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Correction

Translating Translation: An Encounter with the Ninth-Century Tibetan
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Apology

Because of some last minute changes, the article by Peter Alan Roberts in Volume 2, “Translating Translation”, was published with some serious mistakes in the text and without its footnotes. We apologise to readers for this mishap, and are printing the correct version at the end of this issue.

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Editorial

Richard Gombrich

Some time before he became Master of Balliol, Andrew Graham, then a tutor in economics at that Oxford college, gave the customary report required of a Fellow on return from sabbatical leave. "Sometimes," he wrote, "the problem is not so much to extend the frontiers of knowledge as to try to keep them in the same place." Sadly, I find this remark applicable to Buddhist studies. I surmise that it does not often happen in these days of rapid and pervasive global communication that someone in a large field such as, say, chemistry, engineering or modern European history publishes an academic article which is based on facts which have been shown twenty years ago to be incorrect, or fails to mention an equally established discovery which alters the entire complexion of the topic under discussion. Though the number of scholars in Buddhist studies is tiny compared with those in such major fields, the same cannot be claimed for us.

Could this be because, rather than although, we are so few? The Buddhistologist tends to be alone in her university, with no colleague whom she can regularly meet to discuss her (and their) work, let alone ask to check a draft article for errors, whether of omission or commission. Despite the internet and the increasing number of works of reference, perhaps the very flood of information now available makes it almost essential to have the filter of another brain on hand, to discover what it is relevant for us to know.

Be that as it may, I am impelled to these speculations by a book which I review elsewhere in this issue. My review explains that on the whole I think well of the book and recommend it; but there are a few defects in it which I suggest deserve comment in a wider context. So here I shall mention two of them.

I have explained in my editorial in volume 1 how I deplore certain trends in the current study of Buddhism, and consider that postmodernist deconstruction

perniciously militates against progress in historical knowledge and understanding. In my review below I mention a couple of startling post-modernist claims in the book. After stating, I think correctly, that “there was no institutionally organized religion known as ‘Hinduism’ until the British gained control over [India]”, the author goes on, “‘Buddhism’ was constructed similarly...” But in all times and places, so far as I know, both Buddhists and their neighbours have had a clear conception of Buddhism. In the Pali/Theravāda tradition, Buddhism as a historical phenomenon, institutionally organized, is known as the *Sāsana* (*Śāsana* in Sanskrit). There is also another term, no less clear-cut in meaning, which translates “Buddhism” in another sense: *Dhamma* (*Dharma* in Sanskrit) is what the Buddha taught. The *Dharma*, being a set of propositions and injunctions, is eternal, and is rediscovered by each Buddha when it has been completely forgotten in this world.

Nowadays it is usually said that the Buddha prophesied that his *Sāsana* would last for 500 years (a figure subsequently revised to 5,000); not only that, but the tradition goes into detail about what will constitute that disappearance. In fact the canonical text (which I discuss again below) uses the word *sad-dhamma* (“true teaching”) when he makes this prophesy; I think the word is here referring to the texts in which the teaching is conveyed, which the tradition claims will disappear from the world in a precise order, ending with the monastic disciplinary code, the *Pātimokkha* (see below).

There are other Indian terms for “Buddhist” in various contexts; for instance, brahminical Sanskrit texts use *Bauddha*, as in *Bauddha mata*, “Buddhist views”.

This has nothing to do with the fact that people who consider themselves Buddhists, and may indeed have declared themselves to “take refuge” (ultimately rely on) the “three jewels” – the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Saṅgha – may also have other beliefs and practices which cannot be identified as part of the Buddhist tradition. This has confused monotheist observers, who think in terms of “Thou shalt have no other God but me”. But a Buddhist does not stop being a Buddhist by making an offering to a god in a Hindu temple, or even by offering up a Christian prayer, any more than a cricket lover, even a professional cricketer, loses that identity by playing a game of football.

Nor is defining Buddhism the same as defining Buddhist identity. Institutions are indeed crucial to such a discussion. The third jewel of Buddhism is the Saṅgha, the community of monks and nuns, and a higher standard of orthopraxy is expected of them than of other (“lay”) Buddhists. This again is rather alien to the

monotheistic religions, and has had a great effect in shaping modern Buddhism and how it is understood (“constructed”). But it is a grave mistake to think that the outlines of Buddhism have always been as contestable as they have become today.

The other point to which I wish to draw attention concerns a discovery which should affect our whole view of the Buddha’s attitude to women, and also, I believe, our view of whether it is feasible to re-institute the full ordination of women in the Theravāda tradition. I refer to an article published by Ute Hüsken in 1993, and republished in an English translation from the German in 2000. (Full references are given in the review below.) In what Hüsken rightly calls the “legend” purveyed in the Pāli *Vinaya* of how the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha was founded, the Buddha is only persuaded with great difficulty to permit the ordination of women. When he finally does so, he makes it a condition that at ordination each woman take a vow to observe for the rest of her life eight rules, which are given the new technical term *garudhamma*.

What Hüsken has done, in a nutshell, is to prove that this cannot be a true account, because there is much in those rules which presupposes that there were women in the Saṅgha already!

To summarise: the rules include a term for a female novice, *sikkhamānā* (literally “female trainee”), which is not explained and could not be understood unless such people already existed. Moreover, several of the *garudhamma* rules are the same or almost the same as rules which figure in the general catalogue of offenses a nun must not commit, the *Bhikkhunī Pātimokkha*. This is the counterpart to the catalogue of offenses not to be committed by male monks, the *Bhikkhu Pātimokkha*, which is the very backbone of the *Vinaya*. But in the *Bhikkhunī Pātimokkha* these rules are *pācittiya* rules, a technical term which means that the only penalty for breaking them is confession, whereas breaking a *garudhamma* carries a more severe penalty.

Obviously the very same offense cannot carry two different penalties, so the mere inconsistency tells heavily against the story. In fact, however, for there to be a monk there has to be a code of rules for him to observe, and the same must go for women, so the *Bhikkhunī Pātimokkha* must be the older text; and it would not exist if there were no one to whom it applied.

Here let me insert two points of my own which further support Hüsken’s conclusion. She translates *garudhamma* “important rule” (though she wrote in German, this is what the German words she used mean), and this is how the term

has traditionally been understood. However, while *garu* has several meanings, the one I find most relevant here is that a *garu* is someone who must be respected and obeyed. So I think *garudhamma* means “rule of hierarchy”. When we look at their content, that is exactly what these rules are: they lay down how under all circumstances a nun is hierarchically inferior to a monk and even the most senior nun must obey and give precedence to the most junior monk.

Secondly, just after laying down the eight *garudhamma* the Buddha says that if women had not been allowed to ordain, his teaching would have lasted a thousand years, but now it will only last five hundred years. Since this has been falsified, the tradition has not been slow to accept that this piece of text is an inept interpolation. Though Hüsken’s argument is strong enough to stand on its own, this surely makes it even more obvious that the eight *garudhamma* too are a misogynistic interpolation, probably dating from around the time of the Second Council, when that part of the *Vinaya* seems to have been compiled.

In fact, the whole story surrounding the Buddha’s grudging acceptance of women into the Saṅgha becomes extremely suspect – a “legend”, as Hüsken says. After all, we know that there were already Jain nuns in that part of India at that time. Those who now base upon any part of this account their refusal to reinstitute the ordination of women, at a time when according to the same account Buddhism should no longer even exist, are being flagrantly illogical and shamefully biased.

The Chinese Parallels to the *Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta* (1)*

Anālayo

In what follows I translate and study the Chinese canonical parallels to the *Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta*, the discourse that according to tradition was given by the Buddha to his first five disciples soon after his awakening, with the result that one of them attained stream-entry, whereby the “wheel of Dharma” was set in motion.

Introduction

With the present paper I continue exploring the theme of the Buddha’s preaching activities, broached in the two previous issues of the present journal. While in the earlier papers I studied the motif of Brahmā inviting the Buddha to start teaching, and the Buddha’s sojourn in the Heaven of the Thirty-three to teach his mother and the assembled *devas*,¹ in what follows I take up the discourse that tradition considers the starting point of the Buddha’s teaching career. In the Pāli tradition this discourse is known as the *Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta*, found in the *Samyutta-nikāya* and again in the Theravāda *Vinaya*.²

In addition to these two, a somewhat unexpected third Theravāda version exists in the form of a Tibetan translation undertaken in the early fourteenth century

* I am indebted to Rod Bucknell, Jin-il Chung, Shi Kongmu and Giuliana Martini for comments on a draft of this paper.

¹ Anālayo 2011a and 2012c.

² SN 56.11 at SN V 420,22 to 424,11, which in the E^c edition has the title *tathāgatena vuttaṃ* 1 (a title then used again for the next discourse, differentiated as 2), whereas B^c and C^c give the title as *Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta*. SN 56.11 has been translated by Bodhi 2000: 1843–1847. The corresponding *Vinaya* section can be found in the *Mahāvagga*, Vin I 10,10 to 12,18, which has been translated by Horner 1951/1982: 15–18; cf. also Paṭiś II 147,1 to 149,37.

in collaboration with the Sri Lankan monk Ānandaśrī, based on what appears to have been a Pāli original that is no longer extant.³

The “Discourse on Turning the Wheel of Dharma” has a broad range of parallel versions handed down in other Buddhist traditions and preserved in various languages either as discourses or in different *Vinayas*. In view of the importance of the first teaching delivered by the Buddha, a central purpose of my present paper is to present English translations of the canonical versions of this discourse preserved in Chinese, in order to make these more easily accessible to the general reader. I begin by briefly surveying the extant versions, grouped under headings that single out those Chinese versions that will be translated in the course of my study.⁴ The first four texts listed below, stemming from the *Mūlasarvāstivāda* and *Sarvāstivāda* traditions, are translated in this paper; the remainder will be translated and studied in a subsequent paper.

1) *Samyukta-āgama* Discourse

A parallel to the *Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta* has been preserved in the Chinese translation of the *Samyukta-āgama* found in the Taishō edition as entry no.

³This is the *chos kyi 'khor lo rab tu bskor ba'i mdo*, D 31 ka 180b1 to 183a7 or Q 747 tsi 183b4 to 187a2, discussed in Skilling 1993: 103-106. A rendering of this discourse into Sanskrit can be found in Sastri 1938: 484-487, with comparative notes pp. 487-489; for a translation into French cf. Feer 1870: 363-380.

⁴I do not take into account the individual Chinese translation T 109, a discourse that begins by indicating that the Buddha was in the company of a thousand monks, T II 503b6, all of whom at the conclusion of the discourse become arahants, T II 503c14. Besides these indications that do not square well with the standard setting and conclusion of the Discourse on Turning the Wheel of Dharma, T 109 shows clear signs of lateness, as already pointed out by Dessein 2007: 20f. Thus the discourse begins by describing an actual wheel appearing spontaneously in the air in front of the Buddha, which he then orders to stop turning before he begins to deliver his talk, T II 503b7. Thus T 109 does not seem to belong to the canonical versions of the Buddha's first discourse to his five former companions, although it may well be based on elements from a version of this discourse. T 109 has been translated into English by Sastri 1938: 489-492. The motif of an actual wheel is also found in the *Lalitavistara*, Lefman 1902: 415,10, where this wheel appears when the Buddha is about to deliver his first discourse.

99.⁵ This *Samyukta-āgama* probably stems from a Mūlasarvāstivāda line of transmission.⁶

From the same Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition, discourse versions are also extant as individual translations in Chinese and in Tibetan.⁷

Another discourse version is part of the *Catuṣpariṣat-sūtra* preserved in Sanskrit fragments.⁸ The *Catuṣpariṣat-sūtra* relates the history of the coming into existence of the four assemblies of Buddhist disciples (monastic and lay, male and female).

Mūlasarvāstivāda versions of the Buddha's teaching to his first five disciples can also be found as discourse quotations in the *Abhidharmakośavyākhyā*, preserved in Sanskrit,⁹ and in Śamathadeva's compendium of discourse quotations from the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, extant in Tibetan.¹⁰

2) Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*

The Buddha's first teaching is recorded in the *Sanḅhabhedavastu* of the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* as part of a biographical narration of events after the Buddha had attained awakening. The relevant section has been preserved in Sanskrit, Chinese and Tibetan.¹¹ This is not the only version of the Discourse on Turning the Wheel of the Dharma in the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, as two short versions are extant in

⁵SĀ 379 at T II 103c13 to 104c29. For a survey of Sanskrit fragment parallels to SĀ 379 cf. Chung 2008: 122f.

⁶On the school affiliation of the *Samyukta-āgama* cf., e.g., Lü 1963: 242, Waldschmidt 1980: 136, Mayeda 1985: 99, Enomoto 1986: 23, Schmithausen 1987: 306, Choong 2000: 6 note 18, Hiraoka 2000, Harrison 2002: 1, Oberlies 2003: 64, Bucknell 2006: 685 and Glass 2010.

⁷T 110 at T II 504a4 to 504b21, which has been translated into English by Sastri 1938: 479f; and D 337 *sa* 275a6 to 277a4 or Q 1003 *shu* 283b1 to 285a7, entitled *chos kyi 'khor lo'i mdo*; for the text cf. Chung 2006: 86–99, who juxtaposes the Tibetan discourse with SĀ 379, relevant Sanskrit parallels and T 110. A rendering into Sanskrit of the Tibetan discourse can be found in Sastri 1938: 476–478; for a translation into French cf. Feer 1870: 363–380.

⁸The relevant Sanskrit fragments have been edited by Waldschmidt 1957: 140–162 (§§11.14 to 14.12); for a translation into English cf. Kloppenborg 1973: 23–29; cf. also the study by Waldschmidt 1951/1967: 177–180.

⁹Wogihara 1971: 579,19 to 580,22.

¹⁰D 4094 *nyu* 28a7 to 29b6 or Q 5595 *thu* 64a8 to 66a2.

¹¹Gnoli 1977: 135,1 to 137,17, the corresponding part of the Tibetan version is D 1 *nga* 42a5 to 44b6 or Q *ce* 39b8 to 42a7, edited by Waldschmidt 1957: 141–163, and the corresponding Chinese version is T 1450 at T XXIV 127b24 to 128b15, translated into German by Waldschmidt 1957: 141–163.

the *Kṣudrakavastu*,¹² the second of which occurs as part of the account of the first communal recitation or ‘council’ (*saṅgīti*) that according to tradition took place after the Buddha’s demise.¹³ Both of these two versions have been preserved in Chinese and Tibetan translation.

3) *Madhyama-āgama* Discourse

The *Madhyama-āgama* preserved in Chinese translation, generally considered to be a collection transmitted within the Sarvāstivāda tradition,¹⁴ has the beginning part of a version of the Discourse on Turning the Wheel of Dharma in its parallel to the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta*.¹⁵

A quotation of the discourse with which the Buddha set in motion the wheel of Dharma is also extant in the *Dharmaskandha*, a canonical work of the Sarvāstivāda *Abhidharma*. The relevant section is preserved in Chinese translation.¹⁶

4) Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*

A version of the Buddha’s first discourse is also found in the Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*,¹⁷ extant in Chinese, where it occurs in the context of the account of the first communal recitation, *saṅgīti*.

5) *Ekottarika-āgama* Discourse

The *Ekottarika-āgama* preserved in Chinese translation has two versions of the Discourse on Turning the Wheel of Dharma. The first of these two versions occurs as a discourse on its own among the Twos of the *Ekottarika-āgama*.¹⁸ The second *Ekottarika-āgama* version is part of a longer discourse that reports the

¹²T 1451 at T XXIV 292a29 to 292c15, its Tibetan parallel being D 6 *tha* 247b3 to 249a2 or Q 1035 *de* 233b6 to 235b3.

¹³T 1451 at T XXIV 407a6 to 407a17, its Tibetan parallel being D 6 *da* 311a7 and 312a6 to b7 or Q 1035 *ne* 294b1 and 295a7 to b7.

¹⁴On the school affiliation of the *Madhyama-āgama* cf., e.g., Lü 1963: 242, Waldschmidt 1980: 136, Enomoto 1984, Mayeda 1985: 98, Enomoto 1986: 21, Minh Chau 1964/1991: 27 and Oberlies 2003: 48, with a recent contribution in Chung 2011: 13–34 and a reply in Anālayo 2012b: 516–521.

¹⁵MĀ 204 at T I 777c26 to 778a2, translated by Bareau 1963: 173 and Minh Chau 1991: 159.

¹⁶T 1537 at T XXVI 479b25 to 480a15.

¹⁷T 1435 at T XXIII 448b13 to 449a7, translated by Anuruddha 2008: 47–49.

¹⁸EĀ 19.2 at T II 593b24 to 593c10.

events after the Buddha's awakening, found among the Threes of the same collection.¹⁹ While the *Ekottarika-āgama* collection is at present best reckoned as being of uncertain affiliation, an association with the Mahāsāṅghika tradition is the most often voiced hypothesis.²⁰

A version of the present discourse that can with certainty be attributed to this tradition, in particular to the Lokottaravāda-Mahāsāṅghika tradition, can be found in the *Mahāvastu* preserved in Sanskrit.²¹

6) Mahīśāsaka *Vinaya*

The Mahīśāsaka *Vinaya*, preserved in Chinese translation, has its version of the Discourse on Turning the Wheel of Dharma as part of a biography of the Buddha.²²

7) Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya*

Similar to the Mahīśāsaka *Vinaya*, the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya* also has a version of the present discourse embedded in its biography of the Buddha, extant in Chinese.²³

In addition to the above listed canonical parallels, versions of what according to tradition was the Buddha's first discourse can also be found in the *Lalitavistara*,²⁴ the *Buddhacarita*,²⁵ the **Abhiniṣkramaṇa-sūtra*,²⁶ and in several biogra-

¹⁹EĀ 24.5 at T II 619a8 to 619b19; for a translation of the relevant section of EĀ 24.5 into French cf. Bareau 1988: 81f.

²⁰Cf. the survey of opinions on this topic held by Japanese scholars cf. Mayeda 1985: 102f and recent contributions by Pāsādika 2010 and Kuan 2012. My inclusion of the EĀ version at this juncture is simply a matter of convenience of presentation and does not imply any certainty about the school affiliation.

²¹Senart 1897: 330,17 to 335,9; translated in Jones 1956/1978: 322–328.

²²T 1421 at T XXII 104b23 to 105a2; translated into French by Bareau 1963: 174f.

²³T 1428 at T XXII 788a6 to 788c7; translated into French by Bareau 1963: 175–177.

²⁴Lefman 1902: 416,16 to 418,21, translated into French by Foucaux 1884: 346–348; cf. also T 187 at T III 607b15 to 607c26.

²⁵*Buddhacarita* 15.27–58, Johnston 1936/1995: 11–14.

²⁶T 190 at T III 811a14 to 812c4, translated into English by Beal 1875: 251–254; and D 301 *sa* 59b2 to 61b3 or Q 967 *shu* 60b4 to 62b8, part of which has been rendered into Sanskrit by Sastri 1938: 481–483 and translated into French by Feer 1870: 363–380.

phies extant in Chinese translation.²⁷ The school affiliation of these biographies is not always clear. For my present purpose the question of the school affiliation of these works is of less importance, since my emphasis is on the canonical discourse and *Vinaya* versions. Therefore I will only be able to consider the perspectives provided in these biographies as supplementary information, whenever this seems opportune.

As the above survey clearly shows, numerous parallels to the *Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta* are extant. In view of the amount of material to be covered, in the present paper I will focus on the Mūlasarvāstivāda and Sarvāstivāda versions of this discourse, leaving the other canonical version preserved in Chinese translation for a subsequent paper.

In what follows, I alternate the translations with brief studies, in the hope that the relative shortness of the translated extracts will be able to sustain the reader's interest in spite of the inevitable tediousness of reading texts that work again and again through the same topic.

1) Translation of the *Samyukta-āgama* Discourse²⁸

Thus have I heard. At one time the Buddha was staying at Vārāṇasī in the Deer Park, the Dwelling-place of Seers.

Then the Blessed One addressed the five monks: “‘This is the noble truth of *duḥkha*,’ which is a teaching not heard before. When I gave proper attention to it, vision, knowledge, understanding and realization arose [in me].²⁹ ‘This is the arising of *duḥkha* ... this is the cessation of *duḥkha* ... this is the noble truth of the path to the cessation of *duḥkha*,’ which is a teaching not heard before. When I gave proper attention to it, vision, knowledge, understanding and realization arose [in me].

Again, the noble truth of *duḥkha* should be further understood with knowledge, which is a teaching not heard before. When I gave proper attention to it,

²⁷The biographies preserved in Chinese are: 過去現在因果經, T 189 at T III 644b7 to 644c27; 眾許摩訶帝經, T 191 T III 954a2 to 954b3; and 中本起經, T 196 at T IV 148b1 to 148c16.

²⁸The translated discourse is SĀ 379 at T II 103c13 to 104a29. Here and elsewhere, due to the number of extant versions I am not able to undertake a thorough comparative study of each version and have to limit my footnotes to noting only a few points. A full examination of the various versions would require a whole monograph.

²⁹SĀ 379 does not explicitly indicate that the Buddha is the subject of this sentence. My insertion of “I” follows the individual Tibetan discourse edited in Chung 2006: 86, where *nga* introduces the reference to things not heard before.

vision, knowledge, understanding and realization arose [in me]. [Again], the noble truth of the arising of *duḥkha*, [once] being understood, should be eradicated ...³⁰ Again, the cessation of the arisen *duḥkha*, [once] being understood, this noble truth of the cessation of *duḥkha* should be realized ...³¹ Again, this noble truth of the path to the cessation of *duḥkha*, [once] being understood, should be cultivated ...

“Again, monks, this noble truth of *duḥkha*, [once] being understood, has to be understood completely ...³² Again, this noble truth of the arising of *duḥkha*, [once] being understood, has to be eradicated completely ... Again, the noble truth of the cessation of *duḥkha*, [once] being understood, has to be realized completely ... Again, the noble truth of the path to the cessation of *duḥkha*, [once] being understood, has to be cultivated completely [104a] ...

“Monks, [so long as] in regard to these four noble truths in three turnings and twelve modes I had not given rise to vision, knowledge, understanding and realization, I had not yet attained deliverance, release and liberation among the assemblies of those who listen to teachings:³³ *devas*, Māra, Brahmā, recluses and Brahmins; I had myself not realized the attainment of supreme and right awakening.

“[When] in regard to the four noble truths in three turnings and twelve modes I had given rise to vision, knowledge, understanding and realization, then I had thereby attained release and deliverance among the assemblies of those who listen to teachings: Māra, Brahmā, recluses and Brahmins; I had myself realized the attainment and accomplishment of supreme and right awakening.”

While the Blessed One was delivering this teaching, the venerable Kauṇḍinya and eighty thousand *devas* attained the pure eye of Dharma that is remote from stains and free from dust.

Then the Blessed One said to the venerable Kauṇḍinya: “Have you come to know the Dharma?”

Kauṇḍinya replied to the Buddha: “I have come to know it, Blessed One.”

Again he asked the venerable Kauṇḍinya: “Have you come to know the Dharma?”

³⁰ Abbreviations are my own.

³¹ Adopting a variant without 知, in line with the same formulation below for the completed realization of the cessation of *duḥkha*; a variant also followed by Yinshùn 1983: 107.

³² Following an emendation adopted by Yinshùn 1983: 107 and discussed by Chung 2006: 90 note 130.

³³ SĀ 379 T II 104a4: 闍法眾中, an expression that seems to be peculiar to this version.

Kauṇḍinya replied to the Buddha:³⁴ “I have come to know it, Well Gone One.”

Because the venerable Kauṇḍinya had come to know the Dharma, he was called Ājñāta Kauṇḍinya.

When the venerable Ājñāta Kauṇḍinya had come to know the Dharma, the spirits of the earth raised the proclamation: “Dear sirs, at Vārāṇasī, at the Dwelling of Seers, in the Deer Park, the Blessed One [has turned] the wheel of Dharma in three turnings and twelve modes, which has never been turned by recluses, brahmins, devas, Māra or Brahmā, for the benefit of many, for the happiness of many, out of compassion for the world, for the sake of benefitting and profiting *devas* and men. The assembly of *devas* will increase, the assembly of *asuras* will decrease.”

When the spirits of the earth had proclaimed it, on hearing it the *devas* dwelling in the sky ... the *devas* of the Four Heavenly Kings ... the *devas* of the Thirty-three ... the Yāma *devas* ... the Tuṣita *devas* ... the Nirmāṇarati *devas* ... the Paranirmitavaśavartin *devas* in turn passed on the proclamation and within an instant it was heard up to the realm of the Brahmā *devas*.³⁵ The Brahmā *devas* raised the proclamation:

“Dear sirs, at Vārāṇasī, at the Dwelling of Seers, in the Deer Park, the Blessed One [has turned] the wheel of Dharma in three turnings and twelve modes, which has never been turned by those who listen to teachings in the world: recluses, brahmins, *devas*, Māra or Brahmā, for the benefit of many, for the happiness of many, for the sake of benefitting and profiting *devas* and men. The assembly of *devas* will increase, the assembly of *asuras* will decrease.”

Because at Vārāṇasī, at the Dwelling of Seers, in the Deer Park, the Blessed One turned the wheel of Dharma, this discourse is called the Discourse on Turning the Wheel of Dharma.

When the Buddha had spoken this discourse, the monks, who had heard what the Buddha had said, were delighted and received it respectfully.

³⁴Besides minor variations in formulating similar passages, a noteworthy change occurs at the present juncture in SĀ 379 at T II 104a12, which shifts from the earlier transcription of his name as 憍陳如 to the alternative 拘隣. The transcription 拘隣 is also employed in EĀ 24.5 at T II 619b6, whereas the transcription 憍陳如 is used in the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya*, T 1428 at T XXII 788b24, the Mahīśāsaka *Vinaya*, T 1421 at T XXII 104c18, the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, T 1450 at T XXIV 128a9 and T 1451 at T XXIV 292b29 (= T 110 at T II 504b7) or T XXIV 406c5, and the Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, T 1435 at T XXIII 448c14.

³⁵Chung 2006: 97 note 181 points out that an emendation of the present passage suggested by Yinshùn (印順) 1983: 109 note 7 is not supported by the Sanskrit and Tibetan versions.

Study

On comparing the discourse translated above with its Pāli counterpart, a striking difference is the absence of any mention in the *Samyukta-āgama* version of the two extremes of sensual indulgence and self-mortification that should be avoided. Another and perhaps no less striking difference is the lack of any explanation regarding the nature of the four noble truths in the *Samyukta-āgama* discourse, which instead directly proceeds to the different aspects of how the Buddha realized these four noble truths, the “three turnings” that are to be applied to each truth.

The Buddha’s teaching of the two extremes of sensual indulgence and self-mortification is recorded elsewhere in the *Samyukta-āgama*,³⁶ which also has expositions of the nature of the four noble truths similar to the explanations that appear in the *Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta*.³⁷ Thus the reciters of the *Samyukta-āgama* were evidently aware of these two aspects, even though they do not feature in their account of the first teaching given by the Buddha.

The *Samyukta-āgama* discourse does not stand alone in this respect, as similar presentations can be found in the discourses individually translated into Chinese and Tibetan,³⁸ as well as in the discourse quotations in the *Abhidharmakośavyākhyā* and in Śamathadeva’s compendium of discourse quotations from the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*.³⁹

Turning to the *Saṅghabhedavastu* of the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, however, a different picture emerges: here we do find the two extremes as well as an explanation of the nature of the four noble truths.

³⁶ Cf., e.g., SĀ 912 at T II 228c18, which is a parallel to SN 42.12 at SN IV 330,26.

³⁷ Cf., e.g., SĀ 344 at T II 95a1, which is a parallel to MN 9 at MN I 48,29; for a translation of SĀ 344 cf. Anālayo 2011c. Unlike SĀ 912, which has the Buddha as its speaker, SĀ 344 is an exposition by Śāriputra.

³⁸ Chung 2006: 86–99 and T 110 at T II 504a4 to 504b21.

³⁹ Wogihara 1971: 579,19 to 580,22 and D 4094 *nyu* 28a7 to 29b6 or Q 5595 *thu* 64a8 to 66a2.

2) Translation from the *Saṅghabhedavastu* of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*⁴⁰

At that time the Blessed One said to the five men: “Men who have gone forth should not be involved with two types of wrong teachings.⁴¹ What are the two? The first is delighting in attachment, a custom of the worldling that is low, inferior and vulgar, going [so far as] to indulge with delight in licentious sensual pleasures. The second is tormenting oneself, which is mistaken and is not a custom practised by noble ones. One who has gone forth should keep away from these two wrong teachings. Those who always practise the teaching by the middle, which I have established, will attain purification of vision and great wisdom, accomplishing right awakening and the tranquillity of Nirvāṇa. [127c]

“What is that teaching by the middle?⁴² It is the noble eight[fold] path. What are its eight [parts]? They are right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.”

At that time the Blessed One gave teachings like this with a determined mind to the five men. Then two of the five learned the Dharma from the Buddha while three went in the morning to beg alms, returning with enough for the six to eat. In the afternoon, three learned the Dharma from the Buddha and two went into the village to beg alms, returning with sufficient for the five to eat together. Only the Buddha, the Blessed One, did not take food at the wrong time.

Then the Blessed One told the five: “Because of giving reasoned attention with the power of effort to this noble truth of *duḥkha* ... to this noble truth of the arising of *duḥkha* ... to this noble truth of the cessation of *duḥkha* ... to this noble truth of the path to the cessation of *duḥkha*, which I had not heard before, I attained the arising of pure wisdom, vision, knowledge, understanding and awakening.”

Again he told the five men: “Because of giving reasoned attention with the power of effort to this noble truth of *duḥkha*, which I had not understood before and which now was to be understood ... to this noble truth of the arising of *duḥkha*, which I had not eradicated before and which now was to be eradicated ...

⁴⁰The translated section is found in T 1450 at T XXIV 127b24 to 128b15.

⁴¹I have emended the present reference in T 1450 at T XXIV 127b25, which at this point actually speaks of “wrong teachers”, 邪師, but three lines below, as pointed out by Waldschmidt 1957: 141 note 12, T 1450 switches to the more appropriate “wrong teachings”, 邪法. The Sanskrit and Tibetan versions instead speak of the two extremes, cf. Gnoli 1977: 134,10 and Waldschmidt 1957: 141,8 (§14)

⁴²Adopting a variant without 處.

to this noble truth of the cessation of *duḥkha*, which I had not realized before and which now was to be realized ... to this noble truth of the path to the cessation of *duḥkha*, which I had not cultivated before and which now was to be cultivated, I attained the arising of pure wisdom, vision, knowledge, understanding and awakening.”

“Because of giving reasoned attention with the power of effort to this noble truth of *duḥkha*, which I had not heard before, which being already fully understood need not be understood again ... to this noble truth of the arising of *duḥkha*, which I had not heard before, which having already forever eradicated I need not eradicate again... to this noble truth of the cessation of *duḥkha*, which I had not realized before,⁴³ which having already realized I need not realize again ... to this noble truth of the path to the cessation of *duḥkha*, which I had not cultivated before, which having already cultivated I need not cultivate again, I attained the arising of pure wisdom, vision, knowledge, understanding and awakening.

“You five should know that at first, [128a] when I had not yet attained these four truths with three turnings and twelve types, had not aroused pure vision, knowledge, understanding and awakening, I had been unable to go beyond the realm of men and *devas*, up to Brahmā, and the whole world with its recluses and Brahmins, *devas*, men and *asuras*, I had not realized liberation and release, had not become free from distortions, I had not realized the supreme right knowledge.

“You should know that, since I cultivated these four truths with three turnings and twelve types, I realized the arising of pure vision, knowledge, understanding, I awakened to right awakening. Then I went beyond the realm of men and *devas*, Māra and Brahmā, and the world with its recluses and Brahmins, *devas*, men and *asuras*. I was liberated and released, free from distortions. I realized right knowledge and supreme right awakening.”

When the Blessed One delivered this teaching, the venerable Kauṇḍinya realized in the teachings the attainment of the pure eye of the Dharma that is free from dust and free from stains, and a company of eighty thousand *devas* also realized in the teachings the eye of the Dharma.

⁴³As already noted by Waldschmidt 1957: 149 note 13, T 1450 at T XXIV 127c26 here changes from the earlier reference to what had not been heard before, 先未曾聞, to a formulation more closely adjusted to the context, in the present case 先未所證. The exposition of the completed realization of the cessation of *duḥkha* and the completed development of the path in the Sanskrit and Tibetan versions still has *pūrvam ananuśruteṣu dharmeṣu* and the equivalent *sngon ma thos pa'i chos rnam*, cf. Gnoli 1977: 135,25+28 (where the first instance is without *dharmeṣu*, an error in the edition corrected in Chung 2006: 81,16) and Waldschmidt 1957: 149,13+19.

Then the Blessed One asked Kauṇḍinya: “Have you realized the Dharma?” He replied: “Blessed One, I have realized it”. The Buddha asked again: “Kauṇḍinya, have you realized the Dharma?” He replied: “Well Gone One, I have realized it”. The Buddha said: “Venerable Kauṇḍinya has fully realized the Dharma, for this reason his name shall be Ājñāta Kauṇḍinya.”

Then the community of *yakṣas* that dwell on the earth heard what the Buddha had said and together they made this proclamation: “Dear sirs, you should know that at the town of Vārāṇasī, at the Place where Seers Descend,⁴⁴ in the Deer Park, the Buddha, the Blessed One, has [turned] the wheel of Dharma in three turnings and twelve modes, which recluses, brahmins, men, *devas*, Māra and Brahmā are not able to turn, for the welfare of many people, for the benefit of many people, out of feelings of compassion. For this reason, the community of *devas* will increase and the *asuras* will decrease.”

Then the *yakṣas* dwelling in the sky, having heard the proclamation made by those who dwell on the earth, together made this proclamation ... up to ... the *devas* of the Four Heavenly Kings ... the *devas* of the Thirty-three ... the *Yāma devas* ... the *Tuṣita devas* ... the *Nirmāṇarata devas* ... the *Paranirmitavaśavartin devas* ... reaching the *Brahmā devas*, all at the same time in the same instant at the same moment made this proclamation. When the *Akaniṣṭha devas* heard this proclamation,⁴⁵ they also proclaimed:

“Dear sirs, you should know that at the town of Vārāṇasī, at the Place where Seers Descend, in the Deer Park, the Buddha, the Blessed One has [turned] the wheel of Dharma in three turnings and twelve modes, which recluses, brahmins, men, *devas*, Māra and Brahmā are not able to turn, for the welfare of many people, for the benefit of many people, out of feelings of compassion. The community of *devas* will increase and the *asuras* will decrease.”

Because at the town of Vārāṇasī, at the Place where Seers Descend, in the Deer Park, the Blessed One [turned] the wheel of Dharma in three turnings and twelve modes, therefore this discourse and this place have received the name Place or Discourse Where the Wheel of the Dharma was Turned. [128b]

⁴⁴T 1450 at T XXIV 128a16: 仙人墮處, which would reflect an original *ṛṣipātana*; cf. also Chung 2006: 86 note 85 and the discussion in Caillat 1968 and Norman 1989: 375. The corresponding part in Gnoli 1977: 136,23 refers to the *ṛṣivadana*, with its corresponding counterpart in *dran srong smra ba* in Waldschmidt 1957: 155,11.

⁴⁵T 1450 at T XXIV 128a23: 阿迦尼吒天; the Sanskrit and Tibetan versions do not bring in the *devas* of the *Akaniṣṭha* realm, but speak just of the *Brahmā devas*; cf. Gnoli 1977: 137,7 and Waldschmidt 1957: 157,11.

Then the Blessed One said to the [other] four: “There are four noble truths. What are the four? They are the noble truth of *duḥkha*, the noble truth of the arising of *duḥkha*, the noble truth of the cessation of *duḥkha*, the noble truth of the path to the cessation of *duḥkha*.

“What is the noble truth of *duḥkha*? It is this: birth is *duḥkha*, old age is *duḥkha*, disease is *duḥkha*, death is *duḥkha*, separation from what is loved is *duḥkha*, association with what is disliked is *duḥkha*, not getting what one wishes is *duḥkha* ... up to ... the five aggregates of clinging are *duḥkha*. It should be understood like this, [for which] the eight[fold] path should be cultivated, that is, right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.

“What is called the noble truth of the arising [of *duḥkha*]? It is craving and desire that lead to experiencing further becoming, craving conjoined with lust and delight, craving that delights and rejoices in this and that, the stain of craving. In order to give it up and be free from it, the eight[fold] right path should be cultivated.

“What is the noble truth of the cessation [of *duḥkha*]? It is the cessation, the destruction, the appeasement, the disappearance and permanent fading away of the craving and desire that lead to experiencing further becoming, the craving and delight that are the cause of being defiled by attachment. To realize this the eight[fold] right path should be cultivated.

“What is the noble truth of the path to the cessation of *duḥkha*? It is the noble eight[fold] path, which should be cultivated.”

When the Blessed One had spoken this teaching on the four truths, Ājñāta Kauṇḍinya realized the liberation of the mind [through] the eradication of all influxes and the [other] four realized in these teachings the pure eye [of the Dharma] that is free from any stain or dust. At that time in the world there were two arhats, one being the Blessed One and the second being Kauṇḍinya.

Study

There are several interesting features in the above version of the Buddha’s first teaching to his five disciples, such as the suggestion that a time interval occurred between the delivery of the teaching on the two extremes and the disclosure of the four noble truths. A discussion of these will have to wait, however, until I have also surveyed the Sarvāstivāda versions.

The above *Saṅghabhedavastu* version shows that both the rejection of the two extremes and an exposition of the nature of the four noble truths were known in the Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition as part of the teaching given by the Buddha to his first five disciples. In line with the above *Samyukta-āgama* version, however, the *Saṅghabhedavastu* gives central emphasis to the “three turnings” applied to each truth as that part of the teaching which triggered the stream-entry of Kauṇḍinya. Thus the explanation of the four noble truths occurs only subsequent to this event and the acclamation by the *devas*.

Comparing the *Samyukta-āgama* discourse and the *Saṅghabhedavastu* version, the chief difference in coverage between them could in principle be explained in two ways: Either the *Samyukta-āgama* discourse is an earlier version of the Buddha’s first discourse, which was later amplified in the *Saṅghabhedavastu*, or the *Samyukta-āgama* discourse is an extract from a longer version of the first discourse, such as the one found in the *Saṅghabhedavastu*.

Regarding the first of these two alternatives, given that the *Samyukta-āgama* version refers to the Deer Park and reports the Buddha as addressing the five monks, the way the discourse has been preserved gives no indication that the setting of the discourse should be considered different from what other versions report in more detail, namely that the Buddha gave this instruction at the Deer Park to his five former companions who had been with him when he practised asceticism. According to the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta* and its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel, when the recently awakened Buddha approached his former companions at the Deer Park, they decided not to show him any respect, as they thought that he had given up his striving for liberation.⁴⁶ A similar description precedes the extract from the *Saṅghabhedavastu* translated above.⁴⁷

In such a setting a teaching that explains to the five why the Buddha had given up ascetic practices and what alternative route to liberation he had discovered would fit the context well. Some such explanation would seem to be required in order to overcome the diffidence of the five and enable them to become receptive to the disclosure of the four noble truths.

In other words, since the *Samyukta-āgama* discourse does not show any sign of having a different setting from the *Saṅghabhedavastu* other than that it begins at a later juncture of events, an instruction on the two extremes to be avoided would

⁴⁶MN 26 at MN I 171,22 and MĀ 204 at T I I 777c2.

⁴⁷Gnoli 1977: 133,5, T 1450 at T XXIV 127a28 and the Tibetan version in Waldschmidt 1957: 135.

fit the context well and does not give the impression of being a later addition. This makes the second of the two above-mentioned alternatives somewhat more probable, in that the *Samyukta-āgama* could just be an extract from a full account similar to that now found in the *Saṅghabhedavastu*.⁴⁸

The impression that the *Samyukta-āgama* could just be an extract finds further support when examining the *Kṣudrakavastu* of the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, which has two versions of the present discourse. In order to avoid tiring the reader with excessive repetition, I have consigned my translation of these two versions to an appendix to this paper.

The first of these two versions in the *Kṣudrakavastu* has the same coverage as the above *Samyukta-āgama* discourse, that is, the first *Kṣudrakavastu* version has just the exposition of the three turnings to be applied to each of the four noble truths. The second *Kṣudrakavastu* version begins with a brief reference to this teaching on the three turnings, with an explicit indication that this should be given in full as in the discourse on the three turnings, and then continues with Ānanda reporting how the Buddha taught the five monks the nature of the four noble truths, as a result of which Kauṇḍinya became an arahant. There cannot be any doubt that these two *Kṣudrakavastu* versions are two separate extracts from a full version that had both the three turnings and the exposition of the nature of the four noble truths.⁴⁹

Notably, the first *Kṣudrakavastu* version is word for word identical with the individual discourse, which is said to be translated by Yijing (義淨).⁵⁰ Since Yijing is also the translator of the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, there can be little doubt that this discourse was simply taken from the *Vinaya*. This extract from the *Kṣudrakavastu* has become a discourse on its own, now found among individu-

⁴⁸ A somewhat comparable case is the Tibetan translation of the **Abhiniṣkramaṇa-sūtra*. The Chinese translation, T 190 at T III 811a14, reports the teaching on the two extremes, T III 811b5 explains the nature of the four noble truths and at T III 811b20 describes the Buddha's realization of the four noble truths. The Tibetan translation, D 301 sa 59b2 or Q 967 shu 60b4, also begins with the teaching on the two extremes, but then directly follows this at D 301 sa 60a2 or Q 967 shu 61a4 by describing how the Buddha realized the four noble truths and thus does not explain the nature of the four noble truths.

⁴⁹ That the two *Kṣudrakavastu* versions belong to what would have been a continuous account of the teachings delivered by the Buddha to his first five disciples can also be seen from a mistake shared by both, where the reference to the Buddha's realization of what was *not* heard before has lost the negation, cf. T 1451 at T XXIV 292b2: 於所聞法 and T 1451 at T XXIV 406c4: 於所聞法.

⁵⁰ T 1451 at T XXIV 292a29 to 292c15 = T 110 at T II 504a7 to 504b21, a correspondence already noted by Chung 2006: 78.

ally translated *Samyukta-āgama* discourses in the Taishō edition. Only through a comparison with the first *Kṣudrakavastu* version does it become clear that this individual *Samyukta-āgama* discourse has simply been copied from the *Vinaya*. This makes it fairly probable that the *Samyukta-āgama* discourse is similarly an extract from a full version of the first discourse, similar to what is now found in the *Śaṅghabhedavastu*.

The tendency for *Vinaya* extracts to become discourses on their own does not appear to be restricted to the short versions of the Buddha's teaching to his five disciples. The *Catuṣpariṣat-sūtra*'s description of the coming into existence of the four assemblies of Buddhist disciples (monastic and lay, male and female) has its counterparts in other Buddhist schools in their respective *Vinayas*, making it quite probable that the *Catuṣpariṣat-sūtra* had its origin in a *Vinaya* environment.⁵¹ Since the *Catuṣpariṣat-sūtra* has the teaching on the two extremes, the three turnings and the exposition of the nature of the four noble truths,⁵² in this case what appears to be another *Vinaya* extract is not confined to the short version found in the individual discourse copied from the *Kṣudrakavastu*.

In sum, the short versions that only describe how the Buddha realized the four noble truths in three turnings, but do not expound the nature of the four noble truths and do not introduce these with a rejection of the two extremes, are probably intentional extracts from a longer account. Apparently the Mūlasarvāstivāda reciters considered this extract to be the most significant part, the part that should be considered to have set in motion the wheel of Dharma, namely the Buddha's indication how each of the four noble truths needs to be put into practice in three turnings.

A somewhat similar perspective comes to light when one examines the canonical versions of the Sarvāstivāda tradition, found in the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel to the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta* and in the Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*.

3) Translation of the *Madhyama-āgama* Discourse⁵³

At that time I told them: “Five monks, you should know that there are two extreme undertakings that those who are on the path should not practise: the first is attachment to sensual pleasures which is a lowly act, undertaken by the com-

⁵¹ Cf. Hartmann 1994: 333f and on the general pattern of biographies emerging from a *Vinaya* environment cf., e.g., Frauwallner 1956: 46 and Hirakawa 1993/1998: 264.

⁵² Waldschmidt 1957: 140–162 (§§11.14 to 14.12)

⁵³ The translated section is found in MĀ 204 at T I 777c25 to 778a2.

moner; the second is to torture oneself and cause suffering to oneself, which is an ignoble thing and which is not connected to what is beneficial.⁵⁴

“Five monks, abandon these two extremes and take up the middle path that accomplishes understanding and wisdom, [778a] that brings about certainty and the attainment of mastery and that leads to wisdom, leads to awakening and leads to Nirvāṇa, namely the eight[fold] right path, from right view to right concentration. These are its eight [parts].”

Study

The above short passage shows that the Sarvāstivāda tradition considered the rejection of the two extremes to have been delivered by the Buddha to his first five disciples. Now the above brief reference in the *Madhyama-āgama* discourse and the absence of any extract from the first discourse in its *Majjhima-nikāya* parallel, the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta*, has been considered by some scholars as evidence that the four noble truths are only a later addition to the Buddha’s first discourse and consequently are merely a later element in early Buddhist thought.

In order to examine the suggestions made in this respect, I need to depart briefly from my main subject – the Chinese parallels to the *Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta* – and discuss a suggestion made relatively early in the history of Buddhist scholarship regarding the late nature of the four noble truths. This suggestion comes as one of several “curious omissions in Pali canonical texts”, noted by C.A.F. Rhys Davids in 1935, where she points out that the four noble truths are absent from the Fours of the *Āṅguttara-nikāya*. Regarding this absence, Rhys Davids (1935: 723) comments that the four noble truths, being “of the first importance, their occurrence where they should one and all have come, aye, and been given first rank, is ... the reverse of what we ... find”. While looking for the four noble truths among the Fours of the *Āṅguttara-nikāya* may at first sight appear quite straightforward, closer inspection suggests otherwise.

In the way the orally transmitted discourses are now found in the four main *Nikāyas* of the Pāli canon, the material has been divided into predominantly long discourses, allocated to the *Dīgha-nikāya*, mainly medium long discourses, allocated to the *Majjhima-nikāya*, and what for the most part are short discourses, allocated to the *Samyutta-nikāya* and the *Āṅguttara-nikāya*. The *Samyutta-nikāya* then assembles short discourses according to topic, resulting in different

⁵⁴ Adopting a variant without 求.

saṃyuttas, whereas the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* assembles short discourses according to a numerical principle, where the existence of a particular number between one and eleven in some part of a discourse provides the rationale for inclusion in the respective section of the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*.

Teachings on the four noble truths not only involve the number four, but at the same time also address a topic that tradition considers a key doctrine of early Buddhism. Thus the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* has a whole *saṃyutta* dedicated to this theme. This is the *Sacca-saṃyutta*, which collects over one hundred thirty discourses on the four noble truths.⁵⁵ Since these are collected in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya*, it is not surprising to find that such discourses are not collected among the Fours of the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*.⁵⁶

In other words, the expectation to find discourses on the four noble truths among the Fours of the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* appears to be a case of looking in the wrong place. Such an expectation fails to appreciate that, in spite of occasional overlapping, the nature of the four *Nikāyas* is to complement one another. The four *Nikāyas* are not four independent records of what tradition believed to be the Buddha's teaching, each of which has to be in itself complete.

The suggestion by Rhys Davids in turn appears to have inspired Anderson to find further support for the lateness of the four noble truths.⁵⁷ Since the *Ariya-pariyesanā-sutta* does not record the contents of the Buddha's first teaching at all, Anderson (1999/2001: 63) concludes that "the *Ariyapariyesana-sutta* shows that certain redactors of the canon conceived of the Buddha's act of teaching without the four noble truths". Anderson (1999/2001: 55f) holds that probably "the four noble truths emerged into the canonical tradition at a particular point and slowly became recognized as the first teaching of the Buddha ... [being] a doctrine that came to be identified as the central teaching of the Buddha by the time of the commentaries".

It seems to me that this is another case of looking in the wrong place, a failure to appreciate that, just like the four *Nikāyas*, the early discourses complement

⁵⁵SN 56.1–131 at SN V 414–477; according to the survey in Gethin 2007: 386, the count of discourses in the different editions of the *Sacca-saṃyutta* varies between 131 and 135.

⁵⁶Zafropulo 1993: 112f notes that reference to the four noble truths occurs also in verse, such as Dh 190f and its parallels or Th 1258f; he concludes that "le témoignage de ces Gāthās nous semble suffisant pour attester l'ancienneté de la notion d'une quaternité d'Āryasatyāni".

⁵⁷Anderson 1999/2001: ix starts her preface by quoting Rhys Davids 1935 (under her maiden name) and then in the beginning part of the actual study (p. 3f) gives a full quote of the relevant part from Rhys Davids 1935.

one another and are not independent records of what tradition believed to be the Buddha's teaching, each of which has to be complete in itself.

The purpose of the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta* is to depict in autobiographical fashion the Buddha's noble quest for awakening. There is no reason for this discourse to give a full account of the first teaching delivered by the Buddha, which is rather the purpose of the *Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta*. The expectation that the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta* should give a complete account of everything that is in some way related to the Buddha's awakening mistakes a discourse with autobiographical features for a full-fledged autobiography. Such a full-fledged autobiography, however, cannot be found in any discourse in the four Pāli *Nikāyas*.

Staying within the scope of the *Majjhima-nikāya*, a more detailed account of meditative aspects of the Buddha's approach to awakening can be found in the *Bhayabherava-sutta*, which reports how, based on his attainment of the four absorptions, he was able to realize the three higher knowledges (the last of which is formulated in terms of the four noble truths).⁵⁸ The *Bhayabherava-sutta* begins with the difficulties of living in seclusion, followed by the Buddha indicating how he dealt with fear when living alone in the wilds. The context thus makes it natural for the discourse to focus on the meditative development that led to the Buddha's awakening and thereby going forever beyond fear.

Another *Majjhima-nikāya* discourse with autobiographical features is the *Mahāsaccaka-sutta*. The setting of the discourse is a challenge by the non-Buddhist debater Saccaka, a proponent of asceticism, in reply to which the Buddha is on record as describing his own practice of austerities. Here the context naturally leads to a different perspective on the Buddha's progress to awakening, namely on his attempts to reach liberation through breath control and fasting. The fact that such ascetic practices are not mentioned in the *Bhayabherava-sutta* does not mean that these are conflicting accounts of what preceded the Buddha's breakthrough to full awakening, but is simply a result of the setting of each discourse. Nor does the circumstance that neither the *Bhayabherava-sutta* nor the *Mahāsaccaka-sutta* mentions what the Buddha taught his first disciples mean that this teaching was unknown to the reciters of the *Majjhima-nikāya*. It is only natural that, given the purpose of these two discourses, the topic of the Buddha's first discourse does not come within their purview.

That the reciters of the *Majjhima-nikāya* were aware of the four noble truths as the theme of the Buddha's first teaching at Benares is in fact explicitly recorded in

⁵⁸ MN 4 at MN I 23,14; cf. Anālayo 2011b: 218 note 47.

the *Saccavibhaṅga-sutta* of the same *Majjhima-nikāya*. The topic of this discourse is an analysis of the four noble truths; thus in this context it is natural to find an indication that in the Deer Park of Benares the Buddha set in motion the wheel of Dharma by teaching the four noble truths.⁵⁹

A reference to this event can also be found in the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta*, which reports the recently awakened Buddha proclaiming that he is about to go to Benares to set in motion the wheel of Dharma.⁶⁰ The fact that neither his actual realization of the four noble truths nor his teaching of these to his first disciples is recorded in the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta* is just because the main point of this discourse is to contrast the ignoble quest of the average worldling to the noble quest for awakening. Viewed in this perspective, the only part of the *Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta* that the reciters could perhaps have included is the section on the two extremes, as one of these two extremes corresponds to the ignoble quest. The section on the two extremes is precisely what we find in the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel.

The fact that the above translated *Madhyama-āgama* parallel to the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta* has only this much of the first discourse, however, has been taken by Bareau as a sign that some reciters were not aware of the four noble truths as the theme of the Buddha's first discourse or else refused to consider it as such.⁶¹ He then concludes that the doctrine of the four noble truths is only a later development in Buddhist thought.⁶²

As already pointed out by Schmithausen (1981: 210 note 36), Bareau's reasoning is not convincing. Even if the four noble truths were not part of the first sermon, this does not necessarily entail that the doctrine as such is late, as it may well have existed elsewhere in the canon.

Moreover, Bareau's conclusion that the four noble truths were not part of the first sermon is flawed by a methodological problem, as the comparative study on which he bases this conclusion does not take into account important parallels.

⁵⁹MN 141 at MN III 248,5.

⁶⁰MN 26 at MN I 171,11.

⁶¹Bareau 1963: 181 comments that MĀ 204 (as well as EĀ 19.2, which I will be discussing in my second paper) "nous montrer qu'à une lointaine époque, une partie au moins de docteurs du Bouddhisme ignoraient quel avait été le thème du premier sermon ou refusaient de considérer comme tel les quatre saintes Vérités."

⁶²Bareau 1963: 180: "s'il en est bien ainsi, il s'ensuit des conséquences importantes pour l'histoire de la doctrine bouddhique. En effet, la thèse des quatre saintes Vérités se serait développée assez tard et elle ne serait pas, comme on le croit généralement, la base même de la pensée bouddhique."

Bareau considers the above translated *Madhyama-āgama* discourse as representative of the Sarvāstivāda tradition, which he compares with the Dharmaguptaka, Mahīśāsaka and Theravāda *Vinaya* versions. He evidently was not aware of the fact that the Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya* has a version of the Buddha's first discourse that does mention the four noble truths (translated below); and he also left out of account the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*.⁶³ Another version not consulted is the second of the two *Ekottarika-āgama* discourse parallels, of which Bareau takes into account only the first one in support of his conclusions. Thus Bareau's conclusions, which have in turn influenced other scholars,⁶⁴ need to be revised based on a more comprehensive examination of the extant versions.

As becomes clear from the Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya* translated below, alongside the passage on the two extremes in the *Madhyama-āgama* discourse we have a canonical Sarvāstivāda version that has an exposition of the four noble truths from the viewpoint of the three turnings. In addition, a discourse quotation in the *Dharmaskandha* has a corresponding version of the first discourse.⁶⁵

Thus even if one were to adopt the position that each of these versions is an independent witness that was meant to give a complete account of the Buddha's first teaching, within the Mūlasarvāstivāda and Sarvāstivāda traditions the teaching of the four noble truths in three turnings constitutes the Buddha's first discourse in a *Samyukta-āgama* discourse, in an individual Chinese translation equalling the *Kṣudrakavastu* version, in an individual Tibetan translation, in several instances in the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, in the Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, as well as in discourse quotations in the *Abhidharmakośavyākhyā*, in Śamathadeva's com-

⁶³In his survey of the sources utilized for his research, Bareau 1963: 9 indicates that it was his conscious decision to leave aside the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* and the *Catuṣpariṣat-sūtra*, whereas his comment that the Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya* “ne contient de récit parallèle à ceux que nous étudierons” indicates that he was not aware of the relevant passage in T 1435. While overlooking the Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya* parallel can easily happen, it seems to me that the conscious decision to leave aside the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* and the *Catuṣpariṣat-sūtra* is a methodological weakness that undermines his study and conclusions. A proper assessment of the traditions on the life of the Buddha has to be based on a comparative study of *all* extant canonical versions at our disposal, as is the case for an assessment of any *Vinaya* narrative; cf. in more detail Anālayo 2012a.

⁶⁴Bronkhorst 1993/2000: 107 quotes Bareau 1963 and then concludes that “initially those Four Noble Truths were not part of the sermon in Benares, and consequently probably not as central to Buddhism as they came to be”. Dessein 2007: 22 also follows Bareau in stating that MĀ 204 and EĀ 19.2 “see the first ministry of the Buddha as only consisting of the middle mode of progress”.

⁶⁵T 1537 at T XXVI 479b25 to 480a15.

pendium of discourse quotations from the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* and in the *Dharmaskandha*.

In other words, in view of the situation in the parallel versions transmitted within the Mūlasarvāstivāda and Sarvāstivāda traditions, a more likely conclusion would be that the Mūlasarvāstivāda and Sarvāstivāda traditions considered the four noble truths in three turnings, rather than the exposition of the two extremes, to constitute the first teaching.

However, as mentioned above, it seems to me considerably more natural to see the shorter versions as intentional extracts rather than as competing versions of the Buddha's setting in motion of the wheel of Dharma. In fact it is hard to imagine that such glaring contradictions on what tradition regarded as the first discourse of the Buddha would have been transmitted within texts of the same reciter traditions of the Mūlasarvāstivāda as well as the Sarvāstivāda without being made to harmonize with each other during the long period of transmission.

4) Translation from the Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*⁶⁶

At one time the Buddha was staying at Vārāṇasī in the Dwelling Place of Seers, the Deer Park ... At that time the Buddha said to the five monks:

“This is the noble truth of *duḥkha* ... This is the noble truth of the arising of *duḥkha* ... this is the noble truth of the cessation of *duḥkha* ... this is the noble truth of the path, which is a teaching I earlier had not heard from others. When among teachings I gave right attention, vision arose, knowledge arose, understanding arose and awakening arose.

“Monks, this noble truth of *duḥkha* should therefore be understood with knowledge ... Having understood this noble truth of the arising of *duḥkha*, it should be eradicated ... Having understood this noble truth of the cessation of *duḥkha*, it should be realized ... Having understood this noble truth of the path to the cessation of *duḥkha*, it should be cultivated, which is a teaching I earlier had not heard from others. When among teachings I gave right attention, vision arose, knowledge arose, understanding arose and awakening arose.

“Monks, this noble truth of *duḥkha* has therefore been understood with knowledge ... [448c] Understanding this noble truth of the arising of *duḥkha*, it has therefore been eradicated ... Understanding this noble truth of the cessation of *duḥkha*, it has therefore been realized ... Understanding this noble truth of the

⁶⁶The translated section is found in T 1435 at T XXIII 448b₁₃ to 449a₇.

path to the cessation of *duḥkha*, it has therefore been cultivated, which is a teaching I earlier had not heard from others. When among teachings I gave right attention, vision arose, knowledge arose, understanding arose and awakening arose.

“Monks, during the very time that I had not given rise to vision, knowledge, understanding and awakening with regard to the four noble truths in three turnings and twelve parts, turning the wheel of Dharma, in this world with its Māra, Brahmā, recluses, Brahmins and among the assemblies of *devas* and men I had not attained deliverance, not attained liberation, not attained release and not attained an undistorted condition of the mind. At that time I did not have the thought that I had attained supreme and perfect awakening.

“At the very time when I had given rise to vision, knowledge, understanding and awakening with regard to the four noble truths in three turnings and twelve parts, turning the wheel of Dharma, in this world with its Māra, Brahmā, recluses, Brahmins and among the assemblies of *devas* and men I had attained deliverance, had attained liberation, had attained release and had attained an undistorted condition of the mind. At that time I had the thought that I had attained supreme and perfect awakening.”

When this teaching was spoken, the elder Kauṇḍinya and eighty thousand *devas* among all teachings gave rise to the eye of Dharma that is remote from stains and free from dust.

At that time the Buddha said to Kauṇḍinya: “Have you attained the Dharma?” Kauṇḍinya replied: “I have attained it.” The Blessed One similarly [asked] Kauṇḍinya: “Have you attained the Dharma?” Kauṇḍinya similarly replied: “I have attained it.” The Blessed One similarly [asked] Kauṇḍinya: “Have you attained the Dharma?” Kauṇḍinya similarly replied: “I have attained it.” Since Kauṇḍinya was the first to attain it, the Blessed One called him Ājñāta Kauṇḍinya.

As Ājñāta Kauṇḍinya had attained the Dharma, at that time the spirits of the earth made a loud proclamation: “Living beings, at Vārāṇasī, at the Dwelling Place of Seers, in the Deer Park, the Buddha [has turned] the wheel of Dharma in three turnings and twelve parts that other recluses and Brahmins, *devas*, Māra, Brahmā and similar [beings] like this in the whole world are unable to turn in accordance with the Dharma, for the benefit of beings, for the welfare of beings, out of compassion for the world, for the profit and welfare of *devas* and men. The lineage of *devas* will increase, the assembly of *asuras* will decrease.”

The spirits dwelling in the sky, having heard the proclamation by the spirits of the earth, also made a loud proclamation that the Buddha had turned the wheel

of the Dharma. The Four Heavenly Kings heard the proclamation made by the spirits dwelling in the sky and also made a loud proclamation ... the *devas* of the Thirty-three ... the *Yāma devas* ... the *Tuṣita devas* ... the *Nirmāṇarati devas* ... the *Paranirmitavaśavartin devas* at that time made the proclamation ... up to the realm of *Brahmā devas*, all made this loud proclamation:

“Living beings, at *Vārāṇasī*, at the Dwelling Place of Seers, [449a] in the Deer Park, the Buddha [has turned] the wheel of Dharma in three turnings and twelve parts that other recluses and Brahmins, *devas*, *Māra*, *Brahmā* and similar [beings] like this in the whole world are unable to turn in accordance with the Dharma, for the benefit of beings, for the welfare of beings, out of compassion for the world, for the profit and welfare of *devas* and men. The species of *devas* will increase, the assembly of *asuras* will decrease.”

Since at *Vārāṇasī*, at the Dwelling Place of Seers, in the Deer Park, the Buddha had turned the wheel of Dharma in three turnings and twelve parts, therefore this discourse was called the Discourse on the Turning of the Wheel of Dharma.

Study

Similar to the *Samyukta-āgama* discourse translated at the beginning of this paper, the above version of the Buddha’s first discourse in the Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya* focuses on the “three turnings” that need to be applied to each truth. The *Mūlasarvāstivāda* and *Sarvāstivāda* versions surveyed thus far indicate that, as already pointed out by Schmithausen (1981: 202), the first teaching by the Buddha consists “of at least three independent portions which are in fact presented as three different discourses in the version of at least one school”.

When evaluated from the perspective of narrative logic, the suggestion that the Buddha’s initial proposal of a middle path that leaves behind the two extremes was not immediately followed by his delivery of the four noble truths appears quite meaningful. It would fit the narrative denouement if, after the Buddha had introduced the eightfold path as an alternative to the dichotomy between sensuality and asceticism, his five former companions were given a little time to digest this new perspective. Since according to the description that precedes the above discourse they were at first unwilling even to listen to the Buddha at all, as they thought that his giving up asceticism had disabled him from reaching awakening,

it would be natural for them to need a little pondering and reflection in order to be able to accept the new perspective which the Buddha proposed.⁶⁷

This suggestion finds support in some of the biographies preserved in Chinese, which explicitly indicate that the Buddha continued his teaching once he realized that the five had accepted the idea of a middle path.⁶⁸ The same seems implicit in the *Madhyama-āgama* discourse translated above, which right after the exposition of the two extremes continues with the Buddha indicating: “I wished to continue instructing the five monks.”⁶⁹

Once the five monks had accepted the idea of a middle path, this would then naturally lead on to an exposition of what early Buddhist thought reckons as what immediately precedes a practical implementation of the eightfold path,⁷⁰ namely right view in terms of an appreciation of the four noble truths.

Such a suggestion need not be seen as standing in contrast to the *Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta* and those of its parallels that continue from the teaching of the two extremes directly to the four noble truths. These versions may simply have assembled the different spoken parts together, without marking where a longer pause had occurred.

What appears to be less convincing in the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* account, however, is the suggestion that between the delivery of the teaching on the two extremes and the discourse on the four noble truths so much time intervened that

⁶⁷Based on his study and translation of the Tibetan parallels, Feer 1870: 403 comments that “pour faire entrer cette incomparable théorie dans l’esprit des cinq disciples, habitués à voir dans l’exténuation volontaire d’eux-mêmes l’exercice de la plus haute moralité ... l’enseignement dut donc se prolonger.”

⁶⁸T 189 at T III 644b15 continues after the Buddha’s exposition of the two extremes to be avoided and the eightfold noble path to be cultivated by indicating that at that time the five were very pleased on hearing what the Buddha had said, 時彼五人, 既聞如來如此之言, 心大歡喜. T 189 at T III 644b18 then reports that at that time the Blessed One examined whether the faculties of the five men were capable of attaining awakening, whereupon he addressed them again, 爾時世尊觀五人根, 堪任受道, 而語之言, which is followed by his teaching of the four noble truths. T 191 at T III 954a10 provides a similar transition after the teaching on the two extremes, indicating that at that time, after the Blessed One had spoken like this, he examined whether the five men were able to receive the Dharma, after which he continued to speak, 爾時世尊如是說已, 又復觀知五人, 堪能受法, 即復告曰.

⁶⁹MĀ 204 at T I 778a3.

⁷⁰That right view immediately precedes the noble eightfold path is stated in MN 117 at MN III 72,29 and its parallels MĀ 189 at T I 735c13 and D 4094 *nyu* 44b6 or Q 5595 *thu* 84a8.

some monks repeatedly took turns at going begging for alms, a presentation also found in the *Madhyama-āgama* discourse.⁷¹

A similar description occurs in the Theravāda *Vinaya*, where it comes after the complete delivery of the *Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta*, as well as in the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta*, where it is preceded by the indication that the Buddha had been able to convince the five.⁷² The Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya* reports with additional detail how some out of the five went begging after the delivery of the Discourse on the Turning of the Wheel had been completed.⁷³

Now it certainly seems conceivable that the Buddha arrived at the Deer Park at such a time of the day that, after his initial instruction on the two extremes to be avoided had been completed, the time had come for begging food, and he delivered his discourse on the four noble truths after the meal. But it seems less plausible that his first five disciples needed days to digest the new message.

Notably, the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* reports that, after the delivery of the discourse on the three turnings had led to Kauṇḍinya's stream-entry, an explanation of the nature of the four noble truths then resulted in Kauṇḍinya becoming an arhat. This would mean that while his attainment of stream-entry needed a longer interval, his progress to full awakening happened right after his stream-entry.

Vetter (1985: 74) notes that in the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta* “the Buddha is so busy instructing the five ascetics that he no longer goes out begging himself but in turn two or three of the five ascetics must bring back food for the others ... this account only becomes meaningful to me if I assume that he was initiating these ascetics in the stages of *dhyāna*-meditation and was guiding them in a very practical way”.

Following Vetter's suggestion, the interlude during which some monks went to beg would fit a progression from stream-entry to arhatship, which appears to require the development of absorption.⁷⁴ This would be in line with the sequence of events in the Dharmaguptaka and Theravāda *Vinaya*.

⁷¹ After the teaching on the two extremes, MĀ 204 at T I 788a3 continues by reporting that two or three of the five went begging alternately.

⁷² Vin I 13,3; cf. also MN 26 at MN I 173,2.

⁷³ T 1428 at T XXII 788c24.

⁷⁴ In Anālayo 2003: 79-85 I have argued that, as far as the early discourses allow us to judge, it seems that the attainment of stream-entry does not require the previous development of absorption attainment, which appears to be necessary, however, for progress to the two higher levels of awakening, non-return and arhatship. Given that Kauṇḍinya and his companions are introduced as upholders of asceticism, it seems fairly probable that they should be seen as needing some time to train in concentration, which would fit best after stream-entry, but before full awakening.

Perhaps the presentation in the Mūlasarvāstivāda and Sarvāstivāda traditions is the result of shifting the begging from after the delivery of the first discourse to a point before the disclosure of the four noble truths.⁷⁵ That some shifting of textual passages took place in the Mūlasarvāstivāda texts can be seen from the circumstance that the *Kṣudrakavastu* reports that after the delivery of the first discourse and Kauṇḍinya's stream-entry, when the five had gone forth, the Buddha had to tell them that they should no longer address him by his personal name.⁷⁶ In other canonical versions,⁷⁷ including the *Saṅghabhedavastu*,⁷⁸ this episode comes before the delivery of the first discourse, which appears a more natural placing as at that time they had not yet been convinced of his claim to be awakened.

Besides, what appears less straightforward in the Mūlasarvāstivāda and Sarvāstivāda versions is that the Buddha expounds the significance of the four noble truths only after Kauṇḍinya has reached stream-entry,⁷⁹ a presentation not found in other parallels. In fact, without some indication of what the four noble truths are about, it is hard to imagine how Kauṇḍinya could have understood what the Buddha was speaking about and to what the three turnings needed to be applied. In this respect the *Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta* and those of its parallels found outside of the Mūlasarvāstivāda and Sarvāstivāda traditions have a more convincing presentation, in that after the five monks had accepted the notion of a middle path as an alternative to asceticism, they then received a teaching on the nature of the four noble truths. This then could have been followed by an explanation of the “three turnings”, according to which each of the four noble truths needs not only to be understood, but also needs to be put into practice, a practice that needs to be brought to its successful conclusion in order to issue in full awakening.

⁷⁵In the biography T 191 at T III 953c28, the episode of the alternate going to beg alms comes even before the instruction on the two extremes.

⁷⁶T 1451 at T XXIV 292c18 and D 6 *tha* 249a3 or Q 1035 *de* 235b4.

⁷⁷MĀ 204 at T I 777c12, EĀ 24.5 at T II 618c29, the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya*, T 1428 at T XXII 787c23, the Mahīśāsaka *Vinaya*, T 1421 at T XXII 104b15, and the Theravāda *Vinaya*, Vin I 9,12 (cf. also MN 26 at MN I 171,33).

⁷⁸Gnoli 1977: 133,22, the Tibetan version in Waldschmidt 1957: 137,12, and the Chinese version T 1450 at T XXIV 127b12.

⁷⁹The account of the first *saṅgīti* in the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* reckons the teaching of the four noble truths, expounded in detail in the discourse on the three turnings of the Dharma wheel, as the first discourse spoken by the Buddha, while the explanation of what these four noble truths are about is reckoned his second discourse, T 1451 at T XXIV 407a3 and D 6 *da* 312a5 or Q 1035 *ne* 295a6. I am indebted to Rod Bucknell (email 28-4-2012) for having drawn my attention to this pattern.

This completes my survey of the Mūlasarvāstivāda and Sarvāstivāda parallels to the *Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta*. In a subsequent paper I will turn to the other canonical parallels preserved in Chinese translation, based on translating the two *Ekottarika-āgama* discourses and the versions from the Mahīśāsaka and Dharmaguptaka *Vinayas*.

Appendix

Translation of the first version from the *Kṣudrakavastu* of the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* (= individual translation)⁸⁰

Thus have I heard. At one time the Blessed One was staying at Vārāṇasī, at the Place where Seers Descend, [292b] in the Deer Park.

At that time the Blessed One said to the five monks: “Monks, giving reasoned attention to this noble truth of *duḥkha*, which I had [not] heard before ... giving reasoned attention to the teaching of this noble truth of the arising of *duḥkha* ... of the cessation of *duḥkha* ... of the path leading to the cessation of *duḥkha*, I was able to give rise to vision, knowledge, understanding and awakening.

“Monks, giving reasoned attention to this noble truth of *duḥkha* that should be understood like this ... to this noble truth of the arising of *duḥkha* that should be eradicated like this ... to this noble truth of the cessation of *duḥkha* that should be realized like this ... to this noble truth of the path leading to the cessation of *duḥkha* that should be cultivated like this – a teaching to be understood, which I had [not] heard before – I was able to give rise to vision, knowledge, understanding and awakening.

“Monks, giving reasoned attention to this noble truth of *duḥkha* that has been understood like this ... to this noble truth of the arising *duḥkha* that has been eradicated like this ... to this noble truth of the cessation of *duḥkha* that has been realized like this ... to this noble truth of the path leading to the cessation of *duḥkha* that has been cultivated like this – a teaching to be understood, which I had [not] heard before – I was able to give rise to vision, knowledge, understanding and awakening.

“Monks, if I had not understood these four noble truths in three turnings and twelve aspects, then vision, knowledge, understanding and awakening could

⁸⁰The translated section is found in T 1451 at T XXIV 292a29 to 292c15, which corresponds word for word to T 110 at T II 504a4 to 504b21.

not have arisen. In the whole world, with its *devas*, Māra, Brahmā, recluses and brahmins, I would therefore not have become free from worry and defilements and attained liberation of the mind, I could not have realized and attained the supreme awakening.

“Monks, because I realized and understood these four noble truths in three turnings and twelve aspects, vision, knowledge, understanding and awakening were able to arise. In the whole world, with its Māra, Brahmā, recluses and brahmins, I became free from mental worry and defilements and attained liberation of the mind, I was able to realize and attain the supreme awakening.”

At the time when the Blessed One was delivering this teaching, the venerable Kauṇḍinya and eighty thousand *devas* attained the pure eye of Dharma that is remote from stains and free from dust. [292c]

The Buddha said to Kauṇḍinya: “Have you understood this Dharma?”

He replied: “I have understood, Blessed One.”

[The Buddha said again to Kauṇḍinya]: “Have you understood this Dharma?”

He replied: “I have understood, Well Gone One.”

Because of this he was called Ājñāta Kauṇḍinya (*Ājñāta means: having understood the meaning*).⁸¹

Then the earth-dwelling *yakṣas*, having heard what the Buddha had said, gave out a loud shout, telling men and *devas*: “Dear sirs, you should know that at Vārāṇasī, at the Place where Seers Descend, in the Deer Park, the Buddha has fully proclaimed the wheel of Dharma in three turnings and twelve modes, therefore being able to provide great benefit to *devas*, men, Māra, Brahmā, recluses, brahmins and the whole world, so that fellow practitioners of the holy life will quickly attain the peace of Nirvāṇa. Men and *devas* will increase, the *asuras* will decrease.”

Because the *yakṣas* had made this proclamation, the *devas* in the sky and the assembly of the Four Great Kings all heard it and came to know it. Like this in turn, in an instant, in a moment, the six [classes of] *devas* of the sensual realm up to the Brahmā *devas* all heard that shout. Having heard it, all in the assembly of Brahmās also proclaimed it (*to be spoken in full as earlier*). Because of this, the discourse was called the Three Turnings of the Wheel of Dharma.

At that time the five monks and men and *devas* together, having heard what the Buddha had said, were delighted and received it respectfully.

⁸¹ Here and elsewhere, parts in italics are translations from the original Chinese.

Translation of the second version from the *Kṣudrakavastu* of the Mūla-sarvāstivāda *Vinaya* (account of the first *saṅgīti*)⁸²

[Part 1]

Thus have I heard. At one time the Blessed One was staying at Vārāṇāsī, at the Place where Seers Descend, in the Deer Park. At that time the Blessed One said to the five monks: “Giving reasoned attention to this noble truth of *duḥkha*, which I had [not] heard before, I was able to give rise to vision, knowledge, understanding and awakening. *Herein to be spoken in full as above in the Discourse on the Three Turnings of the Wheel of Dharma.*⁸³

[Part 2]

“Monks, you should know that there are four noble truths. What are the four? They are the noble truth of *duḥkha* ... of its arising ... of its cessation ... and of the path.

“What is the noble truth of *duḥkha*? It is this: birth is *duḥkha*, disease is *duḥkha*, old age is *duḥkha*, death is *duḥkha*, separation from what is loved is *duḥkha*, association with what is disliked is *duḥkha*, not getting what one wishes is *duḥkha*, said in short, the five aggregates of clinging are *duḥkha*. This is called the noble truth of *duḥkha*.

“What is the noble truth of the arising of *duḥkha*? It is craving conjoined with delight and acting accordingly, which is an occasion for the arising of defilements.

“What is the noble truth of the cessation of *duḥkha*? It is the complete and entire removal, cessation, discarding, giving up, transformation and elimination of this craving conjoined with delight and acting accordingly, which is an occasion for the arising of defilements and for experiencing further existence, the cessation of defilements conjoined with craving through realizing the sublime Nirvāṇa. This is called the cessation of *duḥkha*.

“What is the noble truth of the path leading to the cessation of *duḥkha*? It is the eightfold right path: right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right

⁸²T 1451 at T XXIV 406c1-5 and 407a6 to 407a17.

⁸³After this indication that the full discourse should be supplemented, the *Kṣudrakavastu* continues by reporting the proceedings of the first communal recitation or council. Then Ānanda is asked where and to whom the Buddha spoke the second discourse, to which Ānanda replies that it was spoken to the five monks at Vārāṇāsī, followed by reciting what I have translated as part 2.

livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. This is called the noble truth of the path leading to the cessation of *duḥkha*.”

When this teaching was spoken, Ājñāta Kauṇḍinya realized the liberation of the mind from all defilements and the other four monks attained the pure eye of the Dharma that is free from stains and dust.

Abbreviations

Ap	<i>Apadāna</i>
AN	<i>Aṅguttara-nikāya</i>
As	<i>Atthasālinī</i>
B ^e	Burmese edition
C ^e	Ceylonese edition
D	Derge edition
Dhp	<i>Dhammapada</i>
E ^e	PTS edition
EĀ	<i>Ekottarika-āgama</i> (T 125)
MĀ	<i>Madhyama-āgama</i> (T 26)
MN	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
Paṭis	<i>Paṭisambhidāmagga</i>
Q	Peking edition
S ^e	Siamese edition
SĀ	<i>Samyukta-āgama</i> (T 99)
SN	<i>Samyutta-nikāya</i>
T	Taishō edition (CBETA)
Th	<i>Theragāthā</i>
Vin	<i>Vīnayaṭṭaka</i>

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Possible Iranian Origins for the Śākya and Aspects of Buddhism

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This article explores the plausibility of Michael Witzel's speculation that the Śākya tribe might have Iranian origins, or at least Iranian connections. Circumstantial evidence suggests that ideas associated with Iran and Zoroastrianism appear in north-east India, especially amongst the *śramaṇa* groups, and in particular amongst Buddhists, but not in the Brahmanical culture. Whereas Buddhism is frequently portrayed as a response to Brahmanism, or, especially by Buddhists, as ahistorical, Witzel's suggestion gives us a new avenue for exploring the history of ideas in Buddhism. This essay attempts to show that, at the very least, possible connections with Iran deserve more attention from scholars of the history of ideas in India and especially Buddhism.

Introduction

In 2010 Harvard Indologist Michael Witzel¹ commented, on the Indo-Eurasian_Research online forum, that we should treat the Śākya as an early incursion of Scythians (known in Sanskrit as Śaka, and in Iranian as Saka) who brought with them many ideas related to Iranian culture and/or Zoroastrian religion. He had made the same suggestion earlier on the INDOLOGY list (Witzel 2002), and had in fact published some of the evidence for this proposition in Witzel (1987,

¹I'm grateful to Professor Michael Witzel for generously corresponding with me and allowing me to steal his idea. He said "expect resistance". Thanks also to readers of earlier drafts who helped me to improve it considerably and encouraged me to pursue the idea in the face of resistance.

1989, 1997).² To date, however, he has not given this idea a full treatment which would allow us to really assess its merits.

In his Indo-Eurasian_Research post Witzel identifies a number of features of the Śākya which appear to support the identification, for example: tribes such as the Śākya are largely absent from the Vedic literature and, where they are noticed, their customs are “strange”, but they are at the forefront in Buddhist texts, suggesting a late migration into the Bihar region; the name Śākya appears to be cognate with Śaka; the existence of burial practices in Magadha that are similar to those in Central Asia; incest marriages; and post-mortem judgement of actions of the body, speech and mind triad.³ Drawing on research from a variety of disciplines including philology, historical linguistics and archaeology as well as climate science and genetics, this article considers whether each feature identified by Witzel could have come from Iran and then examines the possible route for transmission from Iran to India. In conclusion I explore what significance this might have for our understanding of the history of ideas—particularly Buddhist ideas—in India.

Sibling Marriage

In several places, particularly the *Ambaṭṭha Sutta* (D.i.92) and its Theravāda commentary, the progenitors of the Śākya are related to King Okkāka: “The Śākya regard King Okkāka as their ancestor” (Walsh 1995: 114). In the *Ambaṭṭha Sutta* the king banishes his elder brothers from his kingdom and they make their home on the slopes of the Himalayas. But they can find no one suitable to marry, so they take their own sisters as wives, and these incestuous relationships give rise to the Śākya. And it is this sibling marriage that Witzel identifies as an Iranian trait.

The Pāli name Okkāka is usually identified with the Sanskrit Ikṣvāku, a Kosalan king. I have not been able to trace the original identification of Okkāka and Ikṣvāku, but the *Mahāvastu* (Mv) substitutes Ikṣvāku where the Pāli has Okkāka (e.g. Mv 1.348). As Jones says, “The story here given, with some differences in nomenclature, follows pretty closely that in the Pāli texts” (1949: 293, n.7). However, in Mv the brothers marry a half-sister born of a different mother.⁴ Geiger’s *Pāli Grammar* points out that the names Okkāka and Ikṣvāku are not simple ana-

²Witzel (personal communication, 2012) says that the idea goes back at least to Jarl Charpentier in the 1920s, and perhaps even earlier.

³Witzel also mentions some other features, but I have not been able to follow these up.

⁴Jones notes this in his translation along with a note on the Sanskrit text (1949: 296).

logues: “[Okkāka] is in fact derived from Ukkāka (**ukkhu* side-form of *ucchu*). The analogical influence of Okkāmkha also had some effect” (1994: 8; §10, n.3). Note that P. *ukkā* = Skt. *ulkā* ‘firebrand, torch’ (cognate with *volcano*). Sanskrit *ikṣu* = Pāli *ucchu* and means ‘sugarcane’. The Pāli commentary on the *Ambatṭha Sutta* derives the name Okkāka from *ukkā*, saying that when he spoke light came from his mouth like a torch (*ukkā yiva*). (DA i.258).⁵ Rather than invent a hypothetical intermediary (viz. **ukkhu*) it would be more straightforward to take *okkāka* at face value as a secondary nominal derivative: *ukkā* + *-ka* (with *vṛddhi*); and consider that Mv *substitutes* the name Ikṣvāku for Okkāka rather than *translating* it. That is to say that the names are not analogues but refer to two different people; and that by the time and place of the composition of Mv the Śākyas were more closely assimilated to Kosala and it was politic to identify with a Kosalan ancestor. I suggest that the connection with Ikṣvāku was invented for prestige, and is not found in the Pāli texts.

Given the prejudice against incest in later Buddhist writing (Silk 2008a: 263–4), it is remarkable that this detail of the Śākyas arising from an incest union was preserved. It is an example of what New Testament scholars call the *Principle of Embarrassment*: “When an author reveals, in the course of a discussion, something that is quite unflattering to the group or the position that he or she represents, there is a high degree of probability that the statement has a basis in fact” (Nattier 2003: 65).

Witzel suggests that this story of incest marriages reflects a memory of Iran. Jonathan Silk confirms that this was indeed an Iranian custom: “there is good evidence for this practice called *xʷaētuuadaθa*, so-called next-of-kin or close-kin marriage” (Silk 2008b: 444). The extent of this practice before the Sassanian period is unclear, and much debated by scholars of Zoroastrianism and Iranian history. By the Common Era Buddhists were condemning Iranians for this practice in their texts, e.g. in the *Dharmarucy-avadāna* and the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*; and similar condemnations were made by their Greek neighbours and by the Chinese at a later date (Silk 2008b: 445). Note that in Herodotus (iv.5–6) a story of the founding of the Scythians also involves a younger brother taking the throne in precedence of his elder brothers, though it does not involve an incest marriage (Waterfield 1998: 236–7).

⁵ *tassa kira rañño kathanakāle ukkā viya mukhato pabhā niccharati, tasmā taṃ “okkāko”ti sañjānimsūti* (DA 1.258)

All this is to take the origin story of the Śākya as history. In cosmogonic myth incest is quite common. For example, in BU 1.4 *ātman* in the likeness of a man (*puruṣa*) realises he is alone and splits into husband and wife. When he attempts to have sex with her, she flees because of the incest taboo. Indeed, where there is a single progenitor or couple then incest of their children is inevitable. Christian myth glosses over the fact that the children of Adam and Eve must have committed incest in order to populate the earth. However, the story in the *Ambaṭṭha Sutta* doesn't read like creation myth.

In the version of the Śākya origin story recorded in the *Sumaṅgalavilāsini* (the Theravādin commentary on the Dīgha Nikāya), there is some evidence that cross-cousin marriage occurred in the Śākya and Koliya clans (Emeneau 1939: 222). In addition, there are extensive genealogies in the *Mahāvamsa* that show cross-cousin marriages (Trautman 1973: 158–160). A cross-cousin marriage is one in which a boy would marry his mother's brother's daughter, or a girl would marry her father's sister's son. This is one of the preferred matches in South India amongst the Dravidian-speaking peoples. Good (1996) has been critical of the idea that cross-cousin marriage is the only, or most preferred, Dravidian kin relationship, and shows that other marriage matches are made. Be that as it may, cross-cousin marriage is a feature of Dravidian kinship, and the Brahmanical law books (the *Dharmasūtras*) make it clear that cousin marriage is forbidden for Aryas. (Thapar 2010: 306).

The perception then is that if the Buddha's family practised cross-cousin marriage, they cannot have been Aryas, and were likely Dravidians. The idea seems to go back at least to 1923, when A.M. Hocart tried to use observations from the genealogies of Śākya and Koliyas to explain the relationship between the Buddha and Devadatta (Emeneau 1939: 220).⁶ Already in 1939 Emeneau saw the main flaw in this reasoning: the earliest sources we have for cross-cousin marriage are Theravāda commentarial texts written in the 5th century CE in Sri Lanka. To a great extent they reflect the society of 5th century Sri Lanka. Furthermore, there is no corroborating evidence from the *suttas* or *Vinaya* that cross-cousin marriage took place at all, and very little genealogical information.

Cross-cousin marriage is not unknown in Nepal.⁷ However it seems unlikely that present day cross-cousin marriage has any bearing on the time of the Buddha. Of the groups which practice cross-cousin marriage that I could lo-

⁶ cf. Ray (1994: 162 ff.), who points out inconsistencies in the portrayal of Devadatta.

⁷ My thanks to Richard Gombrich for pointing this out.

cate, the Bhalara moved to the far west of Nepal from Rajasthan in the 14th century (Cameron 1998); while the Tamang speak a Tibeto-Burman language and originate from Tibet (Fricke 1990; 1998). Further in the case of the Bhalara the adoption of cross-cousin marriage is related to the necessity for in-caste marriage within a very small population.

The obvious conclusion, then, is that when the authors of the *Mahāvamśa*, and the commentaries upon which the *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī* was based, sat down to compose a genealogy for the Buddha they used familiar figures from the old texts, but arranged them in a way which seemed natural to them: in other words, they unselfconsciously modelled the Buddha's family on their own.

Burial

Witzel (2010) notes that Buddhist *stūpas* “are similar to the *kurgan* type grave mounds of Southern Russia and Central Asia.” *Kurgan* is a Russian word meaning ‘barrow’, and they are described as “tumuli or round burial mounts” (Werner 1987: 503). *Kurgan* mounds begin to dot the steppes as early as the fifth millennium BCE and continue into medieval times. The early mounds contain the first wheeled wagons found in this region (ca. third millennium BCE) and evidence of domesticated horses, along with many other artefacts. The frequency of mounds in time seems to coincide with peaks in nomadic cattle-herding peoples, and one of these peak periods was the early Iron Age (ca. 800 BCE – 400 CE) (Morgunova & Khokhlova 2006). The *kurgan* mounds, however, are *burial* mounds, and the occupants were not cremated.

The *Annual Report of the Architectural Survey of India* 1906–7 notes that the earliest form of *stūpa*, possibly pre-Buddhist, such as those found in Lauriya and Pakhri in Bihar, seem to have consisted of earth piled up around a central wooden pillar (in Przulski 1935: 205–6). Note that this kind of *stūpa* is not identical to the *kurgan*, and appears to be similar only in being a rounded burial mound.

These early *stūpas* were different from the various types of Vedic monuments for the dead called *śmaśāna* (cf. Bakker 2007). The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (ŚB 13.8.1.5) considered round *śmaśāna*⁸ to be associated with *asuras* (“demons”) as against the orthodox square memorials of Brahmins (Witzel 1997: 312). Still, they were not associated with either earlier Indian, or Vedic culture. *Stūpas* were

⁸In later Sanskrit this is the normal word for a charnel ground, where corpses were cremated or simply abandoned.

elaborated over time, but retained the rounded shape of the mound within their overall plan. Jean Przyluski speculated that the elaborate *stūpas* of the 2nd century BCE coincide with the arrival of Central Asians in India, on the basis of their similarity with *kurgans* (1936: 204–209).

Several early 20th century authors noticed the similarity of *stūpas* and *kurgan* mounds, e.g. H.G. Rawlinson: “...relic-worship, and its concomitant the *stūpa*, are quite un-Indian. Gautama belonged to the Sakya clan: were they an early offshoot of the Sakas, the Sacæ or Scyths, who, as we know, followed the Aryans from time to time into India in successive waves? The word *stūpa* signifies a ‘barrow,’ or ‘tumulus,’ a Sanskrit name for a Scythian object ... [the] Sanchi Stupa, with its elaborately carved stone railing, is very probably the lineal descendent of the rude earthen mound covering the tombs of the Scythian chieftains on the Central Asia steppes...” (1913: 201–2).⁹ More recently a direct connection between the *kurgan* and *stūpa* has been proposed by Karel Werner (1987, 2002).

This is not our strongest evidence. The suggestion of a connection appears to rest solely on the similarity of shape, which could easily have evolved by chance. And note that the *kurgan* typically contained bodies, not ashes. That the ŚB saw the *stūpa* as demonic only tells us that it was not sanctioned by Late Vedic society, and this leaves open many possibilities. The location of primitive mounds in Bihar, and not elsewhere, might be consistent with the late migration of Śākyas. However, if this were the case we would expect to find such mounds in Rajasthan from an earlier period. Since the early Bihar mounds are simple constructions of piled-up earth, perhaps they did not survive; or perhaps they did, but have not been found, because archaeology in India is far from comprehensive.

Body, Speech and Mind

In her 1926 essay *Man as Willer*, Caroline Rhys Davids¹⁰ notices that the division of the person into body, speech and mind (*kāya, vāca, citta*) for moral pur-

⁹See also Przyluski (1935, 1936), who cites several more examples, though some of these authors are negatively linked to Orientalism.

¹⁰Rhys Davids only mentions the connection in passing, however, and presents it as an established fact without references or examples. The observation does not occur in Rhys Davids (1924), but it was included when the book was substantially revised (1936: 271). The observation also appears in Rhys Davids (1932). I can find no reference earlier than Rhys Davids (1926). The idea seems to originate with her.

poses, so central to Buddhist morality is also important in Zoroastrianism.¹¹ The triad *humata*, *hūxta* and *hvaršta* in Avestan (i.e. good thought, good speech and good deeds) is said to “encapsulate the ethical goals of Zoroastrianism” (Boyce 2004), and occurs in the earliest Iranian texts, such as the *Avesta* and the *Yasna Haptañhāiti*.¹² In the latter, which may well have been composed by Zoroaster, we find the following:

“We are those who welcome the good thoughts, good words, and good acts which, here and elsewhere, are and have been realized. We are not those who denigrate good (things).” (Boyce 2004)

This moral outlook becomes central in Zoroastrianism, and is still important as a focus and a unifying factor for Zoroastrians today. Rhys Davids notes that the triad is not found in other early Indian texts. Jan Gonda’s survey *Triads in the Vedas* does not mention this set in pre-Buddhist texts, though he does find it in the *Manusmṛti* (12.10f), where it is referred to as “*tridaṇḍa* ‘the threefold control (over oneself)’, viz. over speech, thought, and body” (Gonda 1976: 211).

If this is not a Buddhist borrowing from Zoroastrianism then it is an extraordinary coincidence.

Karma and the Afterlife

Witzel also notes that the idea of deeds being weighed after death was not a Vedic concept. “This was first an Egyptian, then a Zoroastrian and Iranian concept. It is connected with the idea of personal responsibility for one’s action (*karma*)” (Witzel 2010).

The Egyptian form of this idea can be found in *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*. The heart of Ani the scribe, recently deceased, is weighed in a balance, with the law—represented by a feather, or sometimes the goddess Maāt—on the other side. Ani is found to be righteous: “there hath not been found any wickedness in him; he hath not wasted the offerings in the temples; he hath not done harm by his deeds; and he uttered no evil reports while he was upon earth” (Budge 1895: 258).

¹¹My attention was drawn to this connection by Ratnaprabha in a comment on my blog (<http://jayarava.blogspot.com> 20 June 2008). He pointed to a mention of it in Sangharakshita (1984: 34–35). Sangharakshita recalls noticing the connection while reading the Zoroastrian *Gathas*. (Personal Communication 19.1.12.)

¹²The equivalent Sanskrit terms – *sumata*, *sūkta* and *suvrata* – exist, but not as a set, and not with the moral implications.

He is then led into the presence of Osiris (and becomes one of the gods). Note his actions are divided into bodily and spoken, but not (yet) mental. Had Ani's heart been heavy, i.e. if he had not been righteous, he would have been given over to Āmemet, the devourer of the dead.

Similarly, in Zoroastrianism the dead are judged on their actions during life:

“...the soul's fate depends solely on the sum of the individual's thoughts, words, and acts, the good being weighed against the bad, so that no observances should avail it in any way.” (Boyce 1994)

For Zoroastrians, therefore, one's afterlife destination depends on one's actions in life. Technically none of the usual rites and rituals (e.g. the *śrāddha* or funeral rites of the Brahmins) could do anything about it; however, “human weakness (including the force of natural affections) and human illogicality enabled [Zarathustra's] followers to maintain this doctrine while at the same time performing many rites for the departed soul's benefit.” (Boyce 1994).

Gananath Obeyesekere (2002) outlines how this type of thinking results in a bifurcation of the afterlife. Heaven and Hell are necessary consequences of the ethicization of eschatologies:

“There can no longer be a single place for those who have done good and those who have done bad. The otherworld must minimally split into two, a world of retribution ('hell') and a world of reward ('heaven').” (Obeyesekere 2002: 79)

However, good and bad can be defined in many ways. In India the process can be seen in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* and *Chāndogya Upaniṣads*, which propose different destinations for those who know about the five fires (*pañcāgni*), those who only practise the ordinary Brahmanical rituals, and those who do neither (BU 6.2, 5.2–10; cf. CU 8.1–2). There is no hell here, though rebirth as a worm, insect or snake might have been hinting at a very unpleasant afterlife. In fact the idea of hell appears as if from nowhere in Vedic thought.¹³

In Buddhist eschatology one's afterlife destination is linked to one's conduct (*karma*) of body, speech and mind. Karma and rebirth are ethicised, and the afterlife becomes very elaborate, with five or six domains of rebirth, and heaven and hell subdivided into many layers.

¹³cf. Brown (1941), Bodewitz (2002), Stausberg (2009).

Some Buddhist texts do present stories of judgement in the afterlife that are reminiscent of Zoroastrianism, and even of the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*. For instance, the *Devadūta Sutta* (M iii.178) tells how after death a being who has behaved badly might be reborn in hell (*niraya*); there they will be seized by the guardians of hell (*nirayapālā*), dragged before King Yama and cross-examined about their evil conduct of body, speech and mind. Unable to account for themselves, they are then condemned to horrific tortures, which are graphically described, and it is emphasised that “as long as that evil action is not destroyed, he does not die.”¹⁴ And until he dies, he cannot be reborn in another realm.

When it is read in the light of a possible connection to Zoroastrianism, the *Devadūta Sutta* seems to take on a new significance. Particularly the role of Yama as judge and torturer seems to fly in the face of impersonal *karma*.

It is speculative, but we could see the Buddhist theory of karma as the result of Zoroastrian-style ethicization of conduct, with its effects on afterlife destinations, applied to the Indian-style rebirth eschatology. The result is a distinctive eschatology and morality.

Two or More Cultures

Having considered some of Witzel’s suggested parallels we must now turn to the problem of how ideas from Iran might have been transmitted into the areas associated with Buddhism, and seemingly not, in most cases, to the intervening Brahmanical culture. We’ll begin by setting the scene.

Within the last decade the history of India in the first millennium BCE has been substantially revised, although a consensus on the details is still emerging. An appraisal of each theory is beyond the scope of this article, but most scholars now agree that by the beginning of the first millennium in Upper Ganges Valley, in the area of the Yamuna-Ganges Doab, there existed the Kuru-Pāñcāla ‘state’. It was village-based rather than urban, and dominated by the Kuru tribe. It was in this region that the Ṛgveda was compiled, and the elaborate *śrauta* rituals were developed. The legends of the Mahābhārata are probably based on historical events in this region.

Witzel (1987, 1989, 1997), Bronkhorst (2007) and Samuel (2008) have all described a second, adjoining cultural complex, made up of several small states in the Central Ganges Valley. It was within this second region that Buddhism, Jain-

¹⁴*na ca tāva kālaṅkaroti yāva na taṃ pāpakammaṃ byantihoti.* My translation.

ism and other Śramaṇa religions emerged. This Central Region was not initially or fundamentally Vedic, but it was Indic language speaking. Kuru-Pañcāla Brahmins, after some initial reluctance, began migrating into the Central Region ca. 800 BCE, so that Brahmins feature in early Buddhist texts but do not dominate them. There were probably influences from Chalcolithic cultures in the Vindhya Hills, Maharashtra, and the Northern Deccan, and possibly some Tibeto-Burman influence as well, though the nature and extent of this influence is sketchily understood at best. The Central Region also saw the beginnings of the second urbanisation of India, with cities such as Kāśī (Vārāṇasi), Śrāvastī and Rājagṛha being founded in the 7th or 6th century BCE.¹⁵ These dates are still vague and often based on current guesses for the date of the Buddha rather than firm archaeological facts (and those guesses have shifted forwards by a century since most of the archaeology was reported). During the lifetime of the Buddha the Central Ganges plain kingdoms Kosala and Magadha were both aggressive militaristic states that were expanding their territory.

Deshpande (1979, 1995) supports the idea of two cultures on the basis of historical linguistics. There were east-west differences in Indo-Aryan dialects, with the eastern dialects thought to have broken away from the Indo-Iranian slightly earlier; this suggests at least two waves of linguistic change in India, associated presumably with two waves of immigrants.

Genetic studies do not yet have the resolution required to shed light on this problem. They do show migrants from the steppes of Central Asia, who were probably speakers of Indo-Iranian or Indo-Aryan languages, but these migrants must have been few in number and mostly male (Sengupta et al. 2005, Carvalho-Silva et al. 2006, Reich et al. 2009, Majumder 2010). This leaves us to explain the dominance of Indo-Aryan social customs, languages and technology in Northern India in terms other than overwhelming numbers or conquest. It is not clear that we have a satisfactory answer to this question.

Amidst the larger-scale political developments of the first millennium BCE, the Śākyas emerge as a marginal people living in the foothills of the Himalayas at the northern edge of the Central Ganges Region. They were absorbed into the Kingdom of Kosala by the end of the 5th century BCE. Tribes such as the Malla, Vṛjī, and in all likelihood the Śākyas, seem to be late entrants to this area. They are mentioned in the Pāli, but not in the late Vedic texts, which leads Witzel to propose that they only appeared in the region between the Late Vedic and Early

¹⁵See Berchert 1992.

Buddhist periods (Witzel 1997), i.e. between about 1000 BCE and 500 BCE. As we will see, they brought with them a number of features foreign to existing cultures in the Ganges Plain.

Śākyas and Śakas

The Scythians were cattle-herding nomads of the Eurasian Steppes who at different times ranged from 110 to 30 east and between about 40 and 50 north, or from present-day Tuva to the Black Sea. The Steppes were inhabited by a number of pastoralist and agrarian groups, but mobile cattle herding became the dominant lifestyle in the early Iron Age. The Scythians are distinguished by their domestication of horses, their nomadic cattle-breeding lifestyle, their burial mounds, and a fine artistic tradition featuring animal images. Their material culture is described in detail in Davis-Kimball et al. (1995).

Many authors follow the Buddha's contemporary, Herodotus (ca. 484–425 BCE), in referring to the tribes encountered near Europe, especially in the area north of the Black Sea, as *Skythai* (Gk. Σκύθαι) or *Scythian*, and the tribes of the Central Asian Steppes, to the east of the Caspian Sea, as *Sakai* (Gk. Σάκαι) or *Sacae*. In Iranian the Sakai are known as Saka, and in Sanskrit as Śaka. This suggests that Śaka/Saka/Σάκαι represents what they called themselves. Both Scythian and Śaka are used rather loosely, however, and both can refer to any steppe-dwelling people. Scythian is often used as a broader term that includes the Śaka as a subgroup, which is how I will use it.

The Scythians did not use writing; however, the scholarly consensus is that they spoke Indo-Iranian languages (Yablonsky 1995, Forston 2010). On the basis of material culture, particularly *kurgan* or burial mounds, Carbon 14 dating shows three main periods of Scythian history (Alekseev 2001):

- 9th – 7th centuries BCE: pre-Scythian and Initial Scythian phase
- 7th – 6th centuries BCE: early Scythian phase
- 5th – 3rd centuries BCE: classical Scythian phase

The Scythians were important players in history during the Achaemenid Empire, which corresponds to the early and classical phase. Several different groups of them are recorded both in the royal inscriptions of King Darius (ca. 521–486 BCE) and in the *History* of Herodotus. Most of the pre-Scythian burial mounds are in the east of Central Asia near present-day Tuva and Mongolia, but in the 9th

century there was a rapid expansion west, probably prompted by changes in the climate (Davis-Kimball et al. 1995, van Geel 2004). However, even at this early stage the one which most concerns us the Scythians seem to have wandered across the whole of Eurasia (Alekseev 2001, 2002). The Sakai of Herodotus' narrative, who lived on the Eastern shores of the Caspian Sea, went on to become rulers of parts of Iran, Afghanistan and Gandhāra in the 2nd and 1st centuries BCE, but after that began to fade from history.

For Witzel the similarity of the names Śaka and Śākya is no coincidence. Both appear to derive from the root $\sqrt{śak}$, 'to be able, strong or powerful'. Śākya is probably a derivative form meaning 'related to, or descended from, the Śakas' (cf. MW sv. Śākya). The names Śākya and Śaka are probably cognate, however the underlying meaning is 'powerful', and it is not unlikely that two disparate groups might refer to themselves as 'the powerful', or even be given that epithet. In the *Ambatṭha Sutta* the Śākyas are described as fierce, harsh, touchy and argumentative (*caṇḍā*, *pharusā*, *lahusā* and *bhassā*) (D i.90–1), which could be consistent with descriptions of steppes tribes in Herodotus; but we need to keep in mind that in Witzel's account they had arrived in India centuries before the Buddha and had been thoroughly assimilated. The similarity in names is not enough to identify the Śākyas with the Iranian Sakas. We need to start looking more closely at why we might consider the Śākyas to derive from the Śakas. I'll begin by looking at the idea that the Śākyas arrived in India relatively late.

Migration in the 9th century

Michael Witzel notes that in Vedic texts associated with the eastern Ganges plain, none of the various tribes that populate the Pāli texts are found. The Sakya, Malla, Vajji, Licchavi, Naya, Kālāma, Buli, Moriya and Vesali are all missing from the *Brāhmaṇa* and *Āraṇyaka* texts. By contrast, Pāṇini knows the Mallas and the Vṛjīs as tribes of the Panjab and Rajasthan respectively. Some of the Mallas must have remained behind, as Alexander's ambassadors met people called "Malloi" (Witzel 1997: 310). Witzel reasons that these tribes must have arrived in India and migrated eastwards in the space between the composition of the late Vedic texts and the lifetime of the Buddha, i.e. between about 1000 and 500 BCE (Witzel 1997: 312).

The fact that the Śākyas are not mentioned until the Buddhist period may be explained in other ways. They may have been indigenous to the area though this raises the question of where they got an Indic-language name, since the indige-

nous people most likely spoke an Austro-Asiatic language. They may have been an early wave of the Indic-speaking peoples. However, these explanations don't explain how the Śākya came into contact with ideas such as dividing the person into body, speech and mind for moral purposes, which is so very like the Zoroastrian idea.

Witzel's time frame for the migration of non-Vedic tribes eastwards is still very broad, but we can narrow it down. Asko Parpola (2002) has independently put forward a very similar hypothesis. Parpola is concerned with the Pāṇḍavas, and by combining archaeological and textual evidence he comes to the conclusion that a group of Iranians, generically called Pāṇḍu or 'pale', entered India around 800 BCE via the Indus Valley. Some of the Pāṇḍus went north to become the Pāṇḍavas of the *Mahābhārata*, but the main part of Parpola's argument has the Pāṇḍus continuing to migrate southwards down the west coast and eventually becoming the first Indo-European speakers in Sri Lanka (Parpola 2002: 362–4). A possible weakness of this argument is that Sinhalese is usually considered an Indic rather than an Iranian language. However, Parpola suggests that the Pāṇḍavas "quickly adopted the earlier local culture and language", and we assume the proto-Sinhalese Pāṇḍu did the same. Here we might compare the Pāṇḍavas with the 10th century Norse migrants to Normandy, who rapidly adopted French language and customs. Furthermore, the Pāṇḍavas' newly-won positions were "legitimised with fabricated genealogies that made them a branch of the earlier ruling family" (Parpola 2002: 370).

Making something of an intuitive leap, Parpola adds: "Another successful group was the family to which the Buddha belonged: the Śākya, too were Pāṇḍus, ultimately of Śaka origin, as their name reveals" (Parpola 2002: 370). Parpola's date of ca. 800 BCE for the beginning of this migration is well within Witzel's time frame.

As it happens, climate scientists have proposed that an abrupt climate shift "towards increased humidity caused by a decline of solar activity" allowed for a dramatic expansion of Scythian culture around 850 BCE (van Geel et al. 2004a, 2004b; also Chambers et al. 2007). The shift probably happened rapidly, within perhaps a decade, and also led to "a dryness crisis" caused by weak monsoon intensity in north-west India after 850 BCE (van Geel et al. 2004b). Van Geel et al. also note that "aridity forced people to shift from sedentism to sheep/goat pastoralism" (van Geel et al. 2004b: 276), while Gupta et al. suggest that changes in crops grown would also result from climate change and may explain the use

of millet, lentils, chick peas etc. (Gupta et al. 2006: 1086). At the same time, Megalithic people were moving from South India into the Deccan with iron and horses, and “they were probably responsible for the end of the Chalcolithic culture in this region” (van Geel et al. 2004b: 276). Asko Parpola, however, sees the megaliths of South India as a product of the Pāṇḍus moving south (Parpola 2002: 362).

Another possible vein of evidence is suggested by Thomas Hopkins’s claim (in Samuel 2008) that the Central Ganges culture had similarities to the Malwa culture. The Malwa were one of several Chalcolithic societies which flourished in the Northern Deccan, Maharashtra and Gujarat during the second millennium BCE. A feature of these cultures is that they, like the Indus Civilisation, ceased relatively abruptly. “A drastic change in the climate occurred around 1000 B.C., when increasing aridity set in. This probably led to desertion of the vast majority of Chalcolithic settlements” (Dhavalikar 1984: 155). The final desertion occurred around 700 BCE. It may be that the more recent and precise date of 850 BCE applies here as well, and that the collapse of Chalcolithic cultures in the Deccan mirrors the conditions faced by the Mallas, Vṛji and Śākyas.

The 9th century BCE change in climate also corresponds roughly with the change from bronze to iron. It also corresponds to the compilation of the R̥gveda into a collection (Deshpande 1979: 240). Climate change data which can be accurate to within decades may be an increasingly useful tool in establishing the chronology of ancient Indian cultural changes. The date of 850 BCE for this abrupt change fits the date proposed by Parpola, and this in turn lends support to Witzel’s conjecture. Whether or not the Śakas were really Pāṇḍus, as Parpola suggests, we could at least imagine that a sharp reduction in monsoon intensity, combined with pressure from outside India in the form of vigorous and expanding tribes of steppe nomads, may have caused the migrations of the Mallas and Vṛjis that are reasonably well attested.

Other Sources of Iranian Influence

Against this picture we need to recall that the Achaemenid Empire claimed or controlled territory as far east as the Indus River from the late 6th century BCE until Alexander of Macedon invaded in 331 BCE. The extent and duration of this control is still a matter of debate, but according to Herodotus the satrapy of Hinduś

was the largest in the Empire.¹⁶ There were many potential vectors for Iranian and Mesopotamian ideas to find their way into India, with political and trade ties. We might note, for instance, that Indian writing systems, first the Kharoṣṭhī script and later Brāhmī-Lipi, seem to be based at least in part on the form of Aramaic writing used by Achaemenid administrators. The word *lipi* ‘writing’ itself is a Persian loan word (Salomon 1999: 65). A late Pāli tradition describes princes being sent to Taxila for education, and Taxila was the main Achaemenid city in Gandhāra. Another point made by Samuel, based on Hopkins’ unpublished book, is that the first use of coins in India is related to trade contacts between the Achaemenids and the Central Gangetic region (Samuel 2008: 50).

According to David Pingree, Babylonian astronomy began to be introduced into India via an Iranian intermediary, and this cannot have happened before the Achaemenid Empire conquered both Mesopotamia and Gandhāra (Pingree 1963: 231). However, some years later he says “the influence of the astronomy of [Mesopotamian text] *Mul.Apin* upon Vedic texts composed shortly before 1000 and about 500 BC can be clearly discerned” (Pingree 1998: 127). For instance, the *Jyotiṣavedāṅga* (ca. 5th century BCE) contains a calendar which is similar to Babylonian astronomy (Pingree 1963: 231). Pingree also noticed that a list of divination techniques found in the *Brahmajāla Sutta* is almost identical in form and content to Mesopotamian divination manuals *Šumma ālu* and *Enūna anu Enlil* (Pingree 1991, 1998). That the *sutta* forbids the monks from using these types of divination suggests that they were actively practised in North-East India. The likelihood is that they were spread to India in Iranian recensions by the Achaemenids (Pingree 1991: 379). The precision of the memory, combined with the story of *Barlaam & Ioasaph*, is suggestive to Stephanie Dalley: “This is the best evidence we have for Chaldean scholars living far abroad as experts and tutors in royal courts...” (Dalley 1998: 39). The evidence to support the presence of Chaldeans in India at the time is sketchy at best, and of course the idea of the Buddha’s father being a king is inaccurate. Dalley seems to be overreaching the evidence here.¹⁷

The point made by Gérard Fussman in his 2009 Gonda lecture is relevant: “We may also suppose that the non-Vedic characteristics of some early Indian

¹⁶Though Waterfield (1998) notes that this may be a misreading.

¹⁷The story of Barlaam & Ioasaph (Woodward & Mattingly 1983) is supposedly based on a Jātaka story, but the surviving versions are so heavy with Christian accretions that identifying Buddhist elements is scarcely possible.

conceptions are not necessarily borrowings from the indigenous Indian peoples the Āryas vanquished or assimilated, but Āryan ideas which never found a place in the Vedas” (Fussman 2009: 8).

Significance

Ideas have histories. And yet Buddhist narratives of the historical uniqueness of the Buddha accept that the Śākya Sage produced a number of ideas and practices with no apparent history. The last two decades have seen several attempts to create histories for some of the Buddha’s ideas, but these attempts are, almost inevitably, mostly with reference to Vedic culture. We know so very little about Indian social history outside the Vedic milieu before Buddhism that other comparisons are scarcely possible. Where there is textual evidence before ca. 500 BCE it is *all* Vedic; and archaeology has provided precious little help to date. Bronkhorst (2007) has attempted to turn the accepted chronology on its head and made the Buddhists directly influential on the Upaniṣads, but whether this revision is credible remains to be seen. Both Bronkhorst (2007) and Gombrich (2009) have argued that Buddhists must have been influenced by their Jain contemporaries, but as Gombrich (2009: 45) says, “Our evidence for early Jainism is distressingly meagre and difficult to evaluate”, and “In fact much of our best evidence for early Jainism comes from [Buddhist] texts in Pāli.” Some historians have criticised the use of Pāli texts in reconstructing Buddhist history (Walters 1999: 247–249), so their use in reconstructing a different and competing religion must be doubtful at best.

Even if the new ideas of Buddhism had their origin in a single individual, that individual existed in a cultural context, grew up in a family, and absorbed ideas and attitudes from parents, peers and teachers. Buddhism emerges from an apparently diverse cultural milieu, in which the Śākya tribe had been conquered by a dynamic and culturally distinct neighbour, and other major political changes were going on.

The ideas and practices associated with the Śākyas and early Buddhists essayed above do show some similarity to Iranian or Zoroastrian ideas or practices. The weakest link is the similarity between *stūpas* and *kurgan* burial mounds. Despite the conviction of some of the authors cited, this connection seems tenuous at best. However, the incest marriages which mark the founding of the Śākya clan according to the Pāli Canon are more suggestive, especially in light of the hostility to the practice by later Buddhist authors. Sibling marriages are familiar in Iran; and we understand that such a story is likely to have survived only if it has

a grain of truth. The strongest argument for a link to Zoroastrianism is the division of actions into body, speech and mind. That this idea developed in Iran and the Central Ganges plain independently would be a wild coincidence. Other aspects of eschatology are suggestive. The idea of post-mortem judgement for everyday actions, let alone being judged by a god, is not a part of Vedic eschatology in BU or CU, but is central to Zoroastrianism and Buddhism. Particularly, the idea of a realm of punishment seems to be missing from Vedic eschatology but is prominent in both Zoroastrianism and Buddhism.

I think most historians would accept that during the period under consideration that the border between India and Persia was blurred rather than sharp, both in geographical and cultural terms – just as the distinction between Pakistan and Afghanistan is today. Other potential sources of Iranian influence exist, but they do not have the same explanatory power as the Śākya/Śaka connection because they are more or less contemporary with the Buddha. Simple geography suggests that contact between India and Iran would have occurred in the Western regions of India, i.e. the Indus Valley, and the Upper Ganges Region, but as far as I am aware there is no great influence of Iranian culture on Vedic culture. Because Witzel's theory includes a late migration into Eastern India from a non-Vedic part of Western India, it provides a vector for carrying the ideas around the Kuru-Pañcāla state and directly into the Central Ganges Region.

While this is an argument from circumstantial evidence, I hope I have shown that the evidence, such as it is, makes a connection between the Śākyas and Iran at least plausible. If this thesis is correct, then some features of Buddhism are actually cultural features of the Śākya tribe preserved from an earlier period of living in Iran. It still allows for the Buddha as visionary and innovator, and it does not deny the influence of Brahmins and Jains, but it broadens the cultural pool from which he might have drawn his ideas. If the argument is accepted, which remains to be seen, then it obviously has some interesting implications for the study of the history of India and early Buddhism.

Over the last two decades or so an increasingly rich and complex account of Indian history before the Common Era has emerged. Buddhism has come to be seen as involved in a dialogue with the surrounding cultures and as drawing ideas and practices from them. Perhaps it was this dialogue with so many competing ideologies that helped Buddhism to free itself of tribal ties and become a religion which appealed to anyone? What is really interesting about Witzel's Iranian origin theory for the Śākyas is that it may allow us to see the Buddha as a product of his

own culture. If Witzel's thesis is correct, and I think it certainly merits serious consideration and further investigation, it suggests that figures like the Buddha and Mahāvira may have been the culmination of a process rather than its genesis. That process was the assimilation of a tribe, or tribes, who arrived in north-east India in the late 9th century BCE, and brought with them ideas and practices from Iran and Zoroastrianism.

Abbreviations

BU	Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad.
CU	Chāndogya Upaniṣad
D	Dīgha Nikāya
Gk.	Greek
M	Majjhima Nikāya
MW	Monier-Williams Sanskrit English Dictionary
Mv	Mahāvastu
RV	R̥gveda
ŚB	Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa
Skt.	Sanskrit

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Images of Zanskar*

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The ancient kingdom of Zanskar (now in Ladakh), which lay west of Mount Kailash and south of the Indus River, once belonged to Western Tibet. The valley, closed to foreigners until 1973, is one of the rare places in the world where the inner law of life and the physical laws of nature are still the only authorities.

In August 2009, in the small town of Padum, thousands of pilgrims descended from every corner of the mountains. Sheltered by storms of sand, Tenzin Gyatso, His Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama, had come to speak about the power of consciousness and the infinite ways of entering into the path of happiness.

These photographs trace the subtle dance of inner balance and movement between man and his land, in attempts to further define the vast spectrum of human existence, thereby illuminating alternative ways to persevere and to be.

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Figure 1: Near the main temple in Padum. The woman with a baby on her back is wearing a *perak*, the traditional headdress of Ladakh made of turquoises.



Figure 2: Csoma's room. In 1823 Alexander Csoma de Körös, guided by Sangs-rgyas Phun-tshogs, spent 16 months in a cell in Zangla, studying manuscripts to compile the first Tibetan-English dictionary.



Figure 3: Solitude.



Figure 4: Pilgrim.



Figure 5: In August 2005, hundreds of pilgrims descended from every corner of the mountain to hear the Dalai Lama preach.

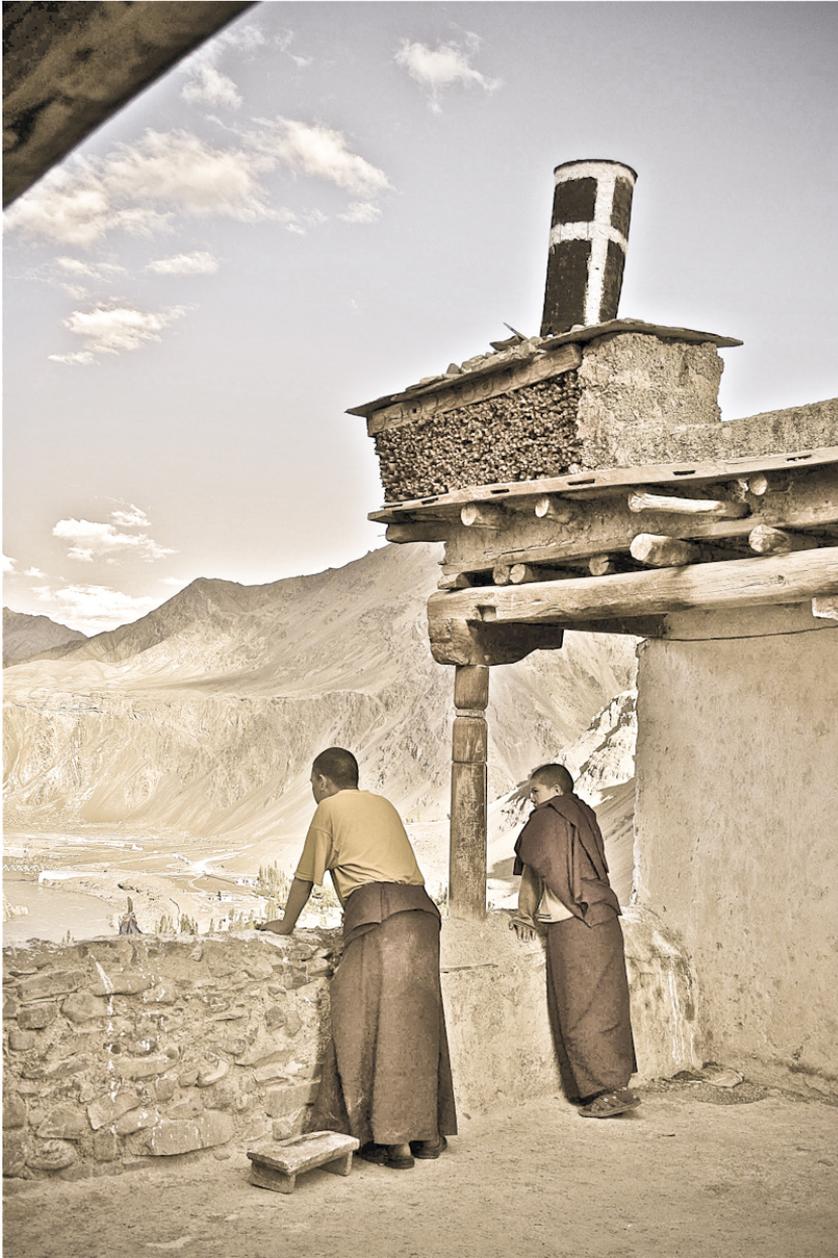


Figure 6: Takmachik, a small village beyond the border of Zaskar, close to Pakistan.



Figure 7: The castle in Zangla, a small principality near Padum. Csoma de Körös stayed here in 1823; it used to house the royal family.



Figure 8: Clouds like prayer flags.



Figure 9: Silence.



Figure 10: Human frailty.



Figure 11: A mountain clad in velvet.



Figure 12



Figure 13



Figure 14: In Zanskar polyandry is still common. This lady is on the roof of a house in which live her two husbands and their children.



Figure 15: Monks carrying branches blessed by the Dalai Lama.



Figure 16: Following the Eightfold Path.



Figure 17: Leaving the temple at Padum, the embrace of a son sees the father off and closes the cycle of teachings imparted by the XIV Dalai Lama.



Figure 18



Figure 19



Figure 20: Near Karcha Monastery.

Semen, Viagra and *Paṇḍaka*: Ancient Endocrinology and Modern Day Discrimination*

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In a *Vinaya* passage, the Buddha laid down a rule to bar *paṇḍakas* from ordination. Although there have been several attempts to shed light on whom the word *paṇḍaka* referred to, all of these were based on the circumstantial evidence in the *Vinaya*. This article argues that this approach is a red herring and conclusions drawn from it are at odds with other parts of the Canon.

Based on an overlooked *Abhidhamma* passage which characterises *paṇḍakas* as those unable to emit semen, the author reconstructs an Indian proto-endocrinology – with support from ancient medical treatises – to identify *paṇḍakas* as impotent men, and to reveal the connection between different *paṇḍaka* types and related terms. He then examines various considerations which the Buddha may have had in banning them from the Order.

The article finally discusses the implications of all this for modern Buddhist societies where gay men and transgenders are often confusedly categorised as *paṇḍakas* and discriminated against for that reason.

In 2004, Kittirat Sukhapool, a male-to-female transgender woman, recently crowned the first runner up in Thailand's world-famous Miss Tiffany beauty pageant for transgenders, went on air to express her desire to ordain for a short period

*The key concepts for this paper were presented at the "Religion, Sexuality and Sexual Diversity" seminar organized by the Thai Sexual Diversity Network in Chiang Mai, Thailand on February 21, 2012. Unless otherwise noted, all English translations of Pāli and Sanskrit sources come directly or slightly adapted from referenced publications as footnoted. References to Pāli texts are to the editions published by the Pali Text Society.

as a Buddhist monk. In Thailand, it is still common for a son to do so, so that his mother can “catch the tip of his saffron robe to heaven”, as women are not allowed ordination.

Public reaction was swift and strong. The majority of Thai Buddhists saw Kitirat’s wish as a violation of the Buddhist monastic rule, the *Vinaya*, which denies ordination to *paṇḍakas*.

In the minds of most Thai Buddhists, this two-millennia-old word is equated with the indigenous term *kathoey* – a male-born person who adopts female roles, dresses and mannerisms or, less commonly, *vice versa*. Some also use this Pāli term to refer to gay men. As a result, the Thai translation of the *Tipitaka* is littered with the use of *kathoey* as though it were an interchangeable equivalent for *paṇḍaka*. Therefore the negative attitude to *paṇḍakas* in the *Tipitaka* provides a basis for prejudice and discrimination against Thai gays and transgenders, as documented by Peter A. Jackson in “Male Homosexuality and Transgenderism in Thai Buddhist Tradition.”¹

The heart of this misconception lies in the following story in the *Vinaya*.

At that time a certain *paṇḍaka* was ordained among the monks. He approached a number of young monks and said: “Come, Venerable Ones, defile me.” The monks reproached him: “Begone *paṇḍaka*, away with you! What have we to do with that?” Reproached by the monks, he approached a number of large stout novices: “Come, Venerable Ones, defile me.” The novices reproached him: “Begone *paṇḍaka*, away with you! What have we to do with that?” Reproached by the novices, he approached elephant keepers and grooms and said: “Come, sirs, defile me.” The elephant keepers and grooms defiled him. They grumbled, became angry and irritated: “These recluses, these followers of the Buddha are *paṇḍakas* and those who are not *paṇḍakas* defile *paṇḍakas*. Thus do they all lack discipline.” Monks heard those elephant keepers and grooms who grumbled, were angry, and irritated, and those monks told this matter to the Blessed One, who said: “Monks, if a *paṇḍaka* is not ordained, let him not be ordained. If he is already ordained, let him be expelled.”²

¹Published in *Queer Dharma: Voices of Gay Buddhists*, Vol. 1, edited by Winston Leyland, Gay Sunshine Press, San Francisco, second printing 2000.

²Vin I, 85-6. Adapted from Leonard Zwilling’s translation in “Homosexuality as Seen in Indian Buddhist Texts”, published in *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, p. 207-208.

The story does not tell us anything about the offending *paṇḍaka*, except his solicitation to be “defiled” (*dūseti*) by men. Other mentions of *paṇḍakas* in the *Vinaya* do not impart much more information, except that they can act as passive partners in oral and anal sex.

Based on modern preconceptions, it is tempting to jump to the conclusions that 1) a *paṇḍaka* is a male-born person with same-sex desire – therefore, a gay man or a male-to-female transgender; 2) and this is the reason the Buddha banned them from ordination. This paper argues that both of these conclusions are false.

A red herring

The popular Thai understanding of *paṇḍakas* as gays and transgenders runs into problems when it becomes clear that the Buddha did not condemn homosexual acts simply for being between members of the same sex. There is a story in the *Vinaya* about two novices, Kaṇḍaka and Mahaka, who “defiled” (*dūseti*) each other, but were not expelled from the Order. Rather the Buddha established a rule to forbid monks from having more than one novice at the same time.³ There is no hint that they were considered *paṇḍakas*.

Later, one of them, Kaṇḍaka, had sex with a *bhikkhunī*. This time it led the Buddha to lay down a rule to expel a novice from the Order in ten cases, one of which is having sexual intercourse with a *bhikkhunī*. However, no other sex-related offense is mentioned in the list.⁴

Another case that implies homosexual attraction is the case of Elder Vakkali, who was obsessed with the appearance of the Buddha.⁵ Again, there is no hint that he was considered a *paṇḍaka*. He is even said to have attained enlightenment in the end.

In Buddhism sexual activity is seen as an impediment to spiritual progress, whether it be between people of the same sex or different sexes. As José Cabezón notes, “The principal question for Buddhism has not been one of heterosexuality vs. homosexuality but one of sexuality vs. celibacy. In this sense homosexuality, when condemned, is condemned more for being an instance of sexuality than

³Vin I, 79.

⁴Vin I, 85.

⁵*Dhammapada Commentary* XXV.11.

for being homosexuality.”⁶ In fact, it must be added that the modern concept of sexual orientation did not exist, so was not an issue in ancient Indian minds.

Regarding the social attitude of the time, John Powers describes: “There are several stories of monks having sexual encounters with other men, but they are not depicted as homosexuals; rather, their orientation is clearly heterosexual, and the underlying assumption is that they are motivated by lust and would prefer to satisfy it with women, if such were available.⁷... Indian Buddhist literature assumes that men do not form strong, lasting commitments in the way heterosexual couples do, and so this sort of activity is not seen as having the destabilizing effects on the order attributed to affairs between men and women.”⁸

Sex changes are also found in the *Tipiṭaka*. Although the events appeared supernatural, the Buddha dealt with them in a matter of fact way. A monk in whom female sexual characteristics (*itthilingaṃ*) appeared was told by the Buddha to join the *bhikkhunī* Order, and a nun in whom male sexual characteristics (*purisalingaṃ*) appeared was similarly told to move to the *Bhikkhu* order.⁹ Kittirat would, one would imagine, be told to ordain as a nun instead, if the Buddha were alive today to re-establish the *bhikkhunī* Order in Thailand.

The story of the Elder Soreyya told in the *Dhammapada Commentary* is also remarkable. Because of his attraction to the Elder Kaccāyana, he magically experienced sex change not once but twice. And yet he was allowed to become a monk and eventually attained enlightenment.¹⁰ In none of these stories is there any mention of *paṇḍaka*.

Therefore, drawing conclusions based on circumstantial evidence (soliciting sex with men) can be misleading, because it may pertain only to a particular *paṇḍaka* who happened to be caught in the limelight and so acquired everlasting notoriety.

⁶José Ignacio Cabezón, “Homosexuality and Buddhism” in *Homosexuality and World Religions*, ed. Arlene Swidler (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1993), p. 82, as quoted in *A Bull of a Man*, p. 94.

⁷Same-sex sexual behaviour seems to be of little importance for ancient Indians. In the legal treatise *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, the penance for “ejaculating semen in a man” is fasting during one day while subsisting on cow’s products. If the offender is a Brahmin, the penance is bathing with his clothes on. (11.174-175). By contrast, a man of inferior caste who has sex with a woman of superior caste is punishable by execution. (8.366).

⁸*A Bull of a Man*, p. 94.

⁹Vin III, 35.

¹⁰*Dhammapada Commentary* III.9.

Another problem with the popular understanding is that *ubhatobyañjanakas* – those with both male and female sex organs – are not included under, although often confused with, *paṇḍakas*. If *paṇḍaka* refers to those who are not really either male or female, it would make more sense to include *ubhatobyañjanakas* as a kind of *paṇḍakas* and not a separate category. In the Pāli Canon, however, *ubhatobyañjanaka* is clearly a separate category and never conflated with *paṇḍaka*.¹¹ The barring of *ubhatobyañjanakas* from ordination also happened separately and for quite a different reason.¹²

Canonical leads

There is danger in jumping to conclusions about the meaning of a term which occurs in a period and a culture far removed from ours. It is prudent to avoid imposing our values and biases on the ancient Indians, because it may turn out that they have prejudices entirely of their own. In this case, they may have had a different meaning in mind for the word *paṇḍaka* which was not spelled out because it was obvious to everyone. As L.P.N. Perera writes in his book *Sexuality in Ancient India*: “...in ancient Indian society the [*paṇḍaka*] (and to a lesser degree the hermaphrodite) constituted a factor to be reckoned with. The [*paṇḍaka*] and hermaphrodite moved freely with the rest of the population, and the peculiarities of their sexual life were taken for granted.”¹³

Leonard Zwilling traces it back further: “Even as early as the period of the *Atharva Veda*, *paṇḍakas* were viewed as a distinct group, different from ordinary males and females, and apparently transvestite.¹⁴ The *Vinaya*, in fact, goes so far as to distinguish sexual activity between normative males from sexual relations between a socially normative male and a *paṇḍaka*.”¹⁵

In the *Vinaya*, sexes are often classified into four categories: male, female, *ubhatobyañjanaka* and *paṇḍaka*, fitting the four-way categorization commonly found elsewhere in the Canon. Since we know that *ubhatobyañjanakas* are true hermaphrodites – those with both male and female sex organs – it is most likely that *paṇḍaka* refers to those with neither – a neuter.¹⁶

¹¹ *Sārattha Saṅgaha* has *ubhatobyañjanaka-paṇḍaka*, but this is almost certainly a confusion.

¹² *Vin I*, 89.

¹³ *Sexuality in Ancient India*, p. 160.

¹⁴ *Ubhatobyañjanaka* is probably meant here.

¹⁵ “Homosexuality as Seen in Indian Buddhist Texts”, *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, p. 205

¹⁶ Peter Harvey came to the same conclusion in *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, p. 414.

In the *Mahānāradakassapa Jātaka*, there is a “neither female nor male” (*n’ ev’ itthī na pumā*) person whose immediate past lives were as a castrated donkey, a monkey whose testicles had been bitten off by the alpha male, and a castrated ox. (This person was at the end revealed to be none other than the Buddha’s half brother Ānanda.)¹⁷ Again, in the *Isidāsī Therī Gāthā* the Elder Isidāsī told of her past life as a “neither female nor male” (*n’eva mahilā na puriso*) person, following births as a monkey whose testicles had been bitten off by the dominant male, a goat whose genitalia were cut off, and a castrated ox.¹⁸ It is most likely that these two cases refer to those who lack “maleness” yet are not female – *paṅḍakas* or, in particular, *napuṃsakapaṅḍakas* (literally, non-male).

Although scholars continue to debate the existence of castrated eunuchs in ancient India¹⁹, it’s clear that *napuṃsakapaṅḍakas* can be found in nature, and are commonly referred to in ancient Indian texts.²⁰ The *vassavara*, traditionally translated as “eunuch”, mentioned along with the king’s wives, in the *Vessantāra Jātaka* (J. vi 502), also likely refers to this type.²¹

Clarification and confusion: *paṅḍakas* in the Commentaries

This is by no means the end of the story. If *paṅḍakas* were simply those without sex organs, it would have been easy to define them as such, and a simple physical examination would have sufficed for identification.²²

¹⁷Synopsis at <http://dictionary.buddhistdoor.com/chi/word/10538/mahānāradakassapa%20jātaka>

¹⁸Synopsis at <http://dictionary.buddhistdoor.com/chi/word/8860/isidāsī%20therī>

¹⁹Zwilling considered intentional castration “virtually unknown” in pre-Muslim India. (*Buddhism, Sexuality and Gender*, p. 204) Perera, on the other hand, suggested that, this foreign concept imported from Persia was already well known at the time of the Buddha. In support, he cited individual acts of castration mentioned in the *Tipiṭaka*. In the *Cullavagga*, a monk frustrated with lust is said to cut off his own penis. [Vin. II, 110] Also in the Vinaya, it is said that a male sex organ was found discarded in a street in the city of Sāvattthi. [Vin. II, 269] And in the *Upāli Sutta* (M. 56), the word “one who removes testicles” (*aṅḍahāraka*) was used. (*Sexuality in Ancient India*, p. 140-1)

²⁰Such condition occurs not only in humans. The medical treatise *Caraka Saṃhitā* mentions *napuṃsaka* snakes, along with male and female ones, as well as the symptoms of their bites and appropriate treatments. *Caraka Saṃhitā* Ci23 #130-131, Vol. IV, p. 358

²¹www.sacred-texts.com/bud/j6/j6o13.htm. The Thai version translated this term as “*khanthee*”, or castrated eunuch – the only place it appears in the whole Thai-language Canon.

²²In “Avoidance and Exclusion: Same-Sex Sexuality in Indian Buddhism”, Zwilling translated the Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivāda school, the version of the monastic code adopted and still adhered to

However, it appears that *paṅḍaka* has a broader meaning beyond the *napuṃsaka* archetype. This is implied in the terms *vassakamma* and *vossakamma* mentioned in the *Brahmajāla Sutta* (D.1) as one of “base arts and wrong means of livelihood”. *Vossakamma* is turning a man into a *paṅḍaka*, while *vassakamma* is turning a *paṅḍaka* into a man.²³ Obviously, *paṅḍaka* here cannot refer to persons without sex organs, because making them functionally male would be impossible.

So who are the *paṅḍakas* in the broad meaning? Buddhaghosa’s often quoted exposition on *paṅḍakas* was perhaps aimed to clarify the broad meaning of *paṅḍaka*. Unfortunately, it is itself nothing short of perplexing. The five types of *paṅḍakas* he described are:²⁴

1. *Yassa paresaṃ aṅgajātaṃ mukhena gahetvā asucinā āsittassa pariḷāho vūpasammati, ayaṃ āsittapaṅḍako*
2. *Yassa paresaṃ ajjhācāraṃ passato usūyāya uppannāya pariḷāho vūpasammati, ayaṃ usūyapaṅḍako*
3. *Yassa upakkamena bijāni apanītāni ayaṃ opakkamikapaṅḍako*
4. *Ekacco pana akusalavipākānubhāvena kālapakkhe paṅḍako hoti, jūhāpakkhe panassa pariḷāho vūpasammati, ayaṃ pakkhapaṅḍako*
5. *Yo pana paṭisandhiyaṃ yeva abhāvako uppanno, ayaṃ napuṃsakapaṅḍako*

At first glance, the list seems to include incongruous groups of individuals. The last, namely, *napuṃsakapaṅḍaka* (“non-male” *paṅḍaka*) is described as one who “from conception, is lacking” – the archetypal sexless *paṅḍaka*. The rest, however, appear curious almost to the point of being bizarre.

Āsittapaṅḍaka (“sprayed” *paṅḍaka*) is described as one “whose sexual burning is assuaged by taking another man’s member in his mouth and being sprayed by semen”.

Usūyapaṅḍaka (“jealous” *paṅḍaka*) is one “whose sexual burning is assuaged by watching other people having sex” – in other words, a voyeur.

in Tibet, in which the offending *paṅḍaka* was explicitly shown to be a *napuṃsaka*. (*Queer Dharma*, p. 50).

²³*vasso ti puriso, vosso ti paṅḍako iti; vossassa vassa- karaṇaṃ vassa-kammaṃ, vassassa vossa-karaṇaṃ vossa-kammaṃ* (DAI, 97).

²⁴I follow the order given in the Commentary. The translation is my own.

Pakkhapaṇḍaka (“fortnight” *paṇḍaka*) is one “who is *paṇḍaka* during the waning fortnight due to maturation of non-virtuous conduct, but his sexual burning is assuaged during the waxing fortnight.”

Opakkamikapaṇḍaka (“by-assault” *paṇḍaka*) is one “whose seeds are annihilated by assault or violence.”²⁵

The list’s disjointed nature makes it easy for modern minds, even farther removed geographically, temporally, and culturally than Buddhaghosa, to hold on to the impression that a *paṇḍaka* is a gay man or a transgender. But an unbiased examination shows that only the “sprayed *paṇḍaka*” appears more or less classifiable as a homosexual or transgender in the modern sense (or does it?). Meanwhile, the “jealous *paṇḍaka*” can be equally applicable to heterosexuals and non-trans people.²⁶ Moreover, the category of *pakkhapaṇḍaka* seems to make no sense. If *paṇḍaka* is a homosexual or a transgender, how can someone be *paṇḍaka* every other fortnight?

It gets more confusing. According to the Commentary, the *Kurundī Atṭhā-kathā* insists that only *napuṃsakapaṇḍaka*, *opakkamikapaṇḍaka*, and *pakkhapaṇḍaka* are barred from ordination, with a caveat that the last can still be ordained during the “bright fortnight”.

The same sense of confusion can be found in academic studies of the term. In his 1993 book *Sexuality in Ancient India*, L.P.N. Perera uses the phrases “sexual weaklings” and “persons with peculiar psycho-sexual problems”²⁷ to describe *paṇḍakas*, which “embrace all eunuchs and sexual deviants, but of course to the exclusion of hermaphrodites.”²⁸

Leonard Zwilling comes closer to the mark in his 1998 paper “Homosexuality as Seen in Indian Buddhist Texts”, pointing out that, “Rather, *paṇḍaka* and its

²⁵Zwilling translates this as “individual who attains ejaculation through some special effort or artifice.” (“Homosexuality as Seen in Indian Buddhist Texts”, *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, p. 204) Harvey takes it to mean “by-a-means *paṇḍaka*” or “one for whom semen is expelled using some special means.” (*An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, p. 414) If correct, this category could refer to those who use aphrodisiacs or other “aggressive means” to achieve ejaculation. The author, however, agrees with the Thai Commentary that the word refers to castrated eunuchs and others whose genitalia have been destroyed with violence. Professor Richard Gombrich remarks that *upakkama* means an assault or act of violence. (Personal communication.)

²⁶I am indebted to Phra Chai Woradhammo, whose article on *paṇḍaka* pointed this out to me, and piqued my interest to delve into more research on the term.

²⁷*Sexuality in Ancient India*, p. 142.

²⁸*Sexuality in Ancient India*, p. 143.

synonyms are to be interpreted metaphorically as we do in English when it is said of a weak or pusillanimous person that he (or even she) ‘has no balls.’”²⁹

Upon considering Buddhaghosa’s list of five *paṇḍaka* types, he concludes, “It is evident, then, that we are dealing with a variety of sexual dysfunctions and variations categorized under the general rubric ‘*paṇḍaka*,’ and the reason for this is that they all share the common quality of being ‘*napuṃsaka*,’ ‘lacking maleness.’”³⁰

Although his contribution to this issue cannot be underestimated, Zwilling’s paper looks at *paṇḍaka* through the lens of sexuality, undoubtedly influenced by the circumstance of the *Vinaya* episode. Indeed, this *a priori* assumption sets the tone for the foregone conclusion that the various *paṇḍaka* types are united by the fact that “for one reason or another they fail to meet the normative sex role expectations for an adult male.”³¹

Zwilling comes to an even more specific conclusion in a 1998 paper, “Avoidance and Exclusion: Same-Sex Sexuality in Indian Buddhism”, when he equates *paṇḍaka* with an otherwise normative male who takes a passive role in homosexual relations, stating, for example, that “In the *Vinaya*, *paṇḍaka*, or *passivos*, are considered in the same light as common prostitutes, widows, and grown up unmarried girls...”³²

This is a bold conclusion, considering his much vaguer characterization of *paṇḍaka* in “The First Medicalization: The Taxonomy and Etiology of Queerness in Classical Indian Medicine” which he co-wrote with Michael J Sweet. In this article, he lumps *paṇḍaka* with other terms: “For Indians of the classical era, the various forms of queerness that have been catalogued above - gender role atypicality, homosexuality, impotence and other sexual dysfunctions, paraphilias and hermaphroditism - were not viewed as discrete and unrelated instances of pathology. Rather, they were seen as instances of a general term known variously as *klība*, *sandha*, *napuṃsaka* and *paṇḍaka* (to mention only the chief examples which have been cited so far). Despite the etymological differences in meaning that may be distinguished among these terms, they came to be used nearly synonymously.”³³

²⁹ *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, p. 204.

³⁰ *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, p. 205.

³¹ *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, p. 205.

³² *Queer Dharma*, p. 48.

³³ “The First Medicalization”, p. 599.

The essence of *paṇḍakas* or the lack thereof?

The author, however, would like to argue that the circumstantial evidence in the *Vinaya* incident is a red herring. Contrary to Zwilling, I propose that the various types of *paṇḍakas*, as far as the *Tipitaka* is concerned, can be more clearly understood as related instances of a discrete pathology based on the criterion of functional impotence – rather than a sundry list of sexual dysfunctions, non-conforming sexual/gender expressions, roles or practices, as Zwilling has suggested. More specifically, I contend that these *paṇḍaka* types are grouped together as special types of those suffering impotence due to seminal absence/deficiency.

Sexless = sonless

First, let us look at what life must have been for *napuṃsaka-paṇḍakas*. Like other early civilizations, ancient India places great importance on procreation, and siring sons is the ultimate purpose of lay life for males. This is illustrated in the background story of the first *Vinaya* rule, where a monk, Sudinna, is asked by his mother to have sex with his former wife to sire offspring lest the family's properties be seized by the state.³⁴

Legal treatises of the time bear testimony to the plea of Sudinna's mother. The *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, the *Laws of Manu*, prescribes, "The sons inherit the father's estate – not the brothers, not the fathers. The estate of a man who has no sons, however, is inherited by his father or by his brothers."³⁵ And under the "Alternative Heirs" section, when no other heirs are available, "...pure and disciplined Brahmins learned in the triple Veda share the estate... [I]n the absence of any heir, the king may take the property of persons belonging to the other classes."³⁶

Not only does the lack of progeny greatly inconvenience one's family in this life, it also troubles them enormously in the afterlife. The *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* describes how sons from certain types of marriage (classified by rites) can purify and "rescue from evil" generations of forefathers before him and generations after him.³⁷

³⁴ Vin III, 18.

³⁵ *Manu's Code of Law*, 9.185, p. 199.

³⁶ *Manu's Code of Law* 9.188-189, p. 199.

³⁷ *Manu's Code of Law* 3.37-38, p. 110.

This clearly puts those without sons in great difficulty. Even today, a Hindu who dies without a male heir is believed to head to the *Put* hell specially reserved for the sonless. It is reasoned that sons are called *putra* in Sanskrit because "... only a son can achieve the gift of immortality for his father, whom he delivers from hell by the ceremonies he performs. 'There is no heaven for a sonless man... Even the beasts of the field know that the creature who does not beget offspring has no place in the world.'"³⁸

The medical treatise *Caraka Saṃhitā* spares no words in extolling the virtues of having children and condemning the vices of childlessness. "A person without a child is like a tree just with one branch, devoid of fruits and shadows, with an unwanted smell... like an idol made of grass wearing the garb of a man... like a lamp in sketches [not the actual lamp which emanates light]... like a dry pond... is comparable to a metal that just looks like gold without any properties of gold... is not established, naked, empty, having only one sense organ and devoid of any useful activity."³⁹

"A person who has many children has many images, many faces, many dimensions, a multitude of activities, many eyes, multi-dimensional knowledge, a multitude of souls. This type of person is auspicious, praiseworthy, blessed, potent, and has many branches. Such persons are hailed in this world. Love, strength, happiness, professional excellence, wide influence, vastness of kinsmen, fame, utility to the world and happiness at the later stage of life and pleasure – all these are dependent upon children."⁴⁰

It is easy to see how in such a society a *napuṃsaka-panḍaka*, guaranteed to have no children, must have been considered a shameful burden – even a curse – on the family. Very likely such a person would find themselves living at the periphery of society, left to fend for themselves. Many would no doubt resort to prostitution for survival.

It is probably the stigmatization of *napuṃsaka-panḍakas* as outcastes, often prostitutes, that earned them notoriety in the Buddha's time. The *Vinaya* suggests that *panḍakas* were considered promiscuous and lascivious, as they are often listed among prostitutes, widows, coarse young girls and nuns as those whose company a monk should avoid lest he become suspected of mischief.⁴¹ More-

³⁸ *Hindu Life and Customs*, p. 10.

³⁹ *Caraka Saṃhitā*, C12.1#16-18, Vol. III, p. 75.

⁴⁰ *Caraka Saṃhitā*, C12.1#19-22, Vol. III, p. 75-76.

⁴¹ A. III.128, Vin I, 70. *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, p. 416.

over, they were thought to be born in such conditions due to past karma. Both the *Mahānārada-kassapa Jātaka* and the *Isidāsī Therī Gāthā* cited such rebirths as results of adultery in earlier lives.

Seedless = Sonless = Sexless

Now let us look at the fate of the impotent. There are endless pieces of evidence showing the disdain for them in ancient India. For the classical Indians, being “seedless” is not much better than being a sexless *napuṃsaka*.

Zwilling fully captures this cultural attitude: “Ancient Indian society was thoroughly patriarchal and male potency was considered of very high value; one of the means by which a man might attain high social status was through his potency and its loss was greatly feared. Anxiety over the loss of potency can be seen in the hymns, charms, and prayers of the *Atharva Veda* and the sacrifices of the *Brāhmaṇa* dedicated to its preservation, augmentation, restoration and destruction in others. It is in these texts belonging to the eighth to sixth centuries BCE that we get our first view of men who did not fulfill the most important male gender role of all, that of procreator.”⁴²

The legal treatise, *Nārada-smṛti*, devotes its chapter 12 to the relationship between a man and a woman, with a substantial exposition regarding *paṇḍakas*. The treatise forbids the marriage of a woman to a man with an incurable type of impotence, because “Women were created for the sake of offspring. The woman is the field; the offspring belongs to the possessor of the seed. A field should be given to one who has seed; one without seed is not entitled to a field.”⁴³

Another term commonly used for the impotent in Sanskrit is *klība*.⁴⁴ They are mentioned in *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* under the section *Disqualification from Inheritance*: “The following receive no shares: the impotent, outcastes, those born

⁴² *Queer Dharma*, p. 46.

⁴³ *Nārada-smṛti*, 12.19, p. 382.

⁴⁴ Like *paṇḍaka*, the term is also under debate. But it seems clear that it refers to impotence, as opposed to homosexuality or transgenderism, as in *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* 9,167: “When a wife of someone who is dead, impotent, or sick bears a son after she has been appointed in accordance with the Law specific to her, tradition calls him a son begotten on the wife.” (*Manu’s code of Law*, p.198). And in 9.59, “When the line of descendants dies out, a woman who has been properly appointed should get the desired children from a brother-in-law or a co-feeding relative... The woman may be appointed by her husband, if he is alive and has failed to give her sons (because he is *klība* or sick, the commentators suggest) or by his relatives, if he has died before producing a son. (*The Laws of Manu*, p. 204).

blind or deaf, the insane, the mentally retarded, mutes, and anyone lacking manly strength.”⁴⁵ They are similarly included among the disinherited in the *Arthaśāstra*, “An outcaste, a son born to an outcaste and an impotent person are not entitled to a share, also an idiot, a lunatic, a blind and a leprous person.”⁴⁶

Another legal treatise, *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra*, advises the king to “... maintain those who are legally incompetent with food and clothing, namely, those who are blind, mentally retarded, impotent, addicted to vice and sick...”⁴⁷ The reason for such ‘kindness’ to the impotent becomes clear when one reads in *Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtras* that, “the king should maintain people who are impotent or mad, because their estates go to him.”⁴⁸

If disenfranchisement is not enough, they are considered unlucky and openly discriminated against by being excluded from sacrificing⁴⁹ and from ceremonies for the dead.⁵⁰ *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* says, “A *cāṇḍāla*, a pig, a cock, a dog, a menstruating woman, or an impotent man must not look at the Brahmins while they are eating.”⁵¹ Needless to say that being mentioned in the same breath as inauspicious animals, *cāṇḍāla* and menstruating women is as bad as it gets in ancient India.

Seminal Importance

However, these pieces of evidence by themselves do not amount to a proof that these various types of *paṇḍakas* in the *Tipiṭaka* refer to those with impotence due to seminal absence/deficiency. The proof must lie in a coherent theory of such pathology and how well it clarifies the hitherto unclear relationships between seminal deficiency on one hand and *fellatio*, voyeurism and lunar fluctuation on the other.

⁴⁵ *Manu’s Code of Law* 9.201, p. 200.

⁴⁶ *Arthaśāstra*, 3.5.30, Vol. II, p. 211.

⁴⁷ *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra* 2.3.37, *Dharmasūtras*, p. 255.

⁴⁸ *Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra* 19.35, *Dharmasūtras*, p. 429.

⁴⁹ “A Brahmin must never partake of food at a sacrifice offered by someone who is not a vedic scholar or who officiates as a priest for a large number of people, or at one offered by a woman or an impotent man. When such persons offer an oblation, it is unpropitious for virtuous people and disagreeable to gods; therefore, he should avoid it.” (*Manu’s Code of Law* 4.205, 206 and 211, p. 134-135).

⁵⁰ “Brahmins who are thieves, fallen from their caste, or impotent, or who follow the livelihood of infidels – Manu has declared these unfit to participate at divine or ancestral offerings.” (*Manu’s Code of Law* 3.150, p. 116).

⁵¹ *Manu’s Code of Law* 3.239, p. 120.

As the monastic order was tasked with following the Buddha’s rule, this list of *paṇḍaka* types is likely the result of a conscious effort to give a precise definition of *paṇḍaka* according to current knowledge. Such a definition has to be understandable and not appear arbitrary to intelligent people of the time. (In this, I follow the general approach Professor Richard Gombrich used in his chapter “Who was Angulimāla?”⁵² to shed light on the eponymous brigand.)

In the *Parūpahāarakathā* section of the *Kathāvatthu*⁵³ in the *Abhidhamma*, the interlocutor (with orthodox view) attempts to corner the responder (with heterodox view) into accepting the orthodox view that, despite food consumption, an enlightened *bhikkhu* (*arahant*) does not emit semen, due to his constant mindfulness and self-control. During the debate, there is an interesting section which seems to give an essential characteristic of *paṇḍakas*.⁵⁴ It reads⁵⁵:

atthi arahato asuci sukkavissatṭhī ti? āmantā.

Does an *arahant* emit semen? Yes.

arahato asuci sukkavissatṭhī kissa nissando ti? asitapītakhāyitasāyitassa nissando ti.

What causes an *arahant*’s seminal emission? It is caused by eating, drinking, chewing and tasting.

arahato asuci sukkavissatṭhī asitapītakhāyitasāyitassa nissando ti? āmantā.

Does eating, drinking, chewing and tasting cause an *arahant* to emit semen? Yes.

...

ye keci asanti pivanti khādanti sāyanti, sabbesaṃ yeva atthi asuci sukkavissatṭhī ti? āmantā.

Do all those who eat, drink, chew and taste emit semen? Yes.

dārakā asanti pivanti khādanti sāyanti, atthi dārakānaṃ asuci sukkavissatṭhī ti? na hevaṃ vattabbe.

Young boys eat, drink, chew and taste. Do they emit semen? No, that cannot be said.

⁵²See Richard F. Gombrich, *How Buddhism Began*, pp. 135-164.

⁵³Translated in *Points of Controversy*, II.1, p. 111.

⁵⁴This *Abhidhamma* characterization of *paṇḍakas* has not, as far as the author is aware, been commented upon by previous studies.

⁵⁵My own translation.

paṇḍakā asanti pivanti khādanti sāyanti, atthi paṇḍakānaṃ asuci sukkavissatthī ti? na hevaṃ vattabbe.

Paṇḍakas eat, drink, chew and taste. Do they emit semen? No, that cannot be said.

devā asanti pivanti khādanti sāyanti, atthi devatānaṃ asuci sukkavissatthī ti? na hevaṃ vattabbe.

Devas (gods) eat, drink, chew and taste. Do they emit semen? No, that cannot be said.

Here, *paṇḍakas* are grouped with young boys and *devas* as those without seminal emission despite food consumption. It nicely echoes classical Indian medical theory, according to which semen is the byproduct of a process of gradual refinement of food. The passage also finds a close parallel in the medical treatise, *Suśruta Saṃhitā*: “Again, it may be asked, how is it that semen is not found in an infant?”⁵⁶

Therefore, I propose that this key *Abhidhamma* passage together with numerous passages in classical Indian medical treatises points to common knowledge shared by the early Buddhists and the emerging Āyurvedic science: a physiological theory of semen under which the five *paṇḍaka* categories can be understood as specific manifestations of seminal deficiency.

Buddhism and classical Indian medicine

In his book *Asceticism and Healing in Ancient India*, Kenneth Zysk showed how the empirico-rational Āyurvedic medicine began to take shape around the time of the Buddha, drawing from a common source of medical doctrines which was partially recorded in the *Tipiṭaka*. His close examination of the classical medical treatises such as the *Caraka Saṃhitā* and *Suśruta Saṃhitā* and the *Vinaya* found close parallels between many prescriptions in the Āyurvedic treatises and treatments the Buddha allowed monks to use.

In the same *Brahmajāla sutta* where *vassakamma* and *vossakamma* appeared, the Buddha also demonstrated detailed knowledge of medical treatments by mentioning “giving emetics, purges, and purges of the upper and lower parts of the body and of the head; administering oil in the ears, refreshing the eyes; nasal ther-

⁵⁶*Suśruta Saṃhitā*, 1.14, Vol. I, p. 111.

apy; applying collyria and ointments; ophthalmology; major surgery; pediatrics; giving root medicines; and administration and evacuation of herbal remedies.”⁵⁷

Moreover, the Buddha also showed a profound familiarity with the medical theory of the time in the *Sīvaka Sutta* when he was asked if all experience, whether pleasure or pain, is caused by karma. His reply was, “There are cases where some feelings arise based on bile [*pitta*] ... based on phlegm [*semha*] ... based on internal winds [*vāta*] ... based on a combination [*sannipāta*] of bodily humors ... from the change of the seasons... from uneven care of the body... from being subjected to violence... from the result of kamma.”⁵⁸

The first three – bile [*pitta*], phlegm [*semha*], and winds [*vāta*] – as well as their combinations are in fact the central etiology of diseases according to the medical theory of the time. According to Zysk, “Although its exact origin cannot be determined, the etiology particular to Indian medicine is the three-humor (*tridoṣa*) theory. Nearly all maladies plaguing humans are explained by means of three “peccant” humors, or *doṣa* – wind, bile and phlegm – either singly or in combination.”⁵⁹

Reconstructing ancient endocrinology

Why should semen matter so much for ancient Indian medicine? This may perplex modern minds, but it will become less strange if we consider it as an early theory – proto-endocrinology, if you will – of male impotence/virility. Therefore, while modern medicine examines the roles of the male hormone testosterone, ancient Indian medicine look at it in terms of the most obvious sign of virility – semen. We will find that similar ideas still linger today. For example, it is still common for a sports coach to forbid his team members to have sex with their partners before important matches. In Thailand, an incompetent man is called *Mai Mee Naam Ya* or “lacking (sexual) fluid”.

Here I will attempt to reconstruct the physiology of semen from classical sources. Sentences and phrases in italics are my own attempts to fill in the gaps and shall be kept at minimum.

⁵⁷Zysk’s translation, *Asceticism and Healing in Ancient India*, p. 27.

⁵⁸Slightly adapted from Thanissaro Bhikkhu’s translation. www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn36/sn36.021.than.html

⁵⁹*Asceticism and Healing in Ancient India*, p. 29.

General theory of semen

The unmanifested soul, which takes different forms in this world, manifests itself in the form of semen. Semen is the final product par excellence of food consumed.⁶⁰ The food is fully digested with the help of the internal heat and ultimately assimilated into the system, giving rise to lymph chyle (*rasa*)... The chyle produces blood. From blood is formed flesh. From flesh originates fat, which gives rise to bones. From bones originate marrow, which, in its turn, germinates semen.⁶¹

Semen gives rise to valour and courageousness, makes the man amorously disposed towards the female sex, increases his strength and amateness, is the sole impregnating principle in the male organism, and is possessed of the virtue of being quickly emitted.⁶²

Semen is the basis of lust; on it depends the energy of man, his power to know and act. It can be used either as a deadly substance or as a giver of immortality. Semen poisons the man of pride but pacifies and illumines the man who controls his passions.⁶³

There are persons who gain sexual vitality only at an appropriate time. There are others who are capable of indulging in sex because of their regular habit. There are others who indulge in sex by taking aphrodisiacs, and there are persons who are virile by nature.⁶⁴

Sexual power gets reduced by old age, worry, diminution of semen because of disease, emaciation, exertion, fasting, excessive indulgence with women, consumption, fear, suspicion, grief, witnessing of the faults in women, non-excitement of the female partner, absence of passionate determination and complete avoidance of sex acts.⁶⁵ One should preserve his own semen because its diminution leads to many diseases and even death.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ *Caraka Saṃhitā*, Ci2.4#49, Vol. III, p. 103.

⁶¹ *Suśruta Saṃhitā*, 1.14, Vol. 1, p. 108.

⁶² *Suśruta Saṃhitā*, 1.15, Vol. 1, p. 122.

⁶³ *The Myths and Gods of India*, p. 77.

⁶⁴ *Caraka Saṃhitā*, Ci2.4#7, Vol. III, p. 96.

⁶⁵ *Caraka Saṃhitā*, Ci2.4#43, Vol. III, p. 102.

⁶⁶ *Caraka Saṃhitā*, Ni6#9, Vol. II, p. 82.

Diagnostic test

The entire sugarcane plant is pervaded by its juice. Ghee is available in the whole of curd, and oil is available in all parts of the sesame seed. Similarly, semen pervades the entire body, which has the sensation of touch.⁶⁷

One should examine a man's virility by his congenital physical characteristics. If his virility is certain, then he is eligible to take a girl. His vertebrae, knees, bones, shoulders, and neck should be well-built. The nape of his neck should be tough, as well as his torso, thighs and skin. He should have a smooth gait and voice. His feces should sink in water, his urine should be noisy and foamy. If he has these characteristics he is virile; if not, he is [a *paṇḍaka*].⁶⁸

Even if the man is cleansed of his physical morbidities by the administration of *pañca karma* (five elimination therapies), his semen should be examined. And from its colour, the nature of the afflicting *doṣas* (if any) should be ascertained.⁶⁹

Etiology

Popular beliefs attribute impotence to various causes – from congenital, physical, and psychological to magical.⁷⁰ Some even attributed it to past karma.⁷¹ A legal

⁶⁷ *Caraka Saṃhitā*, C12.2#46, Vol. III, p. 103.

⁶⁸ *Nāradaśmṛti*, 12.8-12.10, p. 380.

⁶⁹ *Caraka Saṃhitā*, C130#127, Vol. V, p. 161.

⁷⁰ Several such are preserved in the *Atharva Veda* (IV, 4; VI, 10 1) to give virility; VI, 138; VII, 113 to cause impotence) <http://www.ebooksread.com/authors-eng/t-w-rhys-thomas-william-rhys-davids/dialogues-of-the-buddha-iva/page-4-dialogues-of-the-buddha-iva.shtml> In the *Artharva Veda*, there are several charms concerning impotence. One example is VI, 138. "Charm For Depriving A Man Of His Virility": "As the best of the plants thou art reputed, O herb: turn this man for me to-day into a eunuch that wears his hair dressed! Turn him into a eunuch that wears his hair dressed, and into one that wears a hood! Then Indra with a pair of stones shall break his testicles both! O eunuch, into a eunuch thee I have turned; O castrate, into a castrate thee I have turned; O weakling, into a weakling thee I have turned! A hood upon his head, and a hair-net do we place. The two canals, fashioned by the gods, in which man's power rests, in thy testicles... I break them with a club. As women break reeds for a mattress with a stone, thus do I break thy member."

⁷¹ "The inclusion of past actions (*karman, kamma*) as a category of medical etiology is clearly quite old and deserves special attention. The notion that past actions contribute to an individual's overall physical state is... in conflict with the general empirico-rational physiology of Indian medicine. The *Caraka Saṃhitā* mentions that a certain *Bhadrakāpya* was the principal proponent of the theory, but the context in which the passage occurs demonstrates that it was by no means universally followed." *Asceticism and Healing in Ancient India*, p. 30-31.

"The magical medicine of the Veda never completely disappeared in India. It survived in classical Āyurvedic medicine principally in the treatment of ailments that have Vedic parallels, in the

treatise holds that “[Paṇḍakas] are known by experts in the science to be of fourteen different kinds, some curable, some not... They are: one who is impotent from birth, one who has been castrated, ‘one who is capable of sexual intercourse fortnightly’, one whose impotence is the result of the curse of his teacher or illness or anger of the gods, one who is impotent except when jealous [watching others in intercourse], one who is enjoyed by other men, one who ejaculates prematurely, one who engages in oral intercourse, one who cannot ejaculate, one who is sterile, one who is shy, and one who is virile with others than his wife.”⁷²

In this exposition, however, only paṇḍaka types whose impotence is due to seminal absence or deficiency are dealt with.

General signs and symptoms of impotency

Even though a man is constantly desirous of sexual intercourse with the partner who is cooperative, he – because of the looseness (absence of erection) of the phallus – becomes incapable of performing the sexual act. Even if he rarely attempts a sexual act, he gets afflicted with shortness of breath as well as perspiration in the body, and gets frustrated in his determined efforts. His phallus becomes loose (because of the lack of erection), and he does not ejaculate any semen.⁷³ *He is called a paṇḍaka.*

Treatments

The therapy which creates potential for getting offspring for the maintenance of the continuity of the lineage; which causes instantaneous sexual excitation, to such a degree that one is capable of indulging in sexual acts with women without interruption, like a strong horse, and is exceedingly loved by women; which nourishes the tissue elements; by which even in old age one does not get seminal debility; which enables one to remain firm like a big tree with innumerable branches, and to earn respect from people by virtue of having procreated several children; which is conducive to enjoying happiness and eternity in this world

cures for childhood diseases, and in remedies involving the elimination of malevolent entities... Aspects of magico-religious medicine were practiced alongside the techniques of the more empirico-rational tradition of Āyurveda...” *Asceticism and Healing in Ancient India*, p. 19-20.

⁷²*Nāradaśmṛti*, 12.11-13, p. 381.

⁷³*Caraka Saṃhitā*, C130#155-157, Vol. V, p. 169.

and beyond in view of one's offspring; and which brings about longevity, beauty, strength and nourishment – is known as aphrodisiac therapy.⁷⁴

The general principle is this: "... all *dhātu* (elements) get increased by the use of substances with similar properties and reduced by the use of those having opposite properties. Therefore, among other *dhātu* of the body, the muscle gets increased by the administration of meat, blood by blood, adipose tissue by fat, muscle-fat by muscle-fat, bone by cartilage, bone marrow by bone marrow, semen by semen⁷⁵ and fetus by immature fetus (egg).⁷⁶

If a particular *dhātu* is to be increased and the homologous dietary articles cannot be taken because of non-availability or, though available, they cannot be used because of unsuitability, aversion or any other cause, then food preparations of different nature but having the predominance of the attributes of the *dhātu* to be promoted should be used. *In particular*, when there is a deficiency of semen, with a view to promoting it, milk, ghee and other substances known to be sweet, unctuous and cold should be administered.⁷⁷

The physician should collect, *among other things*, the semen of sparrows, swans, cocks, peacocks, tortoises and crocodiles [*for use as aphrodisiacs*]... By the administration of these eatables, a man becomes fully potent, and with strongly erect genital organ enjoys optimal sexual delight in women with stallion vigour.⁷⁸

A person should always seek to take aphrodisiacs because he can earn *dharma*, wealth, love and fame through this therapy alone. A person gets these benefits through his progeny and the aphrodisiac therapy enables him to procreate sons.⁷⁹

In addition to the general kind of impotence, there are also special types of paṇḍaka:

Napūṃsakapaṇḍaka

Being affected with *vāyu* and *agni* (*pitta*) [*in the mother's womb*], if the testicles of the fetus get destroyed, then there is eviration [*loss or deprivation of masculine qualities with assumption of feminine characteristics*] in the offspring.⁸⁰ *This*

⁷⁴ *Caraka Saṃhitā*, C1.1#9-13, Vol. III, p. 8-9.

⁷⁵ This adds weight to the explanation for *āsittapaṇḍaka's* semen ingestion.

⁷⁶ *Caraka Saṃhitā*, Śā6#10, Vol. II, p. 433.

⁷⁷ *Caraka Saṃhitā*, Śā6#11, Vol. II, p. 434.

⁷⁸ *Caraka Saṃhitā*, C12.2#10-13, Vol. III, p. 83-84.

⁷⁹ *Caraka Saṃhitā*, C12.1#3-4, Vol. III, p. 71.

⁸⁰ *Caraka Saṃhitā*, Śā#2.21, Vol. II, p. 356.

condition is called *napuṃsakapaṇḍaka*: one who is *paṇḍaka* because of lack of sex organs.

opakkamikapaṇḍaka

A man whose genitalia have been destroyed with violence (*upakkama*) lose his seminal function – similar to a *napuṃsakapaṇḍaka*. He is called *opakkamikapaṇḍaka*: one who became *paṇḍaka* because of an assault.⁸¹

Both *napuṃsakapaṇḍaka* and *opakkamikapaṇḍaka* are incurable.

Other manifestations of seminal deficiency also have organic causes, but show no physical signs. Only behavioral patterns due to functional impotence are found in such cases, as a result of congenital deficiency of semen.

usūyapaṇḍaka

Reduced passion along with jealousy of the parents' cohabitation produces mixoscopia [*voyeurism*] in the offspring.⁸² [*Such a*] man who cannot copulate with a woman without previously seeing the sexual intercourse of another couple is called *īrṣaka*,⁸³ also known as *usūyapaṇḍaka* [*jealous*].

The semen is ejaculated from the body because of eight factors, namely, excitement, passionate desire, fluidity, sliminess, heaviness, atomicity, the tendency to flow out, and the force of *vāyu*.⁸⁴ *If the father lacks excitement in love making, the son is affected by the low quality of his seminal discharge.* Because [the power to perform a sex act with a woman] is dependent upon excitement and the latter is dependent upon the strength of the body and the mind,⁸⁵ *an usūyapaṇḍaka son needs to witness sexual intercourse of another couple to increase his exhilaration, which is the base of potency.*

⁸¹ Castrated eunuchs would naturally belong in this category. However, upon Professor Gombrich's suggestion that this category can also include other kinds of assaults (personal communication), the author came to think that it can also include those whose genitalia have been severed by others – for example, a jealous wife.

⁸² *Caraka Saṃhitā*, Śā2#20, Vol. II, p. 356.

⁸³ *Suśruta Saṃhitā*, 3.2, Vol. 2A, p. 131.

⁸⁴ *Caraka Saṃhitā*, C12.4#48, Vol. III, p. 103.

⁸⁵ *Caraka Saṃhitā*, C12.4#44-45, Vol. III, p. 102.

āsittapaṇḍaka

A child born of scanty paternal sperm becomes an *asekya* and feels no sexual desire (erection) without previously (sucking the genitals and) drinking the semen of another man.⁸⁶ *He is known as āsittapaṇḍaka and ingests semen to compensate for his own inadequacy.*⁸⁷ The semen-carrying ducts of an *asekya* are expanded by the drinking of the semen as above described, which helps the erection of his reproductive organ.⁸⁸

*Because their organic conditions are congenital, the usūyapaṇḍaka and āsittapaṇḍaka are considered incurable.*⁸⁹

pakkhapaṇḍaka

Semen is spoken of not only as *bīja* (the seed) and *vīrya* (the male essence) but also *soma* (the offering) and *candra* (the moon).⁹⁰ Another common name of semen, *śukra*, also means bright, resplendent. From the same Vedic root derived *śukla-pakṣa*, bright fortnight of the moon.⁹¹

*These etymological connections reveal the nature of yet another particular type of impotence: those who experience temporary impotence due to sexual indulgence like the waning fortnight of the moon. Sexual indulgence is one important cause of semen diminution.*⁹²

Temporary impotence is related to the mythological story narrated by the gods to the sages about the habitual sexual indulgence of Candra (the Moon). The Moon had twenty-seven wives (corresponding to the twenty-seven stations of the moon)

⁸⁶ *Suśruta Saṃhitā*, 3.2.37, Vol. 2A, p. 131.

⁸⁷ Zwilling came to this very conclusion about this type of *paṇḍaka* in “The First Medicalization” p. 594. According to Perera, “Buddhaghosa suggests that this deviant derives sexual satisfaction only by submitting to oral intercourse. This practice may have a connection with a belief in the absorption of virile powers, the matter being completely psychological, as implied even by Buddhaghosa” (*Sexuality in Ancient India*, p. 148). A comparable practice has been documented among some Papua New Guinean peoples such as the Sambia and the Etoro who believe that young boys can gain virility by ingesting the semen of adult tribe members.

⁸⁸ *Suśruta Saṃhitā*, 3.2.44-45, Vol. 2A, p. 132.

⁸⁹ *Nāradaśmṛti* 12:15 permits the wives of these two types to “leave their husbands as if they were outcastes.” (p. 382).

⁹⁰ *The Myths and Gods of India*, p. 226.

⁹¹ *Sukka* in Pāli as in *sukavissatthi*. *Sukkapakkha* means bright fortnight of the moon – synonymous with *junhapaṅkha*, which appears in Buddhaghosa’s description of *pakkhapaṇḍaka*.

⁹² For example, Ci2.4#43, Vol. III, p. 102.

who were all daughters of Dakṣa Prajāpati. Dakṣa felt that the Moon was paying too much attention to one of his daughters, thereby neglecting the rest. The Moon, being exceedingly attached to Rohiṇī (the star Aldebaran), did not care for his health. He became emaciated due to depletion of unctuousness. He was therefore not able to satisfy the sexual urge of the rest of the daughters of Dakṣa. Therefore, Dakṣa's anger came out of his mouth in the form of breath and took a physical form.⁹³ Dakṣa cursed the Moon to die a withering death. But his wives intervened, and so the death became periodic. [Dakṣa] cursed him, saying: "Since you failed in your promise, you shall be seized by consumption, and your seed shall be wasted. You will recover during the second fortnight of each month, that consumption may again devour you during the next fifteen days." Having thus received a curse and a boon, [the Moon] shines in the sky, increasing and decreasing alternately.⁹⁴

The waxing and waning fortnights of the Moon thereafter signify temporary impotence due to sexual indulgence. Therefore a person who experiences this kind of impotence is called pakkhapāṇḍaka or "fortnight paṇḍaka".

[Phthisis] is caused by the deficiency of śukra (semen) and ojas (vital essence) due to overindulgence in sex, etc.⁹⁵ If a person because of excessive mental excitement indulges in sexual intercourse in excess, his semen gets diminished soon, and he gets emaciated. He succumbs to serious diseases, even death.⁹⁶

However, unlike the previous four special types of paṇḍakas, this type can be cured. As digested food is converted into semen in one month,⁹⁷ a pakkhapāṇḍaka treated with appropriate aphrodisiac treatments will replenish his semen in an even shorter period. His wife will not have to wait one month to find her husband has regained his virility and will have no reason to leave him.⁹⁸

In [pakkhapāṇḍakas], [vitiated] vāyu afflicts the pelvic region. To such patients, recipes which are alleviators of vāyu, promoters of nourishment and aphrodisiacs are to be administered.⁹⁹ *They will benefit from aphrodisiacs made of the*

⁹³ Caraka Saṃhitā, Ci8#3-12, Vol. III, p. 365. The myth is also mentioned in Suśruta Saṃhitā 6.41, Vol. 3, p. 237.

⁹⁴ Padma Purāṇa, Sarga khaṇḍa, and Mahābhārata, Śalya parvan, ch.36 [159]; see also Bhāgavata Purāṇa 6.7.23-24). Summarized in *The Myths and Gods of India*, p. 101.

⁹⁵ Caraka Saṃhitā, Ci11, Vol. III, p. 458.

⁹⁶ Caraka Saṃhitā, Ci30#186, Vol. V, p. 176.

⁹⁷ Suśruta Saṃhitā, 1.14, Vol. 1, p. 109.

⁹⁸ Nāradaśmṛti 12:14 allows the wife of pakkhapāṇḍaka to leave him if his condition doesn't improve in one month. (p. 381).

⁹⁹ Caraka Saṃhitā, Ci11#78, Vol. III, p. 477.

cream of curd which is like the autumn moon and free from impurities.¹⁰⁰ They can again become (sexually) like a bull if they use the aphrodisiac formula with *ṣaṣṭika* rice, which is white like moon-rays.¹⁰¹

However, if the patient suffering from phthisis is not given appropriate treatment in time, then this may lead to tuberculosis,¹⁰² which occurred in the Moon, the King of stars, due to excessive sexual indulgence.¹⁰³

End of semen theory and organic paṇḍaka conditions.

Rain as celestial semen

With the recognition of the relationship between *paṇḍakas* and semen in mind, the etymology of *vassakamma* (turning *paṇḍaka* into man = causing virility) and *vossakamma* (turning man into *paṇḍaka* = causing impotence) becomes clearer.

Rev. R. Morris discussed the etymology of these words in the *Journal of the Pali Text Society*:¹⁰⁴ “Vassa-kamma (‘causing virility’). Here vassa = Sk. varṣa (from root vṛṣ). Cf. Sk. varṣadhara, and Pāli vassavara, ‘a eunuch.’ In vossakamma, ‘making a man a eunuch,’ vossa = *paṇḍaka*, from vy-avassa (=vy-assa), from aṛṣa, with vi-ava (from the root ṛṣ).”

Perera also suggests that *vassakamma* is from the root vṛṣ (to wet or to rain), while *vossakamma* is probably from a root implying ‘drying up’.¹⁰⁵

It is clear that semen is associated with rain, as the first fertilizes human beings and the latter all life on earth. *Vṛṣṭi* (rain) and *vṛṣan* (a powerful, virile, or lustful man, or a bull) are also derived from the same root.¹⁰⁶

The relationship between semen and rain does not stop at the etymological and metaphorical level, but extends to the soteriological one. According to the early Upaniṣads, both are connected pathways through which the ancestors are reborn on earth after a sojourn in the moon. In the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, for example, it is said that “... and then they return [from the moon] by the same path they went – first to space, ... to the wind. After the wind has formed, it turns into smoke; ...into thundercloud; ...into rain-cloud; and after a rain-cloud

¹⁰⁰ *Caraka Saṃhitā*, C12.2#24-26, Vol. III, p. 86.

¹⁰¹ *Caraka Saṃhitā*, C12.2#27, Vol. III, p. 87.

¹⁰² *Caraka Saṃhitā*, C111#95, Vol. III, p. 481.

¹⁰³ *Caraka Saṃhitā*, N18#12, Vol. II, p. 104.

¹⁰⁴ *Journal of the Pali Text Society*, 1889, p. 208.

¹⁰⁵ *Sexuality in Ancient India*, p. 113.

¹⁰⁶ *Women, Androgynes and Other Mythical Beasts*, p. 20.

has formed, it rains down. On earth they spring up as rice and barley, plants and trees, sesame and beans, from which it is extremely difficult to get out. When someone eats that food and deposits the semen, from him one comes into being again.”¹⁰⁷

Differential diagnosis: Who is and is not *paṇḍaka*?

Because semen was believed to be intimately linked with virility, almost all men who experience impotence with women, including those who use traditional aphrodisiacs, must have been considered as suffering absence or deficiency of semen – therefore, *paṇḍakas*.

The only kinds of impotence not considered in the *Caraka Saṃhitā* to be related to semen are those with non-erectile phallus due to external causes¹⁰⁸ such as taking meals irregularly; sexual intercourse in parts other than the vagina; sexual intercourse with quadruped animals; emaciation because of disease; injury to the phallus by weapons, teeth, nails, beating by a stick or compression; suppression of the urge to ejaculate during intercourse, etc.¹⁰⁹ Men whose impotence is caused by these factors were probably not considered *paṇḍakas*.

Although the medical treatise holds that semen generally decreases with age, it also cites an exception “if the person is *śukra-sāra* (having the excellence of semen) and if he habitually takes aphrodisiac drugs.”¹¹⁰ Therefore, older men are not necessarily considered *paṇḍakas*.

Furthermore, men who take a passive role in an act of sodomy, *kumbhika*, and those who sodomize them may not be considered *paṇḍakas* in the medical treatise, because such behaviours are not considered congenital or caused by seminal deficiency and the behaviours are not seen as its compensation. Zwilling states that “[t]he preference for passive anal intercourse, unlike fellatio, is seen as an acquired behavior and not as congenital; anal intercourse is practiced, according to the *Suśruta* (3.2.39), by the ‘unchaste and others [*abrahmacāryādi*] who treat their own anus as a man does women.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 5.10.3-6, *The Early Upaniṣads*, p. 237. Similarly in *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 6.2.15-16, p. 149.

¹⁰⁸ *Caraka Saṃhitā*, Ci30#153-155, Vol. V, p.169.

¹⁰⁹ *Caraka Saṃhitā*, Ci30#162-168, Vol. V, p.171-172.

¹¹⁰ *Caraka Saṃhitā*, Vol. V, p.175.

¹¹¹ “The First Medicalization”, p. 596.

It now becomes less certain which *paṇḍaka* type the original offender was, *napuṃsakapaṇḍaka* or perhaps *āsittapaṇḍaka*? And what was meant by the word *dūseti*? Defiling by oral or anal intercourse?

Regardless of whichever *paṇḍaka* type it was, *dūseti* in this context now seems more likely to refer to oral intercourse. Perera states, "... with regard to oral practices... it has to be stated that in ancient India such practices have been considered to be the specialty of the [*paṇḍaka*], and such other deviants."¹¹²

Zwilling provides additional information: "Anal intercourse does not appear as prominently in Sanskrit sources as fellatio; the practice is barely touched on in the *Kāmasūtra* and the other extant treatises on erotics, and then only in a heterosexual context. Historically, this practice is known to have aroused strong negative feelings among the Indians, perhaps because of the Hindu horror of the pollution attached to defecation, as well as the belief in the general ritual impurity of all orifices below the navel."¹¹³

Four considerations for comprehensive ban

The Buddha's ban on all *paṇḍakas*, based on the misconduct of one bad apple, is broad-sweeping, suggesting that the Buddha had other considerations in mind.

The first possible reason is administrative: whether the existence of *paṇḍakas* would disrupt the Sangha. This is widely believed to be the reason behind the Buddha's ban. However, the Buddha could simply expel the offending *paṇḍakas* and lay down rules to prevent the repetition of the specific misconduct in the future, as he had done with various misdemeanours recorded in the *Vinaya*. The fact that he acted otherwise suggests that he had other reasons.

Semen as spiritual energy

The second possible consideration is more fundamental. Although semen deficiency causes impotence and lack of progeny was of grave concern in the lay life, that did not apply to monks. So why should this shortcoming of *paṇḍakas* preclude them from ordination?

One possibility is that the seminal deficiency may have been thought to cause effeminacy and/or homosexual desire, but if those were the concern, it would be much easier to interpret the Buddha's ban along those lines. Instead, we have

¹¹² *Sexuality in Ancient India*, p. 147.

¹¹³ "The First Medicalization", p. 596.

the five *paṅḍaka* types, which, as we have seen, are not characterized by gender expression or sexual desire.

In India, a land, as Perera put it, of the “sharpest contrasts” where “sensuality and asceticism existed side by side,”¹¹⁴ it was the Buddha who proposed the “Middle Way” between these two extremes, although his soteriological method shared characteristics with other religious movements of the time – in particular, what Perera calls “the mastery of instinct and impulses and the channeling of their energies for spiritual purposes.”¹¹⁵

We have seen earlier in the medical treatises how semen was thought to be the source of virile energy. In *A Bull of a Man*, Powers puts this in a spiritual context: “In ancient India, semen was associated with the energy of life, and men who recklessly shed their seed were said to become physically diminished. By contrast, the heroic ascetic who retains his seed is the most manly and virile of men and enjoys robust health, tremendous physical energy, and mental alertness, and he also develops supernatural powers (*siddhi*). Those who practice celibacy and other acts of austerity accumulate an energy called *tapas*, which literally means ‘heat.’ Sages who remain chaste for long periods and who combine this with advanced levels of meditation can even challenge the gods in terms of power and wisdom.”¹¹⁶

The same is held in Yoga, where it is said that “‘ambrosia’ is the name given to sexual energy. Semen is of the same substance as the mind. By sublimating his seed, the yogi acquires prodigious mental powers.”¹¹⁷

This idea seems echoed in the key *Abhidhamma* passage above on the impossibility of an *arahant*’s seminal discharge. Towards the end, the interlocutor cites in his support the Buddha’s teachings in the *Vinaya* and *Aṅguttara Nikāya* that constantly mindful monks do not emit semen. The passage reads: “Bhikkhus! Those bhikkhus who are but average men, yet are proficient in virtue and are mindful and reflective, can go to sleep without seminal discharge. Those Rishis who are outsiders, yet are devoid of passion in matters of sense, also have no seminal discharge. That an *arahant* should have seminal discharge is anomalous and unnatural.”¹¹⁸

In this line of thought, an ideal monk must possess sexual potency and be able to triumph over it. *Paṅḍakas*, on the other hand, are considered sexually

¹¹⁴*Sexuality in Ancient India*, p. 80.

¹¹⁵*Sexuality in Ancient India*, p. viii.

¹¹⁶*A Bull of a Man*, p. 79.

¹¹⁷*The Myths and Gods of India*, p. 98.

¹¹⁸Translation slightly adapted from *Points of Controversy*, p. 114.

defective, depraved and, therefore, deviant. Powers puts it succinctly, “...while monks and nuns are required to maintain total sexual abstinence they must also have no sexual impairments.”¹¹⁹

Moreover, another name for semen is *vīryā* (Pāli *virīya*)¹²⁰ with the primary meaning of manliness, valor, strength, power, heroism, virility. As *virīya* is also one of the seven factors of enlightenment (*bojjhaṅga*), it is no surprise that some commentators would consider *paṇḍakas* who lack semen as incapable of nirvana.¹²¹

Buddhaghosa holds that *paṇḍakas* – along with *ubhatobyāñjanakas* and those with fixed wrong views – are “those who are described as ‘hindered by defilement’¹²² and cannot develop any meditation subject at all.”^{123 124}

In the *Milindapañho*, *paṇḍakas* are among sixteen types of individuals to whom “there is no attainment of insight... even though they regulate their life aright.”¹²⁵

Perera summarizes, “The *brahmacariya* or the religious life of the *pabbajita*, as recognized in Buddhism, was considered a life of strenuous exertion. It is a psycho-physical discipline demanding perfect alertness of body and mind.¹²⁶ ... It may also be said that a conscious effort had been made in the *Sāsana* to make the *Bhikkhu Sangha* a community of normal human beings inheriting no physical and psychological problems which were likely to hinder spiritual progress.”¹²⁷

¹¹⁹ *A Bull of a Man*, p. 84.

¹²⁰ Monier Williams (1899), entry for “*Vīrya*,” defines *vīrya* in part as: “manliness, valour, strength, power, energy, RV [Rig Veda] &c. &c.; heroism, heroic deed, ibid.; manly vigour, virility, semen virile, MBh. [Mahabharata]; Kāv.&c; ...” *Vīryāvṛiddhikāra*, mfu. causing an increase of virile energy; n. an aphrodisiac. *Vīryāhāni*, f. loss of vigour or virile energy, impotence.

¹²¹ I have not tried to analyze the meaning of *paṇḍikā*, the female *paṇḍaka*, who are also barred from ordination. By the same logic, a *paṇḍikā*, is most likely a biological female who lacks the female equivalent of semen (the female hormones estrogen/progesterone in modern terms.) However, unlike in the case of men, it is not clear what sexual fluid was thought by ancient Indians to be the essence of the female sex. Milk seems to be the dominant fluid of female sexuality in ancient India, but according to Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, “the Vedas begin to suggest that the woman has seed, just as the man does; significantly, this fluid is called ‘virile milk’ (*vr̥ṣṇyam payas*, more literally ‘bull-like’ or ‘seed-like’ milk): ‘The wife embraces her husband. Both of them shed the virile milk. Giving forth, she milks (his) juice [*rasa*]’ (RV 1.1-5.2bc)”, *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts*, p. 21.

¹²² *Vibh* 341.

¹²³ *Vism* 177.

¹²⁴ *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, p. 417.

¹²⁵ *Milindapañho* 310. *The Questions of King Milinda*, Part 2, p. 177.

¹²⁶ *Sexuality in Ancient India*, p. 77.

¹²⁷ *Sexuality in Ancient India*, p. 160.

In regards to *paṇḍakas* and hermaphrodites, Perera adds, “Taking the group as a whole, one feels that this has been done to preserve the image of the *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhunī*, and also confine the Order to physically and psychologically normal individuals.”

The equal-minded Buddha

However, there are reasons to believe that the Buddha did not personally share the stereotypical view of *paṇḍakas* as sexual deviants, nor buy the seminal energy theory. Evidently he did not expel the monk who cut off his penis out of frustration¹²⁸ even though such irreversible injury must have been considered an incurable form of impotence.¹²⁹

A stronger argument against the seminal energy theory would be from the *Vāsetṭha Sutta* (M.98), where the Buddha proclaimed human unity and rejected the differences among humans based on various traits. He went on to state that the only thing that differentiates people is conduct. This sutta demonstrates the Buddha’s strong belief in human equality – among males, females, *ubhatobyañ-janakas* and *paṇḍakas*.

“... with humans no differences of birth make a distinctive mark in them; nor in the hair nor in the head,... nor in the buttocks or the breast, nor in the genitals or ways of mating,¹³⁰... nor in their color or in voice. Here birth makes no distinctive mark as with the other kinds of birth. In human bodies in themselves, nothing distinctive can be found. Distinctions among human beings are purely verbal designation.”¹³¹

Indeed the *Suttanta-piṭaka* as a whole is virtually silent about *paṇḍakas*. The Buddha himself never made any characterization of them. It is only in the later strata of the *Tipiṭaka* and the Commentaries that they are portrayed as psychological unstable, a spiritual lost cause, and unable to attain enlightenment – probably

¹²⁸ Vin. II, 110.

¹²⁹ *Caraka Saṃhitā*, C130#188.

¹³⁰ *na sambādhe na methune*.

¹³¹ Bhikkhu Bodhi and Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli’s translation, *The Middle Length Discourse of the Buddha*, Wisdom Publication, 1995.

due to the belief in the seminal energy theory. On the other hand, the commentators do not seem to be too concerned about how *paṇḍaka* ordination would affect the Order as a whole.

But if the Buddha did not believe that *paṇḍakas* were a spiritual lost cause, what other reasons were there to ban them? In other words, if the *paṇḍakas* are not at disadvantage *dharma*-wise, why are they banned *Vinaya*-wise?

A Bull of a Man

While the previous consideration concerns the inner ability of a *paṇḍaka* to become the ideal monk, the third possible consideration relates to whether their outer physique allows them to perform and look the part. This is based on a powerful thesis proposed in John Powers' book *A Bull of a Man* pertaining to the "pervasive concern with bodies— particularly male bodies" in Indian Buddhist literature, where "the Buddha's is held up as the highest development of the male physique."¹³²

Powers points out: "Status is a prevalent concern in Indian Buddhist literature. It relates to possession of a perfect body that proclaims Sakyamuni's spiritual attainments and substantiates his claim to Buddhahood as well as his social position...The Buddha's perfect body is particularly important in these tropes, and it serves to persuade skeptics of his claims to ultimate authority. In a number of such stories, unconvinced Brahmins ... examine his body to determine whether he has the marks of a great man."¹³³

It is also impossible to overlook how the Buddha is commonly portrayed as the epitome of manliness and virility, with epithets such as "bull of a man," "fearless lion," "lion-hearted man," "savage elephant," and "stallion."¹³⁴ These are – except the lion, which has its own symbolism – the very animals cited repeatedly as symbols of male virility and sexual prowess in the medical treatises.¹³⁵

This unmistakable image of supreme masculinity is also expected of the Buddha's followers. Powers detects: "As we saw with the Buddha, the bodies of Buddhist monks are viewed as public spaces on which their virtues are displayed.

¹³² *A Bull of a Man*, p. 9.

¹³³ *A Bull of a Man*, p. 22.

¹³⁴ *A Bull of a Man*, p. 26.

¹³⁵ Bull: Ci2.1#40-41, Ci2.1#50-51, Ci2.2#24-27, Ci2.3#20-25, Ci2.4#7; Stallion: Ci1.1#9-12, Ci2.1#24-32, Ci2.1#38-41, Ci2.2#10-13, Ci2.2#28-30, Ci2.4#51; Elephant: Ci1.3#15-23, Ci2.2#28-29, Ci2.4#33-35.

Physical beauty, good health, an athletic frame, and sexual virility are all associated with good conduct, practice of morality, and attainment of advanced meditative states.”¹³⁶

He describes how the notion that Buddhist monks exhibit exemplary manly toughness is repeated throughout the Canon, showing that “[t]hey endure hardships of the ascetic lifestyle that would defeat ordinary men, live in the wilderness among fearsome beasts in complete equanimity, and subsist on meager alms food and the bare necessities of life.”¹³⁷

The *Caraka Saṃhitā* describes the “embryology” of the sexes: “The characteristic features which determine its male or female sex are either of spiritual or material nature. Sex difference is caused by the dominance of one or the other of these factors. For example, weakness, timidity, lack of wisdom, ignorance, unsteadiness, heaviness of lower limbs, intolerance, slackness, softness, presence of the uterus and ovary and other characteristic features determine the female sex; opposite traits determine the male sex and in a [*napuṃsaka*] both these traits are equally present.”¹³⁸

The sexual prejudice is unmistakable, as Powers writes: “There is a clear bias in favor of male bodies, which are assumed to be stronger and more conducive to development of self-control.”¹³⁹ Therefore in *Atthasālinī*, Buddhaghosa claims, ‘of these two [sexes], the masculine sex is superior, the feminine is inferior. Therefore the latter may be brought about by weak morality.’”¹⁴⁰

Although medical treatises suggest that the cause of *paṇḍaka* conditions are organic, Buddhaghosa’s comment is clearly a remnant of another set of beliefs that women’s “inferior” physical and physiological characteristics are brought about by bad karma in previous lives – the same reason that causes birth as a *paṇḍaka* in the *Mahānārada-kassapa Jātaka* and *Isidāsī Therī Gāthā*.

Paṇḍakas were, therefore, seen as antipodal to ideal monks and must have caused doubts about their suitability for monkhood. Powers points out, “The Buddha indicated on several occasions that he only wished to admit exceptionally gifted men and women to his order.”¹⁴¹

¹³⁶ *A Bull of a Man*, p. 91.

¹³⁷ *A Bull of a Man*, p. 102.

¹³⁸ *Caraka Saṃhitā*, Sā4#14, Vol. II, p. 394.

¹³⁹ *A Bull of a Man*, p. 125.

¹⁴⁰ *Atthasālinī* p. 322-323, as quoted in *A Bull of a Man*, p. 125.

¹⁴¹ *A Bull of a Man*, p. 85.

However, Powers recognizes that external appearance by itself does not provide a strong basis for the Buddha's comprehensive ban. Rather, there is another consideration that it feeds into and helps tip the balance against *paṇḍakas* in the Buddha's mind.

Guilty by public opinion

That consideration is a familiar one. Many *Vinaya* rules were laid down by the Buddha as a result of public opinion.¹⁴² The most well-known example is the observation of the annual rains retreat. Among the ten reasons repeatedly cited for the promulgation of *Vinaya* rules, two are directly linked to winning public confidence.¹⁴³

In addition to the *paṇḍaka*, full ordination is also denied to, among others, those who had been punished by scourging or branding, whose hands, feet, ears, nose, fingers, thumbs or Achilles tendons have been cut off, humpbacks, dwarves, those with goiters, those who had been branded [slaves], those with elephantiasis, those afflicted with serious illness, one-eyed persons, persons with crooked limbs, lame persons, those paralyzed on one side, cripples, persons weak from age, the blind, the deaf, etc.¹⁴⁴ These prohibitions are, undoubtedly, in response to the cultural prejudices of the time.¹⁴⁵

Powers points out: "If the Sangha were to admit the crippled and lame—or, like sexual deviants, people with moral deficiencies—laypeople would regard

¹⁴² An excellent study on the social reasons for the promulgation of *Vinaya* rules can be found in Bhikkhu Giac Hanh's "A Critical Study of the Social Dimension of the Causes and Conditions that influenced the Origin of the Buddhist Vinaya", available online at <http://www.buddhanet.net/buddhas/ebud/ghvin/ghvino1.htm>.

¹⁴³ I follow Bhikkhu Giac Hanh's translation: 1) Well being of the Saṅgha (*saṅghasutthutāya*) 2) Convenience of the Saṅgha (*saṅghaphāsutāya*) 3) Restraint of evil-minded individuals (*dummaṅkūnaṃ puggalānaṃ niggahāya*). 4) For the comfort of well-behaved monks (*pesalānaṃ bhikkhūnaṃ phāsuvihārāya*) 5) For the restraint of influxes that are here and now (*ditṭhadhammikānaṃ āsavānaṃ samvarāya*) 6) For the destruction of influxes in the next life (*samparāyikānaṃ āsavānaṃ paṭighātāya*) 7) For developing confidence in those who yet have no confidence (*appasannānaṃ pasādāya*) 8) For the increase of confidence of those who are already having confidence (*pasannānaṃ bhiyyobhāvāya*) 9) For the firm establishment of the good doctrine (*saddhammatṭhitiyā*) 10) To enhance discipline (*vinayānuggahāya*).

¹⁴⁴ Vin I, 91.

¹⁴⁵ Some of them are also legally disinherited, as seen above. (*Manu's Code of Law* 9.201, p. 200)

them as a group of social outcasts, rather than as an admirable order of monks deserving of support.”¹⁴⁶

After considering these four considerations, it seems that this last consideration most likely provided the strongest basis for the ban.

It seems likely that in the beginning, the Buddha, with his belief in human equality, had not thought anything about allowing *paṇḍaka* ordination, despite doubts in some quarters about their spiritual capacity and appropriate physique for ideal monks as well as the negative perception and discrimination against them in the general population.

With all these factors aligned against them, the offending *paṇḍaka*'s scandalous misconduct only served to support the pre-existing public stereotype of all *paṇḍakas*. With this final straw, the Buddha was left with no choice but barring all *paṇḍakas* in order to safeguard the reputation of the Order, otherwise it would appear to be harboring social miscreants and other undesirable types.¹⁴⁷ In other words, despite his belief in people's equal capacity to achieve enlightenment, the Buddha had to make a decision to suit the context of the time.

Powers bluntly says that the Buddhist Order was “one among a number of rival groups that is constantly scrutinized by a wary public that regards some self-styled ascetics as charlatans seeking a free meal. The laity polices the conduct of those who seek alms from them to ensure that their gifts go to worthy recipients and thus yield maximum merit.”¹⁴⁸

Different times, different prejudices

Can a *kathoey* be ordained? The answer is easy if the transgender in question already has had a sex reassignment surgery. According to the *Vinaya* sex change story, it would appear that she would be eligible to join the Bhikkhunī order. This is no consolation, however, because the Thai Sangha resists the re-establishment of the Bhikkhunī Order, insisting that it is against the *Vinaya* due to discontinuity of the lineage. (This strict adherence to the *Vinaya*, however, does not stop

¹⁴⁶ *A Bull of a Man*, p. 85-86.

¹⁴⁷ Although *paṇḍaka* does not refer to gays, their exclusion from ordination finds a parallel in the now defunct ban against homosexuals serving in the US military. The ban was probably based on similar objections 1) whether homosexuals make good soldiers 2) whether their existence causes organizational problems (morale/order/etc.) and 3) whether their existence affects the reputation of the organization.

¹⁴⁸ *A Bull of a Man*, p. 109.

many Thai monks from adopting practices which would be frowned upon by the Buddha, such as having fat bank accounts and competing for the feudal rankings dished out by the Thai State.)

Unfortunately, that is the only more or less clear-cut case. Because the barring of *paṇḍakas* appears to be based on an ancient prejudice partly supported by an outdated medical theory, it is difficult to justify its enforcement today.

Firstly, it is not clear whether the *napuṃsakapaṇḍaka* archetype includes modern-day transgenders. Although the word seems originally to have referred to those with non-male anatomy, Zwilling suggested that it came to include those with non-male behaviour as well.¹⁴⁹

But even if we accept Zwilling’s theory and are to adhere to the ban as it was originally intended, the people to be denied ordination will not only be (pre-operation) transgenders, but also normative heterosexual males who experience impotence, including many Thai men who gleefully welcomed the recent arrival of a cheap generic Viagra on the market, and those who have used traditional aphrodisiacs or medicine for erectile dysfunction at one time or another.

In order to enforce the rule fairly, the Sangha will have to perform a potency test to verify whether a would-be monk is “male” according to the standard of the Buddha’s time.

Secondly, given that semen deficiency was not thought to be related to sexual preference, it seems to leave out normative males who engage in same-sex sexual behaviors. In particular, the story of Kaṇḍaka and Mahaka suggests that the rule exempts men who have sex with men without identifying themselves as exclusively homosexual. (Think of the two protagonists in the film *Brokeback Mountain* and their equivalents in many traditional cultures.)

The bigger question, though, is whether this two-millennia-old rule still makes sense today. In practice, the Thai Sangha has allowed all male-born persons to or-

¹⁴⁹He writes, “While some of these ‘impotent men’ were otherwise normative males who happened to be sterile or impotent, there were other non-procreators who were associated with transgender behavior such as wearing long hair (perhaps in braids), which was already regarded as a characteristic marker of women, the adoption of women’s ornaments, and dancing, which was an activity otherwise restricted solely to women. Such persons were considered to be ‘neither male nor female’ (*napuṃsaka*) in as much as they were biological males and hence not female, but in as much as they incorporated characteristics belonging to females, they could not, strictly speaking, be considered male. Needless to say, the social position of such radical transgressors of male gender norms was very low, and we find them linked together with other despised members of society like the slut (*pum̐scali*) and the wastrel, and associated with sin (*pāpman*).” (*Queer Dharma*, p.46).

tain as long as they conform to male gender expression at the time of ordination and do not belong to other prohibited types.

Nevertheless, this unenforced rule against *paṅḍakas* still provides a basis for discrimination against Thai gays and *kathoey* in both religious and secular contexts. Interpreting the term *paṅḍaka* to fit their own homophobia and transphobia, many Thai Buddhists say that the presence of gay and *kathoey* monks is causing a crisis of faith. Gays and *kathoey*s also are regarded as not only psychologically but also morally defective, influenced by the negative attitude towards *paṅḍakas* in the Canon.

Such prejudice will become increasingly untenable, as science and modern medicine have come to recognize the diversity of human sexuality. On May 17, 1990 – a day now annually commemorated as the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia - the World Health Organization belatedly removed homosexuality from the International Classification of Diseases. Currently, there is also a long overdue discussion on removing transgenderism from its new version.

Even His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said that, “If science proves some belief of Buddhism wrong, then Buddhism will have to change.”¹⁵⁰ There is now overwhelming evidence that gay men and transgenders are no different from the general population in term of physiology or psychology – apart from stresses caused by social rejection and difficulties imposed by legal discrimination.

Another counter trend is the emerging global consciousness of human rights, which can bring a new balance to the issue. In this 21st century, blatant discrimination against gays and transgenders by Buddhists can also be seen as a violation of human rights standards and shake the faith of those who have such a nature, as well as among those who believe in the principle of human equality and justice – which is in fact more in accordance with the *Vāsetṭha Sutta* and other Buddhist teachings on compassion.

In the end, the decision whether to scrap this obsolete unenforceable rule altogether will have to come from Buddhism itself. During his lifetime, the Buddha amended many rules to suit evolving situations. Before his demise, he also permitted the modification of minor rules, allowing the Order to adapt the *Vinaya* to social changes. Since the rule to ban *paṅḍakas* appears to be due to public opinion, it should logically evolve with public opinion. Unfortunately, Thai Bud-

¹⁵⁰<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/11/12/opinion/12dalai.html>

dhism, priding itself as true “Theravada”, is unlikely to take this approach, and as a result will increasingly be seen as outdated and irrelevant in modern society.

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Crossing to the Farthest Shore: How Pāli Jātakas Launch the Buddhist Image of the Boat onto the Open Seas

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A focus of recent debate in Buddhist Studies has been the extent to which the early Buddhists were involved in maritime activity. This paper takes this discussion as a starting point to explore the use of boats in early Pāli texts. It notes the rarity of nautical imagery in extant Indian literature of the period, and contrasts this with the frequent use of the boat as a simile and metaphor in the *nikāyas*. These early texts, however, exhibit little interest in maritime travel or its imagery. The *Jātakas*, however, select an underlying maritime metaphor for their articulation of the Bodhisatta vow, and include a number of maritime stories that involve the achievements of the Bodhisatta as mariner and hero, as well as other, often unsuccessful, outcomes of voyages undertaken by those who do not follow basic Buddhist principles. This paper examines the few *Jātaka* stories in which the image of the sea voyage is used to demonstrate the nature of the Bodhisatta path and the search for the perfections. These stories, rich in their depiction of sea travel, anticipate the peculiarly Southern Buddhist interest in the image of the boat. This image subsequently features in many forms in the thought, art, practice and narrative of these often coastal and river-based regions.

One of the famous poems of the Pāli canon, dating from the earliest strata of the texts, describes the teaching of the Buddha as like a good boat, an image that recurs throughout the Pāli canon.¹

¹See DP II: 531, *nāvā*.

321. Just as one embarking upon a strong boat, provided with oar and rudder, could bring many others across there, being skilful, thoughtful, and knowing the means thereof.

322. In the same way, one who has knowledge and has developed himself, who is learned and unshakeable, understanding it himself, could make others realize it, if they have the ability to listen attentively (Norman 1995: 35).

The Buddhist tradition is rich in imagery to describe awakening, with the quenching and the quelling of fires, for instance, of *nibbāna*, or the use of a “path” or “road” to describe the means of attaining freedom. The boat, however, is also a central metaphor for the route to the overcoming of the defilements and tendencies: the image of “crossing over” an expanse of water often, though not always, involves a nautical image, in order to reach a “far shore”, taken as the elimination of defilements and attainment of arahatship.²

But what kind of boats are being described? To what extent does the famous image of “crossing over” to the “far shore” apply to seas as well as rivers? In her recent works, *The Winds of Change: Buddhism and Maritime Links in Early South Asia* and *The Archaeology of Seafaring in Ancient South Asia*, Himanshu Prabha Ray has argued that from the third century BCE Buddhists were largely responsible for opening up the trade routes in the Indian Ocean, as opposed to the Arabs or even Europeans to whom this achievement used to be attributed.³ Her work is closely argued and depends upon fine analysis of archaeological, textual, numismatic and inscriptional evidence that will lie outside the scope of this paper, which takes her research as a point of departure for a literary and doctrinal discussion. It asks how often and in what way the “boat” occurs in other extant Indic literature of the time. It then explores the use of the image in Pāli literature, noting that among texts of this period the presence of a nautical image is distinctively Buddhist. The early Buddhists were from the outset travellers and willing to cross large expanses of India. In most Pāli texts, however, the boat employed

²See Collins 1990: 259–261.

³See Ray 1999 and 2003. These works argue that Buddhist interchanges accompanied the move to increased coastal urbanization, the development of emergent nautical technologies and the establishment of trade routes. Her work contains archaeological and inscriptional evidence supporting this paper. For Western classical sources during this period and the differentiation between riverine and maritime nautical networks, see K.R. Hall 1985: 1–47. For numismatic and early inscriptional evidence for trade and exchange of technologies in South Asia see Bopparachchi 1998. For discussion on seafaring in art and literature, see Schlingloff 1987: 195–218.

for “crossing over” is almost always a riverine one. So the paper then examines how the boat that is described in the canon becomes far more adventurous in the *Jātaka* literature, to become a seafaring vehicle. There an underlying maritime nautical image is used as a framing metaphor, as if the emergent ideal of the Bodhisatta path required and exploited not only riverine travel, but voyages crossing oceans too.

The use of images of boats, both riverine and maritime, as an expression of doctrine not only differentiates the Buddhist tradition from other Indic religious systems of the time but also, through presentation of the skills needed to survive on a boat and the very presence of nautical heroes, contributes to the shaping of a new heroic ideal, that of the Bodhisatta, which rejects notions of caste, status, and privileged access to salvific activity. For whatever reason, Buddhist literature offers us the only narratives from this period that feature to any great extent the nautical or maritime traveller as hero. The paper explores the *Jātaka* use of the topos of the sea voyage and argues that not only is it a motif that distinguishes early Buddhist literature, but that it is used to present a Buddhist ethos still popularly recreated in art, narrative and temple depictions throughout the pre-eminently seafaring cultures of Southern Buddhism.

The Indian background

But first it will be useful to consider the Indic background to the Buddhist interest in the nautical and all its manifestations. For all the Indic traditions, existence is regarded as an ocean, that of *samsāra*. As Steven Collins has demonstrated, imagery of the ocean, with positive and negative connotations, is central to Buddhist explication, a pre-eminence derived from the Vedic texts (Collins 1990: 261). The use of the boat in Vedic literature is, however, less frequent. Himanshu Ray argues: ‘References to the sea occur in Vedic literature and indicate a knowledge of the ocean, though there is little evidence of maritime travel implicit in these’ (Ray 2003: 13). There is perhaps more than she concedes: at least two Ṛg Vedic hymns demonstrate boats as an image of spiritual struggle, even though the doctrine of rebirth over many lives, and the ocean as representing the round of existences, were not expressly formulated when the hymns were composed.⁴

⁴See *Rg Veda* 1.97.8 and *Rg Veda* 7.88 and Wendy O’Flaherty, *The Rig Veda* (Harmondsworth, Middsx.: Penguin, 1981), 215. Grateful thanks to Dr James Benson, Dr Elizabeth Tucker and Professor J. L. and Mary Brockington for discussion and references on this subject.

It is notable, however, that while in extant non-Buddhist Indian literary and narrative traditions from the same period as the early Buddhist texts, sea travel sometimes features, it is not centre stage. Unusually for world epic literature, there are almost no boats or maritime journeys in the *Mahābhārata* or the *Rāmāyaṇa*.⁵ This is in striking contrast to, say, the Babylonian epic poem, *Gilgamesh*, the 18th century BCE Akkadian poem, *Atrahasis*, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica* (3rd century BCE), in all of which a journey by boat and the presence of ships are central to the narrative and frame the enactment of a heroic ideal. The *Rāmāyaṇa* involves epic journeys between two lands separated by a stretch of sea, on established trade routes of Lanka and India. Boats, however, are not involved: Sītā's capture by Hanuman is effected by her being transported magically by the demon; for her rescue by her husband a walkway to Lanka is magically created across from India. The sea is frequently mentioned, but no one enters a boat, nor is one described. The ocean is considered dangerous, and tends to have mildly negative connotations.⁶ While there is a rich and varied maritime literature in India dating back at least to the end of the first millennium, early Indian temples did not depict sea travel, boats or indeed shipwrecks, except perhaps in some coastal regions such as Tamil Nadu.⁷

While historical accident must play a part in the survival of maritime texts from this period, the crucial factor is the high-caste Indian attitude to travel by boat: it was regarded as polluting. Manu's law book is unrelenting, saying that any Brahmin who undertakes a voyage on a boat, whether riverine or maritime, must undergo ritual purification.⁸ This point is constantly reiterated in the *dharmasūtras*.⁹ Sanskrit scholars of high caste must have ignored these strictures: they travelled to Cambodia, Thailand and Indonesia from early times, so we do not know how seriously the textual prohibition was taken. Given the great love of ritual, narrative and tradition amongst seafaring classes throughout the world, there must have been many story traditions concerning the sea and sea travel: in-

⁵I am grateful to Dr Nick Allen for discussion on this subject.

⁶See for instance Goldman and Goldman 2006: 311 (35.50) and 181 (15.1).

⁷Sylvain Lévi (1930: 597-614), argues that the specificity of the goddess Maṇimekhālā to a particular region and, later, a twelfth-century Tamil Nadu poem, supports suggestions that *Jātakas* draw on local legends from throughout India which are now lost. This goddess, who rescues sailors from shipwrecks, appears in the *Mahājanaka-Jātaka* (J 539) and the *Saṅkha-Jātaka* (J 442) and many post-canonical *Jātakas*.

⁸See Doniger with Smith 1991: 60 (3.158) for description of the pollution involved.

⁹See Olivelle 1999: B 2.2, where a sea voyage is categorized alongside such crimes as theft from brahmins, trade, and bearing false witness.

deed Sylvain Lévi argued that sea-going *Jātakas* did draw on such regional stories, though one could not rule out *Jātaka* influence the other way (Lévi 1930). As Peter Skilling notes, the word “influence” is a risky one in South and Southeast Asia, whose cultures and narratives in various contexts develop in tandem.¹⁰ Rather, it is useful to speak of a “pool of signifiers” from which storytellers drew, applicable between traditions, as well as within them.¹¹ Sea tales must have circulated amongst those trading and working on boats; their vestiges probably survive not only in *Jātakas* but also in vernacular narratives, songs and dramas around the sub-continent. It is, however, high-caste Indian narratives and the religious literature that have survived: for a text to survive orally it would need to be considered important. Those reciting texts, composing narratives, poems and epics would be unlikely to venture upon sea travel, or, if they did, would not see it as a ground for heroism, adventure or narrative.

The Jain tradition, a product of the same cultural conditions in which Buddhism arose, with a central doctrine that also ignored caste, like Buddhism rejected the hereditary custodianship of texts and associated rituals. It exhibits some mild interest in imagery of the boat and sea travel.¹² But the metaphor that defines Jain teaching is that of the teacher as *tīrthaṅkara*, usually understood as “ford-maker”. Whether this term necessarily suggests “crossing” an expanse of water has been debated: Padmanabh Jaini, for instance, suggests that the word (*titthiya*), used by the Buddhists to denote other sects, may have simply meant “founder of a group”.¹³ Asko Parpola has argued that it means, “the creator of a safe bathing-place” on the side of a river and, comparing the word *ghat* with Dravidian forms, has posited that there was an ancient Indic cult of the sacred bathing place, still evident in the ghats at Varanasi (Parpola 2003: 523ff). Neither of these riverine images involves boats. From the earliest days of the tradition merchants, sea traders and sailors formed a crucial element in the Jaina population and were prepared to travel, as their presence around the world testifies. Such journeys, however, are less prominent in their early literature, not offering

¹⁰He talks of the importance of not necessarily assuming Indian antecedents in ‘quests for origins’ in early Siamese literature, a point that perhaps also applies to narrative developments within India itself (Skilling 2009).

¹¹See Ramanujan 1991: 22–49. These issues are also discussed in Satyanath 2009: 43–56.

¹²For generous comment about the Jain tradition, I am very grateful to Dr Naomi Appleton, Professor Nalini Balbir and Professor Julia Hegewald.

¹³On the associations of the word *tīrtha* see Jaini 1981. For *titthiya* see PED 302.

material for making philosophical and doctrinal points.¹⁴ Modern Jaina maritime depictions tend to be derived from just one narrative, probably dating from the same period as the early Buddhist stories we are discussing, in which it has a counterpart; it describes a boat capsized and survivors seized by demons.¹⁵ This story, however, concerns an unsuccessful voyage, and focuses primarily on the adventures of the merchants after they land on the island dominated by a demoness, not the journey itself. While such material is inconclusive as evidence for early Jaina texts now lost, the Buddhist counterpart, the *Valāhassa Jātaka* (J 196), focuses more on the adventures at sea than does the Jain version.

For whatever reason, the voyage by boat, though it may sometimes have been undertaken by high-caste Indians and by Jains, who in theory rejected caste, does not appear in non-Buddhist literature extant from this period as an imaginative simile, a central narrative motif or a means of expressing doctrine.

Buddhism, crossing over, and boats

In contrast, metaphors and similes associated with the boat are pervasive in Buddhist doctrine, narrative and art. The early Buddhist stress on the eightfold path and the skilful or healthy mind (*kusala-citta*), not external forms, as the means of obtaining liberation from existence, would not support a rejection of travel by boat. Finding liberation is a way through to what is called the ‘farther shore.’ The boat or ship (*nāvā*), or the raft (*uḷumpa*), bound together with bolts or cloth, or a more makeshift one (*kulla*), perhaps made of reeds, which travels across any kind of water, is a central motif in much early Buddhist discourse.¹⁶ The one who is enlightened is “one who has crossed over” (*tiṇṇa*) a flood, or “gone beyond” (*pāragū*), a term associated with the idea of perfecting.¹⁷ Steven Collins comments on this:

¹⁴Ray gives little discussion of the Jains, but see Ray 2003: 282–3.

¹⁵The Jain story involving the sea can be found in Saras 1997. I am grateful to Dr Naomi Appleton for supplying this reference. The earliest strata of Jain texts are lost, but we can surmise that some version of this story was extant at the time of the *Jātakas*.

¹⁶See DP I 709 (Abh 665, Vin I 230, M I 135 etc.) for *kulla* and DP I 510 for *uḷumpa* (Vin III 63, D II 89).

¹⁷For varied interpretations of *pāragū* see PED 454; for associations of *tiṇṇa* with floods see PED 302.

The image is so common that the epithets *pāraḡa*, *pāraḡato*, and *pāraḡū*, ‘crossing’ or ‘crossed over’ come to be used in these meanings without any explicitly marked simile (Collins 1990: 250).

The word boat (*nāvā*), as explained by the *Vinaya*, refers to any vehicle that is used to cross water (Vin III 49). Boats are often mentioned in the *Vinaya*, and there are no strictures on travelling on them, other than enjoinders that monks and nuns should not make arrangements to travel together (Vin IV 65; Vin IV 72-5). These boats are clearly sometimes large, with several rooms (Vin III 200). Ordinations may be carried out on boats, provided there is water on both sides, presumably so that the site avoids being under the jurisdiction of a particular state. In one ruling the crossing over of monks and nuns (*tiriyaṃtaraṇāya*) to the ‘farther shore’ by boat is allowed (Vin IV 65). The commentary explains that this may involve land after sea travel, though this is not stated in the original text, which implies riverine, not maritime, travel and we can infer that this was a later interpretation of the initial ruling (see VinA 809).

Various kinds of rafts are also described in the *nikāyas*, as in the famous simile of the raft (*uḷumpa*) in the *Alagaddupāma Sutta* in the *Majjhimanikāya*, where the Buddha describes his teaching as a raft which will help the practitioner cross over to the other side of the river but needs to be discarded on arrival.¹⁸ The crossing involved is not always by boat. Indeed the incident in the *Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta*, where the Buddha seems to cross over to the other side by magical means, has, it has been argued by Rhys Davids, Norman and An, arisen from a misunderstanding of the associated verse. An also shows, translating the commentary to this passage, that *aṇṇava* refers here to an expanse of water, not the sea.¹⁹ The image suggests that rather than using psychic powers, the Buddha follows the eightfold path by carefully stepping across the river, while those adhering to vows

¹⁸See ‘The Simile of the Snake’ (M I 134-5), *Sutta* 22, in Bodhi and Nāmile o 2001: 228–9.

¹⁹Yang-gyu An agrees with Rhys Davids and Norman, *metri causa*, that *setuṃ katvāna* is an inserted gloss, and that a misunderstanding of the verse has brought about a misinterpretation in the later prose: *ye taranti aṇṇavaṃ saraṃ setuṃ katvāna visajja pallalāni/kullaṇṇaṃ hi jano pabandhati tiṇṇā medhāvino janā ti*. The Buddha has crossed the pools of greed, hatred and delusion by means of the noble path, while, as Rhys Davids and Norman argue, the vain world looks for salvation by means of rites, ceremonies and gods. The water crossed is “a broad stretch of water which as a minimum is one *yojana* deep.” See An 2003: 62–3 and 62, n.5 and PED 17. M I 134 also uses *aṇṇava* in a context where it suggests a flood or a river rather than the sea. S I 214, according to the commentaries, refers to the four floods (*ogha*) of views, existence, sensuality and ignorance (see Bodhi 2000: 485–6, n.598). See also S IV 157.

and rituals are trying to find boats or rafts, or to create makeshift rafts themselves – a rare mildly negative association of the boat. But there are plenty of “crossings” by boat in the *nikāyas* and other early texts (e.g., A II 201, Dhp 369, Sn 777). In a land where floods are common, it is understandable that escaping and saving others from floods is one of the key images for enlightenment.

This water is almost always explicitly stated to be an expanse of river or flood. If the context of each use is examined carefully there are almost no references to a boat being used to cross the sea. It is implied occasionally, such as in the idea that each of the senses is an ocean which needs to be crossed (see PED 688 *samudda* and S IV 157), but no sea-going boats, sailors or passengers are actually mentioned.

There are two exceptions, both involving similes. One describes the beached sea (*sāmuddika*) boat, which rots away after a long maritime trip, a sight of course that anyone might have seen in a large river mouth. The decay of this boat is compared to how a monk dedicated to *bhāvanā* may easily be weakened by defilements (S III 155=A IV 127). The other seems to be the only explicit reference in the *nikāyas* to a seafaring boat actually at sea. In the *Kevaddha Sutta*, Kevaddha asks the Buddha where the four elements cease, and the Buddha tells a story:

Long, long ago (*bhūtapubbam*), brother, sea-faring traders (*sāmuddikā vaṇijā*) were wont, when they were setting sail on an ocean voyage (*nāvāya samuddam*), to take with them a land-sighting bird. And when the ship got out of sight of the shore they would let the land-sighting bird free (D I 222–3/Rhys Davids 1959: I 282–3).

The bird would fly to all points of the compass; if it found land it would go there, if not it would return. Kevaddha’s returning to the Buddha, the only place he will find an answer to his question, after visiting the many highest heaven realms, is compared to the bird returning to the boat, its refuge in the open seas. The implication of course is that the various realms of existence, however rarefied, are still within *samsāra*, the open seas, and cannot offer the path to liberation: the Buddha is the sea-going boat that offers the only safe haven. It is significant that this sole reference to sea-going merchants, and their voyaging, is prefaced by the word *bhūtapubbam*, a story-telling device, suggestive of an experience alien to those composing this text.²⁰

²⁰For *bhūtapubbam* see PED 507.

Indeed in practice, as Ray briefly suggests (Ray 2003: 21), in the canon the image of a boat is almost always used to describe riverine rather than maritime travel, and the crossing of a flood or large expanse of water like a swollen river. Worldly life “has gone adrift on the great flood; there is none other than myself [the Buddha] to rescue it from the flood”.²¹ The boat serves this purpose, but it is not used afterwards, and is discarded, as in the raft simile. The *Mahāśudassana Sutta* does describe the treasurer of the *Cakkavattin* king on a boat on the River Ganges. From this he can bring a pot of gold out of the waters at any time, because the king asks for it: but it is significant that this fabulous *sutta* describes an earlier birth of the Buddha, and so has a *Jātaka* tone, with the rich visual imagery of crystals, jewels and gold found so frequently in that collection (D II 176). Apart from this, boats are not explicitly suggested as a means for making fortunes, undertaking long-range travel, or crossing oceans.

Ray notes: “The early Buddhist texts, particularly the *Vinayaṭīkā* and the *Suttapiṭaka*, contain vivid accounts of the journeys undertaken by the Buddha and his followers on their missions to preach, and thus are a valuable source for the study of early land routes.” (Ray 2003: 21). While still debated, boundaries are probably to the south the Deccan, to the north possibly Taxila, Sāvatti and Rājagaha. The first coastal mention appears to be Bharukaccha or Bharuch at the mouth of the Narmada on the west coast.²² As this brief survey has shown, the lack of geographical travel by maritime routes in early canonical texts also applies to the use of imagery and simile.

The Bodhisatta vow and the need to cross oceans

The earliest layers of the *Jātakas* date from the third century BCE and they were finally committed to writing in the fifth century CE.²³ Their evolution occurs during a time, as Ray and others have shown, when India’s complex maritime and mercantile networks were becoming well established, with trade and interchange

²¹ See Ñānamoli 1991a: 130 (Patis I 597).

²² See (Vin 1 60 and *Suttavibhaṅga* I 10.22).

²³ *Jātakas*, once neglected in academic circles, are now arousing increased scholarly interest. A key work in this regard has been the classic translation and introduction to the last and pre-eminently influential story, Cone and Gombrich 1977. Two excellent recent studies on *Jātakas* are Skilling 2008 and Appleton. For a succinct discussion of the evolution of *Jātakas*, see Gombrich’s introduction to the *Vessantara* story (Cone and Gombrich, 1977). See also Appleton 2010: 41-64 and Skilling 2008b.

of goods, coins, material cultures and technologies becoming widespread.²⁴ Buddhist teaching travelled by sea, to Sri Lanka, continental Southeast Asia and Indonesia, a period during which, Kenneth Hall observes, the pursuit of gold, the development of more sophisticated ship building and navigation techniques and a growing commercial ethos were fostering both the dissemination of Buddhism and an underlying sense in the narrative traditions that “the activities of common men, including their economic activities” were worth addressing.²⁵

It is also during this time that we see the emergence of the Bodhisatta vow, and an ethos dependent on the development of the perfections over many lifetimes. This undertaking may need many types of rebirth, in many lands, conditions and regions. So in the *Jātakas* there is not only a greater geographical spread of locations for stories but also far more reference to travel between them. Indeed, *Jātakas* helped to provide Buddhist validation of various regions throughout Southeast Asia: the Buddha Gotama himself may not have been able to visit regions such as Gandhāra or Namobuddha, near Panauti in Nepal, but there are stories in which the Bodhisatta, his earlier self, is said to be there: as Naomi Appleton has shown, such attributions helped a number of areas to establish their own links with the Buddha through his past lives as the Bodhisatta, when he might have lived or travelled there. So how do these various elements work together in the stories and how does sea travel contribute to the description of the Bodhisatta and his path?²⁶

The importance accorded to sea travel in these tales is evident from the preamble and frame story, the *Jātaka-nidāna*, where the image of the boat becomes a defining feature of the Bodhisatta path to Buddhahood. The commentarial prose describes how the Buddha to be, many aeons earlier, took the Bodhisatta vow. Seeing the earlier Buddha, Dīpaṅkara, he decided not to become enlightened at that time, but rather to develop the ten perfections to become a Buddha himself.

...I would rather, like Ten Powered Dīpaṅkara, seek for the highest, complete awakening. I will embark on the ship of *dhamma* (*dhamaṇāvā*) and take the great mass of people across the ocean of existence (*saṃsārasāgara*): afterwards I will attain to complete *nibbāna*. This would become me (Shaw 2006: 1; J I 14).

²⁴See Ray 2003, Bopearachchi 1998 and Hall 1985: 1-47.

²⁵See Hall 1985:37 and for some early comment, Lévi 1929.

²⁶On the way localities have come to ‘adopt’ *Jātakas* as validation of their own Buddhist connection, see Appleton 2010: 118ff.

While the canonical status of the *Jātaka-nidāna* verses that state this intention are unclear, they speak of an undertaking to take the *dhammanāvā* across a “stream of *samsāra*” (*sotasamsāram*), suggesting that the idea in the later prose of the ocean boat comes a little later (J I 14). Maybe it appears in the prose because of the content of the stories. Within these, canonical verses do describe sea voyages in boats. At a crucial point in the last story, the *Vessantara Jātaka* (J VI 547), the Bodhisatta, about to give his son away, makes a renunciation of that which is most beloved. (It recalls the Biblical story of Abraham and Isaac.) He asks the boy to support him in his endeavour to attain the perfections:

Come my dear son, fulfil my Perfection; consecrate my heart; do what I say. Be a steady boat to carry me on the sea of becoming (*bhavasāgara*). I shall cross to the further shore of birth, and make the world with its gods cross also.²⁷

In this tale, that which is given freely is returned. Even though the story involves no travel by sea, the boat here is clearly a maritime one. For the Bodhisatta path and the cultivation of the perfections, which must involve many kinds of rebirth in the many regions where Buddhism is rapidly spreading, it seems natural that existence (*bhava*) is seen not as a river but more as an ocean (*sāgara*). This represents a major development: it is an ocean that is “crossed” for a work encompassing many lifetimes and involving many other beings and regions, a movement towards far-ranging travel which we see reflected in the content and orientation of some stories.

The Stories

Only a handful of *Jātaka* stories are exclusively devoted to sea journeys. But like riverine voyages they are shown as often precarious, but common ventures. The stories provide important historical information on nautical life of the period. They indicate that the seagoing boat is being absorbed into Buddhist understanding, thought and imaginative life. Many introduce boats and sea voyages as bringing merchants and passengers good fortune. In the *Cullakasetṭhi Jātaka* (J 4), for instance, a merchant organizes a public relations exercise beside a boat which

²⁷ Gombrich discusses this passage as ‘an implicit hint that Vessantara is doing something dubious for the sake of a greater good – ends are invoked to justify the means.’ (Cone and Gombrich 1977: xxiii–xxiv).

he has purchased on credit, persuading people to spend large amounts of money for part shares after “building the market” through carefully placed rumours. The boat “scam”, the culmination of a series of comparable tricks, is clearly regarded as the most prestigious of his money-making exercises. In other stories, the heroes such as the unfortunate Mittavinda and the fortunate Bodhisatta heroes, Saṅkha in the *Saṅkha Jātaka* (J 431) and Janaka in the *Mahājanaka Jātaka* (J 539), go to sea with the express intention of finding wealth. Although they meet with very varied degrees of success, this attitude was presumably widespread. Many of the tales involve shipwreck (J 186, J 196, J 360, J 442, J 539) or, in the case of the set of stories about Mittavinda, someone being put out to sea from a boat as an unlucky passenger.²⁸ The Bodhisatta, who appears in each story, is not always in the boat, though he features in every tale. But when he does go to sea, there is also a chance for that rarity in Indian literature: a literary hero who is either a passenger in a ship, able to exercise skill in means at times of danger, or a professional sailor, whose heroism arises from his knowledge and understanding of seafaring. In such tales, we see what was presumably a manifestation of an established nautical folk tradition: islands haunted by demons and demonesses, or filled with goddesses, seas full of gems, monsters and rescuing deities. While not realistic, these motifs suggest a pre-existing folklore about the sea, its dangers, its adventures, and its providing wealth and good fortune. What is distinctively Buddhist about these ventures, however, is the way the *Jātaka* worldview provides an arena for Buddhist principles and doctrine.

Justin Meiland has noted an important feature of *Jātaka* style: that exploring particular motifs in a number of ways permits a varied and rich perspective on doctrinal points.²⁹ We can see this phenomenon in the sequence of tales about Mittavinda, which exhibit another particularity of *Jātaka* literature, whereby one story is retold with slight variations.³⁰ They are the *Losaka Jātaka* (J 41), three entitled the *Mittavinda Jātaka* (J 82, J 104, J 369), and the *Catuvāra Jātaka* (J 439). The stories are prompted by a story from the present about a monk who is ‘difficult to speak to’ (*dubbacabhikkhu*), indicating an earlier predisposition, except for the minor variation that the *Losaka Jātaka* involves a monk, now an *arahat*, who in

²⁸See Shaw forthcoming 2013.

²⁹See Meiland 2004: 88.

³⁰Stories include *Jātakas* 41, 82, 104, 369, 439. For discussion of this sequence, see Jones 1979: 8–10; Feer 1963: 5.

the past did not listen to those who wished him well.³¹ The stories all give partial accounts of the young man's adventures; none gives the entire plot, and accounts do not always match. But if we take a composite view, the storyline is roughly as follows. A young man behaves badly and goes to sea, but when his ship comes to a mysterious standstill, lots are cast to find the unlucky element. His name is drawn, in one account seven times and in another three, and he is cast into the sea (J 41, J 439). In some versions, he experiences sojourns on magical islands peopled by kindly goddesses and filled variously with crystal, gold and silver (J 41, J 439).³² Although the goddesses advise him to stay while they leave for a few days, he travels on, searching for more (J 41, J 439), full of craving (*taṇhā*: J 439). But his propensity to bad behaviour catches up with him. In some versions he mistakenly takes the four gates of the entrance to the Ussada hell for a city (J 369, J 439) where he can be king (J 439). In *Jātaka* 41, he ends up enslaved after apparently stealing a goat. In the hell stories he suffers great torments and the Bodhisatta, a *deva*, tells him that he can no longer experience the great island palaces he has just visited (J 82, J 104, J 369, J 439); in one version the Bodhisatta appears as a human who tells him he should have listened to others (J 41). In each story, the Bodhisatta tells the protagonist that he could have avoided misfortune if he had not been overcome by excessive greed (*aticcho*: J 104, J 369:), or not listened to others (J 41, J 439) and then been overcome by greed (J 439).³³ No one of these stories recounts a series of events entirely consistent with the others; all share some features with others.

Jones, who discusses the sequence in detail, argues that there is too much variation in the *kamma* involved for one, J 41, to be related. In J41, the protagonist has been a monk who has cheated others and experienced many hells before being born in a beggar family and running away to sea; in J 439 he is born to wealthy parents, but is intractable to his parents' attempts to help him behave well and for instance hits his mother. Feer and Jones, noting some muddles in the way the stories are cross-referenced, argue that *Jātaka* 41 should be excluded from the

³¹Not listening to the advice of others is an offence against the monastic rules (Rule 12 *dubbacasikkhāpadam*, Pruitt and Norman 2001: 19-21).

³²These are alluded to in other stories.

³³The verses read: *laddhā satasahassāni, atirekāni vīsati / anukampakānaṃ nātīnaṃ, vacanaṃ samma nākari || laṅghim samuddam pakkhandi, sāgaram appasiddhikaṃ / catubbhi aṭṭhajjhagamā, aṭṭhāhipi ca soḷasa || soḷasāhi ca bāttimsa, aticcham cakkamāsado / icchāhatassa posassa, cakkam bhamati matthake ||* (J IV 4).

grouping, particularly as it makes no reference to hells.³⁴ But the story does feature a monk who does not take advice, has the same name, runs away to sea, is the ‘unlucky’ passenger chosen by lot, is set adrift on a raft, and visits magical islands peopled by kind goddesses, of comparable type, whose advice he ignores. The ending is different: he ends up enslaved after appearing to steal a goat, but his *kamma* is also related to him by the Bodhisatta, who tells him he should have listened to others. Here we have a slight problem. Feer and Jones argue J 439 to be the primary narrative, from which the others may or may not derive. But this assumption that there is a “true” original version of the story, and that one version is the correct one, is a difficult position to maintain in the light of recent work that points out the fluidity of motif in oral literature. As Ramanujan observes with regard to the Rāmāyaṇa, “I prefer the word tellings to the usual terms versions or variants because the latter can and do typically imply that there is an invariant, an original or Ur-text..., the earliest and most prestigious of them all” (Ramanujan 1991: 24–5). *Jātaka* 41 certainly seems to absorb another story strand in a number of different incidents and features whereby the hero is badly behaved in a different way, but also draws on variants of a narrative thread that was perhaps widely known at the time, with a pool of variable motifs clustering around it. A protagonist (Mittivind(ak)a) behaves badly, goes to sea but is unlucky, is cast off on a raft and yet meets with good fortune on magical islands of jewels and kind goddesses. But he does not listen to advice, and/or becomes greedy, and so comes to grief.

In this group of stories, the ocean (*samudda*) offers many possibilities, both in its enchanted islands and in its capacity to lead to a lower hell. It is not the seas that provide misfortune in these tales, however, but the protagonist’s bad *kamma* and bad judgment, however variously and diversely explained. This makes him unlucky to other sailors, and colours his continued bad behaviour and greed. In some of the stories he encounters the gems and gold so greatly desired by the mercantile sailing classes at the time.³⁵ As the Bodhisatta points out, despite his misfortunes, the magical islands could have given him great fortune. Steven Collins has demonstrated the way the heavens or “the beautiful place” or “lovely spot” embody the “felicities” possible on the way to *nibbāna*, and represent the kinds of

³⁴See Feer 1963, 5 and Jones 1979: 8–10.

³⁵For the search for gold during this period, see Hall 1985: 36.

good fortune that arise for those who keep *sīla*.³⁶ These havens do not undermine, but rather complement and support progress on the path to salvation.³⁷ These islands seem a “beautiful place” of this kind. Indeed, *nibbāna* is famously described as an island, and the islands the protagonist comes across promise wealth and happiness (S III 42 and D II 100).³⁸ But it is as if the voyage at sea amplifies bad tendencies there already. While these islands are like heaven realms, employing the crystal, silver and gold and other gems found in visualized “past life” texts such as the *Mahāsudassana Sutta* (D II 169–199), the protagonist cannot enjoy or take benefits from such idyllic conditions. Rather, the stories suggest, if these heavenly environments are approached with a poor moral character (*sīla*), intoxication may affect the judgment, so that through excessive desire one ignores advice and will be unable to recognize the entrance to hell: indeed in one version the protagonist mistakes the wheel of torture on a hell being’s head for a lotus and even argues with him to take it from him (J 439; Ja IV 3). So Mittavinda’s refusal to take advice and greed impel his travels, and he inevitably falls into misfortune. The practice of *sīla*, the ability to listen to others, and the avoidance of greed are perceived as essential in training discrimination, in sea travel, life and spiritual cultivation, so that the gates of hell and its torments are not mistaken for the pleasant cities and lotus blooms perceived by Mittavinda’s wrong view.

So what is it that ensures safety at sea, and the production of wealth rather than a meeting with disaster? In the *Valāhassa Jātaka* (J 196) the island of Lanḱā offers a less safe haven than the enchanted islands of the Mittavinda sequence. Here, five hundred shipwrecked merchants are entertained by some demonesses, masquerading as humans, who hope to eat them up. One merchant realizes their trick, and persuades two hundred and fifty of the traders to escape. They are rescued by the Bodhisatta, reborn as a magical horse, while the others are left to their grisly fate. At the end of the tale, the Buddha compares the ill-fated two hundred and fifty to followers of the Buddha who ignore advice; the rescued merchants are those that pay attention to advice, and so find fortunate rebirths. So, shipwrecks may occur on the dangerous ocean: the one who is attentive, however, avoids mishap and finds his way home.³⁹

³⁶See Vism VII 33 for *sundaramūndaras*, and, for discussion of *nibbāna* as a ‘place’, Collins, 1998: 224.

³⁷For heavenly realms as enactments of mental states, see, for instance, Gethin 1998: 112–132.

³⁸A useful study of the use of the image of the island as expressive of *nibbāna* is given in Pasanno and Amaro 2009.

³⁹On the many variations of this tale, see Appleton 2006.

In all these stories the Bodhisatta has been commentator, or intercessor, not a sea traveller himself. In others it is the Bodhisatta himself who is the maritime passenger or the sailor, and we see positive outcomes from the voyage at sea, sometimes material, and sometimes in the sense that it has offered an arena for the hero to test his heroism, resourcefulness and vigour – and so develop the perfections. Many *Jātakas* involve misfortune and shipwrecks, caused by many and various supernatural, moral and practical considerations: in one story the wreck is caused by fish maddened by a divine player of music who is masquerading as a human (J 360). But various factors are involved in survival, which indicate that even the wreck is being exploited as a chance to demonstrate Buddhist values, which ultimately bring success.

In the *Saṅkha-Jātaka* (J 442), the Bodhisatta is a Brahmin so generous he runs out of money to give alms, so he decides to go to sea and obtain more wealth. A *paccekabuddha*, foreseeing that the man will suffer shipwreck, also divines that he will not meet with misfortune if he has made a gift to an ascetic. So he pretends that he has burnt his feet in the desert, and elicits from the sailor the gift of his own shoes. When shipwrecked, rather than praying uselessly to the gods, as all the others do, the Bodhisatta covers his body with oil, eats a large quantity of sugar and ghee, climbs up the mast, gets his bearings in the right direction, with his attendant, and casting away fear of the underwater fish, leaps out into the sea. He and his attendant swim for seven days. The goddess Maṇimekhalā has been appointed by the Four Great Kings to protect anyone who has taken refuge in the Triple Gem, or keeps *sīla*, or who looks after their parents. When she sees Saṅkha swimming, she realizes that his prior act of generosity requires her to come to his aid and she addresses him at sea, unseen by the attendant, bringing a golden plate of food. He turns it down, as it is the *uposatha* day. She offers to rescue him, explaining that his gift of his shoes has ensured her intercession. In a canonical verse, she conjures up a magical boat (Ja V 20): it is, the prose explains, made of the seven gems, eight hundred cubits in length, with masts of sapphire, cords of gold, silver sails and golden oars and rudders, filled with precious gems. She pilots the brahmin, now very wealthy, and his attendant, to safety.⁴⁰

The story is prompted by the great generosity of a lay follower and is an example of the fruits it brings: indeed the *Jātaka-nidāna* singles it out as demonstrating that perfection (Ja I 45). But, as Meiland notes with regard to the wreck in the *Mahājanaka Jātaka*, a number of conditions enable safe deliverance from

⁴⁰See Levi 1930: 597–614 and Ray 2003: 270–271.

this shipwreck (Meiland 2004: 69). Although the goddess helps him in response to his gift, the hero's clear-headedness ensures his preliminary survival, and his strength his ability to swim. Such supernatural intervention is frequent in Jātaka literature, as is over-determination, of a kind found in classical Greek literature, whereby gods intervene, for good or ill, where appropriate corresponding actions or mental states occur in human or animal protagonists.⁴¹ So, gods and goddesses frequently help those who keep the precepts, observe the uposatha day, and those who have performed good kamma in the past which is now ready to yield its result (*vipāka*).⁴² Here a generous act and nature predispose the hero to common sense: the skilful or healthy mind (*kusala citta*) is also described as greatly resourceful (*upāyakusala*), a peculiarly Jātaka virtue. These attributes are presented in the tale as just as important as strength or vigour. There is also an implied critique of contemporary brahminic values: this hero, for the sake of generosity, breaks the rules. By choosing to go to sea, considered polluting by brahmins, he is already acting unusually; and likewise he does not take recourse to useless prayers when a wreck occurs. Richard Gombrich has demonstrated the dependency of Buddhist discourse on biting satire of brahminic practice: we can infer something of that here too.⁴³

So such tales offer examples of the attribution of events to multiple supporting conditions that so often characterizes Buddhist narrative causality. The emphasis is on individual volition: as a result of a temperament disposed to generosity, it is implied, the sailor's mind is more alert and he is able to act with common sense and forethought at the crucial moment, rather than follow the usual brahminic pattern of prayer and ritual when all seems lost. Clearly all of this represents a very different kind of heroic ideal than that offered by the brahminic code.

These elements, and indeed many consonant narrative motifs, are more fully demonstrated in the most famous Buddhist story concerning the Bodhisatta and his survival after a shipwreck at sea, the *Mahājanaka-Jātaka* (J 539). The "Great Ten" (*Mahānipata*) stories (J 538–J 547) that complete the *Jātaka* collection have in the course of history been singled out as particularly significant; each story comes to be associated with an (occasionally varied) attribution to one of the ten

⁴¹ See Jones 1979: 174–180, and J 316, J 485.

⁴² In the 'Great Ten' *Jātakas*, two obvious examples are in the *Mūgapakkha-Jātaka* (J 538), where the goddess of the parasol offers advice to the baby Bodhisatta, disgusted at the thought of being king, and the *Sāma-Jātaka* (J 540), where a local goddess saves the Bodhisatta by an act of truth when he seems to be dead.

⁴³ See Gombrich 1996: 27–64 and Gombrich 2009.

perfections too.⁴⁴ Despite a stated link with renunciation (*nekkhamma*) in the “Story from the Present”, this tale has historically been linked to strength or vigour (*virīya*), an attribution made as early as the *Jātaka-nidāna* (J I 46). This association has persisted to this day. In this renowned tale, the shipwreck acts as a preliminary testing ground not just for a fortunate rescue, but for a test of skill, strength and vigour in preparation for the assumption of kingship and authority.

The story recounts the adventures of a young prince, Janaka, the Bodhisatta. He is brought up in exile when his father, the king of Mithilā, is killed by his brother, Polajanaka, who then assumes the throne. At sixteen he finds out his own story, and despite his mother’s objections goes to sea to make his fortune. But the ship is wrecked. Janaka, following much the same sort of procedure as Saṅkha, cleverly saves himself by again smearing oil, eating sugar and climbing the mast, while not falling into the useless prayers tried by the other, doomed passengers (J VI 34). This tale is specially associated with *paccekabuddhas* and imagery associated with them, so it is hardly surprising that he makes his bid for safety alone.⁴⁵ He too swims for seven days, is rescued by Maṇimekhalā after an extensive interchange, again in canonical verses, in which he defends his valiant efforts by saying, “Do you not see, goddess, the visible fruit of deeds?/ For I am crossing (*tarām*) and I can see you near me.// So, I will struggle according to my ability and strength,/ I will do what is to be done by men” (Ja VI 36). The goddess is deeply impressed by his resolve on the “measureless sea”, an echo of his Bodhisatta vow: she takes him to “his heart’s delight”, Mithilā, where he is found by the magical horse who selects the king, and after a series of tests of his suitability to rule, assumes the kingship, marries the princess, and invites his mother to return. Again, although the story is associated with strength, we see the *Jātaka* ethos: the wakeful and attentive observation of practicalities, rather than vows, precepts and prayers, will offer the means of deliverance and the solution to major problems; heavenly intercessions come to those who keep precepts and are generous, not those who follow the brahminic pattern of offering meaningless prayers.

Janaka’s ordeals are presented as a preparation for his assumption of the throne, an association emphasised by the fact that Polajanaka becomes mortally ill the day Janaka sets to sea and dies on the day of the wreck (Ja VI 34). The *Jātaka* attitude towards kingship is ambivalent and highly nuanced, as if a number of different

⁴⁴On the complexities of attributions of the last ten in the *Jātaka* collections, see Appleton 2010: 71ff.

⁴⁵On this story, see Meiland 2004: 69 and Shaw 2006: 222ff.

possible types of kingship were being explored, tested and aligned to a Buddhist ethos whereby the teaching must co-exist with good governance and a stable state. Positive examples include the Makhādeva (J 9) and the Mahāsudassana (J 95) model, of the universal monarch, though some element of renunciation, literal in the case of the *Makhādeva Jātaka*, metaphorical in the case of the *Mahāsudassana Jātaka*, in that the king renounces only at death, is required of the king at the end of his life.⁴⁶ But there are also highly negative views of monarchy, both of misusers of its authority and of the position itself. The last ten *Jātakas*, in which the Bodhisatta only has human or higher rebirths, explore the notion of kingship with a Shakespearean range and depth. The *Mūgapakkha Jātaka* (Temiya), for instance, the first of them (J 538), shows the Bodhisatta appalled at the prospect of kingship because of the terrible *kamma* he must earn as a result of administering punishment. The story culminates in the king and all his subjects simply forsaking the city and palace and living as renunciates – as Collins has shown, a triumphant exposition of the kind of Utopian “felicities” possible for those who follow the Buddhist path.⁴⁷ In the *Sāma Jātaka* (J 540) a renegade king is responsible for shooting the Bodhisatta, and is instructed by him afterwards to return to his kingdom and fulfil the ten duties of the king (J VI 94–5).⁴⁸ Vessantara, who employs a maritime image to address his son to describe his Bodhisatta path, as we have seen, finds himself king at the end of the tale, despite his monumental acts of generosity in giving his kingdom, elephant and family away. In this final *Jātaka*, the Buddha’s penultimate life spent fulfilling the perfections before taking a final rebirth, the world of *samsāra* cannot be rejected or left behind, and the king, the “prosperity of the kingdom” must be reinstated: but it is like a last tribute to the lay life, before the Bodhisatta ascends to the Tusita heaven and then takes rebirth as the Buddha-to-be. As Gombrich notes: “his reward is both on earth and in heaven; and the supreme reward of Buddhahood is still to come” (Gombrich and Cone 1977: xxv).

The *Mahājanaka Jātaka*, however, despite its first part, represents one of the many rejections of kingship afforded by the *Jātakas*. The Bodhisatta endures many ordeals on his way to his accession, and the waters of the sea test his suitability to rule, allowing him to find his “heart’s delight”: when installed as king, he

⁴⁶See Shaw 2006: 26–30 and 75–79 on this subject. The *Mahāsudassana Sutta* shows the king practising *jhānas* on the four divine abidings before his death too (D II 186–7).

⁴⁷See Collins 1998: 433ff and, for further discussion, Shaw 2006:179–188.

⁴⁸On this tale and the king see Shaw 2006: 278–9

says, “I see my own self, who was brought out of the water to dry land.// A wise man should work on and not become discouraged./I look at myself, for what was wished for has come to be” (J VI 43). But this is not enough. As king, Janaka, haunted by the path of *paccekabuddhas*, yearns for renunciation, and the second part of the tale shows him taking up the renunciate life, rejecting all the hard earned fruits of the first part of the story. His perfection of vigour, however, is the result of his early efforts, and indeed perhaps lies also in his withstanding the temptations of the regal life of sensual pleasure and luxury; this aspect is emphasized by the fifth century CE Ajanta cave I paintings, which lovingly dwell on all the beautiful wives that he leaves behind, who, in the story, eloquently bemoan his departure (J VI 53–5). The ocean in this story, and the boat journey across it, bring short term disaster, in the wreck, but ultimately, in accordance with his *kamma*, bring the Bodhisatta to his rightful inheritance – which he rejects for the renunciate path. In the popular imagination, however, it is the drama at sea which is the most memorable evocation of this story. The scene with the swim and the goddess has come to be emblematic for the tale, and the perfection with which it is associated. Thai paintings, particularly in manuscript art, nearly always choose this scene to depict the tale (see Wray et al. 1972: 34). This is evident in Burmese depictions too, in the terracotta glazed tiles that individual patrons have commissioned around the base of the Shwedagon pagoda in Yangon (Rangoon).

One last tale establishes the world of oceans and boats as an arena for the enactment of the Bodhisatta’s search for the perfections. It is the *Suppāraka-Jātaka* (J 463), assigned by its “Story in the Present” to the perfection of wisdom (*paññā*). In this story the Bodhisatta actually takes rebirth as a sailor. But he is blinded by salt, and becomes instead a king’s assessor, capable of telling the value of goods and animals simply by touch. After some time, he is persuaded to go back to sea. For this mariner, the seas are full of wealth, and each new ocean gives up different precious gems of different colours. As they reach each one, the captain recognizes it and throws out ballast while secretly making stores of the gems. His anticipation that the ship will capsize if he tells his passengers of the hidden wealth, as they will overload the boat, demonstrates his perfecting his wisdom; so does, in *Jātaka* style, his trained intuition in knowing the waters and the seas they encounter. Finally they reach a terrifying place, at the end of the world, where vertical waves threaten to engulf the ship. The Bodhisatta makes an act of truth, stating that he has never harmed any other being (Ja IV 142). Hence the boat avoids shipwreck by sailing through the sky back home. The captain distributes all the wealth and



Figure 1: The scene in the sea with Janaka and the goddess Manimekhalā, protective deity of the seas, on an eighteenth-century Siamese *samut khoi* (folding book) now in the Bodleian Library (Ms. Pali a. 27 R). By permission of Bodleian Library (Picture courtesy of Naomi Appleton).

jewels to the passengers, and everyone goes home with plenty of wealth. As in the case of the magical boat of the *Saṅkha Jātaka* and the wonderful islands that welcome Mittavinda, travel at sea offers great “jewels” in the form of the seven kinds of gems we see so often in subsequent Buddhist mythology. The Bodhisatta, however, unlike Mittavinda, knows how to exercise control in the midst of the great wealth and “jewels” that can be found in the ocean. His wisdom is intuitive, and based, as his declaration of truth attests, on non-harm, demonstrated in his care for his passengers. He does not become intoxicated, and brings good fortune, wealth and good luck to those whom he takes on his “boat”. This gives an anticipation of his role in his final life, and an enactment of an uncourtly heroism different from that demonstrated in contemporary Sanskrit drama and poetry.



Figure 2: Glazed terracotta tile, c. 1900, Shwedagon Pagoda, Yangon (Rangoon), showing Janaka's rescue from the sea (Picture courtesy of Lucy Shaw).

Richard Gombrich says, “Summaries of the Buddha’s teachings rarely convey how much use he made of simile or metaphor” (Gombrich 1996: 65). Such a method is part of his *pariyāya* teaching. This, as Gombrich notes elsewhere, “means ‘way round’ and so ‘indirect route’ but it refers to a ‘way of putting things’... *pariyāya* refers to metaphor, allegory, parable, any use of speech which is not to be taken literally” (Gombrich 2009: 6). As Flores notes, the “Buddha is a master of images, and he frequently speaks as a poet or parable-teller, preferring to cast his message as a lyric or a story to illustrate what could also be stated discursively” (Flores 2008: 7). The “ocean” of the *Jātakas* is, from the time of the canonical verses, an imaginative world that threatens monsters, demonesses, wrecks, and even gateways to hell, but also offers wealth and opportunity. Shipwrecks are frequent, as they must have been at the time, but so are the means of finding good fortune and an arena for the enactment of the Bodhisatta’s search for the perfections. The kind of imagery used is found rarely in the *suttas*, but is prevalent in

the world of the *Jātakas*: crystals, gems, jewels, and precious stones emerge from waves, are used to construct magical ships, or are found on islands which, like that in Shakespeare's *Tempest*, are filled with spirits. This *Jātaka* vocabulary for describing the fruits of good *sīla*, generosity and keeping the *uposatha* day aligns its imagined world with many other Buddhist visualised texts, such as the *Mahā-sudassana Sutta* and the *Sukhāvatīvyūha Sūtra*.

One feature highlighted in *Jātaka* tales, is the pragmatic virtue of “skill-in-means”, a peculiarly Buddhist notion, as an attribute of the healthy, good and skilful (*kusala*) mind, a mind that does not become intoxicated by beauty or lose clarity at times of danger. The skilled practitioner, exemplified by the Bodhisatta, uses this at times of trouble: he is a good sailor, deals with difficulty with resourcefulness, navigates his mind well, and so is in a position to help others.

Southern Buddhism and boats

The implications of the use of the boat in Buddhist literature are manifold and multivalent. Other Buddhist literature in subsequent centuries continues a distinctive, if only occasional, use of the image of the boat. The subject warrants further study, but such an interest does not appear to be addressed in the literature of other Indic traditions of this time. In the second century BCE *The Questions of King Milinda* (*Milindapañhā*), the boat, mast, ship's carpenter and anchor are all extolled in various ways as metaphors for the practice of meditation and the Buddhist eightfold path, in precise and technically detailed analogies that appear to have no contemporary counterparts (Miln 377-80). The image of the boat is used by the fifth-century CE monastic commentator, Buddhaghosa, who although brahmin by birth, undertook the sea journey from India to Anuradhapura, in Sri Lanka. In the section on the cultivation of *jhāna*, the skilled meditator is compared to a mariner:

A too clever skipper hoists full sails in high winds and sends his ship adrift, and another, not clever enough lowers his sails in light wind and remains where he is, but a clever skipper hoists full sails in a light wind, takes in half his sails in a high wind, and so arrives safely at his desired destination (Ñāṇamoli 1991b: 134 and Vism IV 136-7).⁴⁹

⁴⁹Buddhaghosa seems to have been a recorder of an established tradition rather than an innovator: the metaphor may not have been his own.

Historically, in Southern Buddhism boats feature repeatedly as symbols of the teaching, and boat travel is frequent. Late, very popular para-canonical *Jātakas* have a strong bias towards maritime adventures: many such stories recount events involving loss, separation, the getting of wealth and reconciliation in association with boats, both riverine and maritime.⁵⁰ The goddess Maṇimekhalā is a frequent intercessor, saving those who have followed the Buddhist path from perils. Such tales, that “recycle” many *Jātaka* maritime tropes, such as the clever escape from shipwreck and Maṇimekhalā’s rescue of those who keep precepts, are often depicted in temple art.⁵¹

Ray notes that “Representations of boats in art and architecture is an integral part of the importance attributed to seafaring activity by society” (Ray 2003: 63). From that point of view, as she demonstrates, the early Buddhists clearly valued sea travel, for their artefacts can be cited as evidence: boats are depicted on coins, seals, and sealings, on Sātavāhana coins, in Caves 1 and 2 at Ajanṭā (Ray 2003: 63ff) and on a Bharhut roundel (see Ray 1998: 176).

In more recent times the maritime and the nautical often feature in Thai temple art, particularly after the 1782 move of the capital to Bangkok, with its close proximity to the sea and strong riverine transport systems. In the city, boats were used commonly in the nineteenth century as the most effective means of transport: monks conducted their almsrounds round Bangkok by boat and even built boats themselves (Tiyavanich 2003: 45-51). Indeed one of the nineteenth-century codified Buddha life postures compiled in the reign of Rama III is of the Buddha sitting “Western style” in a boat, on his way to see his family.⁵² Boats influence art in all sorts of ways: Wat Arun, the riverine Temple of the Dawn, was refurbished in the early nineteenth century by Rama II, who saw its dilapidated state, and employed porcelain and china used as ballast by ships from China to decorate the

⁵⁰See Jaini 1981–3. Boats feature as pivots of the action in: *SumbhamittaJātaka* (no.5), *SamudaghosaJātaka* (no. 6), *SaṅkhatattarājāJātaka* (no 10), *SattadhanuJātaka* (no. 20), *Candakumāra-Jātaka* (no. 21), *RatanapajjotaJātaka* (no. 23) and *VaḍḍhanaJātaka* (no.44).

⁵¹See Skilling 2006: 113–173. The *Suphamitra-Jātaka* describes two royal children lost in a river who are nurtured by a fisherman. Their mother, the queen, is captured for seven years by sailors who fail to defile her because she is protected magically by her virtue. The family is eventually reunited. It is shown in Wat Pipitharam, Cambodia; the *Rathanabachodha-Jātaka* involves more royal separations by shipwreck and eventual reunions (for depictions of these, see Roveda and Yem 2009: 120–2).

⁵²See Matics, 2004: 96–7. The gesture is number 22 of a series developed in King Rama III’s reign in Siam, and shows the Buddha crossing a river in a boat on his way to see his father after the enlightenment.

whole surface of the *stūpa* (O’Neill 2008: 112-115). Boats feature prominently in the temple art of Wat Saket and Wat Suthat. In Cambodia many temples have modern life-sized boats in their precincts, containing statues of the Buddha and his followers, symbolically guiding others through the ocean of existence.⁵³ In Burma some ordinations have historically been conducted on barges or boats, such as those arranged by Dhammaceti in 1476 (Stadtner 2011: 155). In the absence of an ordination ground Southern Buddhist ordinations still occasionally take place on boats, as water is regarded as a space not bound by local or national jurisdiction.⁵⁴

As has been demonstrated, albeit briefly, *Jātakas* took the early Buddhist metaphor of the boat, already distinctive, out from the rivers and floodwaters of India into the open seas. Their underlying journey rests on a metaphor of crossing the ocean of existence, perceived as the mind itself; the boat is the means of crossing. Most Southern Buddhist locations are riverine and maritime in orientation, with sea or river trade routes that still exist to this day. These have historically been essential for communication, economic stability, and livelihood. So it is hardly surprising that the image of the boat, as a means of getting wealth, of finding adventure and as a craft for “crossing over” vast seas as well as rivers, has continued to be popular and indeed is regarded as an apt image for the teaching itself. The ocean, and the boat that travels in it as well as on rivers, is an arena for getting wealth, heroic struggle, practical skill in means, and the transmission of the teaching. From the time of the *Jātakas*, the largely sea-going and riverine regions of Southern Buddhism have in highly diverse ways integrated one of their most important practical means of transport into the teaching.

⁵³See Roveda and Yem 2009: 180–181.

⁵⁴The Oxford Buddha Vihāra organized one such ordination on a barge on the Isis, Oxford, UK, in October, 2010.

Abbreviations of Pali Text Society editions

D	<i>Dīghanikāya</i>
Dhp	<i>Dhammapada</i>
J	<i>Jātaka</i> (where the number of the story is given, this is placed in brackets with J: eg J 539).
M	<i>Majjhimanikāya</i>
Patis	<i>Paṭisambhidāmagga</i>
S	<i>Samyuttanikāya</i>
Sn	<i>Suttanipāta</i>
Vin	<i>Vinaya</i>
VinA	<i>Vinaya-atthakathā</i>

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New Light on Enlightenment: A Convergence of Recent Scholarship and Emerging Neuroscience?

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Gotama Buddha taught that compassion can produce enlightenment. So Richard Gombrich claims, based most notably on his reading of the *Tevijja Sutta*. First announced in his 1996 *How Buddhism Began*, Gombrich revisited this thesis (his “discovery”) the next year in his Gonda Lecture, “Kindness and Compassion as Means to Nirvana in Early Buddhism”¹ and has returned to it more recently in his 2009 *What the Buddha Thought*.

The first of the two sections of this paper explores Gombrich’s admittedly “radical” idea. Although I will tender some suggestions along the way, this section eventuates more in questions than categorical conclusions. In a different vein, the following section provides a brief overview of the recent plasticity revolution in neuroscience, with an eye to assessing the empirical plausibility of the basic idea that Gombrich discerns in the *Tevijja Sutta* that we can achieve enlightenment through compassion.

Enlightenment by Means of Compassion

The *Tevijja Sutta*

The *Tevijja Sutta* purports to record a conversation between the Buddha and two young brahmins who wished to learn how to achieve companionship with the god

¹The text of this lecture is posted on the website of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies, www.ocbs.org. The citations here are to that posting. It has also been collected in Williams, *Buddhism, critical concepts in religious studies*.

Brahma. (WBT 80) The text presumes a familiarity with the brahminical ideas that the universe is governed by an impersonal, unchanging principle (*brahman*) and that the way for someone to break the cycle of otherwise endless reincarnations is by achieving the realization (gnosis) that he is identical with *brahman*. To achieve this insight will mean that one's next death will be one's last. A more popular version of Brahminism personified the metaphysical idea of *brahman* as the god Brahma. (WBT 41) Thus when the young brahmins expressed their interest in learning how one may achieve companionship with Brahma, they were asking how to achieve the liberation promised by classical Brahminism.

The Buddha tells his questioners that he has personal knowledge of what they seek, that “he knows the brahma-world and the way to it as well as if he had lived there his whole life.” (WBT 80) He then proceeds to tell his two interlocutors how to achieve companionship with Brahma. One should first give up his householder status and take up life as a monk outside of society. In this setting one then “pervades every direction with thoughts of kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity.” (WBT 81) The text, Gombrich emphasizes, stresses “the entirety of the pervasion,” that the mental exercise involved extends into all space, is “infinite in extent” and encompasses all beings; it “is said to be ‘extensive, magnified, boundless and without hatred or ill will’” (WBT 82) And once the entirety of the pervasion has been developed and the mind thus expanded, “no bounded (i.e., finite) karma remains there.” (WBT 82) “‘This,’” the text concludes, “is the way to companionship with [Brahma]” that the brahmin youth sought—or should have been seeking. (WBT 82) As Gombrich puts it: “The way to the *brahma*-world is just Upaniṣadic language, borrowed from the interlocutor, for the way to nirvana.” (WBT 83)²

It is this passage in the *Tevijja Sutta* that provides Gombrich with his principal textual basis for the claim that “the Buddha saw love and compassion as means to salvation—in his terms, to the attainment of nirvana.” (WBT 76) For present purposes Gombrich's scholarly analysis and the “bold claim” he makes will not be at issue; the focus here will be on how we might better understand that claim.

Gombrich emphasizes the Skill in Means of the Buddha's metaphor of bounded and boundless karma. For brahmin ideology, liberation comes through an act of mind which effects a joinder of a finite mind with the infinite *brahman* that “per-

²“However,” Gombrich goes on to say, “this was not understood by the compilers of [the Pali canon], let alone by the commentators.” (WBT 84) Gombrich attempts to explain why this misunderstanding occurred, but we will not look at that here.

vades the entire universe as consciousness.” (WBT 83) Thus a Buddhist monk, in “enlarging his consciousness to be boundless [would be] emulating the brahman gnostic who identifies with universal consciousness.” (WBT 83) So too, once a monk develops a full pervasion of the world with kindness and compassion, he attains a “release of the mind’ (*ceto-vimutti*)” in which “no bounded (i.e., finite) karma remains,” (WBT 82) and, “[h]aving transcended the finitude of normal . . . karma, he is fit, like the brahman gnostic, to join *brahman* at death.” (WBT 83)

But how shall we understand the metaphorical structure involved if bounded (finite) karma is developed into unbounded (infinite) karma? For, of course, there would have been no point in using such terminology as the Buddha does unless this way of speaking maps over to his own teaching, more literally expressed.

Karma as *cetanā*

Karma, as a central idea in brahminical soteriology, had two features noteworthy here. First, in Gombrich’s words, the “Sanskrit *karman* and Pali *kamma* [basically] mean ‘act, action, deed,’” where it is understood that “an action is something which takes place in the physical world.” (WBT 7) But, second, not every physical action counts as karma; in the brahminical ideology only certain acts (or acts in certain situations) are soteriologically significant. (WBT 83) These were primarily the proper performance of rituals in prescribed circumstances. Doing one’s duty was good karma; failing to do so, bad karma.

Karma, so understood, was not sufficient to achieve the religious goal of Brahminism, the liberating union of oneself with *brahman*. But it was necessary. By living a life of good karma one not only increased the likelihood of receiving benefits in this life, such as health and prosperity, but also could enjoy a better social status in the next life. In this way, life by life, one might succeed in gaining rebirth as a priest and being able to study the Vedas—and in this way come to the liberating insight that culminates a pilgrim’s progress in Brahmanism.

Early Buddhism, traditionally understood, replicates the two-stage structure of brahminical soteriology and at the same time radically revises its content. The substantive divergence comes about through a shift in the understanding of karma. In numerous places Gombrich appropriately emphasizes the importance of the statement attributed to the Buddha that “It is *cetanā* that I call karma.” “*Cetanā*” is one of those Sanskrit (and Pali) terms that is rather elastic in meaning. Damien Keown, in his dictionary, renders it as: “Term denoting the conative psychological functions of intentions, volitions or motivation.” (51) For Gombrich—and ortho-

dox Buddhism generally—the Buddha meant by karma one’s intention in acting as one does on particular occasions. In this way intention comes to play much the same role for Buddhism that ritual did in Brahmanism; it was, as Gombrich says, “the Buddha’s answer to brahman ritualism.” (*HBB* 51)

So it is, as Gombrich puts it, that “when people die . . . they are born according to their moral deserts.” (*WBT* 11) If your life has displayed a preponderance of acting on good intentions, rather than bad ones, you will be rewarded (or punished) accordingly, in due course. This is the Buddha’s “law of karma,” which Gombrich also refers to as “the law of moral reckoning,” that “worked throughout the universe [and guaranteed] that good would be rewarded and evil punished in the end.” (*WBT* 27) Here is where the Vedic idea of karmic causality comes to rest in early Buddhism.

Presumably, one of the ways that this universal law works out is that living good lives eventually leads to you becoming a monk in some life or other, and in that status you may be able to accomplish the insight (gnosis) by which to achieve nirvana, if not in that life, then in another. In other words, as with brahminism, although karma is not sufficient for the attainment of liberation, it is a necessary step (or at least a conducive one) in that process.

What the *Tevijja Sutta* has to tell us

What then is the notion of karma—or *cetanā*—that is at work in the *Tevijja Sutta*? I propose to consider this question in the context of the Noble Truths that *taṇhā* is the cause of *dukkha* and that the elimination of *taṇhā* awakens one to enlightenment (*bodhi*).

The story has it that soon after the Buddha achieved his enlightenment he sought out his five prior companions in asceticism to tell them of what he had achieved and how he had achieved it. His message, standardly stated, was that although life as we know it is unsatisfactory (*dukkha*) (*WBT* 10), this is because our actions are governed by thirst (*taṇhā*); but this thirst can be eliminated and this transcends the normally unsatisfactory nature of human existence.³

Given that the idea of *taṇhā* as the cause of *dukkha* lies at the center of the Buddha’s message so described, what is *taṇhā*? Thirst, as *taṇhā* is standardly translated, is an expandable term. Narrowly understood, it refers to a desire or

³Early on this message became so central to early Buddhism that the compilers of the canon included it in what they arranged as the canon’s first *sutta*, even though, as Gombrich emphasizes, as there set out it is “far too concise to be intelligible” on its own. (*WBT* 131)

need to drink, typically to drink some water, and commonly a strong urge to do so. One may be in such a state without realizing it. But when one does, one (most typically) forms the intention to get something to drink and perhaps actively sets about doing so. If in this state one is offered a glass of water, the intention to locate and consume some water (typically) crystallizes into a here and now intention (or volition) to take the glass and quaff its contents. This is to say that thirst is a disposition; it is (roughly speaking) being disposed to drink or to ask for a drink or to look for something to drink (etc.). But the word “thirst,” of course, is also used more broadly. We speak, for instance, of a thirst for power or for fame. Such thirst is also dispositional, but refers to a wider universe of objects of desire. And these features of the English term “thirst” are evidently involved in the Buddha’s employment of the Pali *taṇhā* as the cause of *dukkha*: *taṇhā* is a disposition to seek satisfaction, to be disposed to generally act so as to survive and prosper.⁴

With *taṇhā* so understood, the Noble Truths apparently enunciate that the elimination of *taṇhā* is the way to enlightenment; anyone who wishes to achieve the awakening of *bodhi* must end *taṇhā*. This understanding suggests that the bounded karma of the *Tevijja Sutta* should be understood as the *taṇhā* of the Noble Truths, in at least roughly the orthodox understanding of this thirst. (Eliminating *taṇhā*=enlightenment; eliminating finite karma=enlightenment; therefore, finite karma=*taṇhā*.) This is as much as to say that when the Buddha speaks of karma in the *Tevijja Sutta* in terms of being bounded or boundless, he intends a dispositional sense of *cetanā*. (*Taṇhā* is a disposition to seek self-satisfaction; bounded karma is *taṇhā*; therefore, bounded karma is that self-directed motivational disposition.)

Accepting this (at least provisionally), we may additionally conjecture that the elimination of *taṇhā* that the Buddha speaks of in the Noble Truths is to be understood in terms of transforming *taṇhā* (i.e., bounded karma) from the disposition to act primarily for oneself to a disposition to act more broadly for the benefit of others—and that *this* is the way to companionship with Brahma. If so, how shall we understand this transformation?

⁴In this regard, Walpola Rahula speaks for the orthodox in explaining that “the term ‘thirst’ includes not only desire for . . . sense-pleasures, wealth and power, but also desire for, and attachment to, ideas . . . and beliefs,” and that: “According to the Buddha’s analysis, all the troubles and strife in the world . . . come out of this selfish ‘thirst.’” (30; notes omitted)

The *Metta Sutta*

Following Gombrich's lead, we may gain assistance in this endeavor by considering the *Metta Sutta*, an early *sutta* which, as Gombrich emphasizes, from first to last addresses "how one may become enlightened." (*WBT* 87) It opens with a reference to "the peaceful state," i.e., nirvana (*WBT* 7); proceeds to address "what one has to do in order to achieve nirvana" ("Kindness" 7; emphasis omitted); and concludes by stating, in a distinct echo of the *Tevijja Sutta*: "They call this divine living in this world." ("Kindness" 7)

The centerpiece of this poetic exposition is to be found in words which have become widely known: the *sutta* recommends: "Just as a mother would protect her only child even at the risk of her own life, even so let one cultivate a boundless heart toward all beings." This, apparently, is how one may achieve enlightenment. And with the *Tevijja Sutta* in mind, one can hardly miss the fact that cultivating a boundless heart sounds rather much like unbinding one's karma through thoughts of love and compassion.

The *sutta*'s specific example of a mother acting for the wellbeing of her child is a dramatic one. Why, we may ask, use such a striking example? Because of its seeming undeniability, I would suggest. It is easy to accept that a mother would put her child's welfare ahead of her own, and so be led to accept that even if we are born as creatures dominantly directed towards self-satisfaction, in exceptional cases we can (and do) act otherwise. Creatures of *tanhā* though we may be, it is possible to be moved to act directly and knowingly in a manner that favors another's welfare over one's own.

We may then reconceptualize this message of the *Metta Sutta*. We may say, for instance, that the mother considers her child so much a part of herself that she is prepared to count her child's wellbeing as the paramount part of her own self-interest. Understood in this way, the injunction to "cultivate a boundless heart" communicates both that it is possible to alter how we are moved to act so that the exceptional situation, typified by a mother's love for her child, becomes the general rule—and that we should do so. Our inherited conative constitution, although dominantly self-directed, can—in some as yet unexplored manner—be expanded to be boundless. And this is the way to "divine living in this world." In this fashion the *Metta Sutta* provides a way of understanding, at least formally, the transformation from bounded to unbounded karma.

Expanding on Gombrich's claim

This way of understanding Gombrich's "discovery," his "radical" claim, through an interweaving of the vocabularies of the Noble Truths and the *Tevijja Sutta*, brings with it many questions. How, for instance, shall we understand such traditional Buddhist ideas as *dukkha*, *bodhi* and *nibbana*? These are large topics. But we may perhaps just dip our toes into these waters as a way of exploring a little more the conception of liberation Gombrich locates in the *Tevijja Sutta*.

Dukkha. The unsatisfactoriness of human life as we know it was a widespread idea at the Buddha's place and time. It fueled the pan-Indian conviction that endless reincarnation was a dire fate. Thus it would not occasion great surprise if, now and again, the Buddha introduced his message with the idea of *dukkha*. On the other hand, in speaking with the young brahmins the idea seemingly goes without mention. So on the understanding of the *Tevijja Sutta* that we are exploring, what is *dukkha*?

As featured in the Noble Truths, traditionally understood, *dukkha* covers all manner of possible unpleasantness; "all . . . forms of physical and mental suffering, which are universally accepted as suffering or pain, are included in *dukkha*." (Rahula 19) But on reflection, if *dukkha* is removed from human life by the elimination of *taṇhā*, it cannot so widely cover the waterfront of human dissatisfaction. As Sue Hamilton has colorfully phrased it, "the Buddha did not fizzle out of existence at his Enlightenment." (139) Nor was he rendered immune to intestinal discomfort or disappointment in his followers' uptake of his teachings. So we might better ask, what (more specifically) is the *dukkha* that the elimination of *taṇhā* brings to an end?

The *Metta Sutta*'s reference to nirvana as "the peaceful state" may be instructive. This might be considered a condition of calmness achieved through a certain detachment from the turnings of the world. Peacefulness in this sense would contrast with an inner agitation. Peaceful, however, may also contrast with conflict or strife, and in this sense it focuses on one's relations with others. When the *Metta Sutta* tells us—in a distinct echo of the *Tevijja Sutta*—that to be in the world "without enmity" is to enjoy "divine living in this world," it draws on this second meaning.

On either of these two understandings, being in "the peaceful state," still leaves one prone to many sorts of discomforts and disappointments. We will remain subject to frustration—however we may react to it—when the world does not go as we would wish, when (for example) our actions do not turn out to have

their intended effects. There is, however, a special case of frustration that is other than when the world—by flood (say) or fallen tree—impersonally impedes our progress. It is when we do not get what we want because of the actions of others. Adam wants to be the first to taste an apple; but if Eve lustily precedes him, he will be ever foreclosed from realizing his desire. And this, we may recognize, is a frustration of a different order from that of the fallen tree. Other people sometimes act in ways that thwart our aims, whether intentionally or not. Their acts preclude or make difficult our achieving our own ends. And at some level we appreciate this; we understand that others, as they pursue their own desires, are opposed to us, actually or potentially.

Moreover, the recognition (dim or distinct, as it may be) of this continuing potential conflict is disturbing. Not only, it appears, is the world we live in indifferent to us and occasionally thwarting our efforts; we also find ourselves at odds with the very beings with whom we could have the greatest rapport. This displacement from human society, this estrangement from others, is a particularly poignant, and particularly human, form of suffering. And this, we may conjecture, is the *dukkha* that the elimination of *taṇhā* brings to an end.

It is not that if we become more oriented towards acting for the wellbeing of all, others will automatically display reciprocity, acting more kindly towards us in turn. That is unlikely. But it is not the point. The point would be rather that if you eliminate *taṇhā* by becoming compassionate, you will bear no ill will—could bear no ill will—towards others. You will be without enmity. No matter what another does to you or to others you will not regard him as someone with whom you are in conflict. Instead you will regard him non-contentiously and be moved to act for his wellbeing just as with all others you may encounter or have dealings with.

Understanding Gombrich's "discovery" in this way, *dukkha* is that alienation from others that afflicts us so long as *taṇhā* remains in its otherwise natural state of dominantly motivating us to look out for ourselves.

Bodhi. For orthodox Buddhism, enlightenment is the second step in a two-step process of gaining liberation from the unsatisfactory condition of human existence. (In this it mimics the structure of Vedic liberation.) And each of these two components involves what we may call an either/or concept. On the Vedic view, each significant act either helps or hurts the actor in moving, life by life, towards attaining a position from which to be able to take the second step, the transformational realization that *ātman* equals *brahman*. And this liberating gnosis also involves an either/or idea: at any moment one either achieves the gnosis

or one does not; by dint of effort either the bar is cleared or it is not. Likewise, the traditional Buddhist view of enlightenment employs a two-step gnostic model of liberation, and the first step involves a similar bi-valent concept of karma. Every significant act carries either a positive or a negative charge depending on whether the intention out of which one acts is itself good or bad. In this way, time by time, someone can become a monk and undertake suitable training so as eventually to accomplish the second step, to achieve *bodhi*, the awakening that occurs through the insight that eliminates *taṇhā*.

The path to companionship with Brahma that Gombrich discerns in the *Tevijja Sutta*, however, apparently differs from the model of liberation common to Brahminism and early Buddhism in that it does *not* involve a two-step process. Karma, as there understood, is not only *necessary* for awakening to occur, it is *sufficient*. The meditation process (whatever exactly it is) by which one may shift the dominance of one's karma from bounded (finite) to unbounded (infinite) is itself the way to companionship with Brahma, to achieving, as Gombrich puts it, the religious goal that the young brahmins *should* be seeking. Otherwise stated, on this view *bodhi* is not to be thought of as rather like switching on a light.

In addition, the concept of karma implicit in the *Tevijja Sutta*, so understood, does not exhibit the Vedic bi-valent structure. When bounded karma is understood as *taṇhā*, the contrast between bounded and unbounded becomes not that of “plus and minus” but rather one of “more or less,” the concept of infinite karma involving some notion of increased generality.

This concept of karma, however, may appear at odds with that in play with the “law of moral reckoning.” This “law” relies on a bi-valent concept of karma, unlike the dispositional concept of karma (*cetanā*) of the understanding of enlightenment here conjectured, which does not. But we will not, for now, delve into whether or not these two concepts of karma should be understood as complementary to one another—or with how an answer to that question might affect how we understand the Buddha's thought more generally.

Nibbāna. In discussions of the Buddha, the term “enlightenment” is commonly used both for *how* Gotama became the Buddha and *what* was true of him as a result. Although right terminology is not an issue, it can be useful in this context to distinguish process and product, employing “enlightenment” for the former and reserving “nirvana” for the latter

It is a virtue (I would say) of the understanding of enlightenment here conjectured that it provides a unified—and non-accidental—account of the ending

of *dukkha* and the dawning of *karuṇā*. (This, of course, is central to the synoptic consideration of the *Tevijja Sutta*, as read by Gombrich, and the traditional story of the Noble Truths.) And on this account, the post-enlightenment person is (by definition, as it were) a compassionate being, someone motivated towards acting for the wellbeing of all. The account, nonetheless, does not *identify* being in nirvana with being a compassionate being. On the present understanding, divine living need not be thought of *only* as having come to have the nature of *karuṇā*; other alterations may accompany this transformation.⁵

Traditionally, the Buddha is viewed as changed by his enlightenment in many ways. Some of these are undoubtedly hagiographic developments that arose as the evolving legend moved towards his deification; others may at least plausibly be considered as historical fact—becoming more dispassionate or calm, for instance, or more reflective—and effective—in practical reasoning of means to ends.⁶ How we may sort out these two categories and how we may understand how it is that various items in the second could naturally arise as a result of enlightenment may be interesting topics for those who have a taste for plausible biographical reflection. However, they lie beyond the scope of this paper.

Whatever the details, on this reading of the *Tevijja Sutta* it belongs to the Buddha's view of nirvana that it is possible to alter the *tanhā* in our nature so as to live a human life without enmity, and this would be to live in such a way that human life is no longer inherently unsatisfactory. In the cultural context of the time, this would have been a truly radical idea.

A model of meditation

All of this assumes, however, that there is some humanly accessible process or procedure by which bounded karma can be expanded into unbounded karma. And what might this be? The *Tevijja Sutta*'s talk of pervading the world with thoughts of kindness and compassion bespeaks some type of meditation practice, and (I shall suggest) the current Dalai Lama's writings offer a clue as to what such a compassion meditation might involve. To develop "genuine compassion," he tells us, requires "a warm and kind heart that is forceful, stable and firm." (Mehrota 97) And this involves something "more powerful" than "just a wish that sentient beings be free from suffering." (101) Nor is it enough "to have an affectionate

⁵I have benefitted from the comments of one of the journal's reviewers, who understood an earlier draft to be identifying a way to nirvana with nirvana itself.

⁶See Walters, p. 127.

attitude toward sentient beings, regarding them as precious and dear.” (97) It requires, more demandingly, the “taking upon your shoulders the responsibility of working for the benefit of other sentient beings.” (113)

In order to develop such an altruistic orientation, he recommends that we begin with the easiest case, thinking of someone with whom we have—or once had—the strongest affective bond. What would we do to protect her, if need be? What would we do to enhance her wellbeing, if the opportunity presented itself? Let this person and such thoughts be the focus of our meditation so that our willingness to act for her sake soaks deeply into us. Then begin to widen the circle. “Meditate on your own parents, friends and relatives,” he advises, cultivating an attitude of compassion toward individuals in each of these categories in turn. Next, “shift that attention to neutral persons and eventually to your enemies, so that eventually all sentient beings you encounter will be part of your meditation.” (101)

As we do this, he tells us, our regard for others increasingly becomes “that they are ‘mine.’” (186) They become “mine” not in a possessive sense, as if we were asserting dominion over them. Rather they are “mine” in that we have expanded our self-regarding inclinations to include all others within ourselves.⁷ If we can enlarge our self to include “all sentient beings, then they all become like members of our own family.” (186) And, the Dalai Lama concludes, when “you are able to extend your meditation to all sentient beings, your compassion and love will become so pervasive that the moment you see suffering, compassion will spontaneously arise.” (101)

Circling back to Gombrich’s reading of the *Tevijja Sutta*, we may understand the condition the Dalai Lama describes as what it is for someone to eliminate bounded karma and so be without ill will towards anyone. But then, we might ask, is it humanly possible for someone to so alter their conative nature, through some such meditative regimen as the Dalai Lama recommends, that they come to be living the divine life?

What Does Neuroscience Have to Say?

The ongoing plasticity revolution in cognitive neuroscience may have reached a state of development at which it becomes relevant to such a question as whether it

⁷Richard Gombrich has brought to my attention that “the Dalai Lama’s advice about meditating on kindness shares quite a bit, unsurprisingly, with chapter 9 of Buddhaghosa’s *Visuddhi-magga* (‘The Path to Purity’).”

is empirically possible—in the terms of our preceding discussion—for someone to be able to reorient his *tanhā* to the boundless heart of *karuṇā*.

Accepted wisdom

Anyone entering the fields of experimental psychology or neurophysiology in the first couple of decades after World War II “knew”—without necessarily being taught it—that the structures, functions and capacities of the central nervous system were firmly fixed rather early in life. The brain is biologically programmed to perform certain functions—vision, hearing, language, etc.—in certain identifiable areas. When these capacities have developed in the normal maturational process, the process ceases. The fact that you *can* teach an old dog new tricks is just an incidental phenomenon, peripheral to an understanding of the fundamental way the brain works. So accepted wisdom went.

Thus, for instance, even such an insightful little book as Richard Gregory’s *Eye and Brain* (1st ed. 1966) could speak of *the* visual system or *the* visual brain without hesitation or qualification. This type of understanding had been powerfully reinforced by the work of David Hubel and Torsten Wiesel in the 1950’s showing that localization of function in the brain extends all the way down to individual nerve cells. They demonstrated, for instance, that when a bar of light was shown “some cells [in the visual area] were only active when [it] was presented . . . at a certain angle. . . . Others cells responded only to movement, and movement in only a single direction” (69). Gregory described this work as “of the greatest importance” (69), and Hubel and Wiesel later received the Nobel Prize for it. It was assumed that if there was no input to a certain brain area—if, for instance, someone was congenitally unable to send signals from the eyes to the visual cortex of the brain—then that area would have nothing to do and would just sit by quiescent. Or if an area responsible for some function were damaged, then that function would be irretrievably lost. This was the accepted view. And it was wrong.

A change in perspective

By the early 1980s, research was turning up results that would undercut and eventually overthrow earlier dogma. Beginning in the 1970s, Jon Kass and Michael Merzenich, for instance, asked whether mammalian brains can reorganize as a result of experience (Begley 37-38). Working with monkeys, they made extensive

recordings of electrical activity in the somatosensory cortex to map what areas were activated by stimulation of various parts of the monkeys' bodies. They next surgically severed the medial nerve in one hand; after a month, they repeated the mapping process. Received wisdom predicted that the cortical area whose sensory input had been eliminated by the surgery would now be silent. As Mriganke Sur, then a graduate student of Kass, later stated: "The standard view was that when you deprive the brain of sensory input, there should be like a black hole in the cortex where it used to receive that signal" (Begley 38, personal communication). But this was not so. The surgery had silenced any signals from the affected hand; however the area that had previously received those inputs was now registering signals from other, nearby portions of the hand.

This was astounding. As Merzenich later recalled, it was accepted at the time that Hubel and Wiesel "had shown just the opposite: that after a critical period early in life, the brain does not change as a result of changes in sensory input" (Begley 40, personal communication).

In an ingenious experiment a few years later, Merzenich, working with William Jenkins, demonstrated that it did not take a traumatic event to induce the brain to reorganize the sensory cortex. They trained monkeys to reach through the bars of a cage and lightly touch the top of a spinning disc. A deft touch was required to keep contact with the disc and yet not stop it from spinning. This exercise was repeated hundreds of times over several weeks; then they remapped the somatosensory cortex. They found that as a result of the new sensitivity of touch, the cortex corresponding to the sensitized fingers had increased considerably, as much as fourfold (Begley 40-42; Jenkins 82).

These results conflicted with received wisdom. But accepting them, Merzenich later said, "required a different mind-set, one that did not view the brain as a machine with fixed parts and defined capacities, but instead as an organ with the capacity to change throughout life" (Begley 43, personal communication). So the new findings were written off as small-scale and local in character.

Mriganke Sur, who had been part of the team that did the experiment with the monkey hands, set out to investigate the more global question of whether an area of the brain that ordinarily performs one function, such as hearing, could be induced to perform a different function, such as seeing (Begley 54-57; Gazzaniga *Human* 363-364; von Melcher 871-876). For this he used ferrets. Their sensory systems closely resemble those of humans, with one key difference. During brain development in both species the optic and auditory nerves grow from the eyes and

ears, respectively, to eventually arrive at the visual cortex at the back of the head, in the one case, and the auditory cortices on the sides of the head, in the other. In doing so, the optic nerve from the left eye, in both species, crosses over and connects to the right visual cortex—and vice versa. The auditory nerves, however, take a direct route and connect the left ear with the left side of the head, and the right with the right. The key difference that Sur was to exploit is that, although this developmental process is completed by birth in humans, in ferrets these sensory nerves do not reach their intended destinations until somewhat after birth.

Sur surgically intervened and prevented the auditory nerve of the right ear—just the right ear—of his ferrets from extending all the way into the right auditory cortex. As a consequence, the optic nerve for the left eye was induced to grow to the right auditory cortex. The left side of the brain, however, remained normal: right optic nerve to left visual cortex; left auditory nerve to left auditory cortex. The researchers allowed the ferrets to mature. They then trained them to respond to a flash of light by turning right and to respond to a sound by turning left. Now they were ready for the moment of truth. What would the ferrets do when a light was flashed to their left eye, the one that is now connected to the right ear? The answer: They turned to the right. As the researchers wrote, “[The] ‘rewired’ ferrets respond as though they perceive the stimulus to be visual rather than auditory” (von Melcher 872). Helen Neville later demonstrated much the same phenomenon in adult humans, working with deaf individuals. As she explained to the Dalai Lama at a meeting in Dharamsala in 2004, “The brain’s *auditory* region can be recruited to process at least two aspects of *vision*—peripheral vision and the perception of motion” (Begley 104, Neville’s emphasis).

These findings discredited the assumption that mammalian brains are genetically programmed to perform specific functions in certain specified areas of the brain. As Sur said: “An auditory cortex that grows up with visual input sees rather than hears” (Begley 57, personal communication). But arguably it did not disturb orthodoxy’s most basic contention, that once a developmental period closes, that’s it: an area that by design and development is dedicated to one function cannot take on a different one.

Paul Bach-y-Rita began the sensory substitution work for which he would become well known as far back as the 1960s, but it was much later before it received much recognition. He is best known for creating a device that can enable a blind person to see with his tongue. For the blind, whose eyes do not transmit their normal input to the brain, he discovered a way to provide substitute input through

a different channel. A blind person wears a small TV camera on the forehead. Visual images from the camera are carried to arrays of stimulators in a disc worn on the tongue. There coded signals create specific pressure patterns. The neural responses to these patterns travel to the brain along the sensory pathway of the tongue. Over time the wearer learns to use this input to begin to move herself in the world in ways that approximate those of a sighted individual (Gazzaniga *Human* 364-365). In his 2004 review paper, Bach-y-Rita described a “very recent trial” in which “within an hour of being introduced to the [sensory substitution device], a blind person was able to discern a ball rolling on the floor towards him; he was able to reach for a soft drink on a table; and he was able to play the old game of paper, scissors, rock. Later, he walked down a hallway, saw the door openings, examined a door and its frame, actually noting that there was a sign on the door” (56).

Apparently even in adults signals are signals, and cortex is cortex: send one sense’s signals to an area of the cortex that was not expecting them, and the new area will decode that input and enable at least some approximation of a normal person’s behavioral upshot. As Michael Gazzaniga recently put it, “It is the pattern of these signals that determines what you experience; it doesn’t matter where they come from” (*Human* 364).

By the turn of the century it is safe to say that something of a Gestalt shift had occurred in the field of neuroscience. Phenomena once peripheral had become paradigmatic. As the authors of a chapter in *The Cambridge Handbook of Consciousness* stated in 2007, the idea of neuroplasticity, “namely that experience changes the brain,” had “prompted an explosion of research” and had become a “well-accepted and well-documented theory” (Lutz, *Meditation* 522). The question was no longer whether neuroplasticity characterizes the brain, but rather with respect to what areas and what functions, and to what extent.

Mind matters

It appears that the rule is: change the input, change the brain. But the process is not as simple or straightforward as this somewhat mechanical way of putting it might suggest. Consider another of Merzenich’s monkey experiments. His team set up a situation in which a device tapped the monkeys’ fingers one hundred minutes a day for six weeks, this while headphones piped various sounds to the monkeys’ ears. During this time some monkeys were taught to attend to their fingers and others were taught to attend to what they heard. But all monkeys re-

ceived the same tactile and auditory stimulation; each group got the same finger tapping and the same headphone sounds. At the end of six weeks, the researchers examined whether any changes had occurred in the somatosensory and auditory cortices of the monkeys. In those who had been rewarded for attending to the finger tapping, the amount of cortex devoted to their fingers had increased several fold, but there was no similar change in the auditory cortex. And vice versa, with the monkeys trained to attend to the sounds, the areas of the auditory cortex that process the sound frequencies the monkeys heard had increased, but the somatosensory cortex remained unchanged (Begley 196-197). This demonstrated that input alone does not change the brain; attention matters.

In October 2004, the Dalai Lama met for a week at his home in Dharamsala, India, with five prominent neuroscientists; each had one day to report on recent work in his or her area of research. Neville was one of the presenters. “It is a beautiful experiment,” she told the Dalai Lama, referring to this Merzenich study, “because it’s showing the pure effect of attention.” “It is showing,” she said, that “attention” is “necessary for neuroplasticity” (Begley 197-198).

Moreover as demonstrated by Alvaro Pascual-Leone, sometimes mindedness matters most. In the mid-90s, he set up a situation which he expected would show a change in cortical organization as a result of learned finger movements. He taught some volunteers a five-finger piano exercise, which they then practiced two hours a day for five days. Before and after the practice sessions, the investigators used a non-invasive technology (transcranial magnetic stimulation) to map the areas of the motor cortex devoted to the finger movements. Sure enough, this showed that those areas had expanded significantly into adjacent ones. But this was just a prelude. Pascual-Leone then repeated the experiment with another group, and this time the subjects were asked to just imagine they were moving their fingers to practice the piano exercise. Subsequent testing showed that this mental practice had resulted in a similar reorganization of the motor cortex (Begley 187-188; Pascual-Leone *Modulation* 1037-1045). Mental rehearsal apparently activated the same motor circuits as actually piano playing would and thereby brought about a similar cortical reorganization. As Pascual-Leone later wrote: “Mental practice alone may be sufficient to promote the plastic modulation of neural circuits” (Pascual-Leone *Plastic* 380).

The “plastic modulation of neural circuits” with which the neuroplasticity revolution began was largely in certain areas of the cortex. But we are not just cortical creatures. It is, for instance, widely accepted as biological fact that even rather

simple creatures are born with some type of neurological approach-avoidance system which biases the organism to move towards the source of some stimuli and away from the source of others. Some things have (or come to have) a positive valence or value for the organism; others, a negative one; and still others are neutral. We naturally seek to ingest or extend a hand to some things and shy away from or resist others. Indeed the “essence of . . . approach and avoidance,” Antonio Damasio tells us, is as “apparent in a creature as simple . . . as a sea anemone” as it is “in a child at play” (Damasio 78-79). And such an approach-avoidance center is undoubtedly located, at least substantially, in subcortical areas of the brain.

Furthermore, somewhere along the evolutionary line the approach-avoidance module of certain species, our own included, developed a species specific aspect. We are biologically set, it seems, to accord close kin (and others whom we may treat as kin) a highly positive value, and others of our kind a more neutral or to some degree negative value. The former we pre-consciously regard, certainly not as ingestible, but as being at least as important to us as food. Harking back to earlier discussion, we might say that we pre-consciously treat such favored others as within the ambit of our conative self, as part of “the who” for whose wellbeing we are disposed to act.

Accepting these ways of speaking, we may then ask, could it be possible that some form of “mental practice” could modify (“modulate”) the approach-avoidance system of human adults? Otherwise put, could meditation work to expand the range of our conative self? Is this empirically conceivable? And if so, how could it be investigated?

Meditation affects motivation

Richard Davidson has been in the forefront of recent experimental investigation into the possible long-term effect of meditation on brain structure and function. He was another of the presenters at the Dharamsala meeting. In an early study, he and colleagues worked with eight Tibetan Buddhist monks, as well as a control group of non-meditating university students who received a week-long course in a particular meditation technique. The monks were all accomplished meditators, having logged thousands of hours over periods ranging from 15 to 40 years. They were participating in the study at Madison, Wisconsin at the urging of the Dalai Lama. The meditation technique was one in which the meditator attempted to generate “a state of ‘unconditioned loving-kindness and compassion,’” a state described as an “unrestricted readiness and availability to help living beings” (Lutz

Long-term meditators 16369). The subjects had their heads wired for electroencephalogram (EEG) recording. In each test session the subjects were asked to, on cue, to put their minds into a non-meditative state, begin meditation, release back to a neutral non-meditation, and so forth—as EEG recordings were made.

The results were striking, particularly in measurable gamma-wave activity. As Davidson reported in Dharamsala, after just a week's worth of training, "some of the controls . . . showed a slight increase in the gamma signal" (Begley 292). But with the monks it was marked. "Most of them showed very large increases, and some showed extremely large increases of the sort that have never been reported before in the neuroscience literature" (Begley 293). Potentially even more significant was what the recordings told about the monks in their non-meditating state. Even when not engaged in compassion meditation, Davidson reported, their brains "show a large increase in this gamma signal," which suggests long term changes in the brain (Begley 295-296).

Another finding, which Davidson called "novel and unexpected," was that during the test periods when the monks were asked to produce compassion meditation their brains displayed activity in areas associated with planned movement (Begley 296-297). Mathieu Ricard, a monk with a Ph.D. in genetics who participated in this research both as a member of the research team and as a subject, related this neural activity to a feeling of "total readiness to act, to help" (Begley 297). Davidson suggested to the Dalai Lama that what they were measuring "may reflect the generation of a disposition to act in the face of suffering." "It gives real meaning to the phrase 'moved by compassion,'" he added, and concluded: "Science has long held that emotional regulation and emotional response are static abilities that don't much change once you reach adulthood. But our findings clearly indicate that meditation can change the function of the brain in an enduring way" (Begley 297).

Conclusion

Gombrich understands the Buddha to tell us that it is possible through meditation to become someone who will not regard anyone with ill will—and recent neuroscience supports the empirical plausibility of such a claim. More provocatively, Gombrich also understands that, according to the Buddha, attaining this condition *is* to be living the divine life. In this regard, earlier reflections in this paper may enable us to see that, for the Buddha, unbinding bounded karma so as

to become empty of enmity and eliminating *tanhā* so as to be free from *dukkha* are two ways of speaking of one and the same way to that divine life, nirvana.

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Book Reviews

***Aśvaghōṣa, Handsome Nanda.* Translated by Linda Covill. Clay Sanskrit Library. New York: New York University Press and JJC Foundation. 2007. 387 pp.**

Linda Covill's translation of Aśvaghōṣa's *Handsome Nanda* is a pleasure to read. The different scenes and interactions gave me a sense of sitting right beside the characters and being a listener to their dialogues. Covill is clearly a wordsmith with a natural sense for language and beauty. I feel that she has captured the perfect balance between modern English, which gives the book a realism for the contemporary reader, and a more classical form, which gives it the air of something happening in ancient times. It is written in the Sanskrit *kāvya* or poetic style. More precisely, it is composed in what Kṣemendra in his *Suṃṛttatilaka* (*On Metres*) calls the *kāvyaśāstra* style. That is, it is meant to be a didactic work that is also poetical. What the reader is supposed to learn from the work is the dangers of erotic love and, especially, the role that women play in these perils.

The story of Nanda is well-known in Buddhism and comes from the *Nanda Sutta* in the *Udāna* of the *Khuddaka Nikāya*. Aśvaghōṣa's version of the story, written in the second century CE, is a captivating one. Nanda is the Buddha's half-brother. He is someone who seems to have everything: he is handsome, well to do, and has, as Covill beautifully puts it, a "kittenish" wife, Sundarī, who fulfils him sexually and emotionally. The Buddha, however, has other plans for Nanda, and seeks to have him leave his seemingly perfect life. With pressure from the Buddha, he is forced to come face to face with attachment to his erotic and romantic desires.

Aśvaghōṣa's rendition is fascinating reading because it is strewn with many twists and turns. These provoke numerous questions, especially of a psychological nature and concerning the purpose behind Aśvaghōṣa's re-writing of the story.

First, reading between the lines (or even the lines themselves) it is quite obvious that the author is someone in a deep conflict. For although he tries to list the perils of sensual pleasure, he is plainly himself besotted with feminine beauty and finds great enjoyment in trying to capture this feeling. He loves to describe “womanly form”, “swelling breasts”, earrings “pushed sideways from her face”, “putting on make-up”, “swaying anklets”, and on and on. Although many of these descriptions are determined by *kāvya* conventions of the *śṛṅgāra-rasa* or “erotic mood”, Aśvaghōṣa is clearly someone who has observed women intensely.

This is why, I feel, he needs to give his infamous “Attack on Women”: he is trying somehow to convince himself that there is something wrong with the feminine beauty he loves so much. He hopes that by orchestrating such an attack he will be able to free himself from his love for women. But the very fact that he makes this attack (along with his beautiful descriptions of those he wants to attack) demonstrates his love for women. The fact that he is in this conflict—even to the very end—is underscored at the conclusion of the book where he tries to assure the reader that “This composition on the subject of liberation is for calming the reader, not for his pleasure” (18.64).

Why does he say this? Because he is aware that like himself, the typical male, and even female, reader will have taken much pleasure in his erotic descriptions of the feminine beings in the book. Thus, at the end of the book, when Nanda has at last left his kittenish wife, a not unnatural thought for the male reader might be, “Now that Nanda’s out of the picture, perhaps I should drop by and see how Sundarī—with the swelling breasts—is getting by on her own.”

There is also a problem with the story that Aśvaghōṣa never deals with. This is the part of the story where the Buddha uses the *apsarases* (erotic nymph-like goddesses) to lure Nanda away from his wife. The problem is this: If Nanda is so deeply in love with his wife, how can he so easily shift his feelings from her to the *apsarases*? Romantic love does not work like that. Love focuses on the personal aspects of the beloved. It seems true that for many people sexual beauty also plays a role, but romantic love is not solely sexual desire. Aśvaghōṣa however tries to make it look like it is.

Why does he do this? The answer, it seems, is because this would make his attack more credible (though still not successful, I feel). Although few people would agree that being in love is a harmful experience that needs to be overcome, more people would probably agree that being tied solely to sexual attachments (especially at the cost of romantic love) is such an experience. Aśvaghōṣa’s tactic,

therefore, is to try to create guilt by association. In other words, Āśvaghōṣa tries to get the reader to agree with him that purely sexual attachments (for example to the *apsarases*) are bad and then hopes that he or she will not notice the differences between such attachments and romantic love. He then hopes that, consequently, the reader will end up agreeing that romantic love is also bad.

A further problem comes in the story when we see that Ānanda talks “out of affection” to Nanda. For is not affection also a form of attachment? And why is Ānanda’s affection towards Nanda acceptable when Nanda’s affection towards his wife is not acceptable? This is a fascinating question. There are of course numerous answers that could be deployed here. For example, Ānanda’s affection is not sexual affection, it is not a strong affection, it is a compassionate affection, or some such thing. But all of them, I would argue, fail to distinguish the two affections in a way that will allow Āśvaghōṣa to have one, but not the other.

All of this makes me feel that *Handsome Nanda* is based more on a Vedic than a Buddhist philosophy. The various references to things Vedic, Brahmins, soma juice, God, and the attacks on the body, give it the flavour of a Hindu ascetic work, despite its Buddhist trappings. This is plainly evident in the opening of the poem, where the author describes and praises the “ascetics” in their “ashram”. These are elements in Brahmanism, not Buddhism. The Buddha does not praise asceticism; rather he rejects it in favour of the middle way. An attack on women looks out of place for a follower of the middle way. Āśvaghōṣa seems aware of this and accordingly puts his attack on women in the mouth of “a certain ascetic” rather than in the mouth of the Buddha. It would hardly do to have the compassionate Buddha attacking women. There are attacks on women in various purported Buddhist works (*Handsome Nanda* being one such example), but such attacks are at their core very un-Buddhist.

It is noteworthy that in the *Sakkapañha Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, the minstrel Pañcasikha sings an erotic love song for the Buddha. In this song the poet refers to his lover’s beautiful breasts and belly, and begs to be wrapped in the “delightful thighs” of his “soft-eyed lady”. When the song is finished the Buddha does not criticize Pañcasikha for his erotic love. Nor does he proceed to attack women. Rather he praises Pañcasikha for the beautiful harmony of his song. This alone suggests that there are difficulties in seeing *Handsome Nanda* as purely a Buddhist work.

Because of all this, *Handsome Nanda* is an excellent source for anyone who is interested in exploring the similarities and differences between Vedic and Bud-

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dhist views of women and eroticism. Linda Covill deserves much praise for making this work available to English readers in such an exquisite form.

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***Buddhism in the Modern World.* Edited by David L. McMahan. London & New York: Routledge, 2012. xiv, 329 pp., 28 illustrations (b/w photos).**

After the editor's short introduction, this book contains 16 chapters by 17 authors (one of them again the editor). The first thing that strikes one about the book is how tightly it is organised. Each chapter is about 20 pages long. (Three near the end are a bit shorter.) First comes the main text, which is sub-divided into several sections and is illustrated by one or more photographs. Then comes a summary, a set of bullet points about half a page long. Next comes a shorter series of bullet points: "Discussion points". Then a short bibliographical section for "Further reading". Finally a longer bibliographical section, "References".

Clearly this is aimed at the undergraduate classroom. Often teachers have to give a course somewhat outside their main area of expertise. Indeed, almost anyone who has to give a course with a range as global as "Modern Developments in Buddhism" (or indeed in any other world religion) can be forgiven for resorting to a publication designed to lighten their task.

Outside the classroom the more sophisticated reader may initially feel alienated by all the bullet points; but if she thinks of the book rather as a reference work, like a set of encyclopaedia articles, she may be reconciled. What really matters, after all, is the quality of the articles. Inevitably, among 17 authors the standard is uneven, but there are many respectable articles here, and – since I cannot review every article – I shall concentrate on pointing out those I have found worthiest of comment.

In his introduction, McMahan emphasises that "some of the greatest transformations of Buddhism" are "due to its encounter with the West", and particularly that they have responded "to the negative characterizations of Buddhism by colonists and Christian missionaries ... by selectively adopting elements of Western philosophy, scientific thought, Protestantism, romanticism, and psychology" (p.3). He goes on to balance this by saying that "Buddhism is always deeply embedded in and structured by local social practices, institutions, economics, and political affairs" (p.4). One can label these as respectively more cultural and more sociological approaches; the book has far more to say about the first than the second, and I shall return to this at the end of my review.

The first part of the book is called "Buddhism in its Geographical Contexts" and aims to "give accounts of Buddhist life and recent history ... in places where the tradition is especially prominent or where new forms of Buddhism have

emerged.” This means five chapters on Asia, one on Europe and one on North America. The second, slightly longer, part, “Buddhism and the Challenges of Modernity”, “takes up thematic issues”.

To understand Buddhism in a specific area, some knowledge of the local historical context is indispensable; so a good author of a chapter in the first half of the book will convey such information clearly and succinctly. I find Clark Chilson’s chapter on Japan particularly successful in this regard. In the last 150 years Japan has been through two cataclysms, the Meiji restoration and the defeat in World War Two followed by American occupation. Chilson does well to focus on how Buddhism suffered and adapted in the face of these disasters, and what problems it currently faces. He also (unlike some authors here) writes in normal intelligible English.

In principle, the chapter on China could have followed a very similar pattern, with the fall of the Qing dynasty and the arrival of Mao as the focal points; but Gareth Fisher feels that he has to devote a special (albeit short) section to Buddhism in Taiwan, so that the final impression he leaves is breathless and less clearcut.

The chapter on Tibetan Buddhism, by Sarah Jacoby and Antonio Terrone, inevitably deals entirely with the changes resulting directly from Tibet’s relations with China. Adoption by Tibetans of western cultural features thus plays a rather small part in their story, appearing only where those features have been introduced by the Dalai Lama. The increasing interest of Han Chinese in Tibetan Buddhism is commented on as beneficial to both sides (p.99); I had not realised that this began in the early 1930s (p.90). There is a neat summary of the contrast between Western converts to Tibetan Buddhism and the Tibetans: “Non-Tibetan Buddhist converts, the vast majority of whom are non-monastic, tend to focus on meditation practices and Tibetan liturgies that are most often the preserve only of ... full-time religious professionals in Tibet ... [E]thnically Tibetan lay Buddhists tend to focus on accumulating good karma ... via reciting mantras, turning prayer wheels, circumambulating sacred Buddhist sites, maintaining household shrines, making periodic offerings to their family’s lama and his monastery, sponsoring rituals for deceased relatives, and celebrating Tibetan Buddhist holidays” (p.106).

It would be difficult to over-praise Martin Baumann’s potted history of Buddhism in modern Europe. Evidently undismayed by the miracle of compression required of the authors, he manages to give so clear and informative a picture of the many intertwining influences and initiatives that I would recommend this es-

say as a starting point for anyone with the remotest interest in his topic. My only criticism, and it is so tiny as to be almost frivolous, is that his grasp of English idiom sometimes lets him down: “the Koran is the fundament of Islam” (p.114) is unfortunate.

Baumann succinctly summarises how Protestantism influenced the foundation of European Buddhism in the 19th century: “religion was conceived of as text-based, private, personally experienced, and acted out by the mature individual” (p.116). Nearly 40 years ago I became an active member of Shap, a small British organisation founded by Ninian Smart to spread accurate information about world religions, especially through educational institutions. A senior colleague in this “working party” was a well-meaning man who was in charge of how “world religions” were taught in Birmingham schools. I vividly remember arguing against his tenet that Buddhism was entirely unsuitable to be taught to pre-adolescent children. It is strange to reflect how outdated his attitude now seems to us.

Sallie B. King writes on “Socially Engaged Buddhism”, a topic on which she is an acknowledged expert. The next chapter, “Buddhist Ethics: a Critique” is by another acknowledged authority in his field, Damien Keown. McMahan has already pointed out in the “Introduction” that these two contributions are at odds, and I agree with him that this is a strength of the book, not a weakness. I feel bound to say, however, that Keown is not merely thought-provoking but also far more informative.

King gives us a bland, idealised, “see no evil” survey, apparently writing on the principle that one should portray people as they would wish to be portrayed. However much one may sympathise with Buddhist victims and admire certain Buddhist leaders, to write that the Socially Engaged Buddhist responses to violence are “in each case, uncompromised applications of the ideals of the Buddhist tradition: nonviolence, compassion and loving-kindness, and the search for an outcome that benefits all” (p.196) is in effect just parroting propaganda. I doubt that such noble men as the Dalai Lama and Thích Nhất Han are enhanced by such a presentation.

In writing more analytically, Keown attains a far higher intellectual level. Indeed, this is another contribution that I would recommend to anyone, and I find it worth quoting at some length. Keown clarifies that by “ethics” he means not “the moral teachings attributed to the Buddha, but the systematic study of those teachings from a philosophical perspective” (p.216), and that the Buddhist tradi-

tion contains hardly any such study. As he says, “It can hardly be a coincidence that Buddhist ethics and engaged Buddhism have arisen at roughly the same time as Buddhism encounters the West. ... [A]lthough social and political issues such as kingship, war, crime and poverty are mentioned in the Pali canon and later scriptures ... [we find] little interest in developing moral or political theories ... The concept of justice, for example, is seldom – if ever – mentioned in Buddhist literature ...” (p.217).

He continues: “Sometimes it seems the ‘fast forward’ button has been pressed too enthusiastically, and Buddhism is depicted as holding ‘enlightened’ views on any number of contemporary issues, when these have hardly been mentioned in traditional sources, or the evidence is ambiguous or even points in the opposite direction. Thus Buddhism is depicted as eco-friendly, a defender of individual rights, strongly anti-war, and (in the field of sexual ethics) ‘pro-choice’ and tolerant of same-sex relationships, in a manner that coincides neatly with modern liberal and green agendas. This anachronistic construction of Buddhism ... seems to owe as much to the rejection of certain traditional Western values as it does to the views of Buddhism itself, and if Buddhism is the ‘good guy’, it is not hard to imagine who the ‘bad guy’ is. The blame for many of today’s problems is often laid at the door of orthodox Western religion, and in particular Christianity ... While these stereotypes of both Western religion and Buddhism contain some truth, the reality is more complex” (p.217). He goes on to consider ecology, human rights and war in some detail.

Richard K. Payne introduces “Buddhism and the Powers of the Mind” with the sentence: “That Buddhism is primarily concerned with healing both of and by the mind appears to be firmly established in the popular conceptions of Buddhism” (p.234). There follows a learned and interesting, albeit terribly condensed, *tour d’horizon* from the end of the 18th century until now, focussed on the interaction between “occultism, psychotherapeutics, and Buddhist modernism” (p. 235). Payne makes many good points about interpretations and uses of Buddhism in Western society and culture. I particularly like the section on “Commodifying Buddhism”. Those who present Buddhism as psychotherapeutic self-help tend to employ a “Perennialist rhetoric” which “entails removing Buddhist teachings and practices from their cultural context” (p.248). “The fact that the cultures from which Buddhist thought originated were not psycho-socially configured around the narcissistic polarity of overvaluing and devaluing oneself as is contemporary Western society, creates many opportunities for misunderstand-

ings” (ibid). Moreover, in “much of the self-help literature [w]e find Buddhism reduced to a set of tools or techniques by which one can attain happiness, tools whose value is judged by how well they help one to be socially adapted – accepting the standards and values of one’s society and operating successfully within [them]” (p.250).

Here Payne makes a good point about the purely instrumental use of Buddhist teachings, and then tries to make another about equating happiness with social conformity. However, the quotation shows how, presumably because he is trying to cram too much into a few pages, Payne himself creates opportunities for misunderstandings: the two points, while both valid, are quite different and not necessarily linked, while the second, which he mentions only here, in passing, requires expansion.

A more serious opportunity for misunderstanding is a thread running through much of the chapter. He writes: “I initially formulated the thesis [of this chapter] as Buddhism having been interpreted psychologically. Framing the question this way, however, presumes the existence of some object – Buddhism – that is interpreted. The longer I pursued this inquiry, however, the clearer it became that there is no object to be interpreted. That is, this putative object of interpretation has no independent, autonomous existence. It is instead a social construct ... It is a representation, the construction of which is itself a process of interpretation” (p.234).

Here Payne has gone over the top. No one can possibly dispute that interpretations are just that, and themselves liable to interpretation, or that all historians work within a social and intellectual context. But just as he can, and does, write a contribution to the history of ideas, so can others contribute to a better understanding, not perhaps of Buddhism as a whole – that would be almost absurdly ambitious – but of texts, such as those of the Pali Canon, which record basic Buddhist teachings.

Payne writes: “Assertions that the Buddha taught control of the mind for the relief of suffering, for example, construct a certain representation in which the psychotherapeutic interpretation of Buddhism is legitimated as the ‘original’ teaching” (p.237). I wonder whether Payne, or any other reasonable person, has put forward an interpretation of the Buddha in which he did *not* teach control of the mind for the relief of suffering.

Similarly, when Payne writes: “The appeal to personal experience as epistemologically privileged has deep roots in Western religious culture”, it sounds as

if he is proposing a contrast between Western thought and Buddhist or classical Indian epistemology. This would be a real howler, since on the one hand the Buddha in the Pali Canon repeatedly exhorts his listeners to test his teaching on the touchstone of their own experience, and on the other hand Buddhism, like other classical Indian systems of thought, regards personal experience (Sanskrit: *pratyakṣa*) as first and foremost among the means to valid knowledge.

I may have misunderstood Payne: perhaps he only means that the Buddhism he is focusing on, Buddhist modernism, cannot be taken as an “object to be interpreted” – though I think that is what he is in fact doing. However, the issue is surely important, because unless we have some idea of what a set of teachings originally wished to say, the way that modern versions of these teachings relate to the original in terms of contrasts and similarities cannot be assessed.

The same issue arises on the first two pages of the very next chapter, “Buddhism and Gender”. Liz Wilson tells us, for example, that “many early scholars of Buddhism ... idealize[d] the Buddha as a figure whose teachings emphasized instrumental rationality, individualism, gender egalitarianism, and other Western Enlightenment values” (p.258), and that “[t]he common assumption of much Victorian popular writing on Buddhism was that [the Buddha’s] teachings freed those oppressed by gender and caste hierarchies” (p.259); but she writes not a word about whether she thinks these views were right or wrong, let alone why. I find this pointless. Alas, I have to say that this is a shoddy piece of work, with not a few factual inaccuracies. Given her topic, it is ironic that she refers to the female anthropologist Hiroko Kawanami as male (p.268). More serious, because central to her theme, is her failure even to mention Ute Hüsken’s discovery – for so I regard it – that the canonical account of how the Buddha made all nuns hierarchically inferior to all monks contains internal contradictions which show that it must be apocryphal, a later interpolation.¹

It is a pleasure to turn to “Buddhism and Science: Translating and Re-translating Culture” by Francisca Cho. For me this ranks with Keown’s as the most stimulating and original contribution to the book. The title made me approach the chapter with foreboding, but my spirits were immediately lifted by the first sub-heading: “Can Buddhism and science be compared?” Cho proposes that “praxis precedes theory” (p.276). By this she means that “translation is a cul-

¹ Ute Hüsken, “The Legend of the Buddhist Order of Nuns in the Theravāda Vinaya-Piṭaka”, *Journal of the Pali Text Society* xxvi, 2000, pp.42-69. This is a translation of an article which originally was published in German in 1993.

tural process that begins first with the perception of concrete benefit" (ibid). She then offers a splendid example. "The institution of Buddhist monasticism, with its order of celibate monks, seriously clashed with the Chinese concern with ... perpetuating the family line. But in the Buddhist ritual system, supporting the monastic order with economic necessities created merit (good karmic fruit) for the donor that could be transferred to his ancestors, ensuring auspicious circumstances in their new lives. Hence an inherently offensive social institution was brilliantly transformed by the Buddhist cosmology of rebirth into a most potent site for the practice of filial piety." It is a great relief in going through this book at last to come across a historical claim grounding the development of ideas in social and economic realities.

Most of the chapter concerns the "dialogue between Buddhism and western science", particularly psychotherapy, and inevitably there is some overlap with Payne. I do not agree with Cho's every word. On the one hand, she has a very Mahayanist (even Chinese?) view of Buddhist doctrine; on the other, when she analyses the concepts of secularity and science, she is subtle on the western side but inadequate on the Buddhist side. Early Buddhism certainly uses words which can be translated as "secular" and "transcendent": *laukika* and *lokottara* do literally mean "mundane" and "supramundane". The point is, however, that they would never be applied in most of the contexts in which we use "secular". This is grist to Cho's mill, and I am only urging her to push her critical analysis further. But whether she and I agree or not, this is certainly a fine contribution.

The final two chapters, on "Buddhism and Globalization" and "Buddhism, Media and Popular Culture" do not seem to add anything of value to our understanding of the field, and there is considerable overlap between them, including excessive enthusiasm for the jargon introduced by Arjun Appadurai, which I regard as verbiage masquerading as thought. (He has already been called in aid to provide obscurity in chapter 1.)

Looking back at the volume as a whole, one has to say that the problem of overlap has not been entirely overcome. I have quoted some cases of it, and could have mentioned more. In particular, it may seem strange that I have not commented on the editor's own chapter "Buddhist Modernism", which begins the latter half of the book. Of course, the editor has already broached the topic as a whole in his "Introduction", and both pieces are sensible and informative. But I wonder whether it was a good idea for him to take two bites at the cherry. If his chapter stood alone, one would recommend students to read it. But as it is, it contains al-

most nothing which cannot be found, often with more context, elsewhere in the book.

Granted, to get perfect co-ordination in coverage from a team of 17 authors would not be practically possible. Nevertheless, the problem of how well a vast topic like “Buddhism in the Modern World” can be dealt with by a volume organised like this one is surely worth discussing.

It is not that repetition is at all costs to be avoided. Repetition is an important pedagogic device, and every good teacher repeats points to emphasise them. But live teaching and oral communication have different rules from presenting a subject in print. Moreover, repetition has less value when it is accompanied by fragmentation.

Let me give just a couple of examples. The modern Taiwanese Buddhist movement Tzu Chi (also spelled Ci Ji) gets three lines on p.2, a fairly long paragraph followed by a paragraph shared with another movement on pp.74-5, a mention on p.81, another mention, this time by name only, on p.145, and about half a page on pp.205-6. There is quite a bit of repetition between these mentions. Nevertheless, I would be surprised if many people remembered anything about Tzu Chi after going through the book. But it is a distinctive and colourful movement, and if they read one good three-page account of it, including a brief theory of why it has been so successful, I would be surprised if people did *not* remember it.

A bigger example is nationalism. When one has read the sequence of five chapters on Buddhist countries in Asia, one cannot avoid feeling that there is an elephant in the room, a massive but unacknowledged presence: nationalism. However, one has to wait for any discussion of nationalism till the second part of the book, on “thematic issues”. It is here that the intellectual and pedagogic hazards entailed by the book’s rigid format become most obvious. No doubt one can argue that nationalism became a major force in world history before the 20th century, which is roughly when this book begins; but it certainly played no part in earlier Buddhist teachings or practices. It surely has more influence over people than any other of the factors that McMahan has listed in his introduction – perhaps more, indeed, than all of them together. To fail to notice this would be a case of not seeing the wood for the trees.

Had nationalism already been discussed, one would read Paul David Numrich’s chapter, “The North American Buddhist Experience”, with different eyes. But here too the word “nationalism” is not mentioned, even though immigration issues loom large, both past American hostility to certain nationalities and how

immigrant groups of Buddhists have tended not to meld. Then at the end of the chapter we read: “Robert Thurman cited the Japanese Buddhist scholar Gadjin Nagao’s division of Buddhist history into four ‘peaks’, the last occurring in the mediaeval period”, saying “There will be no fifth peak, unless it happens in America ... Then, if you did it, it will reverberate back in Asia ...” Nagao was no doubt being polite, but Numrich gives me no clue why he thinks that this judgment is to be taken seriously. Surely, however, his whole presentation shows how important American nationalism is to understanding America’s encounter with Buddhism.

Nationalism becomes an explicit theme only in Ian Harris’s chapter “Buddhism, Politics and Nationalism”. I am a great admirer of Harris’s research; but I have to admit that the vastness and complexity of this theme has defeated him. Since his remit includes not just nationalism but Buddhist politics in general, it is inevitable that his contribution overlaps heavily with the following chapter, on “Socially Engaged Buddhism” (already discussed above). He provides many interesting nuggets of information, but hardly ventures beyond that. Similarly, while he is the only author to write about Buddhism’s encounter with Marxism (as against just mentioning communist governments), he has no space to deal with the subject. Being an expert on modern Cambodia, he has most to say about SE Asia. But he makes no mention of Heinz Bechert’s superb three-volume *Buddhismus, Staat und Gesellschaft in den Ländern des Theravada Buddhismus* (*Buddhism, State and Society in the Countries of Theravada Buddhism*). Quite rightly, he mentions documents written in Burmese, etc; but evidently German is considered too exotic for mention even in a bibliography. I would say that for almost half a century English-language writings on relations between Theravada Buddhism on the one hand and nationalism or communism on the other have hardly even approached what Bechert achieved, adding little more than updating. This is an opportunity missed in the present volume.

In sum, I would say that this book is to be welcomed for its wide array of information and many sensible observations, even if in my opinion only Keown and Cho achieve real intellectual distinction; Baumann and Chilson are hardly less admirable, but at a more pedestrian level. The book’s main shortcoming is its heavy bias towards “cultural studies” at the expense of history and sociology. We are shown the encounter between Buddhism and various ideas and personalities, but there is a dearth of attempts to explain why those ideas and personalities made their influence felt: on whom, when and under what conditions.

The topic is Buddhism during the past century. But even today, the beliefs,

practices and institutions of the majority of Buddhists in the world owe more to the past, even to the distant past, than they do to modernity. So why are Buddhist traditions barely described, except in the chapter on Tibet? Would that not clarify what is new? I may have overlooked something, but I don't think that apart from Keown's piece the volume contains any reference to a traditional Buddhist text. Thus for students who have not learnt about the past, the entire topic must hang in mid air, as context-free as the "Il Buddino pudding molds on display in a San Francisco gift shop", illustrated on p.318.

I could complain that this is all due to the fact that most of what is on offer in this book can be studied through the English language, whereas to get to know the older stuff requires learning foreign languages. But I do not espouse the perfectionist position that every text must be studied in the original; nowadays there are plenty of translations quite good enough to convey a fair picture of the tradition to people who are not professional scholars.

I think the main culprit must be a facile post-modernism, which decries any attempt to "reify" Buddhism or to claim that we know what Buddhists have thought and practised. I have mentioned above Payne's bizarre statement about "assertions that the Buddha taught control of the mind for the relief of suffering"; his use of the word "assertions" seems intended to cast doubt on whether this interpretation, based on many clear texts and accepted by countless Buddhists for over two millennia, has any more validity than anything else one might say about the Buddha. I find it hard to believe that a distinguished scholar like Payne could really mean this, so I shall not base my case on this example. But the book goes even further when on p. 313 it is claimed that "Buddhism" (yes, the word is in scare quotes) is something constructed by European colonisers. If "modernity" can be taken as the opposite of "tradition", I do not see how one could get any more modern than this!

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The following article by Peter Alan Roberts, originally published in Volume 2 of JOCBS and reprinted here with corrections, retains the original pagination.

Translating Translation: An Encounter with the Ninth-Century Tibetan Version of the *Kāraṇḍavyūha-sūtra*

Peter Alan Roberts

The *Kāraṇḍavyūha-sūtra* is the source for Avalokiteśvara's mantra: *Oṃ maṇi-padme hūm*, the most popular mantra in Tibet. This article examines why the sutra itself is little known, the history of its translation, the challenges that faces the translators, and evidence of corruption in the Sanskrit manuscript that was the basis for their translation. Finally there are thoughts on the meaning of Avalokiteśvara's name, the sutra's title, and the mantra itself.

The "84,000 project"¹ plans to place online, over the next twenty-five years, English translations of the entire Kangyur (*bka' gyur*), the corpus of Tibetan translations of works attributed to the Buddha. In an estimated twenty-five years' time, work will start on translations of the Tengyur (*bstan gyur*), the Tibetan translations of Buddhist commentaries and practice texts, some miscellaneous works (such as Kālidāsa's *The Cloud Messenger*), and a few early Tibetan texts, one of which will be mentioned below.

I had a personal interest in translating the *Kāraṇḍavyūha-sūtra*, as it is the source of the mantra *Oṃ maṇi-padme hūm*, the mantra of bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara (Tib. *spyan ras gzigs*). At the age of sixteen, before my encounter with any Buddhist, I had copied out the Tibetan letters of the mantra, its phonetics and purported meaning from the only book on Tibet available in my corner of Wales at the time: *The Third Eye*, written by an Englishman who claimed to have been a Tibetan named Lobsang Rampa who swapped bodies with an Englishman (and

¹<http://84000.co>

conveniently brainwashed himself to forget Tibetan). He went on to write a series of books, including one telepathically dictated to him by his cat.

After such unpromising beginnings and various vicissitudes, I came to live at the Kagyu Samye Ling Centre in Scotland, where in 1978 I spent fifteen hours a day repeating *Oṃ maṇipadme hūṃ* with the late Khenpo Lhamchok (*mkhan po lha mchog*) from East Tibet, who had turned his back on scholasticism and higher Tantric studies to dedicate himself exclusively to the practice of this mantra and turning his huge *Oṃ maṇipadme hūṃ*-filled prayer wheel. We were in the midst of accumulating a hundred million repetitions of the mantra, which with large groups of laypeople in Tibet and India could be accomplished in a month, but took years in Scotland, even with numbers phoned in from all around Europe.

Khenpo Lhamchok taught that one repetition of the mantra prevented rebirth as an animal, two prevented rebirth as a *preta*, and three prevented rebirth in the hells. He even said (through his female interpreter) that even children and women could gain enlightenment by repeating it. If a prayer wheel containing the mantra is placed on the crown of a dying person's head he/she will certainly be reborn in Sukhāvati. Turn such a prayer wheel three times before setting off on a journey and your goals will be accomplished. I helped make a large wooden sign with the mantra on it set next to a pond so that it would reflect on the water, as the mere reflection would cause the fish in the pond to be reborn in Sukhāvati.

The Tibetan tradition teaches that the six syllables of the mantra include all six Buddha families and six wisdoms, cure all six *kleśas* (defilements), and prevent rebirth in the six realms that comprise the phenomenal world.

The most common representation of Avalokiteśvara in Tibet is white, sitting cross-legged and with four arms, two hands together in *añjali mudrā* (palms together), and holding a wish-fulfilling jewel. The other hands hold up a crystal *mālā* (rosary) and a white lotus. A particularly widespread practice of the four-armed Avalokiteśvara is a very brief *sādhana* (practice) by Tangthong Gyalpo² (d. 1485), also famous for constructing iron suspension bridges³ and for being the founding father of Tibetan opera.⁴ In this meditation, Avalokiteśvara is visualised above the practitioner's head. The written mantra is arranged as a circle in

²Thang stong rgyal po. “*Gro don mkha' khyab ma.*” *Bka' brgyud zhal 'don phyog bsgrigs*,” (*Zhang kang: zhang kang then mā dpe skrun khang*, 2001), pp.155–156.

³Gerner, Manfred. *Chaksampa Thangtong Gyalpo – Architect, Philosopher and Iron Chain Bridge Builder* (Thimphu: Center for Bhutan Studies, 2007).

⁴Stearns, Cyrus. *King of the Empty Plain: The Tibetan Iron-Bridge Builder Tangtong Gyalpo* (Ithaca NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2007).

Avalokiteśvara’s heart. As it turns, it radiates light rays that purify all words and all beings, each one becoming an Avalokiteśvara. In conclusion, Avalokiteśvara dissolves into the practitioner and they become inseparable.

A *Sūtra* in the Shadows

Om maṇipadme hūṃ (pronounced ‘*Om mani pemé hung*’ in most parts of Tibet) is ubiquitous in Tibetan religious culture, filling prayer wheels, both hand-held and gigantic, carved on walls and mountainsides. Tibet is said to be the special field of activity of Avalokiteśvara; such leading lamas as the Dalai Lamas and the Karmapas are regarded as his emanations. It is even said that Tibetan babies speak the mantra spontaneously. The *Kāraṇḍavyūha-sūtra* establishes the pre-eminence of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara even above all Buddhas, We would therefore expect the *sūtra* to be popular in Tibet. However, even the learned lamas I know are unfamiliar with the *sūtra*; some have not even heard of it. One general reason for this is the Tibetan emphasis on native commentarial literature rather than on the Kangyur itself; the latter is normally only read ritually in annual ceremonies. A further reason for the obscurity of the *sūtra* is that the Tibetan Avalokiteśvara meditation practices and explanations of *Om maṇipadme hūṃ* are not to be found in the *sūtra*.

The primary source for Tibetan Avalokiteśvara practices and teachings is not this *sūtra*, but the eleventh-century *Maṇi Kabum* (*maṇi bka’ bum*), “A Hundred-Thousand Teachings on the Maṇi Mantra,” a compilation of texts “discovered” by three tertöns (*gter ston*) or “treasure revealers” between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. It was claimed to have been composed and concealed by Tibet’s first Buddhist king, the seventh-century Songtsen Gampo (*srong btsan sgampo*), who reigned from 617 to 650, and whom the text portrays as an incarnation of Avalokiteśvara (Tib. *spyān ras gzigs*). It quotes from the *Kārandavyūha*, but clearly from the ninth-century translation. The *Kāraṇḍavyūha* is primarily known through the quotations chosen by this text, which extol the merit that comes from reciting the mantra. For example, a Buddha states that although he could count the number of raindrops that fall in a year, he cannot calculate the merit that comes from saying the mantra just once. It is assumed that this is Śākyamuni speaking, but most of these quotations are Śākyamuni repeating what he has heard from five of the past six Buddhas. There is no literary evidence, even in the Dunhuang cave libraries, for the popularity of *Om maṇipadme hūṃ* or for the elevated importance of Avalokiteśvara before the eleventh century, when Avalokiteś-

vara practices were promulgated in a new wave of teachings from India. The Avalokiteśvara texts preserved in the Dunhuang caves use other mantras or *dhāraṇīs*. There is no copy of the *Kāraṇḍavyūha-sūtra* in the collection, even though it had been translated by that time, which indicates its lack of importance, at least in that area. There are, however, two ritual texts that do appear to show the influence of the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*'s six-syllable mantra: one has *Oṃ vajrayakṣamaṇipadme hūṃ* and the other has *Oṃ maṇipadme hūṃ mitra svāhā*.⁵

The *Maṇi Kabum* created a specifically Tibetan version of the Avalokiteśvara myth, but here my focus is on the Tibetan translation of the *sūtra* in the early ninth century. It is a comparatively late translation within that translation project; this too indicates its relative lack of importance at that time, as well as the difficulties involved in translating it.

There are some added difficulties for a Tibetan reader of the *Kāraṇḍavyūha-sūtra*. For example, the author assumed the reader's familiarity with the *Mahābhārata*'s Pāṇḍavas, Kauravas and Khasas, and the story of Viṣṇu's dwarf incarnation as Vāmana, which includes Bali the king of the *asuras*, and his councilor Śukra (who is also the deity of the planet Mercury). The *sūtra* retells this Indian lore in an original manner, but its significance and clarity would be diminished for those unfamiliar with these narratives.

It Came from Inner Space

There is a Tibetan legend that the *sūtra* was one of four inside a precious casket (*kāraṇḍa* can mean casket in Sanskrit; see below) that descended from the sky onto the roof of the palace of the fifth-century ruler of the Yarlung area, King Lhathothori Nyentsen (*lha tho tho ri gnyan btsan*). This first appears in the *Pillar Testament*, where the King's name is given as Lhathothore Nyenshel (*lha tho tho re gnyan shel*). This text was said to have been discovered by Atiśa inside a pillar in 1049, but it exists in various versions dating from the eleventh and twelfth centuries. *The Pillar Testament* states that after the casket's descent from the sky it was revered and treasured, without the contents being understood.⁶

⁵Van Schaik, Sam. 2006. "The Tibetan Avalokiteśvara Cult in the Tenth Century: Evidence from the Dunhuang Manuscripts." *Tibetan Buddhist Literature and Praxis (Proceedings of the Tenth Seminar of the IATS, 2003, Volume 4)*, ed. Ronald M. Davidson and Christian Wedemeyer. (Leiden: EJ Brill, 2006), 60.

⁶*Bka' chems ka khol ma [The Pillar Testament]*. (Gansu, China: Kan su'i mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1989), 95-6.

When Lhathothori's descendant, Songtsen Gampo, became the ruler of Tibet in the seventh century and became a convert to Buddhism, Thönmi Sambhota (Thon mi sam bhota) invented the Tibetan alphabet and translated the texts contained in the casket, including the *Karaṇḍavyūha*.⁷ However, there is no historical evidence for the existence of Thönmi Sambhota, let alone of this translation.

A more mundane account by the thirteenth-century Nel-pa paṇḍita⁸ describes the texts being given to Lhathothori Nyentsen by a paṇḍita from India, who then continues on his way to China. This and other accounts state that one of the treasured writings was the six-syllable mantra, written in gold, but do not list the *Kāraṇḍavyūha-sūtra* as being present. The Tibetan word for Lhathothori's casket is *za ma thog*, so any *sūtra* it contained could be described as a *za ma thog gi mdo*, which could be one reason why the *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra* became associated with that legend. The presence of the mantra alone would still suggest that the *sūtra* dates to before the fifth century, but that assumes the historical reliability of these accounts written six hundred years later.

Lokesh Chandra, in his introduction to his edition of the *sūtra*, records a tradition that Upagupta taught the text to King Aśoka in the second century BCE, though this is analogous to saying Shakespeare read *Oliver Twist*. He also states that it was translated by Dharmarakṣa of Dunhuang into Chinese in 270 CE, and again by Guṇabhadra between 435 and 443 CE. However, as Studholme points out, those were translations of the *Ratnakaraṇḍavyūhasūtra*, a very different text.⁹ The only known translation into Chinese is that by T'ien Hsi-tsai in 983, which is also late in terms of the importance of Avalokiteśvara in Chinese Buddhism, and is indicative of the *sūtra*'s marginal importance even for that tradition.

The manuscript fragments discovered in the Gilgit *stūpa* are not later than the seventh century, and are less Sanskritized than the surviving Sanskrit versions of the *sūtra*, the earliest of which dates to the beginning of the second millennium. Adhelheid Mette, who has published these fragments, suggests that it was composed in the fourth or fifth centuries. The Tibetan version tends to correspond with the earliest of the Cambridge manuscripts rather than the readily accessible Vaidya edition of the twentieth century.

⁷ Ibid., 107-8.

⁸ Uebach, Helga, *Nel-pa Paṇḍita's Chronik Me-tog Phreñ-wa: Handschrift der Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Tibetischer Text in Faksimile, Transkription und Übersetzung* (Munich: Kommission für Zentralasiatische Studien, Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1987), 7a.

⁹ Studholme, Alexander. *Origins of Om Mani Padme Hum: A study of the Karandavyuha*. (State University of New York, 2002), 9.

The *sūtra* evolved eventually into a longer form in verse, entitled *Guṇakāraṇḍavyūha*, one of the last Buddhist *sūtras* to be written in Sanskrit. The early Gilgit version has an even longer title: *Avalokiteśvara-guṇa-kāraṇḍavyūha*. Tuladhar Douglas has established that the *Guṇakāraṇḍavyūha* was written in fifteenth-century Nepal. It incorporates passages from texts such as the *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra*,¹⁰ and is “bookended” by yet another layer of narrative added to what was already a complex story-within-story structure.

The *Kāraṇḍavyūha-sūtra* was evidently composed at a time when and in an area of India where the *purāṇas* of Śaivism and Vaishnavism were well established, for the *sūtra* both reacted against and absorbed those traditions.

As to geographical reference points that the reader is assumed to be familiar with: Varāṇasi plays an important role and its sewer is mentioned on two occasions, so that it must have made a vivid impression on the author. Magadha would have been known well known from accounts of the Buddha’s life. Candradvīpa, is not mentioned in any other sutra, though it appears later in tantras. This is a location in the Ganges delta or south Bengal. Finally, Siṃhala, which is Śrīlaṅka, is clearly a distant land portrayed as an island inhabited by *rākṣasīs* (demonesses who could take on the form of beautiful ladies but then eat their lovers). Siṃhala is often portrayed as the land of the *rākṣasīs* in Buddhist literature, such as the *Lain Buddhist lit*, and also in general Indian literature, such as the *Rāmāyaṇa*, though the males of this species are all curiously absent in the *Kāraṇḍavyūha-sūtra*.

What Avalokiteśvara Did Next; A summary of the *sūtra*’s contents.

Śākyamuni describes to Bodhisattva Sarvanīvaraṇaviṣkambhin that Avalokiteśvara has just visited the Avīci hell, freeing the beings there, followed by a visit to the “city of the *pretas*”. *Pretas* (the departed) are a category of ghosts who are forever tormented by hunger and thirst.)

He then describes Buddha Vipāśyin describing how Śiva, Viṣṇu, Agni, Sarasvatī, the deities of the sun, moon and so on, were all manifested from different parts of Avalokiteśvara’s body; this mirrors the Brahmanical account of the creation of the universe from Brahmā. Avalokiteśvara then warns the newly created Śiva how beings in the future will think that he is the creator instead, and he even recites one of the Śaivite verses about Śiva’s *liṅga*’ (phallus) that he prophesies will

¹⁰Tuladhar-Douglas, Will, *Remaking Buddhism for Medieval Nepal: The fifteenth-century reformation of Newar Buddhism*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 4.

gain currency. It is an almost exact reproduction of a verse in the *Skandapurāos*, which Studholme describes as a major influence on the *sūtra*.¹¹

Śākyamuni then describes Buddha Śikhin describing Avalokiteśvara's qualities to bodhisattva Ratnapāṇi, and Avalokiteśvara comes from Sukhāvati to see Śikhin with an offering of lotuses from Amitābha.

Śākyamuni then describes Buddha Viśvabhū, in a previous Jetavana Monastery, describing to bodhisattva Gaganagaṅja how Avalokiteśvara visited the land of gold inhabited by upside-down beings, the land of silver inhabited by four-legged beings, and the iron land of the *asuras*, where Bali describes to Avalokiteśvara, in yet another narrative within a narrative, how Viṣṇu's deception resulted in his banishment to the underworld. Viśvabhū then describes Avalokiteśvara visiting the land of darkness inhabited by *yakṣīs* and *rākṣasīs*; then manifesting as a Brahmin in the highest paradise, the Śuddhāvāsa realm, where he fills a poor deity's empty palace with wealth; then going to Siṃhala as a handsome man who marries all the *rākṣasīs* and converts them from cannibalism; then becoming a bee that buzzes homage to the three jewels over a sewer in Varanasi, thus liberating all the insects within it; and then going to Magadha, where he invisibly causes a rain of food and drink to fall on people in the wilderness who have been resorting to eating each others' flesh for the previous twenty years.

Then Avalokiteśvara arrives at Viśvabhū's Jetavana Monastery and bodhisattva Gaganagaṅja meets him. As each Buddha's name is only given when they are first introduced into the narrative and they are thereafter referred to only as Bhagavan, as is Śākyamuni too, it is easy to lose track of which Buddha is relating the narrative we are reading.

Śākyamuni then recounts his previous life as a merchant and being rescued from the cannibalistic *rākṣasīs* of Siṃhala (had they relapsed?) by Avalokiteśvara in the form of a flying horse.

Śākyamuni then starts to describe to Bodhisattva Sarvanīvaraṇaviṣkambhin the landscape and inhabitants in each of Avalokiteśvara's pores. However, there will prove to be only ten of them. But the description abruptly stops and is later recommenced, interrupted by the insertion of a narrative that concerns the climax of the *sūtra*: obtaining the *Oṃ maṇipadme hūṃ mahāvidyā*. While *vidyā* is basically a Sanskrit word for "knowledge", and in later tantras meant a consort, in this context it is virtually a synonym of mantra and means "spell" and "incantation", so *mahāvidyā* is "great incantation".

¹¹ Studholme, 19.

Śākyamuni says that he visited trillions of Buddhas in search of the six-syllable mantra, or as the *sūtra* refers to it, the *mahāvidyā*. Eventually he met Buddha Padmottama, who had also searched through trillions of Buddha realms until he came to Amitābha, who instructed Avalokiteśvara to give the *mahāvidyā* to Padmottama. Avalokiteśvara in doing so creates a *maṇḍala* from precious powders. These diagrams that represent the palaces of a deity and its environs became a well-known feature of Buddhist tantra. They represent the palace seen from above, without its roof, and the doors and walls laid out flat. In this *sūtra*, the *maṇḍala* is simple compared to those of the tantras. The four maharajas that guard the four directions stand guard in the doorways. Inside, Amitābha is in the center of the palace with a bodhisattva Maṇidhara on his right, and a four-armed goddess named Ṣaḍakṣarī Mahāvidyā (*yi ge drug pa'i rig sngags chen mo*; “the six syllable great *vidyā*”) on his left. The only other figure is a vidyādhara making offerings beneath the goddess. The vidyādharas were beings with magical powers and spells. Therefore the names of all three deities in addition to Amitābha relate to the *mahāvidyā*. However, we see here the personification of the *mahāvidyā* as a four-armed goddess. because not only is *mahāvidyā* a feminine noun, but the *sūtra* also frequently refers to it as “the Queen of *mahāvidyās*” (*mahāvidyārājñī*; *rig sngags chen mo'i rgyal mo*). She is described as white, with four arms, her extra arms holding a lotus and a rosary of jewels. This is evidently the origin of the later four-armed version of Avalokiteśvara.

Śākyamuni then tells Sarvanīvaraṇaviṣkambhin that presently the only person who possesses the *mahāvidyā* is an incontinent *dharmabhāṅcon* (*dharmabhāṅaka*) in Varāṇasi. A *dharmabhāṅaka* had an important role in the purely oral transmission of Buddhism in its first centuries. They preserved lengthy teachings in their memory and recited them. In this case he has the *mahāvidyā* secretly memorized. He has lost his vows, but still wears his robes, soiled with feces and urine, and he has a wife and children, but nevertheless Sarvanīvaraṇaviṣkambhin should regard him as being equal to all the Buddhas. Sarvanīvaraṇaviṣkambhin goes to Varāṇasi, obtains it, and returns to the Buddha Śākyamuni. Śākyamuni abruptly continues with the description of Avalokiteśvara’s pores, concluding with an ocean that comes from his big toe, reminiscent of the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*’s description of the origin of the Ganges.

Avalokiteśvara then arrives from Sukhāvātī with an offering of lotuses to Śākyamuni from Amitābha. Śiva and his consort Umādevī arrive to receive from the Buddha prophecies of their Buddhahood. However, the Buddha sends them to

Avalokiteśvara to receive them, another demonstration of Avalokiteśvara’s superiority to all Buddhas.

Śākyamuni describes witnessing a *samādhi* competition between Avalokiteśvara and Bodhisattva Samantabhadra during the time of Buddha Krakucchanda (which Avalokiteśvara of course wins), even though earlier Śākyamuni had described Avalokiteśvara as imperceivable and stated that Samantabhadra had spent twelve years in search of one of Avalokiteśvara’s pores and failed to see them.

Avalokiteśvara then departs in what reads like a natural conclusion to the *sūtra*, but it is followed by what is evidently another addition. Śākyamuni prophesies to Ānanda that there will be monks in the future with bad conduct and that they should be expelled. However, the description is peculiarly similar to that of the *dharmabhāimil* who was the only human to possess the *om maṇipadme hūṃ mahāvidyā!* The Buddha also describes with apparent relish all the sufferings in hells that will come to those who appropriate or use monastic property; this reads like a list of complaints about the activities of lay people when this part of the *sūtra* was composed.

An impossible task fulfilled

The Tibetan translator of the *Kāraṇḍavyūha* was Yeshe Dé (*Ye-shes sDe*), the principal Tibetan in the translation program of the late eighth and early ninth centuries, which was begun by King Trisong Detsen (*Khri srong lde btsan*, reigned 742-798).

Yeshe Dé’s name is on no less than 347 texts in the Kangyur and the Tengyur (*bstan gyur*), three of which are his own original works in Tibetan.

He worked on this *sūtra* with two Indian paṇḍitas. One of these was Jinamitra, who is listed as the translator of 234 texts. He had come to Tibet in the reign of Trisong Detsen.

The other Indian was Dānaśīla, also known as Mālava, who came to Tibet much later, in the reign of Ralpachen (*ral pa can*, r. 815-838). Dānaśīla has his name on 167 texts. He is also listed as the author of seven of these, five of which he translated himself, one of which curiously is a text of divination based on the croaks of crows.¹² Of the remaining two texts he authored, Jinamitra translated one, while Rinchen Zangpo (*rin chen bzang po*, 958–1055), the prolific translator

¹²Dānaśīla, “Kākacaritra, bya rog gi skad brtag par bya ba” in *Bstan gyur (dpe bsdur ma)* (Beijing: krung goḥ bod rig paḥ dpe skrun khang, 1994-2008) vol. 114, 1501-6.

of a later generation, translated the other. Dānaśīla was from Kashmir. The earliest manuscripts of the *sūtra* were discovered in a *stūpa* in Gilgit, which is Kashmir's immediate neighbor to the north. Studholme believes that this fact, together with the strong Śaivite influence on the *sūtra*, suggests that it originated in Kashmir. Although there is no concrete evidence for this, its translation only after the arrival of Dānaśīla in Tibet at least does not contradict that hypothesis.

Jinamitra and Dānaśīla, together with a few other Indian scholars, compiled the great Tibetan-Sanskrit concordance entitled *Mahāvvyutpatti*, which was the fruit of decades of work on translation.

The *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra* is listed in the catalogue of the collection in the Tang-tong Denkar Palace (*pho brang thang stong ldan dkar*), which was compiled in 824, and therefore we can date the translation to some time between 815, the beginning of Ralpachen's reign, and 824.

The translation work took place in a building dedicated to the translation project, which was situated within the circular compound of Samye (*bsam yas*) Monastery, Tibet's first monastery. Yeshe Dé appears to have died during Ralpachen's reign and his remains are said to be interred within a *stūpa* on the hill neighbouring the monastery.

The translators had to resort to the transcription of Sanskrit in the lists of flora and fauna that appear in the text, there being no obvious Tibetan equivalents, although even *tarakṣa* was simply transcribed, in spite of there being wolves in Tibet. Apart from the challenging vocabulary there were difficulties that arose from the *sūtra* itself and from errors in the manuscript that the Tibetan translation was made from.

The *sūtra*'s narratives are not always clear, and seem compressed from their original sources. Some of the first person narratives within the *Kāraṇḍavyūha-sūtra* retain egregious signs of their original third person form. For example, in the Buddha's account of his previous life as a merchant on the island of the *rākṣasīs*, as he sets out from his house one night the account is suddenly in the third person, and after his walking all around an iron building (*samantena parikramati*), and climbing a tree, it reverts back to first person (*anuvicaran tvarita āgacchāmi*). These grammatical anomalies tend to be cleaned up in the Tibetan translation, though not in Bali's long story of his unfortunate encounter with Viṣṇu, which is mostly in the third person.

I shall give here a few interesting instances of when the translators were at the mercy of a corrupt text.

In one of Avalokiteśvara's pores there are mountains, each made of a precious substance, and the Tibetan lists diamond, silver, gold, crystal, red lotuses and sapphire. The mountain of red lotuses is obviously anomalous, if charming. The Sanskrit in all present editions has *padmarāga*, ruby, which is usually simply transliterated into Tibetan. It seems that here and in three other places in the text, *padmarāga* was incorrectly copied, or misread, as *padmarakta*, though it would have been a highly suspect strange word.

A more serious corruption is where *adrṣṭa-maṇḍala* (an unseen *maṇḍala*) lost a syllable to become *aṣṭa-maṇḍala* (eight *maṇḍalas*), and this was compounded by the omission of the negative, so that *adrṣṭamaṇḍalasya na dātavyāṃ* seems to have become *aṣṭamaṇḍalasya dātavyāṃ*. In the Sanskrit, Avalokiteśvara is stating that there must be a visible *maṇḍala*, for otherwise the recipient will not see and learn the portrayed *mudras*, or hand gestures, of the deities. The Tibetan instead has Avalokiteśvara announcing that he is going to make eight *maṇḍalas* to transmit the *mahāvīdyā*, even though he then describes just the one.

More confusing yet is where *ayaṃ* ("this (masculine)") was corrupted to *ahaṃ* ("I") in the middle of the Buddha's description of how Avalokiteśvara is unperceivable, with *ayaṃ māyāvī asādhyah sūkṣma evam anudṛśyate* becoming *ahaṃ māyāvī asādhyah sūkṣma evam anudṛśyate*, so that briefly the Buddha is describing himself!

The most interesting mistranslation is perfectly understandable, and has been the topic of papers by Régamey¹³ and Lienhard.¹⁴ It is in the context of the story of the flying horse that rescues merchants from Siṃhala. the land of the *rākṣasīs*, where shipwrecked merchants had unsuspectingly set up home with them, not suspecting that they would eventually be their wives' meals. Naomi Appleton¹⁵ has studied various retellings of this story, which first appears in the *Jātakas*, where the Buddha is the flying horse and the 250 merchants who realize the deception and leave on his back eventually become 250 pupils of the Buddha (another 250 merchants who remained with their wives were eaten up).

¹³Régamey, C., "Le pseudo-hapax ratikara et la lampe qui rit dans le 'sūtra des ogresses' bouddhique," *Asiatische Studien/Etudes Asiatiques* XVIII-XIX (1965), p. 175ff.

¹⁴Lienhard, Siegfried, "Avalokitesvara in the wick of the nightlamp," *Kleine Schriften*, ed. Siegfried Lienhard and Oskar von Hinüber, (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, 2007), pp. 93–10.

¹⁵Appleton, Naomi. "The story of the horse king and the merchant Siṃhala in Buddhist texts." *Buddhist Studies Review, Journal of the UK Association of Buddhist Studies*, 2006. Vol 23 no. 2, p. 187–201.

The *Kāraṇḍavyūha-sūtra*'s particular version is in accord with its promotion of the supremacy of Avalokiteśvara above all Buddhas. Here the previous life of the Buddha is not as the rescuing horse but as the head merchant who is in need of rescue, having been duped by his *rākṣasī* wife, and Avalokiteśvara has appeared as the flying horse that saves him. In this case, however, all the other merchants make the mistake of looking back as their wives call out to them, so that they fall off the horse and are immediately devoured.

The interesting part, in terms of the difficulties of translation, is in the description of how the head merchant discovers that his wife and the other women are *rākrifis*. In Tibetan it is his own wife who informs on herself and the other women while she is asleep. The merchant is astonished to see her laughing in her sleep, as he has never seen such a thing before, and asks her why she's laughing. She then tells him that all the women are *rākṣasīs* and are going to eat the merchants, and if he does not believe her to take a road south (though the Tibetan always translates *dakṣiṇa* in the *sūtra* literally, as "on the right") to see where a previous group of merchants are locked up and being eaten. He does so (this being the point in the narrative where he climbs the tree in the third person and sees the unfortunate prisoners over the wall), and when he returns to his house, she asks him if he now believes her. When he says he does, she tells him where to find the flying horse and how to escape on it. He then climbs into bed and his wife suspiciously asks why he is cold. He says he went outside to defecate and urinate, and for the rest of the stay until his escape he has to keep his plan secret from her.

There is something a little odd about this story, and it hinges on one word: *ratikara*. An *apsaras* (celestial nymph) listed amongst the audience for the Buddha's teaching at the beginning of the *sūtra*, is named *Ratīkarā*, obviously a feminine noun, which could be rendered as "giver of (erotic) pleasure." In the merchant's story, however, it is a masculine noun, and this form appears not to occur anywhere in Sanskrit literature other than in this *sūtra*. The Sanskrit does not mention any sleeping going on while the laughing occurs, but the Tibetan addition of sleeping was presumably the only way to make sense of the passage where the paramour of the "giver of pleasure" is betraying herself.

In the *Guṇakāraṇḍavyūha*, which is the later, extended Nepalese version, *ratikara* has been replaced by *dvīpa*. Now it makes sense, unusual though that sense may be. The merchant's astonishment is at seeing a lamp laugh, and it is the talking lamp that exposes the true nature of his wife and tells him how to escape. This makes narrative sense, in terms of the merchant's astonishment and particularly

as the *rake cus* are all talked about in the third person. The *Kāraṇḍavyūha-sūtra* gives no explanation for the sudden appearance of this strange lamp, which is characteristic of its crude narrative style, but the *Guṇakāraṇḍavyūha* identifies the lamp as also being an emanation of Avalokiteśvara. It could, however, be argued that this clearer version is also a way of rationalizing the *sūtra*'s confusing narrative.

The mysterious name

The *sūtra* describes Avalokiteśvara as having qualities that no Buddha, let alone any other bodhisattva, possesses. His “name”, his *mahāvidyā*, is a secret sought by Buddhas in many realms and eons without success. Yet paradoxically Avalokiteśvara still has the status of being Amitābha's emissary to the Buddha, bringing with him the gift of a lotus flower, as is standard for the role of a bodhisattva in earlier *sūtras*. Perhaps the earliest example of bodhisattvas as emissaries from the Buddhas in other realms is found in the *Lalitavistara*, though this predates the appearance of the *Sukhāvativyūha-sūtra*, so that Avalokiteśvara as a messenger from Amitāyus (the commoner early name for Amitābha) is strikingly absent.

Avalokiteśvara first appears prominently as one of two bodhisattva attendants to Amitāyus in the *Sukhāvativyūha-sūtra*. Avalokiteśvara was translated into Tibetan as *spyan ras gzigs*, “seeing eyes”. The Chinese *Kuan-yin* is derived from a variant in Sanskrit: *Avalokitasvara*, where *svara* means “sound”,¹⁶ which was therefore glossed as “one who perceives the sounds [of the prayers of the faithful],” amongst other interpretations. In the Chinese tradition Avalokiteśvara eventually became worshipped in female form, because of the identification of Princess Miao-chan as his emanation.¹⁷

But even for a bodhisattva this is a curious name: *avalokita* is a past passive participle, meaning “seen”; but in that case what could “Lord of the Seen” mean? It has been glossed as “one who is looking upon all beings with compassion”, but another approach is to consider what it would have meant to Buddhists in the beginning of the first millennium, particularly within the Mahāsaṅghika tradition, which was particularly fertile ground for the appearance of what became known as Mahāyāna sūtras. Two of the principal Mahāsaṅghika sūtras, within its Lokottaravādin tradition, were the *Avalokita Sūtras*. They are contained within

¹⁶ Yu, Chun-fang, *Kuan-yin: the Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteśvara*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 42.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 293-350.

the Mahāvastu and were not translated into Tibetan. They are sometimes referred to as proto-Mahāyāna *sūtras*. In the *Avalokita Sūtras*, *avalokita* does not refer to a being, but means that which has been seen by those who have crossed over *samsāra*, and is therefore a synonym for enlightenment. Therefore for a Lokotaravādin, whatever the actual etymological origin of the name may be, it would inescapably have had the resonance of meaning “Lord of Enlightenment”.

The rise of a bodhisattva to a paradoxical supremacy over the Buddhas resulted from the need for a divine figure who could be prayed to and who would respond by interceding in the difficulties of one’s life. The Buddha of early Buddhism has entered the quietude of nirvana, leaving us to do for ourselves the salvific work that he has explained. Brahmanical deities could not fulfill the role of a saviour, one who could bring liberation through his blessing, and the only kind of Buddhist figure who could be promoted to such a role was the bodhisattva.

But why did Avalokiteśvara rise to such prominence above all other bodhisattvas? Following the *Sukhāvativyūha-sūtra*, where Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta appear as the two bodhisattvas on either side of Amitāyus, *sūtras*, such as the *prajñāpāramitā sūtras* have Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta amongst the Buddha’s audience as a pair. They are both given individual prominence in the additional chapters of the *Lotus Sūtra*, but in the *Kāraṇḍavyūha* Mahāsthāmaprāpta is alone in the audience, presumably listening along with the others to a description of the supremacy of Avalokiteśvara’s qualities and awaiting the rare opportunity to see him. In the Tibetan tradition Mahāsthāmaprāpta even became conflated with and eclipsed by Vajrapāṇi.

One crucial reason for Avalokiteśvara’s initial rise in prominence could simply be his unusual name: in the Buddhist response to and assimilation of Śiva, this bodhisattva’s name mirrored Śiva’s common epithet of Īśvara (Lord). Lokeśvara (Lord of the World) became another name commonly used for Avalokiteśvara. Moreover, Studholme has pointed out that the six-syllable mantra of Avalokiteśvara was a response to Śiva’s five-syllable mantra in the *Skanda Purāṇa*.¹⁸ The reaction to the cult of Śiva by appropriating his qualities into a bodhisattva is evident in Avalokiteśvara’s displacement of Śiva’s role as a creator in the *sūtra*, and is explicit in such texts as the *sādhana* of “Avalokiteśvara with a blue throat”,¹⁹

¹⁸ Studholme, 65.

¹⁹ “Nilakalme, 65..ty Press, 2000), 4; ‘Phags pa spyan ras gzigs dbang phyug mgrin pa sngon po can gyi sgrub thabs,” *Bstan-gyur*, Derge 3431, vol. rgyud Mu, 90a4-90b5.

the blue throat being a characteristic of Śiva; he acquired it when he drank the powerful poison that formed at the creation of the world.

Towards the end of the first millennium, there was an even more explicit Buddhist mirroring of Śiva with the appearance of Cakrasaṃvara, the deity who took possession of Śiva's body, retinue and sacred sites.

The mysterious title

A *karaṇḍa* (without the long *a*) is usually a basket made of reeds, river reeds being the most suitable material for making baskets. A *karaṇḍa* is frequently shown in the background of portraits of Indian *siddhas* as a basket containing their collections of scriptures. *Siddhas* are also portrayed as making a hand gesture representing the basket: a *karaṇḍa-mudrā*. There is even a layperson's hairstyle named *karaṇḍa-makuta*: the hair is arranged on top of the head in the shape of a tall rounded basket. Another word for basket is *piṭaka*, the most common metaphor for the Buddha's teachings: they are described as "the three baskets" or *tripiṭaka*, which contain the *vinaya*, the *sūtras* and the *abhidharma* or its predecessor the *mātrkā*.

However, *kaṛanda* is also used for something more solid than reeds. In the *Kāraṇḍavyūha-sūtra* the word *karaṇḍa* is only used for the container in which beings in hell are crammed together and boiled like beans, which bursts open and frees the beings when Avalokiteśvara arrives there. The Tibetan translates both *karaṇḍa* and *kāraṇḍa* as *za ma tog*, which in present times is generally used for a solid box for carrying food in, and we have seen that King Lhathothori was described as receiving the divine gift of texts in a *rin chen za ma tog*, which would therefore be a precious box or casket.

In the title of the *sūtra*, however, *Kāraṇḍa* has a long *a*, and that word is most commonly used for a duck that lives amongst river reeds, though the *sūtra*'s title is unlikely to mean "A Display of Ducks". In terms of Sanskrit grammar, it appears to be a *vṛddhi* form that would indicate origin. The reeds themselves are never called *karaṇḍa*. Perhaps, if the long *a* has any grammatical significance, it means that this display of Avalokiteśvara's qualities has come from the casket that contains this description.

The word *vyūha* in the title follows the example of such *sūtras* as *Sukhāvati-vyūha* and *Gandavyūha*. *Vyūha* can mean array, display, presentation and description, and is used in the *sūtra* itself to mean a chapter. Studholme points out

that in the Vaishnavite tradition it is used to mean Viṣṇu's emanations.²⁰ The later Nepalese version's longer title *Avalokiteśvara-guṇa-kāraṇḍa-vyūha* is more meaningful and could be translated as *The display from the basket of the qualities of Avalokiteśvara*, or *The display of the baskets (or caskets) of the qualities of Avalokiteśvara*, as when Tuladhar-Douglas takes *kāraṇḍa* to be a plural and mean "reliquaries".²¹

The mysterious mantra

The climax of the *sūtra* is the revelation of the Queen of *mahāvidyā*s: *Oṃ maṇi-padme hūṃ*. The narrative of the *sūtra* is clumsy, for the Buddha states that no one anywhere, not even any Buddha, knows it, but abruptly this description changes to the merits of those rare people who do know it.

As described above, Sarvanīvaraṇaviṣkambhin obtains the *mahāvidyā* from the only person in the world who possesses it. (Though one assumes from the preceding narrative that Śākyamuni has it, he does not act as if he does.) This individual, a lapsed monk with a family, who was nevertheless respected for his esoteric knowledge, was presumably a type of person who existed at the time of the *sūtra*'s composition. A similar description occurs at the end of the *sūtra*, as a prophecy, condemning such lapsed monks with families living in temples.

The mantra itself has been subject to various interpretations and Lopez has given a delightful history of them.²²

The earliest interpretations in the west, as in the venerable Lobsang Rampā's strange book, was that *maṇi* and *padme* did not form a compound and *padme* was the masculine locative, with the result that it meant "Jewel in the Lotus". But as has been pointed out by Martin and others,²³ masculine nouns have female vocative endings in mantras. Maṇipadma is here, as frequently described in the *sūtra*, Avalokiteśvara's name: "Jewel-Lotus."

Verhagen has even supplied us with a translation of one of the few indigenous Tibetan texts in the *bstan-gyur*, a grammar text entitled *sgra'i rnam par dbye ba bstan pa*, "A teaching on the cases", which uses this very mantra as an exam-

²⁰ Studholme, 9.

²¹ Tuladhar-Douglas, 2.

²² Lopez Jr., Donald S., *Prisoners of Shangrila: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 114-34.

²³ Martin, Dan., "On the origin and significance of the prayer wheel according to two nineteenth century sources," *Journal of the Tibet Society*, vol. 7 (1987), 14.

ple for the vocative ending in *-e*.²⁴ Nevertheless, this still puzzles commentators. How can a male noun end up with a feminine ending? One obvious answer to this conundrum is that this is hybrid Sanskrit, in other words a Sanskritized middle-Indic. In Māgadhī Prakrit the masculine nominative and vocative singular ending was *-e*. There are still a few traces of this *-e* ending found in Pali, which otherwise has the northwestern Middle-Indic ending *-o*. However this argument is countered by the *-e* ending being rare in Buddhist hybrid Sanskrit texts. However Signe Cohen has pointed out the unreliability of the printed editions of these texts, for their editors frequently “corrected” the *-e* ending to *-o*, and that the *-e* ending, which has been considered as confined to the north-east, was also widespread in the north-west. She also points out that when we look at Tocharian loan-words from Sanskrit, indicating what kind of Buddhist Sanskrit the inhabitants of Turkestan were familiar with, “masculine personal names and other masculine *-a* stems signifying a person invariably end in *-e* in Tocharian B: *upadhyāye*, *brāhmaṇe*, and *bodhisatve* for *upadhyāya*, *brāhmaṇa*, and *bodhisatva*.”²⁵

My translation, with its various demerits, of this unusual, obscure, but significant *sūtra*, will appear on the 84000 website, so that anyone interested can read for themselves the unexpected source of *oṃ maṇipadme hūṃ*. Whether that will inspire people to recite it more or less often remains to be seen.

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²⁴Verhagen, P.C., “The Mantra ‘Oṃ maṇi-padme hūṃ’ in an Early Tibetan Grammatical Treatise,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, Vol. 13, Number 2 1990, 134-5.

²⁵Cohen, Signe, “On the Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit/Middle Indic Ending “*-e*” as a ‘Magadhism,’” *Acta Orientalia*, vol. 63, (2002), 67-8.

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