Though his insertion of my name into old poems, dramatic comments, and likening of me to the accusers of Socrates are perhaps a bit excessive in any case, I very much regret giving Prof. Dr. von Hinüber the impression that his response to my original paper made me angry. I actually felt both fortunate and honored that such a great scholar as he, whom I have always admired, would respond to my work, acknowledging at least that the issue is worth discussing. I had thought to say more, but ended up with just “we owe him our gratitude for taking up the issue,” though I can say this was intended in earnest. Most scholars, of course, have not taken up the issue, and have continued their long custom of talking about the Buddha and his teachings fancy free. I wonder whom they imagine they are talking about, or how they might try to specify it? Though I did very much appreciate von Hinüber’s response, I see this as an important point, so I do not think he should be surprised that I would defend it as well as I am able. If my arguments seemed forceful, I am sorry to say, it just reflects the fact that his were very weak. I do not understand why he did not come over to the new position, which would have made the ordeal unnecessary. It is still my hope that he will reconsider; I do not think that we are far apart on any matter of substance. My response was also not just intended for von Hinüber: Other scholars have cited his response as “balanced,” or as having “refuted” my view, so I thought it might help to walk them through it. Scholars generally prefer to extend their perspectives than to revise them, to build on extra rooms rather than rebuild what they already have. Sometimes, though, old structures turn out to be unstable and need to be replaced.

Von Hinüber says that I cite de Jong as a skeptic on the Buddha’s historicity. No, I do not: I put both de Jong and Lamotte in the category of scholars who insisted on the Buddha’s historicity while admitting that...
they had no evidence for or about him. My original paper focused mainly on highlighting the incoherence of this position, which remains common in scholarship. Readers should note that von Hinüber misrepresents what I say several other times passim.

Von Hinüber repeatedly expresses frustration and confusion about why I mainly focus on secondary sources. The reason is simple: Prior to his own 2019 response, no significant scholar ever claimed that anything in the primary texts shows the Buddha’s historicity. Since I have also not found anything that seems to do so, my approach has just been to respond to the arguments that have been made, such as they are.

The issue of whether ancient Indians practiced history is too broad to discuss here, except to comment that von Hinüber’s examples do not seem to represent historical thought during the period in question.

Von Hinüber says that it is a pity that I do not state my own views, which is fair. It is not my intention to be a prásaṅgika here, I just have not been able to think of anything that has seemed good or strong enough to be worth mentioning. My view at this point is that our sources do not carry usable information on how Buddhism emerged. There are any number of possibilities. Buddhism could have emerged as an attempt to institutionalize a strand of śramaṇa tradition that coalesced around tree and yakṣa sites. It may have grown out of preaching traditions attributing ideas to a legendary Gautama, much as Brahmanical, Jain, and Hindu authors have long introduced new teachings by putting them in the mouths of legendary sages (including other “Gautamas”). It could have begun as an offshoot of, or attempt to compete with, Jainism, or the two traditions may be related to a common ancestor, such as perhaps a tradition focused on Pārśva. One could think of possibilities all day without being able to come up with anything substantial.

For Buddhism, we cannot go any further back than the mid-third century BCE, when the tradition emerges as a well formed, imperially sponsored religion focused on an omniscient being and his revealed methods for magically manipulating one’s place in an elaborate, supernatural cosmos. We should not pretend to know how it developed before this. Especially, we should avoid projecting modern ideas that we may find compelling, or that may stand at the core of some of our own religious beliefs, onto the tradition’s prehistory as its original focus. The monarch of these,
of course, is the ineffable “mystical experience” that von Hinüber and others so confidently identify, against the texts, and as if by some means of historical mindreading, as the content of the Buddha’s enlightenment. This non-scholarly, perennialist idea has had a badly distorting effect on the field for decades, making it very difficult for scholars to think about the early tradition in a realistic way.

I will close with a few comments on some textual issues that came up in our discussion, though these will be of interest mainly to specialists. First, in Zhen Liu’s transcription, the Dīrghāgama reads karmāntān anusamyo- followed by a lacuna (2008: 122 in the version I have, kindly sent by the author). Liu completes the second word as anusamyo, but I suggest that it “should be anusamyān, or a close equivalent.” Von Hinüber argues that Liu is correct. Anu sam √ṣanj, however, seems to be unattested in Sanskrit or Pali; certainly it is not found in any of the main dictionaries. Anu sam √ṣa, however, is not only one of the small number of known verbs that have anu and sam combined as prefixes, but, as I pointed out, also one of the small handful of verbs that are used with karmāntān/kamante in canonical texts. These should be sufficient grounds for emending against a single vowel in a very faulty manuscript. Von Hinüber argues that the second occurrence of anusamyān that I cite from Gnoli’s edition of the SBV (1977–1978: 1.190) is a misprint and should be anusamyāne: not a participle, but a verbal noun in the locative, on the grounds that the Tibetan translation has gzigs pa na (pa being a nominalizing particle, and na being a locative suffix). To borrow his term, though, this is a bit āmapakva: Tibetan translations render Sanskrit present participles in a number of ways, including by the use of na, with or without a nominalizing particle, for all cases; gzigs pa na in fact supports anusamyān perfectly well. Though it is not publicly available, Charles DiSimone has kindly checked the manuscript of the SBV and informs me that it actually reads karmāntān anusamyāyana, clearly an error (see appendix). Gnoli’s silent emendation to anusamyān, though of course not certain, is supported by the Tibetan and requires just the removal of a single akṣara. Von Hinüber unfortunately ignores the other occurrence of karmāntān anusamyān from the SBV that I cite, mistaking Gnoli’s reconstruction anusamgamyā for the manuscript reading (1977–1978: 1.107). Gnoli reports in a note that the manuscript reads anusamyāṃ
and DiSimone confirms this. Von Hinüber argues that “Pāli anusaṇṇāyamāno involves a movement and thus does not fit well with the following nisanno [sic, text reads ‘nisinno,’ ‘seated’],” but the fit would be no worse than saying, for example, in English, “While running, I stopped for a break.” If we accept anusamyān for at least the passage on page 1.107 of Gnoli’s edition, as we probably must, what is good for the Sanskrit goose should be good for the Pali gander. Though von Hinüber claims that I switch from saying that the Pali “may be corrupt” to saying that it “is corrupt” (his emphasis), if one reads my full sentence, one will see that I do not. My point all along has just been that the reading is uncertain and therefore unsuitable as the foundation for any argument. It may also be helpful to note that, at M 3.8 and Vin 3.43, the kammantas take place in a city rather than a field.

I made a passing suggestion that the commentary on the Mahāsaccakasutta’s pitu sakkassa kammante (M 1.246 and Ps 2.290–291) “likely [drew] on a version of the well-known story of King Janaka discovering the infant Sītā while plowing with a golden plow.” Rejecting this possibility, von Hinüber comments that “the scene as described in [the Vālmiki] Rāmāyaṇa is just ordinary field work,” and “a singular event,” rather than a “regularly returning” ceremony. He unfortunately seems not to have noticed the text’s first passage on Sītā’s discovery, where Janaka says, with Robert Goldman’s translation:

\[
\text{atha me kṛṣataḥ kṣetram lāṅgalād utthitā mama} / \\
\text{kṣetraṃ śodhayatā labdhvā nāmnā sīteti viśrutā} //
\]

Now one time, as I was plowing a field, a girl sprang up behind my plow. I found her as I was clearing the field, and she is thus known by the name Sītā, furrow (VR 1.65.14, trans. Goldmann ([1984] 1990)).

Goldman translates śodhayatā in pāda c as “as I was clearing,” but it is more a word for ritual purification. Plowing is also not done to clear fields, but to make them more fertile. Clarifying things quite a bit, Michael Jones has recently very nicely linked this passage to the Kṛṣisūkta of the Śaunaka recension of the Atharvavedasamhitā, addressed to Sūī as the deified furrow, the third verse of which reads, with his translation:

\[
lāṅgalam pavirravat susīmaṃ somasāsāram // \\
\text{ūd īd vapatu gām āviṃ prasthāvad rathavāhanamī pībarin ca} \\
\text{prapharvyām} //
\]
Let the spear-headed plow, with strap and handle well set, toss up a cow, a sheep, a chariot-cart with a platform, and a lovely young lady (AVŚ 3.17, trans. Jones 2017).

Jones points out that the late Vedic Kauśikasūtra, which provides ritual instructions for the sūkta, prescribes its recitation in a ritual to be performed at the first plowing of the year (2017: 31, 61). We thus have a “lovely young lady,” enjoined to emerge from a furrow, in a hymn addressed to Sītā, in a Vedic samhitā prescribed for use in an annual plowing ritual. The Vālmīki’s story, though but a śloka in length, seems clearly to envision such a ritual, with the hymn’s promise of a pībarī prapharvī emerging from the furrow coming true.

Von Hinüber also repeats several times that, in the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa and its commentaries, and also the version of the story in the Viṣṇu-purāṇa, the plow is not gold: “This feature seems to be absent from the Sītā myth”; “There is no ‘gold’ on the plough here”; “no golden plough is in sight anywhere”; “again no gold in sight, let alone a golden plough.” The plow, however, is gold in many versions of the story (see, e.g., Dvivedi and Paraba [1891] 1983: 7.104, Chhawchharia 2010: 8.37, Wentworth 2011: 8, Growse 1883: 91, Przyluski 1939: 293). There are other royal golden-plow stories as well: In the Vanaparvan of the Mahābhārata, Duryodhana prepares the ground for a sacrifice using a golden plow (MB 3.241.26–3.242.24); in the Vāmana Purāṇa, Kuru uses one to establish Kuruksetra (Gupta 1967: 23.23–35); in the Padma Purāṇa, Rāma uses one to prepare the ground for an Aśvamedha (5.9.26). Though it seems quite possible that the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa’s story of Sītā’s discovery stands at the historical root of all these, as it surely does of other stories of children being discovered by plowing (e.g., Gupta 1971: 2.41, Śrīskandamahāpurāṇam, ed. Śrīkṛṣṇadāsa 1986–1989: 2.1.3, Skandapurāṇa, ed. Adriaensen, Bakker, and Isaacson 1998: Adhy. 20), it would probably be better to say that the Pali story likely drew on, and belongs to, this nexus. It is also possible that the story has some basis in actual practice, on which see mainly Armstrong 1943.

I would like to follow Prof. Dr. von Hinüber in ending on a positive note and thank him for both of his highly engaging responses. Though we may disagree on this issue, I very much appreciate the opportunity to have had this conversation with him. I also thank Charles DiSimone for checking the SBV manuscript readings.
Appendix: *Saṅghabhedavastu* Readings, provided by Charles DiSimone


**Abbreviations**

AVŚ  
*Majjhimanikāya*  
MB  
*Mahābhārata*, Critical Edition  
Ps  
*Papañcasūdanī*  
SBV  
*Saṅghabhedavastu*  
Vin  
*Vinaya*  
VR  
*Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, Critical Edition

**References**


