Evaluation and classification of intertextual elements in a philosophical Jaina Sanskrit work

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Abstract: In this article I treat the phenomena of quotation and re-use of texts as forms of literal correspondence that appear between texts. I conceive these literal correspondences as specific forms of intertextual elements and will, in the first part of the article, touch upon a concept of intertextuality that is appropriate for the philological analysis of Sanskrit works. In the second part, I propose parameters for the evaluation of text passages with literal correspondence and a systematic set for the classification of text passages with high literal correspondence, i.e. quotations and paraphrases. The categories of this set were developed by Ernst Steinkellner for the constitution of texts from the Buddhist pramāṇa-Tradition, which I used and extended in my analysis of the composition structure of two extracts from Vidyānandin’s Satyāśāsanaparīkṣā. In the last part of the article, I discuss some examples for the interpretation of intertextual elements from the two extracts of this work.

1. Intertextuality

1.1. Usages of the term in literary studies

In literary studies today, the phenomena of quotation and re-use of texts are often studied within the general framework of “intertextuality”. This term has many and, at times, fiercely contested usages, but serves well to address in general the relations a text may have to other texts:

“In the widest sense, intertextuality covers all relations of a text to other literary and non-literary texts.”

After Julia Kristeva coined the term in the late 1960s, reflections on and research into intertextuality have been carried out by two groups of literary theorists. The first group of scholars use the term to describe a central concept of a literary theory with a philosophical orientation, whereas the second group uses the term to address particular methods of text analysis:

“… two concepts compete with each other: the all-comprehensive poststructuralist modell,
where every text manifests as a part of an universal intertext, which determines all aspects of an individual text, and the more concise structuralistic and hermeneutical modell, where the notion of intertextuality is confined to cognizant, intended and marked relations between a text and other actual texts or groups of texts.”

The first group of scholars have been characterized as “progressive intertextualists, … linguists, semioticans, philosophers and sociologists” (Plett 1991: 4). An example for their ideas, is Kristeva’s notion that intertextuality is a characteristic feature of every text:

“... any text is a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another”.

With the awareness of the various references to other texts, the reader’s competence for understanding increases. The “pleasure of the text” (Barthes) unfolds even more, if not only references to literary texts are apprehended, but also to non-literary texts, i.e., works of art, social and historical events, etc. With regard to the theory of text interpretation, the reader’s ability to establish connections between texts is highly emphasized and his understanding of a text is even estimated as superseding that of the author. The notion that a critic may be able to reconstruct the author’s intention and the text’s “stable meaning” (see Allen 2011, pp. 59 and 94) is given up. Interesting is what we, the readers, are able to make out of a text.

The concepts of this literary theory have been critized, e.g., as being against logic, inconceivable and politically motivated. Far from sharing the revolutionary attitude of the first group of scholars, a second group of “conventional literary scholars” (Plett 1991: 4), “tried … to make the concept of intertextuality more operational” (Mai 1991: 45) and included it in their methods for textual analysis. In contrast to the initial notion of intertextuality, the term is no longer understood as a characteristic feature of every text, but as a specific feature of particular texts or types of texts. An example for this shift is the definition of the term by Gérad Genette, one of the most influential of the “conservative intertextualists” (Plett, p. 4):

“For my part, I define [intertextuality] … as a relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts; that is … as the actual presence of one text within another. In its most explicit and literal form, it is the traditional practise of quoting (with quotation marks,
with or without specific references). In another less explicit and canonical form it is the prac-
tise of plagiarism …, which is an undeclared but still literal borrowing. Again, in still less ex-
explicit and less literal guise it is the practise of allusion …"9

With a refocussing like this, intertextuality becomes a general term for all literary devices
by which relations between a literal text and individual prior texts or groups of prior texts
are established. Research into intertextuality examines the structural elements of these
devices and the various forms of meaning they convey.10

The reduction of the scope of intertextuality by the second group of scholars has been
critized, on the one hand, as a “deplorable” and “futile academic attempt to tame the indo-
mitable”.11 On the other hand it is rejected because it would provide nothing else than a
new heading for classical subjects of literary scholarship, which are addressed by “notions
like sources and influence, quotation and allusion, parody and travesty, imitation, trans-
lation and adaption, etc.”12 I think that the advantages of intertextual analysis, in the sense
of the second group of scholars sketched above, need in fact to be worked out more
clearly in the field of Sankrit studies.13 I hope to contribute to this effort in part two of this
article, where I apply terms developed in the intertextuality debate to the analysis of a
philosophical Jaina Sanskrit work because of two reasons: (1) The notion of intertextual
elements provides a convenient generic term for the various forms of literal
correspondences between text passages of different works which can otherwise only be
expressed by a bundle of terms like sources, quotations, borrowing, parallels, re-use of
texts, etc. (2) Literary scholars, who conceive intertextuality as a method of text analysis,
developed systematic sets for the description of intertextual elements and the related phe-
nomena, which are sometimes inspirational and sometimes highly useful for the the
detection and description of similar phenomena in Sankrit works.

1.2. Examples for the usage of the term intertextuality in Indological studies

The examination of relations between texts is, of course, an integral part of the field. Me-
thodological reflections on this examination in the context of the intertextuality debate are
rare. Ramanujan (1989) uses the term to subsume different forms of “reflexivity” that
occur between “Indian literary texts” (pp. 189f.) and when he describes the “web of Indian allusion”, which is instantiated in the “vocabulary of Indian literatures” and “part of common parlance” (p. 200). The latter notion is addressed also by Brückner (1994: 165), who conceives “mythical, religious and aesthetic dimensions in Hindu culture” as “intertextual dimensions” and demonstrates their impact on the conceptual framework of a Kannada novel. Also Michaels (2010: 148) identifies “intertextual dimensions” for Newar ritual handbooks, emphasizing that intextuality “frames the rituals” and opens up “various windows—to the Vedic context, the ritual practise, forms of recitation, the participants and audiences”. The consideration of non-literary texts for the analysis of literary texts also makes sense for Freeman (2003: 488), who understands the “gestural ‘speech’” of kathakali as “performative intertextuality”.

A further example for the considering of genuine literary practises in the context of intertextuality are Olivelle’s two short studies in “Śāstric Intertextuality”. Olivelle (2004: 282-288) demonstrates the “interconnection between Manu and the Arthaśāstra at the level of both text and vocabulary” by drawing attention to “verbal correspondences between the texts” and to their common use of an “unusual vocabulary” and of “unique technical terms”. Olivelle further studies the “textual and thematic dependence of the Mānava Dharmāśāstra on the Gautama Dharmasūtra” (2011: 261) under the heading of intertextuality.

Reflections on the theoretical background of intertextuality and its possible impact on the study of influences on and sources for Sanskrit works belonging to a particular genre are found in the writings of Bailey (1999, 2011), Taylor (2007, 2011) and Bronner (2005, 2010). Bailey (1999: 181-184) assumes a “Purānic universe of discourse”, which is manifested through “oral and written transmission” of texts “showing a very high degree of intertextuality”, i.e., their “dependence on other texts for their content, the style of composition, the plots of their individual parts”, etc. For Bailey, the study of intertextuality is not limited “to the act of tracing direct quotes and allusions in a particular texts back to what are postulated as earlier texts” but “makes fullest sense” only when a text is “considered as a confabulation of different materials out of which a new meaning is created,
one differing from the meaning of its individual components”.

Taylor (2007: 135-141) is also of the opinion that “intertextuality is not just concerned with sources and influences”. He shows “how the narrative units and verses found in Pūrṇabhadras Pañcatantra fit into a network of other normative texts”, including also “visual-arts resources and vernacular ‘texts’ from the oral tradition”. Taylor suggests that these “nodes in an intertextual network … form a single intertext, the various manifestations of which reinforce and sustain one another”. By the preservation and perpetuation in multiple sources, individual stories would acquire a “patina of credibility”, which, in turn, “exerts a truth-effect on the discourse. The more widespread and frequently encountered a narrative unit, the ‘truer’ it appears to be”.

Like Bailey and Taylor, Bronner has the acute awareness that studies in intertextuality need to be more than a “hunt for specific sources”.¹⁵ His contribution is, e.g., not only to show that Appayya Dīksita in his Kuvalayānanda frequently incorporates “textual bits”, i.e., “direct quotes”, “adaptions” and “close adaptions”, from various other works of the Alamkāraśāstra. Bronner also interprets one aspect of this “intertextual practise” as a “method of constant referentiality”, which forces an expert audience “to search for and activate an intertext” (2005: 61-64).

The question pursued by Bailey, Taylor and Bronner, i.e., the question how the discursive function of a text is enhanced by reference to other texts (see Taylor 2007: 135), is beyond the scope of this article and will be only touched upon in part three. My main concern is what Olivelle calls the “verbal correspondences between the texts”. Caillat, in her reaction to Olivelle’s first study in Śāstric intertextuality, makes clear that a central topic of Indological studies is addressed here as, e.g., “scholars who have analysed the Jain scriptures, especially the Śvetāmbara canon, have more than once shown how the texts are interrelated and how developments have been borrowed from, and grafted onto another”.¹⁶ My contribution here is to show how exactly – and to what extent – a Digambara philosophical author embeds textual material, which is also reflected in other sources.

(to be continued)
Abbreviations and Bibliography


1 My translation of Martinez 2007: 357: “Im weitesten Sinne umfasst ‘I.[ntertextualität]’ alle Bezüge eines Textes zu anderen lit.[erarischen] und nichtlit.[erarischen] Texten.” Cf. also Mai 1991: 51: “As its least presumptuous, the word ‘intertextuality’ merely indicates that one text refers to or is present in another.”


4 “[A] text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused, and that place is the reader, not … the author.” From Barthes famous piece „Death of the Author“ cited in Allen 2011: 73.

5 See Irwin's polemic article (2004), especially p. 230, and Allen 2011: 44: “... the concept of intertextuality is meant to designate a kind of language, which … is against, beyond and resistant to (mono)logic.”

6 “... the intimate knowledge of this intertextual discourse is limited to relatively few elitist circles. Presumably this is due to its basically philosophical orientation, but esoteric terminology also plays a role.” (Plett 1991: 4)

7 “Barthes and Kristeva, in accord with Marxist principles, oppose the author as acting as the capitalist, supplying meaning to the consumers-readers.” (Irwin 2004: 234). For a more balanced description of the historical background see Allen 2011:30-24.

8 See Pfister 1985: 14f.: “Entscheidend eingeengt wird das Konzept der Intertextualität jedoch dort, wo es nicht mehr einen allgemeinen, immer gegebenen Teilaspekt poetischer oder literarischer Textualität bezeichnet, sondern eine besondere Eigenschaft bestimmter literarischer Texte oder Textsorten.”

9 Genette 1997: 1f. Genette understands intertextuality as one of five hyponyms of “transtextuality”, i.e. “all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts.” (p. 1) The other four hyponyms are paratextuality … <vielleicht unten verwenden, sonst hier kurz ausführen>

10 “In this structuralist version of intertextuality the author retains authority over his text, the unity and autonomy of the text remains intact, and the reader does not get lost in a labyrinthine network of possible references but realizes the author’s intention by decoding the signals and markers inscribed in the text.” (Pfister 1991: 210)

11 See Mai 1991: 45 and Pfister's (1991: 211) hypothetical objection. Mai argues that the two concepts of intertextuality are contradictory and can not be reconciled (see especially p. 51). He, writing on the verge of the digital revolution, envisions the internet's hypertext technology as an apt practical application of the initial concept (pp. 49-51). Pfister, on the other hand, attempts to reconcile the two concepts by what he calls a scaling of intertextuality (“Skalierung der Intertextualität”). He proposes six criteria to evaluate
the intensity of intertextual references in an individual text (Pfister 1985: 25-30).

12 Pfister 1985: 15 my translation. See also Irwin 2004: 229: “At its best, intertextual interpretation is a liberating, empowering tool for social change. At its worst, intertextuality becomes fashionable jargon for traditional notions such as allusion and source study.”

13 See the statement of a reviewer cited in Bailey 1999: 182: “... what is the difference between ‘intertextuality’ as an analytical method and the traditional methods (e.g. find quotations, compare version of myths, collate verbal parallels, compare literary genres like hymns, śravanaphalas, etc)?” See also Bronner 2010: 259: “The problem … is that between the hunt for specific sources and the claim that every works reverberates with endless echoes, the notion of intertextuality has had relatively little power to explain why texts behave the way they do.”

14 We find “very little that is not found elsewhere. That is, in the Purāṇas we find evidence of potential intertexts everywhere we look” (Bailey 1999: 186).

15 See Bronner 2010: 259 cited n. 13 above.

16 Caillat 2003: 1. Caillat's contribution in this article is to show how Jaina authors in the composition of tracts on death and the preparation for death “shared a common heritage of floating stanzas and padas, which, in turn, could give rise to number of new developments, the text remaining open.” (p. 3)