly to the *rājasūya* is revealing. Thite echoes Janamejaya's judgement: 'The famous Bhāratīya war between the Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas must be judged to be the result of this *rājasūya* sacrifice only.'⁴⁶

Yudhiṣṭhira's *rājasūya* fits the lineal interpretation of the *rājasūya* that I am proposing, but it also fits the interpretation proposed by Heesterman on the basis of the Black Yajurveda texts. Heesterman sees the *rājasūya* as a rite of cosmic and temporal regeneration: 'the sacrificer ... performs through the sacrifice the cyclical rhythm of the universe in a series of deaths and births'; through the rite 'the king is born in the centre of the universe, binding together its dispersed elements in his person and regulating their alternating centrifugal and centripetal rotation'; the *rājasūya* is a 'festival by which the regeneration of the powers of fertility and the renewal of the universe are effected'.⁴⁷ This is congruent with the 'divine plan' in the *Mahābhārata* (of which Janamejaya is aware when he questions Vyāsa as quoted above): Earth suffered since various Daityas and Dānavas, defeated by the gods in the worlds above, had taken birth as terrestrial kings, and so she petitioned the gods to

Gehrts (n. 11 above), the 'one ritual aspect done badly' in Yudhiṣṭhira's *rājasūya* would be the failure to kill Duryodhana during the *rājasūya* ceremony; Duryodhana's death at this early stage would have stood as the 'removal of the biters' rite that is prescribed in the Vedic *rājasūya* texts (see Heesterman, *Royal Consecration*, pp. 106–107); and because it did not occur, the ritual is symbolically stretched out by the text, into a bloody tale cautioning against imperfect ritual performance (cf. the warning to Yudhiṣṭhira at Mbh 2.11.68–70, and to Rāma at Rām 7.74.12–14 that the *rājasūya* is a particularly dangerous rite).

⁴⁵ Van Buitenen, 'On the Structure', pp. 70–71; van Buitenen, *Mahābhārata* vol. 2, pp. 27–29.

⁴⁶ Thite, 'Antipathy' (n. 19 above), p. 50.

⁴⁷ Heesterman, *Royal Consecration*, pp. 6, 156, 159; cf. Wilhelm Rau, *Staat und Gesellschaft im alten Indien nach den Brāhmaṇa-Texten dargestellt* (Wiesbaden, 1957), p. 88.

rescue her, which they did by taking birth themselves, arranging the Kurukṣetra war by means of the *rājasūya*, and defeating the miscreants there, thus regenerating time and the cosmos (Mbh 1.58–61; 6.26.6–8 = *Bhagavadgītā* 4.6–8). There is some ambiguity here, because the central purpose of regeneration is offset by the suggestion that the *yuga* following the war was a *kaliyuga*, rather than a *kṛtayuga* as one would have expected,⁴⁸ but nonetheless the cosmic context of Yudhiṣṭhira's *rājasūya* is striking, and fits with Heesterman's account. However, this cosmic context is apparently as unknown to Yudhiṣṭhira as the 'lineal takeover' meaning of the *rājasūya* is; and although Heesterman's interpretation fits Yudhiṣṭhira's *rājasūya*, it does not necessarily fit the other *rājasūyas* discussed above.

In light of Jamison's comments on the role of the *pratihita*, it is notable that the description of Yudhiṣṭhira's *rājasūya* scarcely mentions his heir. This is presumably because Pāṇḍu's line comes down to Janamejaya through Arjuna's son Abhimanyu. Prativindhya, Yudhiṣṭhira's son by Draupadī, is mentioned by Vaiśampāyana in the *Ādiparvan* (Mbh 1.57.101–103; 1.90.82; 1.213.71–82). He is also mentioned by Draupadī as she names her first boon at the end of the first dicing scene (Mbh 2.63.29). But after fighting valiantly at Kurukṣetra, he is killed in the night attack (Mbh 10.8.50). Earlier, the description of Arjuna's northern share of the Pāṇḍavas' pre-*rājasūya* conquests mentions that

After conquering the Ānartas, the Kālakūṭas, and the Kuṇindas, he [Arjuna] made Sumaṇḍala, vanquisher of the evil, his rearguard. Together with him, O king, the left-handed archer, scourge of his enemies, conquered the island of Sakala ['the divisible whole'] and defeated King Prativindhya, the lords of the island of Sakala, and

⁴⁸ See Luis González-Reimann, 'Time in the *Mahābhārata* and the Time of the *Mahābhārata*' (in Sheldon Pollock, ed., *Epic and Argument in Sanskrit Literary History: Essays in Honor of Robert P. Goldman*, Delhi, 2010), pp. 62–63 and nn. 3–10. This ambiguity is potent, and comparatively unexplored in the scholarship.

the princes of the Seven Islands the battle between
Arjuna and their armies was a tumultuous one.

(*Mahābhārata* 2.23.14–16)⁴⁹

I would not argue that the king defeated here is Yudhiṣṭhira's son Prativindhya. But nonetheless the nominal connection is surely not accidental, and works as a poetic premonition of Arjuna's lineal takeover a takeover which is congruent with Biardeau's analysis of Arjuna as 'the epic's ideal king' ('le roi idéal de l'épopée').⁵⁰

Non-primogenitive Succession in Janamejaya's Ancestry without a *Rājasūya*

As shown above, whenever the word *rājasūya* is used in connection with a character in Janamejaya's ancestry, that character seems to occur at a point of contested succession, with kingship transferring to the junior branch. This supports Thite's conclusions, and also suggests a more specific interpretation of the *rājasūya*, namely that the rite's aim would be to contest, on a specific occasion, the passage of kingship from father to eldest son, and to engineer its passage to another son, or to a cousin, thereafter to pass from father to eldest son again until further

⁴⁹ Trans. van Buitenen, *Mahābhārata* vol. 2, pp. 77–78. Van Buitenen's translation reads 'Śakala', which is unattested (though some manuscripts have 'Śākala'); I have emended this to 'Sakala', following the Sanskrit text.

ānartān kālakūṭāms ca kuṇindāms ca vijitya sah |
sumaṇḍalaṃ pāpajitaṃ kṛtavān anusainikam | Mbh 2.23.14 |
sa tena sahito rājan savyasācī paramtapah |
vijigye sakalaṃ dvīpaṃ prativindhyaṃ ca pārthivam | 15 |
sakaladvīpavāsāms ca saptadvīpe ca ye nrpāḥ |
arjunasya ca sainyānām vighrahas tumulo 'bhavat | 16 |

Sumaṇḍala is not mentioned again in the *Mahābhārata*, but the name could evoke Abhimanyu's heroics on the thirteenth day of the Kurukṣetra war (Mbh 7.32–48).

⁵⁰ Madeleine Biardeau, *Études de mythologie hindoue II: Bhakti et avatāra* (Pondicherry, 1994), pp. 149–256.

notice. One can imagine unsuccessful *rājasūya* attempts; but if these occurred in this line, they are not mentioned as such.⁵¹

The data presented above provide positive support for this interpretation. But we should also see whether irregular succession after lateral contestation is ever evident *without* the eventual successor being labelled a *rājasūya* performer; for if it were, this would weaken the interpretation significantly. So I now examine the eleven other instances in this patriline where the successor is apparently not the eldest son. Though the survey presented in this section might seem at first glance to be somewhat tangential to the main subject of the paper, it is logically vital, for without examining this ‘control group’ it will not be possible to make any secure interpretation of the *rājasūya* data presented above.

1. Dakṣa has a thousand sons, but the line continues through Aditi Dākṣāyaṇī, one of his daughters (Mbh 1.70.5–9). This is explained by the fact that Nārada taught the sons about *mokṣa* and *sāṃkhyā*.⁵² The implication is that they renounced and became lineally unavailable. This is made explicit at Hv 3.7–23, where they are said to have travelled off in all directions and never returned.⁵³

2. Manu is said to have ten sons (Mbh 1.70.13–14), but Janamejaya’s line comes through Ilā, the eighth, who is in fact a daughter (Mbh 1.70.16; 1.90.7). In this instance, however, it is not just a matter of a singular royal lineal succession, but of the dispersal of proper human beings across the earth and the ages. Manu is said to be the ancestor of human beings (Mbh 1.70.11), and his sons were ancestors of kings of various different regions (Hv 9.1–37). In the Mbh 1.70 account Manu’s eldest son is

⁵¹ Mbh 1.89.27–41 describes an apparent takeover attempt by Saṃvaraṇa’s junior-line cousin Pāñcālya, who mustered armies, defeated Saṃvaraṇa, and forced him into exile for some years; but after enlisting Vasiṣṭha, the champion of primogeniture (n. 23 above), as his *purohita*, Saṃvaraṇa returned to the city and to power. If Saṃvaraṇa had failed to regain his position, perhaps his being ousted could have been called Pāñcālya’s *rājasūya*.

⁵² *sahasrasāṃkhyān samitān sutān dakṣasya nāradaḥ |*

mokṣam adhyāpayām āsa sāṃkhyajñānam anuttamam | Mbh 1.70.6 |

⁵³ Cf. the *Vāyu Purāṇa* version: Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, trans., *Hindu Myths: a Sourcebook Translated from the Sanskrit* (London, 1975), pp. 46–48.

Vena, which links to the story of Vena's son Pṛthu, who, in a past age, is said to have been the first proper king (Mbh 12.59; Hv 4–6). In the *Harivaṃśa* account Manu's eldest son is Ikṣvāku (the fifth son in the 1.70 account), whose descendants carry the royal line of Ayodhyā. But for the *Mahābhārata* this was in a past age; the Ayodhyā line was interrupted when Rāma died without an heir, long before Vaiśampāyana's recitation, and subsequently Manu's royal heritage was taken on by the Hāstinapura kings and traced through Ilā.⁵⁴ Thus there would have been no need for Ilā or her son Purūravas to wrest kingship from the senior branch.

3. Nahuṣa's eldest son is Yati, but the second son, Yayāti, succeeds (Mbh 1.70.28–29; 1.90.8–11; Hv 22.1–3). In the *Ādiparvan* versions no details are given, but the eldest son's name (meaning 'striver', i.e. an ascetic, a renouncer) suggests a scenario similar to that of Dakṣa's sons, with the firstborn declining the kingship. The *Harivaṃśa* version is explicit:

Yati failed to obtain Kakutstha's daughter Gā, so he sought release and became a hermit; he became *brahman*.

(*Harivaṃśa* 22.2)⁵⁵

4. Yayāti's eldest son is Yadu, but the youngest, Pūru, succeeds. The story is told several times (Mbh 1.70.31–46; 1.79–80; 5.147.3–13; Hv 22.15–43): Yayāti, displeased with all but one of his sons on account of their disobedience, appointed Pūru as king. In one version of the story, the *varṇas* led by the brahmins objected that it contravenes *dharma* to appoint the youngest son if he has elder brothers fit for the role; but Yayāti explained that Pūru was the only suitable son, and the objections were withdrawn (Mbh 1.80.12–23). The elder brothers had effectively opted out of the kingship through their disobedience, and so, when the citizens' objections were withdrawn, Pūru took the kingship uncontested.

⁵⁴ See Brodbeck, 'Solar and Lunar Lines', pp. 134–43.

⁵⁵ *kakutsthakanyām gām nāma na lebhe sa yatis tadā | tenāsau mokṣam āsthāya brahmabhūto 'bhavan muniḥ |* Hv 22.2 |

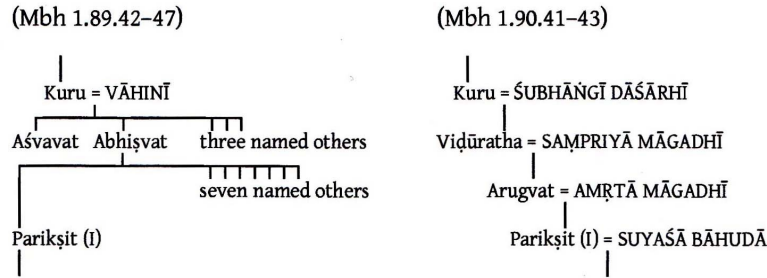
5. Bharata has nine sons, but the line comes through the tenth, Bhumanyu, who is apparently adopted (Mbh 1.89.17–19; see above, in connection with Suhotra's *rājasūya*). It seems that Bharata doubts his paternity of the first nine – an impression that can also be given by Hv 23.50 (n. 37 above) – and doesn't consider himself to have a son until after the adoption. There are passages in the *Mahābhārata* and in the Dharmasūtras and Dharmasāstras that enumerate various kinds of sons and stipulate which are qualified to be heirs and which are not.⁵⁶ These passages are occasionally ambiguous, and do not always agree with each other. Some such passages would seem to suggest that a son of Bharata's wife could have been Bharata's heir whether Bharata sired him or not, and some would seem to suggest that Bharata's adopted son should not have been his heir. This latter suggestion would be consonant with the (ultimately unsuccessful) attempt to insert Bharata's later sired son Vitatha into the line of succession. In any case, such passages do not concern royal families in particular; and as far as the initial exception to primogeniture is concerned, it is clear that there are perceived to be good enough reasons for this exception, and there is no suggestion that Bharata's first nine 'sons' (or Vitatha his eleventh) objected to Bhumanyu's succession.

6. Kuru's eldest son is Aśvavat, but the second son, Abhiṣvat, succeeds (Mbh 1.89.44–46).⁵⁷ The account suggests no explanation for the irregularity. We might imagine Aśvavat's renunciation (he rode away on his horse?), or some circumstance rendering him unsuitable. The 1.90 account inserts an extra generation here (see Figure 4):

⁵⁶ Mbh 1.111.27–30; 13.49; *Mānava Dharmasāstra* 9.141–47, 158–85; *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra* 2.13.5–6; *Gautama Dharmasūtra* 28.32–34; *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra* 2.3.14–35; *Vāsiṣṭha Dharmasūtra* 17.6–39 (Patrick Olivelle, ed. and trans., *Dharmasūtras: the Law Codes of Āpastamba, Gautama, Baudhāyana, and Vasiṣṭha*, Delhi, 2000).

⁵⁷ The situation is similar in the *Harivaṃśa* version: Kuru has four sons, listed as Sudhanvan, Sudhanus, Parīkṣit, and Arimejaya (in that order), but the line comes down from Parīkṣit (Hv 23.109–110).

Figure 4. The generations after Kuru in the *Ādiparvan* genealogies.



Despite the variation in the naming of Kuru's son, the extra generation in the 1.90 account could suggest that Kuru's two eldest sons in the 1.89 version are being interpreted as father and son, thus preserving primogeniture.

7. Pratīpa's eldest son is Devāpi, but the second son, Śaṃtanu, succeeds. This is explained in all the accounts: Devāpi, desiring *dharma*, left home and went wandering (Mbh 1.89.53); Devāpi went to the woods while still young (Mbh 1.90.47); Devāpi was a seer, a teacher of the gods, and cherished Cyavana's son Kṛtaka (*cyavanasya putraḥ kṛtaka iṣṭāś cāsīn mahātmanaḥ* || Hv 23.117cd). Mbh 9.38.31–33 says that Devāpi became a brahmin. At Mbh 5.147.17–26 Dhṛtarāṣṭra says that Devāpi had a skin disease which, to his father's dismay, caused the brahmins, the elders, and the citizens to prohibit his accession (this is stated also at *Bṛhaddevatā* 8.5;⁵⁸ cf. *Ṛgveda* 10.98). In Dhṛtarāṣṭra's account the second son is Bāhlīka, but he had already left the kingdom to live with his in-laws, and he approved Śaṃtanu's accession in his stead (Mbh 5.147.27–28).

8. Śaṃtanu's eldest son is Bhīṣma, but the second son, Citrāṅgada, succeeds, and then, when he dies childless, the

⁵⁸ Arthur A. Macdonell, ed. and trans., *The Bṛhad-Devatā Attributed to Śaunaka: a Summary of the Deities and Myths of the Ṛgveda* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1904).

youngest, Vicitravīrya, succeeds and takes the line. Bhīṣma's non-accession is due to his vow, renouncing kingship and marriagea vow made to allow his father's second marriage, to Satyawatī, whose father stipulated, as a pre-nuptial condition, that her son must be Śaṃtanu's successor (Mbh 1.94).

9. Vicitravīrya's eldest son is Dhṛtarāṣṭra, but his blindness rules him out; Vidura is the son of a servant, which rules him out;⁵⁹ and Pāṇḍu becomes king (Mbh 1.100.11; 1.102.23). But Dhṛtarāṣṭra plays the king to some degree, and wishes for the line not to pass permanently to the junior branch⁶⁰ hence the uncertainty over the succession in the next generation, as resolved by the Pāṇḍava *rājasūya*.

10. Pāṇḍu's eldest son is Yudhiṣṭhira, but after Yudhiṣṭhira, Parikṣit (II), grandson of Arjuna, the third Pāṇḍava, succeeds. Arjuna was effectively wholehearted in his support for his brother Yudhiṣṭhira's cause against their cousins, but signs presaging his takeover were evident, for example, in Pāṇḍu's ambitions for his third son and the celestial response to Arjuna's birth (Mbh 1.114.14–63); in Arjuna's winning of Draupadī (Mbh 1.179); in Arjuna's interrupting Draupadī and Yudhiṣṭhira when they were alone together and then insisting on undertaking the agreed expiation for this misdemeanour (Mbh 1.200–213);⁶¹ in Arjuna's role as the preeminent facilitator of Yudhiṣṭhira's *rājasūya* (Mbh 1.1.84; 3.46.14; 3.79.24–26; 8.49.94); and in Arjuna's visit to his genitor Indra in heaven during the Pāṇḍavas' years in exile (Mbh 3.38–45; 3.161–72) to say nothing of Arjuna's special relationship with Kṛṣṇa. Yudhiṣṭhira and Arjuna exchanged harsh words on occasions (Mbh 8.45–50; 12.7–29), and Yudhiṣṭhira's jealousy was suggested by his comments when Draupadī died (Mbh 17.2.6). Despite the

⁵⁹ It is slightly unclear who is older, Vidura or Pāṇḍu. Mbh 1.90.60, 1.100, 1.102.15, and Hv 23.120 imply the order Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Pāṇḍu, Vidura, but Mbh 1.102.23 implies the order Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Vidura, Pāṇḍu:

*dhṛtarāṣṭras tv acakṣuṣṭvād rājyaṃ na pratyapadyata |
karanāvāc ca viduraḥ pāṇḍur āsīn mahīpatiḥ |* Mbh 1.102.23 |

⁶⁰ See Brodbeck, *Patriline*, pp. 169–70.

⁶¹ See Alf Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking the Mahābhārata: a Reader's Guide to the Education of the Dharma King* (Chicago, 2001), pp. 264–67.

friction between these brothers, however, the deaths of Draupadī's sons (Mbh 10.8.48–58) and the consequent dearth of candidates for Yudhiṣṭhira's heir meant that, once Kṛṣṇa had revived Parikṣit (Mbh 14.65–69), Arjuna's descendants took the line unopposed.

11. Parikṣit's eldest son is Śṛṅgin / Somaśravas / Vaiśampāyana / Lomahaṣaṇa / Lohitākṣa / Āstīka, but the second son, Janamejaya, succeeds.⁶² This is because the eldest son chose to further the line of his mother's father, rather than that of his own father; so there was no contestation of the royal line.

Thus we can see that, within Janamejaya's ancestry, there are no instances of non-primogeniture that would involve the succession being laterally contested, apart from the four instances discussed earlier, which are marked by the unexpected successor's performance of the *rājasūya*. In the case of Aśvavat's non-accession no details are given, but there is no reason to suppose that his succession was contested. Thus the survey in this section of the paper has the effect of confirming the suspicion developed in the previous section.

The survey in this section has the additional effect of confirming the theoretical norm of primogeniture: when there are exceptions to primogeniture Vaiśampāyana almost always gives an explanation, even though in some stretches of the line the exceptions are frequent. In the case of Yayāti's son Pūru the preference for primogeniture, and the need for exceptions to be explained and justified, is clearly stated and attributed to the citizens.

Discussion and Conclusion

On the basis of the above evidence, it seems that one effect – and therefore, presumably, one purpose – of the *rājasūya*, as the

⁶² See Brodbeck, *Patriline*, pp. 217–57; also Simon Brodbeck, 'Janamejaya's Big Brother: New Light on the *Mahābhārata*'s Frame Story' (*Religions of South Asia* 2.2, 2009).

authors of the *Mahābhārata* understood it, was to wrest kingship from the senior lineal branch. Previous scholarly attempts to understand this rite including that of Thite, which in my view is the most potent have neglected the evidence in Yudhiṣṭhira's ancestry. That evidence does not describe the *rājasūya* ritual; rather, it uses the word to mark a type of lineal pattern.

The taking of kingship by a junior branch would require numerical support and, at least in retrospect, discursive justification. With regard to the former, Ṛcepu's, Suhotra's, and Yudhiṣṭhira's *rājasūyas* feature multiple brothers; Ṛcepu's is performed collectively (Mbh 1.89.10). Pāṇḍu's message to Yudhiṣṭhira stresses the obedience of the other Pāṇḍavas (Mbh 2.11.66), and Yudhiṣṭhira's rite is dependent on their conquests (Mbh 2.18–29) and on the support of the *kṣatriyas* en masse (Mbh 2.12.13; 2.22.35–36; 2.42.35–37, 48). Much of the Pāṇḍava narrative (and that of the Dāśarathas in the *Rāmāyaṇa*) stresses the value of fraternal solidarity, as does the very designation 'Pāṇḍava'; and solidarity is also suggested by the repeating -epus and Su-s in the names of the prospering brothers in previous *rājasūya* generations. In Bharata's case, the intervention of the heavenly voice seemingly obviates the need for reinforcements.

With regard to discursive justification, there is brahmin business as standard. Ṛcepu and brothers are 'ritual patrons' (*yajvāno*, Mbh 1.89.8) and 'devoted to *dharma*' (*dharmaparāyaṇāḥ*, Mbh 1.89.8); Bharata is brought up at the brahmin Kaṇva's *āśrama* by Kaṇva's adopted daughter (and his generosity to Kaṇva is noted at Mbh 12.29.44); and Suhotra and brothers have names indicating brahmin sensibilities. The Pāṇḍavas are delivered to Hāstinapura by brahmins in the first place (Mbh 1.1.71–72; 1.117),⁶³ and are careful to enlist a *purohita* early in their lives (Mbh 1.158–74) and to listen to other brahmins along the way. And in the cases of non-

⁶³ *ṛṣibhīś, munayo*, Mbh 1.1.71–72; *maharṣayah, tapasvinaḥ, siddhā, tāpasāḥ, cāraṇasahasrāṇāṃ munināṃ, tāpasān, maharṣigaṇān, maharṣibhyo, jaṭājini maharṣimatam ājñāya maharṣir, cāraṇā guhyakaiḥ saha, ṛṣisiddhagaṇaṃ*, Mbh 1.117.

primogenitive succession where the word *rājasūya* is not used, brahmins are sometimes involved to permit the anomaly as spokesgroup of the people, as at Pūru's succession (Mbh 1.80.12–24) and at Śamtanu's (Mbh 5.147.22, 25).

One puzzling aspect of the *Mahābhārata* data is the mention of some characters' plural *rājasūyas*: Bharata, a hundred *rājasūyas* (*rājasūyaśatena*, Mbh 12.29.42); Māndhātṛ, a hundred (*rājasūyaśatena*, Mbh 12.29.84); Bhagīratha, eight (*aṣṭabhyo rājasūyebhyo*, Mbh 13.106.23). Some hyperbole may be intended; Bharata's thousand *aśvamedhas* and hundred *rājasūyas* are mentioned in one verse and then referred to in the next verse in the singular, as 'Bharata's great rite' (*bharatasya mahat karma*, Mbh 12.29.43). Here one can also draw on Heesterman's analysis of the Vedic *rājasūya*: 'The *rājasūya* seems to have been originally a yearly repeated rite of cosmic regeneration and rebirth',⁶⁴ which would presumably involve one iteration per year throughout the king's reign. We should also recall that junior-branch takeover attempts can be protracted, with many battles.⁶⁵

Perhaps the most troublesome aspect of the interpretation proposed in this paper is that Yudhiṣṭhira's impression of his *rājasūya*, as provided by his advisors, does not match the rite's apparent meaning in his ancestry as later narrated to Janamejaya. (To our knowledge, Yudhiṣṭhira never hears his

⁶⁴ Heesterman, *Royal Consecration*, p. 7; cf. pp. 159, 222–23.

⁶⁵ This is the case with Yudhiṣṭhira's. Cf. Minkowski, 'Interrupted Sacrifice', p. 175, quoted earlier (n. 41); 'Yudhiṣṭhira's *rājasūya*' would normally refer to the Indraprastha ceremonies described in the *Sabhāparvan*, but the Pāṇḍava takeover is only complete when all post-war public relations have been smoothed over. At the beginning of the *Āśvamedhikaparvan*, Vyāsa says:

*rājasūyāśvamedhau ca sarvamedhaṃ ca bhārata |
naramedhaṃ ca nṛpate tvam āhara yudhiṣṭhira | Mbh 14.3.8 |*

'O Yudhiṣṭhira Bhārata, lord of the people! You must offer *rājasūya*, *aśvamedha*, *sarvamedha*, and *naramedha*.' Perhaps Vyāsa means that although Yudhiṣṭhira has performed one of these rites already, he must now go on to perform the others. Alternatively, it might seem that some aspect or iteration of Yudhiṣṭhira's *rājasūya* business is still pending at this point; and if so, then, in the end, he could be described as a performer of *rājasūyas* plural. Yudhiṣṭhira's *aśvamedha* differs from his *rājasūya* in that the heir has changed, and is now not his son; so if the later rite were also another *rājasūya*, it would effectively be performed for Arjuna.

own ancestry in full; if he had, he might have worked this out himself.)

Here we might wonder how much ancient Indian kings are supposed to have known about the rituals they performed. Knowing Yudhiṣṭhira, we would probably not expect him to have agreed to a lineal takeover attempt. He would surely have decided against the *rājasūya* even had he known that Kṛṣṇa would behead Śiśupāla at it (Mbh 2.33–42)! But what did he know? In some ways, the *Mahābhārata* is the story of the gap between what is happening and Yudhiṣṭhira's appreciation of what is happening. In the *Mahābhārata* narrative, as presented through previous nested listeners the *ṛṣis* (Mbh 1.1–Hv 118), Śaunaka the brahmin (Mbh 1.4–Hv 118), and Janamejaya (Mbh 1.55–Hv 113.82), it seems that the royal characters do not know any more about the old rituals than they are told, perform them as suggested by their advisors, receive the results they were told to expect, but within that view them as more or less interchangeable. While the Pāṇḍavas are in exile Duryodhana wants to perform a *rājasūya*, but he is dissuaded by his ministers and performs a *vaiṣṇava* ritual instead (Mbh 3.241–43); and a comparable example is found in the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s *Uttarakāṇḍa*, where Rāma, recently returned from exile, wants to perform a *rājasūya* but is dissuaded by Bharata and persuaded to resolve upon an *aśvamedha* instead (Rām 7.74–81). If the specific meaning of the *rājasūya* that I have proposed was known to (some of) the *Mahābhārata*'s early audiences, then such scenes might be expected to have been rather ironic, because the performance of a *rājasūya* by an elder brother or senior-line cousin would be a contradiction in terms, and because in both of these cases the character who suggests performing a *rājasūya* has been the victim of an attempted *rājasūya* himself. In Rāma's case there is the additional irony that Bharata, the dissuader, was also whether he thinks of himself in these terms or not the refuser of the *rājasūya* proposed by his mother.

If we accept the proposed interpretation (as I think we must), it is only by hypothesising ritual ignorance on the part of *kṣatriya* characters within the text that we can explain the lack

of discord between the two sets of cousins at Yudhiṣṭhira's *rājasūya*. Van Buitenen stresses that the occasion was one of patrilineal solidarity:

Yudhiṣṭhira is not in competition with Hāstinapura. Nor as yet are the Kauravas in rivalry with Indraprastha. ... the Kauravas are charged with responsibilities [at the *rājasūya* ritual] and 'stride like masters.' Yudhiṣṭhira's consecration therefore can only be described as a family affair: The family as a whole will be elevated to the level of the suzerain dynasty.⁶⁶

So it might seem. But after the Indraprastha ceremony a truth dawns upon Duryodhana (Mbh 2.43–50), and at the second dice match the full stake is made explicit: the winner will get the whole kingdom, and the loser and his brothers will be banished (Mbh 2.67.9–13).

In my view, Thite was right to explain the 'antipathy to the *rājasūya*' in terms of violence between relatives. Junior-branch takeover attempts, whether successful or not, would be disruptive, and since we can imagine rival dynasties ready to attack at the first sign of weakness, such attempts might jeopardise dynastic survival; to paraphrase Jesus of Nazareth (*Gospel According to Matthew* 12.25) and Abraham Lincoln, a house divided against itself might well not stand. At the very least, such a manoeuvre would be a dangerous precedent to celebrate. We can imagine that if 'the *rājasūya*' was to remain in the language and the royal repertoire, its application beyond the meaning of 'junior-branch lineal takeover' might have facilitated dynastic survival (and thus, incidentally, the continued employment of the dynasty's staff, including its ritual advisors and its archivists).

Such multivalency would go some way towards explaining the difficulty that scholars have had in identifying the *rājasūya*'s lineal significance. But at the same time, the presence within the text of multiple interpretations of the rite

⁶⁶ Van Buitenen, *Mahābhārata* vol. 2, pp. 19–20; cf. p. 28.

should discourage the idea that, for example, Yudhiṣṭhira does not know the *real* or *original* meaning of the *rājasūya*. Although most of the examples I have discussed are from Yudhiṣṭhira's distant ancestry, the varying interpretations of the *rājasūya* in the *Mahābhārata* are clear and present simultaneously within Ugraśravas's narration. If we want to suppose that an old meaning has been lost or obscured, we will have to admit that this has been done so unsuccessfully that the supposition itself is of dubious value. Moreover, the varying interpretations of the *rājasūya* in the *Mahābhārata* are *for* Ugraśravas's narration; on the basis of the data surveyed in this paper, there is no reason to think that the meaning of the *rājasūya* as a junior-branch lineal takeover would necessarily be applicable in other texts, or in real ancient Indian life.

Nonetheless, to consolidate the findings of this paper, it would be advantageous to explore the available genealogical details of the other *rājasūya* performers mentioned in the *Mahābhārata* (Hariścandra, Māndhātṛ, Bhagīratha, Bhīma of Vidarbha, Soma, Varuṇa, Pṛthu, and the Kāśyapa brahmin; see Table 1), and also of those mentioned as such only in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (Daśaratha and Meghanāda; see n. 16 above). Although such explorations are not included here (because they would swell the paper enormously), I have made preliminary studies of many of those characters, and I hope to develop them for presentation elsewhere.⁶⁷ In several cases the details are scanty in comparison with those in Vaiśampāyana's accounts of Janamejaya's ancestors, and at first glance there may be no

⁶⁷ On Hariścandra, who in the *Mahābhārata* is presented as the paradigmatic *rājasūya* performer, see Simon Brodbeck, 'Triśaṅku, Hariścandra, and the *Rājasūya*' (in Simon Brodbeck, Adam Bowles, and Alf Hiltebeitel, eds, *Proceedings of the 15th World Sanskrit Conference, Delhi, 2012: Epics and Purāṇas Panels*, Delhi, forthcoming). In the *Harivaṃśa* Hariścandra is the son of Satyavrata Triśaṅku, whose non-primogenitive ambition can be glimpsed by interpreting the *bhāryā* and the *para* of Hv 9.89cd (*yena bhāryā hṛtā pūrvam kṛtodvāhā parasya vai* | 'who abducted a woman already led off to another') as, respectively, the Earth and Satyavrata Triśaṅku's elder brother. Regarding Pṛthu: Pṛthu's position as a younger brother is clear at Mbh 12.59 and Hv 5; the brahmins kill Pṛthu's wicked father King Vena, banish Pṛthu's dark and unrefined elder brother Niśāda, and establish Pṛthu as the paradigmatically dharmic king.

suggestion that the word *rājasūya* could indicate a junior-branch takeover. However, as far as I have explored, the details are always compatible with one; and in many cases the notion that there was one can make new and good sense of otherwise obscure narratives.

Regarding the interpretation of the *Mahābhārata* as a whole, we must wonder why this particular meaning of the *rājasūya* is contained in this particular text. The question can be connected to the question of why the *rājasūya* was made such a prominent part of the *Mahābhārata* (to the extent that the *Sabhāparvan* is modelled upon it). After all, most of the plot developments in the *Sabhāparvan* could have taken place without the Pāṇḍavas hosting a *rājasūya*. Yet the *Mahābhārata*'s overriding concerns are the patriline's tendency to remain singular despite the plurality of brothers, and the mechanics of how this is achieved. These concerns are highlighted by the discrepancy between the genealogy at Mbh 1.70 and 89, which mentions several sons per generation, and the parallel prose genealogy at Mbh 1.90, which mentions only one son per generation. In the generations following Bhīṣma's renunciation, the drive towards singularity occasions great bloodshed when the senior branch is found wanting (and the fratricidal nature of the Pāṇḍava coup is underlined by the story of Karṇa).⁶⁸ Although the Pāṇḍavas are ostensibly in the right, and their lineal claim is upheld by destiny and divine fiat, the tale stands as a cautionary tale for those who would lead a challenge against a senior branch. Yudhiṣṭhira, as if by way of reward for performing a *rājasūya*, immediately loses the line to his younger brother, and there is no remedy for his misery after the war; by implication, if the senior branch is not safe, nor is the head of the junior branch.

⁶⁸ The Kurukṣetra war can be seen to represent a wholesale destruction of senior branches, involving as it does the deaths of Bhīṣma (Vicitravīrya's elder brother), Droṇa (who may be a descendant of Bharata's elder brother; see n. 38 above), Karṇa (Yudhiṣṭhira's elder brother), Duryodhana *et al.* (sons of Pāṇḍu's elder brother), Prativindhya (son of Arjuna's elder brother), and, via the *Bhagavadgītā* (see Dennis Hudson, 'Arjuna's Sin: Thoughts on the *Bhagavadgītā* in its Epic Context', *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 4.3, 1996, pp. 70–72, 80–82), the Yādavas (descendants of Pūru's elder brother).

Junior-branch lineal takeover must be discouraged, even if it may sometimes be necessary. These are central concerns of the *Mahābhārata*; and it thus fits that this text would understand the *rājasūya*, the most nominally royal of rites, in the way it does.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ The *Mahābhārata*'s featuring of the *rājasūya* could be connected to its reputation: 'the *Great Bhārata*, as the *Great Bhārata*, is not generally read in the home by orthodox Hindu people; it is read in public settings by groups, but not by individuals or families in their homes. The *Great Bhārata* as a whole is regarded as an unsettling and inauspicious text' (James L. Fitzgerald, 'The Great Epic of India as Religious Rhetoric: a Fresh Look at the *Mahābhārata*', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 51.4, 1983, p. 626). Cf. David Shulman, 'Toward a Historical Poetics of the Sanskrit Epics' (in *The Wisdom of Poets: Studies in Tamil, Telugu, and Sanskrit*, Delhi, 2001; first published in 1991 in the *International Folklore Review*), p. 29; also John Brockington, *The Sanskrit Epics* (Leiden, 1998), p. 1. This was discussed in July 2009 on the email list of the Religions in South Asia (RISA) section of the American Academy of Religion. Contributors shared attitudes and anecdotes they had heard from their contacts in India. The recurring emphasis was upon it being dangerous to keep the whole *Mahābhārata* at home. I have got away with it so far.