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**A PHILOLOGICAL APPROACH
TO BUDDHISM**

The Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai Lectures 1994

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ABBREVIATIONS

AMg	Ardha-Māgadhī
AO	Acta Orientalia
B.C.E.	Before Common Era
BHS	Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit
BHSD	Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary
BHSG	Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar
BSO(A)S	Bulletin of the School of Oriental (and African) Studies
BSR	Buddhist Studies Review
BUp	Brhad-Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad
C.E.	Common Era
CP I–V	K.R. Norman. Collected Papers, Volumes I–IV (1990–94)
CPD	A Critical Pāli Dictionary, Copenhagen
CUP	Cambridge University Press
DEDR	T. Burrow & M.B. Emeneau, <i>Dravidian Etymological Dictionary</i> (Revised edition, 1984)
DPPN	G.P. Malalasekera, <i>Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names</i> (1937–38)
EV I, II	K.R. Norman, <i>Elders' Verses</i> I (1969), II (1971)
GD I, II	K.R. Norman, <i>The Group of Discourses</i> I (1984), II (1992)
IJ	Indo-Iranian Journal
IT	Indologica Taurinensia
JA	Journal Asiatique
JBuRS	Journal of the Burma Research Society
JOI(B)	Journal of the Oriental Institute (Baroda)
JPTS	Journal of the Pali Texts Society
JRAS	Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society
m.c.	metri causa
MIA	Middle Indo-Aryan
MRI	<i>Minor Readings and Illustrator</i>

MW	M. Monier-Williams, <i>Sanskrit-English Dictionary</i> (1899)
OUP	Oxford University Press
PDhp	Patna Dharmapada
PE	Pillar Edict
PED	The PTS's Pali-English Dictionary
Pkt	Prakrit
PTS	Pali Text Society
RE	Rock Edict
SBE	Sacred Books of the East
Skt	Sanskrit
SOAS	School of Oriental and African Studies (London)
SWTF	Goerg von Simson (ed.), <i>Sanskrit-Wörterbuch der buddhistischen Texte aus den Turfan-Funden</i> (1973–)
Überbl	O. von Hinüber, <i>Das ältere Mittelindisch im Überblick</i> (1986)
WZKSO	Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens

Abbreviations of the titles of Pāli texts are those adopted by the CPD.
Editions are those of the PTS, unless otherwise stated.

II Buddhism and Its Origins

In the first lecture I gave a general account of the way in which I personally became involved in the philological study of Buddhism, and I gave some illustrations of the way in which philologists have been able to shed light upon a number of important concepts in Buddhism, and as a result of the shedding of that light to understand the concepts better, to give better translations for them, and to show more clearly how they fit into the general pattern of Buddhism.

I want in this and in the remaining lectures to deal with more specific aspects of Buddhism, and to continue to show how, if we approach them through the medium of philology, always asking “why or how do these words get their meaning”, we may be able to add something to the picture which we get through other means of approach.

Since I shall in these lectures be giving translations of many of the terms I shall discuss, it would perhaps be sensible to start now by giving some idea of the approach to translation which I have evolved over the years.

It is very difficult to give a one for one translation of Sanskrit and Pāli words into English. It is very rare that one Sanskrit or Pāli word has exactly the same connotations, no less and no more, as one English word. This means that if I wish to give a more adequate translation I am forced to give a phrase in English, or perhaps even a whole sentence, or in the case of a very difficult word with a wide range of connotations, even a whole paragraph. Consequently, if I am translating a Buddhist text into English, it is very difficult to produce something which approximates closely to the meaning of the original, and yet appears in good, clear, concise and readable English.

It is for this reason that many translators do not translate the difficult words, but leave them in their original Sanskrit or Pāli form. And this is fine, for them. As they read through their translations, every time they come across a Sanskrit or a Pāli word, they know, within limits, what it means and they can mentally substitute that meaning. It is not, however, so good for the rest of us, who have little idea of what these scholars have in mind, since their translations may consist of little more than strings of Sanskrit, Pāli or Tibetan words linked together with “ands” and “buts”. Reviewers sometimes complain of translations

which are so literal and so full of foreign words that they hardly read as English.¹ Such translations are of little value, and one might just as well leave the whole thing in the original. Only an expert can understand all the words left in the original language, and the expert needs no English words at all.

And so what I have favoured over the years, when translating, is to leave a minimum of these difficult terms in their original form, but the first time they occur, to include a note as lengthy and as detailed as I think is required, giving some idea of what I think the word means, and why I think it means it. In effect I am saying that, every time the reader comes across this word thereafter, he must remember to consult the relevant note to find out what it means in the context. This system does have defects. As anyone who has looked at any of my translations knows, the actual translation is only a small proportion of the book. The notes are far longer, and then there are all the indexes which will enable the reader to find where I dealt first with the problematic word.

However, in the context of lectures such as these, that system is clearly not possible, and so I shall have to give a single word translation, for the technical terms, etc., that I am talking about, but this will be simply for the purpose of identification. In no way do I mean to imply that the one word translation I give is an adequate translation of the technical term we are discussing. And, with that proviso, I will go on now to talk about the information that philology can give us about Buddhism and its origins.

We are all familiar with the account of the origin of Buddhism which we find in the Indian tradition. The Buddha-to-be was the son of an Indian king. Despite his father's attempts to ensure that his son should see no sign of old age, sickness or death, he became acquainted with the suffering existing in the world and the advantages of the ascetic life by seeing four signs at the age of twenty-nine. He left his wife and new-born son and became a wanderer. He tried severe ascetic practices, and followed various teachers, but found that he could not obtain the goal he was seeking. By meditation he obtained *nirvāṇa*, and then began to teach to others the way which he had found to be successful, beginning with those with whom he had earlier practised asceticism.

What light can a philological approach throw on this narrative?

It goes without saying that the origins of Buddhism lie in the political, economic, social and religious environment of the time.

The political and economic picture which we gain from early Pāli texts is one where the urbanisation of the Gangetic plain was well under way. There were large, well fortified cities, with powerful rulers. Movement between those cities was easy, and trade between them was flourishing. We read of merchants setting out

¹ See Gombrich's review of Cousins (et al.), 1974, in *JRAS* 1977, 132–33.

with large caravans, and there are frequent references to the coinage which must have facilitated the growth of trade.² The *kṣatriyas*, the ruling class, had gained a more imposing identity—they were no longer minor chieftains—and the *vaiśyas*, the mercantile class, had begun to gain wealth, and power arising from that wealth, as opposed to an earlier situation where they were merely itinerant traders. This must have led to a situation where the *kṣatriyas* and the *vaiśyas* would be very open to a religion which gave them a social position equal to, or even superior to, that of members of the brahmanical caste. It is very clear that the brahmanical caste was regarded as superior, at least by the members of that caste. As a *kṣatriya* the Buddha might be expected to oppose the brahmanical caste and much of his teaching was devoted to defining the word *brāhmaṇa* as a moral term, and denying that one became a *brahman* simply by birth. He insisted that it was actions which made a *brahman*. A consequence of the Buddha's teaching about this was that (although there are many references to *brāhmaṇas* becoming his followers³) the main support for his religion came from *kṣatriyas* and *vaiśyas*, particularly from the latter. This was presumably because they were wealthy and were well placed to gain merit by *dāna* “giving, generosity”. They also travelled widely, and were able to act as missionaries, taking the message to other *vaiśya* communities. It is a striking fact that, as Buddhism spread, it followed the trade routes, being propagated either by “missionary” traders or by bhikkhus who travelled with the caravans under the protection of the traders.

The Buddha was born in Nepal, and his name was Siddhattha. The traditional story states that his father Suddhodana was a king, that is to say a *rāja*. This word, however, may mean nothing more than a man of the royal tribe or the military caste, i.e. a *kṣatriya*,⁴ and in this context, in a place some way away from the Gangetic plain, it is probable that it still meant a minor tribal chieftain, at the head of the Śākya clan. Siddhattha's gotra name was Gotama, but Gotama is not a *kṣatriya* name, so it probably represents a borrowing of the family *purohita*'s gotra name.⁵ This suggests that the Śākyas were a fairly recent entrant into the caste system, which in turn suggests that perhaps the Buddha's family was not in origin Indo-Aryan. There are other examples of clans or tribes being assimilated into the caste system in a comparable way.⁶ It has been pointed out that important parts of the commentarial tradition concerning the Buddha's family relations followed Dravidian marriage patterns, which is taken, by some, as proving that the commentarial tradition must have been composed in

² Note the story of Anāthapiṇḍika and the purchase of the Jetavana (Vin II 158 foll.).

³ For an assessment of this, see Tsuchida Ryūtarō, 1991, 51–95.

⁴ See MW, s.v. *rājan*.

⁵ See Brough, 1953, 5, note 3.

⁶ e.g. the Rajputs into the *kṣatriya* caste.

areas where Dravidian marriage patterns prevailed, i.e. in the southern half of India or in Sri Lanka.⁷ The tradition, it is suggested, must therefore be a late story from South India. It is, however, quite arguable and, I think, more likely that it represents the actual clan relationships at that time among non-Indo-Aryan tribes in the North, or among tribes which had until recently been non-Indo-Aryan.

What do we know about the religious beliefs of the Buddha's contemporaries, those beliefs which he found around him? When we come to examine the teaching of the Buddha we find that we can make certain deductions about those beliefs from his reactions to them. Some beliefs he accepted as they were, others he accepted nominally, but gave a changed meaning to them, others he opposed outright.

There are, for example, traces in the Pāli texts of a belief which we may assume goes back to an early date. We find references to what one does in this world, and what one consequently experiences as a result of that action, when one has "passed away" (*pretya*). For example, when one has passed away one who has done good rejoices, and one who has done evil laments.⁸ This seems to go back to an earlier reward-and-punishment idea of the after-life. There is no implication that this rejoicing or lamentation will be endured again and again for the whole of eternity. A simple reference in a Pāli *sutta*⁹ to going "beyond this shore and the far shore", caused great problems for the commentators. My personal belief is that this statement was first formulated in a situation where the author was considering two stages only, i.e. this world and the afterlife, rather than the endless stream of *samsāra*. The commentators,¹⁰ however, found the statement difficult to explain, because when they wrote many centuries later, this shore and the far shore meant *samsāra*; and *nirvāṇa*, and to pass beyond *nirvāṇa* was a Mahāyāna idea which had no place in a Theravādin text.

At the same time we find abundant evidence that this earlier stage of religion had been replaced, or at least complemented, by a belief in *samsāra*, the journeying on in a series of existences with no beginning and no end, with the precise nature of each existence dependent upon the actions which one had done in a previous existence, i.e. one's *karma*. The origin of this doctrine of re-incarnation is not clear. There are those who think that the Indus Valley civilisation was the source. It can nevertheless perhaps be explained as a development of the old idea that there was reward or punishment at the end of life. It is possible that the idea grew that the reward or punishment could be

⁷ See Trautman, 1981, 316–30, referred to by Gombrich, 1992, 161.

⁸ See Dhṛp 17–18.

⁹ Sn 117.

¹⁰ For the cty see Brough, 1962, 202 and Pj II 13,1 foll.

another (good or bad) existence, and if, at the end of that existence, there was an imbalance in the reward or punishment, yet another existence, and so on and so on.¹¹ Others think that the idea was imported into India from some other culture, perhaps from the Greek cities of Asia Minor, where we know that the idea of a cycle of births was current. Whether there was any connection between these two areas and, if so, which way the borrowing went, is dependent to some extent upon the dates which we assign to the first appearance of the idea in both areas.

The Buddha accepted the Vedic gods, but although he accepted their existence, he denied them any causal role in the universe. When they had been deprived of their causal role, there was no longer any point in sacrificing to them, and they became simply super-men, enjoying the benefits of the good *karma* they had amassed in a previous existence.¹² The Buddha made it clear that the *devas*, like all others in *saṃsāra*, were subject to death and rebirth. As super-men, they had a longer life-span than men, and Sakka, the king of the *devas*, had a longer life-span¹³ than the other *devas*. Nevertheless, there was an important difference between *devas* and men. When a man died, that was the end of him in that existence; at the death of a king, his successor, a different person, took his place. Not so with the *devas*. When Sakka dies, as he must do,¹⁴ being finite, his place is immediately taken by another Sakka.¹⁵

There are references to an individual being reborn as Sakka a number of times. The Buddha, for example, stated that he had been reborn 36 times as Sakka.¹⁶ The commentator Buddhaghosa tells a story that Sakka once died while listening to a discourse from the Buddha, and was immediately reborn again as Sakka,¹⁷ so that he could continue to hear the sermon. It is clear that the singularity of this occurrence was not lost upon Buddhaghosa, for he proceeds to explain how it was that this was not noticed by the other *devas*.¹⁸

We find echoes of Upaniṣadic statements in the Buddha's sermons, and it would therefore seem likely that any technical terminology he employed which

¹¹ See Collins, 1982, 46–47.

¹² Norman, 1977, 329.

¹³ Sakka's lifespan is said to be *saṭṭhiñ ca vassasatasahassāni tisso ca vassakoṭṭiyo* (Ja II 312, 19–20).

¹⁴ *Sakko hi indo devānaṃ aparimutto jātiyā jarāya maraṇena sokehi ... aparimutto dukkhasmā ti vadāmi* (A I 144, 24–26).

¹⁵ *Sakko ... cavi, añño Sakko nibbatti, so pi devarajjaṃ kāretvā āyukkhayena cavi. eten' upāyena chattimsa Sakkā caviṃsu* (Ja II 312, 19–22).

¹⁶ *chattimsakkhattuṃ devindo devarajjaṃ akārayiṃ* (A IV 90, 5).

¹⁷ *Sakko pana sotāpanno jāto sotāpanno va hutvā, Bhagavato purato yeva cavitvā taruṇa-Sakko hutvā nibbatti* (Sv 732,29–31). The same episode is referred to at Dhṃ-a III 270, 15–16.

¹⁸ *devatānaṃ hi cavamānānaṃ attabhāvassa gatāgataṭṭhānaṃ nāma na paññāyati, dīpa-sikhā-gamaṇaṃ viya hoti. tasmā sesa-devatā na jāniṃsu* (Sv 732, 33–34).

has parallels in the Upaniṣads would be heard by those who were already conversant, if only to a limited extent, with the Upaniṣadic usage. It is, for example, clear from the way in which the Buddha was able to assume that his hearers understood such concepts as *nicca* “permanent”, *anicca* “impermanent”, *sukha* “happiness”, and *dukkha* “misery”,¹⁹ that they had already heard teachers speaking about such things. In the absence of any evidence to the contrary, it would therefore seem likely that any mention the Buddha made of *attā* “self” and *anattā* “not self” would be interpreted, rightly or wrongly, by his hearers in the light of contemporary usage, and that, as far as we can tell, is Upaniṣadic usage.

This being so, it is hard to see why almost all writers about Buddhism accept the statement often made that the Buddha makes no mention of the Upaniṣadic concept of a Universal Self, an *ātman*; or *brahman*.²⁰ When the Buddha stated that everything was *anattā* “not self”, we should expect that the view of *attā* “self” which he was denying was that held by other teachers at that time. We can, in fact, deduce, from what the Buddha rejected, the doctrine which the other teachers upheld. Once we know that the Buddha was using words in this way, then we are aided in our attempt to understand them and translate them.

The Buddha vigorously denied the brahmanical idea of the existence of the *ātman*, the idea that there is no difference between us and a world spirit, the standard *advaitavāda* “non-dual” doctrine,²¹ which is expressed in the Upaniṣads with the words *tat tvam asi* “You are that”. *You are that*. You are identical with that world spirit—the view that we all have a portion of that spirit in us and when everything which hides that identity is removed then we can be absorbed into *ātman/brahman*.

The Buddha, on the other hand, specifically condemned the view that the world and the self were the same thing, and that after death one might become permanent, lasting, eternal and not liable to change, and he rejected the idea that one could look at the various aspects of the world and say “that is mine, I am that, that is my self”, which is a clear echo of *tat tvam asi*, expressed from a different point of view. When the Buddha said: “*rūpa* ‘form’, etc., are not mine”,²² he was denying the view that there is no distinction between knower and known.

The Buddha’s rejection of the existence of the *attā*, i.e. his view that everything was “not self” (*anattā*), was based upon the brahmanical belief that the *ātman* was *nitya* “permanent” and *sukha* “happiness”. Hence the Buddha

¹⁹ See Norman, 1981, 19–29 (22) (= *CP* II, 200–209).

²⁰ See Thomas, 1949, 35.

²¹ See Potter, 1981, 6.

²² *M* I 136, 6.

could refute this by pointing out that the world, which was supposed to be part of *ātman*, was in fact *anicca* “impermanent” and *dukkha* “misery”²³—his belief that the world was *dukkha* was, of course, the first noble truth.

The Buddha’s teaching about this is, however, not always understood. The word *anattā* is sometimes translated “having no soul”, and various things which are specified to be *anattā* are thought of as having no soul. We can see the need for better understanding of this vital concept of Buddhism when we survey the range of translations given for the phrase *sabbe dhammā anattā* which occurs in the Dhammapada²⁴ and elsewhere: “All forms are unreal” (Max Müller);²⁵ “All the elements of being are non-self” (Radhakrishnan);²⁶ “All things are not self” (Acharya Buddhārakkhita);²⁷ “All phenomena are non-substantial” (Kalupahana);²⁸ “All things are ego-less” (Jayasekera);²⁹ “All dhammas are without self”, says a very recent translation (Carter and Palihawadana).³⁰

Translations such as “without self” and “having no soul” cannot be correct, because the grammar and syntax show that *anattā* is not a possessive adjective, which it would need to be to have such a meaning. It is a descriptive compound, and if the correct translation for *attā*; is “soul”, then the word would mean that these various things are “not soul”. This, however, cannot be correct, because the Buddha sometimes exhorted his followers to regard these things as *parato*, i.e. “as other”. We cannot, however, co-relate “as other” and “not soul”. It is clear that the only translation which it is possible to co-relate to “as other” is “not self”. We are not to regard these things as part of the self, and to clarify the point the Buddha asked his followers whether, when they saw wood being burned, they felt any pain. The answer was “No”, and the explanation given was that they did not feel any pain because the wood was not part of the self.³¹ It was other than the self. We might regard the Buddha’s refutation of the *ātman/brahman* idea as being somewhat empirical—as was Dr Johnson’s refutation of Bishop Berkeley’s theory of the non-existence of matter—but it was no less effective for all that.

²³ See Norman, 1981, 22, and Gombrich, 1990, 14.

²⁴ DhP 279.

²⁵ Müller, 1881, 69.

²⁶ Rādhakrishnan, 1950, 147.

²⁷ Buddhārakkhita, 1985, 52.

²⁸ Kalupahana, 1986, 139.

²⁹ Jayasekera, 1992, 92.

³⁰ Carter & Palihawadana, 1987, 312. Strangely enough they translate *anattā* in the gloss as “not self”.

³¹ M I 141, 11.

The Buddha also rejected the alternative brahmanical view of *ātman* as *brahman*. There seems to be no occurrence in Pāli of the uncompounded neuter word *brahma*³² in the sense of the Upaniṣadic *brahman*, but *brahma* is used in compounds, apparently in the sense of “excellent, perfect”. In its basic brahmanical sense *brahma-carya* means “the practice of a *brāhmaṇa*”, i.e. the living of a celibate life, learning the Vedas. The Buddha used the phrase in the more general sense of “to live the best life, i.e. a holy, celibate (or in the case of married couples, a chaste and moral) life”. In the Upaniṣads *brahma-patha* means “the way to *brahman* or Brahṁā”. The Buddha used it in the sense of the way to the best, i.e. *nibbāna*, and it is explained as being the same as *brahma-vihāra*.³³

It is possible that *brahma-vihāra* was in origin a brahmanical term.³⁴ It would literally mean “dwelling in *brahman* or with Brahṁā”, although it is not attested in that usage in Sanskrit. It perhaps shows a trace of its original meaning in a *sutta*³⁵ in which the Buddha speaks to young *brahmins* who were disputing the correct way to obtain *brahma-sahavyatā*. In the context this would seem to mean “union with *brahman*”, but the Buddha, perhaps jokingly, interprets it as meaning a state of union with the god Brahṁā. He explains that someone who practises the four types of concentration³⁶ called *brahma-vihāra* is reborn as a Brahṁā in the Brahma-world.³⁷ It is to be noted that this means only being born in the same heaven as Mahā Brahṁā, not union with the Upaniṣadic *brahman*.

Contemporary with the Buddha there was a growth of non-brahmanical *śramaṇa* “ascetic” movements, and we find in Buddhist texts a list of names of six teachers and something about their teachings.³⁸ This seems to be a very old list because the texts are not consistent about which beliefs they ascribe to which teacher,³⁹ and as we have them they are an unreliable guide to what was really going on at the time of the Buddha. We can, however, see that some of the teachings were a reaction to the idea of *samsāra*, the endless series of rebirths. We can then see a pattern of development of thought in Indian religion: first, the view that there is a single existence at the end of which one was judged and punished or rewarded; then a view that there is an endless series of punishments

³² For the occurrences of *brahman* in the Pāli canon, see Bhattacharya, 1989.

³³ *iriyamānaṃ Brahma-pathe ti catubbidhe pi brahma-vihāra-pathe, brahme va seṭṭhe phala-samāpatti-pathe samāpajjana-vasena pavattamānaṃ*. Th-a III 9, 9–11 (ad Th 689).

³⁴ Thomas, 1949, 126.

³⁵ The Tevijja-sutta (D I 235–53).

³⁶ *mettā, karuṇā, muditā, and upekkhā*.

³⁷ *so cattāro brahma-vihāre bhāvetvā kāyassa bhedaṃ paraṃ maraṇā Brahmālokūpago ahoṣi*, D II 196, 7–8.

³⁸ See D I 52–59.

³⁹ See MacQueen, 1984, 291–307.

or rewards in an endless series of existences; this led on to attempts to gain release from this endless series. We can see that some teachers taught a way out of it, by specifying that *samsāra* is finite, so that, when we have finished a certain number of rebirths, that will be the end. Others taught various methods of gaining *mokṣa* “release” from the endless series of rebirths.

The Buddha’s way to release, as we shall see, was by means of meditative practices, and this method followed closely and was developed from, it seems, the teachings of other *śramaṇas*. The tradition tells us that he went to two teachers, Āḷāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta, but he left them both after a short while because their teachings did not lead to the goal he desired, and they had only reached certain stages in their meditative practices. He went away, and one version of the tradition⁴⁰ tells us that he remembered that as a boy he had entered the first *jhāna*, the first state of meditation. This would seem to presuppose that there was a series of meditative practices which had already been categorised and numbered or—perhaps more likely—that the Buddha was employing a later categorisation and imposing it on an earlier occurrence, i.e. he had had some sort of meditative experience, as a boy, which he equated with the first stage of the code of meditative practices we read about later on. Repeating his boyhood experience, the Buddha then went on to a second and a third and a fourth *jhāna*. I would personally doubt that at this early time the four *jhānas* were so rigidly delineated. I would assume that his meditative experience simply flowed on, and it was only later, when the Buddha came to teach these meditations to his followers, that they were codified and categorised as the four *rūpa-jhānas* “the meditations about form”.

From the fourth *jhāna* he gained *bodhi*. It is not at all clear what gaining *bodhi* means. We are accustomed to the translation “enlightenment” for *bodhi*, but this is misleading for two reasons. First, it can be confused with the use of the word to describe the development in European thought and culture in the eighteenth century, and second, it suggests that light is being shed on something, whereas there is no hint of the meaning “light” in the root *budh-* which underlies the word *bodhi*. The root means “to wake up, to be awake, to be awakened”, and a *buddha* is someone who has been awakened. Besides the ordinary sense of being awakened by something, e.g. a noise, it can also mean “awakened to something”. The desire to get the idea of “awakened” in English translations of *buddha* explains the rather peculiar Victorian quasi-poetical translation “the wake” which we sometimes find.⁴¹

It is not clear what the Buddha was awakened to, or at what particular point the awakening came. In some texts he stated that he was awakened to the

⁴⁰ In the Mahāsaccakasutta (M I 237–51).

⁴¹ See C.A.F. Rhys Davids, 1909, v.

destruction of the *āsavas* “the influxes”. He was therefore *khīṇāsava* “one who has destroyed his *āsavas*”, an epithet of an *arahat*. Elsewhere the Buddha said that he was awakened to the knowledge and insight that this was his last existence.

The shortest account of the Buddha’s *bodhi* in Pāli is that found in the Ariyapariyesanasutta,⁴² and for that reason some scholars believe that this is the earliest account available to us.⁴³ We may assume that in the shortest account of his *bodhi* the Buddha would deal with the most important part of the experience, and it appears from this version that this was the gaining of *nibbāna*. This view is supported by the fact that he left the teachers he had before his *bodhi*, because their teachings were inadequate, as they did not lead to *nibbāna*. Of each of them he said, “This doctrine is not conducive to disgust (with the world), nor dis-passion, nor cessation, nor quiescence, nor super-knowledge, nor awakening, nor *nibbāna*”.⁴⁴

We may deduce from this that the concept of the attainment of *nibbāna* existed, even though the Buddha-to-be and his teachers were unable to achieve it, that is to say that people knew that there was a state to which they gave the name *nibbāna*, even though they could not attain it. Whether this meant that some had indeed already attained it, but had not passed on their method to others, or whether it was a concept of some sort of utopia which had been proposed and named, and towards which men were struggling, is not clear.

We may also deduce that the words in the Buddha’s statement are in the order in which the various states mentioned in it are to be realised, starting with disgust with the world, and going on to awakening and *nibbāna*. This would support the belief that the Buddha’s aim was to free himself from *samsāra*, and all aspects of his teaching were concerned with the acquisition of means to do this, either in this life or a later one, and with finding out how best to dwell in *samsāra* until release was obtained.⁴⁵

There is an interesting point which arises in connection with the four *jhānas* which the Buddha practised at the time of his *bodhi*. I have already mentioned the account of the Buddha’s pre-*bodhi* visits to Ālāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta. With them he practised meditation and reached “the state of nothingness” (*ākiñcaññāyatana*)⁴⁶ and “the state of neither perception nor non-perception” (*nevasaññā-nāsaññāyatana*),⁴⁷ respectively. It is strange and

⁴² M I 160–75.

⁴³ See Norman, 1990A, 24–35 (33, note17) (= CP IV, 124–38 [127, note1]).

⁴⁴ *nāyaṃ dhammo nibbidāya na virāgāya na nirodhāya na upasamāya na abhiññāya na sambodhāya na nibbānāya saṃvattati*, M I 165, 10–12 = 166, 29–31.

⁴⁵ Norman, 1990A, 24–35 (26) (= CP IV, 124–38 [128]).

⁴⁶ M I 164, 15.

⁴⁷ M I 165, 35.

noteworthy that, although he rejected both of these as not leading to *nibbāna*, nevertheless in his own teaching after his *bodhi* he included them as stages on the way to *nibbāna*. As taught by the Buddha, they are the third and fourth of the *arūpa-jhānas* “the meditations about non-form”, i.e. they are devoted to the contemplation of things outside the physical world of form in which we live, and they are therefore the seventh and eighth of the *samāpattis* “attainments”, since they come after the four *rūpa-jhānas* “the meditations about form”. It would appear, then, that the Buddha had already attained the first four attainments with those teachers before he gained the seventh and eighth attainment, and we have the statement of the commentator Buddhaghosa to this effect.⁴⁸ This would make the story of his boyhood memory seem very strange, and we should perhaps follow the view that the four *rūpa-jhānas* and the four *arūpa-jhānas* were originally two quite separate sets of states of meditation.

It would seem very probable that the four *arūpa-jhānas* were not discovered by the Buddha, and were not in origin Buddhist, and that is why they were included in the accounts of the non-Buddhist teachers’ views. If the suggestion of some scholars that the story of the Buddha being taught by these teachers has no historical basis, we must conclude that the inclusion of a mention of the *arūpa-jhānas* in the Buddha’s life history was intended to show that they were inadequate, when compared with the Buddha’s method. They did, however, lead to a state which seems to be equal to *nibbāna*, which presumably means that some, at least, of these non-Buddhist teachers had also succeeded in finding a way out of *samsāra*. It was possibly because the *arūpa-jhānas* were successful in gaining the desired end that they were incorporated into the Buddhist scheme of *jhānas*, not as simultaneous means (which would have been better, because they are really an alternative) but as consecutive.

In the Buddha’s accounts of the eight attainments, however, we read of a ninth state, that of the “cessation of feelings and perceptions” or “cessation of the feeling⁴⁹ of perceptions” (*saññāvedayitanirodha*).⁵⁰ In this state, for one seeing with perceptive knowledge (*paññā*), the *āsavas* are destroyed (*paññāya c’ assa disvā āsavā parikkhīṇā honti*).⁵¹ This would seem to imply that, if we equate the destruction of the *āsavas* (*āsavakkhaya*) with *nibbāna*, this was another way of

⁴⁸ *ākiñcaññāyatanapariyosānā satta samāpattiyo maṃ jānāpesi*, Ps III 171, 22–23.

⁴⁹ Although *saññāvedayita* is usually translated as a dvandva compound, this is not necessarily correct. Grammatically, it could as well be taken as a tatpuruṣa compound, with the past participle *vedayita* being used as an action noun. This interpretation would depend upon the occurrence of *saññā* with the verb *vedayati*. This combination seems not to occur in the Pāli canon as we have it now, but it is possible that it existed at an earlier date, when the precise signification of technical terms had not yet been fixed.

⁵⁰ M I 165, 35.

⁵¹ M I 175, 3–4.

attaining *nibbāna*, and some scholars believe⁵² that this state of the “cessation of feelings and perceptions” (*saññāvedayitanirodha*) and *nibbāna* were originally identical.

We must, however, note that there is no reference to the four *arūpa-jhānas* in the accounts of the Buddha’s own attainment of *nibbāna* at the time of his *bodhi*. In the story of his death, in the Mahāparinibbānasuttanta of the Dīgha-nikāya,⁵³ we read that the Buddha went through all the stages of the *rūpa-jhānas* and the *arūpa-jhānas*, and then entered the “cessation of feelings and perceptions” (*saññāvedayitanirodha*). He was then thought by Ānanda to have attained *nibbāna*.⁵⁴ Anuruddha, however, pointed out that he had only attained the “cessation of feelings and perceptions”,⁵⁵ which clearly, as far as Anuruddha was concerned, was not identical with *nibbāna*, but was probably some sort of death-like trance. From there the Buddha went back, in due order, to the first *jhāna*, and then up to the fourth *jhāna*, from which he died, and presumably attained *nibbāna*.

The root *budh-* in Sanskrit means not only “to be awake, to be awakened”, but also from the earliest texts onwards “to perceive, to notice, to learn, to understand,” and *buddha* in non-Buddhist texts means “intelligent, clever, wise”. *Bodha* as an adjective means “knowing, understanding”, and *bodhi* probably has the idea of “knowledge, understanding”, possibly the knowledge that release from *samsāra* is possible. It is also very likely that the knowledge itself is efficacious, i.e. “I know that it is possible to be released and merely by knowing I am released”. This theory fits in very well with the fact that immediately after his awakening the Buddha rehearsed the 12-fold *pratītya-samutpāda*, the chain of interdependent elements, the so-called chain of dependent causation—the arising of things dependent upon other things.

The 12-fold chain of causation is probably not the earliest form of the chain, and certainly portions of it with less links are found elsewhere in the canon. In discussing the 12-fold chain I am not implying that that was necessarily the form in which the Buddha rehearsed it immediately after the awakening, but it is clear that that was the standard form at some time or other. It is interesting because it seems to be a calculated attempt by the Buddha to work out what he had just achieved. It goes, as is well known: *avijjā* “ignorance” produces *saṅkhārā* “compounded formations”, these produce *viññāṇa* “consciousness”, this produces *nāmarūpa* “name and form”, this produces *salāyatana* “the six senses”, they produce *phassa* “contact”, this produces *vedanā* “feeling”, this produces

⁵² See Schmithausen, 1981, 249 (addendum to ch. H), quoting Nagasaki.

⁵³ D II 72–168.

⁵⁴ D II 156, 17.

⁵⁵ D II 156, 18–19.

taṇhā “craving”, this produces *upādāna* “clinging”, this produces *bhava* “existence”, this produces *jāti* “birth”, and this produces *jarāmaraṇa* “old age and death”.

In other places the chain is set out in reverse order, and I think that that is how the Buddha must have enunciated it when he was trying to explain what had happened to him. It is a statement of where the Buddha was, and how he had got into that situation. It ends, in the traditional form, with old age and death. That I think is where the Buddha started. He started from the position in which he found himself: he knew that he would grow old and die. Why was he going to grow old and die? Because he had been born. Why had he been born? Because of existence. Why was there existence? Because of clinging. Why was there clinging? Because of craving. Why was there craving? Because of feeling. Why was there feeling? Because of contact. Why was there contact? Because of the six senses. Why were there six senses? Because of name and form. Why was there name and form? Because of consciousness. Why was there consciousness? Because of the compounded formations. Why were there compounded formations? Because of ignorance. That is to say: the beginning of all this existence, which we know is suffering, is ignorance. We can now see what has happened to the Buddha. If any link in the chain is removed, then whatever depends upon it cannot arise. It is very clear that if I am not born, then I cannot die. If we look at the *pratītya-samutpāda* as a whole we can see that if there is no ignorance, then there are no compounded formations, and therefore everything else which depends upon the compounded formations will not arise. If instead of “ignorance” we translate *avijjā* as “lack of knowledge”, then we can see that *avijjā* is destroyed by *vijjā* “knowledge”, and knowledge is what the Buddha had just acquired. His knowledge, his *bodhi*, has therefore destroyed all the subsequent links of the chain. He has therefore destroyed future birth, and can exclaim triumphantly: “This is my last birth. I shall not be born again”.

One of the most interesting aspects of Buddhism and one of the strong points of Buddhism—one which undoubtedly appealed to converts who were *kṣatriyas* and *vaiśyas*—was that it presented two ways to salvation. This perhaps reflects the fact, which I have already noted, that the accounts are not consistent in saying what the Buddha was awakened to. One way, the immediate way, was the one which the Buddha himself had employed, the so-called *jhānic* way, by meditation. This was in effect, although not in theory, restricted to those who had abandoned the world to become wanderers, and who had the time, and the inclination, to meditate. When the Buddha began to preach, however, he preached about the four noble truths, not about the destruction of the *āsavas*. The fourth noble truth is about the path which leads to the destruction of suffering, and this was a more gradual way to release, making use of the precepts of the eight-fold path to gain a better rebirth. This is the so-called *kammic* way. One

might hope in time, after entering the stream, by amassing good *kamma*, to get to the point where the number of future birth in this world would be limited. Rebirths after that would be heavenly rebirths, leading at last to release from *saṃsāra*.

The whole point about Buddhism is that by its very nature it requires these two methods of attaining release. The system whereby some abandon the world and become wanderers in the hope of gaining *nibbāna* in that same life can only work as long as there are those who have decided not to abandon the world, not to become wanderers, but to continue as householders and make donations to the community of begging wanderers, the bhikṣus or bhikkhus. A system which depends upon *dāna*, “giving, generosity”, depends upon there being those who are able to make *dāna*, to give generously, to be donors.

Another of the other non-brahmanical *śramaṇa* movements was Jainism, or to be more precise the teaching of Vardhamāna, known as Mahāvīra, or the Jina “the conqueror”. Although we get a picture of Jainism from the Pāli canonical texts which indicates that Jainism and Buddhism were strongly opposed to each other, of all the *śramaṇa* religions of which we have knowledge, Jainism comes closest to Buddhism, in a number of ways. When Western scholars began to investigate Buddhism and Jainism in the nineteenth century they found that the two religions had so much technical and other terminology in common, that Jainism was in fact thought to be an offshoot of Buddhism, although the precise meanings of such terms did not always coincide.⁵⁶

One such word is *āsava*,⁵⁷ for the Buddhist usage does not fit the etymology of the word, while the Jain usage does. The etymology of this word (the preposition *ā* “towards” + the root *sru-* “to flow”) implies something flowing in, and this suits the Jain usage well, since there the *āsavas* are influences which flow into a person, and discolour his soul.⁵⁸ We find illustrations of this in Jain manuscripts, with people ranging from white, through yellow, red, blue and green to black, depending on the amount of *āsavas* which has flowed into them. This does not suit the Buddhist idea, where the *āsavas* are not attributes which are capable of flowing into a person. They are, in fact, identical with the four *oghas* “floods”,⁵⁹ and it seems clear that in Buddhism the word has lost its original meaning. So, although the translation “influence” or “influx” suits the Jain usage well, on etymological and exegetical grounds, it is not entirely satisfactory for Buddhism. This accounts for the number of translations which

⁵⁶ Alsdorf, 1965, 3–6, and Norman, 1989A, 393–97 (= CP IV, 264–70).

⁵⁷ Alsdorf, 1965, 4–5.

⁵⁸ Schubring, 1962, §§ 84, 97.

⁵⁹ The *āsavas* and the *oghas* are *kāma* “sensual pleasure”, *bhava* “existence”, *diṭṭhi* “speculative view”, and *avijjā* “ignorance”.

have been suggested for the word, including “passions”, “intoxicants”, “cravings” and “cankers”.⁶⁰ The latter to me is a disease of dogs’ ears and of roses, and I am always surprised when I find the *arahat*, the one whose *āsavas* have been destroyed (*khīṇāsava*), being described as “canker-waned”.

A comparative study of the terminology of the two religions gives some idea of the religious and cultural background in which Buddhism and Jainism came into being. The explanation for such parallels in terminology as *āsava* can sometimes be seen as a borrowing from one religion to the other or, perhaps more often, a common borrowing by both from a third religion or from the general mass of religious beliefs which we may assume were current at the time the two religious leaders lived, i.e. the beliefs of the *śramaṇas*.

It is to this general background of religious thought that we can probably assign most of the vocabulary of the ascetic type of religion, e.g. such words as *śramaṇa* “ascetic”, *pravrajyā* “going forth”, *pravrajita* “one who has gone forth”, *tapas* “mortification”, and *ṛṣi* “sage”, found in both Buddhism and Jainism, and we may assume that these were terms which were common to many of the religious movements, in which the adherent went forth from the life of a householder and became a wanderer. Much of the terminology used for their religious experiences was also common to the two religions. They had terms such as *nibbāna* (*nivvāṇa*) in common and there is the strange fact that they both use with it the past participle of another root (*nibbuta*, *nivvua*), with a different meaning, which suggests that, just as I have suggested that *nibbāna* as a concept was pre-Buddhist, the word-play on the two words was also earlier than both religions.

It was long ago noted⁶¹ that the Buddhists and Jains “give the same titles or epithets to their prophets”, e.g. (in their Sanskrit forms) *arhat*, *Sugata*, *Tathāgata*, *Jina* “conqueror”, *Mahāvīra* “great hero”, *sarvajña* “omniscient”, *Siddha* “perfected”, *Buddha* “awakened”, *Sambuddha* “id.”, *parinirvṛta* “gained *parinirvāṇa*”, *mukta* “released”.

Two words in this list in particular merit close attention, namely *Buddha* and *Jina*. We are accustomed to think of these words as distinctive of their religions. Buddhism is called after the Buddha, and Jainism after the Jina. If this specific distinction was attached to the words at the time of the founding of the two religions, one might have expected that the other religion, in each case, would have avoided the words, or at least have said “our buddha is better than your buddha” or “our jina is better than your jina”. From the fact that they did not do so but continued to use the terms *Buddha* and *Jina* in both Jainism and Buddhism, we may deduce that these words were in common use prior to the

⁶⁰ See Norman, EV I, 133–34.

⁶¹ See Jacobi, 1884, xix.

origin of both religions and were taken into both of them with a non-distinctive sense. That is to say that there were those who were spoken of as *buddha* “awakened” to some sort of truth—doubtless about the possibility of release from *samsāra*, and those who were called *jina* “conqueror”, doubtless conquerors of *samsāra*, before the words were taken over into both religions, and it was then a matter of the historical development of the terminology of both religions that the specific distinction which those words denote now in those two religions arose. That is to say, there were *buddhas* and there were *jinās* before the beginning of both Buddhism and Jainism. The fact that Gotama was not the first *buddha*, and Mahāvīra was not the first *jina* helps us to understand how both religions evolved a theory of previous Buddhas and Jinās.

It is not known where the idea of a specific number of previous prophets came from, but it may be no coincidence that the Jains have 24 Jinās, while the Buddhists have 24 previous Buddhas,⁶² plus Gotama Buddha. The addition of three extra Buddhas, which we find in the *Buddhavaṃsa*, is clearly a late extension of the general idea in Buddhism.

I have already mentioned in my first lecture the fact that the philological explanation for the difference between Pāli *pacceka-buddha* and Prakrit *patteya-buddha* lends support to the idea that the concept of this particular class of *buddhas* was also earlier than Buddhism and Jainism. The information which the two religions give about these *buddhas*,⁶³ including the details down to the names and the causes of their awakening, suggests that the concept was also something which was part and parcel of the *śramaṇa* movement and not exclusive to any one religious group, and was taken into those two religions from a third, earlier, source.

From the Pāli texts then we see that there was simultaneously a brahmanical orthodoxy and a non-brahmanical *śramaṇa* movement. At a slightly later time Aśoka could refer to all religious persons as being either *brāhmaṇa* or *śramaṇa*, as the compound *brāhmaṇa-samaṇa* which he uses in his inscriptions shows. That *śramaṇa* movement produced not only religious ideas which went against the brahmanical way of thinking, but also literature making the same point. We find that both the Buddhist *Jātakas* and the Jain *Uttarajjhayaṇa-sutta* contain stories referring to the way in which *brāhmaṇas* mis-treated *śramaṇas* who came to their sacrificial enclosure to beg for food. The stories clearly had no specific class of *śramaṇa* in mind, which made it easy for both religions to take over such stories and incorporate them into their collections of texts. Both religions shared texts (once again, probably of a common origin) defining a *brāhmaṇa* by

⁶² For the number of Buddhas see Gombrich, 1980, 62–72 (68), where he suggests that the number 24 was taken over by the Buddhists from the Jains.

⁶³ See Norman, 1983A, 92–106.

his conduct, not by his birth. Such literature emphasised the fact that it was support of the *śramaṇa* movements which would bring merit, not support of the *brahmins*.

The Jains too objected to the brahmanical idea of the *ātman*, and refuted it in a way as empirical as the Buddhists. There is a Jain verse which says: “As a whole mass of earth, with all its manifold nature, is seen as one, so the whole world, with all its manifold nature is seen as the intelligent principle. Some fools, intent on their (bad) activities, say that it is so with the individual. (But) the individual who does an evil deed goes by himself to a harsh misery”, i.e. if we were all part of the same intelligent principle, namely the *ātman*, we as a whole would be responsible for evil deeds as a whole, and would suffer the punishment for them as a whole. It does not happen like that. Only the evil-doer suffers the punishment.

Nevertheless, the Jains differed from the Buddhists in believing that, although there was no world *ātman*, there was nevertheless a permanent, everlasting, individual *ātman*, which was the element which transmigrated. The Jains were able, therefore, to say that when the personal *ātman* gained release it was called *siddhattha* “that which has gained the goal”, and it went to the place of *siddhi* “perfection” at the top of the world, where all the *siddhas* “perfected ones” went. In the diagrams of the world which we find sometimes in Jain manuscripts, the universe is very often depicted in the shape of a man, with the earth at his waist and the hells below the waist and the heavens above the waist, the place of *siddhi*; is right at the top, on his forehead.

The Buddha, on the other hand, had problems. Not only did he deny the existence of a world *attā*, but he also rejected the idea of a permanent individual *attā*. It was therefore very unclear what it was that transmigrated, and he found it very difficult to describe the state of one who had gained *nibbāna*. It would probably be more accurate to talk of the non-state of one who had gained *nibbāna*, because it is not possible to say what *nibbāna* is like, or what someone who has gained *nibbāna* is like. How can you describe the condition of a non-being in a non-state? It is that conundrum which led to the Buddha refusing to discuss the existence or non-existence of the Tathāgata after death. All we can do is say what *nibbāna* is not like. It is not like *saṃsāra*. Consequently it is often defined in terms of negatives or opposites. It is “blissful” (*siva*) or “happy” (*sukha*) as opposed to the *dukkha* of existence. It is “unmoving” (*acala*) as opposed to the endless movement of *saṃsāra*. It is “without death”⁶⁴ (*amata*) as

⁶⁴ Vetter (1985, 74) may not be correct in translating *amata* as “immortality”. This translation perhaps gives the wrong impression, since the Buddha was presumably trying to gain release from *saṃsāra*, i.e. he was trying to find a state where there was no rebirth, and therefore no dying leading to rebirth. For this reason *nibbāna* is described as being without birth, without death, without *gati*, etc.

opposed to the repeated deaths of *saṃsāra*. It is “without birth” (*ajāta*), “without beings” (*abhūta*), “without made things” (*akata*), and “without formed things” (*asaṅkhata*) as opposed to the world, which has birth, beings, made things and formed things.

I said at the beginning of this lecture that the origins of Buddhism lie in the political, economic, social and religious environment of the time.

What time? I do not wish to say much about the date of the Buddha, but I must say something about it, because it has some bearing upon what I have been discussing. There are various ways of calculating the date of the Buddha’s death, and the one which is perhaps most commonly accepted in the West is c. 486 B.C.E. This depends upon a statement found in the Pāli chronicles that the Emperor Aśoka was consecrated 218 years after the death of the Buddha. Aśoka in his inscriptions mentions the names of a number of contemporary Greek kings, which enables us to fix Aśoka’s dates within fairly narrow limits, and by adding 218 to the date we can calculate for his consecration (c. 268 B.C.E.) we get a date c. 486 B.C.E. The Pāli chronicles also give the regnal years of the kings of Magadha between the death of the Buddha and Aśoka, and these dates too support the theory of an interval of 218 years, although they allow only 22 years for the ten sons of Kālāsoka and a similar period of 22 years for the nine Nanda kings who followed them, which seems to represent a manipulation of the chronology to make things fit.

This date of 486 B.C.E. causes difficulties, because the archaeological evidence, such as it is, suggests that, at that time, some of the places which the Buddha is said in the tradition to have visited had barely, if at all, been founded, while the evidence for a monetary economy⁶⁵ suggests that it is to be dated somewhere around 400 B.C.E. If this archaeological dating is to be believed, then the picture of social and political life which we get from the early Pāli texts is misleading, since it reflects the conditions of a later time, not those contemporary with the Buddha.

Fortunately, however, philology has come to our aid. Recently attention has been drawn to the fact that although the Pāli word *sata* and the Sanskrit word *śata* do undeniably mean “one hundred”, they are also used to mean a large number, any large number. It has also been pointed out that the number “eighteen” has some sort of auspicious significance. Kings are very often said to reign for eighteen years, or important events to happen in the eighteenth year of their reign. To say, then, that something happened 218 years after the death of the Buddha, probably means no more than saying that it happened after a large number plus a large number plus an auspicious number of years, and this can in

⁶⁵ See Erdosy, 1993, 40–56 (51). See also Cribb, 1985, quoted by von Hinüber (1993, 111).

no way be taken as firm evidence that the whole period of time came to 218 years.

Other ways of calculating the date of the Buddha's death have therefore had to be employed, and recent attempts making use of the information we find in both Buddhist and Jain texts about the life spans of theras have to some extent settled on about 400 B.C.E.⁶⁶ If we accept the tradition that the Buddha was 80 years old when he died, then we are talking about a life-span covering the period 480–400 B.C.E. and a teaching period of c. 445–400 B.C.E., which fits the archaeological evidence better.

For the forty-five years prior to 400 B.C.E., then, the Buddha moved around Magadha and the surrounding areas, preaching his doctrine which grew out of the general *śramaṇa* tradition of opposition to the brahmanical view of the social superiority of the brahmanical caste, and to the brahmanical belief in the *ātman/brahman* world spirit. The Buddha's meditative techniques and terminology owed much to other *śramaṇa* movements, and his establishment of a mendicant community followed the general *śramaṇa* pattern of abandoning the world, and relying for food and other necessities of life on the generosity of householders who were lay-followers. With those other *śramaṇa* movements he shared technical terms and epithets to describe those who had escaped from *saṃsāra*, as well as anti-brahmanical literature.

Looked at in this way we can see that, although the Buddha's experience and his way of making known his experience to others were unique, there is far more that Buddhism held in common with the movements which were contemporary with it than we would normally assume, and we can see that there is an element of truth in the well known statement that the only original feature of the Buddha's teaching was his combination of a belief in the transmigration of the self with the denial that there was a self to transmigrate.

The Buddha's message about release from *saṃsāra* and the attainment of *nibbāna*, as explained in his sermons, was remembered by his hearers, and repeated by them, as they had heard them. After his death, collections were made by the expedient of asking his leading followers to recite what they remembered the Buddha saying. What they said was in turn recited by the rest of the monks, and arrangements were made for the safe keeping of these texts.

⁶⁶ See Norman, 1991B, 300–12 (= CP IV, 185–201).