

The *tathāgata* and the long tongue of truth

The authority of the Buddha in *sūtra* and narrative literature

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Many in this world claim to be teachers,
And though many say they've presented bondage and freedom,
All they've done is show, as the path to peace,
A method that strengthens the root of cyclic existence.
Whose teaching, for those desiring liberation,
Is the supreme and nondeceptive entryway?
Only the Sugata's teaching,
So the Buddha alone is an authority.¹

The Buddha is the sole authority – he is the *pramāṇapuruṣa*, a term about which much has been written.² In his *Prasannapadā*, Candrakīrti (seventh century) states that,

The discerning proclaim that the word of the Blessed Buddhas alone is a *pramāṇa*, because it is reliable inasmuch as it is supported by argu-

¹ *Grub mtha' shel gyi me long*, p. 14.7: 'jig rten 'di na ston par khas 'che zhing, 'ching grol rnam bzhag smra ba mang mchis kyang, srid pa'i rtsa ba brtan par byed pa'i thabs, zhi ba'i lam du ston pa sha stag ste, gang gi bstan pa thar pa 'dod rnams la, bslu ba med pa'i 'jug ngogs mchog gyur pa, bde bar gshegs pa'i bstan pa kho na'i phyir, sangs rgyas nyag gcig tshad ma'i skyes bu yin. Translation Sopa/Chávez/Jackson 2009: 45.

² See most recently, with reference to earlier studies, Eltschinger 2010: 426–428 (= § 13b).

ments (*sopapattika*). And therefore, it is established that only the word of the perfectly awakened ones is a [nondeceptive] scripture (*āgama*). [It is scripture first] because it comes (*āgata*) from credible [persons] who have eliminated all defilements; [second,] because it ascertains (*āgamayati*) in that it causes one to thoroughly understand the true reality; [third,] because it goes in the direction [of the goal] (*abhimukhād gamanāt*) in that it is by relying on it that the world reaches nirvana. On the contrary, it is established that the doctrines that differ from it are not a *pramāṇa* and [just] pseudo-scriptures because they lack any arguments.³

The epistemologies of authenticity and authority have been debated for centuries in India and Tibet; this is a fascinating and inexhaustible (*akṣaya*) topic in itself, but I do not intend to recapitulate it here. Rather, I will sketch some of the ways in which *sūtra* literature seeks to establish the Buddha's authority. It seems to me that the early *sūtras* – those collected in the Āgamas and the Nikāyas – establish authority in a variety of ways, which include dialogue, debate, narrative, panegyric, and assertion. The configuration of authority depends, self-evidently, on intended audience, on context. There are many examples of dogmatic or logical demonstration, for example the *Caṅgīsutta* (*Majjhimanikāya* No. 95), but this is not the only or even the primary method.⁴ The relation between dogma and authority is multifaceted, and there is a continuity between the Buddha's authority as a Teacher (*śāstr*) and as a locus of power (*ānubhāvā*), energy (*tejas*), and protection (*paritrāṇa*), that is, between didac-

³ *Prasannapadā*, p. 268.1–269.3: *buddhānām eva bhagavatām vacanam pramāṇam ity upavarṇayanti vicakṣaṇāḥ sopapattikatvenāvisaṃvādatvāt. ata eva cāpteḥbhyāḥ prahīṇāśeṣadoṣebhya āgatvāt, āgamayatīti samantāt tattvaṃ gamayatīti vā, abhimukhād* [em.: *ābhimukhyād* ed.] *gamanād vā tadāśrayeṇa lokasya nirvāṇagamanāt sambuddhavacanasyaivāgamatvaṃ vyavasthāpyate, tadanyamatānām tūpapattiviyuktatvān na prāmāṇyam āgamābhāsatvaṃ ca vyavasthāpyate*. See La Vallée Poussin's detailed notes and cross-references. I thank Vincent Eltschinger for his help with this difficult passage.

⁴ For fragments of a Sanskrit counterpart of undetermined school affiliation in the Schøyen collection, see Braarvig/Liland 2010: 2–5.

tic and apotropaic functions.⁵ We cannot easily or neatly divide the Buddha's authority into the philosophical/rational versus magical/majestic/narrative without clumsily rumpling and shredding the fabric of the Buddhist thought-world.

The question of authority revolves around the figure of the Buddha and the transmission of his word. The tension of transmission is central to both traditional and contemporary understandings of the Buddha's legacy. Transmission of "Dharma-Vinaya" descends through a series of councils, which guarantee authenticity within a school or lineage. There were two "universal" councils in the century that followed the Buddha's death; after this the expanding Saṃgha solidified into several lines of transmission.⁶ What we have today are *some* of the end-products of *some* (by no means all) of these lines of transmission.

Tathāgata and truth

What can one say about "the figure of the Buddha"? The Buddha is presented as a person who sought, who realized, and who taught the truth. One of his central epithets is *tathāgata*, and by definition *tathāgatas* speak the truth.⁷ In the Sanskrit *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, King Ajātaśatru (ruler of Magadha, a younger contemporary of the Buddha) enunciates this principle as "*tathāgatas*, worthy ones, truly and fully awakened Buddhas are speakers of what is not false."⁸

⁵ This may be seen from the nature and use of the texts in the various Paritta collections: the texts are memorized and recited in order to teach and to protect and bless.

⁶ For the councils and other aspects of the question of authenticity, see Skilling 2009 and Skilling 2010.

⁷ For Pali sources (*Dīghanikāya-aṭṭhakathā* and *Ṭīkā*) on the meaning of *tathāgata*, see Bodhi 1978: 50–53 and 331–344. See also *Traité* I 126 (with a survey of the variety of interpretation up to ca. 1944); *Traité* III 1340–1341; Endo 1997: 195–206; Manda 2005.

⁸ *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* §1.7: *avitathavādino* [em.: *avitathāvādino* ed.] *hi bhavanti tathāgatā arhantaḥ samyaksambuddhāḥ*. Waldschmidt restores the fragment by comparing the Tibetan: *de bzhin gshegs pa dgra bcom pa yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas rnams ni log par gsungs pa*

The Pali version states more simply, “*tathāgatas* do not speak falsehood.”⁹ The theme of *tathāgata* runs through Buddhist literature, for example in the “Discourse on the World” (*Lokasutta*), a short *sutta* in prose and verse on the nature of the world, which in Pali is included in both the *Aṅguttaranikāya* and the *Itivuttaka*.¹⁰ Associated terms with *tathā* elaborate on this epithet and the truths and realities that the Buddha discovered, as for example in the *Vajracchedikā*:

A *tathāgata*, O Subhūti, is one who speaks what is real; he is one who speaks the truth, he is one who speaks what is. A *tathāgata* does not speak what is not; a *tathāgata* does not speak falsely.¹¹

The Buddha’s teaching is the Dharma, and his authority lies in the Dharma. Dharma is a multivalent term fundamental to Indian thought, religion and statecraft.¹² It is invoked in our earliest documents, for example in Aśoka’s Pillar Edict II:

Dhamma is good. And what is Dhamma? It is diminution of sin,¹³ abundance of good deeds, mercy, liberality, truth, and purity.¹⁴

ma yin no. For a translation, see Weber 1999: 106.

⁹ *Dīghanikāya* II, p. 73.3: *na hi tathāgatā vitatham bhaṇanti*.

¹⁰ *Aṅguttaranikāya*, *Paṭhamapaṇṇāsake Uruvelavaggo Tatiyo*, pp. 30.5–31, antepenult.; *Itivuttaka*, *Itivuttake Catukkanipātassa Paṭhamavaggassa Terasamasuttaṃ*, pp. 321.8–323.2 (last *sutta* in the collection). The key-word of the *uddānas* is *loka*. Cf. also *Pāsādikasutta*, *Dīghanikāya* III, pp. 134.11–135.22.

¹¹ *Vajracchedikā* §14f: *bhūtavādī subhūte tathāgataḥ satyavādī tathāvādy ananyathāvādī tathāgataḥ, na vitathavādī tathāgataḥ*.

¹² For a recent collection of essays on Dharma, with contributions on Buddhism by Rupert Gethin and Collett Cox, see Olivelle 2009. Most recently see Hiltebeitel 2012, which deals specifically with Aśoka’s Dharma.

¹³ A century ago, Smith (1909: 62) remarked that “Scholars differ concerning the derivation and precise meaning of this word *āsinave*,” which also occurs in Pillar Edict III. See further Woolner 1993: 64, s.v. *apāsinave*; Basak 1959: 86. The meaning and derivation remain obscure, and my translation is a guess.

¹⁴ Text from Bloch 1950: 162: *dhamme sādhu. kiyam cu dhamme ti. appāsinave bahukayyāne dayā dāne sacce socaye*.

Aśoka lived between one hundred and two hundred years after the Buddha (depending on whether one favours the short or the long chronology). Aśoka's Dharma is a programme of ethics and principles. As ruler, he uses his authority to foster and promote Dharma, but his authority does not, as such, *derive* from Dharma, except insofar as he rules righteously (*dhammena*).¹⁵ Ethics is one of the primary acceptations of Dharma in Buddhist texts, but prominent also are the senses of "reality" and "true nature," which bear directly upon the person and authority of the Buddha (Aśoka's ethical or socio-political Dharma does not, at least explicitly, carry these senses).¹⁶ A Buddha's authority comes from truth (*satya*) and *dharmatā* (true nature). Neither the Buddhas nor anyone else created the world or the laws of nature.¹⁷ The nature and principle of reality (*dharmatā dharmasthititā dharmaniyāmatā dharmayathātathā / avitathatā ananya-*

¹⁵ Cf. Pillar Edict VII, in Bloch 1950: 161: *esā hi vidhi yā iyaṃ dhammena pālanā dhammena vidhāne dhammena sukhiyanā dhammena gotti*. The admonition to rule righteously is, not unexpectedly, recurrent in Buddhist literature, and the trope of the righteous king or ruler remains potent up to the present.

¹⁶ In his *Vyākhyāyukti* (21.9–22.8), Vasubandhu gives ten meanings for *dharma*. The passage is cited by Bu ston in his long treatment of the term *dharma* (Tib. *chos*): see Obermiller 1931: 18–24.

¹⁷ *Nidānasamyukta*, *sūtra* 17.3, *na bhikṣo mayā pratīyasamutpādaḥ kṛto nāpy anyaiḥ*; Tibetan version cited by Śamathadeva (Zhi gnas lha) in his *Upāyikāṭikā* (Otani Cat. No. 5595, Repr. Vol. 118, *mngon pa'i bstan bcos*, tu, 162a2). The Chinese *Samyuktāgama* version (*sūtra* No. 299) is translated in Choong Mun-keat (Wei-keat) 2010: 49–50, and summarized in Kalupahana 1975: 91–92. This short *sūtra*, which does not have a Pali counterpart, was well known in the Sarvāstivādin tradition and is regularly cited. Pūrṇavardhana and Sthiramati call it the **Buddha-sūtra* (Sangs rgyas kyi mdo). It is invoked, for example, in the *Yogācārabhūmi* (229.7); by Vasubandhu (Dbyig gnyen), *Pratīyasamutpādādivibhaṅganirdeśa* (Otani Cat. No. 5496, Repr. Vol. 104, *mdo tshogs 'grel pa, chi*, 69a8); by Pūrṇavardhana (Gang ba spel ba), *Abhidharmakośaṭikā-lakṣaṇānusāriṇī-nāma* (Otani Cat. No. 5594, Repr. Vol. 117, *mngon pa'i bstan bcos, ju*, 349a4, *sangs rgyas kyi mdo las*); and by Sthiramati (Blo gros brtan pa), *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyaṭikā-tattvārtha-nāma* (Otani Cat. No. 5875, Repr. Vol. 147, *ngo mtshar bstan bcos, tho*, 54b5, *sangs rgyas kyi mdo las*).

thā bhūtaṃ satyatā tattvatā yathātathā aviparītatā aviparyastatā) is nothing other than the fact of conditionality, conditioned arising, *idaṃpratyayatā pratītyasamutpādānulomatā*.¹⁸ Whether or not *tathāgatas* arise, this true nature abides, the element of the principles of reality; having known and understood this directly by himself, the *tathāgata* declares and teaches it.¹⁹

Buddhas come and go, but Dharma remains; Buddhas realize Dharma and reveal Dharma. In this hierarchy, a Buddha is subordinate to the Dharma. And even in contexts where, by metaphysical sleight of hand, the Buddha rebounds and recovers ultimate authority, this is because he is the Dharmakāya. The *Mahāyānottaratantraśāstra* asserts that Buddhahood alone is the refuge for the world, because of the Sage's Dharmakāya.²⁰ Tibetan scholars return to this theme repeatedly; an early example is Gampopa (1079–1153) in his "Jewel Ornament of Liberation."²¹

Dharmatā and *pratītyasamutpāda* have remained touchstones of authenticity over the millennia. Tibetan scholasticism has followed Indian exegesis – not only in the Madhyamaka but also in the

¹⁸ A classical source for these terms is the *Nidānasamyukta*, *sūtra* 14.6 (Tibetan version cited by Śamathadeva in his *Upāyikāṭikā*, *mngon pa'i bstan bcos*, tu, 157a6); see also the citation in Yaśomitra's *Kośavyākhyā* 452.20 ad *Kośa* 3:28ab.

¹⁹ *Nidānasamyukta*, *sūtra* 17.4–5: *api tūtpādād vā tathāgatānām anutpādād vā shtitaiveyaṃ dharmatā dharmasthitaye dhātuḥ, taṃ tathāgataḥ svayam abhijñāyābhisambuddhyākhyāti prajñāpayati ...*; partial citation in the *Kośabhāṣya* (137.15). The formula "Whether *tathāgatas* arise or whether they do not arise" (*utpādād vā tathāgatānām anutpādād vā tathāgatānām*) is deployed in a variety of contexts, including Mahāyāna *sūtras*, to authenticate a subordinated statement. For examples see *Traité* I 157, n. 1.

²⁰ *Mahāyānottaratantraśāstra* 1:21: *jagaccharaṇam ekatra buddhatvaṃ pāramārthikam, muner dharmasārīratvāt tanniṣṭhatvād gaṇasya ca* (*dam pa'i don du 'gro ba yi, skyabs ni sangs rgyas nyag gcig yin; thub pa chos kyi sku can phyir, tshogs kyang de yi mthar thug phyir*).

²¹ See Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen's *Dam chos yid bzhin gyi nor bu thar pa rin po che'i rgyan*. See Guenther 1970: 99–111; Khenpo Konchog Gyaltzen Rinpoche/Ani K. Trinlay Chödrön 1998: 137–146.

Yogācāra/Cittamātra schools of philosophy²² – in emphasizing dependent arising up to the present. Recent Thai teachers like Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu (1906–1993) and Phra Prayudh Payutto (1939–) have highlighted it as well, each in his own way. Buddhādāsa emphasizes the fact of conditionality, *idapaccayatā*. This term had not received much attention in mainstream Thai teaching, or even in the mediaeval Pali exegesis and manuals of the Theravādin tradition, which developed a distinctive and complex theory of causality based on twenty-four conditions (*paccaya*), which in certain contexts eclipsed the old *paṭiccasamuppāda* formulary.²³ Buddhādāsa’s book *Paṭiccasamuppāda* has two parts, (1), “What is dependent arising?” and (2), “Conditionality as the highest thing in the Buddha’s teaching.”²⁴ In the second part, Buddhādāsa writes that:

If you reflect, you will see that we [the Thai] have never been interested in the subject of conditionality (*idapaccayatā*), even though it is the heart of the Buddha’s teaching ... To Thai ears, “conditionality” is an unfamiliar word, a foreign sound – even if we are members of the Buddhist community, we are members of a Buddhist community which does not yet understand the heart of the Buddha’s teaching.²⁵

Payutto’s magnum opus is *Buddhadhamma (Phutthatham)*.²⁶ It contains a long section on dependent origination called “How did life

²² See Skilling 2007.

²³ See Karunadasa 2010: Chap. 18, “Conditional Relations.”

²⁴ Teaching here is *śāsanā*. *Buddhaśāsanā* is also translated as “Buddhism.”

²⁵ Buddhādāsa, n.d., pp. 130–131. This short book is abridged – I do not know the circumstances or principles – from *Idapaccayatā*, BE 2515 [CE 1972], Dhammadan Munlanithi, Sixth printing, 2549 [2006], 529 pages. The importance accorded to dependent arising by Buddhādāsa may be seen from the publication *Paṭiccasamuppāda chak Phra Ot* [Dependent Arising from the Holy Lips (*phra oṣṭha*)], Sixth Printing, 2553 [2010], a collection of *sūtras* on dependent arising translated from Pali into Thai, which is 941 pages long (including detailed indexes).

²⁶ *Phutthatham* is the Thai pronunciation of what is written in Pali as *buddhadhamma*. The original edition, published in Thai 2514 [1971], was 206 pages long. I use here the revised and expanded version, originally published in 2525 [1982], third printing (Bangkok: Mahachulalongkorn

come to be?”²⁷ As in all of P. Payutto’s works, his treatment is grounded in a profound understanding of Pali literature, especially the *Suttapiṭaka*, although it also offers insights into later strata of Pali exegesis. Payutto’s lucid explanation of the topic in Thai relates dependent origination to ethical and practical behaviour in daily life. He opens (p. 79) by stating that dependent origination is one of the principles which the Buddha taught as a law of nature (*kot thammachat, kaṭ-dhammajāti*), or a principle of reality which exists by nature, independently of whether a Buddha arises. He equates dependent origination and conditionality, defining the latter with the formula “when this exists, that is; from the arising of this, that arises” (p. 81, *imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti, imassuppādā idaṃ uppajjati*). He relates this to one method of thought – thought according to conditionality, which means to examine processes or to find solutions to problems by finding the relations and causes from which they have developed (p. 676). This means to see the reality that things do not arise independently and do not exist on their own: they arise dependently on causes and conditions, and they cease, or can be stopped, through the cessation of causes and conditions (p. 711).

Korean Master Seongcheol (1912–1993), drawing on entirely different sources through the medium of Chinese translations (although with comparison of Pali and other sources), taught that:

Although dependent origination is much taught by the Buddha, he did not invent it. Whether the Buddha lived in this world or not, dependent origination is there to be discovered. The causal relatedness of “this” to “that” denotes mutual interdependence. That is to say, birth depends on death, while death depends on birth ... The nature of dependent origination seems to be encapsulated in the expression “it just continues and exists within the world of Dharma” [cited from the *Pratyayasūtra* in the Chinese *Samyuktāgama*]. In other words, dependent origination is closely associated with the *dharma-dhātu*, which implies the Mahāyāna idea of the world of Dharma (*dharma-dhātu*) as the state of being as it is (*bhūta-tathatā*). By “things just continue” is meant the existence of

Ratchawitthayalay 2529 = 1986), which is 1,145 pages long. 11,010 copies were printed.

²⁷ Payutto 2529: 79–222.

things in accordance with dependent origination, while the qualification that things are “empty” explains that things arising in this way lack inherent existence.²⁸

It may be incautious to assert that *pratītyasamutpāda* has been important in all periods and through all transformations of Buddhism, but it is worthwhile to investigate the degree to which this might be the case. Certainly, conditioned arising has had an enduring epigraphic, ritual, liturgical, and metaphysical presence.

Truth and communication

Is truth an inner affair? Does truth exist in itself, in its own right? Many would say so. Can it be communicated? And if so, how can it be communicated? A straightforward answer is that the truth *can* be communicated, and that it is communicated by speaking the truth. “Having known and understood that directly by himself, the *tathāgata* declares and teaches it ...”²⁹ The use of terms may seem not a little circular, but the associations of the thick terminology and the very circularity reinforce the logic of ideas.

Truth, the true nature, is beyond words, beyond the work of thought. Ultimately it is inexpressible. How, then, can truth be taught? One answer to this dilemma is to posit two truths or levels of reality, worldly conventional truth, and ultimate truth. The former can be expressed, the latter is beyond words. “Without resorting to everyday usage, the ultimate meaning is not taught; without reaching the ultimate meaning, nirvana is not realized.”³⁰

²⁸ Hwang Soon-il/Covill 2010: 45–46.

²⁹ *Nidānasamṣyukta*, *sūtra* 17.4 *taṃ tathāgataḥ svayam abhijñāyābhisambuddhyākhyāti prajñāpayati...*

³⁰ Nāgārjuna’s famous maxim, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 24.10: *vyavahāram anāśritya paramārtho na deśyate, paramārtham anāgamya nirvāṇaṃ nādhigamyate.*

Royal endorsement, hierarchical templates

But on the highroad of ideas, truth is a product, and it needs endorsement. Textual tradition agrees that the Awakened One's first patron was King Bimbisāra at Rājagṛha, the capital of Magadha. A range of texts, especially *Vinayas*, promote this notion. The narrative of the Buddha's post-awakening meeting with Bimbisāra is central to the Mūlasarvāstivādin tradition, which places it in the "Chapter on the Division of the Order" (*Samghabhedavastu*) of the *Vinayavastu*. In *sūtra* literature, the narrative is incorporated, in virtually the same words, into the "Sūtra on the Four Assemblies" (*Catuṣpariṣatsūtra*) of the *Dirghāgama*, the "Sūtra on Bimbisāra's Reception of the Buddha" (*Bimbisārapratyudgamanasūtra*) of the *Madhyamāgama*, and the "Sūtra on the Going Forth" (*Abhinīṣkramaṇasūtra*), a long and apparently independent or extra-*Āgama sūtra*. The "Sūtra on Bimbisāra's Reception of the Buddha" circulated as one of a liturgical/didactic group of "Great Sūtras" (*mahāsūtra*), and the story is related in the narrative collection *Karmaśataka* (No. 122, *Khyab 'jug*),³¹ and Aśvaghoṣa's *Buddhacarita* (Chapter XVI) seems mainly to follow a Mūlasarvāstivādin tradition for this event.

The story might be described as the first charter or the blueprint of relations between the Buddha – and the Saṃgha – and royal or temporal power.³² In summary, it runs as follows:

Having heard that the Buddha had arrived, King Bimbisāra left Rājagṛha in a grand procession and went to see the Buddha at Yaṣṭivana in the outskirts of the city. When he came near, he alit from his carriage and continued on foot; as soon as he saw the Buddha from afar, he left his regalia behind, and went before the Blessed One. The king and the leading citizens of Rājagṛha – the brahmins and *grhapatis* – all assembled before the Buddha. At that time, the matted-hair ascetic Urubilvā Kāśyapa, who had recently been converted and had achieved the state of arhat, was seated beside the Buddha. The assembly could not decide: which one is Master, which one is disciple? In order to show who was

³¹ See Feer 1901: 479–482.

³² For texts and references see Skilling 1994: 58–245 and Skilling 1997: 267–333.

who, the Blessed One asked Kāśyapa to “amaze the assembly;” Kāśyapa did this by entering concentration, flying up into space, and performing miracles including the “miracle of fire and water,” the *yamaka-prātihārya*. After this, through a carefully crafted dialogue, the Buddha led King Bimbisāra to understand impermanence, suffering, non-self, karma and rebirth, conditioned arising and nirvana.

The discourse led the king, 80,000 deities, and many hundreds of thousands of brahmins and *grhapatis* to stream-entry. The king then took refuge in the Three Gems for the rest of his life, invited the Buddha and the community of monks to Rājagṛha, and offered to support them with requisites for the rest of his life. The Buddha accepted in silence.

Some time afterwards, the Buddha went to Rājagṛha, and King Bimbisāra invited him with the monks to a meal at the palace. After the meal, King Bimbisāra took a golden pitcher in hand, and offered the Kalandakanivāpa of the Veṇuvana to the Buddha. The Saṃgha was now a landed institution.

We cannot know exactly what happened – what protocols were acted out – when Bimbisāra met the Buddha. Are our texts *describing* an event, or are they *prescribing* a hierarchy, an etiquette? Whatever the case, they established a format, or fashioned a template, for the relations between the Buddha and rulers: a leading king of the period came publicly to the Buddha, accepted his teachings, offered support, and granted land. The hierarchy encoded by the gift of the Veṇuvana was successfully promoted and elaborated by Buddhist monastics across Asia for over two thousand years.

Aśoka: intersection of legend and history

According to general Buddhist tradition, Bimbisāra’s successor, his patricide son Ajātaśatru, first fell under the influence of Śākyamuni’s cousin Devadatta, but in the end he maintained his father’s patronage of the Buddha and his order. A later Pali tradition credits Ajātaśatru with the sponsorship of the first council – that is, he becomes a key figure in the lineage of textual authenticity. Although the detail of his patronage of the council does not seem to be substantiated in the texts of other schools, the figure of Ajātaśatru remains a potent source for moral, metaphysical, and narrative elaboration. Perhaps

the best examples of this are the long Mahāyāna *sūtra* “Dispelling Ajātaśatru’s Guilt” and the so-called **Amitāyurdhyānasūtra*, preserved only in Chinese.³³

After Ajātaśatru, the lines of patronage are unclear, until we arrive at the time of the Mauryan king, Aśoka. The *Buddhacarita* (XVIII, 59–61) – the oldest surviving biography of the Buddha – passes over the interval between the first council and the rise of Aśoka in silence. Aśoka needs no introduction.³⁴ The first historical evidence for the exaltation of the Buddha – we can even say of Buddhas, when we take the Niglīvā pillar inscription into account³⁵ – by a ruler is in the epigraphic and archaeological records of Aśoka’s rule. Textbooks old and new tell us that it was Aśoka who inspired the spread of Buddhism across India and beyond. Sircar writes that “Asoka was a patron of the Buddha’s doctrine and was responsible for raising Buddhism from the status of a local sectarian creed of eastern India to that of one of the principal religions of the world.”³⁶ Deeg cites Lamotte to similar effect: “Buddhism probably would have stayed an insignificant and unknown sect like many other communities had it not benefited from the support of the great emperor Aśoka.”³⁷

³³ For Sanskrit fragments of the former, see Harrison/Hartmann 2000 (with an Addendum, “Two additional fragments of the Ajātaśatru-kaukṛtyavinodanāsūtra,” pp. 301–302); Harrison/Hartmann 2002. For a translation of excerpts from the Tibetan version, see Harrison 2004. Two short passages are translated from the Chinese version in *Buddha-Dharma*, pp. 551–552 (Section 2) and 560 (Section 3). The latter – of debated, possibly Central Asian origins – is a foundational text of the “Pure Land” tradition in East Asia. See most recently Ducor and Loveday 2011 and Radich 2011. Radich discusses the “Contemplation Sūtra” and another important source for “Ajātaśatru studies,” the Mahāyāna *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*.

³⁴ A recent collection of essays on “Aśokan studies” is Olivelle 2009b. For Aśoka’s material traces, see Harry Falk’s superb *Aśokan Sites and Artefacts* (2006).

³⁵ See Falk 2006: 187–189.

³⁶ Sircar 1998: 9.

³⁷ Deeg 2009: 110.

Despite the conviction of these and other authorities, one wonders: most other contemporary religious groups died out with their teachers, but Buddhism not only survived, but spread across northern India for a century or more before Aśoka arrived on the scene. By the time of Aśoka, on the evidence of his edicts alone, the Saṃgha was already established beyond the Magadhan heartland in western India (Bairāṭ) and even southern India (Amarāvātī, Sannati). Can we conclude that it was Aśoka who introduced the Dharma to these places? What distinguished Buddhism? What gave Buddhism its resilience – was it simply external, institutional and social factors? Is it reasonable, or logical, to attribute the agency exclusively to Aśoka? Might it not owe anything to the charisma and vision of the Buddha and his immediate disciples and their successors?

Aśoka's relation to Buddhism as an historical individual is read from his edicts; his role as exemplar is idealized in sermons and legends. Inscriptions and narratives both transmit hierarchical models – not only the ethical system and social guidelines that Aśoka sought to inculcate, but also a model in which Aśoka subordinates himself to the Buddha. Aśoka declares himself to be a lay-follower (*upāsaka*) but his relations with the Saṃgha are ambivalent. On the one hand, he addresses the Saṃgha with classical – one might say canonical – formulas of respect; on the other, in the “schism” and other edicts he issues orders to the Saṃgha.

Aśoka's endorsement of the Buddha through his pilgrimages, his erection of pillars at sites associated with the Buddha and the Buddhas, and with the Buddhist Saṃgha, and his direct patronage of the Buddhist monastic order, are public documents. They are the earliest written documents in the archives of Indian history. The earliest surviving external validation of the words of the Buddha is an Aśokan record, the celebrated Bairāṭ-Calcutta (or Bhābrā) edict:

Priyadarśī, King of Magadha, venerates the Saṃgha and enquires after their health and comfort. Known to you, sirs, is the extent of my reverence for and faith in the Awakened One, the Dharma, and the Saṃgha. Whatever, sirs, has been spoken by the Blessed One, the Awakened

One – all that is well spoken.³⁸ With the wish that the Saddharma may last long, it is suitable for me to say, These, sirs, are the “turns of the Dharma” (*dhamma-paliyāya* = Pali *dhamma-pariyāya* = Skt. *dharma-paryāya* ... [here follows a list of seven titles]³⁹ ... which were spoken by the Awakened One, the Blessed One. It is my desire, sirs, that many monks and nuns regularly listen to these “turns of the Dharma” and memorize them. Male and female lay disciples should do the same. I have ordered this edict to be inscribed, sirs, in order that they may know what I intend.⁴⁰

The edict shares several expressions with Buddhist texts – the polite address concerning good health, the terms *gālava* (Pali *gārava*, San-

³⁸ The multivalent concept of *subhāṣita* is immensely important. It is discussed in the *Vyākhyāyukti* (260–262) and elaborated by Bu ston (Obermiller 1931: 25–30).

³⁹ For the list of titles, some of which are still not conclusively identified, see Lamotte 1967: 256–259. For the possibility that the last, the “sermon to Rāhula on the subject of false speech,” could be related to certain verses transmitted in (Mūla-)Sarvāstivādin versions of the **Rāhula-sūtra*, but not included in the Pali – the *Ambalaṭṭhika-rāhulovāda* or *Cūḷa-rāhulovāda* (*Majjhima-nikāya* 61) – , see Skilling 1996. For further comparative details of the *sutta* in general, see Anālayo 2011a: I 341–346.

⁴⁰ Text from Bloch 1950: 154–155: *priyadassi lājā māgadhe saṃghaṃ abhivādetūnaṃ āhā appābādhattaṃ ca phāsuvihālattaṃ cā.⁽¹⁾ vidite ve bhaṃte āvatake hamā buddhassi dhammassi saṃghassi ti gālave ca prasāde ca. e keci bhaṃte bhagavatā buddhena bhāsite savve se subhāsite vā. e cu kho bhaṃte hamiyāye disseyā hevaṃ saddhamme cilaṭṭhitike hossatī ti alahāmi hakaṃ taṃ vattave. imāni bhaṃte dhammapaliyāyāni vinayasamukkasā aliyavasāṇi anāgatabhayāni munigāthā moneyyasūtte upatissapasine e cā lāghulovāde musāvādaṃ adhigicya bhagavatā buddhena bhāsite, etāni dhammapaliyāyāni icchāmi kiṃti bahuke bhikkhupāye cā bhikkhuniye cā abhikkhinaṃ suneyu cā upadhāleyū cā. hevaṃmevā upāsakā cā upāsikā cā. etenā bhaṃte imaṃ likhāpayāmi abhipretaṃ⁽²⁾ me jānaṃtū ti.*

⁽¹⁾*appābādhattaṃ ca phāsuvihālattaṃ*: for cognate terms and phrases in Pali see CPD I, p. 317; DOP I, p. 176; ⁽²⁾*Abhipretaṃ* (here translated “what I intend”): cp. Pali *adhippeta*, CPD I, p. 135; DOP I, p. 92.

Translation mine; for another translation, see Nikam/McKeon 1978: 66–67. For the site and a bibliography see Falk 2006: 106–108.

skrit *gaurava*) and *prasāda* (Pali *pasāda*).⁴¹ I assume that these expressions were in vogue in northern India at the time, and that they were preserved and perpetuated by Buddhist literature. More significant is the fact that the edict gives the first epigraphic references to the Triple Gem – Buddha, Dharma, Saṃgha –, the four assemblies – monks, nuns, laymen, laywomen – and the term *dhammapaliyāya* (Pali *dhammapariyāya*, Sanskrit *dharmaparyāya*). The latter, on internal textual evidence, was the common word for “discourse” before it was supplanted by *sutta/sūtra*. The pairing of *bhagavat* and *buddha* is stock, for example in the Pali *Vinaya*.⁴² Concepts that I find especially significant are the concern that the Saddharma endure – a perpetual concern expressed to this day in Buddhist liturgy and piety, for example in the Pali phrase, *ciraṃ tiṭṭhatu buddhasāsana* – with idea of “the future threats” (to the Sāsana; a technical term or key phrase that runs throughout Buddhist texts), the recommendation that the four assemblies repeatedly listen to and memorize texts, and the use of *abhipreta*, which brings to mind *abhiprāya*, a key interpretative tool in later hermeneutics and apologetics.

Teacher of kings, gods and humankind: the Buddha in early art

The labelled depictions of Pasenadi and Ajātaśatru paying homage to the Buddha (“Ajātasatu venerates the Blessed One”) at Bharhut are early public visual “memories” of royal patrons of the Master.⁴³ There is no labelled depiction of Aśoka at Bharhut, and the only certain depiction of the king (*rāya asoka*) elsewhere is that on a slab from the great *caitya* at Kanaganahalli in Karnataka.⁴⁴ The Śuṅga-period inscriptions of “Āyā Kuramgi” and the queens of kings Imḍāgimitra and Brahmamitra on the railing pillars at Bodh Gaya are early relics

⁴¹ On *gaurava* and the notion of “prestige,” see von Hinüber 2009: 34–36.

⁴² *Vinaya Mahāvagga* in *Vinaya* I, 1.5: *tena samayena buddho bhagavā...*

⁴³ Lüders 1998, B39 (751): *rājā pasenaji kosalo*; B40 (774): *a[jā]tasat[u] bhagavato vaṃdate*.

⁴⁴ Figures often identified as Aśoka on the Sanchi gateways have been otherwise interpreted by Schlingloff and other authorities.

of royal patronage at the seat of awakening itself.⁴⁵ At the recently excavated but not yet published site in Karnataka, Kanaganahalli, “rājas are depicted everywhere,” including several Sātavāhana kings identified by inscriptions.⁴⁶ In addition to the already famous depiction of Aśoka, there are at least five labelled “portraits” of kings of the Sātavāhana dynasty, not to speak of Cakravartins, Nāgarājas, and so on.

The Buddha was superior to kings, and also to spirits and gods; he was *devātideva*, the “god beyond the gods.” At Bharhut we see him venerated by serpent-deities (“The *nāga*-king Erapato venerates the Blessed One”),⁴⁷ and we see the deities in Indra’s heaven celebrating a festival for his turban-relic.⁴⁸ Early Indian Buddhist art encodes the hierarchies of the Blessed One’s authority over gods and men; it is a pageant of the glory of the Buddha. The early stūpas lay out circles of sacred and narrative space with the Buddha – his living relics – in the centre, initiating a structure that became increasingly intricate as the hierarchies of the maṇḍala developed, enlisting new deities and new ideas, and catering to new ritual programmes.

The Buddha’s great departure from the palace is a defining event in his quest for truth, recounted in literature and celebrated in art to the present day. The young prince left the palace behind; he rejected the Dharma of the householder (*grhasthadharma*) and the throne that awaited him.⁴⁹ But he could not leave behind his royal

⁴⁵ For Āyā Kuramṅī see references in Tsukamoto 1996: I, Bodh-Gaya 3, 7, 8, 12, 13; Coomaraswamy 1935: 58–61; Barua 2004. For the date, see Marshall in Rapson 1922: 625–627 and Chanda 2002: 98–99. For the many complications in the interpretation of these inscriptions, see Bhandare 2006.

⁴⁶ Monika Zin, personal communication, December 2010. These are discussed in Zin 2012.

⁴⁷ Lüders 1998, B37 (753): *erapato nāgarājā bhagavato vadate*.

⁴⁸ Lüders 1998, B21 (775): *sudhammā devasabhā bhagavato cūḍāmaho...* The Sudharmā Assembly-hall of the Gods: the festival of the Blessed One’s top-knot.

⁴⁹ See *Buddhacarita* 5:32–33 (Olivelle 2008: 136–137).

or imperial Cakravartin nature – this was his destiny – and he was not allowed to shed his royal status. He abandoned his regalia on the banks of the Nairañjanā River, but it returned to him – he became the King of the Dharma, and returned to sit in majesty on opulent thrones wearing a magnificent crown. The ideal of the Buddha as Dharmarāja and Cakravartin resounded powerfully across Asia and across the centuries.

Regardless of the historical details, the value of which is by nature contentious, the point is that the texts establish hierarchical paradigms, in which kings, brahmins, *grhapatis*, and *śreṣṭhins* are all subordinate to the Buddha and the Saṃgha. The texts hold up role models and transmit ideal relationships.⁵⁰

The roles continued to delineate the ecologies of exchange between Dharma masters and rulers in Central and East Asia, through the periods of Mongolian, Manchu, and Han political power in China into the Qing and Republican eras. The “five regalia” (*pañcakakudhabhaṇḍa*: the technical term belongs to the *Jātaka* commentary) are part of the regalia of Siam, used in royal consecrations; they are defined and illustrated in the standard Thai language dictionary of the Royal Institute to this day. Monasteries have a special chamber accessible from the perimeter wall where the king, after alighting from a palanquin, changes his royal costume into that of a lay follower. Two millennia of political protocol and theater define the architecture of ritual.

Authority and the aesthetics of worship

What is authority? Authority functions through relationship, specifically, the relationship between the follower and the Buddha. The basic relationship – for peasant and *paṇḍita*, for merchant and monarch – is refuge (*śaraṇa*). People, and beings, take refuge in the Buddha; this brings security and happiness. The Buddha is Śāstrī, teacher of gods and men. The Buddha is not a distant, abstract being, he is “our Buddha” (*amhākaṃ buddha*) – the particular Buddha of a commu-

⁵⁰ Relations with rulers are also seen in epistles sent by monk-scholars to kings, for which see Hahn 2007 and Hahn/Dietz 2008.

nity or individual. The relationship of the devotee to the Buddha is expressed through body, speech, and mind in liturgy, which embeds norms and ideals and impregnates expectations, and through the aesthetics of worship – images, shrines, offerings, lamps, incense, settings. In liturgy and narrative, recurrent terms for authority include *ānubhāva* and *tejas* – aspects of a Buddha’s power which vouchsafe his authority in narrative and in life. The literature of liturgy elaborates on this, from Upāli’s verses⁵¹ and Tsongkhapa’s hymns to the Pali hymns of King Rama IV.

The efficacy of confession is the validation of Buddhas as witnesses:

Before those Buddhas who have become knowledge (*jñānabhūta*), who have become sight (*cakṣubhūta*), who have become witnesses (*sākṣibhūta*), who have become authorities (*pramāṇabhūta*), who know and who see, I confess all of my karmic obstacles – I lay them bare, I do not hide them, I do not cover them up, and in future I will restrain myself.⁵²

What the Buddha says must be true, but a problem arises: how can we know what the Buddha said? What is *Buddhavaṇṇa*?⁵³ The an-

⁵¹ See *Upālisutta*, *Majjhimanikāya* No. 56; Sanskrit version in Waldschmidt 1979; for the Chinese version see Minh Chau 1991: 188–191, 279–289. For details of Sanskrit and other parallels see Anālayo 2011a: I 320–333.

⁵² *Vinayavinīścayopālipariṇeṣa* 35.32–36.22: *tatsarvaṃ karmāvaraṇaṃ teṣāṃ buddhānāṃ bhagavatāṃ jñānabhūtānāṃ cakṣubhūtānāṃ sākṣibhūtānāṃ pramāṇabhūtānāṃ jānatāṃ paśyatāṃ agrataḥ pratideśayāmy āviṣkaromi na pratichchādayāmy āyatyāṃ saṃvaram āpadye*.

⁵³ The compound *buddhavaṇṇa* is used by the Buddha himself, at least in response to the two monks, the “Yamēḷutekula brothers,” according to the *Cullavagga*: *Vinaya* II, p. 139.1 foll. For a recent contribution to the subject of this exchange, the famous or infamous “*buddhavaṇṇaṃ chandaso āropema*” proposal, see Levman 2009. The term *buddhavaṇṇa* is infrequent in early Pali texts: it occurs one other place in the *Vinaya* (IV, p. 54.25, prose) and once in verse in the *Suttanipāta* (v. 202a = *Uragavagga*, *Vijayasutta*, v. 10a). It does not occur in the four *Nikāyas*. I doubt that, except *perhaps* in the *Cullavagga*, the word has the global acceptation that it developed in later centuries, with the exception of the *Saññojana-sutta* of the *Citta-saṃyutta*, in which a group of senior

swer is not as easy as it might seem. Modern scholarship has generally been convinced that there was, has been, and is, a *canon*, but this idea warrants careful scrutiny in the light of traditional Buddhist and Indian understandings of text and context, rather than in the certainties of positivism or the uncertainties of post-modernity. Early definitions of the Buddha's teaching – for example, those given in the *Vinayas* – were flexible,⁵⁴ but the question was not one of canonicities – the inclusion or the exclusion of fixed texts – so much as transmission and authority of the word(s) of the Buddha(s),⁵⁵ and the elaboration of his or their thought(s). If useful at all, the word “canon” should be used in the plural.

An intriguing record of an “official” policy that attempts to address this problem – official insofar as it was sanctioned by the monastic order – is the famous passage on the four *mahāpadeśas*. Embedded in the various versions of the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, it is evidently a record from an early oral period when the Saṃgha was relatively undivided and not especially widely dispersed. The *mahāpadeśa* guidelines are flexible, and they do not categorically reject proposed teachings.⁵⁶

Very different is the approach to the question of authenticity seen in some Mahāyāna *sūtras*, such as the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* or the *Samdhinirmocana*,⁵⁷ or in Abhidharma literature. Something

monks praise the householder Citta, saying, “It is a gain for you, Gahapati, it is a good gain for you, that the eye of wisdom functions for you with regard to the profound teaching of the Buddha” (*Samyuttanikāya, Saḷāyatanavaggo* 349,16: *lābhā te gahapati, suladdhaṃ te gahapati, yasse te gambhīre buddhavadāne paññācakkhu kamatī ti*; PTS IV, p. 283.18 reads *lābhā ti*).

⁵⁴ But constricted by the Pali commentary: see Skilling 2010: 22–23, 32.

⁵⁵ The *Mahāvadāna*/*Mahāpadāna sūtras* cite the verses of previous Buddhas.

⁵⁶ See most recently Yang-gyu An 2002: 55–66, with reference to earlier studies. For an English translation of the Pali commentary, see Yang-gyu An 2003: 114–121.

⁵⁷ Tola/Dragonetti 1997.

has changed. Here the response to ideas that challenge a perceived status quo is categorical (*ekāṃśena*) rejection as insinuations of Māra. Questions and challenges are *mārabhāṣita*, “spoken by Māra” – a phrase that evokes direct contrast and opposition to *buddhabhāṣita*, “spoken by the Buddha or by the Buddhas.” These are potent expressions; the one drives the opponent beyond the arena of debate. An early phrase is *sarva-paravādi-nigrahaṇa*, crushing all opponents,⁵⁸ contrasted with another authenticating phrase that is frequent in *dhāraṇī* literature, *sarvabuddhabhāṣita*, “spoken by all the Buddhas.” Was it the same mentality, the same ideological milieu, that promoted the idea of *apavāda*, or rejection of the Saddharma – the equation of Saddharma with Mahāyāna ideas and literature, and the rejection of Mahāyāna with the rejection of the Saddharma? Was it at the same time that the idea of *apavāda* began to be promoted with the thrust that to question the authenticity of Mahāyāna *sūtras* is to reject and slander the Saddharma itself? These reactions continually draw on established themes and tropes but put them to new purposes, to the defense of new ideologies and practices and their proponents and adherents. The new *sūtras* promote their own authority against all others.

Among the more confrontational is the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*. In Chapter 3, for example, Śāriputra relates how he struggled with doubt, wondering whether the *sūtra* was being taught by Māra in disguise:

At first, when I heard the Buddha’s preaching,
there was great astonishment and doubt in my mind.
Is this not a devil pretending to be the Buddha,
trying to vex and confuse my mind?⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Which already becomes a mantra in the *Druma-kinnara-rāja-paripṛcchā-sūtra*; see Harrison 1992: 296.

⁵⁹ *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* 3:15: *balavac ca āsīn mama chambhitatvaṃ prathamam giram śrutva vināyakasya; mā haiva māro sa bhaved viheṭhako abhinirmīnitvā bhuvi buddhaveṣam*. Translation (from the Chinese of Kumārajīva) Watson 2009: 85. Cp. Burnouf 1989: 40.

This trend of apologetics for the authority of the Mahāyāna does not rely on logical argument, but rather defines the Mahāyāna as the Saddharma, and any opposition as Māra or worse.⁶⁰ Evolving ideologies call for corresponding redefinitions of the “other(s),” the re-mapping and rebuttressing of the frontiers of belonging. Emerging texts recycle key words and phrases, striving to renegotiate fundamental questions of authority. But the other(s) are always moving targets. Was *pramāṇa* a return to the basics, to the epistemology of the *skandha-dhātu-āyatana*, the earliest curriculum of ideas?

I have mentioned only some of the strategies of authentication. Other defences of the Mahāyāna cite scripture and use logical arguments, as may be seen in the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, in Vasubandhu’s *Vyākhyāyukti*, and in Bhāviveka’s *Tarkajvālā*. The denigration of the opposition as a “demonic” Māra is a powerful device that runs through the *sūtra* literature; as a form of insinuation, it needs no logical defense.

The long tongue of truth

We move now from the authority of the *pramāṇapuruṣa* to the authority of the *mahāpuruṣa*, without suggesting that there is any necessary contradiction or tension between the terms. The authority of the Buddha is established physically by the thirty-two marks of the *mahāpuruṣa*, the “great man.” From infancy, his extraordinary bodily features are sufficient to mark him as a man of destiny:

The signs on the body of this illustrious one,
with the brilliance of gold, the radiance of a lamp,
foretell that he’ll be either an Awakened Seer,
or a World Conqueror on the earth among men.⁶¹

Among the thirty-two marks, there is one that directly concerns truth and authority: the Buddha has an exceptional, stupendous, and

⁶⁰ See Jaini 2002.

⁶¹ *Buddhacarita* 1: 34. Translation Olivelle 2008: 13. For the significance of the signs, see Olivelle’s introduction, pp. xxviii–xxxi.

spectacular tongue.⁶² Together with the sheathed male organ, the tongue is one of the two marks that is not normally visible. The long “Perfection of Wisdom” describes the mark as follows:

His tongue is long, i.e. when he desires to do so he touches and strokes with his tongue the apertures of his two ears, and he covers with his tongue the apertures of his two eyes and his entire face up to his hairs.⁶³

The Buddha displayed his tongue under special circumstances, in order to convince others that he was indeed a “great man.” Pali texts record at least three occasions on which the Buddha exhibited the two

⁶² For an early note, see Burnouf 1989: 567. See also Wimalaratana, n.d., pp. 120–121. Like the other marks, the long tongue is a product of aeons of practice aiming towards Buddhahood. Nāgārjuna attributes the long tongue – together with the *brahmasvara* – to speaking true and soft words (Hopkins 1998, v. 191, tr. p. 119, Tib. [unpaginated], *tshig ni bden la ’jam po dag, yun ring dus su brjod pa yis, mi bdag ljags ni ring ba dang, tshangs pa’i dbyangs su ’gyur ba lags*.) There are several variant versions of the verse; see for example *Ratnāvalī* 2:90: *tshig ni bden pa ’jam po dag, yun rings dus su brjod pa yis, mi yi dbang po ljags yangs shing, tshangs pa yi ni dbyangs ldan ’gyur*. The verse is cited in the biography of Dharmasvāmin; see Roerich 1959: 3.10, tr., p. 49: “In conformity with these words, the Dharmasvāmin was born with a large and nimble tongue, endowed with the voice of Brahmā” According to the *Artha-viniścaya-dharmaparyāya* (59.3), the tongue results from adhering to true speech in the past (*pūrve satyavacanasamrakṣaṇatayā nirvṛttam*). Cf. further *Nibandhana* 297.

⁶³ *Aṣṭadaśasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā*_{Conze} 51.4: *prabhūtajihva sa bhagavān. tatreyam prabhūtajihvatā. yadā ākāṃkṣati jihvāyobhe karṇe srotasi parāṃkṣati samparāṃkṣti: ubhe cakṣuḥ srotasi sarvaṅkakeśaparyantaṃ mukhamaṇḍalaṃ jihvāyā ācchādayati*. Translation Conze 1974: 178 = Conze 1984: 585. In this list this is mark No. 27. See also *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā*_{Kimura} 2006: 61.28, 62.24, 64.6, 66.14 = *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā*_{Vajracharya} 2008: 1225.1, 1226.4, 1227.20, 1230.11 = Conze 1984: 659 (24), 661 (24), (25), 663 (49), (50), (51). For Tibetan see *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā*, Otani Cat. No. 5188, Repr. Vol. No. 90, *sher phyin, ca*, 279a7; 280a4, 281a6, 283a8. See also the “*Bṛhaṭṭikā*” (‘*Phags pa shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa ’bum pa dang nyi khri lnga stong pa dang khri brgyad stong pa’i rgya cher bshad pa*, Otani Cat. No. 5206, Repr. Vol. No. 93, *sher phyin, pha*, 306a3).

marks to brahmins: to Brahmāyu, to Sela,⁶⁴ and to Pokkharasādi.⁶⁵ Brahmāyu and Pokkharasādi are two of six Vedic masters listed in the *Samghabhedavastu*,⁶⁶ and others (Kūṭatāndya, Śroṇatāndya, Lohitya) lend their names to *sūtras* in the *Ārghyagāma*. There must be some reason for the focus on brahmins, for the redaction of long and well-crafted narratives designed to demonstrate the superiority of the Buddha over brahmins – can it be a response to ideological and social rivalries in Greater Magadha at the time of redaction?

In the first case, Brahmāyu went to see the Buddha and verified thirty of the features. At first he saw:

[28] ... the thirty-two marks of a Great Man on the Blessed One's body, except two; he was doubtful about two of the marks, and he could not decide and make up his mind about them: about the male organ being enclosed in a sheath and about the largeness of his tongue.

[29] The brahmin Brahmāyu addressed the Blessed One in stanzas:

The two-and-thirty marks I learned
That are the signs of a Great Man –
I still do not see two of these

⁶⁴ *Brahmāyusutta*, *Majjhimanikāya* No. 91; *Selasutta*, *Majjhimanikāya* No. 92 and *Suttanipāta*, *Mahāvagga*, pp. 102–114; *Ambaṭṭhasutta*, *Dīghanikāya* No. 3. I refer to the Pali versions and use the Pali forms as a convenience. There are Sanskrit fragments and Chinese and Tibetan translations of the *sūtras*. For a comparison of the Pali *Brahmāyusutta* with the *Fanmo jing*, No. 161 in the Chinese *Madhyamāgama*, see Minh Chau 1991: 306–312; for the Chinese *Ekottarikāgama* version, see Anālayo 2011b.

⁶⁵ *Ambaṭṭhasutta*, *Dīghanikāya* No. 3: the two complete versions that are preserved in the Tibetan translations of the “Mūlasarvāstivādin Vinaya” (*Bhaiṣajyavastu* and *Kṣudrakavastu*) are edited together with extensive Sanskrit from the Gilgit *Ārghyagāma* in Melzer 2006.

⁶⁶ *Samghabhedavastu* 39.2: *ṣaḍ ānuśravikāḥ katame? tadyathā kūṭatāndyo brāhmaṇaḥ, śroṇatāndyo brāhmaṇaḥ, cogī brāhmaṇaḥ, brahmāyur brāhmaṇaḥ, puṣkarasārī brāhmaṇaḥ, lohityaś ca brāhmaṇaḥ*. Otani Cat. No. 1030, Otani Repr. Vol. 42, 'dul ba, nge, 260a8: *rjes su sgrogs pa drug gang zhe na? 'di lta ste, bram ze rgyus rgyal dang, bram ze gnas rdeg dang, bram ze bzang ldan dang, bram ze tshangs pa'i tshe dang, bram ze pad ma'i snying po dang, bram ze dmar po'o*. I am guessing at the meaning of the rare word *ānuśravika* (Tib. *rjes su sgrogs pa*).

Upon your body, Gotama ...
 Though called by a word of feminine gender,
 Perhaps your tongue is a manly one?
 Perhaps your tongue is large as well,
 According to what we have been taught?
 Please put it out a little bit
 And so, O Seer, cure our doubt ...

[30] Then it occurred to the Blessed One: "This brahmin ... and about the largeness of the tongue."

Then the Blessed One worked such a feat of supernormal power that the brahmin Brahmāyu saw the Blessed One's male organ enclosed in a sheath. Next the Blessed One extruded his tongue, and he repeatedly touched both ear holes and both nostrils, and he covered the whole of his forehead with his tongue.

[31] Then the Blessed One spoke these stanzas in reply to the Brahmin Brahmāyu:

The two-and-thirty marks you learned
 That are the signs of a Great Man –
 All on my body can be found:
 So, brahmin, doubt no more on that.
 What must be known is directly known,
 What must be developed has been developed,
 What must be abandoned has been abandoned,
 Therefore, brahmin, I am a Buddha.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ *Majjhimanikāya* II, p. 143.1–31: *addasā kho brāhmāyu brāhmaṇo bhagavato kāye dvattiṃsa mahāpurisalakkhaṇāni yebhuyyena ṭhapetvā dve dvīsu mahāpurisalakkhaṇesu kaṅkhati vicikicchati nādhimuccati na sampasīdati, – kosohite ca vatthaguyhe pahūtajihvatāya ca. atha kho brahmāyu brāhmaṇo bhagavantaṃ gāthāhi ajjhabhāsi : – ye 'me dvattiṃsāti sutā mahāpurisalakkhaṇā, duve tesam na passāmi bho kāsmaṇṇ, gotama ... nārīsaḥ nāma savhaya? kacci jivhā narassikā? kacci pahūtajivho si? yathā taṃ jāniyāmaṇe. ninnāmay' etaṃ tanukaṃ, kaṅkhaṃ vinaya no, iṣe ... atha kho bhagavato etad ahoṣi ... ayaṃ ... brāhmaṇo ... pahūtajihvatāya cāti. atha kho bhagavā tathārūpaṃ iddhābhisamkhāraṃ abhisamkhāsi yathā addasā brahmāyu brāhmaṇo bhagavato kosohitaṃ vatthaguyhaṃ. atha kho bhagavā jivhaṃ ninnāmetvā ubho pi kaṇṇasotāni anumasi paṭimasi, ubho pi nāsikāsotāni anumasi paṭimasi, kevalakam pi nalāṭamaṇḍalaṃ jivhāya pacchādesi. atha kho bhagavā brahmāyuaṃ brāhmaṇaṃ gāthāhi paccabhāsi: ye te dvattiṃsāti sutā mahāpurisalakkhaṇā, sabbe te mama*

After a further exchange of verses,

[34] When this was said, the brahmin Brahmāyu rose from his seat, and after arranging his upper robe on one shoulder, he prostrated himself with his head at the Blessed One's feet, and he covered the Blessed One's feet with kisses and carressed them with his hands, pronouncing his name: "I am the brahmin Brahmāyu, Master Gotama; I am the brahmin Brahmāyu, Master Gotama."

[35] Those in the assembly wondered and marvelled, and they said, "It is wonderful, sirs, it is marvellous, what great power and great might the recluse Gotama has, for the well-known and famous brahmin Brahmāyu to make such a display of humility."⁶⁸

After taking his seat and receiving progressive instruction (*anupubbikathā*) from the Buddha, Brahmāyu realizes stream-entry. He takes refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṃgha, and he declares himself a lay follower who has gone to the Buddha for refuge for life. He invites the Buddha and the monks for a meal the next day. Not long afterwards, Brahmāyu dies. When asked by the monks, the Blessed One explains that Brahmāyu "has reappeared spontaneously [in the Pure Abodes], and will there attain final Nibbāna, without ever returning to this world."⁶⁹

kāyasmim; mā te kaṅkhāhu, brāhmaṇa. abhiññeyyaṃ abhiññātaṃ bhāvetabbañ ca bhāvitam, pahātabbaṃ pahīnam me; tasmā buddho 'smi brāhmaṇa. Translation MLDB, p. 751–752. See MLDB, p. 1298, n. 862. For other occurrences of the verses see Skilling/Harrison 2005.

⁶⁸ *Majjhimanikāya* II, p. 144.23–31: *evaṃ vutte brahmāyu brāhmaṇo utthāy' āsanā ekaṃsaṃ uttarāsaṅgaṃ karitvā bhagavato pādesu sirasā nipatitvā bhagavato pādāni mukhena ca paricumbati paṇihi ca parisambāhati nāmañ ca sāveti: – brahmāyevāhaṃ, bho gotama, brāhmaṇo ti. atha kho sā parisā acchariyabbhutacittajātā ahoṣi: acchariyaṃ vata bho, abbhutaṃ vata bho; samaṇassa mahiddhikatā mahānubhāvatā; yatra hi nāmāyaṃ brahmāyu brāhmaṇo ñāto yasassī evarūpaṃ paramanipaccakāraṃ karissatīti.* Translation MLDB, p. 753.

⁶⁹ *Majjhimanikāya* II, p. 146.17–18: *opapātiko hoti tatthaparinibbāyī anā-vattidhammo tasmā lokā ti.* Translation MLDB, p. 754.

The progression of events in the *Selasutta* is similar.⁷⁰ After the Buddha displays his male organ enclosed in a sheath and then his tongue, the brahmin Sela thinks,

[15] ... “The recluse Gotama is endowed with the thirty-two marks of a Great Man; they are complete, not incomplete. But I do not know whether he is a Buddha or not. However, I have heard from elder aged brahmins who speak according to the lineage of teachers that those who are the Accomplished Ones, Fully Enlightened Ones, reveal themselves as such when their praise is spoken. Suppose I extol the recluse Gotama to his face with fitting stanzas.”⁷¹

Sela asks why the Buddha is content to be a recluse, when he deserves to be a king. The Blessed One replies:

[17] “I am already a king, O Sela,”
the Blessed One replied.
“I am supreme king of the Dhamma,
I make the Wheel of Dhamma revolve,
The wheel that none can stop.”⁷²

When he has been convinced that Gotama is a Buddha, Sela announces to his three hundred pupils that he will go forth under him. His disciples follow suit; three hundred brahmins become monks under the Buddha.

The *Brahmāyusutta* and its Chinese *Madhyamāgama* counterpart are both set in Videha; the aged brahmin Brahmāyu lives in Mithilā.⁷³

⁷⁰ MLDB, pp. 758–761, §§15–24.

⁷¹ *Suttanipāta*, p. 108.5–12: *samannāgato kho samaṇo gotamo dvattiṃ-samahāpurisalakkhaṇehi paripuṇṇehi no aparipuṇṇehi, no ca kho naṃ jānāmi ‘buddho vā no vā.’ suttaṃ kho pana metaṃ brāhmaṇānaṃ vuddhānaṃ mahallakānaṃ ācariyapācariyānaṃ bhāsamānānaṃ: ‘ye te bhavanti arahanto sammāsambuddhā, te sake vaṇṇe bhañṇamāne attānaṃ pātukarontī’ti, yaṃ nūnāhaṃ samaṇaṃ gotamaṃ sammukhā sārūppāhi gāthāhi abhitthaveyyaṃ ti.* Translation MLDB, p. 758.

⁷² *Suttanipāta*, p. 109.3–7 (v.554): *rājāhamasmi, selātibhagavā, dhammarājā anuttaro, dhammena cakkam vattemi, cakkam appativattiyaṃ.* Translation MLDB, p. 759.

⁷³ For Sanskrit fragments from the Turfan collections, see references at

The *Selasutta* opens in Aṅguttarāpa; the matted-hair ascetic Keṇiya goes to see the Buddha and invites him together with the Saṃgha, on this occasion 1250 monks, to a meal.⁷⁴ When the Buddha accepts, Keṇiya returns to his hermitage (*assama*, *āśrama*) and orders preparations for the morrow's great event. At that time, the brahmin Sela is staying at Āpaṇa.⁷⁵ Both Brahmāyu and Sela are described as follows:

He was a master of the Three Vedas with their vocabularies, liturgy, phonology, and etymology, and the histories as a fifth; skilled in philology and grammar, he was fully versed in natural philosophy and the marks of a Great Man.⁷⁶

In addition, Sela “was teaching the recitation of hymns to three hundred brahmin students,”⁷⁷ who all follow their teacher to become monks at the end of the Pali version.

Anālayo 2011a: II 527 n. 2. Nattier (2008: 129–130) includes the independent translation *Fanmoyu jing* (T. 76) among the authentic texts attributed to Zhi Qian.

⁷⁴ The social significance of the conversion of matted-hair ascetics (*jaṭila*) in the formative period of Buddhist texts is evident from the importance accorded to the conversion of the *jaṭilas* Urubilvā Kāśyapa, his brothers, and their followers.

⁷⁵ According to DPPN I, p. 22, Aṅguttarāpa is a country north of the river Mahī. The village Āpaṇa is the site of several *suttas* including the *Paṭṭaliya* and the *Laṭukikopama* (see DPPN I p. 277). A birch-bark fragment in the Schøyen collection, 2381/188, has a stock formula referring to *aṃguttarāṇāṃ āpaṇo nigamo*. The Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya* version of *Selasutta* agrees on the location with the Pali, but the *Ekottarikāgama* and (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya* versions take place at Rājagṛha and Udumā, respectively (Anālayo 2011a: II 545 nn. 85, 86).

⁷⁶ *Suttanipāta*, p. 105.1–3: *tiṇṇaṃ vedānaṃ pāragū sanighaṇḍukeṭubhānaṃ sākkharappabhedānaṃ itihāsapañcamānaṃ padako veyyākaraṇo lokāyatamahāpurisalakkhaṇesu anavayo...* Translation MLDB, p. 756. For this stock description, see MLDB, p. 1293, n. 850.

⁷⁷ *Suttanipāta*, p. 105.3–4: *...tīṇi māṇavakasatāni mante vāceti*. Translation MLDB, p. 756.

Both *suttas* include the verses, “What must be known is directly known ... Therefore, brahmin, I am a Buddha.” The narrative progresses through the confirmation of the marks and the Buddha’s status as Mahāpuruṣa to the realization that he is a Buddha. Further to this, Sela emphasizes the Buddha’s royal potential, the link between marks and the Cakravartin. In response, the Buddha explains how he is already a king of the Dharma.

The *Selasutta* is one of only two *suttas* which is included in both *Suttanipāṭa* and *Majjhimanikāya* (the other is *Vāseṭṭhasutta* (MN 98 and *Suttanipāṭa* 594ff). The verse can possibly bring us back to Aśoka: one of the titles, the *dharmapāliya* recommended by Aśoka, is the *Śailagāthā*. In addition, the *Śailagāthā* is regularly included among the titles that, with other “poésies psalmodiées,” are incorporated into narratives.⁷⁸ Lamotte describes them as “compositions anciennes d’une haute valeur poétique, utilisant la stance comme moyen d’expression.” Is it possible that the *sutta* is included in the *Suttanipāṭa* in recognition of its ancient “Kṣudraka” status, to keep it together with other texts in the group like *Pārāyaṇa*, *Arthavargīya*, and *Munigāthā*?

These narratives reflect a phase in the early social context of Buddhism, a period in which there was a need to demonstrate the superiority of the Buddha vis à vis the brahmins and other religious systems.⁷⁹ Several long *sūtras* describe “exemplary encounters” in which a leading brahmin goes to see the Buddha, despite being discouraged by his peers. The narrative device of the verification of the two marks occurs in dialogues with brahmins, for – at least according to early Buddhist texts – it is the brahmins who transmit and verify the lore connected with the great man: “M[ajjhima] A[ṭṭhakathā] says that this was a science based on 12,000 works explaining the characteristics of great men, such as Buddhas, paccekabuddhas, chief disciples, great disciples, Wheel-turning monarchs, etc. These

⁷⁸ Lamotte 1967: 176–178.

⁷⁹ On this subject see Chakravarti 1996, and Bailey/Mabbett 2006. More recently see Witzel 2009.

works included 16,000 verses called ‘The Buddha Mantra’.⁸⁰ Early Buddhism claimed authority within or through brahminical notions, and attempted to negotiate a superior position in the established hierarchy. A similar mark is mentioned in Jaina lore, but it does not seem to play a dramatic narrative role.⁸¹

Narrative authority would seem to be beyond argument – it addresses different needs than those addressed by logical debate or the rhetoric of reason. The marvellous tongue is a familiar feature, mentioned in passing in some Mahāyāna *sūtras*. In such cases it has no special narrative function; it is part of a package, the glory of the Buddha, for example in the *Rāṣṭrapālāparipṛcchā*,⁸² *Bodhisattvacaryānirdeśa*,⁸³

⁸⁰ MLDB, p. 1293, n. 850, with reference to *Papañcasūdanī* (PTS III p. 363.1–8), *mahāpurisalakkhaṇaṇ ti mahāpurisānaṇ buddhādināṇ lak-khaṇadīpakāṇ dvadasasahassaganthappamāṇaṇ satthaṇ. yattha soḷasasahassagāthāpadaparimāṇabuddhamantā nāma ahesuṇ, yesaṇ vasena iminā lakkhaṇena samannāgatā buddhā nāma honti, iminā paccekabuddhā dve aggasāvakā asiti mahāsāvakā buddhamātā, buddhapitā, aggupatṭhāko, aggupatṭhāyikā, rājā cakkavattī ti ayaṇ viseso ñāyati*. See also Anālayo 2011a: II 537–538. The relation to brahmins must be more complex, since many of the features are shared in the Jaina and perhaps other *śramaṇa* traditions.

⁸¹ According to *Aupapātika-sūtra* §16, Mahāvīra “has a palate and a tongue which are red like gold being refined by fire, washed, and [again] heated” (*huyavaha-niddhanta-dhoya-tatta-tavaṇijja-ratta-tala-tālu-jīhe*) – from Kawasaki 2009. Kawasaki points out the parallel to the *raktajihvā* of some Buddhist lists of *anuvyañjana*. He notes that other characteristics related to the Buddha’s tongue as listed in BHSD “are not found in depictions of Mahāvīra.” Conversely, the Buddhist texts do not seem to enumerate any special qualities of the palate.

⁸² *Rāṣṭrapālāparipṛcchā* 46.18: *svakamukhapratichādā tasya jihvā prabhūtā*. See Ensink 1952: 108, ult./45; Boucher 2008: 155; *Rāṣṭrapālāparipṛcchā* 50.15: *jihvā prabhūta tanu tāmranibha vadanāṇ ca chādayasi yena svakaṇ*. See Ensink 1952: 113.13/49; Boucher 2008: 160.

⁸³ *Bodhisattvacaryānirdeśa* 144.7: *ljags ni shin tu ring zhing srab, bdag nyid kyī ni zhal gyi ngos, de yis kun tu khyab par gnas*.

and *Vimaladattāparipṛcchā*.⁸⁴ The *Suvarṇabhāsottama* describes the tongue as:

His fine, broad tongue is like a lotus or gold, shining like a lotus, resembling a lotus filament.⁸⁵

The revelation of the tongue features in some of the great *Vaipulya-sūtras*, for example in the splendid opening of the long *Prajñāpāramitā* (*Pañcaviṃśati*,⁸⁶ *Daśasāhasrikā*⁸⁷). It is discussed in the great treasury of Indian Buddhist lore, Kumārajīva's *Da zhidu lun*.⁸⁸

The tongue as arbiter of truth

A tongue as glorious as that of the *tathāgata* could hardly have a single function. The display of the tongue as a guarantee of truth, again to brahmins, occurs in number of narratives, such as one cited at length by Kumārajīva in *Da zhidu lun*,⁸⁹ or, several, times in *Divyāvadāna*, where the Buddha recites a verse with the rhetorical question, how could such a tongue tell lies?

The Blessed One then stuck out his tongue from his mouth so that it covered the entire sphere of his face up to his hairlines. Then he said to the brahmin, "What do you think, brahmin, would a person who can stick out his tongue from his mouth and cover the entire sphere of his

⁸⁴ 'Phags pa dri ma med kyis zhus pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo, Otani Cat. No. 760(33), Repr. Vol. No. 24, *Dkon brtsegs, zi*, 257a1: *de'i ljags che zhal gyi dkyil 'khor khebs*; translated from Chinese in Chang 1983: 77.

⁸⁵ *Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra* 4:4cd (p. 46.7–8): *padmasuvarṇaviśālasujihvaṃ, padmaprabhāsita padmaruhābham*. Translation Emmerick 1996: 18.

⁸⁶ Conze 1984: 658–659, 661. See also Burnouf 1989: 567; *Traité* I 278–279 and 456–471; Conze 1984: 39; Zacchetti 2005: 153–154 (§1.61).

⁸⁷ Konow 1941: 55 (no. 27), 109.33–36.

⁸⁸ *Traité* I 275–276; *Traité* III 1667–1668. At *Milindapañha*, pp. 167.23–170.14 there is a discussion on the Buddha's revealing the hidden organ.

⁸⁹ *Traité* I 457–463 = Dharmamitra 2009: 436–443.

face knowingly tell lies, even for the sake of hundreds of thousands of wheel-turners' kingdoms?"

"No, Gautama."

Then [the Blessed One] uttered this verse:

How could this tongue of mine tell lies;
It speaks with honesty and truth.
Things are as I say, brahmin.
Know that I am the *tathāgata*.

The brahmin became filled with faith.⁹⁰

The tongue as the measure of miracles

With the passage of time, preachers developed new priorities in response to changing contexts. The display of the tongue was no longer used to impress and convert brahmins; it came to figure in fully Buddhist contexts, and to be used for dramatic effect within Buddhist circles (admittedly we know almost nothing about the intended or real audiences of these texts). One of the *Prajñāpāramitā* versions reads:

Thereupon the Lord stretched out his tongue, covered his whole face with it, and said to the Venerable Ānanda: What do you think, Ānanda, could such a tongue speak what is false, what is otherwise?

Ānanda: No, O Lord, no, O Sugata!

The Lord: Therefore, then, Ānanda, do reveal this perfection of wisdom to the four assemblies, explain it, encourage it, analyse it, explain it, enlarge on it, and reveal it in detail!⁹¹

⁹⁰ *Divyāvadāna* 71.14–22: *tato bhagavatā mukhāj jihvām nirṇamayya sarvaṃ mukhamaṇḍalam ācchāditam yāvat keśaparyantam upādāya, sa ca brāhmaṇo 'bhihitaḥ, kiṃ manyase brāhmaṇa yasya mukhāj jihvām niścārya sarvaṃ mukhamaṇḍalam ācchādayaty api tv asau cakravartirājaśatasahasrahetor api samprajānan mṛṣāvādaṃ bhāṣeta, no bho gautama, tato 'nv eva gāthām bhāṣate. apy eva hi syād anṛtābhidhāyinī mameha jihvārjvasatyavāditā, tad evam etan na yathā hi brāhmaṇa tathāgato 'smīty avagantum arhasi, atha sa brāhmaṇo 'bhiprasannaḥ.* Translation from Rotman 2008: 141.

⁹¹ *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā*^{Kimura} 77,19–26: *atha khalu bhagavān jihvendriyaṃ nirṇāmya sarvāvantam mukhamaṇḍalam jihvendri-*

Here we meet familiar terms – *vitatha*, *anyathā* – in the vocabulary of truth; the tongue now certifies the teaching of the *Prajñāpāramitā* to the four assemblies.

In the simplest form of the miracle – in early *sūtras* and *avadānas* – the Blessed One licks his ears and covers his face, up to the hairline. In later texts, his tongue reaches as far up as the Brahma-world. As the literature developed, the wonders diversified – Buddhists took it for granted that the Master's words are true – and the tongue became a launching pad for further miracles like the emission of rays of light and emanations of multitudes of Buddhas seated on lotus flowers, for example in the Long Perfection of Wisdom:

Then at that time the Blessed One extended his tongue, and with it covered the three thousandfold great-thousand world system. Having pervaded in this way, he smiled. From his tongue issued forth hundreds of thousands of *koṭis* of *prabhedas* of variegated rays of lights; on each of these rays appeared a thousand-petalled lotus made of supreme jewels, gleaming with gold; on those lotuses magically created Buddhas were seated cross-legged, teaching a sermon on the six perfections. The beings who heard that sermon became destined with certainty to unsurpassed true and perfect awakening.⁹²

yeṇ' ācchādayitvāyuṣmantam ānandam etad avocat: tat kiṃ manyase. ānandāpi nv īdrśaṃ jihvendriyaṃ vitatha-vādy anyathā-vādi syāt. ānanda āha: na bhagavan na sugata. bhagavān āha: tasmāt tarhy ānanda imāṃ prajñāpāramitāṃ catasṛṇāṃ parṣadāṃ vistareṇ'ākhyāhi deśaya prajñāpaya prasthāpaya vibhaja vibhāvayottanīkuru samprakāśaya. Cp. Conze 1984: 488.

⁹² *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā*_{Dutt} 7.12–8.4: *atha khalu bhagavāṃs tasyāṃ velāyāṃ jihvendriyaṃ nirṇāmayāṃ āsa. yenemaṃ trisāhasramahāsāhasraṃ lokadhātuṃ jihvendriyeṇācchādayāṃ āsa ... sphuritvā ... smitam akarot ... yato 'nekāni raśmikoṭīṇiyutaśatasahasrāṇi niśceroḥ. raśmimukhe caikaikasminn uttamaratnamayāni suvarṇa-nirbhāsāni sahasrapatrāṇi padmāny utpannāny abhūvan. teṣu ca padmeṣu buddhavigrahā niṣaṇṇāḥ saṃsthitāś cābhūvan dharmāṃ deśayanto yad utemāṃ eva ṣaṭpāramitāpratisaṃyuktāṃ dharmadeśanāṃ. ... (8.3) ye ca sattvās tāṃ dharmadeśanāṃ śṛṇvanti te niyatā bhavanty anuttarāyāṃ samyaksambodhau. See also *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā*_{Kimura} I-1, 3.16; *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā*_{Vajracharya} I 50.8; *Śatasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā* 10.11; Conze 1984: 39; *Traité* I 456 = Dharma-*

Chapter 20 of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* presents a grand version of the act:⁹³ Śākyamuni and Prabhūtaratna extend their tongues, which reach up to the Brahma world; from their tongues shine forth multitudes of rays of light, and from each ray issue multitudes of bodhisatvas. The *tathāgatas* who have assembled from multitudes of worlds perform the same miracles with their tongues (*jihvendriyeṇarddhiprātihāryaṃ kurvanti*) for one thousand years. After one thousand years, they withdraw their tongues, all simultaneously clear their throats, snap their fingers, and the earth quakes.

But the tongue may reach even further than the Brahma world, as in the *Siṃhanādikā-sūtra*:

The tongue-faculty (*jihvendriya*) of the Blessed One, the *tathāgata*, *Dharmodgata extended and with his tongue he covered the three-thousand-fold great chiliocosm; from his tongue there issued many hundreds of thousands of rays of light. Those rays illuminated all of the worlds from the great hells, etc., up to the summit of existence (*bhavāgra*). The Blessed One then retracted his tongue and said to the entire assembly: “Friends, one with a tongue like this does not lie. Friends, whatever statements I make should be understood just like that, should be believed that way, you should have faith in them like that.”⁹⁴

mitra 2009: 436. See Zaccheti 2005: 153–154 (§1.61, texts), 260–261 (commentary). For another tongue-based miracle, see *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā*_{Dutt} 95.15; *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā*_{Kimura} 107.8; *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā*_{Vajracharya} I 170.10; Conze 1984: 86. Cf. here the “*Brhatṭikā*” (*‘Phags pa shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa ’bum pa dang nyi khri lnga stong pa dang khri brgyad stong pa’i rgya cher bshad pa*, Otani Cat. No. 5206, Repr. Vol. No. 93, *sher phyin, pha*, 32a1).

⁹³ *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* 387.7; Burnouf 1989: 234 (Notes, p. 417).

⁹⁴ (*‘Phags pa*) *Seng ge’i sgra bsgrags pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po’i mdo*, Otani reprint, Cat. No. 875, Vol. 34, *mdo, tsu*, 121a3 (Derge [Tōhoku] 209, *mdo sde, tsha*, 114a5): *bcom ldan ’das de bzhin gshegs pa chos ’phags kyi ljags kyi dbang po phyung nas stong gsum gyi stong chen po’i ’jig rten gyi kham s thams cad ljags kyi dbang pos yang dag par bkab par gyur to. ljags kyi dbang po de las ’od zer bye ba khrag khrig brgya stong phrag du ma byung ste, ’od zer de dag gis sems can dmyal ba chen po la sogs pa nas*

The tongue is an outstanding and unique engine of authority in Buddhist narrative, but it is more than a stage prop. There are other metaphors of authority: the Buddha roars the lion's roar, and he is the great bull who leads the assembly – but only the Buddha's tongue has metaphysical and cosmic dimensions. It is the impossible tongue that most effectively expresses the wonder and the ineffability of truth.⁹⁵ In early Buddhism, this and other metaphors helped to propel the Buddha onto the stage of Indian religion and philosophy. Otherwise the Dharma might not have been as “long-lasting” as it has proved to be.

References and abbreviations

Primary sources

Unless otherwise noted, references to Pali texts are to editions of the Pali Text Society (PTS) (UK) by volume, page, and line. References to Tibetan texts are to the Peking edition kept in the Otani University Library, Kyoto, by catalogue number, reprint volume number, section and volume, page, and line. Except when otherwise noted, translations are my own.

srid pa'i rtse mo'i bar gyi 'jig rten gyi khams thams cad snang bar byas so. de nas bcom ldan 'das kyi ljags kyi dbang po de nyid slar bsdus nas 'khor gyi dkyil 'khor thams cad la bka' stsal pa, grogs po dag lce 'di lta bu yod pa ni brdzun mi zer ste, grogs po dag ngas gtam cung zad ji lta ba bzhin bshad pa de ltar brtag pa dang, de ltar dad pa dang, yid ches par bgyis shig.

⁹⁵ Burnouf had a quite different opinion. He describes the Lotus Sūtra version of the miracle as “un exemple des incroyables niaiseries auxquelles peut conduire la passion du surnaturel,” concluding that “il semble que les Buddhistes du Nord aient été punis de leur goût pour le merveilleux par le ridicule de leurs inventions” (1989: 417). Conze (1984: 39, n. 8) notes that “In the Rig Veda already Agni's tongue, the priestly voice, ‘touches heaven.’ S. Thomas Aquinas has a similar idea when he says: ‘The tongue of an angel is called metaphysically the angel's power, whereby he manifests his mental concepts. Since the intellectual operations of an angel have no reference to the here and now, in angelic speech distance is no impediment’.”

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