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Contents

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Editorial
The origin of the Pāli language

Richard Gombrich

The oldest Buddhist texts were composed in northern India in the 5th century before the Christian era in a language which became known as Pali. At that time writing was not in use, so they were orally composed, and then orally preserved for several centuries. Theravada Buddhists believe that these texts contain the Buddha's own words as he pronounced them; but many Buddhists of other traditions doubt this, and modern scholars have long argued how close it can be to the truth.

Pali has rarely been the subject of lively interest, let alone controversy, so I had no expectation that I might soon need to update my book.

I am happy to say that I was wrong.

On the first page of chapter I, "Pali in History", I mention and highly commend a book by two Theravada monks, Bhikkhu Sujato and Bhikkhu Brahmali, called *The Authenticity of the Early Buddhist Texts*. I write: "It has not been printed, but is available for free download on the website of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies (OCBS)." I learn that this was already out of date when it was written, and according to the Amazon website it has been published in 4 formats and editions. From Karpik's article in this volume I learn that one of them is by the Chroniker Press in Toronto.

Alexander Wynne's article on the Buddha in this volume not only uses this book but adds quite a few significant details to those which Sujato and Brahmali collected.

Karpik's article has been written in the short time since my book was published and is a fine contribution to the topic. I am of course happy to say that in our main conclusion, that in the Pali texts that have come down to us we have something very close -- and indeed the closest we are ever likely to

get – to the Buddha's own words, he and I are in agreement. This is particularly remarkable because the arguments that he and I use to reach this conclusion are largely different.

I am no less happy to report that on some matters Karpik has shown me to be wrong, and I shall need to revise my views. And there are also points on which we differ, but it is not yet clear to me where the truth lies. Busy with editing this volume, I have not yet had time to revisit these problems. However, what matters most to my mind is that this journal has shaken off the torpor which besets most of Buddhist studies, in which truly new but also plausible ideas are so rare, and is offering material in which the use of sound evidence and rational argument is advancing our understanding of the history of Buddhism.

The Buddha taught in Pali:
A working hypothesis

Stefan Karpik[1]

Abstract

The Theravada tradition claims that the Buddha taught in Pali. This conflicts with most current scholarship. Yet insights from linguistics and close reading of sources suggest that the Theravada account has not been disproved, that it could be correct, and that it even represents a stronger hypothesis than the current consensus. Instead of authorising translation of his teaching into dialects, the Buddha promoted a fixed transmission and the use of standard language. That the Buddha spoke Māgadhī is a late tradition; Tipiṭaka commentaries instead defined *Māgadhabhāsā*, 'Magadha language', as *Ariyaka*, 'Aryan', the canonical term for the Indo-Aryan language. Pali has the expected features of a natural standard language and can be seen as a precursor of Epigraphic Prakrit. This working hypothesis suggests a bolder stance for Pali studies of claiming that Pali is in all probability the formal language of the Buddha.

NOTE: Unless otherwise stated, translations are by this author, and Pali quotations are from the Myanmar Tipiṭaka in the Digital Pali Reader (DPR), available at https://pali.sirimangalo.org/.

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1. The issue

The Theravada Buddhist tradition asserts that the Buddha taught in the language that we now call Pali (§3.2). The model used here to promote that case is analogous to the situation of modern British English, which includes mutually intelligible dialects, such as Cockney, Yorkshire, Black Country etc., alongside a standard language, BBC English or Queen's English, which predominates in the south-east, but is spread across England.[2] BBC English is a sociolect, i.e. a language of a social class, in this case of the well-educated, as well as a south-east dialect. Similarly, in 5th century BCE Northern India, the main language, *Ariyaka*, 'Aryan', had at least three mutually intelligible dialects and one standard language, whose contemporaneous names we do not have. The dialects are now called western, north-western or Gāndhārī and eastern or Māgadhī; *Ariyaka*, which includes these dialects, is now called Indo-Aryan or Middle Indo-Aryan (MIA). The standard language, based on the western dialect and also a sociolect of the well-educated, is controversially called here Pali, in reference to Buddhist texts, and Epigraphic Prakrit, in reference to post-Aśokan inscriptions. In addition, there were two religious sociolects, Sanskrit of Brahmanism and Ardha-Māgadhī of Jainism; 500 years later, Sanskrit started to replace Pali/ Epigraphic Prakrit as the standard language and sociolect of the educated.

The perspective of this paper is that the academic consensus has misidentified the language of the Buddha with Māgadhī. As the Buddha also taught outside Magadha, he is assumed to have spoken other dialects. Opinions vary whether these dialects were close to each other, so Pali is said to have been *translated*,

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[2]The reader may notice a switch from *dialect* to *language*. There is no precise distinction as linguists and Indologists do not have agreed definitions of the two. Southworth (2005: 35) states: "The distinction between different languages and different dialects cannot be made on the basis of objective linguistic criteria. In real life political, historical, and other factors enter in. Thus, mutually unintelligible spoken varieties of Chinese are treated as dialects of the same language because they share a single writing system and belong to the same political entity and share a cultural tradition, while Hindi and Urdu, which are mutually intelligible in many colloquial forms, are treated as distinct languages using the same criteria (different scripts, different political entities, partly distinct cultural traditions)."

However, a line can be drawn between *accent* and *dialect*. Beal (2010: 25) states "... typologies of English dialects have tended to be constructed according to phonological criteria; strictly speaking, they are typologies of accents rather than dialects." She then goes on to describe dialects by variations of morphology, syntax and lexis. Here variation in phonology only is called *accent*, *dialect* is always geographical and *sociolect* is non-geographical.

transposed, or *transformed* from these dialects. The result is that Pali is generally claimed to be an artificial, ecclesiastical language, instead of the natural standard language advocated here. The consensus is called here the 'Multiple Oral Transmission Theory' (MOTT) because the original teachings were allegedly in several dialects. This paper dissents and advocates a Single Oral Transmission Theory (SOTT) of the Buddha teaching in Pali.

This dissent joins a trend of renewed scrutiny of the MOTT: Ruegg (2000), Levman (2008/9) and Gombrich (2009: 146-8) have offered more plausible interpretations to the passage alleged to authorise local dialects (§4); Cousins (2013: 100-101) has claimed there were not enough monastics to maintain multiple oral canons in different dialects; Gombrich (2018: 69ff) has argued that the Buddha may have preached in Pali.

2. The implausibility of oral translation

The MOTT implies oral translation (leaving aside complete fabrication). There is no record of the original transmissions allegedly translated into Pali. There is, however, evidence of an oral transmission of Pali in Sri Lanka in the 1st century BCE (Norman 1983: 10-11). By rejecting oral translation, we will be left with no realistic alternative to identifying Pali as the Buddha's language.

2.1 The impracticality of translation

Norman (1983: 3ff) describes the position that I reject:

> Although there is some doubt about the interpretation of the phrase the Buddha used when asked if it was permissible to translate his sermons [*sakāya niruttiyā*, see §4], it is generally agreed that he did not preach in Sanskrit, but employed the dialect or language of the area where he was preaching. We must assume that his sermons and utterances were remembered by his followers and his audiences as they heard them. In the course of time, during his lifetime and after his death, collections must have been made of his words and translations or redactions of these must have been made as the need arose, either because the collections were being taken into an area where a different dialect or language was spoken, or because as time went by his words became less intelligible as their language became more archaic. As Buddhism became established in various parts of North India, there must have

been an attempt made to render all the holdings of any particular
vihāra, which were probably still in various dialects as they had
been remembered, roughly homogeneous in language, although
we must bear in mind the fact that, as the dialects of North India
had probably not diverged greatly from each other in the fourth
and third centuries BC, absolute perfection of "translation" was
not essential. The anomalous forms in Pāli ... probably represent
the remnants of recensions in other dialects, which had not been
completely translated.

Why, if dialects had not diverged greatly, would the Buddha have varied
his own dialect from place to place? I know of no English speaker who
deliberately in all seriousness switches to a local accent when travelling in
foreign English-speaking countries. Switching accent would distract from
the intended message by producing a comical or satirical effect both now, in
English, and then, in Indo-Aryan.[3] Furthermore, the sheer volume of Early
Buddhist texts (EBTs), amounting to over 5000 pages[4], would preclude oral
translation.[5] Cousins (2013: 100-1,107) rejected translation when arguing
there were not enough monastics to maintain multiple oral canons. Creating a
sufficiently fixed oral translation for group recitation would be an additional
difficulty as the translator and reciter would need to agree and remember the
precise wording and revisions. An oral translation of this scale and of this
accuracy would be unparalleled in human history, let alone Indian history, yet

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[3] Bechert (1980: 14) thought imitation of another dialect would sound ridiculous only if
there were a standard language; he denied this was the case because of the language variation in
Aśokan inscriptions. Although there is an argument for a standard language (§5), that is irrelevant:
comedians entertain with international imitations of accents from Britain, USA, Australia etc.
although there is no standard language common to all English-speaking nations.

[4] The first four Nikāyas amount to 5,512 pages in the PTS editions as follows: D I (252), D II
(357), D III (292), M I (524), M II (266), M III (302), S I (240), S II (285), S III (278), S IV (403),
S V (478), A I (299), A II (257), A III (452), A IV (466), A V (361). Sujato & Brahmali (2015:
9-10) include the above in their definition of EBTs as well as the *pātimokkha* (55) and parts of the
following: Dhp (60), It (124), Sn (223), Th (115), Thi (174), Ud (94). Thus, 5,000 pages for the
EBTs is a conservative figure.

[5] Norman in the above quotation put *translate* in inverted commas. In a later work, Norman
(1989: 374fn) suggests *transform* or *transpose* might be more appropriate than *translate* and
refers to simple sound, morphological or lexical changes without offering examples. However,
it appears that an accumulation of these changes would amount to *translation* in a conventional
sense; Norman is therefore trying to have it both ways, both *translate* and *transpose*.

this is the MOTT's implicit claim. Not only is Norman's account inherently implausible, but also there is textual evidence against it.

2.2 The ideal of a fixed transmission

In the suttas, monks are required to learn the teachings *byañjanena*, 'to the syllable' or, in modern parlance, to the letter.[6] In response to disputes among Jains over accurate transmission of their texts, the Buddha stressed the importance of precise communal recitation in the *Pāsādika Sutta* (D III.127, DN 29.17). Wynne (2004: 115) translates:

> Therefore, Cunda, as regards the teachings I have taught to you through understanding, meeting together again and again, (comparing) meaning with meaning (*atthena attham*), (comparing) letter with letter (*byañjanena byañjanam*), you should recite communally and not argue, so that the holy life will be long lasting and endure long...

To judge the authenticity of a text, the Buddha in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (D II.124, DN 16.4.8) urges reference to the four Great Authorities (*mahāpadesa*). They are the Buddha, a group of monks led by a senior monk, a settled group of monks or a single senior monk. A teaching is authentic if it matches teachings from the Great Authorities to the word and syllable/letter. Wynne (2004: 103) comments:

> ...the 'words and letters' (*padavyañjanāni*) of the teaching under consideration were to be 'learnt correctly' (*sādhukam uggahetvā*) before judgement was passed. If attention was to be paid to the words and letters of proposed teachings, it implies that the content of what was known as 'Sutta' was also transmitted by paying a similar attention to its words and letters, i.e. that it was transmitted word for word. The passage therefore shows that the accuracy with which a body of literature called 'Sutta' was meant to be transmitted was very high, down to the letter.

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[6] It is problematic to translate *vyañjana/byañjana* as 'letter' in an oral context; the Rhys Davids (1910: 134) offer 'syllable'; Woodward (1979: 52) has 'letter', as does Walshe (1987: 111), and MW confirms both as a possible translation. Von Hinüber (1987: 119-120) suggests 'sound' and 'syllable'. However, some accommodate the MOTT, mistakenly in my view, with vague translations that allow the possibility of translation: Walshe (1987: 255, 432) has 'expression'; Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (1995: 848) 'phrasing', Bodhi (2012: 150) 'phrasing' or (2012: 538) 'formulation'.

To resolve disputes over the meaning or the syllable/letter of the dhamma (*atthato...vyañjanato*), the Buddha lays down procedures in the *Kinti Sutta* (M II.239, MN 103.5). These consist of approaching the most amenable monk on each side and attempting to reconcile differences in the text and accepting hurt feelings in the process. In these passages (and elsewhere), Wynne (2004: 97) finds evidence for "a relatively fixed oral transmission of early Buddhist literature". He cited them to disprove improvisation in the Suttas, but they also disprove translation. For, if several dialects were employed from the outset, as Norman suggests, translating them would be altering the syllable/letter. The only way the Buddha's requirements could have been met was to use the same standard language across different regions from the outset (see §5).

There are eighteen suttas in the first four Nikāyas which affirm the importance of learning teachings to the syllable: (1) D II.124 *Mahāparinibbāna*, (2) D III.127 *Pāsādika*, (3) M I.213 *Mahāgosinga*, (4) M II.239 *Kinti*, (5) S IV.379 *Khemā*, (6) S IV.394 *Moggallāna*, (7) S IV.397 *Vacchagotta*, (8) A I.59 *Adhikaraṇavagga*, (9) A I.69 *Samacittavagga*, (10) A II.168 *Mahāpadesa*, (11) A III.178 *Saddhammasammosa* [3], (12) A III.201 *Khippanisanti*, (13) A IV.140 *Vinayadhara* [2], (14) A IV.142 *Vinayadharasobhana* [2], (15) A V.71 *Ubbāhikā*, (16) A V.80 *Kusinārā*, (17) A V.201 *Thera* and (18) A V.32 *Saññā*. This weight of evidence lies in plain sight and is tantamount to forbidding translation.[7] Yet none of the works cited in this paper address this evidence against translation. Nor do any address the futility of translation, the next topic.

2.3 The mutual intelligibility of Indo-Aryan

There are three sources of evidence that the varieties[8] of *Ariyaka,* or Middle Indo-Aryan (MIA), were mutually comprehensible in the Buddha's day. Firstly, the Vinaya (Vin III.27-28) prescribes the language to be used when a monk disrobes. Von Hinüber (1977: 239) translates:

> "He declares his resignation in Aryan to a non-Aryan and the latter does not understand: his resignation from the community is not valid." (see §3.2 for Pāli and further analysis)

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[7] Translation was not explicitly forbidden, but I claim it was never considered as a possibility in the EBTs.

[8] 'Variety' is a term used in sociolinguistics to denote any language type, without committing to whether it is a language, dialect, accent or sociolect.

Similarly, if the resignation is in a non-Aryan language to an Aryan speaker, the resignation is not valid. The commentary gives Tamil and Telugu as examples of non-Aryan languages. This demonstrates that *Ariyaka*, Aryan, was conceptualised as a single language and that the Vinaya was developed on the basis that the varieties of Indo-Aryan were mutually comprehensible.

The second source is the *Araṇavibhaṅga Sutta,* 'Exposition of Non-Conflict' (M III.234-5, MN 139) in which the Buddha gives seven words for 'bowl' as an example of a conflict over terminology. This is analogous to some British and American English terminology:

American equivalent	British English	American English	British equivalent
side walk	**pavement**	**pavement**	road
underpass	**subway**	**subway**	underground (train)

There are many such examples[9] in the two English varieties, which, remarkably, do not destroy mutual intelligibility. Indeed, conflicts over meaning can only happen among mutually intelligible varieties.

The third source is the Aśokan inscriptions of ca. 250BCE, one and a half centuries after the Buddha's death. They are found from Afghanistan to the east coast of India and from the Himalayan foothills to Karnataka. Norman (1980: 70) argues:

> The way in which the dialects of Middle Indo-Aryan continued to diverge from the norm of Sanskrit after 250 B.C. suggests that before 250 B.C. the dialects were less divergent than Sanskrit. We may, therefore, be certain that in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. the dialects of Indo-Aryan spoken in North India were morphologically and phonologically closer together than the dialects spoken at the time of Aśoka, and, as is well known, the latter are in themselves not very dissimilar.

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[9] E.g. (British first) alternative/ alternate; angry/ mad (or pissed); biscuit/ cookie; braces/ suspenders; breastfeed/ nurse; crisps/ chips; handbag/ purse; homely/ homey; jumper/ sweater; parting (in hair)/ part; petrol/ gas; pissed/ drunk; trousers/ pants; waistcoat/ vest. In those examples, one or both of the pairs has a different meaning in the other variety. There are also synonymous pairs, e.g. flat/ apartment; trainers/ sneakers etc., which are much less likely to produce disagreement or confusion.

A fortiori the *Ariyaka* of the Buddha's day showed even less difference. (Some disagree with Norman, see discussion at §5.3). Therefore, it is a reasonable hypothesis that the Indo-Aryan dialects were mutually intelligible from the start of the Buddha's ministry, ca. 450BCE, to ca. 50BCE, when Pali texts were written down in Sri Lanka. Certainly, the inscriptions of this time period show vocabulary, syntax and morphology recognisable to a Pali or Sanskrit reader, but with much variation of pronunciation. This is a modest claim as the period of mutual intelligibility can be extended to the 1st to 4th centuries CE according to Salomon (1998: 85):

> ...it is questionable whether the MIA dialects of the time were really so different; from the available literary and inscriptional data, it would appear that they were not yet so widely divergent as to present major difficulties of communication.

If the dialects were mutually intelligible before they were written and afterwards, there was no necessity for the heroic effort of oral translation of this vast literature. However, although mutual intelligibility eliminated the need for translation, it created a problem for the ideal of fixed transmission: unintended change.

§2.4 The reality of 'fixed' transmission

The Buddha would have known of the precise transmission of the Vedic texts, so precise that Witzel (1997: 258) claimed "They must be regarded as *tape recordings*, made during the Vedic period and transmitted orally, and usually without the change of a single word." Some techniques for this precision are given by Scharfe (2002: 248). They include *saṃhitāpāṭha,* 'continuous' recitation; *padapāṭha,* 'word by word', where compounds are resolved and *kramapāṭha,* 'step' recitation, where, if four words are represented by *abcd*, the recitation order is *ab bc cd.* Scharfe (2002: 241) also attests to accompanying head and hand movements by the students of modern Vedic schools to reinforce their learning.

Yet these methods were not applied to the Buddhist scriptures. Though effective, Vedic techniques involved some reputational damage: Scharfe (2002: 27) translates Mahābhārata V.130,6 (= XII.10,1) *"O king, like the mind—dulled by the (constant recital of) Veda sections—of a dim-witted unintelligent Vedic scholar, your (mind) focuses only on morality."* Anālayo (2009) points out that

Vedic techniques were taught to boys from age 8 when they did not fully understand what they had learnt; on the other hand Buddhists generally learnt the texts only as fully-ordained adults, aged at least 20; by then they would have understood the texts, which paradoxically would interfere with perfect recall. Moreover, most of the texts were in prose, which would offer no mnemonic help from metre. For Buddhist prose texts, different techniques, including standard pericopes and the waxing syllable principle were used, as detailed by Allon (1997). Thus, Buddhist oral transmission would not have had the same accuracy as Vedic.

English speakers intending to repeat *a huge luxury yacht* accurately might say:

(BBC English)	a hyuge lukshury yot	/ə hjuːʒ lʌkʃərɪ jɒt/ or
(Estuary English)	a yuge lugjury yo'	/ə juːʒ lʌgʒərɪ jɒʔ/.

They may sincerely agree that they have repeated the phrase accurately despite the unintentional differences. Even if the speakers noticed the differences and chose to get as close to standard English as possible, they still might not obtain a perfect repetition. It is difficult to lose one's accent and even a standard accent is not unitary. On a single page of an English dictionary[10], the following variations are noted: /ɪˈbʌljənt/, /ɪˈbʊljənt/ for 'ebullient'; /ɛkˈsɛntrɪk/, /ɪkˈsɛntrɪk/ for 'eccentric'; /ˈɛkdɪsɪs/, /ɛkˈdʌɪsɪs/ for 'ecdysis'; /ˈɛʃəlɒn/, /ˈeɪʃəlɒn/ for 'echelon'; /ɪˈkʌɪnədəːm/, /ɪˈkʌɪnəʊdəːm/, /ˈɛkʌɪnədəːm/ and /ˈɛkʌɪnəʊdəːm/ for 'echinoderm'. One page is unrepresentative, but demonstrates some possible phonetic variation even within the narrow dictionary standard. *A fortiori*, in ancient India without dictionaries, there would have been greater flexibility on correct pronunciation.

Similarly, despite the ideal of fixed transmission, phonetic variation inevitably crept into the Buddhist texts. Von Hinüber (1987: 104-9) cites the Vinaya commentary (Vin-a 1399-1400), which lists substitutions which are acceptable for reciters of the Pali suttas: *d* for *t, c* for *j, y* for *k* and vice versa. For legal sangha proceedings, however, these changes are not allowed. Another class of substitutions is allowed, but disapproved of, in legal proceedings: confusing long and short vowels, inserting or omitting sandhi incorrectly and confusing heavy and light syllables. (It seems the ancients were more flexible on the Law of Morae than grammars suggest.) There is also a category that voids legal proceedings: confusing aspirates and unaspirates, also omitting or

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10 *The Concise Oxford Dictionary, Ninth Edition* 1995 p.428.

inserting nasals incorrectly. Perhaps the allowable changes were the concern of the *Kinti Sutta*'s advice not to get into a dispute: "The meaning agrees, but there is a difference in the syllable/letter. This is a trivial matter, namely, a syllable/letter. Let not the venerable ones get into a dispute on a trivial matter."[11]

We thus have a hybrid of a transmission which was fixed so far as the available techniques allowed, but nonetheless was subject to phonetic variation. In addition, the transmission would have been recited by speakers of several varieties who would accidentally introduce their idiosyncrasies, which could become the norm if they were common enough. Inevitably, involuntarily and largely unconsciously the sounds and morphology of the transmission would shift across geographical areas and across centuries through natural variation and transmission errors.[12] Thus, the variants evident in Pali can all be accounted for by the model of a single, somewhat fluid, oral transmission. As Cousins (2013: 107) states, "It is important to appreciate that a chanted text simply evolves in linguistic form with the passage of time as the language itself evolves. There is no need for any process of translation."

2.5 Single transmission compared to translation

The evidence points to translation being impracticable, discouraged and unnecessary. This applies also to variants of *translation*, such as *transposition* and *transformation*, which are all intentional processes in this context. The evidence suggests a single, unintentionally fluid, oral transmission from the Buddha. As we have evidence of an oral transmission in Pali, we have evidence the Buddha taught in Pali.

On the analogy that Shakespeare spoke English although his original pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar differ from modern English, the Buddha's teaching language must have differed somewhat from the Pali now recorded, but it is still Pali. The alleged 'Māgadhisms' in Pali, which are claimed as evidence of translation, are to be expected occasionally in a fluid single transmission across India and will be discussed further in §3. In §5 the case will be strengthened for identifying the single transmission with Pali.

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[11] M II 240, DPR M 3.1.3, MN 103 *atthato hi kho sameti, byañjanato nānaṃ. appamattakaṃ kho panetaṃ yadidaṃ — byañjanaṃ. māyasmanto appamattake vivādaṃ āpajjitthā'ti.*

[12] For example, Gombrich (2018: 80-1) offers what he believes to be different dialect forms, including *tattha* or *tatra*, 'there', and *-e* or *-asmin* or *-amhi* as endings for *-a* declension locative singular endings.

3. The Buddha did not teach in Māgadhī

The basis of the MOTT claim of translation of the EBTs is the argument that the Buddha spoke Māgadhī, not Pali. Although I have not seen a detailed exposition, the argument seems to be:

- the Buddha had a special connection with Magadha, where he attained enlightenment (§3.1);

- the Pali commentaries claim the Buddha spoke Māgadhī (§3.2-5);

- the eastern Aśokan inscriptions, which occur throughout the entire area where the Buddha taught, are uniformly in a single dialect which is a form of Māgadhī (§3.6);

- Pali is predominantly a western dialect, and therefore a change, whether intentional or unintentional, from Māgadhī to Pali must have occurred (§3.7);

- the change was incomplete, and some original Māgadhisms are found in Pali (§3.8).

This apparently formidable argument is now examined.

3.1 The Buddha was a Kosalan, not a Magadhan

Buswell & Lopez (2014: 491, Magadha) exemplify a constant and misleading refrain: "Magadha has been described as the birthplace of Buddhism, and its language, the language of the Buddha."[13] Though Uruvelā in Magadha was where the Buddha became enlightened, the Buddha's primary connection was with Kosala. Edgerton (1953: 3) points out that the Buddha's home (Kapilivastu), one of his favourite dwelling places (Śrāvastī), the scene of his first sermon (Sarnath), and the place of his death (Kuśināgarī) were all outside Magadha; in fact, they were all, except for Kuśināgarī, part of the Kosalan state in the time of the Buddha. Arguably, the birthplace of Buddhism, where the Buddha first taught, was Sarnath, in the province of Kāsi, in the state of Kosala. Furthermore,

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[13]Cf. Thomas (1927: 13), "The home of Buddhism lies in what is now South Behar, west of Bengal and south of the Ganges. This was the country of the Magadhas with the capital at Rājagaha (Rajgir)."; also von Hinüber (1983: 2), "...Theravāda Buddhism, which holds the view that the language of Theravāda is Māgadhī, the language of the province of Magadha, present-day Bihar, where the Buddha lived and taught".

King Pasenadi of Kosala refers to the Buddha as a Kosalan,[14] and the Buddha himself acknowledges he is of Kosalan ancestry.[15]

In the Buddha's day, King Pasenadi of Kosala and King Ajātasattu of Magadha had each defeated the other in battle (J II.237). Pasenadi finally took Ajātasattu prisoner and then made a peace sealed by giving his daughter in marriage (J II.404). Ajātasattu in turn prepared for attacks from King Pajjota of Avanti (M III.7) and also from the Vajjis (Vin I.228). Kosala was then at least an equal military power to Magadha, and their dialects are likely to have been equally prestigious and acceptable throughout the Ganges basin. The comic effect of imitation of another dialect and the difficulty of losing a childhood accent give reason to suppose that the Buddha did not teach in Māgadhī; in any case, imitation

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[14] *bhagavāpi kosalo*, 'the blessed one is a Kosalan'. M II.124, DPR M 2.4.9.374, MN 89.

[15] *kosalesu niketino,* 'they have a home in Kosala', Sn 422, said by the Buddha of his countrymen, *janapado*. This takes *niketino* as a nominative plural in apposition to singular *janapado,* influenced by the plural *kosalesu*. However, the commentary takes *niketino* as genitive singular, meaning 'belonging to one [unspecified] who has a home in Kosala'. It states **kosalesu niketino**ti bhaṇanto navakarājabhāvaṃ paṭikkhipati. navakarājā hi niketīti na vuccati, DPR Sn-a *dutiyo* 3.1. Levman (2013: 157-8) translates: "Saying 'indigenous among the Kosalans' (*kosalesu niketino*), he rejects the new kingship. A new king is not to be called 'indigenous'." This implies that the Buddha was not Kosalan and his clan, the Sakyans, were unwilling vassals of the Kosalans. In contrast, Bodhi (2017: 867) translates with the opposite meaning "'native to the Kosalans'. Saying this, he rejects its rule by a subordinate ruler; for a subordinate ruler is not said to be native." For *navakarājā,* Levman appears to refer to Pasenadi, King of Kosala, and Bodhi to King Suddhodana, the Buddha's father. Cone (2010: 515) has 'new', 'a novice' for this passage; Bodhi is apparently stretching 'novice' to 'junior' and 'subordinate'.

I prefer Bodhi's 'native to' for the text, but Levman's reading of the commentary. For I think the Pali commentary is also "under the influence of the evolving Buddha legend", as Bodhi (2017: 1468) suggests of the Chinese parallel, which drops any mention of Kosala and turns the Buddha's father into a great king. Similarly, the Pali commentary is reinterpreting the vassal status of Suddhodana to harmonise with legends of his being a great king; this entails implying the father was a Sakyan, not a Kosalan, and could not be both.

The Buddha appeared to have a close connection with the king of Kosala. Walshe (1987: 409) gives the Buddha's view of relations as harmonious (*Aggañña Sutta*, DN 27, D III.83-4): "Now the Sakyans are vassals of the King of Kosala. They offer him humble service and salute him, rise and do him homage and pay him fitting service. And just as the Sakyans offer the King humble service, … so does the King offer humble service to the Tathāgata, ..." Walshe (1987: 409) adds "... thinking: 'If the ascetic Gotama is well-born, I (Pasenadi) am ill-born ...'", but Anālayo (2016: 35) argues from the Chinese Āgama that Walshe is translating a mistaken reading *nanu ... ti*, 'certainly', and the Burmese edition *na naṃ ... ti*, '... **not** thinking...', is correct. This is a third instance, in addition to the Pali and Chinese commentaries on Sn 422, of a later source editing away the inconvenient, inferior vassal status of the Buddha's father.

was unnecessary among mutually intelligible varieties of Indo-Aryan.

Nor was Magadha the Buddha's adopted country. Norman (2002: 137) speculates "Most of his [the Buddha's] teaching life was spent in Magadha. We can therefore deduce that on some occasions, at least, he used the Magadhan dialect of the time, which we can call Old Māgadhī." However, Norman's claim is undermined by the evidence in tables 1and 2. They show, in what is possibly a complete count of the Buddha's locations in the first four Nikāyas, that he was recorded in Kosala more often than in Magadha. In table 1 he is recorded in Kosalan locations (including Sakyans) in 78% of the count and in Magadhan locations (including Aṅgas) in 12% of the count; in table 2, which excludes the main cities, the gap narrows to 41% Kosala and 20% Magadha, largely because Sāvatthī is excluded.[16] This evidence supports Warder (1970: 207), who states "In fact, the Buddha spent relatively little time in Magadha, teaching in at least half a dozen other states."

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[16]Table 2 was made because Schopen (1997) argues from the Kṣudrakavastu of the Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya that the settings attributed to the six great cities - Śrāvastī, Sāketā, Vaiśālī, Vārāṇasī, Rājagṛha and Campā (with the Pali tradition substituting Kosambī for Vesālī) - could have been made up. The Kṣudrakavastu offers procedures whereby, if the setting or actor of a sutta was forgotten, they could be substituted by any one of the great cities or an equivalent main person - Pasenadi, if the sutta were about a king, Anāthapiṇḍaka, if a layman etc.; choosing these last two would entail their city, Śrāvastī, becoming the setting.

Accordingly, Table 1 reflects the view that the choice of these particular cities is in itself significant even if they were a default in case of memory failure. Table 2 reflects the view that settings outside the great cities offer a more accurate perspective; it includes unions to show the relative significance in the Buddha's life of Magadha and Kosala.

Table 1: Locations of the Buddha in the first four Nikāyas

People	Place (number of suttas) [DPPN spelling different from the Myanmar Tipiṭaka] Locatives, such as *kosalesu*, show settings with no other location marker.	Total	%
Kosalans	Sāvatthī (1089), *kosalesu* (10), Icchānaṅgala (7), Sāketa (5), Sālā (4), Naḷakapāna (3), Ukkaṭṭhā (2), Uruññā [Ujuññā] (2), Ayujjhā [Ayojjhā]* (2), Ekasālā (1), Opāsāda [Opasāda] (1), Cañcalikappa [Caṇḍalakappa] (1), Daṇḍakappa (1), Nagaravinda (1), Manasākaṭa (1), Venāgapura (1), Veḷudvāra (1), Saṅkavā [Paṅkadhā] (1), Sālavatikā (1), Setabyā [Setavyā] (1).	1135	75
Magadhans	Rājagaha (133), Nāḷandā[†] (9)/ Nālandā (1), Uruvelā (9), Gayā (3), Andhakavinda (2), Ambalaṭṭhikā (2), Ambasaṇḍā (1), Ekanāḷā (1), Kallavāḷaputta [Kallavālamutta] (1), Khāṇumata (1), Pañcasālā (1), Pāṭaligāma (1), Mātulā (1), *magadhesu* (1).	167	11
Vajjis	Vesālī (48), Nātika [Nādikā] (10)/ Ñātika (3), Hatthigāma (3), Mithilā (2), Koṭigāma (2), Ukkacelā [Ukkācelā] (2), Gosiṅgasālavanadāya (2), Veḷuvagāmaka [Beluvagāmaka] (2), Bhaṇḍagāma (2), Bhoganagara [Bhogagāmanagara](2), Ambagāma (1), Jambugāma (1).	80	5
Sakyans	Kapilavatthu (31), Devadaha (3), Silāvatī (2), Nagaraka [Naṅgaraka/ Sakkhara/ Sakkara] (1), Medāḷupa [Medataḷumpa] (1), Khomadussa (1), Cātumā (1), Sāmagāmaka [Sāmagāma] (1), *sakkesu* (1).	42	3
Vaṃsas	Kosambī (15), Bālakaloṇakāra (1).	16	1

Aṅgas	Campā (8), Āpaṇa (4), Assapura (2), Bhaddiya (1).	15	1
Mallas	Kusinārā (6), Uruvelakappa (3), Pāvā (3), Anupiya (1).	13	1
Kāsis	Bārāṇasi (11), Kīṭāgiri (1)	12	1
Kurus	Kammāsadhamma (8), Thullakoṭṭhika [Thullakoṭṭhita] (1)	9	1
Koliyas	Haliddavasana (2), Uttara (1), Kakkarapatta (1), Pajjanika [Sajjanela] (1), Sāmuga [Sāpūga] (1).	6	-
Bhaggas	Susumāragira [Suṃsumāragiri] (6)	6	-
Sumbhas	Sedaka (2)/ Setaka (1)	3	-
Kālāmas	Kesamutta [Kesaputta] (1)	1	-
Cetiyans	*cetīsu* (1)	1	-
Sūrasenas	Madhurā (1)	1	-
Not known	Aḷāvi (4), Verañjā (3), Gajaṅgalā [Kajaṅgala] (1), Cālikā (1)	9	1
Āvantikas, Assakas, Kambojas, Gandhāras, Thūlus [Khūlus/ Bumus], Pañcālas, Būlis, Macchas, Moriyas, Vaṅgas, Sunāparantans.	No record for the Buddha	—	—
Total of records of the Buddha's location counted in the sample.		1516	100

*Ayojjhā is given instead of Kosambī at S IV.179 in the PTS edition, but neither city is on the Ganges, as the text states. Kosambī is on the Yamunā and Ayojjhā on the Sarayū; this supports the view that the transmission became corrupt and a great city name, Kosambi, was selected as being nearest the Ganges. Ayojjhā is counted instead of Kosambī on the assumption that the name of the Sarayū was forgotten and a famous river name, the Ganges, was substituted, followed by another substitution of another famous city name.

†Nālandā is given in the DPPN entry for Kosala, but this is a misunderstanding of the ambiguous S IV.323, SN 42.9: 'for some time, the Blessed One was journeying around in Kosala with a large group of monks and arrived at Nālanda; right there in Nālandā the Blessed One stayed at Pāvārika's Mango Grove.' Here the Buddha has crossed the Ganges from Kosala to Magadha. The Pāvārikambavana is in Nālandā in Magadha, a stop on the Buddha's final journey from Rājagaha to Kusinārā (D II.81).

Table 2: Locations of the Buddha in the first four Nikāyas

Excluding the great cities and showing unions

People	Table 1	Deduct great city locations	Total	%	Union	Total	%
Kosalans	1135	Sāvatthī (1089), Sāketa (5)	41	20	KOSALA and Dominion	85	41
Sakyans	42	—	42	20			
Kāsis	12	Bārāṇasi (11)	1	1			
Kālāmas	1	—	1	1			
Magadhans	167	Rājagaha (133)	34	16	MAGADHA and Dominion	41	20
Aṅgas	15	Campā (8)	7	3			
Vajjis	80	Vesālī (48)	32	15	VAJJIAN Confederacy	32	15
Vaṃsas	16	Kosambī (15)	1	1	VAMSA and Dominion	7	3
Bhaggas	6	—	6	3			
Mallas	13	—	13	6	INDEPENDENTS	42	21
Kurus	9	—	9	4			
Koliyas	6	—	6	3			
Sumbhas	3	—	3	1			
Cetiyans	1	—	1	1			
Sūrasenas	1	—	1	1			
Not known	9	—	9	4			
Total of records of the Buddha's location excluding great cities						**207**	**100**

Notes to tables 1 and 2

Table 1 was made with this procedure: noting the place names of a country in the DPPN, such as *Nālanda* in *Magadha*; searching the first four Nikāyas with the DPR for terms such as *nālanda* etc.; scanning search results to discard those with the Buddha absent, dead or merely mentioning another place;* cross-checking for alternative place name spellings, such as *Nāḷanda*, with the terms *magadhānaṃ*, *magadhesu* etc.; scanning the indexes of the Wisdom

publications translation of each Nikāya for missing place names and countries; finally, collating the results.

Problems included: the Myanmar Tipiṭaka names are often different from the DPPN, e.g. Saṅkavā for Paṅkadhā and Kesamutta for Kesaputta; sometimes more than one setting is given in the same sutta, and each was counted; where the Buddha is travelling between two settlements, both are included on the assumption that he went to both; where the Buddha is claimed to have teleported by psychic power, he is treated as if travelling on foot, and both locations are counted; sometimes a setting can have several names, but only one place name per setting was counted;† significant differences were found in the count of cities in SN to those of Ireland (1976: 105) and Gokhale (1982: 11), so the DPR count was used as it was the lowest and least skewed the results towards Sāvatthī.‡

Table 1 may be incomplete: some settings may have been missed due to alternative spellings or to instances of the Buddha and place name not mentioned in the same paragraph. Hence, these results are presented as a possibly complete sample. If incomplete, there is no reason to suppose that any one country would be disproportionately affected, so inferences from the relative frequency of each country's count should be secure.

3.2 *Māgadhabhāsā* means *Ariyaka*, Indo-Aryan

Childers (1875: vii) states "The true or geographical name of the Pali language is Māgadhī, 'Magadhese language', or Magadhabhāsā, 'language of the Magadha people'". He claims to be following tradition in this understanding, but I find no evidence in the early texts to support this view. As a computer search will confirm, nowhere in the Pali canon or its commentaries is there any reference to Māgadhī. Norman (1980: 63) states "Nowhere, to my knowledge, does Buddhaghosa state that the language of the canon in his day was Māgadhī." MOTT advocates may claim that this is splitting hairs, and the references in the

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*E.g., at different locations the Buddha recalls staying at Senānigama in identical passages in MN 26, MN 36, MN 85 and MN 100, so Senānigama is not counted.

†For example, at S V.152 only Veḷuvagāmaka is counted in *bhagavā vesāliyaṃ viharati veḷuvagāmake*, as elsewhere (at D II.9.8) Veḷuvagāmaka is treated as a separate settlement with no mention of Vesālī.

‡Ireland gives the count for Sāvatthī in SN as 2,091, Gokhale as 736. Neither author gave the editions they were using, so the figures cannot be reconciled with my count of 993 from the DPR, which amalgamates many SN suttas. In the other three Nikāyas, there was no significant difference in counts.

commentaries (but nowhere in the Tipiṭaka) to *Māgadhabhāsā* and *māgadhiko vohāro* amount to the same thing. To disprove that claim we return in more detail to the treatment by von Hinüber (1977: 239) of the disrobing procedure quoted above (§2.3):

> He declares his resignation in Aryan to a non-Aryan and the latter does not understand: his resignation from the community is not valid.[17]

> [Von Hinüber's translation of the commentary:] Here *Ariyaka* means Aryan language (i.e.) the language of Magadha. *Milakkhaka* means any non-Aryan language (such as) that of Andha, Damiḷa, etc.[18]

> [Von Hinüber comments] According to this passage, then, the Dravidian languages of the south, Telugu and Tamil, are contrasted with the language of Magadha, that is to say, of the Buddha.

Thus, where the Vinaya text uses the term *Ariyaka*, its commentary uses *Māgadhabhāsā*. Von Hinüber's point is that the term 'Pali' does not appear in these passages, so he does not make these further inferences: (1) if the commentary and text are read together, it is clear that *Māgadhabhāsā* is defined as *Ariyaka*; (2) *Māgadhabhāsā/Ariyaka* is in contrast to Dravidian languages like Telugu, not to other Aryan dialects like Kosalī and Māgadhī; (3) the commentaries are not defining *Māgadhabhāsā/Ariyaka* as Māgadhī; (4) functionally, *Māgadhabhāsā/Ariyaka* operates as a term for all Aryan dialects. It cannot be that disrobing could only be done by affecting a Māgadhī accent or dialect, for there was not even a standard formula for disrobing[19]. Equating *Māgadhabhāsā* with Māgadhī is a fundamental error, and 'Magadha' in the commentaries must, in the context of *Māgadhabhāsā*, mean the area where Indo-Aryan is spoken. This view is confirmed by the Abhidhamma Vibhaṅga commentary which von Hinüber (1977: 240) translates:

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[17] Vin III.27-28, DPR Vin Pārā 1.1.54: *ariyakena milakkhassa santike sikkhaṃ paccakkhāti, so ca na paṭivijānāti, apaccakkhātā hoti sikkhā. milakkhakena ariyakassa santike sikkhaṃ paccakkhāti, so ca na paṭivijānāti, apaccakkhātā hoti sikkhā.*

[18] Vin-a I.255, DPR Vin-a Pārā 1.1 sikkhāpaccakkhānavibhaṅgavaṇṇanā: *"tattha **ariyakaṃ** nāma ariyavohāro, māgadhabhāsā. **milakkhakaṃ** nāma yo koci anariyako andhadamiḷādi.*

[19] Vin III.26-28

The mother is a Damiḷi, the father an Andhaka. If their newborn child hears its mother speak first, it will speak the Damiḷa language. If it hears its father speak first, it will speak the Andhaka language. But if it hears the language of neither of them, it will speak the Māgadha language. For even someone born in an uninhabited forest where there is no-one else who speaks at all, even he, by his own nature, begins to speak, and it will be the Māgadha language that he speaks…....Only in this Māgadha language, rightly called the language of Brahmā, the language of the Aryans, it alone does not change. When the Completely Enlightened One entrusted the Buddha-word as contained in the Tipiṭaka to the tradition, he did so only in the Māgadha language[20]

Reading together these passages from the Vinaya and two commentaries[21] affirms that the Buddha spoke not Māgadhī, but *Ariyaka*, the canonical term for the language of Indo-Aryan speaking monks, a language assumed to be equivalent to Pali in the Theravādin consciousness. For Pali means 'text' or 'language of the texts' and, from the context, must be what the two commentaries meant by *Māgadhabhāsā*.

3.3 The name change from *Ariyaka* to *Māgadhabhāsā*

In considering when and why the name change from *Ariyaka* to *Māgadhabhāsā* was made, two things are immediately apparent: firstly, it is a later development than the EBTs because *Māgadhabhāsā* is found only in the commentaries; secondly, it relates to a period when Magadha had eclipsed Kosala in prominence. The most likely answer to "when" is during the Mauryan empire, especially

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[20]Vibh-a 387-8, DPR Vibh-a 15.1.1.718, *Mātā damiḷī, pitā andhako. Tesaṃ jāto dārako sace mātukathaṃ paṭhamaṃ suṇāti, damiḷabhāsaṃ bhāsissati; sace pitukathaṃ paṭhamaṃ suṇāti, andhakabhāsaṃ bhāsissati. Ubhinnampi pana kathaṃ assuṇanto māgadhabhāsaṃ bhāsissati. Yopi agāmake mahāraññe nibbatto, tattha añño kathento nāma natthi, sopi attano dhammatāya vacanaṃ samuṭṭhāpento māgadhabhāsameva bhāsissati… Ayam evekā yathābhucca-brahmavohārāriyavohārasaṅkhātā māgadhabhāsā na parivattati. Sammāsambuddhopi tepiṭakaṃ buddhavacanaṃ tantiṃ āropento māgadhabhāsāya eva āropesi.* This is a part of a long gloss, arguably a digression, on *niruttipaṭisambhidā* Vibh 297, No. 731, DPR Vibh 15.2.2.731.

[21]At Vin-a vi 1214, there is a third commentary, discussed at §4.6, which has *māgadhiko vohāro*, the 'Magadhan language', and which I claim refers back to the disrobing commentary. These three are the only Tipiṭaka commentaries where the Buddha is claimed to have spoken the 'Magadha language'.

during the reign of Aśoka. The answer to "why" is that not only was Aśoka a Buddhist, but the entire Indo-Aryan speaking world was for the first time united under a single ruler, king of Magadha and emperor of almost all the Indian sub-continent.

That 'Magadha' became the name of the new empire is suggested by the Bairāṭ edict which starts "Priyadasi, King of Magadha".[22] This minor rock edict is in Jaipur District, Rajasthan, 921 kilometres from the then capital of Magadha, Pāṭaliputra. Magadha, the kingdom in the remote Ganges Plain, would hardly impress locals half-way across India, but 'Magadha', an empire including them, would have been significant.[23] They may have counted themselves as Magadhans, just as the Sakyans were also Kosalans and the Licchavis were also Vajjis. What else was this new empire to be called but Magadha? It would be natural to acknowledge this extraordinary political development by calling the Indo-Aryan language '*Māgadhabhāsā*', a practice sure to be approved of by the government. It would make sense for a standard language used across all geographical areas of the empire, i.e. Pali (§5), to have that title, if only as a technical term among Buddhists.

Norman (1980: 66f) notes that the Buddhist (and Jain) tradition thought *Māgadhabhāsā* (*addhamāgadhabhāsā,* 'Half-Māgadhī' in the Jain tradition) was the root of all languages. He believes this idea of language development grew up during and because of the Mauryan empire; for 'Māgadhī', which Norman takes as the language of the eastern Aśokan inscriptions, would also include variants of that dialect elsewhere in India. Norman (1983: 3) has a further explanation:

> It is also possible that the prestige attaching to Magadha, and by implication to Māgadhī, during the time of the Mauryan kings, and also by the way in which the Māgadhī of the original Aśokan edicts was everywhere in India "translated" into the local dialect or language, led to the taking over by the Buddhists, at about the

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[22] Hultzsch (1925: 172) gives the original as "*Priyadasi lājā Māgadhe saṁghaṁ abhivādetūnaṁ āhā apādhātanaṁ cha phāsuvihālataṁ chā*". He translates "the Māgadha King Priyadarśin, having saluted the Samgha, hopes they are both well and comfortable.", but it could be translated 'King Piyadassi, having saluted the sangha in Magadha...'

[23] Compare the politically incorrect use of *England* to include Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. However, it is still correct to call their common language *English* after the dominant area rather than *British*; this somewhat parallels the use of *Māgadhabhāsā* after the dominant area, Magadha, instead of *Ariyaka*.

time of the council which the Theravadin tradition reports was held during the reign of Aśoka, of the idea that their "ruler" too employed such a language.

All these explanations are simultaneously possible and, crucially for the argument here, all agree that *Māgadhabhāsā* was not a synonym for Māgadhī. Furthermore, those restricting *Māgadhabhāsā* to Māgadhī have problems: Buddhaghosa, who allegedly wrote both commentaries quoted in §3.2, must have known some Māgadhī, yet he described Pali as *Māgadhabhāsā*.[24] This was not just Buddhaghosa's idiosyncrasy. In the 12th century, King Vijayabāhu II of Sri Lanka wrote a letter to a Burmese king in *Māgadhabhāsā,* according to Cūlavaṃsa 80.6. Again, this must mean he wrote in Pali, not Māgadhī, which was hardly appropriate for international diplomacy at that time.

Māgadhabhāsā in the sense of 'Pali' was an anachronistic term for Buddhaghosa's time, the 5th century CE, when Indo-Aryan had fragmented into several dialects. He must have been recording a tradition, but he was also engaging in propaganda, as the next section explains.

3.4 *Māgadhabhāsā* and diglossic competition

A positive pull towards the term *Māgadhabhāsā* during the Mauryan empire was likely, but so was resistance towards reclaiming *Ariyaka* after the collapse of this empire. For *Ariyaka* included a domineering variety, Sanskrit, one of whose grammarians, Patañjali (ca. 150BCE), criticised usages found in Pali and Ardha-Māgadhī as substandard (*apabhraṃśāḥ*, Pischel §8). With increasing Sanskritisation of inscriptions from the 1st century CE, Sanskrit replaced Epigraphic Prakrit as the H-language[25] of India during the 1st millennium CE. Sanskrit had long called itself, 'the perfected language' and 'the language of the Gods'.[26] Deshpande (1979: 1-2) cites the Ṛgveda as claiming the Aryan language was spoken by the gods (RV 8.100.11) and was itself a goddess (RV 10.125.5-

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[24] Norman (1980: 64) argued, unconvincingly in my view, that Buddhaghosa followed tradition in equating Pali, the Buddha's language, with Māgadhī although he knew this was strictly incorrect.

[25] 'H-language' is the H(igh)-language, or formal language, in diglossia, where formal and informal speech become separate varieties, e.g. in German-speaking Switzerland, where the H-language is standard German and the L(ow)-language is Swiss German.

[26] Pollock (2006: 44-5) finds the earliest evidence for 'the perfected language' in the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, before the Common Era, and for 'language of the Gods' in Daṇḍin's 7th century *Kāvyādarśa.* I assume both usages were current earlier than recorded.

6), so the Pali tradition may have wished to downplay *Ariyaka,* which included Sanskrit and its overbearing ideology. Instead, in an act of what Deshpande (1979: 40f) called "sociolinguistic self-defence", *Māgadhabhāsā* was said by the Buddhists (and Ardha-Māgadhī was said by the Jains) to be 'the root language of all people'.[27] It was a universal language for both Brahma Gods and men, not an elitist godly one like Sanskrit. The quote from the Vibhaṅga commentary (§3.2) implies this root language was also that of the forest-dwelling noble savage and, for any repelled by such a basic language, that commentary reminds us that the Buddha himself spoke it.

Pali commentaries may also have implied with *Māgadhabhāsā* that their language was that of the *cakravartin*, the Wheel-turning Emperor. Sujato & Brahmali (2015: 29-30) suggest that the *cakravartin* myth is a Buddhist version of the Brahmanical horse sacrifice, in that the *cakravartin* and the instigator of the horse sacrifice both ruled from sea to sea by conquest, though by non-violent conquest in the Buddhist case. Aśoka in RE13 X (Kālsī) echoes this legend by stating "they (his sons and grandsons) should regard conquest by dhamma as the only (true) conquest."[28] Aśoka, the ruler of the first Magadhan (Mauryan) empire and of all *Ariyaka* speakers, was the first king in Indian history to rule from sea to sea. The term, *Māgadhabhāsā*, reinforces that parallel, hence its appearance in the commentaries attributed to Buddhaghosa, who was living during the Gupta empire, another Magadhan empire that also ran from sea to sea. This propaganda would counter pro-Brahmanical tendencies in society, evidenced by Samudragupta's performance of the horse sacrifice in the 4th century CE (Knipe 2015: 9) and Kumāragupta's in the 5th century (Agrawal 1989: 193).

3.5 *Māgadhabhāsā* changed meaning from *Ariyaka* to *Māgadhī*

After the Magadhan Empires, Magadha remained as an identifiable province, and so gradually *Māgadhabhāsā* shifted in meaning to the language of that smaller region. We have in Cūlavaṃsa 37.227ff the story of Revata, who asked Buddhaghosa to go to Sri Lanka to translate the Sinhalese commentaries into Pali, as India had no commentaries. Pali is there described as *Māgadhānaṃ nirutti*, 'the language of the Magadhans', and *Māgadhā nirutti,* 'the Magadhan

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[27] Cūlavaṃsa (PTS) 37. 244 *sabbesam mūla-bhāsāya Māgadhāya niruttiyā*. The same claim is made at Vism 441.34.

[28] Translation by Hultzsch (1925:49) of *tameva chā vijayaṃ manatu ye dhammavijaye.*

language'.[29] This leaves open whether *Ariyaka* or *Māgadhī* is meant, but other sources clearly mean the latter. Gornall (2014: 529-30) believes Moggallāna, the 12th century grammarian, was distancing his grammar from Sanskrit influenced models, such as Kaccāyana's Pali grammar, when writing:

> Since grammar is manifold on account of the different (languages) such as Sanskrit etc. (sakkatādi), in order to distinguish my grammar, it is said 'Māgadha'. Māgadha words are those (words) that are understood in the Magadha region/among Magadhans. This (work) is a Māgadha grammar (lakkhaṇa) of those (words). It is said 'A grammar of Māgadha'.[30]

> Gornall (2014: 530) comments: 'The reestablishment[31] of the Magadhan realm as the site of the Pāli language perhaps created a territory, albeit an imaginary one, on which the Laṅkan and Cōḻa saṅghas could stake their claim. The Pāli language was no longer a shared, transregional idiom but the site of a struggle between two competing monastic traditions [i.e. between the Moggallāna and Kaccāyana traditions].'

We also have what I believe to be an early use of the term *Māgadhī*, meaning Pali, in a poem added to a sub-commentary on the *sakāya niruttiyā* passage (see §4) in the 12th to 15th century handbook Vinayālaṅkāraṭīkā (34.46): *sā māgadhī mūlabhāsā; Narā yāyādikappikā; Brahmāno cāssutālāpā; Sambuddhā cāpi bhāsare.* 'This Māgadhī is the root language. Men of whatever age, Brahma Gods who have not heard a word and fully enlightened ones speak it.' Around this time, the term *pālibhāsā*, meaning 'language of the texts', came into being according to Crosby (2004), who finds its first definitive use in the Vinayatthasārasandīpanī (12th-13th century, Sri Lanka). This uses *pālibhāsā*, 'the

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[29] Cūlavaṃsa (PTS) 37.230: *Taṃ tattha gantvā sutvā tvaṃ Māgadhānaṃ niruttiyā parivattehi.*
Cūlavaṃsa (PTS) 37.244: *parivattesi sabbā pi Sīhalaṭṭhakathā tadā/ sabbesaṃ mūlabhāsāya Māgadhāya niruttiyā.*

[30] Gornall's translation of Moggallāna-pañcikā 1. 33–1: *saddalakkhaṇassāpi sakkatādibhedena bahuvidhattā sakaṃ saddalakkhaṇaṃ visesayitum āha māgadhan ti magadhesu viditā māgadhā saddā tesam idaṃ lakkhaṇaṃ māgadhaṃ, idaṃ vuttaṃ hoti māgadhaṃ saddalakkhaṇan ti.* [Text from Gornall]

[31] Gornall follows the MOTT misreading of *Māgadhabhāsā* (§3.2), and I argue 'establishment' is the correct term.

Pali language', as a language name in contrast with *sīhaḷa*, 'Sinhalese'. There may be a connection between these developments, as *pālibhāsā* may have been an alternative to *Māgadhabhāsā* for non-supporters of Moggallāna's grammar who did not wish to imply Pali was Māgadhī.

Canonical usages such as *magadhakhetta*, 'Magadhan field', for the robe pattern based on the contours of a Magadhan rice field (Vin I.287) and 'Magadhan' for a type of garlic (Vin IV.259) referred to the province. The Vinaya commentary used both senses of 'Magadha', both 'province' and 'empire', but 'province' became the norm in the later tradition. For, by the time Childers (§3.2) and D'Alwis were consulting their Sri Lankan mentors, Māgadhī was understood by *Māgadhabhāsā*. D'Alwis (1863: xcviii) attests "the promiscuous use of the terms Pali and Magadh in Ceylon". This conflation of the two terms has no authority from the canon or its commentaries. However, Buddhaghosa's non-canonical use of *Māgadhabhāsā*, referring to an empire which did not exist when the EBTs were created, unintentionally misdirected a later Sri Lankan tradition towards equating Māgadhī and Pali. In turn modern scholars have amplified this misdirection and created the MOTT to explain the discrepancy between Pali and Māgadhī.

3.6 Eastern Aśokan inscriptions belie linguistic diversity

Norman (1980: 65) linked Māgadhī to the eastern Aśokan inscriptions, which are found throughout the area travelled by the Buddha. He gave as Māgadhī's features: the nominative singular of short -*a* stems is -*e* instead of Pali -*o*; *l* occurs instead of Pali *r*; all sibilants become *ś* instead of Pali *s*. However, an east-west language division is unsatisfactory. Ardha-Māgadhī, which is supposedly eastern, has the same three features as Pali, although not to the same degree. Norman (1980: 68) argues that, although Aśoka's Kaliṅga inscriptions in the geographical east have nominative singular endings in -*e*, the later Hāthīgumphā inscriptions of that area have 'western' endings in -*o*.

As Cousins (2013: 120) states:

> The significant point is that the Eastern or Eastern-influenced dialect of all other Mauryan inscriptions in India cannot have been the local or ordinary spoken dialect of most people in the majority of the places where it is used. That this is so is indicated rather clearly by the fact that no post-Mauryan inscriptions in this dialect are extant.

We cannot, therefore, infer from the eastern Aśokan inscriptions that this language was universally spoken in the Ganges basin, either when they were inscribed, or in the Buddha's day two centuries earlier.

3.7 Māgadhī could not have changed into Pali

Intentional change has been ruled out in §2, but Cousins (2013: 121) believed natural language change could account for the difference between Māgadhī and Pali:

> The language used in the Indian inscriptions of Aśoka was the state language of the kingdom of Magadha; it can only have been called the Māgadha or Māgadhī language. I can see no reason to suppose that the administrative or cultural change which led to the adoption of some western dialect features would have required a change of name.

However, Pali cannot be said to have adopted "some" western dialect features; it is overwhelmingly 'western', with a very few 'eastern' features. A second difficulty is that one variety changing into another variety is not a phenomenon acknowledged in linguistics. In the case of mutual unintelligibility, Barnes (2010: 39) rejects the theory that Norn, an extinct Scandinavian language spoken in Shetland within the past three centuries, gradually changed into the closely related Scots: "...the imperceptible melting of one language into another they [other scholars] envisage seems to be without parallel." If we assume the alternative, that Pali and Māgadhī were mutually intelligible, contact linguistics would predict dialect mixing or koine creation in newly settled areas and dialect-levelling in established areas, but never one variety almost turning into another. Moreover, the ideal of fixed transmission would limit change drastically. In no case could Māgadhī naturally change into Pali.

3.8 Alleged remaining Māgadhisms in Pali

The MOTT narrative is that Māgadhī was changed into 'western' Pali, except for a few 'eastern' features, called Māgadhisms, which are allegedly residual frozen phonetics.

The Kathāvatthu is a challenge to the MOTT narrative that Māgadhisms signify translation. Norman (1979: 284) points out a frequent contrast many times in that work between a first speaker who uses mainly the nominative singular

-*o* ending (except for set phrases and repeating his interlocutor) and a second speaker who uses the -*e* ending. The differentiation between the speakers, the time of the Kathāvatthu in Aśoka's reign, when Māgadhī would have become a prestigious dialect, and the setting, in Aśoka's capital, Pāṭaliputra, in the heart of the province and empire of Magadha, all suggest that the Māgadhisms are original, native-language features of the second speaker. In the case of the first speaker, the intermittent use of the -*e* ending seems to be a contact Māgadhism in a process of accommodation.[32] I have yet to see a MOTT explanation of why the Kathāvatthu was so incompetently 'translated'. It makes better sense that this work, like other parts of the Tipiṭaka, is an accurate record of the original dialects, even to the point of recording contact Māgadhisms, a sociolinguistic feature probably unidentified by ancient grammarians.

Moreover, it is far from clear which features are 'eastern' and which 'western'. We should write of 'pre-eastern' and 'pre-western' features, if we accept the logic of Brough (1962: 115):

> The classification of the Aśokan inscriptional dialects under the heading 'eastern' and 'western' appears to be due chiefly to extrapolation from linguistic evidence of a much later period; and the distribution of -*e*/-*o* could hardly be taken as defining an isogloss.

Pre-eastern features are found in the west. The pre-eastern nominative singular in -*e*, emblematic of Māgadhisms, is found on the opposite side of Aśoka's India, in modern Pakistan, at Shābāzgaṛhī. We have also seen the pre-eastern *lājā* instead of *rājā* in the west at Bairāṭ in Rajasthan (§3.3 fn). Thus, 'Māgadhisms' in the Aśokan era had a wider distribution than the province of Magadha, making it difficult to determine which are the real Māgadhisms in Pali.

Apparent Māgadhisms of two types could be present in Pali: one explained by spelling convention, the other by natural language change. An example of the first is Brough's suggestion that -*e,* as well as -*o,* was a genuine Gāndhārī form of the nominative, rather than a Māgadhism; it represented developments of a vowel of mixed quality that could not be adequately notated by either ending.[33]

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[32] *Accommodation* in sociolinguistics refers to speakers adjusting their speech to one another, usually to minimise differences and demonstrate mutual understanding.

[33] Brough (1962: 115) explains "So far as we can tell from the writing, the vowel of the inflexional ending ultimately came to coincide with either the *o* or the *e* (according to period

This phenomenon could apply to Pali, as Gombrich (1994: xxvii) argues:

> Before the texts were ever written down, it is not likely that their dialect was ever completely fixed, or even that the differences between the dialects were clearly conceptualised; it must have been a matter of reciting in what appeared like "regional accents". In the last resort, Pāli was formed at the phonetic level by the spelling conventions which the first scribes chose to adopt.

As for natural language change, we know from recordings of 80-90 years ago that even in a standard accent, such as Received Pronunciation in British English, vowels change so much that the old accent sounds strange to modern ears. The Uniformitarian Principle, associated with the Sanskritist, Whitney (Hazen 2011: 30), is also promoted by the linguist, Labov (1972: 101): "the linguistic processes taking place around us are the same as those that have operated to produce the historical record." We must presume a similar fluidity in Pali as in English in the course of oral transmission over several centuries.

I therefore take issue with the practice, found in standard works like Geiger (1916) and Lüders (1954) of automatically regarding all -*e* for -*o* forms as 'Māgadhisms'. The vocative plural *bhikkhave* is an example. In a computer search of the first four Nikāyas, the vocative plural *bhikkhavo* is found only in sentence final position in prose and is the only verse form, whereas the supposed 'Māgadhism' *bhikkhave* is essentially an enclitic which occurs mid-sentence.[34] The difference could simply mark a final secondary stress in *bhikkhavo* by giving -*o* its full length and mark no final stress in the enclitic *bhikkhave*. Typically, *bhikkhave* serves as a pragmatic marker[35] to introduce or emphasise

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and dialect) which represent the older diphthongs. This suggests the hypothesis that at an earlier stage of Indo-Aryan, the ending might have been a vowel of mixed quality: a front rounded vowel [œ:], or a back unrounded [ɤ:]. Either of these qualities would easily be understandable as a development from a rather close central vowel [ə:], which would be theoretically expected as a *sandhi*-variant beside -*aḥ, -as,* [əh, əs], if the phonetic differentiation of *a, ā* [ə, a:] had already taken place. If a dialect had still preserved an ending such as [œ:, ɤ:, or ə:] when it was first reduced to writing, there is no inherent difficulty in supposing that either of the two signs, *o* or *e*, might have been felt to be reasonably adequate notations."

[34] There can be sentence-final use of *bhikkhave* if phrases like *āvuso bhikkhave,* and *taṃ kiṃ maññatha bhikkhave, api…* have the usual commas replaced by full-stops. However, I have not found unambiguous sentence-final *bhikkhave* in the Burmese or PTS editions.

[35] *Pragmatic marker* is a term in pragmatics to indicate words not part of the propositional content of a sentence, e.g. vocatives, conjunctions, disjuncts (*frankly, fortunately*) etc. Fraser

a topic. On the other hand, *bhikkhavo* is a pragmatic marker inviting an answer. For example, the pericope, *tatra kho bhagavā bhikkhū āmantesi — bhikkhavo ti. bhaddante ti te bhikkhū bhagavato paccassosuṃ*, 'right there the Blessed One addressed the monks: "Monks!" "Sir," the monks answered the Blessed One.'[36] There is an analogous phonological change in English *the* to mark different functions: /ðə/ frequently refers to a subject already introduced, but /ðɪ/ introduces a famous name, as in *I'm meeting the David Attenborough*, and is a pragmatic marker with the illocutionary force of 'I expect you have heard of this person'. The alternative explanation of 'Māgadhism' is asserted in these standard works without any examples of an *-ave* form in any dialect but Pali and without examples of any Pali plural but *bhikkhave*.[37] It is more likely that the pronunciation of the original *bhikkhavo* changed in enclitic positions.[38]

(1996: 186) gives the example of a vocative, *my friend*, as a solidarity marker and *bhikkhave/o* may also have had that function.

[36] Giving the final syllable its full length may also be analogous to Pāṇini's Aṣṭādhyāyī Rule 8.2.83 where a final long, high-pitched syllable is used as a *pratyabhivādana*, a response to a respectful greeting, except in the case of a Śūdra. The Buddha, having taken his seat, may have received bows from the audience and used *bhikkhavo* as a formal acknowledgement.

[37] Geiger (1916: §82) claims *bhikkhave* is "a 'Māgadhism' which has penetrated into the literary language from the popular speech", but he did not have the advantage of modern computer searches; Lüders (1954: 13, §1) also asserts a Māgadhism. Their case would be more convincing if they had produced examples of an *-ave* ending in any variety, apart from the vocative plural in Pali. So far as I know, no such examples exist: the Aśokan inscriptions do not have *-ave* or *-avo;* Pischel §381 has only AMg *bhikkhavo* vocative plural and Pischel §378-381 on the *-u* declension offers no *-ave* forms for any case in any Prakrit, including Māgadhī. In Pali, only *bhikkhave* seems to have this *-ave* ending and only for the vocative plural.

Lüders et al. (1963: 70), writing of the Bharhut inscriptions of western India, go further than Geiger, claiming that the stem *bhikkhu* is also a Māgadhism: "When translating into the Western language, which we are used to call Pāli, not only numerous faults occurred, but at many places the Eastern forms have been retained. So, for instance, in the Eastern language the *ksh* of *śaiksha* and of *bhikkshu, bhikkshuṇi* became *kkh*, in the Western language, however, it became *chchh*. But *sekkha, bhikkhu, bhikkhunī* were taken over without change as technical expressions in the church language." The index (Lüders et al. 1963: 198) shows 4 occurrences for *bhikhunī* at Bharhut and 10 for *bhichhunī*. (Sāñchī inscriptions show both *bhikhu* and *bhichu*.) The fact that *bhicchunī* is only western does not mean *bhikkhunī* is only eastern. An alternative explanation is that in the West lenition of *bhikhu and bhikhunī* was developing, but this was not reflected in the earlier and conservative Pali.

I consider these claims of Māgadhisms to be completely unfounded.

[38] Bechert (1991: 11f) claimed *bhikkhavo* was a later form which replaced *bhikkhave* in the above pericope, which was added later, and also in Sutta Nipāta, which was otherwise full of Māgadhisms. Anālayo (2011: 22) finds some ambiguous evidence for Bechert's view, that the

The SOTT also predicts transmission Māgadhisms: that speakers of pre-eastern varieties would inadvertently colour the transmission of texts with their own accent. This could explain inconsistent use of pre-eastern features. Norman (1976: 118ff) points out that Māgadhisms are found only for three of six Ājīvika type ascetics, and not consistently within the three. For Pakudha's doctrine, the varieties are mixed even in the same passage at D I.56: "*pathavikāyo, āpokāyo, tejokāyo, vāyokāyo, sukhe, dukkhe, jīve sattame*", 'The seven are the earth element, the water element, the fire element, the wind element, pleasure, pain and life'.

Thus it should not be claimed that the existence of the very few Māgadhisms in Pali 'proves' incompetent translation from Māgadhī. Original and contact Māgadhisms can be taken as proof of non-translation; elsewhere, apparent or transmission Māgadhisms are more plausible alternatives to the MOTT narrative.

3.9 Conclusion: Māgadhī is a false trail

Current scholarship has followed a false trail by accepting the later tradition that *Māgadhabhāsā* is local and equals Māgadhī, and ignoring the commentaries of Buddhaghosa that it is trans-regional and (Indo-) Aryan, meaning Pali. This has led to unfounded claims that the Buddha's main connection was with Magadha, the province, that his language was a precursor to the Eastern Aśokan inscriptions and that Pali is an imperfect translation of Māgadhī.

Norman (§3.3), for example, saw that *Māgadhabhāsā* was not synonymous with Māgadhī, but did not extricate himself from the academic consensus that identified it with that specific dialect. The *Einstellung* effect may explain this consensus. Bilalić and McLeod (2014: 75ff) explain that the *Einstellung* effect in psychology refers to an obvious solution to a problem, in this case *Māgadhabhāsā* meaning Māgadhī, blocking access to a better solution, in this case *Māgadhabhāsā* meaning *Ariyaka* and Pali. We move on to that better solution in §5.

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above pericope is absent from *Madhyama Āgama*, but is found in a tradition derived from it; however, he also believes a difference of emphasis is plausible. Manné (1990: 82) believes that pericopes are likely to be original features, which supports *bhikkhavo* as the original, as does the *-avo* ending in AMg. and Mg. In fact, *bhikkhavo* is the form used in poetry, even in enclitic positions, at Sn 280, Sn 385, D II.272, A IV.89, It 41and Ap 299. The entire Be Khuddhaka Nikāya has no instances of *bhikkhave* in verse and I believe this holds true throughout the Pāli canon. This implies that the final syllable of *bhikkhave* was a shortened sound prosodically.

4. Sakāya niruttiyā

Oberlies (2003: 166), who has provided a recent and clear explanation of the MOTT (see §6), has made the following claim:

> The Buddha is reported to have said that his teachings should be given to the people not in Sanskrit, but in their own language.

Oberlies does not offer a reference for this point, but almost certainly, like Norman (§2.1), he is referring to the *sakāya niruttiyā* passage in the Cūḷavagga of the Vinaya.[39] MOTT advocates will translate the passage broadly as Edgerton (1953: 1) does:

> Two monks, brothers, brahmins by birth, of fine language and fine speech, came to the Buddha and said: Lord, here monks of miscellaneous origin (literally, of various names, clan-names, races or castes, and families) are corrupting (*dūsenti*) the Buddha's words (by repeating them in) their own dialects. Let us put them into Vedic. The Lord Buddha rebuked them; Deluded men, how can you say this? This will not lead to the conversion of the unconverted... And he delivered a sermon and commanded (all) the monks: You are not to put the Buddha's words into Vedic [*chandaso*]. Who does so would commit a sin. I authorise you, monks, to learn the Buddha's words each in his own [*sakāya*] dialect [*niruttiyā*]. [Pali wording added]

Edgerton claims support from Chinese translations of Vinaya sources.[40]

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[39] Vin II.139, DPR Cv 5.285. *tena kho pana samayena yameḷakekuṭā nāma bhikkhū dve bhātikā honti brāhmaṇajātikā kalyāṇavācā kalyāṇavākkaraṇā. te yena bhagavā tenupasaṅkamiṃsu, upasaṅkamitvā bhagavantaṃ abhivādetvā ekamantaṃ nisīdiṃsu. ekamantaṃ nisinnā kho te bhikkhū bhagavantaṃ etadavocuṃ — "etarahi, bhante, bhikkhū nānānāmā nānāgottā nānājaccā nānākulā pabbajitā. te sakāya niruttiyā buddhavacanaṃ dūsenti. handa mayaṃ, bhante, buddhavacanaṃ chandaso āropemā" ti. vigarahi buddho bhagavā ... pe ... "kathañhi nāma tumhe, moghapurisā, evaṃ vakkhatha — 'handa mayaṃ, bhante, buddhavacanaṃ chandaso āropemā'ti. netaṃ, moghapurisā, appasannānaṃ vā pasādāya ... pe ... vigarahitvā ... pe ... dhammiṃ kathaṃ katvā bhikkhū āmantesi — "na, bhikkhave, buddhavacanaṃ chandaso āropetabbaṃ. yo āropeyya, āpatti dukkaṭassa. anujānāmi, bhikkhave, sakāya niruttiyā buddhavacanaṃ pariyāpuṇitun" ti.*

[40] Edgerton (1953: 2) offers three Chinese sources translated by Lin Li-Kouang:

Mahīsāsaka Vinaya: "...the two originally brahman brothers heard monks reciting the sūtras 'incorrectly'. They ridiculed them, saying: 'Tho' they have long since become monks, they recited the sūtras in this fashion! not knowing masculine and feminine gender, nor singular and plural, nor

However, his reading cannot be correct:

1.   This interpretation is in direct contradiction to the evidence in §2 that oral translation was impractical, discouraged and unnecessary. This includes 18 passages stressing the value of learning Suttas accurately, to the syllable.

2.   The *Araṇavibhaṅga Sutta* (M 139) discourages the use of dialect words (§5.1).

3.   Buddhaghosa's commentary on *sakāya niruttiyā* explains the Buddha's teaching is to be learnt in the Buddha's speech (§4.6).

4.   The Vinaya text could have been *sakasakāya* instead of *sakāya* if 'each in their own dialect' was intended, but the text does not specify that meaning.

5.   The two occurrences of *sakāya* are separated by seven sentences in the PTS edition, so there is no grammatical or logical need for them to have the same referent.

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present, past and future, nor long or short sounds (vowels), nor (metrically) light and heavy sounds (syllables).' When they appealed to the Buddha, he ordered that the texts be recited 'according to the sounds of the regions, but taking care not to distort the meaning. It is forbidden to make of the Buddha's words an "outside" (non-Buddhist, heretical) language.'"

Dharmaguptaka Vinaya: "… a monk... complained to the Buddha that 'monks of different clans and bearing different names were ruining the sūtras', and proposed 'to arrange them according to the good language of the world', that is, no doubt, Vedic or Sanskrit, the language of culture. In his rebuke the Buddha said it would ruin the sūtras to use 'the language of heretics', and that 'it is allowed to recite and learn the Buddha's sūtras according to the interpretation of the popular languages of (various) regions."

Vinayamātṛkā: (Affiliation unknown). The Buddha states "In my religion, fine language is not recognised. All I want is that meaning and reasoning be correct. You are to preach according to a pronunciation (lit. sound) which people can understand. Therefore it is proper to behave (sc. in the use of language) according to the countries."

Lamotte (1958: 611-13) also offers a translation from the **Sarvāstivādin Vinaya**: Two brahmins who had been converted to Buddhism …. had recited the texts of the four heretical Vedas … they recited the Buddhist sutras with the same intonations…. (one) reported the matter to the Buddha. The Buddha said to him: "Henceforth, whoever recites the Buddhist sutras with the intonations of heretical books will be committing a misdeed." and **Mūlasarvāstivādin Vinaya**: The Buddha ... announced the following regulation: "… If bhikṣus recite the sutras with the intonation of the *chan t'o (chandas)*, they will be guilty of the offence of transgressing the Dharma. However, if a regional pronunciation requires the intonation to be long, it is not wrong to do that."

6. If the MOTT claims that the normal role of *saka*, of referring to the grammatical subject of a sentence, can be stretched in its second occurrence to implied subjects, then *a fortiori* it must also equally allow the translation, 'I require you, monks, to recite the Buddha's teachings in **our** language', a translation which does include the grammatical subject (among others) and which undermines the MOTT reading.

7. The most up to date dictionary does not give *dialect* or *language* for *nirutti*. Cone (2010: 607) has only *explanation*, *interpretation*, *expression*, *form of words*, *way of speaking*, *alternative terminology*, or *gloss*. (The earlier PED does have *dialect*.)

8. It is doubtful that any of the five Chinese sources are referring to mutually unintelligible varieties that would require translation. Levman (2008/9: 42, 43) states that all five Chinese sources refer to pronunciation, and only one source, the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya, is about language, as well as pronunciation. He translates it as the Buddha allowing "the sounds and common language of the country to be used in learning the scriptures by recitation and explanation."[41] Levman believes that the translator was not accurate elsewhere and may have wished to legitimise the translation into Chinese with *common language*. Both 'sounds' and 'common language' are outside the scope of *nirutti* as given by Cone. Perhaps a conscientious Chinese translator, uncertain of which nuance of *niruttii* was intended and checking other sources, indicated a range of possibilities.[42] Thus, this one equivocal Chinese source does not confirm the reading of 'dialect'.

9. There are at least six alternative and more plausible readings, the first two take *sakāya* as Edgerton does, the last four follow Buddhaghosa in referring to the Buddha's speech:

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[41] Lin Li-Kouang in Edgerton omits 'sounds' from the Dharmaguptaka version, Brough (1980: 39-40) is ambiguous.

[42] Sincere, competent translators inevitably interpret their sources. For *sandiṭṭhiko dhammo*, literally 'dhamma which is completely visible', Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (1995: 358) has "Dhamma, which is visible here and now," though 'here' and 'now' are nowhere in the original Pali; Bhikkhu Bodhi offers (2000: 98) "this Dhamma is directly visible" even though 'directly' is not a normal translation of the prefix *sam*; Gombrich (2018: 59) has the non-literal 'practical' for *sandiṭṭhiko*.

4.1 Reading 1: Ruegg (*chandaso* = Vedic chant, *niruttiyā* = delivery)

Ruegg (2000: 306) follows Lévi (1915) in taking *nirutti* as meaning prosodic or phonological features. He states:

> In keeping with the prosodic interpretation, the problematic expression *sakāya niruttiyā* seems more intelligible in its context if it is understood to refer to the individual reciter's manner of speaking (on both the prosodic and phonological levels). In other words, it is perhaps best understood as meaning not 'in one's own language/ dialect' but, instead, 'in one's own speech' (i.e. vocal delivery).

As evidence, he cites the Cullavagga (Vin II.107), where a protracted melodic recitation style, *gītassarena*, is not allowed, but *sarabhañña*, 'plainchant', is allowed. This is consistent with the description of the Yameḷakekuṭa brothers as *kalyāṇavācā,* which Ruegg translates as "whose voices were good, whose vocal delivery was good". This sense of *nirutti* is not given by Cone, but it is in line with all five Chinese versions.

4.2 Reading 2: Gombrich (*chandaso* = Vedic chant, *niruttiyā* = gloss)

Gombrich (2009: 147) takes *chandaso* as recitation in a particular Vedic reciting style with pitch accents. As he accepts that monk learnt texts word for word, *sakāya niruttiyā* means 'their own mode of expression' and refers to explanatory glosses or paraphrases given in their own dialects.

4.3 Reading 3: Geiger (*chandaso* = Vedic Sanskrit, *niruttiyā* = language)

Geiger (1916: 7) follows Buddhaghosa's commentary (§4.6) and translates, "I ordain the words of the Buddha to be learnt in his own language (in Māgadhī, the language used by the Buddha himself)." Geiger regarded the Buddha as not speaking a pure Māgadhī, but a form of popular speech. Edgerton (1953: 2) is well aware of the commentary and Geiger's view, but dismisses them on the grounds that Geiger is in a minority of scholars and that the Chinese sources are against him and Buddhaghosa. He does not address Geiger's arguments: that the comparison in question is with dialect and Vedic, not between non-Vedic dialects, that there is no *vo* to connect *sakāya* to the monks' *nirutti* and that memorisation of the founder's words is in accordance with Indian custom.

4.4 Reading 4: Norman (*chandaso* = as desired, *niruttiyā* = gloss)

Norman (1971: 331) paraphrases the Brahmin brothers: "let us translate into the various vernaculars to meet the various needs of these different people who cannot cope with the language of the Buddha's words". According to Norman, the Buddha then refused translation. He (1980: 63) thought that the Buddha varied terms or glosses to meet local needs without translating all his speech, and other reciters followed his practice. He consistently believed *sakāya* cannot have different referents, but decided (1992: 83) it referred to *buddhavacanaṃ,* and not to the Buddha, as he previously thought.

4.5 Reading 5: Levman (*chandaso* = Vedic Sanskrit/ chant, *niruttiyā* = name)

Levman (2008/9: 39) makes a case for *nirutti* to mean 'names' in the sense of 'technical terms' and takes *dūsenti* to be the confusing of these terms. He translates, "Monks, 1 enjoin the Buddha's words be learned with its (my) own names." He has no difficulty with *sakāya* having different referents.

4.6 Reading 6: Karpik (*chandaso* = verse, *niruttiyā* = way of speaking)

Though it is something of a rarity in discussions of this passage, the obvious meaning of *chandaso* as 'into verse' must be considered.[43] I interpret the crucial sentence as 'Monks, I require you to learn the Buddha's words in my (his/ its) own way of speaking (i.e. prose or verse, whichever was the original).' Or, to paraphrase, 'Monks I require you to learn the Buddha's words in the original.'

Thomas (1927: 254) takes *chandaso* as 'metre' and, on the basis of a tendency to versify late texts, notably the Parivāra of the Vinaya, he concludes "there was once an attempt to versify the Canon, and it was rejected, at least to the extent that the versifications were not allowed to take the place of the fundamental texts." It must have been a daily frustration for brahmin converts to Buddhism to memorise suttas in prose when they had been trained from boyhood to use metre as a memory aid. This frustration must have been aired with the Buddha at some point, and the advantages of metre suggested to him, so it would be unsurprising to have a record of

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[43] Thomas (1927: 254) has 'metre', but gives *sakāya niruttiyā* as 'in its own grammar'. As I cannot see how *nirutti* can mean 'grammar', I have altered his reading to Cone's 'way of speaking'. Horner (1963: 194) has 'into metrical form'.

that suggestion being made. Another advantage of metre, the brothers might think, would be reducing variation; for example, metre would eliminate variation in long and short vowels. Communal chanting, as encouraged in the *Pāsādika Sutta* (§2.2), in a variety of broad accents would offend them as lacking clarity. This is the minimum of what the complaint, *dūsenti*, 'they are spoiling', means and is sufficient to understand this passage.

Buddhaghosa's commentary on this passage is given in full:[44]

> 'Fine speech' – pleasant sounding. 'Let us elevate it into verse' [*chandaso*] - let us put the words into the style of refined language like the Veda. 'Own way of speaking' [*sakāya niruttiyā*] – In this case, 'own way of speaking' is the previously stated[45] Magadhan language, [*māgadhiko vohāro*][46] of the Perfectly Awakened One.

Buddhaghosa's "style of refined language like the Veda" appears to be a periphrasis for 'gātha language', which had archaic forms reminiscent of the Vedas. The Brahmin brothers would have been proposing the *gāthā* verse style, putting Buddhist prose into Buddhist verse. The Buddha refused and this refusal would be consistent with the prohibition of *gītassarena* (§4.1), which can be seen as a wish to make chanting nearer normal speech and less like song. *Māgadhiko vohāro*, 'the Magadhan language' refers to *Māgadhabhāsā* and *Ariyaka* (§3.2-5) and signals the ordinary, inclusiveness of the Buddha's speech, the *mūlabhāsā*, 'root language', of the noble savage, a speech far from the exclusiveness imputed by MOTT advocates and to

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[44] Vin-a VI.1214, DPR Vin-a Cv 5.285 *kalyāṇavākkaraṇāti madhurasaddā. chandaso āropemāti vedaṃ viya sakkatabhāsāya vācanāmaggaṃ āropema. sakāya niruttiyāti ettha sakā nirutti nāma sammāsambuddhena vuttappakāro māgadhiko vohāro.*

[45] 'Previously stated' refers to the section on disrobing in Vin-a I.255, DPR Vin-a Pārā 1.1.54 (§3.2), the commentary on Vin III.27-28, DPR Vin Pārā 1.1.54 (§2.3). Norman (1980: 61) rejects Horner's "the current Magadhese manner of speech according to the awakened one" and (1980: 62) offers "the Māgadhī terminology in the form spoken by the Enlightened one". However, I stand by my translation, which is supported by the PED entry for *pakāra*.

[46] 'The term, Magadhan' contrasts with 'refined' [gāthā] language like the Vedas. Buddhaghosa thought the brothers cared about aesthetics ('fine sounding', 'refined language') and wished his readers to be clear that the Buddha's prose language was to be followed. By referring back to the disrobing passage, he is contrasting *Māgadhabhāsā* with non-Aryan languages and implying wide-spread, non-elitist, language of no particular variety.

which they rightly object[47]. Buddhaghosa was implying the Magadhan language, i.e. Pali, was truly a language for all.[48]

This theme of non-elitism fits in well with the five Chinese sources who all refer to the Buddha allowing local sounds. Although the Buddha recommended standard language, he would not, like the Vedic reciters, seek to fix pronunciation to ensure the efficacy of ritual, but had to allow to some degree regional accents in the delivery of the standard language, given that Vedic techniques of transmission were not used. Doubtless, monks would try to tone down their local accent, if any, to conform to the western standard during recitation of texts (§5.6), but not everyone can adapt their accent fully. Hence, the transmission would have been somewhat phonetically fluid (§2.4).

That the Buddha was not elitist over pronunciation and did not want his prose elevated into elitist verse is my reading of the Pali Vinaya passage, its commentary and also of the Chinese sources.

4.7 *Sakāya niruttiyā*: a red herring

In conclusion, the meaning of the expression *sakāya niruttiyā* remains controversial, but provides no solid evidence for the MOTT. The MOTT reading, exemplified by Edgerton, is merely one of seven interpretations and it is by far the worst for the reasons given above. I leave the reader to decide which of the other six readings is best as that is not relevant to this argument.

5. Inferring the Buddha's teaching language

If we accept the evidence for the ideal of a fixed transmission (§2.2), this leaves

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[47] MOTT advocates might mistranslate "'Let us put it into Vedic' [*chandaso*] – let us put our manner of speech into the Sanskrit language like the Veda. Here 'own dialect' [*sakāya nirutti*] is the manner of speech, the Māgadhī usage [*māgadhiko vohāro*] of the Perfectly Awakened One" and thus reject this gloss.

[48] This addresses misreadings of Buddhaghosa, of which Law (1933: xii-xiii) is a forthright example:

"It is beyond our comprehension how Buddhaghosa went so far as to suggest that by the term sakānirutti, the Buddha meant his own medium of instruction and nothing but Māgadhika or the Māgadhī dialect. Nothing would have been more distant from the intention of a rational thinker like the Buddha than to commit himself to such an opinion which is irrational, dogmatic and erroneous. He could not have done so without doing violence to his position as a sammādiṭṭhika and vibbajjavādin. To give out that Māgadhī is the only correct form of speech for the promulgation of his teachings and every other dialect would be an incorrect form is a micchādiṭṭhi or erroneous opinion which the Buddha would ever fight shy of. Buddhaghosa has misled us all."

as the only possibility a single variety suitable for use across all Indo-Aryan-speaking areas, i.e., a standard language.

5.1 Textual evidence for a standard language

In the *Araṇavibhaṅga Sutta* [MN 139, M III.234-5], already discussed in the context of mutual intelligibility of varieties (§2.3), the Buddha recommended standard vocabulary. Horner (1959: 282) translates:

> When it is said: 'One should not affect the dialect of the countryside, one should not deviate from recognised parlance,' in reference to what is it said? And what, monks, is affectation of the dialect of the countryside and what is departure from recognised parlance? In different districts they know (the different words): Pāti … Patta … Vittha … Sarāva … Dhāropa … Poṇa … Pisīla. Thus, as they know the word as this or that in these various districts so does a person, obstinately clinging to it and adhering to it, explain: 'This indeed is the truth, all else is falsehood'. Thus, monks is affectation of the dialect of the countryside and departure from recognised parlance. And what, monks, is non-affectation of the dialect of the countryside and non-departure from recognised parlance? In this case, monks, they know (the different words) Pāti …. Patta … Poṇa … Pisīla, yet although they know the word as this or that in these various districts a person does not cling to it and explains: 'These venerable ones definitely explain it thus.' Thus, monks, is non-affectation of the dialect of the countryside and non-departure from recognised parlance. When it is said: 'One should not affect the dialect of the countryside [Cone: 'local terminology'], one should not deviate from recognised parlance,' it is said in reference to this.[49]

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[49] DPR M3,4.9, MN139 *Araṇavibhaṅgasutta. 331.* "*'janapadaniruttiṃ nābhiniveseyya, samaññaṃ nātidhāveyyā'ti — iti kho panetaṃ vuttaṃ. kiñcetaṃ paṭicca vuttaṃ? kathañca, bhikkhave, janapadaniruttiyā ca abhiniveso hoti samaññāya ca atisāro? idha, bhikkhave, tadevekaccesu janapadesu 'pātī'ti sañjānanti, 'pattan'ti sañjānanti, 'vittan'ti sañjānanti, 'sarāvan'ti sañjānanti 'dhāropan'ti sañjānanti, 'poṇan'ti sañjānanti, 'pisīlavan'ti, sañjānanti. iti yathā yathā naṃ tesu tesu janapadesu sañjānanti tathā tathā thāmasā parāmāsā abhinivissa voharati — 'idameva saccaṃ, moghamaññan'ti. evaṃ kho, bhikkhave, janapadaniruttiyā ca abhiniveso hoti samaññāya ca atisāro.*

332. "*kathañca, bhikkhave, janapadaniruttiyā ca anabhiniveso hoti samaññāya ca anatisāro?*

Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (1995: 1084) concur: "One should not insist on local language, and one should not override normal usage." Von Hinüber (1995: 190) states "The advice given in this paragraph from the *Majjhimanikāya* is clear: one should use standard language, what should be meant by *samaññā* here, and avoid dialects or colloquialisms." Brough (1980: 40) and Norman (1980: 62), both MOTT advocates, take *janapadanirutti* as meaning local dialect, but do not address the corollary that *samaññā* therefore means standard dialect. Cone (2010: 204) takes a different tack and translates *janapadanirutti* as "local terminology", thus implying that *samaññā* means standard terminology, which is confirmed by the commentary.[50]

This injunction to use *samaññā*, 'standard vocabulary', has been widely misread by MOTT advocates. One reason may be that the normally authoritative Lamotte (1958: 611) arrived at the opposite meaning and others have followed.[51]

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idha, bhikkhave, tadevekaccesu janapadesu 'pātī'ti sañjānanti, 'pattan'ti sañjānanti, 'vittan'ti sañjānanti, 'sarāvan'ti sañjānanti, 'dhāropan'ti sañjānanti, 'poṇan'ti sañjānanti, 'pisīlavan'ti sañjānanti. iti yathā yathā naṃ tesu tesu janapadesu sañjānanti 'idaṃ kira meāyasmanto sandhāya voharantī'ti tathā tathā voharati aparāmasaṃ. evaṃ kho, bhikkhave, janapadaniruttiyā ca anabhiniveso hoti, samaññāya ca anatisāro. 'janapadaniruttiṃ nābhiniveseyya samaññaṃ nātidhāveyyā'ti — iti yaṃ taṃ vuttaṃ, idametaṃ paṭicca vuttaṃ.

[50] The commentary states (DPR M-a 3.4.9.232): **samaññan ti lokasamaññaṃ lokapaññattiṃ**, '*samaññā* is universal terminology, universal description.'. This implies a standard vocabulary. There is no comment on *janapadanirutti*.

[51] Levman (2014: 110) confirms that the mistake is Lamotte's. Lamotte (1958: 611) cites *janapadaniruttiyā ca abhiniveso*, 'affectation of the dialect of the countryside' and *samaññāya ca atisāro*, 'departure from recognised parlance'. Then he mistakes this description of how conflict arises for the recommended conduct. As four pages earlier Lamotte (1958: 607) had claimed "The main achievement of the sects was to have put the word of the Buddha into the vernacular", I take this error as confirmation bias. He may have been influenced by Law (1933: xvi) who offers a paraphrase which also reverses the meaning: "Now a man of a particular locality, when he is in other localities where different names of the same thing are in vogue, knowing that in different localities different names of the same thing are used conventionally by the gentlemen, uses different names in different localities without any attachment to his own local form." Wimalawamsa & Perera (1976: 5) also misunderstand: "... it is clear that the Buddha did not pay undue attention to language. When several terms are used to describe one thing in different states or regions, one must not stick to one particular term only." Piyasīlo's (1996: 146) misreading is more nuanced: "… it is said the 'middle way' is not to insist unduly on his own provincial dialect and at the same time not to diverge from general or recognised language….for instance, a different word is used for 'bowl': *pāti, patta, vittha, sarāva, dhāropa, poṇa, pisīla,* and that each one considers his word the only correct one, but that in the interest of peace, it is best for each one to use the word currently at hand."; unfortunately for Piyasīlo's reading, the 'middle way' applies only to the first of the six recommendations for avoiding conflict, that of avoiding both sensuality and self-mortification.

Norman (1988: 12fn) too seems to have misunderstood and has used this very passage as part of an argument that the Buddha must have used local dialects.

This passage contradicts the MOTT claim that the Buddha and his disciples taught in local dialects. Furthermore, although it does not unambiguously refer to a standard language, it strongly implies it, as von Hinüber realised.[52] For it is hard to see how a standard vocabulary arises independent of a standard language. When combined with the evidence of the 18 suttas that affirm learning dhamma to the syllable (§2.2), this is strong circumstantial evidence of the use of a standard language across all dialect areas for transmission of texts.

5.2 The inferred characteristics of the Buddha's teaching language

If a standard form of Indo-Aryan existed in the Buddha's day, we can infer its probable characteristics: a western variety, evidenced in inscriptions and showing pre-Aśokan features. All these features are evident in Pali.

5.2.1 A western variety

A western variety becoming the standard in a dialect continuum spanning the north-west, west and east of India is what one might expect. For there is a tendency for the central variety to become the standard. This was the case in medieval England, as noted by John of Trevisa in 1385,[53] and in Germany, as

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As these four readings claim support from the standard MOTT misreading of *sakāya niruttiyā* as authority for translation (§4), I attribute these mistakes to confirmation bias.

[52] However, von Hinüber dismissed this passage in favour of the MOTT misinterpretation of the *sakāya niruttiyā* passage (§4). Von Hinüber (1995: 190f) questioned the fact of multiple terms by arguing that only *patta* and *pāti* are precise synonyms and the other words refer to different objects. He gives no references and the significance of this point is not clear; he may think only synonymous pairs present difficulties. However, I believe the passage refers, not to synonyms, but to semantic divergence where the same word applies to different objects in different dialects, as in *pavement*, *subway* etc. in British and American English (§2.3). If true, compared to English, semantic divergence was considerable in MIA dialects.

[53] Freeborn (2006: 94) modernises John of Trevisa:

"… also concerning the Saxon tongue that is divided into three and has barely survived among a few uneducated men (there) is great wonder, for men of the east with men of the west, as it were under the same part of heaven, agree more in (their) pronunciation than men of the north with men of the south. Therefore it is that Mercians, who are men of middle England, as it were partners of the extremes, understand better the languages on either side, Northern and Southern, than Northerners and Southerners understand each other."

(The East Midland variety became standard English in the fifteenth century.)

noted by Luther in the 16th century.[54] Of course there are exceptions,[55] but not India. Patañjali claims that the inhabitants of the Āryāvarta, a central region north of the Vindhyas, are the normative speakers of Sanskrit (Deshpande 1986: 316-7). Epigraphic Prakrit was a central-western variety (§5.2.2). Later, the normative speakers of Prakrit were from the Deccan, another central area due south. Bubenik (1996: 12) states:

> Māhārāṣṭrī, according to the grammarians, was the Prākrit par excellence, the 'standard' Prākrit. While the grammarians describe its features, in the case of other Prākrits they mention only how they deviate from the 'standard' Prākrit. According to Daṇḍin (6th c. A.D.), Māhārāṣṭrī was the most 'excellent' Prakrit. It was based on the living tongue of the north-western part of the Deccan (along the river Godāvarī)...

Śroṇa Koṭikarṇa (Pali Soṇa Kuṭikaṇṇa), a native of Avanti in modern Madhya Pradesh or else of Aparānta(ka) further west, was praised by the Buddha for his recitation of the whole Aṭṭhakavagga.[56] The Buddha also regarded him as foremost of monks with a fine speaking voice.[57] The Buddha definitely praises the delivery of the Aṭṭhakavagga recitation[58], but his western accent and dialect were also valued,[59] for eastern varieties were not prestigious.

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[54] Russ (1994: 13) translates Martin Luther:

"I haven't any certain, special language of my own but I use the common German language so that both North and South Germans can understand me. I speak according to the Saxon Chancery, which all the princes and kings in Germany follow; all Imperial Towns, princely courts write according to the Saxon Chancery of our prince, therefore that is the most common German language." Saxony is in the centre of Germany.

[55] For example, from the French Revolution onwards, the government promoted the non-central Parisian French as the standard language.

[56] Vin I.196, DPR Mv 5.258 *sabbāneva aṭṭhakavaggikāni sarena abhāsi* and Ud 59, DPR Ud 5.6.18 *aṭṭhakavaggikāni sabbāneva sarena abhaṇi.*

[57] A I.24, DPR A 1.14.2.206, AN 1.206 *etadaggaṃ, bhikkhave, mama sāvakānaṃ bhikkhūnaṃ kalyāṇavākkaraṇānaṃ yadidaṃ soṇo kuṭikaṇṇo.* 'Foremost, monks, of my monk disciples with fine speaking voices is Soṇa Kuttikaṇṇa.'

[58] Horner (1962: 264) translates the Pali (Vin I.196-7): "Good, it is good, monk, that by you, monk, the Divisions of Eights are well learnt, well reflected upon, well attended to, and that you are endowed with lovely speech, distinct, without hoarseness, so as to make the meaning clear." Tatelman (2005: 89) translates the Sanskrit version "Excellent! Excellent, Shrona! Mellifluous is the Dharma you have spoken and presented."

[59] 'Accent' is possible for *sarena* and is confirmed by Lévi (1915: 404fn.): "une prononciation

Bronkhorst (2007: 7-8) points out the language of the east had low status. He cites the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (3.2.1.23) giving the speech of demons as *he'lavo he 'lavaḥ*; according to Patañjali, this stands for the Māgadhī *he'layo he 'layaḥ*; in Sanskrit, it corresponds to *he'rayo he 'rayaḥ,* 'Hail Friends!' Hock (1991: 1) translates this passage: "The Asuras, deprived of (correct) speech, saying *he lavo, he lavaḥ*, were defeated. This is the unintelligible speech which they uttered at that time. Who speaks thus is a barbarian. Therefore a brahmin should not speak like a barbarian, for that is the speech of the Asuras."

Bronkhorst (2007: 9) follows up with the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa (1.337-38) which relates how a certain Brahmin called Brahmadatta Caikitāneya was appointed *Purohita*, 'head-priest', by the king of the Kosalans, Brahmadatta Prāsenajita, but left claiming the king's son spoke like an easterner and could not be understood.[60] The Brahmin's unwillingness to adapt attests to the low status of the eastern variety. We can infer that in the late Vedic period Kosala must have been a transition zone where a western variety predominated, though an eastern variety was becoming more accepted by the younger generation. From his analysis of Vedic dialects, Witzel (1989: 226) concluded

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spéciale, un accent locale", 'a special pronunciation, a local accent' Lévi offers parallel passages from: Divyāvadāna from the Mula-Sarvāstivādin Vinaya (1915: 404) "*avec le timbre du pays d' Aparantaka*", 'in the accent of the country of Aparantaka'; from the Sarvāstivādin Vinaya (1915: 407) "*avec la prononciation du pays d' Avanti*", 'in the pronunciation of the country of Avanti'; finally, from the Mahīśāsaka Vinaya (1915: 409) with the Buddha enquiring "*Les hommes de ce royaume prononcent-ils tous ainsi?*", 'Do all the men of this kingdom pronounce in this way?' Tatelman (2005: 88-89) confirms 'accent' at Divyāvadāna 1.159 "in the accent of Ashmaparantaka, but with the proper intonation" for *aśmāparāntikayā svaraguptikayā*.

However, the Theravadins appear to have a different tradition on *sarena*, taking it as 'delivery' instead of 'accent': Ud-a and Vin-t offer *suttussāraṇasarena abhāsi, sarabhaññavasena kathesīti attho,* 'he spoke the suttas in a high-pitched voice, the significance is because he recited in plainchant.'; Vin-a makes no comment. Rhys Davids & Oldenberg (1882: 37) give "intoned"; Horner (1962: 264) translates *sarena* as "from memory", which would only be correct if reciting from a written text were the norm in the Buddha's day; Masefield (1994: 105) has "melodically", but this is specifically forbidden at Vin II.107. The commentary to A IV.63 on Veḷukaṇṭakī Nandamāta's recitation of the Pārāyana gives **sarena bhāsatī**ti … *madhurena sarabhaññena bhāsati*, '**she intoned** ... she recited in a pleasing plainchant'.

[60] In case the reader believes this undermines my claim of mutual intelligibility (§2.3), allow me to quote Trudgill (2010: 182): "It is well known that mutual intelligibility can increase with exposure; it can depend on the **willingness** of the parties involved to attempt to understand each other and to make themselves understood; it may not be equal in both directions; and so on."

"The Kosala land, occupied by the Kāṇvas, Baudhāyanīyas, and Śāṇḍilyas, however, is in many ways a transitional area (usually with a strong Western influence) ..." [61]

The Sakyans were possibly considered rough spoken.[62] Certainly one brahmin regarded them, and presumably their language, as lacking prestige and a negative evaluation of the Buddha's people in a Buddhist text must be significant. Whatever, the truth of matter, the Buddha is likely to have been educated, as a chief's son, to speak a standard western dialect suitable for conversation with members of the Kosalan governing elite, including royalty.[63] The Buddha's praise of the westerner Soṇa Kuṭikaṇṇa's accent makes most sense if there existed such a standard variety.

Although eastern Aśokan inscriptions are in the court language of the east, it is uncontroversial to say those of Girnar in Kāthiāwār in the west are close to Pali. Lamotte (1958: 626) wrote:

> ... we can conclude that neither Māgadhī nor Ardhamagadhī constitutes the linguistic basis of Pāli, and that the cradle of the latter - if we can speak of cradle for such a composite language - is to be sought amongst the Western Prākrits, in the area of Avanti extending into Kāthiāwār.

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[61] I assume this linguistic situation continued through the Buddha's time until changed by the Mauryan empire. The bias against eastern varieties must have abated then, but returned afterwards, for eastern varieties disappeared from the inscriptional record and Māgadhī had a low status in Sanskrit drama.

[62] The Brahmin Ambaṭṭha calls Sakyans *pharusā* (*pharusā, bho gotama, sakyajāti* D I.90, DPR D 1.3.264, DN 3); this could mean 'rough-spoken' without the suffix *-vāca*. However, the commentary gives *kharā*, 'rough' for *pharusā*.

[63] Wynne is quoted in Gombrich (2018: 82) as suggesting that the Buddha's dialect would have been a western-type Kosalī as he was based in Sāvatthī, Kosala's capital, midway between Delhi and Magadha. This is compatible with my argument that the Buddha would not have spoken Māgadhī (§3.1)

However, the linguistic situation of Kosala could have been complex. Given the evidence above that Kosala was a transitional area in the late Vedic period, we cannot assume the dialect of Sāvatthī was the same as that of Kapilavatthu, the Buddha's home town, some 100km east and potentially across an isogloss demarcating a more eastern variety. The Sāvatthī dialect may itself have been a mixture of eastern and western types. We cannot even be sure the Buddha was a native Indo-Aryan speaker; Levman (2013: 157) infers that he may have spoken a Munda language. Moreover, the Kosalan elite, including the Buddha, may not have spoken a local dialect, but a standard sociolect. Finally, the Buddha may have spoken both a local dialect and a standard sociolect.

This, of course, is the home region of Soṇa Kuṭikaṇṇa. What is controversial, however, is the claim here that the Buddha spoke this (non-composite) language.

5.2.2 A variety evidenced in inscriptions

Salomon (1998: 77) states:

> Like the eastern dialect under Aśoka, the central-western dialect of the post-Mauryan era was used far beyond what must have been its original homeland. Thus we find inscriptions in this standard epigraphic Prakrit as far afield as Orissa in the east, for instance, in the Hāthīgumphā inscription ..., while in the south it is abundantly attested in inscriptions from such sites as Nāgārjunakoṇḍa and Amarāvatī. This central-western MIA dialect was, in fact, virtually the sole language in epigraphic use in the period in question, and therefore seems, like Pāli, to have developed into something like a northern Indian lingua franca, at least for epigraphic purposes, in the last two centuries B.C. This is not to say that the inscriptions in this dialect, which Senart called "Monumental Prakrit", are totally devoid of local variations. ... But all in all, the standard epigraphic or "Monumental" Prakrit can be treated as essentially a single language whose use spread far beyond its place of origin, and which should not be taken to represent the local vernacular of every region and period where it appears.

Not only did post-Mauryan inscriptions default to a roughly homogeneous western variety, some are remarkably similar to Pali. Therefore, Epigraphic Prakrit is taken here as a reflex of Pali. Barua (1926: 119) states of the 2nd century BCE Bharhut inscriptions in Madhya Pradesh "Barring the provincialisms, the language of the Bharhut railing can be regarded as a Pāli dialect." This is hardly surprising in a Buddhist site. However, in Orissa in the Hāthīgumphā cave, there is a completely secular inscription of the 1st century BCE recording the rule of King Khāravela, who claims to respect all sects. Barua (1929: 157) says of it: "Leaving the spelling and pronunciation of a few words out of consideration, we can say that their language is Pāli, and nothing but Pāli." Norman (1993: 87) concurs: "There is, in fact, very little difference between Pāli, shorn of its Māgadhisms and Sanskritisms, and the language of the Hāthīgumphā inscription." Cousins (2013: 124-7) described Epigraphic Prakrit as 'Old Pāli', and of the much later inscriptions found at Devnimori in Gujarat (ca. 400CE) and Ratnagiri in Odisha (ca. 500 CE) von Hinüber (1985a: 197) states "... the language, although closer to Pāli than any

other surviving Middle Indic, is by no means identical with it. Thus the inscriptions should be classified linguistically as two new varieties of continental Pāli...”

This sketch of the geographical scope, non-sectarian character and longevity of Epigraphic Prakrit on the Indian mainland is offered as evidence that it had the status of a standard language. The similarities to Epigraphic Prakrit suggest that Pali also had the same status.[64]

5.2.3 A variety predating the Aśokan inscriptions
The antiquity of Pali is suggested by features paralleled in Vedic and absent from classical Sanskrit. Oberlies (2001: 7-14) offers:

1. 71 words found in Pali and Vedic but missing from classical Sanskrit;

2. Pali and Vedic use the aorist as the standard preterite, but Sanskrit does not;

3. Pali -a stem m. nom. pl. endings -āse/-āso, n. nom. pl. -ā and m., n. instr. pl. -ehi and -ī stem acc. sg. -iyaṃ parallel Vedic -āsaḥ, -ā, -ebhiḥ, -yaṃ and contrast with Sanskrit -āḥ, -āni, aiḥ, -īm;

4. the Pali dat./gen. sg. of the personal pronouns and the loc. sg. of ta(d) without anusvāra, mayha, tuyha and tamhi, parallel Ṛgvedic máhya, túbhya and yásmi/ sásmi and contrast with Sanskrit mahyam, tubhyam and tasmin;

5. Pali and Vedic preserve suffixes missing from Sanskrit: the infinitive in -tave, the participle in -āvi(n), the suffix -ttana forming abstract nouns;

6. 6 words in Pali and Vedic, but with a meaning lost by classical Sanskrit; e.g. senā 'missile' or the distinction between Pali kasati, 'ploughs', and kassati, 'drags' (Vedic kṛṣáti and kárṣati) fused into Sanskrit karṣati, 'plough/ drag'.

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[64] The silence of Indian grammarians on Epigraphic Prakrit and Pali gives the opposite impression that this variety was a marginal language. Von Hinüber (1985b: 72) explains the silence as Pali being subsumed under Paiśacī. It is also possible that Sanskrit grammars were ignoring the competition for the H-language by linking other Prakrits to Sanskrit.

The Vedic and Pali *-tvāna* absolutive is another example absent from classical Sanskrit.

Pali has early features which are not found in inscriptions.[65] In some cases, they are also clearly older than classical Sanskrit or Ardha-Māgadhī.

1. Barua (1929: 158) noted Pali is close to Vedic in retaining *ḷ* rather than adopting Sanskrit *ḍ,* However, the Hāthīgumphā inscriptions (H) follow Sanskrit (Skt) and Ardha-Māgadhī (AMg). Pali *kīḷikā*, 'sport', (*krīḷa* in Vedic) becomes *krīḍā* (Skt), *kīḍiyā* (AMg) and *kīḍikā* (H). Pali *kīḷitā*, 'played', (*krīḷitā* Vedic) becomes *krīḍitā* (Skt), *kiḍḍā* (AMg) and *kīḍitā* (H). Pali *pīḷā*, 'pain', (Vedic *pipīḷe*, 'was pressed') becomes *pīḍayati* (Skt), *pīḍā* (AMg) and *pīḍāpayati*, 'oppress', (H). Pali *taḷāka*, 'reservoir', becomes *taḍāka* (Skt), and *taḍāga* (Skt, AMg, H). Pali *veḷuriya*, 'beryl', becomes *vaiḍūrya* (Skt) and *veḍuriya* (AMg, H). Pali *kaḷāra* 'tawny' becomes *kaḍāra* (Skt, AMg, H).[66] Salomon (1998: 35-6) states of the Brāhmī script used for Tamil inscriptions of 2nd century BCE at the earliest "...it has four entirely new characters, interpreted as n̲a, r̲a, r̲a and ḻa, which were evidently created in order to represent Dravidian phonemes not represented in standard (northern) Brāhmī.". It appears that ḷa had not been needed in Epigraphic Prakrit because it had already developed into ḍa. For example, in the Aśokan Pillar Edict V, Pali *eḷaka*, 'ram', and *eḷakā*, 'ewe', become *eḍaka* and *eḍakā* (Skt *eḍaka, eḍakā*).[67]

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[65] There is no database of Indian inscriptions to check with and these observations are based on a small sample.

[66] Pischel §240 states that in the literary Prakrits *ḍ* is generally *ḷ*. This is the exact opposite of what I propose for Epigraphic Prakrit. However, I am speaking of historical sound changes proven by *ḷ* vanishing, but *ḍ* remaining in modern Hindi, Urdu, Bhopuri, Magahi, Maithili, Nepali, Sindhi and Kashmiri (Cardona & Jain 2003). Pischel (§226) is referring to spelling conventions of North India which were broadened to the extent that *ṭa, ḍa* or, *ṇa* could become *la* or *ḷa*. These conventions were unlikely to apply to the Sri Lankan Pali tradition; modern Sinhala retains *ṭ, ḍ, ṇ, ḷ* and *l,* as does Oriya, Panjabi, Gujarati, Marathi and Konkani. Cardona & Jain (2003) do not present a modern Indo-Aryan language that retains *ḷ* but loses *ḍ*.

[67] However, Hultzsch (1925: 225) reads *eḷakā* at Toprā and Rāmpūrvā PE V C (*ḍ* at other sites) and *eḷake* at every site but Toprā PE V J, which has *ḍ*. He also reads *duḍī* 'tortoise' (Skt *duḍi/ duli*) for PE V B for Allahabad, but disregards Buhler's *daḍī* for Toprā and offers *daḷī* instead along with *duḷī* for three other sites; there is no Pali equivalent. For Pali *paṇṇarasa* 'fifteenth' Hultzsch reads

2. Oberlies (2001: 99) states that in Pali -*vv*- as a result of -*vy*-, -*vr*- or -*rv*- is represented by -*bb*- in medial position.[68] The -*rv*- cluster has a unique development to -*bb*- in Pali and later to -*vv*-. Vedic, Sanskrit and Western Aśokan conserve *sarva*, 'all', Pali has *sabba*, which develops to Eastern Aśokan, Bharhut, Sañci and Hāthīgumphā *sava*[69] and Ardha-Māgadhī *savva* (with a separate development for North-western Aśokan *savra*). Similarly, Vedic and Sanskrit conserve *parvata*, 'mountain', Pali has *pabbata*, which develops into Eastern Aśokan, Bharhut and Hāthīgumphā *pavata and* Ardha-Māgadhī *pavvata*. The -*vy*- cluster has a unique development to -*bb*- in Pali and later to -*vv*- or -*viy*-. For the gerundive, Sanskrit and Western Aśokan conserve -*tavya*, Pali has -*tabba*, North-western Aśokan -*tave,* Ardha-Māgadhī -*yavva* and Eastern Aśokan -*taviye*. As Pischel §201 gives medial -*b*- changing to -*v*- in literary Prakrits, we can infer -*bb*- in Pali became -*vv*- in Epigraphic Prakrit and its absence from inscriptions makes -*bb*- pre-Aśokan. [70]

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paṃnaḷasaṃ at Ararāj and Nandangarh PE V H, but *paṃnaḍasaye* at every site but Nandandgarh PE V J. In each case, Hultzsch is substituting *ḷ* for Buhler's *ḍ* on the basis of Buhler's admission of some uncertainty on interpreting the shapes of worn characters and Lüders' certainty that *ḷ* was correct here; Lüders (1911: 1089) thought *ḷ* was more widely used in Epigraphic Prakrit and Sanskrit than generally supposed and etymologies needed to be revised accordingly.

In conclusion, Hultzsch and Lüders are contradicted by Salomon's claim that early Brāhmī script had no *ḷ*, and I defer to Salomon as he is more up-to-date; however, if a future critical edition of the Aśokan inscriptions should vindicate Hultzsch, I would modify my argument to say that the change from *ḷ* to *ḍ* was in progress at the time of Aśoka though, as *ḷ* predominates in Pali, Pali has pre-Aśokan characteristics.

[68] By accepting this, I do not wish to imply that Pali is derived from Vedic or Sanskrit. I subscribe to the model following Wackernagel in Hock & Pandharipande (1978: 13) of parallel developments of Vedic and Prakrit with a pre-Vedic common ancestor.

[69] These are written in the Brāhmī script, which gives single letters for double consonants.

[70] The initial *by*- cluster is unique to Pali. Pali frequently also has *vy*- for the same word, but this is the sole form in other varieties. Pali *byañjana/ vyañjana* 'syllable/ letter', has equivalents *vyañjana* (Vedic and Sanskrit), *viyaṃjana* (Aś Sarnath) and v*ayajana* (Aś Rūpnāth). Pali *byatta/ vyatta* 'clever', equates to *vyakta* (Vedic and Sanskrit) and *viyata* (Aś Pillar Edicts). Pali *byappatha/ vyāvaṭa,* 'busy', equates to *vyāpṛta* (Sanskrit), *vyāpata* (Western Aśokan) and *viyapaṭa* (North-western and Eastern Aśokan).

It could be argued that the difference between *by*- and *vy*- is regional: Burmese and Thai manuscripts prefer the former, whereas Sinhalese manuscripts prefer the latter; therefore, while

3. The absolute ending *-tvā* is usually considered a Sanskritisation, on the dubious assumption that the Buddha used (Ardha-)Māgadhī *-(i)ttā*.[71] If, however, one acknowledges the Theravada tradition that Pali dates from the Buddha and the evidence above that Pali is in some respects closer to Vedic

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-bb- is used across all regions, it might merely represent a consensus on orthography and not an original sound.

Against this argument are the following observations:

To my knowledge, the Burmese and Thai editions only have *by-*; this may be related to the lack of [v] or [ʋ] in the Burmese or Thai phonetic inventory.

Sinhalese has both [b] and [ʋ] and Sinhalese editions, as given by GRETIL, http://gretil.sub. uni-goettingen.de/, show the following distributions of *by-/ vy-*: D I, 122/ 43; D II, 83/ 6; D III, 146/ 34; M I, 352/ 58; M II, 129/ 28; M III, 54/ 60; S I, 13/ 7; S II, 156/ 58; S III, 6/ 5 ; S IV, 7/ 276; S V 53/ 155; A I 32/ 130 ; A II 79/ 78; A III 68/ 184; A IV 21/ 92; A V 552/ 126. Only five examples, M III, S IV, S V, A III and A IV, show a preference for *vy-*, whereas the other eleven examples prefer *by-*. I claim that these results do not show any levelling or evidence of a later redaction, unlike the Thai and Burmese texts.

The argument for regional orthographic variation implies the doubly implausible scenario of (a) one orthographic convention, *v*, for inscriptions and a different convention, *b*, for manuscripts and of (b) an exemption from levelling in Sinhalese manuscripts for *by-/vy-*, but a complete levelling of *-vv-/-bb-* to *-bb-*.

The absence of *by-* from the inscriptional record suggests it is pre-Aśokan and confirms *-bb-* as also pre-Aśokan. The scenario envisaged here is that *b* is a genuine phonetic variant of *v*, well entrenched in the Buddha's day in medial position, but influenced in the *by-* cluster by contact with other varieties to become *vy-* at times. Later, /b/ had changed to /v/ in Epigraphic Prakrit (and in literary prakrits), but was conserved as *-bb-* and *by-* in the Sinhalese Pali tradition along with the *vy-* alternative*,* which would be pronounced [vj] or [ʋj]. The *vy-* alternative was levelled to *by-* in the Burmese and Thai Pali traditions, possibly because it was suspected of being a Sanskritism, possibly because [v] and [ʋ] are not in their phonetic inventories, *v* being pronounced [w], and because [wj] is difficult to pronounce.

[71] Norman (1997: 78) states "Writing down would have been an excellent opportunity for the homogenisation of forms – all absolutives in *-ttā* being changed to *-tvā* ...." However, Oberlies (2001: 265) gives eight endings for the Pali absolutive, -(*i*)*tvā, -i*)*tvāna(ṃ), -(i)tu(ṃ), -tūna, -(i)yā (-ccā), -(i)yāna(ṃ), -eyya -* and *aṃ*. He does not include *-ttā*. Against Norman's view, it is unlikely that only the alleged *-ttā* ending would be completely 'Sanskritised', while other absolutive forms remain unedited.

Von Hinüber (1982: 136) argued for an absolutive in *-ttā* by comparing the agent noun *chettā* at Sn 343 in the PTS edition with the Burmese edition absolutive *chetvā*; he suggested that the agent noun was mistaken for the alleged *-ttā* absolutive and was edited in the Burmese edition; however, he has no definitive examples of *-ttā* as an absolutive.

Norman and von Hinüber sought evidence of *-ttā* in Pali on the hypothesis that the Buddha spoke a kind of Māgadhī. I do not think that they succeeded.

than Sanskrit (including the Vedic and Pali -*tvāna* absolutive missing in Sanskrit), we can hypothesise that this absolutive is an original feature. Then we have a simple trajectory of the development from -*(i)tvāna* (Vedic and Pali) > -*(i)tvā* (Vedic, Sanskrit and Pali) > -*(i)ttā* (Ardha-Māgadhī) > -*(i)tā* (Hāthīgumphā) with separate developments for -*(i)tu* (Eastern and North-western Aśokan) and -*(i)tpā* (Western Aśokan). On the basis of Occam's Razor, as advocated by Hock (1991: 538), taking -*tvā* as an original feature is preferable to the redundant Sanskritisation narrative and thus supports the Theravada tradition.

4. *Brāhmaṇa* 'brahmin' is also usually considered to be a Sanskritisation, but by taking it as a 5th century BCE feature we have a simpler and therefore a preferable development from *brāhmaṇa* (Vedic, Pali, and Sanskrit) > *brahmaṇa* (Western Aśokan) > *bram(h)ana* (Bharhut) > *bamhaṇa* (Hāthīgumphā) with separate developments, *bramaṇa* (North-western Aśokan), *baṃmaṇa* (Ardha-Māgadhī) and *baṃbhana* (Eastern Aśokan). Almost certainly brahmins called themselves *brāhmaṇāḥ* in every area of India, and this is likely to be a loanword in Pali before being naturalised in other varieties by the sound changes recorded in inscriptions.[72]

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[72] There are two problems with *brāhmaṇa* in Pali. (1) Oberlies (2001: 93) states that in word initial position in Pali only single consonants are allowed. This is certainly a strong tendency in Pali, but not a rule: the *br-* cluster is repeated in all derivatives of *brahman* and also in *brahant, brūti* and *brūheti* and their derivatives; initial clusters of, *ty-, tv-, dr-, dv-, by-, vy-* and *sv-* are also found in Pali dictionaries. (2) The long first vowel contravenes the Law of Morae, though Geiger, (1916 §7, 8) notes exceptions and the ancients were not always strict about this 'law' (§2.4). Oberlies (2001: 107), relying on Saksena, states "*brāhmaṇa-* is a Sanskritism and does not comply with any Pali sound law; its 'etymologies' (e.g. *bāhitapāpo ti brāhmaṇo*, Dhp. 388) show that it was pronounced as *b(r)āhaṇa-*." The Dhammapada abounds in polysemy and wordplay, so its 'etymology' may say more about a word play than its actual pronunciation; I cannot find an attested example of *b(r)āhaṇa*. *Pace* Saksena, one would not necessarily expect a borrowing from another variety to reflect the host language's sound conventions. In English, *rendezvous* is frequently pronounced as in French with a nasalised first vowel although this feature is not part of English phonology. The French *hors d' oeuvres*, 'starters', is pronounced /ɔː dəːv(rə)/ in Britain, approximating the French, although in America it is naturalised to /ɔːr dɚːvz/. Similarly, *brāhmaṇa c*ould be considered either as an original anomalous feature or as a loanword which

The MOTT claims that Pali represented a translation from Māgadhī, as exemplified in the Eastern Aśokan inscriptions, into a western literary variety. If so, it would be most unlikely to have features pre-dating Classical Sanskrit, Ardha-Māgadhī, the Aśokan inscriptions or Epigraphic Prakrit. If, however, Pali is a natural language of the 5th century BCE, one would expect a few of its features to evolve in its reflex, Epigraphic Prakrit, and in other varieties. This is what is actually found.[73]

5.3 Linguistic conditions supporting a standard language

In §2.3, there were arguments for the mutual intelligibility of Indo-Aryan in the Buddha's day and beyond. I now argue that the standard vocabulary recommended by the Buddha (§5.1) would have strengthened mutual intelligibility among the dialects. For, with standard vocabulary, their differences were overwhelmingly of accent, with very few of syntax and of morphology.

First, we look at a controversy. Regarding the Aśokan Rock Edicts, Cousins (2013: 97) seems to agree on mutual intelligibility: "...the North-Western forms of Middle Indian in the early Mauryan period were certainly relatively close to the dialects spoken on the Gangetic plain." However, Levman (2016: 2), speaking first of the Buddha's time, disagrees:

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was naturalised in later varieties.

[73] Lamotte (1958: 627-8) came to the opposite conclusion: that Pali post-dates the Aśokan inscriptions on the basis of archaisms found in the north-west, e.g. three sibilants compared to one in Pali, *dhrama* (Pali *dhamma*) and *draśana* (Pali *dassana*), showing *r* retention; he also found archaisms in the west: e.g. long vowels before consonant clusters, e.g. *ātpa* (Pali *atta*), and unassimilated clusters such as gerundives in -*tavya*. His reasoning is fallacious because: (1) he would not have found these archaisms had he made the comparisons with the dominant eastern Aśokan variety; (2) language varieties do not change at the same rate in the same features, Thus typically any variety compared to another will have both more archaic and fewer different archaic features. Lamotte (1957: 626) acknowledges that Pali has some archaic features closer to Vedic than Sanskrit, but these are apparently ignored when coming to his final conclusion that Pali is less archaic; (3) the retention of *r* in *dhrama* and *draśana* continued into the Common Era in the north-western variety's reflex, Gāndhārī. On Lamotte's reasoning we could wrongly deduce that Pali post-dates the beginning of the Common Era; arguably, these are not archaisms, but later developments by metathesis from Sanskrit *dharma* and *darśana;* (4) to make a valid relative dating, the **same** features need to be compared across **all** available varieties to identify trends in the majority of varieties, as above in the bullet points of §5.2.3, but Lamotte selected different features in each variety and compared only two varieties at a time. Lamotte also refers to a six-member compound *aniccucchādanaparimaddanabhedanavidaṃsanadhammo* (D I.76) 'an impermanent thing, subject to erosion, abrasion, dissolution and disintegration' and correctly points out such long compounds are not characteristic of early Indo-Aryan texts; however, six member compounds are untypical of Pali and suggest later editing.

We know, for example, that the north-western dialect (Gāndhārī) was quite different from the eastern dialects, and it was unlikely that they were mutually comprehensible. Certainly by Aśoka's time the dialect differences between, for example, the dialect of Shābāzgaṛhī in the north and Kālsī in the east were considerable.

Levman is not alone, as Gombrich (1988: 128) opines:

The Mauryan Empire was a political unit of a new order of magnitude in India, the first, for example, in which there were speakers of Indo-Aryan languages … so far apart that their dialects must have been mutually incomprehensible.

Levman and Gombrich offer no evidence and, to argue the contrary, an excursion into linguistics is offered, exemplifying what Bechert (1991: 6) advocated: "... we should make use of the results of research into related developments outside India." We start with this comparison from Fennell (2001: 92) who is demonstrating the influence of Old Norse on English:

The children are playing in the street (standard Present Day English)

The bairns are lakin out on't street (Modern Humberside dialect)

Barnen leker ute på gatan (Modern Swedish).

To an English native speaker, the last sentence is unintelligible and the middle sentence is understandable only if the local vocabulary (*bairn, lak out*) of the Humberside dialect is understood. The different phonology (final /n/ instead of /ŋ/ in *lakin* and reducing *the* to /t/) presents no problem to a native English speaker.

Therefore, the criteria suggested for mutual intelligibility are: a difference of phonology alone, i.e. of accent, does not normally create a barrier to comprehension; a difference of vocabulary will be a problem until it is learnt. However, differences of grammar, will pose a barrier that mere exposure to the variety cannot resolve, as in the Swedish example.[74]

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[74] Even a pidgin based on English vocabulary, such as Bislama from Vanuatu in the West Pacific, is unintelligible to a native English speaker, so crucial is the role of grammar. Freeborn (2006: 420ff) offers parallel versions of the Bible, Matthew 26:73:

Bislama (Gud Nyus Bilong Jisas Krais): "Gogo smol taem nomo, ol man ia we oli stap stanap long ples ia, oli kam long Pita, oli talem long em, oli se, 'Be i tru ia, yu yu wan long olgeta. Yu

5.3.1 Underlying similarities in Aśokan inscriptions

The opening of the first Aśokan (Aś) rock edict (RE1) illustrates Levman's comparison:

Kālsī (AśK), India, near Dehra Dun. (Hultzsch 1925: 27): (A) *Iyaṃ dhaṃmalipi Devānaṃpiyenā Piyadasinā lekhitā.* (B) *hidā nā kichhi jive ālabhitu pajohitaviye.*	**Shābāzgaṛhī** (AśSh), Pakistan, near Peshawar. (Hultzsch 1925: 51): (A) *Aya dhramadipi Devanapriasa raño likhapitu.* (B) *hida no kichi jive arabhitu prayuhotave.*
'(A) This law edict is inscribed by Piyadasi, Beloved of Gods. (B) Here no life whatever is to be taken and sacrificed.'	'(A) This law edict of the King, Beloved of Gods, is inscribed by order. (B) Here no life whatever is to be taken and sacrificed.'

Although the wording of the two sets is not identical in all cases, it is striking that there are arguably no differences in syntax in either set of inscriptions.[75] In terms of morphology, the differences that could potentially affect comprehension are similarly very small, 1-2%[76], and so we can rule out the unintelligibility

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luk, tok bilong yu itok bilong man Galili ia.'"

English (New English Bible): "Shortly afterwards the bystanders came up and said to Peter, 'Surely you are another of them; your accent gives you away?'"

[75] Twelve differences are noted using Hultzsch's edition: RE1(A) instrumental with non-causative v genitive with causative; RE1(G), (H) *Tiṃni/ tini pānāni* v *trayo praṇa* - neuter v masculine; RE111(C) *etāye* v *etisa* – genitive v dative; REIII(C) *aṭhāye* v *karaṇa* - dative v ablative; REIII(E) *hetuvatā* v *hetuto* – instrumental v ablative; REIV(B) *dasanā* v *draśanaṃ* – plural v singular; REVI(H) *uṭhānasā* v *uṭhānasi* genitive v locative; REVIII(C) *nikhamithā* v *nikrami* - imperfect v aorist; REIX(G) etc. *dāsa-bhaṭakasi* v *dāsa-bhaṭakasa* – locative v genitive; REXI(A) *hā* v *hahati* – aorist v perfect: REXI(C) *dāśa-bhaṭakaśi* v *dasa-bhaṭakanaṃ* – locative singular v genitive plural. Ten of these differences are merely stylistic and the two instances from REI(G) and (H), masculine v neuter, *tini pānāni* v *trayo praṇa,* may not be a mistake in the other dialect, as Pali has both *pāṇāni* and *pāṇā.* These are a mere twelve out of 134 sentences in AśK and 137 in AśSh, 133 of which are comparable. Thus, the differences in syntax are minimal and probably non-existent.

[76] Whether a variation is phonological or morphological is sometimes moot: Beal (2010: 10) states that article reduction from *the* to *t'* could be seen as either (cf. the Humberside example from Fennell); Bloomfield and Edgerton (1932: 15) acknowledge that what they treat as phonetic variation is often accompanied by or results in lexical or morphological change; at AśK and AśSh, two instances, REVI(E) *hakaṃ* v *ahaṃ* and REX(B) *dhatāye* v *etāye*, appear to defy classification into morphological or phonological or lexical. Following Hultzsch (1925: lxxxvii), in this paper variant inflections involving a single phonetic change are taken as phonetic variants; for example,

of unfamiliar grammar paralleled for English speakers by Swedish. Crucially, there is hardly any lexical difference, only four lexemes in AśSh representing about 1% of vocabulary used.[77]

5.3.2 Mutual intelligibility despite different accents

Despite great uniformity in other features, there is considerable variation in phonology, i.e. in accent. While differences of accent are often initially difficult to

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with nominative masculine singular -a declension endings in -a, -e or -o, my reasoning is: (1) There are many obvious phonetic variations in the inscriptions and a native Aryan speaker would have been more likely to process variant inflection as yet another variant pronunciation. (2) At both sites, all these variants are found (Hultzsch 1925: lxxvi, xc), which suggests that they were processed by native speakers as morphophonemes, i.e. interchangeable pronunciations of the same nominative masculine singular morpheme.

Some morphological variants in both varieties are found in a single language, Pali: at REII(A) etc. -asi (AśK) and –e (AśSh) are both locative singular endings. The same goes for the causative variants at REIII(E) etc. anapayisaṃti v aṇapeśaṃti; the standard AśK causative stem in -aya- is also found in AśSh at REVI(F) etc. in aṇapayami instead of the usual AśSh -e- stem; Pali also shows both forms in many verbs. Moreover, -asi, the standard AśK ending, is also found in the other variety, AśSh, at REI(F), etc. (The AśSh variant of -aspi for -asi is regarded here as a phonological variation.) Therefore, these variants are likely to be mutually comprehensible.

One objective measure of morphological change is a difference in the number of syllables. On this basis, the remaining morphological variants which may cause initial difficulty in comprehension are: REI(G), XIV(A) yevā v vo; REII(A), (E), (F), II(A) (twice), 4(B), (F), VIII(F), XIII(A) lājine v raño; REIII(B), (K) duvāḍasa v badaśa; REIV(K) lājinā v raña; REV(D) mamayā v maya; REVIII(B) husu v abhuvasu; REIX(H) suvāmikena v spamikena; REXII(G) kalata v karamino; REXII(J) kayānāgā v kalaṇagama; REXIII(H) evā v vo. This amounts to 20 changes that might be temporarily unintelligible in an estimated 10 lexemes per sentence and 133 comparable sentences, which equals 1330 tokens, between one and two percent of vocabulary.

(An exception to the number of syllables criterion is -iy-, as in REI(B) pajohitaviye versus -v- as in prayuhotave; this is -vy- in Girnar, as in prajūhitavyaṃ; AśK inserts an epenthetic vowel to produce -viy-, whereas AśSh reduces to -v-. This change occurs in nouns as well as gerundives; at RE13(H) there is the noun vyasanaṃ in Girnar, viyaśanaṃ in AśK and vasanaṃ in AśSh Therefore the missing syllable -iy- in AśSh is a phonological not morphological change.)

[77] Hultzsch (1925: xlii) observes that AśSh dipi instead of lipi is found in Persian inscriptions and considers AśSh nipesapita (RE14(A)) as an ancient Persian loan word synonymous with likhapita. Norman (1970: 123-4) includes them in his list of independently verified dialect words, all of which come from AśSh, and adds spasu for bhaginī and kupa for udupāna. Thus the number of identified dialect words at AśSh is a mere 4. Dipi occurs 6 times, nipista 4, nipesita 1, nipesapita 1, spasu 1, kupa 1, a total of 14 occurrences. At an estimated 10 lexemes per sentence and 133 sentences, they approximate to 1% of the vocabulary used. (There are also what I infer are transmission errors, which are not counted, e.g REIV(B) AśK agi-kaṃdhāni, 'masses of fire' v AśSh joti-kaṃdhani, 'masses of light'.)

comprehend (and this may be all that Levman and Gombrich meant), they become comprehensible to a native speaker with sufficient exposure.[78] Native speakers would realise in the case of Sanskrit *dharma* (Pali *dhamma*) that in AśK *dhaṃma r* was assimilated, but in AśSh *dhrama r* was moved before the vowel. (In Pali there is a similar metathesis of *r* which realises Sanskrit *arya* as *ariya* or *ayira*). There is a similar pattern of *r* retention, dropping and metathesis in English:

Standard spelling	General American	Standard British	Non-standard
	(Sanskrit analogy with *r* retention, *dharma*)	(Kālsī analogy with *r* dropping, *dhaṃma*)	(Shābāzgaṛhī analogy with *r* metathesis, *dhrama*)
Perhaps	/pərhaps/	/pəhaps/	/prəhaps/
Performance	/pərfɔ:rməns/	/pəfɔ:məns/	/prəfɔ:(r)məns/

Until the 17th century, the *r* was pronounced throughout England as it is in modern General American English (Sanskrit analogy), but afterwards the r was dropped in southern British English. Non-standard pronunciations on both sides of the Atlantic of **prehaps* for the standard *perhaps* and **preformance*[79] for *performance* are analogous to Shābāzgaṛhī.[80]

It is cumbersome to describe this sound change in English, but a native speaker of any variety of English can process these differences within fractions of a second quite unconsciously and without loss of intelligibility. For the non-native speaker, however, such changes could be glaringly disconcerting. Similarly, the differences in the Aśokan inscriptions may have been unnoticed or irrelevant to native speakers with good exposure to different accents, while appearing highly significant to a modern scholar. Another asymmetry

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[78] By sufficient exposure, I mean staying with a family which speaks the unfamilar variety for a week. It would not be possible for an English speaker to learn Swedish in this time.

[79] For example, Paul Gambaccini, an authority on popular music, can be heard on the BBC using this pronunciation consistently.

[80] The comparison is not perfect, as the AśK accent compensates for r dropping by inserting *ṃ*, whereas the British accent compensates by lengthening the preceding vowel if stressed; thus *car, bird, deer, care* and *poor* are (American first): /kɑr>kɑ:, bərd>bɜ:d, dɪr>diə, ker>keə, pʊr>pʊə/, while the unstressed /pə/ in /pəˈhaps/and /pəˈfɔ:məns/remains unchanged.

between native Indo-Aryan speakers and modern readers, is the optical illusion of difference caused by broad and narrow transcriptions. English uses broad transcription where a single spelling of *exit* will stand for several pronunciations: /ˈɛksɪt/, /ˈɛgzɪt/, /ˈɛgzɪʔ/etc.; the position is reversed in the Aśokan inscriptions, and a single word, *dharma*, is spelt *dhrama* or *dhaṃma* to reflect its local pronunciation. Thus, Aśokan inscriptions can deceptively appear to have greater variation than modern languages with standardised spellings.[81]

An explanation for different accents in the Rock Edicts runs as follows: messengers memorised the edict in court language and recited it to the recipients who in turn memorised the edict, but inevitably coloured it with their own accent before it was written down or inscribed. Reliance on memory was the norm: Megasthenes, the Greek ambassador to the court of Aśoka's grandfather, remarked on the absence of written laws, and Salomon (1998: 7-8) argues that writing had a lesser status compared to the spoken word in much of Indian discourse. Reliance on memory explains the different wording and even omission of sentences in some versions of the Rock Edicts. (The uniform wording and language of the Pillar Edicts suggest lessons were learnt and written messages were used.) Therefore, the linguistic variation evident in the Rock Edicts would not significantly obstruct mutual intelligibility.

5.3.3 Implications for the Buddha's teaching language
The difference between the AśK and AśSh varieties is therefore overwhelmingly one of accent, though some embryonic dialect features are also evident in lexis and morphology. Different accents of the same language are generally mutually comprehensible.[82] We are now able to answer Norman (1980: 70), who objects:

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[81] To illustrate the claim that narrow transcriptions made accents look more divergent than they sound to a native speaker, here are transcriptions from Trudgill (2000: 68) of *very few cars made it up the long hill* in regional accents:

NortheastVeree: few cahs mehd it oop the long hill, /veri: fju: ka:z me:d ɪt ʊp ðə lɒŋ hɪl/

NW Midlands: Veri few cahs mayd it oop the longg ill, /verɪ fju: ka:z meɪd ɪt ʊp ðə lɒŋg ɪl/

Central Southwest: Veree few carrs mayd it up the long iooll, /veri: fju: ka:rz meɪd ɪt ʌp ðə lɒŋ ɪʊl/

None of these differences interfere with intelligibility to a native speaker.

[82] A native English speaker challenged this claim from personal experience of being able to understand Krio, an English-based creole of Sierra Leone, only in written form, and not when spoken. I believe the different syntax, morphology and lexis of Krio make it difficult to separate out the beginnings and endings of words when spoken; on the page, the work of separation is done. However, with Indo-Aryan dialects, the differences of syntax, morphology and lexis have

> Geiger suggested that the Buddha spoke a lingua franca, free from the most obtrusive dialect features, but it is hard to imagine what this could be, for while *ś* and *l* might well be obtrusive in an area where *s* and *r* were normal, the opposite would be the case in a region where a dialect with *ś* and *l* were spoken. It seems much more likely that the Buddha varied his language to suit his audience.

Firstly, these changes seem trivial and unobtrusive. It is plausible that these variations were widely acceptable and unobtrusive because they are merely differences of accent. Secondly, if these differences affected the meaning, the context would make matters clear. In English, a Chinese waiter referring to "flied lice" will be understood from the context as referring to 'rice' and not to a meal of insects.

Thus, the linguistic situation was not comparable to that of English and Swedish, but closer to standard English and Humberside. The Buddhist Sangha conversing with each other would merely have toned down their dialects, removing dialect words as required by the Buddha (§5.1). This would produce varieties which were essentially different accents with some minor morphological variation. The equivalent for Humbersiders would be to say *the children are playing on't street* instead of t*he bairns are lakin out on't street,* eliminating the dialect words but retaining much of their local pronunciation and morphology. As explained in the following three sections, for recitation of texts this degree of variation would be further reduced to the Indo-Aryan equivalent of standard English, *the children are playing on the street*.

5.4 Social conditions supporting a standard language and accent

Rhys Davids (1903: 147), an early SOTT advocate, described how the Wanderers, *paribbājakā*, were able to converse with each other:

> ...the Wanderers talked in a language common among the cultured laity (officials, nobles, merchants and others), which bore to the local dialects much the same relation as the English of London, in Shakespeare's time, bore to the various dialects spoken in Somersetshire, Yorkshire, and Essex.

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been shown to be insignificant (§5.3.2).

The London and Home counties dialect of Shakespeare's time was also used by the educated nationwide.[83] Originally an East Midlands, i.e. central, dialect that had spread south and had reached London some time after the Black Death of 1348, it also became a national sociolect of the educated two centuries later. A sociolect can be spoken in a standard accent or a local accent. Trudgill (2000: 2-3) states that 'BBC English' is Standard English spoken in an accent called Received Pronunciation and is spoken by 3-5% of the population of England; however, another 7-12% speak Standard English in a regional accent. Standard English is understood everywhere in the country and is used in some homes. Similarly, a standard Indo-Aryan could have originated as a prestigious geographical dialect in the west, but also have become within several generations a sociolect of the educated, and not be restricted to formal situations. The Buddha's accent apparently differed from Soṇa Kuṭikaṇṇa's, but they could both be speaking standard Indo-Aryan.

However, there was no single pre-eminent political and commercial centre in the Buddha's day equivalent to medieval London to promulgate a standard language. The drivers towards a standard language in 5th century BCE North India would have been at least three. Firstly, accommodation to other dialects over centuries would accomplish dialect-levelling and the emergence of regional standard languages, one of which could become a supra-regional sociolect. Crystal (2005: 243-8) gives a parallel in the history of English: dialect levelling in the 14th and 15th centuries and the emergence of regional standard dialects, with that of the East Midlands, a central and prosperous region, becoming a national standard.

Secondly, centres of learning existed in Taxila and Benares and perhaps elsewhere. Such centres could have performed a similar role in the standardisation of Indo-Aryan as the British boarding schools did for Received Pronunciation in English.[84] Not that this standard was a Taxila or Benares dialect;

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[83] Cf. George Puttenham's *Of the Arte of English Poesie* 1589 Book 3 Chapter 3, quoted by Freeborn (2006: 321):

"...ye fhall therfore take the vfuall fpeach of the Court, and that of London and the fhires lying about London within lx. myles, and not much aboue. I say not this but that in euery fhyre of England there be gentlemen and others that fpeake but fpecially write as good Southerne as we of Middlefex or Surrey do, but not the common people of euery fhire, to whom the gentlemen, and alfo their learned clarkes do for the moft part condefcend..."

[84] Crystal (2005: 468-9) describes the development in the 19th century of Received Pronunciation, originally called *Public School Pronunciation*:

the probability is that dialects from across India accommodated to the regional standard language of an economically active and reasonably central area of Aryan India, Avanti for example. Such an area would produce more students, and their central speech would be more readily understood and influential in forming a new variety, based on the western dialect. Such a variety could then filter down through government, education, the religious and the army and by intermarriage across dialect areas. We have examples of these processes. The Buddha had contact with five men who had studied at Taxila: King Pasenadi of Kosala; Mahāli, a Licchavi chief and educator; Jīvaka, physician to King Bimbisāra of Magadha; Aṅgulimāla, the mass murderer, possibly a Kāli devotee[85], turned Buddhist monk and Yasadatta, a Mallan convert to the Buddhist order.

King Pasenadi could have influenced the spread of this standard language through his connections across dialect boundaries: two Mallans, Bandhula, a classmate of King Pasenadi at Taxila, and Dīghakārāyāṇa, Bandhula's nephew, served as generals in the Kosalan army; Kosaladevī, Pasenadi's sister, was married to King Bimbisāra of Magadha; Vajirā, Pasenadi's daughter, was married to Ajātasattu, the following King of Magadha. This educated sociolect could move through such networks across dialect boundaries. Once used at home, the children would become native sociolect speakers and the sociolect would spread beyond the formally educated and the elite through networks of government officials, merchants and religious wanderers to become a standard language accepted throughout India.

A third driver would be the recent rise of urban settlements. Chambers and Trudgill (2004: 166) argue that linguistic innovations move, not as a ripple from the innovation source, but as a pebble skipping across water in discontinuous movements, going from population centre to centre and then rippling out from the many centres. Urban settlements would have facilitated the spread of the educated sociolect in this more efficient pattern.

"There was never total uniformity, therefore, but this new accent was certainly one which was more supra-regional than any previous English accent had ever been. The regional neutrality, Ellis believed, had come from a natural process of levelling, with educated people from different regional backgrounds increasingly coming into contact and accommodating to each other's speech... University education had brought people from many regional backgrounds together. Schoolteachers were exercising an increased influence on their charges, and a momentum was building up within the schools themselves ..."

[85] Gombrich (1996: 135ff.)

Sanskrit did not perform the function of a standard language until the Common Era, judging from epigraphical evidence. Deshpande (1986: 317) writes of Sanskrit in the time of Patañjali "It was mainly restricted to the sacrificial and academic activity of learned Brahmins of the Āryāvartta. Women and non-Brahmins were not the normative speakers of Sanskrit." Even though Sanskrit was available, probably as a taught second language among Brahmins, the Buddha would not have adopted it, for ideological reasons. As Deshpande (1978: 41) states:

> On the higher philosophical plane, Buddha totally rejected hereditary caste rank . . . However, on the lower plane, there is a clear assertion that Ksatriyas are superior to Brahmins. Thus, from his point of view, far from being an inferior dialect, Buddha must have considered his own dialect superior to that of the Brahmins, as he considered his own Ksatriya rank superior to theirs . . . only on this interpretation can we explain why the Pāli Buddhist tradition came to view Pāli to be the supreme original language of all beings including gods.

The standard language of inscriptions before Sanskrit was Epigraphic Prakrit. A language with the geographical scope, longevity and non-sectarian character of Epigraphic Prakrit could not have appeared out of nothing. It must have had a long and broad hinterland of several centuries of development across India. From the evidence of §5.2.3, the precursor of Epigraphic Prakrit, an India-wide standard language based on a western dialect, was Pali. We have now seen the processes whereby Pali, also a western dialect, could have developed into the standard Prakrit by the time of the Buddha.

5.5 Pali was not originally an artificial language

Geiger (1916: 2) states "There is now on the whole a consensus of opinion that Pāli bears the stamp of a "Kunstsprache," *i.e.* it is a compromise of various dialects." Geiger (1916: 5-6) proposed that an artificial language, *Kunstsprache*, must have been created after the death of the Buddha based on his language, supposedly a lingua franca based on Māgadhī. Geiger's evidence for *Kunstsprache* was the lack of homogeneity in Pali, and indeed Lamotte called it a composite language (§5.2.1). What *compromise* and *composite* mean in this context is not clear. English, for example, commonly uses words of Danish origin like 'they', 'them', window' and words from French, Latin, Dutch etc., but this does

not make English an artificially constructed language. Lack of homogeneity is normal,[86] and even in the exceptionally homogeneous Sanskrit, there are borrowings from non-Aryan languages. Geiger argues that numerous double forms prove Pali to be a mixed dialect and therefore an artificial compromise, but a natural language like English has these features. Crystal (2005: 75) gives the following dialect words derived from Old Norse followed by the standard English: almous/ alms, ewer/ udder, garth/ yard, kirk/ church, laup/ leap, nay/ no, scrive/ write, trigg/ true. Furthermore, in the past tense we see the following doublets: bet/ betted, burnt/ burned, cost/ costed, crept/ creeped, crew/ crowed, dove/ dived etc. English is not an artificial language like the completely regular Esperanto; instead it is as natural a language as any, despite double forms.

Kunstsprache means literally 'art-speech' and has connotations of an artificial, constructed, literary language. This was perhaps a natural influence on a German scholar 45 years after the unification of Germany in 1871, when there was a need for a state-wide standard language and committees, sometimes at the behest of government, designed compromises amongst the varieties to establish standard vocabulary and also standard pronunciation for the stage (Russ 1994: 12-16).[87] However, for the Buddha's day, a better model to use would be that of 15th century England, which was not a newly-formed state, which lacked state education, which had little literacy and in which printing was a novelty. According to Fennell (2001: 123-5), English had evolved three standard varieties, one of which, the East Midlands dialect, was adopted by a government department from 1430 onwards and by Caxton as a printing standard in 1476; this went on to become standard throughout the educated classes by Shakespeare's day.

In acknowledgement of its prominence, the East Midlands dialect had help from government and printing which accelerated its progress to becoming a national standard. However, prior to this Fennell (2001: 125) believes there existed unattested standard languages to meet the needs of a mobile population involved in pilgrimages, crusades, universities, inns of court and royal households. These examples suggest that evolution and natural or deliberate

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[86] Lodge (1993: 35) writes "… Latin, like any natural language, was an amalgam of varieties, not the homogeneous monolith depicted in the 'Latin myth'."

[87] Oberlies (2003: 166) suggests that Māgadhī was based on an artistic MIA *Dichtersprache. Dichtersprache* was a supra-regional written literary language of the 12th century Hohenstaufen court. However, it is doubtful that this language, based on Swabian, a southern German dialect, was ever a spoken supra-regional standard, even in royal courts. As he did not refer to *Dichtersprache*, I assume Geiger did not have this in mind for *Kunstsprache*.

selection can also produce standard languages. Natural selection in medieval England is a better model for Pali than the intelligent design of 19th century Germany. The earlier social situation matches ancient India better, and no-one would design a language like Pali with so many irregularities and double forms. By contrast, the precision of Sanskrit suggests intelligent design to eliminate irregularities from an existing language.[88]

A religious *Kunstsprache* of a new order of celibate monks could not have produced the scope, longevity and non-sectarian character of Epigraphic Prakrit. It would not have become the standard inscriptional language ahead of the Sanskrit of centuries-old Brahmanism. The social need for communication across dialects would not have originated with the Buddha and must have been met already by an existing standard language.[89] *Kunstsprache* is implicit in the notion of *Hochdeutsch*, standard German, which originated as an amalgam of book German dialects; however, it is superfluous and anachronistic in oral Pali and puts an unnecessary wedge between the Buddha's language and Pali.

5.6 Conclusion: the Buddha adopted western Prakrit for his order

We are now able to infer the language of the Buddhist order on formal and informal occasions. By requiring his monks to use standard vocabulary (§5.1), the Buddha ensured mutual intelligibility within the Sangha because the remaining dialect differences were essentially different accents (§5.3). The standard vocabulary would have been from western Prakrit (§5.2) and this would have ensured harmonious informal communication within the Sangha.

However, to meet the needs of a sufficiently fixed transmission for group recitation, standard morphology and pronunciation were also required and these too would have been adopted from western Prakrit. The result was Pali, which provided the medium for the ideal of fixed transmission and was lexically, morphologically and syntactically fixed, but phonetically somewhat fluid, although identifiably western. Effort would have been required for those unfamiliar with this sociolect to understand it, but preaching would often be in the local dialect by disciples native to that area, who could explain recited Pali texts; in any case, exposure to Pali recitation would make it more easily comprehensible. If he was not a native

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[88] Kulikov (2013: 68) tracks the debate over whether Pāṇini's Sanskrit accurately reflected language in actual use.

[89] This argument against Geiger's *Kunstsprache* applies also to Gombrich's hypothesis (2018: 78) that the Buddha created a lingua franca.

speaker of Pali, the Buddha himself would presumably have set a good example by preaching in Pali, at least on formal occasions or to a mixed-dialect audience, often the case with the accompanying Sangha. Furthermore, this sociolect of the educated would have offered the gravitas of a formal register to occasions such as the Buddha preaching, uposatha observances and recitation of texts.

6. The MOTT refuted

Oberlies (2003: 166) provides a recent and clear explanation of the MOTT. I summarise him first and then reject the MOTT point by point:

1. The Buddha is reported to have said that his teachings should be given to the people not in Sanskrit, but in their own language;

2. This report explains the varied languages used for early Buddhist texts;

3. The Theravada commentaries state that the Buddha spoke Māgadhī, a language of the Ganges basin of the fifth century BCE akin to that of the eastern Aśokan edicts;

4. Pali is the result of recasting proto-canonical Māgadhī into a western dialect, although some eastern features remain that represent 'frozen' phonetics;

5. As Buddhism spread westward, the transformation of Māgadhī into the more archaic language of Pali over-reached itself with hyper-forms such as *Isipatana* for *Ṛṣyavṛjana*;

6. In that way Pali originated as a mixture of dialects, as a kind of lingua franca;

7. The transformation of the eastern proto-canonical language into Pali was done orally before the writing down of the Theravadin canon.

6.1 MOTT Point 1. *sakāya niruttiyā* does not mean 'each in his own dialect'

§4 has shown there is no solid evidence for understanding *sakāya niruttiyā* in terms of the MOTT. Of the seven possible interpretations, Edgerton's MOTT reading is clearly the weakest.

6.2 MOTT Point 2. The varied languages of early Buddhist texts

§2 has argued against oral translation and for a single phonetically fluid oral transmission. §5 argues that a standard language, Pali, was available at the outset of Buddhism and was the only solution to the ideal of a fixed oral transmission. There is not a single Sutta to be found in these alleged varied languages.

6.3 MOTT Point 3. The 'Māgadhī' of the Theravadin commentaries is an eastern dialect

§3 explains this is a misreading of the commentaries' *Māgadhabhāsā* and *Māgadhiko vohāro*.

6.4 MOTT Point 4. Pali is the result of recasting Māgadhī into a western dialect

Intentional recasting, transposition or translation could not have happened during oral transmission of Buddhist scripture (§2). Apart from the Kathāvatthu, the very few pre-eastern features found in Pali are better explained by imprecise oral transmissions of a pre-western variety among speakers with different accents (§3.6-8).

6.5 MOTT Point 5. Hyper-forms were created as Māgadhī transformed into Pali

§3.7 explains that Māgadhī could not have changed into Pali by any natural process, therefore *transformed* is taken as and meaning 'translated' in this context. Norman (1989: 375) defines hyper-forms as "... forms which are unlikely to have had a genuine existence in any dialect, but which arose as a result of bad or misunderstood translation techniques." However, the existence of hyper-forms does not prove translation as they exist in any natural language and are created by native speakers. In the case of English, Trudgill (2000: 76) writes:

> Bristol speech is famous for the presence in this accent of a phenomenon known as the 'Bristol l'. In the Bristol area, words such as *America, India, Diana, Gloria* are pronounced with a final '*l*' - 'Americal', 'Indial', 'Dianal', 'Glorial' - with the result that it was once said that there was a family of three sisters there called 'Evil, Idle and Normal'… Nobody can be sure why this is, but it may be an example of what dialectologists call hypercorrection. This happens when speakers try to acquire a pronunciation which

they perceive as having higher status than their own, but overdo it. An example is when northerners trying to speak with a southern accent change not only 'oop' /ʊp/ to 'up' /ʌp/ and 'booter' /bʊtə/ to 'butter' /bʌtə/ but also 'hook' /hʊk/ to 'huck' */hʌk/ and 'good' /gʊd/ to '*/gʌd/. It may be that 'l' at the ends of words disappeared in Bristol, as a natural sound change, and was then restored even where it did not belong by speakers trying to talk 'correctly'.

English is not unique in having native speakers who produce hyper-forms. Vedic and German also offer examples,[90] and Pali should be assumed to have behaved similarly. Both Norman (1989: 375) and Oberlies (2003: 166) give the example of Pali *Isipatana* for Prakrit **isivayana*, Sanskrit *Ṛṣyavṛjana*, as proof of translation. Yet native speaker hyper-corrections based on a confusion over whether the place name **isivayana* meant 'gathering of the seers' or 'wild-animal enclosure' are an alternative explanation. Oberlies (2001: 79) gives as examples of Pali hyper-forms using unvoiced for voiced consonants, including *ajakara*- 'python' for Sanskrit *ajagara* and *chakala* 'he-goat' for Sanskrit *chagala*; he tendentiously calls them 'hyper-translations'. Yet, in the first case, this could be a native speaker hypercorrection or simple mistake, as Pali normally has voiced *ajagara* and only one instance of unvoiced *ajakara* (J III.484). In the second case, Pali has both unvoiced *chakala* and voiced *chagala* and one could consider the latter to be the result of a process of lenition common across the Indian languages (Bubenik 1996: 54-8; Pischel §192, §198, §200, §203, §204); we should not assume, as Oberlies appears to, that the Sanskrit form is earliest.

6.6 MOTT Point 6. Pali originated as a mixture of dialects, as a kind of lingua franca

This opinion is not universally held even amongst MOTT advocates. Edgerton (1953: 11) regarded each of Pali and Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit (BHS) as essentially a single dialect:

> As is well known, Pāli also shows linguistic differences between the gāthās, canonical prose, later prose etc. … and dialect mixture in all of

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[90]Bloomfield & Edgerton (1932: 20) refer to hyper-Sanskritisms in Vedic. Wells (1987: 310) provides the following examples of hypercorrection by a native German speaker, King Frederick Wilhelm I, father of Frederick the Great: *pfeldt, pfahren, pfertig, anpfandt, hundespfott*. I am informed by my translator that these refer to *Feld, fahren, fertig, Anfang* and *Hundespfote*.

them. I should add that, as in the case of Pāli, I find no reason to question the essential dialectical unity of the BHS Prakrit. Such differences as occur are minor compared to the great mass of resemblances.

Arguments against Pali being a lingua franca were presented in §5.4 and §5.5.

6.7 MOTT Point 7. The transformation into Pali was done orally

Transformation into Pali, both intentionally (§2) and unintentionally (§3.7), has been rejected.

7. Evaluation of the MOTT and SOTT

I believe I have shown how the commentaries could be correct in their claim that the Buddha spoke Pali (§3.2). Yet, under the philosophical system of Karl Popper, to which I subscribe, nothing in this paper definitively proves the Buddha did so, as definitive proof is never possible, only definitive disproof. However, I do claim that the MOTT has been disproved, whereas the SOTT has not.

For those who remain unconvinced, I now offer the argument that the SOTT represents the stronger hypothesis. There are two theoretical weaknesses of the MOTT: redundancy and lack of testability. Taking a very poor theory as an example, we could propose that the Buddha received his teachings from aliens from another planet. This is a poor theory because, first, there is no necessity to consider extra-terrestrials to explain the Buddha's teachings and because, second, there is no way to disprove their presence in India in the 5th century BCE; absence of evidence of aliens is not evidence of absence of aliens. Similarly, the MOTT is a poor theory because, first, there is no necessity to hypothesise multiple oral transmissions when a single transmission will explain the data more economically and, second, because the myth of lost oral transmissions in other dialects cannot be disproved. Thus, the MOTT does not meet the criteria of Occam's Razor and of testability.

On the other hand, the SOTT does not have these problems: there must have been at least one oral transmission for the written texts to exist, so there is no redundancy. It is also disprovable by the following evidence which would entail modification or abandonment of the SOTT:

1. Evidence from an oral culture, preferably of South Asia, of a large volume of communally recited material which changes, by accident or design, into another dialect.

2. Early Buddhist Texts in Māgadhī, Old Māgadhī or Old Ardha-Māgadhī.

3. Early texts describing a process of homogenising several dialects into one 'literary' language.

4. Texts describing translation from one dialect to another.

Moreover, the commentaries of Buddhaghosa are not just one body of work amongst that of many other scholars; they are evidence for the SOTT. The MOTT on the other hand has not a single sample to offer of the multiple dialects allegedly spoken by the Buddha, let alone a whole sutta or Nikāya. Modern scholarship has not disproved the Theravadin claim of the Buddha teaching only in Pali, it has merely misread it with a lack of sympathy. According to Carl Sagan's dictum, an extraordinary claim, such as the MOTT's implied oral translation of over 5,000 pages of text, requires extraordinary evidence. Until the Theravadin tradition is disproved by unambiguous evidence, the only intellectually rigorous position to adopt is to take the Buddha teaching in Pali as its working hypothesis. As Gombrich (1990: 8) states, "I also think it sound method to accept tradition until we are shown sufficient reason to reject it." We have not been shown sufficient reason so far and must reject assertions such as von Hinüber's (2006: 209) "the Buddha did not speak Pāli."

8 Implications of the SOTT

One might think that adopting the SOTT would produce a major shift in Buddhist scholarship. Far from it. While the SOTT may increase subjective interest in Pali significantly, it might have only a minor incremental impact on objective scholarship. In fact, this potentially minor impact would explain why the MOTT has been unchallenged for so long.

8.1 A non-sectarian approach to Early Buddhist Texts

I suspect in the MOTT a kind of "political correctness", the premise that all sects of Buddhism are to be treated impartially and, if some sects have had the language of their texts altered, then all sects must have had them altered.[91] If this is the motivation behind the misinterpretations[92] of the MOTT, then it is

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[91] This may be the thinking behind Law (1933: xi-xxv) and Lamotte (1958: 607).

[92] Viz. the misreadings of *sakāya niruttiyā* (§4)*, samaññaṃ nātidhāveyyāti* (§5.1) and

political correctness gone mad. The MOTT is entirely unnecessary to achieve the laudable aim of impartiality. Acknowledging that the Pali canon is in the original language of the Buddha does not mean that the Pali canon is the original transmission; that would be naive in the extreme. In the Pali transmission, there may have been mistakes, later additions and reorganisations peculiar to the Theravadins. Thus this paper in no way confers priority on the Pali version of the EBTs, which in fact needs other recensions to amend corruptions of its texts.[93] The SOTT in no way implies Theravada fundamentalism, and the trend of modern scholarship to treat each recension of scripture on an equal basis is completely unaffected.

8.2 A historical approach to Early Pali texts

The findings of this paper reject what Sujato & Brahmali (2015: 145) call Denialist Buddhism, "a rhetoric of scepticism". For example, Gregory Schopen is quoted in Wynne (2004: 116) as saying:

> Even the most artless formal narrative text has a purpose, and that in "scriptural" texts, especially in India, that purpose is almost never "historical" in our sense of the term… Scholars of Indian Buddhism have taken canonical monastic rules and formal literary descriptions of the monastic ideal preserved in very late manuscripts and treated them as if they were accurate reflections of the religious life and career of actual practising Buddhist monks in early India.

Wynne counters that such narrative can be taken as circumstantial evidence and therefore valuable in a historical approach. This paper follows Wynne's approach and infers the linguistic reality in which the Buddha operated. It rejects Schopen's approach as potentially corrosive and leading to a slippery

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magadhabhāsā (§3.2).

[93] For example, Levman (2014: 34-8) gives the example of Dhp 414-b *saṃsāraṃ moham*, 'samsara, delusion' as compared to Udānavarga 33.41-b *saṃsāraugham*, 'the flood of samsara'. He believes the original Pali was *saṃsāramo(g)ham*, 'the flood of samsara' and *ogha*, 'flood', was reduced to *oha*, leaving the ambiguous *saṃsāramoham* meaning either 'the delusion of samsara' or 'the flood of samsara'; the Pali commentary refers to both these meanings, but the PTS and Be texts support only the meaning 'delusion'. As the BHS, Sanskrit, Chinese and Tibetan versions support only the meaning of 'flood', it appears that the Pali is corrupt, and other recensions are needed to correct its text.

slope: if we do not have the language of the Buddha, then we do not have the original teachings, and, if we do not have the original teachings, then perhaps the Buddha is a mythical figure.

Furthermore, this paper reinforces Wynne's conclusion (2004: 124) that Pali literature can in principle be stratified, for Pali was a natural, not artificial, language.

8.3 The continuity of Pali and Epigraphic Prakrit

The claim of a Pali/ Epigraphic Prakrit continuity is explicit here, but has been hinted at by several scholars (§5.2.2). Yet it has not so far been examined in detail by the academic community, perhaps because of the prevailing MOTT ideology that Pali is an artificial language. A database of Epigraphic Prakrit is a desideratum to investigate this claim further. Such a database might also assist the stratification of Pali texts.

8.4 Reworking Pali historical (socio)linguistics

The SOTT requires adjustments to Indian historical (socio)linguistics. Principally, the search for the Ur-language of Buddhism can be dropped as the evidence points to its being Pali. This means that the extent of Sanskritisation and Māgadhisms in Pali needs to be revised downwards, though the data collection on which the claims are based remains useful. That Pali was the Buddha's teaching language could also be a partial explanation why the Aśokan inscriptions did not use Pali or Epigraphic Prakrit: Aśoka for reasons of state did not wish to show partiality towards Buddhism just as he equally avoided the Sanskrit of the Brahmins and the Ardha-Māgadhī of the Jains. The narrative of translation from Māgadhī needs to be abandoned together with the claim of Pāli being an artificial language. For Pali remains overwhelmingly a western dialect with minimal intrusions from other dialects and it is a testimony to the efforts of perhaps hundreds of thousands of personnel across twenty-five centuries to preserve, not only the Buddha's teachings, but also his language.

Abbreviations

Abbreviations are as in the *Dictionary of Pāli, Volume 1* with the following additions:

AMg	Ardha-Māgadhī
AN	Aṅguttara Nikāya
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
Be	Burmese/ Myanmar edition
BHS	Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit
Cv	Cūḷavagga
DN	Dīgha Nikāya
DOP	Dictionary of Pāli
DPPN	Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names
DPR	Digital Pāli Reader
EBT	Early Buddhist Text
fn	footnote
H	Hāthīgumphā inscription
IPA	International Phonetic Alphabet
Mg	Māgadhī
MIA	Middle Indo-Aryan
MN	Majjhima Nikāya
MOTT	Multiple Oral Transmission Theory
Mv	Mahāvagga
MW	Monier-Williams Sanskrit English Dictionary
PE	Pillar Edict
PED	Pāli-English Dictionary
PTS	Pāli Text Society edition
RE	Rock Edict
Skt	Sanskrit
SN	Saṃyutta Nikāya
SOTT	Single Oral Transmission Theory

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Brackets () around a second year of publication indicate reference to the later edition's pagination.

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Practice, Not Dogma
Tzu-chi and the Buddhist Tradition

Richard Madsen

Abstract

I argue that the practices of a religion are more important than its formal doctrines. Tzu-chi is an especially good example of a Buddhist movement that stresses practices of compassion rather than adherence to doctrines. Tzu-chi's practices are very modern, using the most advanced scientific methods and adhering to the highest professional standards in health care, disaster relief, education, and environmental protection. But they are also very traditional, focusing on compassion directed at suffering individuals and engaging the whole person, the body and the emotions as well as the mind. In line with other forms of humanistic Buddhism, it extends compassion globally to people of all faiths, ethnicities, and political ideologies. The development of large lay organizations like Tzu-chi has been made possible by the modern conditions of middle class life in Taiwan, where people have some freedom from the demands of unrelenting toil but are afflicted by inflammation of uncontrollable desires in a consumer capitalist society. Although Tzu-chi represents a remarkably creative response to the problems of modernity, it nonetheless faces challenges from modern pressures. The true success of Tzu-chi – not just growth in numbers but modern cultivation of the virtues of compassion – would have important implications for ecumenical engagement with the crises of modernity.[1]

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[1] This paper was originally delivered as a keynote address at the 4th Tzu Chi Forum, held in

The Buddhist tradition carries with it an enormous treasure house of teachings. The quantity of words in the sutras exceeds the Christian Bible and Patristic writings. Scholars like myself love words. Our instinct and inclination is to focus on the words and organize them systematically into theories. But in understanding religions this may be misleading. Before any theories come stories of actions. The ideas that religions teach are mainly ways of explaining such actions. The Buddha witnesses the inevitability of suffering, leaves his kingdom, goes into the forest, joins a group of ascetics but then seeks a middle way, sits under a Bodhi tree and reaches enlightenment. This story of action and its cosmic implications are eventually explained by sutras. Among the many schools of Buddhism there have long been debates about the relative importance of studying doctrines and performing practices. But actions always carry a surplus of meanings that can never be fully captured by any set of words. From the point of view of a scholar of comparative religion, I would argue, practices are the most important. Scholars as well as followers of religions should always be ready to move beyond doctrines to consider the practices that underpin religious life.

A general characteristic of Buddhist practices is that they are open-ended, constantly open to revision through skillful means in the light of new circumstances. A dominant metaphor is that of a "path." One starts out on a path and strives to stick with it despite adversity but one can never fully know at the beginning where the path will lead. The main path in the Mahayana tradition was, of course, the *bodhisattva* path, whose main practice was boundless compassion. The practice of such compassion is not simply a means to some end. The practices of compassion are aimed at alleviating the suffering of sentient beings, but the practices are also ends in themselves. They are not defined simply in terms of their success in efficiently alleviating suffering. Even if one tries but fails with good intention to alleviate someone's suffering, the act of compassion is still good, an expression of the Buddha nature embedded in all of us. The practices of compassion are a kind of ritual: expressive as well as utilitarian. The practices of compassion are also without boundaries. A *bodhisattva* can never limit compassion and will always seek new ways to practice it under the changing circumstances of the world.

One part of the *bodhisattva* path leads to Tzu-chi. One of Master Cheng Yen's most notable sayings is: "Just do it!" Do not intellectualize. Act. In the library of Tzu-chi's headquarters is a large room full of binders documenting all of the works of compassion that Tzu-chi members have carried out. "These," said the person who showed me this room, "are our sutras."

The practice of compassion fostered through Tzu-chi follows the Buddhist tradition but in a modern way. The modernity is in line with the twentieth century reforms of Taixu and Yinshun with creative extension and adaptation by Cheng Yen. The modernity is evident in a kind of purification and professionalization of compassionate practice. By late imperial China, Buddhist practices had become mixed up with the utilitarian economic, social, and political practices of ordinary life. Buddhist rituals were often simply a means of raising money. Acts of helping others in the name of compassion were often just a means for gaining social status. Buddhist practices, even if carried out with little or no interior compassion, were often seen as a means to automatically acquire merit. In the minds of social and political reformers, Buddhists often acquired the reputation of being ignorant and even immoral.

The efforts of reformers like Taixu were to purify Buddhist practices by separating them from worldly motives of greed, delusion, and hatred. This meant refocusing on the specifically Buddhist character of the practices – differentiating Buddhism from normal economic and political activity. But having achieved (at least partially) such differentiation Buddhism should re-enter the world, strive to heal the wounds caused by greed, hatred, and delusion, and by eliciting everyone's Buddha nature, make this world into a loving, caring pureland. Master Cheng Yen, as well as other "humanistic" Buddhist masters especially in Taiwan, has further developed this vision by ensuring that Tzu-chi's works of compassion use the most advanced scientific methods and adhere to the highest professional standards in health care, disaster relief, education, and environmental protection.

At the same time that Tzu-chi is being very modern in this regard, it is adhering to some of the traditional aspects of the *bodhisattva* path. The practice of Buddhist compassion was traditionally directed not to abstract categories of people but to individual persons. It did not seek to change social structures but to help one individual at a time. Compassion also engaged the whole person, the body and the emotions, as well as the mind. As one followed the *bodhisattva* path, the continual practice of compassion changed one, caused one to develop *bodhisattva* virtues, that is, new habits of body, mind, and heart so that one

could more fully embrace all sentient beings with care and wisely understand the interconnectedness of all things. These virtues would transform one's whole personality, so that one would not simply act compassionately while, for example, working in a charitable organization but acting in a non-compassionate way at home.

Thus, while adhering to high professional standards, Tzu-chi's philanthropic work differs from that of modern secular organizations by emphasizing direct, one on one engagements between the givers and recipients. When handing out food and clothing to victims of disasters, Tzu-chi volunteers do so individually, face to face, if possible while looking at the recipient directly in the eyes and bowing in a gesture of respect. One sees similar forms of direct engagement in Tzu-chi's medical and educational work. The result is forms of giving that are not in the short run as efficient or cost-effective as the best practices of many NGOs. But *bodhisattva* compassion is not about costs, it is about personal engagement with others that can lead both giver and recipient to expand their minds and hearts to develop ever fuller degrees of compassion.

Throughout, the emphasis is on doing rather than studying. Most Tzu-chi members I have met do a lot of intellectual work, but it is not aimed at reconciling Buddhist philosophy with modern philosophy (although there are indeed important affinities that would be intriguing for scholars to explore). Although interested in Buddhist teachings, they learn these mostly from the writings of humanistic Buddhist masters like Cheng Yen, Hsing Yun, and Sheng Yen. Most of these are in the form of short aphorisms, stories told in dharma talks, or practical exhortations. As far as I know, there is no readily available systematic treatise on modern humanistic Buddhist philosophy and ethics. The intellectual work done by members of the modern sanga is mostly about how to imbue modern science and technology and modern professional best practices with a Buddhist spirit (itself learned through practice) to apply to the challenges of the modern world.

One of the challenges is the problem of pluralism: the coexistence of many different religions and ethnicities, which has all too often led to serious conflict. This potential problem, however, is as much a benefit as a liability for Tzu-chi. Although it has become extremely popular not only in Taiwan but throughout Asia, Tzu-chi members are still a minority in the populations there. Tzu-chi could not use its power, even if it wanted to – to impose its practices on any nation or group. In line with most eras in the Buddhist tradition, the new sanga presents its practices as invitations rather than prohibitions. What is not

generally provided in advice to lay members is a clear set of rules, like the monastic vinaya rules, for what one must not do. Exhortations are much more a matter of positive encouragement than negative warnings. Through various skillful means, they strive to cultivate deepening awareness of the fundamental interconnectedness of reality – to follow a path of cultivating virtues that would enable them to respond to novel situations with great compassion and true wisdom. The predominant ethic is a virtue ethic, not the application of complicated moral rules but the cultivation of expansive moral selves which can be properly motivated and wisely guided to bring healing and enlightenment to suffering beings everywhere.

In providing help to others, whether in the form of disaster relief, medical care, educational service, or environmental protection, Tzu-chi absolutely refuses to discriminate on the basis of race, religion, and political ideology. Nor is any effort made to proselytize recipients, although Tzu-chi members would of course be happy if people were inspired by their example to join them. They try as far as possible to adapt to the beliefs of their recipients. When I went with a team of Tzu-chi volunteers to visit a woman who was stricken with AIDS, for example, they noted that she was a Catholic and wanted me to help them sing some Catholic hymns to her rather than Buddhist songs. Whether in giving to their recipients or training their own members, the overall approach of Tzu-chi and the other lay Buddhist organizations on Taiwan is to encourage them to be better rather than criticize them for being bad.

All of this is based on more than pragmatic considerations. It is a basic principle of the *bodhisattva* ethic. One cultivates virtue by pushing oneself beyond the boundaries of one's comfort level. One should not only help family members but also neighbors; not only neighbors, but those far away, even those who might be considered one's enemies. This principle drives Tzu-chi's global outreach, even to places like China and North Korea, as well as to Islamic, Christian, or secular countries – where there is need for alleviation of suffering. The practice of extending compassion in ever widening circles is not only a pragmatic effort, but also a spiritual exercise. It makes the Buddhist heart bigger and the mind able to see the whole world as a big family.

Tzu-chi is then a modern form of classical Buddhist practice. One does not have to "officially" be a Buddhist to carry it out. Not all Tzu-chi members have formally "taken refuge" in a temple. Among Tzu-chi volunteers there are certainly people who are Christians, or perhaps even Muslims. One does not have to believe in Buddhist doctrine to carry out Tzu-chi acts of compassion.

Tzu-chi members welcome such non-believers. Yet, whatever they may believe, people who engage in Tzu-chi practices are being Buddhists, or more accurately bodhisattvas. They are following a path toward the fullness of life that originated in the Buddhist tradition and is inextricably connected to it.

What were the causes and conditions that enabled this modernization of traditional *bodhisattva* practice to arise in Taiwan's recent past? And what new challenges lie ahead to extend *bodhisattva* compassion without limit under modern conditions?

To cultivate, purify, and modernize such practices is generally not possible when people are consumed with the necessity of getting enough food and security for basic survival. The creative development of religious practices generally depends on what Robert Bellah calls a "relaxed field", that is, a space of leisure within which cultural creativity can take place. In much of the past two millennia, this meant that ordinary people, pressed with the unrelenting demands of back breaking farm labor, could not find the social space for cultivating the virtues of compassion except by "leaving the family" and joining a monastery. Ordinary people carried out Buddhist practices with a utilitarian attitude, as a means to get merit that might get them reincarnated into a pureland. Monastics were supposed to develop themselves more fully along the path to perfection and they could earn merit that could be given to ordinary people. But in modern middle class societies like Taiwan, people are not faced so much with pressing necessities for survival and they have the freedom to more fully develop the compassionate virtues themselves. Tzu-chi was a response to this new situation.

Tzu-chi is first and foremost a lay organization guided by commitment to *bodhisattva* compassion and closely connected to the monastic community established by Master Cheng Yen. It was Master Cheng Yen's genius to create such a vehicle for enabling lay people to develop their minds and hearts along the path of great compassion. The original social basis for this was the presence of a group of middle aged housewives in Hualien, who though not necessarily rich had enough economic security and leisure time to devote themselves to the cultivation of compassion. As Taiwan society became more prosperous, there were more and more people in this situation and more and more laypeople who could take advantage of the opportunities of Tzu-chi and of other lay Buddhist organizations established by other humanistic Buddhist monasteries. Another set of pressures that would have inhibited lay people from cultivating Buddhist compassion was the restrictions on association imposed by the martial law regime. When this was lifted in 1987 there was new freedom for many

more people to seek Buddhist cultivation. Membership in Tzu-chi and other lay organizations grew explosively.

Even as the "relaxed field" of relative freedom from economic necessities and political constraint opened new opportunities for lay people to follow the *bodhisattva* path without becoming a monk or nun, these freedoms were creating spiritual needs that made the *bodhisattva* path more attractive. People in Taiwan no longer had to worry about basic needs like food and shelter. But global advertising and all the other institutions of an open consumer society constantly created new needs – insatiable needs based on the artificially stimulated desires of a modern capitalist economy. Without a way to regulate these desires, to set reasonable priorities among them, many people face constant anxiety and face the prospect of meaninglessness. The opportunities for cultivation offered by Tzu-chi offer a way to achieve ultimate meaning and heal anxiety. The very demeanor of the volunteers one meets at a Tzu-chi event is remarkably serene. The activities they undertake are meticulously and harmoniously ordered. The atmosphere is like that of a monastery but without so many of the complicated vinaya rules.

The Buddhist middle way does not negate the good and beautiful benefits of a developed society, but it puts them in perspective. The Tzu-chi halls are adorned with beautiful flowers and artifacts. The uniforms of Tzu-chi commissioners are simple but elegant. At Tzu-chi venues, high quality tea is served in porcelain cups. When rebuilding houses destroyed in natural disasters, Tzu-chi ensures that the houses are airy and comfortable. When giving out aid to victims of disasters, Tzu-chi volunteers include not just food and water, but attractive clothing and other material accoutrements of a gracious way of living. The predominant effort is to affirm the benefits of modernity while curtailing the runaway desires that cause suffering.

Besides benefiting from economic freedom while helping to curb its excesses, Tzu-chi benefits from Taiwan's political freedom while providing a partial refuge from its troubles. Taiwan's transition to democracy has provided the opportunity for Taiwan to grow. But that democracy often leads to a cacophony of angry voices and sometimes seems headed for chaos. Tzu-chi stays away from partisan politics and the harmonious order of its activities provide a healing respite from the greed, delusion, and anger often provoked by contentious politics. At the same time, the virtues of generous compassion that Tzu-chi cultivates help engender the wisdom that citizens need to take a responsible role in democratic life.

Tzu-chi and other humanistic Buddhist organizations thus give laypeople a space to escape the troubles of late modernity, but not to escape completely. Rather they enable lay practitioners to return to the world so as to make it better. Tzu-chi members can make direct contact with friends and neighbors in a way that monastics cannot. They can also creatively combine their secular expertise with a Buddhist spirit. Examples would be the innovative gross anatomy program at the Tzu-chi medical school, which combines ways of expressing respect and gratitude toward the donated cadavers with advanced methods for teaching surgical techniques. Another example would be the pioneering establishment of palliative care in Tzu-chi hospitals. Other examples include the extraordinary creativity Tzu-chi members have put into multi-media education. Finally there are the efforts to encourage recycling and to make useful objects like blankets out of recycled plastic products. These and many others are examples of a level of modern creativity that could not have come out of the monastery itself.

The development of Tzu-chi is thus creating a new type of sanga, one that combines elements both of monastic life and lay life and expands the pursuit of virtue along the *bodhisattva* path. It is a sanga that is partially closed to provide an environment in which Buddhist virtue can be developed and open to the world which provides an arena for the exercise of that virtue. It is a traditional Buddhism reconfigured for a modern world.

This development of humanistic Buddhism has been made possible by the wise and creative leadership of Dharma Masters like Cheng Yen in the particular conditions of Taiwan over the past 50 years. But we know that the world is in constant change and the conditions that helped facilitate this efflorescence of compassionate practice will change too. We must anticipate the challenges that change may bring.

One way to anticipate the future is to look at the past. Although the Buddhist practice of compassion pushes beyond all limits, it has in history often been limited by the imperfections of people and institutions. One set of limitations can come from harsh rulers and a chaotic society that at certain times in history disrupted the spiritual path of Buddhists. Near the end of the Qing Dynasty, for example, the popular image of monks in China was that they were ignorant and corrupt, indeed one of the causes of China's weakness and an obstacle to its modernization. It was the task of reformers like Taixu to reform the sanga so that it could make a positive contribution to China's renewal and modernization.

Another set of limitations has at times come from the opposite direction -- from too favorable rulers who have coopted the sanga for their own political

purposes. One unfortunate example comes from the 20th century in Japan, where many Buddhist sects officially contributed to the "spiritual mobilization" for the war against China beginning in 1937.

Besides being corrupted or coopted by external political forces, the sanga has at various times and places limited its practice of compassion by turning inward. Monastics undergoing similar regimes of rigorous practices will naturally develop special affinities with one another. This can cause them to look down on the world they have left behind and to refuse to actively engage with it. They can cling to the routines of their practices without putting all their heart into them and without being driven by the spirit of boundless openness the practices are supposed to engender.

A final set of problems from the past comes from the hardening of ideas about the meaning of Buddhist practices into rigid dogma and a fixation by the sanga on elaborating the dogmas rather than engaging in the practices that lay behind them.

If such limitations have occurred at various times in the history of the monastic sanga, they could certainly befall the sanga of lay practitioners like Tzu-chi. But today there are also unique conditions and we need to consider the challenges they may bring. As before, there is the danger of the turmoil caused by the collapse of political order and the rise of tyrannical rulers. But today the problem is globalized and with the prevalence of weapons of mass destruction there is the potential for more cataclysmic destruction. Particularly dangerous are conflicts between different groups driven by religious fanaticism.

There is now of course an unprecedented ease of instantaneous global communication which not only helps bring the world together in mutually beneficial ways but overwhelms and distracts us with contradictory and often misleading information. Underneath all is an insatiable desire for economic growth that if left unregulated may lead to catastrophic climate change.

There is an overwhelming quality to the ensuing suffering, in some ways greater in breadth and depth than at any time since the Buddha was born. The anxiety created by this naturally leads many people to take refuge in the Buddha. The size of organizations like Tzu-chi is expanding. But because of the scope of troubles in the world the desire for refuge can become a wish to wall oneself off from the turbulent world rather than to extend compassion to where it is needed the most. For example, in some places in the USA, it seems that the membership of Tzu-chi is confined to the immigrant Taiwanese community. It becomes a place where one can meet with and enjoy the company of familiar others, people

who share the same language and cultural background, rather than a vehicle for reaching beyond these boundaries in compassion to the wider world.

Under these conditions, the very success of Tzu-chi can led to limitations. It now has millions of members around the globe and it has grown extremely rapidly since the 1980s. But it can be difficult enough to cultivate the virtues of deep compassion in a monastery of one or two thousand who can devote almost every minute to spiritual development. How can this be done for millions of people who necessarily also have to attend to work and family life? The number of new members can so outpace the earlier generation that the newer members cannot learn from the wisdom of the older generation.

Also, with size – and money – there can arise the temptation to wall oneself off from outside advice and criticism and to develop a kind of arrogance. In a large complex organization it can be difficult to learn from inevitable mistakes. Some of the controversies about Tzu-chi in the media in recent years might be caused not simply by misunderstandings but genuine mistakes which the practice of compassion should push the community to genuinely address.

I offer these remarks not in a spirit of pessimism but of hope. As long as the challenges I have mentioned can be recognized, we can hope that they will be overcome, so that the practice of compassion can continue to surpass all boundaries. On the other hand, the large amounts of suffering created by the modern world cry out for large organizations like Tzu-chi to alleviate their pain.

The true success of Tzu-chi – not just growth in numbers but modern cultivation of the virtues of compassion – would have important implications for ecumenical engagement with the crises of modernity: a time when enormous technological advances have led not to global unity but to terrible conflicts rooted in the capitalistic greed, technological delusions, militarized anger, and ethnic hatreds of the modern world – with the nemesis of glob al climate change waiting in the wings. It is a period of social breakdown like the era that gave rise to Buddhism, Confucianism, prophetic Judaism, and Greek rationalism 2500 years ago – quests for spiritual unity that after initial flourishing were often subsumed by the wealth and power of ancient empires. Such disintegration, as before, can only be overcome through a renewed spiritual unity. So argued the great philosopher Karl Jaspers. But as he said, "The universality of a world order obligatory to all (in contrast to a world empire) is possible only when the multiple contents of faith remain free in their historical communication, without the unity of a universally valid doctrinal content. The common element of all faith in relation to world order can only be that everyone desires the ordering

of the foundations of existence, in a world community in which he has room to evolve with the peaceful means of the spirit." This means that it is impossible – and be foolish to try -- to reconcile the ideas in the various belief systems that have been handed down in religious traditions. But it can be possible for people living within such tradition to mutually engage others through practice. The real development of a world spiritual unity will come (if it comes at all before we destroy ourselves) through confronting our interdependent problems through practices. Buddhist compassion is not the same thing as Christian love or Muslim brotherhood, although they share much more in common than they differ. Such overlap is the perfect common space to begin to develop a foundation for a peaceful world order – to make this globe a pureland.

Did the Buddha exist?

Alexander Wynne

Abstract

Extreme scepticism about the study of early Buddhism is common in Buddhist Studies. Sometimes it is even claimed that the Buddha never existed; myth is all we have. Going against this view, this paper shows that early Buddhist discourses are largely authentic, and can be regarded as a reasonably accurate historical witness. Special attention is paid to the personality of the Buddha, and the way in which his idiosyncrasies flow into the teachings. The resulting 'Dharma' has a very particular character, and should be regarded as a singular creation which could not have been invented by a committee.

The historical Buddha occupies a curious position in the academic study of Buddhism. Despite, or perhaps because of, large collections of texts reporting his teachings, uncertainty about their authorship and doubts about the Buddha's existence are commonplace. In the words of Jonathan Silk (1994: 183), the Buddha 'is essentially historically unknowable', there being 'no certain evidence even that such a man lived … there is no actual "fact" or set of "facts" to which any picture of the Buddha might correspond.' Bernard Faure (2016) allows the Buddha a little more leeway than this. In answering the question 'what do we actually know about the Buddha?', he comments that while '[i]t is fair to say that he was born, he lived, and he died … [t]he rest remains lost in the mists of myth and legend'.

Other scholars have focused their attention on a different type of myth-making. According to Philip Almond (1988: 12) the problem is much bigger than the Buddha, since even 'Buddhism' was a creation of the nineteenth

century Western mind. Donald Lopez Jr. has been more specific than this about the Western creation of Buddhism. In his study of Western views of the Buddha up to the mid-nineteenth century, he has focused on one eminent Orientalist. For Lopez Jr., the modern picture of the Buddha is nothing more than a trend, 'the result of a series of historical accidents' (2013: 226) which was not manufactured 'in India in the fifth century BCE', but created 'in Paris in 1844' (2013: 3), by none other than Eugène Burnouf:

> Relying only on his prodigious Sanskrit skills, his dogged analysis, and his imagination of what must have been, he created a historical narrative of Buddhism—from pristine origin, to baroque elaboration, to degenerate decline—based entirely on his reading of a random group of texts that arrived on his desk as if from nowhere. And from those same texts, he painted a portrait of the Buddha that remains pristine. (2013: 211)

The Buddha as a creation of nineteenth century Orientalist imagination is a feature of a recent paper by David Drewes, who has claimed that late Victorian scholars created a 'flesh and blood person … from little more than fancy' (2017: 1). Extending the perspective of Jonathan Silk, Drewes stresses the failure of 'more than two centuries of scholarship' to 'establish anything' (2017: 1), and sketches a depressing story of scholarly failure since Burnouf:

> Following the publication of Burnouf's Introduction, [scholars] shifted their focus to the final Buddha and spent roughly four more decades proposing one answer or the other on the question of whether or not he was historical. Though the historical faction won out, the scholars involved never cited any relevant facts, or made any significant arguments in support of their views. Burnouf cited no more than pious Nepali belief. Hardy cited nothing, and eventually abandoned the idea. Max Müller treated Wilson's doubts as legitimate until he later rejected them without any explicit justification. Koeppen, early Oldenberg, and Lamotte relied on versions of the Great Man theory, according to which it is inconceivable that Buddhism could have arisen without a powerful founder. Rhys Davids, later Oldenberg, and Bareau relied on *ad populem* arguments, which are inherently fallacious. (2017: 15)

Although Drewes claims that no 'relevant facts' or 'significant argument' have ever been produced in favour of the Buddha's existence, he says neither what the facts might be, nor what kind of historical argument might be acceptable. And he does not explain himself when calling for 'the standards of scientific, empirical inquiry' to be upheld (2017: 19). We will here try to rectify this problem by adopting an approach that is empirical and inductive: by adducing the relevant facts and making significant arguments, we will build up a general picture which proves, beyond reasonable doubt, that the Buddha did indeed exist and that we have a good record of his teachings. We must begin by considering the problem of 'proof'.

1. What is proof?

Good evidence for the Buddha would perhaps be his mention in a non-Buddhist document from the fifth century BC. Although no such document exists, at least one Indian religious figure from the fifth century BC is mentioned in an objective source: Mahāvīra, founder of the Jains and a contemporary of the Buddha, is mentioned in the early Buddhist texts. Were we to believe this non-Jain evidence for Mahāvīra, it would leave us in a quite curious situation. For it would mean accepting Mahāvīra's existence based on the very same sources deemed inadequate as proof for the Buddha. This should surely make us pause for thought. Might not the early Buddhist texts be more reliable than the sceptics claim?

Even if we do not accept the Buddhist depiction of either Mahāvīra or the Buddha, canonical Buddhist texts are the only possible source of evidence about the Buddha; material evidence for the very earliest period of Buddhism is non-existent. What, then, should we make of the Tipiṭakas of various Buddhist schools, a complete version of which exists in the Pāli tradition, but with large collections also in Chinese, Sanskrit, Tibetan and (now) Gāndhārī translation? Scepticism is only one of many possible approaches to canonical Buddhist literature. Bronkhorst (2000: ix) has summed up the three most common opinions as follows:

i.   stress on the fundamental homogeneity and substantial authenticity of at least a considerable part of the Nikāyic materials;

ii. scepticism with regard to the possibility of retrieving the doctrine of earliest Buddhism;

iii. cautious optimism in this respect.

The first position is more or less that of the Theravāda tradition: the Pāli canon is authentic, and while academic study can help recover obscure aspects of early Buddhism, there is no doubt about the general nature of the Buddha's teaching. Most critical studies, however starting with scholars such as T. W. Rhys Davids and Hermann Oldenberg, incline towards the third position, and assume that careful scholarship can reveal 'facts' about the Buddha and early Buddhism. Both scholars, and many more after them, have presented arguments about early Buddhism based more or less entirely on the texts.

The possibility of such proof is, of course, doubted by those who adhere to the second position. Those who doubt that there was a historical Buddha in the first place must assume that there was a period of creative activity lying behind, and hence not recorded in, the canonical texts. This is a quite extreme position, and the notion of an unrecorded period in which the 'idea' of the Buddha was fabricated surely requires some justification. Sceptics must thus provide reasonable arguments to support the claim that the extant texts are later inventions.

In short, sceptics must present 'proofs'; they must *argue* that the content of the Tipiṭaka(s) is of such a nature that the Buddha's historicity cannot be assumed, and is indeed quite unlikely. This point has been elegantly made by E. J. Thomas, author of the influential *Life of Buddha as Legend and History* (1927):

> Is there a historical basis at all? It must be remembered that some recognised scholars have denied and still deny that the story of Buddha contains any record of historical events. We further have the undoubted fact that various … well-known characters once accepted as historical are now consigned to legendary fiction, such as Dido of Carthage, Prester John, Pope Joan, and Sir John Mandeville. The reply to those who would treat Buddha in the same way is not to offer a series of syllogisms, and say, therefore the historical character is proved. The opponents must be challenged to produce a theory more credible… An indolent scepticism which will not take the trouble to offer some hypothesis more credible than the view which it discards does not come within the range of serious discussion.[1]

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[1] Drewes (2017: 12-13), citing Thomas (1927: xvii–xviii).

E. J. Thomas here provides an eloquent summary of the normal 'standards of scientific, empirical inquiry': all parties involved in a debate must be judged on the basis of their arguments, with the most credible theory gaining general acceptance. Bur Drewes misreads this simple and obvious point:

> For Thomas, rather than something that has been or can be proved, the existence of the historical Buddha is simply a realistic hypothesis. Though he suggests that we must accept this hypothesis unless we can provide a better one, a third option would simply be to acknowledge that we do not know how Buddhism originated. (2017: 13)

This is a perverse interpretation of Thomas' approach. At no point does Thomas merely ask for 'a realistic hypothesis'; rather, he assumes that in text-critical history, knowledge is created by advancing credible theses, which are to be judged against each other. Thomas thus points out that the 'we don't know anything' line of thought must stand or fall based on the strength of its arguments:

> [Extreme scepticism] however is not the generally accepted view, and for it to be accepted it would be necessary to go on and show that the theory that the records are all inventions … is the more credible view.[2]

Sceptics such as Drewes fail to understand that such a claim as 'we do not know how Buddhism originated' is a thesis which requires 'proof'. Drewes' analysis is mistaken in another respect. He claims that E. J. Thomas followed 'Rhys Davids' old *ad populum* argument' (2017: 13). But neither Thomas nor Rhys Davids claimed anything like 'we know that X is the case because most people believe that it is'. While Thomas refers to the 'generally accepted view' that the Buddha existed, he makes it quite clear that the reason for its acceptance is its persuasive power. Thomas' point goes something like this: 'Most scholars accept the Buddha's existence as a far more credible thesis than the sceptical view that he did not exist'; this is quite different from the *ad populum* claim 'I accept it because it is the majority opinion.'

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[2] Drewes (2017: 13), citing Thomas (1927: 233–34).

With regard to the view of the Buddha as mere myth, it is also true that T. W. Rhys Davids claimed that 'no one … would now support this view'.[3] But once again this is not an *ad populum* deference to a popular position. Rhys Davids' point is rather that the general lack of support for an entirely mythic view of the Buddha is due to its inadequacies. He instead believed that the historical value of the canonical discourses is proved by their careful study. In this regard, we can consider Rhys Davids' comments on the *Mahā/Kassapa-sīhanāda Sutta* (DN 8):

> When speaking on sacrifice to a sacrificial priest, on union with God to an adherent of the current theology, on Brahman claims to superior social rank to a proud Brahman, on mystic insight to a man who trusts in it, on the soul to one who believes in the soul theory, the method followed is always the same. Gotama puts himself as far as possible in the mental position of the questioner. He attacks none of his cherished convictions. He accepts as the starting-point of his own exposition the desirability of the act or condition prized by his opponent – of the union with God (as in the *Tevijja*), or of sacrifice (as in the *Kūṭadanta*), or of social rank (as in the *Ambaṭṭha*), or of seeing heavenly sights, etc. (as in the *Mahāli*), or of the soul theory (as in the *Poṭṭhapada*). He even adopts the very phraseology of his questioner. And then, partly by putting a new and (from the Buddhist point of view) a higher meaning into the words; partly by an appeal to such ethical conceptions as are common ground between them; he gradually leads his opponent up to his conclusion. This is, of course, always Arahatship …

> There is both courtesy and dignity in the method employed. But no little dialectic skill, and an easy mastery of the ethical points involved, are required to bring about the result … On the hypothesis that he was an historical person, of that training and character he is represented in the Piṭakas to have had, the method is precisely that which it is most probable he would have actually followed.

> Whoever put the Dialogues together may have had a sufficiently clear memory of the way he conversed, may well have even

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[3] Drewes (2017: 10).

remembered particular occasions and persons… However this may be, the method followed in all these dialogues has one disadvantage. In accepting the position of the adversary, and adopting his language, the authors compel us, in order to follow what they give us as Gotama's view, to read a good deal between the lines. The *argumentum ad hominem* can never be the same as a statement of opinion given without reference to any particular person.[4]

Stated in the abstract, Rhys Davids claims that the Pāli Suttas attribute a very particular, even idiosyncratic, dialectical style to the Buddha; that this style is fleshed out in realistic dialogues, which delicately unfold, involving other carefully drawn participants; that the meaning of many such *argumentum ad hominem* often remains implicit, requiring us to 'read between the lines'; and thus that the best explanation for such a complex arrangement of persons, places, ideas and implied meaning is that it actually happened. The argument for inauthenticity, on the other hand, would require us to believe the barely credible notion that compositional committees created didactic scenarios of such a peculiar nature that they contain semantic lacunae. More recently, Richard Gombrich has built on Rhys Davids' understanding of the canonical dialogues to draw a compelling picture of an original and groundbreaking thinker. According to Drewes, however, Gombrich has no argument:

Though Richard Gombrich scornfully rejects skepticism about the Buddha's historicity in his *What the Buddha Thought*, surely the boldest recent publication on the matter, he does not present any clear argument to defend it (2017: 16 n.28).

By any sensible standards, Gombrich's *What the Buddha Thought* consists of a series of arguments about the Buddha. Perhaps Drewes expects an argument in the form of a syllogism, but as E. J. Thomas realised, this would be to set unreasonably precise standards for historical enquiry. Gombrich instead develops a reading of the Buddha rich in textual detail and conceptual mastery, and offers it as a credible hypothesis of the evidence. In particular, he distinguishes his position from the sort of scepticism (in this case, personified by Christian Wedemeyer) which claims we can never know the truth:[5]

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[4] Rhys Davids (1923: 206-07), as cited in Gombrich (1996: 17-18).

[5] Gombrich is here responding to the comments of Christian Wedemeyer, made on the

I have tried in the pages above to show that the Buddha's main ideas are powerful and coherent. If I had a more thorough knowledge of the Pali Canon than, alas, I can claim, I would have made a better job of it; but surely I have done enough to show that this coherence is not imposed by my fantasy, but exists in the texts. Yet, according to the fashionable view represented by my critic, Buddhism, which at least in numerical terms must be the greatest movement in the entire history of human ideas, is a ball which was set rolling by someone whose ideas are not known and – one may presume from what he writes – can never be known. So the intellectual edifice which I have described came together by a process of accumulation, rather like an avalanche. I am reminded of the blindfolded monkeys whose random efforts somehow produce a typescript of the complete works of Shakespeare. (2009: 194)

Gombrich's argument against scepticism implies that the wide variety of teachings attributed to Buddha are so profoundly coherent that the notion of invention is implausible. Idiosyncrasies form part of this coherence; elsewhere, Gombrich has asked 'Are jokes ever composed by committees?' (1990: 12). Whether or not one is convinced by this argument, one can hardly deny that it is an argument, and one that according to Gombrich should be closely evaluated:

I suggest that readers take as a provisional hypothesis, a working basis, that what I have written is more or less correct; and then test it on the touchstone of their own experience by reading the evidence, the texts of the Pali Canon. Then, if they think the evidence is against me, they should say so publicly, and we shall all be the wiser. (2009: 201)

Drewes shows no inclination to take such claims seriously: he asks for 'facts' and 'proofs' without saying what they are; he fails to understand that text-critical history is an empirical discipline; he ignores E. J. Thomas' point that sceptics are also required to present arguments; he accuses Thomas, Rhys Davids et al. of making *ad populum* arguments, as opposed to credible interpretations; and he dismisses Gombrich as having no clear argument, against Gombrich's own claim

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Indology forum on December 9th, 2006: http://list.indology.info/pipermail/indology_list.indology.info/2006-December/124867.html

that his reading of the texts is a provisional hypothesis. All this suggests not just a profound epistemic confusion about what knowledge is and how it is created, but also a nihilistic tendency to take previous generations of Buddhist scholars in bad faith. And yet, as we will see, the approach to the Buddha pioneered by scholars such as T. W. Rhys Davids is not only valid, but is the only way to study early Buddhism.

2. Buddhist texts, Buddhist myth

What is the sceptical approach to the text-critical study of Buddhism? What are the sceptical arguments about the Buddha, and what do sceptics make of the canonical literature? Gregory Schopen has provided a succinct overview of the sceptical reading of canonical Buddhist literature:

> We know, and have known for some time, that the Pali canon as we have it – and it is generally conceded to be our oldest source – cannot be taken back further than the last quarter of the first century B.C.E, the date of the Alu-vihara redaction, the earliest redaction that we can have some knowledge of, and that – for a critical history – it can serve, at the very most, only as a source for the Buddhism of this period. But we also know that even this is problematic since, as Malalasekera has pointed out: "…how far the *Tipiṭaka* and its commentaries reduced to writing at Alu-vihāra resembled them as they have come down to us now, no one can say." In fact, it is not until the time of the commentaries of Buddhaghosa, Dhammapala, and others – that is to say, the fifth to sixth centuries C.E. – that we can know anything definite about the actual contents of this canon.[6]

So the Pali canon cannot be taken back to the early Buddhist age, and is to be dated to the redaction of the commentaries on it; whether it contains anything older than this cannot be known. On the question of content, Drewes reads early Buddhist texts as essentially mythological:

> [I]t is not clear that the tradition itself envisioned the Buddha as an actual person. Early Buddhist authors make little effort to associate the Buddha with any specific human identity. Familiar narratives

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[6] Schopen (1997: 23-24), on which see Wynne (2005: 37*ff*).

of the Buddha's life may seem to tell the story of a specific person, but these are only found in late, non-canonical texts. Early texts, such as the suttas of the Pali canon, say hardly anything about the Buddha's life, and identify him in only vague terms. Rather than a specific human teacher, he appears primarily as a generic, omniscient, supra-divine figure characterized primarily in terms of supernatural qualities. Indeed, although this fact is almost invariably obscured in scholarship, early texts fail to provide us with a proper name… (2017: 16-17)

Thus the Buddha of the early texts is equivalent to apparently fictitious characters of the ancient world such as Abraham, Moses, Lao-tzu, Vyāsa and Vālmīki:

[T]he traditions associated with each of these figures were founded by multiple people whose roles were later either obscured or effaced. Most religious traditions with premodern origins do not preserve an actual memory of their initial formation. Since the actual processes tend to be complex, difficult to remember, and not particularly edifying, they tend to be overwritten with simpler, mythical accounts. (2017: 18)

The mythological tendency was apparently richly and vividly elaborated in classical India:

In ancient India, attributing the origin of family lineages, religious traditions, and texts to mythical figures was not only the norm, but the rule, with very few known exceptions predating the Common Era. (2017: 19)

It follows that even the Buddha's family were an invention:

Linking the Buddha to the Śākyas certainly seems to provide realistic historical texture, but as Wilson pointed out long ago, the Śākyas are not mentioned in any early non-Buddhist source. Further, according to ancient tradition, the Śākyas were annihilated prior to the Buddha's death, suggesting that Buddhist authors themselves may have been unaware of their existence. The entire clan could easily be entirely mythical. (2017: 17)

Such invention was not unprecedented. Drewes points out that in the late Vedic or early Buddhist period, a realistic religious world was invented by the authors of the early Upaniṣads:

> The early Upaniṣads, like Buddhist *sūtra*s, take the form of realistic dialogues with great teachers, and in fact provide significantly more biographical information for several of them than the vastly larger corpus of Buddhist sūtras provides for the Buddha …
>
> Brian Black suggests that the main figures, such as Uddālaka Āruṇi and Yājñavalkya, first appeared in the Brāhmaṇas "merely as names that add authority to particular teachings," and were later developed in the Upaniṣads into complex figures with distinct backgrounds, families, ideas, and personalities … (2017: 18)

Drewes concludes that early Buddhist texts give no reasonable grounds to conclude that we know anything about the Buddha, or even if such a person existed:

> Though there has long been an industry devoted to the production of sensational claims about the Buddha, nothing about him has ever been established as fact, and the standard position in scholarship has long been that he is a figure about whom we know nothing. My only real suggestion is that we make the small shift from speaking of an unknown, contentless Buddha to accepting that we do not have grounds for speaking of a historical Buddha at all. Of course, it is possible that there was some single, actual person behind the nebulous "śramaṇa Gautama" of the early texts, but this is very far from necessarily the case, and even if such a person did exist, we have no idea who he was. There may similarly have been an actual person behind the mythical Agamemnon, Homer, or King Arthur; Vyāsa, Vālmīki, Kṛṣṇa, or Rāma, but this does not make it possible to identify them as historical. If we wish to present early Buddhism in a manner that accords with the standards of scientific, empirical inquiry, it is necessary to acknowledge that the Buddha belongs to this group. (2017: 19)

3. The formation of the Tipiṭaka

The sceptical estimation of the antiquity of canonical Buddhist literature is not remotely credible. Canonical fragments are included in the Golden Pāli Text, found in a reliquary from Śrī Kṣetra dating to the late 3rd or early 4th century AD; they agree almost exactly with extant Pāli manuscripts.[7] This means that the Pāli Tipiṭaka has been transmitted with a high degree of accuracy for well over 1,500 years. There is no reason why such an accurate transmission should not be projected back a number of centuries, at the least to the period when it was written down in the first century BC, and probably further. A few key facts suggest this:[8]

- Indian Inscriptions from the 2nd and 1st century BC indicate indicates the existence of a substantial Buddhist canon, in the form resembling the extant Pali Tipiṭaka; the Aśokan inscriptions suggest a mass of such material was already in existence considerably more than a century earlier.

- Canonical Buddhist texts are the product of a complex system of oral recitation, intended to ensure accurate transmission. Scepticism about the reliability of this means of transmission is unwarranted: information about the Buddha could have been preserved for hundreds of years before the Buddhist canons were transmitted in writing.

- After the Buddha's death, the early Buddhist tradition did not appoint a leader to direct the work of composition/transmission. The work must have been carried out within a decentralised network. Hence there was no central committee which exercised editorial control, and if so, invention would have resulted in a plurality of perspectives and significant disagreement. The general lack of such disagreement suggests against invention.

With regard to the first point, inscriptions from early Buddhist sites include such terms as *dhamma-kathika*, *peṭakin*, *suttantika*, *suttantikinī* and *pañca-nekāyika*. Rhys Davids has commented on the significance of this as follows:

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[7] Stargardt (1995), Falk (1997).

[8] On the antiquity of the Pali Tipiṭaka and parallel materials, see Rhys Davids (1911, especially chapter VIII), Wynne (2005), Anālayo (2012), Sujato and Brahmali (2015).

> They are conclusive proof that some time before the date of the inscriptions (that is, roughly speaking, before the time of Asoka), there was a Buddhist literature in North India, where the inscriptions are found. And further, that that literature then had divisions known by the technical names of Piṭaka, Nikāya, and Suttanta, and that the number of Nikāyas then in existence was five. (1911: 169)

So a large canon, organised already into the divisions of the extant Pāli Tipiṭaka, existed in the Mauryan period, allowing Aśoka not only to name individual texts (in his Calcutta- Bairāṭ edict),[9] but also to allude to many more texts throughout his inscriptions (Sujato & Brahmali, 2015: 86-90). Although there is no evidence for writing before Aśoka, the accuracy of oral transmission should not be underestimated. The Buddhist community was full of Brahmins who knew that the Vedic educational system had transmitted a mass of difficult texts, verbatim, in an increasingly archaic language, for more than a thousand years.[10] Since the early Buddhists required a different means of oral transmission, for quite different texts, other mnemonic techniques were developed, based on communal chanting (saṅgīti).[11] The texts explicitly state that this method was to be employed, and their actual form shows that it was, on a grand scale.

In the *Pāsādika Sutta* (DN III.127-28) the Buddha tells his followers to 'recite communally and not argue, so that the holy life will be long lasting and endure'. This is to be done by 'meeting together again and again, (comparing) meaning with meaning (*atthena atthaṃ*), (comparing) letter with letter (*byañjanena byañjanaṃ*)'.[12] Many more canonical texts say the same thing, and so suggest a concern to ensure accurate transmission even when the Buddha was alive. Indeed, a common refrain, contained in more than 150 discourses and uttered by the Buddha as he is about teach, requests everyone to listen very carefully: 'Well then … listen, pay close attention, I will speak.' (*tena hi … suṇohi sādhukaṃ manasi-karohi bhāsissāmi*). The *Aṭṭhakavagga* (Suttanipāta IV) is even said to have been recited in the Buddha's presence.[13] While not proving that such events

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[9] There is some doubt about the identification of the texts Aśoka names, but it is generally accepted that what Aśoka calls 'Muni-gāthā' is probably the *Muni Sutta* (Sn 2017-21). See Norman (1992: xxix-xxx).

[10] Gombrich (2009: 101-02).

[11] Allon (1997), Wynne (2004), Anālayo (2007).

[12] Wynne (2004:115).

[13] See Udāna 46 (Ee p.59).

happened, the texts show that a concern for accurate transmission is implicit in the teachings themselves.

Little is known about the process of composing and collecting canonical discourses, although the four 'great authorities' (DN II.123*ff*: *mahāpadesa*) mentions four sources of material: the Buddha himself, a particular monastic community (*āvāse saṅghe*), certain elders in such a community (*āvāse sambahulā therā bhikkhū*), and just one elder (*āvāse eko thero bhikkhu*).[14] In other words, material was gathered from multiple sources, and then assessed in a comparative process; new works were compared with an existing collection, and if they agreed with it, they were added to it.

The focus of comparative endeavour was doctrine: the words and meaning (*pada-vyañjana*) of the teachings. Such things as persons and places were not under consideration, and this means that the agreement of contextual aspects of the teachings is historically significant. For the early tradition was acephalous: the Buddha refused to appoint a successor, and there is no evidence for a Buddhist 'pope' or 'Saṅgha-rāja' in the entire Indian tradition. The general agreement of incidental details, probably unchecked and possibly 'uncheckable', lends support to their historical veracity:

> [F]or a document of such scale constructed from multiple oral sources, [the Tipiṭaka] contains very few inconsistencies. This lends credibility to its authenticity. Within a decentralised ascetic culture, and in an age of oral composition, it would have been difficult — perhaps almost impossible — to fabricate a coherent version of the Buddhist past. The significant disagreements to be expected of a multi-authored imagination of the past are more or less completely absent, a fact which rules against large-scale invention. (Wynne 2018: 256)

If there was no effort to check the canonical texts' social and political details, their general coherence suggests that they are, as a whole, trustworthy. The confirmation of some incidental details in the material record supports this view.

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[14] Wynne (2004: 100*ff*).

4. Stones and bones

Apart from Lumbinī, which has layers going back to the 5th century BC and earlier,[15] remains attesting the existence of the Buddhism exist from the Mauryan period (mid 3rd century BC) onwards. Some of these early sites confirm what is contained in the canonical and post-canonical texts. A deep influence from Buddhist teachings on Aśoka's inscriptions has already been noted; we will now focus on more precise correspondences.

a) The Sanchi relics

A coincidence of epigraphy and post-canonical Buddhist literature was noted by Erich Frauwallner in his seminal *The Earliest Vinaya and the Beginnings of Buddhist Literature* (1956). The Pāli commentaries and Sinhalese chronicles state that a number of Buddhist missions, in groups of five, were sent out during the reign of Aśoka. The number 'five' is important, as it is the minimum number of monks required to ordain new monks in distant lands, according to the Vinaya.[16] The names of the missionaries apparently despatched to the Himalayas were found inscribed on two reliquaries from Sanchi, or ancient Vedisā,[17] where they are called 'Himalayan' (Hemavata) monks. The inscriptions thus confirm the Pāli accounts of Aśokan missions, and this lends credibility to other textual details, such as the claim that the group led by Mahinda to Sri Lanka stopped in Vedisā on the way.[18]

A further correspondence between the epigraphic and literary sources of the Aśokan missions can be noted. Aśoka's thirteenth Rock Edict implies that 'envoys' played an important role in achieving his 'Dhamma victory':

> Even those [regions] to whom His Majesty's envoys (*dūtā*) do not go, having heard of His Majesty's duties of morality, the ordinances, (and) the instruction in morality, are conforming to morality and will conform to (it).[19]

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[15] Despite Coningham's claims (Coningham et al. 2013), the site's early layers provide no evidence for the existence of Buddhism in the 6th century BC (Gombrich, 2013).

[16] Frauwallner (1956: 13-14), Wynne (2005: 48-50).

[17] Frauwallner (1956: 14), Willis (2001).

[18] Wynne (2005: 50-51).

[19] Wynne (2005: 52).

The wording of the edict suggests that Aśoka's 'Dharma victory' was achieved by envoys (*dūta*s), and not other Aśokan officials such as 'Dhamma ministers', as has sometimes been assumed (Norman, 2004: 70, 79). This agrees with the account in the Pāli chronicles, for example the *Mahāvaṃsa* (XI: 33-35), which states that Aśokan envoys (*dūta*s) carried 'palm-leaf messages with the true doctrine' (*saddhamma-paṇṇākāraṃ*).[20] The *Dīpavaṃsa* (XII.5-9) makes exactly the same point, and mentions that Mahinda arrived in Laṅkā soon after the activity of Aśoka's envoys.[21] The coincidence of epigraphic and literary evidence is uncanny: the Sanchi relics agree with what the Pali sources say about Buddhist missions, and RE XIII agrees with later Pāli sources by indicating that Aśoka's 'Dhamma victory' was aided or enabled by imperial envoys.

b) The Piprahwa relics

The agreement between Aśokan and post-canonical Pali literature is not an isolated occurrence. A few other inscriptions go further than this by confirming a few details in the Pali Tipiṭaka. Although Drewes claims (2017: 17) that 'the Śākyas are not mentioned in any early non-Buddhist source', this ignores the Piprahwa reliquary, which dates to the late 3rd century BC or not long afterwards (Falk, 2017: 60) and refers to the Sakyas:

> *sukitibhatinaṃ sabhagiṇikanaṃ saputadalanaṃ iyaṃ salilanidhane budhasa bhagavate <saki>yanaṃ*

Falk translates as follows:

> This enshrinement (*nidhāna*) of the corporal remnants (*śarīra*) of the Buddha [1: of the Śākyas], the Lord, (is to the credit) of the [2: Śākya] brothers of the 'highly famous', together with their sisters, with their sons and wives. (Falk 2017: 60)

Falk's translation shows that the term *sakiyanaṃ* 'of the Sakyas' is somewhat ambiguous. If it qualifies *budhasa bhagavate*, the inscription would perhaps only record the mythic idea that the Buddha 'belonged' to the Sakya clan. But it would be strange to refer to the Buddha as 'belonging to the Sakyas', rather

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[20] Wynne (2005: 57).
[21] Wynne (2005: 58).

than using the more normal epithet *sakya-muni*, 'sage of the Sakyas'. Indeed, Falk also connects the term *sakiyanaṃ* to *sukiti-bhatinaṃ sabhagiṇikanaṃ saputa-dalanaṃ*:

> The final *sakiyanaṃ/śākyānāṃ* can be drawn to *sukīrtibhrātṛṇāṃ*, so that all the people mentioned are specified as Śākyas, or to the Buddha, implying that he as well was one "of the Śākyas." The double meaning was probably intended. (Falk 2017: 59)

Falk argues that the inscription refers to the rehousing (*nidhane*) of a portion of the Buddha's bones. This portion of relics probably established in Lumbinī by Aśoka (Falk 2017: 50, 55, 67); for some reason these relics were then moved to a new *stūpa* (Falk 2017: 58*ff*) in Piprahwa, under the care of the Sakyas:

> Seen this way, the dimension of the statement changes completely, from a simple "this is the reliquary box [*nidhane*] of the Śākyas holding the relics of the Buddha" to mean "this whole *stūpa* construction has been installed [*nidhane*] by us Śākyas for the relics of the Buddha." (Falk 2017: 60)

The Piprahwa inscription thus offers material support for the historical reality of the Sakyas, situated more or less exactly where the canonical texts place them. Even if the exact site of Kapilavatthu has yet not been definitely fixed,[22] Gupta-era seals from Piprahwa, recording the 'Kapilavastu monastic community' (*kapilavastu-bhikhu-saṃgha*),[23] show that Kapilavatthu was nearby, indicated in the canonical texts.[24]

c) The Deorkothar inscription

Recent papers by Salomon and Marino (2014) and before them Skilling and von Hinüber (2013) have drawn attention to two recently discovered, early second century BC inscriptions from Deorkothar.[25] The inscriptions record lineages associated with Anuruddha, a prominent disciple of the Buddha.

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[22] Falk (2017: 57): 'the search for the palace area of Kapilavastu can continue'.

[23] Srivastava (1980: 106), Falk (2017: 56).

[24] According to Falk (2017: 57), the seals imply that Piprahwa was 'a place which definitely was close to Kapilavastu'.

[25] Salomon and Marino (2014: 30-31, 37) consider the date of 200 BC, offered by von Hinüber and Skilling (2013: 13-14), as slightly too early.

Inscription 1 mentions the Kukkuṭika-Bahusutiya school (line 5: *kokuḍikena bahūsūtiy[e]*), where *kokuḍika-* is derived from the Kukkuṭārāma monastery of the nearby ancient city of Kosambī, capital of Cedi/Vatsa, a region associated with Anuruddha in the Pāli Suttas. The term *bahūsūtiya-* refers to the Bahuśrutīyas, a branch of the Mahāsāṃghikas which in later accounts of the Buddhist sects is closely aligned with the Kukkuṭikas.[26] Salomon and Marino draw the following conclusions:

> The Deorkothar inscriptions provide strong and unexpected support for the historical veracity of traditional voices with regard to both of these issues, that is, the origin and affiliation of the sects and the lineage of the patriarchs and their disciples, and by implication with regard to other issues in the early history of Buddhism as well. On the one hand, they corroborate, at a surprisingly early date, the association between the Bahuśrutīyas and the hitherto little-known Kaukkuṭika/Gokulika schools which is attested in most of the traditional accounts of the schools; on the other hand, they attest to local patriarchal lineages derived from the Buddha and one of his most favored disciples, Anuruddha, in a geographical context – and again, at a surprisingly early date – which is consistent with canonical information about Anuruddha. We could hardly hope for a clearer warning against the excessive skepticism regarding canonical and post-canonical traditions, as Bareau and Hofinger have eloquently explained. This is not, of course, to argue that we should naively accept traditional accounts at face value, but only that we should not dismiss them out of hand for lack of corroboration. We should keep in mind, in other words, that lack of corroboration does not prove that a statement or claim is false, but only that it is unproven. Sometimes, corroboration comes when least expected, so the door should always be left open (2014: 38-39)

Salomon and Marino (2014: 37) thus warn against 'the danger of letting skepticism take over one's thinking, leading to the mindset of "In the end, we know nothing." Unfortunately, these remarks made no effect on David Drewes, who dismissed Salomon and Marino's points as unproven, because

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[26] Salomon and Marino (2014: 34-35).

'unsubstantiated lineage claims cannot be treated as historical evidence, as has clearly been shown, e.g., by studies of early Chan lineages.' (2017: 16, n.28). This misses the point entirely. Either the inscription substantiates the textual information about Anuruddha, or it is a fabrication by Buddhists from Kosambī/ Cedi, who identified as Kukkuṭikas/Bahussutīyas. If the textual evidence is a fabrication too, as sceptics believe, it would imply a double conspiracy. Sometimes it makes sense to believe the evidence.

A pattern emerges whenever ancient remains from Buddhist India are found: they tend to agree with the texts, which they thus confirm. The Piprahwa inscription might not exactly say 'the Sakyas woz here', just as the Deorkothar inscriptions and the Sanchi reliquaries do not literally say 'Anuruddha woz here' and 'the Aśokan missionaries woz here', respectively. But by any reasonable estimation of the evidence, all those persons probably were there.

5. A pre-imperial world

So far we have established that canonical Buddhist texts existed during the Aśokan period, already composed under exacting standards of mnemonic accuracy, and in arrangements as we still have them. We have now seen that some of their contents is verified in material evidence going back as far as Aśoka. But how much of their content had come into existence then? Were multiple additions made after Aśoka? According to Sujāto and Brahmali (SB, 2015), early Buddhist Texts (EBTs) are consistent in depicting a particular time and place:

> The EBTs depict the emergence of several moderate sized urban centres, a state of development which falls between the purely agrarian culture of the earlier Upaniṣads and the massive cities of the Mauryan empire. (2015: 21).

The canonical texts are set in a 'small scale and low level of urbanisation' and 'do not contain descriptions of large cities' (2015: 109). To pick but one minor example, although Mathurā is a major cultural centre from the 2nd century BC onwards, in the EBTs it is an insignifcant place 'mentioned only once' (2015: 105). There is also a general agreement with the archaeological record, 'where large scale urban development comes later, in the 4th century' (2015: 18). The canonical texts thus pre-date the emergence of Indian empires from Magadha, beginning with the Nandas and followed by the Mauryas:

This is a citation, and so needs to be indented, and it also needs line gaps between the text surround it.

The canonical references to the Mauryan capital of Pāṭaliputta are illuminating. This place is almost entirely absent from the early texts,[27] but during his final journey the Buddha is said to travel through Pāṭaligāma, 'the village of Pāṭali', apparently then in the process of being expanded (DN II.86-87). The Buddha makes a prediction that the site will become the major city of Pāṭaliputta.[28] Perhaps this story was invented to relate Pāṭaliputta to the Buddha. But the consistency with which this place is mentioned throughout the early texts is remarkable. The *Aṭṭhakanāgara Sutta* (MN 52), set after the death of the Buddha, is situated in Pāṭaliputta (SB 2015: 17); the *Ghoṭamukha Sutta* (MN 94), also set after the Buddha's death, mentions the Buddhist community of Pāṭaliputta and money (MN II.163); and AN 5.50 mentions King Muṇḍa, apparently the great-grandson of Ajātasattu, ruling in Pāṭaliputta (the same texts features venerable Nārada, a figure associated with a more developed phase of early Buddhist doctrine).[29]

Beyond the early texts, the post-canonical *Milindapañha* refers to a battle fought by the first Mauryan emperor Candagutta (SB 2015: 19). The consistency of historical development within and beyond the EBTs is therefore impressive: from Pāṭaligāma as a minor site during the Buddha's lifetime, but already being enlarged, to the city of Pāṭaliputta known after the Buddha's death, in a period when money was being used, and then the early Mauryan period, beginning with Candragupta in the late 4th century BC, and known only in post-canonical Pali literature.

It is also worth pointing out that early Buddhist mythicism also reflects pre-imperial India. Sujato and Brahmali note that although the myth of a 'wheel turning monarch' (*cakkavatti*), who is said to 'rule from sea to sea, justly, without violence' (DN 26), is sometimes said to 'date from Ashokan times' (2015: 24), Aśoka's edicts do not mention it. Why is this? Probably because the myth assumes pre-imperial polities, and was unworkable in the Mauryan period. According to the myth of DN 26, the *cakkavatti* visits neighbouring

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[27] Sujato and Brahmali (2015: 17) have noted that at DN II.147, Pāṭaliputta is not included in a list of north Indian cities.

[28] DN II. 87-88 = Vin I.229: *idaṃ agganagaraṃ bhavissati pāṭaliputtaṃ puṭabhedanaṃ*.

[29] According to Sujato and Brahmali (2015: 9), Muṇḍa can be dated to c.350 BC, meaning that AN 5.50 is possibly the latest period referred to in EBTs. In the Vinaya commentary (Sp I.72-73), the length of reigns of the kings of Magadha, starting with Ajātasattu, ruler at the time of the Buddha's *parinibbāna*,is as follows: Ajātasattu (24), Udayabhadra (16), Anuruddha and Muṇḍa (8 or 18). On Nārada see Wynne (2018c: 84*f*).

kingdoms and teaches them his Dhamma. This scenario assumes small states pacified as vassals by a powerful centre, a situation which fits India in the 5th BC, rather than the imperial situation in the generations leading up to Aśoka.

Within a pre-imperial world of moderate socio-political development, Sujato and Brahmali further note that economic conditions could in general be described as small-scale localism:

> King Pasenadi of Kosala is said to have used Kāsi sandalwood (MN 87.28), indicating that even the highest social strata used locally produced luxuries. This situation is perhaps to be expected given the political divisions in North India at the time, which may have complicated long-distance trade. (2015: 23)

In contrast, non-EBTs depict a quite different world of long-distance trade: the Jātakas mention 'trade by sea to Suvaṇṇabhūmi (possibly lower Burma), and also over desert to Sovīra (Rajasthan) and Baveru (Babylon)' (SB 2015: 23). Within an economy largely based on agricultural produce, in particular rice, the early texts also go into remarkably realistic detail, knowing of such things as the 'red rot' sugar cane disease (*mañjeṭṭhika*, Vin II 256,26), still found across northern India today (SB 2015: 72). It is also important to note that early Buddhist texts hardly mention two material developments of great importance in the 4th century BC: coins and bricks. [30] The early texts refer to wealth in terms of 'gold and silver'; the Brahmin Kūṭadanta, for example, is said to have 'great wealth and possessions, and much property, utensils, gold and silver'.[31] And an essential aspect of Buddhist renunciant discipline is abstaining from accepting gold and silver.[32]

These references to gold and silver cannot refer to coinage or money, for

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[30] Rhys Davids has shown that there are barely any clear references to coins in the Pāli canon (1877: 13): 'We have, therefore, no evidence in Buddhist literature that in Magadha before the time of Asoka, or in Ceylon before the fifth century a.d., there were any coins proper, that is, pieces of inscribed money struck by authority.' According to Cribb (1985) the oldest coins from the Gangetic civilization date to the early fourth century bc, i.e. shortly after the Buddha's death in around 400 bc. See Kulke (1995: 162 n.6) for further remarks.

[31] DN I.130: *bhavañ hi kūṭadanto aḍḍho mahaddhano mahābhogo pahūtavittūpakaraṇo pahūtajātarūparajato.*

[32] Vin III.237: *yo pana bhikkhu **jātarūparajataṃ** uggaṇheyya vā uggaṇhāpeyya vā upanikkhittaṃ vā sādiyeyya, nissaggiyaṃ pācittiyan ti*; DN I.5: ***jātarūparajata**-paṭiggahaṇā paṭivirato samaṇo gotamo*; DN I.64: ***jātarūparajata**-paṭiggahaṇā paṭivirato hoti*; Khp 2: ***jātarūparajata**-paṭiggahaṇā veramaṇī-sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.*

the simple reason that the earliest Indian coins, dating to at least the mid-4th century BC, were made of silver, not gold. The Vinaya commentary on the rule forbidding the acceptance of gold and silver confirms this, by glossing silver (*rajataṃ*), but not gold (*jātarūpa*), as coins such as *kahāpaṇa*s.[33] This later stratum of the canonical texts shows, however, that the Vinaya was open long enough to reflect a period when money was being used; the same is true of the Suttas, in which *kahāpaṇa*s are mentioned a few times.[34] But even at the second council of Vesālī, generally placed in the mid to late fourth century BC or even later, one of the contentious practices was the acceptance, by the community of Vesālī, of gold and silver.[35] The Buddha and the first generations of his followers lived in the period before money.

Brick buildings are also rare. The 'brickhouse' (*giñjakāvasatha*) of Nātika/ Ñātika is mentioned in a number of discourses;[36] apparently it was in the Vajji republic on the way to Vesālī from the Ganges.[37] The DPPN states that 'bricks were evidently a special architectural feature, and this confirms the belief that buildings were generally of wood.'[38] Bricks (*iṭṭhaka*) are mentioned in the mythological *Mahāsudassana Sutta* (DN II.178-84), when King Sudassana builds lotus ponds lined with bricks of four colours (*catunnaṃ vaṇṇānaṃ iṭṭhakāhi*), and has a triple storied mansion, and a lotus pond in front of it, built with bricks of the same four colours.

As with coins, more references to bricks occur in later strata of the Tipiṭaka. The Vinaya (III.80-81) mentions building the foundations (*vihāra-vatthuṃ*) and walls (*kuṭṭaṃ*) of a vihāra with bricks and stone (*iṭṭhaka, silā*), and also mentions (Vin IV.266) three types of walls (*kuṭṭa-*) and enclosures (*pākāra-*): of brick, stone and wood (*iṭṭhaka-, silā-, dāru-*). The same three substances are mentioned in sections of the Vinaya (Vin II.118-23, 141-42, 152-54) which refer to the same materials to be used when building other constructions, such as: walking

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[33] Vin III.238: **rajataṃ** *nāma kahāpaṇo lohamāsako dārumāsako jatumāsako ye vohāraṃ gacchanti*.

[34] Four discourses mention *kahāpaṇa*s: MN 94, SN 3.13, AN 3.101 (Ee I.250-51) and AN 10.46 (Ee V.83*ff*). On MN 94 see above p.16.

[35] Vin II.294: *kappati jātarūparajatan ti*.

[36] DN II.91, II.200; MN I.106; SN II.75, II.153, IV.90, IV.402, V.356; AN III.303, III.306, III.391, IV.316, IV.320, V.322. See also Vin I.232.

[37] According to the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (DN II.92), it was the second place the Buddha visited (after Koṭigāma) after crossing the Ganges at Pāṭaligāma.

[38] DPPN s.v. *giñjakāvasatha*.

terraces (*caṅkamana*) with railings (*vedikā*), hot steam rooms (*jantāghara*), foundations (*vatthuka*), raised platforms (*caya*), staircases (*sopāna*) and balustrades (*ālambana-bāha*) of the halls for stitching robes (*kaṭhina-sālā*).

The Pāli Vinaya thus records the development of more complex forms of communal life after the Buddha's death, including the building of Buddhist monasteries with bricks, a development which occurred in the same period in which money began to be used. But the vast majority of canonical discourses set the Buddha's life in a pre-imperial period before long-distance trade, money and buildings of brick and stone.

6. Early Buddhist realism, or what committees do not invent

According to Sujato and Brahmali, the EBTs 'convey a picture of India and Indian society at the time that is vivid and realistic; it could not easily have been made up at a later time or in a different society' (2015: 71). We read of kings, queens, princes, children, farmers, merchants, mendicants, wanderers, Brahmins, grizzled ascetics, faithful (and not so faithful) lay-disciples, parks, meeting-halls, roads, villages, market-towns, cities, kingdoms, seasons, flora, fauna, customs, habits, politics, economics, culture, musicians, courtesans, drunks, gamblers, and on and on. The canvas is vast and portrayed in close and realistic detail, allowing one to enter the world of North India in the 5th century BC. S. Dhammika's study of flora and fauna in canonical Buddhist texts has shown the extent to which early Buddhist authors went in their depictions of the natural world; nothing quite like this exists outside of canonical Buddhist texts, in either Buddhist or non-Buddhist literature from classical or even medieval India. [39]

The attempt to describe a whole world should not be underestimated; nor should the fact that later Buddhist texts lose this realistic perspective entirely. Remarkably, the attempt to record time and place is internally consistent, no mean feat given the scale of the literary endeavour. If such realistic attention was given to wildlife, trades, hobbies and so on, we should not assume the treatment of the Buddha to be any different. Thus we should pause to consider whether the following details could be mythic inventions:

- Major sites associated with the Buddha were insignificant in the 5th century BC. Kapilavatthu was a minor market-town along the northern trade route; Lumbinī was still an insignificant locality

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[39] Dhammika (2015).

in the Aśokan period;[40] and Kusinārā is called a 'minor town, a barren town, a provincial town' in the *Mahāparibbāna Sutta* (DN II.147). It would have served no purpose to place the story of a mythic hero in these backwaters.

- Perhaps most surprising of all, apart from the Vinaya Mahāvagga's mythic and late account of Buddhist beginnings – studied in the next section – hardly any Pāli Suttas are set in Uruvelā/Gayā (i.e. Bodhgayā) after the initial events surrounding the awakening.[41] If the canonical discourses are to believed, the Buddha barely returned to the place where he achieved his awakening.

- The first person to visit the Buddha after the awakening is an Ājīvika ascetic who disregards the Buddha's rather grandiose claims. Not only is this ascetic sceptical of the Buddha, he also speaks with touches of an Eastern dialect different from regular Pāli.[42] The area around Uruvelā/Bodhgayā is thus depicted as non-Buddhist territory in terms of language and religious culture; of course, this fits with the story that immediately before the awakening the Buddha had been practising severe austerities (MN 38).

- In the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* (DN 2), set in Rājagaha, capital of Magadha and not very far from Uruvelā, King Ajātasattu is said to have heard of other religious leaders, but is unaware of the Buddha and cannot recognise him when he visits him; it appears that while other, more ascetic, teachers were renowned in Magadha, the Buddha was not.

This very brief survey suggests it is anachronistic to view Magadha as the homeland of Buddhism. Partial confirmation of this comes in the report of

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[40] Falk (2017: 56): 'Lumbinī was a village, or a garden'.

[41] There are only three Suttas set in Uruvelā/gayā not obviously situated in the period of the awakening (although this could be implied): SN 10.3 (= Sn 2.5), SN 4.24 and AN 8.64. A couple of other texts set in Uruvelā/Gayā should probably be situated at the beginning of the Buddha's teaching career: SN 35.28 is placed by the Vinaya (Vin I.34-35) at the beginning of the Buddha's ministry, and Ud 1.9 is grouped with other Suttas describing events just after the awakening.

[42] Vin I.9 = MN I.172.: ***hupeyy' āvuso ti***, 'maybe, sir'. The text of MN I.72 is abbreviated by the PTS editors of MN 85.

Megasthenes, Greek ambassador of Seleucus I at Chandragupta's Mauryan court in Pāṭaliputta in the late 4th century BC. Megasthenes described a political world which 'post-dates the descriptions in the EBTs', and which is 'broadly in agreement with the archeological evidence' (Sujato and Brahmali, 2015: 12). But while mentioning Brahmins and fairly ascetic *samaṇa*s, most probably Jains or Ājīvakas, Megasthenes does not mention the Buddhists. This argument from silence is perhaps not particularly convincing, but it is at least broadly consistent with the canonical depiction of Magadha as primarily ascetic rather than Buddhist territory.

Canonical Buddhist texts mostly locate the Buddha in the kingdom of Kosala, particularly its capital Sāvatthī; King Pasenadi of Kosala even states that 'the Blessed One is a Kosalan'.[43] Although the Buddha is a frequent visitor to Rājagaha, he is represented as a marginal figure in its more ascetic religious climate. Given the importance of Magadha in Indian Buddhism, starting with Aśoka, its depiction as less than central to the Buddha's career is remarkable; the consistent depiction of Magadha as not quite, but almost, a fringe area of early Buddhist activity can only go back to the pre-imperial age. A similar heritage is suggested by a couple of peculiarities contained in the account of the Buddha's death.

- Although the Buddha says his relics should be placed in *thūpa*s at the sites of his birth, awakening, first sermon and death, the relics were instead distributed to local clans and various kingdoms.[44] A mythic invention would not include such an obvious discrepancy.

- No representative from Sāvatthī comes to claim a share of the Buddha's relics. And yet not only is Sāvatthī closer than the capital cities of some of the other kingdoms mentioned in the account (i.e. Rājagaha and Vesālī), as we have seen it is also central to the canonical account of the Buddha's life. But this absence fits a historical tradition, mentioned in the Pāli commentaries, of hostility between Kosala and the Sakyas at the time of the Buddha's death, soon leading to a battle in which the Sakyas were massacred.[45]

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[43] MN II.124: *bhagavā pi kosalo*.

[44] See DN II.164-65 on the clanships/kingdoms which claim a share of the Buddha's relics.

[45] The account of the battle and the events leading to it are told in the commentary on the *Bhaddasāla Jātaka* (Ja 465).

7. Mythic elaboration: the first sermon and the five disciples

We have seen that early Buddhist texts are pre-imperial, realistic and contain numerous peculiarities in their depiction of places and persons associated with the Buddha. None of this looks like a mythic creation. At best, the canonical discourses make a number of excursions into myth, but these are always easy to identify. A simple example is the *Mahāpadāna Sutta*, which besides elaborating the myth of seven Buddhas, also refers to Kapilavatthu as a 'royal city' (*rājadhānī*). This term is only applied to mythic places in the Pāli canon, whereas Kapilavatthu is a small town in the early texts; Ānanda even fails to mention it among the great cities in which the Buddha could have died, despite it being not far from Kusinārā, and certainly closer than four cities he mentions (D II.146: Sāvatthī, Sāketa, Kosambī and Bārāṇasī).

A mythic elaboration of a pre-mythic core of textual realism can also be seen in the Vinaya Mahāvagga account of the beginning of the Buddha's mission. This account constitutes a small part of what, according to Erich Frauwallner, was once a lengthy myth, composed around the time of the second Buddhist council of Vesālī (mid-late 4th century BC) and concluding with an account of this council.[46] Regardless of Frauwallner's reconstruction, the Vinaya Mahāvagga opens with a thoroughly miraculous version of Buddhist beginnings, a good example being the Buddha's conversion of the Kassapa ascetics (in Uruvelā) through a series of fire miracles (Vin I.24*ff*).

The account of the conversion of the first disciples (Vin I.9*ff*) is also somewhat remarkable. All are said to attain 'vision into the Dhamma' (*dhamma-cakkhu*): Koṇḍañña's attainment is first, followed by Vappa and Bhaddiya, and then Mahānāma and Assaji. With Koṇḍañña's realisation, the event at which 'the wheel of Dhamma' was 'set in motion' (*pavattite ... dhammacakke*), various classes of deities announce the good news, in a relay of information which resounds throughout the cosmos (Vin I.11-12). Soon enough, all the disciples go beyond their preliminary 'Dhamma vision' by attaining liberation, as the Buddha delivers not-self teachings (Vin I.13-14).

This account expands the simpler and apparently older Sutta version of MN 26. But MN 26 also contains legendary episodes, such as the god Brahma Sahampati's request that the Buddha teach (M I.168*f*). MN 26 does not name the five disciples, and does not say anything about a preliminary 'vision into

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[46] Frauwallner (1956, chapter 3).

Dhamma' – or its celebration by the gods – before their final attainment of liberation (M I.173). At first glance, it seems as if the simpler mythicism of MN 26 was expanded by the authors of the Vinaya account. Apart from these two accounts, however, the group of five disciples barely figures in the canonical literature. Nothing more is said about Vappa, Bhaddiya and Mahānāma, unless they have been confused with other *bhikkhu*s of the same names;[47] Koṇḍañña and Assaji are mentioned in a few other texts, but their appearance is quite peculiar.[48]

Koṇḍañña is mentioned in Ud 7.6, where he sits in meditation 'observing the state of release attained through the destruction of craving' (Ee p.77: *taṇhā-saṅkhaya-vimuttiṃ paccavekkhamāno*). But at SN 8.9 (I.193-94), Koṇḍañña visits the Buddha in Rājagaha after an unspecified long period of time (*sucirass' eva*); perhaps because he is old and the Buddha no longer recognises him, he announces 'I am Koṇḍañña, I am Koṇḍañña!' (I.194: *koṇḍañño 'haṃ bhagavā, koṇḍañño 'haṃ sugatā ti*). Venerable Vaṅgīsa calls him a 'little Buddha' (*anubuddha*) and an heir of the Buddha (*buddha-dāyāda*), and praises him for his austerity (*tibba-nikkamo*), and for attaining the goal through diligent training;[49] just as in the Vinaya, he refers to Koṇḍañña as 'Aññāsi-Koṇḍañña' – 'Koṇḍañña who understood (the Dhamma first)'.

Despite this praise of Koṇḍañña as a liberated being, SN 8.9 strikes a rather discordant note. Koṇḍañña is said to lie down at the Buddha's feet, stroking and kissing them, behaviour which elsewhere is associated with lay supporters of the Buddha, such as King Pasenadi of Kosala.[50] SN 8.9 thus suggests that Koṇḍañña did not attain liberation. Perhaps his general absence from the Buddhist texts, an absence confirmed in SN 8.9, indicates that he left the Buddha early on, before returning, emotionally, later in life to see the Buddha once more. At the least, the affirmation that Koṇḍañña left the Buddha for a long spell hardly looks like a mythic invention.

SN 22.88 is clearer about Assaji's non-liberated state. It tells how, after becoming ill while staying in 'Kassapa's park' in Rājagaha, Assaji says that

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[47] DPPN s.v.

[48] The Burmese edition of MN 68 mentions Bhaddiya and Koṇḍañña as 'well-known mendicants, gone forth from home to homelessness with reference to the Buddha' (MN I.462). But in the PTS edition, these names are replaced by Nandiya and Kuṇḍadhāna.

[49] SN I.194: *yaṃ sāvakena pattabbaṃ satthusāsanakārinā, sabbassa taṃ anuppattaṃ appamattassa sikkhato*.

[50] SN I.193-94: *bhagavato pādesu sirasā nipatitvā bhagavato pādāni mukhena ca paricumbati, pāṇīhi ca parisambāhati*. See also MN II.120, MN II.144, SN I.178, AN 5.65.

whereas he could pacify (*passambhetvā passambhetvā*) his bodily 'volitions' (or activities, *kāya-saṅkhāre*) when ill in the past, he is unable to do so now. Assaji uses the same vocabulary as is found in the account of mindfulness of breathing,[51] and so must be talking about a former ability to attain *jhāna* through practising mindfulness, and thus abide without feeling the effects of ill-health (*gelañña*). This time things are different. Assaji is unable to attain absorption (*samādhi*) and is worried about regression (*parihāyāmi*). The Buddha replies that only ascetics and Brahmins for whom 'absorption is the essence' (*samādhi-sārakā*) think like this, before giving a not-self teaching about experiencing sensations in a state of detachment. Despite what the Vinaya says about the first sermon, in SN 22.88 Assaji is certainly not liberated.

The depictions of Koṇḍañña and Assaji in the Pāli canon are a simple guide to distinguishing mythic invention from realism. The accounts of the first sermon, especially the Vinaya but to a lesser extent also in MN 26, are artificial, mythic, and of course unbelievable. But SN 8.9 and 22.88 strike a different tone. Both are idiosyncratic and realistic: one text (SN 22.88) obviously disagrees with the first sermon's myth of liberation, and the other (SN 8.9) inclines in this direction, and at least confirms Koṇḍañña's long absence from the Buddhist movement. Unlike the Vinaya Mahāvagga and MN 26, these texts serve no obvious didactic or dogmatic purpose. What else could they be, apart from an attempt to record what actually happened? With reference to such peculiarities, T. W. Rhys Davids, a trained barrister, has commented as follows:

> It is a recognised rule of evidence in the courts of law that, if one entry be found in the books kept by a man in the ordinary course of his trade, which entry speaks against himself, then that entry is especially worthy of credence.[52]

In other words, the early texts are especially trustworthy when they contain details that contradict later or mythic ideas. Moreover, 'since the EBTs were edited and transmitted through many generations, during which time there would have been many opportunities to edit oddities out, there must have been a general principle of conservatism among editors. This makes the entire corpus trustworthy.' (SB 2015: 75).

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[51] See e.g. DN II.291, MN I.56: *passambhayaṃ kāya-saṅkhāraṃ assasissāmī ti …*
[52] Rhys Davids (1923: x), on which see Sujato and Brahmali (2015: 75).

8. The idiosyncratic Buddha

We have seen that the canonical discourses are full of unexpected and non-mythic details about persons and places related to the Buddha. It is hardly surprising that the Buddha is described in similar terms. We can first of all note a few details about his relatives:

> • His father Suddhodana, his mother Māyā, his son Rāhula, his aunt Pajāpatī, his half-brother Nanda and paternal cousin Tissa are all named in the canon. The Buddha is never said to have had a wife; Rāhula's mother is anonymous and referred to merely as 'Rāhula's mother'.[53]

Drewes has claimed that the early Upaniṣads 'provide significantly more biographical information' for several of its teachers than 'the vastly larger corpus of Buddhist *sūtra*s provides for the Buddha' (2017: 18). Strangely, however, neither does the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* mention the name of Yājñavalkya's cousins, nor does the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* mention Uddālaka Āruṇi's aunt; both mention only Yājñavalkya's wife (Maitreyī) and Āruṇi's son (Śvetaketu).

These few details show that the early Buddhist do not present 'an unknown, contentless Buddha' (Drewes, 2017: 19). But there is much more content about the Buddha than this. Sujato and Brahmali have shown that the early teachings 'leave room for many quirky details about the Buddha that convey a realistic flavour; despite the awkwardness they were not removed' (2015: 74). Such 'quirky' details include (2015: 74-75):

> • The Buddha sleeping on a pile of leaves in the winter (AN 3.35);
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> • The Buddha washing his own feet (MN 31);
>
> • The Buddha being seen as a simple *bhikkhu*, and not being recognised (MN 140);
>
> • The Buddha claiming to enjoy going to the toilet (AN 8.86);
>
> • The Buddha teaching Pasenadi how to lose weight (SN 3.13);
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> • The Buddha avoiding Brahmin householders, because they are noisy (AN 5.30);

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[53] See Vin I.82, *rāhula-mātā*, although she could be Bhaddakaccānā at AN I.25; DPPN s.v. Sakya (Sakka/Sakiya).

- The Buddha dismissing monks because they are noisy, but then changing his mind because lay people persuade him (MN 67);

- The Buddha complaining of back pain and then lying down in a Dhamma talk (MN 53);

- The Buddha warming his back in the sun; his skin is flaccid and wrinkly, his body stooped (SN 48.41);

- Bhaddāli refusing to keep the Buddha's rule about eating after midday (MN 65);

- The Buddha dying of bloody diarrhoea (DN 16).

The early texts even contain unflattering details about the Buddha, such as the story that he became annoyed with the *bhikkhu* Upavāṇa, who was fanning him just before he died (DN II.138-39). Such details are valuable in their own right, but much more important is the fact that they convey a sense of the Buddha as a person. Moreover, the Buddha's personality can be seen to run directly into early Buddhist teaching, which cannot be separated from it:

> The EBTs present a highly distinctive personal style, together with a number of revolutionary ideas, which conveys the flavour of a single and exceptional creator. This can be seen in a number of aspects of the EBTs, such as the large number of similes, analogies and metaphors that are vivid, precise in application, realistic and local, and formal in presentation; the analytical approach to language, which was unknown before the Buddha; use of irony and humour; and internal consistency and coherence. Moreover, many of the ideas presented in the EBTs are revolutionary for the time. This distinctive personal style is quite different from anything found in other Buddhist literature, or even in the Upaniṣads. (SB 2105: 67)

The early texts 'frequently depict the Buddha and his disciples in dialogue with members of other religions and with sceptics' (2015: 27). Texts with an outward-looking perspective, containing a diversity of encounters and teachings embodied in personal idiosyncracy, are exactly what is to be expected of an historical record. Later Buddhist texts in comparison 'contain very little innovation and are mostly concerned with filling in any perceived gaps in the

EBTs, working out their consequences, and systematising them' (SB 2105: 72). Apart from lacking the innovation of the EBTs, later Buddhist literature

> consists almost entirely of Buddhists speaking to other Buddhists. This difference makes sense if we consider that the EBTs largely stem from the life of the founder, one of whose tasks was to persuade others to his path. (SB 2105: 27)

If the founder had an original and vital message to transmit, it explains much about the focus of the early teachings:

> The EBTs are interested in the Dhamma, while after the Buddha's death interest shifted to his life story. The EBTs display little interest in the Buddha's biography. This is in stark contrast to other Buddhist literature. This is most naturally explained by the EBTs stemming mainly from the Buddha himself. He was interested in teaching the Dhamma, not telling his life story. (SB 2105: 79)

Impersonalism is prominent throughout the canonical teachings. It can be seen in the Buddha asking King Pasenadi why he offers 'such elevated respect to this body';[54] more importantly, the same impersonalism can be seen in the Buddha's refusal to appoint a leader after his death, and his admonition that others be 'lights unto yourselves, with the Dhamma as your lamp'.[55] Early Buddhist doctrine is of course defined by impersonalism at the metaphysical level, for example in the Buddha's negation of an individual self or soul (*attan*). Impersonalism, as an idiosyncratic feature of the Buddha's personality, agrees with impersonalism at the metaphysical level, a fundamental coherence which can be extended into other areas.

9. The silent Buddha

Reading between the lines of the canonical discourses, a slightly peculiar story begins to unfold, of a movement with humble beginnings, emerging from Magadha but not based there, whose main events occur in the backwaters of a

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[54] MN II.120: *kiṃ pana tvaṃ mahārāja atthavasaṃ sampassamāno imasmiṃ sarīre evarūpaṃ parama-nipaccakāraṃ karosi.*

[55] DN II.100: *tasmāt ih' ānanda attadīpā viharatha, attasaraṇā anaññasaraṇā dhammadīpā dhammasaraṇā anaññasaraṇā.*

small-scale urban society. The Buddha's place in this world and movement is depicted in quite fine detail, with no shortage of idiosyncracy and yet without much mythic elaboration. Idiosyncracy is notable in one peculiar feature of the Buddha's personality: his strangely silent nature. We have seen that MN 67 and AN 5.30 attest to the Buddha's quietistic nature. In fact, the canonical record is full of instances of the Buddha's preference for silence:

- The Buddha's initial response to attaining awakening is to avoid the hassle of teaching (MN I.168: *so mam' assa kilamatho, sā mam' assa vihesā*).

- When agreeing to a request (e.g. to come for a meal), the Buddha stays silent (*adhivāsesi bhagavā tuṇhībhāvena*).

- The Buddha often recommends mendicants either to talk about the Dhamma, or else maintain a 'noble silence' (*dhammī vā kathā, ariyo vā tuṇhībhāvo*).

- When the Buddha claims to enjoy going the toilet (AN 8.86), he actually says he is at ease (*phāsu me*) when he sees nobody in front or behind him on the road, *even* when going the toilet (AN IV.344); the text is really about the joy of solitude.

- The Buddha claims to enjoy being alone in the forest (SN 1.15).

- The Buddha is accused in MN 37 of taking afternoon naps (MN I.249).

- When the Buddha approaches a raucous assembly of ascetics in DN 9, Poṭṭhapāda asks everyone to be quiet, because Gotama 'is fond of little noise, and speaks in praise of quietude' (DN I.179: *appasaddakāmo kho so āyasmā appasaddassa vaṇṇavādī*).

- When King Ajātasattu of Magadha visits the Buddha in Jīvaka's mango grove in Rājagaha, he is impressed by the deep silence of the community of mendicants, which is 'just like a pellucid pond' (DN I.50: *tuṇhībhūtaṃ tuṇhībhūtaṃ bhikkhusaṅghaṃ anuviloketvā rahadam iva vippasannaṃ*). Just before this, Ajātasattu cannot recognise the Buddha.

- In MN 85, the Buddha will not enter Prince Bodhi's new 'Kokanada' mansion, because the stairs have been covered in new cloth. Instead

of explaining himself, the Buddha just stands next to the staircase and remains strangely quiet, despite the Prince's request that he go up. The Buddha eventually gives a telling glance (*apalokesi*) at Ānanda, who tells the prince to roll up the cloth: 'the Tathāgata has sympathy for later generations of people' (MN II.92: *pacchimaṃ janataṃ tathāgato anukampatī ti*), and will not step on white cloth.

In agreement with the Buddha's quietism, the texts mention his self-effacing nature, for example being congenial and polite, and not frowning but speaking first.[56] These details paint a picture of a quiet and sensitive individual inclined towards retreat and even escapism. This point is elaborated in fascinating detail in the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* (SN IV.15), 'The discourse on taking up the stick (of violence)', in which the Buddha explains his former anxiety at social conflict:

> Observe people engaged in quarrels: fear arises from those who take up the stick; I will explain anxiety, just as I experienced it. (935)

> Seeing creatures floundering, like fish in (a pond with) little water, and people hostile to each other, I became fearful. (936)

> A world utterly devoid of essence, all its quarters trembling, wanting (to find) a home for myself, I did not see any unoccupied. (937)

> But in the end, seeing (people) hostile (to each other), I became dissatisfied, and then saw the dart here, so difficult to see, nestling in my heart. (938)

> Pierced by this arrow, one runs around in all directions, but when that very arrow is removed, one neither moves nor sinks. (939)

These verses read as a quietist's reaction to a troubled world; experiencing hostility and the threat of violence, the speaker focuses on his own fear and dissatisfaction with the world, an inward gaze which leads to a spiritual solution. Such verses add a more personal note to formulaic accounts of the Bodhisatta's renunciation (e.g. MN 26), and of course the mythic version of witnessing four sights in the *Mahāpadāna Sutta* (DN 14).

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[56] DN I.116: *samaṇo khalu bho gotamo ehisvāgatavādī sakhilo sammodako abbhākuṭiko uttānamukho pubbabhāsī ...*

10. Pragmatism and metaphysical reticence

The Buddha's silence finds expression in the early teachings in a number of fascinating ways. This is quite literally the case when the Buddha uses silence as a didactic tool to steer others away from misconceived notions. In a less literal sense, the Buddha's silence is expressed as a *via negativa* form of teaching, in which words are used sparingly, their main purpose being to negate misconceptions rather than affirm metaphysical truths. As a self-professed 'analyst' (*vibhajjavādī*), the Buddha's interest does not lie in abstraction or abstruse debate; his purpose is the psychological transformation of others, achieved mostly by a dialectic of silence.

a) Unanswered questions

Silence is applied as both an analytical and psychological tool in the Buddha's non-response to certain questions. The early texts record a number of occasions when the Buddha, upon being asked a question, remains silent. One text inclining in this direction, although focused on ascetic discipline rather than metaphysical speculation, is AN 8.20/Ud 45: while the community of mendicants is sitting in silence through the night, Ānanda asks the Buddha to recite the Pātimokkha, but the Buddha remains silent (AN IV.204-05: *evaṃ vutte bhagavā tuṇhī ahosi*); after the third request, he reveals that the Saṅgha is impure, prompting Moggallāna to root out the person at fault. At AN 10.95, the layman Uttiya asks the Buddha whether he 'saves the whole world, or half or a third of it, but in response the Buddha just stays silent.[57] More importantly for the present enquiry, at SN 44.10 the Buddha remains silent when the wanderer Vacchagotta asks him if the self exists or not.[58]

In many other texts, the Buddha resorts to a different type of silence when faced with certain metaphysical questions. In DN 9, when asked a series of ten questions by Poṭṭhapāda – about the eternality or infinity of the world, or the reality of the soul/'life principle' (*jīva*), or the existential status of a Tathāgata after death – to each question the Buddha replies 'This too, Poṭṭhapāda, has not been explained by me' (DN I.187-88: *etam pi kho poṭṭhapāda mayā avyākataṃ*). In MN 63, a former wanderer who has converted to Buddhism, Māluṅkyaputta, ponders in private the fact that the Buddha has 'put aside' (*ṭhapita*) or 'rejected'

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[57] AN V.195: *sabbo vā tena loko nīyati upaḍḍho* vā tibhāgo.

[58] AN IV.400: *kiṃ nu kho bho gotama, atth' attā ti? evaṃ vutte bhagavā tuṇhī ahosi. kiṃ pana bho gotama, n' atth' attā ti? evaṃ vutte bhagavā tuṇhī ahosi*.

(*paṭikhitta*) these questions. In these situations, the Buddha is not literally silent but rather adopts a position of silence with regard to questions of metaphysical importance.

The Buddha's silence is sometimes explained through the simile of the man shot by a poison arrow (e.g. MN 63). Just as the man might die if he insists on asking pointless questions about being shot, rather than seeking out a doctor, so too is abstract philosophising a spiritual hindrance, which must be put aside. In other places, the Buddha indicates that the problem is with the questions: in MN 72, each of the ten unanswered questions is in turn said to 'constitute view, the thicket of views … the twitching and writhing of view' (MN I.45: *diṭṭhigatam etaṃ diṭṭhigahanaṃ … diṭṭhivisūkaṃ diṭṭhivipphanditam*). And at SN 7.54, each of the different positions about the Tathāgata's post-mortem state is said to be 'a conceptualisation, an idea, mental profusion' (SN IV.68-69: *saññāgatam etaṃ ...pe... maññitam etaṃ ...pe... papañcitam etaṃ*). The Buddha's point appears to be that the ideas are based on cognitive malfunctioning, which reflect only the constructive power of a person's cognitive capacities, including language, by which reality is distorted. Truth lies beyond the word.[59]

Pragmatism and metaphysical reticence are two foundational pillars of early Buddhist teaching. The Buddha is often portrayed as a spiritual pragmatist, for example in MN 58, where the Buddha tells Prince Abhaya that he only speaks if what he says is not just true but also beneficial. The focus on the problems with language, and the distortions of cognitive conditioning, are also prominent in the early texts, for example in the *Brahma-jāla* and *Madhu-piṇḍika Sutta*s (DN 1, MN 18), and in most texts on the 'dependent origination' of consciousness (e.g. MN 38). The critique is embodied in the list of five aggregates, which presents the construction of cognition in the form of a simple fivefold list: form, sensation, apperception, volitions and consciousness/sentience.

The pragmatic and the analytic perspectives come together in the simile of the raft. Stating that his Dhamma is for crossing over, not for grasping,[60] the Buddha compares it to a raft for crossing a dangerous flood: just as one puts aside the raft after it has served its purpose, rather than carrying it around on one's head, so too are the teachings to be put aside once their purpose has been

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[59] AN 7.54 (Ee IV.68-69).
[60] MN I.134: *kullūpamaṃ vo bhikkhave dhammaṃ desessāmi, nittharaṇatthāya no gahaṇatthāya*.

reached. Pragmatism is not the only point the teaching makes, for in stating that the Dhamma is to be eventually put aside, the Buddha suggests that the goal lies beyond words, which must be transcended. Language cannot capture the truth, and hence misleads the truth-seeker; since it misleads it must be used carefully, and ultimately abandoned if truth is to be realised. Quietism and pragmatism are thus two sides of the same coin.

The reason for leaving certain 'unanswered' (*avyākata*) questions is therefore consistent with the twofold purpose of the early teachings. Nevertheless, the mode of expressing – or not expressing – this point through actual silence or metaphysical reticence is potentially misleading. This can be seen in the post-canonical *Milindapañha*, where King Milinda claims there are only two possible reasons for the Buddha's silence: either he did not know, or else he kept the matter secret (*ajānanena vā guyhakaraṇena*). Nāgasena explains the Buddha's silence as spiritual pragmatism: providing answers could not have 'illuminated' Māluṅkya (*na tassa dīpanāya hetu*). Such an exchange shows how easily the dialectic of silence could be misunderstood and criticised.[61]

As an unusual choice in response to certain didactic contexts, silence is a highly peculiar, deeply ambiguous and potentially misleading style of teaching. The argument that a committee imagined an eccentrically silent or non-committal character is implausible. If committees generally do not make jokes, they certainly do not invent religious founders who appear lost for words.

b) The not-self teaching

The simile of the raft is employed in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* (MN 22) alongside the simile of the water snake (*alagadda*). The latter simile also warns of the dangers of attachment to words rather than understanding their meaning and purpose. Appropriating the Dhamma wrongly, by grasping onto the words rather than their meaning, is like taking hold of a snake badly, by the tail, which allows the snake to wrap itself around a person's wrist and bite. Like the simile of the man shot by an arrow, the obsession with words is said to be like poison. The simile thus combines the pragmatic and analytic perspectives of the Buddha: words are a means to end, rather than an end in themselves. In the same discourse, another peculiar teaching expresses the same dual orientation:

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[61] Mil 145 (IV.2.2): *na tassa dīpanāya hetu vā kāraṇaṃ vā atthi, tasmā so pañho ṭhapanīyo. n' atthi buddhānaṃ bhagavantānaṃ akāraṇam ahetukaṃ giram udīraṇan ti.*

What do you think, mendicants, is form permanent or impermanent?

'Impermanent, sir.'

Is that which is impermanent satisfactory or unsatisfactory?

'Unsatisfactory, sir.'

And is it suitable to regard that which is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change as 'This is mine, I am this, this is my self'?

'Certainly not, sir.'

The same questions are applied to the different aspects of conditioned experience: sensation, apperception, volitions and consciousness. This 'not-self' teaching (MN I.138) thus employs a curious method. First, its approach is fundamentally pragmatic: the Buddha's questions require empirical reflection, so that the *bhikkhus* effectively take part in a thought experiment and hence discover important truths by themselves; the teaching is framed to trigger reflection and hopefully transformation. Second, the analysis negates rather than affirms, so that the Buddha once again assumes a position of metaphysical reticence. Through a *via negativa* examination of experience, the Buddha indicates that a self cannot be found in conditioned experience, but ultimately bypasses statements of ontological truth – what exists or does not. Thus the Buddha avoids stating whether the 'self' exists or not, an ambiguity which emerges from the teaching's formal method, and which was to become a source of speculation and puzzlement for every subsequent generation of Buddhist thinkers.

In the not-self teaching, pragmatism and metaphysical reticence are deeply interwoven; questions work to negate misunderstanding, so that the teaching opens up the way to spiritual transformation, bringing disillusionment, dispassion and then release.[62] The unanswered questions, the similes of the raft, water snake, and man shot with a poisoned arrow all express the same perspective and purpose. Indeed, pragmatism and metaphysical reticence, infused with deep shades of ambiguity, are foundational pillars of a much larger doctrinal edifice, including ethics, meditation, philosophy of mind and much more. There is nothing supernatural or mythic about this system of thought. Quite the opposite: the system is highly original, and brought to life

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[62] MN I.139: *evaṃ passaṃ bhikkhave sutavā ariyasāvako rūpasmim pi nibbindati ... nibbindaṃ virajjati, virāgā vimuccati ...*

in realistic discourses in which the Buddha appears as a rational, courteous, but thoroughly singular teacher.

11. Like a flame gone out

In the Buddha's teachings, the dialectic of silence and metaphysical reticence are combined in another tantalising and ambiguous idea: the present moment ineffability of the person who attains Nirvana. This idea finds highly unusual expressions, for example in the word *tathāgata*, which as Richard Gombrich has pointed out, means 'being in the state thus',[63] and not 'thus gone (or come)'. As such, the compound does not denote a person who has simply 'gone to' (*gata*) the state of Nirvana, in the sense of attaining it, but indicates that the attainer of Nirvana is actually in the state 'thus'. 'Being thus' is, of course, a way of denying that the liberated person can be described, and is consistent with the Buddha's critique of language.

A profoundly ambiguous simile used to describe the realisation of Nirvana is that of the extinguished flame. Perhaps its most famous occurrence is in the *Aggivacchagotta Sutta* (MN 72). Asked by the Buddha in which direction a flame goes when it is extinguished, Vacchagotta replies as follows:

> The issue does not arise, Gotama, for the fire burnt dependent upon its fuel and when the fuel has been consumed, and no more is provided, being without fuel it is reckoned as 'blown out.'[64]

The Buddha's response to this is somewhat mysterious:

> In just the same way, Vaccha, the form (feeling, apperception, volitions and consciousness) with which one might designate the Tathāgata has been abandoned, destroyed, extirpated, annihilated, [and] is not liable to arise in the future for him. The Tathāgata, Vaccha, is released from what is reckoned as 'form': he is deep, immeasurable, unfathomable, just like a great ocean. (The notion) 'he is reborn' is inapplicable…[65]

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[63] Gombrich (2009: 151) and Wynne (2015: 62).

[64] MN I.487: *na upeti bho gotama yañhi so bho gotama aggi tiṇakaṭṭhupādānaṃ paṭicca ajali tassa ca pariyādānā aññassa ca anupahārā anāhāro nibbuto tv eva saṅkhyaṃ gacchatī nibbuto tv eva saṅkhyaṃ gacchati.*

[65] MN I.477-78; Wynne (2007: 83).

The Buddha here uses the most challenging language to indicate the present moment attainment of Nirvana. A nihilist interpretation is not logically possible, for the Buddha and Vaccha are discussing the experiential state of a Tathāgata in the here and now, and not after death; the simile of the extinguished flame is not applied to a dead person; rather, it is mundane experience which has been annihilated, in other words transcended. But taken out of context, the notion of a Tathāgata's 'destruction' (*ucchinna*) or 'annihilation' (*anabhāvaṃkata*) of the five aggregates suggests his ultimate non-existence. Indeed, in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*, the Buddha complains of those who say 'the ascetic Gotama is a nihilist who proclaims the destruction, annihilation and non-existence of an existing being'.[66] The Buddha instead claims to have taught the indefinability of a liberated *bhikkhu* in the present,[67] and so declared nothing more than suffering and its cessation[68].

Another text which employs these ideas allows us to peer with a little more clarity into the Buddha's intellectual background. The Buddha's dialogue with Upasīva, in the *Pārāyanavagga* of the Suttanipāta (Sn 1069-76), is especially important for its context: the statement of original ideas against the meditative presuppositions of early Brahminism. The dialogue can be summarised as follows (Wynne 2007: 85-86):

- 1069–70. Upasīva asks on what object one should meditate in order to escape suffering; the Buddha answers that one should observe 'nothingness' (ākiñcaññaṃ) mindfully. The term 'nothingness' suggests meditative absorption, whereas the word 'mindful' (*satimā*) suggests clear awareness. Indeed the focus on mindfulness is clear, with the Buddha saying that a person should watch (*abhipassa*) the destruction of thirst 'night and day'.

- 1071–72. Upasīva asks if this state of meditation can be sustained without falling away (*anānuyāyī*); he appears surprised to hear that an absorbed state ('nothingness') can be maintained and mindfulness practised at the same time. The Buddha answers that the practice can be sustained without falling away from it.

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[66] MN I.140: *venayiko samaṇo gotamo, sato sattassa ucchedaṃ vināsaṃ vibhavaṃ paññāpetī ti.*

[67] MN I.140: *diṭṭhe vāhaṃ bhikkhave dhamme tathāgataṃ ananuvijjo ti vadāmi.*

[68] MN I.140: *pubbe cāhaṃ bhikkhave etarahi ca, dukkhañ c' eva paññāpemi dukkhassa ca nirodhaṃ.*

- 1073–74. Upasīva asks if there is still consciousness (*viññāṇaṃ*) in the one who 'becomes cool' (*siti-siyā*), probably a reference to attaining liberation at death. The Buddha uses the simile of the extinguished flame (*accī ... atthaṃ paleti*) to point out that a liberated sage (*munī*) is released from the category 'name' (*nāma-kāyā vimutto*) and cannot be 'reckoned' (*na upeti saṅkhaṃ*).

- 1075–76 Upasīva asks if the liberated person exists in a state of eternal bliss (*sassatiyā arogo*), or ceases to exist (*so n' atthi*). The Buddha states that ways of 'measuring' (*pamāṇaṃ*), i.e. modes of speaking (*vādapathā*), do not apply to the one who has 'gone out' (*atthaṅgatassa*), because 'experiential phenomena have been uprooted' (*sabbesu dhammesu samūhatesu*).

This dialogue deals with familiar Buddhist concepts: absorption, mindfulness, the simile of the extinguished flame, the Tathāgata's transcendence and so on. The obscure idea of becoming cool (*sīti-siyā*) is the most difficult concept. A Buddhist meaning of the simile should not be assumed, since Upasīva is a Brahmin, and at the opening of the dialogue the Buddha mentions 'nothingness', a non-Buddhist meditative state associated with one of the Buddha's teachers (Aḷāra Kālāma). In v.1075, moreover, Upasīva asks whether the person who has 'become cool' exists in a state of eternal bliss, or ceases to exist, states which can only refer to a dead liberated person. Such questions are equivalent to the unanswered questions about the Tathāgata's existence and so on after death. There being no change in the subject of discussion in v.1073-75, it means that Upasīva's question about 'becoming cool' must somehow refer to death, most likely the liberation achieved at death.

This analysis suggests that Upasīva's questions are in line with a speculative pattern discernible in the early Upaniṣads and post-Buddhist Mokṣadharma. The general position of these texts is that liberation is achieved at death, when a person's *karma* is finally exhausted, at which point the meditative anticipation of *brahman* in life, through meditation, is actualised.[69] In the Mokṣadharma, the simile of the extinguished flame is even used to refer to liberation at death: just as a flame gone out enters the ether, rather than becoming non-existent, so too is the meditative adept liberated at death by being absorbed into *brahman*.[70]

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[69] See Wynne (2007: 59*ff*).
[70] See Wynne (2007: 77) on Mbh XII.192.122

In response to Upasīva's Brahminic ideas, in the final verse the Buddha states his position of ineffability in life: the cessation of 'phenomena' is not an early Buddhist way of talking about death, and must refer to mental or experiential phenomena. The lack of mundane experiential phenomena, including 'all modes of speaking', cease, and this that the sage is ineffable in the here and now. This understanding also applies to Buddha's use of the simile of the extinguished flame in v.1074: *nāmakāyā vimutto* must mean 'released from the category name', a meaning attested elsewhere in the canonical discourses, whereas the meaning 'name *and* form' is unattested for the compound *nāma-kāya*.[71]

In the highly peculiar dialogue with Upasīva, the Buddha is aware of the finer points of Upasīva's questions, including their Brahminic presuppositions, and yet he responds to them with ease, and indeed with no small degree of conceptual mastery. New ideas, about mindfulness, liberation in life and ineffability, are inserted into Upasīva's older conceptual framework, of concentration as an anticipation of the liberated state achieved at death. Rhys David's point about the depiction of the Buddha in canonical dialogues is apt here:

> On the hypothesis that he was an historical person, of that training and character he is represented in the Piṭakas to have had, the method is precisely that which it is most probable he would have actually followed. Whoever put the Dialogues together may have had a sufficiently clear memory of the way he conversed, may well have even remembered particular occasions and persons. (1923: 207)

Did the composers of the Pārāyanavagga have a 'sufficiently clear memory of the way the Buddha conversed' with the Brahmin Upasīva? And if they did, what hypothesis does it suggest about the Buddha 'as an historical person'? The canonical discourses say that before his awakening, the Buddha was taught meditation by Āḷāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta. The canonical material on these teachers, and on the 'formless' (*āruppa*) meditations connected to them, belongs to the same conceptual stream documented in early Brahminic texts (the early Upaniṣads and Mokṣadharma). Indeed, the meditative goals of the two teachers – 'the sphere of nothingness' (*ākiñcaññāyatana*) and 'neither perception nor non-perception' (*nevasaññā-nāsaññāyatana*) respectively – can be understood as two ways of conceptualising *brahman*.[72]

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[71] Wynne (2007: 79).

[72] Wynne (2007: 37*ff*).

Assigning the two teachers to this stream of thought does not mean that they were Brahmins. It only means that they were early figures in a stream of spiritual speculation, reaching back into pre-Buddhist times and continuing into the early Buddhist period, documented in certain Brahminic texts. The canonical material on the teachers suggests a particular 'training and character' of the Buddha: his emergence from the speculative world of the early Upaniṣads, followed by the creation of a new doctrine. Although original and idiosyncratic in its expression, the Buddha's Dhamma was in many ways formulated with the old Upaniṣadic ideas in mind, as can be seen in the dialogue with Upasīva.

Such a theory makes good sense of the not-self teaching, which negates a thoroughly Upaniṣadic conceptualisation of the self as permanent (*nicca*), unchanging (*avipariṇāma-dhamma*) and blissful (*sukha*).[73] It also explains the dialogue with Upasīva, in which the Buddha responds to Brahminic ideas quite deftly, at the same time introducing new ideas into the old framework. We have also seen that the simile of the extinguished flame agrees with the Buddha's dialectic of silence; indeed, both are used in response to Vacchagotta's questions, indicating the impossibility of conceptualising the liberated state. The Buddha's interaction with Upasīva is similar: when faced with the assumption that liberation is achieved at death, the Buddha articulates his doctrine of ineffable realisation in the present.

The few aspects of the Buddha's teachings studied here suggest that the 'great man' theory of history must certainly apply to the origin of Buddhism. In early Buddhist teaching, quietism, pragmatism, the dialectic of silence, ambiguity and ineffability all come together in a singular doctrinal system, one that is consistent with a particular account of the Buddha's intellectual background. A close study of the origin of Buddhist meditation helps explain the specific historical circumstances behind the highly idiosyncratic formulation of early Buddhist Dhamma.

12. The big picture

The main points which *prove* the Buddha's existence can be summarised as follows:

- If a massive corpus gathered from multiple sources included significant invention, discrepancies would have been unavoidable.

- If the texts had not been composed before the rise of Magadhan empires in the mid-4th century BC, their social and political

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[73] Norman (1981: 20*ff*), Gombrich (1990: 15), Wynne (2010: 201*ff*).

content would reach into the imperial age; even if great care was taken to depict an earlier period, unintended features of the imperial age would have leaked into the texts.

- Coins and bricks are two features of the imperial age which have a marginal presence in the early texts. While this suggests that the period of Sutta composition remained open just about long enough to record these material advances, it is also obvious that little was added to an older corpus, which remained largely intact without revision.

- If the Buddha had been invented, the mythic trends of such texts as the *Mahāpadāna Sutta* would be more apparent, and the canonical discourses would not be so realistic and modest in tone.

- If even the marginal amount of mythic elaboration did not belong to the pre-imperial age, the idea of the 'wheel-turning monarch' (*cakkavatti dhamma-rāja*) would not be conceptualised as it actually is (in DN 26).

- We know what happens when composers or compositional committees create Buddhist discourses with no historical reality whatsoever: the corpus of Mahāyāna Sūtras comprise a monumental edifice of myth, which in style and content is quite different from the canonical discourses.

- If earlier composers had invented many of the extant Suttas, they would not be full of so many ambiguous and peculiar teachings.

- If there had not been an historical Buddha given to quietism, the idea of a metaphysically reticent teacher, employing such didactic means as negation and the dialectic of silence, could not have been created.

- A highly original doctrinal edifice, in which pragmatism, philosophical reticence, negation and ineffability blend in and out of the Buddha's quietistic personality, is too unusual to have been invented. We are forced to conclude that it was not.

These points prove that the historical pedigree of early Buddhist texts is very high, and if so the corpus can virtually be regarded more or less as an objective witness to the Buddha's life and teaching. Indeed, the Buddha of the canonical discourses has as clear a personality as the character of the Dhamma attributed to him. The latter reflects the former: both are thoroughly idiosyncratic and yet consistent, in both content and expression. And both are situated not just in the socio-political world of 5th century BC, but also in the intellectual or spiritual landscape of northern India in the 5th century BC. The latter point can be seen in the following network of connections:

- Information about the Buddha's teachers suggest they emerged from, or were situated in, early Upaniṣadic milieux.

- The 'not-self' teaching, the most important aspect of early Buddhist doctrine alongside Dependent Origination, negates a concept of 'self' in distinctly Upaniṣadic terms.[74]

- The not-self teaching has a *via negativa* form for two reasons:

    i.   Pragmatism: the truth must be discovered, not told.

    ii. Metaphysical reticence: truth cannot be conceptualised.

- The Buddha did not answer fundamental questions about the ultimate reality of the self and the world, because:

    i.   Pragmatism: they do not help a person realise the truth.

    ii. Metaphysical reticence: the questions assume truth can be conceptualised.

- The similes of the raft, of the man shot by a poisoned arrow and of the water snake all express the same ideas: spiritual pragmatism and the inability of concepts to capture truth.

- When asked about the liberated state, early Buddhist teachings sometimes use the simile of an extinguished flame to express the ineffability of a Tathāgata; apart from the fact that the goal must be attained in the present, nothing else can be said.

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[74] Some versions of Dependent Origination are also formulated against an Upaniṣadic background, e.g. MN 38 and DN15, on which see Wynne (2018b: 110*f*) and (2010a: 132*ff*) respectively.

- The Buddha's dialogue with Upasīva employs the simile of the extinguished flame to negate the Upaniṣadic idea of liberation at death.

With the final point we come full circle, for the dialogue with Upasīva belongs to the same world of speculation as the Buddha's training under two meditation masters. The sequence as a whole forms a complex network made up of many particulars, all rooted in realistic depictions of persons, time and place. It also extends out into the entire doctrinal edifice of the early texts, and so forms a much wider web of meaning and particularity that is remarkably consistent.

This is not to say that every single detail of the early texts is reliable; realism and coherence do not necessarily amount to homogeneity. Mythic elaboration already occurred in the pre-imperial period, and if new claims were made about the Buddha, we should not be surprised to find new interpretations of his teachings. There are, indeed, many reasons to think that numerous calm-insight teachings were added after the Buddha.[75] But the likelihood of diverse strata need not push us towards extreme scepticism, and the conclusion that nothing can be known for sure. Rather, it is sensible to approach the canonical texts with cautious optimism about identifying authentic teachings of the Buddha, based on the undeniable point that he really existed. According to this approach, certain teachings will probably be shown to have a later origin than the Buddha himself; but this is a subject for future research and debate.

13. Fear and loathing in Buddhist Studies

This study has hopefully shown that extreme scepticism about the Buddha is unfounded. Beyond any reasonable doubt, we can conclude that early Buddhist texts are ancient and sufficiently objective for us to 'know' the Buddha. Details can be doubted – whether this or that text was really spoken by the Buddha. But this does not detract from the overall coherence of the texts, in terms of both their socio-political and doctrinal particulars. As Sujato & Brahmali have put it (2015: 143-44), we need not be concerned with the sort of sceptic who says, after all this, that 'we can't know for certain whether any specific phrase was spoken by the Buddha'. About this sceptical objection, Sujato and Brahmali are surely right to conclude that '[w]hile the sceptical assertion is true, it is trivially so' (2015: 144).

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[75] Wynne (2007: 102*ff*), 2018a, 2018b.

More important is the big picture, which has been sketched through inductive reasoning: textual specifics have been carefully drawn together to build up a general thesis which accounts 'for the entire range of what is known about the period' (Sujato & Brahmali, 2015: 143). Theories formed in this way can be tested in the light of new particulars drawn from the early texts, and then either modified or rejected. As Sujato and Brahmali have pointed out, examples of inductive theories

> include the theories of evolution and global warming. One of the characteristics of such theories is that they are probabilistic, and hence much better at establishing generalities than specifics. This problem is well known in the case of global warming: the theory cannot predict whether any specific day will be hot or cold, but it can say with a high degree of probability that there will be more and more hot days in coming years. (2015: 143)

The same applies to the picture of the Buddha and his teaching sketched here; the theory cannot confirm that every single textual point about the Buddha is authentic. Nevertheless, the general thesis allows particular details to be checked against it, and in this way the inductive approach allows knowledge to grow: ideas can be modified, improved or rejected, depending on the available evidence.

This inductive approach is not merely a sensible means of dealing with canonical Buddhist texts; it is the only means. In reading an early Buddhist text, the inductive principle is immediately forced upon the enquirer: one cannot avoid asking questions about the meaning and provenance of any particular text, and what it tells us about its composers and their world. Thus the inductive process begins, as one struggles to see the bigger picture; this process is inevitable and unavoidable. Extreme scepticism instead follows a twisted and destructive method, of starting from a premise and then attempting to prove its truth. As Sujato and Brahmali have pointed out (2015: 145-46), the arguments of sceptics

> are reminiscent of arguments by denialists of various types, such as those relating to the harmful effects of tobacco, creationism, or the reality of man-made climate change. Just as sceptics characterise the search for authenticity as "Protestant Buddhism", it seems appropriate to describe this form of scepticism as "Denialist Buddhism". The unifying characteristic of the various forms of denialism is their insistence on extreme, unreasonable scepticism regarding any truth claims they oppose.

All these points can be seen in Drewes' attempt to deny the existence of the Buddha. Instead building up a general thesis based on the textual evidence, Drewes' study is instead based on openly stated prejudices. Thus he claims that the Buddha is a 'generic, omniscient, supra-divine figure characterized primarily in terms of supernatural qualities' (2017: 17), and that a 'supernatural Buddha' is 'the *only* sort of Buddha known to even the earliest texts' (2017: 10). His view of those who study early Buddhism is just as prejudiced. We learn that there is 'an *industry* devoted to the production of *sensational* claims about the Buddha' (p.19); that Rhys Davids and Oldenberg used Pali texts 'to *work up* exciting depictions of the Buddha's life and teaching' (10), and that Buddhist scholars '*never* … made *any* significant argument in support of their views' (15). Such prejudice renders Drewes' final call (2017: 19) to uphold 'the standards of scientific, empirical inquiry' quite laughable. Work which is so openly biased should not be taken seriously; anybody, indeed, who denies the proof of something, without saying what the 'proof' could be, obviously does not want there to be any proof. Instead, the sceptical claim that there is no 'proof' turns out to be nothing more than a self-fulfilling prophecy:

> If one presupposes that Agamemnon was historical, one can spend one's life sifting through the legends for potential evidence about him; if one does not, the effort is meaningless. (2017: 12)

In other words, a bias towards scepticism results in not even studying the object of one's prejudice. But this just begs the question: why take any of it seriously? Sceptical arguments fail the most basic standards of text-critical history; sceptics such as Schopen, Silk, Faure, Lopez Jr., Wedemeyer and Drewes give every impression of not really knowing anything about the primary sources. Dismissing the effort to 'sift through the legends for potential evidence' about the Buddha as meaningless, these scholars have failed to cultivate any expertise in the study of early Buddhism. There could be no clearer warning of the slippery slope from ignorance and prejudice to indolence and nihilism. An emblematic example is Schopen's view of the Pali canon. Dating a corpus of texts to the period when the commentaries on it were redacted, without considering its contents, is an abject failure of text-critical history.

Lacking all academic merit, extreme scepticism should perhaps be viewed as the puerile urge to kill one's ancestors. In recent times, this impulse has been abetted by Edward Said's critique of Orientalism. But the wish to defame the likes of T. W. Rhys Davids is short-sighted, and follows a self-destructive tendency noticed by

Edmund Burke: 'People will not look forward to posterity, who never look backward to their ancestors'.[76] Like everyone distracted by the transient noise of the modern age, sceptics have lost sight of the bigger picture. Motivated by short-term gains, and fearful of that which they loath, Buddhist scholars have indulged in ephemera. Their attention focused on passing fads, it has been forgotten that academic progress is a long process of cumulative gain. The inheritance bequeathed by the Orientalists has been squandered; Buddhist Studies stands disgraced. But there remains hope that, in time, the stigma attached to the study of early Buddhism will fade. Sound empirical standards might eventually prevail. And perhaps the Buddha might then be welcomed back into the study of ideas and culture which depend on him.

Abbreviations

The numbering of individual Pāli Suttas (e.g. AN 8.86) follows the method of Sutta Cental (https://suttacentral.net/). Citations or indications of the volume and page of individual Pali texts (e.g AN IV.344) refer to the volume and page number of PTS (Ee) editions.

AN	Aṅguttara Nikāya
DN	Dīgha Nikāya
DPPN	*Dictionary of Pali Proper Names;* Malalasekera, G. P. 1997: Oxford: Pali Text Society.
Ja	Jātaka
Khp	Khuddaka-pāṭha
Mbh	Mahābharata
Mil	Milindapañha
MN	Majjhima Nikāya
PTS	Pali Text Society
SB	Sujato and Brahmali (2015)
SN	Saṃyutta Nikāya
Ud	Udāna
Sn	Sutta Nipāta
Vin	Vinaya

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[76] Burke (1951: 31).

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Further thoughts on the 'two path thesis'

Alexander Wynne

Abstract

Early Buddhist texts are heterogeneous; some admit to doctrinal disagreement, others post-date the Buddha. In a corpus recording developments beyond the Buddha's life, and which is open about its internal disagreement, it is more than likely that there was a debate between the adherents of calm and insight meditation.

In previous issues of this journal, I argued that more than one conception of the Buddhist path is stated in early Buddhist texts (Wynne 2018, 2018a). One of these papers (2018a) has focused on the notion of an early debate between calm and insight meditation, and as such was critical of Bhikkhu Anālayo's recent treatment of this problem (Anālayo 2106, 2017). Since this is an important debate in Buddhist Studies, I am glad that Anālayo has responded to my critique and defended his own position (2018); the exchange of ideas is most welcome. I am especially grateful to Anālayo for pointing out some works, by himself and others, of which I was unaware. But while Anålayo's points have enriched my understanding of early Buddhism, they have not made me change my mind. Here I will explain why.

There is ample evidence for a debate between calm and insight in the surviving texts of different Indian traditions. For example, the Pali commentary on SN 12.70 interprets those who claim to be 'liberated by insight' as 'dry seers devoid of *jhāna*' (*nijjhānakā sukkhavipassakā)*. The Sarvāstivādin tradition

has a similar understanding, albeit placed in its version of the same Sutta (SĀ 347), rather than a commentary. The question is, just how old was this debate? Should we be guided by the Pāli tradition, in which the notion of 'dry seers' is a commentarial rather than a canonical formulation, or is the Sarvāstivādin tradition essentially correct in attributing the idea to the canonical period? Bhikkhu Bodhi (2007: 68) is surely right in judging that in this case, the Sarvastivādin text is later than its Pāli counterpart. But even if the Sarvāstivādin tradition may have emended the textual record, perhaps there was good reason to do so. Perhaps SĀ 347 is substantially correct, and reflects the fact that a pre-sectarian text was transmitted with an understanding that to be 'liberated by insight' is the same thing as having no jhānic attainment.

1. 'Released on both sides'

There is circumstantial support for the idea that a pure insight tradition is implicit in SN 12.70. At least some canonical texts record old arguments about the relationship between calm and insight. This can be seen in the notion of 'release on both sides' (*ubhato-bhāga-vimutti*), which deals with the 'sides' of 'calm/meditation' and 'insight', and is given different formulations in the Pāli Suttas. For the *Kīṭāgiri Sutta* (MN 70), the two 'sides' are the formless meditation and an unspecified insight (*paññā*) by which the spiritual corruptions are destroyed.[1] But in the *Mahā-nidāna Sutta* (DN 15) the two sides are conceptualised differently: the *bhikkhu* attains the eight 'releases' (including the formless releases) in forward and reverse order, wherever, whenever and for as long as he likes, as well as realising 'the corruptionless release of mind, a release through insight, in the present, through the destruction of the corruptions'.[2]

The difference between these two positions seems slight, since both texts focus on more or less the same meditative states (the formless states), and an insight by which the corruptions are destroyed. But this would be a superficial judgement. The formulation of MN 70 follows what could be called the path of

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[1] MN I.477: *ekacco puggalo ye te santā vimokkhā atikkamma rūpe āruppā te kāyena phusitvā viharati, paññāya c' assa disvā āsavā parikkhīṇā honti.*

[2] DN II.71: *yato kho ānanda bhikkhu ime aṭṭha vimokkhe anulomam pi samāpajjati, paṭilomam pi samāpajjati, anuloma-paṭilomam pi samāpajjati, yatthicchakaṃ yadicchakaṃ yāvaticchakaṃ samāpajjati pi vuṭṭhāti pi, āsavānañ ca khayā anāsavaṃ ceto-vimuttiṃ paññā-vimuttiṃ diṭṭhe va dhamme sayaṃ abhiññā sacchikatvā upasampajja viharati, ayaṃ vuccatānanda, bhikkhu ubhato-bhāga-vimutto.*

formless meditation, stated in a number of texts, according to which the *bhikkhu* progresses through the formless states, before finally attaining the state of the 'cessation of perception and sensation', a state in which insight destroys the corruptions. This path is described in MN 25 (the *Nivāpa Sutta*), where the *bhikkhu* attains the formless releases, including cessation, and then achieves the same insight described in MN 70 (MN I.160: *paññāya c' assa disvā* āsavā *parikkhīṇā honti*). The notion of being 'released on both sides' in MN 70 is just another way of describing the formless path of MN 25.

The *Mahānidāna Sutta* offers a very different version of the concept. By making the attainment of the formless releases a non-essential meditative skill, it indicates that it is spiritually superfluous; the *bhikkhu* does not cultivate them (*phusitvā viharati*) to attain insight. As such, its version of the concept is in fact a critique of the formless path to liberation. While its own understanding of the path is unclear, the 'release of mind, a release by insight' is a common early Buddhist pericope which combines meditative attainment (*cetovimutti*) and insight (*paññāvimutti*). Some texts place this pericope after the jhānic path or something like it (e.g. MN 38, MN 53, MN 54, MN 108, MN 119), and if so, this section of DN 15 would amount to a jhānic critique of the formless path to insight. But this point is not so obvious, since the *ceto-vimutti paññā-vimutti* pericope has a much wider application than the *jhāna*s.

In reading MN 70 and DN 15, it seems as if we are observing, somewhat obliquely, the different sides of an ancient debate. In fact, DN 15 leaves us in no doubt that this is the case. After stating its version of *ubhato-bhāga-vimutti*, it adds a further critical point: 'there is no other release on both sides higher or loftier than this release on both sides'.[3] However its notion of 'released on both sides' is understood – perhaps as a jhānic formulation – the authors of DN 15 were certainly making some sort of calm-insight argument against a different understanding of the path.

From this we conclude not only that there were disagreements about the path among some early Buddhists, but also that some of these disagreements found their way into the canonical texts. It is doubtful that such differences go back to the Buddha himself; the Buddha can hardly have argued that his version of 'released on both sides' is superior to another idea circulating in his community. The difference between DN 15 and MN 70 – an argument not between calm and

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[3] DN II.71: *imāya ca ānanda ubhatobhāgavimuttiyā aññā ubhatobhāgavimutti uttaritarā vā paṇītatarā vā natthī ti.*

insight, but between two versions of calm-insight – must instead belong to the period after the Buddha. This is undisputable, and it is not difficult to extend the line of enquiry beyond rival versions of calm-insight, to debates between calm and insight, in texts that are likely to post-date the Buddha.

First, we can consider two Majjhima Suttas with different versions of Sāriputta's liberation. MN 74 has a pure insight version, in which Sāriputta is not alone in a privately cultivated meditative state, but contemplates a teaching of the Buddha, while standing behind him, fanning him. MN 111 has a different version of Sāriputta's liberation, in which he attains liberating insight in the state of cessation.[4] MN 111 thus resembles the view of MN 70 and MN 25, in that the same insight formula is connected with the formless states. Essentially, we have an insight version of Sāriputta's liberation (MN 74), and a calm-insight version of it (MN 111). Another difference between calm and insight might be stated in texts on the Buddha's awakening. In the *Dhammacakka-ppavattana Sutta* (SN 56.11), the Buddha gains insight into the Four Noble Truths, but there is also a calm-insight version in the *Tapussa Sutta* (AN 9.41), where the Buddha attains liberating insight after attaining the state of cessation (AN IV.448). Once again, the difference is between formless meditation and its insight pericope, on the one hand, and insight into Buddhist truths on the other. If the attainments of the *jhāna*s are to be assumed in SN 56.11, the difference between it and AN 9.41 would resemble the difference between DN 15 and MN 70 (as long as the *ceto-vimutti paññā-vimutti* formula in DN 15 is taken to imply a jhānic path to insight).

2. Dating the calm-insight debate

The different formulations of 'released on both sides', as well as different accounts of the liberations of the Buddha and Sāriputta, suggest different versions of calm and insight, and even a debate between the two. This can only have developed in the generations after the Buddha's *parinibbāna*, and was perhaps inevitable; human beings, by their very nature, cannot help disagreeing and arguing with each other, especially over the fundamentally important matter of religion. If we now turn to the three texts most relevant to the calm-insight debate – SN 12.68, SN 12.70, AN 6.46 – we will see that they too must post-date the Buddha, and probably also record early debates.

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[4] On these accounts, see Wynne (2018: 90*ff*).

Their lateness is obvious in the figure of the venerable Nārada: apart from appearing in a sceptical guise in SN 12.68, he also appears in AN 5.50, a late text set in Pāṭaliputta which concerns the troubles of King Muṇḍa, apparently the great-grandson of Ajātasattu.[5] The Pāli commentaries tell us that Ajātasattu's reign lasted twenty-four years after the Buddha's death; thereafter, the reign of his son Udayabhadra lasted sixteen years, and the combined reign of Anuruddha and Muṇḍa, grandson and great-grandson of Ajātasattu respectively, lasted either eight or eighteen years.[6] According to these estimates, Muṇḍa's reign ended either forty-eight or fifty-eight years after the Buddha's death, and if so Nārada must have flourished in the period c. 20-60 AB. Taking a general estimate, SN 12.68 can thus be dated to around 30-50 AB.

The introduction to SN 12.68 also fails to mention where the Buddha was living, a tacit admission that it takes place after his death. The same is true of AN 6.46: it also fails to mention where the Buddha was living, and so must also be set after his death. A reasonable guess would be to date it in line with Nārada, c.30-50 AB. This leaves SN 12.70, and although it features the Buddha, this attribution can only be considered a *fraud*, just like the various formulations of *ubhato-bhāga-vimutti*. SN 12.70 belongs in the conceptual world of SN 12.68 and AN 6.46, and contains vocabulary that is quite rare and technical (e.g. *dhamma-ṭṭhiti-ñāṇaṃ, nibbāne ñāṇaṃ*).

If SN 12.68, SN 12.70 and AN 6.46 post-date the Buddha by a few generations, and if divergent Buddhist ideas were being voiced in the canonical texts of this period, especially with regard to the relationship between calm and insight, it is highly likely that these texts also record a debate between calm and insight. Let us briefly reconsider once again their contents in the light of Anālayo's response. The certainty that some Pāli discourses and parallel texts were composed after the Buddha's death, and the equal certainty that divergent calm-ideas are stated in late texts, is the context within which the three key texts should be understood.

3. SN 12.68

Both Musīla and Nārada claim to know, directly, all the links in the causal sequence of Dependent Origination, and the fact that 'Nirvana is the cessation of becoming'. But they respond differently when asked if they are liberated

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[5] DPPN, s.v. Muṇḍa

[6] Sp I.72-73. *parinibutte ca pana sambuddhe ajātasattu catuvīsativassāni rajjaṃ kāresi, udayabhadro ca soḷasa, anuruddho ca muṇḍo ca aṭṭhārasa (/aṭṭha)…*

Arahants: Musīla stays silent, implying that he is, whereas Nārada affirms that he is not, and likens his state to a person who can see water in a well, 'without touching it with his body' (*na ca kāyena phusitvā*).

Nārada's disagreement with Musīla can only be a challenge to his position; the simile of the well thus belongs in a critique of Musīla's claim to liberation through knowledge. The notion of seeing water, but not 'touching it with the body' (*kāyena phusitvā*), is of course a metaphor for knowing something without experiencing it; we can assume that Nārada has a knowledge of Nirvana, but has not experienced it. At the very least, Nārada offers a critique of Musīla's knowledge-based soteriology – the notion that liberation is attained through insight alone. But Narada's metaphor is probably more specific than this. The notion of 'touching with the body' is repeatedly connected to the 'formless releases' and the 'cessation of perception and sensation' (*saññā-vedayita-nirodha*) in the canonical discourses. If so, Nārada's critique refers to Musīla's failure to realise a particular type of direct religious experience through specific meditative practices. Since the most common meditative referent of 'touching with the body' is the formless states, this is the most likely interpretation.

In response to this interpretation, Anālayo cites Swearer's argument (1972: 369) 'that the interpretation proposed by de La Vallée Poussin "is severely challenged by an analysis of *viññāṇa* and *paññā*". But Swearer does not spell out what his critique of La Vallée Poussin actually is. His full statement criticising La Vallée Poussin, not given by Anālayo, is as follows:

> Without venturing further into the details of LVP's argument, the general perspective that the "intellectual" and the "ecstatic" or "rational" and "mystical' are two opposing means to the ultimately real in Pāli Buddhism is severely challenged by an analysis of *viññāṇa* and *paññā*.' (1972: 369)

Swearer's study of *viññāṇa* and *paññā* is useful, but since his critique of La Vallée Poussin does not give any 'details', it does not seem relevant. The same applies to Anālayo's citation of Gómez (1999):

> Gómez (1999: 703) concludes that, contrary to the assessment by de La Vallée Poussin, "the contrast is not between the intellectual apprehension and the intuitive apprehension, but between all mental apprehensions and an experience in the body or the whole person: in short, a realization."

While Gómez has many useful things to say, once again his critique of La Vallée Poussin is not based on a text-critical study of the important ideas and words. Gómez does not analyse the different possible senses of *any* ideas or terminology employed in our three texts. It is also unclear what Gómez actually means by mentioning a contrast 'not between the intellectual apprehension and the intuitive apprehension, but between all mental apprehensions and an experience in the body or the whole person'. With reference to the particular debate at hand, it too can be put aside as a vague assessment of Buddhist soteriology.

Anālayo finally points out a Sutta (SN 48.53) which uses the expression 'touching with the body' without reference to the formless spheres, and refers to a paper by Bodhi (2003) to make two objections:

> Wynne does not refer to the detailed discussion of this discourse by Bodhi (2003), a study critical of the two paths theory, which marshals relevant evidence from other discourses that Wynne has not taken into account: a reference to *asekha*s as having touched with the body the consummation of the five spiritual faculties [= SN 48.53], and another discourse that defines the consummation of these five spiritual faculties to be the deathless [= SN 48.57]. This in turn leads Bodhi (2003: 63) to the conclusion that "both the *sekha* and the *arahant* 'see' *nibbāna* with wisdom, but the *arahant* alone can 'dwell contacting it with the body'."

In several places (2018: 4, 12, 13, 16) Anālayo points out that I have not taken Bodhi (2003) into account. This is quite true. While I was aware of this paper, as an itinerant scholar with no institutional affiliation I was unable to procure it. Anālayo's fixation on this fact would be quite understandable if it meant something essential had been overlooked. But this is not the case. SN 48.53 is a rather isolated text, in fact the only Pali discourse which mentions the 'stage of a learner' (*sekha-bhūmi*) and 'stage of an adept (*asekha-bhūmi*).[7] There is no compelling argument that SN 12.68 ought to be interpreted through SN 48.53. And even if it was, it would only imply that Nārada's point is that having correct knowledge is not the same things as experiencing Nirvana; in other words, Nārada would still be offering a clear critique of Musīla's claim that knowledge is enough.

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[7] SN V.229-30.

Wynne (2018a: 85) mentions texts of a similar import to SN 48.53, in that they apply *kāyena phusitvā* to other states apart from the formless spheres; 'touching with the body' is sometimes mentioned with reference to the *jhāna*s, albeit in only a few texts, whereas a few more texts refer to the liberating experience in a similar fashion ('witnessing with the body', *kāyena sacchikaroti*; Wynne 2018a: 84). While considering such references, I argued that, on the whole, Nārada's use of the metaphor of 'touching with the body' most probably refers to the formless spheres. And as we have seen here, MN 70 opposes DN 15 in offering a rival 'formless' version of the path to liberation; the same is true of MN 111 versus MN 74, and AN 9.41 versus SN 56.11. The phrase *kāyena phusitvā* is also applied to the formless releases in SN 12.70, and is connected with meditators in AN 6.46. The overall context is clear enough, but Anālayo unfortunately pays no attention to it, and hence does not offer a reasonable judgement about the *most likely* reading of SN 12.68.

At the least, SN 12.68 registers a kind of critique against 'release through insight'. But since Nārada's critique also implies that direct experience through meditation is required, the only plausible meditative states to which he can refer are the formless spheres.

4. SN 12.70

Susīma encounters Buddhist mendicants in Rājagaha who say they are 'liberated by insight' (*paññā-vimuttā kho mayaṃ*). These mendicants claim not to have any of the higher knowledges which come after the four *jhāna*s, including the 'three knowledges' which finally effect liberation; they also say they have not 'touched with the body' the formless states. When Susīma asks the Buddha how this can be, the Buddha guides him through the not-self teaching and Dependent Origination; this teaching elaborates the point that first there is the 'knowledge of the regularity of dhammas' (*dhamma-ṭṭhiti-ñāṇaṃ*) and then 'knowledge of Nirvana' (*nibbāne ñāṇaṃ*). Since no reference has been made to practising any type of meditation, the Buddha's point seems to be that the liberating knowledge of Nirvana, which makes a person 'released through insight', requires doctrinal contemplation but no meditation. The text seems quite clear, and Anālayo's only response to my reading of it is to note (2018: 13) that

> Wynne (2018: 86) has similarly failed to take into account the discussion by Bodhi (2009). This has brought to light that two Chinese parallels to SN 12.70, found in the Saṃyukta-āgama

and the Mahāsāṅghika Vinaya, explicitly report Susīma's stream-entry. While acknowledging that the textual evidence on this point is ambiguous, Bodhi (2009: 65) rightly points out that such an attainment would fit the context of SN 12.70.

The Pāli text concludes with Susīma confessing to entering the Sangha under false pretences, and the Buddha giving an unusually harsh response, by comparing Susīma's behaviour to that of a criminal who might be executed by a king. Although the Buddha finally accepts Susīma's apology (SN II.128), the context hardly suggests stream-entry. In any case, whether or not Susīma attained stream-entry is beside the point. The important points are: the claim of some to be 'liberated by insight'; the Buddha's statement that *knowledge* (of the regularity of phenomena) precedes the *liberating knowledge* of Nirvana; and his subsequent explanation of this through the not-self teaching and Dependent Origination, at the same time saying nothing about meditation. Anālayo says nothing about these points.

5. AN 6.46

Just like SN 12.68, AN 6.46 records a difference of opinion beyond the Buddha's life. Unlike SN 12.68, which records a frank but mild disagreement between Musīla and Nārada, the disagreement in AN 6.46 is fractious. 'Meditators' are in disagreement with contemplatives 'devoted to the doctrine': whereas the meditators 'touch with the body' (*kāyena phusitvā*) the 'deathless element', the contemplatives 'penetrate the profound words of the doctrine with insight'. A text describing fractious debate is likely to make doctrinal points using specific terminology, rather than engaging in generalities. If so, the meditators' claim about 'touching' the liberated state implies the path of formless meditation, the states with which the notion of 'touching with the body' is almost entirely concerned in the Pāli Suttas. Indeed, a passage in the *Itivuttaka* (It 51) equates the 'deathless element' (*amataṃ dhātuṃ*) with 'cessation' (*nirodha*), the culmination of the 'formless releases'.

As for the contemplatives, it is surely anachronistic to refer to them as 'scholar monks' (Anālayo, 2018: 13): we can hardly imagine that an early group of 'scholar monks' abused a group of liberated meditators. The text reads most naturally as a debate between opposing groups of spiritual *rivals*. Thus the notion of 'seeing' by means of 'penetrating the profound words of the doctrine with insight' (*gambhīraṃ atthapadaṃ paññāya ativijjha passanti*), as a rival

claim to the meditators, probably refers to a sort of liberating cognition. In my previous study (2018a: 82-3), I noted that in the Dhammapada (v.100-02), the term *atthapadaṃ* has no liberating connotations. But I also argued that in AN 4.192, AN 1.112, AN 4.186 and AN 9.4, the expression refers to higher levels of insight, and quite probably liberating insight.

It is worth considering AN 9.4 in more detail, since Anālayo's response focuses specifically on this text. In the relevant section of AN 9.4, venerable Nandaka teaches a group of mendicants the following five benefits of listening to the Dhamma and discussing it:

1. The one who illumines the perfect holy life becomes liked by, agreeable to, honoured by and respected by (*piyo… manāpo… garu… bhāvanīyo*) the Buddha (*satthu*).[8]

2. The one who illumines the perfect holy life, 'in relation to the Dhamma, he experiences inspiration in the meaning, and inspiration in the Dhamma.' (Bodhi 2012: 1253)

3. The one who illumines the perfect holy life 'gains vision, having penetrated the profound words of the doctrine with insight' (AN IV.362: *gambhīraṃ atthapadaṃ paññāya ativijjha passati*).

4. The one who illumines the perfect holy life is regarded by his audience as being a realised person, or on the way thereto (AN IV.362: *ayam āyasmā patto vā pajjati vā*).

5. Those who are learners in the audience (*ye kho bhikkhū sekhā*) will put what they hear into practice in order to attain liberation, whereas those who are liberated Arahants will abide blissfully in the present.

This teaching thus assigns four benefits to a Dhamma teacher, and one benefit to his audience. The list of the teacher's benefits are seemingly progressive: the Dhamma preacher gains the Buddha's respect, experiences the meaning of

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[8] Bhikkhu Bodhi (2012: 1253) follows the Ee reading (*satthā piyo*) rather than Be (*satthu piyo*) and translates 'the Teacher becomes pleasing and agreeable to him, respected and esteemed by him'. This is probably not correct, for the same expression always seems to be qualified by an object in the genitive case: to be 'beloved *to*' or 'respected *by*' someone (in the genitive case)'.

the Dhamma at a deeper level, then gains higher insight into it, before finally becoming renowned as an adept. The fact that the fourth benefit concerns the preacher's renown as liberated or almost liberated suggests that the third benefit is about attaining liberation or coming somewhere close to it. Anālayo's reading of the passage (2018: 15) is simply incorrect:

> … the reference to *atthapadaṃ* in AN 9.4 appears in the context of an ascending list of five benefits of listening to the teachings, where it is part of the description of the third benefit. The fifth benefit is that those in training who hear such teachings will be inspired to make an effort to progress to awakening; for *arahant*s, hearing such teachings will serve as a pleasant abiding in the here and now. The context does not allow for considering the reference to *atthapadaṃ* in the third benefit as already involving the final goal.

Anālayo has strangely failed to notice the bipartite structure of the list, which means that the third benefit' *must* be closely connected with 'the final goal'. There is no other possible reading; the text is quite transparent. Based on this mistake, Anālayo misrepresents my analysis of AN 6.46. He first claims (2018: 15), that I 'set aside' the occurrence of *atthapada* in the Dhammapada 'as if only prose occurrences are relevant to ascertaining the meaning of the compound.'[9] He also claims that I 'left out' AN 9.4 when discussing *atthapadaṃ*, because 'AN 9.4 in this context would have inevitably led to a conclusion that does not accord with the two paths theory.' (2018: 15). Anālayo then makes the following claim:

> From the viewpoint of the need to take the sources seriously and at their own word, this procedure is rather disconcerting. Far stronger words could in fact be used here to qualify Wynne's methodology. Anyway, the facts speak for themselves. (2018: 15)

If Anālayo's judgement of AN 9.4 was correct, he might perhaps have a point. But his reading is clearly mistaken –which would not have been the case had he

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[9] What I actually say is this (2018: 84): 'The parallels to the expression *gambhīraṃ atthapadaṃ paññāya ativijjha passati* show that it denotes an advanced level of insight, one which is either liberating or tantamount to it. Only one early text (Dhp VIII) uses the term *atthapada* in a sense which is obviously unrelated to liberating insight.'

consulted Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation and comments on the passage.[10] And so if 'far stronger words' are to be used in our debate about AN 9.4, unfortunately they do not apply to my 'methodology'. As Anālayo states, 'the facts speak for themselves'. We can only conclude that in the majority of textual parallels, 'seeing, having penetrated the profound words of the doctrine' refers to insight which is probably liberating. Thus we have very good reasons to believe that the contemplatives of AN 6.46 claimed to be liberated without practising meditation.

6. Concluding remarks

It is quite right for Anālayo to have pointed out that my previous critique failed to mention important publications, both by himself and others. But although Anālayo notes that 'Wynne … does not even mention Swearer (1972), Gómez (1999), or Bodhi (2003), let alone engage seriously with the points raised by them', this point is rendered redundant by Anālayo's failure to cite any telling critique from them. And although Anālayo has attacked my supposedly 'disconcerting' treatment of AN 9.4, his critique is undermined by his misreading of this text. To adapt a phrase from Richard Gombrich, a mountain has been made out of a non-existent molehill.

To a neophyte, all this might look like a game of smoke and mirrors: I say one thing, Anālayo says another, claim is opposed by counter-claim and on it goes. But a couple of things now seem undeniable, and speak firmly in favour of an early Buddhist debate between calm and insight. First, rival claims about calm and insight made their way into the Buddhist canon; the *Mahā-nidāna Sutta* openly admits this. And second, two of the three key texts (SN 12.68, AN 6.46) admit that they belong to the period after the Buddha's lifetime. To this we can add the certainty that after the Buddha's death, Buddhist thought did not stand still. Buddhists were argumentative, and disagreements would inevitably have arisen.

If some canonical discourses post-date the Buddha; if arguments about calm and insight *are* recorded in them; and if the formless meditations were at the heart of this dispute, how else are SN 12.68, SN 12.70 and AN 6.46 to be seen, if not as relics of a creative and occasionally fractious period?

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[10] Bodhi (2012: 1252-54); Bodhi (1818 n.1840) comments as follows on AN 9.4: 'Strangely, though the theme of this passage is the benefit in listening to and discussing the Dhamma, the second, third and fourth benefits (and perhaps the first as well) accrue to the monk who is *teaching* the Dhamma.' Bhikkhu Bodhi is far too cautious here; the first benefit *obviously* concerns the monk who teaches, although this his obscured by his incorrect preference for the Ee rather than Be reading..

The context and content of the texts could hardly be clearer: all refer to disagreements, all contain ample evidence for liberation as a kind of doctrinal knowledge, and all assume that the formless spheres comprised a different path to liberation. The early debate between calm and insight should thus be understood as a debate between calm in the sense of the formless path to liberation, and between insight in the sense of contemplating not-self and/or dependent origination.

Abbreviations

The numbering of individual Pāli Suttas (e.g. AN 8.86) follows the method of Sutta Cental (https://suttacentral.net/). Citations or indications of the volume and page of individual Pali texts (e.g AN IV.344) refer to the volume and page number of PTS (Ee) editions.

AN	Aṅguttara Nikāya
DN	Dīgha Nikāya
DPPN	*Dictionary of Pali Proper Names;* Malalasekera, G. P. 1997: Oxford: Pali Text Society.
It	Itivuttaka
MN	Majjhima Nikāya
SN	Saṃyutta Nikāya
Sp	Samantapāsādikā (Vinaya-aṭṭhakathā)

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A Note on the Meaning and Reference of the Word "Pali"

Richard Gombrich

Late last year, my friend Tony Morris, who is a publisher and also a Trustee of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies, persuaded me to write a short book introducing the Pali language to the general public. Under the title *Buddhism and Pali* it was published in the series *Mud Pie Slices* in Oxford shortly before Christmas.

On p.11, early in chapter 1, I state: "The word 'Pali' (which in Pali can also be spelled with a dot under the l: Pāļi) is connected with a Sanskrit verbal root '*paṭh*', meaning 'recite', and originally meant 'text for recitation'." Though I am aware that scholars have made many different proposals concerning the meaning and origin of this word, and few if any of them agree with me, I wrote nothing about my reasons for holding this view. This was because the book was intended for a wide public and hardly any of my readers would be able to follow my arguments. Whether or not my view about the word 'Pali' is correct has no bearing on the main argument (or anything else) in the book. I have therefore decided to present my justification in this statement, which will circulate separately from the book.

My justification has two parts. The first, and in my eyes the more important, is basic to my epistemology, which I learnt from Karl Popper and summarise in my *What the Buddha Thought*, pp.94 ff. As I wrote, "in an empirical subject, be it philology, history, or physics, there is no final certitude: all knowledge is provisional." Thus, just as was the case when I wrote about the Buddha's ideas in that book, I cannot prove that my understanding is correct; I only claim to have the best available hypothesis. Anyone who believes that they can do

better -- that they can transcend such a hypothesis and reach certitude -- is deluding themselves, because no one can. From this I conclude that anyone arguing that I am wrong should present a better hypothesis if they are to deserve a hearing. Moreover, the word we are concerned with, *pāli*, must not merely refer to something – of which, more in a moment – but also have a meaning. So presenting a good solution to this problem involves offering a plausible hypothesis about what the word means – or perhaps I should say, meant. **It must have meant something.**

On pp.85-6 of my book I discuss the word *aṭṭhakathā* and

show that it contains an ambiguity: it means "telling the meaning/ purpose" of the text. So the Buddhists in those days, many centuries after the Buddha, preserved and studied the Buddha's teaching through two bodies of text, the *pāli* and a contrasting but complementary corpus of explanations of what the *pāli* meant and what it was intended for. So what was meant by *pāli*? What the *aṭṭhakathā* explained was a body of textual material which was believed (whether correctly is not relevant) essentially to consist of the Buddha's original words, preserved down the ages by the Saṅgha's constant recitation.

What do the dictionaries say? Of the three main Pali dictionaries in existence, the oldest is the *Pali-English Dictionary* (*PED*) by Rhys Davids and Stede. Their entry begins by giving a few references to passages where *pāli* means a line or row, as of teeth in a mouth. That is the first meaning given. The second (and only other) meaning is given thus: "a line, norm, thus the canon of Buddhist writings; the text of the Pāli canon, i. e. the original text (opp. to the Commentary; thus "pāliyaṃ" is opposed to "aṭṭhakathāyaṃ" at *Vism* 107, 450, etc). It is the literary language of the early Buddhists, closely related to Māgadhī. … The word is only found in Commentaries, not in the Piṭaka."

I have omitted several lines giving references to secondary sources (modern scholarly discussions) and primary sources (occurrences in the texts). I shall not refer further to the comment about Māgadhī, because, as I shall show elsewhere, I think that it has already been superseded. "*Vism*" stands for *Visuddhimagga*, "The Path to Purity" by Buddhaghosa, the great commentator, so it is he who contrasts *pāli* with *aṭṭhakathā* ; the two forms quoted above are locatives.

The compilation of the second Pali dictionary by age, the *Critical Pali Dictionary* published in Copenhagen, made very slow progress and finally died before reaching **p**, so it cannot help us.

The third dictionary, which is still being written, is Margaret Cone's *A Pali Dictionary.* When I published my book, a few months ago, this had not reached

p either. Dr. Cone has since been so kind as to send me her entry, though it will only be published later this year. The entry is extremely long. Like the *PED*, she gives two separate words *pāli*, with the same alternative spellings. The first, which I can here ignore, has two meanings: either "a dam or embankment", or "a line, a row",

The second word has a very long entry. The first meaning given, for which there is only one reference, is "a text, the words of a composition (to be learnt and recited?)". The second meaning has four sub-divisions: (i): "a passage in the *tipiṭaka*, the words of a text"; (ii): "the written text being commented on (differentiated from the commentary)"; (iii) "an alternative version of the written text"; (iv) "the text generally, the *tipiṭaka*; the teaching (differentiated from the commentary)". I think that the only significance between Margaret Cone's conclusions and mine (made before I was aware of hers) is that, having perhaps more regard to how the text was used, I make no reference to writing but instead to recitation, the main mechanism in ancient times for the text's preservation. This also fits the etymology I propose below.

Usage has guided Margaret Cone and me to our interpretation of what the word *pāli* refers to in the Pali texts, but can philology also guide us to a word in Sanskrit with a cognate meaning? If this were easy to trace, modern scholars would probably have found an answer long ago. However, with the confidence that we now know roughly what meaning we are looking for, we can suggest a series of phonetic changes which include a couple of rather unusual steps. In Sanskrit there is a verbal adjective *pāṭhya*. It is derived from the root *paṭh*, and Monier-Williams' *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* gives its meaning as "to be recited". Can *pāḷi* be derived from pāṭhya?

The work of philologists both ancient and modern has produced tables of how phonemes in Sanskrit words undergo changes as those words are taken up in the many forms of the languages directly derived from Sanskrit, which we call Middle Indo-Aryan. This went on for many centuries, and we saw above that the word *pāḷi* first appears in texts composed later than the *Pali Canon* (=*Tipiṭaka*). That Canon apart, not a vast amount of linguistic material has survived from those early centuries, and it is only reasonable to assume that there were phonetic developments of which we have no record – though some of them may yet turn up, e.g., in inscriptions. So we many not have direct evidence for every stage by which *pāṭhya* became *pāḷi*. Nevertheless, we shall see that the gaps are few.

i.   **ṭhy** is a stop followed by a **y**. The most likely development for such a consonant cluster is >**ṭhiy**, so the word would become **pāṭhiya**.

ii. ṭh is cerebral, unvoiced and aspirated. What about the second consonant in *pāḷi*? It is unstable: it can be an **l**, which is dental (with no dot beneath it) or cerebral (with a dot beneath it). It is voiced: for this there are parallel developments in two stages: **ṭ** > **ḍ** > **ḷ**. Geiger para.38.6: "The change of **ṭ** into **ḷ** presupposes an intermediate **ḍ**." Of this Geiger gives several examples, to which we can add Pali *telasa* "thirteen" < Skt *trayodaśa* and Pali *soḷasa* "sixteen" < Skt *ṣoḍaśa* (Geiger para.116.2). Finally, it is unaspirated: the aspirated cerebral **ḷ** does occur in Pali but it is very rare indeed (see Geiger para.35), so to posit a loss of aspiration over so many centuries is not farfetched.

iii. We have thus reached a hypothetical word *pāḷiya*, which in the neuter singular would be *pāḷiyaṃ*. Is this so different from *pāḷi* as to invalidate our hypothesis? In the *Visuddhimagga* we met *pāḷiyaṃ*, but it was a locative, so we would have to say that *pāḷiyaṃ*, meaning "in Pali", has at some point been mistaken for the name of the language. This may not be a very strong argument; but I conclude by repeating that if one denies that *pāli* comes from Skt. *pāṭhya* and has the same meaning, one has to suggest both a more likely meaning and a more likely derivation. We await challenges.

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Reviewed by Christopher V. Jones

Jamgön Mipham (1846-1912) was a celebrated and prolific author of the Tibetan Nyingma tradition, and an early exponent of the Tibetan Rimé (Tib. *ris med*) or 'non-sectarian' movement that worked to bridge doctrinal differences between Tibetan schools in the late nineteenth century. The present volume is an almost one thousand-page tome containing an English translation of Mipham's commentary, produced in the final year of his life, on an important compendium of Indian Mahāyānist teachings: what our translators render as the '*Ornament of the Mahāyāna Sūtras*', or in Sanskrit the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*. Mipham's commentary is preceded by a translation of all, nearly eight-hundred verses, of the Indian root text, and is followed by a number of appendices that provide further details about texts and terminology on which Mipham's commentary relies.

The introduction to the volume details a traditional Tibetan account of the authorship of the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, namely its attribution to Asaṅga, in the fourth century. He is traditionally held to have been the amanuensis of the *bodhisattva* Maitreya. The verses of the Sanskrit *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* (henceforth MSA) are divided into twenty-one chapters (their divisions differing slightly in Tibetan translation), and are concerned with the legitimacy and pre-eminence of the Mahāyāna over 'mainstream' Buddhist teaching. Its perspective is that of the Yogācāra tradition, committed to the principle that all phenomena are reducible to activities of the mind

(*cittamātra*). However, the sequentially first concern of the MSA is the defence of literature fundamental to the Mahāyāna tradition in general, and its authenticity as an authoritative 'vehicle' of teachings that should be attributed to the Buddha. Among many other topics, its verses go on to laud the value of a *bodhisattva* as something like a regent of the Buddha's authority, the importance of cultivating the knowledge that all phenomena are fundamentally non-dual (*advaya*), and the consequence that all sentient beings must be of the same fundamental nature as a Buddha. Hence the MSA offers an apologetic for the Mahāyāna as a heterogeneous phenomenon, and here and there attempts to reconcile seemingly conflicting teachings found across the breadth of Mahāyānist *sūtra* compositions: for example, the notion that the Buddha taught only a 'single vehicle' (*ekayāna*), in contrast to the more conventional 'three vehicle' model (among which the Mahāyāna, leading to the status of a Buddha, is supreme). Other recurring themes are the assertion that followers of the Mahāyāna constitute the best children or 'heirs' of the Buddha, and that the exponent of the 'great vehicle' is one who pursues the 'great purpose' (*mahārtha*; Tib. *don chen*): the liberation of all sentient beings from recurring transmigration.

The MSA boasts rich imagery and plentiful similes, often in descriptions of the qualities of Buddhas or *bodhisattva*s, though these are frequently presented in particularly terse language that requires explanation. To understand both these and the terminological idiosyncrasies of the MSA, students of the text have usually turned to its prose commentary (*bhāṣya*), extant also in Sanskrit and attributed to Vasubandhu (traditionally held to have been Asaṅga's brother, so associated also with the fourth century). Preserved only in Tibetan translation is a further Indian commentary that attends to both the verse MSA and to Vasubandhu's prose: the *Sūtralaṃkāravṛttibhāṣya* (Tib. *mdo sde rgyan gyi 'grel bshad*), which is attributed to the Yogācāra master Sthiramati. The latter may have lived in the sixth century, but is sometimes considered to have been Vasubandhu's student. It is Sthiramati's commentary (known for its extraordinary length, and called in Mipham's text the '*Great Commentary*') that forms the basis for Mipham's own comparatively concise exposition of the MSA. Hence while Mipham's reading of the MSA is a product of a much later period, and of another context in which affirming the fundamental unity of Mahāyānist teaching was of particular concern, his work has one foot planted firmly in the Indian Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda tradition and its interpretation of the Mahāyāna in the middle of the first millennium.

The longest and most detailed chapters of Mipham's commentary generally accompany the lengthier sections of the MSA: those concerned with the status and various bodies proper to a Buddha (chapter 10) and with correct interpretation of impermanence and emptiness (chapter 19). Three chapters of Mipham's commentary are particularly long relative to the number of verses of the MSA that they elucidate: those concerned with the defence of the Mahāyāna (chapter 1), with 'thatness' (*tathatā*: Tib. *de bzhin nyid*) or reality (chapter 7) and with the cultivation of non-dual awareness (chapter 12). One of Mipham's interests is to articulate the compatibility of the Madhyamaka and Yogācāra (or Cittamātra) systems of philosophy, and he argues that any disagreement between the two hinges on whether or not the mind exists on the level of ultimate truth. As the MSA teaches about the fundamentally non-dual nature of consciousness, Mipham finds Asaṅga and the Madhyamaka to be in agreement (the verses of the MSA, unlike Vasubandhu's commentary, make no mention of other challenging points of Yogācāra doctrine, such as the status of the substratum consciousness, *ālayavijñāna*). Here Mipham makes clear his position in relation to other Tibetan scholastic disagreements: he refutes the interpretation of Yogācāra that considers the mind to be not empty (or rather 'empty of other': *gzhan stong*), but acknowledges that self-illuminating gnosis, devoid of any dualistic sense of subject or object, is fundamental to both Madhyamaka and Mantrayāna (i.e. tantric) perspectives on Buddhist practice and purpose. Elsewhere (chapter 12), Mipham follows the MSA – against many voices in the Madhyamaka tradition – by adhering to the position that there exist discrete modes of liberation for *arhats*, solitary realizers (*pratyekabuddhas*) and Buddhas, and that the doctrine of a single vehicle was taught only for the benefit of certain sentient beings.

In so far as the translators have sought to accurately convey the content of the Tibetan form of the MSA for a Western audience, they have certainly succeeded. The translation of its verses is accurate and eloquent, though by their nature many of these verses will mean little to a reader who does not resort to some commentary or other. Mipham's explanation of them is lucid and resourceful, and draws upon a wealth of wider Buddhist canonical literature. In supplementary footnotes our translators provide further references to both Vasubandhu's and Sthiramati's commentaries on the root verses, in each instance relying on our Tibetan translations of these works while remaining conscious of their Indian origins and earlier linguistic context. Other footnotes justify translations of particularly unclear lines or phrases, and defend (infrequent) minor amendments to Mipham's text. The volume includes a very clear glossary, which supplies both

the Tibetan terms underlying the English translation and the Indic terminology that these Tibetan terms usually render. Other appendices present elements on the path of the *bodhisattva* and an outline of Indian Buddhist cosmography.

If anything is lacking from this very rich volume, it is perhaps some greater discussion of the place of Mipham's commentary on the MSA in his wider oeuvre. Mipham was notable in the Nyingma tradition for the attention that he devoted to Indian commentarial literature – masterpieces attributed to founding figures of both the Madhyamaka and Yogācāra systems, as well as a great many other works besides – which he explained with great pedagogical acumen. The MSA is a pertinent choice for an ecumenical commentary not only because of its supposed authorship by Maitreya (than whom there could be no greater authority besides a living Buddha), but because it constitutes one of our earliest systematic defences of the Mahāyāna as a mature and knowingly diverse treasury of teachings. The translation of Mipham's commentary is aimed at an audience acquainted with Buddhism seen through its Tibetan forms, and one that is interested in the manner in which Tibetan scholarship has sought to unpack and harmonise different strands of Indian Mahāyānist thought. Indeed, the MSA is an early instance of Indian Buddhist authors attempting to do a very similar thing: in its original context, to defend the value of the Mahāyāna from its detractors, while explaining how a Yogācāra interpretation of its diverse teachings is best suited to formalize all that has been received from the Buddha.

Westerhoff, Jan (2018), *The Golden Age of Indian Buddhist Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Reviewed by Rafal Stepien

When the time comes, in some hopefully not too distant age, to write the history of the incorporation of non-Western philosophies into the curriculum and canon of philosophy as a whole, Jan Westerhoff's *The Golden Age of Indian Buddhist Philosophy* will stand as one of the landmark monographs in the chapter charting the trajectory of Indian Buddhist philosophy. Somehow, the book manages to combine throughout what can only be described as mastery of the source material with astute theoretical and methodological meta-discourse, and to do so with rhetorical elegance and philosophical ingenuity. It is divided into four main chapters dealing respectively with Abhidharma (35-83), Madhyamaka (84-146), Yogācāra (147-216), and The School of Diṅnāga and Dharmakīrti (217-281). Preceding these are two Diagrams of Schools and Thinkers (xxiv-xxv, of The Main Schools of Indian Buddhism and of Major Indian Buddhist Philosophers and Texts) and an Introduction (1-34), while following them are some Concluding Remarks (282-285), a Bibliography (287-307), and an Index (308-326). In what follows, I will provide a summary of the book's contents liberally interspersed with evaluative comments, and then proffer in the final paragraphs some general observations on its approach overall.

The Introduction is divided into six sections. The first briefly adopts the canonical Buddhist metaphor of a wheel to describe both the static and dynamic aspects of the story that is to unfold (2), while the subsequent five propose to heuristically conceive Indian Buddhist philosophy in terms of a game. Westerhoff distinguishes four factors that shape the dynamics of philosophical developments: "*arguments*, *texts*, *meditative practices*, and *historical background*" (2), and notes that he will treat the last of these but

occasionally, on the grounds both that the social, political, and economic contexts in which philosophers live exert uncertain influences on their philosophies and that relevant reliable historical contextual sources are in this case exceedingly rare. Westerhoff specifies that he is:

> not attempting to cover the whole development of Buddhist thought from the historical Buddha up to the present through all Buddhist cultures, but focus on a specific, seminal place and period: the golden age of Buddhist philosophy in India, from the composition of the Abhidharma texts (about the beginning of the first millennium CE) up to the time of Dharmakīrti (sixth or seventh century CE). (5)

In structuring his material, Westerhoff pursues what he calls "a hybrid approach" according to which the four major schools are treated "according to the traditional and plausible historical sequence Abhidharma–Madhyamaka–Yogācāra–Diṅnāga and Dharmakīrti, while paying attention to their mutual interrelations, and discuss[ing] the difficulties in clearly differentiating between them" (10). This approach allows considerable flexibility, which Westerhoff uses to advantage throughout the book in charting the roughly chronological sequence of Indian Buddhist philosophers and texts as well as mapping the development of key concepts and arguments across chronological and doxographical lines.

The Sources of the Game (11-24) are then listed in terms of the discourses of the historical Buddha and the Mahāyāna *sūtra*s and *tantra*s succeeding them; the debates in which historical Indian Buddhist philosophers were expected to take part and which played no small role in structuring their texts; the various forms of commentaries, sub-commentaries, and auto-commentaries on base texts; and the doxographies used by Buddhist philosophers themselves to organize their own and others' teachings. It is perhaps somewhat surprising that although Westerhoff makes a point of distinguishing between several types of commentary – such as *vivṛti*, *bhāṣya*, and *vārttika* – and discusses the development of the *sūtra*-style elliptical *kārikā* genre of text in some detail, no space is allotted here to investigation of the role the *śāstra* form – as the pan-Indian prose genre of intellectual discourse – played in informing the compositional style of much Buddhist philosophical rhetoric.

In any case, Westerhoff concludes his Introduction by clarifying and justifying his methodological approach to ancient Indian philosophical sources. In doing so, he suggests an approach to those aspects of traditional Buddhist accounts that sit uneasily with the accepted parameters of history, philosophy, and history of philosophy as practised in the 21st century West; he seeks neither to dispense with all assumptions (as if that were possible) nor to force the material into the fixed mould of the exegete's etic (as is witnessed all too often). Instead, Westerhoff proposes that, in order to do full justice to the hermeneutical maxim of charity, the "departure from a historical realist stance" (31) embodied in many a historical source of Buddhist philosophical insight needs to be provisionally accepted by "momentarily bracketing some of the naturalist assumptions we hold" (32). Such willingness to accept those premises of Buddhist philosophical stances altogether alien to contemporary philosophical discourse is a sustained, and welcome, feature of the book as a whole. In contradistinction to those among his various prior publications that seek more or less explicitly to justify Buddhist philosophy as 'philosophy' proper in accordance with the norms of the contemporary Anglo-American analytic tradition, Westerhoff here self-consciously adopts the position of the *historian* of philosophy who accepts that there may well be quite some intellectual distance to travel for the contemporary reader to arrive at an understanding of the classical source material in its own terms, and who furthermore undertakes to convey that material as faithfully as possible in the knowledge that the journey toward such understanding will bear philosophical fruit.

Chapter 1 conceptualizes the Abhidharma texts it treats as "fundamentally an attempt to systematize, and systematically expand, the Buddha's teachings as they are recorded in his discourses" (35-36). On this basis, Westerhoff initially outlines "three possible motivations for the composition of the Abhidharma: to provide an expansion of matrices (*mātṛkā*); to expand texts composed in a question-and-answer format; and to develop a comprehensive ontological theory" (36). Following a brief foray into the question of the authenticity of the Abhidharma "as the authentic word of the Buddha (*buddhavacana*)" (41), Westerhoff spends the bulk of the chapter surveying the philosophical positions of five of the accepted eighteen schools of Abhidharma: the Mahāsaṃghika and four subgroups of Sthaviranikāya: the Theravāda, Pudgalavāda, Sarvāstivāda, and Sautrāntika. No explicit justification is given for limiting discussion to these, but given the relatively parlous state of our knowledge as to the contents of and differentiations among the various schools of thought generally, though

not unproblematically, classed together as Abhidharma, some such delimitation was always going to be needful for a general history such as this, and Westerhoff does as well as anyone reasonably could in the space permitted to disentangle the myriad threads comprising the Abhidharmic corpus.

Discussion of the Mahāsaṃghika focuses on those aspects of its thought recognizable as precursors to Mahāyāna developments. Especial emphasis is placed on the Mahāsaṃghikas' expansion of the range of the notion of emptiness to cover not only the emptiness of persons (*pudgalanairātmya*) but of dharmas (*dharmanairātmya*) too (47). This Westerhoff glosses as a point of conceptual contact between Mahāsaṃghika and Madhyamaka. He interprets their acceptance of a notion of foundational consciousness (*mūlavijñāna*) as one of their "various conceptual seeds that can be considered to fully flourish in later Yogācāra theories" (48). Discussion of the Theravāda largely limits itself to the *Kathāvatthu,* traditionally ascribed to Moggaliputtatissa (whose name is more often rendered as Moggaliputta Tissa), and what Westerhoff describes as "its presentation of a rich variety of different positions *in nuce*, many of which can be seen to germinate into elaborate philosophical theories in later times" (52). The Pudgalavādins' views are given more extended discussion. Their notion of the *pudgala* or person is first juxtaposed with the mereological reductionism regarding selfhood characteristic of early Buddhist teachings. Westerhoff then outlines several overlapping ways in which to understand the *pudgala* in a philosophically coherent manner without lapsing into substantialism as to the self, before touching upon the conceptual points of correspondence between the *pudgala*, *ālayavijñāna*, and *tathāgatagarbha* Buddhist doctrines, all suspected by opponents of "introducing entities that at least *prima facie* look rather self-like" (60).

The longest discussion of any Abhidharma school is reserved for the Sarvāstivāda. After enumerating the major textual sources, Westerhoff summarizes the well-known Sarvāstivāda position that "past, present, and future all exist" (61), sets out four arguments in support of the basic position, proposes possible responses, and then charts the four interpretations of the doctrine propounded by Dharmatrāta, Ghoṣaka, Vasumitra, and Buddhadeva. In line with the general methodology adopted throughout the book, Westerhoff is not content merely to display the philosophical position under study, but undertakes the far more difficult task of working through its premises and implications, as well as the arguments underpinning them, to arrive at a global evaluation of its merits as a philosophical position. His treatment of

Sarvāstivāda thus manages to include philosophically astute critical discussion of topics as disparate as ontological substantialism, causation and simultaneity, momentariness and its relation to epistemological representationalism, direct perception and self-cognition, and the Abhidharma notion of *dharma* in terms of mereological and/or conceptual independence.

In the final section of the chapter on Abhidharma Westerhoff turns his attention to the Sautrāntika school (that is, assuming we are justified in terming Sautrāntika a form of Abhidharma at all, given its rejection of the authoritativeness of Abhidharma treatises). Westerhoff concentrates on the rejection by the Sautrāntika, and most specifically by the Vasubandhu of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, of the signature Sarvāstivāda espousal of the existence of the three times. This naturally leads to discussion of Vasubandhu's argument in support of the theory of momentariness, which Westerhoff calls the "argument from the *spontaneity of destruction*" (77).[1] The philosophical problems entailed by the posited momentariness of objects for perception of them, and the Sautrāntikas' responses to those problems in terms of their denial of the need for a separate object-condition supporting perception, are treated next, followed by their more general views as to mental continuity and *karma*. The chapter closes by assessing the similarities between Sautrāntika and Yogācāra, and more generally by considering Sautrāntika as a bridge between Abhidharma and Mahāyāna.

Thus we arrive at Chapter 2, on Madhyamaka. To signal the transition from Abhidharma to the various developments of Mahāyāna that will take up the remainder of the book, Westerhoff initially outlines the rise of the Mahāyāna movement as a whole and assesses its relation to Buddhist philosophy in general. Particular attention is given to the connections between Madhyamaka, Yogācāra, and the overall Mahāyāna worldview, as well as to specifically Mahāyāna philosophical innovations concerning the bodhisattva, what Westerhoff calls the "de-ontologizing of reality" (87), and illusionism regarding the world.

There then follow two sections nominally devoted to the Madhyamaka School (89-99) and the Teachings of the Perfection of Wisdom (99-107). I say 'nominally' because this is one of the rare instances in the book where the arrangement of materials appears disjointed. Firstly, the section on Madhyamaka includes

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[1] Two other Buddhist arguments for momentariness, those "from the *momentariness of cognition*" and "from *change*," are discussed in the context of Vasubandhu's and Asaṅga's Yogācāra works on 166-167 and 167-168 respectively.

extended discussion of Prajñāpāramitā texts and ideas, while the following section on the Perfection of Wisdom harkens back directly to the discussions of the Abhidharma project and of Mahāyāna illusionism preceding Westerhoff's introduction to Madhyamaka. More substantively, the fact that the section on Madhyamaka precedes that on Prajñāpāramitā may lead to confusion, given that Westerhoff himself understands the Madhyamaka founder Nāgārjuna to be "[t]he first Buddhist philosopher to develop the philosophical position of the Perfection of Wisdom texts in a systematic manner" (105). Indeed, Westerhoff claims no less than that "the Perfection of Wisdom texts are of universal significance for the interpretation of any post-Abhidharma school of Buddhist thought in India" (95). Given all this, disentangling the overlaps between these sections and placing the section on Prajñāpāramitā before that introducing Madhyamaka – in accordance with Westerhoff's own assessment of Prajñāpāramitā as a watershed for all subsequent Indian Buddhist philosophical thought – would perhaps make for smoother transitions between moves in this particular state of the game.

In any case, the chapter continues by outlining the Key Themes of Nāgārjuna's Thought (107-120). This initially focuses on Nāgārjuna's criticism of the Abhidharma and the significant differences between Abhidharma and Madhyamaka ushered in by Nāgārjuna's thoroughgoing rejection of intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*). Despite clearly delineating the distinct positions regarding *svabhāva* characteristic of the Abhidharma and Madhyamaka schools, Westerhoff pauses to note Nāgārjuna's acceptance of certain Abhidharma paradigms, and proposes that "Nāgārjuna's attitude is therefore very far from a wholesale rejection of the teachings of the Abhidharma" (108). Westerhoff goes on to discuss competing Abhidharma and Madhyamaka understandings of *svabhāva*, causation, and conceptualization in some detail, and on the basis of this discussion interestingly suggests that "It seems as if the Abhidharma and Nāgārjuna meant quite different things when they spoke of *svabhāva*" (110). In concluding his survey of the philosophy of Nāgārjuna, Westerhoff treats the topics of illusionism and the charges of ontological and moral nihilism it has entailed, and the (apparent) contradictions embodied in Nāgārjuna's use of the tetralemma (*catuṣkoṭi*). In line with his previous work on this topic,[2] Westerhoff proposes that the contradictions here should be explicated via the doctrine of the two truths so as to turn out "as merely apparent, but not as actual contradictions" (118).

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[2] See for example Westerhoff (2006) and (2009, Chapter 4).

Having assessed the philosophical positions and arguments of Nāgārjuna, Westerhoff next turns his attention to the Commentators (120-138), by which he refers to Buddhapālita, Bhāviveka and Candrakīrti, and the Great Synthesizers: Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla (139-142). Buddhapālita is initially treated but briefly, and chiefly in terms of his commentary on the early Madhyamaka exegetical text known as the *Akutobhayā*. He will crop up repeatedly again, however, as a foil to the positions of his near-contemporary Bhāviveka, whose philosophy is principally engaged with in succeeding pages through his *Prajñāpradīpa*. Westerhoff concentrates on Bhāviveka's innovations to *prasaṅga* methodology through his introduction of the syllogism and distinction between implicative and non-implicative negation. Candrakīrti's criticisms of Bhāviveka's approach follow, in which we find a particularly insightful discussion of the ontological entailments of methodological commitments in philosophical debates, and the emergence of what subsequently came to be known as the Prāsaṅgika-Svātantrika distinction. As for Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla, these key thinkers of later Madhyamaka are introduced primarily in terms of their significance for the transmission of philosophical Madhyamaka from India to Tibet, with especial emphasis on the victory in debate of Kamalaśīla over the Chinese Heshang Moheyan, and the adoption therefore of the 'gradual' over the 'sudden' model of enlightenment in Tibetan Buddhism. The chapter on Madhyamaka concludes with a discussion of its relations to and disagreements with the non-Buddhist school of Nyāya.

Westerhoff's chapter on Yogācāra Buddhist philosophy begins with a chronological outline of what he identifies as the Five Stages of Yogācāra's Development (147-161): the early Yogācāra sūtras such as the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* and *Saṃdhinirmocanasūtra*, the works attributed to Maitreya and Asaṅga, Vasubandhu, and the later Yogācāra of Diṅnāga and Dharmakīrti, both of whom will be dealt with far more extensively in the succeeding chapter. Yogācāra Proofs of Buddhist Doctrines (161-168) follow, the need for which Westerhoff sees as evidence of "a phase of increased debate and argumentative interactions with non-Buddhist schools" (161). Specific attention is given here to three doctrines: rebirth is treated with reference to Dharmakīrti's arguments in the *Pramāṇavārttika* for taking the Buddha as an epistemic authority on the basis of his infinite compassion, and for "the non-material nature of the mental, that is, the establishment of a form of interactionist dualism" (161). The existence of other minds is treated

with reference to Dharmakīrti's inferential argument for other minds in the *Santānāntarasiddhi* and Ratnakīrti's apparent counter-defence of solipsism in the *Santānāntaradūṣaṇa*. Finally, momentariness is treated with reference to the previously mentioned arguments from the momentariness of cognition as per Vasubandhu's *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkārabhāṣya*, and that from change as per Asaṅga's *Śrāvakabhūmi* and Ratnakīrti's *Kṣaṇabhaṅgasiddhi*.

Having surveyed Yogācāra arguments for more broadly Buddhist positions, Westerhoff now turns his attention to specifically Yogācāra concepts: *cittamātra*, *ālayavijñāna* and the eight types of consciousness, *trisvabhāva*, *svasaṃvedana*, the three 'turnings of the wheel of the doctrine' (*dharma-cakra-pravartana*), and *tathāgatagarbha*, with the first three ("the idea that everything is wholly mental (*cittamātra*), the notion of a foundational consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*), and the doctrine of the three natures (*trisvabhāva*)" understood as "constituting the conceptual core of Yogācāra thought" (168). This is the heart of the chapter, and Westerhoff does an admirable job of mustering relevant sources, outlining clearly yet in detail the various Yogācāra positions and arguments in support thereof, and evaluating these on the basis of historical and potential criticisms. More than that, however, Westerhoff seamlessly weaves several pertinent meta-level observations on the study of the history of Yogācāra philosophy into his historical account of that philosophy. Thus, for example, in assessing the non-idealist interpretations of Yogācāra "so popular in contemporary Western discussions of Yogācāra" (177), Westerhoff justifiedly posits that "It would be very peculiar if the fact that contemporary philosophy is not particularly interested in idealism should have any bearing on what we think specific Indian authors wanted to establish when they composed their texts." (178) Such insights regarding the study of Buddhist philosophy as currently practised in the (Western) scholarly community succeed in augmenting the highly informative historical content of the book with theoretical and methodological principles for its historically informed study.

Chief among such principles is the desire to comprehend Buddhist philosophy on its own terms. A particularly clear example of Westerhoff's understanding of and generosity toward the premises and mandates of the Indian Buddhist philosophical traditions under study lies in the manifold references he makes throughout the book to the role meditative practice played in constructing the vast edifice of classical Indian Buddhist philosophy. The importance of meditative practice to the philosophical systems of every major school of Buddhist thought is underlined in

every chapter,[3] but it is perhaps in connection with the aforementioned competing interpretations of Yogācāra as idealist or not that Westerhoff composes his most sustained defence of the philosophical role such embodied practices have held:

> True philosophical insight, the Buddhist philosophers hold, does not come from studying a philosophical treatise, understanding its arguments, refuting objections, and assenting to its conclusions. What is at issue is the transformation of the way the world appears to us in our experience, not just of the way in which we think about the world that appears to us. Once again it has become clear that, in trying to understand Buddhist philosophy in India, we cannot just focus on the arguments and the doctrinal texts containing ideas that the arguments support and develop. We also have to take into account the dimension of meditative practice that such arguments and the views they defend are connected to. Only by being aware of this additional, extra-argumentative factor influencing Buddhist thought can we hope to develop a nuanced understanding of the positions the texts themselves defend. (179)

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[3] In addition to the consideration of meditative practices as one of the "three key factors" (5) underpinning Buddhist philosophy as a whole, and the reiteration of the central importance of such practices in the Concluding Remarks (383), see e.g. 39-41 in relation to Abhidharma, and especially the statement: "The Abhidharma (like all Buddhist thought) should therefore not be conceived simply as argument-driven philosophy, but as a conceptual enterprise that is to be located within the coordinates of the Buddha's teachings, and takes account of the meditative experiences resulting from techniques that are part of this teaching" (41); 102-103 in relation to Prajñāpāramitā and Madhyamaka, and especially the statement "One way of understanding the illusionism of the Perfection of Wisdom texts (as well as other instances where meditative practices appear to be a factor in shaping Buddhist philosophy) is as an ontologizing of meditative phenomenology" (102); 194-199 in relation to Yogācāra, and especially the statement "Without denying that argumentative dynamics or the responses to specific texts were essential for the development of Yogācāra, it will be useful to spend some time discussing the specific interrelation between philosophical development and meditative practice in Yogācāra, as the latter is a factor that is often not sufficiently accounted for when discussing the history of Buddhist philosophy" (194); and 247-250 in relation to the school of Diṅnāga and Dharmakīrti, and especially the discussion of the role and validity of yogic perception there as rationale for "the fact that Buddhist philosophy formed part of a larger enterprise of meditative training that was ultimately intended to lead to liberation from cyclic existence" (238).

I will return to consider Westerhoff's fine balancing of emic and etic exigencies below, but I cite this passage here as an especially lucid exemplar of how philosophically astute exposition of systematic thought built upon presuppositional frameworks alien to those of the exegete's own intellectual culture may transculturally transmit such thought in a manner that simultaneously retains the distinctive features of the source materials and facilitates argumentatively justified engagement with them on the part of audience members unfamiliar with or even antagonistic toward them.

In the subsequent, and final, three sections of the chapter on Yogācāra, Westerhoff traces the Factors That Shaped Yogācāra Philosophy (193-199), the relations between Yogācāra and Other Schools of Buddhist Philosophy (200-212), and the relations between Yogācāra and Vedānta (212-216). I have just mentioned Westerhoff's insistence on the importance of meditative factors in the construction of and justifications of Yogācāra (and more broadly Buddhist) philosophical thought. In addition to these, Westerhoff discusses argumentative and textual factors. His exposition of intra-Buddhist relations centres on Yogācāra and Madhyamaka, and draws upon thinkers as remote from one another in spatio-temporal location and/or intellectual orientation as Bhāviveka, Śāntarakṣita, Ratnākaraśanti, and Kamalaśīla to delineate both some of the well-charted differences in philosophical outlook between these 'rival' schools and some of the intriguing overlaps between them as Buddhist 'allies'.[4] It is fitting, therefore, that the chapter should conclude with discussion of Vedānta: a school of thought unambiguously rival to Yogācāra despite their sharing "a certain surface familiarity… as forms of idealism" (212). Westerhoff here concentrates on the criticisms of Yogācāra's mind-only idealism and doctrine of momentariness on the part of canonical Vedāntins such as Śaṅkara and Madhva.

The fourth and final chapter of the book deals with the school of Diṅnāga and Dharmakīrti often referred to as "logico-epistemological" (250). Within the opening section introducing the lives and major texts of Diṅnāga and Dharmakīrti, Westerhoff helps make sense of the focus on logic and epistemology characteristic of their output by suggesting that this may be attributable to the increased importance of debate with non-Buddhist philosophers during their time, and thus to the increased need for the formulation of modes of argument

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[4] In referring to Yogācāra and Madhyamaka as both 'rivals' and 'allies', I am drawing on the analyses included within the book on *Yogācāra and Madhyamaka: Allies or Rivals?* co-edited by Westerhoff and Jay Garfield (Garfield & Westerhoff 2015)

(logic) and sources of knowledge (epistemology) acceptable to philosophers across systems of thought highly divergent in terms of propositional content and authoritative lineages.

The bulk of the remainder of the chapter is devoted to discussion of this school's contributions to Epistemology (220-225), Inference (225-231), Metaphysics (231-235), Language (235-238), and Scriptural Authority and Yogic perception (238-250). The discussion of epistemology focuses on the role of perception in founding epistemic certainty, and includes an intriguing resolution of the problem of how perception, on Diṅnāga's or Dharmakīrti's account, can access the impartite non-conceptual by suggesting that "the school's final view" as to the objects of perception is not external realist but "an idealistic ontology on Yogācāra lines" (222). The second accepted epistemic instrument, inference, is then discussed, chiefly in terms of Diṅnāga's formulation of the 'triple mark' (*trairūpya*) as characterizing acceptable instances of inferential knowledge. Discussion of specifically metaphysical issues focuses on "Dharmakīrti's identification of the real, the causally efficacious, and the momentary" (233), and Westerhoff neatly segues here from the school's argued rejection of permanent entities in general to their rejection of a soul, a creator god, and caste. As is to be expected, the discussion of Diṅnāga's and Dharmakīrti's philosophy of language revolves around the *apoha* or exclusion theory, which Westerhoff treats in relation to the two kinds of negation (implicative/ *paryudāsa-pratiṣedha* and non-implicative/*prasajya-pratiṣedha*), causation and its relation to desire, and conceptualization. Finally, the section on scriptural authority and yogic perception deals with this school's arguments for, and the problems with, treating the Buddha and Buddhist texts as well as acts of perception occurring within or based upon meditative practice as epistemically authoritative. Westerhoff here usefully supplements his discussion of Diṅnāga and Dharmakīrti with reference to both earlier and later work on related topics by Āryadeva, Vasubandhu, Karṇakagomin, Śākyabuddhi, and Jinendrabuddhi.

Having thus critically surveyed the principal philosophical positions of the school, Westerhoff broaches the topic of How to Classify Diṅnāga's and Dharmakīrti's Philosophy (250-259). The question of classification of source material is a valid and necessary one in any history of philosophy, but Westerhoff makes the point that it is all the more so in the case of the material at hand here, on the basis that:

> the division of Indian Buddhist philosophy into schools is at best to
> be understood as a hermeneutic device that allows us to dig some
> conceptual trenches through a complex field of arguments, and
> not as a system of doctrinal allegiance the Indian thinkers would
> themselves have adhered to in any straightforward manner. (250)

Thus, in addition to investigating the meaningful overlaps between Diṅnāga and Dharmakīrti on the one hand and their Abhidharma, Madhyamaka, and Yogācāra Buddhist brethren on the other, Westerhoff draws on the notion of the "sliding scales of analysis" first introduced by Sara McClintock to grade Buddhist teachings (and specifically here those of Dharmakīrti) in levels of sophistication which differ in accordance with the target audience. "The key idea is that for Buddhist philosophers theories can (and frequently do) diverge in terms of philosophical accuracy and soteriological efficacy" (252).

Westerhoff next devotes a section to the school of Diṅnāga and Dharmakīrti and its relation to Mīmāṃsā (259-270). Although non-Buddhist interlocutors have already appeared at many occasions throughout the book (most prominently in the sections on Madhyamaka and Nyāya and Yogācāra and Vedānta noted above), this is the single most sustained treatment of Buddhist/non-Buddhist philosophical interaction and cross-pollination. Regardless of one's views as to the historicity of purported debates between luminaries such as Dharmakīrti and Kumārila, the fact remains that the extant texts of not only Dharmakīrti but also Diṅnāga and Śāntarakṣita on the Buddhist side and Kumārila on the Mīmāṃsā attest explicit engagement with one another, not least on account of the fact that, as Westerhoff puts it, the approaches of these two schools are located "at two different ends of the philosophical spectrum" (267). Westerhoff ably surveys the centuries' long arguments in terms of epistemology, philosophy of language, and historiography, which latter topic allows him to generalize more broadly regarding the relationships between the vastly divergent philosophical positions of these schools and the intellectual and social backgrounds and implications thereof.

Having thus reached the end of his survey of Indian Buddhist philosophy in its 'golden age', Westerhoff devotes one final section to The End of Buddhist Philosophy in India (270-281). Here we find a sketch of Buddhist philosophy in India during the five centuries following the death of Dharmakīrti until the destruction of the great monastic universities of Nālandā and Vikramaśilā in around 1200. Contra Tāranātha's dour evaluation of this period, Westerhoff

maintains that these final centuries produced much philosophically sophisticated work, though he acknowledges that no new major school of Buddhist philosophy in India was to emerge during this period. Since the thought of latter-day philosophers such as Śāntarakṣita, Kamaśila, Ratākaraśanti, and Ratnakīrti has already been treated at relevant points earlier in the book, Westerhoff's account limits itself here to Śāntideva and Atiśa Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna. Śāntideva is primarily introduced through his *Bodhicaryāvatāra* and its relation to Nālandā, while Atiśa's tale is principally told through the importance for the subsequent history of Buddhist philosophy of his long sojourn in Suvarṇadvīpa (current Sumatra and Java), leadership role at Vikramaśilā, and voyage to Tibet, where he was instrumental in what came to be known as the "later dissemination" (278) of the *dharma* there.

The book concludes with some reflections on the history and the study of Buddhist philosophy in India. Westerhoff sets forth "three main conclusions about the Buddhist philosophical enterprise" (282). First, he advocates "a 'germination' model according to which a variety of conceptual seeds was present in Buddhism's earliest teachings, arguing that the different philosophical systems of Buddhist philosophy then arose from a selective emphasis on some of these seeds over others" (282).[5] Second, and as related above, Westerhoff reiterates the importance of taking into consideration meditative practices he considers ineliminable for full comprehension of Buddhist philosophy, and therefore constitutive of an important point of difference between the Buddhist and Western philosophical enterprises broadly construed. It is important to distinguish here between the self-perception of these over-arching traditions – that is, their avowed mandates – from the ways in which they have actually been practiced. For although we may agree that Western philosophy, though not Buddhist philosophy, has conceived of itself "as primarily providing answers to puzzles about specific fundamental features of reality, an exercise of reason for its own sake, independent of the authority of specific texts or traditions" (283), this is far indeed from actually having been implemented

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[5] See also in this light Westerhoff's statement when introducing the Abhidharma schools that:

> the development of Buddhist philosophy is not characterized by single-handed innovations of autonomous thinkers, but by gradual shifts in emphasis on particular concepts, shifts which, in the fullness of time, can lead to very distinct philosophical positions, but which proceed by never losing sight of anchoring their innovations in the continuity of the Buddhist tradition, thereby attempting to underline their authoritativeness as the genuine word of the Buddha. (49)

when we look at the history of Western philosophy, saturated as it has been with unargued presuppositions, unquestioned assumptions, and uncontested authorities. Nevertheless, the point Westerhoff is making here (as I understand him) concerns not the actual practices but the avowed mandates of the Western and Buddhist philosophical projects, and he is justified in noting this definitive discrepancy. Thirdly and finally, Westerhoff stresses the importance of not merely describing but of "*doing philosophy* with ancient texts" (284) such as the Buddhist ones which occupy the entire monograph. Indeed, Westerhoff makes a persuasive case for the necessity of "thinking through a philosophical question against the horizon of the given ancient text or tradition" (284) in the Indian Buddhist case in particular given the relatively incomplete nature of the positions and arguments preserved in the extant literature. Indeed, his book constitutes a robust embodiment of this principle, as for example in its overall refusal to merely rehearse the positions and the arguments of a given Buddhist philosopher in favour of additionally adducing potential problems with or criticisms of those positions and arguments as well as constructing potential philosophically cogent responses to them coherent with the view being discussed.

Several overall features of *The Golden Age of Indian Buddhist Philosophy* stand out as particularly worthy of emphasis. Given the point raised just now about the differing ends of the Buddhist and Western philosophical enterprises, it merits mentioning that Westerhoff's detailed knowledge of the major issues animating contemporary Western philosophy enables him to regularly point out relevant correspondences between contemporary Western and classical Indian conceptions of a given topic, or to describe the Buddhist position under discussion in terms current in contemporary philosophical discourse. Thus, among many possible examples, he summarizes Diṅnāga's Yogācāra position as to internal representations as causes of perception as "a transcendental argument for idealism" (161) – a use of Kantian terminology apt at conveying the purport of the Yogācāra position in a manner recognizable to students and scholars of Western thought. Of course, Westerhoff also occasionally draws directly on figures familiar from the history of Western philosophy to differentiate between Western and Buddhist positions, as for example when he states forthrightly a little later that, although Yogācāra may well be interpreted as a form of idealism, nevertheless "Yogācāra certainly shows little more than superficial similarity with an idealism of the type Berkeley defended, and has even less in common with idealism of the Hegelian variety" (176).

Relatedly, Westerhoff is careful at numerous points throughout the book to distinguish the presuppositions taken for granted by contemporary Western philosophy from those of the Indian philosophical traditions he is concerned to explicate. Thus, for example, in discussing the historicity of Maitreya and the authorship of works traditionally attributed to him, Westerhoff makes the impeccable point that "It is only if we assume that bodhisattvas without physical bodies cannot author texts that we might feel ourselves pushed to the theory that Asaṅga composed all these texts under a pseudonym" (154). In bracketing frameworks and criteria alien to Indian Buddhist philosophers in such a manner, Westerhoff evinces a careful attunement to the requirements of emic exposition. This is all the more laudable given that the Buddhist philosophical traditions of India routinely accepted as factual or plausible phenomena or explanations considered neither by the typical philosopher of today. In accepting the traditional accounts at face value, and moreover in forging interpretations of their positions that cogently demonstrate the philosophical insights they manifest, Westerhoff succeeds in conveying a philosophical system (or inter-related series of systems) far removed geographically and temporally from our own both in terms common between it and contemporary philosophy (and therefore recognizable to the latter, even acceptable by the latter as philosophy 'proper') and also in terms foreign to contemporary philosophy (and therefore unrecognizable to the latter, even warranting the latter to dismiss Indian Buddhist 'philosophy' as not philosophy at all) but philosophically justifiable and productive in the Buddhist tradition.

Westerhoff's efforts to work across commonly accepted disciplinary and doxographic demarcations finds further elaboration in his linking of concepts typically interpreted as characteristic of a particular school of Buddhist philosophy with their conceptual antecedents and descendants in other schools. Thus, for example, despite the fact that "Abhidharma and Yogācāra could be seen as fundamentally contradictory enterprises" (200), Westerhoff nevertheless charts several underappreciated rapports between Yogācāra ideas such as mind-only (*cittamātra*, *vijñāptimātratā*) and foundational consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) and respective Abhidharma precursors such as the Sautrāntika's notions of representational form (*ākāra*) and karmic potentialities or seeds (*anudhātu*, *bīja*) (200-202). In so doing, Westerhoff both nuances our understanding of the historical interplays among Buddhist philosophers working in distinct periods, and softens the sectarian borders between what thus emerge more as complementary emphases within the overall Buddhist fold than as

rival, mutually distinct schools, in this case even across the conventional divide between 'Hīnayāna' and 'Mahāyāna'.[6]

It is customary for reviewers to express some gripes with the work they are reviewing. Although some of my own published and forthcoming work engages rather critically with Westerhoff's treatments of and approaches to Madhyamaka philosophy in particular,[7] I found this history of *The Golden Age of Indian Buddhist Philosophy* to be quite simply a faultless exemplar of its genre. Could it have been expanded? Of course, almost infinitely. Does it skim over some seriously deep waters of complex debate? Of course, by necessity. But Westerhoff is well aware of these shortcomings (e.g. 9-11, 282), if they are to be considered such, and in fact manages throughout to simultaneously do justice to much of the rich detail of argument and response characteristic of the various traditions he considers while never losing sight of the shared assumptions and goals informing the enterprise of Indian Buddhist philosophy as a whole. Perhaps the sole source of dissatisfaction in reading the book lies in its copy-editing, which leaves much to be desired.[8] Nevertheless, this is a small price to pay for a gem of a book, one which I am certain will become a favoured reference source for many established specialists of Buddhist philosophy, fascinate coming generations of students engaged in the task of comprehending Buddhist philosophical ideas in their complex internal and inter-related historical trajectories, and introduce the history of Buddhist philosophy to countless general readers eager to expand their horizons.

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[6] See also in this connection Westerhoff's mention of the fact that "Doxographers sometimes classify these thinkers [here Diṅnāga and Dharmakīrti] by the curious epithet 'Yogācāra-Sautrāntika'" (250).

[7] See Stepien (2018), (2019), and (forthcoming).

[8] I counted over seventy editorial errors of various kinds in the book without even particularly looking for them, and without cross-checking most of the transliterated textual citations, so I can only hope that Oxford University Press can rectify these when the time comes to issue a second edition.

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Janice Stargardt & Michael Willis (eds), *Relics and Relic Worship*
in Early Buddhism: India, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Burma.
2018, 123 pp., £35, The British Museum, London.

Reviewed by Wannaporn Rienjang

This handsome volume takes a holistic approach to the study of Buddhist relics.
It brings together seven experts from different fields -- literature and epigraphy,
numismatics, art history, material culture studies and archaeology -- to explore how
Buddhist relics were perceived and venerated during the period between the turn
of the Common Era and about the seventh century AD. As Janice Stargardt says
in her introduction, Peter Skilling sets out the theme of the book by highlighting
the centrality of relics in Buddhist rituals and ideology. In so doing, he presents
textual, epigraphic, architectural and sculptural examples from early to later
periods to show how Buddha relics have been treated as the Buddha himself and
how they travelled with his teachings. Skilling also emphasizes the role of relics in
the historiography of Buddhism in South Asia. He warns that relics should not be
studied as mere 'material culture', a contention which resonates with the contents
of this volume as well as the study of relics in recent decades.

The literary context of relics is specially explored by Lance Cousins**,** who
passed away before the book saw its publication. Cousins uses his expertise
in Pali literature to discuss the etymology of the words *cetiya* and *thūpa* as
recorded in canonical and paracanonical Pali texts. While advocating the
antiquity of Buddhist Pali texts, Cousins suggests that only in later Pali texts
do the meanings of *cetiya* and *thūpa* conform to the Buddhist use: they then do
not simply mean mound or heap, as they did earlier, but also the places where
the worship of relics took place. Such worship involves fragrant items such
as flowers, incense, and sumptuous objects associated with royalty, such as
parasols and banners, so that Cousins draws a parallel between the treatment of
the Buddha relics and the bodily remains of the *cakkavattin*.

The significance of relics in literary sources is further explored by Michael Willis, who discusses statements from inscriptions and passages from the *Milindapañho*, *Niddesa* and *Petavatthu.* In citing these texts, Willis explores how offerings to the Buddha, dharma and sangha are perceived. He draws attention to the term *deyyadhamma*, which refers to items that 'should be given' and argues that there is an equivalence in offering *deyyadhamma* to relics of the Buddha, to monks and to Buddha images.

While epigraphic and literary contexts are still retained, the next four chapters of the book also embrace art history and archaeology. Karel van Kooii relates relics to the Indic term *darśana,* and translates the latter as revealing or manifesting itself. In connection to this, van Kooij considers the practice of displaying relics in antiquity and argues that relics, as opposed to foundation or consecration deposits, were meant to be seen and became entwined with Buddha images. Sculptural panels depicting relics in procession and architectural remains in Sri Lanka are brought in to support this argument.

Numismatic evidence is added into the holistic study of Buddhist relics by Elizabeth Errington and Joe Cribb**.** Using one of the richest remaining collections of Buddhist relic materials in the world, the Masson Collection at the British Museum, Errington takes us to see how coins found with relic deposits can inform the chronology of the relic cult in eastern Afghanistan. She presents a picture of relic practice during the first and second centuries AD, in relation to funerary practices whose contemporaneity with the relics is uncertain largely due to the lack of associated coins. She also draws attention to similarities between objects found in these relic deposits and those found in the first century necropolis of Tillya Tepe in northern Afghanistan. One of the objects discussed is the famous Bimaran gold reliquary. Errington argues that, with the depiction of the Buddha that it bears, the reliquary could have served as an *uddesika dhātu* (representational relic), and was originally made to be seen, probably on a display, thus posing the question of its previous life prior to being interred in the stupa.

The context of the Bimaran gold casket is discussed in greater detail in the following chapter by Joe Cribb. Cribb's long and detailed study of coins found in greater Gandhara enables him to establish that the four copper coins found with the Bimaran deposit belong to issues of the late first century satrap who ruled in the Jalalabad area. His holistic and thorough discussion of the Bimaran reliquary in archaeological, art historical, epigraphic and numismatic contexts convincingly suggests that the Bimaran reliquary was probably made before,

at the same time, or soon after the issuing of Buddha coins by Kanishka I, thus dating its production round AD150. This proposition, as argued by Cribb, implies that by the mid second century AD, the prototype of the standing Buddha depicted on the Bimaran reliquary already existed.

Janice Stargardt closes the volume with her chapter illustrating one of the earliest examples of Buddhist relic worship in Burma. She examines the rich relic deposit of the fifth to sixth centuries AD at the ancient Pyu city of Sri Ksetra. Two objects from this deposit are presented: a golden manuscript of 20 leaves of canonical Pali and a large silver reliquary bearing a depiction of seated Buddhas. Stargardt's thorough examination of these objects using art-historical, epigraphic and archaeological methods illustrates the process of reception of Buddhism in Burma, thereby suggesting the Pyus' selective borrowing of iconography and texts from Andhra in India.

The volume overall succeeds in presenting a wide range of evidence to show how Buddhist relics were perceived and used in South Asia and adjacent lands in early times. While materials from the literary and epigraphic world discussed in this volume belong largely to the Pali tradition, this constraint is complemented by a wide range of art-historical and archaeological materials. Although the volume does not address important areas such as the Swat valley in Pakistan, where relic worship in early Buddhism is attested by their rich archaeological remains, the chapters included in the volume address key issues and present methodologies that can be taken forwards in the study of Buddhist relics in countries beyond South Asia, such as China, Tibet, Japan and Thailand, where relic worship has played an important part in Buddhist rituals until the present time.