With this book, originally submitted as a habilitation thesis to the University of Vienna, Eltschinger takes the self-contained and specialized study of Dharmakīrti in an entirely new direction, placing Dharmakīrti’s works strongly within its socio-historical context. It consists of “four studies which, though originally published as independent essays, have been conceived as chapters of an organic book dedicated to the socio-historic context and the dogmatic foundations of early Indian Buddhist epistemology” (p. ix). While the four studies still retain their original character and deal with widely different materials and subjects, the overall combination of these studies into a single volume works well in engaging the reader with the central topic addressed from necessarily varying perspectives, many of which should be of relevance also to non-Dharmakīrtian scholars. The book merits as such a broad readership.

The four chapters of the book are prefaced by an introduction in which the book’s central research topic is presented: the apologetic dimensions of early Buddhist philosophy. It opens with a simple question, “How seriously should we take Dharmakīrti’s Buddhist affiliation?” (p. 1). Tracing the history of Dharmakīrtian scholarship in the twentieth century Eltschinger identifies a major break in the early eighties, which moved from an interest in Dharmakīrti’s philosophical thought to an “interest in the dogmatic and soteriological dimensions of Buddhist epistemology” (p. 3) but without venturing into the vexed question how Dharmakīrti’s thought should be understood against the backdrop of its socio-historical context. It is this that the book under review proposes to do. Outlining his major hypothesis, Eltschinger introduces some of the key themes of the book: “I believe that the socio-historical matrix (religious pluralism, Brahmanical hostility, competition for patronage), the identity of the opponents (rival salvational systems with strong apologetical concerns expressing themselves through linguistic and epistemological theory), the doctrinal foundations and the issues at stake call for a description of Buddhist epistemology as an apologetical enterprise” (p. 4). Identifying this epistemology as apologetics, in short the rational defense of the Buddhist faith, should not in any way “threaten the claim that these intellectuals were genuine philosophers” (pp. 5–6). It seems telling about the state of Dharmakīrtian scholarship that
Eltschinger enters an apologetic mode to defend his position of understanding Buddhist epistemology as apologetics.

Chapter 1 (Apocalypticism, Heresy and Philosophy) starts with a topic that at first sight may come as a surprise: “the evolution of the Brahmanical and Buddhist apocalyptic prophecies found in texts that date from the second to the sixth century CE” (p. 36). One reason for dealing with Brahmanical apocalypticism, which as Veltschinger argues develops from a view of the kaliyuga characterized by the presence of foreigners (mleccha) to one whose main feature is heresy and heretics (pāṣaṇḍa, pāṣaṇḍin), is that “this new apocalyptic concern with Buddhism and Jainism can be seen as one part of the ideological and rhetorical background against which the Brahmanical philosopher Kumārila Bhaṭṭa (sixth century) turned the ritualistic Mimāṃsā into the most uncompromising anti-Buddhist philosophical system ever created in ancient India” (p. 37). The apocalyptic eschatologies of the Gupta age attest to the growing hostility of Brahmanical communities towards Buddhism, which may have led schools such as Nyāya and Mimāṃsā to turn their attention towards Buddhism, and it is the criticism of these Brahmanical schools that formed one factor that at least partly explains “why the Buddhist epistemologists changed their habits and the meaning of Buddhist philosophy radically during the sixth century” (p. 71). The second part of the chapter looks at the development of Buddhist apocalyptic eschatologies, which “provide indicative evidence to the effect that by the turn of the sixth century, certain Indian Buddhists started paying attention to new threats and, in reaction, modified their apocalyptic schemes by taking up the hitherto purely Brahmanical pattern of four ages (yuga)” (p. 37). In contrast to the Brahmanical apocalyptic eschatologies, those of the Buddhists do not as a rule hold outsiders to be responsible for the degeneration of the age, but rather attribute it to internal quarrels and laxity within the Buddhist communities themselves. Nevertheless some texts at least, most notably the Kāraṇḍavyūhasūtra and the work of the Buddhist monk and translator Narendrayaśas, “seem to reflect, though rather sparsely, a Buddhist awareness of otherwise clearly identifiable threats: a loss of political footing (if not political hostility) and the enmity of non-Buddhist orthodox and sectarian milieux” (p. 91).

There is much of interest to the historian of religion in this chapter. The discussion of Brahmanical apocalypticism builds on existing scholarship, in particular that of Gonzáles-Reimann, and finds that references to pāṣaṇḍins outnumber those to mlecchas as a sign of the kaliyuga in texts that were composed towards the end of the Gupta period. There is a caveat here, however, since the texts that are drawn upon to show this (the Vāyu-, Brahmnāṇḍa- and Viṣṇupurāṇa) are anonymous texts whose precise dating, let alone of