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Early Buddhism and its Relation to Brahmanism. A Comparative and Doctrinal Investigation

by
Gabriel Ellis

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
written under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Joanna Jurewicz

July 2020
Updated October 2021

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To my loving parents

Abstract

This dissertation investigates the relation of early Buddhism to the Brahmanism of its time. Both religions are usually researched by their own academic traditions, and due to the lack of big-picture crossover research we still find the opposing views that Buddhism was anti-Brahmanical and, in contrast, that it developed as a reformed Brahmanism. In order to provide more clarity to the religions' connection this study offers an analysis and discussion of several main topics as they are presented in the Buddhist suttas: the portrayal of different types of Brahmins, rituals, deities and supernatural beings, and the concepts of *brahman* and *ātman*.

Throughout this study we also attempt to stratify the Buddhist content linguistically and contextually and to arrive at statements whether a specific content related to Brahmanism belongs to an early or a later Buddhist sutta period. In the end we conclude that early Buddhism had a very differentiated relationship to Brahmanism: The Buddha's relationship to Brahmins is mostly portrayed as benevolent and respectful. Only later suttas display an attitude of polemic criticism. Early Buddhist concepts of deities and supernatural beings are strongly influenced by Vedic Brahmanism, and likewise the concept of spiritual studentship (*brahmacariya*).

Further, the early suttas are not anti-ritualistic but deem Brahmin rituals to be ineffective. Instead of condemning all rituals, they replace the Vedic gods with the Buddha and declare that devotion and religious giving to the Buddha and his monastics are the most efficient ways for lay people to secure a good afterlife.

The Buddhist *anattā* (not-self) turns out to be a general strategy and not specifically directed at Brahmin concepts of *ātman* (self). Additionally, statistical analyses of the suttas show that Brahmins were less likely to receive the teaching of *anattā*.

We come to the conclusion that early Buddhism as a whole has developed independently from Brahmanism, with selective influences from Brahmanism and non-Vedic spiritual movements, altering and utilizing these influences for its own growth against its religious competition.

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I knew Prof. Jurewicz from a few papers where she related the Buddhist model of Dependent Origination to prior Brahmin concepts and was very glad that she was interested in my research questions. As a supervisor she was always interested in exchanging ideas, gave productive feedback, and freely shared her extensive knowledge in Vedic literature and philosophy. So my first thanks go to Prof. Jurewicz and the lucky coincidence that allowed me to write the PhD under her supervision.

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Abbreviations

AB	Aitareya Brāhmaṇa
ĀgGS	Āgniveśya Gṛhyasūtra
AN	Aṅguttara Nikāya
ĀpDS	Āpastamba Dharmasūtra
ĀpGS	Āpastamba Gṛhyasūtra
ĀpŚS	Āpastamba Śrautasūtra
AŚ	Arthaśāstra
ĀśGS	Āśvalāyana Gṛhyasūtra
AU	Aitareya Upaniṣad
AVP	Atharvaveda Saṃhitā, Paippalāda recension
AVŚ	Atharvaveda Saṃhitā, Śaunakīya recension
BauDS	Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra
BauŚS	Baudhāyana Śrautasūtra
BU	Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad
CU	Chāndogya Upaniṣad
DĀ	Dīrgha Āgama
Dhp	Dhammapada
DN	Dīgha Nikāya
GauDS	Gautama Dharmasūtra
GoGS	Gobhila Gṛhyasūtra
HiGS	Hiraṇyakeśi Gṛhyasūtra
JB	Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa
JUB	Jaiminīya Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa
KB	Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa
KhāGS	Khādira Gṛhyasūtra
KN	Khuddaka Nikāya
KU	Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad
MĀ	Madhyama Āgama
Mbh	Mahābhārata

MDh	Mānava Dharmaśāstra, Manusmṛti
MN	Majjhima Nikāya
PāGS	Pāraskara Gṛhyasūtra
ṚV	Ṛgveda Saṃhitā
SĀ	Saṃyukta Āgama
ŚāGS	Śāṅkhāyana Gṛhyasūtra
ŚāŚS	Śāṅkhāyana Śrautasūtra
ŚB	Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa
Skt	Sanskrit
SN	Saṃyutta Nikāya
Snp	Suttanipāta
TB	Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa
TS	Taittirīya Saṃhitā
TU	Taittirīya Upaniṣad
VaDS	Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra
VaiGS	Vaikhānasa Gṛhyasūtra
Vin	Vinaya

Introduction

The main topic of our investigation is to research in detail several main aspects of early Buddhism and how they are related to pre-Buddhist Brahmanism. It goes without saying that this major task will not be completed with this thesis. Also, we had to limit ourselves to quite literal connections and associations, investigating specific terms and their occurrences. Associations underneath the literal level, for example epistemological and ontological explorations, are beyond our scope, but hopefully such research will take advantage of our work in the future.

Naturally, we are not the first to investigate this matter and distinguished indologists have made their contributions to our understanding. In an early assessment Monier-Williams (1889, 93) stated that the Buddha "made the philosophical teaching of the Brāhmans the point of departure for his own peculiar philosophical teaching", and that "Buddhism was undoubtedly a modification of philosophical Brahmanism" (similarly Varma 1973, 104-110). C. A. F. Rhys Davids (1934, 286) concluded that "Buddhism started in agreement with the central religious tenets or principles of the immanence in Brahmanism of that day". And later on, so Rhys Davids, it drifted apart from Brahmanism in regards to rituals and conduct. Coomaraswamy (1943, 73) is in agreement with this position. Warder (2004, 152) doesn't come to a general conclusion but he suggests that the Buddha categorically opposed Brahmin rituals and sacrifices.

Since then, especially scholars like Gombrich and Bronkhorst reinvigorated the research into the connections between original Buddhism and Brahmanism. Gombrich (2009, 2) generally concludes that the Buddha was an original spiritual teacher who yet used existing Brahmin terms and concepts in order to refute them and to bring his own teachings across. All in all, we can support this view, albeit with important exceptions. Bronkhorst (2011, 11) also infers that the Buddha provided a novel teaching. But in contrast to Gombrich he finds that Buddhism was originally virtually free from the influences of Brahmanism. The historical Buddha would have been much more influenced by the local *śramaṇa* (i.e. ascetic) teachers, and the main influences by Brahmanism would have occurred only later in history (ibid., 27-28).

Our investigations partly confirm Bronkhorst's findings. As we will show, the early suttas contain many references to Brahmanism which belong to a later period, especially polemic dismissals. But there are also Buddhist concepts which are unquestionably old *and* rooted in Brahmanism, e.g. the institution of *brahmacariya* (chapter four), or the deities of early Buddhism (chapters five to nine).

A recent generation of researchers has provided more pertinent details. Shults (e.g. 2013 and 2014) identifies and discusses specific Brahmin terms in the suttas. Wynne (e.g. 2007, 101) takes into consideration that some early Buddhist suttas could have been composed by Brahmin converts who still retained concepts of Brahmanism in their wording. And Bausch (2015) has provided a highly detailed investigation specifically of the connections between the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa and the Buddhist Suttanipāta.

We sincerely hope to contribute to what should be regarded as the scholarly standard in the matter, namely that early Buddhism was neither a reformed Brahmanism nor a movement which developed as an opposition to Brahmanism. Instead, original Buddhism should be regarded as an innovative spiritual movement which in certain aspects was closely related to Brahmanism and the *śramaṇa* teachings of that time.

Naturally, the thesis will provide many more details to this general statement. We start in chapter one with a general overview of our sources, their geography, chronology, and transmission. The chapter gives context to the Buddhist sources, laying out how early Buddhism was originally probably a movement of forest meditators, only later growing into a religion which accommodated also the needs of lay followers.

Chapter two investigates the different kinds of Brahmins we encounter in the Buddhist texts, with a focus on the depiction of ascetic Brahmins. In this context, we show that the Buddha had a tendency to teach Brahmins the path of *samādhi* meditation, in contrast to the path of *anattā* (or not-self) which he preferably taught to non-Brahmins.

In chapter three we investigate in detail the relationship of early Buddhism with rituals in general, and Brahmin rituals in particular. We will show how suttas describe some Brahmin rituals accurately while others are polemically distorted. There are also rituals which became an integral part of early Buddhism, namely the ritualized religious giving by the lay population to monastics, and the *uposatha*, which is a regular gathering of the monastic community.

Chapter four describes in depth the concept of the Buddhist *brahmacariya*, which is based on a Brahmin concept of spiritual studentship that was assimilated into Buddhism. Associated with this is another early ritual, namely the Buddhist ordination.

Chapters five to nine examine the vast topic of the Buddhist beliefs in gods and other supernatural beings. These beliefs were in large parts based on Brahmin mythology but were then considerably expanded and made to fit into the particular Buddhist framework. We focus on the god Sakka, the Gods of Thirty-three, different classes of demigods, the evil Māra, and the Brahmā deities. The latter includes a thorough investigation of the Vedic concept of *brahman* in the Buddhist suttas.

Lastly, chapter ten is a contribution to elucidate the Buddhist *anattā* (not-self) teaching and the still disputed question if the Buddha categorically rejected a 'self' or how else his teaching of 'not-self' could be related to the Brahmin conception of *ātman*.

Chapter One: General Overview

Before we delve into the details of our research it is necessary to shine a light on the complexity of our source material. After all, we deal with texts which are more than two thousand years old, and we need to briefly familiarize the reader with their main characteristics[1].

1.1 Source Material

The language of the oldest Indian texts, the Saṃhitās and Brāhmaṇas, is usually called 'Vedic'. This language was later formalized into 'Sanskrit', starting with Pāṇini in the last centuries BCE (Houben 2018, 2-3). However, for the sake of simplicity, when we define key terms we will call their language 'Sanskrit' (Skt), even if we refer to Vedic literature. We will use 'early Vedic literature' when we refer to the Saṃhitās and the Ṛgveda, and 'late Vedic literature' with regards to the Gṛhyasūtras and Dharmasūtras.

Most of the Buddhist literature we consider in the thesis is preserved in Pāli. The most relevant Pāli texts for us are the four oldest sutta collections or 'nikāyas'[2]: Saṃyutta Nikāya (SN), Aṅguttara Nikāya (AN), Majjhima Nikāya (MN), and Dīgha Nikāya (DN). The SN is a large thematically structured collection of mostly short texts (e.g. SN 4 'Connected Discourses with Māra'). The AN is equally large and follows a numerical principle (e.g. the Book of Ones, the Book of Twos, etc.). The 152 MN suttas are of 'middle length' and typically longer than SN and AN suttas, and finally the DN contains 34 'long' suttas. Traditionally the order of nikāyas is given as DN, MN, SN, AN. In our work we change the order to SN, AN, MN, DN which reflects their more probable historical order.

[1] Throughout this thesis translations are generally taken from the works listed in the bibliography section "Source Texts in Translation". For the sake of the discussion I might leave individual words untranslated. Occasionally I provide my own translation which is then always mentioned in brackets.
[2] A sutta is a self-contained Buddhist text in which typically the Buddha teaches about a specific theme.

The SN contains suttas, mostly of Buddhist doctrine, which often provide 'building blocks' for the longer suttas of MN and DN[3]. Suttas of the AN are often also copied into the MN and DN, but in contrast to the SN the AN is more often concerned with social matters, or teachings directed at lay people in an urban environment. The MN contains many fundamental doctrinal Buddhist texts, often with material taken from SN and AN. The DN also features material from SN and AN, but it also often contains supernatural content and exaggerated claims which seem to have been used for the conversion to Buddhism[4].

There is a fifth sutta collection, the Khuddaka Nikāya (KN), the 'collection of small texts', which mostly contains later material. We refer only to two books of the KN: The Dhammapada (Dhp) is an ancient collection with diverse content, and the Suttanipāta (Snp) contains some of the oldest identifiable material of early Buddhism (in Snp 4 and Snp 5).

Apart from suttas we will occasionally use passages from the Vinaya (Vin), the collection of monastic rules, which are generally considered to be of later age than the suttas. We will call the content of the aforementioned texts combined 'early Buddhism', or 'early Buddhist texts' (i.e. the content of SN, AN, MN, DN, Dhp, Snp, and Vin).

Since we investigate the impact of Brahmanism on early Buddhism we will use as our main chronological marker the lifetime of the historical Buddha, as in 'pre-Buddha' and 'post-Buddha'. When we refer to a time prior to early Buddhism as a whole (i.e. the first few centuries of Buddhism) we use the notion of 'pre-Buddhist'.

Throughout our research we assume the historicity of the Buddha, which is nowadays questioned by several scholars[5]. Further, we presuppose that he had a spiritual teaching revolving around a path to spiritual liberation. In this regard one criterion for the 'authenticity' of texts is how much

[3] See for a specific example Bucknell (2014, 80-82). A similar observation has been made in Bible Studies, where "documents with a more complex compositional history may well have been formed from the skillful editorial combination of a number of shorter, independent texts, either those originating from the same author on different occasions (e.g., the Isaiah scroll), or those knit together by a primary 'compiler' from distinct oral and/or written sources (e.g., the Gospel of Luke)" (Wendland 2013, 98).
[4] See for a detailed characterization of the different nikāyas Hinüber (1996, 24-64).
[5] As for example Drewes (2017).

they deal with spiritual liberation. Accordingly, we consider texts as less authentic if they focus mainly on socio-religious topics. Naturally, we can't provide 'proof' for the historical existence of the Buddha, nor for specific teachings being taught by him personally. Yet, we see no sense in taking the extreme skeptical stand of scholars who don't accept the historicity of a person unless it is corroborated by independent sources like archeology – a standard which is impossible to meet when dealing with a culture which developed durable writing techniques only about two hundred years after the Buddha[6].

In general, we will assume throughout the thesis not only that there was a historical Buddha, but also that there was an 'original Buddhism'. This position goes somewhat out of fashion and has given way to the question of why western buddhologists need the construct of an 'original Buddhism' at all (see for a critical overview Freiberger 2010, 332-341). Yet, we don't naively suppose that the texts we have today and which feature a talking and acting Buddha-character are an accurate description of historical events. Rather, we assume the critical position that many texts, narratives, and teachings were created for a specific purpose with a specific audience in mind. As we will detail throughout our work such later content would typically include texts which feature a Buddha with supernatural powers, poetic conversations with deities, or a polemic attitude against Brahmins.

1.2 Chronology

Much scholarly effort has been made to accurately date the life-time of the historical Buddha, yet without reaching a definitive consensus. Cousins (1996) summarizes the results regarding a probable date for the Buddha's passing and comes to a date around 400 BCE[7]. This puts the majority of his teaching years in the time between 450-400 BCE. The first Indian inscriptions known to us were made two centuries later. And it took another two centuries, i.e. the first

[6] See also Levman (2019) for a detailed argument for the Buddha's historicity.
[7] There are a lot of calculations involved, the specifics of which should not bother us. It suffices to say that most scholars disagree on a relatively small scale. See for an overview of the sources Bechert (2013, 160-173), or for example Prebish (2008, 15) who argues for a slightly later date of around 380 BCE for the Buddha's death.

century BCE, until the earliest still preserved Buddhist texts were written, in form of Gandhāri manuscripts from North-West India (Salomon 2018, 1).

The first inscriptions (and evidence for writing) in ancient India are the edicts of King Aśoka who reigned from 268 BCE to 232 BCE (Falk 2018, 47). Aśoka governed a large Indian empire and his epigraphs were found at dozens of locations in Northern and Central India[8], written mostly in local dialects[9]. Based on these epigraphs and the resulting language map for the third century BCE it was shown that the Buddha (who lived in Kosala and Magadha) could not have spoken the Pāli language in which the early Buddhist texts are transmitted. Neither was Pāli any naturally spoken dialect at all. Instead, it was probably a simplified language created for the dissemination of the Buddhist teaching which was understandable by speakers of different Indic dialects[10]. Pāli has similarities with Gāndhārī and it includes eastern features from the dialects of Kosala and Magadha[11]. Gombrich (2018, 69), however, maintains that Pāli could have well been spoken or shaped by the Buddha himself[12]. Yet, he agrees that the language would have been created for the purpose of communicating the Buddhist teachings (ibid., 78). Nevertheless, we fail to see why the Buddha himself would have burdened his audience with an artificial dialect and assume that Pāli was created after the Buddha.

At the time when Pāli was developed Sanskrit was not a formal language yet[13]. Hence, poets of ancient India and transmitters of oral texts in general could choose between a high poetic Vedic language and slightly differing local vernaculars of Northern India[14] (Houben 2018, 8). Basing

[8] See for a detailed overview Lahiri (2015, 308-317; and for a map ibid., 3).
[9] An early comparison of the original texts can be found in Cunningham (1877).
[10] For a more complex discussion see Levman (2019b).
[11] Hinüber (1996, 5), Levman (2016, 1-2), Levman (2014, 639), Witzel (291-294).
[12] Gombrich further argues that the creation of Pāli is in itself a far-reaching rejection of Vedic Brahmanism (ibid., 69, and 72-73). In that, he partly relies on a single vague Vinaya passage in Vin 2.139 (detailed in Gombrich 2009, 146-148), and an essay by Pollock (2005, 403-409). Pollock's speculations are, however, based on much later material and thus his conclusion that original Buddhism was largely anti-Brahmanical is untenable.
[13] The first proof of regular Sanskrit are inscriptions from the mid-second century CE (Houben 2018, 6).
[14] We get the impression that the Buddha was against transmitting his teaching in 'high language' from a passage in the Vinaya where he rebukes Brahmin monastics for transmitting his teaching in *chanda*s, i.e. in high metrical form (Vin 2.139). Some scholars have interpreted this as the Buddha's attitude against Sanskrit, but Eltschinger (2017, 313-316) could show with Chinese parallels that the Buddha's complaint goes against a transmission in *metrical* chanting, which is a stilted way of transmission compared with using *sakāya niruttiyā*, i.e. local dialects.

the rather simple Pāli on local dialects (and not on high language) probably had the purpose to keep it understandable beyond the local confines of Kosala and Magadha.

Generally, there is little doubt that the content of the Pāli suttas developed over a few centuries. The earliest suttas may, in their linguistic form, come from the third century BCE (Levman, 2018) while it is not certain how long it took until entire collections were closed off for new material. Theravāda tradition holds that the canonical texts were written down in the first century BCE in Sri Lanka[15]. Jayawickrama (1976, 155) could show with some certainty that material was added at least until the second century BCE. And we assume that suttas were modified, adapted or edited even until much later. We can take as a confirmation that the early Chinese translations from the first to the fifth century CE are far from being exact counterparts of the Pāli suttas. This shows at least that different text collections and variations were in circulation (Fang Guangchang 2015, 12; see also Anālayo 2007). It is also clear that communities, schools, and sects had their own versions of early text material with different arrangements (Salomon 2018, 364).

The Chinese collections (called '*āgama*s' instead of '*nikāya*s') have been translated from Sanskrit sources and share the collection *titles* but differ both in number and in the actual suttas they consist of: The Sanskrit *dīrgha āgama* (DĀ) is equivalent to the Pāli *dīgha nikāya* (DN), both representing the collection of 'long' texts. But while the Pāli DN contains thirty-four suttas, the originally Sanskrit DĀ contains forty-seven sūtras – of which twenty-four have parallels in the DN, eleven in the MN, and twelve have no Pāli parallel at all (see for details Bucknell 2014, 61-66). Similarly, the Chinese 'middle length discourses', the *madhyama āgama* (MĀ), shares the title with the Pāli *majjhima nikāya* (MN), but has a different composition: The MĀ has 222 sūtras, the MN 152 suttas, of which only 96 are shared by both collections (Anālayo 2012, 1-2). This shows that early Buddhist communities agreed on *how* to structure and collect material but not necessarily *which content* they would include.

[15] Norman (2012, 41). The oldest source for this event is the Sri Lankan chronicle Dīpavaṃsa but it is too brief and remote from the historical events they describe. In chapter XX-XXI it merely says: "Before this time, the wise Bhikkhus had orally handed down the text of the three Piṭakas [i.e. Vinaya, Sutta, and Abhidhamma] and also the Aṭṭhakathā [i.e. the commentaries]. At this time, the Bhikkhus who perceived the decay of created beings, assembled and in order that the Religion might endure for a long time, they recorded (the above-mentioned texts) in written books" (Oldenberg 1879, 211). We find a critical discussion of the accounts to this event in Collins (1990). History books of the 13th and 14th century added more details to these events, but it is obviously doubtful that these very late texts contain historically accurate information (see for details Norman 1983, 11).

Having narrowed down the productive years of the Buddha (450-400 BCE) and the latest period of composition for the early Buddhist material (roughly the first century BCE) we can now locate the early suttas within a larger chronology of ancient Indian literature in order to see which texts we should consider as pre-Buddha and pre-Buddhist. Here, we will present a simplified chronology for our purposes and refer to other publications for more details.

As pre-Buddha we consider the oldest Vedic literature: the Ṛgveda (ṚV), the Atharvaveda, and the other Saṃhitās. As most probably pre-Buddha we also consider the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa (AB), Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa (KB), Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa (TB), Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa (JB), and Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (ŚB). Further some Upaniṣads: Bṛhadāraṇyaka (BU), Chāndogya (CU), and the Jaiminīya Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa (JUB) have more relevance for our investigations, while the other probably pre-Buddha Upaniṣads (Taittirīya TU, Aitareya AU, and Kauṣītaki KU) only rarely have significance for our comparative study (see for a chronology of the Upaniṣads Olivelle 1998, 12). This means that when we encounter similarities between the suttas and these texts the influence most probably goes back to the pre-Buddhist material – or rather the pool of orally transmitted material which was eventually codified as these Vedic texts.

Furthermore, there are Vedic texts that we don't necessarily consider to be pre-*Buddha* but possibly pre-*Buddhist*: Vedic literature that was composed 400-50 BCE, i.e. the time in which the Pāli suttas were still being formed, could have still influenced the sutta material even after the Buddha's lifetime. In this category we include the Śrautasūtras, the older Gṛhyasūtras, and the four principal Dharmasūtras.

1.3 Geographical Considerations

Old Vedic material (especially the Ṛgveda) had more time to influence the general Indian discourse with its language, expressions, and worldview, and thus to influence the language of the Buddhist texts as well. The closer we get to the Buddha's time the more later Vedic texts –

the Brāhmaṇas, Upaniṣads and the Sūtras, would have to be composed geographically closer to Kosala and Magadha, in order to possibly influence the Buddhist texts.

Following a general consensus, we assume that the Brahmin mainland during most of the Vedic period was Kuru in North India and later also the Pañcāla region east of it. With time, probably in the Brāhmaṇa period, an eastward expansion took place, from Kuru-Pañcāla to Kosala, Magadha, and Videha. It is due to this migration that the interactions between Brahmanism and early Buddhism were possible.

In the following we rely on the detailed analysis in Witzel (1987). The eastern border of the Ṛgvedic area was the Yamunā River, which runs through today's New Delhi, i.e. at least seven hundred kilometers west of Lumbinī where the Buddha was born. Another Saṃhitā, the Atharvaveda, also contains very old material but was probably redacted slightly further east to the Ṛgvedic homeland (roughly today's Uttar Pradesh).

In the late Brāhmaṇa period Magadha and Videha were already considered inhabitable for Brahmins. AB and KB were probably redacted in Kuru-Pañcāla but already know of Videha, the eastern limit of the Buddha's dwelling regions. JB and JUB also know of Videha, but were probably redacted more to the south.

The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (along with its appended Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad) is a highly relevant pre-Buddhist text for us because it is close in time and place to the Buddha. The ŚB comes to us in two redactions which differ in composition but not much in content – the Mādhyandina (ŚB) and the Kāṇvīya redaction. The ŚB is based in Pañcāla and further west, while the (less referenced) Kāṇvīya got its redaction much further east – probably in Kosala and Videha, the very region of the Buddha. It is therefore very likely that the Buddha encountered Brahmins who were influenced by the various cosmological, philosophical and soteriological concepts presented in ŚB and BU[16]. Another important Upaniṣad, the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, on the other hand is probably conceived more to the west, in Kuru-Pañcāla (Olivelle, 1998, 15), thus reducing the probable impact on the discourse and thought-world of the Buddha.

[16] See the excellent work of Bausch (2015), detailing the connections between the Kāṇvīya redaction and the Snp.

Of the Śrautasūtras the Āpastamba (ĀpŚS) and the Baudhāyana (BauŚS) are likely to be pre-Buddha. The region of the ĀpŚS is not very clear but could be Kuru-Pañcāla. And the BauŚS encompasses Northern India, with a probable center in Pañcāla. Olivelle (1999, xxvii) discusses the geographical provenance of the Dharmasūtras, and generally assumes Northern Indian origins, but finds the evidence too weak to draw more specific conclusions. He dates the Dharmasūtras with hesitation from ca. 300 BCE to the first c. CE (Olivelle 1999, xxxiii-xxxiv).

To reconstruct a direct influence of specific *texts* on early Buddhism is difficult because we would need to see a high similarity in the wording. An *indirect* impact is more probable and depends on how well the pre-Buddhist material was generally known and how freely it was in circulation. We also have to assume an influence by early converted Brahmins who induced their Brahmin thought-world and language into their teachings as later Buddhist monastics. This influence would not show a connection between Brahmanism and Buddhism but more that influential early teachers used Brahmin concepts in the transmission of Buddhist material.

Even though we cannot be certain that the specific redactions of the Vedic texts available to us today were the texts known to the contemporaries of the Buddha, we nevertheless assume so for the sake of simplicity. We will try to show as clearly as possible if there are specific conceptual and semantic connections between suttas and the language of the Vedic texts.

In conclusion, we presume a certain general influence on early Buddhism by the Ṛgveda, as it is the foundational text of ancient India. Further, we expect more specific connections to the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa and the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad. Sūtra texts will help us to determine if material was added to the suttas long after the Buddha.

As it is evident from the suttas the Buddha spent most of his time in the kingdoms of Kosala and Magadha, and both regions underwent important social changes in the decades and centuries around his lifetime (see Ellis, 2019). The first major development is that Brahmanism continued spreading from the west of India to the east and was getting established as a major socio-religious force in Kosala and Magadha. The second important development was that the spiritual avant-garde both of Brahmanism as well as of the ascetic movements, which were predominantly

a rural and forest phenomenon (Witzel 2009, 297; Bronkhorst 2007, 248-255), moved closer to the cities and adjusted their concepts and dogmas to the city population.

Evidence regarding the eastward expansion of Brahmanism can be found in Houben (2010, 166 f.). One of the texts describing the expansion, ŚB 1.4.1.14-17, implies that the territory of Kosala-Videha – covering approximately the Buddha's area of life – had not originally been settled by Brahmins but that later, at the time of the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, many Brahmins already lived there[17]. Witzel (1997, 316) generally concludes that the eastern kings at some point invited western Brahmins to settle in their lands. As mentioned above, the ŚB is most probably pre-Buddha (Witzel 2009, 299), with a difference of possibly about a century (ibid., 301). Hence, we assume that the society of the Buddha's lifetime was still in flux, with a regionally differing influence of Brahmins, and power structures still in negotiation. And since the suttas were composed over a timespan of possibly three hundred years we suggest that later suttas reflect a socio-religious environment where Brahmins have become much more established, powerful, and therefore self-confident than at the Buddha's lifetime. In contrast, the earlier suttas would preserve a more respectful and careful attitude of Brahmins, one that is trying to find allies and patrons, carefully maintaining diplomatic relationships with the established political and religious powers. In other words, a relatively new religious movement, like the Brahmins in Kosala and Magadha, has to be careful not to alienate the local population and their established religious authorities. The difference between 'new Brahmanism' at the Buddha's time and 'later competitive Brahmanism' in later suttas is important to our study – we will refer to it throughout our work and it will help us to identify which sutta material is more probable to be old.

Our assessment that there was indeed a 'diplomatic period' of Brahmanism in East India is also based on comparative religious studies. Deschner, for example, emphasized a similar phenomenon for early Christianity: "Thus the Church Fathers of the pre-Constantinian times laid great importance on religious tolerance, thus they made a virtue of necessity, demanded constantly religious freedom, consideration, assured their patience, kindness […]"[18] (Deschner

[17] See also Jurewicz (2016, 268), and Malamoud (1996, 198).
[18] „So schrieben die Kirchenväter der vorkonstantinischen Zeit religiöse Toleranz groß, so machten sie aus ihrer Not eine strahlende Tugend, verlangten fortgesetzt Kultfreiheit, Rücksicht, beteuerten ihre Langmut, Güte [...]".

2016, 185; my translation). And even the combative early history of Islam follows this logic and had in the very beginning a short period of tolerance and inclusion of other monotheistic religions: “Muslim tradition seems to contain an early layer according to which Jews and Christians were actually considered part of the Muslim community” (Friedmann 2003, 32).

1.4 Oral Transmission

1.4.1 Original Buddhism and Oral Transmission

Before Indians used writing techniques they applied highly developed mnemonic methods for the oral transmission of text material. Qualified teachers taught Brahmin boys with elaborate techniques how to memorize and recite the long poetic texts of the Vedas (Gonda, 1975, 43). The composition of new poetry was reserved to skilled and gifted poets (ibid., 73), a custom competitively in place already in Ṛgvedic times (ibid., 80-81). We can therefore assume that only specific Brahmins were entrusted with poetic composition and that the verses of highly regarded poets were more likely to be transmitted at all.

The transmission process of the early Buddhist texts, which also includes the composition and transmission of poetry, is more complex and the elucidation of this process will not only be of theoretical interest, for it will also show how the transmission techniques probably affected the *content* of the texts. In our discussion of the matter we will refer to past research but will also make novel assumptions and educated guesses of our own in order to present a plausible transmission process of the early Buddhist material.

The early Buddhist texts have some unique features which are obvious even to the casual reader. One of them is an excessive use of formulas and repetitions, a ‘cut-and-paste’ to which we will refer as ‘stock passages’, ‘text modules’ and ‘formulas’. Even though these seem like features of

written texts there can be little doubt that similar techniques were also used in the first about two hundred years when the Buddhist teachings were transmitted orally[19].

Theravāda tradition has it that shortly after the death of the Buddha a first council took place. During this council five hundred liberated monks under the guidance of the Buddha's senior disciple Mahākassapa allegedly recited the Buddha's teachings, with the help of the Buddha's attendant Ānanda who purportedly memorized and recited the suttas as we have them today, and Upāli who recited the Vinaya (Hinüber 1996, 5). Scholars generally agree that the accounts of this council are legendary and don't refer to historical events[20]. What then can be said with more plausibility about the transmission of the early Buddhist material?

For one, the Buddhist suttas are a layered collection of texts. This can be said with certainty because of some explicit cross-references, meaning that some suttas mention other texts by name. Among these, references to the Pāṭimokkha (lit. 'obligation', the basic monastic rules[21]) are the most frequent, mentioned dozens of times in the suttas[22]. These references to the Pāṭimokkha appear only once in the SN, and most others in the AN. This suggests that references to the Pāṭimokkha don't come from the earliest sutta period, yet are old enough to predate parts of AN, MN, and DN. Different Buddhist schools have their own Pāṭimokkhas, but the differences are mainly in arrangement and only few in fundamental content (Prebish, 1974b). Another indication that the Pāṭimokkha (transmitted in the Pāli Vinaya) contains very old material is the fact that it shares themes and elements even with Jain monastic rules (Hinüber 1996, 11). This is plausible since at the time of the Buddha there was probably little need for an entirely distinct *conduct* of Buddhist monastics, in contrast to a soteriological teaching which would have to be uniquely Buddhist.

[19] Here we assume that writing existed even before the edicts of Aśoka, but it couldn't have been for long since the orthography of the edicts is inconsistent (Salomon, 1998, 72). Furthermore, there is evidence also within the Buddhist texts that they were transmitted orally. See for an overview Allon (1997, 39).
[20] See for example Prebish (1974, 241-245).
[21] See Horner & Brahmali (2014, 24).
[22] SN 47.46, AN 2.36, AN 2.281-283, AN 3.73, AN 3.97, AN 4.12, AN 4.22, AN 4.37, AN 4.181, AN 4.259, AN 5.87, AN 5.109, AN 5.114, AN 5.166, AN 5.232-234, AN 7.75-76, AN 8.2, AN 8.13, AN 8.20, AN 8.52, AN 9.1, AN 9.3, AN 10.17-18, AN 10.31-40, AN 10.44, AN 10.50, AN 10.71, AN 10.97-98, AN 11.14, MN 6, MN 53, MN 77, MN 104, MN 107-108, MN 125, DN 2, DN 10, DN 14, DN 21, DN 26, DN 33, DN 34, Dhp 14, Dhp 25, Snp 2.11, Snp 4.14.

In the following we will propose a transmission process for Buddhist teachings in three stages: After the Buddha his outstanding followers would have presented the teaching in a consistent, but not necessarily semantically fixed way. We suggest that who appears in the suttas as the *dhammakathika*s, 'expounders of the Dhamma', are these first generation teachers. In this first stage they would have transmitted the Dhamma in a spontaneous manner, basing their teachings on core principles heard from the Buddha and elucidated with their own experiences.

In a second stage a primitive differentiation into Dhamma and Vinaya would have taken place. The Dhamma teaching would have been then transmitted by, as they are called in the suttas, the *dhammadhara*s, 'keepers of Dhamma'. The *dhammadhara*s would have contributed to a growing pool of solidified formulas and texts, adding their clarifications, interpretations, and comments.

In a third stage even more specialized reciters, the *bhāṇaka*s, would have transmitted the texts. These *bhāṇaka*s would have been less characterized by their spiritual accomplishments but rather by their exceptional skill to retain large amounts of texts and to freely navigate their 'archive' in order to present a consistent teaching. The *bhāṇaka*s would have been therefore more scholastic and possibly even philosophical in nature in order to eliminate crude contradictions from the set of texts they have collected from their various predecessors.

1.4.2 *Dhammakathika*s – 'Expounders of the Dhamma'

Regarding the first stage we have good evidence for *dhammakathika*s to be the oldest titular transmitters of the Buddha's teachings since they appear in the suttas themselves[23]. It is quite clear though from occurrences in the Vinaya that later on they becamme formal Dhamma teachers who were held in high esteem[24]. And we assume that over time their personal teachings and interpretations became at least partly incorporated into the canonized pool of suttas.

[23] SN 12.16, SN 12.67, SN 14.15, SN 22.115-116, SN 35.155, AN 1.196, AN 1.239, AN 1.250, AN 1.382, AN 4.139, AN 5.59-60, AN 8.71-72, AN 10.8-10, MN 32, MN 113.
[24] Vin 1.354-356, Vin 4.7-11, Vin 4.13, Vin 4.67.

Four *dhammakathika*s are mentioned by name: Puṇṇa Mantāniputta is called in AN 1.196 the foremost *dhammakathika* monk (appearing as an extraordinary teacher also in SN 14.15, SN 22.83, MN 24, and MN 32). Dhammadinnā is called in AN 1.239 the foremost *dhammakathika* nun (appearing as an extraordinary teacher also in SN 55.53, and MN 44). Macchikāsaṇḍika is called in AN 1.250 the foremost *dhammakathika* householder (otherwise only in AN 6.121). Finally, Moggallāna, the second main disciple of the Buddha next to Sāriputta, is called a *dhammakathika* in MN 32. The first three names are largely forgotten by the tradition and might refer to followers of the historical Buddha. Especially Puṇṇa Mantāniputta is praised by other senior monastics: Ānanda (the Buddha's attendant) says in SN 22.83 that Mantāniputta helped him when he was newly ordained, and in MN 24 he is highly praised by Sāriputta (the Buddha's foremost monk) who treats him like a renowned disciple of early times. Mantāniputta was therefore probably one of the Buddha's early disciples and might be the oldest known teacher to whom the title *dhammakathika* was granted.

Overall, we can see in the suttas a clear shift in connotation regarding *dhammakathika*s: The SN presents them as teaching core Buddhist elements of liberation, e.g. dispassion, and cessation of ignorance[25] (SN 12.16, SN 12.67, SN 22.115-116, SN 35.155), while the AN has a more critical distance to them (AN 4.139 AN 5.59-60, AN 8.71-72, AN 10.8-10, MN 113). Here *dhammakathika*s are for example portrayed as speaking much or little, as staying on topic or digressing (AN 4.139), or they are portrayed as not necessarily being good meditators (AN 8.71-72). We suggest that this reflects a professionalization and spiritual decline of the *dhammakathika* institution over time[26].

[25] *avijjāya ce bhikkhu nibbidāya virāgāya nirodhāya dhammaṃ deseti*
[26] Drewes (2011, 334-337) discusses later developments of *dhammakathika*s in commentarial literature, inscriptions, and Mahāyāna.

1.4.3 *Dhammadharas* – 'Keepers of the Dhamma'

The second, probably later, type of transmitters are the *dhammadhara*s, the 'keepers of Dhamma'. AN 4.180 (also copied into DN 16) distinguishes four types of legitimate teachers: (1) the Buddha, (2) senior monks (*thera*s), (3) normal monks (4) and a *dhammadhara*, *vinayadhara* ('keeper of the Vinaya'), or *mātikādhara*[27] ('keeper of the mnemonic lists').

In contrast to the undifferentiated *dhammakathika*s we see that suttas like the above AN 4.180 distinguish between *dhammadhara*s who specialize in either Dhamma, Vinaya, or *mātika*s (which later probably became the Abhidhamma). These specialized *dhammadhara*s appear in several AN-based suttas. Their responsibility is to help with accurate recitation (AN 4.160, AN 5.156) and to interpret and explain the meaning of the texts (AN 3.20, AN 6.51, AN 10.11, AN 11.17, MN 33, DN 16, Snp 1.3). *Vinayadhara*s additionally appear in several other suttas[28] and are even required to be fully liberated as a prerequisite (AN 7.75-82).

Like the *dhammakathika*s the 'Dhamma keepers' originally also included laypeople: In AN 4.6 the keeper of Dhamma is a 'person' (*puggala*) – not a monk – and said to be praised even by devas and Brahmā. AN 4.7 (also SN 51.10 and AN 8.70) explicitly defines the 'keepers of Dhamma' as monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen. AN 4.186 (similarly Dhp 19) goes even further and defines a 'keeper of Dhamma' as anyone who understands and practices the teaching of even a four-line verse (*catuppada*). These suttas clearly point to a time before transmission was a task of specialized monastics, yet was differentiated already into Dhamma and Vinaya.

It is also remarkable that AN 4.186 (also in MN 70, MN 124) seems to define a four-line verse as 'the smallest unit of teaching' which points to an early rhythmically structured mnemonic transmission in the form of short and memorable verses[29].

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[27] *Mātika*s have later developed into the philosophical Abhidhamma, the third type of canonical teaching next to Dhamma and Vinaya. They were probably distilled numbered formulas with the purpose to remember and discuss a consistent set of teachings. See for further elaborations on *mātika*s Gethin (1992, 160-162).
[28] SN 14.15, AN 1.228, AN 1.238, AN 1.383, AN 5.59-60, AN 7.75-82, AN 10.8-10, MN 113.
[29] A famous example is the verse that Sāriputta heard from the early disciple Assaji and lead to his conversion: "Of the things that arise from a cause, the Tathāgata explained their cause, and their cessation. This is the teaching of the great ascetic" (Vin 1.40; *Ye dhammā hetuppabhavā | tesaṃ hetuṃ tathāgato āha | Tesañca yo nirodho | evaṃvādī mahāsamaṇo''ti.*) The variants and parallels of this four-liner are collected in Hinüber (2015, 3-9).

The 'Dhamma keepers' are also mentioned in the context of a specific list of Dhamma genres which belongs to a later period of time[30] when the teachings were already collected, grouped in genres, and separately transmitted. We will now use the opportunity to investigate these genres and will return to the different kinds of transmitters thereafter.

1.4.4 Genres and Formats of Early Buddhist Literature

The just mentioned AN-based lists speak of nine genres (generally called *aṅga*s, i.e. 'limbs'[31]): (1) *sutta*, (2) *geyya*, (3) *veyyākaraṇa*, (4) *gāthā*, (5) *udāna*, (6) *itivuttaka*, (7) *jātaka*, (8) *abbhutadhamma*, and (9) *vedalla* (AN 4.6, AN 4.102, AN 4.107, AN 4.186, AN 4.191, AN 5.73, AN 5.74, AN 5.155, AN 6.51, AN 7.68, MN 22)[32]. Since the early literature doesn't explain these terms[33] we suggest as a translation: (1) short coherent teaching[34]; (2) conceptual premise in verse form; (3) elucidation of concepts; (4) chanted verse; (5) short utterance in verse form, typically in four lines; (6) prose quotes; (7) stories of the Buddha's previous births; (8) stories of the Buddha's wonders and miracles; and (9) irregular teachings[35] (possibly a residual category).

As Hinüber (1994, 122) points out, neither Nāgārjuna (around 200 CE) nor the eminent commentator Buddhaghosa (5th c. CE) have a good understanding of this list anymore which means that it went out of use in early times[36]. We might add the possibility that the list was used only in a specific transmission line, and not throughout the early Saṅgha. Furthermore, three

[30] Here we agree with Cousins (2013, 105) against the opinion of Hinüber (1994).
[31] The notion of nine *aṅga*s appears only in later texts (see Hinüber 1994, 121).
[32] Choong (2000, 16-23) follows Yin Shun and regards the first three limbs (i.e. *sutta*, *geyya*, and *veyyākaraṇa*) as the historically oldest ones. This is mainly based on MN 122 and its parallel MĀ 191 (ibid., 9). This interpretation is plausible, but we find the textual basis too uncertain to elaborate it further.
[33] This list of nine genres has been discussed at various places without a fully satisfactory solution, simply because of the lack of explanatory material. See for details Hinüber (1994), Anālayo (2016, 16-23).
[34] The term *sutta* is very rare in the suttas (in AN 4.180, MN 75), and its exact meaning in the Buddhist context must therefore remain vague. The fact that *sutta* is the first item in the list suggests that *sutta*s contained the core conceptual premise of the teaching. Further, the literal meaning 'thread' or 'string' suggests that a *sutta* was concise.
[35] Anālayo (2016, 17).
[36] Yet the list is repeated without elucidation in the fourth century Dīpavamsa XIV, 15 (Hinüber 1996, 89).

items (*udāna*, *itivuttaka*, *jātaka*) also became titles of collections in the heterogeneous Khuddaka Nikāya – but the sutta list of genres probably predates these Khuddaka books (ibid., 123).

The fact that the list knows so many genres at all is for us a clear sign of a post-Buddha conception since it surely needed time to order and categorize the transmitted oral text material. As a conclusion the Dhamma keepers are probably a post-Buddha institution. Finally, we find the list only in the AN, and not in the SN. All in all, this list of nine genres in connection with the *dhammadhara*s seems to represent a middle layer of suttas in which poetry and prose were distinguished and transmitted separately[37].

Levman (2014, 75) provides good arguments for the hypothesis that the poetry available to us in the suttas contains some of the oldest Buddhist text material. An additional argument for its old age is that poetic meter is robust and makes it difficult to change the content – poetry is therefore a rather conservative genre. Also the meter – and the typically higher language involved – makes poems mnemonically easier to recall once memorized. Levman (ibid., 76-77) also provides examples of verses with probably pre-Pāli material.

In total, the sutta collections we investigate contain more than three thousand verses, most of them in the first book of the SN (*sagāthāvagga*, lit. 'the book with verses'), and in the Snp which consists mostly of verses (Ānandajoti 2004, 11). This means that we, who are interested in the older layers of text, in general give more importance to verses than to prose sections.

We might add that monastics were probably not equally skilled in composing, memorizing, and recalling poetry. Especially if we assume that verses were composed by poets who had experience with poetry and meter, possibly with a Brahmin background[38]. Bulk memorization should therefore have been a skill-based and selective endeavor (see also Lienhard 1984, 75). Norman (1983, 58-59) suggests that part of the verses found in the Pāli suttas belong to a "general store of floating verses which seems to have existed in Northern India in early times".

[37] Another distinction of genres (excluding *gāthā*s and myths) offered by Manné (1990) is: sermons, consultations, and debates. Manné derived her genres from analyzing the MN and DN texts.
[38] Law (2000, 243) points out that some verses of the Snp follow traditional Vedic meters.

This is proven in detail by the works of Bollée (1983) and Yajima (1997) where they show direct parallels of dozens of Pāli verses with verses in Jain literature. If indeed many sutta verses go back to formerly Brahmin poets who were experienced in memorization we would find more Vedic vocabulary in verses than in prose sections.

We already mentioned above that the Dhamma keepers preserved not only Dhamma and Vinaya, but also the *mātika*s – numbered formulas or lists which are a dominant feature of many prose Buddhist doctrines[39]. Almost all important doctrines of early Buddhism are embedded in numbered lists. Many of them are collected in DN 33 and DN 34, and the entire AN has ascending numbered lists as its organizing principle. Famous examples are the 'Four Noble Truths' (*cattāri ariyasaccāni*), or 'the Noble Eightfold Path' (*ariya aṭṭhaṅgika magga*).

Gethin (1992) works out in detail how memorizing the Dhamma in *mātika*s not only helps to remember specific fundamental doctrines but also provides an 'architecture' of the whole teaching because of the interconnectedness of the lists[40]. Lists are therefore very useful mnemonic aids for monastics who necessarily need to have a big picture of the teachings. Gethin (ibid., 158) also points out correctly that in the suttas the term *mātika* appears solely in connection with the *mātikādhara*s mentioned above. Only in the later Abhidhamma is the term explicitly applied to numbered lists. Yet, it makes sense to assume that a list-approach to teaching and learning the Dhamma developed already in an early sutta period and that therefore the *mātikādhara* of the suttas was a teacher who specialized in these lists[41].

*Mātika*s, as soon as they were formulated and learned, should support a very reliable transmission. They are easy to remember, and it is simple for monastics to recognize if one item slipped their mind (e.g. if one remembers only six items of a sevenfold list), and then to ask a

[39] See for a detailed reflection on *mātika*s Gethin (1992). According to Collett (2006, 156) Buddhism is the only religion which makes use of lists in such an excessive way.
[40] For example the Four Noble Truths contain the 'Noble Eightfold Path' and the 'Five aggregates of attachment' (which consists of further lists). The Noble Eightfold Path in turn contains the 'Four Right Efforts', the 'Four Foundations of Mindfulness', the 'Four *Jhānas*' and several other numbered lists.
[41] Dessein (2013) is overly confident when he assumes that *mātika*s were probably in use already at the Buddha's time. Here he relies on accounts from different Vinaya texts which are themselves of a later date and provides no convincing reason to trust these accounts as representing transmission practices at the time of the Buddha.

fellow student or teacher for the missing items. We therefore assume that especially lists which are wide-spread throughout the suttas probably belong to an older layer of texts.

Interestingly, the precise interpretation of important list items has suffered during transmission. There are for example several meditation terms whose precise meanings are still debated today (e.g. *jhāna*, *vitakka*, *vicāra*, *pīti*, *sukkha*, *upekkhā*, *sati*)[42]. This contrast between reliable lists and uncertain meaning of the list items represents, in our opinion, a time gap in their conception: The fundamental lists themselves would thus come from very old times and early transmitters. At these times both transmitters and audiences would have well understood the practical meanings of the terms. With time the lists continued to be transmitted reliably, but the precise understanding would have deteriorated. Finally, at a later period individual teachers would have offered their own interpretations of such less understood list items, some of which would have found entry into commentarial sutta sections as well.

So far we have identified formats of early Buddhism which were probably transmitted in a reliable format – verses and lists. This does not mean, in turn, that most verses and lists in the suttas come from the earliest Buddhist times but rather that *once they have been created* they had a high probability to be transmitted accurately[43].

Two influential transmission theories, of Cousins (1983) and Gethin (1992), deal with the early sutta period. Both propose transmitters to have had 'improvisational flexibility', either to adjust their message to the needs of their audience (Cousins), or to use set lists depending on which aspects they liked to emphasize (Gethin). Both assume that the main goal of early transmitters was to present a *consistent teaching*, not *fixed sutta texts*.

It makes sense to assume that before texts were fixed the principle which gave them authority was either the spiritual liberation of the teacher and/or being in direct lineage of teachers who

[42] Stuart-Fox (1989, 79) points to the inadequacies and discrepancies of meditation terms in the suttas, and that their descriptions therefore cannot serve as guides for meditators. Scholars like Cousins (1992) tried to base their understanding of the terms on a broader review of literature, but such attempts themselves prove the point that the suttas don't provide sufficient clarity of the terms. See for an ongoing debate also Wynne (2018).
[43] See for a similar discussion regarding original Buddhism and the role of poetry Nakamura (1987, 57-59).

were recognized as liberated – the excellent memory of the reciter could not have been sufficient. Further, we assume that fundamental doctrines (the Four Noble Truths etc.) were known among monastics, so that what the Buddhist practitioners needed from teachers was more *elucidation* than mere recitation. Additionally, we suppose that if this 'flexible and improvisational' teaching style was prevalent in the earliest period we would not find this 'method' explicitly discussed in the suttas. After all, these early teachers would have simply continued the style of their own masters, who also didn't stick to a rigid set of explanations and formulas.

In fact, we have a sutta which allows exactly this interpretation. In AN 8.8 god Sakka asks the monk Uttara if the teaching he gave is his own or the Buddha's: "But, Bhante, was this your own discernment, or was it the word of the Blessed One, the Arahant, the Perfectly Enlightened One?"[44]. To which Uttara replies: "Whatever is well spoken is all the word of the Blessed One, the Arahant, the Perfectly Enlightened One"[45]. This means that what is spoken by a liberated master in the *spirit of the Buddha* might as well be considered as coming from the Buddha himself. And this is precisely the position we assume for the early 'flexible' teachers and transmitters. Over the years they would have given sermons with varying wordings, in different lengths, referring to consistent but variable sets of metaphors and key concepts, utilizing flexible narratives involving the Buddha. These early masters would not have pointed out that what they heard was 'just' from their teacher and not from the Buddha himself. Instead, they probably considered their teachers as fully liberated authoritative sources of the Dhamma.

Allon (1997, 54) investigates the repetitive and formulaic features of the Pāli texts and, like us, concludes that the texts fixed in the first century BCE were fundamentally different from the improvisatory manner of teaching by the Buddha or his immediate disciples – the texts we have today were, according to him, *designed* to be memorized. Not only was certain material prioritized and adjusted in wording, there was also ample opportunity to incorporate new material (see also Williams 1970, 158). To preserve the words of the Buddha was only one purpose of the texts, to enable easy memorization, another. As mentioned above, it was probably

[44] *Kiṃ panidaṃ , bhante, āyasmato uttarassa sakaṃ paṭibhānaṃ , udāhu tassa bhagavato vacanaṃ arahato sammāsambuddhassā''ti?*
[45] *yaṃ kiñci subhāsitaṃ sabbaṃ taṃ tassa bhagavato vacanaṃ arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Tato upādāyupādāya mayaṃ caññe ca bhaṇāmā''ti.*

equally important in the centuries after the Buddha to adjust the teachings to new socio-religious challenges. And finally, also the audience changed with time to a more city-based population with rather humble spiritual needs in comparison to the aspiring forest dwellers (Nakamura 1987, 58; see for a further discussion section 1.5). And in order to address this city population effectively, the Buddha's message would have been re-formulated and enriched, e.g. by folk elements, devotional practices, and captivating stories of heavens and hells.

Our conclusion seems to be contradicted by Wynne (2004, 108-112) who collected convincing evidence that the sutta period knew of precise, even word-to-word transmission, especially of the Pāṭimokkha (the code of monastic discipline), but also of suttas. This includes certain mnemonic techniques like repetition of passages within a sutta, and the principle of 'waxing syllables', i.e. arranging a list of words in an ascending number of syllables (Anālayo, 2017; Norman, 2012, 52-55). We don't doubt that this became a successful mnemonic practice *at a certain period of time*. But it's not plausible that this practice necessarily started with the Buddha himself.

In Biblical Studies six types of text production have been suggested: Transcription (in our case 'faithful recitation'), invention, compilation, expansion, adaptation, and integration (Van der Toorn 2009, 110). There is no reason to assume that early Buddhist text production ruled out any of these tools in different time periods systematically, especially in the narrative prose sections[46].

As noted before, our early texts are usually quiet about details of the transmission process itself. A passage in the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya is an exception. There the Buddha allows monastics in case of forgetfulness to fill in the location of a teaching with any of the six large cities where he regularly dwelled (mostly Sāvatthī or Rājagaha). Further, he gives provisions for how to fill in the names of forgotten interlocutors (Schopen, 2004, 571-582). Even though this is a very late rule which explicitly refers to writing (which didn't exist at the time of the Buddha), it is still remarkable that monastic transmission allowed the reciters such a flexibility to fill in details into the narrative sections. Obviously, the names of cities and persons were not considered as critically important. We also doubt that this rule applied to the later professional reciters who

[46] See for a similar assessment in Bible Studies Dunn (2003, 200).

must have had a superb memory (see below), and we rather assume that the rule allowed small monastic communities to perform their recitation practices even if in doubt about minor details[47].

Another evidence that we should not take narrative details as perfectly transmitted are the conversion formulas which seem to have been added out of convention. A regular interlocutor of the Buddha was for example the sympathetic Brahmin Jāṇussoṇī (section 2.1). In the more than ten suttas in which he has conversations with the Buddha he converts in almost each sutta anew. Thus the narratives of these suttas could not have been historical events. They rather reflect an editorial convention to end certain suttas with a stock conversion of the lay interlocutor.

An example for a rather substantial change of narrative is MN 26 which is one of the main sources for the Buddha's own liberation[48]. The Pāli sutta says that the Buddha was initially unwilling to teach because of the challenging profoundness of his insights: "my mind inclined to inaction rather than to teaching the Dhamma"[49]. Only after the deity Brahmā Sahampati invites him to spread the Dhamma the Buddha takes up the task to become a teacher. This episode became very popular as it supposedly demonstrates the profoundness of the teaching (evoking gratitude in the audience), and it establishes Brahmā as the Buddha's devotee (Jones, 2009). Yet, in the Chinese parallel MĀ 204, Brahmā's intervention is absent, in fact, Brahmā doesn't appear at all. Here, after his enlightenment the Buddha simply reflects: "Having just awakened to the supreme, right and complete awakening, I thought: 'To whom should I first teach the Dharma?'" (Anālayo, 2011c, 28). Neither does Brahmā appear in the Chinese parallels of the other three suttas where Brahma's intervention is featured[50]. Anālayo (2011a, 178-182) discusses all parallels and concludes that 'Brahmā's intervention' in the Pāli texts of MN 26, MN 85, and DN 14 represents a later inclusion[51]. This example demonstrates how vulnerable the prose and narrative parts of the suttas were to changes and adaptations.

[47] See for a similar understanding Sujato & Brahmali (2015, 54).
[48] This episode can be found also in MN 85, and DN 14. Its root sutta SN 6.1 has however no Chinese parallel.
[49] *paṭisañcikkhato appossukkatāya cittaṃ namati, no dhammadesanāya*
[50] Choong (2014, 187-188) discusses the (missing) parallels to SN 6.1. The only Chinese sutta which contains Brahmā's plea to teach is EĀ 19.1 (currently untranslated).
[51] We suspect that this story was invented rather late in SN 6.1, then became popular, and was then inserted in the longer MN and DN suttas.

1.4.5 *Bhāṇakas* – the 'Reciters'

With the intricacies of the transmission process in mind we now turn to the third and latest transmitters of early Buddhist material, the *bhāṇaka*s or 'reciters'. These are post-sutta transmission specialists, appearing in the Vinaya and the Milindapañha (whose earliest parts were composed not earlier than 100 BCE[52]). In Milindapañha 6.4.1 we find references to specific *bhāṇaka*s who mostly correspond to the nikāyas we have today: *bhāṇaka*s of *jātaka* (rebirth stories, now in KN[53]), *dīgha-bhāṇaka*s (DN), *majjhima-bhāṇaka*s (MN), *saṃyutta-bhāṇaka*s (SN), *aṅguttara-bhāṇaka*s (AN), and *khuddaka-bhāṇaka*s (KN). We have to keep in mind that the *bhāṇaka*s were not transmitting the entire Dīgha Nikāya, Majjhima Nikāya, etc., especially not of today's Pāli Canon[54]. We can be certain of that because of the different Dhammapadas found in Gāndhārī and the Chinese Long Discourses, Middle Length Discourses, etc., which are differently assembled than their Pāli counterparts. Therefore, the *bhāṇaka*s were specialized in collecting and retaining a specific *genre*, not a fixed collection of texts. Further, *bhāṇaka*s were not only instrumental for transmitting Theravāda material, but Mahāyāna texts as well (Drewes, 2011; Deegalle 37-40), which speaks for an institutionalized transmission from around the turn of the first millennium on[55].

We suggest that these specialists were travelling from monastery to monastery with a set of texts they had memorized, probably including their exegesis[56]. Further, they probably also collected suttas from resident experienced monastics, thus increasing their repertoire. In the monasteries the gifted monastics or scribes would have spent time with *bhāṇaka*s to memorize (or to write down) their texts and to pass them on to the monastery community for public recitation. If this is true, it would have been the *monasteries* which probably first assembled written collections, depending on the available *bhāṇaka*s. The monasteries probably also prioritized certain

[52] See Hinüber (1996, 85).
[53] Possibly the Jātaka was an independent collection by then. Indeed, it is large enough to form a collection of its own, representing a specific genre of fables. See for details Hinüber (1996, 54-58).
[54] See also the plausible reflections of Cousins (2013, 100-101) where he demonstrates that it is statistically highly unlikely that different schools would have had different *bhāṇaka*s. More probably, *bhāṇaka*s were non-sectarian professional 'tape-recorders' who made their mnemonic archive available to diverse monastic communities.
[55] Norman (2012, 44-49) discusses the commentarial claim that *bhāṇaka*s and their genres were instituted already at the first council after the Buddha's death and shows convincingly that this is highly unlikely. However, he places the institutionalization of *bhāṇaka*s into the second century BCE (ibid., 47) which we consider as too early.
[56] Drewes (2011, 335) similarly rejects the notion that *bhāṇaka*s were mere reciters.

*bhāṇaka*s and their collections (e.g. a Dhammapada) over others and chose a specific version as their 'standard version' for public recitation.

This brings us to an aspect of transmission that is usually not a subject of discussion[57], namely that *bhāṇaka*s must have been fully aware of their competition and that their fame and reputation depended not only on their faithful memory but also on how they delivered their material in comparison with other *bhāṇaka*s. There is no reason to rule out that reciters and transmitters tried to outperform each other and that as a consequence more 'impressive' texts ended up being preserved (see also Wendland 2013, 79). Such a competitive influence of reciters on each other would also make the search for individual authorship pointless since we would deal with the end result of a complex interaction between competing reciters and audiences (ibid., 83).

As a clear indication for an adaptable transmission process we find a remarkable non-dogmatic flexibility within old monastic communities: In libraries of the first century CE we have texts of very different sects next to each other, namely texts of Nikāya Buddhism next to early Mahāyāna texts (Salomon 2018, 93-95). Apparently, these communities had little dogmatic hesitation to consider both traditions as valuable and worth preserving. Therefore, we assume that the first centuries CE fixed the *genres* of texts (e.g. Dhammapada or Long Discourses) while still being flexible regarding the sectarian *content*. *Bhāṇaka*s (e.g. *saṃyutta-bhāṇaka*s) would have transmitted 'their' collection of texts without claiming to represent the *entirety* of their genre. In our understanding, the canons would have been fixed at a later time when monastic learning centers developed their own solidified standard collections, growing more and more hesitant to allow new texts to be included. Then perhaps under the patronage of a political leader the collection of a certain monastery would have been chosen as *the* canonized version to be learned and disseminated. In case of the Theravāda Pāli Canon the monastery in question could have been the eminent Mahāvihāra in Sri Lanka (Deeg, 2009).

[57] See Endo (2014, 125-130) for an interesting case study on *dīghabhāṇaka*s which supports this view .

1.4.6 Concluding Reflections on the Transmission of Early Buddhist Texts

So far we have postulated three stages for the transmission of early Buddhist teachings: After the Buddha himself and his earliest followers there were monastic and lay teachers who were held in especially high esteem as *dhammakathika*s, 'expounders of the Dhamma'. This title was initially used for lay teachers as well but eventually it was applied to monastics only. Next, we have the 'keepers' of Dhamma, Vinaya and mnemonic formulas: the *dhammadhara*s, *vinayadhara*s, and *mātikādhara*s. These specialized transmitters could have emerged at the middle or end of the sutta period when individual texts were already formed. And after the content of the suttas was fixed, we have the professional *bhāṇaka*s who were specialized in reciting and teaching the nikāya genres as we find them preserved in the Pāli texts today.

Certainly there must have been a complex interplay of several processes of text transmission in order to create the texts of the Pāli suttas. The old formulas which can be consistently found in all collections (e.g. of the four *jhāna*s) would come from a transmission period before the differentiation into specific nikāyas, e.g. from the time of the early *dhammakathika*s. Then we have material which is rather specific to the SN or AN. For example, the doctrine of the Saṅgha being a 'field of merit' (*puññakkhetta*)[58] is mostly an AN concept, while the label of 'Four Noble Truths' (*ariyasaccāni*) belongs mostly to the SN. These concepts and wordings could therefore have been introduced and propagated by the later *bhāṇaka*s.

Reviewing our investigation of the Buddhist transmission process, it was important to exemplify these three strata in order to account for different types of material in the suttas. We hold the position that there was an 'original' Buddhism that represented the earliest time of the Buddha and his immediate disciples. This was condensed into lists and short formulas and freely used in an otherwise improvisational teaching style. Early poems were another framework in which earliest Dhamma was transmitted. During the transmission process the earliest material was enriched by different layers of narratives, further poems, interpretations, and commentaries (see below). These added layers were not only meant to elucidate Buddhist doctrine but also to cope

[58] This doctrine suggests to lay people that a material 'investment' in the Saṅgha in the form of donations will result in a pleasant rebirth (see section 3.1).

with contemporary issues (e.g. emerging new religions), to answer contemporary questions (e.g. of a laity interested in heavenly rebirth), or to address new audiences (e.g. for conversion). Throughout our work we will refer to these added functions in order to shed light on material that is related to Vedic concepts and to assess to which historical layer it might belong.

As mentioned, the suttas sometimes include their own 'commentarial' layer. There are for example suttas which start with a short teaching by the Buddha, immediately followed by an exposition of the monk Mahākaccāna and then again approved of by the Buddha (AN 10.172, MN 18, MN 133, MN 138). We interpret this structure as a 'narrative compression', where an older teaching by the Buddha was later commented on. Other suttas with Mahākaccāna illustrate this more clearly (especially SN 22.3, SN 22.4, SN 25.130, and AN 10.26). Here the Buddha does not appear in person at all, and Mahākaccāna comments on teachings which are explicitly named: In SN 22.3 he comments on 'The Questions of Māgandiya' (i.e. Snp 4.9); in SN 22.4 on 'The Questions of Sakka' (i.e. DN 21), and in AN 10.26 on 'The Maidens' Questions' (i.e. SN 4.25). These commentaries must have been added after the older texts were already named[59].

This strongly suggests that Mahākaccāna was an early commentator after the Buddha's lifetime. While his commentaries are easy to recognize in earlier suttas (SN and AN) they are concealed in later MN suttas, made to appear as if Mahākaccāna commented on the teachings while the Buddha was still alive. The reason is clear – an exposition which the Buddha personally approves of can claim higher authority than a commentary of a teacher without direct legitimization. While the later authorship is thus relatively clear in the case of Mahākaccāna we suspect that many other suttas are anonymously commentarial while insinuating to be the words of the Buddha himself (similarly Anālayo 2011b, 878-887). There are also numerous suttas in the SN and AN in which no speaker is identified; they simply address a group of bhikkhus (monastics) anonymously. In line with our reasoning a part of these suttas might have been uttered by later teachers and just assumed later on to have been taught directly by the Buddha.

[59] In several suttas the Buddha names that very sutta at the end, a narrative element which is probably also from later times (SN 35.104, SN 35.235, SN 36.22, SN 46.56, SN 55.8-10 [also in DN 16], AN 5.50, AN 6.63, AN 10.216, MN 12, MN 18, MN 115, DN 1, DN 29).

A curious example of complex transmission is DN 18. Here, at the end of the sutta which takes place among deities, it says that the content was spoken by Brahmā Sanaṅkumāra to the Gods of Thirty-three. This was heard by the deity Vessavaṇa and taught to his assembly. Out of this assembly the Yakkha Janavasabha narrated it to the Buddha, who taught it to his attendant Ānanda who finally related it to monastic and lay followers. Here, the 'provenance' of the sutta clearly shows that the authors were interested in presenting the sutta as 'authentic' in order to legitimize the teachings they included.

Implications from the analysis of the transmission process reach far and are not limited to Indology or Buddhist Studies. Wendland (2013) discusses in great detail similar research conducted in the fields of Bible Studies, Literature Studies, and Linguistics. Research has confirmed that oral-based transmission uses "structured repetition, graphic imagery, temporal or spatial sequencing, and standard formulas" (ibid., 15). Wendland further emphasizes that literature in general is a sociocultural phenomenon with social, educational, historical, and religious purposes and has "specific communicative goals (e.g., the functions of motivation, inspiration, commemoration, admonition, enlightenment, consolation, value-reinforcement, tradition-preservation, and so forth)" (ibid., 27).

We find these exact elements in the Buddhist texts as well – next to motivation and inspiration there are notably also promises of mundane rewards, or the denigration of other spiritual movements. Generally, Buddhist texts should not only be imagined in the context of communal monastic recitation but also as public performances by an orator in order "to reinforce, to change, or to augment the thinking of his/her hearers with regard to a particular topic" (ibid., 31-34).

It is certainly important to note that "when we seek to imagine performances in oral cultures, we moderns need to shift our thinking from written to oral, from private to public, from 'public readers' to performers, from silent readers to hearers/audience, from individual to communal audience, and from manuscript transmission to oral transmission" (ibid., 39, quoting Rhoads, 2006, 123). Accordingly, suttas with engaging dialogues, captivating appearances of gods, or entertaining storylines, were certainly suitable for a general public performance.

Even more, *any* sutta would have been transmitted with a certain audience in mind – and the imagined effect must have, in turn, influenced length, structure, and content of the sutta (ibid., 46)[60]. It also makes sense to assume that cultural references were preserved in a condensed metonymical form (ibid., 47). When for example at the end of a sutta a layman declares to become a lay follower of the Buddha the target audience would have had a good idea what this implied in practice while for us the concrete action connected with conversion requires a complex deduction from other sources.

It will be reserved to future scholars to make full use of the implication of transmission research and apply it more comprehensively to the transmission of ancient Indian and Buddhists texts. In our study it will suffice to take these principles into general consideration and to critically apply them to the content we discuss.

To sum it up, based on the different aspects discussed above, we will generally consider sutta content as old when it deals with soteriology and liberation, and as later when it focuses on the lay perspective or on denigrating other spiritual movements like Brahmanism and Jainism. Further, we consider sutta content as old when its liberation-oriented content (e.g. lists and formulas) is spread over different nikāyas, and as later when the content is specific to a single nikāya. When a sutta contains both a prose and a verse section we will generally consider the verse to be older. We will regard content that is limited to very few suttas with caution. And similarly, when suttas contain specific vocabulary which can otherwise only be found in post-Buddha literature we will tend to regard it as late as well. Another aspect which points to a late composition is when a sutta has an overly clear agenda to wow the audience, or to claim an infallible superiority of the Buddha and Buddhism, for example over deities, without backing this claim up with soteriological teachings. The application of these criteria will become clearer when we discuss the different topics of the thesis.

[60] See for a possible application to Mahāyāna Buddhism Gilks (2001).

1.5 The Forest-dwelling Origins of Buddhism

Next to the chronological, geographical, and transmission context presented above, another important investigation is concerned with the living conditions of monastics during the time of the Buddha. In particular, we will discuss if Buddhism was originally a movement of forest renunciates, or if at the Buddha's time there were already village monastics living steadily in monasteries. To put it briefly, forest monastics would represent a more reclusive, ascetic, and meditative tradition while urban monastics would tend to be more scholastic and concerned with the needs of the lay population. If we find that forest monasticism is earlier than the urban one it will help us further to stratify the suttas and determine if certain content connected with Brahmanism is original or added only after the Buddha's lifetime.

The majority of scholars infer that the rise of original Buddhism was deeply connected with the urban population. Following Oldenberg (1991, 187), Weber (1958, 204) finds that "Buddhism presents itself as the product of the time of urban development, of urban kingship and the city nobles". Sarao (2009, 121) states that "new groups of merchants and skilled craftsmen were gaining in wealth and influence. Their values were not those of the Vedic priesthood and aristocracy and they no doubt demanded innovations in the field of religion. This kind of material milieu formed the basis of new faiths like Buddhism". Bailey and Mabbett (2003, 260) summarize their findings similarly: "What we must be fully confident in asserting is that the early Buddhist Order of monks and nuns had emerged and developed in the new urbanism". See for similar views Gokhale (1982, 18), and Gombrich (2006, 50-53).

Many sutta narratives take place in the urban environment of villages and cities and involve lay population, in contrast to another category of suttas which address monastics and ascetics in a rural forest setting. This is confirmed in a statistical analysis by Sarao (2009, 57-63). However, we have to take into account that suttas were probably composed over several centuries. In other words, it is possible that 'urban Buddhism' is a conception we deduce from later suttas. In order to bring some light into the matter we will investigate the relation between texts which advocate for an ascetic 'forest Buddhism' versus texts in favor of a 'village Buddhism' which is more exposed to social influences. This distinction between forest and village monasticism was

already investigated by Ray (1994) who also reviews some of the previous research to this topic (ibid., 20-29). Even though we will reach similar conclusions (ibid., 433-438), we consider only early material, whereas Ray largely bases his research on later and Vinaya texts[61].

In general, we will show that the texts feature three different attitudes: suttas favoring forest-Buddhism, suttas critical of forest-Buddhism, and an approach which focuses on mental development regardless of the place of living. We will show that there was undoubtedly tension between parts of the forest and the urban monastics (mostly found in the AN), and we will conclude that the forest movement more likely represents original Buddhism.

To begin with, we have to keep in mind that the sutta collections available to us are probably the product of urban centers which could provide the necessary resources and scholarly expertise for collecting, archiving, and editing texts (also Ray 1994, 34). We therefore assume that especially later texts reflect the attitudes of such urban monastic centers where the texts were finalized. Hence, we expect these urban composers and editors to view forest-dwelling monastics from a distance as an estranged 'other' that possibly challenges the self-identity of urban monasticism.

We start our detailed investigation with a character who without any doubt belonged to the forest tradition, namely the eminent senior monk Mahākassapa. He outlived the Buddha and was afterwards, according to tradition, *de facto*[62] the most authoritative monastic. He also headed the (traditionally assumed) first council after the Buddha's passing since the other principle disciples Sāriputta and Moggallāna passed away even before the Buddha.

SN 16 (Kassapasaṃyutta) and its thirteen suttas are dedicated to Kassapa and generally praise an ascetic and solitary forest life. In SN 16.5 the Buddha refers to Kassapa's old age and asks him to give up his uncomfortable lifestyle in order to live closer to him – presumably in a village environment. The Buddha refers to Kassapa's burdensome way of living in three aspects:

[61] See for a shorter study which is largely based on post-sutta Buddhist texts Benedetti (2015).
[62] *De facto*, not *de jure*: The Buddha famously declared that the Saṅgha should have no leader after him and instead should be guided by the Dhamma only (SN 47.9, DN 16). In the Zen tradition, however, Mahākassapa (Mahākāśyapa) is considered the successor of the Buddha and the first Zen patriarch (see Morrison 2010, 20-21). The two other main authority figures at the time of the Buddha's death were the Buddha's attendant Ānanda (see Sarao, 2017), and the meditation master Anuruddha (see Singh, 2017).

wearing worn-out hempen rag-robes (*sāṇāni paṃsukūlāni nibbasanāni dhāreti*), walking for alms food (*piṇḍāya carati*), and dwelling in the forest (*araññe viharati*)"[63]. Mahākassapa replies that he continues to follow his austere practice for his own well-being and future generations[64]. Another sutta from the Kassapasaṃyutta, SN 16.8, lets the Buddha praise elder bhikkhus of the past who were following the same austere practices. He then laments that in their present time only the *famous* (non-austere) monks would be venerated, not the ones who practiced austerely.

Generally, the entire Mahākassapa-Saṃyutta SN 16 tries to establish Kassapa's practice as exemplary, and attempts to portray him as an authority second only to the Buddha. For example in SN 16.5 the Buddha says: "Either I should exhort the bhikkhus, Kassapa, or you should. Either I should give them a Dhamma talk or you should"[65]. In SN 16.11 the Buddha and Kassapa even exchange robes. This privileged treatment of Kassapa has to be read as an attempt by the followers of the Kassapa transmission line to increase within the Saṅgha the authority of their austere meditative forest lifestyle. Similarly, Freiberger (2006, 245) suspects that these suttas belong to a minority voice in the Pāli suttas which tries to promote a specific austere mindset.

Apart from Kassapa also other forest-dwellers (*āraññaka*s or *āraññika*s) regularly appear in the suttas. Yet, the only other *named* character directly associated with this lifestyle is Revata Khadiravaniya who is in AN 1.203 singled out as the foremost among *āraññaka*s. Revata is an otherwise forgotten character in the suttas, mentioned only in lists with other senior disciples of the Buddha, in AN 6.17, MN 32, MN 68, and MN 118. MN 32 confirms that he is a senior monk focused on solitary meditation retreats.

In several suttas the forest *āraññika* seems to be the quintessential monk in general. As AN 8.30 says: "This Dhamma is for one who resorts to solitude, not for one who delights in company"[66]. In SN 21.8 the Buddha admonishes his cousin Nanda for being an inappropriately luxurious monk and utters in verse: "When shall I see Nanda as a forest dweller | Wearing robes stitched

[63] *jiṇṇosi dāni tvaṃ, kassapa, garukāni ca te imāni sāṇāni paṃsukūlāni nibbasanāni. Tasmātiha tvaṃ, kassapa, gahapatāni ceva cīvarāni dhārehi, nimantanāni ca bhuñjāhi, mama ca santike viharāhī.*
[64] In SN 16.5, SN 16.8, and MN 32 we find a set of nine austere practices of otherwise little importance. Choong (2017, 301-302) shows that these are missing in Chinese parallels, hence we don't consider them further.
[65] *Ahaṃ vā, kassapa, bhikkhū ovadeyyaṃ tvaṃ vā; ahaṃ vā bhikkhūnaṃ dhammiṃ kathaṃ kareyyaṃ tvaṃ vā.*
[66] *Pavivittassāyaṃ, bhikkhave, dhammo, nāyaṃ dhammo saṅgaṇikārāmassā.*

from rags | Subsisting on the scraps of strangers | Indifferent towards sensual pleasures?"[67] The verse expresses the wish for Nanda to become a 'real' monk, practicing as a forest-dweller. Likewise, AN 5.78 sees dwelling in the wilderness as the normal practice for all monastics before they get old: "Now when one is old, overcome by old age, it is not easy to attend to the Buddhas' teaching; it is not easy to resort to remote lodgings in forests and jungle groves"[68]. This reminds us of the Buddha asking Kassapa to give up his austere life because of his old age. AN 5.114 teaches that novices should be encouraged to live in remote forests (*araññavanapattha*). AN 8.58 describes the praiseworthy monastic who first develops restraint and learns the teaching well, then becomes an *āraññika*, masters meditation and finally gets liberated. Following a similar logic, AN 10.8-9 contain a list of ascending accomplishments in which being an *āraññika* ranks highly, preceding the mastery of meditation and liberation.

Meditation is often found in forest environments, at the root of a tree (*rukkhamūla*)[69] or an empty hut (*suññāgāra*). And since mastering *jhāna*s and *samādhi* meditation are generally important for liberation it doesn't surprise us to find a close association between forest dwelling and liberation. In MN 122 the Buddha says that "it can be expected that when a bhikkhu lives alone, withdrawn from society, he will obtain at will […] the bliss of enlightenment"[70]. Accordingly, in AN 6.42 and AN 8.86 the Buddha praises the *āraññika*, maintaining that staying in the forest is conducive to overcoming difficult states of mind. In contrast, it is difficult for the monastic who stays close to a village (*gāmantavihāri*) to develop higher states and easier to deteriorate due to association with lay people and the danger of seeking honor (similarly SN 17.4-9). SN 20.9-10 repeat the danger of seeking honor in villages and add that the sight of beautiful women is a risk for monks. Thus, we can see how villages and towns were associated with specific dangers: gain, honor, praise, sexual attraction, and also the convenient availability of food and shelter[71].

[67] *Kadāhaṃ nandaṃ passeyyaṃ, āraññaṃ paṃsukūlikaṃ; Aññātuñchena yāpentaṃ, kāmesu anapekkhina''nti.*
[68] *Jiṇṇena kho pana jarāya abhibhūtena na sukaraṃ buddhānaṃ sāsanaṃ manasi kātuṃ, na sukarāni araññavanapatthāni pantāni senāsanāni paṭisevituṃ.*
[69] SN 11.3, SN 41.7, SN 54.1, SN 54.3-10, SN 54.13-20, AN 4.198, AN 10.99, MN 10, MN 27, MN 39, MN 43, MN 50, MN 51, MN 62, MN 106, MN 107, MN 118, MN 119, MN 125, DN 2, DN 10, DN 19, DN 22, DN 25.
[70] *Yo ca kho so, ānanda, bhikkhu eko gaṇasmā vūpakaṭṭho viharati tassetaṃ bhikkhuno pāṭikaṅkhaṃ yaṃ taṃ […] sambodhisukhaṃ.*
[71] See Freiberger (2008) for his investigation on the 'nuisance' of prestige in ascetic movements.

In this context it makes sense to find in AN 9.40 an urban monastic who longs for solitude, goes to live in the forest, and masters the meditative states. SN 1.9 and SN 1.38 are additional suttas which praise solitude with the verse: "Having abandoned conceit, well concentrated, | With lofty mind, everywhere released: | While dwelling alone in the forest, diligent, | One can cross beyond the realm of Death"[72]. We find another verse which praises solitude in MN 128: "Better it is to walk alone, | There is no companionship with fools. | Walk alone and do no evil, | At ease like a tusker in the woods"[73]. This verse echoes the probably most famous sutta about solitude, viz. the Rhinoceros Sutta in Snp 1.3 which praises solitude in the context of meditation and liberation. Fittingly, in most suttas of the Ānāpānasaṃyutta (SN 54) breath meditation takes place in the forest (SN 54.1, SN 53.3-10, SN 53.13-16, SN 53.20), and also in AN 5.98 forest-dwelling is seen as a catalyst for breath meditation. Finally, AN 5.77 emphasizes that the dangers of the forest help *āraññika*s to reflect death and thus to attain liberation[74].

Forest dwelling can also be tied to the striving of Gotama himself before his liberation, e.g. in MN 4 and MN 26. In SN 7.17-18 the Buddha says in verse that he finds delight meditating alone in the forest. The Buddha recalls in MN 12 a verse he composed while he was striving: "Chilled by night and scorched by day, | Alone in awe-inspiring groves, | Naked, no fire to sit beside, | The sage yet pursues his quest"[75]. And shortly after his liberation the Buddha says in SN 4.25: "Having conquered the army of the pleasant and agreeable, | Meditating alone, I discovered bliss, | The attainment of the goal, the peace of the heart. | Therefore I don't make friends with people, | Nor will I form any intimate ties"[76]. And in AN 10.30 King Pasenadi of Kosala enumerates ten reasons why he venerates the Buddha, one of which is that the Buddha is an *āraññika*.

AN 5.80 predicts a time of spiritual decline of the Saṅgha when monastics will "give up remote lodgings in forests and jungle groves, and having converged upon the villages, towns, and capital

[72] *Mānaṃ pahāya susamāhitatto, | Sucetaso sabbadhi vippamutto; | Eko araññe viharaṃ appamatto, | Sa maccudheyyassa tareyya pāra*
[73] *Ekassa caritaṃ seyyo, natthi bāle sahāyatā; | Eko care na ca pāpāni kayirā, | Appossukko mātaṅgaraññeva nāgo*
[74] The dangers are: animals, accidents, disease, criminals, and spirits. ŚB 13.2.4.2 is aware of similar dangers in forests when it cautions that "ogres, man-tigers, thieves, murderers, and robbers would come to be in the forests".
[75] *Sotatto sosinno ceva, eko bhiṃsanake vane; | Naggo na caggimāsīno, esanāpasuto munī*
[76] *Atthassa pattiṃ hadayassa santiṃ, | Jetvāna senaṃ piyasātarūpaṃ; | Ekohaṃ jhāyaṃ sukhamanubodhiṃ, | Tasmā janena na karomi sakkhiṃ; | Sakkhī na sampajjati kenaci me'ti*. This poem is probably of old age because it is quoted in another sutta, in AN 10.26.

cities, will take up their residence there"[77]. Probably, this 'prediction' laments the then current spiritual decline, worded as a prediction of the Buddha (see also Nattier 1991, 120-126). With a similar motivation AN 7.23 (also copied into DN 16) says that "as long as the bhikkhus are intent on forest lodgings, only growth is to be expected for them, not decline"[78].

MN 5 presents an interesting logic, saying that *even though* monastics are *āraññika*s they are not necessarily purified – and *even though* other monastics live close to the village they might still be purified after all. What seems like a balanced argument emphasizing the development of mind regardless of the place of living still presupposes that *āraññika*s have the reputation of being more developed than village monastics. Similarly, MN 69 criticizes in detail a lax *āraññika* who doesn't show exemplary behavior, thus showing that forest dwellers were held to higher standards and were supposed to practice tirelessly towards liberation – which by implication means that laxness was more tolerable for village monastics. Likewise, AN 1.378-393 contains a list of people with descending accomplishment, led by the *āraññika* and followed by the scholar, thus showing the hierarchy among monastics in terms of reputation.

Based on the numerous examples above we conclude that there is a valid argument for forest-dwelling to represent original Buddhism. Meditation is essential for the Buddhist goal of liberation and is consistently put in the context of forest-dwelling. In contrast, social activities and urban life are portrayed as obstacles for meditation, triggering sensual desires and providing dulling comforts.

We also get the impression that when the Saṅgha became an institution it developed a 'curriculum' for novices to first join a monastery close to a village, learn restraint and several teachings by heart – and only after thus being sufficiently prepared in conduct and doctrine they would have ventured into the solitary meditative forest life. In the *āraññika* stage monastics would have lived solitarily and assembled only every fortnight for the recitation of the monastic rules, as suggested by MN 77. We suspect that in an even later development urban scholar

[77] *Te cīvare kalyāṇakāmā samānā riñcissanti paṃsukūlikattaṃ, riñcissanti araññavanapatthāni pantāni senāsanāni*.
[78] *Yāvakīvañca, bhikkhave, bhikkhū āraññakesu senāsanesu sāpekkhā bhavissanti; vuddhiyeva, bhikkhave, bhikkhūnaṃ pāṭikaṅkhā, no parihāni.*

monks became teaching authorities (the 'famous' monks of SN 16.8) – this could have motivated young monastics to stay with their famous teachers in the village monastery altogether, by time solidifying the distinction between village and forest monastics.

When it comes to the distribution of the above suttas in the nikāyas we find about the same amount in SN and AN, with the entire SN 16 and SN 54 advocating forest-dwelling practices. A few MN suttas do the same, while the DN is mostly quiet about the 'forest-urban debate'. We find a contribution only in DN 23 which mystifies the forest dwellers from a distance, saying that with their meditative powers they can directly experience the gods.

In contrast with the large amount of consistent evidence for forest-dwelling as original Buddhism there are also a few voices which make forest dwelling appear in an *un*favorable light or are in favor of village monasticism. For example, in AN 6.59 the Buddha tells a lay follower to give *dāna* (alms, donations) not only to *āraññika*s but equally to village monastics because lay people could not directly assess the monastics' spiritual attainment. The implication is that *āraññika*s had a reputation among lay people to be spiritually higher developed than village monastics.

AN 5.181 displays a very critical stand towards forest-dwellers and details five reasons to become an *āraññika*: dullness and stupidity, evil desires, mental illness, just because the Buddha praised it, and only as the last item for the sake of liberation. Obviously, the sutta invites the audience to doubt the genuine spiritual mindset of *āraññika*s. Even if with time *āraññika*s indeed declined spiritually the sutta insinuates that their character should be doubted *per se* – a position which probably developed among urban monastics who felt disdained by the high esteem that the lay population had for *āraññika*s. In accordance with this polemic attitude the sutta doesn't reflect the motivations to become a *village* monastic at all.

AN 5.110 imposes strict conditions for the ability to dwell in forests: restrained behavior, solid foundation in the teachings, being energetic, mastery of meditation, and full liberation. The proponents of this teaching effectively dissuade their (obviously village) monastic audience from staying in the forest at all. This sutta also stands in direct opposition to the suttas mentioned above which see forest-dwelling as *necessary* for a liberation-oriented monastic life. AN 5.110

seems, therefore, to come from a time when forest dwelling was already idealized as a practice only of bygone masters, not suitable for the majority of present monastics.

In a similar way AN 10.99 contains a clear warning. Here, the Buddha discourages the monk Upāli to dwell in the forest by saying: "Remote lodgings in forests and jungle groves are hard to endure, Upāli. Solitude is hard to undertake and hard to delight in. When he is alone, the woods steal the mind of a bhikkhu who does not gain concentration"[79]. Thus, again, in contrast to the numerous suttas above this sutta states that the mastery of meditation is a *precondition* for staying in the forest, effectively dissuading the audience to enter a forest-dwelling life at all.

Likewise, in AN 9.3 the Buddha warns a monk not to dwell alone in the wilderness because he lacked spiritual maturity. A similar premise is expressed in MN 4 where it is a Brahmin who tells the Buddha that "remote lodgings in forests and jungle groves are hard to endure"[80] with which the Buddha agrees. The Buddha then recounts the time before his liberation when he realized that he was not afraid of the forest because of his purity and high mental development. He ends with saying that he continues to dwell in the forest because of a happy life in the present and out of compassion for future generations (reusing a passage from SN 16.5 and AN 2.30).

In summary, the few suttas critical of forest dwelling actually revere it as a practice of the Buddha and the old masters. Thereafter, they either criticize some *current* forest-dwellers as spiritually deficient, or they warn monastics that a secluded forest life is too dangerous and that they should pursue it only after mastering meditation. However, if we assume that someone could have mastered meditation in a village monastery the question remains why they should pursue forest dwelling at all. In the end it seems that these few critical suttas come from an urban monastic environment that didn't prepare monastics for the solitary forest life. With this in mind we read AN 3.46 which tells monastics that their village life is for the benefit *of the village population*. Urban monasticism is hereby portraying itself as a lifestyle of compassion.

[79] *Durabhisambhavāni hi kho, upāli, araññavanapatthāni pantāni senāsanāni. Dukkaraṃ pavivekaṃ durabhiramaṃ. Ekatte haranti maññe mano vanāni samādhiṃ alabhamānassa bhikkhuno.*
[80] *Durabhisambhavāni hi kho, bho gotama, araññavanapatthāni pantāni senāsanāni, dukkaraṃ pavivekaṃ*

There are, however, also moderate suttas which emphasize spiritual development regardless of village or forest life. SN 35.63 maintains that one could live close to a village and abandon craving *internally* (similarly AN 3.93). Likewise, AN 3.128, AN 6.45, and MN 113 say that accomplishment does not depend on village or forest life. AN 9.6 and AN 10.54 concede that some villages are conducive to practice and others are not. AN 4.138 favors *mental* solitude over solitude only with the body. AN 10.61 describes monastics for whom solitary dwelling is beneficial and others for whom it is not. Finally, also MN 17 is a more balanced sutta which tells monastics who dwell in the forest to reflect if their lifestyle helps them to develop their mind and practice, and if not, to seek a more beneficial environment.

We assume that these moderate suttas were taught to novices in a village monastery environment, by teachers who were more impartial towards the forest-village debate. In the end, however, even if these suttas promote a balanced argument, they mostly end up endorsing the village monastery lifestyle by saying that going into the forest will not in itself improve the practice. If liberation can equally be attained in a village environment then exposing oneself to the hardships and dangers of the forest hardly makes sense.

To sum up our investigation, we conclude that in spite of the common scholarly position that original Buddhism was from the beginning an urban phenomenon there is in fact more support in the suttas for the conclusion that the *origin* of Buddhism firmly lies in the lifestyle of forest dwellers. The main reason is that mastering meditation is of high importance for liberation, and that the right environment for meditation is, according to the overwhelming majority of suttas, the solitude of the forest retreat. We also see consistently that forest dwellers were highly respected, to the extent that some suttas lament the high reputation of each single *āraññika*.

One of the fundamental tenets of our work is to keep in mind the centuries between the lifetime of the Buddha and the finalization of the sutta collections as we have them today. As shown above, original Buddhism was probably a movement of forest practitioners, and only later on monastics settled closer to villages and cities, adapting the teachings to the needs of urban audiences (see also Bailey 2003, 258). In this close interaction suttas with ‘urban content’ were

most probably composed later, leading to the probably misleading scholarly impression that Buddhism was from the beginning both a solitary ascetic and an urban phenomenon.

We can now draw connections to pre-Buddha Brahmanism and see if among Brahmin practitioners there was a discernible preference for solitude and wilderness as well. Indeed, there is one seemingly obvious link between forest-dwelling and a certain set of Vedic teachings, namely the genre of *āraṇyaka*s. These are generally the concluding parts of the Brāhmaṇas and are literally 'forest texts'. Yet, Gonda (1975, 423) and others have pointed out that the title does not refer to a *life* in the forest but to sacred teachings that had to take place outside of the village because they were seen as too sacred, esoteric, or even dangerous.

The only well-developed Vedic figure that can claim with some justification the characteristic of ascetic renunciation is the Vedic student, the *brahmacārin* (see for details chapter four). He is occasionally associated with wearing the black antelope-skin, exercising *tapas* (ascetic 'heat'), collecting alms-food, and keeping chastity.

Regarding the Upaniṣads Black (2007, 100) is critical of reading into them a truly renunciate lifestyle and maintains that the Upaniṣadic teachers are not solitary renunciates "but tactical orators and wily negotiators who are active participants in personal, regional, and political rivalries." And referring to Yājñavalkya, one of the main spiritual authorities of the BU, he states: "Despite teaching about renunciation and opting to live as a renunciate in his later years, he establishes his reputation by means of the debates that he wins and the wealth he accumulates" (ibid.). Yet, Black has to concede that Yājñavalkya has no children and eventually leaves his household for the life of a wanderer (ibid., 95; BU 4.5.2). As Black emphasizes, Yājñavalkya is the only early Upaniṣadic Brahmin who chooses this solitary lifestyle (see also Bausch 2015, 31-33).

We do, however, find vague references in BU and CU to "the people here in the wilderness who venerate thus: 'Austerity is faith'"[81] which is contrasted with the village population (CU 5.10.1-3, similarly BU 6.2.15-16). Olivelle (2011, 47-48) who discusses these passages in some detail

[81] *ye ceme 'raṇye śraddhā tapa ity upāsate.*

points out that the mentioned forest lifestyle was new to Vedic thought, but he does not mention the possibility that the 'people in the wilderness' could be a reference to non-Vedic *śramaṇa*s[82].

In the end, we can not rule out that the few references to forest renunciation in the early Upaniṣads result from early interactions with pre-Buddhist ascetics in East India. After all, the suttas not only describe Buddhist forest-dwellers but many other groups of renunciates (the *paribbājaka* wanderers) who long before the Buddha pursued an ascetic renunciate lifestyle (Freiberger, 1997). Possibly, this non-Vedic *śramaṇa* lifestyle was even appropriated and legitimized by teachers like Yājñavalkya (see also Bronkhorst 1998, 82). Eventually, after a few more centuries of assimilation, the post-Buddha Dharmasūtras came to feature proper Vedic 'forest ascetics' (*vaikhānasa* and *vānaprastha*, see for details section 2.5). In this sense, we see the possibility that *śramaṇas* and early Buddhism influenced the development of Brahmanism, and not the other way around.

[82] We use the term *śramaṇa* throughout our thesis in the meaning of 'non-Vedic professional ascetic'. In this sense it refers to Buddhist and Jain monastics, Ajīvakas, and other 'ascetic wanderers' (see section 2.5.2), especially in Kosala and Magadha. The term *śramaṇa* goes back to the verb *śram*, i.e. 'to perform austere exertion' (see for the close relationship of the verb with Vedic ritual, especially the *dīkṣā*, Bodewitz 2008). In pre-Buddhist literature the noun *śramaṇa* is rare. See for a discussion of its occurrence in Vedic literature Olivelle (1993, 11-16), and from a Buddhist perspective Shults (2016).

Chapter Two: Different Types of Brahmins

The suttas of early Buddhism are full of references to Brahmins, and in order to establish the connections of Brahmanism with early Buddhism we will discuss the different types of Brahmins in detail. It will be especially interesting to see if certain types of Brahmins are treated benevolently and others with more critical distance. Additionally, we have to investigate if the references to Brahmins belong to different time periods and how this influences our assessment of the relationship between these two religious movements at the time of the historical Buddha.

References to Brahmins in the suttas are numerous and contain diverse details, for example their names: Many of the Brahmins are anonymous, others come from old-established *gotta*s (clans), like Bhāradvāja, and again others have names unknown to Vedic literature. We have Brahmins in narratives without any revealing context, and others who follow specific ascetic practices like purification through bathing (e.g. in SN 7.21, MN 7, Snp 3.4). In certain cases we also learn about the social context, for example when Brahmins hold administrative positions[83].

In general, the suttas' inconsistent attitude toward Brahmins has been long recognized. Several scholars highlight that some suttas criticize ritual practices of Brahmins or their ostentatious attitude of class superiority[84]. But the notion of 'Brahmin' has also been embraced by early Buddhism, especially when the Buddha discusses the 'ideal Brahmin' who is not defined by birth but by his spiritual conduct and accomplishment (SN 7.7, SN 7.8, MN 98, Dhp 26, Snp 1.7, Snp 3.9). In these cases 'Brahmin' becomes a synonym for the *arahant*, the liberated Buddhist master[85]. When for example the imagery of the 'far shore' is used, which is a metaphor for spiritual liberation, it is explicitly the 'Brahmin' who has 'crossed over' and 'stands on high ground' (SN 35.228, SN 35.238, AN 4.5, AN 7.15, Snp 4.15).

[83] As a special case we find in DN 13 Brahmins of different schools of Vedic thought. It mentions *addhariya* Brahmins – either referring to the Yajurveda (Shults 2013, 108), the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (Jayatilleke 1963, 480), or the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa (Walters 1999, 262). The *tittiriya* Brahmins are probably followers of the Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa. The *chandoka* Brahmins probably represent followers of the Chāndogya Upaniṣad. And the *bavhārijjha* Brahmins (Skt possibly *bahvṛcas*) might be followers of the Ṛgveda (Jayatilleke 1963, 479).
[84] Scholars who represent this opinion are collected in Krishan (1993): e.g. Oldenberg (1971, 172); Thomas (1953, 11-13); Warder (2004, 152).
[85] Widmer (2010) describes sutta narrative frameworks in which Buddhists become liberated *arahants* while alive.

The idea of 'the *real* Brahmin' can also be found in the early Jain Ācārāṅga Sūtra and in pre-Buddhist times. BU 3.8.10 states: "But a man who departs from this world after he has come to know this imperishable – he, Gargi, is a Brahmin"[86]. BU 4.4.23 is yet another passage that could be interpreted as defining a 'true Brahmin': "Evil does not pass across him, and he passes across all evil. He is not burnt by evil; he burns up all evil. He becomes a Brahmin – free from evil, free from stain, free from doubt"[87]. Similarly, in CU 4.4.5 the young Satyakāma Jābāla, who doesn't know his lineage, is because of his truthfulness recognized as a Brahmin by his future teacher: "Who but a Brahmin could speak like that!"[88]

There are more examples for a positive assimilation of the 'Brahmin' in early Buddhism. In a series of short repetitive suttas (AN 7.85-92, also MN 39), one who has attained Buddhist liberation is called different epithets, most of them connected with Brahmanism: i.a. *brāhmaṇa* (also in SN 2.5, SN 4.25, AN 3.85, MN 18), *sottiya* (Skt *śrotriya*, 'versed in the Vedas'), *nhātaka* (Skt *snātaka*, one who has completed the Brahmin studentship, also in MN 56, MN 98), and *vedagū*[89] (a usually Vedic 'knowledge master'). Putting these positive examples in context shows that there is an obvious inconsistency within the suttas, criticizing specific Brahmin practices on the one hand (see for example sections 3.4 and 3.5), and on the other hand incorporating the idealized Brahmin into the Buddhist framework[90].

Lastly, we have texts which call the Buddha himself a Brahmin. In a few suttas (SN 1.1, SN 2.18, SN 7.8, SN 7.9, Snp 2.12) the Buddha is called a Brahmin *by others*. In SN 10.8, AN 3.35 and AN 8.85 he refers *to himself* as a Brahmin, among other epithets[91]. In a poetic praise in MN

[86] *atha ya etad akṣaraṃ gārgi viditvāsmāl lokāt praiti sa brāhmaṇaḥ*
[87] *nainaṃ pāpmā tarati | sarvaṃ pāpmānaṃ tarati | nainaṃ pāpmā tapati | sarvaṃ pāpmānaṃ tapati | vipāpo virajo 'vicikitso brāhmaṇo bhavati |*
[88] *naitad abrahmaṇo vivaktum arhati*
[89] The term would traditionally refer to a 'master of the Vedas'. In SN 7.9 and Snp 3.4 we find the variation *vedantagū* in connection with Buddhist liberation. The term *vedagū* has no direct Sanskrit equivalent.
[90] A special attempt to incorporate Brahmins is AN 4.185 where the Buddha discusses four allegedly Brahmin truths (*brāhmaṇasacca*) which are, however, clearly Buddhist and don't resemble any pre-Buddhist Brahmin teachings.
[91] The full list for SN 10.8, AN 3.35 is: *samaṇa*, *brāhmaṇa*, *vedagū*, *bhisakka* (Skt *bhiṣaj*, 'healer'), *nimmala* (unstained), *vimala* (stainless), *ñāṇī* (Skt *jñānin*, 'possessing higher knowledge'), *vimutta* (liberated).

56 the newly converted Upāli calls the Buddha *isisattama*, 'the seventh seer' (also in SN 8.8 and Snp 2.12), a reference to the ancient Brahmin visionary poets, the *ṛṣi*s[92] (see also section 2.6). In his thorough study McGovern (2013) comes to the conclusion that in ancient India there were many terms to characterize an ideal sage, and that *brāhmaṇa* was one of them, next to *arhat*, *nāga*, *jina*, or *muni* (ibid., 629). 'Brahmin' would therefore not only refer to a socio-religious category but also to an accomplished spiritual master (see also Black 2007, 172). And in this sense it would not be surprising to find the designation of 'Brahmin' regularly applied to the Buddha as well. It might well be that the suttas contributed to an ongoing discussion of what constitutes the ideal Brahmin. If this is true we can follow McGovern (2013, 630) when he concludes that the designation of 'Brahmin', which was originally prestigious also for Buddhists, became problematic only in later times, when the two movements became more antagonistic.

McGovern (ibid., 71-97) also correctly describes how the ubiquitous use of the compound *samaṇabrāhmaṇa* in the suttas does not refer to *śramaṇa*s and Brahmins as two opposing groups but in fact to rather similar ones (ibid., 632). It is not difficult to imagine that it was convenient in early times to merge *śramaṇa*s and Brahmins when one wanted to speak of 'spiritual professionals' in general. There are, however, scholars who doubt that the two groups were seen as similar. They base their understanding on doctrinal differences between *brāhmaṇa*s and *śramaṇa*s, and on Patañjali who used this very *dvandva* to demonstrate how a compound can consist of two *opposing* categories (e.g. Bronkhorst 2007, 84-85). Yet, it is possible that *śramaṇa*s and Brahmins were originally respectful towards each other and only became antagonistic later on, so that Patañjali's interpretation should not be seen as deciding the matter.

All in all, we interpret the evidence above as indicating that the early sutta period perceived especially the *ideal* Brahmin as a designation for a spiritual master well compatible with the Buddhist teaching, not at all as an antagonist.

[92] The reference to the Buddha as the *seventh* seer is unclear. The list of *isi*s (Skt *ṛṣi*) in the suttas typically comprises ten names. There is an old tradition of seven *ṛṣi*s (e.g. in ṚV 9.67, ṚV 10.137) but only in ṚV 1.164.15 a myth of a seventh seer is mentioned. See for an astronomical interpretation Brereton (1991). Funahashi (2006) argues that *isisattama* originally was *isi-tama*, the 'best seer'. This would have later been misinterpreted as the 'seventh seer' in the sense of Gotama as the 'seventh Buddha', in reference to the canonical six previous Buddhas.

2.1 Buddha and the Brahmins of Kosala

Sutta narratives mention many geographical details: regions, kingdoms, cities, villages, mountains and rivers. Details like these seem to authenticate the suttas, but taken literally some of them would mean that the historical Buddha traveled several thousand kilometers in Northern India during his teaching years, which is very doubtful. And we see good reasons why such remote residences of the Buddha would have been fabricated, for example in order to instill devotion in the residents of these areas, by creating the impression that the historical Buddha graced the region with a visit. Or, in order to increase the credibility of resident Buddhist teachers who claim that their teachings directly go back to the historical Buddha himself.

We can demonstrate the improbability of the Buddha's journeys to these remote locations. Madhurā lies about 500 km west of Sāvatthī (which was one of the most relevant dwelling places of the Buddha) and is mentioned only very few times in the suttas. The distance from the Buddhist homeland and the lack of narratives located in Madhurā make it highly improbable that the Buddha had actually been there, as tradition claims. Yet, AN 4.53 has the Buddha travelling between Madhurā and the close-by located Verañjā[93], and AN 8.11 and AN 8.19 locate discourses of the Buddha in Verañjā itself. The more probable founder of the Madhurā tradition is Mahākaccāna, who is the sole protagonist of AN 2.38 and MN 84, which are located in the Madhurā region. MN 84 even clearly states that the Buddha has already passed away.

Mahākaccāna is also associated with another remote region, the kingdom of Avantī that is located even further away, around 900 km south-west of Sāvatthī. The suttas located in Avantī only have Mahākaccāna as the protagonist (SN 22.3, SN 22.4, SN 35.130, SN 35.132, AN 10.26), so here the suttas seem to be more faithful in preserving that the Buddha was *not* teaching in this far-away area.

[93] The exact location of Verañjā has not been identified, but we can infer that it is relatively close to Madhurā: A passage in the Vinaya (Vin 3.11) mentions a route from Verañjā to Benares (Varanasi), passing Saṅkassa and Kaṇṇakujja. We can identify the two cities from travel diaries of the Chinese pilgrim Hwen Thsang as Sangkisa (today 'Sankisa') and Kanoj (ancient Kānyakubja, today 'Kannauj'). An approximate line puts Verañjā close to Madhurā, to its north or north-east. See for a discussion of Hwen Thsang's travel route Sastri (1924, 430-432).

The examples of Madhurā and Avantī merely serve as a side-note to the difficulty of assessing the Buddha's historical encounters with places and people. Narratives in more probable sutta locations are likely to contain an inseparable mix of authentic and inauthentic encounters. As we shall see, Kosala and Magadha are the most probable locations for authentic interactions of the Buddha with locals and Brahmins. If it turned out that some encounters with these Brahmins indeed were probably authentic, we could learn which topics the Buddha taught them and if Brahmins and the Buddha had a specific attitude towards each other.

The reason why Kosala serves as a probable location for authentic interactions with local Brahmins is that different suttas mention several Kosala Brahmin leaders by name, position and even teaching lineage. We learn for example that the Brahmin Tārukkha is the teacher of Pokkharasāti (MN 98) who in turn is the teacher of Vāseṭṭha (DN 13) and Ambaṭṭha (DN 3). Other named elite Brahmins are Caṅki (MN 95), Jāṇussoṇī, and Todeyya. Interactions with them often take place in the Brahmin village of Icchānaṅgala.

Kosala was also neighbor to the Buddha's home region Sākya and its capital Kapilavatthu (Skt Kapilavastu). The capital of Kosala was Sāvatthī, one the most frequent locations for suttas. There, an eminent benefactor of the Saṅgha, Anāthapiṇḍika, dedicated a piece of land to the Buddha and his Saṅgha. Kosala, just about 100 km away from the Buddha's birth place, is therefore a very sensible location for encounters with eminent Brahmin leaders.

One of the most respected Brahmins mentioned is Pokkharasāti Opamañña who lived in Ukkaṭṭhā, a property that was given by King Pasenadi of Kosala (DN 3). His social importance is also stated by three suttas which mention him as an eminent lay follower of the Buddha next to King Bimbisāra of Magadha and King Pasenadi of Kosala (MN 95, DN 4, DN 5). Pokkharasāti has three named students in the suttas: Ambaṭṭha (DN 3), Vāseṭṭha (DN 13) and Subha (MN 99). The latter is the son of another respected teacher, Todeyya, and has a proxy-debate with the Buddha instead of his teacher Pokkharasāti – who at this point still thinks that liberation as proclaimed by the Buddha is not possible. DN 13 mentions that Pokkharasāti teaches a direct path to the 'companionship with brahma' (*brahmasahabyatā*, i.e. *brahmaloka*). Finally, DN 3 presents the conversion of Pokkharasāti to the Buddha. The Chinese parallel of the sutta, DĀ 20,

preserves an interesting variation, namely that Puṣkarasārin excuses himself for not being able to publicly show proper veneration since this would give him a bad reputation. DĀ 20, therefore, portrays him as an unofficial Buddhist follower, not as a convert.

The consistent details in several suttas make Pokkharasāti a very plausible historical character. There is, however, reasonable doubt about his conversion which would have come at a high social cost for Pokkharasāti. Regrettably, we don't find a real exchange of ideas between Pokkharasāti and the Buddha. Pokkharasāti doesn't even get persuaded by the Buddha's *teaching*, instead he is convinced by the so-called 'thirty-two marks of a great man' (*dvattiṃsa mahāpurisalakkhaṇāni*). These are, according to the suttas, physical marks on the body of spiritually accomplished men which, so the suttas claim, come from a Brahmin tradition of 'mark-reading' unknown to pre-Buddhist texts[94]. Hence, while the character Pokkharasāti and his general connection with the Buddha seem plausible we cannot rely on the suttas to tell us what they discussed, and which arguments eventually won him over to Buddhism.

Another eminent Kosala Brahmin is Jāṇussoṇī who is mentioned in a large number of suttas[95] and who is taught several core Buddhist doctrines. In SN 12.47 Jāṇussoṇī questions the Buddha about the ontological status of the world, if it ultimately exists or not. As a response the Buddha replies with the central doctrine of Dependent Origination (see for example Shulman, 2008). In AN 2.17 he asks why people take different courses after death, to which the Buddha replies with the law of *kamma* (Skt *karma*), i.e. the consequences of bodily, verbal and mental actions. In AN 3.55 Jāṇussoṇī inquires how *nibbāna* (Skt *nirvāṇa*) can be directly experienced – the Buddha explains that *nibbāna* can be experienced as the end of suffering and the complete destruction of lust, hatred and delusion. In AN 3.59 Jāṇussoṇī is of the opinion that offerings should be made to traditional Brahmins, which the Buddha rejects in favor of Buddhist liberated masters. In AN 4.184 Jāṇussoṇī argues that everyone is afraid of death. The Buddha replies that there are people not afraid of death: people free of greed for sensual pleasures, people who have done good deeds,

[94] For details see Zysk (2015, 162-172), Levman (2013, 165), Tan (2007, 152-154), and Radich (2007, 295-331) who all doubt that mark-reading was a Brahmin practice, mostly because the Vedic texts show no indication of it.
[95] SN 12.47, SN 45.4, AN 2.17, AN 3.55, AN 3.59, AN 4.184, AN 6.52, AN 7.50, AN 10.119, AN 10.167, AN 10.177, MN 4, MN 27, MN 99. Interestingly, we find a conversion formula in many of these suttas, whereas a real conversion naturally could have taken place only once. Apparently, the 5th century Buddhist commentator Buddhaghosa took Jāṇussoṇī to be the *purohita* (high priest) to the king of Kosala; see Anderson (1999, 57).

and people who have no doubt about the true teachings. In AN 10.119 and AN 10.167 Jāṇussoṇī describes the Brahmin ritual of *paccorohaṇī* (Skt *pratyavarohana*, see section 3.3), which the Buddha dismisses, instead favoring the Buddhist Eightfold Path (or in AN 10.167 the Buddhist right conduct). In AN 10.177 Jāṇussoṇī asks the Buddha about the efficiency of the *saddha* (Skt *śraddha*) ancestor ritual, prompting the surprising confirmation by the Buddha that the rite is always useful (see section 3.7). Finally, in MN 27 the Buddha gives Jāṇussoṇī a detailed description of the 'gradual training', the Buddhist path from beginning to liberation.

In summary, we get with Jāṇussoṇī another plausible erudite Kosala Brahmin interlocutor. It is remarkable that both the Buddha and Jāṇussoṇī are friendly with each other, respectful, and inquisitive. In reality there might have been much more an exchange of ideas than just one-sided teachings by the Buddha, but it is understandable that the Buddhist texts preserve more what the Buddha taught than the Brahmin's views. Most of the topics are concerned with death, afterlife, and liberation – all of which are plausible topics for a spiritually interested Brahmin. Jāṇussoṇī is taught fundamental Buddhist teachings: the Eightfold Path, Dependent Origination, the 'gradual training', the law of *kamma*, and *nibbāna*. We also notice that the Buddha does *not* teach Jāṇussoṇī (or any other elite Kosala Brahmin) the *anattā* doctrine of 'not-self' which might have been objectionable to traditional Brahmins (see section 2.8 and chapter ten).

Another Kosala Brahmin, Todeyya, is less visible than Jāṇussoṇī but he nonetheless can be seen as a character with distinct features. SN 35.113 takes place in his Mango Grove and two suttas prominently feature Todeyya's son Subha (MN 99, DN 10). In AN 4.187 Todeyya criticizes his own Brahmins who ridicule King Eḷeyya for being devoted to Rāmaputta who was an early teacher of Gotama and who passed away before the Buddha's liberation. This suggests that Todeyya knew Gotama's teacher Rāmaputta personally, which means that he must have been much older than the Buddha. The only sutta where Todeyya directly interacts with the Buddha, Snp 5.10, therefore dates (if authentic) from a very early period of the Buddha's teaching.

In summary, the Kosala Brahmins Pokkharasāti, Jāṇussoṇī, and Todeyya stand out as probable authentic Brahmin characters of social significance who interacted with the historical Buddha[96]. Their interactions are amicable, respectful, and inquisitive. Based on these interactions early Buddhism was clearly not an 'anti-Brahmin' movement, nor did it emerge out of Brahmanism. Instead, the early Buddhist teaching seems to be quite different from, yet relatable to the views of the elite Brahmin householders of Kosala.

A forgery of these characters would have been risky for Buddhist editors – after all, audiences could have asked who the descendants of these famous personalities were and where they lived. Also, their descendants could have refuted an alleged sympathy to the Buddha. It is unfortunate, but lies in the nature of the Buddhist texts, that the Brahmins' thought-world is only alluded to. The purpose of these suttas seems to be to convince its audiences: "If even these Brahmins were devoted to the Buddha then surely he is worthy of *my* veneration as well."

2.2 *Brāhmaṇagāma* – Brahmin Villages

In several suttas we are told that the Buddha visited a Brahmin village (*brāhmaṇagāma*), or that people from a Brahmin village visited the Buddha. This detail goes counter our assumption that villages and towns were inhabited by all sorts of social groups. We can further deduce that these villages were predominantly inhabited by Brahmins from the fact that their residents were called *brāhmaṇagahapatikā*, i.e. Brahmin householders[97]. Another interesting detail is that four of these villages are explicitly said to be royal gifts from a king.

There are twelve Brahmin villages in the suttas, seven in Kosala, and five in Magadha. The most prominent one is Icchānaṅgala in Kosala, mentioned in AN 5.30, AN 6.42, AN 8.86, and DN 3[98].

[96] A last character, Caṅkī, was according to MN 95 the Brahmin leader of Opāsāda, a property given to Brahmins by King Pasenadi of Kosala. He is also briefly mentioned in MN 98, MN 99, DN 13, and Snp 3.9.
[97] We therefore agree with Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation of the term as a *tatpuruṣa*, i.e. 'Brahmin householders', while Sujato translates it as the *dvandva* 'Brahmins and householders'.
[98] Icchānaṅgala is also mentioned without the label 'Brahmin village' in MN 98, SN 54.11, SN 54.12, and Snp 3.9.

Other Kosala Brahmin villages are Sālā (SN 47.4, SN 48.51, MN 41, MN 60), Ekasālā (SN 4.14), Manasākaṭa (DN 13), Opāsāda (MN 95), Veḷudvāra (SN 55.7), Venāgapura (AN 3.63), and Nagaravinda (MN 150). The Brahmin villages in Magadha are: Khāṇumata (DN 5), Ambasaṇḍā (DN 21), Pañcasālā (SN 4.18), and Ekanāḷa (SN 7.11, Snp 1.4)[99].

The existence of these villages helps us to understand the progress of the Brahmin 'expansion into the East' at the time of the Buddha (as suggested by Bronkhorst, 2007, e.g. 2, 7, 358; see also section 1.3). Based on the suttas this Brahmin settling was apparently supported by the kings of Kosala and Magadha, but the integration of these Brahmins was apparently not completed yet at the time of the Buddha and they partially still lived in segregated communities. Additionally, we learn from DN 3 that a Brahmin who visited Kapilavatthu (Bodhisattva Gotama's home and capital of Sākya) was not treated with high respect and that Brahmins were not venerated there. The Brahmin is told in DN 3 that his annoyance is unjustified since Kapilavatthu is the "Sakyans' own place"[100], which suggests that Brahmins had no political influence in Sākya yet, and that the elite probably consisted of the *khattiya* warrior caste only.

Hinüber (2006) analyzed the peculiar way in which the Brahmin villages are featured in sutta introduction formulas and concludes that the suttas mentioning them belong to an old layer of texts, from a time when Buddhist narratives have not yet moved to big cities like Sāvatthī or Rājagaha. This gives us further confidence to see the interactions of the Buddha with elite Kosala Brahmins as based on authentic events which might go back to earliest Buddhism. It also further authenticates Kosala and Magadha as the main living areas of the historical Buddha.

[99] There are a few other 'Brahmin places' in Kosala which are not identified as villages. They are called *brahmadeyya*, 'a gift to Brahmins': Ukkaṭṭhā (DN 3), Salāvatikā (DN 12), Setabyā (DN 23). See also Tsuchida (1991, 54-57); and Wagle (1966, 18-19).
[100] *sakyānaṃ yadidaṃ kapilavatthuṃ*

2.3 *Mahāmatta* – the Kingdom's High Officials

In several suttas we encounter the office of *mahāmatta* (Skt *mahāmātra*, lit. 'great in measure'), royal ministers or high officials. The office of *mahāmātra* appears outside of the Buddhist texts first in Aśoka edicts[101] and the Arthaśāstra. Olivelle (2013, 40-42) describes the most important offices in the Arthaśāstra and interprets the *mahāmātra* as a category of high officials, next to *amātya* (minister), *mantrin* (counsellors to the king) and *purohita* (royal high priest). Rangarajan (1992, 208-209) points out that of the eighteen different types of *mahāmātra* in the Arthaśāstra not all represent high positions. The *mahāmatta*s we encounter in the suttas mostly represent the king or the kingdom as a whole: *magadha-mahāmatta, licchavi-mahāmatta,*and *rāja-mahāmatta*[102]. We also find the specific office of the *gaṇaka-mahāmatta* (treasury official) in DN 26 and DN 30[103].

The most prominent *mahāmatta* in the suttas is the Brahmin Vassakāra, a *mahāmatta* of Magadha, appearing in AN 4.35, AN 4.183, AN 4.187, AN 7.22, MN 108, and DN 16. He could well be based on a real character since his depiction across suttas is quite consistent. He is invariably called '*vassakāra brāhmaṇa magadhamahāmatta*' which explicitly emphasizes that he is a Brahmin. This emphasis might be due to the fact that Brahmins like Vassakāra were still rare in such high positions in the royal administration. Other *mahāmatta*s are never called 'Brahmin' in the suttas: DN 16 mentions Vassakāra's colleague Sunidha, also a *magadhamahāmatta*. Both are overseeing the construction of a citadel, which indicates their involvement in military tasks. The *mahāmatta* of Kosala, Sirivaḍḍha, is only mentioned briefly in MN 88, and the *mahāmatta* of Licchavī, Nandaka, in SN 55.30. Another Licchavī *mahāmatta* mentioned in DN 24 remains anonymous. Hence, Vassakāra is the only explicitly Brahmin *mahāmatta*.

[101] Rock Edicts 5, 6, 12, 15, 16; Minor Pillar Edicts 1, 2; Pillar Edicts 1, 7; in Sircar (1967).
[102] *Magadhamahāmatta* in AN 4.35, AN 4.183, AN 4.187, AN 7.22, MN 108, and DN 16. *Licchavimahāmatta* in SN 55.30 and DN 24. *Rājamahāmatta* in SN 12.65, SN 35.63, SN 35.244, SN 35.246, SN 45.60, SN 46.4, SN 47.8, SN 52.8, AN 3.51, AN 3.100, AN 3.127, AN 5.103, AN 6.60, AN 7.7, AN 8.30, AN 9.40, MN 32, MN 75, MN 77, MN 122, DN 1, DN 2, DN 16, DN 25. *Mahāmatta* alone, but probably with the meaning of *rājamahāmatta* appears in SN 3.25, SN 56.10, AN 10.69-70, MN 76-79, MN 88, MN 122, DN 1, DN 2, DN 9, DN 25.
[103] Interestingly, we find *mahāmatta*s in the suttas also in a mythological context: DN 32 features *yakkha-mahāmatta* ('chief demon'), *gandhabba-mahāmatta* ('chief of lower heavenly beings'), *kumbhaṇḍa-mahāmatta* ('chief dwarfish spirit'), and *nāga-mahāmatta* ('chief mighty spirit').

What is interesting about Vassakāra's conversations with the Buddha is that at the end of the suttas he never declares to become a follower of the Buddha, he never converts. Instead, he ends the conversations by excusing himself with some business he has to attend, or he merely 'agrees with what the Buddha says' – which in the suttas verges on impoliteness. His character appears to be of a high government official, a bureaucrat, who is quite aware of his social position. He therefore never publicly acknowledges the Buddha as a higher authority, something which could have been interpreted as compromising his loyalty to the king. Also, if he was indeed one of the first Brahmins in a Magadha royal office he must have been self-aware and careful not to jeopardize his position.

Vassakāra is also unusual in that he doesn't hold back his own beliefs. The suttas usually open with him voicing his view, to which the Buddha then responds. In AN 4.35 for example Vassakāra declares that a *mahāpurisa* (Skt *mahāpuruṣa*, a 'great person') has four qualities: he is learned, good in interpreting statements, has a good memory, and is a responsible householder (a view we don't find in pre-Buddhist literature[104]). The contents of other suttas featuring Vassakāra are surprisingly trivial as well (AN 4.183, AN 4.187) or deal with military topics (AN 7.22, DN 16). The spiritually trivial content is peculiar, and maybe a reason to transmit these suttas was to show the poor spiritual ambition of high officials like Vassakāra, in spite of their privileged access to such a gifted teacher as the Buddha.

Vassakāra seems to have lived around the end of the Buddha's life: He is included in DN 16 which narrates the last days of the Buddha (re-using his passages from AN 7.22). The narrative of MN 108 puts him even after the Buddha's death, where Vassakāra reflects with the Buddha's former attendant Ānanda why the Buddha left no official successor.

The evidence on Vassakāra fits to our assessment of the still developing socio-religious status of Brahmins in the Buddha's environment. His distant and almost disrespectful personality is consistent across the suttas, and serves as a peculiar case study of a Brahmin official who came in contact with the Buddha.

[104] The notion of a *mahāpuruṣa* is very rare in pre-Buddhist texts. There is some similarity to Aitareya-Āraṇyaka 3.2.3. For more sources and a cosmological discussion of *mahāpuruṣa* see Norelius (2017).

2.4 Purohita

A *purohita* is the king's high priest, an office well attested from the times of the early Brāhmaṇas on[105] (see also Gonda 1975b, 320-337), and already descriptions in the Ṛgveda and the Atharvaveda might allude to an early office of the *purohita*, lit. 'the one placed in front'. The Brāhmaṇas also mention several *purohita*s by name[106] which emphasizes the extraordinary position they had. A *purohita* is generally the religious protector of king and kingdom (ibid., 332). A main ritual function of the *purohita* is to perform the *abhiṣecanīya* 'anointment rite' which is part of a group of rituals comprising the *rājasūya* inauguration of a king (ŚB 5.4.2.1). *Purohita*s, therefore, represent an important Vedic institution and must have been widely known socio-religious leaders. If kings in Kosala and Magadha had *purohita*s they would have surely influenced the kings' and kingdoms' attitude to Buddhism[107].

In the suttas, the most relevant *purohita*s appear in AN 4.198, MN 51, and MN 94 where they supposedly participate in a *dīkṣā* ritual and assist the *yajamāna* sponsor who mortifies himself and others (section 3.5). However, the suttas misrepresent the actual *dīkṣā* ritual. Also, based on the Vedic ritual texts available to us, *purohita*s don't participate in the *dīkṣā*. Thus the suttas wrongly put *purohita*s in this ritual context and are therefore probably later fabrications based on hearsay or speculation.

Apart from that, *purohita*s appear in the suttas only in legendary tales (AN 6.54, DN 5, DN 14, DN 19, DN 21; see also Bronkhorst 2011, 37-38) of which we want to briefly mention DN 21 as an example. Here, two former followers of the Buddha are reborn in the highest heaven of *brahmaloka* into the 'office' of *brahmapurohita*s. This is based on a pre-Buddhist Vedic idea where "Bṛhaspati is the *purohita* of the gods"[108] (e.g. AB 8.26.4, ŚB 4.1.2.4, ŚB 5.3.1.2; see for more sources Gonda 1989, 13). More specifically, Bṛhaspati is the *purohita* of the 'Gods of Thirty-three' (ŚB 12.8.3.29) which is the main group of high deities in Vedic literature. DN 21,

[105] e.g. AB 8.24-28, JB 1.152, JB 1.182, JB 2.128-130, ŚB 5.4.2.1, ŚB 5.4.4.15, ŚB 6.6.3.12-14, ŚB 13.4.4.1.
[106] E.g. *purohita* Ṛṣi Gotama Rāhūgaṇa of King Māthava of Videha (ŚB 1.4.1.10), *purohita* Devabhāga Śrautarṣa of the Kurus and Sṛñjayas (ŚB 2.4.4.4), and *purohita* Vṛśa Jāna of King Tryaruṇa (JB 3.94).
[107] The 5th century Buddhist commentator Buddhaghosa took the Brahmin Jāṇussonī (see section 2.1) to be the *purohita* for the king of Kosala, but this commentarial opinion is not based on suttas (see Anderson 1999, 57).
[108] *Bṛthaspatir ha vai devānām purohitas*

however, elevates the two followers of the Buddha to become the *purohita*s of Brahmā himself – who is higher than the Gods of Thirty-three. We suspect that these passages were crafted to impress audiences, suggesting that faithful followers of the Buddha can attain extraordinary divine rebirths. Another indication that this notion of *brahmapurohita* is a late addition is that it is missing in the Chinese parallel DĀ 14 – which states instead that the two followers of the Buddha were reborn in Ābhāsvara Heaven (Pāli *ābhassara*, see section 6.4.1). Both versions want to achieve the same effect with the audiences but choose different 'high rebirths' as a means. Necessarily, we conclude that *brahmapurohita* in DN 21 is a late insertion.

We come to see that *purohita*s are late insertions to the suttas: In contrast to many other named Brahmins in the suttaas, of all things the *purohita* – the most relevant Brahmin in the country – remains anonymous. If King Bimbisāra of Magadha or King Pasenadi of Kosala had such an outstanding Brahmin to their side we can safely assume that they also would have become named characters in the suttas[109]. Also the wrong association of the *purohita* with the *dīkṣā* ritual and the legendary *brahmapurohita*s are strong indications for late insertions. Hence, occurrences of *purohita*s in suttas don't clarify the relationship of original Buddhism and Brahmanism.

2.5 Ascetic Brahmins

From the different types of Brahmins we encounter in the Pāli suttas Brahmin ascetics would have been of special importance to the early Buddhist movement. In this section we investigate four questions: How do the suttas depict ascetic Brahmins? Are they reliably from the Buddha's lifetime or do they represent later additions to the texts? What is the relationship between the Buddhist movement and Brahmin ascetics? And, have ascetic Brahmins developed within the Vedic culture or were they strongly influenced by non-Vedic *śramaṇa*s?

[109] This seems to be contradicted by JB 1.335 which mentions a Kosala *purohita*. Witzel (2009, 304) and Bodewitz (1990, 314), however, both have doubts about this reference.

The topic of ascetic Brahmanism has been investigated before. Bronkhorst (1998, 54), for example, concludes that Vedic asceticism developed out of the Vedic sacrifice. Also Heesterman (1985, 41-42) determines "that renunciation is already implied in classical ritual thinking". While this is certainly true, especially regarding *brahmacarya* (chapter four) and the *dīkṣā* ceremony (section 3.5) we will further investigate Brahmin asceticism as a general lifestyle[110]. We also have to draw a clearer distinction between pre- and post-Buddha literature. A difficulty in investigating the relationship between Buddhist monastics and ascetic Brahmins is that we don't have a Pāli term that would clearly identify the latter. Hence, we will investigate ascetics in the suttas in general as well as in non-Buddhist literature in order to identify similarities.

Among the suttas SN 3.11 stands out in providing a general list of ascetic practitioners: *nigaṇṭha*s (Jain ascetics), *acelaka*s (naked ascetics), *ekasāṭaka*s (one-cloth ascetics), *jaṭila*s (matted-hair ascetics), and *paribbājaka*s (wanderers). While we will discuss *jaṭila*s and *paribbājaka*s in more detail in the following sections we will only briefly examine the other categories and their possible connections with Brahmanism.

*Nigaṇṭha*s clearly represent the *śramaṇa*s of Jainism, which is older than Buddhism and almost certainly developed independently from Brahmanism[111].

*Acelaka*s are naked ascetics who are depicted in the suttas as self-tormenters who fast, consume no meat or alcohol, inflict physical hardship on themselves, and bathe thrice a day[112]. The apparently famous *acela* Kassapa is mentioned in four suttas with four different accounts of his conversion to Buddhism and his liberation (SN 12.17, SN 41.9, MN 124, DN 8), yet, no sutta mentions any of his doctrines or beliefs.

DN 24 is describing two peculiar naked ascetics. *Acela* Korakkhattiya took the vow to behave like a dog (see for another naked 'dog ascetic' MN 57). The other, *acela* Kaḷāramaṭṭaka, became

[110] Some scholars have identified two categories which probably referred to certain Vedic ascetics, *yati* and *vātaraśana* (see Olivelle 2011, 151-152; and Clark 2006, 6). Both are not relevant in our discussion as they don't appear in early Buddhism and had little impact on Vedic literature as well.
[111] See for a general introduction Dundas (2002).
[112] AN 3.156-162, AN 4.198, MN 45, MN 51, MN 60, MN 94, DN 8.

rich and famous by observing very peculiar vows: to go naked, have no sex, consume only meat and alcohol (which *acelaka*s explicitly abstain from in the more common *acelaka* stock passage), and not walking past certain tree shrines.

Based on MN 36 scholars tried to identify the *acelaka*s as Ajīvakas, i.e. followers of Makkhali Gosāla, but we find this hardly convincing[113]. It might well be that Gosāla was a naked ascetic, but this doesn't mean in turn that all naked ascetics were followers of Gosāla (see for a similar understanding Balcerowicz 2016, 321). Indeed, early Jain sources show that Jain ascetics could be both naked and clothed (Jaini 2008, 6). Also, naked ascetics obviously had the liberty to follow their own practice (e.g. imitating dogs). Apart from purification through austerity we see no specific doctrinal or soteriological teaching that would unite *acelaka*s. What is important for our purpose is that, based on the suttas, *acelaka*s are likely to have been a loose group of *śramaṇa*s and were certainly not Brahmins.

The next category are the *ekasāṭakas*, one-cloth ascetics, who are otherwise mentioned only in AN 6.57 which defines them as a type of *nigaṇṭha*s, i.e. Jain ascetics. Vin 3.211 suggests that the 'one-cloth' was an undergarment and that it was shameful for regular people to wear it in public. It can therefore be seen as a form of humility and an emblem of austerity. As with the naked ascetics also the one-cloth ascetics are unlikely to have been Brahmins.

2.5.1 *Jaṭila*s – Matted Hair Ascetics

A type of ascetic mentioned a few times in the suttas is the metonymic 'matted-hair' *jaṭila*. Matted-hair ascetics don't occur in pre-Buddhist literature at all. In the post-Buddha Dharmasūtras different categories of spiritual practitioners wear matted hair, but it is not eponymous to a whole group of ascetics as in the Buddhist suttas.

[113] Horner & Brahmali (2014, 436, n. 2).

Matted hair is in ĀpDS 1.2.31 one possible hairstyle of the *brahmacārin* (i.e. the Vedic student) next to a matted topknot (also in VaDS 7.11 and GauDS 1.27). In GauDS 3.34 the *vaikhānasa* hermit generally has matted hair, alongside the emblems of living in the forest, practicing *tapaḥśīlaḥ* (austere restraint), kindling the sacred fire, eating fruits and roots, receiving guests, making offerings, and wearing clothes of bark or skin. BauDS 2.11.15 agrees with the characterization of the *vaikhānasa* in the GauDS, adding that he bathes thrice a day (similarly in VaDS 9.1). ĀpDS (2.21.18-2.23.2) sees the *vaikhānasa* as synonymous with the *vānaprastha* hermit, but doesn't mention his hair. Arthaśāstra 1.3.11, however, does mention the matted hair of the *vānaprastha*[114]: "[His practice] consists of celibacy, sleeping on the ground, wearing matted hair and antelope skin, offering the daily fire sacrifice, bathing, venerating gods, forefathers, and guests, and eating forest produce"[115]. The *vānaprastha* seems thus to be similar to the *vaikhānasa* forest hermit and therefore to the *jaṭila* of the suttas.

The *jaṭila* in the suttas indeed fits the description of the Dharmasūtra forest hermits. In MN 92 and Snp 3.7 a *jaṭila* is described as 'having faith in Brahmins' (*brāhmaṇesu abhippasanno*)[116] and living in an *assama* (Skt *āśrama*, hermitage[117]), yet having contact with friends and relatives. In DN 10 we find an *aggika jaṭila* (i.e. a fire practitioner) who lives in a forest leaf hut, attending the sacred fire. Dhp 10 and Snp. 2.2 argue that austere practices, including matted hair, don't purify, thereby implying that the *jaṭila* was practicing austerities. Dhp 26 says that neither matted hair nor a garment of skins (*ajinasāṭī*[118]) make one a (real) Brahmin[119] which might show an affiliation with Brahmanism. The introductory verses of Snp 5 (which are a later addition to the otherwise old Snp 5[120]) describe sixteen Brahmin master students wearing matted hair and a deer-skin. In SN 35.132 finally, we find a more polemic description of western Brahmins (see section 2.5.3) who wear matted hair (*jaṭā*), fast, sleep on the ground, bathe at dawn, study the

[114] Also by this name in VaDS 6.19-20, ĀpDS 2.21.18-2.22.
[115] *vānaprasthasya brahmacaryaṃ bhūmau śayyā jaṭā ajina dhāraṇam agni hotra abhiṣekau devatā pitr atithi pūjā vanyaś ca āhāraḥ*
[116] Repeated in Vin 1.246.
[117] See for a discussion of *āśrama* in ancient India Bronkhorst (2016).
[118] The term is unknown to Vedic literature. The equivalent *ajinavāsin* appears in ŚB 3.9.1.12 as a (regular) Brahmin who wears animal skin, possibly in a ritual, but not as a general ascetic lifestyle.
[119] *Na jaṭāhi na gottena, na jaccā hoti brāhmaṇo | Kiṃ te jaṭāhi dummedha, kiṃ te ajinasāṭiyā*
[120] The introductory verses have very few parallels and use terms not known to older Pāli. See also Norman (1992, 364, n. 1009).

Vedas, wear rough hides, follow austere practices, wear bent staffs, and hypocritically use their 'austerity' to increase their worldly gain.

In summary, the *jaṭila* seems to be associated with Brahmanism and might very well be a Brahmin ascetic, yet no *jaṭila* in the suttas is directly addressed as 'Brahmin', even though in one case a *jaṭila* 'has faith in Brahmins' and the Brahmins of the Snp 5 introduction wear matted hair. In general, *jaṭila*s in the suttas seem to practice a 'Brahmanism-inspired asceticism'. For the sake of simplicity, we will therefore call them 'Brahmin ascetics'. Their occurrence in the suttas doesn't mean, however, that the *jaṭila*s were indeed contemporaries of the Buddha[121].

An important hint that *jaṭila*s came up only after the Buddha is that we otherwise find them only in the post-Buddha Dharmasūtras. Also, even in the suttas *jaṭila*s occur only rarely which probably means that they were not of great importance to the ascetic landscape of early Buddhism[122]. Finally, some of the suttas which mention *jaṭila*s are polemic and dismissive – which we generally see as characteristics of late suttas.

We tend to conclude that the *jaṭila* (and accordingly the *vaikhānasa* and *vānaprastha*) represents a post-Buddha assimilation of *śramaṇa* asceticism within Brahmanism. If *jaṭila*s became more relevant in the two centuries following the Buddha there might have been enough opportunity and reason to include them into later suttas, also in order to polemicize against emerging religious competition.

2.5.2 *Paribbājaka* – The Ascetic Wanderer

The *paribbājaka* (Skt *parivrāja* or *parivrājaka*), 'the wanderer', is very common in the suttas and is featured in the post-Buddha Dharmasūtras and the Arthaśāstra as well, but is absent from

[121] See also Bronkhorst (2016, 139, n. 6). Tsuchida (1991, 53), however, seems to accept *jaṭila*s as contemporary to the Buddha. Freiberger (2009, 71, n. 15) shares his position.
[122] See for a legendary mass conversion of a thousand *jaṭila*s Vin 1.24-31.

pre-Buddhist literature. This could be an indication for an originally east Indian type of ascetic. In the suttas the *paribbājaka* is used as a third category of ascetics which is distinguished from the *samaṇa* and *brāhmaṇa* but is otherwise very heterogeneous in clothes, diet, and lodgings (see for a detailed discussion Freiberger, 1997). *Paribbājaka* as a third category is explicit in SN 13.11, SN 42.7, and SN 44.9 where we encounter the expression '*samaṇa*s, *brāhmaṇa*s, and *paribbājaka*s of other sects'[123]. In many other cases where they are not explicitly mentioned we assume that *paribbājaka*s are subsumed under the *samaṇa* label.

In ĀpDS 2.21.7-16 it is said that the *parivrāja* should live with no fire nor house. He should only speak when engaged in private Vedic recitation, go on alms-round, wear discarded clothes or go naked. He should abandon pleasure (*sukha*), pain (*duḥkha*), and a desire for *ātman*. In awakening (*buddha*) he attains refuge (*kṣema*)[124] and thereby ends *duḥkha*. BauDS 2.11.16-27 says that the *parivrājaka* should abandon relatives and possessions, be shaven except for a topknot, wear a loin cloth or ochre robes, and reside in one place during the rainy season. He should go on alms round (*bhikṣā*), and practice non-violence (*ahiṃsā*). Most importantly, the text says that the *parivrājaka* rejects the Vedic rites and embraces the 'middle course' (*madhyamaṃpadaṃ*).

Anyone familiar with the vocabulary of early Buddhism easily recognizes in these Dharmasūtra descriptions aspects of the early Buddhists. Especially the abandonment of *sukha*, *duḥkha*, and the desire for *ātman*, the rejection of Vedic rites and following the 'middle course' (in Pāli *majjhimā paṭipadā*[125]) are characteristic for the early Buddhists. Some aspects seem, however, to be conflated with Jain practitioners, e.g. going naked and practicing *ahiṃsā*.

VaDS 10.1-30 confirms the above image of the *parivrāja* and adds a few aspects. It agrees with BauDS that the *parivrājaka* is shaven-headed, without possessions, and has abandoned rituals – but here he doesn't abandon the Veda. He is going on alms-round mornings and evenings, eating vegetarian food. The text has *parivrājaka*s wearing a one-cloth cover, antelope skin, or a

[123] *samaṇabrāhmaṇaparibbājakā* and *aññatitthiyasamaṇabrāhmaṇaparibbājakā.*
[124] Olivelle translates *buddha* as 'insight', and *kṣema* as 'bliss'.
[125] In SN 42.12, SN 56.11, AN 3.156-162, MN 3, MN 139. As *majjhena desanā* in SN 12.15, SN 12.17-18, SN 12.35-36, SN 12.46-48, SN 14.13, SN 22.90. This connection is also suggested by Gombrich (1992, 173), but repudiated by Tsuchida (1996), who however has not considered the ĀpDS.

garment of grass. They have no fixed residence, lives in a temple, an abandoned building, or under a tree. They cultivate spiritual knowledge, *jñāna*, have their sense-faculties (*indriya*) in control, and put an end to delight (*prīti*). They contemplate the 'higher self' (*adhyātma*) and engage in a dispassionate observation (*upekṣaka*) of the mind. In contrast to the BauDS which bases its *parivrāja* image on Buddhist and Jain monastics the VaDS blends additional ascetic wanderers into one mold, as we can see with from the garments not worn by Buddhist or Jain monastics. At the same time the VaDS confirms that *parivrāja*s abandoned the Vedic rites (like the BauDS), yet insists that they accept the Vedas.

Arthaśāstra 1.3.12 sums up its own view of the *parivrājaka*: "[The practice] of a wandering ascetic consists of mastery of the senses, abstaining from ritual activities, living without possessions, abandoning attachments, practicing mendicancy, residing in the wilderness but not in a single place, and purifying himself externally and internally"[126].

The ĀpDS even references Buddhist and Jain terminology (*sukha*, *duḥkha* and *buddha*), and their appearance (rag-robes or naked). Additionally, in Vedic literature *parivrāja*s appear only in the post-Buddha Dharmasūtras. Thus, as concluded above, the Dharmasūtra *parivrājaka* is not a genuinely Vedic ascetic but is rather an attempt to incorporate mostly Buddhist and Jain monastics into a larger Vedic social framework[127]. The consistent view of the Dharmasūtras that these 'wanderers' have no fixed residence also fits well with our conclusion above, namely that early Buddhism was originally a movement of forest meditators.

To sum it up, we have so far only encountered the rare *jaṭila*s as Brahmin ascetics who probably emerged after the historical Buddha, assimilating *śramaṇa* elements into a still developing Brahmin asceticism. The *parivrājaka* wanderers, however, are certainly not related to Brahmanism. It therefore seems unlikely that the historical Buddha encountered a fully developed type of Brahmin ascetics.

[126] *parivrājakasya jitendriyatvam anārambho niṣkiṃcanatvaṃ saṅgatyāgo bhaikṣavratam anekatrāraṇye ca vāso bāhyābhyantaraṃ ca śaucam*
[127] See also Bronkhorst (2007, 87-88) and Bronkhorst (1998, 5-10).

2.5.3 Ascetic Brahmins of the West

As established above, there is no category of ascetic Brahmins in the early suttas. Yet, we find rare descriptions of ascetic Brahmins who don't live in the Buddha's home region. SN 35.132 is located in Avantī, a state of ancient India located around a thousand kilometers west of Kosala[128]. Here, Mahākaccāna, a missionary of early Buddhism encounters young Brahmin students (*antevāsika*, Skt *antevāsin*, similar to *brahmacārin*) who make fun of him, to which he gives a polemic response against ascetic Brahmins in general.

It is essential to keep this geographical context in mind, since this sutta contains harsh criticism against ascetic Brahmins. In Avantī (and probably after the Buddha's lifetime) Brahmins have been well established as a socio-religious power, certainly much more than in Kosala at the time of the Buddha. It is therefore plausible that in Avantī rude Brahmin students could have ridiculed a bald ascetic in 'their' home region, whereas this behavior would *not* have been plausible in Kosala where Brahmins were in no position yet to display such arrogance.

In the sutta Mahākaccāna praises the 'Brahmins of old' (*pubbatarā brāhmaṇā*) who excelled in ethical restraint (*sīla*), following *dhamma* and *jhāna* meditation – hereby praising the Brahmins of the past with Buddhist terminology. He goes on to criticize contemporary Brahmins who claim to recite scriptures and are overly proud of their clan (*gotta*). He then condemns these Brahmins for using the following emblems for worldly gain: ascetic fasting (*anāsakā*), sleeping on the ground (*thaṇḍilasāyikā*), ritual morning bathing (*pāto sināna*), the threefold Veda (*tayo vedā*), rough antelope hide (*kharājina*), matted locks and dirt (*jaṭāpaṅka*), hymns (*manta*), customary conduct (*sīlabbata*), austerities (*tapa*), deceit (*kuhanā*), bent staffs (*vaṅkadaṇḍa*), and ritual water rinsing (*udakācamana*)[129]. It's worth to investigate if these terms appear in Vedic literature in order to see if they indeed represent 'western' Brahmin ascetics or if we rather deal with a fictional polemic from a late sutta Buddhist perspective.

[128] The exact location is still not known but is estimated by Bühler (in Singh 2016, 22) to be around today's city of Kurawar in Madhya Pradesh.

[129] *Anāsakā thaṇḍilasāyikā ca; | Pāto sināñca tayo ca vedā. | Kharājinaṃ jaṭāpaṅko, mantā sīlabbataṃ tapo; | Kuhanā vaṅkadaṇḍā ca, udakācamanāni ca.*

Anāsakā (the only other sutta occurrence is in Snp 2.2), Skt *anāśaka*. The term is certainly Vedic and not a Buddhist invention. In ŚB 2.4.3.2-3 it means involuntary starvation due to lack of food. ŚB 9.5.1.6 and ŚB 9.5.1.9 describe *anāśaka* as the ritual fasting after the *dīkṣā* consecration. In BU 4.4.22 *anāśaka* is one of the tools employed by Brahmins to realize *ātman* – next to Vedic recitation (*vedānuvacana*), worship offering (*yajña*), gift-giving (*dāna*), and austerity (*tapas*)[130]. Apparently, the sutta polemicizes against Brahmins who show off their powers of self-control and fasting 'skills' in order to increase their reputation.

Thaṇḍilasāyikā (the only other sutta occurrence is in Dhp 10), Skt *sthaṇḍilaśa.* This austere practice of lying on the ground appears only after the Buddha – in VaDS 10.11 describing *parivrājaka* wandering ascetics, and a few times appearing in the Sanskrit epics. An older term for sleeping on the ground, *adhaḥśaya*, was available (e.g. ŚB 6.6.3.6, ŚaGS 2.6.8) but not used in the sutta. This points rather to a post-Buddha composition.

Pāto sināna (only in this sutta), Skt *prātaḥ snāna* (the morning bath). Among the different types of bath *snāna* traditionally marked the end of the Vedic *brahmacarya* studentship – one is then called a *snātaka* (see e.g. Lubin, 2011). Different types of *snāna* are described only in the post-Buddha Gṛhyasūtras and Dharmasūtras, mostly in the context of penance and purification. In BauDS 2.11.14 and VaDS 9.9 it is the forest hermit who bathes three times a day, in VaDS 7.17 it is the *brahmacārin*. Since the sutta doesn't refer to *brahmacarya* and more to an ostentatious asceticism, again, this would rather point to a post-Buddha Dharmasūtra practice.

Kharājina (also in AN 4.198, MN 51, MN 94, Snp 2.2), Skt *khara ajina* (not as a compound). The *ajina* or *kṛṣṇājina* antelope skin appears in pre-Buddha contexts of the *dīkṣā* consecration ritual (see section 3.5), and in AB 7.13[131]. Only later it becomes a regular garment of ascetics.

[130] Note that the equivalent ŚB 14.7.2.25 has a slightly different list: *vedānuvacana* (Vedic recitation), *brahmacarya*, *tapas*, *śraddhā* (faith) *yajña* (worship offering), and *ānāśaka*.
[131] In contrast to Bronkhorst (1998, 49-50), however, we see the AB passage not as a confirmation of Vedic asceticism. On the contrary, because the AB is *dismissive* of 'dirt', 'antelope skin', and celibacy, it rather criticizes potentially non-Vedic practitioners.

Jaṭāpaṅka, Skt *jaṭa paṅka* (not as a compound). Probably this is meant as a *dvandva*, i.e. 'matted hair and mud'. The matted hair is an ensign of the probably post-Buddha *jaṭila* (section 2.5.1).

Tapa, Skt *tapas*. The 'heat' of ascetic fervor is an integral aspect of ancient ascetic practice and known from pre-Buddhist literature and early Buddhism as well (see below, section 2.7).

Kuhanā, no pre-Buddhist Sanskrit equivalent, see Hadeka (1962, 164); there are a few occurrences in the suttas as *kuh*/*kuha*[132]. We know the Skt *kuhaka* from post-Buddha literature as a trickster (ĀpDS 1.20.5, VaDS 6.40), sometimes also as a juggler or entertainer (AŚ 4.1.65). The inclusion of this very rare term, again, rather points to a late composition.

Vaṅkadaṇḍa (as *daṇḍa* also in SN 21.4), Skt *vaṅka daṇḍa* (not as compound). Even though the *daṇḍa* staff later on became one of the standard requisites of Brahmin ascetics it is doubtful that this was the case before the Buddha or during his lifetime. Olivelle (2011, 232) maintains that "Manu (MDh 6.52) is the earliest Dharmaśāstric writer to make any reference to a renouncer's staff" – not mentioning our Buddhist sutta SN 35.132 which is certainly older. Still, also the *brahmacārin* has the staff as his ensign from at least the times of the Śrautasūtras and Gṛhyasūtras on (see e.g. Kajihara 2002, 349) and could be considered as an ancient type of ascetic. Additionally, the post-Buddha VaDS 12.14 explicitly describes the *snātaka* who has completed his *brahmacarya* studentship as wearing a staff, however using the term *yaṣṭi* instead of *daṇḍa*. In ritual contexts the *daṇḍa* is frequently mentioned (e.g. in context of the *dīkṣā* consecration, or given as a *dakṣiṇā* offering to Brahmins in ŚB 11.1.5.11). The stratum of the reference to the *daṇḍa* staff of ascetics is therefore uncertain. In itself it probably signifies a late sutta but it could be contemporary to the Buddha as well.

Udakācamana (only in this Sutta), Skt *udaka ācamana* (not as a compound), 'water rinsing'. Gonda (1980, 129) provides many sources for the customary water rinsing of the mouth before certain rituals, especially in the Gṛhyasūtras. ĀśGS 1.20.4 has it as part of the *brahmacarya upanayana* (initiation into Vedic studentship). The rinsing itself is also mentioned in ŚB 1.7.4.17 as a means of purification. In ŚB 2.3.1.21 sipping water is done after an offering. ŚB 14.1.1.29 teaches it explicitly as a practice of austerities (*tapas*) while abstaining from eating meat. BauŚS

[132] SN 7.7, SN 7.8, AN 5.83, AN 6.77, AN 10.78, AN 10.85, 117, DN 1, DN 2, DN 28, Snp 2.9, Snp 5.1.

mentions it in passing as a part of rituals (BauŚS 6.7, BauŚS 20.23). VaiGS 1.2 describes an intricate ritualistic sipping. In the Dharmasūtras it still appears as a ritualized sipping but gets also incorporated into more mundane contexts, like food preparation by Śudras (ĀpDS 2.3.5, BauDS 1.10.20). The Buddhist sutta could therefore well refer to a custom contemporary to the Buddha. Yet, we fail to follow the argument of the sutta, i.e. how ritually sipping water could be exploited by 'corrupt' Brahmins for worldly gain, even if done theatrically.

All in all, SN 35.132 features an interesting collection of ascetic practices which were as a set most probably performed after the Buddha's lifetime. Whether these practices are characteristic for western Brahmins, as suggested by the location of the sutta, is however not clear. Generally, the sutta reflects a disparaging attitude of later sutta Buddhism against the ostentatious asceticism of Brahmins with pretentious intent.

In this context we like to mention a similar list of attributes mentioned in Dhp 10, which is however not explicitly related to Brahmins of the West. Dhp 10 is about non-violence and the karmic retribution after verbal or physical injury. Then it states: "Not nakedness (*naggacariya*), nor matted hair, nor mud, nor fasting, nor lying on the ground, nor dust (*raja*) and dirt (*jallaṃ*), nor exertion in a squatting position (*ukkuṭikappadhāna*) purify a mortal who has not passed beyond doubt"[133]. This list is not specifically anti-Brahmin, since for example the 'conduct of nudity' (*nagga-cariya*) probably refers to Jains more than to the late Brahmin version of the fully naked ascetic (see also Olivelle 2011, 249-251). But since Dhp 10 features some of the terms which appear also in SN 35.132, we suggest that both were compiled from the same source.
We can now discuss two other suttas with explicit references to austere Brahmins of the West (*brāhmaṇā pacchā*), SN 42.6 and AN 10.176. In SN 42.6 the Buddha has a conversation with a Brahmin who claims that "there are western Brahmins draped with moss who carry pitchers, immerse themselves in water, and serve the sacred flame. When someone has passed away, they truly lift them up, raise them up, and guide them along to heaven[134]". This sutta is of particular interest because of the claim that certain Brahmins accomplish something similar as the Buddha:

[133] *Na naggacariyā na jaṭā na paṅkā, nānāsakā thaṇḍilasāyikā vā, rajo jallaṃ ukkuṭikappadhānaṃ, sodhenti maccaṃ avitiṇṇakaṅkhaṃ.*
[134] *brāhmaṇā pacchā bhūmakā kāmaṇḍalukā sevālamālikā udakorohakā aggiparicārakā. Te mataṃ kālaṅkataṃ uyyāpenti nāma saññāpenti nāma saggaṃ nāma okkāmenti.*

to guide into heaven, and potentially to immortality. These western Brahmins are described to have four attributes (also in AN 10.176): water pitcher (*kamaṇḍalu*), moss garland (*sevālamāla*), they immerse themselves in water (*udakorohaka*), and they attend a fire (*aggiparicāraka*).

The *kamaṇḍalu* water pitcher (also in SN 7.9 and its parallel Snp 3.4) is a relatively late term which starts to appear in the Śrautasūtras where it is used only in ritual settings (e.g. BauŚS 15.35, BauŚS 21.14). This changes in the Dharmasūtras where the *snātaka* (i.e. one who has concluded the Vedic studentship), carries a *kamaṇḍalu* as an insignia (BauDS 1.5.4, BauDS 1.6.1), mainly for his own ritual purification, for drinking, and for devotional rituals (BauDS 1.7.1). Levman (2013, 148) lists *kamaṇḍalu* as one of the non-Vedic indigenous terms that found its way into Vedic-based languages. If this is true it could show that particularly BauŚS and BauDS originated closer to the Buddha's mainland. The water pitcher doesn't add, however, to our understanding of the enigmatic western Brahmins described.

Even rarer are references to moss garland, *sevālamāla*, Skt *śaivala-māla*. The 'moss-color', *śaivalavarṇa*, appears in AŚ 2.11.54. *Śaivala* is probably synonymous to Skt *śīpāla*, which appears already in ṚV 10.68.5 and later in ĀśGS 2.8.14. In ĀśGS 4.4.8 it is specifically used as a ceremonial accessory to guide a deceased soul to heaven. There, it appears together with the *avakā* plant, which according to Dange (2006, 32) represents the principle of coolness to contrast fire. However, we don't find moss as an insignia of any type of Brahmin in Vedic literature, so our sutta could contain a detail that is otherwise not preserved. At least ĀśGS 4.4.8 seems to confirm that the sutta refers to an actual practice of specific Brahmins related to the afterlife.

The next characteristic of the 'western Brahmin' is that he is an *udakorohaka*, 'one who descends into water', from *udaka* (water) and *orohati* (descend) – a term that cannot be found in Vedic literature. In the post-Buddha Dharmasūtras bathing thrice a day is considered a purificatory act, often as a penance (e.g. ĀpDS 1.25.10, GauDS 19.15, BauDS 2.2.10). The only person this practice is explicitly associated with is the *vānaprastha* forest hermit (BauDS 2.11.14, VaDS 9.9; see section 2.5.1). There are, however, more suttas which mention a ritual practice of purificatory bathing. In SN 7.21 the respective Brahmin explains the purpose of his practice as washing off *pāpakamma*, i.e. the impact of bad deeds (also in MN 7, Snp 3.4).

Similarly, MN 40 names the *udakorohaka* as a distinct type of ascetic. In several suttas (AN 3.156-162, AN 4.198, MN 12, MN 45, MN 51, MN 94, DN 8, DN 25) water purification is listed as one of the self-tormenting practices, even though it is not clear what is tormenting about it, except for the implication of perpetual guilt. Since the Vedic references are post-Buddha we suspect that it doesn't represent an ascetic Brahmin practice at the Buddha's time.

The last characteristic of the 'western Brahmin' is that he is an *aggiparicāraka*, a fire servant (Skt *aggi-paricāraka*, does not appear as a compound). Again, this practice seems to relate to the idea of purity, since in MN 12 practitioners proclaim: "Purity comes from attending the fire" (*aggiparicariyāya suddhī*). The compound doesn't appear at all in Vedic texts, and uncompounded only in the Dharmasūtras, for example in BauDS 3.1.19.

The second sutta which comments on the 'western Brahmins' is AN 10.176. It mentions the same four emblems, but also that they teach purification (*soceyya*, Skt *śauca*) by getting up in the morning and touching the ground, or fresh cow dung, or green grass, or by serving fire, venerating the sun with joined palms, or by immersing themselves in water three times a day.

It is apparent from SN 42.6 and AN 10.176 that these western Brahmins were seen as unusual ascetic specialists. Of their four insignia three are related to water (water pitcher, moss garland, ritual bathing) and one to fire. Most importantly, they are singled out as having the supernatural ability to lift the dead up into heaven. Even though we could not identify these specific Brahmins in Vedic literature, we are reminded of CU 4.15.5 and CU 5.10.2 where it is said about the dead: "Then a person who is not human (*amānava*) – he leads them to *brahman*"[135]. *Amānava*, the non-human, can be understood as a supernatural being or, in the light of our suttas, as a human who has transcended common human abilities.

Together with the previously discussed SN 35.132 we carefully conclude that at the time of the Buddha there might have been indeed unconventional Brahmin ascetics, but only in the West, and not in the Buddha's mainland. Their focus on austerity, penance, and purification resembles

[135] *tat puruṣo 'mānavaḥ | sa enān brahma gamayati |*

different aspects of the Magadha ascetics. Yet, it is not clear if they developed independently or if Vedic and non-Vedic ascetics originally contributed to each other's development.

2.5.4 Summary

Now we are able to answer the questions we put forth at the beginning of the chapter. Our conclusion is that a few suttas indeed feature ascetic Brahmins – particularly *jaṭila*s and practitioners of purification. Yet, they seem mostly to belong to a time after the Buddha. Not only are these Brahmins rare in the suttas, they also don't appear in pre-Buddhist literature. The first category of ascetic Brahmins appears only in post-Buddha Dharmasūtras, as forest hermits.

We consider the critical and dismissive attitude of the suttas towards *jaṭila*s as a later addition. They are collectively dismissed based on their looks and practices, without acknowledging a possibly genuine spiritual motivation. This attitude fits more to a later time when institutionalized Buddhism would have sought to diminish religious competitors.

The last question we need to answer is if ascetic Brahmins in the early post-Buddha centuries were influenced by *śramaṇa*s or Buddhists in particular. This might be partly the case. Vedic *brahmacarya* and the *dīkṣā* austerities existed long before Buddhism. And also the 'ascetic Brahmins of the West' might have developed independently from *śramaṇa* influences. On the other hand, it is probable that later Brahmin ascetics (like the *vaikhānasa* hermits), particularly in Kosala and Magadha, assimilated elements of *śramaṇa* practices into their Vedic framework.

2.6 The Buddha as *Muni* and *Ṛṣi*

So far we have detailed a layered relationship of early Buddhism with ascetic Brahmanism. In this context it is also interesting to find the Buddha associated with epithets of ancient Vedic spiritual archetypes: the *muni* and the *ṛṣi*. According to Rahurkar (1964, 15) the *ṛṣi* represents prayer, ritual, and the social life of a householder, while the *muni* practiced austerities, renunciation, and wandering mendicancy. All the more it is interesting that the Buddha is called both a *muni*[136] and a *ṛṣi* numerous times[137].

The original meaning of the term *muni* is, as Olivelle (2011, 150) points out, unclear but later on it became commonly understood as 'sage'. Interestingly, the only relevant pre-Buddhist text about the *muni* is ṚV 10.136. Much later, in BU 3.5.1, BU 4.4.22, and CU 8.5.2 *muni* vaguely designates an accomplished spiritual master. The Dharmasūtras are in line with Rahurka's reasoning: The *muni* is in BauDS 2.17.30 peaceful, in VaDS 10.2 a *parivrājaka* wanderer who has abandoned rituals, and in VaDS 27.5 he practices *tapas* in the wilderness. The *muni* is mentioned more vaguely in ĀpDS 2.21.10 and ĀpDS 2.21.20 (see for a detailed discussion Wayman (1974) and Werner (1977)). Based on the late Vedic interpretation of the term it makes therefore sense to characterize the Buddha as a *muni*. And the broad application of this epithet to the Buddha, even in old sutta layers as the SN and Snp 4-5, is for us an indication that it was an honorific title long before the Buddha and was as such even used in Kosala and Magadha.

The Vedic seer, the *ṛṣi* (Pāli *isi*), on the other hand, holds a special position of authority within the ancient Indian world-view as a composer of the foundational Vedic mantras[138]. The suttas even know their own list of ancient *ṛṣi*s which is in quite good agreement with Vedic lists of the traditional *ṛṣi*s[139]. In contrast to the *muni*, however, a *ṛṣi* was specifically regarded as the spiritual

[136] SN 1.39, SN 2.7, SN 2.8, SN 4.6, SN 6.3, SN 7.8, SN 7.9, SN 7.13, SN 7.18, SN 8.2, SN 8.10-12, SN 22.3, SN 51.10, AN 3.40, AN 3.58-60, AN 3.122, AN 4.5, AN 4.10, AN 8.70, AN 9.42, MN 12, MN 91, MN 92, MN 116, MN 131-134, MN 140, DN 16, DN 20, Dhp 19, Dhp 26, Snp 1.2, Snp 1.12, Snp 3.1, Snp 3.5-3.7, Snp 3.11, Snp 4.2-3, Snp 4.6-7, Snp 4.9-10, Snp 4.13, Snp 4.15, Snp 5.4, Snp 5.7-8.
[137] SN 1.45, SN 3.9, SN 7.8, SN 7.9, SN 7.11, SN 15.10, AN 4.25, AN 4.39, MN 86, MN 98, MN 116, DN 16, Dhp 26, Snp 1.4, Snp 1.9, Snp 1.12, Snp 3.4, Snp 3.9, Snp 4.14, Snp 5.4, Snp 5.5, Snp 5.7.
[138] See for a stratification of the Ṛgveda and its *ṛṣi* composers Bhargava (1985).
[139] The list of ten *isi*s is: Aṭṭhaka, Vāmaka, Vāmadeva, Vessāmitta, Yamadaggi, Aṅgīrasa, Bhāradvāja, Vāseṭṭha, Kassapa, Bhagu (AN 5.192, AN 7.52, MN 95, MN 99, DN 3, DN 13). See for the more details Mitchiner (2000).

authority *par excellence* and as a proclaimer of truth (Ferrante 2016, 44-48). To call the Buddha a *ṛṣi* has, therefore, the function to legitimize him in exactly this function of authority, probably also with a Brahmin audience in mind.

2.7 *Tapas* in Early Buddhism

Even though designated Brahmin ascetics are rare in the suttas and in pre-Buddhist literature, there is yet an *attitude* of austerity in pre-Buddhist Vedic texts which is also familiar to early Buddhism, namely in the form of *tapas* (lit. 'heat', austerity, Pāli *tapa*). In the following section we will show that the attitude of the suttas towards *tapas* is ambivalent. We will also demonstrate that *tapas* was originally part of the early Buddhist thought-world and that it was subsequently neglected and avoided in Buddhist vocabulary, probably in order to differentiate itself against other austere *śramaṇa* movements and Vedic Brahmanism.

In Vedic literature (e.g. in ṚV, AVŚ, and ŚB) *tapas* is closely connected with the element of heat. We follow Kaelber (1979, 192-200) in her lucid presentation of *tapas* in Vedic literature in that it originally meant fire and heat, then burning, and then burning pain. Later on, especially when TS and ŚB describe the *dīkṣā* rituals (section 3.5) it came to mean the self-inflicted burning pain of the sacrificer (e.g. through fasting) who thereby transcended the human state, became godlike and thus worthy of sacrificing (Kaelber 1979, 200-204). Gonda (1982, 48) describes *tapas* slightly differently as "process of internal heating, producing supernormal and often creative power". In her recent cognitive linguistic studies of Vedic literature Jurewicz (2016) pointed to additional connotations of *tapas*, namely as the heat created during sacrifice (ibid., 126), as evoking the concepts of light and seeing (ibid., 209), and in early Upaniṣadic times as spiritual practice leading to higher states of consciousness (ibid., 633).

In the suttas *tapa* appears in several contexts, with two very different connotations: mostly as a highly condemned feature of other ascetics' practice who inflict pain and suffering on themselves; and secondly as a positive quality of the Buddha.

A formula repeated in several suttas (AN 4.198, MN 51, MN 60, MN 94, DN 33) features *tapa* in the meaning of physical strain. Here we have (1) the *puggala attantapa*, the self-tormenting ascetic wanderer; (2) the *puggala parantapa* who torments *others* – e.g. hunters, butchers and executioners; (3) a practitioner who torments himself *and* orders the killings of animals; and (4) the one who does neither, the Buddhist monastic. Here, clearly *tapa* has a negative connotation of unwholesome suffering and pain.

The critical position towards *tapa* continues in suttas which declare that it is irrelevant for spiritual development and liberation, or even detrimental to it (see also Freiberger 2006, 242). This attitude targets Jains (AN 3.74, MN 14, MN 51, MN 101), Brahmins (SN 1.38, SN 7.7, SN 35.132), *samaṇabrāhmaṇa*s in general (AN 4.196, DN 25, DN 8), or uncategorized self-tormenters (SN 4.1, SN 42.12, Snp 2.2).

Tapa is further criticized when it is used to bring about devine rebirth[140] (SN 35.241, AN 5.206, AN 7.50, AN 9.72, AN 10.14, MN 16, MN 57, MN 76, DN 33). Surprisingly, not Brahmins are addressed here, but bhikkhus who have a corrupt motivation. Yet, it is possible that these suttas specifically address bhikkhus with a Brahmin background.

A special case in the discussion of *tapa* are the suttas which describe Bodhisatta Gotama's struggle for liberation when he was practicing severe austerities, mainly in MN 12 and MN 36. The *tapa* passages use the same formulas that describe the austere practices of Jains and other 'wanderers'. This could mean that Gotama was either a follower of austere sects himself or that the description of his practice simply re-uses formulas with which Jain practice was portrayed.

Coming to the contexts in which *tapa* appears in a positive light it's important to point out that they often occur in verses, whereas most negative depictions appear in prose[141]. This is relevant since verses are, as discussed, more robust against alterations and might date from earlier periods than a lot of the prose material (see section 1.4).

[140] *Idha, bhikkhu, ekacco aññataraṃ devanikāyaṃ paṇidhāya brahmacariyaṃ carati – 'imināhaṃ sīlena vā vatena vā tapena vā brahmacariyena vā devo vā bhavissāmi devaññataro vā'ti.*
[141] AN 10.94 treats *tapa* more neutrally, pointing out that it should only be practiced if the result is beneficial.

In Snp 1.4 *tapa* is likened to rain on a fertile field, in SN 1.58 and SN 1.76 it is compared to a purifying bath, and in DN 32 Buddha Vessabhū is called a *nhātaka* ('one who has bathed') and a *tapassin*, i.e. an austere practitioner. The connection of Buddhist *tapa* with water images of fertility and purification might imply a purposeful contrast to the unpleasant inner 'burning' of the Vedic practitioner. These images would then promote the Buddhist *tapa* as essentially pleasant, contrary to a painful Vedic *tapas*.

AN 6.43 compares the Buddha to a mighty elephant and uses the metaphor to describe the feet on which he stands as: gentleness (*soracca*), harmlessness (*avihiṃsā*)[142], *tapa*, and *brahmacariya*. DN 14 and Dhp 14 have the past Buddha Vipassī declare patient endurance to be the highest *tapa*[143]. SN 2.17 states that spiritual safety must include supreme knowledge, *tapa*, restraint, and relinquishment[144]. Similarly, MN 98 and Snp 3.9 declare that *tapa*, *brahmacariya*, restraint, and taming are necessary in order to become a (real) Brahmin[145]. In SN 9.8 the *tapassi* ascetic is synonymous to a bhikkhu, the Buddhist monastic. These passages imply a clearly positive image of *tapa*, yet they remain vague about what the *tapa* practice precisely entails.

Without mentioning *tapa*, other passages clearly show that endurance of discomfort, arguably an important aspect of *tapas*, was a key attitude of early Buddhist monastics. There is a prominent text module that originated in the AN and was transferred to the MN[146]: Here, bhikkhus practice to endure "cold, heat, hunger, and thirst. They endure the touch of flies, mosquitoes, wind, sun, and reptiles. They endure rude and unwelcome criticism. And they put up with physical pain – sharp, severe, acute, unpleasant, disagreeable, and life-threatening"[147]. The Chinese parallel adds enduring hits with sticks (in Bingenheimer 2013, 60). This points us to another prominent image, the "simile of the saw" in MN 21 (also referenced in MN 28) where the Buddha demands of his monastics an attitude of loving-kindness, even if bandits were to cut off their limbs with a saw.

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[142] See for the development of the concept of *ahiṃsā* (non-harming) Schmithausen (2000, 254).
[143] *Khantī paramaṃ tapo titikkhā*
[144] *Nāññatra bojjhā tapasā, nāññatrindriyasaṃvarā; Nāññatra sabbanissaggā, sotthiṃ passāmi pāṇina''nti.*
[145] *Tapena brahmacariyena, saṃyamena damena ca; / Etena brāhmaṇo hoti, etaṃ brāhmaṇamuttamaṃ.*
[146] AN 4.114, AN 4.157, AN 4.165, AN 5.140, AN 6.58, AN 10.71, MN 2, MN 119, MN 125, Snp 1.3.
[147] *Idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhu paṭisaṅkhā yoniso khamo hoti sītassa uṇhassa, jighacchāya pipāsāya. Ḍaṃsamakasavātātapasarīṃsapasamphassānaṃ, duruttānaṃ durāgatānaṃ vacanapathānaṃ, uppannānaṃ sārīrikānaṃ vedanānaṃ dukkhānaṃ tibbānaṃ kharānaṃ kaṭukānaṃ asātānaṃ amanāpānaṃ pāṇaharānaṃ adhivāsakajātiko hoti.*

The Buddha's demand to accept drastic pain and discomfort in the context of spiritual practice obviously contrasts with the above criticism of *tapa*. Yet, Buddhist practitioners are not supposed to inflict pain on themselves *purposefully*.

We conclude that *tapa* was indeed practiced in early Buddhism, by enduring hardship and pain, hunger and thirst, criticism and violence. It thereby shared its attitude to spirituality with austere Brahmin practices. As with other *śramaṇa* movements, it was also for Buddhist monastics essential to be able to endure the harsh conditions of the recluse forest life, focused on meditation and modesty. Therefore it was consistent for early suttas to praise the Buddha's *tapa*, which would have resonated with Brahmins, and to teach it to the early forest Saṅgha as well (see also section 1.5). We assume that over time, while a minority continued to practice this austerity (see Freiberger, 2006) the Saṅgha became more settled in urban monasteries, so that hunger, thirst, and hardship became rare. This increased the contrast to the still austere wandering ascetics and Jain monastics and made *tapa* problematic as a concept for Buddhist self-description. *Tapa* was then used to criticize the *self-inflicted* hardship and physical pain of non-Buddhist practitioners, thus devaluing the spiritual benefits of *tapa* in general. The disappearance of *tapa* from the intra-Buddhist discourse made it easier to present Buddhism as 'the middle path' between sensual indulgence and self-torment[148].

2.8 The Buddha's Attitude towards Brahmins

So far in this chapter we have seen how very different types of Brahmins are depicted in the suttas and that the Buddhist texts deal with them very differently. The most authentic spirit seems to be represented by suttas which depict interactions of the Buddha with the eminent Brahmins of Kosala. The attitude in these texts is mutually benevolent and respectful, which should represent an early time when Buddhism was not yet in opposition to Brahmanism.

[148] Freiberger (2006, 244-246) comes to a similar conclusion investigating the ascetic *dhutaṅga* practices (in AN 5.181 and MN 113), namely that it was more prominent in the early days of Buddhism and later got marginalized.

With respect to ascetic Brahmanism we concluded that apart from traditional *brahmacārin*s the Buddha did not directly experience *a specific type* of ascetic Brahmins. The Brahmin *jaṭila* probably developed only with time as the result of an assimilation of Buddhist and Jain practices into the Vedic thought-world. Additionally, there might have been individual Brahmins who developed their own purificatory ascetic practices[149].

Now that we covered the different types of Brahmins in the suttas, we can ask the general question if the Buddha taught Brahmins specific teachings and omitted others. The general assumption is that Brahmins could have understood advanced spiritual teachings because of their own spiritual background. But on the other hand, they might have resisted specific aspects of the Buddhist teachings. As we already observed, even though the Buddha teaches the elite Kosala Brahmins a variety of essential Buddhist concepts and doctrines there are no suttas in which he explicitly teaches them *anattā*, i.e. the 'not-self' practice of early Buddhism (see chapter ten).

In a recent statistical analysis of the Buddhist suttas Walser (2017) investigates if the Buddha was teaching Brahmins different content than non-Brahmins. His findings show a clear tendency of the Buddha to teach Brahmins the Eightfold Path, *jhāna* and *samādhi* meditation. Conversely, he teaches *anattā* more to non-Brahmins (ibid., 113-116). Walser concludes that before the canonization of the nikāyas different practitioners were given different kinds of Buddhist teachings – that there were custom-made collections for specific audiences. Hence, separate 'canons-within-the-canon' could have been in circulation (ibid., 117), so that Brahmins could have been taught their own kind of 'Buddhism'.

The implication of Walser's finding might be far-reaching. It could mean that the Buddha generally taught two paths to spiritual liberation. One would be tailored mainly to Brahmins and other believers in a 'spiritual self', focusing on liberation through advanced *jhāna, samādhi,* and *brahmavihāra* meditations (see section 9.6). Accordingly, the teaching of the Eightfold Path (which culminates in *samādhi*) would have specifically targeted this group of practitioners, including Brahmin Buddhists. On the other hand, there would have been a separate set of

[149] E.g. Sundarika who practices purification through bathing in SN 7.9, MN 7, Snp 3.4; also Saṅgārava in SN 7.21. Aggika practices purification with sacred fire in SN 7.8 and DN 23.

teachings mainly for non-Brahmins who didn't believe in a 'spiritual self', focusing on *anattā*, i.e. detachment and dis-identification from the 'sense of self' and the cognitive building blocks of experience. This practice focuses on a deconstruction of experience which doesn't necessarily require the highest meditations.

For now, Walser's conclusions remain a working hypothesis, with some questions still open: Which of the two approaches was more 'original' and effective? When teaching Brahmins, did the Buddha focus on *samādhi* because it didn't clash with their *ātman* concept? Were the two frameworks originally considered to be compatible or incompatible?

Indeed, we can pursue these questions further. For this purpose we have investigated suttas that contain teachings of not-self (including, but not limited to the term *anattā*) and tested if they include teachings on *samādhi* or *jhāna* as well – regardless if the interlocutor is a Brahmin, a non-Brahmin, or anonymous. Hence, we investigate if the two frameworks were generally taught separately.

We put emphasis on the SN and AN, and to a certain extent on the MN, but leave the DN aside (because of its assimilation of content from different sources). If there were indeed originally separate lines of teachings then this would manifest first of all in the SN and AN. A combination of *samādhi* and *anattā* would then be more probable in the later compilation suttas of the MN.

Overall, the SN and AN contain more than five thousand suttas (according to the counting in Gethin, 2007), and among them there are several hundred suttas which contain either teachings on not-self, or on *samādhi* and *jhāna*. A rare overlap of the two should, therefore, be a good confirmation of Walser's hypothesis of 'canons-within-the-canon'. And indeed our results confirm that, as a rule, *anattā* and *samādhi* were taught separately. That means that the vast majority of suttas with *samādhi* and *jhāna* don't teach not-self. And the vast majority of suttas with not-self don't mention *samādhi* and *jhāna*.

The SN contains the least overlap of the two teachings. In three suttas not-self and *samādhi* are mentioned in an unrelated way. One instance is in a devotional poem in SN 22.76[150]. In SN 22.90 a monk practices not-self (*anattā*) and later on spontaneously develops a lower stage of *samādhi*[151]. And in the connected SN 28.1-9 it is said that Sāriputta easily attains all levels of *samādhi* because he has long eradicated *ahaṅkāra*, i.e. 'I-making' (which is related to not-self). But again, in none of these suttas does the Buddha actually teach both frameworks together.

The AN contains four, more direct, exceptions to the rule which teach not-self together with *samādhi*. In AN 3.32 the Buddha explains that there is a type of *samādhi* that contains no 'I-making' or 'mine-making'[152]. AN 4.124 and AN 9.36 (copied into MN 64) teach that meditators after reaching any of the four *jhāna*s contemplate phenomena as not-self[153]. And AN 3.94 teaches that the erroneous 'view that one exists as a true entity' (*sakkāyadiṭṭhi*[154]) is given up before attaining the first *jhāna*. Beyond that we have three suttas (AN 4.38, AN 4.200, AN 6.29) which list several practices without connecting them doctrinally – among them removing the conviction of 'I am' (*asmimāna*) and attaining *jhāna*s.

For the sake of completeness we also present the results for the MN – even though we expect here more overlap because of the composite nature of the suttas. MN 2 teaches *samādhi* (as part of the *bojjhaṅga* 'limbs of awakening'[155]) and removing views of 'self' (*attā*). MN 8 teaches that views connected with *attavāda* (teaching of self) are to be given up, loosely followed by the practice of *jhāna*. MN 28 combines contemplations of not-self and having the 'mind unified in *samādhi*' (*samāhitaṃ cittaṃ ekaggaṃ*). In MN 44 (and similarly MN 64) the nun Dhammadinnā mentions that personality-view is wrong, and then teaches the *jhāna*s as a tool to remove it. Hence, in total we have five MN suttas which include some kind of overlap.

[150] The sutta says that arahants have cut off the 'pride of self' (*asmimāna*), and later that arahants are *samāhita*, i.e. collected in mind – a reference to *samādhi*.
[151] More specifically he develops *pītipāmojja*, joy and gladness, which are characteristic only for the first two of the four *jhāna*s (see for details e.g. Stuart-Fox 1989, 81).
[152] The term used, *ahaṅkāramamaṅkāramānānusaya*, is the same as in SN 28.1-9.
[153] More specifically, "as impermanent, as suffering, as a disease, as a boil, as a dart, as misery, as an affliction, as alien, as disintegrating, as empty, as non-self" (*aniccato dukkhato rogato gaṇḍato sallato aghato ābādhato parato palokato suññato anattato*).
[154] See for more details on the term e.g. Barua (2018, 57), or Somaratne (1999).
[155] See for details e.g. Gethin (2001, 146-189).

To sum up our findings, we can confirm that the Buddha, based on the suttas, taught not-self and *samādhi* separately. We examined all suttas which contain teachings of not-self or *samādhi* (several hundred in total) and could find only very few which teach both frameworks together. We take this finding as a confirmation of Walser's hypothesis that the Buddha didn't teach Brahmins (who generally believed in a spiritual self) the practice of not-self because this would have been in conflict with their fundamental concept of *ātman*. We would adapt Walser's hypothesis, though, because not only Brahmins in ancient India believed in an essential 'self' but certain other *śramaṇa* groups as well[156]. We suggest for future research to keep this distinction between *samādhi* and *anattā* in mind, and take into consideration that the Buddha taught his audiences specific meditations and contemplations according to their socio-religious background and mindset.

[156] See for example Dundas (2002, 110-111), Black (2012), and Mukherjee (1993).

Chapter Three: Brahmin Rituals and Early Buddhism

At several places within the suttas we find references to particular Brahmin practices, ideas, rituals and sacrifices. Sometimes they are mentioned in passing and sometimes they are in the center of a polemic against Brahmanism. In this chapter we will collect and discuss these references[157]. The discussion will help us to distinguish if we deal with: 1. an old source, potentially from the time of the Buddha himself; 2. authentic experiences from after the historical Buddha's time; or 3. distorted or polemic presentations of rituals. Additionally, we will investigate the most relevant Buddhist ritual frameworks. In the end we will come to an understanding about how much knowledge early Buddhism had of Brahmin rituals, and how it related to rituals in general. After all, early Buddhism has the reputation to be anti-ritualistic.

Vedic rituals appear in two frameworks: *śrauta* and *gṛhya* rituals. *Śrauta* rituals are more elaborate, and regularly involve three ritual fires and several priests[158] who perform on behalf of the *yajamāna* patron beneficiary[159]. *Gṛhya* rituals on the other hand often need only one ritual fire and can be performed by a single person[160]. Even though the proper Gṛhyasūtra texts seem to be compilations from around the Buddha's time or later, many *gṛhya* practices are probably much older (Gonda 1977, 546-555; Jamison & Witzel 1992, 20-21). Suttas in which solitary Brahmins perform a *gṛhya* ritual are therefore not necessarily late.

[157] For a valuable collection of some Vedic ritual terms in the suttas see Falk (1988, 230).
[158] The *adhvaryu* performs the most ritual activities and is associated with the Yajurveda. The *hotṛ* recites the mantras of the Ṛgveda. The *udgātṛ* recites mantras from the Sāmaveda. And the *brahman* as the presiding officer remains mostly silent and knows all three Vedas. Each of these might additionally have assistant priests.
[159] See for these and other ritual terms Sen (2001). The *yajamāna* is both in Vedic and Buddhist texts the sponsor and beneficiary of rituals. In the suttas the term appears in SN 3.9, SN 11.16, SN 7.13, AN 2.35, AN 4.39, AN 8.1, AN 8.59, AN 8.60, DN 5, and Snp 3.5.
[160] See for finer distinctions Smith (1986b).

3.1 Religious Giving and the Worship Discourse for Lay People

3.1.1 The Framework of Religious Giving

Religious giving is of crucial importance to all religions of ancient India. Especially the *śramaṇa*s depended almost entirely on the willingness of lay people to provide them with food, clothing, and shelter. Apart from allowing the bare survival of the religious professionals the act of giving was relevant on a religious and spiritual level from the time of the Ṛgveda on.

In this section we will show that in early lay Buddhism the ritualized act of giving has been strongly influenced by Brahmanism. Afterwards we will discuss how religious giving fits the soteriological foundation of Buddhism and we will argue that the promised afterlife rewards of lay donations are quite problematic for the inner consistency of Buddhism.

This far-reaching topic of religious giving in early Buddhism has already been investigated in detail, especially by Egge (2002). Generally, Egge (ibid., 5) sees spiritual progress in early Buddhism discussed in two different discourses: a karmic discourse, and a discourse of worship[161]. To put it simply, in the karmic discourse the effect depends on the purifying act of giving, and it aims at the eventual liberation of the donor, be it in a current or a future life. In the discourse of worship the effect depends on the qualities of the *recipient*, and the aim is to secure a heavenly rebirth for the lay donors.

Religious giving in early Buddhism is almost entirely situated in the discourse of worship, for it doesn't lead to liberation, no matter how perfectly executed or how large the donation to the Saṅgha is. Additionally, central aspects are directly taken from Brahmanism, for example when the Buddhist worship discourse applies the language of Brahmin rituals: *yaññ*a (Skt *yajña*), i.e. 'worship offering' (see Anālayo 2009); *dakkhiṇā* (Skt *dakṣiṇā*), which is originally the ritual fee given to Brahmin priests; and *puñña* (Skt *punya*), 'merit' as the beneficial result of giving.

[161] Egge calls it 'sacrificial-purificatory discourse' which we find slightly misleading because purification is part of the monastic path as well.

Yajña is a central term in the context of Brahmin rituals. Commonly translated as 'sacrifice' we follow Ferrara (2016, 182) and translate it as 'the action to honour, to offer, to worship gods' – or simply 'worship offering' (see also Jain 2010-2011, 162). As Ferrara points out further (ibid., 175), 'sacrifice' is better represented by the term *medha* (as in the *aśvamedha* 'horse sacrifice'). Other related Vedic terms are *āhuti* ('libation' or 'ritual pouring'), *havya* ('oblation'), *iṣṭi* ('offering'), and *purodāśa* ('cake offering').

With the earliest understanding of *yajña* as 'worship offering to the gods' we can turn to early Buddhism and see how this originally Vedic term was appropriated and redefined in the Buddhist suttas[162]. In general, the suttas confirm that *yaññа* is indeed an originally Brahmin term (AN 3.59, AN 3.60, AN 6.52, MN 93, DN 3, Snp 3.4). A recurrent theme is that *yaññа* including animal victims is strongly criticized while offerings without animal victims are accepted and endorsed (SN 1.32, SN 3.9, AN 4.39, AN 4.40, AN 4.198, AN 7.47, MN 51, MN 94, DN 5, DN 23, Snp 2.7) – this already contradicts the notion that early Buddhism was anti-ritualistic *per se*. Fittingly, *yaññа* is condemned if the donor is stingy (SN 1.32, AN 4.57). Yet, occasionally the limited benefit of *yaññа* is pointed out, and Snp 2.2 and Snp 5.3 even emphasize that it has no salvific value. Rarely a *yaññа* also results in a joyful state of mind (AN 6.37, Snp 3.5).

Snp 3.4 promotes a shift of *yaññа* from worshipping devas to worshipping Buddhist arahants. The Buddha predicts positive results for the donor: "If an accomplished one, a Veda-master, at the time of *yaññа*, gains an offering [*āhuti*, i.e. libation] from anyone, it succeeds for the donor, I say"[163]. More directly, the Buddha tells his Brahmin interlocutor that he should give *him* the *habya* oblation[164]. And finally he declares that "the Tathāgata is worthy of the sacrificial cake [*pūraḷāsa*]"[165]. As can be clearly seen, Snp 3.4 consistently uses Brahmin ritual terms in order to make the Buddha (and in extension Buddhist monastics) the recipient of Brahmin offerings.

Snp 3.5 continues to promote the same shift. First, the Buddha confirms that giving generously is meritorious for the giver. But then he specifies that the resulting merit (*puññа*) depends on the

[162] See the discussion of *mahāyaññа* below.
[163] *yadantagū vedagū yaññakāle yassāhutiṃ labhe tassijjheti brūmi.*
[164] *Kālena tamhi habyaṃ pavecche, yo brāhmaṇo puññapekkho yajetha.*
[165] *tathāgato arahati pūraḷāsaṃ.*

recipient of the *dakkhiṇā*. What follows is not surprisingly the description of the Buddha himself as the ideal recipient. Further, the Buddha explains that during the offering act the mind should be clarified by unbounded loving-kindness (*mettā*). The sutta ends with the Buddha's declaration that proper worship offering leads to rebirth in *brahmaloka*, the highest heaven of Brahmanism. Clearly, the sutta takes the framework of Brahmin ritual offering to the gods, argues for a shift to the Buddha as a recipient, and promises Brahmins the highest rebirth in return.

In summary, the suttas attempt to assimilate *yaññ*a into a Buddhist ritual discourse of worship offering. Yet, it is generally used in conversations with Brahmins. In some cases it is criticized when animal killings are involved (see section 3.4). Especially in Snp 3.4 and Snp 3.5 the *yaññ*a concept is redirected from devas as recipients to the Buddha (but not yet to arahants or monastics in general), which speaks for a rather early conception of these suttas. For the survival of the Saṅgha as a whole, however, the focus on the Buddha or arahants was bound to be insufficient, because lay people had no way of knowing whether a recipient was indeed a liberated master and thus if the offering guaranteed heavenly rebirth. As we will show below, a later development indeed saw *any* monastic as a worthy recipient, no matter how developed or liberated they were.

But first we have to examine another Vedic term which was central in the context of religious giving and was also broadly employed by the suttas: *dakṣiṇā*, the fee given to Brahmin priests for their ritual services. Gonda (1975, 75) points to the centrality of *dakṣiṇā* for the Vedic ritual in the Brāhmaṇa period when he writes: "*dakṣiṇā* is the very keystone of the sacrifice without which the oblations are not complete. It is, in a mystical way, placed on the credit side of the donor's account. The sacrifice instituted by him goes to the world of the gods, followed by the *dakṣiṇā*, and holding on to the *dakṣiṇā* the institutor (donor) himself goes to heaven". Mylius (1979, 178) emphasizes that *dakṣiṇā* was not only of symbolic value but also of substantial economic importance: "*Dakṣiṇā* was the share of the available goods in early Vedic and later Indian times which the priests claimed as wages or fees for their ritual activities and which they sought to constantly expand by a system of regulations" (my own translation)[166].

[166] „Die *dakṣiṇā* war derjenige Teil des im jungvedischen und späteren Indien erzeugten Mehrproduktes, den die Priester als Lohn bzw. Gebühr für ihre kultische Tätigkeit in Anspruch nahmen und den sie durch ein System von Vorschriften ständig zu erweitern suchten."

Dakṣiṇā, Pāli *dakkhiṇā*, appears often throughout the suttas. More than *yaññ*a it has been subject to appropriation by early Buddhism and is thus not limited to Brahmin interlocutors or Brahmin rituals. Yet, it has not lost its main ritual purpose, namely to secure a good return – be it material, immaterial, or in form of a good afterlife. But the focus of the suttas lies on securing a good rebirth[167], as can be seen in the formula: "one establishes for ascetics and Brahmins an uplifting *dakkhiṇā* that is heavenly, resulting in happiness, and conducive to heaven"[168] (SN 3.19, AN 4.61, AN 5.41, AN 5.227, AN 6.37, DN 2, DN 26).

A few more suttas retain a more Brahmin perspective on *dakkhiṇā*. AN 5.39 and DN 31 say that descendants are praiseworthy if they give *dakkhiṇā* on behalf of their deceased ancestors (*peta*)[169], which is a reference to Vedic ancestor rites. In DN 16 the Buddha says that even monastics should dedicate *dakkhiṇā* to the local devas in order to be honored by them in return. In AN 7.46 and AN 7.47 (similarly in DN 33) the fire for oblations is mentioned (*āhuneyyaggi*), and the fire for those worthy of *dakkhiṇā* (*dakkhiṇeyyaggi*). These suttas and passages retain a perspective of early Buddhism on ritual offerings which is in agreement with Brahmanism.

Confirming our above observations, Egge (2002, 115) shows that not the pure intention of the donor is essential in the Buddhist worship discourse but the qualities of the *recipient*. This is mostly accurate, with a few notable exceptions: AN 4.78 (also in MN 142 and DN 33) allows both a purification of the *dakkhiṇā* by the donor and the recipient. And AN 6.37 praises a *dakkhiṇā* for an arahant, if the donor has purified their mind. Still, these are exceptions to the rule which defines the value of the *dakkhiṇā* through the monastic recipient.

So far, we focused on the attempt of the suttas to shift offerings from the gods to liberated Buddhist masters. Yet, religious professionals from other spiritual movements equally competed for material contributions – a challenge to which some suttas react with harsh language: AN 3.57 states that "fools devoid of understanding, dull-witted, unlearned, do not attend on the holy ones

[167] There are a few exceptions which promise also mundane benefits, just as in the early Vedic discourse. AN 4.34, AN 4.57, and AN 5.32 promise to those giving *dakkhiṇā* to Buddha and Saṅgha an excellent life span, beauty, glory, good reputation, happiness, and strength.
[168] *samaṇabrāhmaṇesuuddhaggikaṃ dakkhiṇaṃ patiṭṭhāpeti sovaggikaṃ sukhavipākaṃ saggasaṃvattanikaṃ*
[169] *Atha vā pana petānaṃ, dakkhiṇaṃ anuppadassati*

but give their gifts to those outside"[170]. And AN 5.175 calls a lay follower who gives *dakkhiṇā* to non-Buddhist teachers an outcast (*caṇḍāla*)[171], a stain, and blameworthy.

Thus the Saṅgha actively pursued from a certain time on to move the 'worthiness' of receiving gifts away from Brahmins, devas, and other sects, to the Saṅgha. Beyond that we can see a broadening of the concept of 'worthiness' within the Saṅgha. The original *dakkhiṇeyya* (Skt *dakṣiṇīya*), i.e. the worthy recipient of *dakkhiṇā*, was originally the Buddha himself. Most instances in the suttas indeed refer to him, or in extension, to the fully liberated arahants[172]. The idea that a regular monastic could be an equal 'field of merit' of the same quality could only have been a later development.

The following formula was not only inserted into dozens of suttas but also gained tremendous popularity in the Theravāda world until today where it is regularly chanted in monasteries: "This Saṅgha of the Blessed One's disciples is worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality, worthy of offerings [*dakkhiṇeyya*], worthy of reverential salutation, the unsurpassed field of merit for the world"[173]. What is essential here is that no distinction is made between the Saṅgha as a whole and the Buddha, and even within the Saṅgha there is no difference anymore between regular monastics and arahants. Each monastic is now a representative of the 'unsurpassed field of merit for the world' and the Saṅgha as a whole presents itself as a solid block of 'worthiness'. MN 142 drives this point home when it claims that *dakkhiṇā* would have incalculable and immeasurable benefits – even if the Saṅgha consisted only of unethical monastics.

[170] *Bālā ca avijānantā, dummedhā assutāvino; Bahiddhā denti dānāni, na hi sante upāsare*
[171] See for a detailed discussion of outcasts in Buddhism Silk (2020).
[172] The Buddha is the worthy recipient in SN 7.8, SN 7.9, SN 7.11, AN 10.30. Arahants are the field of merit in AN 3.57, AN 3.96-98, AN 3.133, AN 4.114, AN 4.181, AN 4.259, AN 4.260, AN 5.38, AN 5.44, AN 5.107-108, AN 5.139-140, AN 5.179, AN 6.2-4, AN 6.37, AN 6.58, AN 7.14, AN 7.16-19, AN 7.95-614, AN 8.34, AN 8.57-60, AN 10.97, MN 65, MN 125.
[173] *esa bhagavato sāvakasaṅgho, āhuneyyo pāhuneyyo dakkhiṇeyyo añjalikaraṇīyo anuttaraṃ puññakkhettaṃ lokassā'ti* (SN 11.3, SN 12.41, SN 40.10, SN 41.10, SN 55.1, AN 3.70, AN 3.75, AN 3.96, AN 3.98, AN 4.34, AN 4.52, AN 4.181, AN 4.190, AN 5.32, AN 5.107, AN 5.108, AN 5.139, AN 5.140, AN 5.179, AN 5.203, AN 6.1, AN 6.3, AN 6.10, AN 6.58, AN 7.14, AN 7.16, AN 7.95, AN 8.57, AN 8.59, AN 9.10, AN 10.30, AN 10.92, AN 10.97, AN 11.11, MN 7, MN 65, MN 118, DN 16, DN 24, DN 33).

3.1.2 The Rewards for Religious Giving

The essential metaphor connected with *dakkhiṇā* is the 'field of merit', *puññakkhetta* (Skt *puṇyakṣetra*), a term appearing first in early Buddhism. This metaphor employs the image of a seed (the *dakkhiṇā*) that is planted in fertile soil (the attainments of the Buddha and his arahants) to grow into rich crop (the resulting merit for the donor in the afterlife). A devotional poem in SN 1.33 explicitly states that what is given to *dakkhiṇeyya* (the ones worthy of offering) "bears great fruit like seeds sown in a fertile field"[174].

When we review all occurrences we can see how the concepts of *dakkhiṇā*, *dakkhiṇeyya*, and *puññakkhetta* were mostly propagated by the AN. In the SN religious giving is directed more to the Buddha and less employed to benefit the early Saṅgha as a whole. Since we assume that naturally the Buddha would have been the first 'worthy recipient' followed by other arahants and only much later by regular monastics, this supports our general tendency to see the SN as older than the AN.

So far we could show how early Buddhism successfully appropriated from Brahmanism the discourse of worship, worship offerings, and the promise of substantial 'return-on-investment' in the afterlife. However, the logic of this appropriation is not fully clear yet. In Vedic rituals *dakṣiṇā* is given in return for the ritual services of Brahmins, but in the Buddhist reinterpretation *dakkhiṇā* is not given for a ritual service. Rather, the existence of the Buddha and the Saṅgha *per se* makes other rituals superfluous. If worshiped through donations, Buddha and Saṅgha *are* the *puññakkhetta*, the field of merit, and fulfill the rebirth aspirations. Hence, Buddha and Saṅgha don't replace the Brahmins, but the gods themselves.

Implementing this new worship discourse was probably instrumental for securing powerful and royal patronage, eventually putting Buddhist monastics at the top of society. We doubt though that this could have happened during the Buddha's lifetime. It is more probable that in the earliest stages Buddhist monastics were perceived as just another group of ascetic wanderers. Then the Buddha's spiritual teachings and an inspiring conduct of the first-generation disciples

[174] *Etesu dinnāni mahapphalāni, Bījāni vuttāni yathā sukhette''ti.*

would have convinced lay people to support especially the Buddhist monastics. With time, lay people would have demanded from Buddhist monastics to satisfy their need for a secure heavenly rebirth, and only then the broad concept of the 'field of merit' would have developed, culminating in the royal patronage of King Aśoka in the third century BCE.

One would think from the above discussion that lay followers were mostly interested in a good afterlife and thus followed the worship discourse. But as Kelly (2011, 18-19) shows, about a third of the suttas in which lay audiences are instructed have liberation as their goal[175]. Also Samuels (1999, 233-235) collects circumstantial evidence for a liberation-oriented laity. It is therefore appropriate to distinguish several types of 'lay people' from a Buddhist perspective: An upper class with *political power* who could legitimize early Buddhism on a systemic level; wealthy male householders with *economic power* who were able to make big donations; female supporters who provided daily meals; spiritually gifted lay people with a potential for ordination; and the general public which was important for accepting Buddhism as a legitimate spiritual movement.

Gifted lay people are in some cases the explicit audience for a teaching on *both* discourses, worship and liberation: "Then the Blessed One gave […] a progressive discourse, that is, a talk on giving, virtuous behavior, and heaven; he revealed the danger, degradation, and defilement of sensual pleasures and the benefit of renunciation. […Then] he revealed that Dhamma teaching special to the Buddhas: suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path"[176] (AN 8.12, AN 8.21, AN 8.22, MN 56, MN 91, DN 3, DN 5, DN 14).

Interestingly, the discourses are presented one after the other – the first consists of religious giving and attaining heaven, and the second conveys the path to liberation. What is essential here is that only the second is marked as a teaching 'special to the Buddhas' – which by implication

[175] According to Kelly (2011, 18) the teachings to lay people had the following spiritual goals: good present life or rebirth (SN 34%, AN 61%, MN 32%, DN 34%), and liberation (SN 45%, AN 22%, MN 48%, DN 50%). The AN stands out in having the fewest teachings to lay people on liberation.

[176] *Atha kho bhagavā sīhassa senāpatissa anupubbiṃ kathaṃ kathesi, seyyathidaṃ – dānakathaṃ sīlakathaṃ saggakathaṃ, kāmānaṃ ādīnavaṃ okāraṃ saṃkilesaṃ nekkhamme ānisaṃsaṃ pakāsesi. Yadā bhagavā aññāsi sīhaṃ senāpatiṃ kallacittaṃ muducittaṃ vinīvaraṇacittaṃ udaggacittaṃ pasannacittaṃ, atha yā buddhānaṃ sāmukkaṃsikā dhammadesanā taṃ pakāsesi – dukkhaṃ samudayaṃ nirodhaṃ maggaṃ.*

means that the teaching on giving (*dāna*), virtuous restraint (*sīla*), and heaven (*sagga*, Skt *svarga*) is *not* a specifically Buddhist teaching and therefore probably goes back to Brahmins and *śramaṇa*s. We therefore suggest an the hypothesis that lay people in early Buddhism were generally located in a worship discourse, *unless* they were perceived as spiritually ready for teachings aiming at liberation.

This leaves us with a difficult question: Since early Buddhism made wide use of the worship discourse, applying terms from Brahmanism and promising lay people a heavenly rebirth – what is the spiritual value of the worship discourse within Buddhism? After all, the core Buddhist doctrines are clear: *only liberation* will end the round of rebirths. Heavenly rebirth is presented to monastics as worthless, eventually leading again to a lower rebirth[177]. And, escape from perpetual rebirth was not generally taught to lay people[178] (see also Gombrich 2006, 75-76).

In contrast, the suttas which praise the merit of religious giving don't warn lay people that the promised heavenly rebirth is only temporary – it is rather presented as a genuinely positive goal in itself, just as in the Brahmin worldview. And at no place is a teaching on religious giving coupled with the promise that the lay follower would get liberated after the heavenly rebirth. Neither do the suttas contain narratives with deva devotees of the Buddha who attain liberation, so that laypeople were *not* taught a sequence of: donation – heavenly rebirth – liberation. Therefore lay supporters who are in the suttas promised heavenly rebirth through religious giving are knowingly kept in the round of rebirth without pointers to liberation. To make things worse, the Saṅgha benefited economically from lay people not knowing that their aspired heavenly rebirth is, ultimately, of no value at all.

There are even some explicit examples for insufficient teachings of laypeople. In MN 97 the Buddha's master disciple Sāriputta teaches the Brahmin Dhānañjāni, and assumes that *because he is a Brahmin* he should merely be taught a path to *brahmaloka*, not to liberation. The Brahmin

[177] E.g. the whole of SN 15, SN 22.99, SN 22.100, SN 48.50 and SN 56.35 speak of a beginningless *saṃsāra* (transmigration). And suttas like SN 9.6, AN 7.62, AN 7.66, DN 1, and DN 24 describe how even the highest gods are eventually reborn again. See further chapter six.
[178] Only two suttas teach *saṃsāra* to non-monastics (SN 15.8, MN 82). Other than that it appears in the suttas mentioned in the note above, and in SN 1.55-57, SN 6.14, SN 12.60, SN 15, SN 24.8, SN 35.229, AN 4.9-10, AN 4.49, AN 4.199, AN 5.55, AN 5.71, AN 8.29, MN 12, MN 22, MN 76, MN 98, DN 2, DN 15, DN 16, and DN 18.

dies soon afterwards and the Buddha reproaches Sāriputta for leading him only to *brahmaloka*. But in MN 99 and DN 13 it is the Buddha himself who teaches Brahmins only the path to *brahmaloka*, and not to full liberation. Even clearer is MN 143 where Sāriputta gives the generous lay supporter Anāthapiṇḍika the higher teaching only on his death bed[179]. Anāthapiṇḍika then cries and says: "But although I have long waited upon the Teacher and bhikkhus worthy of esteem, never before have I heard such a talk on the Dhamma"[180]. Sāriputta candidly replies: "Such talk on the Dhamma, householder, is not given to lay people clothed in white. Such talk on the Dhamma is given to those who have gone forth [i.e. ordained]"[181].

There is a common belief, based on SN 47.9 (copied into DN 16), that the Buddha did not have a 'closed fist' in regard to the teaching, i.e. that he didn't hold anything back. Yet, according to the previous passage monastics were clearly privileged in their access to liberation-oriented teachings[182]. And in general we have to conclude that liberation was mainly taught to monastics and not to lay followers.

Were the Buddha and early Buddhist preachers concealing the gloomy implications of endless transmigration in order to not alienate lay followers? Is the worship discourse a consequence of a laity not interested in higher teachings? Or are the numerous suttas featuring religious giving later insertions after all, coming from an urbanized and spiritually deteriorated Saṅgha focusing on economic gain and social influence?

We find it implausible that all the suttas which praise religious giving for the sake of a pleasant afterlife would be later insertions. Even though a majority of them are in the AN and less in the SN they still contain wide-spread formulas and diverse material and are too large in number to be merely late corruptions. If the worship discourse did *not* come from the Buddha himself it still

[179] This is mostly consistent with the other suttas in which Anāthapiṇḍika appears as interlocutor (SN 10.8, SN 12.41, SN 55.26-28, AN 2.35, AN 3.109, AN 3.110, AN 4.58, AN 4.60-62, AN 5.41, AN 5.43, AN 5.174, AN 5.176, AN 5.179, AN 7.63, AN 9.20, AN 9.27, AN 10.91-92, in SN 1.48 and SN 2.20 after his death as a deva). The only exception is AN 10.93 where Anāthapiṇḍika shows a deep knowledge of Dependent Origination.
[180] *api ca me dīgharattaṃ satthā payirupāsito manobhāvanīyā ca bhikkhū; na ca me evarūpī dhammī kathā sutapubbā''ti.*
[181] *Na kho, gahapati, gihīnaṃ odātavasanānaṃ evarūpī dhammī kathā paṭibhāti; pabbajitānaṃ kho, gahapati, evarūpī dhammī kathā paṭibhātī''ti.* Anālayo (2010) argues that Anāthapiṇḍika was not interested in liberation.
[182] The commentary says that the passage means not to have favorite students. See Bodhi (2000, 1920, n. 140).

must have been inserted very early on. And while it is likely that the lay population was generally not very interested in the radical vision of liberation it is still surprising that the inferior teaching of religious giving is so prominently featured in the early Buddhist texts.

We believe that in the end two factors were decisive. First of all, the teaching on Buddhist liberation might have been difficult to convey and to understand. At the same time there must have been a genuine gratitude towards a donating laity which enabled monastics to focus on their spiritual quest. The concept of merit thus would have been used at first to generally reward the donating laity and to make them participate in the attainments of the monastics. The second factor is the promise of heavenly rebirth in exchange for religious giving, which is essentially an appropriation of the Brahmin worship offering. From what we can gather this indeed belongs to the earliest layers of texts. But we also assume that the promise of heavenly rebirth was increasingly used in the later suttas. Taking into account an eventual spiritual decline in the first two centuries after the Buddha, and an urbanized Saṅgha competing for patronage against other spiritual movements, we can easily imagine how lay people received increasingly bold promises for their donations. Together, this would have led to the prominence of religious giving and the reward of heavenly rebirth as we find them in the suttas today.

3.2 *Agnihotra*

In this section we will look at the *agnihotra* ritual – one of the essential daily Brahmin rituals – as it is portrayed in the Pāli suttas. We will show how events and details involving the *agnihotra* probably date back to an early stage of text formation, even though in the process redactions and transmission errors got codified. At the end we will see how authentic events were utilized by redactors to serve an explicit purpose – to create stories of enthusiastic Brahmin devotion towards the Buddha.

3.2.1 *Agnihotra* in General

Agnihotra (Pāli *aggihutta*) is a fundamental ritual for Brahmins, performed twice a day, in the morning and the evening, in which milk is offered into the ritual fire. We encounter sutta narratives involving the *aggihutta* most prominently in SN 7.8, SN 7.9, Snp 3.4, Snp 3.7 (and the identical MN 92). The *śrauta agnihotra* for which several priests are necessary doesn't appear in the suttas[183]. Instead, we encounter the *gṛhya* equivalent which can be performed by a single Brahmin (Skorpuski 2016, 78). The important elements of the ritual are: milk collected in a special clay basin, the *agnihotrasthālī*; a special ladle (the *agnihotrahavaṇī*) to pour libations into the fire; and the remainder of the milk in the ladle usually drunk by the Brahmin. With this in mind we can now inspect the suttas in which the *agnihotra* appears and see how the Buddhist depiction relates to the original Vedic sources.

3.2.2 *Agnihotra* in SN 7.8

In SN 7.8 a solitary Brahmin from the Bhāradvāja clan wants to perform the *aggihutta* and has arranged ghee (*sappi*, Skt *sarpis*) and rice milk pudding (*pāyasa*). Then the Buddha, walking for alms, arrives at the Brahmin's house and stands outside. The Brahmin says that only a Brahmin master of the 'three knowledges' (i.e. Vedas) may partake of the rice pudding. The Buddha replies that a Brahmin is not defined by his lineage and that the proper 'three knowledges' come from (Buddhist) liberation. The Brahmin is convinced and exclaims "Eat, Master Gotama! You are truly a Brahmin"[184]. But the Buddha rejects the food, saying that it was 'with verses recited' (*gāthābhigīta*), and not fit for him to be eaten – instead he asks for different food. In the end the Brahmin receives ordination and attains liberation at an unspecified later time.

Generally, it seems that Brahmin practitioners had the freedom to perform the *agnihotra* with different kinds of food, at least as interpreted by Yājñavalkya in JB 1.19. So the rice pudding

[183] See for the *śrauta agnihotra* process Dumont (1964, 337), Bodewitz (1976, 62-69), and Payne (2004, 207).
[184] *Bhuñjatu bhavaṃ gotamo. Brāhmaṇo bhavaṃ.*

mentioned in the sutta might fit the ritual, even though we ususally would expect milk. On the other hand, *sarpis* and *pāyasa* are very specific for a ritual setting, and there is indeed a better fitting ritual in BauDS 4.7.9, titled by Olivelle as the "*gaṇa* oblation for securing wishes"[185]. Here, a Brahmin has fasted for three days (BauDS 4.7.4), recites different texts (BauDS 4.7.5), offers ghee (*sarpis*) and rice pudding (*pāyasa*) into the fire (BauDS 4.7.6), and concludes the ritual by feeding the leftovers to a Brahmin. Sumant (2017, 124) generally defines *gaṇa*s as "groups of mantras with specific technical designation". And Olivelle comments that the *gaṇa* ritual contains "several groups of verses set in numerous meters" (Olivelle, 2000, 628) which the Buddha might have called *gāthābhigīta*, i.e. 'with verses recited'. Because of the fitting food items and the verses recited it is possible that the Brahmin in the sutta actually performed the *gaṇa* ritual instead of the *agnihotra*.

Regarding the term *gāthābhigīta*, it might be relevant that the *gāthā* verses had a close connection to *sāman* practices (Horsch 1966, 213-219) which had to be practiced in the forest because they were considered powerful and dangerous (Gonda 1975, 317). This dangerous or magical practice might have been what the Buddha in the end objected to. Another possibility is that the Buddha rejected the *purpose* of the *sāman*s, since many of them are motivated by malice and intend to destroy enemies (Vira & Chandra 1968, xv).

We conclude that the details described in SN 7.8 could be based on real events, even though probably the ritual in question was not the *agnihotra* as the sutta narrative claims. The question remains if indeed the historical Buddha could have been the source of the event. As shown above, a good fit for the Brahmin's practice is the *gaṇa* ritual of BauDS 4.7.9. It is practiced by a single Brahmin, involves potentially objectionable verses, and at the end the leftovers have to be given specifically to a Brahmin. The problem is that the Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra was composed around 150 BCE (Olivelle 2000, xxxiii). Naturally there is the possibility that this ritual was practiced centuries before it was fixed in the Dharmasūtra, and indeed the inaccuracies of the sutta regarding the details suggest that a longer time of transmission has passed before the text was fixed. Nonetheless, the fact remains that our main Vedic source places the composition of our sutta much later than the Buddha's lifetime.

[185] BauDS has no specific title for the ritual. It can also be found in parts in the Āgniveśya Gṛhyasūtra 2.4.5.

In spite of the unclear details, the purpose of the sutta is clear, namely to show that a practicing Brahmin who initially looked down on the Buddha eventually became a devoted and liberated Buddhist monastic. This particular narrative could only develop because the Brahmin initially rejected the Buddha as a non-Brahmin, and the performance of a ritual which requires giving leftovers to a Brahmin created a formidable setup for the eventual conversion to unfold.

3.2.3 *Agnihotra* in SN 7.9

The following Sutta SN 7.9 (along with its close parallel Snp 3.4) gives us an alternative narrative to SN 7.8 but adds interesting details. Here again a solitary Brahmin from the Bhāradvāja clan, this time named Sundarika, performs the *aggihutta* on the bank of the river Sundarikā, hence his toponymic name. From MN 7 we learn that Sundarika dwelled at the river because he regularly practiced water purification.

After performing the *aggihutta* Sundarika looks for a recipient of his offering leftovers. The term translated as 'leftovers' is *habyasesa* and consists of Skt *havis* (oblation in fire rituals) and *śeṣa* (remainder). Generally, the leftovers of ritual food were considered powerful and had their own high significance, as Sojková (2016) and Malamoud (1996, 7-22) show. There are two kinds of leftovers: The leftovers in the ritual ladle are frequently called *ucchiṣṭa* (explicitly in ŚB 2.3.1.39), and are consumed by the Brahmin himself. Leftovers in the pot are often referred to as *śeṣa*, which fits better the *habyasesa* of the sutta.

While Sundarika looks around he sees someone (the Buddha) sitting at the root of a tree and approaches him with the leftovers in his left hand and a water pitcher in his right. Gonda (1972, 14) confirms that gifts of worship offering or consecrated material are regularly held in the left hand and served with the right. Additionally, instances in the BauŚS show that pouring water from a pitcher was done with the right hand[186], so that these details in the sutta prove to be accurate. Approaching the Buddha with food and water also fits very well the instructions of how

[186] E.g. BauŚS 20.26, BauŚS 21.6, BauŚS 21.12, BauŚS 22.4, BauŚS 22.5, BauŚS 22.16.

to receive honorable guests in ĀpDS 2.6.3-20. A 'guest' (*atithi*) is specifically defined as someone who has studied the Vedas – (and according to MDh 3.110 explicitly not a *kṣatriya*, as Gotama Buddha was). This corresponds to SN 7.8 where the Brahmin wants to offer his food only to someone who has mastered the three Vedas[187].

Sundarika hesitates when he sees that the stranger is a shaven ascetic, but he reminds himself that some Brahmins are shaven as well and so he asks the Buddha for his *jāti* (lineage). Obviously Sundarika is looking for a Brahmin in order to give him the leftovers of the *agnihotra* (just as in SN 7.8). Vedic texts, however, usually don't insist that *agnihotra* leftovers should be given to another person. E.g. JB 1.41 deals with them ceremonially without the need of a recipient. ŚB 2.3.1.39 prescribes to cast the leftovers away, or to have a Brahmin drink it. And Mānava Śrautasūtra 11.9.1.7 advises to offer the *śeṣa* to the Forefathers (i.e. the ancestors).

There is, however, another possibility, which would speak for a later composition of the sutta, namely that the Brahmin was practicing the 'five great offerings' (*mahāyajña*, see also section 3.4) which require feeding a Brahmin. PāGS 2.9.11 says: "Taking the Brahmin's portion, he should give it to a Brahmin, after he has made him wash himself, with, 'Well! to thee!'"[188]. This passage would explain why Sundarika would require a Brahmin and why he carries water as well. Even clearer is MDh 3.82 regarding the *mahāyajña*: "He should feed at least a single Brahmin for the benefit of his ancestors as part of the five great sacrifices"[189]. MDh 3.96 continues: "He should garnish some alms food or a pot of water and present it in accordance with the rules to a Brahmin who knows the true meaning of the Veda"[190]. MDh 3.130 adds: "He should search far and wide for a Brahmin who has mastered the Veda; such a man is the proper recipient of divine and ancestral offerings"[191]. MDh 3.151 also explicitly warns not to feed a bald head (*durvāla*) at an ancestral offering. These explicit requirements fit very well the descriptions of the sutta but push its composition to a later date, closer to the development of the MDh material, at the earliest around the first century BCE (Olivelle 2005, 22-25).

[187] In the ĀpDS passage the guest has to be received with food and water in a clay pot and his feet are supposed to be washed (see also Keith 1998, 363; Kane 1941, 749-756).
[188] *uddhṛtyāgraṃ brāhmaṇāyāvanejya dadyāddhantata iti*
[189] *ekam apy āśayed vipraṃ pitrarthe pāñcayajñike*. (Similarly ŚāGS 4.1.12 regarding the monthly *śraddha.*)
[190] *bhikṣām apy udapātraṃ vā satkṛtya vidhipūrvakam / vedatattvārthaviduṣe brāhmaṇāyopapādayet*
[191] *dūrād eva parīkṣeta brāhmaṇaṃ vedapāragam / tīrthaṃ tad dhavyakavyānāṃ pradāne*

As mentioned, Sundarika needs to know if the stranger is a Brahmin – which gives the Buddha the opportunity to teach him that conduct is more important than *jāti* (lineage) or *kula* (family). Further, the Buddha calls himself a *vedantagū*, i.e. one who is a master of the Vedas, or more generally of the 'knowledges'. The Buddha also proclaims that he is worthy of worship offering (*yaññopanīta*) and oblation poured into the fire[192]. Sundarika replies: "My sacrificial offering must have been well performed, since I have met such a *vedagū*! It's because I'd never met anyone like you that others ate the leftover offering. Eat, Master Gotama, you are truly a Brahmin"[193]. This confirms that Sundarika has been giving ritual *śeṣa* to others on a regular basis and that he sees the Buddha as an honorable Brahmin, a master of knowledge. His gladness also indicates that he used the offerings to find a spiritual teacher and that the original ritual could indeed have been the "*gaṇa* oblation for securing wishes" from BauDS 4.7.4-8, as discussed above. An even better fit for SN 7.9 is, however, the *mahāyajña* ritual as described in MDh.

The term *vedantagū*, which the Buddha applies to himself, appears only here and in this sutta's parallel Snp 3.4 which will be discussed below. In Vedic literature the term '*vedanta*' was first used only in the post-Buddha BauDS 3.10.10 and GauDS 19.12. This speaks, again, for a late redaction of our sutta, and also links this narrative (as SN 7.8) to the BauDS.

Moving on in the narrative, just as in SN 7.8, the Buddha surprisingly rejects the food as *gāthābhigīta*, 'with verses recited'. He adds, however, that only he and his followers could digest this food. Interestingly, this claim is missing in the Chinese parallels of the sutta (Choong 2009, 376). Indeed, it is peculiar that the Buddha would reject the food even if he insisted that he could digest it. Consequently, Sundarika asks the Buddha what to do with the *śeṣa*. Even though as a practicing Brahmin he should know the alternatives himself, he apparently has at this point accepted the Buddha as his teacher. The Buddha tells him to dispose of it in the river. The Brahmin does as told, and like "a ploughshare that had been heated all day" (*phālo divasaṃsantatto*) the water sizzles and steams, to the bewilderment of Sundarika.

[192] *yaññopanīto tamupavhayetha, kālena so juhati dakkhiṇeyye*
[193] *Addhā suyiṭṭhaṃ suhutaṃ mama yidaṃ, yaṃ tādisaṃ vedagumaddasāmi; tumhādisānañhi adassanena, Aññο jano bhuñjati habyasesaṃ, bhuñjatu bhavaṃ gotamo, Brāhmaṇo bhavaṃ*

Once more we find a parallel in MDh. MDh 3.253 instructs the worshiper that after feeding a Brahmin the ancestor offering, the worshiper should ask him what to do with the leftovers and to follow his instructions. This again suggests that the sutta uses material from a much later time.

The topic of indigestible food appears twice more in early Buddhist texts, in Snp 1.4 and Vin 1.224-225. In Snp 1.4 a Brahmin Bhāradvāja, this time a farmer, is supervising the sowing of his large estate, and offers the Buddha alms at the food distribution. The Buddha rejects with the already known argument that it is *gāthābhigīta*, 'with verses recited'. The Buddha instructs to dispose the remains in water, which again sizzles and steams 'like a ploughshare that had been heated all day'. In this farming-context the metaphor of the ploughshare makes sense, but it is not sensible that food at a public food distribution would be indigestible, nor the claim that it was magically charged by unusual rituals. The passage in Vin 1.224-225 is even more obscure. Here a lay follower distributes regular sugar to Buddhist monastics, which then sizzles in the water. It is obvious that these three suttas go back to one original source narrative.

Returning to SN 7.9 the Buddha not only rejects the ritual leftovers, he also criticizes Vedic rituals and teaches Sundarika that kindling fire-wood is only external and worthless for purification. He then says that he has given up burning firewood himself, and now only kindles the *inner* flame (*ajjhatta joti*). A similar internalization can be found already in ŚB 11.2.6.13 where the 'self-offerer' (*ātmayājin*) is preferred over the 'god-offerer' (*devayājin*). A comparable logic of internalization is suggested in JB 1.2 and CU 5.24.4[194].

In the sutta the Buddha then employs a philosophical device well-known from the Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads, namely *bandhu* or 'correspondences'[195], i.e. he equates external ritual elements with internal characteristics of humans: e.g. fire-smoke with anger, or the sacrificial ladle with the tongue. Hereby, the sutta presents the Buddha with skills similar to Vedic teachers (see also Shults 2014, 123-125; Wezler 1996; Gonda 1965b). Finally, the sutta ends with the Brahmin receiving ordination and attaining liberation.

[194] See for a detailed discussion of the *prāṇāgnihotra* Bodewitz (213-338), also Heesterman (1985, 93-94), and Cavallin (2003). For the Buddhist perspective see Shults (2014, 123-125).
[195] See Schayer (1925, 22-24), Gonda (1965b); Farmer, Henderson, & Witzel (2000, 51-54), or Cavallin (2003b).

Overall, SN 7.9 contains several references to Brahmanism. The ritual described is probably the *mahāyajña* of the post-Buddha MDh. Also, the sutta advocates for an internalization of rituals – a theme already in use in pre-Buddhist texts. And, the Buddha declares that ritually pouring libation into the fire (*juhati*) for a 'worthy one' (i.e. the Buddha) is appropriate – which means that he doesn't reject all aspects of external rituals[196]. Also, the use of *bandhu* echoes a Vedic teaching style.

The *gāthābhigīta* treatment of food in SN 7.9 (and the other two suttas mentioned) makes it improbable that we really deal with the *agnihotra* ritual. Instead, we suggest that the original event involved either the *mahāyajña* or dangerous recitations in the context of the BauDS *gaṇa* ritual. The Buddha would have refused the leftovers either because the food was really indigestible, or because he didn't want to condone unwholesome rituals. During the Buddhist transmission the events have probably been dramatized, and possibly enriched by MDh material. Transmitters might have assumed that the food must have had extraordinary powers if even the Buddha rejected it and accordingly added the dramatic element of the 'sizzling water'.

In any case, the *effect* of SN 7.9 is that a monastic audience would have been warned to accept ritual leftovers from Brahmins. In the end, this is a harsh rejection of a key element of Brahmanism, namely the preparation and consumption of food in Vedic rituals, as detailed in Malamoud (1996), Guha (1985), and Lopez (1997). Yet, even though the accurate ritual framework has been lost in the transmission of SN 7.9 and its parallels, we still find a remarkable willingness of the Buddhist author to include Vedic elements and ritual details. This is most probably an indication that former Brahmins were involved in the composition and transmission of these suttas at certain points in time.

[196] *Juhati*, the ritual pouring into the fire, is found with a positive connotation only in the suttas discussed here, i.e. SN 7.8, SN 7.9, and Snp 3.4. It is criticized in AN 4.198, MN 51, and MN 94 in the context of the *dīkṣā* ritual. In DN 1, DN 2, and DN 10 it is dismissed as a means of livelihood.

3.2.4 Other Mentions of the *Agnihotra*

There are a few other mentions of the *agnihotra* in suttas, but they are less detailed. All of them appear in seemingly more archaic verses and not in prose. In MN 92 (and the identical Snp 3.7) the Buddha calls the *aggihutta* the foremost of worship offerings (*aggihuttamukhā yaññā*), which shows a rather benevolent attitude towards Vedic practices.

In Snp 3.2 Māra approaches (the yet unliberated) Gotama who is practicing extreme austerities and tempts him to give up striving, live as a *brahmacariya* and follow the *aggihutta* practice[197]. This sutta is unusual as it praises the austerities of the Buddha (see section 2.7). It also suggests that Gotama, who is of the *khattiya* warrior caste, could live as a *brahmacariya* and perform the *aggihutta* – a privilege that is explicitly denied to *kṣatriya*s in pre-Buddhist texts (Bodewitz 1976, 116-117).

Snp 2.2 is decidedly anti-ritualistic and focuses entirely on the individual spiritual progress of the earnest practitioner. It rejects the purificatory power of fasting, *tapas*, ritual offerings, and rituals like the *aggihutta*, and advocates the Buddhist practices of sense-control, modesty, and kindness.

Finally, Dhp 26 says that a Buddhist should worship a Dhamma teacher like a Brahmin worships the *aggihutta*[198]. This casually confirms how several suttas relate to Brahmin rituals, namely not as *worthless* but rather as *misdirected*. Instead of following a non-efficient practice one should direct one's ritual activity towards the real 'field of merit', i.e. the Buddha and the Saṅgha.

Overall, the occurrences of *aggihutta* show how ambivalent the suttas are towards Brahmin ritualism. On the one hand, the ritual is seen with disfavor and linked to the Brahmin claim of superiority. On the other hand, the power of the *aggihutta* is acknowledged, but dismissed as misdirected – instead of the Vedic gods the Buddha and his liberated followers should be venerated. Based on the other scattered references throughout the suttas (and which might be earlier than the accounts of SN 7.8 and SN 7.9) it is possible that a *general* practice of *aggihutta*

[197] *Carato ca te brahmacariyaṃ, aggihuttañca jūhato; Pahūtaṃ cīyate puññaṃ*
[198] *Yamhā dhammaṃ vijāneyya, sammāsambuddhadesitaṃ; Sakkaccaṃ taṃ namasseyya, aggihuttaṃva brāhmaṇo.*

was known to early Buddhists. Beyond that, the numerous details in the late SN 7.8 and SN 7.9 show two things: Firstly, that Brahmin Buddhists with knowledge in rituals were likely involved in the original composition. And secondly, that later sutta transmitters were willing to wrongly label a ritual as '*aggihutta*', possibly because they rather addressed a non-Brahmin audience which wasn't familiar with the intricate ritual details.

3.3 Paccorohaṇī, the Ceremony of 'Descent'

Two suttas describe the Brahmin ritual of *paccorohaṇī* (AN 10.119, AN 10.167). In both cases the Buddha reinterprets the ritual: as giving up the wrong path of practice (AN 10.119), and as giving up unethical behavior (AN 10.167). As we will show, in the Pāli suttas the actual Vedic ritual is mentioned, but not properly described.

Literally translated *paccorohaṇī* is the 'ceremony of re-descent', and the source of the ritual is the *gṛhya pratyavarohaṇa* ritual. In both suttas the Buddha asks the Kosala Brahmin Jāṇussoṇī to explain activities that are unknown to him. Jāṇussoṇī answers as follows:

> "On the *uposatha* day, the Brahmins wash their heads and put on a pair of new linen clothes. They then smear the ground with wet cow dung, cover this with green kusa grass, and lie down between the boundary and the fire house. In the course of the night, they get up three times, and with reverential salutation pay homage to the fire: 'We descend in honor of the revered one. We descend in honor of the revered one.' They offer abundant ghee, oil, and butter to the fire. When the night has passed, they offer excellent food of various kinds to Brahmins"[199].

[199] *brāhmaṇā tadahuposathe sīsaṃnhātā navaṃ khomayugaṃ nivatthā allenagomayena pathaviṃ opuñjitvā haritehi kusehi pattharitvā antarā ca velaṃ antarā ca agyāgāraṃseyyaṃ kappenti. Te taṃ rattiṃ tikkhattuṃ paccuṭṭhāya pañjalikā aggiṃ namassanti – 'paccorohāma bhavantaṃ, paccorohāma bhavanta'nti. Bahukena ca sappitelanavanītena aggiṃ santappenti. Tassā ca rattiyā accayena paṇītena khādanīyena bhojanīyena brāhmaṇe santappenti.*

The similarities between the above description and passages in the Gṛhyasūtras were already collected by Hardy (1898) so it will suffice to repeat and summarize his findings. There is no single source that includes all the details of the suttas, but the two closest texts are ĀśGS 2.3.1-13 and PāGS 3.2.1-16.

PāGS 3.2.1 calls the ceremony *āgrahāyaṇī* and basically agrees on the timing of the full-moon, which the suttas call *uposatha* (see section 3.6). In PāGS 3.2.3 cooked food is prepared, but not offered into the fire (as the sutta claims). PāGS 3.2.6 mentions bathing, wearing new garments, laying out a layer of straw, and 're-descending'. In PāGS 3.1.14-15 the family gets up three times and recites a verse. PāGS doesn't mention a preparation of the ground with cow dung or offering food to Brahmins. Also the verse that is recited three times does not match – the PāGS prescribes "Up! with life, with blessed life. Up! with Parjanya's eye, with the seven spaces of the earth"[200].

In ĀśGS 2.3.1 the rite is called *pratyavarohaṇa*, and can be performed on the full moon day of the *mārgaśīrṣa* month, which deviates from the timing of the suttas. ĀśGS 2.3.3 mentions the renovation of the house, levelling of the floor, and the offering of rice pudding (*pāyasa*). ĀśGS 2.3.7 says that the family lies on a layer of straw on the floor. In ĀśGS 2.3.11-12 they get up four times and recite a verse from ṚV 1.22.16: "From that place may the gods bless us"[201]. Finally, in ĀśGS 2.3.13 the family feeds Brahmins with prepared food. In this version the ritual name corresponds with the suttas, also the renovation of the floor, and the straw. Bathing and fresh clothes are not mentioned (but interestingly appear in the unrelated previous chapter, in ĀśGS 2.2.2). Also the recitation differs, but like the suttas the *pratyavarohaṇa* concludes with feeding Brahmins.

What is not mentioned in the suttas at all is the *purpose* of the 're-descending' ritual. The wider context of the original ritual is that snake protection rites are performed at the beginning of the rain season (ĀśGS 2.1 and PāGS 2.14), and also the bedsteads are raised for protection against snakes, which are more active during this time of year (Vogel 1926, 11; Sen 2001, 150). The *pratyavarohaṇa* marks the end of the 'snake season' when the family 're-descends' to the ground

[200] *udāyuṣā svāyuṣotparjanyasya vṛṣṭyā pṛthivyāḥ saptadhāmabhiriti*
[201] *ato devā avantu na*

floor again, renovates the house after the rains, repairs the ground of the fireplace etc. The Gṛhyasūtras have different names for the rite, focusing either on the activity of 'descent' or on the day at which it is performed – '*Āgrahāyaṇī*' (PāGS 3.2.1) refers to the full moon day of the month *Mārgaśīrṣa* (ĀśGS 2.3.1 and Kane 1941, 829). The ritual is therefore performed only once a year and the suttas wrongly claim that it is performed at each *uposatha*.

The question is why the Buddha would not know a ritual like the *pratyavarohaṇa*. After all, in this case we don't deal with a ritual for ritual specialists but instead with a sensible public ceremony of house maintenance. And since it is performed each year one would assume that the Buddha didn't need a Brahmin to explain it to him.

To us, the narrative can only be authentic in connection with our assumption that at the time of the Buddha Vedic Brahmins were not yet fully established in Magadha and Kosala and lived in separated communities, the *brāhmaṇagāma*s, or 'Brahmin villages' (see section 2.2). Thus, non-Brahmins like the Buddha wouldn't have been easily exposed to household rituals of traditional Brahmins, especially if they took place only once a year (and not as the sutta states each month). Further, we can imagine that Jāṇussoṇī, who was close to the Buddha, invited him to a Brahmin village to bless the 're-descending' ritual with his presence, and this could have allowed the Buddha to witness the ritual. In conclusion, the *paccorohaṇī* ritual of the suttas could well go back to authentic events involving the historical Buddha.

3.4 Mahāyañña – Big Sacrifices and Ritual Victims

It is commonly acknowledged that animal sacrifice constitutes an important element in Vedic *śrauta* rituals (e.g. McClymond 2002 & 2008). A simple classification of *śrauta* offerings is threefold: *iṣṭi* (vegetal offerings), *paśubandha* (animal sacrifices) and *soma* which includes *iṣṭi* and *paśubandha* elements (Gonda 1975, 468). Apart from that there are also elaborate soma rituals which include several animal victims, most prominently *aśvamedha*, the horse-sacrifice.

Since early Buddhism (along with early Jainism) unanimously condemns violence in general and animal killing in particular the topic also serves as an important way to contrast its self-identity against Brahmanism[202]. With this background we now discuss the most extensive animal sacrifices found in the suttas, the *mahāyañña*, or 'great worship offering'[203].

The following stock passage is applied to King Pasenadi of Kosala (SN 3.9), the Brahmin Uggatasarīra (AN 7.47), and the Brahmin Kūṭadanta of Magadha (DN 5)[204]: "Now at that time a *mahāyañña* had been set up by [name]. Five hundred chief bulls, five hundred bullocks, five hundred heifers, five hundred goats, and five hundred rams had been led to the pillar for the sacrifice"[205] (SN 3.9 and AN 7.47. In DN 5 the number is seven hundred animals each).

In total, these suttas describe the sacrifice of two thousand five hundred animals in a single *mahāyañña* – in DN 5 even three thousand five hundred. Chinese parallels confirm that this content belongs to a somewhat old strata of suttas, although the numbers of animal victims there range from five hundred to a thousand each.

The sutta term *mahāyañña*, Skt *mahāyajña*, seems to be used as a technical ritual term, but in Vedic texts there is no single ritual with this label which fits the description. In ŚB 2.4.4.14 *mahāyajña* is used in the context of the soma sacrifice (also in TS 3.2.2.4 and BauŚS 14.8). In ŚB 11.5.6.1 the later better-known use of *mahāyajña* is introduced, namely the 'five great offerings' that Brahmins should perform daily: the worship offering to beings (*bhūtayajña*), to men (*manuṣyayajña*), to the Forefathers (*pitṛyajña*), to the gods (*devayajña*), and to Brahman (*brahmayajña*)[206]. None of these five rituals is connected with animal sacrifice – on the contrary they represent a general movement *away* from the elaborate *śrauta* rituals towards rituals

[202] See for Buddhist attitudes towards animal violence, including the consumption of meat Perlo (2009, 115-132).
[203] The term is used in a few different contexts which will be discussed below. It appears in SN 3.9, AN 4.39, AN 7.47, AN 7.52, MN 92, MN 99, DN 5, DN 23, Snp 3.7, Snp 5.1.
[204] Only King Pasenadi is a character who is known to other suttas as well (SN 3.1-25, SN 44.1, SN 55.6, AN 5.49, AN 6.43, AN 11.29-30, MN 24, MN 35, MN 86-90, MN 95, MN 99, DN 3-5, DN 12, DN 23, DN 27).
[205] *Tena kho pana samayena [name] mahāyañño paccupaṭṭhito hoti, pañca causabhasatāni pañca ca vacchatarasatāni pañca ca vacchatarisatāni pañca ca ajasatāni pañca caurabbhasatāni thūṇūpanītāni honti yaññatthāya.*
[206] Also BauGS 2.9.1-8, ĀśGS 3.1.1-4, PGS 1.2.6, PGS 2.9.1, ĀpDS 1.13.1, VaiGS 6.17, similarly in BauDS 2.11.1, MDh 3.68-70.

benefitting common Brahmins on a daily basis (BauDS 2.11.7). Therefore, we have to understand *mahāyañña* in the suttas as a generic term for a 'huge worship offering'.

Next to the generic *mahāyañña* in the prose section, SN 3.9 lists in the verse section several Vedic rituals by name (also in AN 4.39, AN 8.1, and Snp 2.7): *assamedha*, *purisamedha*, *sammāpāsaṃ*, *vājapeyya*, and *niraggaḷa*. We have to assume that the term '*mahāyañña*' from the prose section applies to all of these rituals, which we will now discuss.

The *assamedha* 'horse-sacrifice' (Skt *aśvamedha*) is "the king of sacrifices" (Heestermann 1957, 4). It appears briefly in the Ṛgveda (ṚV 5.27.4-6, ṚV 8.68.15-16) and finds its most detailed treatment in TB 3.8-9 and the thirteenth book of the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (see also Zaroff 2005). The ritual has different parts and – depending on which ritual aspects one includes – lasts for three days (for the core ritual) or more than a year (Karmarkar 1949; Teshima 2005). Its purpose was to ensure the royal benefactor's future victory, sovereignty, and fecundity (Dumont 1948, 449). It is also the ritual with the most mentioned sacrificed animals, Skt *paśu*. *Paśu*s are twofold: domesticated village animals (*grāmya*) and wild forest animals (*āraṇya*). The former were ritually killed while the latter were merely captured and then set free again. The number of killed *grāmya*s differs across the texts and ranges between 235 and 349 – with a sum total of killed and not-killed *paśu*s between 346 and 569 (Teshima 2016).

This means that the number of sacrificed animals mentioned in the suttas is ten times higher than in the Vedic manuals and therefore grossly exaggerated. If the suttas indeed refer to the royal *aśvamedha* as the '*mahāyañña*', also the non-royal Brahmin benefactors of AN 7.47 and DN 5 would be inaccurate and King Pasenadi of Kosala would be the more realistic benefactor (as in SN 3.9). However, we find it highly unlikely that such a mass slaughter could have taken place in the proximity of the Buddha. Not that he would have necessarily tried to prevent it, but such an event would have had a much stronger impact on the suttas than just a formulaic insertion in three suttas.

Purisamedha (Skt *puruṣamedha*), the 'human sacrifice' is detailed in TB 3.4, ŚB 13.6.1-13.6.2.20, and ĀpŚS 20.24 (see also Dumont 1963). It lasts for five days and includes at least

twenty-two animal victims. Additionally, humans were most probably only ritually captured and then released again (see for details Wyatt 1989; Parpola 2007; Thite 1996; Thite 1970). It is also noteworthy (and has to my knowledge not been pointed out yet) that even the most polemic Buddhist suttas never directly accuse Brahmins of human sacrifice. Again, this shows that most probably the knowledge of these rituals comes only from hearsay.

The *sammāpāsa* ritual cannot be found in Vedic literature. Thite (1972, 195) suggests that the regular *agniṣṭoma* (with one animal victim) is meant. Falk (1988, 238), Kosambi (1951, 55) and Bausch (2015, 58) follow the Buddhist commentaries and assume that the Vedic *śamyāprāsa* is meant, an obscure ritual including 'throwing a peg'. This ritual, however, does not include a large animal sacrifice and therefore would not fit the polemic purpose of the sutta. Instead, we propose to follow the order of items in the sutta list. Several Vedic expositions (e.g. in ŚB, ĀpŚS, and BauŚS) follow *aśvamedha* and *puruṣamedha* with the *sarvamedha* (see also Mehra 1994, 222) and hence we suggest to understand the *sammāpāsa* as the Vedic *sarvamedha*. It includes important aspects of both the *aśvamedha* and the *puruṣamedha* (ŚB 13.7.1.7-8, ĀpŚS 20.25.6-12), lasts ten days and involves up to 145 animal victims (ŚāŚS 16.15.17-18).

The fourth 'big sacrifice' mentioned in the suttas is *vājapeyya* (Skt *vājapeya*), a ritual supposed to ensure 'universal sovereignty' (Steiner, 2005, 263). It is performed in seventeen days and thus neatly fits into the organizing principle of increasing duration (*aśvamedha* three days, *puruṣamedha* five days, *sarvamedha* ten days, *vājapeyya* seventeen days). Seventeen animal victims are sacrificed (ŚB 5.1.3.7, ŚāŚS 15.1.19-22 has thirty-nine victims). Interestingly, it is a ritual that can be performed for a king or a Brahmin (ŚB 5.1.1.11) and would therefore fit the different benefactors in the suttas, however, not nearly reaching the animal victims mentioned.

The last of the items is *niraggala*, commonly sanskritized as *nirargala* (i.e. 'free', or 'unimpeded'), and has no direct Vedic equivalent[207]. We, too, have no satisfying suggestion. In order to keep the proposed organizing principle of increasing duration it would have to be a ritual that takes even longer than the seventeen days of the *vājapeya*, and even though there are several such rituals (e.g. the *gavāmayana* with 361 days) they don't seem to involve extensive animal

[207] See for little convincing interpretations Kosambi (1951, 54), and Thite (1972).

killings. The most important large ritual that is so far missing in the list, the *rājasūya* royal consecration, lasts for two years but involves only few animal victims (Heestermann 1957, 4). In order to make sense of the list we follow Norman (2001, 226) who observed that the list creates a corrupt meter in the text. Eliminating exactly one of the rituals would restore the meter, and possibly *niraggala* is the item which was added later on.

When we review the Buddhist presentation of the 'great offerings' which allegedly involved thousands of animal victims we encounter several inconsistencies. On the one hand a real event of such a mass slaughter must have been horrendous from a Buddhist perspective. But in contrast to these claimed atrocities the verse at the end of SN 3.9 and AN 4.39 is surprisingly moderate. It merely says that great killing doesn't bring about a great result. The verse instead recommends to perform the 'customary family offerings' (*yajanti anukula*) which don't involve killing but yield great results. The sutta commentary (Bodhi 2012, 403, n. 215) explains these as the regular food offering, which is confirmed by DN 5 which calls food offering the "regular giving of customary family sacrifice to morally restrained ascetics"[208]. The condemnation of the mass killing in the verse section of AN 8.1 is equally moderate. It merely praises kindness and says that the 'great sacrifices' are not worth the sixteenth of a loving mind (*mettā citta*). In contrast to the exaggerated claims of the prose section the moderate verses are more convincing and fit our general assessment that Brahmins in Kosala at the Buddha's time would have avoided to infuriate the local population.

Striking is also the absence of any 'karmic threat' against Brahmins for the ritual killing of animals. SN 19.1-21 apply such a 'karmic threat' to butchers, hunters, torturers, horse trainers, slanderers, corrupt magistrates, and adulterers. All these, according to the suttas, are tortured for many hundreds of thousands of years in hell – but apparently not Brahmins responsible for a ritual mass slaughter! All in all, we have to conclude that the exaggerated numbers and descriptions of the alleged animal victims of Brahmin *mahāyañña* rituals are a later polemic addition.

[208] *niccadānāni anukulayañāni sīlavante pabbajite*

So far, we described the attitude of early Buddhism towards Vedic animal sacrifice, exemplified by the polemic criticism of late suttas. Yet, also Vedic texts show that animal cruelty was an issue. Thite (1970, 153-157) identifies in the ŚB two strategies to deal with the cruelty of ritual killing. One strategy is suppression and displacement of guilt: The text speaks not of 'killing' an animal but of 'quieting' (*saṃjñapana*), i.e. suffocating it (ŚB 3.8.1.15). It then says that the victim 'rests in immortal life' (*amṛta āyuṣi pratitiṣṭhati*, ŚB 3.8.2.27, ŚB 3.8.3.26). The other strategy acknowledges that an ethically cruel (*krūra*) act is being done and tells priests not to look at the animal while it is killed (ŚB 3.8.1.15, also ŚB 3.8.3.28). Also, they sprinkle water at the wounds in order to soothe the pain (ŚB 3.8.2.8-11), afterwards dedicating the first blood to the evil *rakṣa* demons (ŚB 3.8.2.14). Further, ŚB 3.8.5.8 acknowledges the anguish (*śoka*) of the killed animal and says that by piercing the heart the anguish is transferred to the spit (similarly ŚB 11.7.4.3) – and as a consequence, ŚB 3.8.5.9 forbids to throw the now toxic spit on the ground nor in the water. Instead it has to be buried 'where the dry and moist meet' (ŚB 3.8.5.10). Even more explicitly, CU 3.17.4 and CU 8.15.1 refer to the spiritual doctrine of non-injury (Skt *ahiṃsā*) in explicit contrast to animal sacrifices. Overall, however, these signs of compassion towards animal sacrifice remain the exception in Vedic literature (Bodewitz 1999, 26).

In summary, regarding the suttas which mention large animal sacrifices we conclude that the numbers of animal victims, which are part of the prose narrative, are exaggerated and belong to a late sutta period. Earliest Buddhism is much better represented by the moderate verse sections which generally oppose animal sacrifice and prefer the regular giving of food instead. Yet, even these verse sections contain the names of large Vedic rituals which the earliest Buddhists at best heard of from hearsay. Without doubt non-violence was an important part of early Buddhism, but it was much more an overall attitude than a specific sentiment against Brahmins living in Kosala and Magadha at the time of the historical Buddha.

3.5 Dīkṣā - A Consecration Ritual

In the previous section we discussed suttas which refer to specific Brahmin rituals with animal victims. Another Brahmin animal sacrifice is mentioned in the suttas but it is not specifically labeled or named. It appears in AN 4.198, MN 51, MN 60, and MN 94 and characterizes "a person that mortifies himself and others"[209] – lit. a person practicing 'self-*tapa*' (*attan-tapa*) and 'other-*tapa*' (*paran-tapa*). Neither of these sutta passages have Chinese parallels (Anālayo 2011a, 309) which raises doubts about an early age of this particular content. So far, to our knowledge, the ritual has not been identified in academic literature. We will show below that the ritual in question is the *dīkṣā* consecration rite. First, we quote in detail the sutta segment in order to properly justify our conclusion:

> "(1) A person is an anointed king or a well-to-do Brahmin. He has a new hall[210] built to the east of the city. (2) He shaves off his hair and beard, dresses in a rough antelope hide, and smears his body with ghee and oil. (3) Scratching his back with antlers, he enters the temple with his chief queen and the Brahmin high priest. (4) There he lies on the bare ground strewn with grass. (5) The king feeds on the milk from one teat of a cow that has a calf of the same color. The chief queen feeds on the milk from the second teat. The Brahmin high priest feeds on the milk from the third teat. The milk from the fourth teat is offered to the flames. The calf feeds on the remainder. (6) He says: 'Slaughter this many bulls, bullocks, heifers, goats, rams, and horses for the sacrifice! Fell this many trees and reap this much grass for the sacrificial equipment! His bondservants, workers, and staff do their jobs under threat of punishment and danger, weeping, with tearful faces"[211].

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[209] *puggalo attantapo ca hoti attaparitāpanānuyogamanuyutto*

[210] Bodhi translates as 'temple'. Pāli *santhāgāra*, however, does not refer to a temple but to a regular meeting hall.

[211] *ekacco puggalo rājā vā hoti khattiyo muddhāvasitto, brāhmaṇo vā hoti mahāsālo. So puratthimena nagarassa navaṃ santhāgāraṃ kārāpetvā kesamassuṃ ohāretvā kharājinaṃ nivāsetvā sappitelena kāyaṃ abbhañjitvā magavisāṇena piṭṭhiṃ kaṇḍuvamāno navaṃ santhāgāraṃ pavisati, saddhiṃ mahesiyā brāhmaṇena ca purohitena. So tattha anantarahitāya bhūmiyā haritupalittāya seyyaṃ kappeti. Ekissāya gāviyā sarūpavacchāya yaṃ ekasmiṃ thane khīraṃ hoti tena rājā yāpeti; yaṃ dutiyasmiṃ thane khīraṃ hoti tena mahesī yāpeti; yaṃ tatiyasmiṃ thane khīraṃ hoti tena brāhmaṇo purohito yāpeti; yaṃ catutthasmiṃ thane khīraṃ hoti tena aggiṃ juhati; avasesena vacchako yāpeti. So evamāha – 'ettakā usabhā haññantu yaññatthāya, ettakā vacchatarā haññantu yaññatthāya, ettakā vacchatariyo haññantu yaññatthāya, ettakā ajā haññantu yaññatthāya, ettakā urabbhā haññantu yaññatthāya, (ettakā assā haññantu yaññatthāya,) ettakā rukkhā chijjantu yūpatthāya, ettakā dabbhā lūyantu barihisatthāyā'ti. Yepissa te honti dāsāti vā pessāti vā kammakarāti vā tepi daṇḍatajjitā bhayatajjitā assumukhā rudamānā parikammāni karonti.*

This description is oddly in contrast with what it *supposedly* depicts, namely a person who mortifies himself and others. While the sacrificer mortifies 'others' by ordering the animal killings, it is not clear at all how he would torment *himself* with this ritual (*attan-tapa*), unless scratching himself with antlers would be considered 'self-torment'.

The sutta passage above offers, however, specific details that help us to identify the ritual as the Vedic *dīkṣā* consecration rite. With the *dīkṣā*, the worshiper and his wife prepare themselves for the fundamental soma offering, the *agniṣṭoma*, which serves as the basis for many other soma offerings (see for an overview Keith 1925, 300-302). There are several detailed descriptions of the *dīkṣā* in Vedic literature, but here we will focus on the accounts in the Taittirīya Saṃhitā, the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, and the Āpastamba and Baudhāyana Śrautasūtras. The view of the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa is of particular interest to us because of the proximity to the Buddha's time and place. For the sake of clarity we will present not all the details from the Vedic texts.

(1) The description in the suttas starts with the *yajamāna* (the benefactor), either a king or a wealthy Brahmin, who has built a meeting hall (*santhāgāra*) to the east of the city. The Vedic texts don't use the supposed Skt *saṃsthāgāra*. Instead, ŚB 3.1.1.6 and BauŚS 6.1 speak of *śālā*, a (sacrificial) shed, *vimita* (a square shed), and TS 6.1.1.1 and ĀpŚS 10.5.1 of *prācīnavaṃśa*, a roofed space facing east. While the Vedic texts regularly mention the eastward *orientation* of the worship offering space (e.g. ŚB 3.1.1.7, BauŚS 6.1), they don't state that the building should be located in the *east of the city* as the sutta describes.

(2) In the sutta the worshiper shaves off his hair and beard himself, which is confirmed by TS 6.1.1.1, yet in the Śrautasūtras shaving is a ritual performance that is done by the *adhvaryu* priest and his assistants (BauŚS 6.2, ĀpŚS 10.5.6). In ŚB 3.1.2.2-9 the worshiper partly shaves himself and is partly shaved by a barber. He takes a bath (TS 6.1.1.2, ŚB 3.1.2.10-11, ĀpŚS 10.5.15) and afterwards wears a fresh garment given to him by the *adhvaryu* priest (TS 6.1.1.3, ŚB 3.1.2.13, BauŚS 6.2, ĀpŚS 10.6.4), not the antelope skin. In contrast to the sutta where he smears his body with *sappi-tela* (i.e. butter-oil) he anoints his body with butter, Skt *navanīta* (TS 6.1.1.5, ŚB 3.1.3.8, BauŚS 6.2, ĀpŚS 10.6.5). Similar to the sutta the *adhvaryu* priest guides the worshiper into the hall (ŚB 3.1.3.28).

The following details are not mentioned in the suttas: In the hall the worshiper gets several accessories (BauŚS 6.4) – most importantly, now he gets the *kharājina* (skin of a black antelope, TS 6.1.3.2), the *caudumbara daṇḍa* (a staff of Udumbara wood, TS 6.1.4.1, ŚB 3.2.1.32-33), the *kṛṣṇaviṣāṇā* (horn of a black antelope, TS 6.1.3.7, Pāli *magavisāṇa*), *vāsa* (the aforementioned garment), *mekhala* (the girdle, TS 6.1.3.5), and *uṣṇīṣa* (a ceremonial turban). Henceforth the *yajamāna* has to carry staff and antelope skin until the end of the ritual (ĀpŚS 10.15.12).

(3) Only now the *yajamāna* scratches himself, similar to the sutta text, namely next to the right ear (TS 6.1.3.7-8, BauŚS 6.5, *godāna*, lit. 'the place of the side-hair'), or according to ĀpŚS 10.10.2-3 at head or limbs, with the formula, "(I scratch) thee for plants bearing good fruit" (*supippalābhyas tvauṣadhībhyas,* similarly in ŚB 3.2.1.30-31). It is important to point out that he uses the antelope horn so that he doesn't touch himself with his mundane fingers. It is therefore not, as one could misunderstand the sutta, a self-harming excessive scratching.

The next events are not mentioned in the sutta: After more ritual activities and formulas the *adhvaryu* proclaims the consecration of the *yajamāna*: "Consecrated has been this Brahmin N.N., belonging to the clan (*gotra*) N.N., son of N.N., grandson of N.N. great grandson of N.N. We announce him to Indra, Indra-Agni, Vasus, Rudras, Adityas, Visve Devas, and the Brahmins who have drunk Soma"[212] (BauŚS 6.5, ĀpŚS 10.11.5). Or simply: "This Brahmin has consecrated himself"[213] (TS 6.1.4.3 and ŚB 3.2.1.39).

(4) After the proper consecration the *yajamāna* begins a period of austerity. He remains silent until the night (TS 6.1.4.3, ŚB 3.2.2.4, ĀpŚS 10.12.3, BauŚS 6.6) and stays awake for three nights (ĀpŚS 10.12.6; TS 6.1.4.6-7 has no time specification; the sleep deprivation is unknown to ŚB 3.2.2.22). He also starts fasting directly after the *dīkṣā*. The only allowable food during this time is milk[214] from the dedicated *vratadughā*, i.e. the observance cow[215]. The idea behind it is that the consecrated *yajamāna* is like a new-born and should therefore have milk only (TS

[212] *adīkṣiṣṭāyaṃ brāhmaṇo 'sāv itthaṃgotro 'muṣya putro 'muṣya pautro 'muṣya naptā tam indrāyendrāgnibhyāṃ vasubhyo rudrebhya ādityebhyo viśvebho devebhyo brāhmaṇebhyaś ca somapebhyaḥ prabrūmas*
[213] *adīkṣiṣṭāyaṃ brāhmaṇa*
[214] See on variations in the Brāhmaṇas regarding this milk Oshima (2009).
[215] ŚB 3.2.2.14 allows adding rice or barley to the first day's milk.

6.2.5.5; also Gonda 1965, 337-340). The images and ritual acts at this stage are based on mammal pregnancy and birth which echoes the *upanayana* initiation ritual and underlines the significance of the ritual as a rite of passage[216].

(5) The regulations for obtaining the fasting milk only partly resemble the details given in the suttas but also differ among the Vedic sources, so that it may well be that the suttas preserve a specific interpretation that got otherwise lost. In the sutta passage the king feeds on the milk from one teat, the queen from the second, the *purohita* priest (see section 2.4) from the third, the milk of the fourth gets offered to the flames, and the calf feeds on the remainder. ĀpŚS 10.12.4 mentions that one teat is left for the calf while the three others provide the milk for the subsequent fasting period of the *yajamāna* (similarly BauŚS 6.10). In other places the number of teats used for the fasting food is reduced throughout the fasting period from three to one (ŚB 3.4.4.25-27), or from four to one (TS 6.2.5.1-2; AB 1.25). The offering of milk into the fire which is mentioned in the sutta is specifically prohibited in ŚB 3.2.2.10-12.

The duration of the fasting (which is followed by the actual soma offering) is not consistent in the texts. According to ĀpŚS 10.14.8 it lasts at least twelve days, or a month, or a year, or until the *yajamāna* is *kṛś*, i.e. thin and emaciated. It even goes on to reference an allegedly older authority, saying that the fasting has to go on for a long time – "skin and bones have to be united" (*tvacāsthi saṃdhīyate*) – before he is fit for the offering (ĀpŚS 10.14.9)[217]. ŚB 3.1.2.1 and ŚB 3.2.1.10 mention the milk-fasting without a defined duration, ŚB 3.4.4.25-27 suggests twelve days, among other possibilities (see also Thite 1970b, 171; Kaelber 1979, 200-201).

It has to be stressed that the sleep deprivation and the fasting in (4) and (5) are the proper reasons why the suttas treat the *yajamāna* sacrificer as a 'self-mortifier'. It was essential for this assertion to gather the Vedic sources, since the sutta stock passage doesn't mention these aspects. And we know that the suttas generally regard fasting as an unwholesome practice because Gotama's extreme fasting (in MN 12 and MN 36) is seen as harmful self-mortification, as well as the fasting of Jain monastics (in AN 3.157, MN 45, DN 8, DN 25).

[216] See for a discussion of the broader significance of the *dīkṣā* Gonda (1965, 316ff.).
[217] According to Fushimi (1998, 17) the source of this alleged authority cannot be found in Vedic texts.

(6) The sutta finally mentions a number of different animal victims. This is not a regular part of the Vedic *dīkṣā* rite. The usually following *agniṣṭoma* ritual has a single victim. Only more elaborate rituals like the *aśvamedha* include many more animal victims (see above).

Reviewing the Vedic sources and the details provided in the suttas we can first of all state that whoever composed the original sutta stock passage must have had intimate knowledge of the Vedic *dīkṣā* ritual and was probably a former Brahmin who either knew the actual practice itself or the respective Brāhmaṇa or Śrautasūtra texts. It is also apparent that important details were lost – and, most importantly, the rational of why the practitioner is regarded as a self-mortifier has been forgotten.

Furthermore, we have to assume that the sutta stock passage is quite a late insertion because there are no Chinese parallels, neither in detail nor in an abbreviated form. Yet, it must have been inserted early enough to be copied from AN 4.198 into MN 51, MN 60, and MN 94.

At the end of our discussion we can attempt to reconstruct the context and purpose of the sutta passage: An early Buddhist teacher and former Brahmin with intimate knowledge of the *dīkṣā* consecration taught that there was an unwholesome practice where a person mortifies himself through fasting and causes harm to animals as well – the *yajamāna* of a soma ritual, typically a king. During the Buddhist transmission process details the *dīkṣā* ceremony went lost (particularly the aspects of fasting and sleep deprivation), possibly because Buddhist transmitters were not familiar enough with the ritual, or because the details were not considered important. In this corrupt form the content was codified rather late into a single sutta, probably an early version of AN 4.198, and when editors compiled material for the MN they inserted the already corrupted content into MN 51, MN 60, and MN 94.

3.6 Buddhist *Uposatha* vs. Vedic *Upovasatha*

Throughout the thesis we try to understand how early Buddhism was connected with Brahmanism, in vocabulary, culture, concepts, and doctrine. The Buddhist *uposatha* is yet another ritual phenomenon which is partly related to Brahmanism. To put it simply, in early Buddhism all members of the Saṅgha gathered on the *uposatha* days of the new and full moon to recite the main monastic rules (*pāṭimokkha*[218]) and to confess any violations (Gethin 1998, 90). The Vedic *upavasatha*, on the other hand, is also a fortnightly event, but very different in nature, in that it is a preparation for a ritual on the following day. Generally, the development of the Buddhist *uposatha* encompasses two aspects: A first aspect of *uposatha* is older and relates to the purity of the Saṅgha, and a later development emulates customs of non-Buddhist *śramaṇa* sects.

It is generally believed (with some notable exceptions) that the Buddhist *uposatha* is based on the Vedic *upavasatha*[219]. Some authors argue for a linguistic derivation from Sanskrit (e.g. Oberlies 2003, 172) while others deny a common linguistic root (Haskett 2011, 40). Others again maintain that while the terms are etymologically related, the practices are not (Schontal 2006, 52; Hotta 2017, 11). In order to show the intricate relationship of the Buddhist and Vedic concepts we will first discuss the Vedic term.

Upavasatha is a preparatory fasting day before major (soma) rituals, on full and new moon days[220]. It first appears in the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa (e.g. AB 3.40.8 in the context of the *agniṣtoma*) and later in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa. A meaning based on etymology is given in ŚB 1.1.1.7, ŚB 2.1.4.1, and ŚB 3.9.2.7: here the Gods ‘dwell near’ (*upa-vas*) the one who vows to make an offering on the following day. An explicit rule not to eat on *upavasatha* can be found in ŚB 9.5.1.6-9. And ŚB 9.5.1.23 details that the animal victim for the soma ritual is to be slaughtered on the *upavasatha* day. Keith (1916) argues that the term originally applies only to the night before the ritual (referring to TS, 1.6.7.3 and ŚB 1.1.1.7).

[218] Dutt (1924, 99-109) and Prebish (1974b) discuss potential old meanings of the term and suggest that it was originally not as ritualized as is came be described in the Vinaya.
[219] See for an overview on scholarly positions Nguyen (2016, 46-48).
[220] For a historical discussion about what constitutes a full and new moon day see BauŚS 20.1.

Hence, the *upavasatha* occurs in a specific ritual context. The worshiper purifies himself through fasting and makes himself worthy to do the (soma) offering. Essentially, his austere preparation 'draws the gods near' with the main event happening on the following day. In contrast, the Buddhist *uposatha* doesn't lead up to any essential event on the next day – it *is* the main event.

Vin 1.101-102 presents an origin story of the Buddhist *uposatha*: King Bimbisāra of Magadha (here already a Buddhist follower) observes that wanderers of other sects (probably Jains) meet on the eighth, the fourteenth and the fifteenth of each lunar fortnight, give public teachings and thus increase their popularity. King Bimbisāra recommends to the Buddha to hold similar regular meetings as well, the Buddha then agrees and allows gatherings on these very same moon days.

According to this particular story the Buddhist *uposatha* would not have been about purification. It would have rather emulated a practice of competing *śramaṇa*s as a 'marketing tool' to get more followers. Also, the initiator would have been the Magadha king and not the Buddha himself. In this story the king's suggestion was to appeal to the concerns of the laity. Schonthal (2006, 57-60) indeed points out that according to the suttas not just Buddhists and Jains but also independent 'wanderers' had large followings, and lay people had a wide selection of spiritual movements to choose from. In this environment regular meetings with lay followers would have certainly strengthened the movement.

Yet, an essential aspect of the actual *uposatha* is the recitation of monastic rules (see below) which don't concern the needs of the lay followers. We have also to keep in mind that in the necessarily oral tradition of early Buddhism such communal recitations must have been of utmost importance for the cohesion of the spiritual movement. Even though three days per fortnight are typically mentioned in connection with the *uposatha* (the eighth, the fourteenth, and the fifteenth day) only once a fortnight the Pāṭimokkha is recited (Vin 1.104, Vin 1.111, Vin 1.124), during which lay people cannot be present (Vin 1.115).

An essential aspect of the *uposatha* is that the recitation of the Pāṭimokkha is followed by a ritualized confirmation that the rules of offence and expiation have been applied – the Saṅgha is then declared *pārisuddhi*, entirely pure. And so we re-encounter the theme of purification which

is so important to the Vedic *upavasatha*. The original purification process is, however, not entirely clear. According to one version monastics had already to be purified through confessions *before* the *uposatha* (e.g. Vin 2.240, also AN 8.20; see also Voyce 1984, 144; and Prebish 1974b, 172)[221]. Another version states that offences were declared *during* the *uposatha* (Vin 1.102-103). Regardless of how originally confession and expiation took place, at the end of the Pāṭimokkha recitation *pārisuddhi* of the Saṅgha was declared, originally by the Buddha himself, and later by whoever officiated the *uposatha* (AN 8.20). Therefore, if we prioritize this aspect (and not pleasing lay followers), the main purpose of the *uposatha* was a communal *maintenance of law* and *group purification*.

Voyce (2016, 102) presents the development of the Pāṭimokkha *uposatha* in three stages: first, as a confession of faith, then it would have turned into a confirmation of the monastic rules, and finally it would have become a ritual liturgy. In our own reconstruction we assume that originally early Buddhism was a movement of ascetics who were encouraged by the Buddha to practice in solitude or in small groups in the forest. Thus spread-out, the monastics would have still depended on regular instruction and inspiration by the Buddha and would have sought his support (MN 108). Regular meetings would have taken place at the main moon phases which served as a time-keeping device. The full-moon would have been the obvious choice for such gatherings, both for reasons of solemnity and light conditions at night[222]. Those meetings then served for both Dhamma (spiritual teachings)[223] and Vinaya (community issues), eventually becoming an element of 'Buddhist identity' (also Dutt 1924, 99). 'Confessions' would have served as an occasion to teach how to deal with spiritual obstacles, and as a correction tool to maintain the movement's public reputation. At the same time the regular exposure to the Buddha, who was also reputed to have supernatural mind-reading skills, must have stirred in the monastics a fear and shame of wrong-doing. Accordingly, monastics could have sought the relief of confession before a humiliating public exposure by the master[224].

[221] The Vinaya expert Ajahn Brahmali confirmed this in a personal communication to be the current practice: Monastics are supposed to come to the Pāṭimokkha gatherings already purified, having confessed eventual offences. Confessions are also possible during the recitation, to the monastic sitting next-by, but not publicly.
[222] In the *suttas*, however, the only narrative moon-phase for *uposatha*s is the full-moon (SN 22.82, MN 109, MN 110, MN 118, DN 2, DN 18, DN 19, Snp 3.12).
[223] As for example in AN 4.190, AN 10.67, AN 10.68.
[224] See examples for this effect, i.e. of the master's mind-reading, Mahā Boowa Ñāṇasampanno (2004, 275 and 280).

If this is somewhat close to the original circumstances it could also show the connection with the Vedic *upavasatha*. There, the gods 'dwell near' (*upa-vas*) the one who vows to make an offering on the following day. And in the Buddhist context it would be the Buddha who 'dwells near' on *uposatha* day. And as the Vedic practitioner uses fasting to purify himself and to make himself worthy of the ritual offering, the Buddhist monastics purify themselves through confession and expiation to be worthy of the Buddha's liberating Dhamma[225].

We also find another hint for a Buddhist-Brahmin connection of *uposatha*: In a Vinaya passage the Buddha rebukes a monastic who was formerly a Brahmin for skipping an *uposatha* congregation: "But if you Brahmins do not reverence, revere, esteem, honour the *uposatha*, who is there who will reverence, revere, esteem, honour the *uposatha*?"[226] (Vin 1.105). This suggests that *as a former Brahmin* the monk should have known better than others about the importance of the *uposatha*, which can only be a reference to the Brahmin's own experience.

We now return to the relevance of the *uposatha* for lay followers. The most important sutta source for the lay *uposatha* is AN 3.70. Here the Buddha says that there are three types of lay *uposatha*s: the one of cowherds (*gopālaka*, Skt '*gopāla'*), the *uposatha* of Nigaṇṭhas (i.e. Jains), and the one of the *ariya*s (i.e. Buddhists). No *uposatha* of Brahmins is mentioned. People of the first type spend the *uposatha* day thinking about mundane things like food. The Nigaṇṭha lay followers are described as practicing on *uposatha* non-injury and ritually taking off their clothes, claiming to have no possession, and thus imitating the naked Jain monks for that day. The sutta says that this pseudo 'dispossession' of lay Jains on *uposatha* is untruthful and thus unethical.

Just as with the Jains, the essential performative aspect of the Buddhist lay *uposatha* is to emulate the monastics by abstaining from eight activities: (1) killing (*pāṇātipāta*), (2) stealing (*adinnādāna*), (3) unchastity (*abrahmacariya*), (4) lying (*musāvāda*), (5) intoxicants

[225] Additionally, in MN 4 and AN 3.37 we find indications that on *uposatha* days supernatural beings and gods judge and frighten the humans, which could be a projection of the 'judgment' by the Buddha on lay people.
[226] *Tumhe ce brāhmaṇā uposathaṃ na sakkarissatha na garukarissatha na mānessatha na pūjessatha, atha ko carahi uposathaṃ sakkarissati garukarissati mānessati pūjessati?*

(*surāmerayamajja*), (6) eating more than once on that day (*vikālabhojana*), (7) entertainment[227], and (8) sleeping on high beds (*uccāsayana*)[228] (AN 3.70, AN 8.41-45, AN 9.18, Snp 2.14). This eightfold *uposatha* restraint of lay followers leads, according to the final passage of AN 3.70, to the prospect of divine rebirth – which is incidentally also a goal of traditional Brahmanism[229].

The lay Buddhists finally are described in AN 3.70 as purifying their mind by reflecting on Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha, ethical self-restraint, devas and divine qualities within themselves. Interestingly, reflecting on the Buddha is called *brahmuposatha* and makes laypeople "associate with Brahman" (*brahmunā saddhiṃ saṃvasati*). Just as the promise of divine rebirth this suggests that the audience was at least familiar with the Brahmin thought-world. Most importantly, it equates the Buddha with *brahman* (see also section 9.1). Another interesting aspect is that again purification is an important motif of *uposatha*. Just as the Brahmin sacrificer purifies himself to be close to the gods, and the Buddhist monastics might have purified themselves to be close to the Buddha-Dhamma, here the Buddhist lay followers purify themselves in an attempt to emulate the monastics and reap heavenly rewards.

Generally, researchers rely too heavily on AN 3.70 when they develop a theory on lay *uposatha* in early Buddhism. After all, it is only a single sutta. The anti-Jain polemic and the generous promise of heavenly rebirth make it doubtful in our eyes that the sutta as a whole belongs to an early layer of texts.

A few words might suffice to outline connections to the Jain equivalent, the *posaha*[230]. Schonthal (2006) provides good arguments that the Buddhist term '*uposatha*' more likely derives from the Jain '*posaha*' than from the Vedic '*upavasatha*'. As Haskett (2011) demonstrates, the Jain *posaha* has been first and foremost a regular observance for lay followers who for two days a fortnight (the fourteenth and the eighth day) would emulate the life of monks by adhering to

[227] *naccagītavāditavisūkadassanamālāgandhavilepanadhāraṇamaṇḍanavibhūsanaṭṭhāna*, lit. abstaining from 'dancing, singing, instrumental music, and unsuitable shows, and from adorning and beautifying themselves by wearing garlands and applying scents and unguents'.
[228] Instead they lie on a low bed or a straw mat.
[229] A sutta with even more grandiose promises is AN 10.46 which predicts that keeping the *uposatha* for just one night and day could lead to millions of years of happiness or even to become a 'non-returner' (*anāgāmi*) who gets reborn one last time in a heavenly realm and attains liberation there.
[230] See for the different possible Sanskrit equivalents for the Jain *posaha* Hotta (2017).

specific rules (also Prasad 1972, 165). On these days they practiced non-injury, not-lying, not taking what is not given, no sexual intercourse, and no purchase of property. The similarities to the Buddhist lay practices are obvious. Jain monks on the other hand would not observe any exceptional practice on these days. As shown above, circumstantial evidence from the suttas suggests that the Jain *posaha* is older than the Buddhist equivalent. Also, there is no claim in Jain texts that Mahāvīra founded the *posaha* himself, so that it might go back to an even older *śramaṇa* tradition (Haskett 2011, 46; also Jacobi 1884, xxii-xxiv).

In conclusion, we suggest that the Buddhist *uposatha* took inspiration both from Brahmanism and from other *śramaṇa* groups. Monastics congregated on the main moon phases to recite the Pāṭimokkha and declare the purity of the Saṅgha. This aspect of purification while 'dwelling close' to the Buddha relates to the Vedic *upovasatha*. The lay *uposatha*, on the other hand, seems to be inspired by previously existing customs of other *śramaṇa* groups. Lay followers emulated on these days the monastics by following a set of behavioral restraints. They also practiced purification, albeit for the reward of heavenly rebirth. This aspect of lay *uposatha* was probably introduced later on as a means to please lay followers and increase the reputation of Buddhism.

3.7 Ancestor Rituals

As we have shown, the Western perspective that Buddhism is mainly an ethical and meditative practice without ritual elements or supernatural beliefs, clashes with the early Buddhist texts in many respects. Even Vedic ancestor worship is not simply dismissed by the suttas. Ancestor rituals are wide-spread in Asia and are well rooted also in the Vedic worldview (see for a detailed treatment Sayers, 2013). We encounter the ancestor offering (*pitṛyajña*, lit. the 'offering to the Forefathers'[231]) first in the cremation ritual of ṚV 10.16.10 where Agni is implored to carry the deceased to the heavenly realm of the Forefathers[232]. Overall, however, ritualized

[231] Sayers (2013, 48-50) distinguishes between *pitṛyajña* and *piṇḍapitṛyajña*, a difference we neglect in our study.
[232] See for a discussion of this hymn and its significance for early Vedic rebirth belief Jurewicz (2010, 293-319). For the status of the ancestors as divine heavenly beings since the time of the ṚV, see Sayers (2003, 26 f.).

ancestor worship in the form of *pitṛyajña* was only of little importance for early Vedic practice (ibid., 36-38) and mostly developed in the periods of the Brāhmaṇas, Śrautasūtras, and Gṛhyasūtras. Even later, ancestor rituals in the form of *śrāddha* rites emerged first in the Gṛhyasūtras and developed up until the period of the Purāṇas (ibid., 57).

There are several differences between the *pitṛyajña* and the *śrāddha* rituals: The *pitṛyajña* is generally a *śrauta* ritual which requires several Brahmin priests, and it consists of rice balls which are at the end eaten by the priests or thrown into water (ibid., 43-45). Its purpose is to feed the Forefathers, move them to a better world, and purify the worshiper (ibid., 54; also ŚB 2.6.1.3). Later daily *pitṛyajña* offerings are part of the 'five great offerings' (*mahāyajña*) which also include an offering to the Forefathers (*pitṛyajña*) (ŚB 11.5.6.1, PāGS 2.9.1-16, BauDS 2.11.1-8, MDh 3.70-286).

In contrast, the *śrāddha* is generally a domestic ritual which can be performed by the lay worshipers themselves. It is performed once a month, consists of rice balls and meat[233], and requires Brahmins as 'professional guests' who legitimize the rite, are fed, and accept the offerings on behalf of the ancestors (ibid., 58). As Sayers puts it: "Inviting and feeding a Brahmin of quality became integral to most domestic [gṛhya] rituals" (ibid., 67).

In the Buddhist texts Brahmin ancestor offerings occasionally appear in the context of fivefold ritual offerings (*pañcabali*) which are legitimized by the Buddha: offerings to relatives (*ñātibali*), guests (*atithibali*), ancestors (*pubbapetabali*), to the king (*rājabali*), and to deities (*devatābali*). These five are mentioned in detail in AN 4.61 and AN 5.41, and with variation in AN 8.38 and MN 97. This fivefold offering of the suttas is a clear reference to the Vedic daily *mahāyajña*. Thus, the mentioned suttas bear the surprising implication that early Buddhism (and potentially even the historical Buddha) saw value in the Brahmin veneration of the departed ancestors.

A second set of suttas uses the later term *saddha* (Skt *śrāddha*) for the ancestor offering and generally addresses a Brahmin audience (AN 3.59, AN 4.40, AN 10.177, MN 93, and DN 3). Of special importance is AN 4.40 in which the Buddha advises a Brahmin that worship offering

[233] See the praise of meat offerings culminating in ĀpDS 2.16.26-2.17.3 and GauDS 15.15.

(*yañña*, Skt *yajña*) and *saddha* are fruitful if they are non-violent and the meals are offered to spiritual practitioners (*brahmacariya*s), in this context probably Buddhist monastics. This is relevant as later Vedic literature strongly warns to give food of ancestor offerings to non-Brahmins (e.g. ĀpDS 2.17.4-5, ĀpDS 2.17.20-21, ĀpDS 2.20.2, GauDS 15.6-9, BauDS 14.6). Some texts even explicitly exclude bald-headed people, probably also referring to Buddhist monastics (GauDS 15.18 and MDh 3.151); and naked people (possibly Jain monastics) are excluded in VaDS 11.19. It is therefore possible, either that AN 4.40 tries to re-legitimize *śramaṇa*s as recipients of *śrāddha* food, or that the Dharmasūtras react to a growing number of Brahmin practitioners who give *śrāddha* food to Buddhists and Jains, and not to Brahmins.

Another sutta which clearly endorses ancestor offerings is AN 10.177, where the Buddha teaches the Brahmin Jāṇussoṇī, who as discussed in section 2.1 is probably an authentic contemporary of the Buddha. Jāṇussoṇī describes that Brahmins perform the *saddha* with the words in mind: "Let our gift be of benefit to our departed relatives and family members. Let our departed relatives and family members partake of our gift"[234]. He then asks if the gift (*dāna*) really supports the deceased relatives. The Buddha replies that it would only support them if they were reborn in the realm of ancestor spirits (*pettivisaya*)[235]. Yet, even if the particular relative was not reborn there the offering would still benefit other ancestors in that realm. Then the Buddha states that the offerings are also beneficial for the next rebirth of the donors[236] – as long as they give the offering to *samaṇa*s and Brahmins. *Where* the donor is reborn depends on their morality, but any such donation would help them to improve their afterlife in whatever realm they are reborn in. In reference to suttas like these Sayers (2013, 86) correctly concludes that "gradually the paradigm of ancestor worship is subsumed under the broader practice of religious gifting."

It is not clear to us if these suttas which affirm ancestor offerings signify a later development in early Buddhism. A detail which points in this direction is a term used in AN 10.177, namely the gifting of garlands, scents, and unguents (*mālāgandhavilepana*). Otherwise, this term appears mostly in late suttas which crudely threaten the audience with deformation and poverty in their

[234] *idaṃ dānaṃ petānaṃ ñātisālohitānaṃ upakappatu, idaṃ dānaṃ petā ñātisālohitā paribhuñjantū*.
[235] The other realms mentioned are *niraya* (hell), *tiracchānayoni* (animal realm), *manussānaṃ sahabyataṃ* (companionship with humans), and *devānaṃ sahabyataṃ* (companionship with devas).
[236] *Api ca, brāhmaṇa, dāyakopi anipphalo*

next life if their conduct is improper (AN 3.13, AN 3.21, AN 4.85, AN 4.197, AN 6.57, MN 129, MN 135).

More generally, the suttas have some knowledge of Brahmin ancestor rituals. They are, however, rare and appear mostly in the AN. The suttas surprisingly concede to the Brahmin rituals a certain efficiency, which indicates an audience of lay people and suggests an attempt to replace a Brahmin perspective on ancestors with a Buddhist one. Related to this appropriation is an economic and reputation aspect where the suttas try to make Buddhist monastics eligible for ancestor offerings – which is explicitly ruled out in the Dharmasūtras. Hence, we rather suspect that these suttas express a later competition for resources and therefore belong to a later stratum.

Connected with ancestor rituals are also cremation rites. In SN 42.6 a lay Jain disciple asks the Buddha if he can ensure rebirth in a heavenly realm like the 'western Brahmins' (see section 2.5.3). The Buddha, however, doesn't give him a direct answer. Instead, he criticizes a *regular* cremation rite as ineffective: "A large crowd comes together to offer up prayers and praise, circumambulating them [the dead] with joined palms and saying: 'When this person's body breaks up, after death, may they be reborn in a good place, a heavenly realm!'"[237].

The Buddha argues that these recitations don't affect the rebirth destination of the deceased. He compares a deceased unethical person with a large rock which cannot be made to float with recitations. Conversely, trying to make oil (representing a deceased ethical person) sink in water through recitations is equally impossible. The Buddha concludes that ritual circumambulation and funeral recitation are just as ineffective.

When we compare the sutta with actual Vedic funeral rites we see some inaccuracies. The Buddha mentions the circumambulating 'large crowd' which probably refers to the relatives of the deceased who during the funeral rites walk in a procession towards the cremation site. Caland (1896, 21) describes the procession being headed by the sons at the front, followed by elderly male relatives, then young males, and lastly the female relatives. Four Brahmin priests are

[237] *Tamenaṃ mahājanakāyo saṅgamma samāgamma āyāceyya thomeyya pañjalikoanuparisakkeyya: 'ayaṃ puriso kāyassa bhedā paraṃ maraṇā sugatiṃ saggaṃ lokaṃ upapajjatū'ti.*

present and potential servants who carry the body. After the procession has covered a fourth of the distance to the cremation ground everyone stops and the relatives circumambulate the corpse reciting verses, and twice again after more distance has been covered. Another version allows all circumambulations to happen at the cremation ground (ibid., 24-25).

We also find actual prayers similar to the one mentioned in the sutta: According to ĀpŚS 31.1.31 the verses recited are from ṚV 1.97, starting with: "Blazing away the bad for us, blaze wealth here, o Agni, blazing away the bad for us", and ending with: "Carry us across, as if across a river with a boat, to well-being, blazing away the bad for us"[238]. Caland (ibid., 24) also quotes another song that is recited according to an unspecified Baudhāyana source: "Pleasant fragrant winds shall blow on your way, refreshing spirit and limbs, and favorable. Refreshing skin, flesh, and bones may the Maruts guide you to the realm of the blessed"[239]. The latter song is in content closer to the prayer mentioned in the sutta.

We conclude that the Buddha dismisses the efficiency of prayers of normal people. But he doesn't address the question if people with special powers (e.g. the 'western Brahmins') are able to change the course of the deceased. Even though the suttas seem to dismiss such hopes or claims they actually contribute to this way of thinking at other points. After all, the Buddha and some of his master disciples are often portrayed as teaching gods and other supernatural beings to their benefit. Thus the suttas obviously imply that special people like the Buddha could indeed influence the course of the deceased.

[238] ṚV 1.97.1 & 8: *a apa naḥ śośucad agham agne śuśugdhy ā rayim | apa naḥ śośucad agham […] sa naḥ sindhum iva nāvayāti parṣā svastaye | apa naḥ śośucad agham*

[239] My own translation from the original German: „Winde wohlig duftend sollen dir am wege wehen, geisterfrischend, gliedererfrischend, günstig, hauterfrischend, fleischerfrischend, knochenerfrischend sollen dich die Maruts zur welt der seligen führen."

3.8 Conclusion

When we review the depiction of Brahmin rituals in the suttas and the attitude of early Buddhism towards rituals in general we arrive at different conclusions. The most momentous development in this regard was when early Buddhism re-interpreted and appropriated the Vedic dynamic of religious giving and reward. In the framework of Vedic rituals the Brahmin priests were given *dakṣiṇā* in return for a divine fulfillment of mundane and afterlife wishes. Early Buddhism made use of the same dynamic and replaced the gods, first with the Buddha, then expanded to liberated arahants, and finally any monastic became a worthy recipient and a 'field of merit'. Yet, the promised reward for lay donors remained heavenly rebirth. This necessarily changed the nature of early Buddhism. What was originally a practice aiming at liberation during one's lifetime was adapted for laity into a conventional religion based on faith: Laypeople materially supported the Saṅgha and had to rely on afterlife promises of monastics, without any ability to validate their claims. We suggest that this shift in early Buddhism resulted in a large number of suttas which accommodated the needs of lay followers who were not primarily aiming at liberation.

Another important Buddhist ritual framework is the *uposatha* where the monastic rules are recited and the purity of the Saṅgha is ritually proclaimed. Lay followers are integrated by emulating the monastic lifestyle, but again, rewarded with a pleasant afterlife, not liberation.

Other than that we find references to Vedic rituals scattered over the suttas (e.g. *agnihotra, pratyavarohaṇa,* ancestor rites), some even conceding a certain efficacy. We also find accurate details which were probably authored by former Brahmins (e.g. regarding *dīkṣā* and *aśvamedha*). Yet, in these cases the descriptions are distorted in order to portray Brahmanism as a cruel and ineffective religious practice. Ironically, early Buddhism itself has at the same time developed faith-based claims of afterlife rewards which conflict with its own essential goal of liberation.

Our detailed discussion of rituals unveils several goals of early Buddhism: The ritual of religious giving was integrated into mainstream Buddhism to secure the material support of the Saṅgha. Suttas favorable to some rituals integrated Brahmin practitioners. And suttas which exaggerate the animal violence in Vedic rituals helped to condemn Brahmanism as a competing religion.

Chapter Four: *Brahmacarya*

Brahmacarya is known to most people acquainted with ancient Indian literature as a term for 'Vedic studentship' and is thus essentially connected with Brahmanism. It is much less known that the Pāli term *brahmacariya* plays an essential role in early Buddhism as well[240]. Here, *brahmacāri* is not a term for a young apprentice but rather for the monastic on his path to liberation. In this chapter we will cover two aspects of *brahmacriya*. First, we will examine the pre-Buddhist concept of Vedic *brahmacarya,* and then investigate the occurrences of Pāli *brahmacriya* in early Buddhism. We will end the chapter by comparing the initiation rituals of the Vedic *brahmacārin* and the Buddhist monastic (Pāli *brahmacāri* or *bhikkhu*).

4.1 *Brahmacarya* in Vedic Literature

Several attempts have been made to define the meaning of Vedic *brahmacarya*. Lubin (2018, 98) suggests that the Vedas were considered to be *brahman,* "and the process for learning them by rote and thus embodying them was called *brahmacarya*, literally 'pursuit or practice of *brahman*'". For Black (2007, 26) the *brahmacārin* is simply a 'Vedic student'. More literally, Robertson (2017, 71) understands him as one who 'wanders about as *brahman*' and 'practices expansion'. Kajihara (2002, 7) sees the *brahmacārin* as someone who is "engaged in/devoted to *(car)* the formulated speech (*brahman*)". Olivelle in his translation of the Upaniṣads often chooses the term 'studentship' for *brahmacarya*.

As we will see, the concept of *brahmacarya* appears in all historical layers of Vedic literature. Kaelber (1981, 80; 1989, 109-113) emphasizes in her interpretation the continuity of the *brahmacarya* concept from the Saṃhitā period on; others (e.g. Kajihara 2002, 375-380; 2014, 16) rather focus on the development that the concept underwent in different Vedic periods.

[240] See for example Neri & Pontillo (2014, 157-164).

4.1.1 *Brahmacarya* in the Samhitās

Brahmacarya is not a common concept in the oldest Vedic literature. The term appears once, rather vaguely, in the Ṛgveda: "The *brahmacārin* keeps constantly laboring at his labors. He becomes one limb of the gods"[241] (ṚV 10.109.5). Kajihara (2002, 29-34) suggests, based on ṚV 7.103, that in Ṛgvedic times *brahmacārin*s were generally taught by their fathers. A passage in TS 3.1.9 seems to confirm that when it says: "Manu divided his property among his sons. He deprived [his son] *brahmacarya* Nabhanedistha of any portion"[242]. Another reference in the TS suggests that *brahmacarya* is related to the preservation of the ancient mantras: "A Brahmin on birth is born with a threefold debt, of *brahmacarya* to the Ṛsis [the ancient seers who composed the mantras], of sacrifice to the gods, of offspring to the Pitṛs [Forefathers]"[243] (TS 6.3.10).

These passages show that *brahmacarya* existed at least from the late Ṛgvedic period on. The first *detailed* exposition of *brahmacarya*, however, comes from the Atharvaveda[244]. It has come down to us in two recensions, the widely used *Śaunakīya* recension (AVŚ) and the recently newly edited *Paippalāda* recension (AVP), which seems to be of older age (Gonda 1975, 275). The latter contains more details on *brahmacarya* and its initiation (see below), and has content that is otherwise found only later in the Brāhmaṇas (Kajihara 2002, 21-22).

The language of the Atharvaveda relating to *brahmacarya* is often exalted which makes it difficult for us to assess if this represents an idealization of the *brahmacārin* or if he indeed had this high status among the Atharvavedic Brahmins. A good example is AVŚ 11.5 which is fully dedicated to the *brahmacārin*. The hymn states that the *brahmacārin* was born earlier than Brahman (AVŚ 11.5.5), that he was the origin of the worlds, of Prajāpati and Indra (AVŚ 11.5.7), the Master and Prajāpati (AVŚ 11.5.16), and that he is the source of all seasons, plants, and animals (AVŚ 11.5.20-21). Because of the extraordinary status of the *brahmacārin* in this hymn we follow Kajihara (1995, 1049) who understands the subject of AVŚ 11.5 to be "not the *brahmacārin* on earth, but the […] cosmic *brahmacārin*" (see also Jurewicz 2016, 207-230).

[241] ṚV 10.109.5: *brahmacārī carati veviṣad viṣaḥ sa devānām bhavaty ekam aṅgam*
[242] *manuḥ putrebhyo dāyaṃ vy abhajat sa nābhānediṣṭham brahmacaryaṃ vasantaṃ*
[243] *jāyamāno vai brāhmaṇas tribhir ṛṇavā jāyate brahmacaryeṇarṣibhyo yajñena devebhyaḥ prajayā pitṛbhya*
[244] E.g. AVŚ 5.17.5, AVŚ 6.108.2, AVŚ 6.133.3, AVŚ 7.109.7, AVŚ 19.19.6-10.

Yet, we find also more mundane descriptions of the *brahmacārin.* In AVŚ 11.5.6 we learn that he is "clad in black-buck skin, consecrate, long-bearded"[245]. In AVŚ 11.5.9 he is described as collecting alms food. In AVŚ 6.108 he is connected with intellect (*medhā*), and in AVŚ 6.133 with the girdle (*mekhalā*), *brahman* (see chapter nine), austere heat (*tapas*) and toil (*śrama*), all of which point to the practice of austerities (also Kajihara, 1995). The overall theme, therefore, is that in the AVŚ *brahmacarya* represents a life of spiritual practice. Additionally, he is not necessarily young, judged by his beard (Kajihara 2002, 374). Also, collecting alms food and *tapas* show a structural similarity to the early Buddhist monastic (see also section 2.7).

Kajihara (2002, 54) concludes that in the early Atharvavedic period Brahmins needed to establish a formal system for retaining the traditional mantras. This institution would have been *brahmacarya*, in which the *brahmacārin* was devoted to the mantras and *brahman*, i.e. 'formulated speech' (ibid., 373). This connection between *brahman* and the *brahmacārin* is attested in AVP 5.35.8: "They inclined to it [*brahman*] through the *brahmacārin*s". We find another confirmation for an institution of *brahmacarya* when Atharvaveda teachers express their wish for many *brahmacārins* (e.g. AVP 19.53)[246], which means that already then they could have had more than one student.

In summary, we can state that the Atharvaveda establishes the existence of the *brahmacārin* in ancient times and provides some details about his actual life. If one aspect of *brahman* in the Saṃhitās was to mean 'formulated' or 'sacred speech' this could be a clue for understanding why also the Buddha referred to his students as *brahmacarī*s. They would have been the followers of *his* sacred speech, the Dhamma (see section 9.1).

[245] *brahmacāry eti samidhā samiddhaḥ kārṣṇaṃ vasāno dīkṣito dīrghaśmaśruḥ*
[246] See Kajihara (2002, 165). Also to be found later, e.g. in Taittirīya Upaniṣad 1.4.2.

4.1.2 *Brahamcarya* in the Brāhmaṇas

The Brāhmaṇas continue to feature *brahmacarya* and provide more details for its understanding. The TB confirms that *brahmacarya* was a personal studentship with one teacher (TB 3.10.9), but it also suggests that the *brahmacārin* was moving around ("*adhvane brahmacāriṇam*", TB 3.4.16). Also in TB 3.7.6 the *brahmacārin* who practices *tapas* (broadly rendered as 'austerity') in his heart "wanders as a messenger, within the regions of men"[247].

The Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa also suggests that *brahmacarya* was a studentship with a teacher (JB 1.22, JB 3.152, JB 2.271). In JB 2.276 we find the story of two *brahmacārin*s, one tending the cows of the teacher, the other studying the Vedas[248] – which shows that institutionalized *brahmacarya* allowed a teacher to keep his student as a mundane household helper.

In the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa we learn most about *brahmacarya* from two later passages, ŚB 11.5.4 and ŚB 11.3.3 (see also Black 2007, 38-41). ŚB 11.5.4.16-17 discusses whether the *brahmacārin* could have sexual intercourse or not. The author references different views but finally endorses a position of non-celibacy. Apparently, at the time of the ŚB the celibacy of the *brahmacārin* depended on the teacher, while a general trend of sexual austerity was already developing.

ŚB 11.3.3 provides further details: *Brahmacarya* formally begins by putting a log onto the ritual fire, and thereafter the *brahmacārin* must provide fire-wood every day until the *brahmacarya* concludes with a last piece of fire-wood and a ritual bath. In general, the *brahmacārin* has to be obedient to the teacher. The begging of alms food is another characteristic aspect, allowed exclusively for the *brahmacārin*. He begs from women only, preferably non-related, but if necessary also from his own mother or the teacher's wife. A last detail can be found in ŚB 3.6.2.15 which mentions that the *brahmacārin* guards the teacher, his house, and cattle[249] – a confirmation of the mundane aspects of institutionalized *brahmacarya* in JB 2.276.

[247] *idaṃ tasmai harmyaṃ karomi / yo vo devāś carati brahmacaryam / medhāvī dikṣu manasā tapasvī / antardūtaścarati mānuṣīṣu*
[248] *tayor ha mitravid daṃṣṭradyumna ācāryakarma cakāra. gā ha sma rakṣati. atha hetaro 'dhyāyam eva cacāra.*
[249] *tasmādbrahmacāriṇa ācāryaṃ gopāyanti | gṛhānpaśūnnenno 'paharāniti tasmāttatra…*

It is interesting that in the Brāhmaṇa period we still don't find more references to what must have been an essential aspect of *brahmacarya*, namely the precise transmission of the Vedas (as in JB 2.276). We have to assume, however, that this was so obvious for Vedic audiences that it didn't need to be spelled out. After all, the mentioned passages confirm that *brahmacarya* represented a formal studentship with a teacher. However, teachers could apparently decide how to make best use of the 'human resource' of their *brahmacārin*s – whether to make them focus on the Vedas and the religious path, or if they had to support the household and herd the cattle.

The descriptions in the Brāhmaṇas are obviously more sober than the exaltation of the Atharvaveda, which speaks for a more solidified institution of *brahmacarya* in the Brāhmaṇa period. At the same time the practice of *tapas* and collecting alms food illustrate the ascetic and spiritual framework of the institution.

4.1.3 *Brahmacarya* in the Upaniṣads

The Upaniṣads help us to get a differentiated understanding of *brahmacarya* in the immediate pre-Buddhist times. Generally, 'studentship' becomes more diverse in the Upaniṣads. We occasionally encounter *kṣatriya*s (i.e. members of the warrior caste) who teach Brahmins (see Black 2007, 129), the possibility of a second *brahmacarya* initiation for adult Brahmins (see below), and non-Brahmins becoming *brahmacārin*s as well (e.g. CU 4.4.5). All in all, the institution of *brahmacarya* is firmly established in the Upaniṣads. For example, in TU 1.4.2 we find a Brahmin who yearns for prosperity and who also desires a large number of *brahmacārin*s. Further, we find the confirmation of already well known aspects like collecting alms food (CU 4.3.5).

But along with the solid institution we also see a specification of the *brahmacārin*. CU 2.23.1 informs us of three types of spiritual practitioners and that *tapas* is disconnected from *brahmacarya*: "There are three types of persons whose torso is the Law (*dharma*). The first is one who pursues sacrifice, Vedic recitation, and gift-giving. The second is one who is devoted

solely to austerity (*tapas*). The third is *brahmacarya* of the Veda living at his teacher's house – that is, a student who settles himself permanently at his teacher's house"[250]. Thus, the first type pursues ritualistic Brahmanism, the second a practice focused on austerity-based knowledge, and *brahmacarya* supposedly focuses on Vedic knowledge in a teacher-student relationship.

In this context we learn from CU 4.10.1-2 that a *brahmacārin* could perform austerities and household duties for twelve years without even receiving secret knowledge from his teacher. Naturally, we ask ourselves: What did the 'student' then get in return for his services? In the best case, apparently, the teacher imparts the liberating knowledge of *ātman* and *brahman* to his student: "Now, what people normally call a sacrifice is, in reality, the life of a *brahmacārin,* for it is by the life of a *brahmacārin* that one finds him who is the knower. And what people normally call an offering is, in reality, the life of a *brahmacārin*, for it is by seeking through the life of a *brahmacārin* that one finds the *ātman*"[251] (CU 8.5.1). And similarly CU 8.4.3: "So, only those who find this world of *brahman* by living the life of *brahmacarya* come to possess that world, and they obtain complete freedom of movement in all the worlds"[252].

We see two possibilities to describe the development of *brahmacarya* in the Vedic tradition. One possibility is that it originally encompassed the practice of austere *tapas,* then included learning the Vedas, and finally discarded both of these aspects as superficial in order to realize the true liberating knowledge of *ātman*. Another way to see it is that the *brahmacārin* was originally an austere spiritual practitioner, which then degraded into an institution with only formalized austerity and standard Vedic practices. And finally, at the time of the Upaniṣads it would have further degraded into 'cheap labor' for teachers who measured their status with the number of students they had, conveniently granting them 'philosophical' teachings at their will.

[250] *trayo dharmaskandhāḥ | yajño 'dhyayanaṃ dānam iti prathamaḥ | tapa eva dvitīyaḥ | brahmacāryācāryakulavāsī tṛtīyo 'tyantam ātmānam ācāryakule 'vasādayan | sarva ete puṇyalokā bhavanti | brahmasaṃstho 'mṛtatvam eti*

[251] *atha yad yajña ity ācakṣate brahmacaryam eva tat | brahmacaryeṇa hy eva yo jñātā taṃ vindate | atha yad iṣṭam ity ācakṣate brahmacaryam eva tat | brahmacaryeṇa hy eveṣṭvātmānam anuvindate*

[252] *tad ya evaitaṃ brahmalokaṃ brahmacaryeṇānuvindanti teṣām evaiṣa brahmalokaḥ | teṣāṃ sarveṣu lokeṣu kāmacāro bhavati*

Incidentally, it is possible that both developments took place at the same time. 'Successful' spiritual studentships and extraordinary teachers could have set the example that other students and teachers tried to emulate. This, in turn, could have led to an 'industry' of *brahmacarya* where teachers sought to increase their reputation and wealth, and students tried to become students of famous teachers in order to receive a reputable education themselves. Such an 'industry' would have over time necessarily produced a large number of only trivial studentships.

All in all, however, the early Upaniṣadic texts are a testament for the earnest search for true spiritual knowledge, and *brahmacarya* seems to have been an integral aspect of this pursuit, in that it formalized the intimate relationship of spiritual masters with their students. With this in mind, it becomes understandable how the Buddha fully embraced the very concept of *brahmacarya* for his own 'students', the monastics of early Buddhism.

4.1.4 The Duration of *Brahmacarya*

In discussions about Vedic *brahmacarya* there is often an assumption that we deal with boys or young men who lived as Vedic students before having their own family. Yet, the respective passages in the Vedic texts rarely give us an indication about the age of the *brahmacārin*s. We also keep in mind that AVŚ 11.5.6 mentions that the *brahmacārin* has a long beard. To bring more light into the matter will not only advance our knowledge about Vedic *brahmacārin*s – if it turns out that Vedic 'students' could have been also adults it would increase the similarity to the Buddhist *brahmacarī*s, the monastics, who had to be at least twenty years old in order to be initiated (see section 4.3.2) and could live as monastics until the end of their lives.

A few suttas (AN 5.192, AN 7.42-43, Snp 2.7) refer to a specific duration of Brahmin *brahmacarya*. The three suttas share a common theme – the Buddha gives teachings about the supposed customs of ancient Brahmins, and mentions that *brahmacariya* used to last for forty-eight years: "For forty-eight years they practiced the life of *brahmacariya*"[253] (Snp 2.7).

[253] *Aṭṭhacattālīsaṃ vassāni, (komāra) brahmacariyaṃ cariṃsu te*

This time span of forty-eight years appears nowhere in pre-Buddha texts but only in a few Gṛhyasūtras and Dharmasūtras. HiGS 1.2.8.14, ĀgGS 1.1.4.57, PāGS 2.5.13 (and similarly ĀśGS 1.22.3) use the same formula, saying that *brahmacarya* is supposed to last forty-eight years, or twelve years for each Veda, or until the *brahmacārin* has learnt the texts[254]. Similarly, ĀpDS 1.2.12, 1.30.2, 2.18.4 and BauDS 1.3.1 indicate a duration of forty-eight years. The other Dharmasūtras don't mention a specific duration. As quoted above, according to CU 4.10.1 twelve years were considered a standard period of time.

A sutta which supports the timespan of twelve years is AN 7.42-43. Here, Sāriputta overhears 'wanderers of other sects' (*paribbājakā*) saying: "Friends, anyone at all who lives the complete and purified *brahmacariya* for twelve years is fit to be called a bhikkhu who is *niddasa* [i.e. a teacher]"[255]. Sāriputta then asks the Buddha about his view, and he replies that becoming a teacher depends on spiritual achievement and not on a mere studentship of twelve, twenty-four, thirty-six, or forty-eight years. The numbers in these intervals of twelve explicitly echo the duration of *brahmacariya* according to the Dharmasūtras, namely twelve years for each Veda (ĀpDS 1.2.11-17, GauDS 2.45-47, BauDS 1.3.1-4).

There is, therefore, an obvious reference in the suttas to the Dharmasūtras which suggests that these (and other) portions of early Buddhist texts were added at least after 300 BCE, where Olivelle tentatively locates the composition of the oldest Dharmasūtras. Theoretically, the suttas could also preserve a custom which only later got fixed in the Dharmasūtras, but the fact remains that older texts don't contain these intervals of twelve years for *brahmacarya*.

What we do have is the CU mentioning *different* periods of time for *brahmacarya*: In CU 6.1.1 Svetaketu becomes a *brahmacārin* at the age of twelve and returns after learning all the Vedas at the age of twenty-four, i.e. in total a period of twelve years. In CU 8.7.2-3 Indra and Virocana go with firewood to Prajāpati for *brahmacarya* and stay there for thirty-two years. And in the

[254] *aṣṭācatvāriṃśadvarṣāṇi caturviṃśatiṃ dvādaśa yāvadgrahaṇaṃ vā na tvevāvrataḥ syāt*
[255] *yo hi koci, āvuso, dvādasavassāni paripuṇṇaṃ parisuddhaṃbrahmacariyaṃ carati, 'niddaso bhikkhū'ti alaṃvacanāyā*. Bodhi translates *niddasa* vaguely as 'ten-less'. We argue that *niddasa* is based on Skt *nirdeśa* (also *nirdeṣṭṛ* or *nidarśaka*), i.e. instructor or teacher.

related account in CU 8.11.3 Maghavan (an epithet of Indra) lives as a *brahmacārin* with Prajāpati for a hundred-and-one years.

We get again a different duration from Strabo who transmits Megasthenes' notes from around 300 BC[256], viz. thirty-seven years (Strabo, Geography, 15.1.59; in Jones 1930, 99). Later in the text, Strabo repeats the duration of thirty-seven years from a different unnamed source but relates it to non-Brahmins, the naked 'Pramnae'[257] who "live naked, for the most part in the open air, practising endurance, as I have said before, for thirty-seven years" (Strabo, Geography, 15.1.70). Megasthenes is usually considered a reliable source, and we have no reason to doubt that here a form of *brahmacarya* is meant which was incorporated into a non-Brahmin *śramaṇa* tradition (see also Stoneman 1995, 105).

We conclude that the duration of *brahmacarya* was not fixed yet in pre-Buddha times. Specific durations mentioned in the suttas probably come from a later time when the Dharmasūtras were compiled. On the other hand it is possible that there were at the time of the Buddha Brahmin *brahmacārin*s who chose *brahmacarya* as a permanent lifestyle. This could have influenced the Buddha's decision to regard monastics of all ages as *brahmacarī*s.

4.2 *Brahmacariya* in Early Buddhism

As mentioned above, the concept of *brahmacariya* is very common in the Buddhist suttas, representing the whole monastic life until liberation. Thus, the Buddha assimilated a Brahmin institution for his Saṅgha, and the investigation of this term in the suttas will therefore contribute to our assessment of how the Buddha related to Brahmanism. We will discuss *brahmacariya* in the two meanings it has in the suttas: as monastic studentship, and as celibacy.

[256] Bongard-Levin & Bukharin (1991-1992).
[257] Barnett (1931) concludes that the Pramnae must derive from Sanskrit *prajña*, which would mean that they were wisdom-seeking ascetics, who according to Strabo were opposed to the Brahmins.

4.2.1 *Brahmacariya* as Monastic Studentship

Most sutta translations mask the Brahmin background of the Buddhist term *brahmacariya*. Bhikkhu Bodhi for example often uses 'holy life' as the standard rendering. As a consequence, the casual reader misses the semantic connection to the Vedic studentship.

In the suttas the term appears alone and also in several important compounds. One such compound denotes the beginning of monastic training in early Buddhism, namely *ādibrahmacariya*, lit. the 'beginning of *brahmacariya*'[258]. While most suttas don't feature the term in a revealing context AN 8.2 (copied into DN 34) defines *ādibrahmacariya* by the dependence on a teacher, ethical restraint, and the contemplation of fundamental Buddhist teachings. These aspects indeed make sense for the newly ordained.

While *ādibrahmacariya* marks the beginning of the spiritual training *vusitabrahmacariya* (lit. 'having lived *brahmacariya*') signifies that the Buddhist spiritual training has been completed. The compound appears in a few verses of SN, AN, and Snp[259], yet it is much more significant in its uncompounded form, '*vusita brahmacariya*'. In this form it is part of a stock passage that proclaims the end of the spiritual training and the attainment of liberation: "One understands: 'Depleted is birth, *brahmacariya* has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more being-here'"[260]. This passage appears more than two hundred times in the suttas, mostly in the SN[261], less in the AN[262], regularly in the MN[263], and a few times in the DN[264] (no occurrence in Dhp, and once in Snp 1.4).

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[258] SN 16.12, SN 56.7-8, SN 56.10, SN 56.31, SN 56.41, AN 3.86-88, AN 4.245, AN 8.2, MN 63, MN 100, DN 9, DN 19, DN 29, DN 34.
[259] SN 2.26, SN 7.9, SN 35.228, AN 4.5, AN 4.45, AN 4.46, Snp 3.4, Snp 3.5.
[260] *Khīṇā jāti, vusitaṃ brahmacariyaṃ, kataṃ karaṇīyaṃ, nāparaṃ itthattāyā'ti pajānāti.* My own translation.
[261] SN 6.3, SN 7.1-10, SN 12.17, SN 12.32, SN 12.51, SN 12.61-62, SN 12.70, SN 18.1-11, SN 22.12, SN 22.14, SN 22.35, SN 22.45-46, SN 22.49, SN 22.53-55, SN 22.59, SN 22.61-72, SN 22.76-77, SN 22.79, SN 22.136, SN 23.11-22, SN 24 71-96, SN 35.1-6, SN 35.28-52, SN 35.62, SN 35.64, SN 35.73-75, SN 35.86, SN 35.89-91, SN 35.95, SN 35.105, SN 35.108, SN 35.121, SN 35.140-145, SN 35.153-154, SN 35.186-227, SN 35.234-235, SN 35.351, SN 44.2, SN 46.5, SN 46.30, SN 47.3, SN 47.5-6, SN 48.45-49.
[262] AN 3.37, AN 3.58-59, AN 3.66, AN 3.130, AN 4.198, AN 4.257, AN 5.56, AN 5.75, AN 5.180, AN 6.49, AN 6.55, AN 6.60, AN 7.61, AN 8.11, AN 8.30, AN 8.63, AN 9.25-26, AN 10.84, AN 10.86.
[263] MN 4, MN 7, MN 11, MN 19, MN 22, MN 27, MN 36, MN 37, MN 39, MN 51, MN 57, MN 60, MN 65, MN 73, MN 74, MN 75, MN 76, MN 79, MN 80, MN 82, MN 85, MN 86, MN 92, MN 94, MN 100, MN 101, MN 105, MN 109, MN 112, MN 121, MN 124, MN 125, MN 140, MN 147, MN 148.
[264] DN 2, DN 8, DN 9, DN 10, DN 15, DN 16.

It is quite remarkable that the most frequent formula which proclaims the highest Buddhist attainment contains *brahmacariya*, a term that is so deeply rooted in Vedic Brahmanism. This must mean that *brahmacarya* was a concept flexible enough to be used by non-Brahmins as well. At the same time the suttas set the bar for 'completing *brahmacariya*' very high – the 'studentship' ends not with mastery of the doctrines, a deep understanding of the Dhamma, or sublime meditations – but only with liberation itself.

Another very similar term that appears often in all nikāyas is *brahmacariyapariyosāna* and means 'conclusion' or 'perfection of *brahmacariya*'[265]. At the end of the spiritual journey the bhikkhu "realizes for himself with direct knowledge, in this very life, that unsurpassed *brahmacariyapariyosāna* for the sake of which clansmen rightly go forth from the household life into homelessness, and having entered upon it, he dwells in it"[266]. This passage again uses *brahmacariya* as 'spiritual studentship' and serves as a reminder that early Buddhism developed in a social context in which regular people left their home to became ascetics on a spiritual quest.

Next to the wide-spread use of *brahmacariya* in early Buddhism we also find hundreds of times the term for the monastic 'student' himself, the *brahmacāri*. Among these instances often the term appears as *sabrahmacāri*[267], often translated as 'fellow monk', again masking the reference to Vedic Brahmanism. The *brahmacāri* also appears a few times in a context with *garu* (Skt *guru*)[268], the teacher, thus mirroring another ancient Indian institution shared by Buddhism and Brahmanism, viz. the personal teacher-student relationship.

[265] SN 6.3, SN 7.1, SN 7.2, SN 7.10, SN 12.17, SN 21.4-6, SN 21.11, SN 21.12, SN 22.35, SN 22.63, SN 35.64, SN 35.89, SN 35.95, SN 41.9, SN 47.3, SN 47.15, SN 47.16, SN 47.46, AN 2.5, AN 3.130, AN 4.257, AN 5.56, AN 5.180, AN 6.55, AN 6.60, AN 7.56, AN 8.30, AN 8.63, MN 7, MN 26, MN 27, MN 57, MN 70, MN 73, MN 75, MN 82, MN 85, MN 86, MN 89, MN 92, MN 124, DN 8, DN 9, DN 16, DN 25, DN 26, Snp 1.4.
[266] *yassatthāya kulaputtā sammadeva agārasmā anagāriyaṃ pabbajanti, tadanuttaraṃ - brahmacariyapariyosānaṃ diṭṭheva dhamme sayaṃ abhiññā sacchikatvā upasampajja vihāsi.*
[267] Very often in AN and MN, much less in SN and DN.
[268] AN 5.26, AN 5.166, AN 6.60, AN 8.2, AN 10.87, MN 5, DN 10.

4.2.2 *Brahmacariya* as Celibacy

In spite of the overwhelming majority of cases in which *brahmacariya* means 'monastic spiritual practice' or 'spiritual studentship', we also encounter *brahmacariya* in the AN-based meaning of 'celibacy' or 'chastity'[269]. Most prominently when *abrahmacariya* is mentioned (i.e. as a negation), it refers to the monastic precept of celibacy[270], for example: "Having given up *abrahmacariya*, living as a *brahmacāri*, they are far away and abstain from the misconduct of sexual intercourse"[271] (AN 4.198, AN 10.99, MN 101, MN 112).

In MN 99 a Brahmin mentions *brahmacariya* in the meaning of celibacy as one of the general meritorious instructions for Brahmins, next to truth (*sacca*, Skt *satya*), austerity (*tapa*, Skt *tapas*), study (*ajjhena*, Skt *adhyayana*), and generosity (*cāga*, Skt *tyaj*). Bronkhorst (1998, 69) comments that only in the post-Buddha Mbh a similar list can be found. A pre-Buddhist list in CU 3.17.4 which could have been the blueprint mentions: austerity (*tapas*), generosity (*dāna*), integrity (*ārjava*), non-injury (*ahiṃsā*), and truthfulness (*satya*). Another possibility is TU 1.9 which features a more comprehensive list of duties of a Brahmin: recitation (*svādhyāya*), the righteousness (*ṛta*), truthfulness (*satya*), austerity (*tapas*), self-control (*dama*), tranquility (*śama*), the fires (*agnaya*), the *agnihotra* ritual, guests (*atithaya*), humaneness (*mānuṣa*), and different terms for offspring. Notably, these two lists don't feature any celibacy or chastity, in case of the TU rather the opposite. This doesn't disqualify MN 99 as inauthentic, but at least we can state that the Brahmin in the sutta does not reference a wide-spread Vedic position.

Apart from the contexts which feature *abrahmacariya* there are almost twenty suttas in which *brahmacariya* means 'celibacy' or 'chastity'[272]. The vast majority comes from the AN (the instances in the MN can be considered copies from the AN). Occurrences in the SN are very few, which certainly speaks for a distinct AN transmission of this meaning, and most probably also for a later development of *brahmacariya*-as-celibacy in the suttas.

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[269] SN 45.8, AN 3.70, AN 3.113, AN 3.121, AN 3.122, AN 4.198, AN 5.286, AN 8.41, AN 10.99, MN 8, MN 27, MN 38, MN 51, MN 94, MN 96, MN 101, MN 112, DN 1, DN 2, Snp 2.14.
[270] Exceptions are SN 45.18, MN 76, and MN 90 where *abrahmacariya* means 'not dedicated to monastic practice'.
[271] *Abrahmacariyaṃ pahāya brahmacārī hoti ārācārī virato asaddhammā gāmadhammā*. (My translation.)
[272] SN 2.24, SN 35.241, AN 5.75, AN 5.80, AN 5.180, AN 5.226, AN 6.16, AN 6.43, AN 6.44, AN 7.50, AN 7.72, AN 8.19, AN 8.21-22, AN 10.73, AN 10.75, SN 1.50.

4.2.3 Summary

Several things could be established so far: 1. *Brahmacariya* and *brahmacāri* are exceptionally common terms in early Buddhism. 2. *Brahmacariya* was originally a term for the whole period of monastic practice, starting from ordination up until liberation. 3. 'Celibacy' is a confirmed, albeit probably later, meaning of *brahmacariya* in the suttas.

4.3 Brahmin *Upanayana* and Buddhist Ordination

The question of interest in this section is to investigate how the early Buddhist initiation procedure[273] related to the Brahmin *upanayana*, the initiation into Vedic *brahmacarya*. If there was any similarity we can expect that it is more prominent in the earlier sutta layers where the Saṅgha has not yet refined its own independent ordination ritual, and when Buddhism and Brahmanism still maintained a rather benevolent co-existence.

4.3.1 The Vedic Initiation, or *Upanayana*

The Vedic term for the initiation into *brahmacarya* is *upanayana*. This Vedic initiation procedure developed over time and eventually became institutionalized. In the Atharvaveda the initiation is described as a 'birth' of the *brahmacārin* that is completed after three days: "The Master, welcoming his new disciple, into his bowels takes the *brahmacārin*. Three nights he holds and bears him in this belly. When he is born, the Gods convene to see him"[274] (AVŚ 11.5.3).

[273] See for details Kloppenborg (1983, 158-168), and Kieffer-Pülz (2000, 281-402).
[274] *ācārya upanayamāno brahmacāriṇaṃ kṛṇute garbham antaḥ | taṃ rātrīs tisra udare bibharti taṃ jātaṃ draṣṭum abhisaṃyanti devāḥ*

Other details about the *upanayana* from the Paippalāda Atharvaveda are confirmed later in the ŚB. The different elements are (1) the teacher's wish for *brahmacārin*s, (2) the teacher takes the *brahmacārin* by the hand (3) the *brahmacārin* is entrusted to the deities (Kajihara 2000, 187 and 219). As Kajihara points out, taking the *brahmacārin*'s hand is connected to the nuptial ritual (ibid., 221-224), symbolizing an intimate relationship. We will see below that such signs of expressed closeness are missing in the Buddhist initiation.

For the authors of the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa the *upanayana* was already a customary ritual. The sequence of events in ŚB 11.5.3.13-4.14 is:

1. The aspirant brings logs for fuel and asks to be accepted as a *brahmacārin.*
2. The teacher asks for his name, to which the aspirant answers accordingly[275].
3. The teacher takes the aspirant's right hand, commits him to the gods, declares him to be a *brahmacārin*, tells him to sip water, to be vigorous, and to put on fuel on the fire.
4. The teacher concludes the initiation by reciting to the student the Sāvitrī mantra[276].

Two points are important here: We often find in the Upaniṣads that the aspirant brings logs of firewood when he formally asks for studentship. Bringing firewood thus metonymically represents the full ritual of *brahmacarya* initiation. Secondly, there is a theme of second birth[277], both in the AVŚ (having the *brahmacārin* three days 'in the teacher's belly') and in the ŚB where the 'pregnancy' is completed by teaching the Sāvitrī mantra. After the initiation the teacher is the sole authority for the 'new-born' student (for 'rebirths' in rites of passage see Lubin 2010, 269).

The Upaniṣads introduce several changes to the *upanayana* initiation. One of them is that *kṣatriya*s can initiate Brahmins[278]. Further we find the possibility for a *second* initiation (e.g. CU

[275] This aspect gains importance in the story of CU 4.4 where the youth Satyakāma Jābāla wants to become a *brahmacārin* but doesn't know his lineage, which means that he doesn't know the name of his father.
[276] The text specifically recommends to do this right away, arguing against doing it only after a year, six months, twenty-four days, twelve days, six days or three days. This last variation of three days is related to the teacher being three days 'pregnant' with the student (as in the above mentioned AVŚ 11.5.3).
[277] *Dvija* or 'twice-born' only appears later in the Dharmasūtras. In the suttas it occurs in Snp 1.7.
[278] See in particular Black (2007, 118-119), Bronkhorst (1996), and Olivelle (1999).

5.11.1-7). BU 6.2.4 combines both: An erudite Brahmin father and his son both undergo initiation under the more learned *kṣatriya* prince Jaivali (parallels in CU 5.3.6 and KU 1.1). This is of importance for us since these examples paved the way for Brahmins to have a second initiation and receive *brahmacarya* also with the *kṣatriya* teacher Gotama, i.e. the Buddha. We see another important precedence in KU 1.1, where the teacher informally accepts his new student with the words "*ehi vy eva tvā jñapayiṣyāmīti*" ("Come, I'll see to it that you perceive it clearly"). This is echoed by the Buddha's short initiation formula "*ehi bhikkhu"* (see below).

In conclusion, the possibility of a second initiation in the Upaniṣads opened up the possibility for Brahmins to undergo a second studentship with the Buddha. Additionally, the possibility for *kṣatriya*s to initiate *brahmacārin*s paved the way for the Buddha to legitimately initiate students. As a consequence, an accomplished Brahmin could become a Buddhist monastic and still refer to his studentship as *brahmacarya*. The usage of this term in early Buddhism therefore parallels the Brahmin studentship, made the status of Buddhist practitioners immediately recognizable for outsiders, and allowed open-minded Brahmins to enter the Buddha's order under the label of a well-known Vedic institution.

4.3.2 Initiation and Ordination in Early Buddhism

For us it is important to see how comparable the Brahmin and the Buddhist initiations were in order to assess if similarities were more than just nominal. We have seen already (e.g. in KU 1.1) that a previously formalized and ritualistic *upanayana* might have become more casual in the Upaniṣads. Similarly, also in early Buddhism the earliest initiation into monastic *brahmacariya* might have been unassuming. The Vinaya at least preserves a short old version of initiation and also a more elaborate procedure from later times. A question we attempt to answer is if short Buddhist initiations were actually practiced, or if we merely have a short metonymic *presentation* in non-legalistic texts.

The suttas don't contain many examples of explicit initiations, but when they occur they are executed quite casually. An example is how Gotama, the Buddha-to-be, joined the order of his first teacher, Āḷāra Kālāma: "I went to Āḷāra Kālāma and said to him: 'Friend Kālāma, I want to lead *brahmacariya* in this Dhamma and Vinaya.' Āḷāra Kālāma replied: 'The venerable one may stay here'"[279] (MN 26, MN 36, MN 85, MN 100). We note that the text shows no hesitation to call also this (neither Brahmin nor Buddhist) studentship *brahmacariya*. On the other hand we keep in mind that the only source is the MN. A potential older source for this formula could be SN 12.70 where the wanderer Susīma asks Ānanda for *brahmacariya* initiation in the same informal way: "Friend Ānanda, I wish to lead the *brahmacariya* in this Dhamma and Vinaya"[280]. Overall, there is a possibility that among *śramaṇa*s (hence also in earliest Buddhism) such unceremonious initiations were indeed common.

When the Buddha himself initiates a monk in MN 86 he simply says: "*ehi bhikkhu*", i.e. "come, monk". This reminds us of the short 'initiation' in KU 1.1 instead of a 'proper' Vedic initiation ritual. The Vinaya even contains the formula of the supposedly first Buddhist ordinations: "'Come, monk,' the Lord said, 'well taught is Dhamma. Fare the *brahmacariya* for making an utter end of *dukkha*'"[281] (Vin 1.12-13, Vin 1.17, Vin 1.19, Vin 1.24, Vin 1.33-34, Vin 1.43).

Thus we have the term *brahmacariya* at the very establishment of the Buddhist monastic order. Further, the Buddha calls the initiate a bhikkhu (Skt *bhikṣu*), i.e. a mendicant who is dependent on collecting *bhikkhā*, i.e. alms food (Skt *bhaikṣa*). The formula contains also the very purpose of *brahmacariya*, namely making a complete end to suffering (*sammā dukkhassa antakiriyāyā*). We therefore find in this short passage the principles of Buddhist ascetic life in a nutshell: *brahmacariya*, dependence on alms, based on the Dhamma, with the purpose to end suffering. The similarities to the Brahmin *brahmacarya* are striking: They share the same title, i.e. *brahmacarya*, are both associated with alms food (e.g. AVŚ 11.5.9, ŚB 11.3.3, CU 4.3.5), and the Upaniṣadic goal to know *ātman* is at least comparable to the Buddhist goal to 'end suffering'.

[279] *Upasaṅkamitvā āḷāraṃ kālāmaṃ etadavocaṃ – 'icchāmahaṃ, āvuso kālāma, imasmiṃ dhammavinaye brahmacariyaṃ caritu'nti. Evaṃ vutte, bhikkhave, āḷāro kālāmo maṃ etadavoca – 'viharatāyasmā'*
[280] *icchāmahaṃ, āvuso ānanda, imasmiṃ dhammavinaye brahmacariyaṃ caritun"ti.*
[281] *''labheyyāhaṃ, bhante, bhagavato santike pabbajjaṃ, labheyyaṃ upasampada''nti. ''Ehi bhikkhū''ti bhagavā avoca – ''svākkhāto dhammo, cara brahmacariyaṃ sammā dukkhassa antakiriyāyā''ti.*

In contrast to the Vedic *brahmacariya* where the *teacher* was of central significance, the Buddha would emphasize the central importance of the Dhamma and play down the relevance of him as a person: "It is in just this way that some hollow men here make requests of me, but when the Dhamma has been explained, they think only of following me around"[282] (AN 8.63, SN 47.3). The Buddha also emphasized that he has no successor and that his followers should rely only on themselves and the Dhamma as a refuge[283] (in SN 22.43, SN 47.9, SN 47.13, SN 47.14, DN 16, and DN 26). This independence from a personal teacher marks a difference to the more personal studentship in Brahmanism. At the same time we have numerous suttas where not a specific teaching makes people follow the Buddha but his awe-inspiring personality (see e.g. section 3.2). It cannot, therefore, be ruled out that originally the Buddha as a person (i.e. independent from the teaching) was just as vital for *brahmacariya* as the Brahmin teacher.

With time the casual early initiations by the Buddha were replaced with a ritual that could be performed by other Saṅgha members. We find this more formal ritual described in the Vinaya where the Buddha instructs the Saṅgha how to henceforth perform the initiation:

> "And thus, monks, should one let go forth, should one ordain: First, having made him have his hair and beard cut off, having made him put on yellow robes, having made him arrange an upper robe over one shoulder, having made him honour the monks' feet, having made him sit down on his haunches, having made him salute with joined palms, he should be told: 'Speak thus: "I go to the awakened one for refuge, I go to Dhamma for refuge, I go to the Order for refuge. And a second time […] And a third time […] the Order for refuge."'[284] (Vin 1.22, Vin 1.82).

In comparison to the Vinaya initiation performed by the Buddha himself the terms *brahmacariya* and *dukkha* have disappeared. Instead we have *pabbajjā* (the 'going forth' from household life,

[282] *Evamevaṃ panidhekacce moghapurisā mamaññeva ajjhesanti. Dhamme ca bhāsite mamaññeva anubandhitabbaṃ maññantī''ti*.
[283] E.g. DN 16, MN 108. Eventually the later monastic system still developed a dependence (*nissaya*) of the initiate on a teacher by living for at least five years in his proximity. See Kieffer-Pülz (2000, 341).
[284] *Evañca pana, bhikkhave, pabbājetabbo upasampādetabbo – Paṭhamaṃ kesamassuṃ ohārāpetvā , kāsāyāni vatthāni acchādāpetvā, ekaṃsaṃ uttarāsaṅgaṃ kārāpetvā, bhikkhūnaṃ pāde vandāpetvā, ukkuṭikaṃ nisīdāpetvā, añjaliṃ paggaṇhāpetvā, evaṃ vadehīti vattabbo – buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi, dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi, saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi; dutiyampi […]; tatiyampi […] saraṇaṃ gacchāmī''ti.*

Skt *pravrajyā*) and *upasampadā* (the 'attainment' of ordination, Skt *upasaṃpadā*)[285]. The ritualistic elements are now: (1) shaving hair and beard, (2) putting on yellow robes[286], (3) arranging an upper robe over one shoulder, (4) touching the initiator's feet, and (5) squatting with joined palms, exclaiming three times the triple refuge to Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha[287].

The shaven head is according to the suttas a feature of ascetics (and certain indigenous people) that Brahmins looked down upon[288]. The yellow robe must have equally been a visible symbol of the ascetic renunciate. Even though there is no direct parallel in the suttas to this later Vinaya initiation, we find it partly to be based on a stock passage that also appears in the Buddha's recollection of his own renunciation: "It is not easy, while living in a home, to lead the *brahmacarya* utterly perfect and pure as a polished shell. Suppose I shave off my hair and beard, put on the yellow robe, and go forth from the home life into homelessness'"[289] (as the Buddha's renunciation in MN 36; as the renunciation of other monastics in SN 16.11, AN 4.198, AN 10.99, MN 27, MN 38, MN 51, MN 82, MN 94, MN 101, MN 112, MN 125, DN 2, DN 10).

In contrast to the Vedic initiation we hardly find any physical contact between the Buddhist preceptor and the initiate, except for the reverential touch of the preceptor's feet in the later Vinaya initiation. The lack of bodily contact throughout early monastic Buddhism is possibly a feature it shared with other *śramaṇa* traditions which also wanted to overcome the attachment to the body.

For the sake of completeness we end our overview of early Buddhist initiation with the fully elaborated ordination procedure. But we have to keep in mind that this is probably the latest iteration within early Buddhism and very different from the original initiation. The elements here are: choosing a preceptor; being given bowl and robes; touching the preceptor's feet, kneeling, and asking for ordination; assuring to be free of diseases, to be human, debt-free, a free man (not

[285] Later *pabbajjā* came to mean novicehood, and *upasampadā* full ordination. Pandita (2011) argues convincingly that the two terms were originally two aspects of the same ordination procedure.
[286] See for the reasoning behind the color yellow Gombrich (2015).
[287] This detailed fivefold initiation formula is not to be found in the suttas.
[288] See for the pejorative meaning of *muṇdaka*, 'shaveling', Levman (2011). This pejorative meaning can be found in SN 7.1, SN 7.9, SN 7.22, SN 35.132, MN 50, MN 81, MN 82, MN 95, MN 100, DN 3, DN 27, Snp 1.7, Snp 3.4.
[289] *Nayidaṃ sukaraṃ agāraṃ ajjhāvasatā ekantaparipuṇṇaṃ ekantaparisuddhaṃ saṅkhalikhitaṃ brahmacariyaṃ carituṃ. Yaṃnūnāhaṃ kesamassuṃ ohāretvā kāsāyāni vatthāni acchādetvā agārasmā anagāriyaṃ pabbajeyyan'ti*.

a slave); having the parents' consent; to be at least twenty years of age; the names of oneself and the preceptor; and finally the silent approval by the monastic community (Vin 1.94-95).

4.3.3 Assessing the Authenticity of the Buddhist Initiation Ritual

We now want to assess how plausible the non-ritualistic early initiation of the suttas and the Vinaya is. An important objection is that 'going forth', i.e. leaving the household life, becoming an ascetic, and ordaining into a monastic system must have been a life-changing event. Also, the initiation did not just change the life of the aspirants, but the lives of their families as well. This is expressed in the late ordination procedure which explicitly required the parents' permission.

It is astonishing that these consequences on the families' lives are only rarely dealt with: An MN stock passage says that the parents of the Buddha-to-be were crying when he became an ascetic[290]. In MN 82 an aspirant doesn't get the parents' permission, so that he lies down in protest and refuses to move, until eventually his parents give in (see also Anālayo, 2012b).

As limited as our knowledge is about the effects on the initiates' family-of-origin, it is at least well-attested that ordination was not an irrevocable event, and that a return to household life was possible. Numerous suttas show that disrobing and 'returning to the low life' (*hīnāyāvatto*) did occur[291], even though it is strongly discouraged by the texts. The most common reasons for disrobing are: lust and the lack of sense restraint, followed by a frustrating inability to reach liberation, and lastly the unwillingness to deal with criticism from other monastics.

Because of the severe consequences for the family of origin we doubt that a casual initiation was realistic for people who still lived a household life (as in Vin 1.17, Vin 1.19, and Vin 1.24). After all, initiates had to settle their worldly affairs, and only after these arrangements the simple

[290] MN 26, MN 36, MN 85, MN 95, MN 100, similarly DN 4, DN 5.
[291] SN 12.32, SN 16.11, SN 17.9, SN 20.10, SN 35.120, SN 35.244, SN 45.160, SN 52.8, AN 3.39, AN 4.122, AN 5.5, AN 5.75, AN 5.76, AN 5.80, AN 5.226, AN 6.55, AN 6.60, AN 7.72, AN 8.14, AN 11.6, MN 63, MN 67

"come, monk" initiation could have taken place. The latest Vinaya procedure is more realistic with its concerns, like health, having no debt, and parental consent. Yet, it only reflects the initiation at the time of an institutionalized Saṅgha, not the original ritual.

All in all, we could show that the Buddhist initiation into *brahmacariya* was probably possible because of socio-religious changes which have occurred prior in the Upaniṣadic times, in particular the possibilities of a second *upanayana* and initiations by *kṣatriya*s. Beyond that, we have to point out again that the Buddha called the entire period of monastic studentship *brahmacariya*, closely following the Vedic tradition. In regards to the original Buddhist initiation ritual, however, we have to concede that we lack authentic old material. It remains, therefore, an open question if the Buddhist initiation was originally more based on the logic of a rite-of-passage (as the Upaniṣadic *upanayana*), or on then-contemporary casual *śramaṇa* initiations.

4.4 Was Gotama a Vedic *Brahmacārin* himself?

So far, we have focused on Vedic *brahmacarya* and its Buddhist counterpart. *Brahmacarya* was, however, embedded in a larger socio-religious context: Already in the Gṛhyasūtras it was obligatory for boys of the three highest castes to become a Vedic *brahmacārin*, not just for Brahmins. Naturally then we need to investigate the question if the young *kṣatriya* Gotama, the Buddha-to-be, himself underwent a traditional Vedic *brahmacarya*.

As we discussed in section 1.3, Brahmanism was during the Buddha's lifetime still establishing itself in the East. Hence, we cannot be sure if regulations of certain Gṛhyasūtras were already in place in the Buddha's homeland. Theoretically at least, it could have been considered fashionable for wealthy households to get their sons a Vedic education. In order to answer this question we can collect some circumstantial evidence from the suttas.

A possible hint *for* a Vedic *brahmacarya* past of Gotama can be found in SN 7.9 where the Buddha describes to the Brahmin Sundarika how he used to tend the fire himself: "Having given

up the fire made from wood, | I kindle, O Brahmin, the inner light alone. | Always ablaze, my mind always concentrated, | I am an arahant living *brahmacariya*"[292]. The unique content of this sutta suggests not only that the Buddha still considers himself a *brahmacārin* but also that he used to tend the traditional ritual fire in his past, even though there is no mention of him having been a student under a Vedic teacher.

Another hint relates to the culmination of the Vedic *upanayana* where the teacher tells his new student the Sāvitrī mantra (as seen in ŚB 11.5.4.6). We can assume that the mantra itself could have been known by non-Brahmins as well but that it could only be legitimately transmitted in a proper initiation ritual. With this in mind the following utterance by the Buddha is interesting: "If you call yourself a Brahmin, but call me a non-Brahmin, then I ask you about the Sāvittī, with three lines and twenty-four syllables"[293] (Snp 3.4). The Buddha refers to the Sāvitri mantra (ṚV 3.62.10) and specifically to the Gāyatrī meter ('three lines and twenty-four syllables') which, according to the Gṛhyasūtras (ŚāGS 2.5, PāGS 2.3), was supposed to be taught to Brahmins only. A *kṣatriya* like himself should have been taught in his initiation a mantra in the Tṛṣṭubh meter (ṚV 1.35.2, with four lines and forty-four syllables)[294]. But since he challenges the Brahmin to ask him about the 'Brahmin meter' the text emphasizes that the Buddha is 'a real Brahmin'. The implication is, hence, that he underwent a legitimate 'Brahmin' *upanayana*.

Similarly, Snp 3.7 (copied into MN 92) contains a poem in which the Buddha says that Sāvitrī is "the glory of Vedic hymns" (*sāvittī chandaso mukhaṃ*). This again suggests that the Buddha had specific knowledge about the Sāvitrī mantra, which traditionally would have been acquired during his own Vedic initiation.

If the rules of the Gṛhyasūtras applied to the young Gotama then he would have received a *kṣatriya upanayana* at the age of eleven[295] (age of eight for Brahmins, and twelve for Vaiśyas). He would then also have worn a specific animal skin, girdle and staff (Iwasaki 1965, 810).

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[292] *Hitvā ahaṃ brāhmaṇa dārudāhaṃ | Ajjhattamevujjalayāmi jotiṃ; | Niccagginī niccasamāhitatto, | Arahaṃ ahaṃ brahmacariyaṃ carāmi*

[293] *Brāhmaṇo hi ce tvaṃ brūsi, mañca brūsi abrāhmaṇaṃ; Taṃ taṃ sāvittiṃ pucchāmi, tipadaṃ catuvīsatakkharaṃ.*

[294] See also Iwasaki (1965), Smith (1986, 73), and Gonda (1963, 285).

[295] ŚāGS 2.1, ĀśGS 1.19, PāGS 2.2, KhāGS 2.4, GoGS 2.10, HiGS 2.1, ĀpGS 4.3.

According to the Gṛhyasūtras such an initiation would have even been mandatory for *kṣatriya*s, who otherwise had to pay a high social price for *not* having entered *brahmacarya* by the age of twenty-two – they would become "sinful and outside the pale of Aryan societies", and "such men degenerate instantly into the status of the Śudra" (see Smith, 1986).

Another interesting circumstantial evidence that the Buddha might have been a traditional *brahmacārin* is related to the conduct of the Vedic *snātaka* (i.e. one who has completed *brahmacarya* with a ritual bath). In ŚāGS 4.11 a *snātaka* is told not to look at or interact with certain women, to observe certain dietary rules, and to restrict his sleep, including only to sleep during the second watch of the night. In the suttas we find a similar *structure* of rules for the monastic practitioner, even though the *details* differ. Here, the monastic practice consists of sense restraint, moderation in eating, and wakefulness[296]. The instruction on wakefulness explicitly includes to sleep only during the second watch of the night. Accordingly, the Buddha as a former *brahmacārin* could have remembered these rules as useful and installed a similar structure when he set up his own Saṅgha.

But there is also evidence which speaks against a former *brahmacarya* of Gotama. In DN 3 Gotama's home Kapilavatthu is described as the "Sakyans' own place", which suggests that Brahmins had no political influence in that area (see also section 2.2). If this is true it would be difficult to imagine how Brahmins in general and the Gṛhyasūtras in particular could have been influential enough to regulate young Gotama's life with a traditional Vedic framework.

In summary, there is some evidence which suggests that Gotama could have undergone some sort of traditional *brahmacarya* in his youth. If this was the case it would not be surprising that we don't find more direct evidence for this in the suttas. Neither the Buddha would have had an interest to dwell on socio-biographical details of his mundane past nor would the compilers of the texts have wanted to suggest that the Buddha was substantially influenced by a traditional Vedic upbringing. Yet, if Gotama indeed was a *brahmacārin* he would have learned Vedic knowledge, practiced austerities, and a conduct generally conducive for spiritual seekers, e.g. regarding sense control, food and sleep. Also, it would have helped him later on to relate to

[296] SN 35.120, SN 35.239, AN 3.16, AN 4.37, AN 8.9, MN 39, MN 53, MN 107, MN 125.

traditional Brahmins. Naturally, we cannot rely too much on such reflections, but our discussion at least shows the possible interpretations of early Buddhism with a close reading of the suttas.

4.5 Summary

The Vedic institution of *brahmacarya*, or spiritual studentship, developed over a long period of time. From a marginal position in the Ṛgveda it developed into a religious institution in the Brahmaṇas. A major change took place in Upaniṣadic times: Here, *brahmacārin*s sought to attain the liberating knowledge of *ātman* with the help of their personal teachers. But not only Brahmins were spiritual teachers – now also *kṣatriya*s became masters of sacred knowledge, taught the realization of *ātman* and *brahman*, and initiated *brahmacārin*s. In another structural development also repeated initiations became possible.

The early Buddhist 'monastic studentship' benefitted from these developments and shared the title of *brahmacariya* with its Vedic precursor along with the aspects of *tapas* and gathering alms food. While the Vedic studentship depended on teacher and Vedas and probably ended after a defined period of time, the Buddhist *brahmacariya* is based on the Buddha's own 'sacred speech', the Dhamma, and ends only with spiritual liberation (or with a return to lay life).

Our investigations regarding a possible connection of the Vedic and Buddhist initiation rituals are not conclusive. It is possible that the first initiations which were carried out by the Buddha followed informal precedences from the Upaniṣads or other *śramaṇa*s. But it might just as well be that the short Buddhist initiation formulas metonymically stand for a longer procedure which is simply not transmitted in our texts. Beyond that, the Vedic and Buddhist initiation rituals have only little in common.

Chapter Five: Belief in Gods and the Example of Sakka in Early Buddhism

Buddhism is often perceived in the West more as a spiritual practice than a religion. Often we encounter the idea that it is atheistic or even anti-theistic. According to Cohen (2006) it was the eminent scholar Max Müller who portrayed the Buddha as one who "threw away the whole ceremonial, with its sacrifices, superstitions, penances, and castes, as worthless, and changed the complicated systems of philosophy into a short doctrine of salvation" (Müller 1857, quoted in Cohen 2006, 3). This agenda of 'Secular Buddhism' is further advanced by popular teachers like Batchelor (e.g. 2012) who perceive all supernatural elements in early Buddhism as inauthentic.

But it is not only in the West that Buddhism is perceived in the light of atheism, also in India Buddhism has for a long time met with skepticism because of its supposed anti-Vedic, anti-ritual, and atheistic outline. Ironically, this view of Buddhism was partly responsible for the assimilation of the Buddha as one of the avatars of Viṣṇu between the sixth and eighth century CE (Rocher 1986, 111; Gail 1968, 923). A story in Viṣṇupurāṇa 3.17-18 has a group of asuras (enemies of the devas, see below) becoming powerful through their Vedic practice and asceticism. Viṣṇu then appears as a sophistic shaven-headed naked ascetic and afterwards as a monk in robes, and convinces the asuras to stop their powerful rituals and animal sacrifices, until eventually the asuras become weak and get killed by the devas. In the Purāṇa neither the naked ascetic nor the monk in robes are explicitly identified, but they seem to be a fusion of Mahāvira and the Buddha and generally represent anti-Vedic *śramaṇa*s. With time some strands of Vaiṣṇavism came to identify this Purāṇic character more consistently as the Buddha and to thus popularize the Buddha as an avatar, achieving the feat to accept the Buddha as holy, but reject Buddhism as malicious at the same time[297].

The medieval Vaiṣṇava view on Buddhism most probably contributed to the later general perception that Buddhism disregards the Vedic rituals and the gods. As we have shown above (section 3.4) early Buddhism indeed rejects animal sacrifice and has an ambivalent relation to

[297] We find good overviews for the assimilation of the Buddha into Vaiṣṇavism in Serikov (2010), Doniger O'Flaherty (1988, 187-211), and Lee (2002). Schneider (2015) also highlights some positive aspects of the assimilated Buddha.

rituals. In the following chapters we will discuss the complex position of early Buddhism on gods and supernatural beings. We will show that early Buddhism was far from being atheistic, in fact it was quite fascinated by the gods, introduced new classes and realms of deities and developed a unified system of the heavens.

5.1 General Categories of Supernatural Beings

When it comes to supernatural beings in early Buddhism we can distinguish three sources: (1) the pre-Buddhist Vedic religion, (2) pre-Buddhist non-Vedic religions, and (3) supernatural beings introduced by early Buddhism itself.

The Vedic gods have their root in the Ṛgveda and can be divided into different groups (Jamison and Brereton 2014, 35-53): Agni and Soma who are essential for rituals; gods of nature (e.g. Sūrya for the sun, Vāuy for wind, Dayus for heaven, Pṛthivī for the earth); gods of the social sphere (the three Ādityas: Mitra, Varuṇa, and Aryaman), and many other specialized gods. Indra has a category of his own with almost a quarter of the Ṛgveda hymns and many of the soma sacrifices dedicated to him.

The later parts of the Ṛgveda, the Atharvaveda and the Brāhmaṇas feature a category of demonic anti-devas, the asuras. These asuras, who apparently were originally humans who got later mythologized to be anti-devas, became in time synonymous with the *rakṣasa*s, a category of pure demons (Hale 1986, 179-181). We will discuss some of their characteristics in section 8.2, but will start in the following section with Indra as an important early Vedic deva who, adapted as Sakka, became the most important early Buddhist god.

Our knowledge of pre-Buddhist *non-Vedic* gods is meagre but we can find some traces of them in the Buddhist suttas. We will draw attention to some deities with roots in non-Vedic cultures in chapters six and seven.

Beyond the traditional deities early Buddhism has also introduced its own several classes of deities. Often, these result from an attempt to establish correspondences between developed states of mind and a resulting divine rebirth. Later suttas claim, for example, that if someone attained the third *jhāna* in meditation they must be reborn as a deity in a realm which specifically represents this meditation attainment and is exclusive to these practitioners.

It is therefore necessary for our discussions in chapters six to nine to outline the spiritual attainments in early Buddhism. A crude distinction of rebirths can be based on progress in ethical restraint (*sīla*), meditation (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*). Ethical restraint, and especially religious giving (section 3.1), can already result in divine rebirth. Beyond that, accomplished meditators are reborn as higher deities who enjoy a long and pleasant existence but are not yet on an irreversible path to liberation. When *paññā* is developed, however, the practitioner can attain one of the four levels of Buddhist liberation[298]: The *sotāpanna* (stream-enterer) will be reborn at most seven more times before liberation, and never below the human realm. The *sakadāgāmi* (once-returner) will be reborn once as a human and will in that life attain liberation. The *anāgāmi* (non-returner) will be reborn as a specific deity and will in that state attain liberation. Finally, the *arahant* ('the worthy one') is fully liberated while alive and will not be reborn at all.

Other Pāli terms require a short description as well: *deva, devatā*, and *devaputta*. *Deva* is a straight-forward term for 'god' (also opposed to the *asura* demons, or anti-gods). *Devatā* is synonymous to *deva,* even though it occasionally seems to denote a lesser divinity. *Devaputta* (Skt *devaputra*) literally means 'son of a god' and refers to some divine beings in the suttas. It should not be confused with the same Vedic term which invariably means the 'divine descendants of the progenitors Heaven and Earth' (e.g. in ṚV 1.106.3, ṚV 1.159.1, ṚV 1.185.4, AVŚ 18.1.25, TS 2.6.7.5 and even still in ŚB 1.8.1.29). This Vedic meaning is completely forgotten in the suttas. Instead, *devaputta* is translated as 'young deva' (Bodhi) or, 'glorious god' (Sujato). Only Walshe translates it in DN 11 more literally as 'son of the devas', but remarks that in other contexts it simply means 'male deva' (Walshe 1995, 557).

[298] This fourfold categorization is the most common but not the only one found in the suttas. We will stick to it for the sake of simplicity. For a thorough discussion see Manné (1995).

5.2 Indra and Sakka

It is generally assumed that the Vedic god Indra and the Buddhist god Sakka refer to the same deity, mainly because already in the Ṛgveda *śakra* ('the able one') is a frequent epithet of Indra. For now, we follow this traditional interpretation but will investigate its validity below in section 5.3.1. Suffice to say that this traditional view is more or less correct, with only few reservations.

The etymology of 'Indra' is not clear, but most researchers seem to favor a meaning of 'to infuse strength', derived from the root '*in*' (Chakravarty 1995, 31). As Jamison & Brereton (2014, 38-40) point out, Indra is most of all a warrior and protector of his worshipers. His most prominent victory is against the serpent-deity Vṛtra (lit. 'obstacle', e.g. in ṚV 1.32) in order to release the waters necessary for life – he is therefore the overcomer of obstacles. A second Ṛgvedic battle is against the demon Namuci whom Indra beheads (see section 8.4). In a narrative not related to fighting, Indra performs the role of a priest-king who achieves the release of mythological cattle through the power of truthful chants (e.g. in ṚV 3.31). Already in the Ṛgveda Indra has an anthropomorphic appearance, with body, head, long arms, hands, a great belly, hair, and a beard (see for sources Mukhopadhaya 1989, 7-8) – these features probably facilitated an anthropomorphic Sakka in the Buddhist suttas.

In the Ṛgveda Indra is occasionally called 'the king of gods' (in varying expressions), sharing this status a few times with Varuṇa[299]. ŚB 12.8.3.10 calls Varuṇa the king of gods (*devānām rāja*), ŚB 13.4.3.14 gives this title again to Indra (keeping in mind that in the Brāhmaṇas both are consistently placed below the creators Prajāpati and Brahmā). Schlerath (1960, 106) points out that the Vedic poets didn't need to settle for *one* king of devas and instead chose to assign this status depending on context and circumstances. And Olivelle (2004, 493-496) shows that it is often the association with *dharma* that qualifies the kingship over the gods, whether it is Varuṇa who fulfills this function, or Indra. All in all, Indra can be generally seen with more justification as 'ruler of the gods'.

[299] Indra is superior in ṚV 1.100.1, ṚV 3.46.2, ṚV 6.22.9, ṚV 6.30.5, ṚV 6.36.4, ṚV 6.47.16, ṚV 7.27.3. Yet, sometimes Varuṇa is given this title, so in ṚV 2.27.10, ṚV 5.85.3, ṚV 7.87.6. Soma is king of gods in ṚV 9.97.24, and Vāyu in ṚV 10.168.2.

Turning to the Buddhist suttas, it is the god Sakka who has in most occurrences the epithet '*devānaminda*'[300], which is often translated as 'lord of devas'. The compound consists of '*devānam-inda*' and literally means '*indra* of devas'. Interestingly, '*indra*' refers in this case not to the god Indra but is a descriptive name which means, according to Monier-Williams, 'best of', 'first of', or as we prefer 'foremost of'[301]. We are certain that this interpretation is correct because in several suttas we encounter the analogous '*asurinda*'[302] which must mean 'foremost of the asuras' and cannot refer to the god Indra. The Sanskrit equivalent *devānamindra* and generally the qualifying '*-indra*' at the end of compounds are unknown to pre-Buddhist texts and appear only in the Sanskrit epics. This could hint at a late application of this epithet to Sakka in the Buddhist texts – in any case, it is noteworthy that the standard Pāli epithet for Sakka '*devānaminda'* is not taken from pre-Buddhist Vedic texts.

The term *devarāja* is a more straight-forward characterization as 'king of devas' and is used in the suttas and the Sanskrit epics, but again not in pre-Buddhist texts (in contrast to the already mentioned *devānām raja*). It is applied to Sakka in SN 11.9, SN 11.18-20, SN 11.23, and SN 7.12[303]. Still, in SN 11.3 Pajāpati, Varuṇa, and Īsāna, are all three called *devarāja*.

Even though we have not established yet if Sakka is merely the sutta name for the Vedic Indra, there is at least enough justification to see Sakka as the 'foremost' and 'king' of *Buddhist* devas, and indeed as their ruler: In SN 11.12-13 it is Sakka who "exercises supreme sovereignty and rulership over the Tāvatiṃsa devas; therefore he is called lord of the devas."[304] This sovereignty and rulership (*issariyādhipacca rajja*) of Sakka is also mentioned in SN 11.1-2, and SN 11.4.

It is noteworthy that the Buddhist suttas unanimously assign the role of rulership over the gods to Sakka, without any competition among his peers. This could hypothetically mean that even

[300] SN 6.15, SN 11.1-9, SN 11.11-25, SN 35.118, SN 35.248, SN 40.10, AN 3.37-38, AN 6.54, AN 7.62, AN 7.66, AN 8.8, AN 8.36, MN 37, MN 83, DN 11, DN 16-19, DN 21.
[301] Choong (2012, 564) however explains the Chinese translation as '*ruler* of the gods' which follows the traditional Theravāda interpretation. It is unclear to us how literal his translation from the Chinese is.
[302] SN 2.9-10, SN 2.20, SN 7.3, SN 7.10, SN 11.4-5, SN 11.7-10, SN 11.23, SN 35.248, AN 4.15, AN 4.50, AN 5.197, AN 8.19.
[303] SN 7.12 just names *devarāja*, without a specific reference to a god. But the deity in question makes it rain, and because of Indra's victory over Vṛtra and the 'release of the waters' we assume that Sakka is meant.
[304] *Sakko, bhikkhave, devānamindo devānaṃ tāvatiṃsānaṃ issariyādhipaccaṃ rajjaṃ kāreti, tasmā devānamindoti vuccati.*

before the Buddha Sakka had this position in the eastern territories of Kosala-Magadha. But more importantly, we will show below that the clear leadership of Sakka is useful for the Buddhist agenda: If the Buddhist devas were on an equal footing, without a clear hierarchy, the suttas would have needed to demonstrate the superiority of the Buddha over each deva anew. With Sakka as the ruler of the 'Gods of Thirty-Three' (see chapter six), the suttas only had to make *him* a devout follower of the Buddha, thus subjugating all other devas at the same time.

Reflections like these show that when we deal with Buddhist deities we have to consider several aspects, e.g. historical stratification, the potentially intended effect on audiences, and the 'agenda' of the sutta in general. Sutta composers also differ in their knowledge about Vedic mythology. Especially composers of the DN were knowledgeable and we find in their suttas numerous specific allusions to Vedic mythology which help us to stratify their texts. In DN 17, for example, Sakka orders *devaputta* Vissakamma (Skt Viśvakarmān, appearing only in this sutta) to build a palace for the mythological king Mahāsudassana. The deity Viśvakarmān goes back to the ṚV where he is – among other important attributes – a cretor deity (ṚV 10.81.4). Yet, in the Ṛgveda and the Brāhmaṇas he is not a subordinate who would take orders from Indra but a powerful deity himself. Only in the Mahābhārata he is presented similarly to DN 17 – e.g. in Mbh 1.60.27-28 he is described as "the originator of a thousand arts, the engineer of the immortals, the maker of all kinds of ornaments, and the first of artists. And he it was who constructed the celestial cars of the gods…"[305]. Hence, the Vissakamma of DN 17 is not based on the Saṃhitās but on the much later conception of the Indian epics[306].

When it comes to specific mythology there is surprisingly little that connects the Buddhist Sakka to Indra. The important Vedic Vṛtra narrative for example is not mentioned at all. Namuci, the other great opponent of Indra in the Ṛgveda, is alluded to in a few suttas (SN 2.30, AN 4.13, DN 20, Snp 3.2), but interestingly never in connection with Sakka and instead as an epithet of the *Buddha's* adversary Māra (see section 8.4). It is unlikely that the knowledge of these famous battles were lost to the Buddhist composers, and more probable that they focused on boosting the

[305] *kartā śilpasahasrāṇāṃ tridaśānāṃ ca vardhakiḥ |bhūṣaṇānāṃ ca sarveṣāṃ kartā śilpavatāṃ varaḥ |yo divyāni vimānāni devatānāṃ cakāra ha*
[306] See also Hopkins (1999, 201) for further references to Viśvakārman as an architect in the epics.

reputation of the Buddha, and not of Sakka. Additionally, as we will see below, Sakka is mostly presented as an ethical peaceful deity, removed from Indra's association with combat[307]. With these differences in mind the question is well justified if Sakka is indeed equal to Indra at all.

5.2.1 Is Sakka Equal to Indra?

As most researchers of Buddhism see it, Sakka (Skt Śakra) of the Buddhist texts is merely another name for the Vedic god Indra[308]. And there are good arguments for this position. As mentioned, already in the Ṛgveda *śakra* ('the able one') is an epithet of Indra (ṚV 7.104.20, ṚV 8.78.5, ṚV 10.43.6, ṚV 10.104.10). In the Atharvaveda Śakra is even an alternative name for Indra (not just an epithet), appearing in thirteen hymns[309]. There are also single occurrences in TS 1.6.12.5, TB 2.5.3.1, JB 1.220.18, and BauŚS 18.28 where Indra and Śakra are clearly equated. Strangely enough though, 'Śakra' doesn't appear at all in the ŚB, the early Upaniṣads, or the Gṛhyasūtras. Based on the name alone it is, therefore, possible that the knowledge of Indra-Śakra arrived in Kosala in early Vedic times, before the association of Indra with this epithet has vanished from late Vedic literature.

Because of the vast material involving Indra we are content to refer to scholars who assess Indra's character reliably. Gonda (1975, 96) remarks on Indra's character in the Ṛgveda:

> "In the case of no other divinity do we find so plastic a figure and so pronounced a tendency to anthropomorphism as in that of Indra, the most popular god, whose huge size, impetuosity, generosity, exploits, readiness to fight, unerring weapons and mighty horses the poets are never weary of describing. In one and the same hymn they may picture him as great, terrible, mighty, fond of soma, heroic, gracious, destructive, generous, indomitable and a source of

[307] See for the change of character Malalasekera (1938, 965), Anderson (1978, 23-24), and Appleton (2017, 50-56).
[308] See for a variety of sources Anālayo (2011d, 157-158, n. 4).
[309] AVŚ 4.11.2, AVŚ 70.86.1, AVŚ 80.4.20-21, AVŚ 80.8.5-8, AVŚ 90.4.5, AVŚ 12.1.37, AVŚ 200.17.6, AVŚ 200.20.4, AVŚ 200.51.3, AVŚ 200.57.7, AVŚ 200.77.6, AVŚ 200.89.3, AVŚ 201.11.2 (probably also AVŚ 3.31.2 and AVŚ 50.1.70).

> afflictions as well as of blessings. Neither his birth and infancy, nor his various metamorphoses fail to attract their attention."

This is significantly different from the characterization of Sakka in the Buddhist suttas. There, Sakka is in most cases only of narrative interest when he expresses devotion to the Buddha or elicits some Buddhist teaching.

Appleton (2017, 26) correctly points to the tension between Indra's character with the Sakka image we find in the suttas: "One of Indra's main roles in Vedic and Brahmanical narrative is to protect the gods from rivals, whether these are demons or powerful humans. His status as supreme warrior thus forms a large part of his identity, and this poses obvious problems for the Buddhist and Jain traditions and their emphasis on non-violence."

With these characterizations of Indra in mind we will now review the appearances of Sakka in the suttas in order to compare the two subsequently. A separate discussion per nikāyas (SN, AN, MN, DN, Snp) will provide an insight into Sakka's personality and his function in the texts, starting with SN 11, which includes the main Buddhist sources in regards to Sakka.

In SN 11 actually many suttas refer to the conflict of Sakka (and the devas) with the demonic asuras and thus remind us of the Vedic Indra. The Buddha tells these allegorical stories as if they had taken place in a distant past. Hence they don't include an actual exchange between Sakka and the Buddha, but instead they inspire the Buddha to comment on the story with his own particular teaching. For example, in the stories of SN 11.1-2 Sakka praises 'initiative and energy' when he prepares a counter-attack against the asuras. The Buddha then uses this story, which happened "once in the past" to demand even more initiative and energy *from his monastics*. SN 11.3-5, SN 11.8, SN 11.22, and SN 11.24-25 equally start with the Buddha telling a short story involving Sakka and the asuras and then end with a commentary-teaching by the Buddha.

A group of suttas in the second half of SN 11 shows the Buddha in *direct* interaction with Sakka: SN 11.14-22 portray Sakka as venerating the Buddha and the Saṅgha. And in SN 11.13 the Buddha confirms that he has personally seen Sakka, which is particularly interesting because it

shows that audiences even back then were not sure if the 'direct encounters' of the Buddha with Sakka had to be understood symbolically or literally.

We find an interesting misattribution in SN 11.9 and Snp 2.12, calling Sakka "the thousand-eyed one in the midst of the devas" (*sakkova devāna sahassanetto*). In Vedic literature, however, other gods were called 'thousand-eyed' (*sahasracakṣa*, or *sahasrākṣa*): Agni (ṚV 1.79.12, ṚV 10.79.5, ŚB 7.5.2.32, ŚB 9.2.3.32), Varuṇa (ṚV 7.34.10, AVŚ 4.16.4, AVŚ 10.3.3), Soma (ṚV 9.60.2, ṚV 9.65.7), Rudra (AVŚ 11.2.3, ŚB 9.1.1.6), or Puruṣa (ṚV 10.90.1, AVŚ 19.6.1, ŚB 13.6.2.12), but only once Indra together with Vāyu (ṚV 1.23.3)[310]. Most likely Sakka's *sahasrākṣa* epithet refers to post-Buddha literature. There, in a very popular story in the epics and the Purāṇas, Indra was punished for seducing a chaste woman by marking his body with a thousand vulvas, which were then mercifully turned into a thousand eyes (Söhnen 1991, 73; Söhnen-Thieme 1996, 52-53). This reference to a late post-Buddha story suggests that SN 11.9 and potentially also other suttas of SN 11 could have been conceived in a late sutta period.

We should point out again that the suttas of SN 11 are our main source for Sakka in early Buddhism. The 'stories' of Sakka and the asuras are, however, simple parables, lacking the complexity of old mythology. More precisely, these suttas under the guise of 'stories of the past' exploit Sakka mythology in order to present and legitimize Buddhist ethics and basic teachings, while Sakka is at the same time presented as a devotee of the Buddha. What we don't see is any connection of Sakka with Buddhist liberation. Therefore, the Sakka stories are located in the lay discourse of ethics, devotion, and generosity, and not in the monastic discourse of liberation.

An unusual Sakka sutta outside of SN 11 is SN 6.15 (copied into DN 16) as it deals with the Buddha's passing. Here, Sakka is the only character next to the monks Anuruddha and Ānanda who recite a verse during the last moments of the Buddha's life. Other SN suttas involving Sakka are negligible.

AN suttas involving Sakka are also not complex: AN 3.37-39 clarify that Sakka is inferior to liberated arahants. In AN 7.62 (similarly AN 7.66) the Buddha recalls his past births in which he

[310] See for the significance of the 'thousand eye' epithet Srinivasan (1978).

was Sakka thirty-six times, thus elevating 'Sakka' from a specific deity to a 'cosmic office', probably of the god-king. AN 8.36 states that the elevated status of Sakka is due to his generosity and ethical conduct in a previous life, but that he also lacked meditative attainments.

In the MN Sakka plays a very minor role, appearing only in MN 37 and insignificantly in MN 83. In MN 37 Sakka is introduced to the monastic discourse and is taught non-attachment and the destruction of craving. This is followed by a visit of the Buddha's master student Mahāmoggallāna. During the visit it becomes clear that Sakka has neglected the Buddha's teaching and is again following sensuality. As a consequence Moggallāna stirs urgency into him with his superior psychic powers. The sutta thus repeats already known elements: Sakka is a follower of the Buddha, but also inferior to arahants. The characterization of Sakka as a god who is easily lost in sensual pleasure is, however, completely absent from the suttas of the SN. For this reason MN 37 is very probably from a very late sutta period. Also the theme it introduces is a late one, namely that the pleasure available to devas makes it difficult for them to practice Buddhism seriously, and that they are therefore less respectable. We will see a similar late sutta attitude which looks down on deities in section 9.4.

As mentioned above, several DN suttas are relatively knowledgeable about Vedic mythology, and they use this knowledge to propagate Buddhism to their audience. The main DN sutta which features Sakka is DN 21, 'Sakka's Questions' (*sakkapañhasutta*)[311]. This is the sutta in which Sakka has the first personal interaction with the Buddha. The Buddha tells Sakka that in a previous attempt to see him Sakka's chariot wheels roused him from his meditation – which shows us that the composer envisioned Sakka moving around with a chariot like the *kṣatriya* deity Indra. Yet, the normal 'means of transportation' for devas (and gifted Buddhist masters) in the suttas is simply teleportation – they vanish from one place and appear in another. The composer therefore purposefully evokes associations with Indra when he mentions Sakka on a chariot.

[311] Sakka is otherwise irrelevant in the DN: In DN 11 and DN 30 Sakka is mentioned only in passing. And in DN 18 and DN 19 Sakka praises previous followers of the Buddha who were reborn as devas – very similarly to DN 21.

Going on with DN 21, the Buddha then teaches Sakka about meditation up to the second *jhāna*[312], about the monastic code, and about sense restraint. To this Sakka replies that other teachers he visited could not teach him anything relevant. Then Sakka relates that the joy he felt when the devas conquered the asuras was inferior to the joy of hearing the Buddha's teaching "which is not due to blows and wounds" (*adaṇḍāvacara asatthāvacara*). Here Sakka explicitly leaves behind his violent Vedic past and endorses the Buddhist non-violent mindset. Finally Sakka declares that by virtue of the Buddha's discourse he is a stream-enterer (*sotāpanna*), and that he is destined to attain liberation in one of his next lives. The sutta ends with a devotional poem by Sakka: "Just as Brahmā's worshipped by the gods, | So likewise today we worship you, | Enlightened One, and Teacher unsurpassed, | Whom none can equal in the human world, | Or in the heavens, dwelling of the gods!"[313]

The poem demonstrates a common position of early Buddhism towards the gods: it accepts the traditional devas worshiped by Brahmanism and the lay population, claims that the Buddha and his master disciples (in contrast to Brahmins) have *direct interactions* with them, and makes the Buddha so superior over the devas that they themselves become devotees of the Buddha.

Under normal circumstances it should actually be surprising that Sakka becomes a stream-enterer in DN 21 merely from hearing an exposition by the Buddha because such attainments are usually believed to require high meditation states. It becomes more plausible if we follow Manné (1995, 94) in that 'stream-entry' (*sotāpatti*) originally signified conversion, and not an advanced spiritual attainment. In this case DN 21 would be an old sutta which retained the original meaning of 'stream-entry' and not the later interpretation as a meditation-based attainment: Sakka hears a profound discourse by the Buddha, gains deep confidence, converts and thus 'enters the stream' to the end of rebirth. Another indication that DN 21 is of old age is that it is referenced in another sutta, SN 22.4, where the probably later monk Mahākaccāna quotes a verbatim passage of DN 21.

[312] Samādhi meditation consists of four stages, the *jhānas*. Usually, the fourth *jhāna* is considered necessary for liberation.

[313] *Yaṃ karomasi brahmuno, samaṃ devehi mārisa; | Tadajja tuyhaṃ kassāma, handa sāmaṃ karoma te. | Tvameva asi sambuddho, tuvaṃ satthā anuttaro; Sadevakasmiṃ lokasmiṃ, natthi te paṭipuggalo''ti.*

Our conclusion about DN 21 is that it might contain material which belongs to the oldest Sakka suttas in the Buddhist texts, probably older than the texts of SN 11. In fact, it is here that he encounters the Buddha for the first time and acknowledges the Buddha's superiority over the devas and other teachers. Here he also renounces from his former violent past. Additionally, Sakka equates the Buddha with Brahmā. More importantly, he doesn't elevate the Buddha *beyond* Brahmā, which later suttas would do. But there is also the inclusion of probably later material, e.g. the long narrative introduction, or a passage about the monastic code and sense restraint which belong more to a monastic setting (as e.g. in MN 114).

In the Snp Sakka is insignificant except for a short reference in Snp 3.9 which treats him with utmost respect: "One possessing the three clear knowledges, peaceful, for whom renewed existence is finished: know him thus, Vāseṭṭha, as Brahmā and Sakka for those who understand"[314]. Clearly, the poet is not subjugating Sakka but rather confirms Sakka's and Brahmā's high status, and he puts the liberated Buddhists on the same level, not beyond them. Such an attitude is plausible only for the early sutta period, before Sakka (and Brahmā) became plain props to demonstrate the Buddha's superiority.

As we could show, there are different facets of the Sakka character in the suttas. We suggest that Sakka is in the oldest layer still a highly respected deva, which is why composers make efforts to incorporate him into the Buddhist worldview. We can see this in Snp 3.9, the passages of DN 21 where Sakka gets converted and rejects his violent past, and in SN 6.15 (copied into DN 16) where Sakka is one of the very few characters who recite a poem at the Buddha's passing. To a certain extent we can also count SN 11.1-12 to this period where Sakka gets introduced to the audience in the form of 'stories of the past' and short mythological references.

The late period of references present Sakka as a devout and humble follower of the Buddha, fully functionalized as a prop for Buddhist teachings without contributing in his mythological capacity (e.g. the later parts of DN 21 and the second half of SN 11). As a latest development we can see MN 37 where Sakka's spiritual status is ridiculed.

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314 *''Tīhi vijjāhi sampanno, santo khīṇapunabbhavo; Evaṃ vāseṭṭha jānāhi, brahmā sakko vijānata''nti.*

To sum up, it is sufficiently clear that Sakka is originally based on the Vedic Indra. Yet, it is also clear that his character as a Buddhist deity has completely changed: He has become the undisputed leader of the devas and a devout non-violent follower of the Buddha. The suttas never actually start out with the character of the Vedic Indra – no matter where we look, we already see a pacified Sakka ready for the Buddha's teachings, and we suggest that this change in Sakka's character has already taken place in Kosala/Magadha centuries before the Buddha[315]. Sakka might have, therefore, not come with the eastward expansion of Brahmins but would have arrived there much earlier – we suspect at a time closer to the Saṃhitās when *śakra* was still frequently mentioned in connection with Indra.

5.2.2 Indra in the Suttas

After the investigation of Sakka we also have to account for the appearance of *Indra* (Pāli Inda) in the suttas, often in the DN[316]. As mentioned in section 1.1, the DN seems to have been a collection of texts often used for conversion. Does the mention of Inda, therefore, signify later texts which were designed to specifically address Brahmins not familiar with the Sakka epithet? Or do we find Inda on the contrary in older material where the image of Sakka is not dominating yet and Buddhist authors were closer to the Vedic source material? In the following, we will make detailed contextual observations in order to answer these questions.

An interesting term appearing in a few suttas is 'Inda's pillar' (*indakhīla*, Skt *indrakīla*) which is a firm pillar, beam, or bolt, used in construction (SN 1.37, SN 56.39, DN 20, DN 29, Dhp 7, Snp 2.1). Interestingly, all non-Buddhist references to *indrakīla* are of later age: BauDS 2.6.13, AŚ 2.3.26, and Mbh 3.38.30. We find it very unlikely that an architecture-related term containing 'Indra' would appear first in Buddhist texts, especially since 'Sakka's pillar' should have been the first choice for the suttas. Therefore, we have to conclude that *indakhīla* was inserted as a

[315] Appleton (2017, 50) reviews Jain sources with Śakra and sees a very similar development to the Buddhist texts.
[316] SN 1.37, SN 22.79, SN 56.39, AN 11.9, MN 22, DN 13, DN 20, DN 21, DN 29, DN 30, DN 32, Dhp 7, Snp 2.1, Snp 2.7, Snp 2.8, Snp 5.1.

fixed Sanskrit term from post-Buddha literature and regard the sutta passages containing the term accordingly as late.

In three suttas (SN 22.79, AN 11.9, MN 22) we find the expression "the devas together with Inda, Brahmā, and Pajāpati" (*saindā devā sabrahmakā sapajāpatikā*), which signifies 'the supreme deities'. In this formula Inda is coupled with the two major creator deities of the Brāhmaṇas, i.e. Brahman and Prajāpati, and together they legitimize in these suttas the superior status of the Buddhist arahants. Even though these texts elevate the arahants beyond the highest deities they still regard them as high authorities. Such a respectful attitude speaks more for an early period of composition when the Buddhist Saṅgha was still amicable towards traditional Vedic cosmology.

In DN 13 it is said that corrupted Brahmins call upon Inda, Soma, Varuṇa, Īsāna[317], Pajāpati, Brahmā, Mahiddhi[318], and Yama. This Pāli list of eight deities raises our doubt because it is absent from its Chinese parallel[319]. Yet, it probably reflects an older concept of Vedic gods of directions which often appear in lists of eight: According to Wessels-Mevissen (2002, 105), four, eight, and ten are the most common numbers in Indian mythology for gods of direction. Yet, the list of eight in DN 13 does not resemble the most common set of eight Vedic gods, which includes deities like Agni, Nairrita, Vayu, and Kubera (ibid., 106). In lists collected by Wessels-Mevissen (2001) we find the closest similarity with a list from JUB 3.21.2 which contains the first five names of our sutta list (ibid., 8)[320]. The research by Wessels-Mevissen further shows that the order of gods in the sutta list is not random – it goes counterclockwise, starting with Indra (East), Soma (North), Varuṇa (West), Īśāna (South), Prajāpati (Zenith). The logic of the remaining three sutta names (Brahmā, Mahiddhi, and Yama) is unclear, but our evidence is strong enough to confirm that the sutta refers to an actual practice of Brahmins who called upon the gods of directions. Possibly this reference goes back to a former Brahmin Buddhist, but beyond that we cannot assess the strata of the sutta.

[317] *Īsāna* as an independent deity appears only in AVŚ 15.5, AVŚ 15.14.10, BU 4.1.11, and BU 4.4.15. See also Killingly (2018, 197-198). Īsāna also appears in SN 11.3 as *devarāja* next to Sakka, Pajāpati and Varuṇa.
[318] This is a corrupted reference to an unknown Vedic deity, appearing only in this sutta.
[319] The Chinese parallel DĀ 26 lacks these deities completely. Instead it says: "While they may conduct their ceremonial rites correctly in reference to the sun and moon, water and fire" (See Ichimura 2018, 97).
[320] Wessels-Mevissen refers to JUB III.5.2.2, but in the edition of Oertel (1896) it can be found in JUB 3.21.2.

The next sutta with a reference to Indra is DN 20 which is a presentation of Buddhist cosmology with a large number of supernatural beings coming to see the Buddha. The lowest deities in Buddhist cosmology are the 'Four Great Kings' (see section 6.3.2), which rule over different demigods (chapter seven), i.a. the Yakkhas. DN 20 says that the many sons of the Four Great Kings "bear Inda's name"[321]. DN 32 adds that the number of the sons is ninety-one, and that indeed all of them are called 'Inda' – interestingly the composer adds with caution "so I heard" (*me sutaṃ*). It is not clear from the context why these sons of lower deities would be named after god Indra, and neither do we get a hint from Vedic literature. Yet, we find this unusual claim confirmed in SN 10.2. Here we encounter a 'Yakkha Sakkanāmaka' (i.e. a 'Yakkha with the name Sakka') who talks to the Buddha and is also addressed by him as 'Sakka'. In DN 21 a Gandhabba (another category of demigods ruled by the Four Great Kings) is called 'son of Sakka' as well[322]. To put it shortly, DN 20 and DN 32 say that the demigods are called 'Inda' and SN 10.2 and DN 21 confirm that they are called 'Sakka'. This is a rare explicit evidence from the suttas that confirms that Inda and Sakka indeed refer to the same deity.

Interestingly, DN 20 mentions separately that Sakka *purindada* (Skt *puraṃdara*, 'the breaker of fortresses')[323] enters the scene but later summarizes that everyone including *Inda* has arrived. It is also noteworthy that Sakka's epithet *purindada* does not fit to his otherwise peaceful character in the suttas. Indra has the epithet *puraṃdara* mostly in the Ṛgveda and then again only in the epics[324]. We conclude from this that these passages refer to an old, potentially pre-Buddhist, image of Indra. This interchangeable use of Indra and Sakka is the second direct evidence involving DN 20 for the equivalence of the two deities.

Another passage in DN 20 tells us that also the asuras arrive who were 'conquered by *vajirahattha* (Skt *vajrahasta*)'. *Vajrahasta* is since the Ṛgveda (e.g. ṚV 1.109) the 'thunderbolt-hand' of Indra with which he defeated enemies. Interestingly, there are only few pre-Buddhist

[321] *Puttāpi tassa bahavo, indanāmā mahabbalā*
[322] DN 21 mentions also another case, a woman who gets reborn among the Gods of Thirty-Three as a son of Sakka (*sakkassa puttatta*), without giving further indication to which class this new deity belongs.
[323] Sakka's epithet *purindada* is confirmed in SN 11.12, SN 11.13, and MN 56. See Bingenheimer (2008, 155-156).
[324] The epithet is given to Indra in ṚV 1.102.7, ṚV 2.20.7, ṚV 3.54.15, ṚV 5.30.11, ṚV 8.1.7, ṚV 8.61.8, AVŚ 8.8.1, and ŚB 6.4.2.3. In ṚV 1.109.8 he shares it with Agni, and in ṚV 6.16.14 and ṚV 7.6.2 it is only Agni who is called 'the breaker of fortresses'.

instances where specifically Indra strikes the asuras (see e.g. TB 1.1.2.5, ŚB 4.5.3.4, and ŚB 4.6.6.1; see also Bhan 1981, 140-161; and Hale 1986, 170-178). Still, the source of this reference comes probably from pre-Buddha times.

Next in DN 20 we have the phrase "Erāvana […], the mighty *nāga* chief" (*erāvaṇa mahānāga*), yet without a textual connection to Indra or Sakka. Usually Skt *airāvana* is popular as Indra's three-headed elephant in the epics, so the occurrence without Indra is peculiar. The term *nāga*, however, can also refer to an elephant or a snake (see section 7.3). And indeed, there is a Vedic reference to a serpent, where AVŚ 8.10.29 says: "The Serpents called her, Venomous! come hither […] Airāvan's offspring, Dhritarashtra milked her, and from her udder drew forth only poison"[325]. The reference in DN 20 is therefore to the snake, and not to Indra's elephant. The composer of DN 20 thus shows a surprisingly good knowledge of early Vedic mythology.

MN 37 and DN 21 feature a small reference, in which Sakka is called 'Kosiya' (also in the Chinese parallels of SN 11.12 and SN 11.5). Skt Kauśika is a Ṛgvedic name for Indra (in ṚV 1.10.11). We therefore have a rare Ṛgvedic epithet of Indra applied to Sakka, both in the Pāli suttas and in the Chinese parallels – giving further evidence that the Buddhist composers fashioned Sakka with a clear image of Indra in mind.

A last interesting reference to Indra in the Buddhist suttas can be found in Snp 5.1. While Snp 5 is generally considered for good reasons to be one of the oldest Buddhist texts, it is also acknowledged that the introductory verses of Snp 5.1 have been composed much later (Jayawickrama 1976, 150-156). It is here that the sutta mentions '*inda sujampati*', i.e. 'husband of Sujā'. Other than here 'Sujampati' is always an epithet of Sakka, and not of Inda (SN 11.7, SN 11.12-13, SN 11.18-20, SN 11.23). SN 11.12-13 provide additional details, explaining that Sakka is called Sujampati because his wife is the asura maiden Sujā[326]. Thus we get introduced to a wife of Sakka (and Indra) who is supposedly an asura.

[325] *tāṃ sarpā upāhvayanta viṣavaty ehīti […] tāṃ dhṛtarāṣṭra airāvato 'dhok tāṃ viṣam evādhok*
[326] The Chinese parallels to the SN suttas confirm the wife's name, adding that Sujā is the daughter of the asura king Vepacitti (Skt Vemacitra) – who is not known to pre-Buddhist literature (see Bingenheimer 2008, 160).

The oldest Vedic reference to Indra's spouse simply calls her 'Indrāṇī' (ṚV 1.22, ṚV 2.32, ṚV 5.46, ṚV 10.86), without any details about her descent. Another common epithet of Indra in ṚV and AVŚ, is *śacīpati* ('Lord of Skill'). This epithet has probably been misinterpreted over time to mean 'husband of Śacī' (Ronzitti 2011, 335-336)[327]. Then, in Mbh 1.5.15 we encounter the demon Rākṣasa Puloman, and in the even later Harivaṃśa (3.71-79) Puloman's daughter Śacī is the mother of Jayanta who is usually taken to be Indra's son (see for more details Sahoo, 1998). It is therefore only in the epics that Indra's partner is the daughter of a demon (yet, of a *rākṣasa*, not of an asura). Thus we have further evidence that Snp 5.1, which promotes the same mythology as the epics by saying that Inda is the husband of Sujā, is a late addition to the otherwise very early Snp 5.

From the several direct and indirect references to Indra in the suttas we are not able to distinguish Inda and Sakka as two different deities. We rather have some examples for suttas which explicitly equate the two. Some suttas like SN 22.79, AN 11.9, MN 22, and DN 13 present Inda in a reverential way and therefore possibly come from an early sutta period. But they could equally just show that even later on there were composers who continued to treat the Vedic deities reverently. A sutta which stands out is the knowledgeable DN 20 which features specific Indra details. A possibly former Brahmin composer who knows even rare details of the Ṛgveda is addressing here an audience which is probably also able to understand the many mythological allusions. The intended audience might therefore be Brahmin as well. Overall, this gives further plausibility to the hypothesis that DN suttas were used for conversion.

[327] ṚV 10.159 is attributed to the seer Paulomī Śacī who speaks about getting rid of her co-wives. This led to an interpretation that Śacī was Indra's wife. Yet, neither the name Śacī is mentioned in the text, nor Indra.

5.3 Conclusion

Marasinghe (1974, 68) seems to be right when he suggests that the character of Sakka "was drawn from the living religio-ritualistic traditions of the Gangetic peoples, at that time"[328]. Our own interpretation is that Sakka developed in Kosala and Magadha into a different character than the Vedic Indra. We believe that knowledge of Sakka came to north-east India at the time of the Saṃhitās or the early Brāhmaṇas and would have been exposed to the local *śramaṇa* tradition for a long time before it was utilized in the Buddhist suttas. The comparative Buddhist-Jain research of Appleton (2017) makes this a plausible scenario and is backed up by our research presented above. The *śramaṇa* image of a pacified Sakka would then have met Buddhist composers who wanted to establish the superiority of the Buddha over the devas. In order to achieve that the composers had to flesh out the Sakka character by alluding to Indra mythology (e.g. mentioning asuras in SN 11). It makes sense to assume that composers who wanted to achieve this effect of Buddha-superiority used mythology which was popular at that time. Thus, suttas which utilize mythology of the Sanskrit epics have to be regarded as late suttas, while for example DN 20 uses more mythological images of pre-Buddhist texts and is therefore probably a much earlier composition.

Generally, we assume that a respectful attitude towards Sakka or devas is a good indication for earlier suttas, coming from a time when the gods were still revered as part of the commonly accepted religious discourse. Only in later suttas it is conceivable that sutta authors were bold enough to create an image of the Buddha which is so superior that it would have humbled Sakka into the position of a disempowered Buddhist follower.

[328] Marasinghe entertains the speculative idea that the name 'Śakra' might have spread to the east because it was used in rituals instead of 'Indra' and that ritualistic culture spread more successfully than mythology. As a source, however, he can only refer to one ritual, quoted in Keith (1925, 338).

Chapter Six: *Tāvatiṃsā Devā* - The Gods of Thirty-Three, and Beyond

We mentioned above that Sakka is regularly described as the ruler of a group of devas, the *tāvatiṃsā devā*, or Gods of Thirty-three. They frequently appear in all nikāyas[329], although it is never specified in the suttas what this group of devas exactly is or who it consists of. Since the concept of this group is Vedic and older than Buddhism itself, it will be informative to investigate the sources and then see how they relate to the Buddhist conceptualization.

The understanding that there are thirty-three devas is ancient, probably even earlier than the Ṛgveda itself[330]. The mere number of thirty-three devas is mentioned in ṚV 3.6.9, ṚV 8.28.1, ṚV 8.30.2. Additionally, in a few mantras it is said that the number is three times eleven, which speaks for a tripartite group (ṚV 1.34.11, ṚV 8.35.3, ṚV 8.39.9, ṚV 8.57.2, ṚV 9.92.4, also in ŚB 12.8.3.29). ṚV 3.6.8 specifies that two of these groups are in *antarikṣa* ('mid-space', or 'atmosphere') and *rocana* ('bright sky' or 'firmament'). ṚV 1.139.11 locates these three groups of eleven slightly differently as in heaven (*dyāvā*), earth (*pṛthivi*) and clouds (*apsukṣit*[331]). ṚV 1.45.1-2 finally mentions the number of thirty-three along with three deva categories: Vasus, Rudras, and Ādityas[332].

The AVŚ continues this tradition to explicitly divide the gods in three sets of eleven in heaven (*div*), atmosphere (*antarikṣa*), and earth (*pṛthivi*) (AVŚ 19.27.11-13). Other hymns confirm the general number of thirty-three devas (AVŚ 10.7.13, AVŚ 10.7.23, AVŚ 10.7.27, AVŚ 12.3.16, AVŚ 19.27.10, AVŚ 20.130.4)[333].

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[329] SN 1.11, SN 5.7, SN 9.6, SN 11.1-4, SN 11.11-14, SN 11.22, SN 11.24-25, SN 35.248, SN 40.10, SN 48.68, SN 55.1, SN 55.18-20, SN 55.54, SN 56.11, AN 3.37-38, AN 3.70, AN 3.80, AN 6.10, AN 6.25, AN 6.34, AN 7.66, AN 7.69, AN 8.35, AN 8.42-43, AN 8.8, AN 8.35-36, AN 8.42-43, AN 8.69, AN 9.21, AN 10.29, AN 11.11, MN 12, MN 31, MN 37, MN 41-42, MN 75, MN 83, MN 90, MN 97, MN 120, MN 134, DN 11, DN 14, DN 16-19, DN 21, DN 23, DN 24, DN 33. It has to be noted though, that the *tāvatiṃsā devā* don't appear in Dhp or Snp.
[330] We find 'thirty-three lords of ritual order' in the Zend-Avesta (Indradeva 1980, 99; Bhattacharyya 1970, 37).
[331] The term means 'water-dwelling', which Jamison and Brereton translate literally as 'in waters', but we follow Monier-Williams when he interprets it as 'in the clouds'. Jamison and Brereton (2014, 35) themselves refer in ṚV 1.139.11 to "gods of the earth, gods of the mid-space, and gods of heaven".
[332] These three groups of Vasus, Rudras, and Ādityas (without the number thirty-three) are mentioned together also in ṚV 2.31.1, ṚV 3.8.8, ṚV 6.62.8, ṚV 7.10.4, ṚV 7.35.14, ṚV 10.48.11, ṚV 10.66.4, ṚV 10.128.9, ṚV 10.150.1. At several places we get a more extensive list including these three categories, e.g. in ṚV 3.20.5 and ṚV 8.35.1.
[333] The AVŚ also groups together the Vasus, Rudras, and Ādityas, in AVŚ 4.30.1, AVŚ 6.68.1, AVŚ 6.74.3, AVŚ 10.7.22, AVŚ 19.9.11, AVŚ 19.11.4, AVŚ 20.135.9. More extensive lists are presented, e.g. in AVŚ 8.8.11-15.

It is the Taittirīya Saṃhitā that introduces a new segmentation of the thirty-three devas[334]. The original division of three times eleven is still presented (in TS 3.2.11, in TS 1.4.10 also as in heaven, earth, and 'waters'). But we also find for the first time different numbers for the three groups, namely eight Vasus, eleven Rudras, and twelve Ādityas (in TS 3.4.9 and TS 3.5.2). This new segmentation prevails until Upaniṣadic times (e.g. BU 3.9.2) and beyond. Since the new clusters add up to only thirty-one, and the overall number still remains thirty-three, the remaining two spots have to be filled, and they are filled differently by different texts. The reason for the new segmentation seems to lie in a correspondence with the poetic meters: Just as the Gāyatrī has eight syllables the Vasus are eight devas. Eleven is the number for the Triṣṭubh meter and the Rudras, and twelve for the Jagatī meter and the Ādityas (e.g. TS 3.4.9.7, JB 2.100-102, CU 3.16.5). Even though there are many more Vedic meters (fifteen in total, seven of them being somewhat frequent) the three mentioned meters indeed account for about 80% of all stanzas in the Ṛgveda (Gonda 1975, 173) and are therefore singled out with good textual justification to represent the devas[335].

What seems peculiar at first – namely that the definition of the thirty-three main gods should depend on poetic meters – becomes understandable when we keep in mind that speaking, language, and the ancient Vedic hymns are of central importance to the Vedic thought-world, especially in the speculations of the Brāhmaṇa period (see Jurewicz, 2012). The correspondences go beyond the devas and extend to other fields as well: e.g. social classes[336], animals, and parts of the body (Gonda 1975, 177). For example, the Gāyatrī is Agni's meter (e.g. in TS 2.2.5.5) and represents the Brahmins, and the Triṣṭubh is Indra's meter (e.g. TS 1.7.11.2) and is associated with nobility (i.e. *kṣatriya*s and *rājanya*s). As Gonda (ibid., 177) puts it, "the meters become deities themselves, instruments of creation, and are even raised higher than the gods."

It is therefore the 'metered devas' who account for thirty-one, which is why two gods had to be added in order to complete the traditionally irrevocable thirty-tree devas. In some passages of the AB the remaining two are Prajāpati and the *vaṣaṭ* call (the personified exclamation at the end of

[334] The number as such is again confirmed in TS 2.4.2, TS 5.4.1, TS 5.4.8, and TS 7.4.3.
[335] Sometimes we find instead of the Gāyatrī meter the Anuṣṭubh. Both have eight syllables, but while the Gāyatrī meter has three verses the Anuṣṭubh has four (Gonda, 1975, 173).
[336] See Smith (1992).

a sacrificial verse, known already in the ṚV)[337]. For ŚB 4.5.7.2 the remaining two are Heaven and Earth. In KB 12.6, JB 2.77.14, ŚB 11.6.3.5, and BU 3.9.2 the two are Indra and Prajāpati[338]. This is especially important in our case since there is a similarity to a few suttas which mention "the devas, with Inda, Brahmā, and Pajāpati"[339] (SN 22.79, AN 11.9, MN 22). In the Brāhmaṇas the importance of Prajāpati has grown, and he is singled out as a thirty-fourth deity (JB 2.128-130, ŚB 4.5.7.2, ŚB 5.1.3.13, ŚB 5.3.4.23, ŚB 12.2.2.7, ŚB 12.6.3.37). Thus, the three suttas mentioned would follow the understanding of the ŚB and present thirty-one devas, plus Indra and Brahman, and as a thirty-fourth deity Prajāpati.

What we can conclude so far is that the number of thirty-three devas goes back to an ancient tradition. An early formula for three times eleven devas (for the three realms of heaven, atmosphere, and earth) was later replaced in favor of a correspondence with the three most important Vedic meters. Especially the Brāhmaṇas establish the new clustering with eight Vasus, eleven Rudras, and twelve Ādityas (adding Indra and Prajāpati) – a clustering which we also assume as the standard for the Buddha's time. This leaves the question which devas actually belonged to the three clusters and why these were not detailed in the suttas.

The eight Vasus are specified only quite late, in ŚB 11.6.3.6-7 and BU 3.9.3-4, as fire (*agni*), earth (*pṛthivī*), wind (*vāyu*), the atmosphere (*antarikṣa*), sun (*aditya*), sky (*dyau*), moon (*candra*), and the stars (*nakṣatrāṇi*). Why they are called 'Vasus' is not clear, but there is some association with Indra as their possible forefather[340].

The Rudras can be reliably identified with the Maruts, who are consistently described as the sons of Rudra[341]. The Maruts are originally an undifferentiated, yet prominent, group of deities (see for some details Jamison & Brereton 2014, 49-50). Only in later times are they identified – as ten

[337] AB 1.10, AB 2.18, AB 2.37, AB 3.22. Probably based on TS 3.4.9.7.
[338] Actually BU 3.9.1-9 is almost a verbatim repetition of ŚB 11.6.3.4-10.
[339] *saindā devā sabrahmakā sapajāpatikā*. DN 21 features in a verse a shorter version only with Inda and Pajāpati (*saindā devā sapajāpatikā*), perhaps for metrical reasons.
[340] ṚV 7.10.4 presents Indra as the forefather of the Vasus. Indra is also sometimes called Vasu (AVŚ 20.23.7, AVŚ 20.52.2, AVŚ 20.57.15) or is otherwise associated with the Vasus (ṚV 7.35.6, ṚV 7.47.2, ṚV 10.66.3).
[341] ṚV 1.64.2/12, ṚV 1.85.1, ṚV 1.114.6, ṚV 2.33.1, ṚV 2.34.10, ṚV 3.26.5, ṚV 4.42.15, ṚV 5.52.16, ṚV 5.59.8, ṚV 5.60.5, ṚV 6.50.4, ṚV 6.66.3, ṚV 7.56.1, ṚV 8.20.17.

*prāṇa*s plus *ātman* (ŚB 11.6.3.7 and BU 3.9.4)[342]. More details about the ten devas can be pieced together from the Upaniṣads[343]: out-breath (*prāṇa*), in-breath (*apāna*), inter-breath (*vyāna*), up-breath (*udāna*), and link-breath (*samāna*), speech (*vāc*), sight (*cakṣu*), hearing (*śrotra*), mind (*manas*), and semen (*reta*) (for a slightly different view see Olivelle 1998, 511).

According to Jamison and Brereton (2014, 43) the Ādityas (the sons of Aditi) represent the powers that order human society. We don't have a complete ancient list, but at least the triplet of Varuṇa, Mitra, and Aryaman is reliably identified in the Ṛgveda as Ādityas[344]. Closer to the time of the Buddha, ŚB 11.6.3.8 and BU 3.9.5 both state that the twelve Ādityas are the twelve months of the year.

So why are the Gods of Thirty-three mentioned that often in the suttas but not in detail? One reason could be simplicity, i.e. to keep the Vedic devas vague with the exception of Sakka who rules them. After all, the devas don't have a purpose on their own in the suttas but are used to elevate the Buddha and the Saṅgha, and too many Vedic devas could distract from this goal. Additionally, we suspect, that a conscious omission is made. If the Buddhist composers had admitted that the months of the year, the earth and the sun, the *prāṇa*s, or that sight, mind, and speech were actual devas, they could hardly have argued that the devas are irrelevant for the lives of normal lay people. On the contrary, it would have connected the laity with the Vedic world-view which saw humans as fundamentally interwoven with devas and divine principles. It was much more in the interest of the Buddhist agenda to *distance* the gods to a remote realm that can be accessed only by supernatural means and thus to minimize their power[345].

For early Buddhism it is considered a spiritual *obstacle* to identify with essential aspects of the human experience (like speech, mind, earth, water, etc.). And the texts related to meditation spend a lot of effort to make the practitioner dispassionate towards them. Buddhist composers

[342] The predominant model of the ŚB is that three types of *prāṇa* exist: *prāṇa*, *udāna*, and *vyāna* (ŚB 1.2.1.19, ŚB 2.2.2.18, ŚB 3.1.3.20, ŚB 4.1.1.1, ŚB 6.4.2.5, ŚB 8.4.3.4, ŚB 8.7.1.22, ŚB 9.4.2.10, ŚB 11.5.4.15, ŚB 12.8.1.11, ŚB 12.8.2.27, ŚB 13.2.8.2, ŚB 14.1.3.30, ŚB 14.1.4.7, ŚB 14.3.1.21). A tenfold model (without details) is mentioned in ŚB 3.1.4.23, ŚB 3.8.1.3, ŚB 6.2.2.9, ŚB 11.2.1.2, ŚB 13.2.5.4.
[343] Based on BU 1.5.3, BU 3.9.26, BU 6.1, CU 2.7.1, CU 5.1.15.
[344] ṚV 1.41, ṚV 1.136.3, ṚV 5.67.1, ṚV 7.51.2, ṚV 7.60.4, ṚV 8.19.35, ṚV 8.31.13, ṚV 8.47.9, ṚV 8.67.4, ṚV 8.83.2, ṚV 10.126.5.
[345] Only exceptionally the earth is seen as quasi-sentient, trembling at certain occasions (AN 8.70, DN 16).

would have, therefore, not framed the qualities of body and mind as divine, for this would have made it much more difficult for the meditator to develop dispassion and dis-identification.

In summary, while the suttas acknowledge for historical reasons the number of devas as thirty-three, the silence of the texts regarding their individual identity is highly functional. It facilitates to devalue the gods, also by avoiding to recognize body, mind, and nature as divine.

In the following we will investigate the suttas in order to find mythological details related to the Gods of Thirty-three which will help us to stratify the respective suttas. Three suttas (SN 1.11, SN 55.1, MN 75) mention the Grove of Delight (*nandana vana*) in which the Gods of Thirty-three enjoy themselves. The notion of this grove is certainly not pre-Buddhist, can only be found in later literature like the Harivaṃśa (see Kaul 2015, 4) and underlines the later Buddhist notion that the Gods of Thirty-three indulge in sensual pleasure (also in SN 5.7, SN 9.6). Three suttas (SN 48.68, AN 7.69, MN 134) single out a special tree which is regarded as the foremost tree of the Gods of Thirty-three, the *pārichattaka* (Skt *pārijāta*), or coral tree. This is again a mythological detail only to be found in epic literature like the Mahābhārata and is absent from pre-Buddhist works[346]. A last detail regarding the Gods of Thirty-three is their formal assembly place, the *sudhamma sabhā*, or 'assembly of good justice' (SN 11.4, SN 11.24-25, SN 35.248, AN 3.37, MN 50, MN 83, DN 18, DN 19, DN 21). Again, this is a term that can only be found in the Sanskrit epics.

These mythological details are doctrinally insignificant, but they show how suttas from all nikāyas which deal with the Gods of Thirty-three seem to derive their material more from post-Buddha texts than from pre-Buddha ones. This suggests that there is more sutta material pertaining to supernatural beings which is composed after the Buddha and cannot be easily identified as such when no conspicuous vocabulary is used.

[346] Two other outstanding trees are mentioned: the *cittapāṭali* tree of the asuras (SN 48.69), and the *kūṭasimbalī* tree of the mythical *supaṇṇa* (Skt *suparṇa*) birds (SN 48.70). Neither appear in non-Buddhist literature.

6.1 Divine Beings and Divine Realms

So far we focused on the Gods of Thirty-three and their leader Sakka. But early Buddhism in its fascination with divine beings knows many more gods and divine realms. So, naturally the question comes up if all this diversity started with the historical Buddha, or else how it developed. Throughout the following investigation it will become evident that the system of divine realms became more elaborate with time. At a late sutta period all realms were eventually pressed into a strict hierarchical structure, and each realm was characterized by its own gods, lifespans, and specific paths of action which grant rebirth into particular realms.

6.2 The Oldest Formula with Supernatural Beings

If we look for the reliably oldest view of the suttas in regards to deities, we should look for a text element which is repeated in all nikāyas and is not under suspicion to serve an obvious socio-religious agenda. The following formula, which stands for 'all higher beings', is exceptionally well attested and can be found in more than one hundred instances all over the nikāyas[347]. The formula is used rather casually in the texts and we see no reason to suspect any agenda of a later composer. It says: "…in this world with its devas, Māra, and Brahmā, in this generation with its ascetics and Brahmins, its devas and humans"[348].

We can categorize the individual items in three groups: supernatural beings, spiritual seekers, and humans and devas in general. The first group consists of devas, the Buddhist adversary Māra, and the highest deity Brahmā, with the latter two apparently not seen as 'devas' in a narrow sense. The second group consists of *samaṇa*s and *brāhmaṇa*s, and is qualified as *pajā*

[347] SN 6.2, SN 7.1, SN 7.9, SN 10.3, SN 10.12, SN 14.31-34, SN 22.26-28, SN 22.56, SN 35.13-18, SN 35.229, SN 46.52-54, SN 48.21, SN 48.28, SN 48.42, SN 55.7, SN 55.23, SN 56.11, SN 56.28, AN 3.14, AN 3.63, AN 3.103-105, AN 4.8, AN 4.15, AN 4.21, AN 4.23-24, AN 4.127, AN 4.182, AN 4.193, AN 4.198, AN 5.30, AN 5.48-50, AN 5.131-133, AN 6.42-43, AN 7.50, AN 7.58, AN 8.11, AN 8.44, AN 8.64, AN 9.41, AN 10.27, AN 10.99, MN 12-13, MN 18, MN 23, MN 27, MN 31, MN 38, MN 41-42, MN 47, MN 51, MN 56, MN 60, MN 82, MN 91-92, MN 94-95, MN 101, MN 114, MN 117, MN 123, MN 125, MN 141, MN 148, DN 2-6, DN 10, DN 12, DN 14, DN 16-17, DN 26, DN 29, Snp 1.4, Snp 1.10, Snp 2.5, Snp 3.7, Snp 3.12.

[348] *sadevake loke samārake sabrahmake sassamaṇabrāhmaṇiyā pajāya sadevamanussāya*

(Skt *prajā*), i.e. 'generation', 'offspring', or more generally 'mankind'. The third group consists of the compound *devamanussa* (Skt *devamanuṣya*, i.e. 'gods and men') which is of Vedic origin and appears first in the Atharvaveda, then more regularly in the Taittirīya Saṃhitā and the Brāhmaṇas[349]. *Devamanussa* also appears alone in the suttas and expresses the world-view that devas and humans are deeply connected as the main actors of this universe.

Generally, the formula depicts the world as consisting of a highest deity Brahmā, the evil being Māra, other devas, spiritual seekers in particular, and humans in general. As mentioned above, the frequency and usage of this formula make us confident to assume that it represents the worldview either of the Buddha himself or at least the early generations after him[350]. We will mention 'the formula' more often throughout the next sections and chapters.

6.3 The Sevenfold List of Divine Beings

The next categorization of supernatural beings we discuss is much more detailed and structured, and is rooted in the AN, which already shows that it doesn't represent early Buddhism as a whole. It has, therefore, to be regarded as a later development. Yet, it gives us the opportunity to discuss many important Buddhist devas. The highly structured list also includes the Tāvatiṃsa Devas (the Gods of Thirty-three) – therefore the compiled list must be later than the original incorporation of the Gods of Thirty-three into the suttas. In total the list contains seven items: (1) Four Great Kings (*cattāra mahārājā* or *cātummahārājika devā*); (2) Tāvatiṃsa Devas; (3) Yāma Devas; (4) Tusita Devas; (5) Nimmānarati Devas; (6) Paranimmitavasavattī Devas; (7) Brahmā and Brahmaloka[351].

[349] AVŚ 8.10.9, TS 1.2.3.1, TS 1.6.8.1, TS 2.6.7.4, TS 4.1.11.2, TS 5.1.4.5, TS 5.2.5.3, TS 5.4.7.2, TS 5.4.8.6, TS 6.1.1.1, TS 6.1.4.3, TS 6.4.5.4, JB 1.116.13, JB 1.145.3, JB 3.159.24-25, JB 3.216.6, ŚB 3.6.2.26, ŚB 6.3.1.17, ŚB 6.4.4.22, ŚB 6.6.2.3, ŚB 7.5.2.27, ŚB 9.2.3.28, ŚB 9.3.4.13, ŚB 10.4.2.2, ŚB 13.4.2.15-16.
[350] A related but later list has eight items, the so-called 'eight assemblies' (Pāli *parisā*, Skt *pariṣad*) – consisting of four human groups (*khattiya*s, Brahmins, householders, and ascetics) and four divine ones (the Four Great Kings, the Gods of Thirty-three, the Māra-group, and the Brahmā-group) (AN 8.69, MN 12, DN 16, DN 33).
[351] A few suttas (AN 3.70, AN 6.10, AN 6.25-26, AN 11.11-12) end the list with the hint "and devas still higher than these" (*devā tatuttari*) which forecasts the devas of the 'extended list' (section 6.4).

As mentioned, we find this list, with small variations, mostly in the AN[352]. Some suttas in AN 8 omit Brahmaloka. SN 56.11, AN 7.69, and MN 31 add as the lowest category the *bhumma* devas (i.e. Earth Gods). We encounter their Sanskrit counterpart, *bhūmideva*, only in the Mbh, yet another hint for the late conception of this list. AN 3.70, AN 8.42-43, and AN 8.45 include a calculation of these devas' lifespan (without providing a lifespan for the Brahmās).

In the following table we provide the most important details about the devas in this sevenfold list, their rulers and lifespan, along with the suttas which contain the information.

Name	**Ruler(s)**	**Lifespan in years** (AN 3.70, AN 8.42-43, AN 8.45, DN 23)
Four Great Kings (*cattāra mahārājā*)	Dhataraṭṭha, Virūḷhaka/Virūḷha, Virūpakkha, Vessavaṇa/Kuvera (DN 18-20, DN 32)	9.000.000
Gods of Thirty-three (*tāvatiṃsā devā*)	Sakka	36.000.000
Yāma Devas	Suyāma (SN 40.11, AN 8.36, DN 11)	144.000.000
Tusita Devas	Santusita (SN 40.11, AN 8.36, DN 11)	576.000.000
Devas Who Delight In Creation (*nimmānarati devā*)	Sunimmita (SN 40.11, AN 8.36, DN 11)	2.304.000.000
Devas Who Control The Creation Of Others (*paranimmitavasavatti devā*)	Vasavattī (SN 40.11, AN 8.36, DN 11)	9.216.000.000

Table 1: The sevenfold list of divine beings, with their rulers and lifespans.

[352] SN 55.54, SN 56.11, AN 3.70, AN 3.80, AN 6.10, AN 6.25, AN 6.34, AN 7.66, AN 7.69, AN 8.35-36, AN 8.42-43, AN 8.45, AN 10.29, AN 11.11, MN 31, MN 97, DN 11, DN 18-19, DN 33.

According to SN 5.7 all these devas are bound by sensuality (*kāmabandhana*). And according to AN 8.36 each group of these devas surpasses the lower one in celestial lifespan (*āyu*), celestial beauty (*vaṇṇa*), celestial happiness (*sukha*), celestial glory (*yasa*), celestial authority (*ādhipateyya*), and sensuality. The same sutta states that humans will get reborn as these devas if they are generous but lack meditation attainments.

Similar hierarchically structured lists in Vedic literature are rare. In TU 2.8.2-4 we find a paragraph including: human Gandharvas (*manuṣyagandharva*), divine Gandharvas (*devagandharva*)[353], Forefathers (*pitṛ*), 'gods by birth' (*ājānajadeva*), 'gods by performing rites' (*karmadeva*)[354], devas, Indra, Bṛhaspati, Prajāpati, *brahman*. A very similar list can be found in BU 4.3.33. It includes: Forefathers, Gandharvas, *karmadeva*s, *ājānajadeva*s, Prajāpati, *brahman*. Some structural similarities with the Buddhist list are obvious: The sevenfold sutta list lacks the Gandhabbas but they are still implied by their rulers, the Four Great Kings (see chapter seven). Both, the Vedic and the Buddhist lists include 'regular' devas and end with the exceptional *brahman*/Brahmā. It is therefore well possible that the Vedic lists served as a blueprint for Buddhist composers to create their own list.

6.3.1 *Sahabyatā* – Rebirth as a 'Companion' of Deities

The Buddhist conception of rebirth into different divine realms is logically problematic. The realm of Gods of Thirty-three is per definition confined to exactly thirty-three devas. Yet, if one applies Buddhist rebirth logic then specific actions should necessarily lead to rebirth in this exact realm – which would increase the number of deities and make the label 'thirty-three' obsolete.

This is similarly true for the Buddhist Brahmās. In the Vedic tradition the texts strongly suggest that there was only *one* Brahman. This must have, therefore, been the starting point for Buddhist authors as well: *one* Brahmā, dwelling in *one brahmaloka.* So just as with the Gods of Thirty-

[353] *Manuṣyagandharva* appears only in the TU; *devagandharva* occurs in HiGS 1.7.24.6 and the epics.
[354] *Ājānajadeva* and *karmadeva* appear also in BU 4.3.33-34.

three, it is difficult to imagine that Buddhist audiences were suddenly to believe that in contrast to ancient tradition there could be countless Brahmās. Yet, Buddhist rebirth logic implies precisely that a specific spiritual accomplishment *must* result in a rebirth as a Brahmā. Indeed, the suttas do feature a few individual Brahmās (sections 9.4 and 9.5), but not many – Brahmā Sahampati is by far the most important Brahmā while few others are mentioned only occasionally. When we consider that the suttas acknowledge Buddhas of the past (see Nattier 1991, 19-20)[355] who would also have taught a practice leading to Brahmā-rebirth, *brahmaloka* should already be teeming with former Buddhist practitioners who were reborn as Brahmās.

It seems that in order to dissolve this tension between tradition and novel Buddhist claims, two similar concepts were used: the rebirth concept of *sahabyatā* (i.e. 'companionship'), and *kāyika*, i.e. 'group-membership' with deities (e.g. *tāvatiṃsa-kāyika* or *brahma-kāyika*). Both concepts allow rebirth in a certain realm without adding to the 'core' Tāvatiṃsa Devas or Brahmās. Instead, we get slightly inferior 'companions' to the Gods of Thirty-three, or 'companions' to Brahmā. The number of these 'companions' can be limitless without questioning the time-honored conception of these deities. This possibility to be reborn as almost equivalent 'companions' to specific deities is fundamentally important for the lay Buddhist discourse which is invested in divine rebirth and seeks practices to secure a pleasant heavenly afterlife through generosity towards the Saṅgha.

And indeed we can find the concepts of *sahabyatā* companionship and *kāyika* mostly applied to the Gods of Thirty-three (SN 7.18, SN 11.14, SN 55.1, AN 5.34, MN 75, DN 21), and to Brahmās (AN 6.54, AN 7.66, AN 7.73, DN 13, DN 19)[356]. Furthermore, we find only rarely the 'companionship' with an isolated class of deities, and much more often we find *lists* with several classes of deities and companions. For example, all occurrences of *sahabyatā* with the 'Four

[355] According to some suttas Gotama is the seventh Buddha. We find *general* references to 'Buddhas of the past' in SN 6.2, SN 35.83, SN 47.12, SN 47.14, SN 56.24, AN 3.137, AN 4.21, MN 51, MN 123, DN 14, DN 16, DN 20, and DN 28. The full list of names is mentioned in SN 12.4-9, DN 14, DN 32 – in SN 15.20 only the previous three are named. The most frequently mentioned previous Buddha is Kassapa who preceded Gotama (SN 1.50, SN 19.12, SN 19.17-21 SN 48.57, AN 5.180, MN 81, Snp 2.2). Before him came: Koṇāgamana, Kakusandha (MN 50), Vessabhū, Sikhī (SN 6.14, AN 3.80), Vipassī (DN 28). They also appear in Chinese sūtras, e.g. MĀ 32, or DĀ 1.
[356] We won't discuss isolated occurrences related to other individual classes of supernatural beings: SN 29.3-112 has the companionship with Nāgas, SN 30.3-46 with Supannas, SN 31.2-112 with Gandhabbas, SN 32.2-52 with Valāhaka cloud gods. AN 3.116 has a companionship in immaterial realms based on immaterial meditations. Other 'companionships' are mentioned in AN 5.33, AN 8.46-48, AN 5.166, AN 11.13, and MN 127.

Great Kings' are in lists[357]. These lists should, therefore, generally be seen as later attempts to organize the knowledge about deities and supernatural beings.

6.3.2 The Four Great Kings

The *cātumahārājika* or *cattāra mahārājā*, i.e. the Four Great Kings and their companions, are the lowest group of devas, just below the Gods of Thirty-three. Many details about this group are spread throughout the suttas, e.g. the path to get reborn among them: According to AN 8.36 someone gets reborn as a companion of the Four Great Kings if they have given a lot of donations (*dāna*) and exercised ethical restraint (*silā*), but have not developed the mind through meditation. AN 7.52, AN 8.35, and DN 33 define further that such a rebirth is conditioned by narrow-minded donations which seek direct rewards (confirmed by a short narrative in DN 23). In AN 3.37 the Four Great Kings and their companions are in charge of examining if human beings are ethical and honor the *uposatha* observance day (see section 3.6). They later report their findings to their direct superiors, the Gods of Thirty-three.

The Four Great Kings are specified in DN 18 and DN 19: Dhataraṭṭha protects the East, Virūḷhaka (also named Virūḷha) protects the South, Virūpakkha protects the West, and Vessavaṇa (also named Kuvera) protects the North. DN 20 confirms that they are associated with these four directions (*catura disā*). Therefore, the Four Great Kings are evidently Buddhist directional devas. The concept of directional deities can be found in many different sets throughout Vedic literature (see Wessels-Mevissen, 2001), but the Vedic texts offer no identical blueprint for the Buddhist directional deities. Of the four only Kuvera occasionally appears in epic non-Buddhist texts as the guardian of the North (ibid., 18). Since the others are unknown to Vedic literature the Four Great Kings are probably specific to Kosala-Magadha.

In the strictly hierarchical model that developed over time the Four Great Kings rule four different classes of 'demigods'. DN 32 tells us that Dhataraṭṭha rules over the Gandhabbas,

[357] AN 3.70, AN 7.52, AN 7.66, AN 8.35-36, AN 8.42-43, AN 8.45, MN 41-42, MN 120, DN 18, DN 19, DN 33.

Virūḷhaka over the Kumbhaṇḍas, Virūpakkha over the Nāgas, and Vessavaṇa over the Yakkhas (see chapter seven). Yet, these four groups of demigods are not under complete control of the Four Great Kings, in fact they are occasionally in opposition to them and can act against humans as well. This relative 'independence' of the demigods is probably a remnant from older times when they were not yet pressed into the Buddhist hierarchical model.

Name (DN 18-20, DN 32)	**Direction** (DN 18-20)	**Ruled demigods** (DN 32)
Dhataraṭṭha	East	Gandhabbas
Virūḷhaka / Virūḷha	South	Kumbhaṇḍas
Virūpakkha	West	Nāgas
Vessavaṇa, Kuvera	North	Yakkhas

Table 2: The Four Great Kings

As we can see, the Four Great Kings are specified only in four suttas of the DN, which means that our knowledge of them surely contains only a small part of the original mythology. Of the four Vessavaṇa is most mentioned individually (in AN 7.53, AN 8.8, MN 37, DN 18, DN 21, Snp 2.14). In DN 32 Vessavaṇa himself tells the Buddha many details about the Four Great Kings, and especially about himself: that he has cities in the sky, with the paradisiacal capital Visāṇā, ten assistants (individually named), a hall where Yakkhas spend time, fruitful trees, and beautiful birds. Virūpakkha, the Nāga (snake) king, appears also in AN 4.67 as *one* of four *ahirājakula*s, i.e. royal snake families. The four snake kings are Virūpakkha, Erāpatha, Chabyāputta, and Kaṇhāgotamaka. Most probably also the three additional Nāga kings refer to pre-Buddha mythology of Kosala-Magadha.

The long lifespan of the Four Great Kings (nine million years) poses some consistency problems. In DN 32 Vessavaṇa praises the six previous Buddhas before Gotama (see Nattier 1991, 19-20), as if he directly witnessed them. This would make sense considering his old age, but it begs the question why he and other deities, who are portrayed as devout followers of the Buddha, are not liberated yet. After all, they would have had a very long time to practice. It is clear that just as with other deities (Indra, the Gods of Thirty-three, etc.) the composers included them out of

tradition. Naturally, the gods had to be made devotees of the Buddha in order to legitimize Buddhism to their audience. But because the composers also introduced the concept of *past* Buddhas it leaves the question unanswered why after millennia of teaching and devotion the deities are still not liberated Buddhist masters themselves.

One way of resolving the problem could have been to present the deities as liberated arahants due to their extensive Buddhist practice in the past, but then people would have ended up venerating arahant deities – which was clearly not in the interest of the Buddhist composers. So they needed to remain unliberated. Moreover, later suttas made it explicitly clear that deities are essentially disadvantaged to apply the Buddhist teachings because of their abundant sensual pleasure (Sakka in MN 37), or because they are self-absorbed (Brahmā Baka in SN 6.4 and MN 49), or because they are ignorant (Mahābrahmā in DN 11).

As mentioned above, the Four Great Kings are not of Vedic origin, only once do we find King Kuvera (Skt Kubera) in a pre-Buddha text. ŚB 13.4.3.3-14 describes how in the preliminary ceremonies of the *aśvamedha*, before the *dīkṣā*, ten kings are addressed: King Manu rules over men (*manuṣya*), King Yama rules over the Forefathers (*pitṛ*), King Varuṇa over the Gandharvas, King Soma over the female *apsara* 'nymphs', King Arbuda over the *sarpa* snakes, King Kubera over the *rakṣa* demons, King Asita over the asuras, King Matsya over the *udakecara* water-dwellers, King Tārkṣya over the *vaya* birds, and King Dharma Indra over the devas. Thus, in the ŚB we have King Kubera ruling over the *rakṣa* demons while in DN 32 Kuvera rules over the *yakkha* 'demons'. Kubera was apparently more popular than the other three Kosala divine Kings, even outside the non-Vedic realm.

The information we could gather about the Four Great Kings is rather scarce but prove to be fruitful. It shows that they were mainly seen as a *group* of directional devas, with only Vessavaṇa/Kuvera standing out as a character outside of the DN. They are consistently shown to be inferior to the Gods of Thirty-three. Moreover, the DN places them above four groups of demigods. While the Four Great Kings are consistently shown as good in nature and supportive of Buddhism, we will show below how this applies to the demigods only to a limited extent.

The mythological function of the Four Great Kings was to be directional guardians. And while this function is well known in early Vedic literature, it has been associated there with very different Vedic deities. Surprisingly, we therefore come to a similar conclusion as with Indra/Sakka: Migrants must have taken the concept of directional deities to the East in very early times, possibly the Saṃhitā period. There it developed its own mythology with different deities than the Vedic ones. This complex influence of different time periods on our texts shows how important it is for scholarly research to further stratify our early Buddhist source material.

6.3.3 Yāma Devas

After the Four Great Kings and the Tāvatiṃsa Devas the sevenfold list follows with the Yāma Devas. God Yama and the Yāma Devas are not mentioned frequently in the suttas apart from our list. Yama is in Vedic texts the deity associated with physical death. The most prominent Buddhist deity which represents death in a wider sense is Māra, but as we will show in chapter eight he is more associated with spiritual obstacles than with physical death.

Our knowledge of Yama goes back to the Ṛgveda (especially ṚV 10.10-19). 'Yama' literally means 'twin' and refers to the mythological incestuous siblings Yama and Yamī (ṚV 10.10). Yama is the first mortal (ṚV 10.10.3), albeit by choice (ṚV 10.13.4), and he is the first being who died and went to the realm of the deceased (AVŚ 18.3.13). He is the one who governs the realm of the Forefathers (ṚV 10.16.9, AVŚ 5.24.14, AVŚ 11.6.11, ŚB 13.4.3.6), and he is frequently identified with death in general (e.g. AVŚ 6.63.2, AVŚ 6.84.3).

In his discussion Siklos (1994, 173-174) concludes that in the Brāhmaṇas Yama becomes more dreadful and the god of death (instead of merely the god of the deceased). A rare confirmation for this theory is JB 1.28: "Yama, named the one who will devour, forsooth, is death"[358]. What we surely *don't* have in pre-Buddhist literature is the Yama of MN 130, where he is the supervising judge in the afterlife and orders torture. In fact, there is very little in the suttas which

[358] *eṣa mṛtyur yad yamo 'tsyann eva nāma*

relates to the pre-Buddhist conception of Yama. Only DN 20 proves again to be knowledgeable in old Vedic mythology and mentions the 'Yama twins'.

SN 1.49 states that stingy people who additionally prevent others from giving are reborn in hell (*niraya*), in the animal realm (*tiracchānayoni*, lit. an 'animal womb'), in Yama's world (*yamaloka*), or in a poor family. This shows that Yama's realm was considered a low rebirth realm. SN 1.33 continues the theme of donations and claims that people who made righteous *dāna* donations safely pass Yama's Veteraṇī river (Skt Vaitaraṇī) on the way to their divine destinations. The Veteraṇī is mentioned also in Snp 3.10, here however, the river is part of hellish realms, a dangerous river in which sinners fall, devoured by wild animals. In non-Buddhist literature the river Vaitaraṇī is only mentioned in the Mahābhārata where it is similarly represented as a frightful river in hellish realms (Hopkins, 1969, 110-111). Evidently, the hellish Veteraṇī river is part of a later mythology which is absent from pre-Buddhist literature, even though the general concept of crossing a river to the realm of death is probably of older Vedic origin (Norelius, 2016). In another short reference, Dhp 4 claims that the Buddhist practitioner conquers *yamaloka*, probably in the sense of realm-of-death in general.

These few suttas evidently presume a knowledge of Yama and the basic mythology that he somehow governs the realm of death. Based on the suttas everyone who dies comes to the river of death. While the 'good people' (i.e. people who donated to the Saṅgha) pass the river and reach a heavenly realm, the sinners fall into the river and suffer immensely. The scaremongering suttas SN 1.33 and SN 1.49 have a very clear purpose, and are most probably later suttas, as their connection to the Mbh shows. This is even more the case in the following suttas which feature Yama most extensively, AN 3.36 and almost identically MN 130.

AN 3.36 features a theatrical enactment of how 'bad' people are treated in the afterlife: "Now the wardens of hell [*nirayapāla*][359] seize such a being by the arms and present him to King Yama saying: 'Sire, this man has ill-treated his mother, ill-treated his father, ill-treated recluses

[359] The *nirayapāla*s also appear in MN 50, MN 97, MN 129, DN 23.

[*sāmaññā*], ill-treated Brahmins; he has had no respect for the elders of his clan. Let the king order his punishment."[360]

In the ensuing dialogue Yama scolds the diseased human extensively. Then the wardens of hell torture the man in several detailed ways in different hells. Towards the end of the sutta Yama thinks: "Those in the world who do evil deeds are punished with such diverse tortures. Oh, that I might attain the human state! That a Tathāgata, Arahant, Perfectly Enlightened One might arise in the world! That I might attend upon that Blessed One! That the Blessed One might teach me the Dhamma, and that I might come to understand his Dhamma!"[361]

The development of this content is reasonably clear. It is based on existent Yama mythology and the idea of karmic retribution in hell. The purpose of the sutta is to scare the audience into 'good behavior', i.e. respecting parents, ascetics, Brahmins and elders, and finally to express the inferiority and devotion of Yama to the Buddha. Yama is therefore, at least in a few late suttas, the 'executioner' of karmic retribution.

In conclusion, we assume that the conception of the Yāma Devas in our sevenfold list is based on traditional awe and reverence with which Yama was regarded. It is not clear yet why the Yāma Devas are placed above the Gods of Thirty-three (we will discuss the underlying Vedic influence in section 9.2). A reason consistent with the Buddhist worldview is that the Gods of Thirty-three are mortal and eventually have to face Yama themselves. Alternatively, the composers of the sevenfold list saw the Four Great Kings and the Tāvatiṃsa Devas as a unity, and then placed the Yāmas above them.

6.3.4 Tusita Devas, Nimmānarati Devas, and Paranimmitavasavattī Devas

The next category of Tusita Devas (rendered as the 'Pleased Devas') is very vague. The main information shared by several suttas is the mythological story that Bodhisatta Gotama descended

[360] *Tamenaṃ, bhikkhave, nirayapālā nānābāhāsu gahetvā yamassa rañño dassenti – 'ayaṃ, deva, puriso amatteyyo apetteyyo asāmaññho abrahmaññho, na kule jeṭṭhāpacāyī. Imassa devo daṇḍaṃ paṇetū'''ti.* See for vaguely similar Vedic passages Jurewicz (2016, 518-585).

[361] *ye kira, bho, loke pāpakāni kammāni karonti te evarūpā vividhā kammakāraṇā karīyanti. Aho vatāhaṃ manussattaṃ labheyyaṃ, tathāgato ca loke uppajjeyya arahaṃ sammāsambuddho, tañcāhaṃ bhagavantaṃ payirupāseyyaṃ. So ca me bhagavā dhammaṃ deseyya, tassa cāhaṃ bhagavato dhammaṃ ājāneyya'nti.*

from the Tusita Devas into a miraculous birth (AN 4.127, AN 8.70, MN 123, DN 14, DN 16). Two of these suttas (MN 123, DN 14) also have Gotama's mother being reborn among the Tusita Devas when she passed away seven days after giving birth. Probably the oldest account of this myth is Snp 4.16 where Sāriputta says: "I have never before seen,' | (said the Venerable Sāriputta), | 'nor have I ever heard it from anyone | a teacher of such lovely speech, | leader of a group, who has come from Tusita'"[362].

Based on this popular story that Gotama descended from Tusita heaven the view might have developed that Tusita Devas are once-returners[363], just like the Buddha lived in Tusita heaven prior to his last human birth. Also AN 6.44 and AN 10.75 feature a story in which two characters, who are declared by the Buddha to be once-returners, are reborn among Tusita Devas. The only other occurrence is in MN 143 where the eminent lay supporter Anāthapiṇḍika is said to reappear after his death among the Tusita Devas.

The term *tusita* (sanskrized as *tuṣita*) is a Buddhist (or at least non-Vedic) innovation and can otherwise only be found in the later Sanskrit epics. We have therefore reached a stage in the sevenfold list of devas where the non-Vedic gods supersede the Vedic ones. Only the top of the sevenfold list re-introduces the highest Vedic realm of Brahmā, i.e. *brahmaloka*.

The Tusita Devas are followed by the Nimmānarati Devas (untranslated), about whom information is rare in the suttas. DN 33 explains them as beings who desire what they have created, hence the rendition 'The devas who delight in creation'. Other than that we learn nothing about this class of devas which has no pre-Buddhist equivalent.

There is also very little additional information about the next category of Paranimmitavasavattī Devas (untranslated). DN 33 merely says that they are 'the devas who control what is created by others'. We get a slightly better understanding of the Paranimmitavasavattī Devas when we contextualize the last limb of the compound, *vasavatti* (Skt *vaśavartin*, 'ruling over',

[362] *Na me diṭṭho ito pubbe, (iccāyasmā sāriputto) | Na suto uda kassaci; | Evaṃ vagguvado satthā, | Tusitā gaṇimāgato.*
[363] A 'once-returner' is a Buddhist practitioner who is reborn one last time, as a human, before attaining liberation.

'dominating', appearing only in the Sanskrit epics). The term appears mostly as a formula praising Brahmā, as "the Great Brahmā, the vanquisher, the unvanquished, the universal seer, the wielder of mastery [*vasavatti*]"[364] (SN 6.4, AN 5.170, AN 7.62, AN 7.66, MN 49, DN 1, DN 11, DN 24). In two suttas the composer even applies this very formula to the Buddha, challenging Brahmā's supremacy (AN 4.23, DN 29). DN 13 describes a path to *brahmaloka* and uses this quality of *vasavatti* to equate the power of Brahmins with the power of Brahmā. The examples show that the Paranimmitavasavattī Devas were conceptualized as close to Brahmā.

6.5.3 Discussion and Summary

The sevenfold list ends with Brahmā as the highest deity (discussed separately in sections 9.4-9.6). We can already briefly mention that one of the main paths to a rebirth as Brahmā is the development of meditation, specifically the first *jhāna* or the *brahmavihāra*s. This means that the highest divine rebirth through morality and religious giving is the sixth deva class in the list, while a rebirth as Brahmā is generally reserved for monastics who have developed meditation.

This logic is rather consistent in the suttas, except for AN 3.70 and AN 8.42-43 which drastically lower the requirements for a rebirth in any divine realm up to the Paranimmitavasavattī Devas and claim that it is enough for lay Buddhists to keep the *uposatha* observance day (see section 3.6). These suttas, however, seem to represent a blatant attempt, by probably later composers, to lure lay people into conversion and to keep them committed. In other words, the main audience for suttas with the sevenfold list of deities was lay, and not monastic.
It is also worth pointing out that even though the Tusita realm is exclusive for once-returners, no divine realm corresponds to the Buddhist stage of the stream-enterer (*sotāpanna*)[365]. One could argue that stream-enterers get reborn as humans only, but DN 21 where Sakka proclaims his stream-entry explicitly predicts that he will be reborn as a god of the Pure Abodes (section

[364] *mahābrahmā abhibhū anabhibhūto aññadatthudaso vasavattī.*
[365] The stream-enterer is the first stage of Buddhist liberation. They are guaranteed to have at most seven more rebirths until full liberation. The next three stages are once-returner (one more birth as a human), non-returner (one more birth as a deva), and arahant (full liberation while alive, no more rebirths).

6.4.3). Next to the lack of a corresponding realm there is also no meditation path or specific practice which directly corresponds to stream-entry. This strikes us as odd, especially when we keep in mind the urge of the early Buddhist philosopher-composers to categorize and systematize the available knowledge into a coherent system of Buddhist attainment. The omission of the stream-enterer gives further plausibility to the conclusion of Manné (1995, 94) that stream-entry was originally the state of the convert, not of the spiritually advanced practitioner. The implication is that every convert would have been assured to attain liberation in a limited number of rebirths – but divine rebirth still had to be 'earned' by ethical behavior and religious giving.

Reviewing the sevenfold list, we can see a mix of different categories, combining non-Vedic east-Indian, Vedic, and purely Buddhist devas. The Four Great Kings are non-Vedic directional deities probably of Eastern India, and the Gods of Thirty-three and Yama are Vedic. The three following categories are purely Buddhist, probably coming from a specific AN transmission line. While there is at least a limited mythology surrounding Tusita Devas in the suttas, the following two groups have no further descriptions in the suttas at all, which makes their purpose unclear. In general we can distinguish three different purposes for the sevenfold list:

(1) Structuring and systematizing. This would be the motivation of early Buddhist philosophers who were interested in logical order and bringing structure into the divine realms. In contrast, the structure of the deities in earlier suttas and Vedic literature is much less apparent and more complex. The early philosophers certainly assumed that the Buddha understood the status of devas as a result of their past karma, and then tried to reconstruct the governing logic from the material transmitted to them. As a consequence the (mostly AN-based) authors created a unified list which has served as a map for supernatural realms ever since.
(2) Impression management. The innovative Buddhist list was probably used to impress both monastic and lay audiences who were fascinated by divine realms. Such specific knowledge also meant to prove that Buddhist monastics had more insight into divine realms than Vedic seers and other *śramaṇa* teachers.

(3) Establishing the Buddha as absolute authority. The list implies that in contrast to Vedic seers the Buddha was not limited to *visions* of the divine realms. Instead, he had direct knowledge of

them. He could even travel to *brahmaloka* and converse with the gods. Hence, devotion to him and the Saṅgha was more justified than to other religious teachers and traditions.

6.4 The Sevenfold List Extended

In addition to the sevenfold list three suttas (MN 41, MN 42, MN 120) present an extended version with seventeen more categories of devas beyond Brahmā[366]. We need to keep in mind that for a rebirth as a deva in the sevenfold list no meditation was necessary (except for Brahmā rebirth which requires the first *jhāna* or the *brahmavihāra* meditations; see section 6.5, table 3). This changes in the extended list, where mastery of meditation is required in order to be reborn in certain realms.

Is it useful at this point to sum up the most relevant model of Buddhist meditation stages. It starts with the four *jhāna*s[367] after which most suttas already place liberation. Another sutta tradition allows beyond the four *jhāna*s four even more subtle stages of meditation: The dimensions of infinite space (*ākāsānañcāyatana*), infinite consciousness (*viññāṇañcāyatana*), nothingness (*ākiñcaññāyatana*), and neither-perception-nor-non-perception (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*).

The late sutta composers of MN 41, MN 42, and MN 120 have mapped out a strict 'correspondence model'[368] between the microcosmic element of meditation and the macrocosmic element of rebirth realm. Simply put, the higher the meditation achievement as a human, the higher the rebirth as a deva. It is also important to emphasize that now with the 'extended list' we leave behind the discourse of lay-followers and are exclusively in the monastic discourse where rebirth is not any more conditioned by religious giving and ethics but by increasingly subtle attainments in meditation. This means that the audience who was probably more interested

[366] A simplified variation of this extended list can be found in MN 1 and MN 49. It consists of: devas, Pajāpati, Brahmā (7), the devas of Streaming Radiance (11), the devas of Refulgent Glory (14), the devas of Great Fruit (15), and the Overlord (*abhibhū*, otherwise unknown).
[367] See among others Arbel (2016), Cousins (1992), Bucknell (1993), and Stuart-Fox (1989).
[368] See for detailed discussions of the Vedic so-called '*bandhus*' Schayer (1925, 22-24), Gonda (1965b), or Farmer, Henderson, & Witzel (2000, 51-54), Cavallin (2003b).

in the application of this knowledge were monastics. Hence, we can no longer claim that the interest in devas was driven by lay Buddhists only – the extended list captures the fascination of monastics.

The seventeen additional deva categories are: 8.-11. The Devas of Radiance (*ābhā*). The Devas of Unlimited Radiance (*parittābhā*). The Devas of Immeasurable Radiance (*appamāṇābhā*). The Devas of Streaming Radiance (*ābhassara*) 12.-14. The Devas of Limited Glory (*parittasubha*). The Devas of Immeasurable Glory (*appamāṇasubha*). The Devas of Refulgent Glory (*subhakiṇha*). 15. The Devas of Great Fruit (*vehapphala*). 16. The Aviha Devas 17. The Atappa Devas 18. The Sudassa Devas 19. The Sudassī Devas 20. The Akaniṭṭha Devas. 21.-24. The gods experiencing the dimension of infinite space (*ākāsānañcāyatanūpaga*). The gods experiencing the dimension of infinite consciousness (*viññāṇañcāyatanūpaga*). The gods experiencing the dimension of nothingness (*ākiñcaññāyatanūpaga*). The gods experiencing the dimension of neither-perception-nor-non-perception (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatanūpaga*).

6.4.1 The Devas of Radiance (Devas 8.-11.)

MN 127 claims that the Devas of Radiance are immaterial. Other suttas put it differently, namely that these devas are "identical in body but different in perception"[369], without providing more details (AN 7.44, AN 9.24, DN 15, DN 33, DN 34).

Among the four types of Devas of Radiance one type stands out in the suttas, the Devas of Streaming Radiance (*ābhassara*). From SN 4.18, AN 4.123, AN 5.170, DN 33, and Dhp 15 we deduce that a mastery of the second *jhāna* results in a rebirth as an *ābhassara* Deva[370].

There is another peculiarity connected with the Devas of Streaming Radiance. Several suttas claim that the world (*loka*) periodically dissolves (*saṃvaṭṭati*) and re-starts again (*vivaṭṭati*)[371]. And a few suttas (AN 10.29, DN 24, DN 27) tell us that for the period of dissolution most beings take the form of Devas of Streaming Radiance and are therefore 'outside' of the process of dissolution. Then one of them gets reborn as the Brahmā of the new world, and others follow and become his companions. The lifespan of a Brahmā is accordingly one *kappa* (i.e. the timespan of the cosmos; AN 4.123, AN 4.125). The lifespan of Devas of Streaming Radiance is specified as two *kappa*s (AN 4.123, AN 4.125). There are even two suttas in which the Buddha recounts his personal memory of the world dissolution as such a deva (AN 7.62, AN 7.66). Among the suttas which describe the world-dissolution we find the most vivid description of the Devas of Streaming Radiance: "There they exist mind-made, feeding on rapture, self-luminous, moving through the skies, living in glory, and they remain thus for a very long time"[372] (AN 10.29, DN 1, DN 24, DN 27). All in all, the Devas of Radiance exemplify the power of Buddhist meditation and outlive the Vedic deities. Accordingly, lay followers who knew of these suttas must have regarded monastic meditators as future devas with immense powers. This surely increased the perceived authority of Buddhist monastics over Brahmin and *śramaṇa* teachers.

[369] *ekattakāyā nānattasaññino*
[370] AN 4.123 is specific in this, the other suttas mention qualities like *pīti* and *sukha* which are characteristic for the second *jhāna*. AN 4.125, however, sees as a prerequisite the mastery of compassion meditation (*karuṇā*).
[371] SN 12.70, SN 51.11, AN 3.58, AN 3.101, AN 5.23, AN 7.62, AN 7.66, AN 8.11, AN 10.21, AN 10.30, AN 11.15, MN 4, MN 6, MN 12, MN 51, MN 73, MN 77, MN 94, MN 101, MN 108, DN 2, DN 10, MN 25, DN 28.
[372] *Te tattha honti manomayā pītibhakkhā sayaṃpabhā antalikkhacarā subhaṭṭhāyino ciraṃ dīghamaddhānaṃ tiṭṭhanti.*

6.4.2 Devas of Glory (Devas 12.-14.), Devas of Great Fruit (Devas 15.)

The different 'Devas of Glory' are doctrinally of little importance, are again based on the AN, and simply continue the logic of 'the higher the meditation attainment the higher the rebirth'. Of the three types mentioned in the expanded list, only the last one occurs independently, namely the Devas of Refulgent Glory (*subhakiṇha*). Just as Devas of Streaming Radiance correspond to the second *jhāna*, the *subhakiṇha* Devas of Refulgent Glory correspond to the third *jhāna*[373], albeit only according to AN 4.123. This is indirectly confirmed by a few AN-based suttas which state that the Devas of Refulgent Glory enjoy intense *sukha*, meditative happiness, which is the main quality of the third *jhāna* (AN 3.23, AN 4.233-4, AN 5.170, MN 57, DN 33). The lifespan of this category is again doubled to four *kappa*s in comparison with the previous category (AN 4.123). Further, a few suttas claim that the Devas of Refulgent Glory are "identical in body and identical in perception" (*ekattakāya ekattasaññi*), which implies that they are more subtle than the Devas of Radiance (AN 7.44, AN 9.24, DN 15, DN 33, DN 34).

The Devas of Great Fruit (*vehapphala*) follow the same pattern and are otherwise of little doctrinal importance. They are associated with the fourth *jhāna*, but their lifespan increases drastically from four *kappa*s to five hundred *kappa*s (AN 4.123)[374]. Possibly the authors wanted to emphasize that the fourth *jhāna* is much 'closer' to liberation.

6.4.3 Devas of the Pure Abodes (Devas 16.-20.)

The next five categories of Devas (Aviha, Atappa, Sudassa, Sudassī, Akaniṭṭha) are called in DN 14 and DN 33 'Devas of the Pure Abodes' (Suddhāvāsa Devas). More generally, AN 4.124 and AN 4.126 state that when practitioners have mastered any of the four *jhāna*s and then contemplate impermanence (*anicca,* Skt *anitya*) they will get reborn as Suddhāvāsa Devas.

[373] In the otherwise similar AN 4.125 *subhakiṇha* Devas correspond to meditative *muditā*, sympathetic joy.
[374] AN 4.125 associates these devas with the meditative mastery of *upekkhā*, equanimity, which is incidentally also the main quality of the fourth *jhāna*.

Moreover, Suddhāvāsa Devas have been according to MN 12 'non-returners' (*anāgāmi*), i.e. they will attain full liberation as these devas without being reborn as a human.

Coming to the next category, the Aviha Devas (Skt Abṛha, etym. unknown) are referenced a few times in the suttas. SN 1.50 and SN 2.24 even name seven bhikkhus who were reborn as Avihas and overcame the 'divine bondage' (*dibbayoga*)[375], among them the devotee Siṅgiya. AN 3.127 claims that the exemplary *gahapati* householder Hatthaka[376] was reborn in Aviha. AN 6.123 says of Hatthaka that he has seen and realized immortality (*amata*), usually an epithet of full liberation. Yet, among his many characteristics, including faith and morality, we don't find meditative attainments (AN 8.23). This leads us to conclude that at a time before the extended list was fixed also faithful devotees were able to be reborn in Aviha, even without meditative accomplishments[377].

The next deva categories – Atappa (Skt Atapa), Sudassa (Skt Sudṛśa, 'well-looking'), Sudassī (Skt Sudarśana, also 'well-looking') are not referenced in the suttas at all beyond our list.

The last category is the Akaniṭṭha Devas (Skt Akaniṣṭha, lit. 'not-the-youngest', possibly meaning 'the most superior') is among the most reliably referenced of the otherwise rather poorly documented devas of the extended list, with suttas providing different paths to a rebirth in this realm[378]. In SN 46.3 this rebirth is achieved by establishing *upekkhā*, the meditative equanimity of the fourth *jhāna*. In SN 48.15-17 and SN 48.24 it is by perfecting the five qualities of faith, energy, mindfulness, *samādhi*, and wisdom. In several suttas it is realized by bringing to an end the 'five lower fetters' (*pañca orambhāgiya saṃyojana*) which keep humans attached to rebirth (SN 48.66, SN 51.26, SN 54.5, SN 55.25, AN 3.88-89, AN 7.16, AN 7.19, AN 7.55, AN 7.95, AN 9.12). Another number of suttas also confirm that the Akaniṭṭha Devas are 'non-returners' (SN 48.15-17, SN 48.24, SN 55.25, AN 3.88-89, AN 9.12, AN 10.63-64, DN 21)[379].

[375] Upaka, Palagaṇḍa, Pukkusāti (mentioned in MN 140), Bhaddiya (possibly identical to a character in SN 55.48 and AN 1.193), Khaṇḍadeva (or Bhaddadeva), Bāhuraggi (or Bāhudantī), and Siṅgiya (or Piṅgiya, an ardent devotee mentioned in AN 5.194-5 and Snp 4.16).
[376] SN 17.23, AN 1.251, AN 2.133, AN 3.35, AN 4.176, AN 6.123, AN 8.23-24.
[377] Even though the 'wisdom' (*paññā*, Skt *prajñā*) of Hatthaka could refer meditative attainments as well.
[378] These paths mostly result either in rebirth as an Akaniṭṭha Deva, or in full liberation.
[379] See for a not fully compatible model AN 4.131.

It is interesting that the numerous occurrences in these SN and AN suttas did not result in a transfer to the MN. The only reference outside of SN and AN is DN 21 where Sakka, who has declared to be a 'stream-enterer', predicts his future and that before his eventual liberation he will be reborn in the highest deva realm (*devaloka uttama*) among the Akaniṭṭha Devas.

In summary, Devas of the Pure Abodes are an interesting category of deities which are mentioned in suttas from different time periods. Among the latest suttas are probably the ones which feature our extended list. Older are the suttas which present them as non-returners. And the oldest are probably the suttas which allow a wider range of followers to be reborn in the Pure Abodes, even devotee householders and Sakka. In the extended list, however, the Devas of Pure Abodes continue the logic of correspondences: The Devas of Glory represent the third *jhāna*, the Devas of Great Fruit the fourth *jhāna*, and the Devas of Pure Abodes represent non-returners, just one stage before full liberation. Furthermore, the number of suttas which mention some Devas of the Pure Abodes shows that this realm was widely discussed and not just artificially created out of logical necessity in order to complete a list which pedantically parallels meditative attainments with rebirth in a divine realm.

6.4.4 Formless Devas (21.-24. Devas)

The realms of the following four categories of devas are occasionally termed in the suttas *arūpa* (also *āruppa*, Skt *arūpa*), i.e. 'formless'. In contrast to the previous ones, the devas in these four categories are named directly after the according meditative attainment which is probably a sign of their late conceptualization. As noted above, numerous suttas describe beyond the four *jhāna*s four *arūpa* meditation states. Following the names of the meditation states they are called: 'the Devas experiencing the dimension of infinite space' (*ākāsānañcāyatanūpaga*), '… of infinite consciousness' (*viññāṇañcāyatanūpaga*), '… of nothingness' (*ākiñcaññāyatanūpaga*), and '… of neither-perception-nor-non-perception' (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatanūpaga*).

Information about these devas is scant. AN 3.116 calculates their lifespan as 20.000 *kappa*s for the first, 40.000 *kappa*s for the second, and 60.000 *kappa*s for the third category. Remarkably, after this lifespan is exhausted one attains liberation *only* if one has been a Buddhist, while a non-Buddhist 'ordinary person' (*puthujjana*, no Skt) would be reborn in hell, as an animal or a ghost. Nowhere else do we find such a harsh 'punishment' for non-Buddhist meditators.

These abstract devas are not related to specific characters or narratives and are most probably inventions of the philosophers who compiled the extended list. There are, however, some hints in the suttas which shed a little light on *arūpa* devas[380].

DN 9 presents a very crude categorization of beings in three groups: beings who are solid (*oḷārika*) and consume solid food[381], mind-made beings (*manomaya*) who have a body-like form (*rūpa*), and formless beings (*arūpa*). As in many other suttas the order of items is not random – the solid beings are seen as inferior to *manomaya* beings, which are again inferior to *arūpa* beings. Probably all three represent devas. The only revealing example for a *manomaya* deva is presented in AN 5.100 where its immaterial subtle body is described as being larger than a Magadha village, meaning it is immaterial but still has size. The implication is that *arūpa* devas are even more subtle and have no spatial limitation at all.

The 'invention' of the *arūpa* devas is problematic for several reasons. Since one of the basic purposes of the extended list is to establish a correspondence between meditation states and a later rebirth, it was necessary to construe these devas and include them in the list. The problem is that the devas of the Pure Abodes already represent the highest possible rebirth attainment, namely of the non-returner, after which there is only full liberation. There is simply no further conceptual space for an even higher realm, which is why this category of *arūpa* devas reads more like a dutiful exercise out of logical necessity than a representation of the Buddha's teachings.

[380] *Arūpa* devas are briefly mentioned in SN 5.4, AN 5.166 and MN 60. Further, several suttas see *arūparāga* (the desire for the formless) as an important spiritual obstacle, probably signifying the desire to get reborn as an *arūpa* deva (SN 45.180, SN 46.130, SN 46.184, SN 47.104, SN 48.124, SN 48.178, SN 49.54, SN 50.54, SN 50.108, SN 51.86, SN 53.54, AN 6.67, AN 9.70, AN 10.13, DN 33).
[381] This might be a reference to Vedic gods who feed off solid food offered by Brahmins (also in AN 5.166, AN 11.13).

Another problem is connected with biographical sutta material of the Buddha. According to MN 26, MN 36, MN 85, and MN 100 (all draw from the same text material) Bodhisatta Gotama practiced in his quest for liberation under the guidance of two teachers, Āḷāra Kālāma and Udaka Rāmaputta[382], who attained the two highest *arūpa* meditations[383]. Gotama learned after his enlightenment that his former teachers had passed away. According to our extended list the former teachers should have been reborn as *arūpa* devas. But if we also follow AN 3.116, it would mean that as non-Buddhists they are destined to be reborn as ghosts, animals, or in hell. The uncomfortable conclusion for the Buddhist tradition is that the Buddha's former teachers, who were the spiritually most advanced beings after the Buddha, were doomed to an undignified rebirth. We, therefore, suspect that the singular voice of AN 3.116 was not meant as an adequate description of rebirth mechanics but as a teaching to increase Buddhist group cohesion: It reassures Buddhist monastics that only they will reap the positive results of *arūpa* meditations.

6.5 Concluding Observations

What we have learned so far from the large amount of sutta material about devas is that the Buddhist composers were deeply interested in devas, their hierarchy, lifespan, rebirth paths, powers, and their relationship to states of mind and meditation. Much material seems to have been produced by a philosophical desire to catalogue, order, and clarify older material regarding devas. Even though the tone of these suttas is sober, a fascination with organizing knowledge about devas is evident. Another purpose which can be consistently found in deva-related material is to superelevate the Buddha and his arahants above devas, especially the Vedic ones.

The following table summarizes the correspondence between devas, the paths leading to a rebirth in their realms, and which stage of Buddhist liberation is associated with them:

[382] Apart from the suttas mentioned there are only few other occurrences. There is an indirect reference to Āḷāra Kālāma in DN 16, and Udaka Rāmaputta is mentioned in SN 35.103, AN 4.187, and DN 29.
[383] See Bronkhorst (2000, 80-93) where he argues that the *arūpa* meditations are based on an older Jain practice and were integrated into Buddhism only later. See for the opposite view that the *arūpa* meditations were part of original Buddhism Anālayo (2017b, 150-163).

Name	Path to deva rebirth	Buddhist stage
Four Great Kings (*cattāra mahārājā*)	[1) 2) 3)] reward-seeking donations (AN 7.52), careless donations (DN 23)	-
Gods of Thirty-three (*tāvatimsa*)	[1) 2) 3)] careful donations (DN 23)	-
Yāma Devas	[1) 2) 3)]	-
Pleased Devas (*tusita*)	[1) 2) 3)]	Once-returner
Nimmānarati Devas	[1) 2) 3)]	-
Paranimmitavasavattī Devas	[1) 2) 3)]	-
Brahmā	[2)] Brahmavihāras (AN 5.192, MN 83, MN 97, MN 99, DN 13, DN 17, DN 19), First *jhāna* (AN 4.123), *mettā* meditation (AN 8.1, AN 4.125, AN 11.15), donations (AN 7.52, Snp 3.5), five Indriyas (SN 48.57), ethical behavior (SN 6.4)	Non-returner (only AN 7.52)
Deva of Streaming Radiance (*ābhassara*)	*Pīti* (SN 4.18), *sukha* (AN 5.170, DN 33), second *jhāna* (AN 4.123), *karuṇā* meditation (AN 4.125)	-
Devas of Refulgent Glory (*subhakiṇha*)	Third *jhāna* (AN 4.123), *mudita* meditation (AN 4.125)	-
Devas of Great Fruit (*vehapphala*)	Fourth *jhāna* (AN 4.123), *upekkhā* meditation (AN 4.125)	-
Devas of the Pure Abodes (*suddhāvāsa*, *akaniṭṭha*)	For *suddhāvāsa*: Meditation mastery and impermanence contemplation (AN 4.124, AN 4.126). For Akaniṭṭha: *upekkhā* meditation (SN 46.3), Perfecting the five qualities of faith, energy, mindfulness, *samādhi*, and wisdom (SN 48.15-17, SN 48.24), ending five lower fetters (SN 48.66, SN 51.26, SN 54.5, SN 55.25, AN 3.88-89, AN 7.16, AN 7.19, AN 7.55, AN 7.95, AN 9.12)	Non-returner (for *suddhāvāsa* MN 12, for Akaniṭṭha SN 48.15-17, SN 48.24, SN 55.25, AN 3.88-89, AN 9.12, AN 10.63-64, DN 21)
Formless Devas (*arūpa*)	*Arūpa* meditation stages (AN 3.116, DN 1, DN 15, DN 33, DN 34)	Non-returner (AN 3.116)

[1)] donations & ethical restraint, no meditation (AN 8.36)
[2)] ethical restraint and rewards-seeking donations (AN 8.35, DN 33)
[3)] Keeping the eightfold fortnight *uposatha* observance day (AN 3.70, AN 8.42-43)

Table 3: Devas, rebirth-path, and Buddhist attainment

There can be little doubt that the mention of devas in general and some related rebirth speculations belong to the earliest strata of the suttas. It is also true, however, that the majority of deva-related material occurs in the AN and belongs to the lay discourse of ethics and religious giving, which makes us suspect that these texts were produced by a specific transmission line and most probably do not go back to the historical Buddha. Yet, we cannot ignore the sheer amount of suttas which propagate teachings about devas and divine rebirth. In the end we have to conclude that already in original Buddhism there was a stock of deva-related material which later teachers expanded and commented on. What we find in the suttas is therefore a blend of these oldest teachings, interwoven with later commentaries and new scholastic material.

All in all, deva-related teachings were fundamental for the earliest Buddhist worldview, and we can assume that devas were venerated by lay followers and monastics alike. We suggest that shortly after the Buddha meditative attainments were seen as resulting in divine rebirths beyond the Vedic devas. This led to a diverse 'landscape' of deities in the suttas. The lower ones have a Vedic background (Yama, Brahmā), others have been adopted and altered in North-East India before the Buddha's time (Sakka as a variation of Indra, or the concept of directional guardians). Others again are specifically North-East Indian (e.g. the Four Great Kings, the 'demigods'), and lastly we have devas which are specifically Buddhist (Tusita Devas, and all devas beyond Brahmā).

In conclusion, it is impossible to maintain the position that original Buddhism was atheistic or free of the notion of supernatural beings, as is nowadays claimed by some secular Buddhist teachers. Instead, we have to acknowledge that from the beginning there must have been fundamental notions of devas and other supernatural beings. Also the possibility for the Buddha and other meditation masters to directly interact with devas must be an old notion. Surely after the Buddha the strong interest of the lay population in divine rebirth was met with the readiness of monastics to provide more details. These teachers made their knowledge of devas even more relevant by laying out Buddhist practices which would secure a divine rebirth. It is no coincidence that the practices leading lay people to divine rebirth depended on religious giving to the Saṅgha.

Chapter Seven: Demigods - Gandhabbas, Kumbhaṇḍas, Nāgas, Yakkhas

As discussed above, the Four Great Kings are the lowest category of devas, but they are described as ruling over a yet lower level of 'demigods', who however don't have their own label. Instead, the Four Great Kings each rule over a different class of beings: Dhataraṭṭha over the Gandhabbas, Virūḷha over the Kumbhaṇḍas, Virūpakkha over the Nāgas, and Vessavaṇa over the Yakkhas (see also table 2 in section 6.3.2). We discuss these demigods because they add to our understanding of the early Buddhist worldview, whose relationship with devas was necessarily always conflicted: Traditions had to be respected, superiority over the Vedic deities maintained, and the fascination of laypeople and monastics with divine rebirth had to be kept in check. These agendas don't exist with the demigods who don't challenge the spiritual ambition of Buddhist followers. We might, therefore, by discussing the four groups of demigods get a more unbiased glimpse into early Buddhism and its relationship with Brahmanism and deities.

7.1 Kumbhaṇḍas

The Kumbhaṇḍas are the vaguest category of demigods. We know from DN 20 and DN 32 that they are ruled by the Great King Virūḷha, and in SN 19.10 a Kumbhaṇḍa is described as a grotesque figure: "I saw a Kumbhaṇḍa man moving through the air. When he walked, he had to lift his *aṇḍa* onto his shoulders, and when he sat down he sat on top of the *aṇḍa*"[384]. The commentaries interpret *aṇḍa* as the scrotum, and 'Kumbhaṇḍa' as 'pot-size testicles'.

Marasinghe (1974, 232-238) shows that the earliest non-Buddhist records of Kumbhaṇḍas are in the Purāṇas, so that they are not of Vedic origin. He also doubts the traditional interpretation of them having a pot-sized scrotum. We follow the reasoning of Agrawala (1987, 186) who analyzes sculptures at the Sanchi temple and identifies Kumbhaṇḍas as having a pot-shaped *belly*. It remains peculiar, however, why they don't appear in the suttas more frequently.

[384] *Idhāhaṃ, āvuso, gijjhakūṭā pabbatā orohanto addasaṃ kumbhaṇḍaṃ purisaṃ vehāsaṃ gacchantaṃ. So gacchantopi teva aṇḍe khandhe āropetvā gacchati.*

7.2 Gandhabbas

Gandhabba (Skt Gandharva) is an ancient category of supernatural beings which apparently has been known throughout north India. Their origin, however, is not certain. Sterken (2016, 100-105) discusses several possibilities for their origin without coming to a definite conclusion. One of them is that they could have been originally a non-Aryan tribe. Wijesekera (1994, 176-177) opts for an Indo-Iranian origin and that the Sanskrit Gandharva is identical with the Avesta *Gandarewa*, a dragon-like sea-monster.

The earliest Ṛgvedic conception is probably that there was *one* Gandharva, and only with time the notion of Gandharvas as a group of beings has developed (Sterken 2016, 75-78; also Kuiper 1996, 249). A few sources also indicate that the Gandharvas were originally an "autonomous group besides the devas" (ibid., 79-82). Gandharvas are for example associated with the important Vedic mytheme of the theft of soma (ibid., 74-75; 96-100).

As we shall see, a part of this rich Vedic mythology is still present in the suttas, enough to confirm that the early Buddhist tradition included Gandhabbas independently before they were eventually pressed into a strict hierarchical system below the Four Great Kings. We get a good sense of their original relevance from lists in which they appear along with other supernatural beings. MN 98, Snp 3.9, and Dhp 26 list devas, Gandhabbas, and humans. DN 15 features a list with devas, Gandhabbas, Yakkhas, and humans. DN 21 and DN 30 list devas, humans, asuras, Nāgas, and Gandhabbas. Another list in DN 30 features devas, humans, asuras, Sakka, *rakkhasa* demons (Skt *rākṣasa*), and Gandhabbas, which is similar to DN 20 with Gandhabbas, asuras, Yakkhas, and *rakkhasa* demons. Finally, a list in Dhp 8 includes devas, Gandhabbas, Māra, and Brahmā. In short, many different lists include the Gandhabbas as a separate category, often next to humans and devas. These lists are particularly important because they are inconspicuous, with the sole purpose to convey to the audience that the most important categories of beings have been considered. From this we conclude that for the audience Gandhabbas were a very relevant category of beings and not at all subjugated to the Four Great Kings, and maybe even not to devas in general. Also in Vedic literature lists which include Gandharvas have a long tradition, going back to the Atharvaveda. Some of those include devas, the Forefathers, Gandharvas and

Apsarases (AVŚ 10.9.9, AVŚ 11.7.27), others also add the Sarpa snakes (AVŚ 8.8.15, AVŚ 11.9.24, AB 3.31.7).

When we go into the details of how Gandhabbas are portrayed in the suttas we get very different images: On the one hand, AN 8.19-20 state that they live in the ocean (*mahāsamudda*, Skt *mahāsamudra*) along with asuras and the Nāgas. This is more in line with Wijesekera's view of the Gandharva as an ancient being of the water abyss, e.g. as in AVŚ 2.2.3-5 where the (singular) Gandharva can be found in the sea, together with his wives, the Apsarases. The Gandharva is associated with water also in ṚV 9.86.36 and ṚV 10.10.4. Another Vedic tradition depicts Gandharvas as birds (so in ṚV 9.85.11-12, ṚV 10.136.6, ṚV 10.177.2). Related is the association with the wind element (BU 3.3.2), and also in BU 6.6.1 the region of the Gandharvas is the sky (see also Sterken 2016, 82-87; Wijesekera 1994, 182-183). We find the concept of a bird-Gandharva echoed in AN 4.36 where the Buddha denies to be a "Gandhabba that travels through the sky" (*gandhabba vihaṅgama*).

SN 31.2 calls the Gandhabbas 'devas', and describes them as having a radiating complexion (*vaṇṇavanta*), and as abundantly happy (*sukhabahula*). Similarly, in AN 4.36 the Buddha's graceful appearance makes the Brahmin Doṇa ask him if he is a Gandhabba. Possibly related to the handsome appearance is the notion of a pleasant scent that is alluded to in SN 31.1 and AVŚ 8.10.27. In the Atharvaveda the looks of Gandharvas is more seductive than just handsome – e.g. in AVŚ 4.37.11 a Gandharva puts on a lovely appearance and pursues a woman. In contrast, there are also Vedic sources that see Gandharvas as demonic (see for sources Sterken, 2016, 77).

So far we have found in the suttas that Gandhabbas were sometimes seen as water creatures and sometimes as bird-like, possibly a third perspective sees them as attractive devas. All three conceptualizations can be found in pre-Buddhist Vedic texts as well, and possibly all three belong to a single original conceptualization that is not accessible to us any more.

Interestingly, the suttas also describe a path to a rebirth as a Gandhabba, which implies the important pre-Buddhist status they had. SN 31.2 describes that a rebirth as a Gandhabba requires good conduct (*sucarita*). Similarly, DN 18 and DN 19 claim that good conduct will lead at least

to a rebirth as a Gandhabba (if not to a rebirth as a higher deva). A Vedic path to becoming a Gandharva (as in ŚB 11.5.1.16-17) is based on a specific ritual fire.

A mysterious sutta reference to Gandhabbas and fertility can be found in MN 38 (similarly in MN 93): "when there is the union of the mother and father, and the mother is in season, and the *gandhabba* is present, through the union of these three things the descent of the embryo takes place"[385]. Anālayo (2008) discusses the role Gandhabbas seem to play in the act of conception, and he agrees with the commentaries that *gandhabba* here refers to the spirit of the embryo that is about to be conceived in the sexual act. Oberlies (2005, 106-108), in contrast, concludes that Gandharvas generally served as catalysts for transitions, were specifically linked to lust and sexuality, and thus facilitated the conception of children. Wijesekera (1994, 182) points to yet another Vedic notion, namely that Gandharvas were responsible for the sudden infant death syndrome (AVŚ 8.6.18-23).

Our own conclusion is more in line with Oberlies, namely that Gandharvas were related to sexual desire and within this framework also facilitated conception and birth. For example AVŚ 14.2.9 asks Apsarases and Gandharvas to protect the fertile bride. Also ṚV 9.86.36 and ṚV 10.177.2 mention with a positive connotation Gandharvas and child-birth. These passages are very well in line with the sutta claim that a Gandhabba is necessarily present at child-birth. Additionally, the heightened sexual desire of Gandharvas is well known in Vedic literature – as it is said in ŚB 3.2.4.3: "The Gandharvas are fond of women"[386]. In AVŚ 4.37.11 a Gandharva puts on a lovely appearance to pursue a woman, and in AB 5.29.4 a maiden is kidnapped by a Gandharva. Furthermore, ŚB 9.5.1.2 features sexually jealous Gandharvas (see also ŚB 3.9.3.20 and AB 1.27.1; for more details see Sterken 2016, 89-90, and Wijesekera 1994, 189).

A sutta narrative confirms the sexual character of Gandhabbas: In DN 21 Gandhabba Pañcasikha[387] plays the ancient Indian *vīṇā* lute and sings to the Buddha a song (*gāthā*) which

[385] *Yato ca kho, bhikkhave, mātāpitaro ca sannipatitā honti, mātā ca utunī hoti, gandhabbo ca paccupaṭṭhito hoti – evaṃ tiṇṇaṃ sannipātā gabbhassāvakkanti hoti.*
[386] *yoṣitkāmā vai gandharvā*
[387] Pañcasikha (Skt Pañcaśikha) appears also in SN 35.119 and DN20 and is called a *gandhabbadevaputta*, i.e. 'son of a Gandhabba Deva'.

combines the sexual longing for his beloved Suriyavaccasā (Skt Sūryavarcasinī) and his admiration for the Buddha. He then successfully introduces Sakka to the Buddha and gets as a reward his father's office as a *gandhabbarājā*, a Gandhabba King, and his beloved Suriyavaccasā as a partner. Suriyavaccasā's father is identified as *gandhabbarañña* (the Gandhabba ruler) Timbaru (Skt Tumburu). DN 21 thus relates a very specific mythology of several named Gandhabbas[388] – albeit a late one: The mythology involving Pañcaśikha, Tumburu, and Sūryavarcasinī belongs to the Mbh (Norelius 2015, 11, n. 57) – which points to a late composition of this part of DN 21. Yet, as shown, Gandharvas are associated with sexuality at least from the time of the Atharvaveda on and even more explicitly in some Gṛhyasūtras (Allen & Woodard 2013, 21-23). The lustful sexual nature of Gandhabbas must have been appreciated by both author and audience of DN 21, for the Buddha *praises* Pañcasikha for his salacious song rather than rebuking him for connecting his praise of the Buddha with sexual lust.

One recurring aspect in Vedic literature which is absent from the suttas is the consistent connection of Gandharvas and Apsarases[389]. Gandharva is the husband of Apsarases (AVŚ 4.37.7, AVŚ 4.37.12) and both are mentioned together in numerous hymns (AVŚ 4.37.2, AVŚ 8.5.13, AVŚ 11.6.4, AVŚ 12.1.23, AVŚ 19.36.6, AVŚ 19.54.4, KB 2.2, ŚB 9.4.1.2-3; see for more references Sterken 2016, 87-88). The Apsarases are also associated with sexuality (already in ṚV 10.123.5, ṚV 10.95, also ŚB 11.5.1; see for details Covill 2005, 132). Their Pāli counterparts, the Accharās, continue to symbolize sensuality and lust, but are never mentioned in connection with Gandhabbas. Four suttas (SN 1.11, SN 55.1, MN 37, MN 75) describe them as an ornament of the Grove of Delight (*nandana vana*) to which the Gods of Thirty-three have access. Lastly, SN 1.46, MN 50 and MN 82 imply that spiritual seekers were striving for a heavenly rebirth in order to enjoy the Accharās – a notion that belongs to the epic-purāṇic tradition (Covill, 2005, 132).

Summing up our findings about the Gandhabbas, we can see that the sutta material is quite diverse, partly going back to myths of the Saṃhitās and Brāhmaṇas, in other parts revealing a

[388] More Gandhabbas are known to the suttas by name, among them Cittasena who is mentioned in DN 20 and DN 32 without further details. Also Skt Citrasena belongs to the epic time period (Allen & Woodard 2013, 25-27).
[389] We don't detail the associations of Gandharva with soma and the sun. See for these details Barnett (1928, 705-706), Sterken (2016, 74-75), and Wijesekera (1994, 182-184).

late composition based on mythology of the Sanskrit epics. The oldest sutta material including Gandhabbas seems to be found in the lists of Snp 3.9, Dhp 8, and Dhp 26 which feature them as an independent category next to the devas. The suttas which depict Gandhabbas as having a lustful sexual character also refer back to pre-Buddhist mythology. Specific names, however, their status as musicians, and the 'decorative' depiction of Accharās (Apsarases) as a heavenly reward for spiritual practice, belong to later suttas, which utilize material wich belongs to the later Sanskrit epics. As described above, in late suttas Gandhabbas lost their independent powerful status and were demoted to a position below the Four Great Kings.

7.3 Nāgas

Nāgas are a little understood class of supernatural beings. The Sanskrit epics see them as snakes or serpents, and Rawlinson (1986, 135) suggests the same for Buddhist literature: "*Nāga* is often translated 'snake, serpent' (even 'dragon') and indeed this clearly is its primary meaning." But all examples he brings are from the Vinaya (e.g. Vin 3.145-147, Vin 4.108) and the Jātakas, i.e. not from the early four sutta nikāyas. Indeed, in our own research we could find only a single sutta (DN 20) where *nāga* explicitly signifies a snake-like being. Rawlinson adds, however, that *nāga* can also mean certain trees and creepers, elephant, a certain race of people, and a kind of deva (ibid., 136). Marasinghe (1974, 54) argues anachronistically that *nāga* in Pāli and Sanskrit *generally* means 'cobra', but also 'elephant'. He then focuses on the Nāga people of northern India who are mentioned in DN 16 (ibid., 72-74), and concludes, only based on this one reference, that the Nāga tribe was important for the *nāga* image in the suttas.

Curiously, *nāga* is exceedingly rare in pre-Buddhist literature, and in fact we suggest that the term is originally non-Vedic and comes from the Buddha's region. The only instances we could find are from the ŚB and the BU, which both have eastern influences, being also chronologically close to the Buddha.

In ŚB 11.2.7.12 we find the passage: "To him who will thus know that glory of the fore-offerings, people will in days to come be flocking from all sides as if wishing to see some great *nāga*"[390]. Eggeling translates *nāga* here as 'serpent', but the context itself only implies that a great Nāga was perceived as a miraculous and attractive sight. On the other hand, ŚB 7.4.1.25-30 containts a rare description of serpent-worship, yet *without* using the term *nāga*. Instead, we have the unambiguous term *sarpa* for snake[391]. We find a second passage with *nāga* in the BU, which says: "Or maybe it is called Sāman because it is equal in size (*sama*) to a gnat or a mosquito, on the one hand, and to a *nāga*, to these three worlds, or even to the entire universe, on the other"[392] (BU 1.3.22). Olivelle translates *nāga* as 'elephant' – without support from the context. Nonetheless, *nāga* is here a juxtaposition to tiny animals like gnats and mosquitos, which rightly suggests a giant animal as a counterpart. A snake makes no sense in this context, and Olivelle's interpretation as 'elephant' is thus sensible.

There is further justification for Nāga-as-elephant in mundane post-Buddha literature. AŚ 2.2.6-10 deals with creating infrastructure for elephants and uses the term *nāgavana*, i.e. 'Nāga-forest', whereas the actual elephants are called *hasti* (also in AŚ 13.2.39). This could refer to a mythological elephant-being, just as today we might call a lizard-garden a 'dragon park'. We understand Pāṇini's Aṣṭādhyāyī 2.1.62 similarly, where we find the passage: "the magnificient *nāga* elephant (*nāga-kuñjara*) ought to be praised"[393], which we interpret as a bull-elephant who surpasses ordinary elephants and is an object of *pūja* worship.

But there are also passages in the Arthaśāstra which suggest a snake-being: AŚ 4.3.38 mentions *nāga-pūja* in connection with snakes (*sarpa*), and also in AŚ 5.2.43 Nāga rather refers to a snake. Still, the AŚ features even a third significant aspect of Nāga, namely as a water being connected with Varuṇa. In AŚ 13.1.3 and AŚ 13.2.16 we find deceivers disguised as a Nāga or Varuṇa emerging from water, which must mean that this supernatural Nāga was believed to live under water (similarly in AŚ 13.1.6). In AŚ 13.2.23 these same false agents assume "the form of

[390] *kaṃ svidevāparīṣu mahānāgamivābhisaṃsāraṃ didṛkṣitāro ya evametatprayājānāṃ yaśo vediteti*
[391] This changed later, and within Buddhism Nāga-as-snake worship was performed (Deeg, 2008).
[392] *yad v eva samaḥ pluṣiṇā samo maśakena samo nāgena sama ebhis tribhir lokaiḥ samo 'nena sarveṇa tasmād v eva sāma*
[393] *vṛndāraka-nāga-kuñjaraiḥ pūjyamānam*

Nāgas, their bodies anointed with glowing oil"[394], which tells us that Nāgas-as-water-deities were imagined to have shimmering glowing bodies. Similarly, AŚ 5.2.42 mentions a (fake) underwater Nāga with several heads. A connection of Nāgas with Varuṇa can also be found in the Rāmayana (Hopkins, 1915, 119-120).

The different *nāga* images so far are difficult to reconcile. To this point at least, 'snake' is *not* the dominant meaning, and we have to consider 'mighty elephant' and 'water demon' just as well. In the suttas the meaning is clearer. In about two-third of the cases[395] the meaning is elephant, e.g. in SN 22.78 and AN 4.33: "Even those royal bull elephants (*raññа nāga*), bound by strong thongs in the villages, towns, and capital cities, burst and break their bonds asunder; frightened, they urinate and defecate and flee here and there"[396]. Similar examples occur in all nikāyas, which gives us confidence to interpret Nāga as originally meaning 'mighty elephant'.

The next best understanding is *nāga* as a generally mighty being, occurring in praises of the Buddha or one of his disciples, e.g.: "O Blessed One, your name is 'Nāga,' The best seer of the seers"[397] (SN 8.8). Passages which place the Nāgas as demigods below the Four Great Kings are equally not revealing. About twenty suttas fall into this category[398]. Among them are also the suttas of the Nāgasaṃyutta SN 29 which unfortunately consist only of formulaic passages which don't reveal anything particular about Nāgas. In SN 29 they must be, however, mythological beings because the following saṃyuttas apply the same formulas to the mythological *supaṇṇa* birds and the Gandhabbas.

Lastly, we have a small minority of suttas which refer to a mighty sea-creature and which therefore connect to the mythology mentioned in the AŚ and the Sanskrit epics. SN 6.4 says: "When a ship was seized on the river Ganges | By a fierce *nāga* longing for human flesh, | You

[394] *maṅgalye vā hrade taṭāka madhye vā rātrau tejana taila abhyaktā nāga rūpiṇaḥ*
[395] The suttas we consider as referring to *nāga* as 'elephant' are SN 1.38, SN 6.3, SN 16.10-11, SN 20.9, SN 22.78, SN 22.96, SN 55.6, AN 4.33, AN 4.36, AN 4.114, AN 5.138, AN 6.43, AN 9.40, AN 10.99, MN 27, MN 50, MN 61, MN 66, MN 88, MN 125, MN 128, DN 2, DN 16, DN 17, DN 21, Dhp 23, Snp 1.2, Snp 1.3, Snp 1.9, Snp 3.1.
[396] *Yepi te, bhikkhave, raññо nāgā gāmanigamarājadhānīsu, daḷhehi varattehi baddhā, tepi tāni bandhanāni sañchinditvā sampadāletvā bhītā muttakarīsaṃ cajamānā, yena vā tena vā palāyanti.*
[397] *Nāganāmosi bhagavā, isīnaṃ isisattamo*
[398] SN 1.30, SN 8.8, SN 21.3, SN 22.76, SN 29, SN 30.2, AN 7.67, AN 8.85, MN 23, MN 56, MN 92 (also Snp 3.7), DN 20, DN 30, DN 32, Snp 3.6, Snp 4.9, Snp 5.4, Snp 5.12.

freed it forcefully by a valiant act"[399]. SN 45.151 (repeated in SN 46.1) claims that Nāgas originate in the Himalayas and end up in the ocean. Similarly AN 8.19-20 declare that the living-place of several mythological beings, among them Nāgas, is the ocean. Because of the similarities only with post-Buddha non-Vedic literature we consider this content to belong to the latest stratum.

Finally, only in DN 20 do we find that Nāga clearly refers to a snake-being. Here, the mythological *supaṇṇa* birds hunt Nāgas: "And the twice-born, winged and clear of sight, | Fierce *garuḍa* birds (the *nāga*s' foes) have come | Flying here — Citra and Supaṇṇā. | But here the *nāga* kings are safe: the Lord | Has imposed a truce. With gentle speech | They and the *nāga*s share the Buddha's peace" (DN 20)[400]. This rivalry between birds of prey and snakes (suggested as well by SN 30.2) is also attested in epic literature (see Faller 2018, 49-52). In the case of DN 20 a mighty elephant is, therefore, ruled out and we have to assume that Nāga here is a mythological snake. Also the "*nāga* chief" Erāvaṇa (*erāvaṇa mahānāga*) who appears in DN 20 is (as shown in section 5.2.2) probably a reference to a snake being.

In the end we have to admit that the identity of the Nāgas remains unresolved. It is clear that they were not just regular natural elephants or snakes. At the same time there must have been an understanding of how they looked like – otherwise the deceivers in the Arthaśāstra couldn't have faked their appearance. Perhaps the snake-being and the water-demon are compatible, as a dragon-like reptile which can inhabit both land and sea. From the available texts we carefully conclude that the meaning as elephant-being belongs to an earlier period and the meanings as water-demon and snake fit a later time better.

Even though we could not come to a satisfying conclusion about the Nāgas our discussion made at least clear that Nāgas as subordinates to the Four Great King belong to a very late stratum of texts, when Buddhist authors forced groups of mythological beings and devas into an artificial hierarchy of supernatural beings.

[399] *Gaṅgāya sotasmiṃ gahītanāvaṃ, | Luddena nāgena manussakamyā; | Pamocayittha balasā pasayha*
[400] *Ye nāgarāje sahasā haranti, dibbā dijā pakkhi visuddhacakkhū; | Vehāyasā te vanamajjhapattā, citrā supaṇṇā iti tesa nāmaṃ. | Abhayaṃ tadā nāgarājānamāsi, supaṇṇato khemamakāsi buddho; | Saṇhāhi vācāhi upavhayantā, nāgā supaṇṇā saraṇamakaṃsu buddhaṃ.*

So far the ‘demigods’ discussed were the Kumbhaṇḍas which probably belonged to East India, and the Gandhabbas which have a rich and ancient Vedic history. The Nāgas belong to a complex East Indian mythology but became popular enough to find representation in later Sanskrit literature as well. Putting these very different mythological beings on one level and subordinating them to the Four Great Kings is, therefore, a clear attempt to bring order into a vast and diverse mythological landscape.

7.4 Yakkhas

The development in meaning of the Vedic *yakṣa* (Pāli *yakkha*) is one of the most complex among the supernatural beings in ancient India, with mysterious references going back to the earliest Vedic texts, denoting highly abstract ideas, down to demonic figures in the latest layers of Vedic literature. Wijesekera (1994, 131-141) has investigated mostly the philosophical aspect of Vedic Yakṣa. In his view the earliest meaning of the term in the Ṛgveda is rather vague and could be best rendered as ‘a mysterious thing’ or ‘related to magic’ (ibid., 132). Sutherland (1992, 70) confirms this interpretation by reviewing different translators, and adds that the earliest occurrences can be read as nouns and adjectives alike.

A deification takes place in the Atharvaveda where Yakṣa can mean ‘divine essence’, the impersonal absolute (*brahman*), or the creator-gods Brahmā and Prajāpati[401] (ibid., 71). In the Brāhmaṇas, where the term occurs occasionally, it still essentially represents a mysterious force: “Let us honor with an oblation the firstborn god, Asceticism, that is the highest self-existing Brahman. He is the father, he is the son, he is the mother. Asceticism indeed became the first divine Yakṣa”[402] (TB 3.12.3.1). Closer in time and location to the Buddha are ŚB and BU, and both are in line with the previous use of the term: “These, indeed, are the two great Yakṣas of the Brahman [i.e. Name and Form]”[403] (ŚB 11.2.3.5). And BU 5.4.1 states: “Brahman is the real – a

[401] E.g. in AVŚ 8.9.8, AVŚ 8.9.25-26, AVŚ 10.2.32 (see also Jurewicz 2016, 278-281), AVŚ 10.8.15.
[402] *prathamajaṃ devaṁ haviṣā vidhema, svayaṃbhu brahma paramaṃ tapo yat, sa eva putraḥ sa pitā sa mātā, tapo ha yakṣaṃ prathamaṁ saṃbabhūva.*
[403] *te haite brahmaṇo mahatī yakṣe*

man who knows this immense and firstborn Yakṣa in this manner conquers these worlds"[404]. We see a significant shift in meaning first in the Gṛhyasūtras where Yakṣas are mentioned in connection with other demigods like Gandharvas and rakṣases (ŚāGS 4.9.3, ĀśGS 3.4.1). This association with demonic figures continues in the Sanskrit epics (Coomaraswamy 1928, 5-6). The shift from the earlier elusive concept to a concrete demonic figure brought DeCaroli (2004, 9) to conclude that the term *yakṣa* signifies two different ideas, a philosophical Vedic concept, and a demonic figure of non-Vedic mythology which merely appropriated the earlier term.

Early Buddhism with its application of Yakkhas as demonic demigods represents, at least partly, the later use of the concept. Yet, we have to investigate if early Buddhist suttas contain traces of the older Vedic Yakṣa as well. The Yakkhas have their own Saṃyutta in SN 10, which features the demonic-demigod aspect. As translator Bodhi remarks: "What unites them [the suttas of the Yakkhasaṃyutta] is not so much the content of the verses but their propagational function in showing the Buddha as the invincible sage who, by his skilful means, can tame and transform even the most violent and fearsome ogres" (Bodhi 2000, 86). This functional aspect of SN 10 (also in Snp 1.9) makes us suspect that we deal with later material. Fittingly, the Yakkhas of SN 10 appear mostly in prose narratives (which are typically later) and not in the sutta verses[405].

The demonic aspect of Yakkhas is very clear in several suttas, e.g. when they threaten to split the head of the Buddha if he lies (SN 10.3, SN 11.3, Snp 2.5), or they threaten other beings (SN 10.12, identical to Snp 1.10, MN 35, DN 3). In DN 23 a group of people was devoured by a 'nonhuman Yakkha' (*yakkha amanussa*). The Yakkhas of Madhurā are vicious (AN 5.220), or they release vicious beasts on humans (AN 3.56). In SN 10.5 and DN 32 a Yakkha possesses a human; in SN 11.22 another Yakkha provokes Sakka; and the series of suttas in SN 19.1-21 contains grotesque Yakkhas who display their demonic features visually.

A few DN suttas represent the late understanding that Yakkhas are positioned below the Great King Vessavena: In DN 16 and DN 17 Vessavena's capital Āḷakamandā is full of Yakkhas. And in DN 18 a powerful Yakkha states that he is a companion of Vessavena. DN 20 calls Kuvera (an

[404] *satyam eva | sa yo haitaṃ mahad yakṣaṃ prathamajaṃ veda satyaṃ brahmeti jayatīmāṃl lokān*
[405] Exceptionally they appear also in verses in SN 10.3 (identical with Snp 2.5), and SN 10.5.

epithet of Vessavena) 'Lord of Yakkhas' (*yakkhānaṃ adhipati*). DN 32 is entirely dedicated to demonic Yakkhas and how the Great King Vessavena teaches the Buddha a protective poem to be recited against malevolent Yakkhas. Here, Vessavena confirms their demonic nature and states that most Yakkhas don't want to refrain from bad conduct (including killing and stealing) and hence don't want to follow the Buddha.

Interestingly, there are also suttas in which *yakkha* means 'powerful supernatural being', similar to the early Vedic meaning. For example, the Buddha is indirectly called *yakkha* in SN 1.43, SN 2.23, SN 11.19, and explicitly in MN 56 where the Buddha is "most worthy of gifts, most mighty of Yakkhas, | most perfect of persons, beyond estimation"[406]. Devas are called 'Yakkha' in SN 1.20, SN 2.18, SN 9.14, and Sakka is called likewise in MN 37 and DN 21. There are even a few suttas which call Māra, the evil nemesis of the Buddha, a Yakkha (SN 4.23, MN 50, and Snp 3.2). These instances seem to echo the pre-Buddhist Vedic Yakṣa, just in a less abstract form. And we even have two instances in which Yakkha clearly represents the old Vedic concept of a supreme being. In Snp 3.4 it is said: "[who] has attained enlightenment – unsurpassed, auspicious – | to this extent there is purity of the *yakkha*"[407]. Similarly, Snp 4.11 speaks of *yakkhassa suddhi*, which can be rendered as 'purity of the highest mind'.

In conclusion, the Yakkha occurrences in the suttas can be put in three categories: 1. Yakkha is *inside* of a being, in the sense of a highest mind that needs purification (in Snp). 2. Yakkha is not inside of a being but is an attribute of the *entire* being, e.g. as a *superior being* (mostly SN). 3. Yakkhas as demonic demigods, which can be tamed and converted to Buddhism (mostly AN and DN). Of these three categories, the first two are rare, closer to the Vedic usage, and located in the rather older SN and Snp. Suttas of the third category are more frequent and can be found in the SN (e.g. SN 10).

We cautiously conclude that the original use of *yakkha* in the suttas was more or less in line with the Vedic concept of *yakṣa*, in that it signified supernatural power, albeit in a personified form. A

[406] *Āhuneyyassa yakkhassa, uttamapuggalassa atulassa*
[407] *patto ca sambodhimanuttaraṃ sivaṃ; Ettāvatā yakkhassa suddhi*. The commentary explains *yakkha* as *purissa*, i.e. as 'person' or 'being'.

later development would then have incorporated elements of local mythology, in which Yakkhas are powerful demonic beings. In the latest stage of sutta composition these demonic Yakkhas would have been integrated into the unified hierarchical model, as demonic demigods below the Four Great Kings, and specifically under Vessavena/Kubera. This complex example of the Yakkhas demonstrates how material from different sources and times have been integrated into the Buddhist suttas.

7.5 Other Supernatural Beings

Before we discuss the remaining two major deities of early Buddhism, Māra and Brahmā, we will shortly mention less important classes of supernatural beings which are mentioned in the suttas[408]. Even though of overall little significance also these minor examples show that early Buddhism incorporated supernatural beings from Vedic and non-Vedic sources alike.

Supaṇṇa (Skt *suparṇa*) has a prominent Vedic background, being mentioned dozens of times in Ṛgveda and Atharvaveda[409], Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa and Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa[410]. Norelius (2016b, 3-4) summarizes the *suparṇa* as a mythological bird, in many instances a bird of prey, and in some cases as a fruit-eater. It also signifies the sun and the moon (ibid., 6). Suparṇas are so prominent in Vedic mythology that we are puzzled not to find them more often in Buddhist literature as well. This only makes sense if Supaṇṇas were irrelevant in the local East Indian culture. This would mean that some mythological Vedic characters were actively passed on and disseminated in early Buddhism, and others became marginal. We also have to keep in mind that it must have been important for early Buddhist authors to include local mythology. They chose, for example, the surely local Kumbhaṇdas as a category of demigods instead of the Supaṇṇas. To

[408] DN 20 and DN 32 mention many more classes and names of supernatural beings, but since they appear only in these two suttas and maybe very few additional places it goes beyond the scope of this work to detail them.
[409] E.g. ṚV 9.85.11, ṚV 10.123.6, ṚV 10.30.2, AVŚ 1.24.1, AVŚ 2.27.2, AVŚ 2.30.3, AVŚ 4.6.3, AVŚ 4.20.3, AVŚ 5.4.2, AVŚ 5.14.1.
[410] JB 1.156.11, JB 1.168.5, JB 2.440.4, JB 3.18.3, JB 3.84.14, JB 3.147.13, JB 3.197.4, ŚB 3.2.4.1, ŚB 3.6.2.2-7, ŚB 6.1.2.36, ŚB 6.7.2.6-8, ŚB 7.4.2.5, ŚB 8.1.4.8, ŚB 9.2.3.18, ŚB 9.4.1.11, ŚB 9.4.4.3, ŚB 10.2.2.4, ŚB 12.3.4.4, BU 3.3.2, BU 4.3.19.

be sure, Supaṇṇas have their own Saṃyutta in SN 30 but the generic content makes the collection seem like an afterthought – as if they were reacting to the question of later generations what the Buddha taught about Supaṇṇas and then added this generic content. The only interesting information is that "Supaṇṇas carry off Nāgas" (SN 30.2). This is consistent with their only other relevant occurrence in the suttas, in DN 20, where their rivalry with the Nāgas is mentioned. And as we described above, if 'Nāgas-as-snakes' belongs to a late sutta period (in contrast to the early meaning as 'elephant') then also Supaṇṇas as enemies of Nāgas-as-snakes would be rather late.

A different class of supernatural beings is featured in SN 32 Valāhakasaṃyutta. *Valāhaka* (Skt *balāhaka*) is literally a cloud and in mythological contexts signifies cloud devas (*valāhaka deva*). These nature deities appear in SN 32 and about a dozen other suttas across the nikāyas[411] without leaving a mark on early Buddhist mythology. The Valāhakas are first known from Buddhist literature, appear later in the Sanskrit epics, and are probably of non-Vedic origin.

Another nature deity is the Moon God (*candimā devaputta*) who is presented as a follower of the Buddha. In Vedic mythology the moon is eclipsed by the demonic Rāhu (AVŚ 19.9.10, CU 8.13.1; see for the Purāṇas and epics Bailey 2012, 6-42). SN 2.9 appropriates this myth – here the Buddha forces Rāhu to release the Moon God again. The same story is repeated in SN 2.10, only replacing the Moon God with the Sun God *sūriya devaputta*. The Moon God makes minor appearances also in SN 2.11, AN 4.15, AN 4.50, AN 5.197, MN 134, DN 20, and Snp 3.4-5.

A final class of beings we want to mention are the Pisācas (Skt *piśāca*), demonic goblins first known from the Atharvaveda and ṚV 1.133.5. They are always presented as enemies of humans (explicitly in JB 1.154.17-20), according to AVŚ 4.20.9 they can fly, and from AVŚ 5.29.5-10 we learn that they were thought to eat human flesh. Interestingly, they don't appear in the ŚB, so the suttas in which they appear were probably influenced by the older AVŚ or JB (SN 1.46, SN 10.6, AN 5.55, MN 66, DN 2, DN 3). SN 10.6 suggests that they belong to a ghost realm, and DN 3 describes them as black in color.

[411] SN 2.29, SN 22.96, SN 22.102, SN 32, SN 45.147, AN 3.94, AN 5.197, AN 10.15, MN 46, MN 79-80, MN 129, DN 17, DN 20.

Chapter Eight: Māra

Māra is the classic adversary of the Buddha, at times a force of spiritual obstacles and at times an anthropomorphic supernatural being. We encounter Māra at important junctions of the Buddha's biography – in his attempts to dispirit the Buddha just before his liberation (MN 26), at the end of his life when he demands the Buddha's body (DN 16), and in several other narratives.

Scholars trace the word '*māra*' back to the root *mṛ* with meanings like 'killing', destroying', 'death', and 'slaying'[412]. Nichols (2019, 3) understands 'Māra' as a causative, hence as the 'killer'. We find this position first in Windisch (1895, 186), namely that Māra is the agent noun to the causative *mārayati*. Hence, Māra would etymologically designate the deity which kills.

The occurrences of the term *māra* in Vedic literature confirm Windisch's understanding as a causative (ibid., 187), e.g. in AVŚ 4.17.6-7: "Death caused by famine, caused by thirst"[413] (lit. 'famine-*māra*' and 'thirst-*māra*'). In AVŚ 8.6.18 we find: "If one should touch thy coming babe or kill [*mārayāti*] thine infant newly born"[414]. And similarly AVŚ 13.3.3: "He who takes life away [*mārayati*], he who bestows it"[415]. We find in Brāhmaṇas similar examples with *māra* as 'killing'[416].

But there is no trace in Vedic literature of a deification of *māra*. There is, however, a passage which might have contributed to a personification later on, where Yama, the god of death, is associated with *māra* in AVŚ 6.93.1: "Yama, Death, evil and deadly (*aghamāra*), the Destroyer…"[417]. Death personified in Vedic literature is certainly Yama (see section 6.3.3), and we will discuss below if the Buddhist Māra is simply an emulated Vedic Yama (similar to the Buddhist Sakka representing the Vedic Indra), or if the two figures are more independent from each other.

[412] E.g. O'Flaherty (1988, 213), Wayman (1959, 113), Karetzky (1982, 77).
[413] *kṣudhāmāraṃ tṛṣṇāmāram*
[414] *yas te garbhaṃ pratimṛśāj jātaṃ vā mārayāti te*
[415] *yo mārayati prāṇayati*
[416] In JB 1.254-255, JB 2.442, ŚB 2.3.3.8, ŚB 3.8.1.15, ŚB 11.8.4.2, ŚB 11.8.4.
[417] *yamo mṛtyur aghamāro nirṛtho*

While the etymological meaning of *māra* is a causative, i.e. 'killing', the Buddhist suttas feature only one instance that describes Māra as an actual 'killer': "When there is form, Rādha, there might be Māra, or the killer, or the one who is killed. Therefore, Rādha, see form as Māra, see it as the killer, see it as the one who is killed"[418] (SN 23.1).

In most cases, however, Māra is a blinding force which tries to deter monastics from liberation and is thus a personification of spiritual obstacles[419]. We find this best expressed in MN 106: "Bhikkhus, sensual pleasures are impermanent, hollow, false, deceptive; they are illusory, the prattle of fools. [… They] are Māra's realm, Māra's domain, Māra's bait, Māra's hunting ground. On account of them, these evil unwholesome mental states such as covetousness, ill will, and presumption arise, and they constitute an obstruction to a noble disciple in training here."[420]

As an anthropomorphic character who thinks and acts Māra is somewhat similar to the Judeo-Christian Satan (Hebrew *sâtan*, lit. 'adversary')[421]. Such a sole single adversary doesn't exist in Vedic texts, there are different characters which fulfill this role, Vṛtra, Namuci, and other asuras. An obvious conclusion would be that Māra was a shared character among *śramaṇa*s in Kosala-Magadha. Curiously, Jain texts feature neither Māra nor any other main mythological adversary[422]. Māra in its specific function is therefore most probably an exclusively Buddhist innovation.

There is further circumstantial evidence that Māra has no long history prior to Buddhism: If Māra was based on a historically developed Māra-mytheme then we would find in the suttas allusions to these old foundational stories – comparable to the mytheme of Indra and Vṛtra in the

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[418] *Rūpe kho, rādha, sati māro vā assa māretā vā yo vā pana mīyati. Tasmātiha tvaṃ, rādha, rūpaṃ māroti passa, māretāti passa, mīyatīti passa*.

[419] The incongruity between Māra as a 'killer' and his actual function as a spiritual obstacle led Giddings (2014, 75-76) to prefer the root *mṛd* over *mṛ*, signifying 'rubbing away' and 'erosion'. This is, however, very improbable since other Pāli terms which derive from the Vedic root *mṛd* without exception lose the 'ṛ', mostly don't develop an 'ā' and often get a 'dd', e.g. *maddana*, *omaddati*, *maddin*, etc. Hence, we wouldn't expect *māra*, but *madda*.

[420] *aniccā, bhikkhave, kāmā tucchā musā mosadhammā. Māyākatame taṃ, bhikkhave, bālalāpanaṃ. […] ubhayametaṃ māradheyyaṃ, mārassesa visayo, mārassesa nivāpo, mārassesa gocaro. Etthete pāpakā akusalā mānasā abhijjhāpi byāpādāpi sārambhāpi saṃvattanti. Teva ariyasāvakassa idhamanusikkhato antarāyāya sambhavanti.*

[421] See for a discussion of Māra and Satan Boyd (1973), and Batchelor (2004, 29-38).

[422] A less influential demon-deity known as Sudanstra, Sudāḍha, or Saṅgama appears only in later Jain literature (see Johnson 1962, 58-62; and Nagrajji 2002, 188-192).

Ṛgveda or the Gandhabbas and Yakkhas in Buddhist texts. Instead, the Māra narratives are simple stories with little assumed prior knowledge of the audience. Hence, the anthropomorphic Māra character probably developed rather late in the suttas.

8.1 Māra and Yama

As noted above, the Vedic personification of death is Yama. This image is already set up in the Atharvaveda where Yama is mentioned consistently and numerous times as 'Ruler of the departed Fathers'[423] and 'King Yama'[424]. Even though there is a personified *Mṛtyu* deity in AVŚ 18.2.27 it is still subordinated to Yama and is called 'Yama's messenger'. Properly speaking, Yama is in the AVŚ the revered god of the deceased. This changes in the Brāhmaṇas where Yama absorbs *mṛtyu* and occasionally represents death as well[425] (see Shende 1952, 109-115).

It is important for our investigation that Yama assimilates *mṛtyu* because a list in KB 20.1 (discussed in Bodewitz 2019, 42-43) features Mṛtyu as a deity above the traditional devas, and below Brahman – similar to our Buddhist formulaic lists. The seven deities in KB 20.1 are: Agni, Vāyu, Indra, Varuṇa, Mṛtyu, Brahman, and Nāka. The first four devas are traditional Ṛgvedic deities, then Mṛtyu and Brahman are placed above them, and the list ends with Nāka (firmament, or vault of heaven). And since it is reasonable in the Vedic context to associate Mṛtyu with Yama we might simplify the list as: devas, Mṛtyu/Yama, Brahman. The same structure can be found in lists of JB 1.333 and JB 3.341-347 (ibid.).

Now we see the relevant influence on the Buddhist lists, since both sutta lists we discussed – the early 'formula' (section 6.2) and the later 'sevenfold list' (section 6.3) – both follow the same structure. To recall, the early 'formula' includes "devas, Māra, and Brahmā", and the later 'sevenfold list' similarly features (2) Tāvatiṃsa Devas, (3) Yāma Devas, and (7) Brahmā.

[423] AVŚ 5.24.14 and AVŚ 11.6.11, AVŚ 18.2.46.
[424] ṚV 10.16.9, AVŚ 1.14.2 and AVŚ 8.10.23, AVŚ 12.2.8, AVŚ 12.3.1-3, AVŚ 12.4.36, AVŚ 15.14.7, AVŚ 18.2.3, AVŚ 18.2.46, AVŚ 18.3.13, AVŚ 18.3.69, AVŚ 18.4.26, AVŚ 18.4.43, and ŚB 12.8.1.19.
[425] E.g. in JB 1.28, ŚB 2.3.2.2. See also Siklos (1994, 173-174). In BU 4.1.11 however the two are named separately.

These structural similarities are not coincidental and we conclude that the early Buddhist 'formula' is based on an older Vedic understanding that Yama dwells in a realm higher than the other devas (see also Jurewicz 2016, 160), surpassed only by Brahman and *brahmaloka*.

Now that we have found good circumstantial evidence that the Buddhist lists with Yama/Māra are *structurally* based on the Vedic deities Yama/Mṛtyu we can investigate which other connections between Vedic Yama and Buddhist Māra can be drawn.

We find one such association in the suttas in Māra's epithet *antaka*, the 'end-maker' (SN 4.3, AN 3.40, MN 50), which is in Dhp 4 also associated with Yama. The quality of *antaka* is known to us from the Atharvaveda where in AVŚ 6.46.2 and AVŚ 16.5.1-8 it is an epithet of Araru, a minister of Yama and embodiment of sleep, otherwise identified as an asura (Bodewitz 2019, 236). In AVŚ 8.10.23 Antaka is the *son* of death (*mṛtyu*). And in AVŚ 8.1.1, ŚB 10.4.3.2-3 and ŚB 10.4.3.11 death itself is called *antaka*. Apparently, the Buddhist Māra became a vessel for diverse characteristics, i.a. Yama, death, sleep, evil (see section 8.3), or the demon Namuci (see section 8.4). These aspects occasionally appear as epithets which seems like an attempt to legitimize Māra by associating him with older Vedic mythology.

Another epithet which is traditionally taken to refer to Māra is *maccurāja* (from Pāli *maccu*, Skt *mṛtyu*), i.e. 'king of death'. Yet, this title mostly appears alone in the suttas without explicit mention of Māra (SN 35.229, SN 55.43 Snp 2.10, Snp 5.15). And even when Māra is in narrative proximity (SN 4.25, Dhp 4, Dhp 13) the association with him is uncertain. Also, no other context confirms that Māra was seen as a 'king' in any way[426]. It makes more sense that *maccurāja* in the suttas refers to Yama, who is actually regarded as a 'king' in Vedic literature (see above).

As discussed in section 6.3.3 Yama is in early Buddhism mostly the afterlife judge who decides if someone moves on to a pleasant or painful realm. Māra is not associated with this function at all. Māra is only similar to the pre-Buddhist Yama in the sense that both represent aspects of *mṛtyu*, death. And as shown above, Māra seems to replace Yama in lists of supernatural beings.

[426] 'King Māra' appears a few times in Chinese parallels, e.g. in MĀ 3, MĀ 32, MĀ 66, and in Chinese parallels to SN 4 and SN 5, but Bingenheimer (2007, 51) expresses several doubts about the old age of this epithet.

8.2 Māra in the Suttas

Māra combines not only elements of Yama but also has demonic characteristics. We find these mostly in the suttas of Mārasṃyutta SN 4 which is entirely dedicated to him and presents a *personified* Māra – a thinking, talking, and acting character. Māra tries in some of these suttas to be frightening e.g. with a scary appearance or a loud noise[427]. Or he tries in disguise to provoke the Buddha by telling him that he is not austere enough, or lazy in his practice[428]. In other suttas Māra simply pretends that the Buddha is not liberated yet[429]. And in a few cases Māra praises the advantages of household life[430], tries to seduce the Buddha to rule the world (SN 4.20), or uses his daughters to try to seduce the Buddha (SN 4.25). Māra also attempts to keep the Buddha from getting alms food (SN 4.16, SN 4.18), or to dissuade him from teaching (SN 4.14). In SN 5 Māra tries specifically to confuse liberated nuns, but here he only talks and doesn't shape-shift or act. There are a few other SN suttas with a personified Māra but they are of little relevance[431].

This 'demonic' Māra character deserves some attention, even though it's mostly limited to SN 4 and SN 5 (other examples are MN 49 where Māra possesses a Brahmā deity, and MN 50 where he enters the belly of the Buddha's master student Moggallāna. SN 51.10, AN 8.70 and DN 16 all contain the same story where Māra confuses the Buddha's attendant Ānanda (see below). Passages like these with a demonic Māra prompted Ling (1962, 45-46) to assume that Māra was originally a Yakkha demon. Another possible blueprint for the demonic aspects of Māra are the Vedic rakṣas (or rakṣases)[432]. For example in ŚB 1.1.4.6, ŚB 1.2.1.8, and ŚB 1.3.4.13 rakṣases regularly try to obstruct the performance of rituals[433], while the Brahmin priest repels them. Anālayo investigates Māra's demonic aspects in Chinese sutta parallels (2011a, 306) and observes: "it seems that the Pāli discourses stand alone in attributing to Māra the ability to take possession of someone and thereby make this person speak or act according to his will". We,

[427] SN 4.2, SN 4.3, SN 4.6, SN 4.11, SN 4.17, SN 4.22.
[428] SN 4.1, SN 4.7, SN 4.13.
[429] SN 4.4-5, SN 4.10, SN 4.12, SN 4.15, SN 4.19.
[430] SN 4.8-9, SN 4.21, SN 4.24.
[431] SN 2.30, SN 22.87, SN 35.240, SN 51.10.
[432] Pāli *rakkhasa*s appear in SN 7.4 as shape-shifters. In SN 35.228-229 as *gāha* sea-monsters (Skt *graha* or *grāha*; only in epics). In DN 30 and Snp 2.7 they are merely powerful beings alongside other demons and devas.
[433] See also e.g. ŚB 1.2.1.6, ŚB 1.2.1.9, ŚB 1.2.2.13, ŚB 1.6.1.11, ŚB 2.4.2.15, ŚB 3.4.3.8, ŚB 3.8.1.6. For the interference of rakṣases in Vedic rituals see Izawa (2007).

therefore, doubt that demonic possession (which is a rare feature of Māra in the Pāli suttas anyway) was an original characteristic of Māra[434]. Most probably, late sutta authors wanted to create fable-like relatable Māra stories and applied to him demonic characteristics they knew from other demon characters.

Other than as the demonic adversary of SN 4 and SN 5 Māra appears in the SN mostly in 'the formula' with devas and Brahmā (see section 6.2). In other suttas Māra appears as bondage[435]. In these cases we find expressions like "the bondage of Māra" (*mārabandhana*)[436], or "the snare of Māra" (*mārapāsa*)[437]. A few suttas explicitly see Māra in a more fundamental function of bondage, namely as the five *khandha*s, the 'aggregates of attachment'[438]. So we see in the SN a large variety of Māra representations: as synonymous to Yama, as a demonic figure, and as bondage.

In the Aṅguttara Nikāya Māra occurs mostly in the by now familiar 'formula' (which includes devas, Māra, and Brahmā). We find seven suttas with Māra as bondage[439]. Five times in the AN Māra is personified[440], but only in two of these cases (AN 8.70, AN 9.39) Māra is actually speaking or thinking. All in all, Māra is of little importance in the AN.

The Majjhima Nikāya features Māra prominently in MN 49 and MN 50. Māra is most frequent (in seventeen suttas) in 'the formula'. He also appears as spiritual bondage (MN 19, MN 34, MN 106, MN 116, MN 119), as a combination of bondage and personified figure in MN 25-26, and as clearly personified in MN 12, MN 49, MN 50, MN 92, and MN 115. Except from MN 49 and MN 50 Māra is, however, of little relevance in most of these MN occurrences.

Māra has lost narrative significance in the DN, appearing in the majority of suttas only in 'the formula', twice as bondage (DN 25, DN 26), and personified only a few times (DN 16, DN 20,

[434] See for a comparison of the Pāli and Chinese Mārasaṃyutta also Bingenheimer (2007).
[435] SN 1.35, SN 1.50, SN 8.8, SN 17.2-3, SN 20.8, SN 21.4-5, SN 21.12, SN 22.63-65, SN 35.114-115, SN 35.136, SN 35.230, SN 35.243, SN 35.248, SN 46.43, SN 47.6-7.
[436] SN 1.35, SN 4.4, SN 35.114-115, SN 35.248, Dhp 3, Dhp 20, Dhp 24.
[437] SN 1.50, SN 2.24, SN 4.4, SN 35.114-115.
[438] SN 23.1, SN 23.11-12, SN 23.23, SN 23.35, and in SN 35.65 Māra is defined as the sense realm in general.
[439] AN 3.40, AN 4.13, AN 4.16, AN 4.49, AN 5.55, AN 7.67, AN 8.29.
[440] AN 2.282, AN 4.15, AN 8.69, AN 8.70, AN 9.39.

DN 32, DN 33) of which DN 16 stands out as it describes the last days of the Buddha. Here, Māra is claiming the body of the Buddha – and succeeds. This theme of DN 16 (which expands on SN 51.10 and AN 8.70) is unusual. In other texts Māra represents spiritual bondage and confusion, but not the purely physical death of the body. Perhaps the death of the Buddha marked such a traumatic event in Buddhist memory that it had to be attributed to the evil Māra. Indeed, according to these suttas the Buddha's physical death could have been prevented if his attendant Ānanda had requested from the Buddha that he continued to live. But Ānanda's mind was confused by Māra and he failed to recognize him – with the most severe consequences, namely the Buddha's untimely demise. The scapegoating logic of the sutta along with the personified Māra strongly suggest that the narrative is a late creation.

The Dhammapada is different from the collections in so far as we find Māra in 'the formula' only once (Dhp 8). Most frequently Māra represents bondage (Dhp 1, Dhp 3, Dhp 4, Dhp 13, Dhp 20, Dhp 24). And once he is personified as *maccurāja*, the king of death. But nowhere is he actually acting, speaking or thinking. The Māra of the Suttanipāta is similar to the one in the SN. Five times Māra appears in 'the formula'[441], five times as a force of bondage[442]. And twice he tries to confuse the Buddha in person, praising a mundane life (Snp 1.2, Snp 3.2).

Summarizing all occurrences in the suttas, we propose to stratify three main aspects of Māra. It seems quite clear to us that the mention of Māra in the formula with "devas, Māra, and Brahmā" is old, because it is frequent and wide-spread. We keep in mind, however, that lists like the 'formula' could have been easily added also to later suttas without any issues. The suttas which feature Māra as spiritual bondage, however, are diverse in content, often in poetic meter, and spread enough to suggest an old layer as well. Interestingly, these two older aspects rarely overlap – we either find Māra in 'the formula' *or* Māra as bondage, which indicates separate transmission lines. The third aspect of Māra as a personified demonic character is limited and most probably belongs to a very specific and later layer of text production.

[441] Snp 1.4, Snp 1.10, Snp 2.5, Snp 3.7, Snp 3.12.
[442] Snp 3.6, Snp 3.7. Snp 3.12, Snp 5.10, Snp 5.12.

In addition to the rarity of the personified demonic Māra, suttas with this aspect are also suspicious because the narratives don't refer to a pre-existent Māra mytheme. In order to understand these Māra stories one only needs to know the basic character of Māra as a force of spiritual bondage, similar to knowing the character of the fox in order to understand a fable. Often Māra's attempts, for example to frighten the Buddha with a loud noise or to trick him with a shape-shift, make Māra look like the villain in a children's play – he appears comically pathetic, and when exposed he is laughably frustrated, "silent, dismayed, with his shoulders drooping, downcast, brooding, unable to speak, scratching the ground with a stick"[443] (SN 4.25). And because there is no sign (particularly from Jain sources) that Māra was a shared character of East India we conclude that especially the personified Māra is a late fabrication (i.e. SN 4, SN 5, SN 51.10, AN 8.70, MN 49, MN 50, the Māra sections of DN 16, and Snp 3.2).

Overall, the Māra concept expresses no specific attitude towards Brahmanism – only in SN 4.21 Māra appears as an ascetic Brahmin (with topknot, antelope hide, ascetic's staff), praising the mundane life. We already concluded, however (in section 2.5.3), that the Brahmin depicted in SN 4.21 is a caricature from later times. Thus, Māra is surely *not* representing a general 'demonized Brahmanism' as proposed by Nichols (2019, 64)[444]. Instead, Māra is a purely Buddhist character which borrowed characteristics from diverse mythological sources.

8.3 Māra, the Evil One

The most frequent epithet of Māra is *pāpimant* (Skt *pāpman*), the Evil One. The distribution of this epithet is peculiar as we can find it predominantly in the SN – in each sutta of SN 4 and SN 5, and in about a dozen others as well[445]. In the AN it appears only four times[446], five times in the

[443] *tuṇhībhūto maṅkubhūto pattakkhandho adhomukho pajjhāyanto appaṭibhāno kaṭṭhena bhūmiṃ vilikhanto.*
[444] Nichols unfortunately relies in his treatment too much on unstratified research, e.g. by Gombrich and Norman (Nichols 2019, 65). He assumes that Brahmins were the most relevant competitors of the early Buddhists and then infers that "Māra cannot be seen as anything less than the demonization of Brahmanism" (ibid., 64). Yet, he bases this view mostly on SN 4.21, Snp 3.2, and the Buddhacarita from the first century C.E.
[445] SN 2.30, SN 4.1-25, SN 5.1-10, SN 17.1-3, SN 20.8, SN 22.63-65, SN 22.87, SN 35.114-115, SN 35.230, SN 35.240, SN 35.248, SN 51.10.
[446] AN 4.15, AN 7.67, AN 8.70, AN 9.39.

MN, thrice in the DN, and twice in the Suttanipāta[447]. It is surprising that the wide spread over the SN didn't affect the other collections much, which we take as a confirmation for the late age of SN 4 and SN 5. It could also be an indication that Māra as *pāpimant* is late in general.

Evidently, *pāpman* is an attribute rooted in Vedic literature. The oldest occurrences of *pāpman* go back to the Atharvaveda where it is mentioned several times, e.g. together with *yakṣma*, i.e. disease (AVŚ 3.31.1-11), and *mṛtyu*, i.e. death (AVŚ 17.1.29, later also in BU 1.3.10-11). In AVŚ 11.8.19 *pāpman* entered the human body along with other attributes (see also Bodewitz 2019, 345-346). In ŚB 1.4.2.12 we find *pāpman* in connection with the demonic rakṣas, in ŚB 1.6.3.28, BU 1.3.2-7, and in CU 1.2.2-6 with asuras, and in ŚB 4.3.3.5 with Indra's enemy Vṛtra (also in ŚB 6.2.2.19 and ŚB 9.5.2.4).

Bodewitz (2019, 14) suggests that *pāpman* originally signified death but at the time of the Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads became "the symbol of mortality, the body, of which one wants to become freed". He discusses a set of six cardinal *pāpmān*s in JB 1.98 and JB 2.363 which are presented as part of human nature (ibid., 343-345): sleep, laziness, anger, hunger, passion for dice, and passion for women. It is important to point out that these vices (which would also well fit in a Buddhist context as 'spiritual obstacles') are not externalized and projected onto a supernatural being – as the Buddhist texts do with Māra – but are seen as part of human nature.

We can see that *pāpman* in pre-Buddhist Vedic literature first referred to misfortune, tragedy, and death[448], then to innate 'evil' human characteristics, and finally to evil supernatural beings, like rakṣases, asuras, and Vṛtra. This has a certain parallel with Māra in the Buddhist suttas, who in the older layers similarly represents 'evil' human characteristics of spiritual bondage and only later the demonic being.

Most remarkable is, however, that we find in the CU the overcoming of *pāpman* connected with liberation, anticipating the Buddhist view. In CU 1.6.6-8 we encounter a mysterious golden person (*hiraṇmaya puruṣa*) who is beyond *pāpman* and beyond the desire for the gods

[447] MN 19, MN 25, MN 26, MN 49, MN 50, DN 16, DN 21, DN 25, Snp 1.2, Snp 3.2.
[448] See also the discussion in Jurewicz (2016, 389; 545; 586).

(*devakāma*) – for which we find a later parallel in Buddhism, namely the monastic notion that divine states are ultimately undesirable. CU 8.1.5 says with respect to *brahman*: "That is the self free from evils [*pāpman*] – free from old age and death, free from sorrow, free from hunger and thirst"[449] (similarly in CU 8.4.1, CU 8.7.1, BU 5.7.1. In CU 8.7.3 and BU 4.4.23 regarding *ātman*). The similarities to Buddhist liberation which is occasionally described as 'freedom from suffering, old age, sickness, and death' are striking[450]. We therefore conclude that not only the Vedic concept of *pāpman* was known to the Buddha or the Buddhist authors, but also that the *freedom* from *pāpman* meant spiritual liberation. It was then incorporated into the suttas in two ways – as the more abstract freedom from existential suffering (*dukkha*), and as 'defeating' Māra. Therefore, early Buddhism was, in the way that it framed spiritual liberation, strongly influenced by preceding concepts of the early Upaniṣads.

8.4 Māra as Namucī

Apart from the epithets discussed above there is another Vedic epithet which is applied to Māra and is worthy of discussion, namely Namucī (Skt Namuci). It is four times in the suttas applied to the personified Māra (SN 2.30, AN 4.13, Snp 3.2, and DN 20), and twice as a variant reading of *maccu*, death, in SN 4.23 and SN 5.3 (see for details also Giddings, 2014).

The Buddhist commentaries don't mention any connection to the Vedic demon Namuci (Bodhi, 2017, 869). For those familiar with Vedic literature Namuci is, however, a famous demonic character and one of the traditional enemies of Indra (see also Nichols 2019, 49-50). Already in the Ṛgveda Namuci appears as a powerful being[451], equal in strength to Indra who can overpower Namuci only with wit, eventually beheading him. The story of Namuci gained popularity over time, becoming one of the standard victories of Indra[452]. By giving Māra the

[449] *eṣa ātmāpahatapāpmā vijaro vimṛtyur viśoko vijighatso 'pipāsaḥ*
[450] SN 3.18, SN 48.41, SN 56.11, AN 2.6, AN 3.38-40, AN 3.51-52, AN 3.61-62, AN 5.57, AN 6.63, MN 82, and DN 14.
[451] ṚV 1.53.7, ṚV 2.11.20, ṚV 2.14.5, ṚV 5.30.7-8, ṚV 6.20.6, ṚV 7.19.5, ṚV 8.14, ṚV 10.74.7, ṚV 10.131.4.
[452] See Nichols (2019, 49-52), Jamison and Brereton (2014, 40), Oldenberg (1893), and Bloomfield (1893).

Namucī epithet the suttas equate the Buddha with Indra as the victor over a most powerful enemy. Obviously, Māra is called 'Namucī' only allegorically since the Vedic Namuci was already defeated and beheaded by Indra (see also Windisch 1895, 185). The purpose is, evidently, to give the Buddhist invention of Māra some mythological depth, since he doesn't have his own mythology and is otherwise a pale character[453].

The only place where Namucī is mentioned in the suttas as the original Vedic demon, and not as Māra, is in DN 20 where he appears together with other asura demons like Vepacitti. There, they are treated as demons which were defeated by (Indra's) 'thunderbolt-hand' (see section 5.2.2).

In summary, Māra as Namucī belongs to a late stratum of suttas, the epithet being used as a device to give the otherwise pale personality of Māra more allegorical and historical depth. Additionally, it equips the Buddha with mythological victories originally achieved by Indra.

8.5 Māra as a Representation of Repeated Death

We discussed above that *māra* etymologically means 'killer', and that it is also connected to *mṛtyu*, death. In the sutta narratives there is, however, little evidence that Māra actually represents 'death' or a 'killer' – he simply doesn't kill anyone. Instead, we will argue below that 'defeating Māra' is an allegorical expression for overcoming the Vedic issue of 'second death'.

The context of *punarmṛtyu*, or 'second death' is the following: According to Bodewitz (2019, 121-134) it was ancient Vedic practice[454] to use rituals in order to gain after death a permanent immortal existence in a heavenly realm. At a later point (possibly influenced by non-ritualistic and/or *śramaṇa* practitioners) the view arose, so Bodewitz, that this existence in heaven was not immortal but ending in the dreaded annihilation of a 'second death', *punarmṛtyu*. Accordingly,

[453] For more similarities between Māra and Namuci see Giddings (2014, 77-80; 87-96) and Nichols (2019, 62).
[454] Starting roughly with the tenth book of the Ṛgveda (Bodewitz 2019, 106-108).

practitioners had to find ways to prevent this annihilation of the second death and to secure real immortality in heaven[455].

The term *punarmṛtyu* is relevant mostly in the Jaiminīya and Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa. But, as Bodewitz (ibid., 126) observes: "The concept of redeath lost its significance as soon as the concepts of rebirth and release had become accepted. The limited period in which *punarmṛtyu* played a role indicates that it belonged to a period of transition to new ideas." This limited period encompasses precisely the later Brāhmaṇas and the early Upaniṣads, i.e. the literature immediately before the rise of Buddhism. Bodewitz concludes in this context that there were two groups of practitioners: Traditional ritualists who sought to overcome *punarmṛtyu* by reaching immortality in the highest heaven of *brahmaloka*[456]; and non-ritualists (like Buddhists) who believed in a cycle of rebirth and thus pursued *mokṣa* or *nibbāna*, i.e. liberation from this continuous transmigration (ibid., 128; 192).

Since the prominence of the *punarmṛtyu* concept falls precisely into the immediate pre-Buddhist time it is possible that it contributed to the earliest Buddhist worldview[457]: At this earliest stage Brahmin converts might have continued to fear annihilation through a 'second death'. Therefore, earliest Buddhism had to provide an answer to this concern, framing the Buddhist goal not only with terms like *nibbāna* but also with expressions like 'defeating death', 'overcoming Māra', or immortality, *amata* (see below).

Keeping this in mind, we note that overcoming death (Pāli *maccu*, Skt *mṛtyu*) is a major concern for the early suttas. A few SN suttas, for example, claim that with liberation one crosses beyond *maccudheyya*, the 'realm of death'[458]. Other suttas state that *maccudheyya* is transcended by leaving behind sensual pleasure and attachment, or by generally following the Buddhist

[455] In contrast, Jurewicz (2016, 485; 585) suggests that *punarmṛtyu* refers to a cyclical process, namely a re-birth and re-death on earth.
[456] The immortality of the gods is associated with *brahman* in KB 21.1.1 and ŚB 11.2.3.6. The immortality of humans attained by a realization of *brahman* is mentioned in BU 2.5.1-19, CU 2.23.1. And a connection of the immortal *brahman* with *ātman* can be found in TU 1.6.2, BU 4.4.5, BU 4.4.8-22, CU 3.14.4, CU 4.15.1, CU 8.3.4, CU 8.7.4, CU 8.8.3, CU 8.10.1, CU 8.11.1, and CU 8.14.1.
[457] There is no direct Pāli equivalent, but *pubabbhava* ('rebirth') might be related. See Somaratne (2017).
[458] SN 1.9, SN 1.50, SN 1.38, SN 2.24, and SN 4.24.

practice[459]. And students of the Buddha are *maccuhayi*, victorious over death[460]. Transcending *maccudheyya* and being *maccuhayi* are therefore equivalent to attaining liberation.

There are more examples for the interest of early suttas in overcoming *maccu*: unliberated beings are said in SN 2.22 and Snp 4.2 to be in *maccumukha*, 'the mouth of death', and in SN 48.41 and Snp 3.8 they are *maccuparāyaṇa*, ending in death. Other suttas speak of *maccuno sena*, the 'army of death', as a spiritual obstacle[461]. The 'snare of death', *maccupāsa*, is mentioned in AN 4.35, AN 7.64, and Snp 1.9. And there are many more single contexts in which overcoming *maccu* is presented as the main spiritual goal[462]. SN 35.136 explicitly mirrors the term *maccudheyya* with *māradeyya*[463], 'the realm of Māra', and says that unliberated beings "flow along in the stream of existence, | Deeply mired in *māradeyya*"[464].

Another related and essential term is *amata* (immortality). It appears in the SN and AN in various contexts, which means that it was used by different transmitters throughout the early and middle sutta periods. Some suttas equate *amata* with *nibbāna* and other terms for liberation[465]. Also, the Buddhist Eightfold Path[466] and certain meditations lead to immortality[467], and there are numerous more individual occurrences of *amata* in the suttas[468].

A striking image is *amatadvāra*, the 'door to immortality' which the Buddha metaphorically opened for himself and others. In SN 6.1 (also in MN 26 and MN 85) Brahmā Sahampati asks the Buddha to teach after his liberation: "Throw open this door to *amata*!"[469], which DN 14 and DN 18 later directly reference, saying: "thrown open are the doors to *amata*!"[470]. MN 34 refers to

[459] SN 1.34, SN 45.34, SN 46.17, AN 10.117-118, AN 10.169-170, MN 34, Dhp 6, Snp 2.12, Snp 5.12, and the Snp 5 epilogue.
[460] In SN 6.13, SN 8.7, SN 8.10, AN 3.58, and Snp 3.13.
[461] SN 4.23, SN 5.3, SN 6.14, and MN 131-134.
[462] SN 1.20, SN 1.66-68, SN 2.6, SN 2.12, SN 3.25, SN 4.9, SN 35.229, MN 131-134, MN 142, Dhp 2, Dhp 4, Dhp 9-11, Dhp 13, Dhp 20.
[463] In SN 4.17, SN 4.25, SN 35.136, AN 4.13, AN 8.29, MN 34, MN 106, Dhp 3, Snp 3.12.
[464] *Bhavarāgānusārībhi; māradheyyānupannehi.*
[465] SN 43.13-43, AN 9.36, AN 9.54, MN 26, MN 64, MN 85, Snp 1.11, Snp 2.1.
[466] SN 4.24, SN 45.7, SN 45.115-139, SN 45.149, SN 45.161, SN 45.180, SN 46.184, SN 48.44, SN 48.57, MN 75
[467] AN 1.616-627, AN 5.61-62, AN 6.19-20, AN 6.30, AN 7.48-49, AN 8.73-74, AN 9.16, AN 10.56-57
[468] SN 1.42, SN 7.11, SN 8.8, SN 10.9, SN 22.1, SN 47.37-38, SN 47.41, AN 3.130, AN 6.46, AN 6.119-139, AN 9.14, AN 10.58, MN 98, MN 106, MN 115, DN 21, Dhp 2, Dhp 8, Dhp 25, Dhp 26, Snp 1.4, Snp 3.9.
[469] *apāpuretaṃ amatassa dvāraṃ*
[470] *apārutā amatassa dvārā*

the same expression poetically: “Knowing directly all the world, | The Enlightened One who understands | Opened the door to the *amata* state | By which the safety of *nibbāna* may be reached”[471]. AN 11.16 (also in MN 52) speaks of eleven meditation stages as ‘eleven doors to *amata*’. Additionally, SN 12.27-28, SN 12.33, and SN 12.49-50 call a highly developed student ‘one who abides having struck the door to *amata*’[472]. There is no directly equivalent ‘*amṛtadvāra*’ in Vedic literature[473], but there are examples which share a similar imagery: Already in the Ṛgveda there are ‘divine doors’ (*dvāra devīr*) to heaven[474]. And ŚB 11.4.4.1-7 features *brahmaṇa dvāra*, six doors to Brahman and *brahmaloka*. Therefore, while the Buddhist metaphor is not based in its exact wording on Vedic texts it clearly refers to Vedic imagery.

A common devotional formula describes the Buddha not only as the ‘giver of *amata*’, but also as having become Brahman[475]: “[The Buddha] has become vision, he has become knowledge, he has become the Dhamma, he has become Brahman; he is the expounder, the proclaimer, the elucidator of meaning, the giver of *amata*, the lord of the Dhamma, the Tathāgata”[476]. SN 21.7 and AN 4.48 demand that a wise man should point out the ‘immortal path’ (*amata pada*[477]), and “raise high the seers’ banner”[478] – the ‘seer’ (Pāli *isi*) here is a direct reference to the Vedic *ṛṣi*. Another direct connection between *amata* and Brahmanism can be found in DN 19. Here, in a former life of the Buddha a Brahmin asks him: “By doing what | Can mortals reach *amata brahmaloka*?”[479] – which is yet another reference (well understood by the audience) to the Brahmin search for immortality in the conceptual framework of *brahmaloka*.

It was necessary to reference the numerous terms and contexts related to death and immortality in order to justify our suggestion for the following line of reasoning: Pre-Buddhist Brahmins

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[471] *Sabbaṃ lokaṃ abhiññāya, sambuddhena pajānatā; | Vivaṭaṃ amatadvāraṃ, khemaṃ nibbānapattiyā.*
[472] *amatadvāraṃ āhacca tiṭṭhati*
[473] There is the similar expression ‘*svargasya lokasya dvāra*’, i.e. “the gate to the world of heaven”, to be found in AB 3.42.1, JB 3.375, ŚB 6.6.2.4, ŚB 11.5.3.7, JUB 4.14.5-7, JUB 4.15.2-5, KU 1.2, CU 3.13.6. See also ‘*pitṛlokasya dvāra*’, i.e. “the door to the world of the Forefathers”, in ŚB 13.8.1.5.
[474] ṚV 1.13.6, ṚV 1.142.6, ṚV 2.3.5, ṚV 5.5.5, ṚV 9.5.5, and ṚV 10.110.5.
[475] Translators usually translate as ‘Brahmā’, which is misleading as we will show in the chapter on Brahman.
[476] *So hāvuso, bhagavā jānaṃ jānāti, passaṃ passati – cakkhubhūto, ñāṇabhūto, dhammabhūto, brahmabhūto, vattā, pavattā, atthassa ninnetā, amatassa dātā, dhammassāmī, tathāgato* (SN 35.116, AN 10.115, AN 10.172, MN 18, MN 133, MN 138).
[477] *Amata pada* appears also in SN 10.9, Dhp 2, and Snp 1.11.
[478] *paggaṇhe isinaṃ dhajaṃ*
[479] *Katthaṭṭhito kimhi ca sikkhamāno, | Pappoti macco amataṃ brahmaloka’’nti.*

were supposedly facing the issue of a possible 'second death' in heaven. When they converted to Buddhism they needed the Buddhist teaching to offer a solution to this problem. This resulted in numerous suttas framing the Buddhist path in terms of 'overcoming death', 'attaining immortality', and 'defeating Māra'. Thus Brahmins were convinced that by following the Buddhist practice they got a valid path to overcome the dreaded second death in heaven. In later times the concept of *punarmṛtyu* became generally less important and Buddhist authors increasingly framed the teaching from a non-Brahmin perspective and used less death-related concepts like *maccu* and *amata*. Accordingly, also the relevance of Māra diminished and became merely allegorical.

An important evidence in our proposed line of reasoning is the distribution of the terms discussed in the nikāyas. *Maccu* occurs mostly in poetry of the SN, i.e. a presumably old layer of suttas. *Amata* can be frequently found in SN and AN, and also Māra is most prominent in the SN. We have an additional example for a death-related term which appears frequently in the SN with the originally Vedic noun for 'mortal, human', i.e. *macca* (Skt *martya*)[480].

On the other hand, the above 'second death' hypothesis remains speculative. For the fact remains that there are simply no explicit dialogues between the Buddha and Brahmins in which they voice their fears and concerns about a 'second death' in heaven. What remains is the still significant distribution of terms related to death and immortality in the old layers of the suttas, which are incidentally related to Brahmanism. We hope that scholars continue to investigate this matter and provide further hypotheses to explain their occurrence.

Our investigation contributes to the hypothesis we discussed in section 2.8, namely that parts of early Buddhist teachings are specifically aimed at Brahmins, taking into consideration their worldview, attitudes, and aspirations. There, we highlighted that specifically *samādhi* meditation as a path to liberation suited former Brahmins better than an approach of *anattā* (not-self). Similarly here, we argue, that the early Buddhist discourse of death and immortality aimed more at former Brahmins who were in general concerned with immortality in heavenly realms.

[480] SN 1.33, SN 1.48, SN 1.59, SN 1.76, SN 1.78, SN 2.20, SN 3.4, SN 4.10, SN 7.19, SN 11.20, AN 4.61-62, AN 5.41, AN 10.219, MN 143 (from SN 1.48), DN 19, Dhp 4, Dhp 10, Dhp 14, Snp 2.2, Snp 3.8, Snp 4.1.

8.6 Conclusion

Reviewing our findings, we conclude that Māra was an exclusively Buddhist character which combined several aspects. As a deity in the very frequent formula (including devas and Brahmā) Māra represents the Vedic god of death, Yama. In soteriological contexts Māra signifies the spiritual bondage that has to be overcome. Finally, we suggest that Māra and other related terms relate to the Brahmin desire for immortality.

The latest aspect is Māra as a narrative character who personally interacts with the Buddha and his master disciples. These narratives belong to the fable genre, are very simply structured, and add demonic qualities of spirit possession and malice to Māra. These narratives make clear that there was no previously existing Māra mytheme. These stories have the goal to display the Buddha's powers to conquer evil in a simple entertaining way for a general audience.

In summary, Māra is a complex, uniquely Buddhist character which is rooted in diverse non-Buddhist sources. We could show that one should not be misled by the simplicity of the Māra character. Māra is connected with several layers of Vedic texts and has changed throughout the development of further text material. Given its eclectic history it is remarkable that the Māra concept has contributed to an effective communication of Buddhist soteriological ideas and is in this function effective to this day.

Chapter Nine: Brahman and Brahmā

The concept of *brahman* is present throughout Vedic literature. In the Saṃhitās it generally signifies 'sacred speech'. Later in the Brāhmaṇa period *brahman* begins to represent the quality of something foremost or supreme, occasionally already as 'ultimate unmanifest reality'. In the pre-Buddhist Upaniṣads finally the development culminates in the dialectic tension between *ātman* and *brahman,* which both alternate in signifying the highest mystical principle.

Given the importance of *brahman* in Vedic literature and especially in the early Upaniṣads it is surprising that it is not of major relevance in the Buddhist suttas – there, the main philosophical anti-Brahmin target seems to be *ātman,* not *brahman.* Instead, we find in early Buddhism a personified Brahmā as the highest deity which inhabits the realm of *brahmaloka.*

In the following we will investigate if the suttas still include, in a subtle way, the two main aspects of Vedic *brahman*, namely as 'sacred transformative speech' and 'ultimate reality'. Secondly, we will examine if the Brahmā deity of the suttas can be traced back to Vedic literature or if it is a purely Buddhist invention[481].

9.1 *Brahma* as 'Transformative Speech'

Reviewing several attempts to define the early Vedic concept of *brahman,* scholars have come to similar conclusions. According to Thieme (1952, 125) the root *bṛh* means 'to form', thus *brahman* (n.) would mean 'formation' and *brahman* (m.) 'the one who forms'. Sandness (2007, 72) refers to Mayrhofer's etymological dictionary and understands *bṛh* as 'to grow', 'to develop', 'to extend', and 'to expand'. Likewise Gonda (1950, 40) sees *brahman* as "something that causes to increase", but also as a power which manifests itself as 'word', 'ritual', and 'sacred or magical word' (ibid., 58). De La Vallée Poussin (1917, 22) states that *brahman* meant "the sacred

[481] In the following, when sutta passages refer to the abstract Vedic *brahman* we will indicate the term as 'Brahman' – in contrast to many sutta translators who translate as 'Brahmā' which for us only signifies the deity.

formula [which] came to be regarded as the great creative power", and Jurewicz (2016, 394-396) concludes that early *brahman* signifies 'sacred speech'. Thus, the two main aspects of the early *brahman* are: A power connected with growing or forming, and a power connected with sacred words and rituals. Thus, we understand *brahman* henceforward as 'powerful speech which causes growth or formation', or in short as 'transformative speech'. A later conceptualization which was fully developed in the pre-Buddhist Upaniṣads sees *brahman* as 'ultimate reality', 'immortal', 'supreme', 'eternal', etc.[482] (see Gonda 1950, 10-11; Jurewicz 2016, 550).

Brahman as 'transformative speech' is not immediately visible in the Buddhist texts. Yet we find clear indications that *brahman* was used in this sense in passages which equate *dhamma* (i.e. the teaching of the Buddha) and *brahman*. Particularly, some word pairs are significant: *brahma-* and *dhammacakka*, *brahma-* and *dhammabhūta*, *brahmaja* and *dhammaja*, and *brahma-* and *dhammacariya*[483]. The connection of *dhamma* and *brahman* has already been discussed by Geiger (1973, 88-98), e.g. regarding BU 1.4.14: "[*Brahman*] created the *dharma*, a form superior to and surpassing itself"[484]. Additionally, in AB 8.12.5 Indra is called 'the guardian of *brahman*' and 'the guardian of *dharma*'[485].

Several suttas use instead of *dhammacakka* (the wheel of Dhamma) the term *brahmacakka* (the wheel of *brahman*). This is important since 'setting in motion the wheel of Dhamma' marks the beginning of the Buddha's teaching, without which no Buddhist liberation is possible[486]. The term *dhammacakka* alone is well attested in all nikāyas[487] so that there can be little doubt about its old age. It is therefore noteworthy that the suttas choose the 'Brahmin' term *brahmacakka* to occasionally refer to the Buddhist teaching. In AN 4.23, for example, we find the poem: "He is the Blessed One, the Buddha, | he is the lion unsurpassed; | in this world with its devas, | he set in

[482] Yet, there are also later Vedic passages in line with 'transformative speech' e.g. ŚB 2.1.4.10, AU 3.3, TU 1.8.1, TU 2.1.1, BU 1.3.21, BU 1.5.17, BU 2.3.3, BU 4.1.2, BU 5.4.1 and CU 8.3.4.
[483] *Dhammacariya* is of little doctrinal importance. It simply means 'conduct in line with the Dhamma', similar to 'ethical conduct'. Nonetheless, it means 'conduct in line with the *Buddha's transformative speech*' (SN 3.25, SN 55.47, AN 2.16, AN 4.4, AN 6.113, AN 10.47, AN 10.220, MN 41-42, MN 97, MN 129, DN 14, Snp 2.4, Snp 2.6).
[484] *tac chreyo rūpam atyasṛjata dharmam*
[485] *brahmāṇo goptājani, dharmasya goptājanīti*
[486] The allegedly first sermon of the Buddha is called *dhammacakka-ppavattana-sutta*, 'Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dhamma' (SN 56.11).
[487] SN 1.46, SN 8.7, SN 22.78, SN 56.11, AN 1.187, AN 3.14, AN 4.8, AN 4.33, AN 4.118, AN 4.127, AN 5.131-133, AN 8.70, MN 26, MN 85, MN 92, MN 111, MN 141, DN 14, DN 16, Snp 3.7, Snp 3.11.

motion the wheel of *brahman*"[488]. Additionally, in several suttas we find the formula: "the Tathāgata claims the place of the chief bull of the herd, roars his lion's roar in the assemblies, and sets rolling the wheel of *brahman*"[489] (SN 12.21-22, AN 4.8, AN 5.11, AN 6.64, AN 10.21-22, MN 12). These passages don't occur in a particularly 'Brahmin' setting. We have to conclude that it was normal for Buddhist audiences to understand the pre-Upaniṣadic notion of *brahman* as 'transformative speech'.

A second important term in the suttas is *brahmabhūta*, i.e. 'having become *brahman*'[490]. It appears in a common devotional formula about the Buddha: "For, friends, knowing, the Blessed One knows; seeing, he sees; he has become vision, he has become knowledge, he has become the Dhamma (*dhammabhūta*), he has become *brahman* (*brahmabhūta*); he is the expounder, the proclaimer, the elucidator of meaning, the giver of *amata* (immortality), the lord of the Dhamma, the Tathāgata"[491] (SN 35.116, AN 10.115, AN 10.172, MN 18, MN 133, MN 138, similarly DN 27). This passage clearly highlights that the Buddha is the one who transforms and liberates with his speech, both as Dhamma and as *brahman*.

In another formula *brahmabhūta* is applied to the liberation of the Buddha's followers: "Thus in this very life he dwells hungerless, quenched and cooled, experiencing bliss, having himself become *brahman* (*brahmabhūta*)"[492] (AN 3.66, AN 4.198, MN 51, MN 60, MN 94, DN 33, similarly in SN 22.76). Here the meaning is not as clear as in the previous passage. *Brahmabhūta* could signify that the arahant is now an embodiment of the transformative speech of the Buddha, or it could refer to *brahman* as 'supreme', similar to some passages in the Upaniṣads[493].

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[488] *Esa so bhagavā buddho, esa sīho anuttaro; | Sadevakassa lokassa, brahmacakkaṃ pavattayī.*
[489] *tathāgato catūhi ca vesārajjehi samannāgato āsabhaṃ ṭhānaṃ paṭijānāti, parisāsu sīhanādaṃ nadati, brahmacakkaṃ pavatteti*
[490] The identical Skt is not pre-Buddhist and appears only in the Skt epics and in MDh 5.93. Olivelle (2005, 284) interprets the latter passage as 'unified with *brahman*' but doesn't take into account the Buddhist precedents. Bhattacharya (1989, 17) has argued – partly relying on Geiger (1973, 91) – that *brahma* in the compound *brahmabhūta* means *nibbāna*, but he references only commentarial literature and not the suttas.
[491] *So hāvuso, bhagavā jānaṃ jānāti, passaṃ passati – cakkhubhūto, ñāṇabhūto, dhammabhūto, brahmabhūto, vattā, pavattā, atthassa ninnetā, amatassa dātā, dhammassāmī, tathāgato.*
[492] *So diṭṭheva dhamme nicchāto nibbuto sītibhūto sukhappaṭisaṃvedī brahmabhūtena attanā viharatī'ti*
[493] MN 92 and Snp 3.7 apply *brahmabhūta* in this meaning of 'supreme' to the Buddha and let him say: "I have become *brahman* (*brahmabhūta*), peerless, one who has crushed Māra's army. Having mastered all my enemies, I rejoice, without fear from anywhere."

Another pair of terms to consider is *brahmayāna* and *dhammayāna*, i.e. 'the vehicle of Brahman' and 'the vehicle of Dhamma'. Both refer to the Buddhist Eightfold Path in SN 45.4[494]. The sutta interestingly ends with a poem which includes the line: "This *brahmayāna* unsurpassed | Originates from within oneself (*attā*)"[495]. This led Geiger (1973, 94) to interpret it as a rare reference to the *ātman-brahman* dynamic of the Upaniṣads. We agree that this is possible, but in the end the reference remains too vague and unique to come to such a conclusion.

A last pair of terms to examine is *brahmaja* and *dhammaja*, i.e. 'born of *brahman*' and 'born of Dhamma'. In identical formulas in MN 84, MN 93, and DN 27 Brahmins claim that "Brahmins alone are the sons of *brahman*, the offspring of *brahman*, born of his mouth[496], born of *brahman* (*brahmaja*), created by *brahman*, heirs of *brahman*"[497] – '*brahman*' here has the connotation of 'Vedic knowledge' which is accessible to Brahmins only. SN 16.11, MN 111, and DN 27 contrast this with the equivalent Buddhist formula: "I am a son of the Blessed One, born of his breast, born of his mouth, born of the Dhamma (*dhammaja*), created by the Dhamma, an heir to the Dhamma". In both cases the respective followers define themselves as being transformed and created by their respective teachings, the sacred words of their traditions.

An ambivalent example can be found in Snp 3.5 where a Brahmin tells the Buddha: "The Blessed One is *brahman* made manifest, seen by me today (*brahmajjadiṭṭha*), for in truth you are like *brahman* to us"[498]. Here, *brahman* could mean 'transformative speech' personified, or 'the supreme' (see for further instances in later texts Neri and Pontillo, 2014).

The above examples strongly suggest that *brahman* was in numerous suttas understood as 'transformative speech'. A few other terms in the suttas preserve the meaning of *brahman* as 'supreme', e.g. when *brahmabhūta* appears alone; in *brahmadeyya*, 'the supreme gift' (MN 95,

[494] In SN 45.4 also a richly decorated chariot is called '*brahmayāna*', i.e. 'supreme vehicle' which the Buddha interprets metaphorically as the Eightfold Path. The meaning of '*-yāna*' as 'vehicle' is also confirmed for the ŚB and CU (see Kasamatsu 2013, 1068).
[495] *Etadattani sambhūtaṃ, brahmayānaṃ anuttaraṃ*
[496] This refers to an old image in ṚV 10.90.12 where Brahmins are the mouth of the primordial *puruṣa* who represents the cosmic sacrifice which brings about creation itself. See for different interpretations Gonda (1980, 137-138). In Jurewicz (2016, 66-86) *puruṣa* in this hymn is understood as the manifest aspect of reality. The hymn could thus describe Brahmins as the mouth of reality itself (ibid., 81).
[497] *brāhmaṇāva brahmuno puttā orasā mukhato jātā brahmajā brahmanimmitā brahmadāyādā*.
[498] *bhagavā hi me sakkhi brahmajjadiṭṭho; Tuvañhi no brahmasamosi saccaṃ*

DN 3-5, DN 12, DN 23); or in *brahmadaṇḍa*, 'the highest penalty' (DN 3, DN 16). These terms appear only in the MN and DN and we assume that they represent a later layer of text, at a time when *brahman* as 'transformative speech' has lost its significance.

In conclusion, we see that there is an interesting variety of meanings related to *brahman* in the suttas. There seems to be an older tradition which understands *brahman* as 'transformative speech', similar to how older Vedic literature employed the term. This is probably the more reliable meaning for the Buddha's lifetime. Another meaning of *brahman* in the suttas is 'supreme'. *Brahman* in the Upaniṣadic meaning of 'ultimate reality' does, however, not appear in the suttas. This is surprising, for we could assume that the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad should have been known in general lines at least to the Brahmin devotees of the Buddha. On the other hand, also details around the equally important *ātman* are hardly found in the suttas (see section 10.7). Similar to other topics we have so far investigated in this thesis we seem to find in the suttas more references to concepts of the Saṃhitās and Brāhmaṇas and less to the distinct thought-world of the Upaniṣads.

9.2 Vedic Brahmaloka

As noticed above, the suttas don't reflect on *brahman* as 'ultimate reality' as the Upaniṣads do, possibly because the tenets of spiritual competitors were generally not discussed in detail. Yet, we find a related Vedic concept incorporated in the suttas and the Buddhist worldview, namely *brahmaloka* ('the realm of *brahman*').

The concept of *brahmaloka* makes its first appearance in the late Atharvaveda. In AVŚ 19.71.1 the poet addresses the hymn itself: "Go ye to Brahma's world having enriched me with life and breath, with children and with cattle, with fame and wealth, and with a Brahman's lustre"[499]. Next is a passage in TB 3.1.5.6 in which we learn that a personified Brahman conquered *brahmaloka* with a worship offering, concluding with the possibility of the practitioner to reach

[499] *āyuḥ prāṇaṃ prajāṃ paśuṃ kīrtiṃ draviṇaṃ brahmavarcasam | mahyaṃ dattvā vrajata brahmalokam*

brahmaloka as well: "He indeed conquers the world of Brahman, he who offers that oblation and who thus knows it"[500]. This means that already in the early Brāhmaṇa period an attainment of or rebirth in *brahmaloka* was pursued.

JB 1.333-334 contains an interesting model including Brahman and *brahmaloka* as the highest of seven worlds (see also Gonda 1966, 56). The six previous worlds are inhabited by: 1. Agni, 2. Vāyu (God of Wind), 3. The Sun (*āditya*), 4. Varuṇa, 5. Death (*mṛtyu*), and 6. Hunger (*aśayā*/*aśanāyā*); see for a further discussion of this passage Bodewitz (2019, 189-193).

In the ŚB the term *brahmaloka* is exceedingly rare – ŚB 11.4.4.1-2 vaguely echoes the passage of the JB above, and there is another short allusion in ŚB 11.2.3.3. Other than that we find further mentions only in the ŚB's last portion, the BU. In the end there are merely a handful of occurrences of *brahmaloka* in the Brāhmaṇas. This changes in the early Upaniṣads where *brahmaloka* appears in a few, but significant, passages.

A section in KU 1.2-7 contains the most important depiction of the personified Brahman deity in pre-Buddhist literature (see section 9.3), and moreover the journey of a deceased soul up to the highest *brahmaloka*[501]. It also expands on the cosmology in JB 1.333 and represents *brahmaloka* as the highest of seven worlds in an ascending order: "He then gets on the path leading to the gods and reaches first the world of fire, then the world of wind, then the world of Varuṇa, then the world of Indra, then the world of Prajāpati, and finally the world of brahman"[502] (KU 1.3). Here, we wish to bring back to mind that also a Buddhist cosmological model consists of seven realms, albeit in a completely different composition (see section 6.3).

The Chāndogya Upaniṣad introduces the notion of *brahmaloka* only in its last chapter[503]. CU 8.1 includes the concept of *brahmapura*, 'the fort of Brahman', an inner space within the heart (CU

[500] *brahmalokáṁ ha vấ abhíjayati | yá eténa havíṣā yájate | yá u ca enad eváṃ véda*
[501] See for a thorough discussion Jurewicz (2016, 630-643), showing that the unmanifest reality of *brahman* is here conceived in terms of a king (ibid., 368).
[502] *sa etaṃ devayānaṃ panthānam āpadyāgnilokam āgacchati | sa vāyulokam | sa ādityalokam | sa varuṇalokam | sa indralokam | sa prajāpatilokam | sa brahmalokam*
[503] Even though we find *brahmapatha*, 'the path to Brahman', already in CU 4.15.5. Here an afterlife path is described which leads to immortality: "This is the path to the gods, the path to *brahman*" (also Geiger 1973, 92).

8.1.3) which contains the outer space, the earth and the sky (for a detailed analysis see Jurewicz 2010c, 15-19). This *brahmapura*, which is equated to *brahmaloka* (CU 8.3.2), is free of old age and death, hunger and thirst (CU 8.1.5), and thus foreshadows the Buddhist notion of *nibbāna*. Then CU 8.3.3 reveals that also *ātman* is found within the heart (i.e. in *brahmaloka*), and finally the chapter ends with the revelation that "anyone who knows this goes to the heavenly world every single day"[504] (CU 8.3.5). This CU passage develops an explicit vision of liberation: *ātman* and *brahman* can be found within one's own heart which is at the same time *brahmaloka*. All of one's true desires find fulfillment in this space beyond old age and death. Upon realization one goes there *daily*, not just in the afterlife (as in other passages[505]). The composer thus describes, what could have been later interpreted by teachers who influenced the Buddha's soteriology, a full liberation *while alive*.

In the BU occurrences of *brahmaloka* are also limited and mostly associated with the teachings of Yājñavalkya. In BU 3.6.1 he declares *brahmaloka*s as the most fundamental worlds, more than the *prajāpatiloka*s and others (similarly in BU 4.3.33). In BU 4.3.32 Yājñavalkya continues his revelation and exclaims regarding *brahmaloka*: "This is [a person's] highest goal! This is his highest attainment! This is his highest world! This is his highest bliss!"[506] In BU 4.4.23 he goes on to declare the liberated person to be free of *karma* and concludes: "A man who knows this, therefore, becomes calm, composed, cool, patient, and collected. He sees the self (*ātman*) in just himself (*ātman*) and all things as the self. […] He becomes a Brahmin – free from evil, free from stain, free from doubt. He is *brahmaloka*"[507]. Hence, similar to CU 8.1 and foreshadowing the Buddhist teaching, Yājñavalkya reveals that liberation (and a realization of *brahmaloka*) can occur within one's lifetime, not only after death.

The only BU passage independent from Yājñavalkya that mentions *brahmaloka* is more traditional in the sense that *brahmaloka* is only realized in the afterlife. BU 6.2.15 (also CU 5.10.1-10) describes that only certain forest dwellers are reborn in *brahmaloka* (the so-called

[504] *ahar ahar vā evaṃvit svargaṃ lokam eti*
[505] In CU 8.13.1 *ātman* attains *brahmaloka* after casting off the body. And other passages make the attainment of *brahmaloka* (possibly in afterlife) dependent upon the lifestyle of *brahmacarya* (CU 8.4.3, CU 8.5.3-4, CU 8.15.1).
[506] *eṣāsya paramā gatiḥ | eṣāsya paramā saṃpat | eṣo 'sya paramo lokaḥ | eṣo 'sya parama ānandaḥ |*
[507] *tasmād evaṃvic chānto dānta uparatas titikṣuḥ samāhito bhūtvātmany evātmānaṃ paśyati | sarvam ātmānaṃ paśyati | […] vipāpo virajo 'vicikitso brāhmaṇo bhavati | eṣa brahmalokaḥ samrāṭ |*

devayāna path, in contrast to the perpetual rebirth of *pitṛyāna*[508]). Their journey contains the already mentioned elements of passing through several other worlds (e.g. moon, devas, sun) before arriving at the final destination: "A person consisting of mind comes to the regions of lightning and leads him to the worlds of *brahman*. These exalted people live in those worlds of *brahman* for the longest time. They do not return"[509]. Even though not as innovative as Yājñavalkya's vision of a liberation in *brahmaloka* while alive we can still sense the influence of non-traditional Vedic forest mystics on Upaniṣadic thought. These forest dwellers are able to achieve the highest goal, in contrast to ritualists who are described as being trapped in the cycle of rebirth: "Rising up once again to the heavenly worlds, they [the ritualists] circle around in the same way"[510] (BU 6.2.15, see also the discussion in Jurewicz 2016, 481-488).

When we review the pre-Buddhist notions of *brahmaloka* we can distinguish two different views. In the older one *brahmaloka* is reserved to certain divine elements (Brahman, hymns, *ātman*) and allows an attainment in the afterlife through the correct ritual practice. The later view occurs in the BU and CU and states that the liberation of *brahmaloka* can be attained through spiritual realization during one's lifetime. Liberation is thus not a question of faith anymore but can be observed in liberated saints and pursued in one's own spiritual practice.

The term *brahmaloka* was later appropriated by the Buddhist suttas, but obviously the Buddhist liberation demoted the formerly supreme *brahmaloka*. Still, especially at the beginning and with Brahmin audiences the Buddha would have been evaluated based on his ability to convey truths about *brahmaloka* and paths to reach it in one's lifetime and afterwards. If the Buddha claimed to be the ultimate spiritual master he must have therefore first demonstrated his intimate knowledge of *brahmaloka* before presenting another, superior, vision of full liberation.

Generally, in early Buddhism the concept of *brahmaloka* is strongly associated with personified Brahman deities, i.e. Brahmās. Therefore, we now have to investigate if this notion of a Brahmā deity has Vedic predecessors, or if it is a Buddhist innovation.

[508] See Bodewitz (2019, 117-120), Bronkhorst (1998, 46-48), Fuji (2011), Narahari (1943).
[509] *tān vaidyutān puruṣo mānasa etya brahmalokān gamayati | te teṣu brahmalokeṣu parāḥ parāvato vasanti | teṣāṃ na punar āvṛttiḥ*
[510] *lokān pratyuthāyinas ta evam evānuparivartante*

9.3 The Vedic Brahman Deity

We will show below that Brahmā as a persofinied deity held an important position in the early Buddhist suttas. Yet, this personified Buddhist Brahmā has predecessors in Vedic literature[511] – first in rather vague anthropomorph allusions and more pronounced in the Upaniṣads[512]. This is not to say that Vedic composers really believed that *brahman* was a concrete personified being – in fact, Jurewicz (2016, e.g. 631-642) collects and discusses in detail evidence that passages with a personified *brahman* were metaphorically describing abstract concepts of reality. Yet, such instances might have after all allowed Buddhist authors to create their own variation of a personified Brahmā deity. In other words, we seek out Vedic instances in which anthropomorph language regarding *brahman* might have influenced Buddhist authors to create a literary Brahmā character who served their own purposes and had rather little to do with the Vedic worldview.

The oldest examples which could have been interpreted by Buddhist authors as an anthropomorphized or personified[513] *brahman* character can be found in the AVŚ, e.g. in AVŚ 10.7.32-36 and AVŚ 19.22.21. Examples from the Brāhmaṇa period include JB 2.369 which presents two competing first creators, Brahman and Prajāpati, both of whom are personified and engage in short conversations[514]. In KB 15.2.20 Brahman encourages Indra to slay Vṛtra. TB 3.1.5.6 narrates how Brahman itself conquered *brahmaloka* with a proper worship offering. In ŚB 13.7.1.1 the self-existent (*svayaṃbhu*, i.e. not created) Brahman is presented as a character who performs austerities and then gains supremacy over all creatures by offering itself up. Also the genealogy of ŚB 10.6.5.9 (similarly in BU 2.6.1-3, BU 4.6.1-3, and BU 6.5.4) presents Brahman as the self-existent first creator[515]. In ŚB 11.3.3.1 Brahman and Death (*mṛtyu*) have a short dialogue over the fact that Brahman delivers him all creatures except for the *brahmacārin*.

[511] We will use '*brahman*' in cursive when we refer to 'transformative speech' and 'ultimate reality'. We will use 'Brahman' for the personified deity in Vedic literature, and Brahmā for the Buddhist deity.
[512] Gonda (1950, 62) is critical of the idea that an originally impersonal *brahman* got only with time personified. On the other hand we see no other way to interpret the very few occurrences in the Saṃhitās, the slight increase in the Brāhmaṇas and finally the clearer personifications of the Upaniṣads.
[513] 'Personified' in the sense that an abstract principle is given characteristics akin to an anthropomorph character.
[514] Gonda (1989, 36) concludes that the author tries "to harmonize the figure of Prajāpati and the impersonal Bráhman in such a way that both of them may be considered to be the first cause".
[515] See for creation stories in the Brāhmaṇas Gonda (1982).

These examples illustrate that composers of the Brāhmaṇas already used literary means of personification to convey abstract issues regarding *brahman* with metaphors and allegories. In the Upaniṣads Brahman is even more prominently presented in narratives as a creator deity and surpasses Prajāpati in that respect (TU 2.8.1, BU 3.6.1, BU 4.3.33, BU 6.1.7)[516]. Additionally, in BU 1.4.6 an originally mortal Brahman "created the gods, who are superior to him, and, being a mortal himself, he created the immortals"[517] (see for a discussion Jurewicz 2016, 423-425).

Stylistically, the potentially most influential blueprint for a personified Buddhist Brahmā can be found in Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad 1.2-7 (see for a discussion Bodewitz 2019, 116-117; and Jurewicz 2016, 632-643). The text contains a long afterlife dialogue in which Brahman receives a deceased soul in the supreme heavenly realm of *brahmaloka*. Just as in the historically later suttas we get here a conversation of a Brahman deity with a human, albeit with a deceased soul. In contrast, it seems that the Buddha's *direct* conversations with Brahmā while alive are a demonstration of his superior liberation over the Vedic tradition.

In summary, pre-Buddhist Vedic composers utilized the literary form of a personified Brahman to convey their knowledge about reality, and their audiences were most probably capable to understand the metaphors and references to the Vedic thought-world. In contrast, we cannot assume such a subtle understanding for the audiences of the Buddhist suttas which were composed for monastics, ascetics, and lay people – not primarily for Brahmins. The goal of the suttas was probably to convey that the Buddha was superior to Brahman/Brahmā, and this was best to achieve in form of an anthropomorph Brahmā deity, and in narratives in which the Buddha directly interacts with Brahmās.

[516] In the Buddhist suttas Prajāpati (Pāli Pajāpati) is rarely mentioned. MN 1 and MN 49 present the order devas-Pajāpati-Brahmā and thus suggest that Brahmā was the mightier of the two. SN 22.79, AN 11.9, and MN 22 on the other hand present the order devas-Brahmā-Pajāpati. SN 11.3 even calls Pajāpati '*devarāja*', king of devas.
[517] *yac chreyaso devān asṛjatātha yan martyaḥ sann amṛtān asṛjata tasmād atisṛṣṭir*

9.4 The Buddhist Brahmā

The Buddhist suttas know, in contrast to the Vedic tradition, not only an occasional personification of Brahman. Instead they present several named Brahmā deities. The most prominent of the Brahmās is the SN-based Sahampati who appears in a large number of suttas[518]. The meaning of the name 'Sahampati' (Skt Sahāṃpati) is not entirely clear. Choong (2014, 185) agrees with the commentaries which explain the meaning as 'Lord of the Saha World' (see for a short critique Wogihara 1902, 424). Instead, we suggest to read Sahampati as 'Lord of Power' (Skt *sahaṃ-pati*), similarly to how Thieme (1952, 129) interprets the meaning of 'Bṛhaspati'.

Interestingly, Sahampati occasionally reads the Buddha's mind[519] which shows the importance and power the suttas accredit to him. Generally, Sahampati has to be considered as *the* Buddhist Brahmā[520] as he appears at key narrative occasions throughout the Buddha's life and is always devout and reverential to him: Sahampati is present at the Buddha's enlightenment (SN 6.2, SN 47.18, SN 47.43, SN 48.57, AN 4.21), invites the Buddha to teach after his enlightenment (SN 6.1, MN 26, MN 85)[521], and is present at the Buddha's death (SN 6.15, DN 16). He never needs to be reprimanded or taught and always appears as an advocate of the Dhamma.

Through the depiction of Brahmā Sahampati we can see how the sutta authors attempt to ideally integrate Brahmins into the Buddhist movement, namely as devout followers. When Sahampati appears he often "arranged his upper robe over one shoulder, [and] raised his joined hands in reverential salutation towards the Blessed One"[522] (SN 6.2, SN 22.80, SN 47.18, SN 48.57, AN 4.21, MN 67). In some suttas Sahampati additionally "knelt down with his right knee on the ground"[523] (SN 6.1, SN 47.43, MN 26, MN 85). In these cases, the author employs human physiognomy, clothes, and behavior to express Sahampati's devotion.

[518] SN 6.1-3, SN 6.10, SN 6.12-13, SN 6.15, SN 11.17, SN 22.80, SN 47.18, SN 47.43, SN 48.57, AN 4.21, AN 10.89, MN 26, MN 67, MN 85, DN 16, Snp 3.10.
[519] SN 6.1-2, SN 22.80, SN 47.18, SN 47.43, SN 48.57, AN 4.21, MN 26, MN 67
[520] In the Chinese texts Brahmā Sahāṃpati is typically followed by the epithet 'King of Brahmās'.
[521] This story is missing in the Chinese sūtras, which casts doubt on its authenticity.
[522] *Atha kho brahmā sahampati ekaṃsaṃ uttarāsaṅgaṃ karitvā yena bhagavā tenañjaliṃ paṇāmetvā bhagavantaṃ*
[523] *dakkhiṇajāṇumaṇḍalaṃ pathaviyaṃ nihantvā*

Another relevant Brahmā is Sanaṅkumāra who in most appearances delivers the same short poem of little relevance (SN 6.11, AN 11.10, MN 53, DN 3, DN 20, DN 27) but finds more significant treatment in the bluntly polemical DN 18 and DN 19 (see for a similar conclusion Bapat 1926, 10-12): In DN 18 we are told that certain followers of the Buddha were reborn as devas and outshone the Gods of Thirty-three who celebrate the Buddha and their new 'colleagues'. Then a radiance beyond the gods appears, indicating the arrival of Brahmā Sanaṅkumāra. Brahmā Sanaṅkumāra then delivers a devotional poem praising the Buddha and gives a Buddhist teaching about happiness, meditation, and the Eightfold Path. At the end the sutta gives us its 'provenance', to make its content more plausible (see section 1.4.6). DN 19 introduces Brahmā Sanaṅkumāra similarly, but in a convoluted story within a story. Here, Brahmā Sanaṅkumāra narrates how he taught the Buddha in a previous life the path to *brahmaloka*. At the end of the sutta the Buddha emphasizes that his present teaching leads not merely to rebirth in *brahmaloka* but to full liberation. Both suttas have to be regarded as late propaganda, placing Brahmā above all devas and then subjugating Brahmā under the Buddha. Yet, DN 19 shows that *brahmaloka* is for Brahmins still the main spiritual goal (also in MN 97).

Brahmā Baka appears twice in the suttas (SN 6.4 and MN 49). In both suttas Brahmā Baka is presented as dwelling in *brahmaloka*, thinking that his state is immortal and that there is no aging, death, nor rebirth in his realm. In SN 6.4 the Buddha then laments Brahmā's ignorance. At first Brahmā Baka insists: "We seventy-two, Gotama, were merit-makers; Now we wield power, beyond birth and aging"[524]. This number of seventy-two Brahmās is not explained (see also Bodhi 2000, 436, n. 387), but it seems to represent a specific lost mythology. Then the Buddha reveals to Brahmā his actual life span: A hundred thousand *nirabbuda*s (which would equal 10^{69} years according to commentarial literature[525]). He then tells Baka that he gained his rebirth in *brahmaloka* by giving water to the thirsty, releasing captives, and saving people from danger. Eventually, Baka acknowledges the Buddha's superiority. MN 49 expands on SN 6.4 but tells us that it is Māra who makes Brahmā Baka ignorant. The sutta also speaks explicitly of 'Brahmā and his assembly' (*brahmapārisajja*), which is probably this sutta's interpretation of the 'seventy-two' mentioned in SN 6.4. Here, the Buddha confronts Baka's ignorance by telling him

[524] *Dvāsattati gotama puññakammā, Vasavattino jātijaraṃ atītā*
[525] See Datta & Singh (1962, 12).

that there are even higher realms than *brahmaloka* (see realms 8-15 in section 6.4). Moreover, the Buddha also displays stronger supernatural powers than Baka, so that in the end he silences Baka, and Māra who possesses him. Both suttas, SN 6.4 and MN 49, don't add to our understanding of Brahmā mythology, but they confirm that Brahmins considered *brahmaloka* existence to be eternal. Additionally, MN 49 devalues Brahmā Baka when Māra easily takes possession of him.

Apart from Sahampati, Sanaṅkumāra, and Baka, a few other Brahmās are mentioned, but they are of little relevance. Yet they show us that Buddhist authors had little issues with introducing new Brahmās to the canon[526]: Brahmā Turū (SN 6.9, AN 10.89)[527], a 'certain Brahmā' (SN 6.5), Subrahmā (SN 2.17, SN 6.6-8, DN 20) and Suddhāvāsa (SN 6.6-8). Apart from the Brahmās Sahampati and Baka no other Brāhmā from the Pāli suttas is mentioned in the Chinese sūtras (Choong 2014, 184).

A noteworthy sutta is SN 6.5 as it represents a straightforward humiliation of a Brahmā. Here a certain (i.e. unnamed) Brahmā had the 'evil' (*pāpaka*) view that "there is no ascetic or Brahmin who can come here"[528] – which is an obvious set-up for a power-demonstration of the Buddha. He easily appears in this Brahmā's realm, reprimands him, and floats above him. Then, four of the Buddha's master disciples appear as well and surround the Brahmā. This demonstration of power is clearly intended for a devotional audience and has no soteriological value.

As a last example, in SN 6.6 the two Brahmās Subrahmā and Suddhāvāsa notice that another Brahmā is negligent – so they visit him and tell him to venerate the Buddha. Eventually they convince him through their superior supernatural power, and by insisting that the Buddha is still much more powerful than them. So again the argument of supernatural power is used to instill awe in the audience and to convince it by extension that the Buddha (and hence his teaching) is more powerful than the Brahmins and their deities.

[526] See for Brahmās mentioned in the Chinese parallels Choong (2014, 183-184).
[527] He is called a *paccekabrahmā*, which probably means 'a solitary Brahmā' (Anālayo 2010c, 32, n.54).
[528] *natthi so samaṇo vā brāhmaṇo vā yo idha āgaccheyyā"ti.*

In most of the above cases the purpose of the narratives involving individual Brahmās is blatantly obvious, namely to show that the Buddha is far more powerful than them. Some, like Sahampati, are already devout followers of the Buddha, others (like Baka) are overpowered during the sutta narrative. The blatant intention suggests that these suttas are late fabrications, with the goal to instill awe instead of conveying spiritual teachings.

9.5 Mahābrahmā

Beyond the 'normal' Brahmā deity we also have the notion of a Mahābrahmā[529] who is higher in rank. The term is unknown to pre-Buddhist texts – only in ŚB 10.4.1.9 we find the term *mahadbrahman* in a devotional meaning. In the suttas Mahābrahmā presupposes the notion of regular personified Brahmās and is therefore probably a later development. Mahābrahmā is mentioned in three suttas of the AN, once in the MN and in seven DN suttas – also this distribution indicates a late inception. We will still examine some of these suttas in detail because they will show us the function of these late mythological narratives.

In AN 7.62 the Buddha reflects on his past-life practice of loving-kindness (*mettā*) and how as a result he was reborn as the first being in the newly evolving universe after its previous dissolution (see also section 6.4.1)[530]: "When the world was evolving, I was reborn in an empty mansion of Brahmā (*brahmavimāna*). There I was Brahmā, the Great Brahmā (*mahābrahmā*), the vanquisher (*abhibhū*), the unvanquished (*anabhibhūta*), the universal seer (*aññadatthudasa*), the wielder of mastery (*vasavattī*)"[531].

AN 10.29 engages in even further cosmological speculations, stating that there are 'galaxies' (*sahassadhā loka*, literally 'a thousandfold world') which contain a thousand moons, a thousand suns, a thousand Gods of Thirty-three, etc., and a thousand *brahmaloka*s. The foremost being in

[529] AN 7.62, AN 7.66, AN 10.29, MN 49, DN 1, DN 11, DN 14, DN 18, DN 19, DN 20, DN 24.
[530] AN 7.66 attributes the same text to the mythological teacher Sunetta.
[531] *vivaṭṭamāne loke suññaṃ brahmavimānaṃ upapajjāmi. Tatra sudaṃ, bhikkhave, brahmā homi mahābrahmā abhibhū anabhibhūto aññadatthudaso vasavattī.*

such a ‘galaxy’ is Mahābrahmā (also in DN 20). The sutta goes on to clarify that even this Mahābrahmā is subjected to impermanence and that a Buddhist disciple should be dispassionate even towards this foremost of celestial beings.

In DN 11 the Buddha narrates a story in which Mahābrahmā is portrayed as ignorant and is thus ridiculed. Here, an unnamed monk wants to find out where earth, water, fire, and air “cease without remainder”[532], and goes to heaven to ask the gods[533]. The narrative is of course only a pretense – a real Buddhist monk (just like any Vedic student) would have asked their teacher, i.e. the Buddha himself, such a question and not the gods. In the sutta the gods don’t know the answer and refer the monk to Mahābrahmā who at first awkwardly evades the question. Then, admitting his ignorance “Mahābrahmā took that monk by the arm, led him aside and said: ‘Monk, these devas believe there is nothing Brahmā does not see, there is nothing he does not know, there is nothing he is unaware of. That is why I did not speak in front of them’”[534]. He then tells the monk to put the question to the Buddha. The Buddha’s answer is, however, enigmatic: “Where consciousness is signless, boundless, all-luminous, | That’s where earth, water, fire and air find no footing”[535].

The ignorance of the gods and Mahābrahmā clearly are meant to represent the shortcomings of Brahmanism, only to end with an unsatisfying answer by the Buddha himself which is not even particularly ‘Buddhist’. The sutta’s purpose is clear: To effectively depict Mahābrahmā as a dishonest fraud, not worthy of any respect or veneration. The message to the audience seems to be: ‘Don’t seek deep answers from Brahmin teachers, who only pretend to have deep knowledge. Trust the Buddha and Buddhist teachers in general.’

The last suttas involving Mahābrahmā we would like to discuss are DN 1 and DN 24. They have a similar purpose as DN 11, but are not as demeaning. In both suttas the Buddha explains the

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[532] *aparisesā nirujjhanti*
[533] The question reminds us of inquiries in BU 1.8.4, BU 4.4.5, CU 1.8.4, and CU 7.1.1-7.15.1.
[534] *Atha kho so, kevaṭṭa, mahābrahmā taṃ bhikkhuṃ bāhāyaṃ gahetvā ekamantaṃ apanetvā taṃ bhikkhuṃ etadavoca: ‘ime kho maṃ, bhikkhu, brahmakāyikā devā evaṃ jānanti, “natthi kiñci brahmuno aññātaṃ, natthi kiñci brahmuno adiṭṭhaṃ, natthi kiñci brahmuno aviditaṃ, natthi kiñci brahmuno asacchikatan”ti. Tasmāhaṃ tesaṃ sammukhā na byākāsiṃ.*
[535] *‘Viññāṇaṃ anidassanaṃ, | anantaṃ sabbatopabhaṃ; | Ettha āpo ca pathavī, | tejo vāyo na gādhati.*

cyclical dissolution and evolution of the world. Then he describes the appearance of a Mahābrahmā: "But the time comes, sooner or later after a long period, when this world begins to evolve[536]. In this evolving world an empty palace of Brahmā appears. And then one being, from exhaustion of his life-span or of his merits, falls from the [higher] Abhassara world [see section 6.4.1] and arises in the empty Brahmā-palace"[537]. Eventually other beings join the first Brahmā: "Then in this being who has been alone for so long there arises unrest, discontent and worry, and he thinks: 'Oh, if only some other beings would come here!' And other beings, from exhaustion of their life-span or of their merits, fall from the Abhassara world and arise in the Brahmā-palace[538] as companions for this being"[539]. The sutta emphasizes that no acts of creation are involved here – the development of the world happens by itself. Furthermore, the appearance of beings in this *brahmaloka* is only due to their past merit (*puñña,* Skt *puṇya*) with no cosmic creator involved.

In the next passage the ignorance and fundamental misunderstanding of Mahābrahmā is introduced: "These beings were created by me. How so? Because I first had this thought: 'Oh, if only some other beings would come here!' That was my wish, and then these beings came into this existence! But those beings who arose subsequently think: 'This, friends, is Brahmā, Great Brahmā [...] How so? We have seen that he was here first, and that we arose after him'"[540].

In DN 24, which otherwise repeats the same material, the Buddha explicitly rejects Vedic creation myths: "There are, Bhaggava, some ascetics and Brahmins who declare as their doctrine that all things began with the creation by a god (*issara,* Skt *īśvara*), or Brahmā. I have gone to them and said: 'Reverend sirs, is it true that you declare that all things began with the creation by

[536] The original translation of *vivaṭṭati* as 'expanding' is misleading, I change it here into 'evolving'.
[537] *Hoti kho so, bhikkhave, samayo, yaṃ kadāci karahaci dīghassa addhuno accayena ayaṃ loko vivaṭṭati. Vivaṭṭamāne loke suññaṃ brahmavimānaṃ pātubhavati. Atha kho aññataro satto āyukkhayā vā puññakkhayā vā ābhassarakāyā cavitvā suññaṃ brahmavimānaṃ upapajjati.*
[538] The *brahmavimāna* 'Brahmā-palace' occurs only in DN 1, DN 24, AN 7.62, and AN 7.66. The term has no Vedic equivalent and is probably specifically Buddhist. It can also be understood as a synonym for *brahmaloka* itself.
[539] *Tassa tattha ekakassa dīgharattaṃ nivusitattā anabhirati paritassanā uppajjati: 'aho vata aññepi sattā itthattaṃ āgaccheyyun'ti. Atha aññepi sattā āyukkhayā vā puññakkhayā vā ābhassarakāyā cavitvā brahmavimānaṃ upapajjanti tassa sattassa sahabyataṃ.*
[540] *Mayā ime sattā nimmitā. Taṃ kissa hetu? Mamañhi pubbe etadahosi: "aho vata aññepi sattā itthattaṃ āgaccheyyun"ti. Iti mama ca manopaṇidhi, ime ca sattā itthattaṃ āgatā'ti. Yepi te sattā pacchā upapannā, tesampi evaṃ hoti: 'ayaṃ kho bhavaṃ brahmā mahābrahmā [...] Iminā mayaṃ bhotā brahmunā nimmitā. Taṃ kissa hetu? Imañhi mayaṃ addasāma idha paṭhamaṃ upapannaṃ, mayaṃ panamha pacchā upapannā'ti.*

a god, or Brahmā?' 'Yes', they replied. Then I asked: 'In that case, how do the reverend teachers declare that this came about?' But they could not give an answer, and so they asked me in return"[541]. Here the sutta is misleading the audience, for pre-Buddhist mythology is certainly not short of different cosmogonies, starting already in the Ṛgveda (Brown, 1965; and see below). This passage shows us also that the intended audience did not consist of learned Brahmins who would have known about different creation myths. Instead, the sutta is either meant for Buddhists in order to look down on Brahmins and enhance their self-identity as Buddhists – or for any other audiences who have little knowledge of Vedic material. Additionally, the mention of Īśvara exposes the sutta as late since this deity is mentioned only in post-Buddha Upaniṣads and the Sanskrit epics (Gonda 1960, 266-274).

The Buddhist cosmogony of DN 24 has been discussed by Buddhist scholars as the mockery of a Vedic creation myth, unfortunately not in enough detail. Gombrich (1990, 13) has suggested that "this is just a satirical retelling of the creation myth in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad [BU 1.4.1-3]", which since then has become an accepted interpretation among Buddhist scholars (e.g. Norman 1991, 272). Anālayo (2010b, 27-28) refers to Gombrich as well but also refers to BU 1.2.1. Perez-Remon (1978, 72) concedes that this passage "is a reference to some mythological accounts of creation, in which the Supreme Being is made to give expression to such a wish [that other beings shall appear as well]", and refers to BU 4.4 as such an example – BU 4.4, however, doesn't contain any creation myth, so perhaps he meant BU 1.4, instead.

Contrary to Gombrich who is ready to accept the Mahābrahmā mockery as the words of the historical Buddha, we are convinced to deal with the composition of a later author due to several reasons: The philosophical view of a cyclical universe, the propagandistic oversimplification of Brahmin views, the mockery of Brahmā and other deities, and the mention of Īśvara – all these aspects point to a later conception. We also have to keep in mind that the arguments (both the ridiculed Brahmin position as well as 'the truth' proclaimed by the Buddha) are metaphysical

[541] *Santi, bhaggava, eke samaṇabrāhmaṇā issarakuttaṃ brahmakuttaṃ ācariyakaṃ aggaññaṃ paññapenti. Tyāhaṃ upasaṅkamitvā evaṃ vadāmi: 'saccaṃ kira tumhe āyasmanto issarakuttaṃ brahmakuttaṃ ācariyakaṃ aggaññaṃ paññapethā'ti? Te ca me evaṃ puṭṭhā, 'āmo'ti paṭijānanti. Tyāhaṃ evaṃ vadāmi: 'kathaṃvihitakaṃ pana tumhe āyasmanto issarakuttaṃ brahmakuttaṃ ācariyakaṃ aggaññaṃ paññapethā'ti? Te mayā puṭṭhā na sampāyanti, asampāyantā mamaññeva paṭipucchanti.*

and speculative in nature – in contrast to Buddhist teachings on mind, ethics, and meditation. The salvific value is negligible, which stands in conflict with more practical teachings of the Buddha.

Before we attempt to find the actual source of the mocked Vedic cosmogony we will distinguish in a very simple way two types of Vedic creation myths – cosmogonies with personified creators, and more abstract evolutionary models. Again, here we don't analyze the intricate thought-world of Vedic composers, or if the creation stories were allegorical or mutually compatible (see for profound analyses Jurewicz 2010 and 2016). We rather try to show that Buddhist authors had numerous Vedic cosmogonies available, but instead presented a specific model as 'Brahmin' and then mocked it.

If, as it is our hypothesis, the motivation of the Buddhist authors was to ridicule Brahmin beliefs, this could have been achieved either with a specific cosmogony which was popular at that time, or by putting together a general *quasi*-Brahmin cosmogony which was easy to ridicule. In the latter case it would have been enough to pick aspects from Brahmin cosmogonies which for the audience *resembled* a Brahmin model. Clearly, it was not the intention of the Buddhist authors to have a serious debate about cosmic creation and evolution. We suggest that the objective was much more to denigrate the Vedic religion in general in order to consolidate Buddhist talking points and to win over skeptics who hadn't committed to Buddhism yet. This would go beyond mockery and has to be seen in the context of fierce religious competition with the goal to expand the religious power of Buddhism and to reduce the influence of Brahmanism.

When it comes to the supposedly referenced Vedic creation myth we can start by examining the hypothesis of Gombrich (1990, 13) that we deal with a satire on BU 1.4.1-3. The BU says that in the beginning there was only *ātman* shaped like a human (*puruṣa*), who saw that he was alone, and said: "Here I am" (*so'ham*) (BU 1.4.1). Then he became afraid but lost his fear again after realizing that there is nothing to be afraid of (BU 1.4.2). For his own pleasure he created a companion *by splitting his body into two*, thus creating husband and wife. He then copulated with her resulting in the birth of human beings (BU 1.4.3). Out of shame his wife hid as a cow only to be penetrated again by her husband in the shape of a bull, thus creating cattle, and in the

same pattern all other animals (BU 1.4.4). Then the first being thought: "I alone am the creation, for I created all this"[542] (BU 1.4.5). Then, churning and blowing, he created fire (BU 1.4.6)[543]. Obviously, there is little similarity with the Buddhist mocked cosmogony. Especially the creation through self-splitting and the sexual act of creation are completely absent. Instead, we have in the Buddhist version a literally impotent first being who is not able to create anything.

Anālayo (2010b, 27-28) considers BU 1.2.1 as a potential blueprint, which is equally unsatisfying: Here, at the beginning there was only death/hunger which then equipped itself with a body (*ātman*). Through recitation it then created water (BU 1.2.1). The foam on the water solidified and became earth. Then death toiled upon the earth and this heat turned into fire (BU 1.2.2). By dividing his body he then created sun, wind, directions, sky, and atmosphere (BU 1.2.3). This myth of BU 1.2.1 is equivalent to ŚB 10.6.5.1: "Verily, there was nothing here in the beginning: by Death this (universe) was covered, by hunger, for Death is hunger. He created for himself this mind (*manas*), thinking, 'May I have a soul (*ātman*).' He went on worshipping. Whilst he was worshipping the waters were produced"[544]. Both passages don't bear a resemblance with the Buddhist narration even on the surface level.

Below, we will present the variety of Vedic creation myths (see for further examples Gonda 1982, and Jurewicz 2012). But we can already state that there is no real Vedic blueprint for the Buddhist mockery. Yet, a detailed presentation is necessary in order to prove that the Buddhist mockery was misleading from the outset. We will focus on cosmogonies in the BU and ŚB, which were close to early Buddhism in time and place. Because of apparent dissimilarities we won't discuss the myths in JB 1.68-73; JB 2.369; JUB 1.23.1-3; JUB 1.46.1-1.48.8; AU 1.1.1-4.

A cosmogoy we find in ŚB 2.5.1.1 declares: "Verily, in the beginning, Prajāpati alone existed here. He thought within himself, 'How can I be propagated?' He toiled and practiced

[542] *ahaṃ vāva sṛṣṭir asmy ahaṃ hīdaṃ sarvam asṛkṣīti*
[543] This part might be based on a shorter myth in ŚB 2.2.4.1: "Prajāpati alone, indeed, existed here in the beginning. He considered,' How may I be reproduced?' He toiled and performed acts of penance. He generated Agni from his mouth" (see for a discussion Jurewicz 2016, 311).
[544] *naiveha kiṃ canāgra āsīt mṛtyunaivedamāvṛtamāsīdaśanāyayāśanāyā hi mṛtyustanmano'kurutātmanvī syāmiti so'rcannacarattasyārcata āpo'jāyantārcate vai*

austerities”[545] and thus created animals and men (similarly in AB 2.5). ŚB 6.1.3.1-18 presents a detailed creation myth in which again Prajāpati was alone in the beginning. Through toil and austerity he created water. The heated water created foam, the heated foam turned into clay, then sand, then pebble, and eventually the gods and nature. This cosmogony is curious because after an initial act of creation a self-regulated evolution takes place which resembles the Buddha’s description.

A similar myth in ŚB 11.1.6.1-24 involves a primordial cosmic egg (see also Witzel 2012, 121-124): “Verily, in the beginning this (universe) was water, nothing but a sea of water. The waters desired, 'How can we be reproduced?' They toiled and performed fervid devotions, when they were becoming heated, a golden egg was produced”[546] (ŚB 11.1.6.1). Out of this egg Prajāpati was born (ŚB 11.1.6.2), who then created the gods by singing praises and toiling (ŚB 11.1.6.7; variation in CU 3.19.1-3; see for a cognitive linguistic discussion Jurewicz 2016, 384-392).

We find a more straight-forward creation story in ŚB 11.2.3.1: “Verily, in the beginning, this (universe) was the Brahman. It created the gods; and, having created the gods, it made them ascend these worlds: Agni this (terrestrial) world, Vāyu the air, and Sūrya the sky”[547]. And by heating the three worlds he created lights, gods, and the Vedas (ŚB 11.2.3.2-5). A variation can be found in ŚB 11.5.8.1: “Verily, in the beginning, Prajāpati alone was here. He desired, 'May I exist, may I be generated: He wearied himself and performed fervid devotions: from him, thus wearied and heated, the three worlds were created – the earth, the air, and the sky”[548]. The implication of this variation is that the creator made the three worlds *from himself*[549].

Apart from the BU myths already mentioned, there is the following one in BU 1.4.10: “In the beginning this world was only *brahman*, and it knew only itself (*ātman*), thinking: ‘I am

[545] *prajāpatirha vā idamagra eka evāsa | sa aikṣata kathaṃ nu prajāyeyeti so 'śrāmyatsa tapo*
[546] *āpo ha vā idamagre salilamevāsa tā akāmayanta kathaṃ nu prajāyemahīti tā aśrāmyaṃstāstapo'tapyanta tāsu tapastapyamānāsu hiraṇmayamāṇḍaṃ sambabhūvājāto*
[547] *brahma vā idamagra āsīt taddevānasṛjata taddevāntsṛṣṭvaiṣu lokeṣu vyārohayadasminneva loke'gniṃ vāyumantarikṣe divyeva sūryam*
[548] *prajāpatirvā idamagra āsīt eka eva so'kāmayata syām prajāyeyeti so'śrāmyatsa tapo'tapyata tasmācrāntāttepānāttrayo lokā asṛjyanta pṛthivyantarikṣaṃ dyauḥ*
[549] See for the foundational myth of world creation from the body of the primordial man Witzel (2012, 117-120).

brahman.' As a result, it became the Whole"[550]. Brahman then created gods more powerful than himself, e.g. Indra and Varuṇa. After creating more gods it created the *dharma* (BU 1.4.14).

As a preliminary result, we see the most prominent similarity to the Buddhist version in myths where a single first being is alone – be it in the form of Brahman or Prajāpati. In grave contrast to the Buddhist mockery the creator deities in the Vedic texts exert themselves in the creative act and are literally potent and fertile. In the sutta, however, Brahmā just *assumes* that the appearing second generation deities have manifested through his desire. But in the Vedic texts the creators purposefully employ exertion in order to create. Or, they split themselves up in order to form their creations. So already in these aspects we see the distortion of the Buddhist text.

There are, however, also Vedic myths without a personified creator deity. These offer less of a satirical target and were ignored by the Buddhist authors whose mockery *depends* on an ignorant creator. The oldest texts with a creator-less evolution of the world can be found in ṚV 10.129.1: "The nonexistent did not exist, nor did the existent exist at that time. There existed neither the airy space nor heaven beyond"[551] (see for a detailed discussion Jurewicz 2010, 44-62, and Brereton 1999; see for later variations ŚB 6.1.1.1-6, ŚB 10.5.3.1, CU 6.2.1-3). If the Buddhist authors indeed wanted to ridicule the ignorance of the Brahmin tradition they could have misinterpreted this ṚV mantra, because it asks questions without answering them directly: "Who really knows? Who shall here proclaim it? – from where was it born, from where this creation? The gods are on this side of the creation of this (world). So then who does know from where it came to be?"[552] (ṚV 10.129.6). The Buddha could have then conveniently provided the answer to the questions of the ṚV mantra himself. The fact that the Buddhist author doesn't use this classic hymn of the ṚV again shows that the purpose of the suttas was not to provide knowledge or give answers to ancient questions of creation but rather to denigrate Brahmin teachings in general.

[550] *brahma vā idam agra āsīt | tad ātmānam evāvet | ahaṃ brahmāsmīti | tasmāt tat sarvam abhavat*
[551] *nāsad āsīn no sad āsīt tadānīṃ nāsīd rajo no vyomā paro yat*
[552] *ko addhā veda ka iha pra vocat kuta ājātā kuta iyaṃ visṛṣṭiḥ | arvāg devā asya visarjanenāthā ko veda yata ābabhūva*

The following two creation myths develop a creator deity only later on[553]. The first is at the end of the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa, in JB 3.360-367 (see for a translation and detailed discussion Schwerda 2017, 9-24): In the state of non-existence righteousness (*ṛta*), truth (*satya*), and heat (*tapas*) swam up, fed on light, and unified into a golden egg. The egg split into a lower half creating the earth, and an upper half creating the heaven. The distance between the two became the atmosphere. From the egg the creator was born (presumably Prajāpati) and his first utterances became the Vedas and Brahman. The second occurs in BU 5.5.1: "In the beginning only the waters were here. Those waters created the real (*satyam*), the real created *brahman*, that is, Prajāpati, and Prajāpati created the gods"[554].

There are more creator-less cosmogonies in Vedic literature (e.g. in AVŚ 19.53-54 and JUB 4.22.1-12) but our discussion has already sufficiently shown that the Buddhist 'mockery' is based on a misrepresentation of the majority of Vedic texts where a creator *actively* creates (e.g. through *tapas*; see for a further discussion Gonda 1982, 47-53). Additionally, there were several evolutionary cosmogonies without creators that the sutta authors could have referenced. The conclusion is clear: The Buddhist story was not the mockery of a *specific* myth or passage, as suggested by Gombrich, Anālayo, and others. Rather, it is a polemic satire of the Brahmin worldview *in general*, denying that a creator deity could have creative powers at all.

What then is the actual value of the Buddhist mockery? First of all, it presents the Buddha as knowing the deepest mysteries, even of creation and the universe, and in general 'the truth'. In contrast, Brahmin teachers can (from the Buddhist perspective) only repeat their traditional myths (or variations of their central myth) without seeing the truth directly. By presenting the cyclical evolution of the world the suttas not only tell the audience that the Buddha knows more than the Brahmins, they present *several layers* of knowledge not covered by the Vedic speculations: The oscillating world, merit as the foundation of the rebirth mechanism, and deities even higher than Prajāpati or Brahman. Secondly, the authors of these polemic suttas apparently address an audience that is to be dissuaded from supporting Brahmanism.

[553] Another possible but less clear example is ṚV 10.190.
[554] *āpa evedam agra āsuḥ | tā āpaḥ satyam asṛjanta | satyaṃ brahma | brahma prajāpatim | prajāpatir devān |*

As suggested already several times, this attitude doesn't fit to the earliest benevolent relationships with Brahmins (section 2.1). Instead, such ridicule makes sense for a period after the Buddha, when religious competition over followers and resources became fierce and even malicious attacks and misrepresentations became legitimate means to that end.

9.6 *Brahmaloka* in Buddhism

We encounter two main kinds of *brahmaloka* in the suttas. The first group is mentioned by the *narrator*, e.g. when Brahmā Sahampati disappears from *brahmaloka* in order to appear on the scene[555]: "Then, just as quickly as a strong man might extend his drawn-in arm or draw in his extended arm, Brahmā Sahampati disappeared from *brahmaloka* and reappeared before the Blessed One"[556] (SN 6.1).

This narrative element must be an invention of the narrator. Even if the Buddha had the supernatural power to interact with Brahmās he could only have been a witness to their sudden *appearance* but not to their prior *disappearance* from *brahmaloka* before they came to see him. A few suttas use the same wording to describe the *appearance* of the Buddha or his followers in *brahmaloka* (SN 6.4-5, SN 6.14, AN 6.34, AN 7.56, MN 49). The fact that these passages use the exact same formula suggests that they are narrative devices to set the stage for an encounter with a Brahmā deity.

The second group of contexts in which *brahmaloka* occurs concerns the realm itself and how to attain it. These contexts deserve more attention since the Buddha, as a self-declared fully liberated being with supreme knowledge, would have been expected to provide viable practices and paths for a rebirth in *brahmaloka*. Given the critical position of some suttas against the Brahmin world-view it is remarkable that no sutta suggests that *brahmaloka* or other divine

[555] In SN 6.1-3, SN 6.6, SN 22.80, SN 47.18, SN 47.43, SN 48.57, AN 4.21, MN 26, MN 67, MN 85, DN 11, DN 14, DN 19. The formula is used to describe teleportation, for which *brahmaloka* is a prominent destination.
[556] *Atha kho brahmā sahampati – seyyathāpi nāma balavā puriso samiñjitaṃ vā bāhaṃ pasāreyya, pasāritaṃ vā bāhaṃ samiñjeyya; evameva – brahmaloke antarahito bhagavato purato pāturahosi.*

realms were merely imaginations of Brahmin composers. Instead, we see that the suttas appropriate *brahmaloka* as an actual space and put some effort into detailing paths to attain it, even though in the end an existence in *brahmaloka* is seen as inferior to Buddhist liberation.

We encounter the spatial conceptualization of *brahmaloka* in SN 6.14 when a liberated monk says: "Friends, while standing in *brahmaloka* I can make my voice heard throughout the thousandfold world system"[557]. The image we get is similar to standing on a mountain-top from where sound travels far (see this image also implied in SN 56.11 and AN 3.80). SN 51.22 adds another aspect to the Buddhist conceptualization of *brahmaloka* – here the Buddha says that he visits *brahmaloka* not only with a mind-made body (*manomaya kaya*) but also with his *physical body* composed of the material elements (*cātumahābhūtika kāya*). This means that *brahmaloka* is not understood as some 'astral' or extra-dimensional realm but as a concrete space which is located in our physical universe. The specific claim of visiting *brahmaloka* physically is unique to SN 51.22 but it is consistent with a frequent formula of supernatural powers developed through meditation. After mentioning other powers it says: "seated cross-legged, he travels in space like a bird; with his hand he touches and strokes the moon and sun so powerful and mighty; he exercises mastery with the body as far as *brahmaloka*"[558] (SN 51.11-14, SN 51.17-32, SN 52.12, AN 3.60, AN 3.101, AN 5.23, AN 5.28, AN 5.68, AN 6.2, AN 6.70, AN 9.35, AN 10.97, MN 6, MN 12, MN 77, MN 108, MN 119, DN 2, DN 10, DN 11, DN 28, DN 34).

The wide distribution of this passage suggests that it became popular relatively early[559], but it shows no organic variations and thus could be an editorial copy-and-paste. Be it as it may, in the stock passage we progressively ascend in height – first 'travelling like a bird', then 'touching moon and sun', and finally going as far as *brahmaloka*. This 'astronomical' model is generally consistent with the ancient Vedic subdivision into earth, atmosphere, and sky[560] (see for a discussion Gonda 1966, 53-66).

[557] *pahomi khvāhaṃ, āvuso, brahmaloke ṭhito sahassilokadhātuṃ sarena viññāpetun'ti.*
[558] *ākāsepi pallaṅkena kamati, seyyathāpi pakkhī sakuṇo; imepi candimasūriye evaṃmahiddhike evaṃmahānubhāve pāṇinā parimasati parimajjati; yāva brahmalokāpi kāyena vasaṃ vatteti.*
[559] There are also Chinese parallels, e.g. in MĀ 185, DĀ 18, DĀ 20, and DĀ 24.
[560] The particular order of sky, moon, sun, *brahmaloka*, is however difficult to attribute. See for example Bodewitz (2019, 118-120). A possible source is the model of BU 6.2.15: moon – sun – lightning – *brahmaloka.*

Now we can turn to the paths to *brahmaloka* presented in the suttas. Pre-Buddhist Brahmanism is rather enigmatic about reaching this supreme realm so that the Buddha (and the sutta authors after him) had to show two things: a convincing familiarity with the realm of *brahmaloka*, and a sensible path for any practitioner to attain it. We will see that it was apparently important for Buddhist teachers to present this knowledge, even if a rebirth in *brahmaloka* was inferior to Buddhist liberation.

No other sutta shows this clearer than DN 13 which has the sole purpose to convince Brahmin students of the Buddhist path to *brahmaloka*. Here, two Brahmin students discuss the paths of their teachers to *brahmaloka* (unfortunately without details) and decide to go to the Buddha to solve the matter. The Buddha then makes them admit that neither their Brahmin teachers nor any Brahmin in history, including the ancient Ṛṣis, has seen a Brahmā with their own eyes nor that they have any detailed knowledge about Brahmās. Consequently, the students have to concede that their teachers' paths must be wrong. The Buddha finally teaches them as a path the four *brahmavihāra* meditations (lit. 'abodes of *brahman*'): *mettā, karuṇā, muditā, upekkhā* (see Anālayo, 2015). Interestingly, the sutta doesn't progress to describe Buddhist liberation. The purpose of DN 13 is, therefore, solely to demonstrate the Buddha's superior knowledge on *brahmaloka*.

The *brahmavihāra* meditations are: *mettā* ('loving-kindness'), *karuṇā* ('compassion'), *muditā* ('sympathetic joy'), and *upekkhā* (rendered as 'equanimity'). The mastery of these meditations leads to *cetovimutti*, 'liberation of the mind'[561]. On a macrocosmic level the mastery of these meditations is the most common path for rebirth in *brahmaloka*. The term *brahmavihāra*, however, is problematic for two reasons. First, it is very rare, occurring only in SN 54.11-12, AN 5.192, MN 83, and DN 17, which means that in most cases the four meditations occur without any specific title or label[562]. Secondly, in SN 54.11-12 the term *brahmavihāra* also applies to a completely different meditation, namely to *samādhi* based on breath meditation (*ānāpānassatisamādhi*). SN 54.11-12 also offer synonyms for *brahmavihāra*, namely

[561] *Mettācetovimutti* etc., i.e. 'the liberation of mind by loving-kindness' etc. (in SN 21.3, SN 21.5, SN 46.51, SN 46.54, AN 5.13, AN 10.219, AN 11.16, AN 11.982, MN 52, and DN 34). See for *cetovimutti* also De Silva (1978).
[562] In DN 33 and Snp 3.5 they are alternatively called the four *appamaññā*, i.e. 'boundless states'.

‘*ariyavihāra*’ (the abode of Buddhist master practitioners), and ‘*tathāgatavihāra’* (the abode of a Buddha)[563].

Today it is a widely held assumption among Buddhist practitioners that the four *brahmavihāra* meditations are *the* Buddhist practices for a *brahmaloka* rebirth. This is mostly correct (in AN 5.192, MN 83, MN 97, MN 99, DN 13, DN 17, DN 19), but there are also suttas which single out only one of the four. AN 4.125, AN 8.1 and AN 11.15 mention only *mettā* (‘loving-kindness’) as a practice. And some suttas mention a legendary Brahmin teacher who focused on *karuṇā* (compassion) for a *brahmaloka*-rebirth (AN 6.54, AN 7.66, AN 7.73, also DN 19, Snp 1.7)[564]. This utilization of a legendary Brahmin teacher seems like an attempt to further legitimize the Buddha’s teaching in the eyes of Brahmin audiences.

As mentioned above, there are also other practices in the suttas that lead to a rebirth in *brahmaloka*[565]. Snp 3.5 is peculiar in that it says that a Brahmin who makes a worship offering (*yañña*) to arahants is reborn in *brahmaloka*. It mentions in passing that during the offering one should practice *mettā*, but here the important element is clearly the offering to arahants. This echoes the discussion we had in section 3.1 about religious giving and how the suttas maintain that a donation to the Buddha and his arahants is ‘a better investment’ than an offering to the gods. Appropriately, in SN 6.3 Brahmā Sahampati tells a Brahmin woman that her oblations are without effect and that she should better ask the Buddha (he calls him *brahmadeva*) for the proper path to Brahman (*brahmapatha*[566]). Curiously she ends up making a devotional offering to the Buddha instead of asking him, so again the implication is that religious giving *is* a path for *brahmaloka* rebirth (also in AN 7.52 and AN 8.35).

SN 48.57 provides a path to *brahmaloka*-rebirth through the cultivation of five faculties (*indriya*)[567] which eventually leads to the elimination of sensual desire (see also Ellis, 2020). In

[563] Both terms appear only here, in SN 54.11-12.
[564] The legendary Brahmin teaches also the overcoming of *kāma* (sensual desire), similar to Yājñavalkya in BU 4.4.6-7. See for *kāma* in Vedic thought e.g. Macy 1975, 145-147; Gonda 1975, 294; Das 2006; Jurewicz 2016, 642.
[565] Two minor examples: In AN 4.123 the first *jhāna* and in MN 41-42 good conduct result in *brahmaloka* rebirth.
[566] The term *brahmapatha* appears already in CU 4.15.5 as a path to immortality (see also Geiger 1973, 92).
[567] These particular five faculties are: faith (*saddha*), energy (*vīriya*), mindfulness (*sati*), *samādhi*, and wisdom (*paññā*). See Warder (2004, 89-92).

this sutta it is Brahmā Sahampati who says of his own previous life: "By having developed and cultivated these same five faculties, venerable sir, I eliminated desire for sensual pleasures (*kāma*) and thus, with the breakup of the body, after death, I was reborn in a good destination, in *brahmaloka*"[568]. Interestingly, at the beginning of this sutta the Buddha says that the cultivation of these faculties culminates in *amata*, i.e. immortality, which is usually a synonym for full liberation. But Brahmā Sahampati obviously didn't attain full liberation and got reborn in *brahmaloka* instead.

In summary, the most common path in the suttas for a rebirth in *brahmaloka* are the four *brahmavihāra* meditations. Among these, the practice of *karuṇā* (compassion) might have been the oldest since it is a practice that the suttas themselves project into the past. Apart from these meditations the most important practice which leads to a rebirth in *brahmaloka* is religious giving, which emulates the Brahmin practice of Vedic worship offerings. These two paths are very different from each other: The *Brahmavihāra* practices are advanced meditations and mostly limited to monastics, whereas religious giving can be practiced by any lay follower. Given the allure of a *brahmaloka* rebirth it is surprising that the path of religious giving was not utilized more in the suttas. Perhaps *brahmaloka* was too abstract for lay people after all, at least in comparison to a more colorful rebirth as a deva. So in the end it might be that the Buddhist goal of a *brahmaloka* rebirth was mostly interesting to Brahmin philosophers and converts who were familiar with the late Vedic world-view, just as the Brahmins depicted in DN 13.

9.7 Summary

The above chapter is, to our knowledge, the most comprehensive discussion of *brahman* in academic Buddhist literature and indeed we could find complex Buddhist references to different aspects of the Vedic *brahman*. The suttas consciously use the old Vedic meaning of *brahman* as transformative speech, especially in compounds where *brahman* and *dhamma* occur in very

[568] *So khvāhaṃ, bhante, imesaṃyeva pañcannaṃ indriyānaṃ bhāvitattā bahulīkatattā kāmesu kāmacchandaṃ virājetvā kāyassa bhedā paraṃ maraṇā sugatiṃ brahmalokaṃ upapanno.*

similar meanings – e.g. *brahma-* and *dhammacakka*, and *brahma-* and *dhammabhūta*. The suttas also imply this meaning of *brahman* in regards to *brahmacariya* which has been discussed in chapter four. The later Upaniṣadic meaning of *brahman* as 'ultimate reality' is rare in the suttas.

It is doubtful that especially later sutta composers, who were very critical of Brahmanism, had a good understanding of the subtle aspects of the Vedic *brahman*. But early Buddhism generally confirms that Brahmins hoped to attain immortality by a rebirth in *brahmaloka*. Also, the suttas appropriate *brahmaloka* in their cosmology as a physical realm in which Brahmā deities dwell, making yet clear that *brahmaloka* is inferior to Buddhist liberation. The suttas also provide their own two Buddhist paths to a *brahmaloka* rebirth: Most prominently the four *brahmavihāra* meditations, and rarely also religious giving.

Brahmā deities play an important part in early Buddhist mythology, much more than in Vedic literature where a personified Brahman occurs relatively rarely. The most relevant Brahmā Sahampati is a humble devotee of the Buddha and appears at important biographical events: The Buddha's liberation, his decision to teach, and his death. Other Brahmās have to be reprimanded and humbled first. These attempts of the suttas to incorporate Brahmās into Buddhist devotional myths are, however, little convincing. Too obvious is the purpose to subordinate the supreme Brahmin deity under Buddhist supremacy. This becomes overly clear in late suttas like DN 11 where Mahābrahmā (representing Brahmin creation mythology in general) is mocked and described as a hypocritical being who only pretends to be all-knowing.

In their attempts to transform the Brahmin discourse of *brahman*, either by making Brahmā a devotee of the Buddha, or by presenting the Buddha as superior in knowledge and power, Buddhist authors resorted to new means: They introduced into the ancient Indian discourse the idea of several different Brahmās, and the possibility of liberated Buddhists to interact with them directly – an audacity that was probably inconceivable before the Buddha and was meant to emphasize Buddhism's entitlement to religious leadership. We suspect that these texts represent later additions, from a time when it became important for the self-identity of Buddhist leaders to proclaim their superiority over Brahmanism.

Chapter Ten: Vedic *Ātman* and Buddhist *Anattā*

10.1 General Notes

In this final chapter I would like to add a modest contribution to a topic which has captivated scholars and philosophers for centuries, namely the so-called *anattā* or 'not-self' doctrine of early Buddhism. As I suggest below, there are two main aspects of *anattā* in early Buddhism. The first is that for the spiritual seeker the *innate sense of self* is an obstructive object of attachment and has to be dissolved on the path to liberation. This sense of self is not philosophical or spiritual. Instead, it is a '*de-facto*' intuitive sense of being-a-person that the vast majority of people can easily subscribe to. It is experiential and necessarily based on perception and cognition (for example the experience of waking up in the same body every day). This intuitive sense of self is rejected by the Buddhist *anattā*, and is to this extent in tension not only with our intuition but also with Upaniṣadic concepts of *ātman* which use perception and cognition as reference points. Yet, it is unlikely that this first aspect of the Buddhist *anattā* targets Upaniṣadic concepts *explicitly*, since it doesn't at all mention the life force *prāṇa*, which is an essential quality of the Upaniṣadic *ātman*. The second aspect of the Buddhist *anattā* teaching is, as I argue, to dismiss the attachment to any *spiritual concept* of *ātman*, especially the aspect that it should grant immortality in the afterlife. In this respect the Buddhist approach refers to *all* teachings of *ātman* which imply such an afterlife aspiration.

It might come as a surprise that *anattā* (Skt *anātman*), which is the antonym to *attā* (Skt *ātman*), should not be directly aimed at Upaniṣadic concepts since '*ātman*' in popular perception quintessentially stands for the philosophy of the Upaniṣads[569]. Generally, the Buddhist *anattā* could refer to: specific Vedic *ātman* concepts, Vedic *ātman* concepts as a whole, or *ātman* concepts of non-Vedic *śramaṇa* teachers[570].

[569] Some scholars caution against overstating the significance of *ātman* in the Upaniṣads, e.g. Edgerton (1916) or Nakamura (1990, 104-106).
[570] See Dundas (2002, 110-111), Black (2012) and Mukherjee (1993). Bronkhorst (2007, 261) prefers this third possibility: "The *ātman*-doctrine rejected by the Buddhists was not a late-Vedic idea, but an idea introduced into late-Vedic texts under the influence of the culture of Greater Magadha."

Even though *anattā* is the dominant attitude of early Buddhism, we find in the suttas also *positive* mentions of *attā*. Scholars have interpreted these instances differently, ranging from the theory that the Buddha rejected some *ātman* concepts and affirmed others[571], to the theory that the suttas accept a 'common sense' *attā* while rejecting a metaphysical *attā*[572]. To further complicate the matter, in both Pāli and Sanskrit *attā* and *ātman* denote next to philosophical concepts also the simple grammatical reflexive pronoun (i.e. myself, himself, herself, etc.), so that in some of the affirmative cases *attā* could serve a simple grammatical purpose.

Our fragmentary understanding of Buddhist *anattā* shows that probably important context was lost in the transmission process. As a consequence, scholars, with the intention to present a coherent vision of early Buddhism, have often closed the gaps rather with their own concepts than by presenting what the texts themselves have to say. Hence, we will focus below on describing how *anattā* is represented in the suttas.

First of all, it is important to point out that even in the Vedic tradition *ātman* has several historical layers of meaning, for it already appears in the Ṛgveda and can be rendered there as 'the spirit which animates beings' (Elizarenkova 2005, 122), as 'wind' and 'breath' (Jurewicz 2007, 133), or 'life breath' (Jamison & Brereton 2014, 344). Throughout the Brāhmaṇas the *ātman* concept has adapted, often denoting the mortal body (Kazama 1962), man's appearance, and the manifest aspect of reality (Jurewicz 2016, 398). As can be expected, in the Brāhmaṇas *ātman* appears in ritual contexts, and there it refers not only to the body of the sacrificer but is metaphorically linked to the fire altar which is also called '*ātman*' (ibid., 364). An additional meaning is the immortal 'self' that the Vedic practitioner prepares for himself in the sun to grant him an immortal afterlife (ibid., 371 and 400, referring to JB 1.17-18).

Finally, the descriptions of *ātman* are not even uniform in the Upaniṣads, where it is usually translated as 'self' (e.g. Jayatilleke 1963, 114). In spite of our common usage, however, our western notions of 'self', 'essence' or 'soul' themselves are problematic and far from self-

[571] The claim is, that by detailing what is not-*attā* he actually wanted his followers to realize the real *attā* (see especially Bhattacharya 1987, Perez-Remon 1980, or Horner 1946).
[572] Oetke (1988) as reviewed in Franco & Preisendanz (1991).

evident (Oetke 2008). Generally, the Upaniṣadic *ātman* can be understood as the "ultimate essence of the human being". It can also refer to aspects which contribute to our individuality – from the body to the innermost self (Jurewicz 2007; Olivelle 1998, 26).

Before we get into the details of the suttas it is important to emphasize that the Buddha did *not* directly deny an ontological 'self'. A declaration like "there is no self" is simply nowhere to be found in the suttas[573]. Instead, it has been sufficiently shown that *anattā* should be translated as *not*-self rather than *no*-self (e.g. Wynne, 2010), because we mostly find *specific* refutations – e.g. the body is not-self, feelings are not-self, sense impressions are not-self, etc.

Another interesting debate is whether *anattā* was a metaphysical view at all or instead a pragmatic (and therefore necessarily imprecise) strategy to dissolve the meditators' attachments on their path to liberation (e.g. in Albahari, 2002; or Thanissaro 1993). We will show below that this interpretation of *anattā* fits much better with the vast majority of *anattā* suttas, going well with our general impression that the historical Buddha was more interested in bringing about liberation than in sophisticated metaphysics (see also Verhaeghen 2017, 22). On the other hand this can be said about pre-Buddhist literature as well, and we should keep in mind that Vedic texts about *ātman* not only present abstract philosophy but that for the practitioners the topic was of actual liberating significance[574]. We suggest that readers who are interested in more detailed philosophical elaborations, including the connections of *anattā* with the 'dependent origination' (*paṭiccasamuppāda*, Skt *pratītyasamutpāda*), consult the pertinent literature[575].

Going forward, we assume that if Buddhist composers wanted to refute a specific Upaniṣadic concept they would do so explicitly, making it clear for the audience, using specific terms and vocabulary. They would also take the Vedic *ātman* concepts at face value, disregarding their deep soteriological meaning. Therefore, the vocabulary of the suttas is very significant for our investigation.

[573] The closest denial of any self occurs in MN 22 (see Norman, 1984; also Werner 1988, 96). Apperently, however, the Chinese suttas MĀ 62 and SĀ 105 do contain direct ontological denials of a self (see Bingenheimer 2016, 384).
[574] Edgerton (1929, 102): "Abstract truth for its own sake, as an end in itself, has never for a moment been conceived by Indian philosophers as a proper objective for their speculations". Similarly, Burns (2014, 16-17).
[575] Apart from the literature already mentioned see also Albahari (2006), Buddhadhasa (1990), Collins (1982), Harvey (2004), Kuznetsova et al. (2012), Siderits et al. (2011), Perez-Remon (1980), Jurewicz (2010b).

When we investigate the *anattā* suttas we keep in mind their distribution in the nikāyas. Additionally, we emphasize that finding content in single suttas does not mean that it represents original Buddhism in general. There is a considerable risk that exceptional content is a product of late editing (also Oetke 2019, 272). This is why we rather rely on content that is consistently spread over numerous suttas. We point this out at the beginning of this chapter because when discussing the topic of *anattā* it makes a big difference if one focuses on wide-spread teachings or on exceptional content. Most scholarly research overemphasizes the rare content, thus making the reader undervaluing the more representative teachings of early Buddhism.

There is, however, no particular *anattā* teaching that is evenly spread out over the nikāyas. We find the most relevant texts which lay out the main arguments for *anattā* in the SN. The AN on the other hand, already implying an intellectual understanding of the *anattā* logic, mostly promotes applied *anattā* techniques. In total, the approximately two hundred SN and AN suttas which include 'not-self' are mostly succinct and formulaic, are relatively consistent with each other and should be regarded as representing the early Buddhist position on *anattā*.

Apart from that we have exceptional single suttas which offer detailed elaborations on *anattā* (MN 2, MN 22, DN 1, DN 9, DN 15, DN 29). Understandably, scholars have dedicated more work to these suttas. Yet, the resulting conclusions rely too heavily on this exceptional content. In order to represent early Buddhism more faithfully we will, therefore, focus on the relationship of the SN and AN to the Vedic *ātman* concepts.

The SN *anattā* suttas fall into two categories: suttas which directly state what should be considered as *anattā* (from now on called 'declaration suttas'). On the other hand we have suttas which follow a three-step *anattā* argumentation (further called 'argumentation suttas').

10.2 Declaration Suttas – Addressing the Sense of Self

The 'declaration suttas' declare two cluster-concepts as not-self: The *khandha*s (Skt *skandha*) are declared as *anattā*[576]; and the *saḷāyatana*s (Skt *ṣaḍāyatana*) are declared as *anattā*[577].
To put it simply, the five *khandha*s constitute the basic components, 'aggregates', or 'categories' of human experience (see for details Boisvert 1995): form or body (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*, Skt *saṃjñā*), 'mental formation' (*saṅkhāra*, Skt *saṃskāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*, Skt *vijñāna*). Declaring them as *anattā* means that neither the body nor any aspect of the mind are considered 'self', not feelings, thoughts, memory or intention (which belong to *saṅkhāra-khandha*), or consciousness itself. In short, any category of experience that can be an object of ostensive definition (Wittgenstein 1999, 13) is declared as not-self.

The *saḷāyatana*s on the other hand, are the six 'sense spheres' (see Ellis 2020b): seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touch, and the mind (*manas*). Hence, also these aspects of conscious experience, including the mind with its mental objects, are declared as *anattā*, not-self.

By stating that *khandha*s and *saḷāyatana*s are not-self the Buddhist texts therefore rule out that any *attā* could be connected to human experience. By stating that our body, sense impressions, feelings, thoughts, intentions, memories, etc. are not-self the declaration suttas dismiss the intuitive *sense* of self[578], rather than philosophical or spiritual *concepts* of self. This focus on dismissing the innate sense of self questions our firm belief to 'be somebody'. For monastics this metonymically activates a meditative process of dis-identification. In this function this strategy should be understood as pragmatic, not as an ontological dogma (we are here in line with Thanissaro 2011, 14).

[576] SN 18.21-22, SN 22.1, SN 22.7-8, SN 22.11, SN 22.14, SN 22.17, SN 22.20, SN 22.43-44, SN 22.47, SN 22.55, SN 22.59, SN 22.71-72, SN 22.81-82, SN 22.85, SN 22.90-93, SN 22.99-100, SN 22.117-119, SN 23.17, SN 35.234, SN 41.3, SN 44.8, AN 3.133, AN 4.181, AN 4.196, MN 22, MN 62, MN 35, MN 109, MN 148.
[577] SN 35.3, SN 35.6, SN 35.9, SN 35.55-59, SN 35.71-72, SN 35.87, SN 35.142, SN 35.149, SN 35.174-176, SN 35.183-185, SN 35.192-194, SN 35.201-203, SN 35.210-212, SN 35.219-221, SN 35.224, SN 35.227, SN 44.7, AN 10.60, MN 144, MN 148.
[578] See for a contemporary equivalent in philosophy the 'no-subject' doctrine in Strawson (2003, 95-98).

Now that we have identified experience as the main target of the declaration suttas, we can check if this rejection relates to a specific Upaniṣadic understanding which would describe *ātman* in the context of experience. Indeed *ātman* is described in CU 3.14.2 and similarly in CU 7.3.1 as *manomaya* (composed of mind). Likewise, BU 4.3.7 and BU 4.4.22 state that *ātman* is made of *vijñāna* (consciousness or perception, see also BU 4.5.13). These are descriptions which the Buddhist declaration suttas explicitly reject (in the form of *manāyatana* and *viññāṇa khandha*).

Other passages include more detailed descriptions of *ātman* associated with experience. TU 2.1-5 regards as aspects of *ātman*: food, breath (*prāṇa*), mind (*manas*), *vijñāna*, and bliss. BU 1.4.7 considers breath (*prāṇa*), speech, sight, hearing, and mind (*manas*) as *ātman*. Likewise, BU 1.5.3 states that *ātman* consists of speech, mind, and breath. BU 4.4.5 (comparably BU 3.7.3-23) gives us an even larger number of experiential qualities associated with *ātman*: perception (*vijñāna*), mind (*manas*), sight, breath (*prāṇa*), hearing, earth, water, wind, space[579], light and the lightless, desire (*kāma*) and the desireless, anger and the angerless, the righteous (*dharma*) and the unrighteous (*adharma*). All in all, *ātman* is most frequently connected with cognitive aspects, making *ātman* "the highest cognitive agent" (Jurewicz 2016, 499; also Jayatilleke 1963, 60).

This cognitive quality of *ātman* seems to match the most important Buddhist *anattā* aspects of the declaration suttas: The Upaniṣadic *ātman* is connected with sensory functions (*vijñāna*, *manas*, sight, hearing), which match the *āyatana*s of seeing, hearing, and mind. And among the *khandha*s mainly *saññā* (perception) and *viññāṇa* (consciousness) would target the *ātman* descriptions above. It, therefore, indeed seems that the cognitive aspects which are of major importance for the Upaniṣadic *ātman* are dismissed by the suttas.

But this is not enough in order to regard the Buddhist *anattā* teachings as *specifically* 'anti-Upaniṣadic'. As our examples show, in most cases *ātman* is also conceived in association with *prāṇa* (Pāli *pāna*), i.e. 'breath' or 'vital force'[580]. All the more it is significant that early Buddhism doesn't refer to *prāṇa* (Pali *pāna*) in its spiritual or metaphysical aspects at all. In

[579] There are a few suttas which, fitting BU 4.4.5, also declare earth, water, fire and air as non-self, namely AN 4.177, MN 28, MN 112, and MN 140.
[580] *Prāṇa* appears in connection with *ātman* in KU 2.14, KU 3.8, TU 2.2.1, TU 2.3.1, TU 2.8.1, TU 3.10.5, CU 3.14.2, BU 1.4.7, BU 1.5.3, BU 4.3.7, BU 4.4.5, BU 4.4.22, BU 3.7.16.

early Buddhism breath is described as a mere bodily function and receives only technical treatment in the context of breath meditation[581]. Hence, the fact that Buddhist *anattā* is not applied to *prāṇa* is a key evidence that Buddhist composers didn't primarily have Upaniṣadic teachings in mind when they formulated their *anattā* approach[582]. Otherwise the refutations would have included "*pāna* is *anattā*", following the same logic as "the body is *anattā*" or "seeing is *anattā*".

Going beyond the descriptions of *ātman* which include perceptible aspects, there are also several Upaniṣadic passages which declare that *ātman* itself can*not* be perceived: "He perceives, but he can't be perceived"[583] (BU 3.7.23); "you can't perceive the perceiver who does the perceiving. The self within all is this self of yours"[584] (BU 3.4.2); "*Brahman* is this *ātman* here which perceives everything"[585] (BU 2.5.19, similarly CU 8.12.4). The impossibility to perceive *ātman* as an object finds its clearest expression in the famous formula of '*neti, neti*': "About this *ātman*, one can only say 'not-, not-.' He is ungraspable, for he cannot be grasped"[586] (BU 3.9.26, BU 4.2.4, BU 4.4.22, BU 4.5.15).

As shown above, the Buddhist refutation strategy clearly targets the idea of a perceptible *ātman* (as *manas*, *vijñāna*, sight, sound, etc.). However, the suttas considered so far – and therefore the vast majority of *anattā* suttas – don't explicitly relate to an *im*perceptible *ātman*. SN 22.47 unambiguously confirms that: "Those ascetics and Brahmins who regard *attā* in various ways all regard the five *khandha*s subject to clinging"[587]. Therefore, these *anattā* suttas simply don't address what is outside of the scope of the perceptible *khandha*s. Which means that they don't address the *im*perceptible *ātman* of the Upaniṣads.

So far we have learned that the 'declaration suttas' of the SN consistently state that early Buddhism regards *khandha*s and *saḷāyatana*s are *anattā*, i.e. not-self. Consequently, they

[581] SN 54.1-20, AN 10.60, MN 10, MN 62, MN 118, MN 119, DN 22.
[582] See already Glasenapp (1939, 258) with a similar conclusion.
[583] *avijñato vijñātā*
[584] *na vijñāter vijñātāraṃ vijānīyāḥ | eṣa ta ātmā sarvāntaraḥ*
[585] *ayam ātmā brahma sarvānubhūḥ*
[586] *Sa eṣa neti nety ātmā | agṛhyo na hi gṛhyate*
[587] *Ye hi keci, bhikkhave, samaṇā vā brāhmaṇā vā anekavihitaṃ attānaṃ samanupassamānā samanupassanti, sabbete pañcupādānakkhandhe samanupassanti.*

implicitly reject those Upaniṣadic concepts which attribute to *ātman* any perceptible aspect, or allow an ostensible definition. Additionally, by stating that *rūpa khandha* ('appearance' or 'body') is *anattā*, another important notion of the Brāhmaṇas is implicitly rejected, namely when the Brāhmaṇas call the human body *ātman*. The Buddhist texts, however, don't mention any connection of *pāna* (breath) with *attā* which is a strong indication that the Buddhist teachings don't *explicitly* refer to the Upaniṣadic *ātman*. Also, Upaniṣadic concepts which take *ātman* to be *im*perceptible are not covered by the SN 'declaration suttas'.

10.3 Argumentation Suttas – Addressing Concepts of Self

We can now turn to the second category of wide-spread SN *anattā* teachings, which is based on a particular line of arguments[588]. These 'argumentation suttas' start by saying that the primary characteristic of the *khandha*s and *saḷāyatana*s is to be impermanent (*anicca*, Skt *anitya*). What is impermanent is then said to be inevitably dissatisfactory (*dukkha*, Skt *duḥkha*). And the conclusion is that what is *dukkha* is inevitably of a third characteristic, namely *anattā*. About half of these suttas end with a fourth conclusion, namely that what is *anattā* should be seen as not-mine, not-me, and not-myself[589].

In a very typical sutta the Buddha teaches: "Bhikkhus, form (*rūpa*) is *anicca*. What is *anicca* is *dukkha*. What is *dukkha* is *anattā*. What is *anattā* should be seen as it really is with correct wisdom thus: 'This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self'"[590] (SN 22.15). Then the sutta applies the same line of reasoning to the other four *khandha*s. The *saḷāyatana anattā* argumentation suttas are constructed accordingly.

[588] For the *khandha*s SN 22.15-16, SN 22.45-46, SN 22.59, SN 22.76-77, SN 22.79, SN 22.82, SN 24.71, SN 44.2, MN 28, MN 35, MN 109. For the *saḷāyatana*s SN 35.1-2, SN 35.4-5, SN 35.204-209, SN 35.213-218.
[589] SN 22.15-17, SN 22.45-46, SN 22.76-77, SN 35.1-6, SN 35.204-221.
[590] *Rūpaṃ, bhikkhave, aniccaṃ. Yadaniccaṃ taṃ dukkhaṃ; yaṃ dukkhaṃ tadanattā; yadanattā taṃ 'netaṃ mama, nesohamasmi, na meso attā'ti evametaṃ yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya daṭṭhabbaṃ.*

The implication is that a valid *attā* would have to meet certain requirements, namely to be *stable* (i.e. not-*anicca*) and *not-unpleasant* (i.e. not-*dukkha*). In short the argument is: Because all experiences are evidently impermanent, and all impermanent experiences are dissatisfactory[591], it follows that they cannot be regarded as self and hence have to be dis-identified from.

Norman (1981, 22) has been influential among scholars of Buddhism in stating that the Buddhist *anattā* goes against "the Upaniṣadic idea of an *ātman* which is *nitya* [i.e. stable] and *sukha* [i.e. pleasant]" – without backing up his claim with references. In fact the term '*sukha*' is exceedingly rare in the Upaniṣads[592] and is therefore, at least in the context of soteriology, probably a *śramaṇa* term[593]. Also '*nitya*' is very rare[594]. In short, the Upaniṣads never state that *ātman* is *nitya* and *sukha*, as Norman suggests. Neither is the explicit association of *ātman* with other terms for 'pleasure' particularly dominant. Only in a few instances we find a close textual connection with *ānanda*, bliss (TU 2.5.1, TU 2.8.1, TU 3.10.5, and KU 3.8).

The only Upaniṣadic passage which would somewhat fit the Buddhist requirement for *ātman* to be permanent and pleasant is KU 3.8: "This very breath (*prāṇa*) is the self (*ātman*) consisting of intelligence (*prajñā*); it is bliss (*ānanda*), unaging (*ajara*), and immortal (*amṛta*)"[595]. Notably, the passage starts with *prāṇa*, which is as mentioned absent from the *anattā* suttas. *Prajñā* (Pāli *paññā*) equally doesn't play a role in the *anattā* suttas. Overall, even KU 3.8 can't be taken as a possible main target of the argumentation suttas. Instead, we propose that the Buddhist refutation does not necessary demand that *ātman* is pleasant (*sukha*) but simply that it's not *un*pleasant (i.e. not-*dukkha*).

In contrast to the declaration suttas which target an experiential sense of self, the argumentation suttas with their logical approach address rather *concepts* of self. However, the three-step

[591] Here we have to keep in mind that *dukkha* has next to the cognitive aspect of 'dissatisfaction' also the emotional component of 'suffering' (explicitly in SN 48.36-38, MN 10, MN 141, DN 22; see also Ñāṇamoli, 1973). Accordingly, the opposite *sukha* is an emotive happiness rather than just 'satisfaction' (see Arbel 2015, 197-199).
[592] In the early Upaniṣads only in CU 7.22-23. In the KU only as the compound *sukhaduḥkha* (KU 1.7, KU 2.15, KU 3.5-8). In the Brāhmaṇas in AB 8.20, KB 5.5, KB 26.8, ŚB 2.6.2.11, ŚB 11.5.7.1, ŚB 11.5.7.4. In the saṃhitās only in the older meaning of 'swift' or 'best-naved' in connection with a chariot.
[593] In a more general sense *sukha* as 'pleasant' could still refer to an older Ṛgvedic conception (see Jurewicz, 2018).
[594] In TU 1.9, BU 4.4.23. In the ṚV it is more common, mostly in the original meaning of 'own' (see Hara 1959).
[595] *Sa eṣa prāṇa eva prajñātmānanto 'jaro 'mṛtaḥ.*

argument is overly succinct and cannot be clearly understood. Most probably longer teachings which describe the argument in more detail were lost in transmission. The problem is that while the first argument has a matter-of-fact logic ('experiences are impermanent'), the middle link ('what is impermanent is dissatisfactory') is not obvious at all. For example, people are well able to enjoy the impermanent pleasures of food, conversations etc., without expecting the joy to be permanent. Even the highest sensual pleasures, ecstasy and orgasm, are sought by the general population only as an impermanent thrill and not as a permanent attainment.

Hence, in order to make sense of the middle link ('what is impermanent is dissatisfactory') we need a sensible re-contextualization. For us, an important clue is that the audience of these suttas are monastics[596], i.e. people who seek permanent liberation instead of mundane satisfaction. Consequently, we suggest that the logic of the argumentation suttas is not meant to be *generally* valid, but rather specifically tailored to monastics, i.e. spiritual professionals. *Their* specific dissatisfaction (*dukkha*) comes from the impossibility to derive a permanent spiritual attainment from impermanent *khandha*s and *saḷāyatana*s[597]. We find this exact attitude also in Upaniṣadic literature with the spiritual seeker Maitreyī in BU 2.4.3 and BU 4.5.4 who asks: "What is the point in getting something that will not make me immortal?"[598]

Therefore, we propose that the line of reasoning in the argumentation suttas is a mnemonic aid for monastics which was supposed to metonymically activate a more elaborate line of reasoning: 1. Impermanent experiences can only lead to impermanent attainments. 2. Impermanent attainments are dissatisfactory to the spiritual seeker who longs for liberation or immortality. 3. What leads to dissatisfactory attainments cannot be relied on as a foundation for spiritual liberation, as *ātman*. 4. Hence, attachment to the sources of these impermanent attainments (i.e. impermanent experiences) should be discarded as not-mine, not-me, and not-myself[599].

[596] Sole exception is MN 35 where the interlocutor of the Buddha in an argumentation sutta is a Jain.
[597] Indeed, the imperceptible *ātman* of the Upaniṣads might have been an attempt to solve the same problem.
[598] *Yenāhaṃ nāmṛtā syāṃ kim ahaṃ tena kuryām.*
[599] A few scholars see in the Buddhist 'not-me' (*ne-soham-asmi*) a direct reference to the Chāndogya Upaniṣad. Jayatilleke (1963, 39) sees a reference to the "I am this" (*ayam aham asmi*) of CU 8.11.1. Szczurek (2008, 195; based on Norman 1981, 23; and Gombrich 1996, 38-39) regards it as a dismissal of the identification of *ātman* with "you are that" (*tat tvam asi*) in CU 6.8.7-6.16.3. For us, these are not clear enough references to the Upaniṣads. Better references can be found in MN 22 or DN 1, but they are exceptional and don't represent early Buddhism in general.

The implication of the third statement is that a proper *attā* would be a reliable foundation for spiritual liberation. And indeed is *ātman* explicitly associated with liberation in several Upaniṣadic passages (e.g. BU 3.5.1, BU 4.4.20, BU 4.5.14, CU 4.15.1, CU 8.1.5, CU 8.7.1). Yet, the Buddhist argumentation suttas claim that such an 'instrument' for liberation cannot be based on impermanent experiences.

When we think of *ātman* as an instrument we are specifically reminded of JB 1.17-18 which instructs the practitioner to ritually produce a second *ātman* in the sun in order to attain immortality in the afterlife (see also Jurewicz 2016, 371; ibid., 400). Here, the *ātman* (which is produced in the sun while alive) is not the intuitive 'sense of self' or a vague concept of self – it seems to us rather to be a receptacle or vessel for the future liberated self. The same is also the case in KU 2.14: "…after he has recognized the preeminence of breath and united himself with that very breath, which is the self consisting of intelligence, [he] departs from this body accompanied by all these, and, entering the wind and *with space as his self*, goes to heaven"[600]. This means that the spiritual practitioner is not limited to what his *ātman* 'is'. Much more, he *chooses* to associate himself with a very specific *ātman* (in this case 'space'), and as a consequence of this effective choice he goes to heaven. Hence, this *ātman* is precisely not an innate 'self' which one finds through spiritual investigation within oneself, but rather an instrument which – if used wisely – yields spiritual results.

We find a similar approach of *ātman*-as-instrument, with a different *ātman*-object, in AU 3.4: "It is with this self (*ātman*) consisting of knowledge (*prajñā*) that he went up from this world and, having obtained all his desire in the heavenly world up there, became immortal"[601] (see also TU 2.8.1, TU 3.10.5). The production of *ātman* can also be explicitly found in several other places, e.g. AB 2.40: "verily thus he creates the self as a complex…"[602] (see also AB 3.46, or BU 1.2.1).

[600] *Tatho evaivaṃ vidvān prāṇe niḥśreyasaṃ viditvā prāṇam eva prajñātmānam abhisambhūya sahaivaitaiḥ sarvair asmāc charīrād utkrāmati sa vāyupraviṣṭa ākāśātmā svar eti*
[601] *Sa etena prajñenātmanāsmāl lokād utkramyāmuṣmin svarge loke sarvān kāmān āptvāmṛtaḥ samabhavat samabhavat.*
[602] *ātmānam eva tat samastaṃ sambhāvayaty*

Based on these examples, we propose an additional meaning for the Vedic *ātman*, namely as an instrument for liberation. In this sense the argumentation suttas would have dismissed the *khandha*s and *saḷāyatana*s as valid instruments or vessels for liberation[603].

10.4 Dhamma as *Attā*

Based on the majority of *anattā* suttas we have so far identified two targets: 'Declaration suttas' seem to target the experiential sense of self. 'Argumentation suttas' are more conceptual and argue that *ātman* as an instrument for liberation cannot be based on impermanent experiences. Clearly, Buddhist monastics are supposed to dis-identify from both, the sense of self, and from concepts of *ātman* as an instrument for liberation.

Yet, if we take our understanding of the texts seriously in that they dismiss any instrument, receptacle, or vehicle for liberation which is based on experiences or concepts, this would necessarily include the *Buddhist* concepts of liberation as well. After all, the Buddhist teaching is also based on experiences, e.g. of impermanence (*anicca*) and dissatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and on concepts like the Noble Eightfold Path[604]. Buddhist practitioners are promised liberation if they faithfully adhere to these experiences and concepts on the path to liberation. How then does the *anattā* logic avoid to turn against the Buddha-Dhamma itself?

The suttas don't offer an explicit answer to this question – no one asks the Buddha if the Dhamma could be taken as a reliable *attā*, so we have to approximate an answer from the texts available. A possible way to look at it is that early Buddhism sees the Dhamma as *truth* revealed by the perfected Buddha, not as speculative theory. In other words, the authentic liberation of the Buddha would elevate the Dhamma from the status of a (speculative) set of concepts to the status of truth itself. This can be seen in the essential teaching of 'the Four Noble *Truths*' (*ariyasacca*),

[603] See also DN 24, where a wanderer is asked if he knows where "his *attā* is going" (*attano gatiṃ*). He replies by saying that he will be reborn in the realm of the asuras. *Attā* functions here as the vessel for his future experience.
[604] See for an introduction Bodhi, 2010.

or statements like: "Tathāgatas [i.e. Buddhas] do not speak untruth"[605] (AN 7.22, MN 87, DN 16). Accordingly, *anattā* would not apply to the Buddha-Dhamma because the Dhamma wouldn't be considered as speculative. This is not a compelling argument for us, but for the faithful monastic audience of the suttas it might have been convincing.

Another possible answer (as proposed by Perez-Remon, 1980) is that the Buddha actually dismissed only *some* views on *attā* but accepted others. From this perspective one could argue that the Buddha-Dhamma is the 'true' *attā* (in the sense of representing fundamental reality and thus a valid instrument for liberation), in contrast to the mere theories of other teachers. This interpretation is in conflict with the general anti-attachment approach of early Buddhism, but there are certainly a few texts which seem to confirm this interpretation. Most importantly, there is a statement in which the Buddha positively associates the Dhamma with *attā*: "Dwell with *attā* as an island, with *attā* as a refuge, with no other refuge; with the Dhamma as an island, with the Dhamma as a refuge, with no other refuge"[606] (SN 22.43, SN 47.9, SN 47.13-14, DN 16, DN 26). Here, Dhamma meets the requirement of the argumentation suttas for a legitimate *attā*, namely to be a reliable instrument on the path to liberation. Another sutta which presents *attā* similarly is Dhp 25, verse 380: "The self (*attā*) indeed is master of the self, the self indeed is the refuge of the self; therefore restrain yourself, as a merchant restrains a fine horse"[607].

Additionally, there are several suttas which present the Dhamma as timeless – and therefore not as *anicca*, not as impermanent: "Whether Tathāgatas [i.e. Buddhas] arise or not, there persists that law, that stableness of the Dhamma, that fixed course of the Dhamma"[608] (SN 12.20, AN 3.136, DN 9). Numerous other suttas claim that Buddhas of the past and the future proclaim the same teaching, or that practitioners of the past and future benefit in exactly the same way from the Dhamma[609] – yet another indication that the Dhamma was perceived as timelessly valid.

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[605] *Na hi tathāgatā vitathaṃ bhaṇantī''ti.*
[606] *attadīpā viharatha attasaraṇā anaññasaraṇā, dhammadīpā dhammasaraṇā anaññasaraṇā.* Other suttas also use the same image of an *attadīpa*, a 'self-island' (Dhp 18, Snp 3.5). See for additional examples Perez-Remon (1980, 20-49). See in contrast Collins (1982, 73-76) who argues that the sutta passage is just a common exhortation and doesn't relate *attā* to *dhamma* in a substantial way.
[607] *Attā hi attano nātho, attā hi attano gati; Tasmā saṃyamamattānaṃ, assaṃ bhadraṃva vāṇijo.*
[608] *Uppādā vā tathāgatānaṃ anuppādā vā tathāgatānaṃ, ṭhitāva sā dhātu dhammaṭṭhitatā dhammaniyāmatā.*
[609] SN 6.2, SN 12.33, SN 12.66, SN 46.41, SN 47.12, SN 47.14, SN 51.5-6, SN 51.16-17, SN 56.5-6, SN 56.24, AN 3.137, AN 4.21, AN 10.19-20, MN 51, MN 121, DN 16, DN 18.

Hence, if the Dhamma is timeless then it is not *anicca*, and as a working instrument for liberation it would not be dissatisfactory (*dukkha*), and could therefore be regarded as *attā*.

There can be little doubt that early Buddhist practitioners were inclined to identify with the Dhamma, in spite of the general attitude of dis-identification, and regardless if one calls it *attā* or not. An example is the Buddhist declaration: "I am a son of the Blessed One, born of his breast, born of his mouth, born of the Dhamma, created by the Dhamma, an heir to the Dhamma" (SN 16.11, MN 111, DN 27; see section 9.1). Similarly, in a very frequent SN-based formula monastics reply to the Buddha who asks them a Dhamma question: "Our teachings are rooted in the Blessed One, guided by the Blessed One, have the Blessed One as their resort"[610]. Here we have to keep in mind the essential orality of early Buddhism and its transmission – monastics had to absorb and internalize the Dhamma as heard from the Buddha if they wanted to follow and practice it. In this sense their attainments were indeed 'born of his mouth'. This indispensable internalization of the Dhamma could easily have led to attachment and identification[611]. This, in turn, means that monastics, who after all left their lay life behind and dedicated themselves completely to the monastic life, depended entirely on the Buddha-Dhamma as an instrument for liberation, and in this sense they relied on Dhamma as an *attā*.

A third way to see it is that the Buddha actually *didn't* exclude his own teaching from the *anattā* logic. However, we find this confirmed only in MN 22 and MN 38. Here the Buddha likens his teachings to a raft. He then ridicules the idea that someone after crossing a river would stay attached to the raft and carry it around on their head. He concludes that "the Dhamma is similar to a raft, being for the purpose of crossing over, not for the purpose of grasping"[612]. In other words, it would be wrong to stay attached to the Dhamma after liberation. Instead, it should be regarded as a vehicle only, and after it has fulfilled its purpose the attachment to the Dhamma would need to cease[613].

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[610] *Bhagavaṃmūlakā no, bhante, dhammā bhagavaṃnettikā bhagavaṃpaṭisaraṇā.* (SN 12.19, SN 12.51, SN 16.3-4, SN 22.58, SN 22.150-158, SN 24.1-96, SN 35.105, SN 35.108, SN 35.153, SN 36.6, SN 36.16, SN 36.18, SN 48.43, SN 48.45-48, SN 48.53, SN 51.15, SN 51.28, SN 51.30-32, SN 55.14, SN 55.16, AN 3.68, AN 8.6, AN 8.83, AN 9.1, AN 10.58, AN 11.19, MN 46-47, MN 68, MN 122).

[611] We occasionally find a 'good desire' for liberation in the suttas: In SN 51.15 as *chanda*, desire, for arahantship; in AN 4.159 as *taṇhā*, thirst, for liberation. And in MN 44 and MN 137 as *pihā*, longing, for liberation.

[612] *kullūpamo mayā dhammo desito nittharaṇatthāya, no gahaṇatthāya.*

[613] See for a similar interpretation Gombrich (1996, 24) and Wynne (2010b, 199-200).

In this sense we also understand another statement which sometimes occurs in the context of the *anicca-dukkha-anattā* line of argumentation. It says that "all formations (*saṅkhāra*) are impermanent; all *dhamma*s are *anattā*"[614] (SN 22.90, AN 3.136, MN 35, Dhp 20). Here, '*dhamma*s' is traditionally understood and translated as 'things' or 'phenomena'[615]. In light of the discussion above, however, I suggest to translate *dhamma*s more directly as 'teachings', and specifically as 'Buddhist teachings'. So our interpretation of the quote is: "All conditioned phenomena are impermanent and cannot be taken as an instrument for liberation. And even the Buddha's timeless teachings should not be taken as a self".

All in all, we still don't propose that early Buddhism *explicitly* regarded Dhamma as a legitimate 'self', in spite of the few exceptions that seem to suggest otherwise[616]. We rather assume that for practicing Buddhists the Dhamma was indeed the only valid instrument for liberation and the source of truth – similar to how we proposed above that Brahmins understood *ātman* as a vehicle for liberation. With this psychological setup Buddhist followers consciously or unconsciously had to create a deep identification with the Dhamma, a 'Dhamma-self' effectively, which they relied on in their progress towards liberation. This reliance on a 'Dhamma-self' must have eventually become difficult in a Buddhist framework which sees *any* attachment as problematic. It makes therefore sense to occasionally find reminders to let go of an unwholesome attachment to the Dhamma itself[617]. But it also makes sense that the instruction to detach from the Dhamma was only given at a highly developed stage and maybe only to certain individuals, just as the metaphor of the raft is only taught in regards to the final step on the path. Metaphorically speaking, it cannot be given at a time when the monastic struggles to put the raft (his practice) into the water and to understand the flow of the river (the unliberated mind). Thus, we suggest that the suttas which associate *attā* with the Dhamma, and the ones which generally present *attā* in a positive light, are teachings aimed at followers who still benefit from a positive attachment to the Dhamma.

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[614] *Sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā, sabbe dhammā anattā*.
[615] See for a critique of *dhamma*-as-phenomena Perez-Remon (1980, 211-226). For more fundamental similarities of Dhamma and *ātman* see Glasenapp (1938, 420).
[616] See for example AN 1.270 and MN 115 (and similarly AN 6.100): "It is impossible and inconceivable, bhikkhus, that a person accomplished in view [i.e. an accomplished Buddhist follower] could consider anything as a self".
[617] Similarly the Buddha complains about some monastics being attached to him in an unwholesome way, e.g. in SN 47.3 and AN 8.63: "It is in just such a way that some foolish persons here make requests of me, but when the Dhamma has been spoken to them, they think only of following me around."

10.5 *Anattā* in the AN – Not-self as Meditation Practice

So far, we have focused on the *anattā* logic of the SN, specifically the 'declaration suttas' and the 'argumentation suttas'. Interestingly, this *anattā* logic turns in the AN to a contemplation practice, more precisely into the 'perception of *anattā*' (*anattasaññā*). In line with the two SN categories of *anattā* suttas there are also two categories of AN practices: A straightforward *anattasaññā*[618] equivalent to the declaration suttas; and a practice which mirrors the argumentation suttas: a foundational 'perception of *anicca*', followed by 'perception of *dukkha* in what is *anicca*', and ending with 'perception of *anattā* in what is *dukkha*'[619].

The 'perceptions' are described as leading to immortality (*amata*) and usually occur without further details or instructions in lists with other contemplations. For example AN 7.48 presents without further details a list of seven perception-meditations: the perception of unattractiveness, the perception of death, the perception of the repulsiveness of food, the perception of non-delight in the entire world, the perception of *anicca*, the perception of *dukkha* in *anicca*, and the perception of *anattā* in what is *dukkha*.

The only (and therefore unreliable) sutta which details how the perception of *anattā* is actually practiced is AN 10.60: "Having gone to the forest, to the foot of a tree, or to an empty hut, a bhikkhu reflects thus: 'The eye is *anattā*, forms are *anattā*, […]'"[620] followed by the other five senses and their objects. This would be therefore a deliberate *saḷāyatana anattā* practice. We are skeptical that this alone represents the main authentic *anattā* practice, and we assume that there were originally more elaborated instructions which got lost in transmission.

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, the *anattā* logic of the SN and the 'perception' practice of the AN together cover the vast majority of early Buddhist *anattā* texts. These

[618] SN 22.42, SN 22.149, AN 1.476, AN 4.124, AN 4.126, AN 5.62, AN 5.304, AN 6.104, AN 6.112, AN 7.18, AN 7.48-49, AN 7.617, AN 9.16, AN 9.36, AN 9.93, AN 10.56-57, AN 10.59-60, AN 10.237-238, DN 16, DN 33, DN 34.
[619] SN 46.73, SN 55.3, AN 1.471, AN 5.72, AN 5.305, AN 6.35, AN 6.142, AN 7.27, AN 7.616, AN 9.1, AN 9.3, DN 33, DN 34.
[620] *bhikkhu araññagato vā rukkhamūlagato vā suññāgāragato vā iti paṭisañcikkhati: 'cakkhu anattā, rūpā anattā, […]'.*

teachings address monastics and dismiss the identification with any experiential sense of self, and they dismiss the belief in concepts of self which promise to secure liberation. Elements of what is dismissed fit Upaniṣadic descriptions of *ātman*, especially when they dismiss experiences and the body as *attā*. But these similarities are too vague in order to conclude that specific Upaniṣadic *ātman* concepts are dismissed. Especially the absence of references to *prāṇa* (as an essential aspect connected with *ātman*) makes it highly doubtful that this majority of *anattā* teachings target Upaniṣadic concepts. Also, the suttas assume that all *ātman* concepts deal with a perceptible *ātman* and thus don't target Upaniṣadic concepts which explicitly teach an *im*perceptible *ātman*. We conclude, therefore, that the *anattā* teachings target only *ātman*-beliefs in general, both of Brahmins and *śramaṇa*s of that time, but not specific Upaniṣadic concepts.

10.6 Exceptional *Anattā* Content in Selected Suttas

After our modest contribution to the topic of *anattā* we briefly return to the starting point of this chapter. There, we pointed out that it makes a big difference if one focuses on the general *anattā* strategy of the suttas, or if one takes into account exceptional suttas. In such exceptional suttas we can find more specific content pertinent to the discussion of *anattā*, but to discuss these in detail goes beyond the scope of our investigation and it has already been done in length by other scholars (see below). As noted, we generally suspect that exceptional content represents later material and especially with a topic like *anattā* we find it important to have focused on the vast majority of *anattā*-suttas, which most probably represent early Buddhism.

However, we would like to give a few glimpses of what has been scholarly discussed with regards to these exceptional suttas (particularly MN 2, MN 22, DN 1, DN 9, DN 15, and DN 29). Often these suttas enumerate different *attā* views very briefly and then refute these views with rather generic Buddhist arguments. For example MN 2 depicts six flawed convictions: 1. "*attā* exists for me"; 2. "no *attā* exists for me"; 3. "I perceive *attā* with *attā*"; 4. "I perceive *anattā* with *attā*"; 5. "I perceive *attā* with *anattā*"; 6. "It is this *attā* of mine that speaks and feels and

experiences here and there the result of good and bad actions; but this *attā* of mine is permanent, everlasting, eternal, not subject to change, and it will endure as long as eternity"[621].

Some of these views could be associated with Upaniṣadic concepts of *ātman*. The second view for example ("I perceive *anattā* with *attā*") could refer to the imperceptible *ātman* which perceives but cannot be perceived itself. And the sixth view correlates with several passages which proclaim the immortality of *ātman*[622], especially with BU 4.4.23: "He sees the self (*ātman*) in just himself (*ātman*) and all things as the self […] He is not burnt by evil; he burns up all evil […] He is the world of *brahman*"[623]. The 'evil' of the BU could correspond to the 'good and bad actions' of the sutta; and the 'world of *brahman*' could correspond to the 'eternal *attā*' of the sutta. But to draw such connections would be admittedly vague.

Another reference found in a few suttas associates *attā* with the world and with immortality. We find this 'eternalism' (*sassatadiṭṭhi*) worded as: "The self and the world are eternal" (*sassato attā ca loko ca*, in MN 102, DN 1, DN 28, and DN 29); and as: "That which is the self is the world; having passed away, that I shall be permanent, stable, eternal, not subject to change"[624] (in SN 22.81, SN 22.152, SN 24.3, and MN 22). The subsequent refutations are not specific but more general. For example in SN 22.81 the Buddhist refutation only states: "That eternalist view is a [mental] formation (*saṅkhāra*)"[625], suggesting that it is merely a belief, and not reality[626]. The other 'refutations' equally lack context and need extrapolation in order to make sense. Gladly we refer to scholars who have offered different elaborations on this matter, e.g. Jayatilleke (1963, 248-257), Norman (1981, 23-28), Bronkhorst (2007, 215-217), or Wynne (2010b, 200-205).

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[621] 1. *Atthi me attā'ti.* 2. *Natthi me attā'ti*. 3. *Attanāva attānaṃ sañjānāmī'ti.* 4. *Attanāva anattānaṃ sañjānāmī'ti.* 5. *Anattanāva attānaṃ sañjānāmī'ti.* 6. *Yo me ayaṃ attā vado vedeyyo tatra tatra kalyāṇapāpakānaṃ kammānaṃ vipākaṃ paṭisaṃvedeti so kho pana me ayaṃ attā nicco dhuvo sassato avipariṇāmadhammo sassatisamaṃ tatheva ṭhassatī'ti.*

[622] E.g. BU 2.5.1-14, BU 3.7.3-23, CU 4.15.1, CU 8.3.4, CU 8.7.4, CU 8.8.3, CU 8.10.1, CU 8.11.1, CU 8.12.1, CU 8.14.1). Although there are many more principles apart from *ātman* which are considered immortal, e.g. *brahman* or *prāṇa*.

[623] *ātmany evātmānaṃ paśyati | sarvam ātmānaṃ paśyati […] nainaṃ pāpmā tapati | sarvaṃ pāpmānaṃ tapati […] eṣa brahmalokaḥ samrāṭ*. See also Wynne (2018b, 110-118) and Gombrich (2009, 119-120).

[624] *So attā so loko, so pecca bhavissāmi nicco dhuvo sassato avipariṇāmadhammo'ti.*

[625] *Yā kho pana sā, bhikkhave, sassatadiṭṭhi saṅkhāro so.*

[626] See for discussions of this view Bronkhorst (2007, 216-217), Wynne (2010b, 201-202), Norman (1981, 23-24). For a more general discussion of views in early Buddhism see Gombrich (2009, 153-155).

10.7 Conclusion

There is no doubt that early Buddhism had a clear attitude of *anattā*. But ultimately, it remains difficult to decide how much of the Buddhist *anattā* originally dismissed Upaniṣadic views. If we rely on the majority of suttas in the SN and AN we get refutations which would incidentally cover some Upaniṣadic aspects of *ātman*, but these suttas don't explicitly target the Upaniṣadic texts. If we focus on exceptional suttas (mostly in MN and DN), however, we find references which fit much better to Upaniṣadic concepts of *ātman.*

Regardless which suttas one takes into account, the Buddha was apparently a *pragmatic* teacher urging his monastic students to use *anattā* strategies and practices for the purpose of liberation. This includes dismissing non-Buddhist concepts as mere theories while claiming that his own concepts are eternal, true, or self-evident. Another pragmatic feature of his teaching is that occasionally he used notions of *attā* himself when it was useful, apparently without shying away from ontological implications. A third inconsistency which speaks for a pragmatic approach, is that while the Buddha urged his monastic followers to dis-identify from any experiential or conceptual 'self' – which is in line with a general Buddhist practice of dis-identification and detachment – we only rarely find explicit reminders to let go of the attachment to the Buddha-Dhamma, hence affirming this particular attachment.

In conclusion, the early Buddhist *anattā* was an advanced pragmatic approach of detachment, targeting subtle identifications of the mind which create a sense of 'self', and dismissing concepts of 'self' from other teachers. The *anattā* strategy is *not* specifically anti-Brahmin or anti-Upaniṣadic. Nonetheless, it is plausible to assume these general Buddhist *anattā* teachings had the consequence that *anattā* was not preferably taught to Brahmins (see section 2.8).

General Conclusion

We set out to investigate in detail early Buddhism and its relation to Brahmanism. For that purpose we delved into very different topics: social aspects, asceticism, rituals, deities, and philosophical concepts like *brahman* and *ātman*. To our knowledge this is the most detailed investigation of its kind and has, therefore, the potential to change traditional views on early Buddhism. For many Buddhists, however, possible influences from Brahmanism are a sensitive subject because they challenge the assumed originality of the Buddha and all of his teachings. This assumed originality in many cases prevents Buddhists and Buddhist scholars to examine connection points with Vedic Brahmanism. We hope that with our work we contribute to reduce the distance of these two academic fields. Yet, in order to remain comprehensible even to skeptical readers we limited ourselves to literal and explicit connections (for example when we investigated if Buddhist terms appeared in pre-Buddhist literature or only in the Sanskrit epics) and put less emphasis on non-literal influences on a more conceptual level (for example questions about *dhamma*/*dharma*, liberation, self/soul, or other underlying philosophical principles). For the same reason we provided extensive Vedic and Buddhist references, namely to substantiate uncommon postulates, e.g. that the historical Buddha had amicable relationships with contemporary Brahmins and that the fierce competition between Buddhists and Brahmins is a product of later times. Whether or not the reader will share our conclusions, we hope that the large number of references will enable scholars to develop more differentiated discussions in the disciplines of Indology and Buddhist Studies.

We started with the basic assumption that early Buddhism did not develop in a cultural and conceptual vacuum. When the Buddha started to teach he had to use the current language and distinguish himself from concepts of other sources – the general culture of Kosala and Magadha, the spiritual traditions of local non-Vedic *śramaṇa*s, and Vedic Brahmins. In our investigation we focused on the connections with the Vedic tradition, where we can take advantage of various well-edited sources and excellent translations. Yet, at several places we came to the conclusion that the Buddha referred more to a *śramaṇa* thought-world than to a Vedic one. Hopefully the field of early Jainism will find more scholarly attention in the future in order to help us better understand the confluence of Buddhism, Jainism, and Brahmanism in the first centuries B.C.E.

Throughout our investigation we kept in mind a fundamental assumption about early Buddhism, namely that the majority of Pāli suttas don't represent earliest Buddhism at the time of the Buddha. Instead, they are a corpus of texts which developed over a few centuries after his lifetime. Over this period the transmission of texts was exposed to the stress of time and the changing needs of a growing and adapting Buddhist community. This means that some texts represent original Buddhism more faithfully while others use the literary format of the suttas in order to address later social, religious, and spiritual issues.

We could further substantiate one of our basic postulates, namely that at the time of the Buddha Brahmanism was a relatively new social and religious force in Kosala and Magadha. When we investigated the different types of Brahmins depicted in the suttas (chapter two) we could confirm that, generally speaking, interactions of the Buddha with contemporary Brahmins were rather benevolent and had the character of respectful disagreement. In contrast, suttas which are more polemic and dismissive of Brahmins and Brahmanism often use vocabulary that hardly appears in pre-Buddhist literature and can be found more in the post-Buddha Sanskrit epics. We determined for example that Brahmin ascetics were probably very rare at the time of the Buddha and became a more serious competition and target for criticism only later on. Our conclusion is, therefore, that large parts of the anti-Brahmin attitude that can be found in the suttas comes from a time after the Buddha. In contrast, there is the Vedic institution of *brahmacarya* (spiritual studentship) that the historical Buddha reliably embraced and used for his monastic followers (chapter four).

Another interesting aspect which is not yet acknowledged by the scientific community is that the Buddha probably taught Brahmins differently than non-Brahmins. Brahmins were more likely to be taught the *samādhi* path to liberation, while non-Brahmins were more likely to receive the *anattā* (not-self) path to liberation. We assume that this was due to the strong attachment of Brahmins to concepts of 'self' or *ātman*. While selected Brahmins might well have received *anattā* teachings, the statistical analysis still shows a clear overall trend.

We also have reached a better understanding of the early Buddhist attitude towards rituals (chapter three). It is misleading to think that the Buddha was generally against rituals. More

correct is that early Buddhism is consistently against the *violence* in animal sacrifice. Moreover, suttas which mention exaggerated numbers of animal victims in Brahmin rituals most probably belong to a later period. The Buddha also dismissed non-violent Brahmin rituals, not because they were rituals *per se* but because they were ineffective compared to the Buddhist practice. Interestingly, a few suttas contain accurate details about Brahmin rituals (e.g. the *dīkṣā* consecration, or the *paccorohaṇī* ritual), but apparently important context information was lost in transmission and the otherwise accurate ritual details were incorporated into a more generic anti-Brahmin criticism.

On the other hand, there are also rituals and ritualistic frameworks that were embraced by early Buddhism, especially the religious giving by lay people to monastics as a form of 'karmic investment', which is based on the Brahmin *dakṣiṇā*. Also early Buddhist monastics applied rituals, especially the ordination ritual (section 4.3.2), and the *uposatha* congregation during which monastics meet to recite the monastic rules and where communal purity is declared (section 3.6).

A popular 'Western' and anachronistic misconception is that early Buddhism is a rational spiritual practice with little emphasis on supernatural powers and deities. In fact, the suttas are quite fascinated with deities, how to categorize them, and how specific actions and meditations correspond with rebirth in the respective divine realms. In chapters five to eight we investigated in detail the deities of early Buddhism, focusing on Sakka and the Gods of Thirty-three, higher deities, different groups of 'demigods', the evil Māra, and the Brahmā deities. Most of them are heavily influenced by Brahmanism and then further developed within the specific Buddhist framework. It is safe to say that the belief in deities goes back to the very earliest period of Buddhism. Yet, later suttas set out to present to their audiences a forced structured hierarchy of the supernatural world where the Vedic deities are inferior to the Buddhist deities. In other suttas the Buddha directly interacts with the originally Vedic deities, exposes their ignorance and weaknesses, or receives their admiration.

Finally, we contributed to the ongoing debate about the Buddhist not-self, or *anattā*, teaching. Against a common preconception we came to the conclusion that the Buddhist *anattā* was not

specifically an anti-Brahmin attitude, philosophy, or practice. Rather it was a set of views directed against any intuitively perceived sense of self, and against any concepts which rely on a 'spiritual self' in order to attain liberation. This encompasses intuitive non-religious convictions, as well as Brahmin and *śramaṇa* views, albeit in a more general fasion. Early Buddhism counters such views with a fundamental practice of dis-identification which itself is supposed to lead to liberation.

In summary, we can now present a differentiated understanding of early Buddhism in its relation to Brahmanism. Surprisingly, it turns out that early Buddhist texts only had a relatively limited knowledge of specific Upaniṣadic concepts. Instead, some of the influences seem to derive from the early Vedic Saṃhitās and Brāhmaṇas, particularly regarding Sakka and *brahman*. Generally, the strongest influences can certainly be found in the realm of deities and the assimilation of *brahmacarya* and religious giving, while in other areas Brahmanism was influential only to a smaller degree. Early Buddhism was therefore neither a 'reformed Brahmanism' nor an 'anti-Brahmanism', even though the tension between the two religious movements noticeably grew in the later sutta periods. We end with our assessment that early Buddhism developed in a spiritually fruitful environment, in tension with Brahmin and *śramaṇa* teachings. And it actively made use of these frictions in order to effectively frame the early Buddhist concepts and practices of spiritual liberation.

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