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A PHILOLOGICAL APPROACH TO BUDDHISM

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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	Bṛhad-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, *Dravidian Etymological Dictionary* (Revised edition, 1984)
DPPN	G.P. Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names* (1937–38)
EV I, II	K.R. Norman, *Elders' Verses* I (1969), II (1971)
GD I, II	K.R. Norman, *The Group of Discourses* I (1984), II (1992)
IIJ	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	*Minor Readings and Illustrator*

MW	M. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (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.), *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch der buddhistischen Texte aus den Turfan-Funden* (1973–)
Überbl	O. von Hinüber, *Das ältere Mittelindisch im Überblick* (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.

III
Buddhism and Oral Tradition

In the second lecture I spoke about the way in which the Buddha's teaching evolved from the general *śramaṇa* religious movement, which had grown up in opposition to the *brāhmaṇa* caste, as both a social and a religious entity. After seeking—unsuccessfully—release from *saṃsāra* by means of severe ascetic practices and the meditation techniques taught by contemporary teachers, he succeeded by means of his own meditative practices—unique as far as we can tell, since no one else is known to have gained release in precisely that way before him. His message that it was possible to gain release (*mokṣa*) from *saṃsāra*, and to attain *nirvāṇa*, in this unique way, was taught, by word of mouth, first to his former associates in ascetic practices, and thereafter it was spread by the Buddha and his followers throughout Magadha and the surrounding areas.

There is no agreement among scholars about the date when writing first came into use in India but everyone, I think, agrees[1] that during the early period of Buddhism, even if writing was available, all teaching was by oral methods, and the Buddhist scriptures were transmitted orally, as was also the case with the brahmanical texts.

If writing was in use during the early period of Buddhism, we should have expected to find rules laid down in the Vinaya governing the proper use and storage of writing implements and materials, in the way in which we find instructions about everything else which concerns a monk's daily life. There are no such instructions in the Vinaya, and there are in fact only two mentions of writing in the whole text, both of them in the Parivāra, the last section of the Vinaya.

The Theravādin tradition confirms the absence of writing by stating that the canonical texts were first written down during the reign of Vaṭṭagāmiṇī Abhaya, in the first century B.C.E.[2] in Sri Lanka, implying that before that date they had

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[1] See Bechert, 1991A, 3–19 (10).
[2] 89–77 B.C.E. according to Bechert, 1991A, 3–19 [9].

not been written down—at least in their entirety. As we shall see in the fifth lecture, there is no good reason for doubting that the two statements about writing in the Vinaya, which I have just mentioned, are interpolations, added when the Parivāra, together with the rest of the canon, was written. The absence of writing is also confirmed by the terminology employed in the texts themselves, which enables us to deduce a great deal about the manner of teaching.

The vocabulary of the early texts is centred around the words for "hearing" from the root *śru* "to hear", and for "speaking" from the root *vac* "to speak". So a learned man is spoken of as *bahuśruta* (Pāli *bahussuta*—"having much hearing [*śruti*]"), and the word for "to teach" is *vāceti* "to make someone say something, to recite something (after his teacher)". Such examples can be multiplied endlessly, and collections have been made of the words and phrases which imply reciting (an orally transmitted) text, rather than reading (a written) one.[3] With the aid of such collections we can make certain deductions about the transmission of texts before the writing down of the canon. It must, however, be noted that this terminology does not, in itself, prove that that the texts were not in written form, because we know that the Aśokan inscriptions, which by definition are inscribed, i.e. written, on rocks and pillars, employ the same type of terminology. Aśoka says at the end of some of his inscriptions, "This edict is to be listened to" (*iyaṃ lipī sotaviyā*), suggesting that perhaps only the administrators were able to read, and their duty was to recite the contents of the edict to an audience, on the dates and in the manner specified by Aśoka.

We find, indeed, that the early terminology—the use of the verbs *śru* and *vac*, for example—was widely used at a much later time when writing was well known, because it was the standard terminology. That is to say: the technology changed, but the terminology did not, in the same way as the French for "pen" is "plume", or I still find at the bottom of copies of letters which are sent to me "carbon copy to Norman", when what I receive is not an almost illegible letter written on some sort of flimsy tissue paper, but an impressive document printed on a LaserWriter, and indistinguishable in every respect from the top copy sent to the original addressee.

We must assume that in the early days the Buddha's followers spread the message as they had heard it from the Buddha himself, and from his chief disciples, and as they had remembered it. We have no idea of the amount of divergence which began to creep into the message as a result of poor memory, or other defects in such a method of transmission, but it would be surprising if transmission in such a haphazard way had no effect upon the words and form of the message, if not its basic content. It is possible that in the very earliest stages

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[3] See Collins, 1992, 121–35.

of the oral tradition the situation was much the same as we are told exists in the recitation of modern oral epics, where no two performances are exactly the same, and the order of episodes may be changed from recitation to recitation, and episodes may even be omitted. It does not, however, matter very much if the reciter leaves out a portion, or adds something, as long as the main narrative is maintained and the desired end is achieved. The same may well have been true of early recitations of Buddhist *suttas*. The name of the place where the sermon was preached, and the identity of the audience, and other such relatively unimportant details, may well have varied from recitation to recitation.

The way in which groups of synonyms were used to explain or elaborate concepts, which we find in particular in the commentarial portion of the Vinaya, in the Niddesas and in some of the Abhidhamma texts, also suggests that texts of this type were composed and then transmitted orally. In their earliest form, they must have represented the attempts of individual bhikkhus to explain something, with a resultant variation in the details of the sermon, although the main theme would doubtless have been retained unchanged. We can imagine that if someone was reciting, for example, the Dhammasaṅgaṇi, he might insert synonyms and quotations from other texts, as they occurred to him, and on some occasions he might remember more or less of them, but it made little difference if synonyms were omitted or their order was changed. It is possible that, as the result of such inconsistencies, the need for some sort of codification was realised, and it might even have begun to take place during the lifetime of the Buddha.

We know that the Pātimokkha, the body of rules which governed the monks' behaviour, already existed as a collected corpus of material because the monks came together twice a month to recite it, and we may assume that each recitation was identical, unless new rules had been promulgated, or old ones modified. The fact that the Pātimokkha was structured so early doubtless accounts for the fact that the formulation of the monastic rules, although not their number, is very similar in the Pātimokkhas of the various schools. We also know that four times a month the monks preached sermons to the lay-followers, so we could speculate that such public recitations, presumably in the presence of other monks, might have led to some inconsistencies in recitation being noted and as far as possible eliminated. This would have been the beginning of codification. We can only guess at the amount which had taken place during the Buddha's lifetime.

We do, however, know that the tradition records that after the Buddha's death a meeting was held at which the Buddha's teachings were recited at a joint recitation (*saṅgīti*). In the form in which the tradition tells the story, one thera recited the Vinaya rules, and another the Suttas, and they were accepted by the rest. This was the beginning of canonicity, about which I shall speak in the eighth lecture, but I must anticipate my future remarks by saying that it seems to

me to be most unlikely that all these sermons were already in the shape, and in the order, in which they are said to have been recited on that occasion, and it is probable that even the use of the names of the *nikāyas* at the first joint recitation is an anachronism.

The tradition tells us that, after the first recitation, measures were taken to ensure that this body of material was preserved from then on. The *Buddhavacana* was divided up into parts and given to groups for safe keeping. Buddhaghosa tells us that the Vinaya was entrusted to Upāli and his pupils. Upāli was the expert who had replied to Mahākassapa's questioning about the rules of the Pātimokkha, giving information about where the offence was laid down, with respect to whom, on what subject, etc. In the same way the Dīgha was entrusted to Ānanda (who had recited the Sutta-piṭaka), the Majjhima to Sāriputta, the Saṃyutta to Mahākassapa, and the Aṅguttara to Anuruddha, and their respective pupils.[4] The way in which the texts were said to have been shared out to these various groups implies that they were already organised into the *nikāyas* as we know them: long (*Dīgha*), middle length (*Majjhima*), those linked by associated subject matter (*Saṃyutta*) and those arranged in numerical order, smallest first, with each section increasing by one (*Aṅguttara*).

It is generally accepted that this distribution was probably the beginning of the *bhāṇaka* system. The word *bhāṇaka* means "speaker", from the root *bhaṇ* "to speak", and is another of the items of vocabulary which suggest that the early Buddhists used an oral tradition. There are references in the Pāli commentaries to *bhāṇakas* of the first four *nikāyas*, and also of the Jātaka and the Dhammapada, but it is probable that there were also *bhāṇakas* of other individual Khuddaka-nikāya texts.[5] There seems to be only one reference in the early literature to the Khuddaka-*bhāṇakas*. Since the Jātakas are part of the Khuddaka-nikāya, the relationship between the Khuddaka-*bhāṇakas* and the Jātaka-*bhāṇakas*, who are mentioned in the same sentence by the author of the Milinda-pañha,[6] is not clear.

If the material entrusted to the groups of *bhāṇakas* was at first of a somewhat haphazard nature, as I have suggested, then the first task would have been to start some sort of editorial process, to make the material more consistent and to devise ways which would ensure that the consistent whole which the *bhāṇakas* produced could easily be handed on to their successors. We can surmise that the language was homogenised to a large extent. Once we have determined the nature of the language which we call Pāli we can see that in the canon as a whole there are very few non-Pali characteristics and most of those are due to a

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[4] Sv 13, 23–24; 15, 2–13.
[5] See Norman, 1989B, 29–53 (33) (= *CP* IV, 92–123 [98]).
[6] Miln 342, 1.

consistent introduction, at a later date, of Sanskritisms, which are restricted in number, the most obvious being the absolutive in -*tvā*. By eliminating anomalous dialect forms, such an editorial process may be presumed to have made learning the texts easier, by simplifying forms which at the beginning were probably quite divergent.

Once the language was homogenised, then the lists of synonyms, etc., which I have just mentioned, would probably have been fixed both in number and in order, and we can see signs of this in some of the categories of the Dhammasaṅgaṇi, where we commonly find a trio of words together, in a list of synonyms—a short *a*- or long *ā*-stem noun, then an action noun made from the same root with the -*ana* suffix, and then an abstract noun made by adding -*tta* or -*tā* to the past participle of the verb—always in the same order.

It is clear from a comparison of the way in which the *nikāyas* are formulated that there are certain differences between them, presumably arising from the fact that they were remembered in a slightly different way by the *bhāṇakas* responsible. We would expect the editorial process to vary from *bhāṇaka* group to *bhāṇaka* group, so that it is not surprising to find that formulation also varied from one group to another.

Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that, by and large, the differences in the language and other features of the various Pāli *nikāyas*, to which I have just alluded, are not great. Considering the disparate nature of the material with which the *bhāṇakas* must have started, this is rather surprising, because, although we know little about the relationship between the various groups of *bhāṇakas* in the Pāli tradition, we can deduce that they did not consult with each other to the extent of making their recitations of individual *suttas* or groups of verses identical, as we can see, for example, in the case of the thera Vaṅgīsa's verses, for a comparison of the versions of the verses ascribed to him in the Theragāthā, the Saṃyutta-nikāya and the Suttanipāta, shows that the versions preserved by the *bhāṇakas* of the Saṃyutta- and Khuddaka-nikāyas do not agree in every way, although it is possible that Vaṅgīsa repeated his verses in different ways on different occasions.

The *bhāṇakas* also had different ideas about matters of Buddhist history, e.g. whether the four *nimittas* were seen on the same day or not, and why Ānanda arrived late at the recitation,[7] and also about the distribution of texts between the various *piṭakas*. Nevertheless, despite these differences, the fact that in general duplicated texts do not differ so very much, when they occur in different *nikāyas*, would indicate that there was, or had been, some sort of co-operation between the *bhāṇakas* or their predecessors. In the case of the *bhāṇakas* belonging to different traditions, or their equivalents in other system of

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[7] See Norman, 1983C, 9

transmissions, we can assume that the co-operation between them was less, although recent investigation has shown that communication between some schools, at least in later times, was closer than has sometimes been thought.[8]

If, however, the *bhāṇakas* had started their conservation work immediately after the first recitation, without consulting one another, it is not easy to see how the homogenisation of the language of the texts, and in particular the translation from one dialect to another, which must have happened on more than one occasion in the history of the Theravādin canon, as the Buddha's message spread—as we shall see in the fourth lecture—could have happened in such a consistent way between the various *nikāyas*, with no one *nikāya* showing a greater proportion of anomalous sound changes than another. This would suggest that a certain amount of homogenisation had already taken place before the *bhāṇakas* took over, and the delay entailed in this standardisation would also, of course, have allowed time for the texts to be collected, classified and codified into *nikāyas*.

The fact that differences of dialect are detectable in the Pāli canon shows that the form of the texts was certainly not fixed unalterably immediately after the first recitation. If changes could be made, this too would suggest that the *bhāṇaka* system was not yet in operation, or at least not in the form of caretakers of an immutable body of material. The possibility that change could still take place would suggest that similar changes could occur when comparable texts were being remembered by the monks belonging to other traditions. This would perhaps account for the differences which we find in related *suttas* belonging to other schools.

We must accept, then, that the story that the *bhāṇakas* system was instituted at the first joint recitation creates great difficulties. Although it seems clear that the origin of the *bhāṇaka* system must have been on the lines that have been suggested, it clearly cannot have happened in exactly that way. It is most unlikely, to say the least, that within a very short time of the Buddha's death *suttas* had already been collected and categorised by length and subject matter into the form in which we have them in the Theravādin canon, and it is most unlikely that the Sutta-piṭaka was in its present form at that time. It is obvious that if the Dīgha-nikāya, Majjhima-nikāya, etc., had not yet been formulated and named, there could hardly have been Dīgha-*bhāṇakas* and Majjhima-*bhāṇakas*, etc.

The Khuddaka-nikāya presents even greater problems, e.g. there are references in the Apadāna to the Kathāvatthu. The Kathāvatthu is, however, acknowledged by the Theravādin tradition to be a very late text, composed on the occasion of the third recitation in Aśoka's time. It is obvious, then, that portions, at least, of

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[8] In particular the Sarvāstivādins and the Mūla-Sarvāstivādins; see Schmithausen, 1987.

the Apadāna must be very late additions to the Khuddaka-nikāya, and yet the Apadāna is included in the lists of texts recited at the first recitation. As I have suggested, it is probable that even the use of the names of the *nikāyas* at the first recitation is an anachronism.

It is therefore possible that the information about the texts which were recited at the first recitation was given with the benefit of hindsight, by those who knew what form the canon had in their day, and who thought or at least maintained, perhaps for the purpose of authenticating their own school, that that form was precisely what had been recited at the first *saṅgīti*. Similarly, the *bhāṇaka* tradition was perhaps a later invention in the form in which we hear about it, being restricted to the Theravādin tradition, and the story of its early foundation was invented to give authenticity to the Theravādin canon. As to when this was done, we cannot say much, except to draw attention to the occurrence of the names of the *nikāyas* and the word *baṇaka* (of the *majhima*, *eka-uttiraka* and *śayutaka nikāyas*[9]) in early Sinhalese inscriptions probably datable to the second century B.C.E. The institution of the *bhāṇaka* system might then be the result of a decision taken after the second recitation, or even as late as the third recitation, i.e. the *bhāṇaka* system arose before the formation of the Abhidhamma-piṭaka.

On the other hand, we should perhaps note that there is no reference to the existence of Abhidhamma-*bhāṇakas* in the sentence in the Milinda-pañha which I mentioned earlier. We find *ābhidhammikas* included there, presumably experts in the Abhidhamma, but there is no mention of *bhāṇakas*. This may mean that the *bhāṇaka* system was closed, with no new groups being set up by the time the Abhidhamma was formulated, so that the Abhidhamma as a whole was composed too late to be incorporated in the *bhāṇaka* system. The Milinda-pañha sentence might indicate that there was a difference between an *ābhidhammika* and an Abhidharma-*bhāṇaka*. It is probable that the *bhāṇakas* were something more than mere caretakers of the texts entrusted to them. It has been suggested that they were also professional reciters, and this seems to be the sense of the word in Buddhist Sanskrit, where it occurs most commonly in the compound dharma-*bhāṇaka* "a preacher of the dharma".[10] They could perhaps be called upon to deliver a sermon when required, and someone asking for a sermon to be recited could specify the type of sermon by length. As I mentioned in the first lecture, we sometimes find two versions of a *sutta*, one long and one short, and so it would be possible for someone to say "I would rather like a middle length sermon, about something or other, and by the way I would prefer the shorter rather than the longer version of that sermon".

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[9] See Norman, 1989B, 33, note 26 (= *CP* IV, 97, note 3).

[10] See *BHSD*, s.vv. *bhāṇaka* and *dharma-bhāṇaka*.

The differences of view between the *bhāṇakas* about historical matters, which I have mentioned, perhaps indicates that a *bhāṇaka* did not merely recite, but could also put his recitation into some sort of context. The same distinction between a caretaker-cum-historian and a reciter is perhaps to be made about the word *tepiṭaka* "knowing the three *piṭakas*", which is used to describe, for example, the monks at the third *saṅgīti*. There was presumably a distinction between knowing the *tipiṭaka* and being a member of a group whose purpose in life was to teach a text to others and to be able to recite it to order. If the purpose of the *bhāṇaka* was to recite sermons to lay-followers at their request, then we may assume that few lay-followers wanted a recitation of a portion of an *abhidhamma* text. The teaching of *abhidhamma* was perhaps still possible by means of the elaboration of the *mātikās*—which I shall mention in a moment—on an ad hoc basis.

We can only speculate about the way in which the *bhāṇaka* system operated. We might assume that the junior *bhāṇakas* sat around their seniors and learned the texts from them. Since the oral tradition is still strong in the Buddhist countries of South and South-east Asia it might be thought to be a simple matter to visit a monastery, and see just how the oral tradition is preserved, and we might have hoped that descriptions of the way in which texts are remembered and recited in modern times would have thrown light upon the situation at earlier times. This unfortunately does not appear to be the case. There is, for example, an account, by Tambiah, of the way in which texts were learned by junior monks when they were first admitted to the circle of reciters. He reported[11] that, in the monastery which he visited, texts were chanted by monks morning and evening. Newcomers repeated what they heard and memorised the chants fairly quickly, e.g. chants used in the daily worship of the Buddha—*parittas* such as Maṅgala, and other texts such as the Pātimokkha (which as we have seen was one of the first Buddhist texts to be recited).[12] This would seem to be a good guide as to the way in which memorisation was done in early times. Unfortunately, the picture is somewhat ruined by Tambiah's discovery[13] that when the monks practised chants individually, they did so with the aid of printed texts, to ensure that they got them right.

We do not know how long the *bhāṇaka* system remained in being. Buddhaghosa refers to it as though it was still in operation in his time, although by then the canon had been written down for some hundreds of years. This is, however, not conclusive, because when Buddhaghosa says that the Dīgha-*bhāṇakas* and the Majjhima-*bhāṇakas* do such and such he may simply be

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[11] Tambiah, 1968, 100.
[12] Tambiah, 1968, 99.
[13] Tambiah, 1968, 100.

repeating what he found in the commentarial literature available to him in the Mahāvihāra in Sri Lanka, and it seems very clear that this commentarial literature was composed some centuries before the time when Buddhaghosa wrote and presumably referred to conditions at that time, which perhaps no longer pertained by Buddhaghosa's time.

I said at the beginning of this lecture that one of the first acts of the *bhāṇakas*, or their predecessors if they were a late institution, must have been to attempt to homogenise the language. Side by side with that imposed consistency of language we can see that there is a certain consistency of structure.

There has been in the past a certain reluctance to believe that all early Buddhist teaching could be based entirely upon an oral/aural tradition, because of the sheer quantity of the material which would have to be remembered. In this connection we must have regard for the tradition, which I have mentioned, that the texts were divided up into *nikāyas* and shared out to different theras and their pupils for safe keeping and onward transmission, so that no thera was responsible, as a *bhāṇaka*, for more than one *nikāya*.

When oral literature became the object of academic study, and research was carried out into the recitation of oral epics in various parts of the world, it was discovered that so-called "primitive" peoples were able to remember and recite very long texts. Doubts about the ability of the early Buddhists to memorise their material were thought, by some, to have been dispelled by reference to such feats of memory, since it was thought that similar recitation might explain how the oral tradition of Buddhism and other religions could be maintained.

It became clear after a while that the situation was not as simple as might appear. The oral literature which was being studied was essentially of a verse nature and therefore the comparison would seem to apply only to Buddhist verse texts, but even there the situation was not entirely comparable, because the very nature of Buddhist verse texts, and the metres in which they were written, demanded complete accuracy of memorising, whereas the oral literature which has been studied is essentially of an epic nature where, as I said earlier, it is alleged that no two performances are ever identical because the reciter is free to insert, at any point, material of a formal nature, the so-called formulae which can be used to keep the recitation going while he remembers what happened next in the story. The great majority of Pāli canonical texts, however, are in prose, and complete accuracy of reproduction is required at each recitation. In these circumstances the findings of modern investigators of oral epic literature seem to have little relevance.

It seems that we must seek elsewhere for the explanation of the way in which the Pāli material could be remembered and handed on. We know that elaborate systems of recitation were and to a limited extent still are employed in Vedic

recitation, but there is no evidence known to me for the employment of such methods by the Buddhists. Nor would they be entirely appropriate for prose texts.

I have already mentioned a consistency of structure as being one of the features which we can detect in the Pāli canon, and if we examine the canonical texts we can, in fact, find many features which we may assume were employed for mnemonic purposes to make the memorisation, and therefore the recitation, of these texts easier.

Rhys Davids a century ago[14] drew attention to some of the features which, he suggested, aided the power of memory for Buddhist Sutta and Vinaya texts. He pointed out "firstly, the use of stock phrases, of which the commencement once given, the remainder followed as a matter of course and secondly, the habit of repeating whole sentences or even paragraphs, which in our modern books would be understood or inferred, instead of being expressed".

It is not precisely clear what he meant by stock phrases, and I suspect that he was referring to the way in which *suttas* tend to start in the same way—"Thus have I heard"— this is said by the commentaries to be a reference to the way in which Ānanda at the first recitation repeated what he could remember of the Buddha's sermons[15]—"At that time the Buddha was staying at such and such a place with a group of bhikkhus, and one day the bhikkhus decided to do something, or ask a question, etc." Many of the introductory paragraphs to these sermons carry on with stereotyped phrases—someone approached the Buddha, and having approached him sat down at one side; to him seated at one side the Buddha said something or other.

In a paper read at the conference of the International Association of Sanskritic Studies in Australia in 1994,[16] it was shown that the consistency in the way in which these introductory paragraphs are structured is, in fact, more meticulous than might at first appear. It can be seen that the wording changes subtly in conformity with a fixed pattern to specify who is approaching whom. In each case the wording is slightly different and a further result of this is that, once a story teller has remembered that the particular sermon he is about to recite is, say, about one or more bhikkhus approaching the Buddha, to ask a particular type of question, the form of wording to be used is prescribed. And therefore he does not, so to speak, have to remember the form of words to use because the circumstances fix the form for him.

Interestingly enough, it has been pointed out that if we examine such stereotyped phrases in one *nikāya* and compare them with the phrases in another,

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[14] T.W. Rhys Davids, 1881, xxiii (quoted by Tambiah, 1968, 100–101).
[15] See Norman, 1983C, 8.
[16] Allon, 1994.

we find that the forms which are employed do not necessarily agree—something which leads us to the conclusion, I think, that, as we would expect, once the texts had been distributed among groups to preserve and hand them on to their successors, the precise methods of stereotyping which were employed, in an attempt to make remembering easier, were not necessarily the same for each set of *bhāṇakas*.

Another way in which we can see that these texts were recited rather than read is the way in which they include in them lists of contents or indexes—the so-called *mātikās*,[17] sometimes translated as *matrixes*. It has been pointed out that these lists play a mnemonic role,[18] which, as we have seen, is important in a tradition which is founded essentially upon oral transmission. The word *mātikā* is sometimes used to designate the precepts of the Vinaya,[19] and *mātikās* form, as it were, compendia of the doctrine. They are, however, also lists, especially in the Abhidhamma, which are presented in a numerically progressive form and they have a creative role, in as much as they allow the Abhidhamma to be composed and thus, it has been suggested, the idea of "mother" is contained in both *mātikā* and *matrix*. It has been said with regard to the Paṭṭhāna, for example, that if one knows the *Mātikā* to that text with its 24 conditional relations, and relates them to the 22 triplets and 100 couplets of the *mātikā* to the Dhammasaṅgaṇi, in all the permutations and combinations in which these can be taken, one can reconstruct the whole of the Paṭṭhāna.[20]

Something similar can be seen in the *uddānas* (the lists of contents) which are found in, or at the end of, a number of texts, e.g. in the Dhammapada where the *uddāna* gives the names of the *vaggas*, and in the Thera- and Therī-gāthās, i.e. the verses ascribed to male and female elders, where we are told how many elders there are and how many verses as a whole they have recited. Despite their position in our texts, these *uddānas* were probably intended originally for use at the beginning of the recitation, and even as the reciter progressed. Someone reciting the Dhammapada, for example, had a guide to tell him which *vagga* came after which, so that he could keep them in order. It must be pointed out that the system is not foolproof, because the numbers given in the *uddānas* to the Thera- and Therī-gāthās do not agree entirely with the numbers as we have them now,[21] and they presumably refer to an earlier recension of the text, where such numbers were relevant and of value to the reciters. They have been retained in a written recension, even though they are no longer of any value.

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[17] Cousins, 1983, 1–11.
[18] See Gethin, 1992A, 149–72.
[19] See Norman, 1983C, 126.
[20] See I.B. Horner, in the Foreword to Nārada, 1969, viii.
[21] See Oldenberg & Pischel, 1883, xiv.

Listing things by numbers is a very common mnemonic device in India, and both the Buddhists and Jains make use of this idea. The Jains have the Sthānāṅga and the Samavāya, the contents of which are listed numerically, and the Buddhists have something very similar in the Saṅgīti-suttanta of the Dīgha-nikāya. The name Saṅgīti is reminiscent of the *saṅgīti*s at which the texts were recited in a joint recitation, and the name of the *sutta* suggests that it represents a recitation of doctrinal matters, arranged in a numerical way, and intended for chanting together, perhaps in an attempt to provide a summary of the doctrine as a precaution against the confusion among the Jains after the death of their leader Nāthaputta, which was the occasion for the preaching of the Saṅgītisutta. Whether the recitation was at one of the great *saṅgīti*s or at some other chanting is a matter for investigation.

We also find this "more by one" principle used in the Aṅguttara-nikāya, which is listed numerically for the same reason. It is quite clear that this method of enumeration is purely for artificial purposes, because we find that although the lists of ones and twos and threes and fours, etc., are genuine groups, when we get to the higher numbers the authors of the text were obliged to make combinations, e.g. one group of ten is made of the five fears (*bhaya*), the four elements of stream-entry (*sotāpattiyaṅga*), and the ariyan method (*ariya ñāya*).[22]

Another guide for oral recitation which we can find in the Pali texts is the principle which appears in the list of abbreviations in *A Critical Pāli Dictionary* as *wax. comp.*, i.e. the rule of waxing components. It is a translation of a German term, which was first used, as far as I know, in the field of Assyrio-Babylonian studies.[23] It perhaps sounds odd in contemporary English, where the word "waxing" in the sense of "growing larger" is almost entirely restricted to the moon growing larger, as opposed to its waning phase. If we are to retain the word "waxing" then it is perhaps clearer if we call it the Waxing Syllables Principle, because the phrase refers to the fact that strings of words which make up a group, e.g. a number of Pāli epithets describing a city as "large, rich, prosperous, flourishing, crowded", are very often put into order depending upon the number of syllables in each word, with the words with the fewest syllables coming first, and then the word with the next fewest syllables next, and so on until the word with the most syllables comes last.

Such a principle clearly guards against the way in which the order of such a string of adjectives might be shuffled around. They were put into a fixed order depending on this Waxing Syllables Principle and therefore they were always remembered in that fixed order. If anyone recited the string of words and put one word in the wrong place, then the change in the number of syllables would

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[22] A V 182.
[23] Ehelolf, 1916.

immediately reveal it. Once this principle became second nature, so to speak, then a reciter could not go wrong, because he would automatically recite words in the right order.

Something similar in English, but based on an entirely different principle, is the way in which we might talk about, say, a big red armchair. For some reason, of great interest to linguists, we never say a red big armchair, and so if we are telling a story where there is frequent reference to a big red armchair, to some extent our task of remembering that part of the story is eased, because we do not, each time, have to remember the order in which to say the words. The order is fixed for us in a pattern by something we do not know about and do not have to worry about. It is, so to speak, automatic.

The interesting thing about this is the way in which we occasionally find that words are not in the Waxing Syllables Principle order. If we find a set of words which we might suspect was at one time arranged on that principle—and if the suspicion is supported by the fact that in another tradition or in a comparable phrase in a Jain text it does occur in that order—but it no longer is, we may well be able to find a reason for the change. Perhaps one term has been replaced by a synonym, with a different syllable length, or a word in its Pāli form with a svarabhakti vowel is out of place, but if we calculate what the Sanskrit form or the form in another dialect was, we can see that the principle is indeed retained intact. This gives us information about the dialect in which the phrase was first composed. Sometimes we may suspect that the replacement took place at a time when the Waxing Syllables Principle was no longer operative, i.e. when the oral tradition which required memorisation had given way to a written tradition, which did not require it, and the Waxing Syllables Principle was of less importance.

Another principle to which Rhys Davids drew attention a hundred years ago is the way in which we find in Buddhist texts frequent examples of repetition.

The way in which repetition operates varies considerably. Sometimes it is exact repetition. If something happens twice or more, or something is said twice or more, then the exact passage is repeated verbatim on each occasion, e.g. stock sets of words, such as the description of a city, which I have just mentioned. Sometimes the repetition is partial, for example, we may find a statement saying that the good man does a series of actions, followed by a statement that the bad man does the opposite of these, each word being the same words used for the good man, with a negative prefix *a-* added to each. The reciter had therefore in effect only to remember one set of adjectives, and to put the negative in front of them, e.g. the good man does *kusala* deeds, while the bad man does *akusala* deeds. Once again the effort involved in memorising the sermon which contains these phrases is reduced. Similarly, there might be a passage followed by its

opposite with the negative particle *na* in front of each verb. The good man does this, does that, does something else. The bad man does not do this, does not do that, does not do something else. Or there might be a set of phrases in each of which one word is changed: "We go to the Buddha for refuge, we go to the Dhamma for refuge, we go to the Saṅgha for refuge".

Although it is unlikely that the circumstances were completely identical, the stories in the Majjhima-nikāya about the Buddha-to-be visiting the two teachers, which I mentioned last week, starts off with identical phrases, with changes made only to cover the different level of meditation reached, and the different response of the teacher when his pupil has successfully imbibed the teaching. Sometimes translators get carried away when they find such repetition. It is not, in this particular example, as exact as one would believe from reading Miss Horner's translation, in which she makes the stories even more parallel, even more repetitive, than the Pāli justifies.[24]

Repetition reaches its highest (or lowest, depending on how you look at it) level in Pāli, in my experience, in the Alagaddūpamasutta of the Majjhima-nikāya.[25] In that *sutta* a bhikkhu called Ariṭṭha developed the erroneous view: "In so far as I understand the *dhamma* taught by the Bhagavat, it is that, in following those things called stumbling blocks by the Bhagavat, there is no stumbling block at all".[26] The text tells us that other monks heard that Ariṭṭha had developed the erroneous view that "In so far as I understand the *dhamma* taught by the Bhagavat, it is that, in following those things called stumbling blocks by the Bhagavat, there is no stumbling block at all", and so they went to him and said; Is it true Ariṭṭha that you have developed the erroneous view that "In so far as I understand the *dhamma* taught by the Bhagavat, it is that, in following those things called stumbling blocks by the Bhagavat, there is no stumbling block at all", and Ariṭṭha replied; Yes, I have developed the view that "In so far as I understand the *dhamma* taught by the Bhagavat, it is that, in following those things called stumbling blocks by the Bhagavat, there is no stumbling block at all". The text goes on to say that despite all their efforts, Ariṭṭha maintained his view that "In so far as I understand the *dhamma* taught by the Bhagavat, it is that, in following those things called stumbling blocks by the Bhagavat, there is no stumbling block at all". So the bhikkhus went to the Buddha, and told him that Ariṭṭha had developed the view that "In so far as I understand the *dhamma* taught by the Bhagavat, it is that, in following those things called stumbling blocks by the Bhagavat, there is no stumbling block at

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[24] Horner, 1954, 207–210.

[25] M I 130–42.

[26] *tathāhaṃ Bhagavatā dhammaṃ desitaṃ ājānāmi yathā ye 'me antarāyikā dhammā vuttā Bhagavatā te paṭisevato nālaṃ antarāya*, M I 130, 6–8.

all", and that they had heard that he had developed the view that "In so far as I understand the *dhamma* taught by the Bhagavat, it is that, in following those things called stumbling blocks by the Bhagavat, there is no stumbling block at all", and so they had gone to him and asked him if it was true that he had developed the view that "In so far as I understand the *dhamma* taught by the Bhagavat, it is that, in following those things called stumbling blocks by the Bhagavat, there is no stumbling block at all"; and he had replied that he had developed the view that "In so far as I understand the *dhamma* taught by the Bhagavat, it is that, in following those things called stumbling blocks by the Bhagavat, there is no stumbling block at all", and yet despite their efforts, he had persisted in his view that "In so far as I understand the *dhamma* taught by the Bhagavat, it is that, in following those things called stumbling blocks by the Bhagavat, there is no stumbling block at all". And so the Buddha sent for Ariṭṭha, and asked him if he had developed the view that "In so far as I understand the *dhamma* taught by the Bhagavat, it is that, in following those things called stumbling blocks by the Bhagavat, there is no stumbling block at all", and Ariṭṭha replied that he did have the view that "In so far as I understand the *dhamma* taught by the Bhagavat, it is that, in following those things called stumbling blocks by the Bhagavat, there is no stumbling block at all". Whereupon the Buddha condemned it as a wrong view.

That is to say that, if my arithmetic is correct, the identical passage occurs 12 times, and it was partly for that reason that I used to include that *sutta* very early in my Pāli course—the doctrinal importance of its contents was another reason. For beginners in Pāli the sheer size of the vocabulary to be mastered is a deterrent, since every line of every sentence presents new words which have to be understood and committed to memory. The amount of repetition in the Alagaddūpamasutta means that students suddenly find that they already know the words, and they begin to think that they are making progress as the same sentence describing the erroneous view occurs again and again, until they are able to chant out the heretical statement as well as any *bhāṇaka* proving the value of repetition when memorising.

To us, repetition carried to such an extreme length is ludicrous, and we should certainly try to avoid it, introducing such phrases as "This view", "such a view", "the view which you mention", etc., yet quite clearly such repetition was not regarded as otiose at the time of the oral tradition, although as we shall see in the fifth lecture when we consider Buddhism and writing, the situation changed somewhat at a later time.

Stock phrases, lists, the waxing syllable principle, repetitions, are all things which make the memorising and recitation of prose texts easier. In addition to

these there are the usual literary features of alliteration, etc., which help to determine the choice of words to use, and to assist in remembering them.

But despite the help which such aids gave, and despite the care which the *bhāṇakas* may be assumed to have taken in reciting the texts allotted to them, it is inevitable that mistakes would creep into the tradition by reason of the type of error which is inherent in oral recitation, particularly when monks from different parts of India, with different pronunciations of Pāli, were assembled together. Buddhaghosa gives a list of errors which would invalidate a *kammavācā*—an official action of the *saṅgha*: uttering an aspirated consonant when it should be unaspirated, and vice versa, de-voicing a voiced consonant and vice versa, etc., all of which would be of general application in oral recitation.

In addition to such errors, the dangers inherent in an oral tradition are obvious. Handing texts on orally depends on two essentials: a donor to hand them on, and a recipient to accept them. If interest in a religion wanes, and no one wants to hear a text, it dies out, or if the number of donors of a text are reduced in number to a few old men, with failing memories, then the text is likely to be handed on partially or incorrectly, or not at all.

At some time after the introduction of Theravādin Buddhism into Ceylon, war and famine and the destruction of *vihāras* led to a breakdown in the *bhāṇaka* system, and to a situation where some texts were known to a very few bhikkhus. Buddhaghosa records the fact[27] that there came a time when only one bhikkhu knew the Niddesa, and urgent measures had to be taken to have him repeat his text to receivers before he died. From fear of the Niddesa disappearing completely, the thera Mahārakkhita was persuaded to learn it from this one bhikkhu, and other theras learnt it from Mahārakkhita, so that the future transmission of the text was assured.[28]

Such incidents no doubt had an effect and gave a warning to the *saṅgha*, and made the theras in Ceylon realise that the whole canon could disappear if the oral tradition died out. This was probably one of the factors which persuaded the *bhāṇakas* that it was time they made use of the new-fangled writing. The inter-action between the oral tradition and the written tradition, and the effect which that had upon Buddhism are the subjects of my fifth lecture.

Before then I want to talk about the way in which the Buddha's message spread from Magadha, where he had first delivered it, throughout the North of India, down south to Sri Lanka, and North through Chinese Turkestan to China and elsewhere. And it is the first part of that movement, away from Magadha, which will be the subject of the fourth lecture. In that lecture I will deal with the philological information which we have about the form of the language which

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[27] Sp 695–96.
[28] See Norman, 1983C, 87; and 1988,1–27 (15) (= *CP* III, 225–43 [236]).

was used in the very early stages of Buddhism, and the way in which we can interpret philological material to give us some idea of the way in which Buddhism began to spread from the boundaries of its origin.