

The Mass Suicide of Monks in Discourse and *Vinaya* Literature*

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With an Addendum by Richard Gombrich

In the first part of the present article I examine the canonical accounts of a narrative that accompanies the *pārājika* rule on killing. The narrative concerns a mass suicide by monks disgusted with their own bodies, which reportedly happened after the Buddha had praised seeing the body as bereft of beauty, *aśubha*. I argue that this episode needs to be understood in the light of the need of the early Buddhist tradition to demarcate its position in the ancient Indian context vis-à-vis ascetic practices and ideology.

The mass suicide by monks is found in discourse and *Vinaya* texts. This is significant for appreciating the respective roles of these two types of literature, a topic that I will explore in detail in the second part of this article, in dialogue with observations made in a recent monograph by Shayne Clarke on family matters in Indian Buddhist monasticism.

Introduction

The topics I will cover are as follows:

Part 1) THE MASS SUICIDE OF MONKS

- 1) Translation of the *Samyukta-āgama* Discourse
- 2) The *Vinaya* Versions
- 3) Early Buddhism and Ancient Indian Asceticism

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Part II) DISCOURSE AND *VINAYA* LITERATURE

- 4) *Vinaya* Material in Discourse Literature
- 5) Family Matters in Pāli Discourses
- 6) Reading *Vinaya* Literature

PART I) THE MASS SUICIDE OF MONKS

In what follows I begin with the discourse versions that report the mass suicide of monks, based on translating the *Samyukta-āgama* discourse, and follow by studying the narrative in six extant *Vinaya* versions.

1) Translation of the *Samyukta-āgama* Discourse¹

Thus have I heard. At one time the Buddha was staying in a Śāla tree grove alongside the river Valgumudā, by a village of the Vṛjīs.² At that time the Blessed One spoke to the monks on contemplating the absence of beauty; he praised contemplating the absence of beauty (*aśubha*), saying: “Monks, one who cultivates contemplating the absence of beauty, much cultivates it, attains great fruit and great benefit.”³

Having cultivated contemplating the absence of beauty, the monks then exceedingly loathed their bodies. Some killed themselves with a knife, some took poison, some hanged themselves with a rope or committed suicide by throwing themselves down from a crag, some got another monk to kill them.⁴

A certain monk, who had given rise to excessive loathing and aversion on being exposed to the absence of beauty, approached *Mrgadaṇḍi[ka], the son

¹The translated discourse is SĀ 809 at T II 207b₂₁ to 208a₈, parallel to SN 54.9 at SN V 320,7 to 322,13; for a reference to this discourse in the *Vyākhyāyukti* cf. Skilling 2000: 344. In order not to overburden the footnotes to this translation, in what follows I only note selected variations between the two discourse versions (except when discussing an issue of Chinese translation in note 5 below, where I also take up several of the *Vinaya* versions).

²SĀ 809 at T II 207b₂₁: 跋求摩河, for reconstructing the Sanskrit name I follow Akanuma 1930/1994: 725. The location in SN 54.9 at SN V 320,7 is the Hall with the Peaked Roof in the Great Wood by Vesāli.

³SN 54.9 does not report any direct speech and thus only has a counterpart to the preceding sentence, according to which the Buddha spoke in praise of cultivating *aśubha*.

⁴SN 54.9 at SN V 320,23 reports that on a single day ten, twenty or thirty monks committed suicide.

of a Brahmin.⁵ He said to *Mṛgadaṇḍi[ka], the son of a Brahmin: “Venerable, if you can kill me, my robes and bowl will belong to you.”⁶

Then *Mṛgadaṇḍi[ka], the son of a Brahmin, killed that monk. Carrying the knife he went to the bank of the river Valgumudā. [207c] When he was washing the knife, a Māra deity, who stood in mid-air, praised *Mṛgadaṇḍi[ka], the son of a Brahmin: “It is well, it is well, venerable one. You are attaining innumerable merits by being able to get recluses, sons of the Śākya, upholders of morality and endowed with virtue, who have not yet crossed over to cross over, who have not yet been liberated to be liberated, getting those who have not yet been stilled to attain stillness, getting those who have not yet [attained] Nirvāṇa to attain Nirvāṇa; and all their monastic possessions, robes, bowls, and various things, they all belong to you.”

Having heard this praise *Mṛgadaṇḍi[ka], the son of a Brahmin, then further increased his evil and wrong view, thinking: “I am truly creating great merit now by getting recluses, sons of the Śākya, upholders of morality and [endowed] with virtue, who have not yet crossed over to cross over, who have not yet been liberated to be liberated, getting those who have not yet been stilled to attain stillness, getting those who have not yet [attained] Nirvāṇa to attain Nirvāṇa; and their robes, bowls, and various things all belong to me.”

Hence he went around the living quarters, the areas for walking meditation, the individual huts, and the meditation huts, holding in his hand a sharp knife. On seeing monks he spoke in this way: “Which recluses, upholders of morality and endowed with virtue, who have not yet crossed over can I get to

⁵SĀ 809 at T II 207b₂₉ reads 鹿林, which I emend to 鹿杖. The first part of the name is unproblematic, as 鹿 renders “deer”, *mṛga/miga*. The second part 林 could refer to a “forest”, *dāva/dāya*, *vana* or *ṣaṇḍa/saṇḍa*, which could then reflect the name *Mṛgaṣaṇḍi[ka]. The Chinese counterpart to the *Samantapāsādikā*, T 1426 at T XXIV 744c₂₂, however, renders his name as 鹿杖 (note that Sp II 399,¹⁵ gives his name as Migaladdhika, whereas Vin III 68,²¹ speaks of Migalaṇḍika). The rendering 鹿杖 is also found in the Mahāsāṅghika, Mūlasarvāstivāda, and Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya* versions of the present event, T 1425 at T XXII 254b₁₁, T 1442 at T XXIII 659c₂₈, and T 1435 at T XXIII 7c₄. The use of 鹿杖 suggests, as noted by Bapat and Hirakawa 1970: 292 note 21, an original *Mṛgadaṇḍi[ka], which I use to reconstruct his name. As already suggested by Horiuchi 2006 (in an English summary of his paper given on page 120 of the journal; due to my ignorance of Japanese this is the only part of his research that I have been able to consult) the reading 鹿林 in SĀ 809 would originally have been 鹿杖. This could well be the result of a scribal error confounding 杖 and 林, two characters that easily can get mixed up with each other; in fact the reference to 鹿杖 in T 1442 at T XXIII 659c₂₈ has 林 as a variant for 杖.

⁶Such a tale is not found in SN 54.9, although it does occur in the Theravāda *Vinaya*, Vin III 68,²¹.

cross over, who have not yet been liberated can I get to be liberated, who have not yet been stilled can I get to attain stillness, who have not yet [attained] Nirvāṇa can I get to attain Nirvāṇa?”

All the monks who loathed their bodies then came out of their monastic living quarters and said to *Mṛgadaṇḍi[ka], the son of a Brahmin: “I have not yet attained the crossing over, you should [make] me cross over, I have not yet attained liberation, you should liberate me, I have not yet attained stillness, you should get me to attain stillness, I have not yet attained Nirvāṇa, you should get me to attain Nirvāṇa.”

Then *Mṛgadaṇḍi[ka], the son of a Brahmin, killed the monks one after another with his sharp knife until he had killed sixty men.

At that time, on the fifteenth day, at the time for reciting the rules, the Blessed One sat in front of the community and said to the venerable Ānanda: “What is the reason, what is the cause that the monks have come to be few, have come to decrease, have come to disappear?”

Ānanda said to the Buddha: “The Blessed One spoke to the monks on contemplating the absence of beauty, he praised contemplating the absence of beauty. Having cultivated contemplating the absence of beauty, the monks exceedingly loathed their bodies ... *to be spoken in full up to* ... he killed sixty monks. Blessed One, this is the reason and the cause why the monks have come to be few, have come to decrease, have come to disappear.

“May the Blessed One give them another teaching so that, having heard it, the monks will diligently cultivate wisdom and delight in receiving the true Dharma, delight in abiding in the true Dharma.”

The Buddha said to Ānanda:⁷ “Therefore I will now teach you step by step [how] to abide in a subtle abiding that inclines to awakening and that quickly brings about the stilling of already arisen and not yet arisen evil and unwholesome states. It is just as a heavy rain from the sky can bring about the stilling of arisen and not yet arisen dust.⁸ In the same way, monks, cultivating this subtle abiding can bring about the stilling of all [already] arisen and not yet arisen evil and unwholesome states. [208a] Ānanda, what is the subtle abiding which, being much cultivated, inclines to awakening, and which can bring

⁷In SN 54.9 at SN V 321,¹⁰ the Buddha has Ānanda first convene all the monks that live in the area of Vesāli.

⁸The corresponding simile in SN 54.9 at SN V 321,²⁵ only mentions dust that has already arisen, not dust that has not yet arisen.

about the stilling of already arisen and not yet arisen evil and unwholesome states? It is this: abiding in mindfulness of breathing.”

Ānanda said to the Buddha: “How does one cultivate the abiding in mindfulness of breathing so that one inclines to awakening and can bring about the stilling of already arisen and not yet arisen evil and unwholesome states?”⁹

The Buddha said to Ānanda: “Suppose a monk dwells in dependence on a village ... *to be spoken in full as above up to* ... he trains to be mindful of breathing out [contemplating] cessation.”¹⁰

When the Buddha had spoken this discourse, hearing what the Buddha had said the venerable Ānanda was delighted and received it respectfully.¹¹

2) The *Vinaya* Versions

In addition to the *Samyukta-āgama* version and its *Samyutta-nikāya* parallel, representing a Mūlasarvāstivāda and a Theravāda line of textual transmission,¹² the same story occurs in six *Vinayas* as part of their exposition of the *pārājika* rule regarding killing a human being. These are the Dharmaguptaka, Mahāsāṅghika, Mahīśāsaka, Mūlasarvāstivāda, Sarvāstivāda, and Theravāda *Vinayas*.¹³

In agreement with the other *Vinayas*, the Theravāda *Vinaya* reports that the monks were killed by a certain person; his name in the Pāli version is Migalaṇḍika. The *Samyutta-nikāya* discourse, however, does not mention this episode. This has the unexpected result that there is a prominent discrepancy between two versions belonging to the same Theravāda canon.

⁹In SN 54.9 at SN V 322,³ this question is part of the Buddha’s own speech, instead of being posed by Ānanda.

¹⁰The reference is to a preceding discourse in the *Samyukta-āgama* collection, which gives the sixteen step scheme for mindfulness of breathing in full. In the *Samyukta-āgama* this scheme has cessation as its last step, whereas in the Pāli parallel the last step is letting go; cf. SN 54.1 at SN V 312,¹⁹ and for a translation and comparative study of the corresponding exposition in Mahāsāṅghika and Mūlasarvāstivāda canonical texts Anālayo 2007 and 2013b: 227–237.

¹¹Instead of the standard conclusion, reporting the delight of the audience, SN 54.9 at SN V 322,¹⁰ concludes with the Buddha repeating his introductory statement on the benefits of mindfulness of breathing practised in this way.

¹²On the school affiliation of the *Samyukta-āgama* cf., e.g., Lü 1963: 242, Waldschmidt 1980: 136, Mayeda 1985: 99, Enomoto 1986: 23, Schmithausen 1987: 306, Choong 2000: 6 note 18, Hiraoka 2000, Harrison 2002: 1, Oberlies 2003: 64, Bucknell 2006: 685, and Glass 2010.

¹³In what follows I take up only selected differences, as a full comparative study of all versions is beyond the scope of this article.

A variation in this aspect of the tale occurs also within the textual corpus of the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, where the story can be found twice: once in the *Vinayavibhaṅga* for *bhikṣus* and again in the *Vinayavibhaṅga* for *bhikṣuṇīs*. The Chinese translation of the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinayavibhaṅga* for *bhikṣus* has the *Mṛgadaṇḍi[ka] tale, whereas the *Vinayavibhaṅga* for *bhikṣuṇīs* does not mention *Mṛgadaṇḍi[ka] at all.¹⁴ The corresponding passages in the Tibetan translation of the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, however, give this tale on both occasions, that is, in the *Vinayavibhaṅgas* for *bhikṣus* and for *bhikṣuṇīs*.¹⁵ This makes it clear that the short version in the Chinese translation of the *Vinayavibhaṅga* for *bhikṣuṇīs* must be an abbreviation, as the whole tale has already been given in the preceding *Vinayavibhaṅga* for *bhikṣus*.

Returning to the Theravāda canonical sources, the circumstance that the *Samyutta-nikāya* discourse occurs among collected sayings on mindfulness of breathing may have been responsible for a shortened narrative introduction to what in this context is the main theme: the sixteen steps of mindfulness of breathing. In a collection of discourses on this meditation practice, it is indeed relevant to show the function of mindfulness of breathing as a remedy for excessive disgust with the body, whereas the details of how the monks killed themselves are not relevant. In contrast, in the Theravāda *Vinaya* the issue at stake is killing and assisting suicide, hence it is natural to find more attention given to the activities of Migalaṇḍika.

The *Samyutta-nikāya* discourse itself indicates that the monks *satthahārakam pariyesanti*.¹⁶ Some translators understand this expression to imply that they were looking for someone to kill them.¹⁷ On this reading, the present passage would

¹⁴In contrast to the detailed description of *Mṛgadaṇḍi[ka]’s killings in the *Vinayavibhaṅga* for *bhikṣus*, T 1442 at T XXIII 659c₂₈, the actual story in the *Vinayavibhaṅga* for *bhikṣuṇīs* is very short. The part that comes after the Buddha’s recommendation of the practice of *aśubha*, and before his inquiry why the monks have become so few, reads as follows, T 1443 at T XXIII 923b₁₇ to b₂₀: “The monks then contemplated the absence of beauty. After having cultivated it, they gave rise to thorough disgust with their bodies [full] of pus and blood. Some took a knife to kill themselves, some took poison, some hung themselves with a rope, some threw themselves down from a high rock, some killed each other in turn. At that time the community of monks gradually decreased.” This account has no allusion to an intervention by *Mṛgadaṇḍi[ka].

¹⁵*Vinayavibhaṅga* for *bhikṣus* (parallel to T 1442): D 3 ca 133a₇ or Q 1032 che 119b₃, *Vinayavibhaṅga* for *bhikṣuṇīs* (parallel to T 1443): D 5 ta 52a₃ or Q 1034 the 50b₆.

¹⁶SN 54.9 at SN V 320,22.

¹⁷Rhys Davids and Stede 1921/1993: 674 translate the term *satthahāraka* as “an assassin” and Bodhi 2000: 1773 renders the whole phrase *satthahārakam pariyesanti* as “they sought for an as-

then reflect implicit knowledge of the Migalaṇḍika tale. Yet this understanding of the phrase seems doubtful, and others have taken the phrase to refer to looking not for a killer, but for a means to kill themselves (see the addendum below).¹⁸ In this case, the *Samyutta-nikāya* discourse would be without any reference to the Migalaṇḍika episode, similar to the case of the Chinese Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinayavibhaṅga* for *bhikṣuṇīs*.

In principle it is of course possible that the Theravāda *Vinaya* version is an expansion of the account in the *Samyutta-nikāya*.¹⁹ In this case the *Samyutta-nikāya* discourse would preserve an earlier version of the tale and the *Samyukta-āgama* discourse and the *Vinayas* later versions that have incorporated the tale of *Mrgadaṇḍi[ka]. However, to me this seems to be the less probable explanation, given that the *Samyutta-nikāya* discourse and the Theravāda *Vinaya* share a story of the Buddha going on retreat,²⁰ which is not attested in any of the other versions.²¹ The story of the Buddha's retreat clearly shows that the two Theravāda versions did not develop in isolation from each other. This makes it in turn more probable that the absence of details on the Migalaṇḍika episode in the *Samyutta-nikāya* discourse would be intentional, in the sense of reflecting the

sailant"; cf. also Thānissaro 2001/2013: 87, who argues that "the word *satthahāraka* clearly means 'assassin' in other parts of the Canon (see, for example, MN 145)." Yet the significance of the expression in MN 145 at MN III 269,¹² is not as self-evident as Thānissaro seems to think; cf. the addendum by Richard Gombrich to the present paper. One of the Chinese parallels to MN 145, T 108 at T II 503a6, appears to be based on a similar Indic expression, reading 求刀為食, where the use of 刀 makes it clear that the translator understood the phrase to refer to a tool for killing, not a killer (as part of my comparative study of MN 145 in Anālayo 2011a: 830 note 50 I had noted this expression in T 108, without in that context having had the time to proceed to a closer study of the significance of the corresponding Pāli phrase).

¹⁸Woodward 1930/1979: 284 translates the phrase *satthahārakam pariyesanti* as "sought for a weapon to slay themselves", and Hecker 1992/2003: 367 similarly as "sie suchten eine Waffe, um sich umzubringen." Delhey 2009: 90 note 70 draws attention to the gloss on *satthāharaka* at Vin III 73,²⁶ in support of taking the term to refer to a weapon instead of an assassin.

¹⁹This has been suggested by Delhey 2009: 91 note 70.

²⁰SN 54.9 at SN V 320,¹² and Vin III 68,⁶ report that the Buddha had gone on a retreat for two weeks, giving the explicit order that nobody was to approach him except for the person bringing him almsfood.

²¹The Mahiśāsaka *Vinaya* reports that the Buddha had just risen from his meditation when he discovered that the community of monks had diminished, T 1421 at T XXII 7b₂₁: 從三昧起. This does not seem to refer to a meditation retreat, but only to a rising from his daily meditation practice. If a comparable reference should have been found at an earlier point in the Theravāda version as well, it could easily have given rise to the idea of the Buddha going on a whole retreat.

teaching context of the discourse as part of a collection of instructions on mindfulness of breathing.

Be that as it may, the report shared by the *Samyutta-nikāya* discourse and the Theravāda *Vinaya* that the Buddha had gone on a retreat is also significant in another way. The arising of this motif points to a need to reconcile the disastrous results of the monks attempting to engage in something the Buddha had recommended with the traditional belief that the Buddha was an outstanding and skilful teacher.²² The Pāli commentaries in fact build precisely on this retreat in their attempt to explain how such a grievous outcome could have happened.²³

The mass suicide of the monks becomes particularly problematic once the Buddha is held to have been omniscient.²⁴ While in the present case this is exceptionally evident, the same holds for most *Vinaya* narratives in general. These often feature the Buddha in the role of a law-giver who does not seem to foresee possible complications and therefore is repeatedly forced to adjust his rulings. Such a depiction is not easily reconciled with the belief that he was omniscient.²⁵

Probably the same belief in the Buddha's omniscience leads the Pāli commentaries to explain that, when the Buddha asked Ānanda what had happened, he did

²²As one of a standard set of epithets in the early discourses, the Buddha is reckoned to be the supreme trainer of persons to be tamed; cf., e.g., MN 27 at MN I 179,² and its parallel MĀ 146 at T I 656c₂₈ (on the apparent confusion underlying the Chinese rendering of this phrase cf. Nattier 2003: 227). Bodhi 2013: 9f describes the traditional belief to be that the Buddha is able “to understand the mental proclivities and capacities of any person who comes to him for guidance and to teach that person in the particular way that will prove most beneficial, taking full account of his or her character and personal circumstances. He is thus ‘the unsurpassed trainer of persons to be tamed’”, and his “teaching is always exactly suited to the capacities of those who seek his help, and when they follow his instructions, they receive favourable results.”

²³According to Spk III 266,³¹ and Sp II 397,¹¹, the Buddha knew that due to past deeds these monks had accumulated the karma of being killed. Not being able to prevent it, the Buddha decided to withdraw into solitary retreat. The commentaries also record an alternative explanation according to which the Buddha went into retreat foreseeing that some might try to blame him for not intervening in spite of his claim to be omniscient.

²⁴Mills 1992: 73 comments that the “Commentator grapples with the dilemma of proclaiming the Buddha omniscient on the one hand ... while showing him doing nothing to stop his monks committing suicide”; for a more detailed study of the notion that the Buddha was omniscient cf. Anālayo 2014b: 117–127.

²⁵Gombrich 2007: 206f points out that “the idea that the Buddha was omniscient is strikingly at odds with the picture of him presented in every Vinaya tradition”, which “show that the Buddha ... occasionally made a false start and found it necessary to reverse a decision. Since omniscience includes knowledge of the future, this is not omniscience.” That tradition had to grapple with this problem can be seen in the dilemma raised at Mil 272,¹⁸.

so knowingly.²⁶ That is, he inquired only for the sake of getting the conversation started. Explicit indications that the Buddha inquired knowingly, not out of ignorance, are also found in the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya*, the Chinese translation of the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinayavibhaṅga* for *bhikṣuṅīs*, and the Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*.²⁷

Coming back to the *Mṛgadaṇḍi[ka] tale, the Mahāsāṅghika *Vinaya* differs from the other versions in so far as it presents this episode right at the outset.²⁸ It begins by reporting that a monk who had been very sick asked his attendant to help him commit suicide. The attendant passed on this request to *Mṛgadaṇḍi[ka].²⁹ *Mṛgadaṇḍi[ka] killed the monk, but then felt remorse.³⁰ A Māra deity appeared and praised him for the killing, after which he went around offering to kill monks. It is at this point only that the Buddha gives a talk on the absence of beauty,³¹ which then motivates the monks to take up *Mṛgadaṇḍi[ka]’s offer to help them across by killing them.

According to the Mahāsāṅghika, the Mūlasarvāstivāda, and the Sarvāstivāda *Vinayas* he killed up to sixty monks.³² The number sixty occurs also in the Dharmaguptaka, Mahīśāsaka, and Theravāda *Vinayas*, but here this is the maximum

²⁶Spk III 268,₂₅ and Sp II 401,₂₅. Mills 1992: 73 notes that here “the Commentator arrives at another difficult point: explaining why the Buddha asked Ānanda where the monks had gone. If he was omniscient he knew already; if not, then he would be like ordinary people who need to ask ... such complications always follow from claims to omniscience.”

²⁷T 1428 at T XXII 576a₂₅: 知而故問, T 1443 at T XXIII 923b₂₀: 知而故問 (notably a remark without a counterpart in its Tibetan counterpart D 5 ta 53a₁ or Q 1034 the 51b₃, or in the account given in *Vinayavibhaṅga* for *bhikṣus*, T 1442 at T XXIII 660a₁₅ and its Tibetan counterpart D 3 ca 134a₅ or Q 1032 che 120a₈), and T 1435 at T XXIII 7c₁₅: 知故問. In Anālayo 2014a: 46f I have argued that the addition of such a phrase in the case of a *Dirgha-āgama* discourse is probably the outcome of commentarial influence, which may well hold also for the present case, in view of the similar indication being found in Spk III 268,₂₅ and Sp II 401,₂₅.

²⁸T 1425 at T XXII 254b₁₁.

²⁹T 1425 at T XXII 254a₂.

³⁰His remorse for the first act of killing is also reported in the Dharmaguptaka, Mahīśāsaka, and Theravāda *Vinayas*; cf. T 1428 at T XXII 575c₂₈, T 1421 at T XXII 7b₇, and Vin III 68,₂₈ (in these versions this occurs after the Buddha had commended contemplation of *aśubha*). According to Sp II 399,₂₆, he had approached the Vaggumudā river, whose waters were believed to be auspicious, in order to wash away not only the blood, but also the evil he had done.

³¹T 1425 at T XXII 254b₂₀.

³²T 1425 at T XXII 254b₂₅, T 1442 at T XXIII 660a₁₃ with its Tibetan counterpart in D 3 ca 134a₃ or Q 1032 che 120a₇, and T 1435 at T XXIII 7c₁₃. As part of Ānanda’s report to the Buddha, T 1425 at T XXII 254c₃ explicitly specifies that during a fortnight sixty men were killed, and T 1442 at T XXIII 660a₂₁ indicates that he killed a total of sixty monks.

number of those he killed in a single day.³³ This results in a much higher count of casualties. According to the *Samantapāsādikā*, commenting on the Theravāda *Vinaya*, he killed five hundred monks in total.³⁴

While the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya* does not give a total count of the killings, it shows the situation to have been rather dramatic. In a description without counterpart in the other versions it reports that the laity got so upset at the monastery being full of dead bodies like a cemetery that they decided to stop their support for the monks.³⁵

Together with the higher number of casualties, this attests to a tendency to dramatize the event, probably reflecting the development of the narrative in a *Vinaya* teaching context for the purpose of inculcating the need to avoid such suicidal behaviour. The more dramatic the tale, the better the lesson will be learned.

Alongside narrative elements related to the need to reconcile the story with the belief in the Buddha's omniscience and the apparent tendency towards dramatization, the main thread of the narrative is the same in the two discourse versions and the six *Vinaya* versions. The gist of the story thus would be as follows: The Buddha recommends the practice of contemplation of *aśubha*. In all versions he only gives such a general recommendation, without providing any detailed instructions. The monks then engage in this on their own and presumably in a way that lacks the balance that would have come with full instructions.³⁶ As a result of

³³T 1428 at T XXII 576a₁₂, T 1421 at T XXII 7b₂₀, and Vin III 69,₂₀ report that he killed from one up to sixty per day; for a partial translation of this part of T 1421 cf. Dhammajoti 2009: 257.

³⁴Sp II 401,₂₁.

³⁵T 1428 at T XXII 576a₁₄ to a₂₀: "Then in that monastic dwelling there was a disarray of corpses; it was a stinking and impure place, being in a condition like a cemetery. Then householders, paying their respects at one monastery after the other, reached this monastic dwelling. Having seen it, they were all shocked and jointly expressed their disapproval: 'In this monastic dwelling an alteration has taken place. The recluses, sons of the Śākya, are without kindness or compassion, killing each other. They claim of themselves: 'We cultivate the true Dharma.' What true Dharma is there in killing each other in this way? These monks even kill each other, let alone other people. From now on we will no longer worship, respect, and make offerings to the recluses, sons of the Śākya.'" For an alternative translation of this passage cf. Heng Tao (et al.) 1983: 67. On the conflict between the need of Buddhist monastics to ensure lay support by maintaining a proper public image and modes of monastic conduct related to the dead and cemeteries cf. Schopen 2006.

³⁶Spk III 265,₂₂ and Sp II 393,₂₂ relate the Buddha's recommendation on cultivating *aśubha* to contemplating the anatomical parts. In MN 10 at MN I 57,₂₀ and its parallel MĀ 98 at T I 583b₉ such contemplation of the anatomical parts of one's own body comes together with a simile that describes looking at a container filled with grains; cf. also the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, Bendall 1902/1970: 210,₈, and the *Arthaviniścaya-sūtra*, Samtani 1971: 24,₄. This simile seems to be intended to convey nuances of balance and detachment, instead of aversion; cf. in more detail Anālayo 2003: 149 and

this, they are so disgusted with their own bodies that they commit suicide, on their own or with assistance. As soon as he is informed of this, the Buddha intervenes and stops the monks from going so far as to kill themselves.

3) Early Buddhism and Ancient Indian Asceticism

Even when shorn of dramatic elements found only in some versions and after setting aside the belief in the Buddha's omniscience, the tale of the monks' mass suicide is still perplexing. Its depiction of the practice of *aśubha* going overboard to the extent that monks commit suicide needs to be considered within its cultural and religious context.

Among ancient Indian ascetic traditions in general, suicide was considered an appropriate means in certain circumstances;³⁷ particularly famous in this respect is a Jain practice often referred to as *sallekhanā*, where the accomplished saint fasts to death.³⁸ Keeping in mind this context helps to comprehend better the idea of helping monks who have not yet crossed to cross over by assisting them in suicide.

Not only does suicide appear to have been an accepted practice among some ancient Indian recluses; an attitude of disgust towards the body also seems to have been fairly commonplace in ascetic circles.³⁹ The thorough disgust the monks in the above tale came to feel towards their own bodies finds illustration in several *Vinaya* versions in a simile. This simile describes a youthful person fond of or-

2013b: 68. In fact in early Buddhist meditation theory contemplating the body as *aśubha* comes together with other practices that relate to the body in a different way, resulting in an anchoring in the body through postural awareness and in the experience of intense bodily bliss and happiness with the attainment of absorption; cf. in more detail Anālayo 2014d. The present case shows a similar counterbalancing, where an attitude of loathing the body finds its antidote by anchoring mindfulness in the body through awareness of the breath; on the practice of mindfulness of breathing cf. in more detail Anālayo 2003: 125–136 and 2013b: 227–240.

³⁷Cf., e.g., Kane 1941: 924–928 and 1953: 604–614, Thakur 1963, Filliozat 1967, Sircar 1971, Olivelle 1978, and Oberlies 2006.

³⁸Cf., e.g., Tatia 1968, Tukul 1976, Caillat 1977, Bilimoria 1992, Bronkhorst 1993/2000: 31–36, Settā 1990, Skoog 2003, and Laidlaw 2005; on suicide by Ājīvikas cf. Basham 1951: 63f, 84–90, and 127–131.

³⁹On the generally negative attitude towards the body in ancient Indian ascetic circles cf., e.g., Olivelle 2002.

nament who finds the carcass of a dead snake, a dead dog, or even of a human corpse hung around his or her neck.⁴⁰

Notably, this rather stark simile recurs in a discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* and its parallels to describe the attitude of a fully awakened one towards his own body. The narrative context depicts the arhat Śāriputra defending himself against a wrong accusation by another monk. Śāriputra illustrates his mental attitude by comparing it to each of the four elements — earth, water, fire and wind — which do not react when any dirt or impurity is thrown on them. Other comparisons take up the docile nature of a dehorned ox or the humble attitude of an outcaste. Then Śāriputra uses the imagery of having the carcass of a dead corpse hung around one’s neck to illustrate how he is “repelled, revolted, and disgusted with this foul body”, that is, his own body.⁴¹ Similar statements can be found in two *Āgama* parallels.⁴²

In the case of another reference to “this foul body”, however, the parallel versions do not have such a reference. Here a nun, who also appears to be an arhat,⁴³ replies to Māra who tries to tempt her with sensuality. According to the Pāli version, she proclaims herself “repelled and revolted by this foul body”.⁴⁴ Two

⁴⁰This is the case for the Dharmaguptaka, Mahīśāsaka, Sarvāstivāda, and Theravāda *Vinayas*: T 1428 at T XXII 575c₁₆, T 1421 at T XXII 7a₂₉, T 1435 at T XXIII 7b₂₅, and Vin III 68,₁₆ (the simile is not found in SN 54.9).

⁴¹AN 9.11 at AN IV 377,₂: *ahaṃ, bhante, iminā pūtikāyena aṭṭiyāmi* (B^c: *aṭṭiyāmi*) *harāyāmi jigucchāmi*. When considered within its context, the statement seems a bit out of place. The earlier similes, found also in the parallel versions, illustrate a balanced and non-reactive attitude, where the elements do not react with aversion towards anything impure. The present simile instead conveys a reaction, and a rather strong one at that. The simile thereby does not fulfil the purpose of illustrating a non-reactive attitude. This leaves open the possibility that during oral transmission the earlier references to the elements bearing up with impure things might have attracted the present simile, since it is also concerned with the topic of impurity. This remains speculation, however, since similar statements are found in two parallels; cf. the note below.

⁴²MĀ 24 at T I 453c₁₃: “I frequently contemplate the foul and impure parts of this body with a mental attitude of being embarrassed and ashamed and filled with utter disgust”, 常觀此身臭處不淨，心懷羞慙，極惡穢之； and EĀ 37.6 at T II 713b₁: “I am disgusted with this body”, 厭患此身。

⁴³The description in SN 5.4 at SN I 131,₁₂ indicates that she had gone beyond sensual desire and desire related to the form and formless realms, which would imply that she had become an arhat. The parallels are more explicit in this respect. SĀ 1204 at T II 328a₁₁ indicates that she had eradicated the influxes (*āsava*), and SĀ² 220 at T II 455b₂₁ reports that she had cut off all craving; for a translation of SĀ 1204 cf. Anālayo 2014c: 128f.

⁴⁴SN 5.3 at SN I 131,₁₁: *iminā pūtikāyena ... aṭṭiyāmi* (B^c and C^c: *aṭṭiyāmi*) *harāyāmi*. Another comparable reference by *bhikkhunī* Khemā can be found in Thī 140.

parallel versions of her reply to Māra do not have a corresponding expression.⁴⁵ In these discourses she expresses her lack of interest in sensual pleasure without bringing up a loathing for her own body and without qualifying her body as foul.⁴⁶ The variation found in this instance seems to reflect some degree of ambivalence in the early Buddhist texts vis-à-vis the ancient Indian ascetic attitude of being disgusted with the body, something that is also evident from other passages.

The need to avoid the excesses of asceticism already forms a theme of what according to tradition was the first discourse given by the Buddha after his awakening, which sets aside asceticism as one of the two extremes to be avoided.⁴⁷ The Buddha's claim to have reached awakening after giving up asceticism met with a rather hesitant reaction by his first five disciples. This exemplifies the difficulties of getting the Buddhist path to awakening acknowledged in a setting dominated by ascetic values.

The *Mahāsakuludāyī-sutta* and its parallel report that, on being praised for his ascetic qualities, the Buddha clarified that some of his disciples were considerably more ascetic than himself.⁴⁸ His lack of conforming to ascetic values as a Buddha is to some extent made up for by his pre-awakening practices, where he is on record as having himself tried out breath control and fasting.⁴⁹ Other ascetic practices and a life of total seclusion from human contact, described in the *Mahāsīhanāda-sutta*, apparently reflect previous life experiences as an ascetic.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ SĀ 1204 at T II 328a₆ and SĀ² 220 at T II 455b₁₇.

⁴⁶ Another occurrence of the “foul body” in SN 22.87 at SN III 120,₂₇, here used by the Buddha to refer to his own body, also does not recur in the parallels. In this case, however, the parallels do not have a counterpart to the entire statement that in SN 22.87 leads up to the expression: in SĀ 1265 at T II 346c, the Buddha's instruction follows a different trajectory and EĀ 26.10 at T II 642c₂₀ does not report any instruction at all; cf. in more detail Anālayo 2011d.

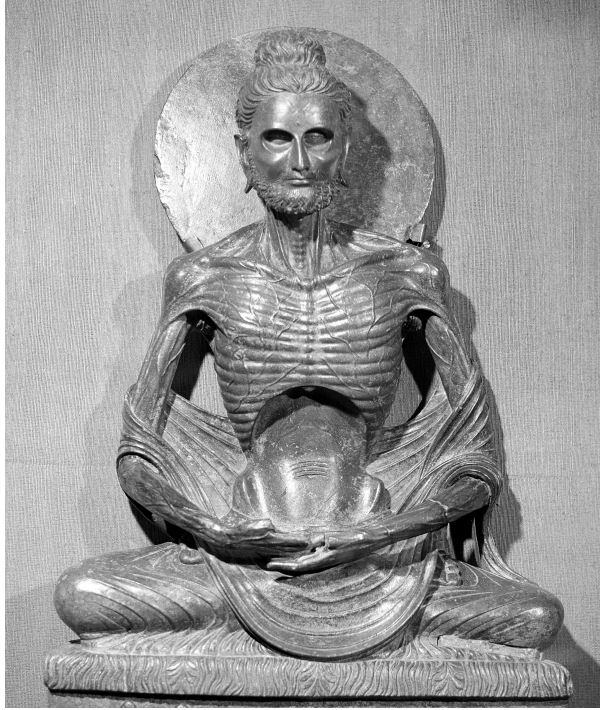
⁴⁷ For a study of the Chinese versions of this discourse cf. Anālayo 2012b and 2013a.

⁴⁸ MN 77 at MN II 6,₃₁ and MĀ 207 at T I 782c₂₁.

⁴⁹ MN 36 at MN I 243,₄ and a Sanskrit fragment parallel in Liu 2010: 171; on the significance of fasting in ancient Indian ascetic traditions cf. Olivelle 1991: 23–35

⁵⁰ MN 12 at MN I 77,₂₈ and its parallel T 757 at T XVII 597a₁₃. The allocation of these ascetic practices to a past life emerges from Jā 94 at Jā I 390,₁₆, noted by Hecker 1972: 54. MN 12 at MN I 77,₂₃ introduces these practices simply as something from the past, without this necessarily being the past of the same lifetime of the Buddha, and MN 12 at MN I 81,₃₆ then turns to other experiences the Buddha had in former lives. As already pointed out by Dutoit 1905: 50 and Freiburger 2006: 238, several of the austerities listed in MN 12 would in fact not fit into the account of events before the Buddha's awakening: his dwelling in solitude was such that he went into hiding as soon as any human approached from afar, which does not square with the traditional account that he was in the company of the five who later became his first disciples. His undertaking of ritual bathing

The Buddha's personal acquaintance with asceticism is also reflected in iconography, vividly depicting his emaciated body after prolonged fasting.



*Figure 1: Fasting Siddhārtha
Lahore Museum, courtesy of John and Susan Huntington,
The Huntington Archive at The Ohio State University.⁵¹*

three times a day does not match the description of dust and dirt accumulating on his body over the years to the extent of falling off in pieces. The depiction of his practice of nakedness stands in contrast to his wearing different ascetic garments. Such a variety of ascetic practices could only be fitted into a whole life of asceticism, as reported in the *Jātaka* account, not into the few years of austerities practised by the Buddha-to-be before his awakening. Although Bronkhorst 1993/2000: 22 comments that “it is hard to see in what other context this part could originally have existed”, taking into account Jā 94 suggests that it could have originated as an account of ascetic practices done by the Buddha in a previous lifetime, thereby documenting that his rejection of such practices was based on having himself tried out and found them not conducive to liberation.

⁵¹Cf. also Bapat 1923: 142 and Rhi 2006/2008: 127–131, as well as the discussion in Behrendt 2010.

The need to accord a proper place to ascetic values within the Buddhist tradition has also found its expression in the form of the *dhutaṅgas*. These comprise such activities as wearing rags as robes, subsisting only on almsfood, dwelling at the root of a tree, staying in a cemetery or just living out in the open, not reclining (even at night), accepting any type of accommodation, and taking one's meal in a single session per day.⁵²

The tension in early Buddhism between the need to accommodate ancient Indian asceticism and not going too far in that direction is well exemplified in the two figures of Mahākāśyapa and Devadatta. Mahākāśyapa features as an outstanding disciple renowned for his asceticism.⁵³ Devadatta is on record for having caused the first schism in the early Buddhist tradition through his request that some ascetic practices be made binding on all monks.⁵⁴

It is against this background of ancient Indian ascetic values that the significance of the *Vinaya* tale of the mass murder of monks and its relation to the *pārājika* rule on killing can be better appreciated. The tale is best understood in the light of the need of the early Buddhist tradition to demarcate its position in the ancient Indian context vis-à-vis ascetic practices and ideology.

Now the *pārājika* rule itself concerns intentionally depriving a human being of life and assisting others in committing suicide, or inciting them to kill themselves. Together with the actual rule, the accompanying narrative in the *Vinaya* has an important function for inculcating Buddhist monastic values. This is particularly so for a *pārājika* rule, an infringement of which involves loss of one's status of being fully ordained.⁵⁵ Therefore *pārājika* rules and the stories that come with them

⁵²For a reference to such practices, notably here presented as potential bases for arousing conceit, cf. MN 113 at MN III 40,23 and its parallels MĀ 85 at T I 561c6 and T 48 at T I 838b14; on variations in the later standardized listings of ascetic practices cf., e.g., Bapat 1937, Dantinne 1991: 24–30, Ganguly 1989: 21–23, Nanayakkara 1989: 584, Ray 1994: 293–323, and Wilson 2004: 33

⁵³The listings of outstanding disciples in AN 1.14 at AN I 23,18 and EĀ 4.2 at T II 557b8 reckon him foremost in the observance of the ascetic practices; cf. also the *Divyāvadāna*, Cowell and Neil 1886: 395,23, and the *Mahāvastu*, Senart 1882: 64,14.

⁵⁴For detailed comparative studies of the Devadatta episode cf. Mukherjee 1966 and Bateau 1991.

⁵⁵The present *pārājika* rule applies to any fully ordained monk, independent of his particular living situation, *pace* Kovan 2013: 794, who holds that “*pārājika* rules (initiated in and) structured around a communal body are attenuated in solitude.” Kovan 2013: 794 note 27 bases this suggestion on contrasting individual suicides like those of Channa and Vakkali (on these two cases cf. in more detail Delhey 2006 and 2009 as well as Anālayo 2010b and 2011d) to the mass suicide of monks. In the case of the mass suicide, according to him “in that communal monastic context the Buddha's condemnation of suicide is unequivocal and suggests nothing of the ‘particularism’ of the responses

can safely be expected to receive special attention in the training of a monastic.⁵⁶

In view of this it seems to me that the main issue at stake is to demarcate the early Buddhist monastic identity in contrast to ancient Indian asceticism. The story is on purpose so dramatic, in order to make sure that newly ordained monks who are being taught the narrative context of the *pārājika* rule regarding killing clearly understand what goes too far. The vivid details of the drama throw into relief the importance of a balanced attitude that leads beyond sensuality without resulting in self-destructive tendencies.

The need to avoid killing living beings in general was commonly accepted in ancient Indian ascetic and recluse circles as part of the overarching value of non-violence, *ahiṃsā*. It would therefore have been less in need of illustration through the main narrative that comes with the corresponding rule. It seems to me therefore natural that the story related to this rule takes up in particular the issue of assisting suicide, to throw into relief the early Buddhist attitude in this respect. In sum, the final versions of the tale of the mass suicide of monks are in my view best understood as being strongly influenced by narrative requirements resulting from a *Vinaya* teaching context.

In another study I took up the narrative that comes with the *pārājika* rule against sexual intercourse, concerning the monk Sudinna. I concluded that this narration sets early Buddhist monasticism in contrast to the Brahminical notion of a man's duty to procreate and warns against excessive intimacy with one's own family.⁵⁷ In the present case of the *pārājika* rule against killing a human being, the narrative depicts excesses in ascetic values, resulting in a loathing of one's own body to the extent of wishing to commit suicide.⁵⁸

In a way, these two tales can be seen to negotiate the need of the early Buddhist monastic community to carve out a clear-cut identity in distinction to contempo-

he appears to bring to the solitary monks in the other cases." Now the *pārājika* rule common to the different *Vinayas* concerns killing someone else as well as inciting someone else to commit suicide or even actively assisting in it. "The solitary monks in the other cases" only killed themselves. Thus their cases do not reflect a restricted scope for this *pārājika* rule, an idea which as far as I can see is without a basis in *Vinaya* literature. Instead, they simply do not belong to the category of *pārājika* offences; cf. also below note 123.

⁵⁶This is reflected, e.g., in Vin I 96,²², which reports that the four *pārājikas* should be taught right after full ordination has been received, in order to make sure that the newly ordained monk knows what must be avoided and thus preserves his status as a fully ordained *bhikkhu*.

⁵⁷Anālayo 2012a: 421f.

⁵⁸Kuan 2008: 54 succinctly summarizes the lesson conveyed by the tale, in that the monks "did not realize that such practices are intended to remove desire for the body, not the body itself."

rary Brahmins and to ascetically inclined recluses. The two narrations throw into relief these two extremes to be avoided, sensuality and excessive concern with family on the one hand and asceticism leading to self-destruction on the other hand. They thereby reiterate the contrast between the two extremes to be avoided that stands at the outset of what according to tradition was the first discourse spoken by the Buddha. With these two *Vinaya* narratives, the two extremes come alive through showcasing monastics going off the middle path.

Unlike the depiction of Sudinna's breach of celibacy, the story about the mass suicide of monks is also found in two discourses, alongside the six *Vinaya* versions. This difference is of considerable importance for the second part of my study, since it provides significant indications for assessing the potential of reading *Vinaya* literature compared to reading the discourses.

PART II) DISCOURSE AND VINAYA LITERATURE

4) *Vinaya* Material in Discourse Literature

A perusal of the early discourses soon makes it clear that these regularly contain *Vinaya*-related material. This holds not only for the *Samyutta-nikāya*, which has the story of the mass suicide of monks, but also for each of the other three *Nikāyas*.⁵⁹ The *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta* in the *Dīgha-nikāya* is a prominent example, apparently being the result of a wholesale importation of what originally was a *Vinaya* narrative.⁶⁰ The same discourse in fact records the promulgation of a new type of rule against an obstinate monk and the application of this rule is then reported in the Theravāda *Vinaya*.⁶¹ The promulgation of this rule is also found in the discourse parallels to the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*.⁶²

The *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta* does not stand alone in this respect. A similar pattern can be observed in the *Alagaddūpama-sutta* in the *Majjhima-nikāya*, whose depiction of another obstinate monk finds its complement in the Ther-

⁵⁹Cf., e.g., Gethin 2014: 64. My presentation in what follows takes the Pāli discourses as its starting point since this is the only complete set of four *Nikāyas/Āgamas* at our disposal.

⁶⁰Cf., e.g., Frauwallner 1956: 46 and Hirakawa 1993/1998: 264.

⁶¹DN 16 at DN II 154,17 and Vin II 290,9.

⁶²Waldschmidt 1951: 284,17 and 285,24 (§29.15), DĀ 2 at T I 26a19, T 5 at T I 168c13, T 6 at T I 184b12, T 7 at T I 204c4, and EĀ 42.3 at T II 751c7.

avāda *Vinaya*'s report of how he should be dealt with.⁶³ His obstinate behaviour is also taken up in the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel to the *Alagaddūpama-sutta*,⁶⁴ as well as in the Dharmaguptaka, Mahāsāṅghika, Mahīśāsaka, Mūlasarvāstivāda, and Sarvāstivāda *Vinayas*.⁶⁵ In this way the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta* and the *Alagaddūpama-sutta*, together with their parallels, point to a close interrelation between discourse and *Vinaya* literature as a feature common to various schools.

The *Alagaddūpama-sutta* is not the sole instance of *Vinaya* material in the *Majjhima-nikāya*. The *Sāmagāma-sutta* offers detailed explanations on how to implement seven ways of settling litigation (*adhikaraṇa-samatha*) in the monastic community; tradition reckons these seven to be part of the *pātimokkha*.⁶⁶ The seven ways of settling litigation recur in the parallels to the *Sāmagāma-sutta* as well as in the *prātimokṣas* of other schools.⁶⁷

The *Bhaddāli-sutta* and the *Kīṭāgiri-sutta* in the same *Majjhima-nikāya* feature monks who openly refuse to follow a rule set by the Buddha.⁶⁸ In both cases, similar indications can be found in their respective discourse parallels,⁶⁹ and the story of Bhaddāli's refusal recurs also in the Mahāsāṅghika *Vinaya*.⁷⁰

The seven ways of settling litigation are also listed in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*,⁷¹ which moreover contains a series of discourses elaborating on the reasons for the promulgation of *pātimokkha* rules in general.⁷² In addition, this collection has a

⁶³MN 22 at MN I 130,2, with the whole event being reported again at Vin II 25,11 and Vin IV 133,33 as the background narration for legal actions to be taken. In his detailed study of the Theravāda *pātimokkha*, von Hinüber 1999: 70 considers the present case as one of several instances where material originated as part of a discourse and then came to be integrated in the *Vinaya*, noting that there is also evidence for a movement of texts in the opposite direction; cf. also his comments below in note 73.

⁶⁴MĀ 200 at T I 763b3.

⁶⁵The Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya*, T 1428 at T XXII 682a9, the Mahāsāṅghika *Vinaya*, T 1425 at T XXII 367a3, the Mahīśāsaka *Vinaya*, T 1421 at T XXII 56c12, the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, T 1442 at T XXIII 840b21 (cf. also Yamagiwa 2001: 86,7 and 87,8 (§6.1)), and the Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, T 1435 at T XXIII 106a3.

⁶⁶MN 104 at MN II 247,6 and Norman and Pruitt 2001: 108,5; cf. also Vin IV 207,1.

⁶⁷MĀ 196 at T I 754a21 and T 85 at T I 905c4; for a comparative survey of the seven *adhikaraṇa-samatha* in the different *prātimokṣas* cf. Pachow 1955: 211–213.

⁶⁸MN 65 at MN I 437,24 and MN 70 at MN I 474,1.

⁶⁹Parallels to MN 65: MĀ 194 at T I 746b27 and EĀ 49.7 at T II 800c2. Parallel to MN 70: MĀ 195 at T I 749c27.

⁷⁰T 1425 at T XXII 359b13.

⁷¹AN 7.80 at AN IV 144,1, which is preceded by a series of discourses (7.71–78) on commendable qualities of an expert in the *Vinaya*.

⁷²AN 2.17 at AN I 98,9 to 100,7.

whole section with question and answers on various legal technicalities ranging from the ten reasons for the promulgation of rules to the topic of schism. This section closely corresponds to a section in the Theravāda *Vinaya*.⁷³ The exposition on the ten reasons for the promulgation of rules has a counterpart in a discourse in the *Ekottarika-āgama*, as well as in the different *Vinayas*.⁷⁴

Most of this material reflects problematic issues that concern the monastic community, yet it is nevertheless found among the Pāli discourses. Clearly the mass suicide of monks is not unique in this respect and there seems to have been no definite and fixed dividing line between *Vinaya* material and the discourses.

Turning to the Pāli *Vinaya* itself, according to the *aniyata* regulation a trustworthy female lay follower can charge a monk with a breach of a rule and such evidence requires the *saṅgha* to take action.⁷⁵ The *prātimokṣas* of other schools agree in this respect.⁷⁶ This confirms that, in regard to knowledge about breaches of rules and related *Vinaya* matters, the Buddhist monastic legislators did not operate from the perspective of a clear-cut divide between laity and monastics, nor were their concerns solely dominated by the wish to maintain a good reputation among the laity.

In the case of the mass suicide of monks, the fact that we only have two discourse versions may well be due to the vicissitudes of transmission, as a result of which we do not have access to complete discourse collections of those schools of which we have at least a *Vinaya*. In the case of another *Vinaya* narrative found in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, concerning the foundation of the *bhikṣuṇī* order,⁷⁷ we in fact have not only two discourse parallels preserved in Chinese translation,⁷⁸ but also a reference to yet another such discourse version in the *Mahāsāṅghika*

⁷³ AN 10.31–43 at AN V 70,3 to 79,3. As already noted by Norman 1983a: 28, this corresponds to Vin V 180,1 to 206,25. In relation to the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* in general, von Hinüber 1996/1997: 40 comments that this collection “contains sometimes rather old *Vinaya* passages ... sometimes old material may be preserved from which the *Vinayapiṭaka* has been built. In other cases the source of an AN paragraph may have been the *Vinaya*.”

⁷⁴ EĀ 46.1 at T II 775c7; the ten reasons for the promulgation of rules can be found in the *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya*, T 1428 at T XXII 570c3, the *Mahāsāṅghika Vinaya*, T 1425 at T XXII 228c24, the *Mahīśāsaka Vinaya*, T 1421 at T XXII 3b29, the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*, T 1442 at T XXIII 629b21, the *Sarvāstivāda Vinaya*, T 1435 at T XXIII 1c16, and the *Theravāda Vinaya*, Vin III 21,17.

⁷⁵ Vin III 187,1.

⁷⁶ For a comparative survey of the *aniyata* rules in the different *prātimokṣas* cf. Pachow 1955: 95–97.

⁷⁷ AN 8.51 at AN IV 274,1.

⁷⁸ MĀ 116 at T I 605a8 and T 60 at T I 856a4; cf. in more detail Anālayo 2011c.

Vinaya.⁷⁹ The reference clearly shows that a record of this event was found among the Mahāsāṃghika discourse collections. This further confirms the overall impression that the textual collections were not based on keeping *Vinaya* related material apart from discourses meant for public consumption. Instead, these two types of literature are closely interrelated and the tale of the mass suicide of monks is an example of a recurrent tendency.

5) Family Matters in Pāli Discourses

In order to corroborate my conclusion that information on monastic issues can be found not only in *Vinaya* texts, but also in the discourses, in what follows I turn to another topic that comes to the fore in the Sudinna episode that forms the background to the *pārājika* against sexual intercourse, namely its warning against excessive intimacy with one's own family. Unlike the case of the mass suicide of monks, Sudinna's breach of celibacy to ensure the continuity of his family line is not recorded among the early discourses, but only in different *Vinayas*.

The topic of how Indian Buddhist monastics relate to their families has recently been explored in detail by Clarke (2014: 162), who identifies “privileging of *sūtra*—and in particular Pāli *sutta*—over *vinaya* literature”, in combination with some preconceptions, as a major factor contributing to the construction of a scholarly misconception regarding the nature of Indian Buddhist monasticism.⁸⁰ Clarke (2014: 153 and 163) therefore advocates that, whereas in his view so far “we have placed all of our eggs in one basket, the *Suttapiṭaka* of the Pāli canon”, instead “we need to go off the sign-posted and well-trodden highways of Buddhist *sūtra* literature and continue to explore the still largely uncharted terrain of ‘in-house’ monastic codes such as the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*”.

The scholarly misconception he targets is best summarized with an excerpt from the dust jacket of his study:

⁷⁹T 1425 at T XXII 471a₂₆ indicates that the full narration should be supplemented from the discourse version; for another reference to the same discourse cf. T XXII 514b₄.

⁸⁰Clarke 2014: 17 notes that the misunderstanding he has targeted “cannot be attributed, solely, to the privileging of one type of canonical text over another (i.e., *sūtra* over *vinaya*) ... rather, I suggest that it stems from selective reading within the corpus of privileged traditions and genres, a selectivity guided by preconceived notions about what Buddhist monasticisms should look like and perhaps also by how they have been put into practice by schools of Buddhism in the modern world.”

“Scholarly and popular consensus has painted a picture of Indian Buddhist monasticism in which monks and nuns severed all ties with their families when they left home for the religious life ... This romanticized image is based largely on the ascetic rhetoric of texts such as the *Rhinoceros Horn Sutra*. Through a study of Indian Buddhist law codes (*vinaya*), Shayne Clarke dehorn the rhinoceros.”

In the context of the present paper it is of course not possible to do full justice to Clarke’s monograph, which would require a proper review.⁸¹ Hence in what follows I only take up what is relevant for my discussion of *Vinaya* narrative. In relation to the story of the mass suicide of monks, of particular interest to me is the relationship between discourse and *Vinaya* material, given that this story is found in both genres.

One issue here would be to see how far scholarly misconceptions regarding Indian Buddhist monasticism are indeed related to privileging Pāli discourse material. The best way to go about this would be to see what the Pāli discourses in the four main *Nikāyas* have to say on family matters.⁸² Of course, given that discourses have a considerably lower percentage of narrative material when compared to *Vinaya*, it is impossible to find a similar wealth of tales and stories in both types of literature, especially as detailed background narratives are often found only in the commentaries. Nevertheless, a quick perusal of the Pāli discourses, by no means meant to be exhaustive, does bring to light a few relevant indications.

The *Mahāpadāna-sutta* of the *Dīgha-nikāya* acknowledges the importance of family relations in its description of past Buddhas. In addition to reporting the names of the mother and father of each Buddha,⁸³ it also depicts the recently awakened Vipassī deciding to teach first of all his half-brother, the prince Khaṇḍa, who then became one of his two chief disciples.⁸⁴

The importance of family relations in a past life of the present Buddha comes to the fore in the *Mahāgovinda-sutta*, according to which he went forth together with all of his forty wives.⁸⁵ The discourse concludes with an evaluation of the

⁸¹I would like to be clear that what follows is not meant to stand in place of a review (for which cf., e.g., Ohnuma 2014) and my discussion is not solely concerned with Clarke’s monograph.

⁸²In order to explore what the Pāli discourses can offer in this respect, here and below I on purpose do not take up the parallels.

⁸³DN 14 at DN II 6,31.

⁸⁴DN 14 at DN II 40,8.

⁸⁵DN 19 at DN II 249,24; on the family dimension of Gautama Buddha’s going forth cf. also Strong 1997.

practice undertaken by the bodhisattva at that time. This conclusion does not in any way express criticism of the act of going forth together with all of his wives.⁸⁶

In his present life the Buddha then is on record as approaching his son Rāhula for a visit.⁸⁷ On other occasions he goes to beg together with his son or goes to meditate together with him.⁸⁸ According to the *Aggañña-sutta*, Buddhist monks in general should consider themselves as sons of the Buddha, born from the Buddha's mouth.⁸⁹ The imagery of the disciples being the sons of the Buddha recurs again in the *Lakkhaṇa-sutta*.⁹⁰

The *Ratṭhapāla-sutta* shows the monk Ratṭhapāla intending to visit his family. The Buddha, realizing that it will be impossible for Ratṭhapāla to be lured back into lay life, gives his explicit permission.⁹¹ In conjunction with the other passages surveyed so far, this episode clarifies that there is no problem as such in associating with members of one's family, as long as this does not compromise essential aspects of one's monastic role, such as celibacy.

Other passages provide similar indications, if they are read taking into account the background information provided in the commentaries.⁹² One example is the *Cūlavedalla-sutta*'s record of a long discussion between the nun Dhammadinnā and the layman Visākha, who according to the commentary was her former husband.⁹³ When the discussion is reported to the Buddha, he lauds Dhammadinnā for her wisdom, without the least censure of her having such a long exchange with her ex-husband.⁹⁴

The converse can be seen in the *Nandakovāda-sutta*, which reports that the monk Nandaka was unwilling to take his turn teaching the nuns, who according

⁸⁶DN 19 at DN II 251,12; the only criticism raised is that due to engaging solely in the practice of the *brahmavihāras* and not practising the noble eightfold path, his going forth did not lead to full awakening.

⁸⁷MN 61 at MN I 414,3.

⁸⁸MN 62 at MN I 421,1 and MN 147 at MN III 278,1.

⁸⁹DN 27 at DN III 84,21.

⁹⁰DN 30 at DN III 162,5; for monks and nuns referring to themselves or being referred to as sons and daughters of the Buddha cf., e.g., Th 174, Th 348, Th 1237, Th 1279, Thī 46, Thī 63, and Thī 336 (not taking into account Th 295, as here such a reference is attributed to the Buddha's actual son Rāhula).

⁹¹MN 82 at MN II 61,16.

⁹²Discourse commentary need not invariably reflect a textual stratum later than *Vinaya*, which contains material of originally commentarial nature that can be considerably later than the rules themselves; for a survey of the historical layers in the Pāli *Vinaya* cf. von Hinüber 1996/1997: 20.

⁹³Ps II 355,29.

⁹⁴MN 44 at MN I 304,33.

to the commentary had been his wives in former times.⁹⁵ When informed about this, the Buddha calls Nandaka to his presence and orders him to teach the nuns, whereupon Nandaka goes to the nunnery to fulfil his duty.⁹⁶ The circumstance that in the Pāli account he approaches the nunnery shows that, from the viewpoint of tradition, this incident should be placed at an early stage in the teaching career of the Buddha, before a rule was promulgated that monks should not approach nunneries to give teachings.⁹⁷ In other words, this particular episode should be read as reflecting an early stage in the development of Buddhist monasticism.

This much already suffices to paint a picture of the early Buddhist monastic attitude towards family relations that offers no support to the assumption that going forth meant a total severance of all possible interaction with the members of one's family.⁹⁸ Such a conclusion is in fact not altogether new. Collins in his introduction to Wijayaratne (1990: xvif) points out that the assumption that a solitary lifestyle was characteristic for an early stage of Indian Buddhist monasticism has been shown by Wijayaratne's research on the Pāli *Vinaya* (originally published in 1983 in French) as being merely a myth.

As already noted by several scholars, the very organisation of early Buddhist monasticism was modelled on a republican form of government based on the clan chiefdom, *gaṇa*, such as the Vṛjis;⁹⁹ and the "importance of kinship ties in the extension of support to Buddhism" in its early phase has been discussed by Chakravarti (1987/1996: 143–145). According to Wilson (1996: 29), "evidence from every category of Indian Buddhist literature may be found to support the view that the *sangha* is held together by a variety of pseudofamilial ties. Kinship structures are reduplicated within the *sangha* in a variety of ways."

Again, as already noted by Frauwallner (1956: 71), most *Vinayas* preserve an explicit stipulation according to which a new monk who joins the Buddhist monastic community should look on his preceptor as a "father", who in turn looks on him as a "son".¹⁰⁰ In this way several scholars have highlighted various as-

⁹⁵ Ps V 93,8; for a more detailed discussion cf. Anālayo 2010a: 373.

⁹⁶ MN 146 at MN III 271,4.

⁹⁷ Vin IV 56,13.

⁹⁸ With this I do not intend to underrate the importance given to dwelling in seclusion; cf. in more detail Anālayo 2009 and 2011b.

⁹⁹ Cf., e.g., Bhagvat 1939: 126f, Barua 1968: 43ff, Thapar 1984: 70ff, and Hazra 1988: 62ff; just to mention a few.

¹⁰⁰ Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya*, T 1428 at T XXII 799c₄, Mahīśāsaka *Vinaya*, T 1421 at T XXII 110c₂₆, Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, T 1435 at T XXIII 148b₂₃, and Theravāda *Vinaya*, Vin I 45,26. To these a stipulation to the same effect in the Mūlasarvāstivāda *bhikṣukarmavākya* can be added; cf. Banerjee

pects of the family dimensions of Indian Buddhist monasticism. The continuing importance of family matters for Buddhist monastics in modern times has been documented in anthropological studies, be these on monastics in Sri Lanka or in the north of India in Zangskar.¹⁰¹

The passages on family matters in the Pāli discourses surveyed so far come alongside recurrent references to departing from the home for homelessness and leaving behind one's relatives.¹⁰² The home that one should leave behind receives a more detailed explanation in a discourse in the *Samyutta-nikāya*, according to which this implies leaving behind desire, lust, and craving.¹⁰³ Once again consulting a Pāli discourse can help to make it clear that the notion of leaving behind one's home and family was not invariably meant to be taken in the strictly literal sense that one is in principle never allowed to approach the place where one formerly lived. In line with this indication, those who go forth leave behind family and relatives without this implying that they could never ever relate to them as monastics.

Perhaps a simile may be useful at this point for the sake of illustration. Let us assume someone has left her job. Having left her job does not mean she can never again enter her former workplace. She might enter it again, but she would do so as a client or customer. Having left her job also does not mean she will never again have any contact with her former colleagues. She may well have such contacts, even with her former boss. But she will not relate to her ex-boss as an employee,

1977: 72,¹⁶ a passage that has already been highlighted by Cohen 2000: 15. In the words of Cole 2004: 281, the “very effort to leave domesticity was itself domesticized and remade into a Buddhist family”; cf. also Cole 2006: 301, who points out that “the monastic space was regularly organized as something like a patriarchal family that employed the language of fathers and sons to structure discipline, identity, and authority in a way that rendered monastic identity not all that different from those templates constructed within the sphere of the lay family.”

¹⁰¹ Cf., e.g., Samuels 2010 and Gutschow 2006.

¹⁰² The standard description of going forth as part of the gradual path account in the Pāli discourses, cf., e.g., DN 2 at DN I 63,⁹, indicates that leaving behind a large or small group of relatives one cuts off hair and beard, dons the yellow robes, and goes forth from the household into homelessness.

¹⁰³ SN 22.3 at SN III 10,⁸ (which uses the term *oka* instead of *agāra*); for a discussion of different nuances of the notion of leaving behind the home cf. Collins 1982: 167–176. Olivelle 1993: 67 explains in relation to the concern with homelessness in ancient Indian recluse circles that “the value system of the vedic world is inverted: wilderness over village, celibacy over marriage, economic inactivity over economic productivity, ritual inactivity over ritual performance, instability over stable residence, inner virtue and experience over outward observance”; cf. also Ashraf 2013.

nor expect to receive a salary. In fact she might dare tell her former boss things she would not have dared to say earlier, when she was still an employee.

I suggest that going forth from the household life as depicted in early Buddhist texts is similar. Those who have left their family homes may still return to visit, but they do so as monastics. They may still meet their family members, who may even go forth together with them, but after having gone forth they relate to each other from the viewpoint of being themselves monastics.

This suggestion finds support in the examples that Clarke has examined in his study. Particularly striking are *Vinaya* narratives reporting that pregnant women go forth and then, once they have delivered, do not dare to stay in the same room or even touch their own baby boy.¹⁰⁴ This runs so much counter to the normative reaction of a mother as to make it clear that, even right after having given birth, they are shown to see themselves as monastics first of all. The stories portray them approaching the situation of having a child from within the prescribed code of conduct of a nun vis-à-vis a male.

What about the solitary lifestyle depicted in the *Khaggavisāṇa-sutta*?¹⁰⁵ According to the two commentaries on the *Sutta-nipāta*, the *Khaggavisāṇa-sutta* is a collection of sayings by Pratyekabuddhas.¹⁰⁶ The canonical *Apadāna* and its commentary take the same position.¹⁰⁷ A similar understanding can be seen in the *Mahāvastu*, which introduces its version of several stanzas paralleling the *Khaggavisāṇa-sutta* by indicating that the stanzas were spoken by different Pratyekabuddhas.¹⁰⁸ Such an understanding recurs in relation to another parallel stanza found in the *Divyāvadāna*.¹⁰⁹

Given this agreement between texts from the Lokottaravāda-Mahāsāṅghika, the Mūlasarvāstivāda, and the Theravāda traditions, it seems fair to assume that the attribution of these stanzas to Pratyekabuddhas is comparatively early.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁴Several such cases are discussed in Clarke 2014: 121–146.

¹⁰⁵The *Khaggavisāṇa-sutta* is found at Sn 35 to 75.

¹⁰⁶Nidd II 83,21 and Pj II 52,11; references already noted by Clarke 2014: 7 and 175 note 42.

¹⁰⁷Ap 7,17 and its commentary Ap-a 129,14.

¹⁰⁸Senart 1882: 357,12, where the stanzas are spoken right before the Pratyekabuddhas enter final Nirvāṇa.

¹⁰⁹Cowell and Neil 1886: 294,13; the stanza, counterpart to Sn 36, is here spoken by a Pratyekabuddha after having reached awakening.

¹¹⁰Norman 1983b: 106 note 70 comments that the parallel in the *Mahāvastu* “proves that the attribution predates the schism between the Theravadins and the Mahasāṅghikas.” Salomon 2000: 8f points out that “various Buddhist traditions surrounding the Rhinoceros Sūtra are unanimous, where they say anything about the matter at all, in describing its verses as the inspired utterances

From the viewpoint of tradition, then, the *Khaggavisāṇa-sutta* was apparently never meant to represent the norm for an ideal Buddhist monasticism. Instead, its purpose was to depict what happens precisely when there is no Buddhist monasticism.¹¹¹ The few who reach awakening on their own during such a period become Pratyekabuddhas and, in contrast to a Buddha, do not start a monastic community of disciples.¹¹² So the solitary lifestyle eulogized in the *Khaggavisāṇa-sutta*, just as the *Mahāsihanāda-sutta*'s depiction of the bodhisattva dwelling in total seclusion from human contact,¹¹³ does not seem to be meant to depict normative behaviour to be emulated by Buddhist monastics.

There has been considerable discussion about whether the term *khaggavisāṇa* in the title of the discourse and in the recurrent phrase *eko care khaggavisāṇakappo*

(*gāthā* or *udāna*) of the pratyeka-buddhas.” “Some doubt exists on the part of modern scholars as to whether this association is historically original to the text or, rather, is a later interpretive imposition”. However, “it is clear that the association of the Rhinoceros Sūtra with the pratyeka-buddhas had become widespread, indeed apparently unanimous, at a relatively early period, as confirmed by its attestation in both the Pali and the Sanskrit tradition.”

¹¹¹Based on what appears to be an implicit reference to the Buddha in Sn 54, Bronkhorst 1993/2000: 125 argues that “the *Khaggavisāṇa Sutta* must therefore have been composed after, or at the earliest during the preaching of the Buddha. How then could it be thought of as being composed by Pratyekabuddhas?” Sn 54 appears to refer to MN 122 at MN III 110,²⁸, where the Buddha warns Ānanda against excessive socializing. Needless to say, the point of the original passage was not that Ānanda should live an entirely solitary life, which would have left the Buddha without his attendant. Sn 54 might therefore be the result of combining this reference with the refrain *eko care khaggavisāṇakappo*. Such a presumably later addition does not render impossible the assumption that the bulk of the discourse depicts a mode of thought believed to have been pre-Buddhist. The *Apadāna*, Ap 7,¹, in fact explicitly introduces the Buddha as the source of information about the sayings by Pratyekabuddhas reflected in the *Khaggavisāṇa-sutta*. This would be in line with a general attitude in tradition, reflected, e.g., in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, Wogihara 1971: 397,¹¹, and the *Cullaniddesa*, Nidd II 80,¹, according to which the Buddha was able to teach events that took place long ago, based on his own direct knowledge of the past. A to some extent comparable case can be seen in the *Mahāpadāna-sutta* and its parallels, where the present Buddha gives information about past Buddhas as well as about himself; cf. DN 14 at DN II 2,¹⁵, Fukita 2003: 34,⁹, DĀ 1 at T I 1C¹⁹, T 2 at T I 150a¹⁷, T 3 at T I 154b⁹, T 4 at T I 159b¹¹, and EĀ 48.4 at T II 790a²⁷. Here, too, the time when the story is told being the lifetime of the present Buddha, about whom detailed information is given, does not render it impossible for events to be reported by the same speaker that were believed to have taken place in the far distant past.

¹¹²In the words of Ashraf 2013: 29, the motif of the Pratyekabuddha “describes the practice of a *monachos*, solitary monk, in contrast to the cenobite, who finds his relevance in a community of practitioners.” For a critical reply to the suggestion by Norman 1983b that the term Pratyekabuddha refers to one who awakens because of an external stimulation, *pratyaya*, instead of standing for one who lives a solitary life without disciples, *pratyeka*, cf. Anālayo 2010c: 11ff.

¹¹³Cf. above note 50.

illustrates a solitary lifestyle with the example of a rhinoceros or rather of its horn. As far as I can see, the evidence points to the comparison being with the animal itself.¹¹⁴ Whatever may be the final word on the significance of the term *khaḍgaviṣāṇa/khaggavisāṇa*, however, the foregoing discussion would have made it clear that there is no need to try to dehorn the rhinoceros, since neither the horn nor the whole animal poses a problem.

For correcting the mistaken notion that a solitary lifestyle of the type depicted in the *Khaggavisāṇa-sutta* was normative for Indian Buddhist monasticism, the

¹¹⁴Taking the imagery to be about the horn would have the support of the commentaries; cf. Nidd II 129,¹³, Pj II 65,¹⁰, and also Ap-a 133,³². Hare 1945/1947: 11 note 2 comments that the idea of the single horn of the Indian rhinoceros would convey its “being contrasted no doubt with the two horns of other animals”. This imagery comes alive in the description of the Indian rhinoceros by Megasthenes in McCrindle 1877: 59, according to which “a horn sprouts out from between its eyebrows, and this is not straight, but curved into the most natural wreaths.” Contrary to the commentarial explanation, however, according to Edgerton 1953/1998: 202 s.v. *khaḍga-viṣāṇa*, the term “means *rhinoceros*, = Skt. *khaḍgin*, originally *having a sword(-like) horn*. The comparison is to the animal, not to its horn.” Yet, Norman 1996/2001: 38 points out that in the Jain *Kalpa-sūtra* the comparison is to the horn of a rhinoceros. In reply, Salomon 2000: 11 comments that “when we look further afield, in the Buddhist Sanskrit tradition, the answer seems to be exactly the opposite”, that is, there is considerable support for the image being concerned with the rhinoceros itself. In addition to this, as noted already by Jayawickrama 1949/1977: 22, “in other places in the Pāli Canon the idea of wandering alone is compared with the movements of animals of solitary habits rather than with parts of their anatomy”, for which he provides several examples. To this Salomon 2000: 12 adds that a stanza in the Gāndhārī parallel to the *Khaggavisāṇa-sutta* speaks instead of a solitary elephant, where “the reference can only be to the solitary habits of the bull elephant.” Regarding animal habits, Saddhatissa 1985: 8 note 1 refers to the “gregarious nature of the Indian species, called *Rhinoceros unicornis*”, in support of the interpretation that opts for the horn. But, as pointed out by Jamison 1998: 253, based on quoting authorities on zoology, the rhinoceros is indeed a solitary animal; thus “the root *car* ‘wander’ is particularly appropriate to the seasonal behavior of the rhinoceros, who seems almost to conduct himself like a roaming mendicant.” Schmithausen 1999: 233 note 13 points out that in the *Khaggavisāṇa-sutta* the image serves to illustrate the activity of *carati*, which would support an interpretation of it as referring to a rhinoceros; cf. also Wright 2001: 4, who notes that “the verb *care* shows that the idea of solitary perambulation is paramount.” That the image is indeed about a solitary habit finds further support in the observation by Caillat 2003: 38 that, judging from Jain texts, it seems preferable “to retain the full meaning of the substantive *kappa*, *kalpa*, ‘usage, practice’ ... thus, for *khaḍga-viṣāṇa-kalpa*, ‘following the habits of the rhinoceros’ (in contrast to the commentarial understanding, which takes *kappa* to stand for *sadisa*, “like”). Although the situation may have seemed ambivalent by the time of Jones 1949/1973: 250 note 1 and even Kloppenborg 1974: 60, who takes both interpretations as being valid, to my mind by now the contributions that have been made by various scholars render the situation fairly conclusive, in that the original idea would have been to illustrate a solitary lifestyle with the habits of a rhinoceros, the idea of the single horn gaining prominence as a secondary development.

potential of reading the Pāli discourses could be put to the test again. A standard phrase found repeatedly at the outset of a Pāli discourse shows the Buddha in the company of 500 monks.¹¹⁵ While the number is of course stereotypical, there can be little doubt that it portrays a substantial group of monks living and travelling together with the Buddha. A discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* even goes so far as to report that the Buddha stopped one of his monks from going off into seclusion, recommending he should better stay with the community of monks.¹¹⁶ This much already suffices to show, again, that recourse to the Pāli discourses themselves can help to rectify the notion that monastics are invariably expected to live a solitary life.

6) Reading *Vinaya* Material

The relevance of reading Pāli discourse literature alongside *Vinaya* material for exploring topics like family matters can be seen with another discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*. The discourse reports that a mother and her son had both gone forth and were spending the rainy season retreat together, visiting each other often. Eventually they engaged in sexual intercourse with each other.¹¹⁷ This story not only shows that it was in principle possible for mother and son to go forth together, but also for them to meet regularly and this evidently in rather private circumstances. A problem arises only once this leads to sex, aggravated in the present instance by being incest.

The incest story in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* clearly shows that discourse literature can contain material that is rather compromising. The same holds for the mass suicide of monks, where a narrative with a considerable potential to be damaging to the reputation of the Buddha as a teacher is not confined to the *Vinayas*.¹¹⁸ Here the discourse material is as revealing as the *Vinaya* texts, both reporting that a recommendation given by the Buddha on a meditation topic led to

¹¹⁵For a discussion of variations in the standard number of monks accompanying the Buddha cf. Anālayo 2011a: 417–419.

¹¹⁶AN 10.99 at AN V 209,15.

¹¹⁷AN 5.55 at AN III 67,24; cf. also the discussion in Silk 2009: 126–128.

¹¹⁸Even for it to be recorded in the *Vinaya* is remarkable. Mills 1992: 74 comments that “it is strange that a story like this, which does no credit to the Buddha, but quite the opposite, was permitted to remain in the *Vinaya* ... if the story is partly true, it would hardly reflect well on the Buddha, while if the whole story is true he appears in a worse light still.”

a mass suicide among his disciples.¹¹⁹ A case of incest among Buddhist monastics is similarly problematic. Both tales should be found only in “in-house” literature, if a clear dividing line between material for public display and in-house documentation had indeed been a concern informing the formation of the Buddhist textual collections. This is clearly not the case.

The evidently complementary nature of discourse and *Vinaya* material makes it in my view indispensable that a proper appreciation of individual tales (like the mass suicide of monks) or Indian Buddhist monasticism in general is based on reading *Vinaya* stories in conjunction with what early discourse material has to offer. In contrast, relying only on *Vinaya* texts would be like trying to reconstruct the history of a particular country or time period solely based on criminal records. It does not need much imagination to envision a rather distorted picture emerging from using solely such material.

Vinaya tales have their origin in something that went wrong. They need to be contextualized. Using only *Vinaya* texts to reconstruct the history of Indian monasticism would be even worse than relying only on criminal records, since such records can be expected to be based on actual events. In contrast, *Vinaya* narratives feature misbehaving monastics side by side with celestial beings, demons, and animals able to speak. Such narratives tell us a lot about the views and beliefs held by those responsible for their coming into being, but circumspection is required when they are used as a basis for reconstructing the actual situation on the ground.

Vinaya passages referring to nuns running brothels, for example, need not invariably be reflecting actual conditions. In view of the general Indian perception

¹¹⁹The tale of the mass suicide is also of interest in relation to the proposition in Clarke 2014: 17 that “whereas *sūtras* go into lengthy discourses on the value of meditation, for instance, Schopen has shown that Buddhist monastic law codes warn against rigorous engagement in contemplative exercises” (reference is to Schopen 2004: 26). In the present case the dangers of improper meditation practice are indeed highlighted, but this occurs together with drawing attention to the advantages of proper practice of mindfulness of breathing. Here the dangers and advantages of meditation practice are taken up both in discourse and *Vinaya* literature. In the case of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*, just to give one other example, Hu-von Hinüber 2014: 89 notes that instructions on examining the anatomical parts of the body occur as part of “a long passage about different matters concerning the meditation” on *aśubha*, in what she considers an attempt “to impart all of the basic knowledge [of] what a monk needs to practice his daily life in the Saṃgha.” Here the purpose is clearly to encourage meditation—precisely the meditation that the tale of the mass suicide of monks shows to be problematic—not to warn against it.

of renunciant women as being on a par with prostitutes,¹²⁰ it is in principle possible that the idea of nuns running brothels could have arisen in an environment antagonistic to Buddhist monastics.¹²¹ Once having become a popular perception, this could then have motivated the drawing up of rules to safeguard reputation, even without it needing to have actually happened.¹²²

This is of course not to say that it is in principle impossible for something like this to have taken place, but only to point out that the implications of the existence of such a rule require evaluation. A decisive criterion when evaluating such stories is to my mind a principle espoused by Clarke (2014: 166), according to which all of the extant *Vinayas* need to be consulted. In his own words: “any *vinaya* cannot be accepted as representative of Indian Buddhist monasticisms without first fully examining the other five monastic law codes; we must marshal all available evidence in rereading Indian Buddhist monasticisms.”¹²³ Given that references to nuns running brothels do not seem to appear in all *Vinayas*,¹²⁴ the possibility that these references have come into being as the product of imagination has to be seriously taken into consideration. Had this been a real problem during the

¹²⁰Olivelle 2004: 499 notes that in the *Manusmṛti* “there are women of certain groups ... who are stereotyped as being sexually promiscuous”, one of them being “female wandering ascetics”. Similarly, a commentary on the *Manusmṛti*, quoted in Jyväsjärvi 2007: 80, defines females who have become homeless as “women without protectors ... [who], being lustful women, are disguised in the dress (of ascetics).”

¹²¹The suggestion in Clarke 2014: 35 that the occurrence of certain narrative motifs in Sanskrit drama and other Indian literature antagonistic to Buddhism can serve to corroborate that descriptions of misbehaviour in *Vinaya* narratives are based on historical facts is therefore to my mind not conclusive.

¹²²Horner 1938/1982: xxi notes that *Vinaya* narratives at times give the impression “that these are the outcome, not of events, so much as of lengthy and anxious deliberations. The recensionists had a responsible task. They were legislating for the future.” Therefore quite possibly “at the time of the final recension, each rule was minutely scrutinised and analysed, and all the deviations from it, of which the recensionists had heard or which they could imagine, were formulated and added.”

¹²³As a side note, it seems to me that doing full justice to this important principle would stand in contrast to the suggestion by Clarke 2009 that breach of a *pārājika* rule may only result in loss of communion with a particular local community, given that this suggestion is based on a story found only in a single *Vinaya*. In general terms, as indicated by Kieffer-Pülz 2014: 62, by now “general statements on the basis of only one *Vinaya* should belong to the past.” Moreover, as I already argued in Anālayo 2012a: 418f note 42, even the assumption that this single story has implications on the nature of *pārājika* rules is rather doubtful; cf. also above note 55 and below note 125.

¹²⁴Judging from the survey in Clarke 2014: 228 note 63, the brothel motif is only found in some *Vinayas*.

early stages of Indian Buddhist monasticism, we would expect all of the *Vinayas* to try to tackle it.

Regarding Indian Buddhist monasticism in general, based on his study of family matters in *Vinaya* literature Clarke (2014: 155) comes to the conclusion that “mainstream Buddhism itself is starting to look surprisingly and increasingly like what we see in later Mahāyāna Buddhism in Nepal, for instance.” In my view this is not an accurate reflection of the material he has studied, as it does not reflect the difference between monastics who relate to their former partners as monastics and priests who actually live a family life. Moreover, it fails to distinguish between what the texts present as exceptional in contrast to common behaviour.¹²⁵

The cases Clarke has surveyed in his study all fall under the first category of monastics relating to their former partners as monastics. When those who go forth need not obtain a legal divorce, in keeping with ancient Indian customs, then this does not imply that their marriage will not be considered on a practical level as having come to an end. Once former husband and wife relate to each other as monastics and are no longer permitted to have sex with each other, this does amount to a substantial difference from the married priests of Newar Buddhism in Nepal.¹²⁶ In sum, Clarke’s conclusion is an example of a tendency where, in the

¹²⁵In relation to the discussion by Clarke 2014: 47–56 of the tales of Dharmadinnā and Sudinna as evidence for monastics living with their families, Ohnuma 2014: 2 queries, in relation to Sudinna, “shouldn’t his behavior be seen as a precedent-setting example of everything that a monastic should *not* do, and thereby as a highly unusual case?” Thus “making *some* distinction—no matter how speculative—between those familial practices that were truly ordinary and those that were highly unusual” seems to be required. Besides, “Clarke also fails to consider the *negative* evidence: If the practice of monastics living at home were anything other than highly unusual, wouldn’t the *vinayas* contain legal procedures for how to deal with such monastics and legislate their proper roles within the monastic community? And if such rules are lacking, shouldn’t we conclude that the cases of Sudinna and Dharmadinnā were, in fact, fairly unusual and lacked the taken-for-granted quality of occasional visits home?” Regarding the story of Dharmadinnā found in the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*’s account of ordination by messenger, it seems to me that Clarke’s presentation is beset by the same methodological problem as his reasoning regarding the nature of *pārājika* rules (cf. above note 123), where he also bases far-reaching conclusions on a story found only in the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*. In the present case the accounts of ordination by messenger in the parallel versions, listed in Clarke 2014: 190 note 37, have completely different narratives. Yet, as formulated by Clarke 2014: 18 himself, when studying *Vinaya* narrative we should “ensure that what we see is not just an isolated viewpoint of a single tradition, but is broadly representative of the canonical jurists’ handling ... in all extant *vinayas*.”

¹²⁶Gellner 1989: 6 explains that “the role of part-time Buddhist monk within the institutional framework of Newar Buddhism is restricted to [the sacerdotal caste of the] Śākya and Vajrācāryas. The role of the permanent, and permanently celibate, monk or nun is open neither to them nor

words of Ohnuma (2014: 3), he “occasionally overstates his case.”

This to my mind corroborates that excessive emphasis on misdeeds reported in *Vinaya* texts can lead to painting a distorted picture. The same holds for the mass suicide of monks. The story does make it unmistakably clear that the early generations of reciters did not yet conceive of the Buddha as an infallible and omniscient teacher. At the same time, however, the tale needs to be considered alongside records of the Buddha’s successful teaching activities found elsewhere, that is, it needs to be contextualized in order to avoid arriving at a distorted picture of the Buddha’s role as a teacher. Only such contextualization within the whole extant textual corpus, in combination with taking into account the ancient Indian setting, enables a proper appreciation of this and other *Vinaya* tales.

Conclusion

Understanding the tale of the mass suicide of monks requires taking into account the ascetic environment within which early Buddhism evolved. The tale itself depicts a recommendation given by the Buddha being put to use without proper instructions. The resultant mass suicide reflects the influence of a prevalent negative attitude towards the body and the tolerance of suicide in ancient Indian ascetic circles. In a *Vinaya* teaching context, this tale would have evolved in line with its function to demarcate Buddhist monastic identity in contrast to contemporary ascetic values by showing how things can go wrong.

The occurrence of the mass suicide tale among the discourses shows that problematic narratives were not allocated to *Vinaya* texts only, making it improbable that these offer us the only window available for in-house information on what took place on the ground. Instead, *Vinaya* narratives need to be read with a clear recognition of their teaching purposes and of the fact that they are naturally con-

to any other Newar ... the traditional institutions of Newar Buddhism provide for no such role”; cf. also Gellner 1992: 59: “Vajrācāryas and Śākyas are, then, householder Buddhist monks.” Allen 1973: 11 even speaks of “the radical anti-celibacy of the form of Buddhism” found in Nepal. As explained by von Rospatt (forthcoming), “though assuming monkhood only ritually for a few days, they maintain their monastic identity even after disrobing. Thus Newar Buddhism is not a ‘Buddhism without monks,’ as some observers have held, but a Buddhism with monks who have turned householders without giving up their identity as monastics”; cf. also Lienhard 1999 and von Rospatt 2005. I fail to see how mainstream Indian Buddhist monasticism could be considered as resembling such descriptions. With this I do not in any way intend to encourage an evaluation of Newar Buddhism as a degeneration, but only to clarify that it does differ substantially from what available sources allow us to know about mainstream Indian Buddhist monasticism.

cerned with what went wrong, instead of giving us a complete picture of Indian Buddhist monasticism as a whole. They reflect views and opinions held by those responsible for the final shape of the passages in question, which result from a range of influences, historical events being only one of them.

Addendum

By Richard Gombrich

In the *Puṇṇovāda sutta*, MN *sutta* 145, the Buddha and the monk Puṇṇa are discussing the latter's intention to become a missionary in a remote region called Sunāparantaka, where they consider that that people may well react to him with active hostility. They consider a series of possible reactions in ascending order of violence, culminating in the possibility that they will kill him. What, asks the Buddha, does Puṇṇa think of that?

He replies that sometimes people feel such self-disgust that they *sattha-hāraḥkaṃ pariyesanti*: “they look for a *sattha-hāraḥkaṃ*.” He goes on: *Taṃ me idaṃ apariyitthaṃ*¹²⁷ *yeva sattha-hāraḥkaṃ laddhaṃ*. This means: “So I have acquired this *sattahāraḥkaṃ* without even looking for it.” The grammar of this sentence is crucial to how we can translate *sattha-hāraḥkaṃ*. It has to be the grammatical subject of the sentence, and the neuter pronoun *idaṃ* agrees with it. So it is neuter, in fact neuter singular, and cannot refer to a person. It must mean “thing which takes away life”.

The *pada-vaṇṇanā* (word commentary) at Vin III 73, glossing the word, has given 8 examples of such things, including poison and a rope. The word occurs in several places, as Anālayo reports, and it would be tedious to list all the wrong translations of it which have been published. They seem to have been influenced by the fact that there is a word *sattha* (< Sanskrit *śastra*) meaning a cutting weapon, e.g. a knife or dagger. This however is not that word, but a homonym of it. Though it is not in the *PED*, *sattha* can mean, if we interpret it as the p.p.p. of Sanskrit $\sqrt{\text{śvas}}$, “[the breath of] life”, a synonym of *pāṇa*. *Hāraḥka* means “taking away”.

¹²⁷There is a variant reading *apariyitthaṃ*; this makes no difference at all.

This is not the place to take my own analysis of the story much further, but I shall indicate the direction of my thoughts. I have always admired the dictum of Dr Samuel Johnson, who said, “Sir, I get the Latin from the meaning, not the meaning from the Latin.” In the present case, this means that I start from the observation that the whole story which introduces the third *pārājika* offense with the story of the mass suicide of monks is totally absurd and must owe its form to some misunderstanding – a misunderstanding which I think we can dimly discern.

Why is it absurd? I can easily suggest four reasons.

We know that Roman warriors sometimes committed suicide by getting someone to hold a sword onto which they threw themselves; Japanese warriors (*samurai*) had almost the same custom; but is there any other trace of this custom, or any similar form of assisted suicide, in India?

If that is not enough, does this story not conflict with other major features of what we know of early Buddhism? How come that so spectacular an event is never mentioned outside this immediate context, either in the Buddhist texts or in the polemics of non-Buddhist religious literature? It is as if even the Buddhists themselves did not believe this story.

And well might they not so believe! Buddhists knew that if one killed oneself, one would not escape from corporeal existence but be reborn in another body – but probably in worse circumstances, because one had died by self-inflicted violence.

Finally, as Anālayo points out in his article, the story reflects amazingly badly on the Buddha: not only does it impugn his omniscience, but something far worse: it shows him guilty of the most shocking misjudgment, failing to foresee the effect of his own preaching. Anālayo mentions this, most pointedly in note 118 and the related text in this article, but goes no further than calling it “remarkable”. Yet is any comparable episode to this recorded elsewhere?

None of this is in disagreement with Anālayo’s analysis of the function that this story was intended to have. It survives in several versions, and this alone shows that it did serve a purpose in training monastics and setting a limit to permissible asceticism. My intention is merely to dig deeper and suggest how so grotesque and unrealistic a fable came about.

Abbreviations

AN	<i>Aṅguttara-nikāya</i>
Ap	<i>Apadāna</i>
Ap-a	<i>Apadāna-aṭṭhakathā</i>
B ^e	Burmese edition
C ^e	Ceylonese edition
D	Derge edition
DĀ	<i>Dīrgha-āgama</i>
DN	<i>Dīgha-nikāya</i>
EĀ	<i>Ekottarika-āgama</i> (T 125)
Jā	<i>Jātaka</i>
MĀ	<i>Madhyama-āgama</i> (T 26)
Mil	<i>Milindapañha</i>
MN	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
Nidd II	<i>Cullaniddesa</i>
Pj II	<i>Paramatthajotikā</i>
Ps	<i>Papañcasūdanī</i>
Q	Peking edition
SĀ	<i>Samyukta-āgama</i> (T 99)
SĀ ²	<i>Samyukta-āgama</i> (T 100)
SN	<i>Samyutta-nikāya</i>
Sn	<i>Sutta-nipāta</i>
Sp	<i>Samantapāsādikā</i>
Spk	<i>Sāratthappakāsinī</i>
T	Taishō edition
Th	<i>Theragāthā</i>
Thī	<i>Therīgāthā</i>
Vin	<i>Vinayaṭṭhaka</i>

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