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Anālayo

The Genesis of the Bodhisattva Ideal



Hamburg University Press

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Hamburg Buddhist Studies 1
General editor: Michael Zimmermann

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Figure on cover: The Meeting with Dīpaṃkara.

The image on the cover combines successive moments of the meeting between the bodhisattva, who was to become the Buddha Gautama, and the former Buddha Dīpaṃkara: the bodhisattva buys flowers; he scatters these flowers over Dīpaṃkara; and he spreads his hair on the ground for Dīpaṃkara to step on. Gandhāra; courtesy Kurita Isao.

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Foreword

About *Hamburg Buddhist Studies*

Buddhism has enjoyed a prominent place in the study of Asian religious ideas at Hamburg University for almost 100 years, ever since the birth of Buddhist Studies in Germany. We are proud that our program is housed in one of the pioneering academic institutions in Europe at which the study of Buddhism became a core subject for students focusing on the religious dimensions of South and Central Asia.

With this new publication series, the Center for Buddhist Studies at Hamburg University aims to honor this long-standing commitment to research and share the results of this tradition with the community of scholars and the wider public. Today, Buddhist Studies as an academic discipline makes use of a broad variety of approaches and methods. The field now covers contemporary issues as much as it delves into the historic aspects of Buddhism. Similarly, the questions shaping the field of Buddhist Studies have broadened. It has become clear that understanding Buddhist phenomena as they occur today, as well as how these phenomena are rooted in a distant past, is not a luxury. Rather, such understanding is one of the many challenging duties of modern multicultural societies in a globalized world.

Buddhism is one of the great human traditions of religious and philosophical thought. This new series aims to discuss aspects of the wide variety of Buddhist traditions that will be of interest to scholars and specialists of Buddhism, but it will also confront Buddhism's rich heritage with questions whose answers might not be easily deduced using a more traditional perspective. Such questions require the penetrating insight of scholars who approach Buddhism from a variety of disciplines building upon and yet going beyond the study of textual materials. We are convinced that the new series of Hamburg Buddhist Studies will contribute to opening up Buddhist Studies to those who are not necessarily trained in the classical languages of the Buddhist traditions but want to approach the field with

their own disciplinary interests in mind. We very much hope that this series will lead to a wider audience taking interest in the academic study of Buddhist phenomena.

About this Publication

It is my great pleasure to introduce this first volume of this new series, a study by the Venerable Bhikkhu Anālayo, member of the academic staff at Hamburg University. In this book he investigates the genesis of the bodhisattva ideal, one of the most important concepts in the history of Buddhist thought. Bhikkhu Anālayo brings together material from the corpus of the early discourses preserved mainly in Pāli and Chinese that appear to have influenced the arising of the bodhisattva ideal. He takes his inquiry in a direction not yet explored and draws on material that up until now has received little attention from scholars of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Anālayo convincingly shows that the early sources do not present compassionate concern for others as a motivating force for the Buddha's quest for awakening. He further offers an analysis of the only reference to Maitreya in the Pāli canon, showing that this reference is most likely a later addition. Anālayo also examines a Madhyamāgama discourse in which Śākyamuni Buddha predicts the future buddhahood of Maitreya and explores the possibility that this could be the first instance of such a prediction in Buddhist literature. In sum, Bhikkhu Anālayo is able to delineate a gradual genesis of central aspects of the bodhisattva ideal by documenting (1) an evolution in the bodhisattva concept reflected in the early discourses, (2) the emergence of the notion of a vow to pursue the path to buddhahood, and (3) the possible background for the idea of a prediction an aspirant to buddhahood receives from a former buddha.

I am extremely grateful to Bhikkhu Anālayo for his willingness to inaugurate this new series with his fine contribution. It is my hope for the future of Hamburg Buddhist Studies that many more excellent volumes will follow.

Michael Zimmermann

Introduction

Theme

The notion of a bodhisattva is such a central motif in Buddhist thought that the way in which this basic idea may have come into existence is almost beyond being questioned. Intending to do just that, I invite the reader to join me in a search for what could be found in the textual corpus of early Buddhist discourses that may be related to the arising of this conception. My frame of reference is that of the thought-world of the early Buddhist discourses themselves, whose perspective forms the point of departure for my attempt to collect indications relevant to the genesis of the bodhisattva ideal.

My examination falls into three chapters. In the first chapter I investigate the bodhisattva conception as such, surveying relevant passages from the early discourses. With the second chapter I turn to the meeting between the previous Buddha Kāśyapa and the bodhisattva Gautama, examining the relation of this meeting to the notion of a vow the bodhisattva took to pursue the path to Buddhahood. The future Buddha Maitreya is the theme of the third chapter, in which I take up the notion of a prediction a bodhisattva receives in assurance of his future success.

Sources

The chief material on which my study is based are the discourses found in the four main Pāli *Nikāyas*, together with material from the fifth *Nikāya* that may reasonably be held to belong to roughly the same textual stratum (*Dhammapada*, *Udāna*, *Itivuttaka* and *Sutta-nipāta*). These “early discourses”, transmitted by the Theravāda tradition, have counterparts in a number of Sanskrit fragments and in the Chinese *Āgamas*, in particular in a *Dirgha-āgama* (長阿含經) generally held to stem from the Dharmaguptaka tradi-

tion,¹ a *Madhyama-āgama* (中阿含經) probably from the Sarvāstivāda tradition,² a *Samyukta-āgama* (雜阿含經 / T 99) usually associated with the (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda tradition,³ and a partial *Samyukta-āgama* (別譯雜阿含經 / T 100) whose school affiliation is at present still under discussion.⁴ Besides these collections, several individual discourse translations are extant in Chinese, in which case the respective school affiliation is, however, difficult to ascertain. In addition to the material preserved in Chinese translation, discourses from the (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda tradition are also extant as quotations in the Tibetan translation of a commentary by Śamathadeva on the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*. It is this range of material that I refer to with the expression “early discourses”.

When, on comparison, parallel versions of an early discourse differ, at least one of them must have suffered from some alteration or error. Though in this way different textual layers can be discerned – and whenever possible I will point out aspects that suggest a relative chronology between individual texts or passages – as a whole this corpus of early discourses nevertheless does seem to contain the earliest layer of Buddhist textual activity and thus has the potential of taking us back to the beginnings of Buddhist thought, in as much as it has left its traces in literature.⁵

The Chinese translation of an *Ekottarika-āgama* (增壹阿含經) of uncertain school affiliation differs from the above delineated textual corpus, in that material found in this collection stems from a longer time span than what is reflected in the other *Āgamas* and the four Pāli *Nikāyas*. While the *Ekottarika-āgama* does contain a number of early texts, other passages found in this collection pertain to a much later period, showing that the collection must

¹ Demiéville 1951: 252f; Lü 1963: 242; Bareau 1966b; Waldschmidt 1980: 136; Mayeda 1985: 97; and Enomoto 1986: 25.

² Lü 1963: 242; Waldschmidt 1980: 136; Enomoto 1984; Mayeda 1985: 98; Enomoto 1986: 20; and Minh Chau 1991: 27.

³ Lü 1963: 242; Enomoto 1986: 23; Schmithausen 1987: 306; Choong 2000: 6 note 18; Hiraoka 2000; and Bucknell 2006: 685. Out of the discourses in this collection quoted in my study, SĀ 604 would not fall under the rubric of being an “early discourse”, as it appears to be the result of a later incorporation of a version of the *Aśokāvadāna* into the *Samyukta-āgama*, which according to Bucknell 2006: 685 may have been “inserted to fill gaps created when two of the original SA [*Samyukta-āgama*] fascicles were lost”; cf. also Deeg 1995: 77 note 49.

⁴ Bingenheimer 2008: 149–152 and 2009: 127–134.

⁵ For a more detailed discussion of the historical value of the Pāli discourses cf. Anālayo 2012.

have remained open to the integration of new material and ideas for a considerable time span.⁶ This collection is therefore best considered on a par with texts like the *Mahāvastu*, a *Vinaya* text from the Lokottaravāda-Mahāsāṃghika tradition that similarly contains a mixture of early and late material. For my present study these two works, together with several Buddha-biographies, are also of considerable relevance, as they tend to show further developments of what manifests in an incipient stage in the early discourses.

My research in the following pages is based on consulting three Asian editions alongside the PTS edition for passages from the Pāli discourses and the Pāli *Vinaya*, for other passages from commentaries etc. I employ only the PTS edition. In the case of the Chinese canon, I have relied on the Taishō edition, conveniently accessible through the digital CBETA edition, though in the case of quotations in footnotes I double-checked with the printed edition. For Tibetan sources, I have consulted the Derge and Peking editions, quotations from which I give following the system devised by Wylie.⁷ In general, when quoting various text editions, I have occasionally standardized, adjusted punctuation etc., for the sake of readability.

Acknowledgement

The present booklet originates from several articles originally intended for independent publication. My study of the meeting of the bodhisattva Gautama with the previous Buddha Kāśyapa had in fact already come out,⁸ and I was on the verge of submitting another two articles to academic jour-

⁶ EĀ 36.5 at T II 706a12 (noted by Lamotte 1958: 704) reports how, during the lifetime of Śākyamuni Buddha, a statue was made in his likeness at the request of a king. Since archaeological findings indicate that the idea of depicting the Buddha in sculpture or painting arose only after a period of aniconic representation (cf. also below note 31 page 23, this passage must be a late addition to the collection. Other examples for passages reflecting late thought are references to the Hīnayāna in EĀ 26.9 at T II 640a5 (noted by Deeg 2006: 112), and to the cultivation of the *bodhicitta* in EĀ 35.2 at T II 699a7 and EĀ 36.5 at T II 703b19; cf. in more detail Anālayo 2009b.

⁷ Wylie 1959: 267.

⁸ Anālayo 2009a.

nals, when it became clear that it would be preferable to combine the different strands of my research in a single volume. During various stages of my work, I benefited from valuable suggestions made on some of these article drafts or on the whole of the present publication by Bhikkhu Bodhi, Bhikkhu Brahmāli, Bhikkhu Pāsādika, Rod Bucknell, Jan Nattier, Lambert Schmithausen, Peter Skilling, Ken Su and Michael Zimmermann. I am especially indebted to Giuliana Martini for assisting the coming into being of this publication in a number of ways. It goes without saying that I remain solely responsible for any error or omission in my presentation. At this point I would also like to mention that my ignorance of Japanese has prevented me from taking into account research published in that language (except for editions of Sanskrit texts).

1 Gautama as a Bodhisattva

In the present chapter, I explore the usage and significance of the term bodhisattva in the way it is employed in the early discourses to designate Gautama as a Buddha-to-be. My intention is to trace a development that led from a concept standing for the unawakened Gautama who sets out in quest for awakening to the notion of Gautama as a bodhisattva who is invariably destined to become a Buddha.

My examination covers four topics: the bodhisattva Gautama's progress to awakening (1), his motivation (2), his marvellous qualities (3), and the lineage of former Buddhas (4).

1.1 Gautama's Progress to Awakening

In the discourses collected in the Pāli *Nikāyas* of the Theravāda tradition, the term bodhisattva (or more precisely its Pāli counterpart *bodhisatta*) is used predominantly by the Buddha Gautama to refer to his pre-awakening experiences, the time when he was 'the bodhisattva' par excellence. Such usage occurs as part of a standard formulaic phrase, according to which a particular event or reflection occurred "before (my) awakening, when still being an unawakened bodhisattva", *pubbe va (me) sambodhā anabhisambuddhassa bodhisattass' eva sato* (henceforth referred to as the 'before awakening' phrase).

Counterparts to this phrase in texts belonging to the Sarvāstivāda tradition(s) do not employ the term bodhisattva.¹ Bapat takes this to be a deli-

¹ The term bodhisattva does, however, occur in relation to the Buddha's pre-awakening experiences in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, fragment S 360 folio 176 R3 in Waldschmidt 1950: 20: "at the time when the bodhisattva", *yasmim samaye bodhisatva*. Similarly, the *Mahāvādāna-sūtra* uses the same term in relation to the pre-awakening experiences of the Buddha Vipasyī, cf. below note 89 page 47. For occurrences of the term bodhisattva in relation to the Buddha's pre-awakening experiences in *Āgama* discourses, in addition to the passages discussed in the notes below, cf. DĀ 3 at T I 31b20; SĀ 1177 at T II 317a26 (here in the context of a simile; I do not take into account occurrences in SĀ 604, cf. the remark above in note 3 page 12); EĀ 24.2 at T II 616b9; EĀ 40.3 at T II 739a12; and EĀ 44.7 at T II 766c26.

berate omission in order “to show greater respect to the Buddha” by applying a honorific term like ‘the Blessed One’ already to the period of his life that preceded his awakening.² The same tendency can in fact be seen in several Pāli discourses. In passages where the Buddha is not the speaker, the Pāli term *bodhisatta* tends to be replaced by expressions like ‘Blessed One’ or ‘Buddha’, even though the period in question clearly precedes his awakening.³

The majority of occurrences of the ‘before awakening’ phrase in the Pāli discourses are related to various aspects of the bodhisattva Gautama’s meditative development. The relevant instances, which I now briefly survey, cover three main themes:

- the bodhisattva’s overcoming of unwholesome states of mind,
- his development of mental tranquillity,
- the growth of his insight.

² Recorded in Minh Chau 1991: 34 note 1; cf. also Anālayo 2008: 12f.

³ This change of expression can be seen in Ud 5.2 at Ud 48,8, which reports the Buddha explaining that “seven days after *bodhisattvas* have been born, the mothers of *bodhisattvas* pass away”, *sattāhajātesu bodhisattesu bodhisattamātaro kālaṃ karonti*. Yet, when Ānanda describes the same state of affairs in the same discourse, Ud 5.2 at Ud 48,6 reads: “seven days after the Blessed One had been born, the mother of the Blessed One passed away”, *sattāhajāte bhagavati bhagavato mātā kālaṃ akāsi*. Another instance testifying to the usage of honorific terms instead of the expression *bodhisattva* can be found in the *Pabbajā-sutta*, Sn 408, where a verse narrating an event that took place before the awakening uses the expression *buddha*; cf. also Rhys Davids 1880/2000: 32 note 1. Similarly, the *Padhāna-sutta*’s report of Māra’s attempt to prevent the bodhisattva from continuing with his quest for awakening employs the terms *buddha* and *bhagavant*, Sn 430f. Again, the *Padhāna-sutta*’s description of the period that Māra kept on following the bodhisattva uses the terms *bhagavant* and *sambuddha*, Sn 446f; cf. also Nakamura 2000a: 160. Counterparts to these references from the *Pabbajā-* and *Padhāna-suttas* in the *Lalitavistara* and in the *Mahāvastu* speak instead of the bodhisattva, cf. Lefman 1902: 240,11, 260,17 and 261,15+16 and Senart 1890: 198,1 and 238,1+14+15. In relation to Th 534, which speaks of the *bodhisatta* and his mother, referred to as *buddhassa mātā*, Rhi 1994: 209 note 12 explains that this does not involve a real inconsistency (as assumed by van Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1995: 179, who argues that this passage shows the term *bodhisattva* to be applicable to Buddhas), because “Māyā can be called the ‘mother of the Buddha’ regardless of time, because this describes the general status of Māyā.” Similar to the above described pattern in Pāli discourses, a Bhārhut stūpa refers to the bodhisattva’s entry into his mother’s womb as the descent of the Blessed One, *bhagavato ūkraṃti*, cf. Lüders 1912: 80 (no. 801); Barua 1934/1979: 11; Coomaraswamy 1956: 66 (plate 24 fig. 61); or Tsukamoto 1996: 582 (no. 116); and the discussion in Lüders 1941/1966: 45. In the same vein, Aśokan inscriptions commemorate the bodhisattva’s birth with the formulations *budhe jāte* and *bhagavaṃ jāte*, cf. Woolner 1924/1993: 51,15+17 (middle column) or Bloch 1950: 157,2+3.

An aspect of the bodhisattva's struggle with unwholesome mental qualities is taken up in a Pāli discourse and its *Ekottarika-āgama* parallel, which describe how he faced fear that had arisen while he was living in seclusion.⁴ Another Pāli discourse and its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel record how the bodhisattva developed a clear distinction between those of his thoughts that were unwholesome and those that were wholesome.⁵ Out of various possible types of unwholesome thoughts, several discourses highlight in particular the bodhisattva's struggle with sensuality.⁶

The bodhisattva's development of mental tranquillity appears to have stood in close relationship to the roads to [psychic] power (*rddhipāda*), as three Pāli discourses mention these as central aspects of his pre-awakening development.⁷ As a meditation technique, according to a discourse in the *Samyutta-nikāya* he predominantly engaged in the practice of mindfulness

⁴ MN 4 at MN I 17,6 (here and below, page and line references are to the occurrence of the 'before awakening' phrase), where the counterpart EĀ 31.1 at T II 665b22 also employs the term bodhisattva: "formerly, at the time when I had not [yet] accomplished Buddhahood, when I was practising as a bodhisattva", 我曩昔未成佛道時, 為菩薩行。

⁵ MN 19 at MN I 114,23, where the parallel MĀ 102 at T I 589a13 does not employ the term bodhisattva: "formerly, at the time when I had not [yet] awakened to unsurpassable, right and complete awakening", 我本未覺無上正盡覺時。

⁶ MN 14 at MN I 92,1, where the parallels MĀ 100 and T 55 do not refer to the Buddha's pre-awakening period, while another parallel, T 54 at T I 848b18, has such a reference and employs the term bodhisattva: "formerly when I was in quest of Buddhahood ... at the time when I was a bodhisattva", 我故求佛道者 ... 我為菩薩時, though this passage does not describe the bodhisattva's struggle with sensuality. Another relevant discourse is SN 35.117 at SN IV 97,17, where the parallel SĀ 211 at T II 53a27 does not mention the term bodhisattva, reading "formerly, at the time when I had not [yet] accomplished full awakening", 我昔未成正覺時。Yet another relevant discourse is AN 9.41 at AN IV 439,21, of which no parallel seems to be known. A reference to the bodhisattva's pre-awakening struggle with sensuality and other unwholesome thoughts can also be found in a Chinese *Udāna* collection, T 212 at T IV 686b20. This passage does employ the term bodhisattva, 菩薩, though the term is used by the narrator, while a statement by the Buddha does not employ the term, T IV 686b19: "formerly, at the time when I had not [yet] accomplished Buddhahood", 昔我未成佛道時。

⁷ AN 5.68 at AN III 82,11 (where the 'before awakening' phrase has the alternative reading *pubbāhaṃ sambodhā anabhisambuddho bodhisatto va samāno*, B^c, C^e and S^c read *pubbevāhaṃ*); cf. also SN 51.11 at SN V 263,12 (E^c reads *pubbeva me sambodhāya*, S^c: *pubbe me sambodhāya*) and SN 51.21 at SN V 281,11 (S^c: *pubbe me*). No parallels to these discourses seem to be known.

of breathing.⁸ Other discourses report that, with deepening concentration, he experienced mental light and meditative forms,⁹ whose stabilization enabled him to attain full absorption (*dhyāna*).

The growth of the bodhisattva's insight appears to have been based on his pre-awakening investigation of the dependent arising of *duḥkha*.¹⁰ Other discourses describe his examination of the true nature of feelings,¹¹ of the four elements,¹² of the five aggregates,¹³ of the six senses and their objects,¹⁴ and of the world.¹⁵ These passages thus highlight various aspects of Gautama's development of insight, which in turn became facets of the comprehensive realization he attained on the night of his awakening.¹⁶

⁸ SN 54.8 at SN V 317,7 (reading *pubbe va sambodhā anabhisambuddho bodhisatto va samāno*), which continues by indicating that, dwelling much in the practice of mindfulness of breathing, the bodhisattva's mind was liberated from the influxes through not clinging, *iminā vihārena bahulaṃ viharato ... anupādāya ca me āsavehi cittaṃ vimuccati* (B^e: *vimucci*; C^e: *vīmucci*). That is, mindfulness of breathing would have been the method he used to develop the absorptions (*dhyāna*) that then enabled him to attain the three higher knowledges (*trividyā*). The partial parallel SĀ 814 does not refer to the Buddha's pre-awakening experiences.

⁹ MN 128 at MN III 157,29 (reading *pubbe va sambodhā anabhisambuddho bodhisatto va samāno*) and AN 8.64 at AN IV 302,8 (reading *pubbāhaṃ sambodhā anabhisambuddho bodhisatto va samāno*), where the respective parallels MĀ 72 at T I 536c19 and MĀ 73 at T I 539b22 do not use the term bodhisattva: "formerly, at the time when I had not [yet] attained awakening to the unsurpassable, right and true path", 我本未得覺無上正真道時.

¹⁰ SN 12.10 at SN II 10,1 and SN 12.65 at SN II 104,6, where the parallels SĀ 285 at T II 79c28 and SĀ 287 at T II 80b25 actually speak of a previous life of the Buddha (cf. also Lamotte 1980a: 122), while another parallel, EĀ 38.4 at T II 718a14, employs the term bodhisattva: "formerly, at the time when I was a bodhisattva and had not [yet] accomplished Buddhahood", 我本為菩薩時, 未成佛道. A counterpart in Sanskrit fragment Pelliot Rouge 14 (7) V3 in Bongard-Levin 1996: 38 (cf. also Lévi 1910: 438 and Tripāṭhi 1962: 95) does not employ the term bodhisattva.

¹¹ SN 36.24 at SN IV 233,12, where the parallel SĀ 475 at T II 121c12 does not employ the term bodhisattva, reading: "at the time when I had not [yet] accomplished Buddha-[hood]", 未成佛時.

¹² SN 14.31 at SN II 170,1, no parallel seems to be known.

¹³ SN 22.26 at SN III 27,27, where the parallel SĀ 14 does not refer to the Buddha's pre-awakening period.

¹⁴ SN 35.13 at SN IV 6,25 and SN 35.14 at SN IV 8,3 (in both cases S^e reads *pubbe me sambodhāya*); no parallel seems to be known in both cases.

¹⁵ AN 3.101 at AN I 258,23, no parallel seems to be known.

In sum, the above surveyed texts, in which the ‘before awakening’ phrase occurs, depict the bodhisattva Gautama’s struggle with unwholesome thoughts – in particular fear and sensual desire – as well as his development of tranquillity and insight. These stand out as the central aspects of his progress to awakening.

The descriptions given in these discourses are fully within the scope of standard accounts given in early Buddhist discourse of an arhat’s progress towards awakening.¹⁷ The central import of the term bodhisattva that emerges from these passages could thus be summed up as presenting the individual Gautama as a bodhisattva in the sense of being “in search of awakening”.¹⁸ To the bodhisattva’s quest I turn next.

¹⁶ De Silva 1987: 49 compares these various aspects, which at first sight may appear different and perhaps even conflicting insights, to a “circular vision, as when one is on top of a mountain ... however different the sceneries may be from the different directions, all the scenes constitute one integrated experience” for one who stands on the mountain’s top.

¹⁷ Endo 1997/2002: 220 notes that in such passages “the bodhisatta is depicted as a being seeking higher knowledge. No marked difference in this case is seen between the bodhisatta and any other mendicants who also seek the realisation of the truth.”

¹⁸ Regarding the term *bodhisattva*, or more precisely its Pāli counterpart *bodhisatta*, Neumann 1896/1995: 1091 note 5 suggests a possible derivation from *bodhi* + *sakta*, conveying a sense of being “intent” on or “devoted” to *bodhi*. Neumann points out that this etymology for *sattva* occurs in SN 23.2 at SN III 190,3: “being attached, fully attached to desire, lust, delight and craving for bodily form, therefore a ‘being’ is so-called”, *rūpe ... yo chando yo rāgo yā nandī yā taṇhā tatra satto tatra viatto tasmā satto ti vuccati* (B^e reads *nandī*), followed by stating the same for the other four aggregates; cf. also the parallel SĀ 122 at T II 40a6, which makes the same point in a shorter formulation. A similar etymology can also be found in the Jain *Viyāhapaṇṇatti* 2.15, Lalwani 1973: 150,1: *jamhā satte subhāsubhehi kammehi tamhā satte tti vat-tabbam siyā*, trsl. ibid. “he may be called ... *satta* because he is tied to righteous and non-righteous deeds.” Kajiya 1982: 258 notes that the Pāli commentaries employ this etymology as one out of various explanations of the term *bodhisatta*, indicating that a bodhisattva is “attached, wholly attached to awakening”, Spk II 21,13: *bodhiyam satto āsatto ti pi bodhisatto*. Oltramare 1923: 251 note 4, however, objects that the term never seems to express a spiritual or moral form of attachment, “*saj* ne semble pas avoir jamais exprimé l’idée d’un attachement spirituel ou moral.” Vetter 1988: 97 note 16, who holds it to be quite “possible that ... the Middle Indic *bodhi-satta* ... meant [a being] attached to, i.e. striving for, enlightenment and in Sanskrit would be *bodhi-sakta*”, explains that the adoption of the term bodhisattva could have come about precisely because “*sakta* was perhaps felt to be used too much in a negative sense.” On the etymology *bodhi-sakta* cf. also Walleiser 1914: 5 note 3; Dayal 1932/1978: 7; Thomas 1933/2004: 167 note 1; Rahula 1978: 51; Basham 1981: 22; Norman 1990/1993: 87; Schmithausen 2002: 11 note 40; and von Hinüber 2007: 388.

1.2 Gautama's Motivation

The 'before awakening' phrase occurs in some discourses in relation to the bodhisattva Gautama's going forth. These instances record his reflection that the confinement of the household life does not offer the appropriate conditions for fully dedicating oneself to progress towards liberation.¹⁹ That is, from the bodhisattva's perspective, going forth was a necessary foundation for his awakening.²⁰

Additional detail on the bodhisattva Gautama's reflection that motivated him to set out on his quest can be gathered from another occurrence of the 'before awakening' phrase, found in the Discourse on the Noble Quest, the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta*,²¹ and in its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel.²² The two discourses contrast an average person's quest for worldly things that are subject to decay and death to the noble quest for what is not subject to decay and death. Both reveal that this noble quest motivated the bodhisattva to go forth in search of awakening, presenting his reflection in nearly identical terms:

¹⁹ MN 36 at MN I 240,20 (after the 'before awakening' phrase): "dwelling at home is oppressive, a path for the dust [of passion], going forth is [like emerging] out in the open. It is not easy to live the holy life entirely complete and pure like a polished shell while dwelling at home", *sambādho gharāvāso rajāpatho, abbhokāso pabbajjā, na-y-idaṃ sukaraṃ agāraṃ ajjhāvasatā ekantaparipuṇṇaṃ ekantaparisuddhaṃ saṅkhalikitaṃ brahmacariyaṃ caritum*; repeated in MN 100 at MN II 211,28.

²⁰ In the conception of the path of a bodhisattva as reflected in early Mahāyāna scriptures, going forth as a Buddhist monk (on the predominance of males cf. Harrison 1987: 76–79) seems to have continued to play a prominent role. The assumption of a lay origin of early Mahāyāna, proposed by Hirakawa 1963 (cf. also Przyluski 1926: 369f; Lamotte 1954: 378f; the related position taken by Ray 1994; and the discussion in Vetter 1994), has been critically reviewed by e.g. Schopen 1975: 180; Williams 1989/2009: 21–27; Harrison 1995a: 57–63; Sasaki 1997; Silk 2002: 376–382; Nattier 2003a: 89–96; and Sasaki 2004. Durt 1991: 16 even goes so far as to suggest that "the image of laymen Bodhisattvas ... has been largely metaphorical ... this ideal has not been realized in concrete historical situations except by some marginal movements."

²¹ B^a and S^a have the title "Discourse on the Heap of Snares", *Pāsārāsi-sutta*.

²² MN 26 at MN I 163,9 (reading *pubbe va sambodhā anabhisambuddho bodhisatto va samāno*). The parallel MĀ 204 at T I 776a26 does not employ the term bodhisattva: "formerly, at the time when I had not [yet] awakened to unsurpassable, right and complete awakening", 我本未覺無上正盡覺時.

“Being myself subject to old age ... and death, now suppose I were to search for what is free from old age ... and death, for the unsurpassable peace from bondage, Nirvāṇa.”²³

“Being myself truly subject to old age and death ... suppose I were to search ... for what is free from old age and death ... for the unsurpassable peace from bondage, Nirvāṇa.”²⁴

This appears to be the only passage in the Pāli *Nikāyas* that explicitly formulates what motivated the bodhisattva Gautama to set out in search of awakening. Notably, this formulation does not in any way reflect a concern for others. Rather, according to this autobiographical report the bodhisattva Gautama’s motivation was to find a solution for the problem of being “himself”, *attanā*/自, subject to old age and death etc.²⁵

The same trait recurs in the description of the successful completion of the bodhisattva’s quest, given in the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta* and its parallel. According to both versions, having arrived at the unsurpassable peace from bondage that is free from old age and death, Gautama realized that he had fully liberated himself from the prospect of future birth and existence.²⁶ Here, too, there is no reference at all to being able to save others. Instead, the way the Buddha perceived his own awakening – according to early

²³ MN 26 at MN I 163,18: *yannūnāhaṃ ... attanā jarādhhammo samāno ... attanā maraṇadhammo samāno ... ajaraṃ ... amataṃ anuttaraṃ yogakkhemaṃ nibbānaṃ pariyeseyyav.*

²⁴ MĀ 204 at T I 776a27: 我自實老法, 死法 ... 我今寧可求 ... 無老, 無死 ... 無上安隱涅槃 (Hirakawa 1997: 375 indicates that 安隱 can render *yoga-kṣema*); for further parallels cf. Schmitthausen 2000b: 122 note 16, who already drew attention to the absence of any reference to compassionate concern for others in these passages.

²⁵ Wangchuk 2007: 82 explains that “there is no canonical evidence for the theory that the main motive for the Buddha’s appearance in the world was for the sake of others. This idea is found only in the post-canonical literature. The overwhelming majority of the canonical material suggests that ... he was concerned with his own release.”

²⁶ MN 26 at MN I 167,12: “being myself subject to old age ... being myself subject to death ... I attained the supreme peace of Nirvāṇa which is free from old age ... free from death ... this is the last birth”, *attanā jarādhhammo samāno ... attanā maraṇadhammo samāno ... ajaraṃ ... amataṃ anuttaraṃ yogakkhemaṃ nibbānaṃ ajjhagamaṃ ... ayam antimā jāti*; MĀ 204 at T I 777a13: “I searched for what is free from old age and free from death ... and attained the supreme peace of Nirvāṇa which is free from old age and free from death ... birth has been extinguished”, 我求 ... 無老, 無死 ... 便得無老, 無死 ... 無上安隱涅槃 ... 生已盡.

Buddhist discourse – is formulated entirely in terms of having freed himself.

The conspicuous lack of any concern for others becomes even more prominent with the next episode recorded in the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta*, according to which the newly awakened Buddha was disinclined to teach others and decided to rather remain content with having reached liberation himself.²⁷ Notably, this entire episode is not found in the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel. Thus this part of the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta*, with its report of an intervention by Brahmā in order to convince the Buddha to spread the message of liberation, could be a later addition.²⁸ Be that as it may, given that Brahmā's intervention is documented in a range of other sources,²⁹ the implications of this episode deserve further attention.

The Pāli commentary on the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta* explains that the Buddha only hesitated to teach because on examination he had realized the degree to which people were under the influence of defilements. The commentary adds that the Buddha also wanted Brahmā to invite him, since this would instil respect for the Buddha's teachings among people in the world.³⁰

²⁷ Bareau 1963: 141 sees an egoism in this decision, commenting that “la paresse et l'égoïsme dans sa décision, trahissant l'idéal du Bodhisattva”; cf. also Foucher 1949: 190: “ce n'est qu'à la deuxième réflexion que la compassion pour l'humanité souffrante l'emporte sur l'égoïsme de la raison”; though, as pointed out by Schmithausen in a personal communication, to speak of egoism in this context would be going too far, cf. also Schmithausen 1997: 47.

²⁸ On this difference cf. Nakamura 2000a: 212 and Jones 2009: 90. I intend to explore this point in more detail in a separate paper.

²⁹ The need for Brahmā to intervene in order to convince the newly awakened Buddha to share his discovery with others is reported in other Pāli discourses, MN 85 at MN II 93,26 and SN 6.1 at SN I 137,15 (cf. also Vin I 6,4); in the *Ekottarika-āgama*, EĀ 19.1 at T II 593b4; in several biographies of the Buddha preserved in Chinese, T 189 at T III 643a4, T 190 at T III 806a14 and T 191 at T III 953a2; in the *Catuspariṣat-sūtra*, fragment S 362 (46) V4, Waldschmidt 1952: 29; in the *Lalitavistara*, Lefmann 1902: 394,8; in the *Mahāvastu*, Senart 1897: 315,1; in the *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya*, T 1428 at T XXII 786c25; in the *Mahīśāsaka Vinaya*, T 1421 at T XXII 103c24; in the *Saṅghabhedavastu*, Gnoli 1977: 128,30; and in the Theravāda *Vinaya*, Vin I 5,23. The location associated with this episode was also known to Fāxiǎn (法顯) and Xuánzàng (玄奘), cf. T 2085 at T LI 863b16 and T 2087 at T LI 917a27. Schmithausen 2005: 172 note 19 explains that by requesting the Buddha to teach, Brahmā is “implicitly urging his own worshippers, the Brahmans, to acknowledge the superiority of the Buddha and his teaching.”

³⁰ Ps II 176,21 and Ps II 177,11. According to Rahula 1978: 268, a problem with this suggestion would be that “the Buddha never attempted to convert anyone on the ground that he was



Figure 1.1 The Entreaty to Teach the Dharma

The figure above shows an aniconic representation of the recently awakened Buddha, flanked on his sides by Brahmā and Śakra, who with folded hands appear to be inviting him to teach.³¹

Gandhāra; courtesy Trustees of the British Museum.

prompted by Brahmā to preach his doctrine”, which would have been a rather convenient argument to be used in encounters with Brahmins.

³¹ As the above figure 1.1 shows, the motif of Brahmā’s entreaty is reflected relatively early in Indian sculpture (for another example cf. e.g. Foucher 1905: 425 figure 214), making use of a form of representation that still belongs to the aniconic tradition when the presence of the Buddha was only symbolized (on aniconism cf. also Dehejia 1991 and Linrothe 1993).

The first of these explanations seems to confuse the temporal sequence of events in the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta*, where the Buddha's reluctance to teach occurs before he surveyed the degree to which beings are defiled.³² On surveying their condition, according to the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta's* report, the Buddha realized that some would understand his message, which motivated him to accept Brahmā's invitation to teach.

The second explanation would imply that the Buddha acted with the ulterior purpose of enhancing his reputation by getting Brahmā to invite him, an idea not easily compatible with the total detachment from fame and glory which the discourses usually associate with the condition of being fully awakened. Besides, according to an earlier section of the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta* the Buddha quite explicitly informed the monks listening to his autobiographical report of his initial disinclination to teach: "Considering like this, monks, my mind inclined to inaction, not to teaching the Dharma."³³ This does not give the impression that he was anticipating an invitation from Brahmā. The passage reads more naturally if one were to assume that it means precisely what it says, that is: the Buddha was reluctant to teach.

Such reluctance on the part of the newly awakened Buddha is not easily reconciled with the notion common to all Buddhist traditions that he had prepared himself over immense periods of time with the sole intention of executing the task of leading others to liberation.³⁴ Judging from the account given in the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta*, the reason for the Buddha's disinclination to teach was that it would be fatiguing (*klamatha*) and vexing (*vi-heṭhā*) for him if others should fail to understand the profound truth he had realized. Similar reasons recur in other reports of his initial hesitation to teach, found in an *Ekottarika-āgama* discourse, in the *Catuṣpariṣat-sūtra*, and

³² MN 26 at MN I 168,1 reports the Buddha's reluctance to teach, whereas his surveying of the degree to which beings are defiled is described only at MN I 169,7.

³³ MN 26 at MN I 168,9: *iti ha me, bhikkhave, paṭisañcikkhato appossukkatāya citta namati, no dhammadesanāya*.

³⁴ Schmithausen 2000b: 120 note 5 draws attention to the way *Buddhacarita* 14.97 has ironed out the difficulty with this passage by reporting that the Buddha remembered his former vow and decided to teach even before Brahmā intervened. Another mode of tackling the same difficulty seems to be implicit in the presentation in the *Mahāsaṃvartanīkathā*, Okano 1998: 129, which indicates that the Buddha remained inactive until the time had come to teach, so that here Brahmā's invitation seems only to have the function of marking the fact that the time had ripened.

in the *Vinayas* of the Dharmaguptaka, Lokottaravāda-Mahāsāṃghika, Mahīśāsaka and (Mūla-)Sārvāstivāda traditions.³⁵

That is, when reflecting on the possibility of sharing his discovery with others, according to a range of sources the Buddha considered the matter entirely from the perspective of how it would affect himself. This ties in with the observations made above regarding his motivation and his reaching of the final goal. Throughout, according to these texts the Buddha's predominant concern is with himself, when he forms his initial motivation to set out for awakening, when he successfully completes his quest, and even when he reflects about what course of action is to be taken next.

This certainly does not imply that from the perspective of the early discourses the Buddha was not compassionate. The *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta* reports that, once Brahmā intervened, the Buddha surveyed the world out of compassion.³⁶ Another discourse clarifies that compassion is a quality inherent in the Buddha's attainment of full awakening.³⁷ However, the early discourses do not give any indication that a concern for others was part of the motivation of the bodhisattva Gautama to set out on his quest for awakening,³⁸ nor does the successful reaching of this goal show any immediate relationship to teaching activity. This applies also to the *Madhyama-āgama*

³⁵ MN 26 at MN I 168,2: *so mam' assa kilamatho, sā mam' assa vihesā*; cf. also the reference to "perception of harm", *vihiṃsasaññī* at MN I 169,26; and the discussion in Webster 2005. Similar expressions can be found in *Catuṣpariṣat-sūtra* fragment M 480 R5, Waldschmidt 1952: 44: *vihiṭṭhaprekṣe*, the *Mahāvastu*, Senart 1897: 319,5: *viheṭṭasaṃjñānī*; the *Sanḥabhedavastu*, Gnoli 1977: 130,10: *viheṭṭhaprekṣī* (the Chinese counterpart in T 1450 at T XXIV 126b14 speaks of "weariness", 勞, and of "vexation", 惱; and the Tibetan version in Waldschmidt 1957: 111,2 of "fatigue", *dub pa*, and "weariness", *ngal ba*). EĀ 19.1 at T II 593a29 similarly gives the reason for the Buddha's disinclination to teach as 損, for which one of the equivalents listed by Hirakawa 1997: 556 is *vihiṃs*, and as 勞, "weariness"; a term used in the same context in the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya*, T 1428 at T XXII 786c6, and the Mahīśāsaka *Vinaya*, T 1421 at T XXII 103c13.

³⁶ MN 26 at MN I 169,5: "having come to know the request by Brahmā, with the eye of a Buddha I surveyed the world, out of compassion for beings", *Brahmuno ca ajjhesanaṃ viditvā satteṣu ca kāruṇīyatam paṭicca Buddhacakkhunā lokam volokesiṃ*; cf. also Sn 693. As Hamilton 1950: 146 notes, the Buddha's compassion "arose as an impulse after his attainment of Enlightenment." Wangchuk 2007: 104 explains that the motif of the Buddha's compassionate motivation was then, "in the course of time ... increasingly placed further back in time: at first, prior to the awakening, then prior to his renunciation, and finally back in the distant past."

³⁷ MN 55 at MN I 370,32 clarifies that the Buddha had eradicated all those mental defilements that could be responsible for an absence of compassion; cf. also MN 58 at MN I 395,23, which emphatically states that the Buddha had compassion for beings.

parallel to the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta* which, though lacking the Brahmā episode, nevertheless agrees with the Pāli account in presenting the future Buddha's motivation and his successful reaching of the goal entirely in terms of finding liberation for himself and having liberated himself.

The passages surveyed above reveal that the early Buddhist conception of the bodhisattva's motivation did not allot a prominent role to compassionate teaching activity for the sake of delivering others, a quality that only becomes evident after the bodhisattva has reached awakening and decided to teach. This is intriguing in view of the way some early Buddhist discourses depict an arhat.

In line with the above noted parallelism between the progress towards awakening of the bodhisattva and of arhats in general, in the early discourses compassion for others appears to be a result of awakening, whether this be the awakening of the bodhisattva or the awakening of an arhat.

An example could be found in an episode recorded in a range of sources, according to which the first arhats, as soon as they had reached awakening, were sent by the Buddha to tour the country so that they may teach others.³⁹ Another example for the importance given to concern for others occurs in a discourse in which the Buddha dismisses a group of newly-ordained monks for having created too much noise. Śāriputra fails to realize that it is now his duty to look after and provide guidance to this group of monks, as a consequence of which he has to face the Buddha's stern rebuke.⁴⁰ Another discourse records Śāriputra being vexed by another

³⁸ Compassion as a quality developed during the period previous to his awakening comes up in the *Mahāgovinda-sutta* and its parallels, according to which in a former life the bodhisattva practised meditation on compassion, DN 19 at DN II 239,20; DĀ 3 at T I 32b14 (where he practises all four *brahmavihāras*); T 8 at T I 211a9; and the *Mahāvastu*, Senart 1897: 210,10. The point of this practice, however, was not progress towards becoming a compassionate teacher in the distant future. Instead, his meditative development of compassion was undertaken out of the wish to have direct communion with Brahmā.

³⁹ SN 4.5 at SN I 105,24 and its parallel SĀ 1096 at T II 288b3; cf. also the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya*, T 1428 at T XXII 793a7; the *Mahāvastu*, Senart 1897: 415,8; the Mahīśāsaka *Vinaya*, T 1421 at T XXII 108a7; the (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, T 1450 at T XXIV 130a20; the Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, T 1440 at T XXIII 511a12; and the Theravāda *Vinaya*, Vin I 21,1. Gombrich 1988: 19 comments that this injunction "shows that concern for the happiness of all beings is the foundation of the Saṅgha's very existence."

⁴⁰ MN 67 at MN I 459,19 and EĀ 45.2 at T II 771b6.

monk who repeatedly contradicts what Śāriputra has been teaching the monks. Instead of intervening in support of Śāriputra, Ānanda thinks it better to keep quiet, a lack of compassion for which he incurs the Buddha's public censure.⁴¹ Given that elsewhere in the discourses these two chief disciples are often praised, the fact that in these two instances they are rebuked for their lack of compassionate concern for others underlines the degree to which the early discourses consider their unconcerned attitude as inappropriate.⁴²

Intervening in support of someone who is being vexed, like in the above case involving Ānanda, as well as teaching others was apparently expected not only of arhats, but also of those who are on the path to arhat-ship. Several discourses indicate that teaching others is of such importance for a monastic that neglecting to do so will obstruct progress on the path.⁴³ In fact, one out of several possible occasions for attaining liberation, according to the early discourses, is precisely while teaching others.⁴⁴ Judging from this presentation, it would be possible to become an arhat at the time of being engaged in the compassionate activity of teaching others the Dharma, provided earlier practice has sufficiently matured the mind for the final breakthrough to liberation to take place.

In sum, in early Buddhist thought the compassionate impulse to become active for the sake of others was associated with the Buddha as well as with arhats and those who aspire to become arhats, but was not seen as a quality that motivated the bodhisattva's quest for awakening.

⁴¹ AN 5.166 at AN III 194,22 and MĀ 22 at T I 450a21.

⁴² With this I do not intend to propose that any arhat is automatically a teacher, but only that it appears to have been considered a common trait of arhats, and even of those who have embarked on the path to liberation, that they engage in teaching activities. On some degree of variation in the conception of an arhat in the early discourses cf. Anālayo 2007a and Anālayo 2010a.

⁴³ MN 33 at MN I 221,17; AN 11.18 at AN V 349,11; SĀ 1249 at T II 343a5; T 123 at T II 546b15; and EĀ 49.1 at T II 794b8; cf. also the **Mahāprajñāpāramitā(-upadeśa)-śāstra* (on the title of this work cf. Demiéville 1950/1973: 470 note 1), 大智度論, T 1509 at T XXV 74a21.

⁴⁴ DN 33 at DN III 241,15; DN 34 at DN III 279,12; AN 5.26 at AN III 21,28; DĀ 9 at T I 51c11; DĀ 10 at T I 53c22; SĀ 565 at T II 149a11; cf. also the *Saṅgītiparyāya*, T 1536 at T XXVI 424a29, and the *Abhidharmakośavyākhyā*, Wogihara 1971b: 54,21; for a more detailed study cf. Anālayo 2010b.

The lack of a prominent role played by compassion in the conception of what motivates the quest for becoming a Buddha is not confined to the early discourses. De La Vallée Poussin (1915: 330) notes that the same applies to the *Mahāvastu*. According to the findings by Fronsdal (1998: 220) and Nattier (2003a: 146), compassion remains a relatively marginal aspect in the conception of a bodhisattva reflected in early *Mahāyāna* texts like Lokakṣema's translation of the Perfection of Wisdom in Eight-thousand Lines, *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, or the Inquiry of Ugra, *Ugraparipṛcchā*.

1.3 Gautama's Marvellous Qualities

Instead of compassion, the emphasis in the early discourses is on a range of other qualities of the bodhisattva. A detailed exposition of what tradition considered to be particularly inspiring about the bodhisattva can be found in the Discourse on Wonderful and Marvellous Qualities, the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* of the *Majjhima-nikāya*, and in its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel, the Discourse on Marvellous Qualities (未曾有法經).⁴⁵ As these two discourses are of central importance for my exploration of the conception of the bodhisattva, in what follows I briefly survey the Pāli version in comparison with its Chinese counterpart. Then I examine the function of this discourse, after which I turn to its contribution to the development of the bodhisattva concept.

The speaker of the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* is Ānanda, who lists a series of wonderful and marvellous qualities of the Buddha. In the Pāli version, he begins by describing that the bodhisattva Gautama was endowed with mindfulness and clear comprehension when arising in Tuṣṭa,⁴⁶ during his sojourn – which lasted for the whole of his lifespan – and when departing from this realm. The *Madhyama-āgama* parallel does not mention his

⁴⁵ MN 123 at MN III 118,9; where the discourse's title in B^e and C^e dispenses with °*dhamma*. The title of the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel agrees with E^e and S^e, MĀ 32 at T I 469c20: 未曾有法經.

⁴⁶ MN 123 at MN III 119,21: *sato sampajāno bodhisatto Tusitaṃ kāyaṃ uppajji*. This passage thus uses the term bodhisattva for a past life of the Buddha, corresponding to the third of three usages of the term identified by Kariyawasam 1972: 224f, who proposes that the earliest usage of the term just stands for the period from going forth to awakening, followed by the term representing the time from birth to awakening, until it comes to cover past lives as well.

mindfulness or clear comprehension when being reborn in Tuṣita. Instead, this version reports that he outshone other heavenly beings (*deva*) with respect to lifespan, appearance and glory. The two versions agree, however, that the bodhisattva entered into his mother's womb with clear comprehension, an event that was accompanied by an earthquake and the manifestation of a great light.

The *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* continues by depicting the conditions of the bodhisattva's sojourn in his mother's womb, reporting that four heavenly beings protected him; that his mother was virtuous, free from sensual thoughts, but at the same time endowed with the five types of sense pleasures; and that she was able to see the bodhisattva in her womb, comparable to seeing a beryl strung on a coloured thread.⁴⁷ None of these marvellous qualities occur in the *Madhyama-āgama* version. Though the *Madhyama-āgama* discourse also describes the conditions of the bodhisattva in the mother's womb, it instead notes that inside the womb he rested on his right side, with his body fully stretched.

Next the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* reports that the mother passed away seven days after giving birth, followed by indicating that the pregnancy lasted ten months and that the mother gave birth while standing. None of these qualities is found in the Chinese parallel.

The two versions agree that on being born the bodhisattva was not sullied by any bodily impurities and was received by four deities. They also agree that two streams of water appeared in the sky to bathe him, and that on being born the bodhisattva took seven steps. The Pāli version records a declaration made by the newly born bodhisattva on this occasion, in which

⁴⁷ The beryl imagery recurs in the *Śaṅghabhedavastu*, Gnoli 1977: 42,16. The *Lalitavistara*, Lefmann 1902: 72,9, compares her vision of the bodhisattva to looking at one's own face in a clean mirror. According to the *Mahāvastu*, Senart 1890: 16,16, she saw him as if she were seeing a body of gold, a vision comparable to a beryl placed in a crystal casket. Rhys Davids 1910: 10 note 1 explains (in relation to the Pāli version) that the original "point of the simile is not the perfection of the jewel, but the clarity of vision", as can be seen from its occurrences in other contexts. In fact, as already noted by Windisch 1908: 118 and Foucher 1949: 39, taken in a literal sense the image does not work so well, as it would compare the mother to a beryl and the bodhisattva only to a coloured string. Nevertheless, a probably central aspect of the present episode is reflected in Jā I 52,2, which compares the mother's womb to a *caitya*. This points to a strand of thought of considerable significance for subsequent Buddhist history, reflected in a remark by Durt 2003: 44 that within the context of "a larger programme of quasi-deification of the Buddha ... Māyā appears as a living tabernacle sheltering her son"; cf. also Drewes 2007: 107–110.

he proclaims his superiority in the world and his transcendence of future existences, a declaration absent from the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel.

The two versions agree again that the birth was accompanied by another earthquake and the manifestation of a great light. While in the Pāli version the listing of marvellous qualities by Ānanda comes to an end at this point, in the *Madhyama-āgama* account he continues by mentioning several remarkable events that took place during the Buddha's youth and after his awakening. The two versions agree in concluding the discourse with the Buddha highlighting another marvellous quality of his, namely his ability to be aware of the arising, continuity and disappearance of feelings, perceptions and thoughts.

As this brief survey shows, the two versions differ considerably from each other. The bodhisattva's descent from Tuṣita into his mother's womb and the extraordinary form and circumstances of his birth seem to be their common starting points,⁴⁸ from which the two versions appear to have developed the theme of the marvellous qualities of the bodhisattva in independent ways.

As a result of these independent developments, their present listings of marvellous qualities show more differences than similarities.⁴⁹ The two discourses thereby diverge from each other to a greater degree than usually found between discourses in the *Majjhima-nikāya* and their *Madhyama-āgama*-parallels.⁵⁰ This circumstance suggests a comparatively late date for the coming into being of each version in its final form.

⁴⁸ The centrality of these two events is also reflected in AN 4.127 at AN II 130,20, which lists four marvels, out of which two are the manifestation of a great light on the occasion when the bodhisattva descended into his mother's womb and when he was born (AN 4.127 differs from MN 123 and MĀ 32 in as much as it does not mention earthquakes on these two occasions). The other two marvels in AN 4.127 are manifestations of light on the occasion of the Buddha's awakening and when he set in motion the wheel of Dharma.

⁴⁹ More than half of the qualities listed by Ānanda in MN 123 are not found at all in MĀ 32, and several others are treated quite differently. Minh Chau 1991: 165 concludes that "the accounts of the Buddha's ... marvellous qualities are not the same in both versions, each seems to derive from an independent source." According to Thomas 1927/2003: 2, "the miracles of the birth ... show most clearly the growth of apocryphal additions."

⁵⁰ For a survey of differences between *Majjhima-nikāya* discourses and their parallels see Anālayo 2011.



Figure 1.2 The Birth of the Bodhisattva

The figure above shows an aniconic representation of the bodhisattva's birth. Queen Māyā stands in a posture expressive of a sense of ease, gracefully holding on to a tree with her left arm. Her right waist, the side where according to tradition the infant emerges,⁵¹ is marked by a little swelling. To her right stand what appear to be four gods, holding a long cloth in their hands to receive the newborn. The presence of the bodhisattva is indicated by footprints on the cloth held by the god closest to Māyā and by an empty stool beneath.

Amarāvati; courtesy Trustees of the British Museum.

⁵¹ That the Buddha issued from the side of his mother was also known to Hieronymus, cf. Dihle 1965: 38. Bollée 2005: 15 suggests that the motif of the lateral birth "perhaps ... originated in the custom of carrying children on the hip." Dayal 1932/1970: 298 notes that "the idea of being born from the mother's side is referred to in a hymn of the *R̥gveda* (iv, 18.1)." Regarding the choice of the right side, Printz 1925: 125 explains that, according to ancient Indian beliefs, when a foetus is on the right side of the mother's womb it will be a boy, while a foetus on the left side shows that it will be a girl; cf. also e.g. the *Divyāvadāna*, Cowell 1886: 2,7, or Abhidh-k 3.15 in Pradhan 1967: 126,24.

Regarding qualities found in only one of the two versions, given that the presentation in both discourses conveys the same attitude towards the marvellous nature of the Buddha, the possibility that a quality now found in only one version was on purpose omitted in the parallel version can safely be set aside. Since both discourses otherwise show no sign of textual loss, it seems also improbable that one version lost a whole series of qualities, which are now found only in the other version. Thus in the case of qualities that occur in only one of the two versions, the most straightforward explanation would be that these are later additions.

A sign of later addition in the Pāli version can in fact be found in relation to the passing away of the mother seven days after giving birth to the bodhisattva.⁵² The placing of this particular event in the *Acchariyabbhuta-dhamma-sutta* is out of sequence, as it occurs after several marvels that, in a chronological order, depict his birth and life in Tuṣita, his descent from Tuṣita and his subsequent sojourn in his mother's womb. In continuation of this pattern, the bodhisattva's birth should be the next marvel, yet in the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* his birth is mentioned only after the passing away of his mother has been described.

As the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel does not refer to her passing away at all, it seems safe to assume that the reference to the death of the mother is a later addition. In fact, one would not naturally place the early death of the bodhisattva's mother under the heading of being a marvel of her son.⁵³ A

⁵² The full quote can be found below in note 55.

⁵³ The mother's death differs from other qualities related to her well-being or virtue during pregnancy, as at that time the bodhisattva was still present in her womb, whereas in the case of her death he obviously was no longer physically connected to her. Jā I 52,2 explains that the mother had to die soon since a womb that has borne a bodhisattva cannot be occupied again by another being. The *Mahāvastu*, Senart 1890: 3,10, gives the related reasoning that it is not proper for a woman who has given birth to the bodhisattva to indulge in sensuality again; cf. also Rahula 1978: 201. Though these explanations relate the mother's early death to the sublime nature of the bodhisattva, strictly speaking the premature death would still be a quality of the mother, not of the son. As noted by Hara 2009: 219, the function of "the story that she was destined to die seven days after the Buddha's birth" is to highlight "the purity of the mother's womb" and thus not a quality of the bodhisattva himself. By including this quality, the treatment in MN 123 can be seen to evolve from marvels of the bodhisattva, via marvels that are a direct result of his physical presence (such as qualities of the pregnant mother or cosmic events that accompany his conception or birth), to marvels that are qualities of others; cf. also below note 65.

discourse in the *Udāna* reckons her early death as a marvel in general, a probably more straightforward way of qualifying this event.⁵⁴ Perhaps due to a growing interest in marvellous qualities of the Buddha, at some point during oral transmission this *Udāna* passage may have come to be added to the account of marvels in the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta*. If that should indeed be the case, then this addition took place without awareness of the chronological sequence of marvels otherwise observed in this discourse.

The function of this listing of marvellous qualities in the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* and its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel is reflected in a peculiar feature found in both versions, which rarely occurs in other early discourses. Both follow each quality with a remark by Ānanda that he keeps this marvel in mind.⁵⁵ In this way, each marvellous quality is described

⁵⁴ Ud 5.2 at Ud 48,4: “it is wonderful, venerable sir, it is marvellous, venerable sir, how short-lived, venerable sir, the mother of the Blessed One has been. Seven days after the Blessed One had been born, the mother of the Blessed One passed away”, *acchariyaṃ bhante, abbhutaṃ, bhante, yāvad appāyukā hi bhante bhagavato mātā ahoṣi. sattāhajāte bhagavati bhagavato mātā kālāṃ akāsi* (B^e, C^e and S^e read *yāva appāyukā*).

⁵⁵ Thus in the case of the early death of the bodhisattva’s mother, MN 123 at MN III 122,1 reads: “I heard this from the Blessed One’s own lips, venerable sir, I received it from his own lips: ‘Ānanda, seven days after the bodhisattva has been born, his mother passes away and arises in the Tusita Heaven’; venerable sir, that ... , this too, venerable sir, I remember as a wonderful and marvellous quality of the Blessed One”, *sammukhā me taṃ, bhante, bhagavato sutāṃ, sammukhā paṭiggahitaṃ: ‘sattāhajāte, Ānanda, bodhisatte bodhisattamātā kālāṃ karoti, Tusitaṃ kāyaṃ uppajjati’ti; yam pi, bhante, ... idam p’ ahaṃ, bhante, bhagavato acchariyaṃ abbhutadhammaṃ dhāremi* (the elision is found in the original, marked in B^e, C^e and S^e with *pe*; S^e reads *sattāhaṃ jāte*). Fukita 1986: 488 (in relation to another text) explains that “the addition of [such a] refrain is a spontaneous interpolation occurring when a sūtra is passed down by oral ... transmission.” In fact, it is noteworthy that the first section of this passage in MN 123 still conforms to the general pattern observed in other Pāli discourses, where the term *bodhisattva* is only used by the Buddha, whose words are just quoted by Ānanda. In the second section, however, the part not fully given in the editions would have to be supplemented with *sattāhajāte bodhisatte bodhisattamātā kālāṃ karoti*, so that here the term *bodhisattva* would be used by Ānanda in what is no longer a direct quote (that the term *bodhisatta* is to be used at this point can be seen from the full text given in relation to earlier qualities, cf. e.g. MN III 119,21). This stands in contrast to the way he formulates the same states of affairs in Ud 5.2 at Ud 48,6, cf. above note 54, where he instead uses the respectful term “Blessed One”, *bhagavant*. Thus the present instance would not agree with the usage of the term *bodhisattva* elsewhere in the Pāli discourses and might be due to simply copying the formulation employed in the first part. This supports the impression that the refrain-like section could indeed be an “interpolation” that occurred during oral transmission.

twice, once as an actual description and again as something that Ānanda keeps in mind.⁵⁶

Now in the thought-world of the early discourses, Ānanda stands out as the disciple foremost in memory.⁵⁷ The same quality is also reflected in the circumstance that, according to the account of the so-called first council in the different *Vinayas*, he had memorized all the discourses spoken by the Buddha.⁵⁸ Thus the fact that he keeps each of the Buddha's marvellous qua-

⁵⁶ The same pattern recurs in the next discourse in the *Majjhima-nikāya*, which also follows a listing of marvellous qualities – in this case the qualities of the monk Bakkula – with a similar type of acclamation by the reciters. Thus in MN 124 at MN III 125,18, for example, after the monk Bakkula has proclaimed that during the eighty years of his monkhood he has never had a single perception of sensuality, the reciters of the discourse state: “that the venerable Bakkula does not recall to have ever had the arising of a sensual perception for eighty years; this we remember as a wonderful and marvellous quality of the venerable Bakkula”, *yam p’ āyasmā Bakkulo asītiyā vassehi nābhijānāti kāmasaññāṃ uppannapubbaṃ, idam pi mayāṃ āyasmato Bakkulassa acchariyaṃ abbhutaṃ dhammaṃ dhārema* (B° reads *Bākulo* and consequently also *Bākulassa*; B°, C° and S° read *abbhutadhammaṃ*). The parallel MĀ 34 at T I 475b4 proceeds similarly, though without repeating the quality itself: “‘friends, during the eighty years that I have been practising the path in this right teaching and discipline, I never had a perception of sensuality’. That the venerable Bakkula makes such a declaration, this [we] reckon a marvellous quality of the venerable Bakkula”, 諸賢，我於此正法律中學道已來八十年，未曾有欲想，若尊者薄拘羅作此說，是謂尊者薄拘羅未曾有法。Now the circumstance that the protagonist of MN 124 has been a monk for eighty years implies that the discourse took place at least thirty-five years after the Buddha's demise. In fact the commentary, Ps IV 197,2, explains that MN 124 was included in the canon only at the second ‘council’ or communal recitation, *saṅgīti*. Given that MN 123 and MN 124 share the feature of following each marvellous quality with a refrain-like indication that this is being kept in mind by the reciter(s), another aspect of this refrain might be related to the need to ensure the text's preservation during oral transmission. Gombrich 1990: 26f has suggested that in the early stages of the Buddhist oral tradition “it must have been difficult, if not impossible, to slip a new text into the curriculum”, so much so that “any text which ... introduces something which is palpably new has no chances of survival.” Could these refrain-like statements have originated as the result of precisely such difficulties, in that the relative lateness of MN 124 and of considerable sections of MN 123 required an explicit indication – expressed in these refrain-like statements – to the effect that the respective material is worthwhile memorizing? If this should have been the case, then the indications given in this way would be in line with a tendency prominent in later times of building into a text protective measures that assure its survival.

⁵⁷ AN 1.14 at AN I 24,32 and EĀ 4.7 at T II 558a26; cf. also Th 1024.

⁵⁸ Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya*, T 1428 at T XXII 968b15; Mahāsaṃghika *Vinaya*, T 1425 at XXII 491c2; Mahīśāsaka *Vinaya*, T 1421 at T XXII 191a18; (Mūla-)Sārvāstivāda *Vinaya*, T 1451 at T XXIV 407a3; Sārvāstivāda *Vinaya*, T 1435 at T XXIII 449a20; Theravāda *Vinaya*, Vin II 287,12.

lities in mind would not require any explicit highlighting. Besides, this much is anyway self-evident, since otherwise he would not have been able to list them.

In addition to stating an obvious fact, these refrain-like statements would have the effect of indicating to the audience that each of these qualities is worth being memorized. In this way, the pattern observed throughout both versions – where hearing that the bodhisattva had such-and-such a quality is followed by remembering that the bodhisattva had such-and-such a quality – would encourage others to keep this quality in mind.

Another noteworthy feature of the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* is its recurrent use of visual stimulants. The first of these is the description of an earthquake accompanied by a great light of such intensity that it outshines even the moon and the sun, reaching areas of utter darkness where beings for the first time are able to see each other. The second image illustrates the mother's ability to see the bodhisattva in her own womb with the example of seeing a coloured thread strung through a well-cut beryl of pure quality. The third image compares the newly born bodhisattva to a gem placed on Kāśī cloth, and the fourth image again depicts the appearance of a great light together with an earthquake.⁵⁹

These visual stimulants, with their symbolic allusion to the dispelling of darkness through the teaching activity of the Buddha (whom tradition considers the first of the three 'gems'), are set in a frame that alludes to meditation: The first marvel in the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* highlights the bodhisattva's possession of mindfulness and clear comprehension on appearing, remaining in and leaving Tuṣita. The last marvel, mentioned by the Buddha in reply to Ānanda's exposition, describes the Buddha's aware-

⁵⁹ These occur in MN 123 at MN III 120,6, MN III 121,20, MN III 123,1 and MN III 123,28. The parallel MĀ 32 at T I 470a15 and T I 470b5 only reports the two earthquakes accompanied by appearances of a great light and thus does not have a counterpart to the images of a beryl and a gem. The motif of the two earthquakes at the time of the conception and the birth of the bodhisattva is in fact fairly common, being also recorded in a standard listing of eight earthquakes found e.g. in DN 16 at DN II 108,9, with parallels in fragment S 360 folio 36 R2 in Waldschmidt 1950: 20; DĀ 2 at T I 16a5; T 5 at T I 165b4; T 6 at T I 180c19; T 7 at T I 191c28; and the '*dul ba*' version in Waldschmidt 1951: 215,21. Another occurrence is AN 8.70 at AN IV 312,30 and its parallel EĀ 42.5 at T II 753c20. According to Frauwallner 1956: 157–159, this set of eight may have evolved from earlier listings of just three earthquakes, found e.g. in MĀ 36 at T I 477c7. For a study of earthquakes in Buddhist literature cf. Ciurtin 2009.

ness of feelings, perceptions and thoughts as they arise, are present and disappear – an ability elsewhere in the discourses presented under the heading of clear comprehension.⁶⁰

Thus underlying the listing of qualities in the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* a circular pattern can be discerned that moves from the bodhisattva's clear comprehension via the manifestation of a great light to the description of a jewel, and then continues from another jewel via another manifestation of a great light to the Buddha's clear comprehension. That is, the recollection of the Buddha's marvellous qualities in the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* proceeds in an almost rhythmic pattern that takes off and concludes with meditative qualities, and whose trajectory progresses through a set of images that have a strong visual and symbolic component. In this way, the discourse exhibits considerable evocative qualities, revealing that the purpose of the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* is probably best understood as inviting recalling, perhaps even visualizing, in a rather lively manner the marvellous qualities of the Buddha.⁶¹

The recollective and evocative message of the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* would have been of particular importance for the early Buddhist community after their founder had passed away, especially for disciples who had never met the Buddha. Lacking the experience of a personal encounter with the living Buddha, and given that during the early period the Buddha was not represented in sculpture or painting, discourses like the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* would have enabled new converts to engage in some form of emotional contact with their teacher, by memorizing and perhaps even visualizing his marvellous qualities.

Now the act of becoming a Buddhist involves taking the three refuges. Yet, new converts would have lacked an opportunity to establish a direct rapport with the first refuge, the Buddha, once he had passed away.⁶² In

⁶⁰ SN 47.35 at SN V 180,27.

⁶¹ In his insightful study of the *Mahāsudassana-sutta*, Gethin 2006: 99f points out that, given that the discourses were transmitted orally, "the visual dimension may have come alive more or less spontaneously to those reciting and listening to the texts. An oral culture may well nurture a more active visual imagination." On the importance of 'seeing' the Buddha after his demise cf. also Rotman 2009: 151–175.

⁶² Schmithausen 2000a: 9 highlights the need for some personal relation to the object of the first refuge as a driving force for a range of developments in Buddhism. Williams 2000:

line with a general trait of religious traditions, the passing away of the founder inevitably creates a vacuum not easily filled. In the case of early Buddhism, this vacuum would have been particularly challenging for those who could not find all the inspiration they needed in the teachings alone, who were in need of something more personal that touches the heart.

The *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta*'s taking up of common events like pregnancy and birth can be understood as a means of addressing such needs by uplifting and inspiring its audience through a stimulating description of the marvellous way the Buddha-to-be passed through these experiences, common to all human beings. By treating events familiar to anyone who had lived or still lived in an ancient Indian household, the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* treads common ground and at the same time creates distance and evokes awe through the medium of the marvels that accompany these events.⁶³ Thus, the didactic function of the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* would have been to stimulate and strengthen devotion based on the superior nature of the Buddha, evident in the marvels that accompany his god-like descent from heaven to the world of human beings.⁶⁴

The important function that the marvels would have assumed in this respect may also help to appreciate why marvels came to be part of the traditional listings of canonical texts. Judging from the function of the marvels suggested above, it is hardly surprising that discourses on marvels should have been considered important enough to be included in the register of Buddhist texts in terms of nine or twelve "limbs", *aṅgas*.⁶⁵

108 comments that "in the early centuries the inability to see and benefit any more from the actual physical presence of the Buddha was felt by some very acutely." For a survey of the importance that recollection of the Buddha had in Buddhist history cf. Harrison 1992.

⁶³ For a study of the contrast between the suffering associated in ancient Indian thought with birth and the depiction of the marvels that accompany the same event in the case of the bodhisattva cf. Hara 1980. On the miracles accompanying the bodhisattva's birth, Griffiths 1994: 88 comments that such "miraculous signs are generally meant ... to inculcate astonishment in the ... hearer of the legend." Robinson 1970/1982: 7 remarks that "the purpose of all the mythical elements in the nativity cycle is to show that the Bodhisattva was innately different from ordinary man."

⁶⁴ Senart 1882b: 432 comments that "le Buddha, avant sa naissance, est un dieu, le chef des dieux, à vrai dire il ne naît point, il s'incarne parmi les hommes en vue de leur bien et de leur salut."

⁶⁵ The Pāli commentarial tradition, e.g. Ps II 106,22, defines this particular *aṅga* as covering marvels in general, giving as example a listing of marvels of Ānanda, mentioned in DN 16

This function of the marvels provides the background for the coming into being of a rather significant development in regard to the bodhisattva concept that manifests in the *Acchariyabbhutatadhamma-sutta*. This occurs in the discourse's description of how, on just being born, the bodhisattva takes seven steps and then proclaims:

at DN II 145,3 and AN 4.129 at AN II 132,17. According to von Hinüber 1994: 131, however, the *aṅga* of marvels should more specifically be understood to represent the incipient Buddha legend. In fact, a Chinese *Udāna* collection, T 212 at T IV 643c9, defines this *aṅga* in the following way: “the eleventh [*aṅga*] is called ‘marvellous qualities’, like venerable Ānanda extolling the Blessed One’s virtues as marvellous qualities”, 十一名曰未曾有法, 若尊者阿難以未曾有法歎如來德. According to one of the definitions quoted in the **Mahāvibhāṣā*, T 1545 at T XXVII 660b2, examples of this *aṅga* are “disciples extolling the Blessed One’s marvellous virtues, like Śāriputra extolling the Blessed One’s supreme virtues, [or] venerable Ānanda extolling the Blessed One’s extremely marvellous qualities”, 諸弟子等讚歎世尊希有功德, 如舍利子讚歎世尊無上功德, 尊者慶喜讚歎世尊甚希有法 (this is preceded by an alternative definition mentioning marvels related to the three jewels; a definition that recurs in the *Udāna-varga-vivaraṇa* in Balk 1984: 31,19). The **Mahāprajñāpāramitā(-upadeśa)-śāstra*, in its definition of this *aṅga*, lists several marvels that accompanied the Buddha’s birth, T 1509 at T XXV 308a13: “at the time of just being born he took seven steps without needing any support, wherever he placed his feet there were lotuses, and he made the declaration: ‘I shall deliver all sentient beings from old age, disease and death’” (cf. also Lamotte 1980b: 2301f), 又生時不須扶持而行七步, 足跡之處皆有蓮華, 而發是言, 我是度一切眾生老病死者. The (*Mahāyāna*) *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra* (on the title of this work cf. Habata 2007: xliii-li) begins its definition of this *aṅga* with the same marvel of the bodhisattva’s ability to walk at birth, T 374 at T XII 452a9: “what are texts called marvels? Like when just after being born the bodhisattva took seven steps without anyone supporting him”, 何等名為未曾有經, 如彼菩薩初出生時, 無人扶持, 即行七步, continuing with other marvels related to the Buddha; cf. also T 375 at T XXII 694a10 and the Tibetan counterpart in D *mdo sde, nya* 234a3 or Q *ju* 247a5: *rmad du ’byung ba zhes bya ba ni byang chub sems dpa’ thog ma btsas ma thag tu sus kyang ma bstan par gom pa bdun song ba dang*. Guang Xing 2002b: 19 note 80, after quoting the definitions given in T 212, T 1509 and T 1545, concludes that “*adbhuta-dharma* originally only included the miracles of the Buddha.” Though this may indeed have been the original implication, already with the treatment in MN 123 the conception of ‘marvels’ can be seen to evolve from qualities of the Buddha to marvels that, strictly speaking, are no longer his own qualities – such as the early death of his mother (cf. above note 53) – which makes an expansion of the concept of this *aṅga* to include marvellous qualities of others a natural development. An example in case would be the discourse that follows MN 123 in the *Majjhima-nikāya*, MN 124 at MN III 124–128, which highlights the wonderful and marvellous qualities of the monk Bakkula in a way that has much in common with the presentation in MN 123 (cf. above note 56). The par-

"I am supreme in the world, I am the highest in the world, I am the first in the world; this is my last birth, there will be no further existence."⁶⁶

The marvellous character of this quality in the Pāli version appears to be in particular what the bodhisattva said, since according to the *Ambaṭṭha-sutta* another boy was also able to speak right after his birth. Instead of making a majestic proclamation, however, he asked his mother to wash him, because he had such dark skin. The *Ambaṭṭha-sutta* reports that people who witnessed his ability to speak at birth drew the conclusion that he must be a goblin (*piśāca*).⁶⁷

allel to MN 123, MĀ 32, heads a whole chapter in the *Madhyama-āgama* dedicated to the theme of marvels, 未曾有法品, which besides the marvellous qualities of Ānanda and Bakkula also has discourses depicting the marvellous qualities of some lay disciples (MĀ 38–41 at T I 479c12–485a2, with their Pāli counterparts in AN 8.21–24 at AN IV 208,17–220,13). The *Abhidharmasamuccaya* in fact begins its definition of marvels with disciples, cf. Hayashima 2003: 610,6 (= Pradhan 1950: 79,6): "what are marvels? Expositions regarding highly marvellous and extraordinary qualities of disciples, bodhisattvas and *Tathāgatas*", *adbhutadharmaḥ katamaḥ? yatra śrāvakabodhisattvatathāgatānaṃ paramādbhutāścaryadharmāṇāṃ deśanā*. A definition of marvels in the *Śrāvakabhūmi*, though beginning its listing with marvels of Buddhas, continues by listing disciples, monks, nuns, probationary nuns, male and female novices, male and female lay followers, even including those outside of the Buddhist community, cf. Matsunami 1998: 232,1: *yatra buddhānāṃ ca buddhaśrāvakāṇāṃ ca bhikṣūnāṃ ca bhikṣuṇīnāṃ ca śikṣamāṇānāṃ śrāmaṇerāṇāṃ śrāmaṇerikāṇāṃ upāsakānāṃ upāsikānāṃ sādharmaṇāsādhāraṇās ca tadanya prativiśiṣṭās cāścaryādbhutaśaṇmatā guṇaviśeṣā ākhyātāḥ, ima ucyante 'dbhutā dharmāḥ*. Cooray 1963: 172 notes that, in the case of Ud 5.5 at Ud 54,33, "qualities of the *Dhammavinyaya* have also been admitted in the category of the wondrous and miraculous", hence the category of marvels was "not confined to qualities pertaining to individuals". In sum, though the qualities of the Buddha must have played a central role in regard to the implications and the importance of this particular *aṅga*, the conception of marvels appears to have soon acquired a rather broad scope.

⁶⁶ MN 123 at MN III 123,21: *aggo 'ham asmi lokassa, seṭṭho 'ham asmi lokassa, jeṭṭho 'ham asmi lokassa, ayam antimā jāti, n'atthi dāni punabbhavo* (B° and S° differ in as much as they have *jeṭṭho* as their second and *seṭṭho* as their third part of the proclamation).

⁶⁷ DN 3 at DN I 93,11: "on being born this one spoke, a dark one has been born, a goblin has been born", *ayaṃ sañjāto paccābhāsi, kaṇho jāto piśāco jāto* (B°, C° and S° read *ayaṃ jāto pabyāhāsi*); cf. also Printz 1925: 127. One of the parallels to this passage, DĀ 20 at T I 83a10, reports that people even tend to be frightened by an infant's ability to speak. For another instance where a baby is able to speak soon after being born cf. Ud 2.8 at Ud 17,27.



Figure 1.3 The First Proclamation of the Bodhisattva

The figure above shows Queen Māyā at the time of giving birth, standing in a posture that conveys a sense of ease and comfort, elegantly stretching up her arms to hold on to the bough of a tree on her left side. To her right the bodhisattva stands on a lotus, his whole body surrounded by an aureole, with his right hand raised as if he is making a proclamation.⁶⁸ Above the bodhisattva two celestial beings are pouring out water, presumably mixing cold and hot water to bathe him.

North India; courtesy National Museum of Nepal.

⁶⁸ For other instances where the infant bodhisattva is portrayed with his right hand raised up, apparently expressing that he is making a solemn proclamation, cf. e.g. Foucher 1905: 306 (cf. also Karetzky 1992: 17 and figure 16) and Schlingloff 1988: 20.

Thus the mere ability of an infant to speak at birth was in itself not necessarily seen in a positive light. Besides, according to the Pāli *Jātaka* collection already in two previous existences the bodhisattva was able to speak right after being born.⁶⁹ Since these instances are not explicitly reckoned as marvels, in the present case the marvel would be the content of his proclamation.

The *Madhyama-āgama* version differs from the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* in as much as it only records the seven steps, without any proclamation made at all.⁷⁰ Nakamura (1980/1999: 18) is probably right when he concludes that “the verse claimed to have been proclaimed by the Buddha at his birth was composed very late.”⁷¹

In addition to the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta*, a range of sources record a proclamation made by the newly-born bodhisattva Gautama, though varying on its precise content.⁷² Variations can also be found in regard to the proclamation made by the former Buddha Vipasyī right after being born. While the Pāli version of this stanza is identical to the declara-

⁶⁹ Jā 546 at Jā VI 331,15 and Jā 547 at Jā VI 485,14 report that Mahosadha and prince Vessantara conversed with their respective mother right after being born.

⁷⁰ MĀ 32 at T I 470b29.

⁷¹ Gowans 2003: 17 and 23 remarks that, even though the tale of the bodhisattva's declaration given right after his birth is an “obvious fabrication”, such “apparent amendments are often symbolically significant even if historically false.” Irwin 1981 even goes so far as to assume that this declaration has cosmogonic significance; cf. also Eliade 1948. Mus 1935: 497 observes that “les thèmes fondamentaux de la spéculation postérieure ont leurs racines dans le commun bouddhisme, et sans doute bien avant qu'il ne soit permis de prononcer les mots de Mahāyāna ...”. The significance of this particular marvel also appears to be reflected in the high percentage of representations of the newborn bodhisattva taking seven steps found among a sample of temple paintings and sculptures in modern Sri Lanka surveyed by Gombrich 1971/2008: 110, ranking second only to depictions of the lineage of twenty-four Buddhas, the reclining Buddha and the first sermon.

⁷² The bodhisattva's proclamation of his own supremacy right after birth is recorded in several Buddha-biographies preserved in early Chinese translations, cf. T 184 at T III 463c14; T 185 at T III 473c2; and T 188 at T III 618a19; to which a range of sources add that he also announced to have reached his last birth, cf. SĀ 604 at T II 166c2 (this is part of the *Aśokāvadāna*, which would not have been part of the original *Samyukta-āgama* collection, cf. above note 3 page 12; with a counterpart in the *Divyāvadāna*, Cowell 1886: 389,20); T 189 at T III 625a27; T 190 at T III 687b10; the *Buddhacarita* 1.15, Johnston 1936/1995: 2; the *Lalitavistara*, Lefmann 1902: 85,1 (cf. also T 186 at T III 494a27, where the last birth is not mentioned explicitly, and T 187 at T III 553a21); the *Mahāvastu*, Senart 1890: 24,8; and the *Sanḥabhedavastu*, Gnoli 1977: 45,13 (cf. also T 1450 at T XXIV 108a16).

tion made according to the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* by the bodhisattva Gautama, the *Dirgha-āgama* record of the words spoken by the newly born bodhisattva Vipasyī contains a reference to delivering sentient beings.⁷³ This brings in the notion of concern for others that is so conspicuously absent from the passages discussed so far.

When considered from the perspective of the didactic function of the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta*, the proclamation made by the bodhisattva Gautama may at first have come into being as just another facet in the overall scheme of exalting the Buddha. Yet, this particular marvel has consequences that originally may have been neither intended nor foreseen.

The significance of this proclamation emerges once it is compared with the passages examined in the first part of the present chapter. These passages invariably indicate that the bodhisattva was not yet awakened, *anabhisambuddho*, which holds true even in the case of those versions that do not employ the term bodhisattva. Thus, from the perspective of this general consensus among early Buddhist discourses, the bodhisattva would have been able to make the claim that “this is my last birth, there will be no further existence” only once he had become a Buddha.

In the Pāli discourses in general, the claim that this is one’s last birth etc. is invariably a statement made after someone has reached full awakening.⁷⁴ The majority of these passages describe the Buddha’s own awakening, in-

⁷³ DĀ 1 at T I 4c1 reads: “all over in heaven and earth, I alone am to be honoured. [My] aim is to deliver sentient beings from birth, old age, disease, and death”, 天上天下唯我為尊, 要度眾生老病死, thereby combining a reference to delivering sentient beings with a claim to being supreme, but without any announcement of this being Vipasyī’s last birth. The proclamation by Vipasyī in DN 14 at DN II 15,10 corresponds to Gautama’s proclamation in MN 123. The Sanskrit counterpart to DN 14, fragment 360 folio 123 V4 in Fukita 2003: 9 and 64, has preserved a proclamation by Vipasyī that “this will be my last birth”, *iyam me bha(ve)[t paśc]imā jā[tiḥ]*, without a claim to being supreme and without a reference to delivering others.

⁷⁴ DN 29 at DN III 134,12; MN 26 at MN I 167,28 and MN I 173,19; MN 128 at MN III 162,25; SN 14.31 at SN II 171,2; SN 14.32 at SN II 172,12; SN 22.26 at SN III 28,33; SN 22.27 at SN III 29,29; SN 35.13 at SN IV 8,2; SN 35.14 at SN IV 8,26; SN 35.15 at SN IV 9,30; SN 35.16 at SN IV 10,21; SN 48.21 at SN V 204,12; SN 48.28 at SN V 206,6; SN 56.11 at SN V 423,10; AN 3.101 at AN I 259,11+32; AN 7.47 at AN IV 56,15; AN 8.64 at AN IV 305,4; and AN 9.41 at AN IV 448,19. The discourses MN 4 at MN I 23,24; MN 19 at MN I 117,18; MN 36 at MN I 249,17; MN 85 at MN II 93,23; MN 100 at MN 212,17; MN 112 at MN III 36,26; and AN 8.11 at AN IV 179,7 make a statement to the same effect in terms of having eradicated birth. Exceptions to this pattern of associating such a statement with the actual experience of awakening are the present passage in MN 123 and the *Mahāpadāna-sutta*, DN 14 at DN II 15,12.

roducing the proclamation “this is my last birth, there will be no further existence” by indicating that on that occasion “knowledge arose” of having reached this condition.⁷⁵ One discourse explicitly indicates that this knowledge attained by the Buddha was “born of awakening”.⁷⁶

On considering these formulations, it seems safe to conclude that when these descriptions of the Buddha’s awakening came into being, the idea had not yet arisen that already at his birth he knew that this was going to be his last birth. In other words, the proclamation made by the infant bodhisattva in the *Acchhariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* involves a clear shift of a claim, originally made after awakening, to the time when the bodhisattva Gautama had just been born.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ E.g. in the case of the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta*, MN 26 at MN I 167,27: “knowledge and vision arose in me that ... this is the last birth, there will be no further existence”, *ñāṇaṃ ca pana me dassanaṃ udapādi ... ayam antimā jāti, n’atthi dāni punabbhavo*. The parallel MĀ 204 at T I 777a17 similarly indicates that on that occasion “knowledge arose and vision arose that ... birth has been eradicated ... there will be no further experiencing of existence”, 生知生見 ... 生已盡 ... 不更受有.

⁷⁶ DN 29 at DN III 134,11: “with regard to the future, knowledge born of awakening arises to the Tathāgata that this is the last birth, there will be no further existence”, *anāgataṃ ca kho ad-dhānaṃ ārabha tathāgatassa bodhiyaṃ ñāṇaṃ uppajjati, ayam antimā jāti, n’atthi dāni punabbhavo*. The parallel DĀ 17 at T I 75b29 indicates that “regarding the future, [the Tathāgata knows it through his] knowledge born of the path”, 於未來世, 生於道智, though DĀ 17 does not follow this with any further specification about knowing that this is his last birth etc.

⁷⁷ A similar instance can be found in Sn 683f, according to which the *devas* rejoice that “the bodhisattva has been born in the world of men for [their] welfare and happiness ... the supreme of all beings, the best of all persons ... supreme among all mankind”, *bodhisatto ... manussaloke hitasukhatāya jāto ... sabbasattuttamo aggapuggalo ... sabbapajānam uttamo* (B^c reads *hitasukhattāya*). This set of verses thus likewise shifts the superiority of the Buddha to the time of his birth. Elsewhere the Pāli discourses also associate the welfare and happiness of mankind with the Buddha, though the context shows that this intends the time after he has reached awakening and become a teacher, cf. e.g. MN 4 at MN I 21,26 or MN 12 at MN I 83,14: “a being free from delusion has arisen in the world for the welfare of many, for the happiness of many, out of compassion for the world, for the benefit, welfare and happiness of *devas* and men”, *asammohadhammo satto loke uppanno bahujaṇahitāya bahujaṇasukhāya lokānukampāya atthāya hitāya sukhāya devamanussānaṃ* (S^c reads *lokānukampakāya* in the case of MN 4, as does C^c in the case of MN 12). Notably, other Pāli discourses use the same string of terms on welfare etc. to qualify the following: the holy life (*brahmacarya*), e.g. DN 16 at DN II 119,27, DN 29 at DN III 127,19, DN 33 at DN III 211,5; noble disciples who teach the Dharma, It 79,22; monks in general or individual monks, some of whom live a rather secluded and withdrawn life, MN 31 at MN I 211,31, SN 4.5 at SN I 105,24, SN 16.5 at SN II 203,20; and virtuous recluses and Brahmins as a field of merit, DN 23 at DN II 332,9. Thus the ideas of the

As the passages surveyed in the first part of this chapter make clear, in his progress towards awakening the bodhisattva had to struggle with various mental defilements, such as fear and sensual desire, whose roots must thus have been present in his mind at the time of his birth.⁷⁸ From the perspective of these passages, the bodhisattva would not have been able to claim supremacy in the world, neither when he was a newly born infant nor when he eventually went forth in quest of awakening.

In contrast, from the perspective of the *Acchariyabbhutatadhamma-sutta* the simple fact of being the bodhisattva, however much he may be just a newly born infant, enables him to profess to be foremost in the whole world and to have already transcended future becoming. In this way, the bodhisattva's announcement of having reached the last birth and his proclamation of being foremost in the world reflect a clear change in the conception of the nature of the bodhisattva.

An inevitable outcome of this shift of perspective is that the bodhisattva's progress to awakening – depicted in the passages surveyed in the first part of the present chapter – loses importance. Once Gautama is already accomplished at birth, the stages of his progress must necessarily have taken place earlier, that is, in some former life or lives. An evident expression of this shift of perspective in the *Acchariyabbhutatadhamma-sutta* itself is its employment of the term bodhisattva for the previous life of the Buddha in Tuṣita, whereas in the discourses surveyed earlier the same term was only used in relation to his last life as a human.

Besides this temporal expansion of the usage of the term bodhisattva, the proclamation of superiority and final accomplishment has a rather weighty ramification, as it establishes the notion that the bodhisattva was

'welfare and happiness of mankind' and of having 'compassion for the world' are not employed exclusively in relation to the Buddha, but can apply to others who teach the Dharma, or even to those who just function as a source of merit. In fragment fol. 18 r9 of the *Dharma-skandha* in Dietz 1984: 76,2, *bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya* is even used for the case of a lay-follower who refrains from killing, encourages other to do the same, and rejoices in restraint from killing.

⁷⁸ Silk 2003a: 864 takes up this contrast, where the bodhisattva "is virtually fully awakened ('enlightened') from the moment of his birth", whereas subsequent events show that he was still ignorant and under the influence of defilements, summarizing that whereas "the infant, upon his birth, knows everything; the young man he becomes knows nothing".

already at birth invariably destined to become a Buddha.⁷⁹ The same is also reflected in a listing of five great dreams of the bodhisattva in the *Āṅguttara-nikāya*, another passage that employs the ‘before awakening’ phrase. These five dreams are portents of his future success in reaching full awakening, in teaching the path to awakening, in having a substantial congregation of lay disciples, in having monastic disciples from all four castes, and in receiving ample support without being attached to it.⁸⁰ From the perspective of such passages, the bodhisattva’s quest for awakening, described in the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta* and elsewhere, was anyway destined to end successfully.⁸¹

In sum, the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* reflects a significant change in the bodhisattva conception.⁸² Already at birth the bodhisattva is in posses-

⁷⁹ Guang Xing 2004: 45 comments that “the *Acchariyābhūtasutta* provides some vital statements that served as repositories of the transcendental Buddha” conception. According to Saibaba 2005: 118, “the origins of [the] transcendental (*lokuttara*) conception of the Buddha can be traced as far back as the accounts regarding Gautama’s descent as *bodhisatta* on the earth.”

⁸⁰ AN 5.196 at AN III 240,15. Though no *Āgama* parallel to this discourse seems to be known, a similar listing of dreams can be found in the *Mahāvastu*, Senart 1890: 136,14. Rahula 1978: 259 comments that “although the Buddha’s discipline and doctrine has no place ... for ... the belief in ... premonitory signs and dreams, the zealous propagators could not neglect” such popular ideas, “whence we find Siddhārtha having propitious dreams before his grand success.” According to the *Divyāvadāna*, Cowell 1886: 247,29, the bodhisattva experienced a number of premonitory dreams already at the time of the Buddha Dīpaṃkara.

⁸¹ Strong 2001: 51 comments that “for the whole story of the Buddha’s quest to make good narrative sense, we must assume that he has, at least temporarily, forgotten ... who he is: a being whose buddhahood is certain.”

⁸² Another text which exemplifies the continuity of some ideas adumbrated in the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* is the *Adbhutadharma-paryāya*, which also has the Buddha and Ānanda as its protagonists. The central theme of this text is the merit of constructing stūpas and images. In reply to an inquiry by Ānanda, the Buddha proclaims that to construct a clay stūpa of the size of a myrobalan fruit for the Buddha with an image of the size of a barley grain and a relic of the size of a mustard seed is more meritorious than offering an amount of precious gems as large as the continent of Jambudvīpa to those who have attained various stages of awakening, cf. Bentor 1988: 35. The *Adbhutadharma-paryāya* continues with increasingly larger amounts of precious gems that still fall short of matching the merits of the miniature stūpa. Though apart from the title and the protagonists there is nothing that suggests any direct relationship, the presentation in the *Adbhutadharma-paryāya* can nevertheless be seen to complement, from the perspective of later times, the presentation in the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta*, by highlighting the superiority of devotion directed to the Buddha.

sion of the supreme degree of perfection that other discourses consider the final result of his prolonged quest for awakening. As a consequence of this shift of perspective, the superiority associated with the status of the Buddha now becomes a birthright of the bodhisattva.

The *Acchariyabbhutatadhamma-sutta* is not unique in this respect, as other texts also show signs of a tendency to endow the bodhisattva with qualities whose full development the early discourses reckon as something the Buddha attained in the night of his awakening. Thus the *Sanṅhabhedavastu* suggests that the bodhisattva was already at birth endowed with the divine eye.⁸³ According to the *Divyāvadāna*, the bodhisattva was in possession of this ability even in a previous birth.⁸⁴ The *Mahāvastu* proclaims that the bodhisattva reached dispassion already at the time of Dīpaṃkara and had attained the perfection of wisdom since countless crores of aeons.⁸⁵

The Great Discourse on the Life History [of Buddhas], the *Mahāpadāna-sutta*, takes a position similar to the *Sanṅhabhedavastu* in relation to the former Buddha Vipassī. It indicates that Vipassī, too, was already in possession of the divine eye when he was born.⁸⁶ This takes me to the next step in my inquiry, to the lineage of former Buddhas described in the *Mahāpadāna-sutta*.

⁸³ Gnoli 1977: 52,7: "on being born, the bodhisattva was endowed with the divine eye, through which he sees for a whole league by day and night", *sāmpratajāto bodhisattva ... divyena cakṣusā samanvāgato yenāsu paśyati divā ca rātrau ca samantayojanam* (this ability is not identical to the exercise of the divine eye developed on the night of the awakening, which witnesses the passing away and reappearing of beings, but instead would be a less developed form of this particular supernormal power); cf. also its Chinese counterpart in T 191 at T III 940c18.

⁸⁴ Cowell 1886: 315,28.

⁸⁵ Senart 1882a: 170,3+5: "the Tathāgata is free from lust since [the time of] Dīpaṃkara ... having attained perfection of wisdom for countless crores of aeons", *Dīpaṃkaram upādāya vītaraḡas tathāgataḡ ... kalpakoṭṭim asaṃkhyeyāṃ prajñāpāramitāṃ gatā*.

⁸⁶ DN 14 at DN II 20,12: "monks, the divine eye manifested to the prince Vipassī on being born, as a result of [his former] deeds", *jātassa kho pana, bhikkhave, Vipassissa kumārassa kammavipākajaṃ dibbaṃ cakkhuṃ pāturaḡ ahoṣi* (B° reads *dibbacakkhu*, S° reads *dibbacakkhuṃ*), followed by indicating that with the help of this divine eye he was able to see for the distance of a whole league by day and night.

1.4 The Lineage of Former Buddhas

The whole of the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta*'s description of the bodhisattva's marvellous qualities recurs in the *Mahāpadāna-sutta*'s depiction of the pre-awakening period of the six previous Buddhas. According to Gombrich (1980: 65), the *Mahāpadāna-sutta*'s "account of ... six predecessors is patterned on the story of Gotama's own life".⁸⁷ Support for this suggestion can be gathered from a closer inspection of the *Mahāpadāna-sutta*'s description of the former Buddha Vipassī. Passages in this description that parallel the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* refer to Vipassī as the "bodhisattva", whereas other passages that portray events of his youth refer to him as "prince".⁸⁸ The same pattern also manifests in the Sanskrit parallel and to some degree in the Chinese parallels.⁸⁹ Once the infant Vipassī is qualified as a bodhi-

⁸⁷ Windisch 1908: 103 notes a similar case in the *Mahāvastu*, where the biography of Dipamkara, Senart 1882a: 199,3, is patterned on the biography of Gautama, Senart 1890: 3,1.

⁸⁸ DN 14 qualifies Vipassī as a *bodhisatta* from DN II 12,3 to 15,28, which records the marvels accompanying his descent from Tusita Heaven and his birth (starting from DN II 12,5, these marvels are presented as the general rule for any future Buddha, *dharmatā*). When describing the period from his birth until his going forth, DN 14 from DN II 16,1 to 30,9 refers to him simply as "prince", *kumāra*; after which DN 14 at DN II 30,10 reverts to the qualification *bodhisatta*, a change that occurs in the middle of a paragraph that reports how, on hearing that 'prince' Vipassī had gone forth, a great group of people decide to go forth under the 'bodhisattva' Vipassī. The remark in Walshe 1987: 561 note 280 that "Vipassī is here called the Bodhisatta for the first time, having now 'gone forth'" is not correct, as the same qualification is already used earlier, cf. DN 14 at DN II 12,3: "then, monks, having passed away from the Tusita realm the bodhisattva Vipassī entered his mother's womb with mindfulness and clear comprehension", *atha kho, bhikkhave, Vipassī bodhisatto Tusitā kāyā cavitvā sato sampajāno mātukucchiṇi okkami*. The term *bodhisatta* also recurs in partial parallels to DN 14, SN 12.4–10 at SN II 5–11, which report the pre-awakening insight into dependent arising of the Buddhas from Vipassī to Gotama. The parallel SĀ 366 at T II 101a17 does not employ the term *bodhisattva*, as is the case for what has been preserved of this discourse in the corresponding Sanskrit fragment in Waldschmidt 1956/1967: 280.

⁸⁹ In the Sanskrit version, the section treating the descent from heaven until birth employs the expression *Vipaśyī bodhisatva*, cf. Fukita 2003: 52–69. The subsequent description of his endowment with the thirty-two characteristics qualifies him as "prince", *kumāra*, cf. Fukita 2003: 70–85 (Fukita does not seem to have noticed this shift of expression and has supplemented the expression *bodhisatva* in some early parts of this description as well). After that, both terms make their appearance, thus e.g. the description of his unblinking vision (which in the Pāli version DN 14 at DN II 20,15 has *Vipassī kumāro* as its subject) reads *Vipaśyī bodhi-*

sattva, it is difficult to imagine a cogent reason for discontinuing that qualification when describing his childhood and youth. Hence this pattern gives the impression that an earlier account of the experiences of ‘prince’ Vipasyī was subsequently expanded by adding the description of marvels from a discourse like the *Acchariyabbhuta-dhamma-sutta*.⁹⁰

Whatever may be the final word on this suggestion,⁹¹ what the *Mahāpa-dāna-sutta* definitely does is that it places the theme of the wonderful quali-

satvo in the Sanskrit prose section, whereas the Sanskrit verse reads *kumāro*, cf. Fukita 2003: 90. Similarly, the first part of DĀ 1 at T I 3c15 narrates the descent from Tuṣita etc. of the “bodhisattva” Vipasyī, 毗婆尸菩薩 (with a single usage of the term ‘prince’ in a verse at T I 4b10), but once it begins to describe his experiences after birth, DĀ 1 employs the expression “prince”, T I 4c20: 太子, eventually using both terms. In T 2 the pattern is less evident, as though the discourse starts at T I 152b19 by describing the descent etc. of the “bodhisattva”, 菩薩, from T I 153a20 onwards it also makes use of the expression “prince”, 童子, and thereafter both are used. A comparable pattern can be found in two biographies of the Buddha, T 184 (修行本起經) and T 185 (太子瑞應本起經), noted by Rhi 1994: 219, though here, too, the general tendency of not using the term bodhisattva for the period from birth to renunciation is not without some variations. Thus in the case of T 184, after frequent occurrences of “prince”, 太子, T 184 at T III 467b22 employs “bodhisattva”, 菩薩, when describing his famous first experience of absorption while being seated under a tree (on which cf. also Foucher 1903: 277–285; Horsch 1964; Durt 1982; Schlingloff 1987; and Klimkeit 1990: 73). Similarly, in the case of T 185 at T III 476c4 a reply given by the young prince to his father during a discussion is introduced with the phrase “the bodhisattva answered”, 菩薩答曰.

⁹⁰ However, in the case of the famous four encounters with an old man, a sick man, a dead man and a recluse, described in DN 14 at DN II 21,13, according to Bareau 1974: 240, 245 and 254 the tale would originally have developed as part of a fictional account of the former Buddha Vipasyī, which was then subsequently held to exemplify the rule for all Buddhas and was thereupon also applied to Gautama, cf. Jā I 58,31. This account may in turn have its origins in AN 3.38 at AN I 145,21 and its parallel MĀ 117 at T I 608a3; cf. also Bodhi in *Ñāṇamoli* 1995/2005: 1342 note 1207 and *Anālayo* 2007b: 22f.

⁹¹ Lamotte 1946b: 55 instead suggests that the marvels originated with Vipasyī and were subsequently applied to Śākyamuni. Though my above findings suggest the opposite, it is noteworthy that the presentation in DN 14 of the various marvels as a general rule for any Buddha, *dhammatā*, also appears to be implicit in the use of the present tense in the corresponding section in MN 123 (noted by Thomas 1927/2003: 30 note 2; cf. also Windisch 1908: 95). Thus, even though it seems to me probable that the description of marvels in MN 123 was first of all applied as such to DN 14, the resultant idea of an inherent rule applicable to all Buddhas in turn appears to have influenced the wording in MN 123 during the prolonged period of oral transmission. This goes to show the complexity of textual interrelation during oral transmission, making it less important to establish beyond

ties of a Buddha-to-be within a wider framework, indicating that such marvels are to be expected of all those who are about to become Buddhas.⁹² That is, while the discourses surveyed so far spoke of a single individual, the bodhisattva Gautama, the *Mahāpadāna-sutta* employs the term bodhisattva in a generic manner, informing its audience of the qualities of bodhisattvas who became Buddhas in the past. Independent of whether this discourse constitutes the historically first occasion for these developments, it does constitute a testimony to them and thus exemplifies with considerable probability the basic pattern of what took place.

Buddhist literature reflects an increasing interest in the lineage of former Buddhas, which may well be related to its function, highlighted by Gombrich (1980: 71), “to authenticate the Buddha’s message”.⁹³ In this way, the Buddha could be shown to have had a line of predecessors comparable to the *tīrthaṅkaras* of the Jaina tradition,⁹⁴ or to the Vedic sages of the Brahmanical traditions.⁹⁵

In view of this purpose a perhaps unintended side-effect of the application of the bodhisattva’s marvels to the *Mahāpadāna-sutta*’s scheme of former Buddhas is to ascribe the acquisition of these marvellous qualities to

doubt which text influenced which. The main point that emerges from both texts is how elements from each influenced the development of the bodhisattva notion.

⁹² With this I do not intend to question the basic idea of former Buddhas as such, my point is only that the application of the bodhisattva’s quality to former Buddhas appears to be a later development. Collins 1998: 350 explains that: “the fact that multiple Buddhas are implied by the logic of Buddhist thought does not mean, of course, that a fully worked-out system of named past and future Buddhas was present from the very start.”

⁹³ Odani 2007: 437 comments that “the effort to impute authority to Śākyamuni also led to the creation of the genealogy of buddhas, with its hagiographical feature of ancient buddhas.”

⁹⁴ Though the full list of former *tīrthaṅkaras* may not yet have come into existence at the time of early Buddhism, Mahāvīra’s predecessor Pārśva nevertheless could have been a historical person, cf. e.g. Schubring 1962/2000: 29 and von Glasenapp 1925/1999: 16; in fact Sharma 1999: 82 holds that five out of the full list of twenty-four stand a chance of being historic personalities. Hence it seems quite probable that Mahāvīra would have been seen by his contemporaries as the successor to an already established lineage. The same seems to have been the case for the Ājīvikas as well, in that they too apparently saw themselves as possessing a lineage of teachers from the past, cf. Basham 1951: 27.

⁹⁵ Dhammajoti 1987: 191 explains that the *Mahāpadāna-sutta* reflects “a response to the challenge from the *brāhmaṇas* and was designed to show the superiority of the Buddha ... to establish mainly that the Buddha had an unbroken spiritual lineage of seven generations.”

anyone who is about to become a Buddha. That is, with the marvels in the *Mahāpadāna-sutta's* account of previous Buddhas, the *Acchariyabbhuta-dhamma-sutta's* presentation of an individual case becomes the norm for anyone on the path to Buddhahood.

This is a significant step in the direction of the bodhisattva concept becoming an ideal to be emulated. It needs to be noted, however, that at this stage the idea of a direct relationship between a bodhisattva and a former Buddha has not yet made its appearance. The *Mahāpadāna-sutta's* portrayal of former Buddhas does not refer to any meeting between a Buddha of the past and the bodhisattva Gautama and thus provides no indication of a direct relationship between them.⁹⁶ All it does is to show that all these individual instances conform to the general pattern that governs the life of a Buddha.

Nevertheless, once the proclamation "I am supreme in the world, I am the highest in the world, I am the best in the world" is made in the *Mahāpadāna-sutta* by all bodhisattvas, it naturally follows that the same claim can be made by anyone who is about to become a Buddha. In this way, worldwide superiority becomes a birth right of a bodhisattva in his last life. Due to being a bodhisattva already at birth – provided this is going to be one's last birth – one is the foremost, highest and best being in the whole world.

The resultant sense of superiority can be seen to pervade the development of the bodhisattva conception in later texts. In the case of the *Mahāvastu*, Rahula (1978: 54) observes that "'future bodhisattvas' seem ... to have been more influenced by the Buddha's personality and glory than by serious contemplation of the woeful condition of the suffering masses. The enthusiastic desire to become equal of the present Buddha predominates their thoughts in the moment of *bodhi-citta-utpāda* ... attaining of personal beauty and transcendental glory plays a prominent part in the formula of resolve (*praṇidhāna*)."⁹⁷ A sense of supremacy is also a prominent feature of

⁹⁶ See below note 105 page 92.

⁹⁷ Along similar lines, according to the *Pratyutpanna-Buddha-saṃmukhāvasthita-samādhi-sūtra*, Harrison 1978b: 68,19, a bodhisattva should contemplate the thirty-two marks of a Buddha, reflecting: 'a la la de bzhin gshegs pa dgra bcom pa yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas de dag mdzes pa ni ngo mtshar te, bādag kyang ma'ongs pa'i dus na lus yongs su grub pa'di lta bu dang ldan par 'gyur ro, mtshan'di lta bu dag yongs su rdzogs par 'gyur ro, trsl. Harrison 1990: 69: "oh how marvellous the beauty of those *Tathāgatas*, *Arhats* and Perfectly Awakened Ones! I too at a future time shall be endowed with such bodily perfection. I shall perfect such marks"; notably a reflection that starts off with the theme of what is 'marvellous'.

early Mahāyāna discourses, where Nattier (2003a: 146) highlights that “a stimulus to pursuing the bodhisattva path” is “the goal of becoming the highest being in the universe”. According to Harrison (1995b: 19), in some Mahāyāna texts the bodhisattva ideal involves “a kind of power fantasy, in which the Buddhist practitioner aspires ... to the cosmic sovereignty and power represented by complete Buddhahood – not the destruction of ego, but its apotheosis.”

Summary

The starting point of the development examined in the present chapter are those early discourses that describe the period from going forth to awakening of the Buddha Gautama, when he was a being in quest of awakening. Passages that reflect his motivation indicate that Gautama’s chief concern was to find liberation for himself. His compassionate concern for others appears to have arisen only as a consequence of his awakening, instead of having motivated his quest for liberation.

Gautama’s decease must have created a vacuum that needed to be filled. Bereft of the possibility of having a personal encounter with the living Buddha, for disciples in need of some form of emotional contact with the object of their first refuge, recollecting his marvellous qualities would have been of considerable importance.

The Discourse on Wonderful and Marvellous Qualities, the *Acchariyabhutadhamma-sutta*, reflects such concerns and reveals a significant development, where the superiority and freedom from future rebirth the Buddha acquires after having successfully reached awakening is already part of a proclamation he makes at the time of his birth. With this marvel, the bodhisattva becomes a being inevitably destined to awakening, and in some respects even an already awakened being.

The vacuum created by the teacher’s demise would have had its effect not only on the internal level – within the community of disciples – but also on the external level, namely in relation to other contemporary religious groups and practitioners.



Figure 1.4 The Awakening-tree of the Buddha Gautama

The figure above shows the Buddha's seat of awakening, standing at the root of the Aśvattha-tree under which according to tradition he won liberation. The seat and tree are flanked by worshippers expressing their reverence with folded hands. A fifth worshipper pays respect to footprints found in front of the seat. The footprints carry wheel marks and, together with an umbrella above the seat, stand for the Buddha's presence.

Amarāvati; courtesy Trustees of the British Museum.

Here the need to authenticate the Buddha as an eminent spiritual teacher would have fostered an increasing interest in the details of his spiritual lineage, the Buddhas of the past. Such an interest underlies the Great Discourse on the Life History [of Buddhas], the *Mahāpadāna-sutta*, and its parallels. With these discourses, the marvels of the bodhisattva Gautama become the norm for a bodhisattva in general. This prepares the ground for the bodhisattva notion to become a generic term, thereby laying the foundation for the bodhisattva concept eventually evolving into an ideal to be emulated.

The development surveyed so far does not yet involve an incipient stage of the bodhisattva ideal, an ideal that as such is not found within the textual corpus of early Buddhist discourses. Though in regard to matters of conduct the Buddha at times sets himself as an example to be imitated,⁹⁸ when it comes to the spiritual quest the models to be followed are other disciples who have reached the final goal by becoming arhats.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, with the above described shift in the bodhisattva conception the necessary foundation is laid and based on this foundation the next steps can take place. These involve the idea of a vow for Buddhahood – taken at some time in the past when the decision to pursue the career of a bodhisattva was taken – and the prediction received thereupon from another Buddha that this quest will meet with its successful conclusion. These two ideas – the vow and the prediction – are the central themes of the next two chapters.

⁹⁸ Thus e.g. in MN 65 at MN I 437,16 and its parallels MĀ 194 at T I 746b21 and EĀ 49.7 at T II 800b28 (cf. also the Mahāsāṃghika *Vinaya*, T 1425 at T XXII 359b11), the Buddha encourages the monks to follow his own example of eating only a single meal per day.

⁹⁹ Bodhi 2003: 288 points out that “when the Buddha speaks about his quest for enlightenment in previous lives, he usually stresses that at such times he was following a wrong path to deliverance, not a temporally extended version of the correct path.” “He urges his bhikkhu disciples to take the arahants Sāriputta and Moggallāna as their model; he does not ask them to take himself as a model. Similarly, he urges his bhikkhunī disciples to take Khemā and Uppalavaṇṇā ... as their model.” De La Vallée Poussin 1909: 739 noted already a century ago that “there is no indication in the oldest literature that Śākyamuni or his immediate disciples called upon the faithful to follow in the steps of former Buddhas, and themselves to become Buddhas”; cf. also Ñāṇatiloka 1952/1988: 41 (s.v. *bodhisatta*) and Vetter 2001: 69.

2 Meeting the Previous Buddha

The central theme of the present chapter is the notion of a vow taken by the bodhisattva when he decided to pursue the goal of Buddhahood. Of central relevance for my exploration of this topic is the tale of a meeting between the bodhisattva Gautama and the previous Buddha Kāśyapa.

In order to provide background to my study of this meeting, I first examine the *jātaka* genre in general (1), then turn to the discourses that record this meeting (2), followed by examining the nature of this tale as a *jātaka* (3). With these preliminaries in place, I then turn to the theme of the bodhisattva's vow (4). Though I believe these explorations are required as a background for my subsequent discussion, readers interested exclusively in the theme of the bodhisattva ideal may, if they so wish, skip the first parts of the present chapter (1–3) and turn directly to page 84.

2.1 The *Jātaka* Genre

In the previous chapter of my investigation into the genesis of the bodhisattva ideal, I suggested that the application of the Buddha's qualities to the newly-born bodhisattva, evident in the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta*, has significant consequences. Once the bodhisattva is perceived as being already accomplished at birth, his progress towards such accomplishment must have taken place earlier, before his birth.

In this way, the development of the bodhisattva conception evident in the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta*'s exposition of marvels would in turn have invested the previous lives of the Buddha with increasing importance. In other words, the shift in the bodhisattva conception evident in the marvels would have stimulated interest among early generations of Buddhists in another member of the traditional listing of canonical texts (*aṅga*): the *jātakas*. The significance of this genre of text is well corroborated by its abun-

dant representations in ancient sculpture and inscriptions,¹ and also by the circumstance that reciters of *jātakas* are reckoned as a class of *bhāṇakas* on their own.²

The *jātakas*, perceived by tradition as records of the bodhisattva's experiences and struggles during his gradual acquisition of the qualities that would enable him to become a Buddha,³ would have played a central role for those interested in and attracted by the bodhisattva conception.⁴ In fact the *Mahāvastu*, itself a repository of numerous *jātakas*, associates the delivery of such tales with the revealing of a bodhisattva's course of practice.⁵

A well-known feature of *jātaka* tales is the integration of various ancient Indian fables, anecdotes and parables, which become *jātakas* through the simple act of identifying one of the protagonists – usually though not always the most heroic and exemplary one – with the Buddha in one of his former lives.⁶

¹ Cf. e.g. the surveys in Sarkar 1990: 120–158; Ahir 2000: 1–31; and Skilling 2008: 59–63.

² Cf. Adikaram 1946/1994: 25; Goonesekera 1968: 689; Mori 1990: 123; and Adhikari 1996. Abeynayake 1984: 94 concludes that these references show that the *Jātaka* reciters were part of an ancient division of reciters. The significance of this type of tales also stands out against the circumstance, noted by Skilling 2006a: 113, that the *Jātaka* “as a genre ... is unique to Buddhism: it is not found in Jaina or Brahmanical literature” (though the tales themselves often draw on a common ancient Indian narrative heritage).

³ According to Feer 1875: 284: “les faits racontés dans nos jātakas tendent à un but unique: ... graver dans l'esprit une règle de conduite, appuyée ... sur l'exemple du Buddha.” Kulasuriya 1996: 19 explains that in the *jātakas* “the Bodhisatta, by his thoughts, words and deeds, reveals the path to enlightenment.” However, as pointed out by Cone 1977: xvii, the idea that “the Bodhisattva is throughout these lives developing ... [the] prerequisites for Buddhahood”, “certainly postdates most of the stories” in the *Jātaka* collection. In fact, according to Cummings 1982: 20 “most Jātakas at the time of Bhārhuṭ were simply used as parables in illustration of the Doctrine, and did not yet carry any specific significance as stories of the Buddha's previous incarnations”; cf. also Sarkar 1990: 5.

⁴ Hirakawa 1990/1998: 269 comments that the “*jātakas* ... must have played a significant role in the early development of Mahāyāna thought”; hence Nattier 2003a: 186 recommends a study of the *jātaka* tales “to gain a glimpse of the Mahāyāna in its formative stage”; cf. also Skilling 2006b: 56; though Boucher 2008a: 21 considers both as arising “from a shared nexus of innovations in the Buddhist tradition.”

⁵ Senart 1882a: 104,12: *bodhisatvacaritaṃ ... jātakāparamateṣu kovidā deśayanti ... īśvarā*, “the supreme ones [Buddhas], who are skilled in *jātakas* and other doctrines, teach the course of practice of a bodhisattva”; cf. also Edgerton 1953/1998: 240.



Figure 2.1 The Departure of Rāma and Sītā

The figure above seems to depict Rāma and Sītā, both in plain dress and apparently just about to depart for their exile; while the remainder of the image would show their father, the king, who is seated at his court.⁷

Nāgārjunikoṇḍa; courtesy Parimal Publications.

⁶ This tendency has been noted by several scholars. Thus e.g. Alsdorf 1977: 25 points out that the majority of the Pāli *jātaka* verses are, if not pre-Buddhist, at least non-Buddhist, “die über-große Mehrzahl der Jātaka-Gāthās [ist], wenn nicht vor-, so doch jedenfalls unbuddhistisch”; cf. also Norman 1983: 79. Regarding *jātaka* prose, Franke 1906 offers a survey of narrative material shared in common between the Pāli *Jātaka* collection and the *Mahābhārata*. Kulasuriya 1996: 10 notes that “stories of the *Jātaka* Book occur in the *Pañcatantra*, *Kathāsaritsāgara* and other Indian story books. Some stories have parallels in the *Mahābhārata* and in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and still others in Jaina literature.” Laut 1993: 503 sums up that most *jātakas* are popular tales with a Buddhist veneer, “bei den meisten Jātakas handelt es sich ... um volkstümliche Erzählungen ... denen der Buddhismus als Firnis aufgetragen wurde.” According to Winternitz 1920/1968: 90, the tendency of turning popular tales into *jātakas* had the result that at times rather worldly narrations became ‘Buddhist’ even though they may have had little in common with Buddhist thought, “so konnte jede noch so weltliche, dem buddhistischen Ideenkreise noch so ferne stehende Geschichte zu einer ‘buddhistischen’ werden.”

⁷ For descriptions and plates related to this representation cf. e.g. Longhurst 1938: 49–51 and plate 45a; Ray 1965 plate 18; Murthy 1987: 7–9; Lal Nagar 1993: 143–145 and plates 39–41; and Rama 1995: 108–110 and plate 40, who holds that the above picture rather represents Rāma’s brother Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā.

To mention just one example, a version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* found in the Pāli *Jātaka* collection presents the exploits of its hero Rāma as past life experiences of the bodhisattva.⁸ The same holds for a Chinese version of this tale,⁹ whereas another Chinese version does not take the form of a *jātaka*.¹⁰ Similar variations can be found with other manifestations of this tale that have made their way into various Asian cultures, which only at times appear as a *jātakas*.¹¹

⁸ This is the *Dasaratha-jātaka*, Jā 461, whose prose at Jā IV 130,19 identifies Rāma with the bodhisattva. Jacobi 1893/1970: 84–93 (in reply to Weber 1870) offers several arguments for considering the prose narration of the *Dasaratha-jātaka* to be an adaptation of an already existing version of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The two most salient points are: a) Sītā is introduced as Rāma's sister, even though from the outset she carries the epithet *devī* and at the end of the tale she marries Rāma (Przyłuski 1936: 183, however, takes this to be an original element); b) the narration of the king granting a boon to his second wife becomes superfluous, as he does not comply with her request to make her son crown prince instead of Rāma. On this topic cf. also Brockington 1985: 260; Gombrich 1985: 434f, Senart 1882b: 317 note 1; and Sircar 1976. Lüders 1897/1940: 35–40 makes the important point that, what holds for the prose, does not apply to the verses; cf. also Winternitz 1908: 434.

⁹ T 152 at T III 27b11, trsl. Chavannes 1910: 178.

¹⁰ T 203 at T IV 447a16, trsl. Lévi 1903: 279–281 and Willemen 1994: 6–9, where none of the protagonists is identified with the bodhisattva.

¹¹ A Burmese version identifies Rāma with the bodhisattva, Thein Han 1963: 78. In Cambodian versions of the tale (trsl. Martini 1978 and Pou 1977 and 1982), though Rāma is a manifestation of Viṣṇu, cf. Hak 1969: 35, he is nevertheless also identified with the bodhisattva (this has been pointed out by Martini 1952: 68f and 1961: 354, cf. also Pou 1975: 356–359). An Indonesian version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (summarized in Stutterheim 1925: 66–80) does not take the form of a *jātaka*. In a Japanese version, Rāma is identified with the bodhisattva, cf. Hara 1980/1989: 335. A Khotanese version (ed. and trsl. Bailey 1940: 376 and 571) is ambivalent since, though it probably does identify Rāma with the bodhisattva (cf. Bailey 1939b: 464 and Maggi 2009: 367), it could also be taken to imply that Rāma was Maitreya in a former life while his brother Lakṣmaṇa was the bodhisattva (cf. Warder 1988: 636). In any case, the Khotanese version does take the form of a *jātaka*. A Lao version does identify Rāma with the bodhisattva (cf. Dhani Nivat 1969: 86 or the trsl. in Sahai 1996: 326); whereas another Lao version (trsl. in Sahai 1976: 34–74; cf. also Deydier 1952) does not take the form of a *jātaka*. Malaysian versions (summarized in Stutterheim 1925: 28–63 or Ziesenis 1928: 7–64) do not take the form of a *jātaka* (though similar to the *Dasaratha-jātaka*, mentioned above in note 8, here Sītā is also Rāma's sister, cf. Kats 1926: 583). A Sri Lanka version described in Godakumbura 1946 also does not appear to be a *jātaka* (on the general dearth of *Rāmāyaṇa* tales in Sri Lanka cf. Bechert 1978: 230f). A Thai version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (trsl. in Velder 1962, summary in Puri 1940/1998) “is not presented as an incident in a previous life of the Buddha”, as noted by

For a proper appreciation of the formation of *jātakas*, of particular interest are those stories that are already found among the early discourses and in the *Vinaya*, which take us to the beginning stages of *jātaka* literature.¹² In what follows, I survey several examples that illustrate how some of these stories originated.¹³

In his study of the *jātaka* genre, Rhys Davids (1903/1997: 194) takes up a tale found in a discourse from the *Samyutta-nikāya*.¹⁴ In agreement with its *Samyukta-āgama* counterpart,¹⁵ this discourse reports the Buddha narrating how a quail strays outside of its proper resort and is thereupon caught by a falcon. The moral of the story is that, just as the quail should have kept to its proper resort, so the monks should keep to the practice of mindfulness as their proper resort in order to withstand Māra.

While in the discourse versions in the *Samyutta-nikāya* and in the *Samyukta-āgama* the whole story takes the form of a parable, in the Pāli *Jāta-*

Reynolds 1991: 56. Among the manuscripts of a Tibetan version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (Balbir 1963 and de Jong 1971/1994; cf. also the survey in Lalou 1936 and de Jong 1972/1994: 4–10), the final part of the story, which in *jātakas* usually provides an identification, is not preserved; de Jong 1983/1994: 57 notes that in a 15th century version of the tale, Rāma is identified with “a divinity of the Sa-skya school”, which would thus exclude him being identified with the bodhisattva. A version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Uigur (on which cf. also Laut 1996: 198) does not provide an identification, though in this case this is due to the circumstance that the text only gives an abbreviated summary of the tale (ed. and trsl. Zieme 1978: 28 and 30). For a comparative survey of *Rāmāyaṇa* tales in Buddhist literature cf. e.g. Desai 1970; for a study of Jain versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* cf. e.g. Kulkarni 1990. Raghavan 1975: 161 concludes his comparative study of various versions of the tale by commenting that “in some of the areas of South-East Asia, a slight Buddhistic *adjustment*, by making Rāma a Bodhisattva, has been adopted”, just as in other versions the tale is adjusted to Islamic thought; cf. also Barrett 1963.

¹² Von Hinüber 1998: 187 notes that such individual “Ur-jātakas” found in the early Pāli discourses share as a distinct characteristic that they are entirely in prose. In contrast, the Pāli canon’s *Jātaka* collection is in verse, with prose narrations provided only in its commentary.

¹³ In the notes to my survey of selected *jātaka* tales, I do not mention well-known translations such as e.g. Cowell 1895–1907/2000 of the Pāli *Jātaka* collection or Jones 1949–1956/1973–1978 of the *Mahāvastu*, but only translations that I assume are less well-known. I also do not aim at an exhaustive survey of relevant publications, as in the context of my present research I can only scratch the surface of the fascinating topic of how these *jātaka* tales developed in literature and art.

¹⁴ SN 47.6 at SN V 146,18.

¹⁵ SĀ 617 at T II 172c25.

ka collection the same tale is a *jātaka*, which identifies the clever quail with the bodhisattva.¹⁶ Rhys Davids (1903/1997: 195) comments that “there can be no question as to which is the older document; for the *Jātaka* quotes as its source, and by name and chapter, the very passage in the *Samyutta* in which the fable originally occurs.” A version of this tale found in an *Udāna* collection preserved in Chinese agrees with the two discourses in as much as it does not identify any of the animals in this story with the bodhisattva.¹⁷

In the context of a study of the history of the Buddhist canon, Oldenberg (1912a: 192) draws attention to two tales found in the Discourse to Pāyāsi, the *Pāyāsi-sutta* of the *Dīgha-nikāya*, which recur similarly in a *Dirgha-āgama* and a *Madhyama-āgama* version of this discourse. The setting at the background of these two tales is a discussion between a sceptic and a Buddhist monk. During this discussion, the monk employs several examples to illustrate his arguments. One of these examples contrasts a clever caravan leader to a foolish one;¹⁸ another describes how someone tries to cheat when playing dice.¹⁹

Both tales also occur in the Pāli *Jātaka* collection, which identifies the chief protagonist in each parable with the bodhisattva.²⁰ As the Discourse to Pāyāsi and its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel explicitly introduce these tales as “parables”²¹ it can safely be assumed that they became *jātakas* only at a later

¹⁶ This is the *Sakuṇagghi-jātaka*, Jā 168 at Jā II 60,23.

¹⁷ T 212 at T IV 695a12; cf. also T 2122 at T LIII 784b19 and T 2123 at T LIV 74a11 (here and below, unless otherwise indicated, references are to the beginning of the tale).

¹⁸ DN 23 at DN II 342,20; DĀ 7 at T I 45c6; and MĀ 71 at T I 529c25.

¹⁹ DN 23 at DN II 348,19; DĀ 7 at T I 46b21; and MĀ 71 at T I 530b28.

²⁰ These are the *Apaṇṇaka-jātaka*, Jā 1 at Jā I 106,9, and the *Litta-jātaka*, Jā 91 at Jā I 380,25. The identification of the clever caravan leader with the bodhisattva can also be found in T 203 at T IV 466a2 (the trsl. by Chavannes 1911b: 32 does not include this final part); and in the (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, D (1) ‘*dul ba, kha* 245a2 or Q (1030) *ge* 229a4 (for a summary cf. Panglung 1981: 44). On the game of dice in ancient India cf. Lüders 1940. For a representation in art of game players that at times has been thought to be related to the *Litta-jātaka* cf. e.g. Cunningham 1879: 94f and plate XLV.9; Barua 1934/1979: 95–97 and plate 73/96; Coomaraswamy 1956: 93f and fig. 223; Lal Nagar 1993: 103 and plate 32; for the corresponding inscription cf. Hultzsch 1886: 63; Lüders 1963: 162f; and Tsukamoto 1996: 555.

²¹ MĀ 71 at T I 529c25 and T I 530b28 qualifies each tale as a simile, 喻, introducing them with the expression “just as if”, 猶如. DN 23 at DN II 342,18 and DN II 348,17 also qualifies each of the two tales as a simile, *upamā*, though it introduces them as an event from the past,

time. For the second tale to become a *jātaka* is in fact not unproblematic, as this requires identifying one of the two dice players with the bodhisattva. Yet, one dice player is a cheat, while the other dice player poisons his opponent. The Pāli *jātaka* tale chooses the second player and solves the problem by reporting that, though the bodhisattva did poison his opponent, he then administered a cure to save the other player's life.²²

Another relevant case would be the tale of a flying horse that saves a group of ship-wrecked merchants from being devoured by ogresses, which in the *Madhyama-āgama* is explicitly qualified as a simile.²³ A version of this tale in an *Udāna* collection preserved in Chinese also does not take the form of a *jātaka*.²⁴ Yet, in the Pāli *Jātaka* collection, as well as in a discourse in the *Ekottarika-āgama*, this story records a previous life of the Buddha.²⁵ The same is the case for several other versions of this tale, which differ, however, on whether the flying horse or the leader of the group of merchants should be identified with the bodhisattva.²⁶

bhūtapubbaṃ (on this expression cf. the study by Tanabe 2003). DĀ 7 at T I 45c6 and T I 46b21 similarly presents each tale as something from the past, using the expressions 久遠 or 昔者. A parallel to the first tale in T 45 at T I 834b1 begins with the indication that the monk who delivers this tale recalls this event from the past, 我念往昔. Though none of these versions is a *jātaka*, it is noticeable how what in MĀ 71 is a mere simile told by way of comparison ("just as if") tends to become more realistic by being presented as something that actually happened in the past and is then recalled. This in turn paves the way for their eventual evolution into an event recalled by the Buddha from one of his former existences.

²² Jā I 380,17.

²³ MĀ 136 at T I 644c7 concludes with the Buddha qualifying the tale as a simile, 喻.

²⁴ T 212 at T IV 718c28 provides no identification and thus does not take the form of a *jātaka*.

²⁵ The *Valāhassa-jātaka*, Jā 196 at Jā II 130,21, concludes by identifying the flying horse with the bodhisattva, as does EĀ 45.1 at T II 770c4. EĀ 45.1 and T 212 additionally incorporate a narration found in the Pāli canon as Jā 96 at Jā I 393,16. The same happens with several other versions, which must have contributed to the below noted variations regarding which protagonist should be identified with the bodhisattva.

²⁶ Similar to Jā 196, the flying horse is identified with the bodhisattva in a tale in T 152 at T III 33c13 (trsl. Chavannes 1910: 226); in T 190 at T III 882b1 (trsl. Beal 1875: 340; on the title of this work cf. Durt 2004: 56); in stanza 24 of the Khotanese *Jātakastava*, Dresden 1955: 425 (cf. also Bailey 1945/1969: 201); in a stanza in the *Lalitavistara*, Lefman 1902: 169,1; in the *Mahāvastu*, Senart 1897: 76,19 (prose) and 90,3 (verse); and in one of two versions of this tale in the Tibetan (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, D (1) 'dul ba, kha 239b3 or Q (1030) ge 224b1 (summary in Panglung 1981: 42). Another version in the above-mentioned T 152, found at T III 20b3 (trsl. Chavannes 1910: 125), identifies the head merchant with the bodhisattva. The same is

In his detailed examination of the Pāli *Jātaka* collection, von Hinüber (1998: 188) highlights a case where a tale in the Pāli Vinaya is presented as a story of a former life of the Buddha in the *Jātaka* collection.²⁷ This parable describes how a bird, a monkey and an elephant live together in harmony by giving foremost respect to the eldest among them, which turns out to be the bird.

According to the Theravāda *Vinaya* account, the Buddha had addressed this story to a group of notoriously misbehaving monks who had occupied all dwellings without leaving room for elder monks. The Pāli *Jātaka* collection concludes the same tale with the Buddha identifying the elephant and the monkey as former existences of Mahāmaudgalyāyana and Śāriputra, while he was the bird in one of his past lives.²⁸

the case for another version in the *Mahāvastu*, Senart 1897: 299,2 (prose) and 300,3 (verse); a tale in the *Dīvyāvadāna* in Cowell 1886: 528,14 and in the Chinese (Mūla-)Sārvāstivāda *Vinaya*, T 1442 at T XXIII 891c6 (combined trsl. of both in Schlingloff 1981: 167–184; cf. also Huber 1906: 22–24), with its Tibetan counterpart D (3) *’dul ba, nya* 186b1 or Q (1032) *te* 173b6 (summary in Panglung 1981: 156). The same identification of the head merchant with the bodhisattva recurs in the *Kāraṇḍavyūha* (fragm. 1607b1 in Mette 1997: 50 and Vaidya 1961: 285,1; summarized in Burnouf 1844/1876: 200; cf. also Majumder 1948: 296); cf. also the *Guṇakāraṇḍavyūha* in Iwamoto 1967: 294,4. Xuánzàng (玄奘) in his travel records concludes a version of this tale by noting its *jātaka* nature, T 2087 at T LI 934a9 (trsl. Beal 1884/2001b: 246), without, however, providing any identification. A medieval Tibetan version does not identify any of its protagonists with the bodhisattva, only indicating that the flying horse is a manifestation of Avalokiteśvara (ed. Kuznetsov 1966: 36; trsl. Sørensen 1994: 119 and Wenzel 1888: 504), an indication also made in several other versions where the head merchant is the bodhisattva. Both identifications are found in the *Rāṣṭrapālāparipṛcchā-sūtra* (ed. Finot 1901: 23,13 and 26,13; cf. also T 310.18 at T XI 462a12 and T XI 462c12; T 321 at T XII 5c8 and T XII 6b9; and the trsl. in Boucher 2008a: 133 and 135, stanzas 129 and 156). For studies of various versions of this tale or its representations in art cf. e.g. Jacobs 1896: 129f; Vogel 1909: 72 and plate 26c; Duroiselle 1912/1990: 104 and plate 24; Foucher 1921: 212f; Tucci 1922/1923: 617–630; Penzer 1926: 284; Goloubew 1927; Krom 1927: 133f; Le Coq 1928/1975: 54; Przyluski 1937; Yazdani 1955: 82–95; Singh 1965: 29; de Jong 1968; Luce 1970 plate 325d; Giteau 1976: 145; Meech-Pekarik 1981; Schlingloff 1981: 161–187; Lienhard 1985; Schlingloff 1988: 256–265; Dehejia 1990: 390f; Lal Nagar 1993: 116; Lewis 1993 and 2000: 49–88; and Appleton 2006. For a Jain version in the *Nāyādhammakahāo* cf. Schubring 1978: 35–40 and the discussion in Lienhard 2003.

²⁷ Vin II 161,18 and the *Tittira-jātaka*, Jā 37 at Jā I 218,18.

²⁸ Jā I 220,12.

Versions of the same tale in the Mahāsāṃghika, (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda and Sarvāstivāda *Vinayas* agree with the Pāli *Jātaka* collection on presenting this tale as a *jātaka*. While the (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda and Sarvāstivāda *Vinayas* also identify the bird with the bodhisattva,²⁹ according to the Mahāsāṃghika *Vinaya* he had been the elephant.³⁰ Versions of this tale in the Dharmaguptaka and Mahīśāsaka *Vinayas*, as well as a in an *Udāna* collection preserved in Chinese, do not identify any of these animals with the bodhisattva, so that here this tale does not take the form of a *jātaka*.³¹

In principle, such variations could be the result of a parable turning into a *jātaka* or else of a *jātaka* becoming a parable. Yet, the context shows that the purpose of the story was to deliver a teaching on the need of according proper respect to elders. For this purpose, the form of a parable would suffice, without needing any of its protagonists to be identified with the bodhisattva. Given that those *Vinayas* that do present this tale as a *jātaka* differ in regard to the animal with which the Buddha should be identified, it seems safe to assume that these identifications are a later feature. In fact, in the thought-world of the early discourses the Buddha's former lives usually involve human rebirths instead of rebirth as an animal,³² making it more probable that the tale of the harmonious living together of these animals was originally not meant to record former experiences of the bodhisattva.

²⁹ Dutt 1984c: 125,16, with its Tibetan counterpart at D (1) 'dul ba, ga 192a4 or Q (1030) nge 183b5, translated in Schiefner 1876: 112 (the (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda account differs in as much as it speaks of four animals instead of three); and T 1435 at T XXIII 242c9; cf. also T 1509 at T XXV 146c7 (trsl. Lamotte 1949/1981: 718), and T 2053 at T L 235c19. Xuānzàng (玄奘) refers to a stūpa that commemorates this tale, T 2087 at T LI 906a9 (trsl. Beal 1884/2001b: 49); on the localization of *jātakas* cf. also Appleton 2007. For studies of various versions of this tale, references to it or representations in art cf. e.g. Clouston 1887: 91–93; Grünwedel 1897: 82f and fig. 64; Fournereau 1908: 80f; Ecke 1935: 58; Bailey 1939a: 855 (stanza 9); Lamotte 1946a; Foucher 1955: 90; and Schwarzbaum 1979: 358f.

³⁰ T 1425 at T XXII 446b5.

³¹ T 1428 at T XXII 940a8; T 1421 at T XXII 121a11; and T 212 at T IV 686a6; the same is the case for a version of this tale in T 2121 at T LIII 247b2 (trsl. Chavannes 1911b: 272f).

³² According to Rhys Davids 1903/1997: 196, "in no one of these instances of the earliest compositions that were called *Jātakas* is the Buddha identified in his previous birth with an animal"; though, as already pointed out by Peris 2004: 56 note 26, the counterpart to the *Nandivīsāla-jātaka* in Vin IV 6,1, discussed below (cf. note 43), would be an exception to the pattern described by Rhys Davids. For a survey of the bodhisattva's rebirths as an animal in the *Jātaka* collection cf. Jones 1979: 15–19 and Laut 1993: 503f.



Figure 2.2 The *Ṛṣi* and the *Nāga*

The figure above shows a *ṛṣi* with what appear to be matted hairs bound together, seated cross-legged to the side of a hut. His right hand is raised and he appears to be in conversation with a five-headed *nāga* that wears a square object on its throat. The feet of the *ṛṣi* still touch the coils of the *nāga* whose heads are bent back as if to convey a sense of withdrawal. The various details of this scene would fit the assumption that it may be depicting the request for the *nāga*'s jewel.

Bhārhut; courtesy Abhinav Publications.³³

Another comparable *Vinaya* instance revolves around the theme of contentment. According to the Theravāda *Vinaya*, some monks had been asking for this and that from the local population to such an extent that at the mere sight of a monk people would quickly take another road or even run away.

³³ Coomaraswamy 1956 pl. 51 fig. 247f, with a description in *ibid.* 96. Zin 2003: 123 note 18 points out that the identification of this sculpture with the *Mañikaṇṭha-jātaka* is uncertain. On this and other possible representations of the *Mañikaṇṭha-jātaka* cf. also e.g. Cunningham 1879: 27, 99 and plate XLII.1; Rouse 1895/2000: 197 note 1; Grünwedel 1897: 58f and fig. 41; Taw Sein Ko 1906/1990: 131 and plate 253; Hultzsch 1912: 407; Foucher 1919: 8 and plate I.6; Barua 1934/1979: 110f and plate 78/106; Luce 1970 plates 102b and 174e; Lutzker 1977: 6; Lal Nagar 1993: 97, 196f and plate 28.

To teach these monks a lesson, the Buddha delivered the tale of a *nāga* ('serpent') king who used to visit a *ṛṣi* (seer) regularly, but stopped his visits and never came again when the *ṛṣi* asked to be given the *nāga*'s jewel.

The Mahāsāṃghika and (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda *Vinayas* agree with the Theravāda *Vinaya* in presenting this tale as a parable.³⁴ In the Dharmaguptaka and Mahīśāsaka *Vinayas*, as well as in the Pāli *Jātaka* collection, this story records a past life of the bodhisattva.³⁵ In this case, too, the tale need not originally have been a record of a past life of the Buddha to serve its purpose, so that those versions that do not identify the protagonist with the Buddha in a past life may be more original in this respect.

Yet another *Vinaya* case is concerned with the topic of patience. The Theravāda *Vinaya* reports that a bitter quarrel had broken out among the monks of Kauśāmbī in relation to a minor issue of proper conduct. In order to inspire the disputing factions to patience, the Buddha delivered the tale of a prince who, wishing to avenge the cruel killing of his father by a king who had conquered their kingdom, enrolled in the services of this king without being recognized. When an occasion arose to carry out his plan, however, he decided to spare the king.

Versions of this story in the *Madhyama-āgama* and the *Ekottarika-āgama*,³⁶ in an *Udāna* collection preserved in Chinese,³⁷ as well as in the Dharmaguptaka, Mahīśāsaka and Theravāda *Vinayas*, do not take the form of a *jātaka*.³⁸

³⁴ T 1425 at T XXII 277b7 (trsl. Chavannes 1911a: 318–320); T 1442 at T XXIII 854c5; D (3) 'dul ba, nya 4b3 or Q (1032) te 4a5 (summary in Panglung 1981: 144); and Vin III 145,37.

³⁵ T 1428 at T XXII 584c4, T 1421 at T XXII 13b7, and the *Mañikanṭha-jātaka*, Jā 253 at Jā II 286,6, identify the one who gave counsel to the *ṛṣi* as the bodhisattva in a former existence. On this tale from the perspective of the significance of a *nāga*'s jewel cf. Gaeffke 1954/1965: 581f and 592; from the perspective of *nāgas* in general cf. Vogel 1926: 148f.

³⁶ MĀ 72 at T I 535b14 and EĀ 24.8 at T II 629a1 (due to the length of the tale, references here and below are to the conclusion of the tale).

³⁷ T 212 at T IV 694c18.

³⁸ T 1428 at T XXII 882b6; T 1421 at T XXII 160a5; and Vin I 349,5. Winternitz 1920/1968: 91 notes the discrepancy between the Pāli *Vinaya* and the Pāli *Jātaka* collection and concludes that this tale was only subsequently turned into a *jātaka*; cf. also Lamotte 1946a: 650.



Figure 2.3 The Tale of Prince Long-life

The figure above appears to depict scenes from the tale of Prince Long-life. In the larger section soldiers can be seen leading away two prisoners, probably the parents of the prince that are being brought to the place of execution. In the remaining section of the panel the upper part shows a person respectfully approaching a king, which would be the prince enrolled in the services of the king who had ordered his parents to be executed.

Nāgārjunikoṇḍa; courtesy Parimal Publications.

The Pāli *Jātaka* collection, however, identifies the prince with the bodhisattva.³⁹ A Chinese *Jātaka* collection instead identifies the father of the prince with the bodhisattva, indicating that the prince was Ānanda in a past life.⁴⁰

³⁹ The prince is identified with the bodhisattva in one of his former lives in the *Dīghitikosala-jātaka*, Jā 371 at Jā III 213,5, and in the *Kosambī-jātaka*, Jā 428 at Jā III 490,10. For representations of this tale in art cf. e.g. Duroiselle 1912/1990: 98 and plate 7; Longhurst 1938: 55 and plate 47a; Ray 1965: 23 (plate 26); Lal Nagar 1993: 178 and plate 72 (cf. also plate 41); Rama 1995: 118 and plate 43; and Ahir 2000: 21.

⁴⁰ T 152 at T III 6a14 (trsl. Chavannes 1910: 45); an identification also recorded in T 161 at T III 387b21.

The disagreement between the two *Jātaka* collections on who should be identified with the bodhisattva and the absence of any such identification in the other versions gives the impression that this tale was probably not a *jātaka* from the outset.⁴¹

While in the cases surveyed so far, the Theravāda *Vinaya* version differed from the *Jātaka* collection of the same tradition in that it does not identify the respective tales as *jātakas*, it does so in another case. The story in question is about an ox that refuses to perform a particular feat because its owner has addressed it in insulting words. According to the *Vinaya* report, the Buddha had delivered this tale in order to stop monks from abusing each other.

The way the Theravāda *Vinaya* concludes this story implicitly indicates that this ox was the bodhisattva in a former life;⁴² hence in this case the Theravāda *Vinaya* is in agreement with the corresponding Pāli *jātaka* tale.⁴³ Versions of this story in the Dharmaguptaka, Mahīśāsaka and (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda *Vinayas*, as well as in a Chinese *Udāna* collection, do not have such an identification.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Tanabe 2003: 53 concludes that there is a tendency for “parables for teaching monks [found] in [the] *Vinaya Piṭaka* of the Pāli Canon” to be turned into “previous lives of Śākyamuni-Buddha”; on the different strata in the evolution of this material in the case of the *Vinaya* cf. Hirakawa 1960: 14, on the same in general cf. Vetter 1988: 96f.

⁴² According to Vin IV 6,1, at the conclusion of this story the Buddha states that already “at that time insulting and deriding was displeasing to me”, *tadāpi me, bhikkhave, amanāpā khumsanā vambhanā*, where, as already pointed out by Oldenberg 1912a: 188 and von Hinüber 1998: 188, the use of the personal pronoun indicates that the tale should be reckoned a *jātaka*.

⁴³ This is the *Nandivīsāla-jātaka*, Jā 28 at Jā I 193,18, which explicitly identifies the ox with the bodhisattva in a former life. On some elements of this tale found already in the *Ṛg-Veda* cf. Franke 1894; for representations of this tale in art cf. e.g. Grünwedel 1897: 63f and fig. 46; Taw Sein Ko 1906/1990: 129 and plate 28; Luce 1970 plate 98a; and Lal Nagar 1993: 44f.

⁴⁴ T 1428 at T XXII 635b2; T 1421 at T XXII 38a9; and T 1442 at T XXIII 765b23, with its Tibetan counterpart D (3) *’dul ba, cha* 232b1 or Q (1032) *je* 215a3 (summary in Panglung 1981: 135). In these passages, the Buddha refers to the ox as an “animal”, without any indication that this tale records one of his past lives. The same is the case for T 212 at T IV 667a22 (trsl. Chavannes 1911a: 233). The relevant passage in the Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, T 1435 at T XXIII 64b19 (summary in Rosen 1959: 124) is ambivalent, since even though there is no explicit identification of the ox with the bodhisattva, T 1435 at T XXIII 64a21 introduces this tale as a narration of former lives, 本生因緣.

The present tale in the Theravāda *Vinaya* appears to be the sole instance within the corpus of Pāli discourses and canonical *Vinaya* texts where a former life of the Buddha as an animal is recorded. Given that in other *Vinayas* the tale does not appear as a *jātaka*, it is possible that at some point during oral transmission the wording of the present passage in the Theravāda *Vinaya* was influenced by the tendency – clearly apparent in the earlier surveyed instances – of considering tales from the past as records of former existences of the bodhisattva.

The logic behind this tendency would have been based on the assumption that, when delivering teachings, the Buddha drew on such tales based on recollections from his previous lives.⁴⁵ When considered from this perspective, it would not be at all surprising if during oral transmission some of the above tales should have acquired a more explicit statement of what tradition had come to believe to be anyway implicit in them, namely that each of these tales records a past life experience of the Buddha.

The reasoning underlying such assumptions can be seen in the *Kūṭadanta-sutta* and its parallels, which report the Buddha describing a magnificent sacrifice undertaken in the past by a king and his Brahmin chaplain. One hearing this description, an eminent Brahmin present among the audience wonders if the circumstance that the Buddha does not claim to have heard of this event could imply that he had witnessed this sacrifice himself.⁴⁶ The Buddha confirms that this is indeed the case. This tale thus gives canonical sanction to the reasoning that when the Buddha relates a tale without expli-

⁴⁵ According to the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, Wogihara 1971a: 397,11, the Buddha's ability to recall former lives is in fact the source of his knowledge and teaching of *jātakas*, *pūrvanivāsānusmṛti-jñānabalena tathāgataḥ ... jātakāṃś ca smṛtvā ... deśayati*. Foucher 1955: 70, comments that "la connaissance surnaturelle prêtée au Bouddha de ses vies antérieures ... assume avec le temps un rôle de plus en plus considérable dans la tradition ... on en vint vite à penser qu'il n'avait pu garder pour lui seul un pareil trésor d'expérience." Ohnuma 2004: 401 explains that "the existence of the *jātaka* genre is based on the notion that the Buddha, on the night of his enlightenment, attained the recollection of his previous lives, which then, throughout his life, he often had occasion to relate in order to illustrate a point, drive home a moral lesson, or shed light on some situation." A shift from parable to *jātaka* may also have been facilitated by a tendency in ancient Indian thought for the symbolic and the literal to overlap, blurring a clear distinction between them, with the symbolic at times being endowed with a power that has quite 'real' consequences.

⁴⁶ DN 5 at DN I 143,15; DĀ 23 at T I 100b21; and fragment 408r2 in von Criegern 2002: 35.

citly indicating that he has heard it from somewhere, then this can be assumed to be an event he remembers from his own past.

In addition to providing this precedent, the *Kūṭadanta-sutta* and its parallels also exemplify the above-described pattern underlying the formation of some *jātaka* tales, as the Pāli version identifies the bodhisattva with the Brahmin chaplain who led the sacrifice, the Chinese version instead identifies him with the king on whose behalf the sacrifice was undertaken, and Sanskrit fragments of this discourse identify him with both.⁴⁷ The tale itself has evident comic traits which,⁴⁸ together with its absence from the Pāli *Jātaka* collection and the variations among the parallel versions on who should be identified with the bodhisattva, make it safe to assume that it was not a *jātaka* from the outset.

Nevertheless, with some of the other cases discussed above a degree of uncertainty prevails, since one may wonder if the mere lack of explicit identification makes it really certain that the tale was from the outset not conceived of as a *jātaka* – except for those cases where these tales are explicitly introduced as parables.

Another somewhat ambivalent example would be the story of the Brahmin Mahāgovinda. In the *Dīgha-nikāya* and *Dirgha-āgama* versions of this tale, the Buddha identifies the story of the Brahmin Mahāgovinda as a record of one of his former lives.⁴⁹ In an individual translation of the same discourse, however, no such identification is found.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ In DN 5 at DN I 143,26, the Buddha explains that he was the Brahmin chaplain, *purohito brāhmaṇo ahoṣiṃ*. In DĀ 23 at T I 100b25, the Buddha first asks the rhetorical question if the warrior king for whom that great sacrifice was undertaken was someone else, 刹利王為大祀者, 豈異人乎, followed by indicating that one should not see it like this, as he was [that king] himself, 勿造斯觀, 即吾身是也. Fragment 408r4–5 in von Criegern 2002: 35 reports the question whether the venerable Gautama at that time was the head-anointed warrior king or the Brahmin chaplain, *kin nu bhavāṃ gautamas tasmiṃ samaye rājā kṣa[tr]iyo mūrdhābhiṣikto ... āho soḍ brāhmaṇapurohita*, which then receives the puzzling reply by the Buddha that he remembers having been both of them, *ubhayam apy ahaṃ bhāradvāja samanussmarāmi api rājā kṣatryo mūrdhābhiṣikta evaṃrūpasya yajñasya yaṣṭā api brāhmaṇaḥ purohitaḥ evaṃrūpasya yajñasya yājītā*.

⁴⁸ Cf. e.g. Rhys Davids 1899: 160–166; Ling 1973/1976: 82–85; Gombrich 1988: 82f; and Collins 1998: 479f.

⁴⁹ DN 19 at DN II 251,9 and its parallel DĀ 3 at T I 34a10; cf. also the *Mahāvastu* version, Senart 1897: 224,5.

⁵⁰ T 8 at T I 213c14 concludes by stating that “the Blessed One delivered this narration about the past”, 世尊宣說往昔因緣事, without reckoning it a *jātaka*.

This leaves open the possibility that Mahāgovinda was identified with the bodhisattva only at a later stage, thereby turning this story into a *jātaka*. In fact, references to the same Brahmin in a discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* do not present his tale as a record of a former life of the Buddha; the same is also the case for a *Madhyama-āgama* parallel.⁵¹ In the case of another teacher, mentioned similarly in this *Aṅguttara-nikāya* discourse and in other Pāli discourses without being identified with the bodhisattva,⁵² the parallel version in the *Madhyama-āgama* does provide such identification.⁵³

Another ambiguous case can be found in relation to the Discourse about [the Brahmin] Velāma, the *Velāma-sutta*. The different versions of this discourse describe the lavish offerings made by a Brahmin in the bygone past, highlighting that through lack of adequate recipients the merits of this fabulous offering were no match to an act as simple as taking refuge in the Buddha.

In the Pāli version and most of its parallels, the Buddha concludes the tale by indicating that he had been that Brahmin in the past.⁵⁴ Yet, one version preserved as an individual translation does not provide such an identi-

⁵¹ AN 6.54 at AN III 372,1 (where the Brahmin is referred to by his proper name Jotipāla, not by the honorific Mahāgovinda that was accorded to him as per DN 19 at DN II 232,24) and its parallel MĀ 130 at T I 619c17. The contrast between AN 6.54 and DN 19 in this respect has already been noted by Law 1930a: 173 and Gokuldas 1951: 50.

⁵² The tale of Sunetta is given in AN 6.54 at AN III 371,16 in the same terms as for Jotipāla. Other discourses with the Sunetta tale are AN 7.62 at AN IV 103,24 and AN 7.69 at AN IV 135,9, none of which takes the form of a *jātaka*. However, the description of Sunetta's practice of loving kindness in AN 7.62 at AN IV 104,22 (not mentioned in AN 6.54 or AN 7.69) has a counterpart in AN 7.58 at AN IV 89,4, which records the Buddha's practice of loving kindness undertaken during a past existence.

⁵³ MĀ 8 at T I 429b29 (parallel to AN 7.62). The same identification is also recorded in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* 9 in Pradhan 1967: 472,3 and in a *sūtra* quotation from Śamathadeva's commentary on this work, edited in Dietz 2007: 98,32 (for quotations in other works cf. the survey in Lamotte 1944/1981: 520 note 5). In another parallel to AN 7.62, T 30 at T I 812c5, this teacher of former times is himself a Buddha, 過去世有佛出現, 名妙眼如來, who surprisingly is nevertheless identified as the present Buddha in a past life at T I 812c17: 往昔妙眼如來者, 非別有佛即我身是. A parallel to AN 7.70, MĀ 160 at T I 684b11, provides an identification with the bodhisattva, though in this case in relation to another of those teachers of former times.

⁵⁴ AN 9.20 at AN IV 394,11; MĀ 155 at T I 678a7; T 73 at T I 879c19; T 74 at T I 882a13; and EĀ 27.3 at T II 645a9.

fication.⁵⁵ Thus it seems at least possible that the tale of this Brahmin and his sumptuous offerings may not always have been recognized as a past life experience of the bodhisattva.

In sum, despite some ambiguity prevailing in certain cases, the instances surveyed so far do point to a tendency for parables and similes to become *jātakas* by identifying one of their protagonists with the bodhisattva. Though in several instances this tendency emerges with considerable clarity through comparative studies, in other cases the evidence does not suffice for coming to a definite conclusion.

2.2 Gautama Meets Kāśyapa

Keeping in mind the way some canonical *jātakas* appear to have come into being, as well as the fact that at times only indications of this process can be found that do not allow a definite conclusion, we are now ready to turn to the record of the bodhisattva Gautama's meeting with the previous Buddha Kāśyapa. This meeting takes place at a time when Gautama's own Buddhahood is close at hand. Hence, from the traditional perspective of his prolonged career towards Buddhahood, the maturation of his spiritual qualities should manifest in an evident manner on this occasion of meeting his predecessor.

The meeting between the two is recorded in the *Ghaṭikāra-sutta* of the *Majjhima-nikāya*, which has a parallel in the *Madhyama-āgama*.⁵⁶ Besides these two discourses versions, further parallels can be found in the *Mahāvastu* of the Lokottaravāda Mahāsāṃghika tradition, in the *Saṅghabhedavastu* of the (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda tradition, and in a Chinese *Avadāna* collection.⁵⁷ In

⁵⁵ T 72 at T I 878c11 relates the tale of the Brahmin, but does not provide any identification, though this could be due to the circumstance that this version is rather brief, compared to its parallels. A quotation of this tale in D (4094) *mngon pa, tu* 195b5 or Q (5595) *ju* 169b5 also does not identify any of its protagonists with the Buddha, which in this case is simply because the quoted extract does not cover the passage that usually provides such identification.

⁵⁶ *Ghaṭikāra-sutta*, MN 81 MN II 45–54; 轉婆陵耆經, MĀ 63 at T I 499a-503a; for a partial translation of MĀ 63 cf. Anālayo 2009a.

what follows, I survey the general narrative progression of the tale, based on the two discourse versions.

The *Ghāṭikāra-sutta* and its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel begin with the Buddha displaying a smile, whereon Ānanda inquires about the reasons for this smile.⁵⁸ The Buddha thereupon relates a tale from the past of two friends, a potter and a young Brahmin, who live at the time of the former Buddha Kāśyapa. The potter invites the young Brahmin to come with him to visit the Buddha Kāśyapa. In reply, the young Brahmin refuses, a refusal reported in the *Ghāṭikāra-sutta* and in its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel in the following manner:

“What [use] of [going to] see that shaven-headed petty recluse?”⁵⁹

“I do not want to see [that] bald-headed recluse.”⁶⁰

The other versions record him using the same type of derogatory expression to refer to the Buddha Kāśyapa.⁶¹

In the *Ghāṭikāra-sutta*, the potter then repeats his invitation two times, and once the young Brahmin has refused these as well, they go to bathe. After bathing the potter again invites the young Brahmin three times, and the latter again refuses up to the third time.⁶²

⁵⁷ *Mahāvastu*, Senart 1882a: 317–329; *Saṅghabhedavastu*, Gnoli 1978: 22–30, with its Tibetan counterpart at D (1) *’dul ba, ga* 4a–10a or Q (1030) *nge* 3b–9a; and the tenth tale in an *Avadāna* collection preserved in Chinese, 佛說興起行經, T 197 at T IV 172c–174b, whose translation the Taishō edition ascribes to Kāng Mèngxiáng, 康孟詳, though Nattier 2008: 177 does not include T 197 among the translations that can safely be attributed to him.

⁵⁸ MN 81 at MN II 45,3 and MĀ 63 at T I 499a12. In the *Mahāvastu*, Senart 1882a: 317,8, a smile by the Buddha similarly provides the occasion for the delivery of the tale, while the *Saṅghabhedavastu* and T 197 do not report such a smile.

⁵⁹ MN 81 at MN II 46,11: *kiṃ pana tena muṇḍakena samaṇakena dīṭṭhena?*

⁶⁰ MĀ 63 at T I 500a21: 我不欲見禿頭沙門。

⁶¹ The *Mahāvastu*, Senart 1882a: 320,3: “whence should I [go to] see those shaven-headed recluses?”, *kiṃ me ... tehi muṇḍikehi śramaṇehi darśanāye?* The *Saṅghabhedavastu*, Gnoli 1978: 23,19: “how could this shaven-headed petty recluse be awakened?”, *kutas tasmin muṇḍake śramaṇake bodhi?*; D (1) *’dul ba, ga* 5a4 or Q (1030) *nge* 4b5: “how could there be awakening in the case of such a shaven-headed recluse?”, *dge sbyong mgo reg de la byang chub ga la yod?* The Chinese *Avadāna* tale, T 197 at T IV 172c23: “what use of seeing this shaven-headed recluse?”, 用見此禿頭道人為?

The *Madhyama-āgama* version does not report any repetition of the invitation, as here the potter follows up his invitation by right away taking hold of the topknot of the young Brahmin, forcing him to descend from the chariot in which he was driving. The *Ghāṭikāra-sutta* depicts a more gradual build-up of the potter's physical attempts to overcome his friend's resistance. After his repeated verbal invitations have proved unsuccessful, he at first takes hold off the young Brahmin by the belt, only seizing the freshly washed hair of the young Brahmin when the latter undoes his belt.⁶³

In both versions, the young Brahmin finally agrees to come along and thereon gets to hear a discourse from the Buddha Kāśyapa. On their way back home, the young Brahmin expresses his wish to go forth. The potter brings him back to the Buddha Kāśyapa, who at the request of the potter ordains the young Brahmin.

Next the scene shifts to Vārāṇasī, where the Buddha Kāśyapa is visited by the local king, to whom he delivers a teaching. After providing Kāśyapa and his monks with a meal on the next day, the king invites Kāśyapa to stay with him for the rains retreat period, but Kāśyapa does not accept the invitation.

Asked by the saddened king if there is another supporter that equals him, Kāśyapa mentions the potter, who has insight into the four noble truths and is endowed with exceptionally virtuous conduct. Kāśyapa relates how on two former occasions he helped himself to food in the potter's house, having been invited to do so by the blind parents of the potter, who was away; and how on another occasion he told his monks to remove the roofing from the potter's workshop to repair his own hut. In all these instances, the potter reacted with joy and delight on finding out what had

⁶² MN 81 at MN II 46,12. The *Mahāvastu* and the Chinese *Avadāna* tale proceed similarly, though they only report a single invitation after the two have taken a bath, Senart 1882a: 320,19 and T 197 at T IV 172c27. The *Śaṅghabhedavastu*, Gnoli 1978: 23,23 and D (1) 'dul ba, ga 5a7 or Q (1030) nge 4b8, only has the first instance with three invitations, without following this with the bathing interlude.

⁶³ MN 81 at MN II 47,12. The *Mahāvastu* proceeds similarly, with the difference that the first attempt does not involve the belt but rather the neck of the young Brahmin, Senart 1882a: 321,2. In the Chinese *Avadāna* tale, T 197 at T IV 173a1, the potter first takes hold of the clothes of his friend, then of the belt, and then of the hair. The *Śaṅghabhedavastu*, Gnoli 1978: 23,32 and D (1) 'dul ba, ga 5a7 or Q (1030) nge 4b8, proceeds similarly to MĀ 63, though without reporting that the potter's action forced his friend to descend from the chariot.

happened. Having heard this good report of the potter, the king of Vārāṇasī decides to send food supplies to the potter, which the potter politely declines – with which the tale concludes.

Considering the *Ghaṭṭikāra-sutta* and its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel as a whole, a central theme in both discourses appears to be the contrast between the potter and the king of Vārāṇasī, in the sense that due to his virtues the potter is – from the perspective of the Buddha Kāśyapa – a superior lay supporter than the wealthy and powerful king of the country. In fact, throughout the discourse the potter is the main protagonist, exhibiting the exemplary conduct of an ideal lay disciple.⁶⁴ In contrast, the young Brahmin plays a role only in the first part of the tale and does not occur at all in the second part of the discourse.

The central purpose of the *Ghaṭṭikāra-sutta* thus appears to be the depiction of an ideal lay disciple and his deep devotion to the Buddha Kāśyapa, throwing into relief how this exemplary lay follower is able to convince even a reluctant and somewhat arrogant Brahmin to pay a visit to the Buddha.

2.3 The Meeting with Kāśyapa as a *Jātaka*⁶⁵

The *Ghaṭṭikāra-sutta* and all of its parallel versions conclude by identifying the young Brahmin with the Buddha Gautama in one of his former lives.⁶⁶ A discordant note in this otherwise unanimous identification comes from a

⁶⁴ Oldenberg 1912a: 189: “auch ist die Erzählung vielmehr der Verherrlichung des Ghaṭṭikāra und seiner frommen Intimität mit dem Buddha jenes Weltalters gewidmet, als der Joṭipālas.”

⁶⁵ The present section is based on excerpts from Anālayo 2009a.

⁶⁶ MN 81 at MN II 54,18; MĀ 63 at T I 503a4; the *Mahāvastu*, Senart 1882a: 335,5; and the *Saṅghabhedavastu*, Gnoli 1978: 30,14 and D (1) ‘*dul ba, ga* 10a4 or Q (1030) *nge* 9a7. The **Mahāvibhāṣā*, T 1545 at T XXVII 863c22, similarly refers to a former life of the bodhisattva during which he was a monk disciple of the Buddha Kāśyapa. The same is also implicit in the tale given in T 197, which moreover in its description of the Brahmin youth at T IV 172c11 indicates that he had thirty of the thirty-two marks (of a great being), 有三十相. Lüders 1913: 883 notes a pictorial representation of the meeting between the Buddha Kāśyapa and the young Brahmin, in which the latter is depicted as a monk endowed with *uṣṇīṣa* and *ūrṇā*, two prominent marks out of the set of thirty-two marks of a great being; for another representation of this meeting in Gandhāran sculpture cf. Vogel 1954: 810.

passage in the *Ekottarika-āgama* preserved in Chinese, which identifies the young Brahmin from the time of the Buddha Kāśyapa with a monk who lived at the time of the Buddha Gautama.⁶⁷ This would make it impossible for the young Brahmin to be the bodhisattva at the same time.

Though the indication provided in the *Ekottarika-āgama* is not decisive, it does provide a hint sufficiently strong to warrant further investigation, in that it suggests that the present tale may not always have been considered a *jātaka*. To explore this possibility, in what follows I examine the proposed identification of the young Brahmin with the bodhisattva from its two possible perspectives, namely from the perspective of the young Brahmin and from the perspective of the bodhisattva.

When evaluated from the perspective of the young Brahmin, a problem arises owing to his manifest lack of interest in meeting the Buddha Kāśyapa. When considered from the perspective of the developed bodhisattva ideal, for a bodhisattva to be able to meet a Buddha would be the most significant event imaginable, providing the occasion for the initial resolve to follow this path and for subsequent reaffirmations of this aspiration.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ EĀ 1.1 at T II 551b18: “in this auspicious aeon there was also a Buddha, called the Tathāgata Kāśyapa, who had appeared in the world having reached the truth and being fully awakened. At that time, the monk Uttara was called Brahmin Uttara ... Now the Tathāgata Śākyamuni has appeared in the world, having reached the truth and being fully awakened. Now this monk is called Uttara”, 此賢劫中次復有佛，名迦葉如來，至真，等正覺，出現於世，爾時，優多羅比丘名梵優多羅 ... 今釋迦文如來，至真，等正覺，出現於世，今此比丘名優多羅。 EĀ 1.1 thus uses the same name for the young Brahmin as MĀ 63 at T I 499a28: 優多羅, and the *Śaṅghabhedavastu*, Gnoli 1978: 23,1: *Uttara* and D (1) and D (1) ‘*dul ba, ga 4a6 or Q (1030) nge 3b8: bla ma*. MN 81 at MN 46,4 gives the name of the young Brahmin as Jotipāla. The *Mahāvastu*, Senart 1882a: 319,11 similarly speaks of Jyotipāla; and the Chinese *Avadāna* tale, T 197 at T IV 172c13, reads: 火鬘, which according to Akanuma 1930/1994: 251 stands for Jotipāla. The name Uttara for Gautama in his former life at the time of the Buddha Kāśyapa recurs in the *Avadānaśataka*, e.g. Speyer 1906/1970: 239,7 and 1909/1970: 23,5, 51,8 and 88,1. An identification of the bodhisattva with a Brahmin youth by the name of Uttara who goes forth as a Buddhist monk is also recorded in Bv 12.11 at Bv 53,21 and Jā I 37,31, though with the difference that this past life took place at the time of the former Buddha Sumedha.

⁶⁸ As becomes readily apparent from the study by Skilling 1996, different Buddhist schools and textual traditions agree that the bodhisattva served and worshiped exceedingly high numbers of Buddhas during the aeons of his gradual progress to Buddhahood, making it inconceivable that he should conduct himself otherwise on meeting the last Buddha he was ever going to encounter.

According to a well-known tradition, whose Theravāda version is found in the *Buddhavaṃsa*, at a time in the remote past the bodhisattva Gautama was a Brahmin by the name of Sumedha. Merely hearing about the former Buddha Dīpaṃkara filled the bodhisattva with such inspiration and faith that, aspiring to become a Buddha in the future himself, he lay down in the mud as a plank so that the Buddha could walk over him.⁶⁹

The *Mahāvastu* records how, at an even earlier time, in an extravagant act of pious devotion the bodhisattva scattered flower-powder worth a hundred-thousand as an offering over the Buddha Sarvābhīhū and his disciples,⁷⁰ at the same time aspiring to become a Buddha himself.

What these two tales have in common is their depiction of the deep respect and faith the bodhisattva Gautama had towards Buddhas in the distant past; something not easy to reconcile with the description in the *Ghāṭikāra-sutta* and its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel of the young Brahmin's reluctance even to visit the Buddha Kāśyapa, the last Buddha to arise before the advent of the Buddha Gautama.

Regarding the young Brahmin's reluctance, while according to the *Madhyama-āgama* version of this encounter the young Brahmin refuses the potter's invitation to visit the Buddha Kāśyapa only once, in the other versions he refuses repeatedly. In the *Madhyama-āgama* account his disinclination is also more easily understandable, as according to this version he is just about to give teachings to a group of five hundred disciples, who have gathered to study under him. If he were to go and visit the Buddha Kāśyapa, as

⁶⁹ Stanza 2.51 in Bv 12,14. Rahula 1978: 121 notes that in some traditions emphasis is instead on an offering of flowers as the main act undertaken by the bodhisattva at that time. A precedent for the motif of lying down in the mud can be found in MN 65 at MN I 439,26 and its parallel MĀ 194 at T I 747a28. These two discourses report that the Buddha, when admonishing a recalcitrant monk, remarked that other monks would even be willing to lie down in the mud if he asked them to do so (the Pāli version specifies that the purpose of this act would be to become a plank for the Buddha).

⁷⁰ The *Mahāvastu*, Senart 1882a: 38,9, indicates that he scattered *keśara* over the Buddha and his disciples. Jones 1949/1973: 32 note 3 explains *keśara* to be "a perfume prepared from the flower of that name", while according to Franke 1929: 118 the term refers to the pollen. The same *Mahāvastu* associates the bodhisattva's original aspiration with a gift given to a former Buddha by the name of Śākyamuni, the bodhisattva being a merchant at that time, Senart 1882a: 47,16.

suggested by the potter, all these disciples would not be getting the instructions they are expecting of him.

The same pattern continues when according to the *Madhyama-āgama* discourse he is willing to visit the Buddha Kāśyapa after his friend has taken hold of him once, whereas in the *Ghaṭikāra-sutta* and other versions, he only acquiesces after being taken hold of several times. The different versions agree, however, that the potter eventually took hold of the young Brahmin's hair.

In his detailed study of the implications of seizing someone's hair in ancient India, Hara (1986: 71f) explains that in a fighting situation "the seizure of the hair in single combat means complete control over one's adversary", as "once he succeeds in holding his adversary's hair, he is in a position to behead him." Hence "being held by the hair is an unbearable humiliation."

The *Ghaṭikāra-sutta* in fact makes a point of noting the extraordinary nature of this deed, reporting that the young Brahmin was rather surprised at the audacious act undertaken by someone of considerably lower social standing than himself.⁷¹ Thus it would be quite surprising for the potter to act in the way depicted in the *Madhyama-āgama* version, where after a single refusal he immediately gets onto the chariot, grabs the young Brahmin's hair and pulls him down from the chariot, an act undertaken in front of a company of five hundred disciples of the young Brahmin. When viewed from an ancient Indian perspective, this narration seems highly unlikely.⁷²

⁷¹ MN 81 at MN II 47,28 reckons it marvellous that the potter, though of inferior birth, should go so far as to seize a Brahmin's freshly washed hair. According to the *Mahāvastu*, Senart 1882a: 321,5, the potter had gone so far as to seize the young Brahmin's hair because the latter kept on refusing to visit the Buddha Kāśyapa and finally had pushed the potter away and was about to leave. Thus in this account it is sheer exasperation that causes the potter to undertake an action that involves a serious breach of etiquette.

⁷² According to the Chinese *Avadāna* account, T 197 at T IV 173a6, grabbing someone's hair was considered to be so outrageous in this part of ancient India that it was punishable by death. The same is also reflected in the *Mahāvastu*, Senart 1882a: 321,19, which reports that, on arriving in the presence of the Buddha Kāśyapa, the young Brahmin declares that he is not ready to take the precepts because he still has to kill the potter for having seized his hair. Though it remains open to interpretation how far this remark is intended in a humorous sense, it certainly does highlight the inappropriateness of this act of the potter.

The *Madhyama-āgama* discourse's presentation of the young Brahmin as being quickly convinced to approach the Buddha Kāśyapa could thus be an attempt to iron out the difficulty underlying this episode, according to which the potter had to be quite insistent in order to overcome the young Brahmin's reluctance to visit the Buddha.

Another aspect of the same problem would be the way the young Brahmin formulates his objection, giving vent to his unwillingness to visit one of those "bald-headed recluses". Thus according to this episode, in a life close to the time of becoming a Buddha himself,⁷³ the bodhisattva was not only disinclined to visit another Buddha, but even went so far as to disparage a Buddha.⁷⁴ In the *Madhyama-āgama* account, the potter in fact quite explicitly tells the Buddha Kāśyapa that the young Brahmin has no faith or respect for the Buddha.⁷⁵

The original point of this whole episode may have been to depict the lengths to which a faithful lay disciple like the potter is willing to go in order to convert others, in that he would even dare to seize a Brahmin's hair for the sake of getting him to pay a visit to the Buddha. Once the young Brahmin is identified with the bodhisattva Gautama, however, the episode becomes problematic.

The difficulty caused by the young Brahmin's disrespectful attitude towards a Buddha is also reflected in several works that present the six years of asceticism spent before the Buddha's awakening as the karmic result of the disparaging remark he had made about the Buddha Kāśyapa in his for-

⁷³ MĀ 32 at T I 469c27 presents this life of the bodhisattva under Buddha Kāśyapa as the last existence before his life in Tuṣita, whence he descended to become a Buddha; the same is the case for the *Sanḅhabhedavastu*, Gnoli 1977: 21,1. According to Jā I 47,16 and Ps IV 169,7, however, in the life that preceded his stay in Tusita he was prince Vessantara, described in detail in *Jātaka* tale no. 547 at Jā VI 479–596.

⁷⁴ Peris 2004: 48 notes that when a narration originally not related to the bodhisattva has become a *jātaka*, it easily happens that "carried away by the intrinsic drama of the plot, the Bodhisatta is made to say and do things unbecoming of a Bodhisatta, a being on the path of Buddhahood."

⁷⁵ MĀ 63 at T I 500b3: "he has no faith and no respect [in his] mind for the Blessed One", 彼於世尊無信敬心. Whereas MN 81 and the *Mahāvastu* do not explicitly mention that the young Brahmin had neither faith nor respect for the Buddha, the *Sanḅhabhedavastu* and the Chinese *Avadāna* tale highlight that he had no faith in the Buddha, the Dharma and the *Sanḅha*, cf. Gnoli 1978: 24,14 and D (1) 'dul ba, ga 5b7 or Q (1030) nge 5a8, as well as T 197 at T IV 173a15.

mer life as a young Brahmin.⁷⁶ The title of the Chinese *Avadāna* version reflects the same theme, announcing the contents of the tale to be on “the causes in former existences [for the Buddha’s undertaking of] ascetic practices”.⁷⁷ In the *Saṅghabhedavastu*, the Buddha delivers the tale of the potter and his young Brahmin friend in reply to an inquiry by the monks about the former deeds responsible for his having to spend six years undertaking ascetic practices.⁷⁸ That is, in these versions the main purpose of the present story is to explain why the Buddha practised asceticism before reaching awakening. Evidently, the for a bodhisattva rather surprising conduct did not go unnoticed.

Thus, on considering the supposed identity of the young Brahmin with the bodhisattva from the perspective of the young Brahmin, this identification can be seen to result in several difficulties.

Turning to the other aspect of this identification, when considered from the perspective of the life of the bodhisattva, a problem related to this identification is raised in the *Kathāvatthu*. This problem is: Could the Buddha Gautama claim to have been without a teacher, if not too far back in the past he had been a disciple of the Buddha Kāśyapa?⁷⁹

⁷⁶ This is reported in the *Saṅghabhedavastu*, Gnoli 1978: 21,31 and its Tibetan counterpart in D (1) ‘dul ba, ga 3b7 or Q (1030) nge 3b1; cf. also the *Bhaiṣajyavastu*, Dutt 1984a: 217,15. The same karmic relationship is also reflected in the Chinese *Avadāna* collection, T 197 at T IV 173c24 and T IV 174a3 (in verse); and the Pāli *Apadāna* verses 387: 29f at Ap I 301,7; for a corresponding Sanskrit fragment and its Tibetan counterpart cf. Bechert 1961: 238f; cf. also the *Bodhisattoṽvadāna-kalpalatā* résumé in Mitra 1882/1971: 58; and the discussion in Walters 1990: 77 and 81; Cutler 1997: 73; Hara 1997: 250–253; and Guang Xing 2002a: 21. A further step is then taken in the *Upāyakaṇṭhāya-sūtra*, which reasons that the bodhisattva’s reluctance was only a skilful means in order to convince some former friends to visit the Buddha Kāśyapa as well, cf. T 310 at T XI 602b3 and T 345 at T XII 162a12 (in T 346 at T XII 174a15 the bodhisattva’s remark differs from the other versions), and the translation in Tatz 1994/2001: 62.

⁷⁷ T 197 at T IV 172c5: 佛說苦行宿緣經.

⁷⁸ Gnoli 1978: 21,30: “venerable sir, what deed did the Blessed One perform that, [in retribution] for the fruition of this deed, he undertook ascetic practices for six years”, *kim bhadanta bhagavatā karma kṛtaṃ yasya karmaṇo vipākena śaḍvarṣāṇi duṣkaram caritam*; with a similarly worded counterpart in D (1) ‘dul ba, ga 3b6 or Q (1030) nge 3b1: *btsun pa bcom ldan ‘das kyis phrin las ci zhiḡ mdzad na phrin las de ‘i rnam par smin pas lo drug tu dka ‘ba spyad par gyur lags*.

⁷⁹ Kv 286,16 (§ 4.8), where the issue at stake is whether at that time the bodhisattva had reached the path of assurance, *okkantaniyāmo*; cf. also the discussion in McDermott 1989.

teaching capable of leading to liberation. According to the Pāli commentary on the *Ghaṭikāra-sutta*, the young Brahmin had in fact learned all of the Buddha Kāśyapa's teachings and had practised insight meditation right up to the brink of stream-entry.⁸²

By recollecting the teachings of the Buddha Kāśyapa, the bodhisattva Gautama would have had a firsthand experience of the liberating teachings of a Buddha, which would have shown him how to proceed in order to reach awakening himself. From this perspective, it would follow that Gautama's own awakening did not really take place independently of a teacher.

Such a conclusion would to some degree conflict with the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta* and a range of other sources, which agree in reporting that, right after his awakening, the Buddha claimed to have no teacher.⁸³ Though one might take this to refer to the absence of a living teacher, another difficult passage would be his claim to having realized what was "unheard before", made according to the *Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta* and a range of parallels when, soon after having reached awakening, he began to teach his five earlier companions.⁸⁴ For Gautama to have heard similar teachings during

⁸² Ps III 282,18 presents this as a general pattern for any bodhisattva, in that they learn the three baskets of the Buddha's word and cause insight to increase until they remain at the brink of conformity knowledge, *tepiṭakaṃ Buddhavacanāṃ uggāṇhitvā ... vipassanāṃ vadḍhetvā yāva anulomaṃ nāṇaṃ āhacca tiṭṭhanti*.

⁸³ Several discourses report, in only slightly varying formulation, that the Buddha proclaimed to have no teacher: MN 26 at MN I 171,7: *na me ācariyo atthi* (= Vin I 8,21); MĀ 204 at T I 777b17: 自覺誰稱師; EĀ 24.5 at T II 618c8: 我亦無師保。The same is also found in several biographies of the Buddha, T 189 at T III 643c22: 無師無等侶; T 191 at T III 953b21: 我今無所師; T 196 at T IV 148a8: 我行無師保; and in the *Lalitavistara*, Lefmann 1902: 405,20: *ācāryo na hi me kaścīd*. Other occurrences of this statement can be found in the different versions of the *Udāna(-varga)* (on the title of this work cf. Bernhard 1968 and the discussion in Willemen 1978: xxvf and Dhammajoti 1995: 39), Bernhard 1965: 279 (21.4): *ācāryo me na vai kaś cit*, Nakatani 1987: 60 (273): *[ācār]yya ko asti* (cf. also Chakravarti 1930: 263); with the Chinese parallels, T 212 at T IV 717b22 and T 213 at T IV 787c1: 我既無師保; and the Tibetan version, Beckh 1911: 69 or Zongtse 1990: 209 (21.4): *nga la slob dpon su yang med*. In addition, several *Vinayas* have preserved this statement, such as the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya*, T 1428 at T XXII 787c3: 我亦無有師; the *Mahāvastu*, Senart 1897: 326,11: *na me ācāryo asti*; the Mahīśāsaka *Vinaya*, T 1421 at T XXII 104a26: 我行不由師; the *Śaṅghabhedavastu*, Gnoli 1977: 132,5: *na me 'sti kaścīd ācārya*, with its Chinese parallel, T 1450 at T XXIV 127a20: 我今不從師受業, and its Tibetan counterpart in Waldschmidt 1957: 129,4: *nga la slob dpon 'ga' med do*.

⁸⁴ With only minimal variations, a range of discourses and Buddha-biographies record that Gautama considered his realization to be of a nature that was "not heard before": SN 56.11

his earlier lifetime under the Buddha Kāśyapa would not fit too well the way the present statement is worded, according to which he had realized what was “unheard before”, not something that was just “unheard at present”.

In view of the esteem accorded in ancient India to being the successor of a lineage of teachers, it would have been rather convenient for Gautama to be able to point to a past Buddha as his teacher.⁸⁵ This would have enhanced his claim to having reached full awakening rather than detracting from it. Thus, if on the night of his breakthrough to awakening he had indeed recalled the instructions received from the previous Buddha Kāśyapa, it would have been natural as well as convenient for him to indicate this when proclaiming his realization.

In fact, according to a discourse in the *Samyutta-nikāya* and its parallels the Buddha considered his awakening to be a rediscovery of an ancient path, trodden by awakened ones of the past.⁸⁶ This puts his assertion of having realized what was “unheard before” in perspective: He did not claim to have discovered something entirely new; instead, he considered his own realization to be a rediscovery. In view of this, his claim to have realized what was “unheard before” must be intending to highlight that he accom-

at SN V 422,3: *pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu* (= Vin I 11,1); *Catuṣpariṣat-sūtra* fragment 484e R2 in Waldschmidt 1952: 52: *pūrvam-ananuśruteṣu dharmeṣu*; SĀ 379 at T II 103c15: 本所未曾聞法; EĀ 24.5 at T II 619a21: 本未聞法; T 109 at T II 503b19: 本未聞道 (adopting the variant 未 instead of 末); T 212 at T IV 685c27: 本所未聞; D (337) *mdo sde, sa* 275a7 or Q (1003) *shu* 283b2: *sngon ma thos pa'i chos*; the *Lalitavistara*, Lefman 1902: 417,15: *pūrvamaśruteṣu dharmeṣu*. The same recurs in several *Vinayas*, such as the *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya*, T 1428 at T XXII 788a30: 本未聞法; the *Mahāvastu*, Senart 1897: 332,13: *pūrvē ananuśrutehi dharmehi*; the *Mahīśāsaka Vinaya*, T 1421 at T XXII 104c7: 是法我先未聞; the *Saṅghabhedavastu*, Gnoli 1977: 135,2: *pūrvam ananuśruteṣu dharmeṣu*, with its Chinese parallel, T 1450 at T XXIV 127c8: 我未曾聞, and the Tibetan counterpart in Waldschmidt 1957: 149,1: *sngon ma thos pa'i chos*; and in the *Sarvāstivāda Vinaya*, T 1435 at T XXIII 448b19: 我先不從他聞法; cf. also Chung 2006.

⁸⁵ Gombrich 1980: 64 speaks of the Buddha's “failure to authenticate his position by reference to a long line of teachers”, when compared to other contemporary religious teachers.

⁸⁶ SN 12.65 at SN II 106,15: “I saw an ancient path”, *addasaṃ purāṇaṃ maggaṃ* (S^c: *purāṇamaggaṃ*); SĀ 287 at T II 80c27: “I attained an ancient path of seers”, 得古仙人道, EĀ 38.4 at T II 718c6: “I saw an ancient path, where former Buddhas had passed by”, 見古昔諸佛所遊行處; T 713 at T XVI 827b7: “I attained an ancient path”, 得故道所; T 714 at T XVI 828b21: “I now realized an old path”, 我今證得舊道; T 715 at T XVI 830a24: “I walked a path like that, which had been used by past Buddhas”, 我亦如是履, 於諸佛舊所行道; and a Sanskrit fragment, Bongard-Levin 1996: 80 (I.32): “I attained an ancient path”, *adhigato me paurāṇo mārgaḥ*; cf. also Lévi 1910: 440 and Tripāṭhi 1962: 103.

plished awakening independent of any direct instructions from a teacher (which in the ancient Indian context would necessarily have been oral instructions “heard” by the disciple). It is precisely this entirely self-reliant manner of discovering the path to realization that makes him a Buddha.⁸⁷

Though these considerations are in themselves not conclusive, the above discussed passages do not give the impression that the early discourses present the Buddha’s awakening as simply a matter of having remembered teachings received from the previous Buddha Kāśyapa. These passages would read more naturally if one were to assume that at the time when they came into being the idea that the Buddha had been a monk disciple of the previous Buddha had not yet arisen. Thus, on considering the life of Gautama from the perspective of his supposed identity with the young Brahmin who went forth under the Buddha Kāśyapa, it seems quite possible that this identification may have come into being only at a later time.

It is also worthy of note that the young Brahmin’s encounter with the former Buddha Kāśyapa has not made its way into the Pāli *Jātaka* collection. This stands in contrast to cases like the *Mahāsudassana-sutta* or the *Makhādeva-sutta*, for example, where besides the discourse proper a version of these former lives of the Buddha can also be found in the *Jātaka* collection.⁸⁸ This absence from the *Jātaka* collection would support the impression that the present discourse may not have been considered a *jātaka* from the outset.

When considered against the background of the above studied cases of several canonical *jātakas*, the *Ghaṭikāra-sutta* would not be the only instance where a didactic tale was subsequently identified as a record of a former life of the Buddha. Unlike most of the above studied *jātaka* tales, however, in the case of the *Ghaṭikāra-sutta* such a conclusion is less straightforward,

⁸⁷ SN 22.58 at SN III 66,15; SĀ 75 at T II 19c3; and SĀ 684 at T II 186c6 highlight the discovery of the path as the decisive difference between a Tathāgata and an arhat. Cf. also MN 100 at MN II 211,16, according to which the Buddha claimed to have reached realization after having directly known for ‘himself’ the Dharma among things not heard before, *pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu sāmaṇi yeva* (C: *sāmaññīeva*) *dhammaṇi abhiññāya*, with a similarly worded counterpart in Sanskrit fragment 348r1–2 in Zhang 2004: 12: *pūrvam ananuśruteṣu dharmeṣu [svayaṇ dha]rmmā[n abhijñāya]*; cf. also SHT IV 165 folio 26Vc in Sander 1980: 200. The emphasis in this formulation is on having reached realization on his own, without relying on instructions by others.

⁸⁸ DN 17 at DN II 169–199 and MN 83 at MN II 74–83, who have their counterparts in Jā 95 at Jā I 391–393 and Jā 9 at Jā I 137–139; a contrast already noted by Oldenberg 1912a: 189.

since all extant versions agree on identifying the young Brahmin who goes forth under the Buddha Kāśyapa as the Buddha Gautama in a former life.⁸⁹ Hence it is only the indication given in the *Ekottarika-āgama* and the difficulties that result from this identification that would support the assumption that the tale of the young Brahmin may not always have been held to be recording past experiences of the bodhisattva Gautama.

Whatever may be the final word on this hypothesis, tradition clearly identifies the young Brahmin with the bodhisattva. This identification, together with an awareness of the difficulties it involves, provides the background for the remainder of the present chapter, in which I turn to the notion of the bodhisattva's vow.

2.4 Gautama's Vow under Kāśyapa

In the previous chapter of my study, I discussed a passage in the *Acchariyabbhutatthamma-sutta* of the *Majjhima-nikāya* that points to a development of considerable significance for the bodhisattva conception, where qualities a Buddha acquires through awakening are attributed to the newly born bodhisattva.

⁸⁹ Some degree of ambivalence in regard to this identification also emerges from a comparison of the different versions of a discourse that reports a meeting between the Buddha Gautama and the potter, who in the meantime has been reborn as a *deva*. According to SN 1.50 at SN I 36,2+9 (cf. also SN 2.24 at SN I 60,25+32) this *deva* says to the Buddha: "I was your friend", *ahuvā te sagāmeyyo*, and the Buddha confirms "you were my friend", *ahuvā me sagāmeyyo*. In the parallel SĀ 595 at T II 159c6+14, the *deva* instead claims having been a friend of the Buddha Kāśyapa, "I and him were intimate", 我亦彼知識, which the Buddha Gautama then confirms, "you and him were friends", 汝亦彼良友. In another parallel, SĀ² 189 at T II 442c21+28, the *deva* similarly remarks in regard to the Buddha Kāśyapa that "he was my friend", 彼是我親友. The Buddha Gautama then endorses this by repeating this remark in the form "he was a friend with me", 彼與我親友, which appears to be intended as a quote, confirming that the Buddha Kāśyapa had indeed been the potter's friend, though it could also be read as meaning that the Buddha Kāśyapa had been the friend of Gautama (which, given the context, is the less probable interpretation). Thus it is only in the Pāli version of this encounter that the potter emerges as a former friend of the Buddha Gautama. While such variations may simply be the result of transmission error(s), they could also reflect some degree of uncertainty regarding the *jātaka* nature of the tale that depicts the young Brahmin and his potter friend at the time of the Buddha Kāśyapa.

The counterpart to the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* in the *Madhyama-āgama*, entitled ‘the Discourse on Marvellous Qualities’ (未曾有法經), also contains a passage that reflects a rather important idea in relation to the bodhisattva conception. The passage in question reports the vow taken by the bodhisattva Gautama to become a Buddha in the future. This vow occurs as the first of the marvels listed in the *Madhyama-āgama*’s Discourse on Marvellous Qualities. According to this first marvel, the bodhisattva took his initial vow to become a Buddha when he was a monk under the Buddha Kāśyapa:

“The Blessed One, at the time of the Buddha Kāśyapa, made his initial vow to [realize] Buddhahood [while] practising the holy life.”⁹⁰

The circumstance that the present quality is without a counterpart in the Pāli version makes it quite probable that this particular marvel is a later addition, similar to the case of the proclamation made by the bodhisattva right after being born, which is found only in the Pāli version.

The assumption that this particular marvel may be a later addition receives further support from a closer examination of the Discourse on Marvellous Qualities in the *Madhyama-āgama*. The bodhisattva’s initial vow to pursue Buddhahood occurs not only as the first marvellous quality, but is repeated again in relation to the second marvel (the bodhisattva’s rebirth in Tuṣita) and in relation to the third marvel (the bodhisattva excelling other heavenly inhabitants of Tuṣita, where moreover his rebirth in Tuṣita is also repeated). From the fourth marvel onwards, however, the discourse simply lists each marvel singly, without repeating those that had been mentioned earlier.⁹¹ The irregularity found at the beginning of the listing in relation to

⁹⁰ MĀ 32 at T I 469c24: 世尊迦葉佛時，始願佛道，行梵行；translated by Minh Chau 1991: 159 as “at the time of the Buddha Chia-yeh (Kassapa), the W. H. One began to make the vow to become a Buddha and to practise the brahma-life.” The far-reaching implications of this sentence depend on a single character, namely 始, “initial” (Hirakawa 1997: 360 lists Sanskrit equivalents like *ādi*, *prathama*; *ārambha*; *agra*, *ādyā*, *pūrva*, *prathamāt*). A comparison of various editions of this sentence confirms this reading, as it is found in: 宋版磧砂大藏經, XVII 485c10; 房山石經, XXI 75a9; 高麗大藏經 (Korean ed.), XVII 1085b11; 洪武南藏, XC 533a10; 永樂北藏, LV 209a10; 乾隆大藏經, XLVI 678a10; 卍正藏經, XXII 589b16; 中華大藏經, LXXXV/VI 36384a10; 佛教大藏經, XXIII 636,19.

⁹¹ Thus the pattern of marvels in MĀ 32 proceeds like this: 1, 1+2, 1+2+3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24.

the bodhisattva's vow gives the impression that some form of change took place during the transmission of the discourse, quite probably caused by the inclusion of the bodhisattva's initial vow to pursue Buddhahood in the listing of marvels.

Such an inclusion of the marvel of the bodhisattva's initial vow, taken under the previous Buddha Kāśyapa, would have been a natural result of the temporally wider frame adopted in the *Madhyama-āgama* discourse. While the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* lists marvels that occurred from the time of the bodhisattva's arising in Tuṣita to his birth, the *Madhyama-āgama* version covers marvels that happened before his arising in Tuṣita and marvels that took place after his birth.⁹² As according to the Sarvāstivāda tradition the bodhisattva's life in Tuṣita was preceded by his monkhood under the Buddha Kāśyapa,⁹³ it is only natural that the temporally expanded framework adopted in the *Madhyama-āgama* version brings in a marvel that took place at that time.

Another argument in support of the assumption that the bodhisattva's initial vow is a later addition to the *Madhyama-āgama* listing of marvels can be gained from the above discussed *Madhyama-āgama* parallel to the *Ghaṭikāra-sutta* that records the meeting between the Buddha Kāśyapa and the bodhisattva Gautama, who at that time was a young Brahmin. This *Madhyama-āgama* discourse does not in any way mention that the young Brahmin, who was to become the Buddha Gautama, decided to pursue the career of a bodhisattva. This is remarkable, given that this decision is reported in the Discourse on Marvellous Qualities in the same *Madhyama-āgama* collection. Such a decision would be too important to be overlooked in an account of the meeting between the bodhisattva and the Buddha Kāśyapa. This suggests that the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel to the *Ghaṭikāra-sutta* may well stem from a time when the idea of a decision taken by the bodhisattva at the time of the Buddha Kāśyapa to pursue the path to Buddhahood had not yet come into being.

Other texts associate the bodhisattva's embarking on the quest for Buddhahood with a considerably more remote lifetime. As mentioned earlier, according to the *Buddhavaṃsa* Gautama had already received a prediction of his future Buddhahood at the time of the Buddha Dīpaṃkara, the first in

⁹² Nakamura 2000a: 68 comments that, compared to MN 123, MĀ 32 "represents a movement toward a more fully organized biography."

⁹³ See above note 73 page 78.

a series of twenty-four former Buddhas, of which Kāśyapa is the last.⁹⁴ Other traditions vary, some also associating such a prediction with the time of Buddha Dīpaṃkara,⁹⁵ while others allocate it to an even earlier time.⁹⁶ A general tendency apparent in these accounts is that Gautama's embarking on the quest for Buddhahood shifts ever more into the distant past.

As a consequence of this shift, with works like the *Avadānaśataka*, the *Buddhavaṃsa*, the *Jātakanidānakathā*, the *Mahāvastu* and the *Saṅghabheda-vastu*, the bodhisattva's meeting with the Buddha Kāśyapa acquires the function of confirming his quest.⁹⁷ Such confirmation of the bodhisattva

⁹⁴ *Buddhavaṃsa* stanza 2.54 in Bv 12,21 reports that in a former lifetime as Sumedha the bodhisattva vowed to become a Buddha, whereupon he received a corresponding prediction by Dīpaṃkara Buddha; for a comparative study of different versions of this event in Pāli literature cf. Matsumura 2008. Nattier 2004b: 230 concludes that "Dīpaṃkara's complete absence from the Pāli sutta literature makes it virtually certain that traditions concerning this Buddha did not gain currency until several centuries after Śākyamuni Buddha's death."

⁹⁵ The prediction by Dīpaṃkara Buddha can be found in EĀ 20.3 at T II 599b14 and EĀ 43.2 at T II 758b26, instances that betray the incorporation of later elements in this collection (cf. also note 6 page 13). Some other occurrences are e.g. in the *Divyāvadāna*, Cowell 1886: 252,12; in the *Lalitavistara*, Lefmann 1902: 415,19; in the *Mahāvastu*, Senart 1882a: 239,6; or in the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya*, T 1428 at T XXII 785b25, trsl. Bareau 1966a (according to a quotation in Eckel 2008: 354,14, cf. also Skilling 1997a: 609 (16), the *Dharmapada* of the Dharmaguptaka tradition also had a reference to this prediction). Besides these, the same event is referred to in numerous other passages (cf. also the survey in Lamotte 1944/1981: 248 note 2), a recently published specimen being fragment Or. 1510/21+24 r7 in Karashima 2009: 361. On some traditions that do not record this event cf. Durt 2006: 70. Nattier 2004a: 72 notes that the story of the meeting between Gautama bodhisattva and Dīpaṃkara "is frequently depicted in art from the Gandhāra region ... suggesting that it may have originated at the northwestern fringes of the Indian cultural sphere"; cf. also Biswas 2009: 98, who similarly comments that "the distribution of Dīpaṃkara images ... points to the likelihood that the story of Dīpaṃkara was first formulated on the further fringes of north-west India." On the predominance of Dīpaṃkara in Gandhāran representations of *jātaka* tales cf. Rhi 2003: 157f; on occurrences elsewhere cf. Vasant 1992.

⁹⁶ According to the **Mahāvibhāṣā*, T 1545 at T XXVII 891c29, Gautama's initial vow to become a Buddha took place long before his meeting with Dīpaṃkara Buddha. The same is the case for the *Divyāvadāna*, Cowell 1886: 227,4, and the *Mahāvastu*, Senart 1882a: 39,8 and 47,16. For a study of yet another tale recording Gautama's initial resolve to pursue the path to Buddhahood, found in different versions of the *Prabhāsa-jātaka*, cf. Hahn 2006; Demoto 2009; and Hahn 2009.

⁹⁷ *Avadānaśataka*, Speyer 1906/1970: 239,7 and 1909/1970: 23,5, 51,8 and 88,1; *Buddhavaṃsa* stanza 25.16 at Bv 93,6; *Jātakanidānakathā* at Jā I 43,20; *Mahāvastu*, Senart 1882a: 332,2; and *Saṅghabheda-vastu*, Gnoli 1977: 163,15 and 1978: 3,26, 52,7 and 67,9.

Gautama's future attainment of Buddhahood by the Buddha Kāśyapa then forms the last in a series of such proclamations made by former Buddhas.

Now most of the sources that record the taking of such a vow by the bodhisattva Gautama or the predictions he received from other Buddhas belong to a later textual stratum than the early discourses. This makes it reasonable to assume that the *Madhyama-āgama* Discourse on Marvellous Qualities may have preserved a remnant of an incipient stage in the development of the idea that in a former life the bodhisattva Gautama made a vow to follow the path to Buddhahood. That is, in the beginning stages of the development of this idea the vow was – quite naturally one might say – associated with the Buddha that immediately preceded the Buddha Gautama.

With the passing of time and the increasing glorification of the Buddha Gautama, the period he was held to have required for developing the necessary qualifications would naturally have expanded, causing a shift of the starting point of his quest for Buddhahood to a more distant time in the past.⁹⁸

In sum, the encounter between the bodhisattva and the previous Buddha Kāśyapa seems to have gone through three main stages:

- In the first stage, represented by the *Ghaṭikāra-sutta* and its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel, the bodhisattva Gautama is simply identified with a young Brahmin who goes forth under the Buddha Kāśyapa.
- With the second stage, represented by the *Madhyama-āgama* Discourse on Marvellous Qualities, this meeting inspires the bodhisattva to take a vow to become a Buddha himself.
- With the third stage, the bodhisattva's meeting with the Buddha Kāśyapa serves to reconfirm his impending Buddhahood through a prediction, as his decision to pursue Buddhahood has already been taken much earlier.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Wangchuk 2007: 92f notes that "the changing view of the nature of the Buddha directly affected how his initial resolution was viewed." "When and how the historical Buddha resolved to become a *buddha* for the first time was [thus] perceived differently at different times and places in different texts and traditions"; cf. also Dayal 1932/1978: 293.

⁹⁹ Shiraishi 1958: 311f suggests that after the passing away of the Buddha, among his followers "their devotion and adoration made them even believe that Śākyamuni exerted himself not only in this last rebirth, but in his former one also ... [that already then] he had expressed his bodhi wishes and ... had been given the assuring prophecy to be a future buddha", a development that continued until "all ... [past] buddhas gave him their assuring prophecies."



Figure 2.4 The Awakening-tree of the Buddha Kāśyapa

The figure above shows the Nyagrodha tree under which the previous Buddha Kāśyapa is held to have reached his awakening. The tree is surrounded by worshippers who express their adoration with folded hands and hang garlands on its branches.¹⁰⁰

Bhārhut; courtesy Abhinav Publications.

¹⁰⁰ The inscription at the top of figure 2.4 identifies the tree to be the one under which the previous Buddha Kāśyapa gained awakening, reading *bhagavato Kasapasa bodhi*, cf. Barua 1934/1979: 4; Coomaraswamy 1956: 66 (pl. 23 fig. 60); Lüders 1963: 86 (no. 760); or Tsukamoto 1996: 571 (no. 75). The significance of the Buddha Kāśyapa for early Buddhist generations in general is reflected in different *Vinaya* accounts related to his worship, cf. Bareau 1960: 257–261; Schopen 1985/1997: 29; and Strong 2004: 32–39, accounts that may well reflect actual practice during the period when these *Vinaya* passages came into being. According to Roth 1987: 292, “it appears that in the earliest period of the spread of Buddhism in India, say during the fourth and third centuries B.C., the worship of the shrine of the Śākyamuni Buddha had not yet become a common practice. Instead of this, the shrines of Śākyamuni’s predecessors, as of Kāśyapa Buddha ... are reported to be worshipped.”

On the assumption that the Discourse on Marvellous Qualities in the *Madhyama-āgama* testifies to an incipient stage in the development of the notion that the bodhisattva took a vow to pursue the path to Buddhahood, the question could be asked whether the context in which this vow occurs provides any rationale for the arising of such a notion. In other words, does the tale found in the *Ghaṭikāra-sutta* and its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel give any indication as to what might have been responsible for the arising of the idea of a vow, taken by the bodhisattva at that time?

When considered from this perspective, it is noteworthy that, after reporting that the bodhisattva went forth under the Buddha Kāśyapa, the *Majjhima-nikāya* and *Madhyama-āgama* discourses give no further information about him. That is, in these two discourses the potter shows exemplary conduct and exhibits praiseworthy qualities, whereas nothing particularly inspiring is recorded about the bodhisattva. This is remarkable, since the bodhisattva usually, though not exclusively, assumes the role of a shining example in a *jātaka*, as from the perspective of tradition the events portrayed serve to highlight some particular quality he developed during that life in the past.¹⁰¹

In the present case, however, in a former life of the bodhisattva Gautama at a very close temporal distance to his lifetime as a Buddha, he plays only a secondary role in the story. Instead of exhibiting an inspiring conduct, the bodhisattva does not even want to meet a Buddha and makes a derogatory remark about him. Another noteworthy aspect of this tale is that, once he has developed faith and has gone forth as a monk under the Buddha Kāśyapa, nothing more is heard about him. No exemplary deed or attainment worth recording is reported in the *Ghaṭikāra-sutta* or in its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel from the period that the bodhisattva spent as a monk under the Buddha Kāśyapa. Instead, both discourses focus on the inspiring qualities of the potter.

Now with the *Madhyama-āgama* Discourse on Marvellous Qualities, this somewhat uninspiring record of the bodhisattva's monkhood under the previous Buddha Kāśyapa turns into a marvellous and wonderful quality

¹⁰¹ As noted by e.g. Ohnuma 2004: 401, "most jātakas portray the bodhisattva as an exemplary figure"; cf. also Shaw 2006: xxii, who similarly mentions that the bodhisattva is only "very rarely shown with some faults", as "his behaviour is ... largely exemplary and an embodiment of heroic elements."

through a simple but ingenious shift of perspective: It is only natural that no further attainment or distinction achieved during his life as a monk under the Buddha Kāśyapa has been recorded, as at that time he decided to pursue the career of becoming a Buddha in the future. That is, far from being a failure, his period as a monk under the previous Buddha becomes inspiring and marvellous since “at the time of the Buddha Kāśyapa, [he] made his initial vow to [realize] Buddhahood [while] practising the holy life.”¹⁰² This marvel thus explains why he did not take full advantage of the instructions on the path to awakening, directly available to him from a fully awakened Buddha, to attain liberation himself.

The *Mahāvastu* tackles the same issue in a more explicit manner. It reports that, on an occasion after the young Brahmin had gone forth, the Buddha Kāśyapa assembled his monks and told them to sit in meditation without getting up until their defilements were destroyed.¹⁰³ This instruction quite dramatically highlights the type of conduct that, from the perspective of the early discourses, would be appropriate for someone who goes forth under a Buddha. The *Mahāvastu* proceeds by recording that the young Brahmin instead aspired to become a Buddha himself. This obviously excuses him from not carrying the determined sitting to its successful conclusion.

The way the *Mahāvastu* quite directly confronts the problem of the bodhisattva's lack of attainment highlights the ingenuity of the solution to this dilemma through the idea that at that time he had decided to pursue the path to Buddhahood. In this way, a clear precedent is set for later developments, and it is only a further step to assume that the bodhisattva became a monk under the Buddha Kāśyapa precisely to promote his own progress towards Buddhahood, a step taken in the *Kathāvatthu* and in the *Saṅghabhedavastu*.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² See above note 90.

¹⁰³ Senart 1882a: 329,17.

¹⁰⁴ Kv 288,34: “it was said by the Blessed One: ‘Ānanda, I lived the holy life under the Blessed One Kassapa for the sake of full awakening in the future’”, *vuttaṃ bhagavatā: Kassape ahaṃ, Ānanda, bhagavati brahmacariyaṃ acariṃ āyatiṃ sambodhāyāmi*, a quote not found in the Pāli discourse collections. The *Saṅghabhedavastu*, Gnoli 1977: 20,17, refers to “the Buddha, the Blessed One by the name of Kāśyapa ... in whose presence the Bodhisattva, the Blessed One, had lived the holy life for the sake of his aspiration for awakening in the future”,

In this way, the Discourse on Marvellous Qualities in the *Madhyama-āgama* may well testify to an important intermediate stage in the development of the bodhisattva concept, when the idea of a vow to embark on the path to Buddhahood emerges. Notably, the listings of former Buddhas in the *Mahāpadāna-sutta* and its parallels have not yet taken this step, as they do not establish a direct relationship between the bodhisattva and any of the former Buddhas.¹⁰⁵ Thus the *Madhyama-āgama* Discourse on Marvellous Qualities appears to reflect a rather significant development of the bodhisattva conception, which lays a crucial foundation for the emergence of the bodhisattva ideal.

Summary

The *Ghaṭikāra-sutta* and its parallels narrate how a potter convinces his reluctant friend, a young Brahmin, to visit the former Buddha Kāśyapa. The young Brahmin decides to go forth, after which the discourse no longer pays attention to him. In line with a pattern that emerges from studying several other canonical *jātakas*, this tale could originally have been simply a didactic tale depicting the potter as an exemplary lay disciple. Nevertheless, according to the nearly unanimous account of tradition, the young Brahmin is identified with the bodhisattva Gautama in one of his former lives.

The problem caused by the uninspiring account of the conduct of the bodhisattva at the time of the Buddha Kāśyapa, and thus in a past lifetime in close proximity to his own attainment of Buddhahood, receives an ingenious solution through a perspective proffered in the *Madhyama-āgama* Discourse on Marvellous Qualities. According to this discourse, at that time Gautama took the decision to pursue the goal of Buddhahood. With this marvel, another important ingredient of the bodhisattva ideal falls into place: the resolve to become a Buddha in the future.

Kāśyapo nāma ... buddho bhagavān, yasya antike bodhisattvo bhagavān āyatyāṃ bodhāya praṇidhāya brahmacaryaṃ caritvā.

¹⁰⁵ Gokuldas 1951: 26 notes that in the Pāli tradition such a direct relation is entirely absent from the *Mahāpadāna-sutta*, in contrast to its prominence in the *Buddhavaṃsa*. Walters 1997: 184 note 22 points out that in the “*Mahāpadāna* [-sutta] the ... frame is not [yet] universal soteriology.”

Still missing in the development surveyed so far within the textual corpus of the early discourses is the idea of a prediction of future Buddhahood given by a Buddha to an aspiring bodhisattva. Among the early discourses, a record of Gautama receiving such a prediction is not found. Nevertheless, the missing piece in the puzzle can be discovered within the same textual corpus, namely in another discourse in the *Madhyama-āgama*. In this discourse, the Buddha Gautama gives such a prediction to Maitreya, the next Buddha to arise in the future. This prediction and the role of the Buddha Maitreya in the early discourses in general is the theme of the next chapter.

3 The Advent of the Next Buddha

The present chapter's theme is the notion of a prediction given by a Buddha to an aspiring bodhisattva, assuring his future success. Among the early discourses, the only passage in which such a prediction makes its appearance occurs in the Discourse on an Explanation about the Past (説本經) in the *Madhyama-āgama*, whose second part describes the advent of the future Buddha Maitreya. A monk, present in the assembly hearing this description, aspires to become the Buddha Maitreya and thereupon receives a corresponding prediction from the Buddha Gautama.

Before embarking on a closer study of the discourse in question, I first survey another textual reference to the Buddha Maitreya, found in the different versions of the Discourse on the Wheel-turning King. After a summary of this discourse and a translation of the episode in question (1), I examine the implications of the differences found between the parallel versions (2). This forms the background to my subsequent study of the Discourse on an Explanation about the Past in the *Madhyama-āgama* (3), and of the prediction received by the monk who aspires to become the future Buddha Maitreya (4). Readers interested exclusively in the theme of the bodhisattva ideal may skip the first part of the present chapter (1–2) and turn directly to page 113.

3.1 Maitreya in the Discourse on the Wheel-turning King

The future Buddha Maitreya has been a source of religious inspiration and aspiration during much of the history of Buddhism. Manifestations of his cult are evident in sculptures from ancient India and other Buddhist countries.¹ According to the Theravāda chronicle *Cūlavaṃsa*, for example, sev-

¹ For a survey of Maitreya statues cf. Bhattacharya 2000: 20–24, for a detailed study cf. Inchang 1992. Already Getty 1914: 21 had noted that the influence of Maitreya extends also to Theravāda countries, pointing out that “statues of him are found in Ceylon, Burma and Siam.”

eral Sri Lankan kings constructed Maitreya statues;² and from Fāxiān's (法顯) travel records we know of a large wooden Maitreya statue in the area of modern Dardistan.³

Maitreya seems to have been not only an object of popular worship, but also appears to have exerted considerable influence on several famous Buddhist scholars. Thus the eminent Theravāda commentator Buddhaghosa concludes his magnum opus with the hope that the merit accrued by compiling the *Visuddhimagga* will enable him to reach final liberation at the time of the Buddha Maitreya.⁴ According to Tāranātha's History of Buddhism, during a sojourn in Tuṣita Asaṅga received teachings on Mahāyāna directly from Maitreya.⁵

Besides being a teacher, Maitreya also has a protective function. This can be seen in the biography of Xuánzàng (玄奘), for example, which documents how fervent devotion to Maitreya saved the Chinese pilgrim from a band of robbers intent on killing him.⁶

² Cv 38.68; Cv 45.62; Cv 79.75; and Cv 100.248+259 in Geiger 1925/1980: 27, 75, 442 and 586f. Kitagawa 1981: 112 explains that the "convergence of the Cakkavatti and/or Metteyya ideals" stand at the background of these pious activities. Holt 1993: 9 explains that "in traditional Sinhala Buddhist culture" Maitreya has also been "associated with ... the highest of the four national guardian deities in the Sinhala pantheon." On Sri Lankan Mahāyāna sculptures in general cf. Dohanian 1977.

³ T 2085 at T LI 858a1, on the location 陀歷 cf. Deeg 2005: 111, for an English translation of the passage cf. Legge 1886/1998: 25. Xuánzàng (玄奘) also refers to this statue, cf. T 2087 at T LI 884b10, trsl. in Beal 1884/2001a: 134.

⁴ Vism 713,3: "by this deed of merit ... may I illuminate the dispensation of the victorious one, [by] having seen the wise one, Metteyya, the chief of sages, having heard [his] teaching of the true Dharma and having reached the highest fruit [of arhat-ship]", *etena puññakammēna ... Metteyyaṃ munipungavaṃ ... disvāna tassa dhīrassa sutvā saddhammadēsaṃ adhigantvā phalaṃ aggaṃ sobheyyaṃ jīnāsānaṃ* (according to a note in E^c, "these verses are found in Singhalese recensions"). The aspiration also mentions the attainment of stream-entry during an interim existence in the realm of the Thirty-three. For a study of similar aspirations in other commentarial Pāli works cf. Kloppenborg 1982: 42–44.

⁵ Schiefner 1868: 87,9: "there, in Tuṣita, he [Asaṅga] received the complete Mahāyāna teachings in their entirety from Lord Ajita [= Maitreya]", *der dga' ldan du mgon po mi pham pa las theg pa chen po 'i chos ma lus pa mtha' dag gsan te*. Not only doctrinal teachings were given by Maitreya, but according to T 2059 at T L 339c10, trsl. Shih 1968: 123, he was also approached (via the medium of an arhat well versed in concentration) to resolve a monk's doubt if his higher ordination was valid.

These instances exemplify only some of the multiple functions fulfilled by Maitreya throughout Buddhist history, showing him as a future teacher once he becomes the next Buddha, as a teacher who at present dwells in Tuṣita and delivers teachings, and as a source of protection for those who are devoted to him.⁷

Indubitably, Maitreya is a figure of considerable importance in the history of Buddhism. In the present chapter, however, my concern is solely with what can be found on him among the early discourses. Besides the Discourse on an Explanation about the Past (說本經), Maitreya occurs in the Discourse on the Wheel-turning King,⁸ which contains what is probably the historically earliest textual reference to the future Buddha. The Discourse on the Wheel-turning King is extant in three versions:

- The Discourse on (the Lion's Roar of) the Wheel-turning King (*Cakkavatti-(sīhanāda)-sutta*) in the *Dīgha-nikāya*;⁹
- the Discourse on the Conduct of the Wheel-turning King (轉輪聖王修行經) in the *Dīrgha-āgama*;¹⁰
- the Discourse on the Wheel-turning King (轉輪王經) in the *Madhyama-āgama*.¹¹

⁶ T 2053 at T L 234a13, trsl. in Beal 1911/2008: 88. According to this tale, on being caught by robbers and about to be sacrificed to their divinity, Xuánzàng (玄奘) concentrated his mind on Maitreya until he became so absorbed that he completely forgot about his surroundings. At the same time a storm arose, which so frightened the bandits that they decided to release their prospective victim.

⁷ On the significance of Maitreya cf. also the surveys in Lancaster 1987/2005 and Nattier 1988.

⁸ Another noteworthy passage is the occurrence of Tissametteyya as one of the Buddha's interlocutors in the *Sutta-nipāta*, cf. Sn 814–823 and 1040–1042, whom later tradition relates to the future Buddha Maitreya, cf. the survey in Lamotte 1958: 775–788. The verses themselves, however, do not provide any indication in that direction, and according to the commentary, Pj II 589,5, Tissametteyya became an arhat, which would eliminate the prospect of any future rebirth for him, be this in Tuṣita, as a future Buddha or in any other form.

⁹ DN 26 at DN III 58,1–79,4; B^e, C^e and S^e have the title *Cakkavatti-sutta*, whereas in E^e the title is *Cakkavatti-sīhanāda-sutta*.

¹⁰ DĀ 6 at T I 39a22–42b19.

¹¹ MĀ 70 at T I 520b17–525a2.



Figure 3.1 The Bodhisattva Maitreya

The above figure shows a standing Maitreya wearing earrings, a necklace and bracelets; his upper torso is surrounded by a halo and a thinly incised sacred thread (*yajñopavīta*) passes from the left shoulder to the right waist. His right hand displays the gesture of fearlessness (*abhayamudrā*), with a small wheel incised in the palm, while his left hand holds a little vase (*kamaṇḍalu*).

Mathurā; courtesy Daniel Waugh.

In what follows, I first summarize the main part of the discourse shared in common by these three versions, followed by translating the Maitreya episode from the *Dīgha-nikāya*, the *Dīrgha-āgama* and the *Madhyama-āgama* discourses respectively. Though this involves some degree of repetition, I believe that the conclusions to be drawn from comparing the three versions are weighty enough to justify such detailed treatment.

The three versions of the Discourse on the Wheel-turning King begin with the Buddha encouraging his disciples to be self-reliant, with the Dharma as their sole refuge. The *Dīgha-nikāya* and *Dīrgha-āgama* versions indicate that, in order to follow this advice, the monks should practise the four establishments of mindfulness (*smṛtyupasthāna*). By keeping to their own resort in this way, Māra will not be able to get at them.

After this introductory instruction, the three versions continue with a story that serves as an illustration of the advice just given.¹² This story begins with a detailed description of the splendid conditions and exceedingly long lifespan of human beings during the reign of a former wheel-turning king, who is endowed with seven treasures of magical property. One of these is the wheel-treasure, which slips from its place when the wheel-turning king's life is about to come to an end.

On realizing that the wheel has slipped from its place, the wheel-turning king decides to abdicate the throne in favour of his crown prince and live as a recluse for the remainder of his life. The newly crowned king finds that the wheel-treasure has completely disappeared. On consulting his father he finds out that the wheel-treasure will reappear if he governs by relying on the Dharma, which will enable him to conquer the whole world peacefully and become a wheel-turning king himself. Following his father's advice, he becomes a wheel-turning king and in turn hands over power to his crown-prince when the wheel slips from its place.

The same pattern continues until eventually a crown prince, on ascending the throne, does not follow the advice of his father. Instead, he governs according to his own ideas, which causes a decline in the prosperity of the

¹² The two Chinese versions provide a transition from the initial advice to the story through the question "why is that?", 所以者何, cf. DĀ 6 at T I 39b4 and MĀ 70 at T I 520b23, thereby making it clear that the tale about to be told is an illustration of the instruction just given. DN 26 at DN III 59,1 has no such transition, but begins directly with the story, introduced with the expression *bhūtapubbam*; on which cf. Tanabe 2003.

country.¹³ Being admonished by his ministers he mends his ways, but neglects to care for the poor, as a result of which poverty spreads. Driven by poverty someone commits theft, is caught and brought before the king. On finding out that the man has stolen out of dire need, the king lets him go and gives him some wealth so that he need not steal again.¹⁴ News spreads that the king rewards those who commit theft, as a result of which stealing increases. On realizing the unintended effect of his benevolent action, the king has another thief punished, which in turn leads to a general increase of violence among the population. As a result, the lifespan of people becomes shorter and their former beauty disappears. Falsehood manifests when another thief, on being caught, denies his deed to avoid punishment.¹⁵

Things continue to get worse, people's lifespan becomes ever shorter and a continuous decline in morality and external conditions prevails. This reaches the condition of present times and continues further until at a future time a low point is reached when people live only up to ten years and morality completely disappears.¹⁶ An Armageddon type of battle ensues for seven days, during which people kill each other indiscriminately.¹⁷

During this battle period some go into hiding and decide to abstain from killing. Their practice of this moral restraint results in an increase in their lifespan and beauty, motivating them to abstain from theft,¹⁸ due to which their lifespan further increases. The same pattern continues, with im-

¹³ DN 26 at DN III 64,27; DĀ 6 at T I 40b15; and MĀ 70 at T I 521b25.

¹⁴ DN 26 at DN III 66,1; DĀ 6 at T I 40b27; and MĀ 70 at T I 522b5.

¹⁵ DN 26 at DN III 68,28; DĀ 6 at T I 41a1; and MĀ 70 at T I 522c12.

¹⁶ A fragment parallel to this part of the discourse, SHT V 1334 R3 in Sander 1985: 230, reads (*da*)*śavarṣāyusāṃ manuṣyāṃṇāṃ paṃ[ca]*, with the editors in note 2 suggesting that the lifespan diminishes to five years. This need not be the case, as the reference may well be to the five years (or five months in the Chinese versions) at which women become marriageable, which comes in all versions immediately after mentioning the lifespan of ten years, cf. DN 26 at DN III 71,15: "monks, among humans of a lifespan of ten years girls will be marriageable at five years", *dasavassāyukesu, bhikkhave, manussesu pañcavassikā kumārīkā alampateyyā bhavissanti* (B^s and S^e *alam*), DĀ 6 at T I 41a12: "at the time when people have a [lifespan] of ten years, five months old girls will get married", 十歲時人, 女生五月便行嫁, and MĀ 70 at I 523a12: "at the time when people have a lifespan of ten years, five month old girls will right away leave [their home] to marry", 人壽十歲時, 女生五月即便出嫁.

¹⁷ DN 26 at DN III 73,3; DĀ 6 at T I 41a27; and MĀ 70 at T I 523b3.

¹⁸ DN 26 at DN III 74,8; DĀ 6 at T I 41b15; and MĀ 70 at T I 523b22.

provements in morality resulting in an increase in lifespan and beauty, until eventually a peak of long lifespan and wellbeing is reached again. It is at this point, in the context of the description of the glorious condition of this future time, that Maitreya makes his appearance. In what follows, I translate the relevant section from each version.

a) The *Dīgha-nikāya* version¹⁹

“Among people who have a lifespan of eighty thousand years, monks, a King by the name of Saṅkha will arise in the royal capital of Ketumatī. He will be a wheel-turning king, a dharmic king of the Dharma, conqueror of the four quarters, who has achieved stability in his realm and is endowed with the seven treasures. He will possess these seven treasures, namely: the wheel-treasure, the elephant-treasure, the horse-treasure, the jewel-treasure, the woman-treasure, the householder-treasure and the counsellor-treasure as the seventh.

He will have more than a thousand sons who, being courageous and of heroic stature, will be defeaters of enemy forces. He will rule having conquered this world, surrounded by the ocean, without rod or sword, [just] by means of the Dharma.

Among people who have a lifespan of eighty thousand years, monks, a Blessed One by the name of Metteyya will arise in the world. He will be an Arhat, a Fully Awakened One, endowed with [perfect] knowledge and conduct, a Well-gone One, a knower of the world, an unsurpassed trainer of persons [capable] of being tamed, a teacher of gods and humans, a Buddha, a Blessed One; just as I now have arisen in the world, being an Arhat, a Fully Awakened One, endowed with [perfect] knowledge and conduct, a Well-gone One, a knower of the world, an unsurpassed trainer of persons [capable] of being tamed, a teacher of gods and humans, a Buddha, a Blessed One.

He will proclaim, having himself realised with higher knowledge, [the true nature of] this world with its gods, its Māras, its Brahmas, its recluses and Brahmins, this generation with its gods and humans; just as I now proclaim, having myself realised with higher knowledge, [the true nature of] this world with its gods, its Māras, its

¹⁹ The translated passage covers DN III 75,19 to DN III 77,3.

Brahmas, this generation with its recluses and Brahmins, its gods and humans.

He will teach the Dharma good in the beginning, good in the middle and good in the end, with [appropriate] meaning and expressions, and will make known a holy life that is entirely perfect and pure; just as I now teach the Dharma good in the beginning, good in the middle and good in the end, with [appropriate] meaning and expressions, and make known a holy life that is entirely perfect and pure. He will be surrounded by a community of several thousands of monks;²⁰ just as now I am surrounded by a community of several hundreds of monks.

Then, monks, the King by the name of Saṅkha will re-erect the palace that had been constructed by the King Mahāpanāda and will live in it.²¹ [Later] he will give it away and relinquish it, and making

²⁰ C^e reads *anekasatasahassaṃ*, i.e. a community of “several hundreds of thousands”; a variant *anekasatasahassaṃ* is also noted in E^e page 76 footnote 2. As already pointed out by Abegg 1946: 12, Mīl 159,10 speaks of “several thousands”, *anekasahassaṃ*, thus agreeing with the reading in the other editions of DN 26.

²¹ DN 26 at DN III 76,23: *taṃ yūpaṃ ussāpetvā ajjhāvasitvā daditvā vissajjeto*, B^e reads *taṃ yūpaṃ ussāpetvā ajjhāvasitvā taṃ datvā vissajjeto*, and S^e reads *taṃ yūpaṃ ussāpetvā ajjhāvasitvā vissajjito*. Franke 1913: 270 translates *yūpa* as a sacrificial post (“Opferpfosten”). Norman 1969: 21, cf. also 157, similarly renders a reference to the *yūpa* in Th 163 as “pillar”. This may well be the original meaning (cf. also the *Dirgha-āgama* version), presumably in the sense of the wheel-turning king celebrating his world-wide dominion by erecting a pillar as a symbol of the *axis mundi* (on the symbolism of the *yūpa* in this respect cf. e.g. Irwin 1980, for critical remarks on some aspects of Irwin’s presentation cf. de Jong 1982: 317f). Yet, the use of the verb *ajjhāvasati* in the Pāli version suggests something inhabitable and has thus made me prefer the sense of a “palace”. Auboyer 1949: 80 (cf. also Snodgrass 1985: 27) explains that a *yūpa*-palace, in the sense of a palace erected on a single column, was the typical residence of a wheel-turning king, “*yūpa*-palais, palais ‘reposant sur une seule colonne’ ... est la demeure par excellence du *cakravartin*”, which would fit the present context well. To understand *yūpa* as representing a palace would be in accordance with the commentarial gloss, Sv III 856,5: *yūpo ti pāsādo*, a gloss found also at Th-a II 40,21 and Jā II 334,9. Jā IV 323,13 relates how this palace was build for prince Mahāpanāda. A counterpart to this story in the *Divyāvadāna* in Cowell 1886: 56,16, however, appears to be intending a pillar. Sv III 856,27 reports that once King Mahāpanāda was reborn in heaven, the palace disappeared into the Ganges; whereas according to the *Divyāvadāna* in Cowell 1886: 60,8, the king had the pillar immersed in the Ganges because people were so fascinated by it that they kept looking at its beauty instead of doing their work. Mahāpanāda is also mentioned in a listing of former kings in Dīp 3.7 in Oldenberg 1879: 26,12.

an offering to recluses, Brahmins, beggars, mendicants and the needy, he will shave his hair and beard, put on the yellow robes, and go forth from the home life to homelessness in the presence of the Blessed One Metteyya, the Arhat, the Fully Awakened One. Having gone forth in this way and dwelling alone, secluded, diligent, energetic and resolute, he will soon enough dwell having himself by direct knowledge achieved realization here and now of the supreme consummation of the holy life, for the sake of which clansmen rightly go forth from the home life to homelessness.

Monks, dwell as islands to yourselves,²² with yourselves as a refuge, with no other refuge; dwell with the Dharma as an island, with the Dharma as a refuge, with no other refuge."

The *Dīgha-nikāya* version continues with the Buddha explaining that in order to dwell with themselves and the Dharma as an island and a refuge the monks should practice the four establishments of mindfulness. As long as the monks keep to their own resort in this way, they will grow in lifespan, beauty, happiness, wealth and strength. The Buddha then identifies lifespan to refer to the monks' practice of the roads to [psychic] power, beauty to their upholding of the precepts, happiness to their attaining meditative absorption, wealth to their practice of the divine abodes and strength to their destruction of the influxes.

b) The *Dirgha-āgama* version²³

"At the time [when people live eighty thousand years], a Buddha will appear in the world by the name of Maitreya (Mile) Tathāgata,²⁴ who has attained the truth and is fully awakened, endowed with the ten epithets, just as now I am a Tathāgata endowed with the ten epithets.

²² Franke 1913: 271 in translating *attadīpa* opts for the sense of being a "light" or "lamp" (Leuchte) to oneself; cf. also Wright 2000. Bapat 1957, however, points out that in the context of the present type of injunction *dīpa* is better understood as "island"; cf. also e.g. Brough 1962/2001: 210; Schneider 1980/1992: 113 note 69; and Nakamura 2000b: 95.

²³ The translated passage covers T I 41c29 to T I 42a27.

²⁴ DĀ 6 at T I 41c29: 彌勒, with the early middle Chinese pronunciation *mji lək* according to Pulleyblank 1991: 212 and 184. Lévi 1932b: 375 comments that 彌勒 "est irréductible à Maitreya, et plus encore au pali Metteyya." On the name Maitreya cf. e.g. Gonda 1973: 98.

In this world with its gods and humans ...²⁵ he will attain direct realization himself; just as now I in this world with its gods and humans ... have attained direct realization myself.

He will teach the Dharma, which is good in the beginning, good in the middle and in the end, which is endowed with [appropriate] meaning and expression,²⁶ [and he will teach] the pure practice of the holy life; just as now I teach the Dharma that is [good] in the beginning, in the middle and in the end, all completely genuine, endowed with [appropriate] meaning and expression, a holy life that is pure.

He will have a community of innumerable thousands of ten-thousands of disciples; just as I nowadays have several hundred disciples. At that time, people will address those disciples by the epithet 'Sons of Maitri', just as my disciples are addressed by the epithet 'Sons of the Śākyan'.²⁷

At that time there will be a king by the name of Śaṅkha (Rangga),²⁸ a head-anointed warrior and wheel-turning king, who will rule over the four quarters of the world by means of the right Dharma, without any force. He will be endowed with seven treasures: the first is the golden wheel-treasure, the second is the white elephant-treasure, the third is the purplish horse-treasure, the fourth is the lustrous jewel-treasure, the fifth is the jade woman-treasure; the sixth is the householder-treasure, the seventh is the counsellor-treasure.

The king will have a thousand sons, who will be courageous and heroic, capable of overcoming enemy forces, who will be respected in the four directions naturally and peacefully, not [needing to rely on] soldiers equipped with weapons.²⁹

²⁵ The abbreviation is my own.

²⁶ DĀ 6 at T I 42a5: 味, literally "taste", which according to Hirakawa 1997: 250 can also render *vyāñjana*.

²⁷ DĀ 6 at T I 42a9: 釋子; on the corresponding expression in the Pāli canon cf. Freiburger 2000: 221–225.

²⁸ DĀ 6 at T I 42a10: 儻伽. T 1744 at T XXXVII 9c16 explains that this stands for conch shell, 儻伽此云螺.

²⁹ Adopting the variant 仗 instead of 杖.

At that time, the noble king will raise a great jewelled pillar of sixteen fathoms circumference, a thousand fathoms high.³⁰ The pillar will be adorned and ornamented with a thousand different colours, it will have a hundred edges, each edge having a hundred sub-sections, all embroidered with jewels and with many jewels attached in between.

Then, having destroyed this pillar, the noble king will offer it as a gift to recluses and Brahmins and to the destitute in the country. Then he will shave off his hair and beard, put on the three monastic robes and leave the home life to practise the path. Practising the supreme path he will directly realize by himself here and now that birth and death have been extinguished, the holy life has been established, what had to be done has been done, there will be no more becoming hereafter.

The Buddha told the monks: 'You should diligently cultivate wholesome conduct. Through cultivating wholesome conduct, your lifespan will be prolonged, your complexion will improve, you will be happy, richly provided with wealth and endowed with awesome strength.

Just as kings who conducted themselves according to the ancient customs of wheel-turning kings had a prolonged lifespan, their complexion improved, they were happy, richly provided with wealth and endowed with awesome strength; in the same way, monks, by diligently cultivating wholesome customs you will have a prolonged lifespan, your complexion will improve, you will be happy, richly provided with wealth and endowed with awesome strength.'"

The *Dīrgha-āgama* version continues with the Buddha indicating that lifespan represents the monks' practice of the roads to [psychic] power, beauty their upholding of the precepts, happiness their attaining meditative absorption, wealth their practice of the divine abodes and strength their insight into the four noble truths.

³⁰ DĀ 6 at T I 42a15: 幢, for which Hirakawa 1997: 423 lists *yūpa*, besides its usual meaning of *ketu* or *dhvaja*.

c) The *Madhyama-āgama* version³¹

“Monks, at the time when people have a lifespan of eighty thousand years, there will be a king named Śaṅkha (Conch-shell). He will be a wheel-turning king, intelligent and wise, who with his fourfold army will rule over the whole world, according to his wish. He will be a dharmic king of Dharma who possesses the seven treasures. These seven treasures are: the wheel-treasure, the elephant-treasure, the horse-treasure, the jewel-treasure, the woman-treasure, the householder-treasure, and the counsellor-treasure – these are reckoned to be the seven. He will have a thousand sons, who will be handsome, courageous and without fear, capable of defeating the troops of others.

He will definitely rule over the whole earth, up to the great ocean, without relying on sword or rod, [just] by teaching the Dharma, so as to achieve the well-being [of others]. Monks, he will become chief of all head-anointed warrior kings and rule over the entire world by keeping to his own resort, inherited from his forefathers. Because he keeps to his own resort, inherited from his forefathers, his lifespan will not decrease, his beauty will not deteriorate, his happiness will not disappear, and his strength will not decline.

Monks, you too should act like this. [Now that you have] shaved off your hair and beard, put on the yellow robes and out of faith left the home life to go forth and practise the path, [you should] keep to your own resort inherited from your forefathers. Monks, because of keeping to your own resort inherited from your forefathers, your lifespan will not decrease, your beauty will not deteriorate, your happiness will not disappear, and your strength will not decline.”

The *Madhyama-āgama* version continues with the Buddha indicating that in order to keep to their own resort inherited from their forefathers the monks should practise the four establishments of mindfulness. He then explains that lifespan stands for the monks’ practice of the roads to [psychic] power, beauty for their upholding of the precepts, happiness for their attaining meditative absorption, and strength for their destruction of the influxes.

³¹ The translated passage covers T I 524b29 to T I 524c14.

3.2 The Maitreya Episode in Comparative Perspective

Besides some minor differences, the main point that emerges from comparing the above translated versions is that the placing of the occurrence of the Maitreya episode shows the following variations:

- after the description of the wheel-turning king (*Dīgha-nikāya*);
- before the description of the wheel-turning king (*Dirgha-āgama*);
- not found at all (*Madhyama-āgama*).

The complete absence of the Maitreya episode from the *Madhyama-āgama* version could in principle be either because of a loss of text in this version or else due to an addition in the other two versions. The possibility that a reference to Maitreya was intentionally omitted by those who transmitted the *Madhyama-āgama* can safely be set aside, as a more developed version of the advent of Maitreya can be found in the Discourse on an Explanation about the Past (說本經), to which I turn later on. Once a description of the future Buddha Maitreya exists elsewhere in the *Madhyama-āgama*, there would have been little reason for the transmitters of the *Madhyama-āgama* to eliminate a reference to the future Buddha Maitreya in the present discourse.

The *Madhyama-āgama* version also does not give the impression that an accidental loss of text has occurred. In fact, its transition towards the final advice runs smoothly, where the beginning section “Monks, you too should act like this” directly takes up the theme of the preceding paragraph on the proper conduct of the wheel-turning king who keeps to his own resort, inherited from his forefathers. In contrast, in the Theravāda version in the *Dīgha-nikāya* the injunction “Monks, dwell as islands to yourselves” does not have such a direct connection to the preceding paragraph. The same applies to the *Dirgha-āgama* version’s injunction to the monks that they “should diligently cultivate wholesome conduct.” The somewhat less smooth transition in these two versions could easily have occurred if the reference to Maitreya should have been subsequently added to the discourse.

This hypothesis would also fit the circumstance that in the *Dīgha-nikāya* and *Dirgha-āgama* versions the reference to Maitreya occurs at different places vis-à-vis the depiction of the wheel-turning king. This does give the im-

pression that a portion of text has been added in different ways. Compared to these two versions, the *Madhyama-āgama* discourse appears to testify to a state of the discourse when this addition had not yet happened.

A problem with the present passage in all versions is that, if taken literally, it presents a precise prediction of the names and actions of individuals at a rather distant time in the future. In the Pāli discourses, the present passage is thus not only the sole reference to the Buddha Maitreya, but also the sole instance where such a type of prediction is given.³²

From the perspective of the early Buddhist conception of causality, to make precise predictions that at some remote time in the future someone named so-and-so will do such-and-such a thing to some degree conflicts with the notion of dependent arising (*pratitya-samutpāda*), according to which things are conditioned but not wholly determined. To predict the far away future in such detail would require a strong form of predeterminism.³³ There should not be any free will or choice operating in the lives of the people concerned – in particular in the lives of the two individuals that will become the wheel-turning king and the Buddha in the future – otherwise they might end up doing something that differs from what has been predicted.

As Gombrich (1993: 144) has pointed out, in early Buddhist thought the kind of prediction one finds is more “what we would call prognosis.” Though in the case of an arhat a definite prediction can be given that no future life will be experienced, already when one moves beyond the time span of a single life, the situation becomes more difficult. In the cases of non-returners and once-returners, a prognosis can be given that these will reach final liberation within a single lifetime, yet some uncertainty prevails, as they might also progress further in their present life and still become ar-

³² A long-distance prediction does occur in AN 7.62 at AN IV 100,12, with counterparts in MĀ 8 at T I 428c12; T 30 at T I 811c28; EĀ 40.1 at T II 736b2; for Sanskrit fragments and a Tibetan version cf. Dietz 2007; for quotations from this discourse cf. the survey in Lamotte 1970/1976: 2091 note 2. In this case, however, the gradual destruction of the whole planet is predicted, without giving the names of particular individuals that will live at that time.

³³ That the early Buddhist conception of causality is not predeterministic has been highlighted by several scholars, cf. e.g. Jayatilke 1968; Gómez 1975: 82; Nāṇaponika 1975: 91; Story 1975: 74; Fujita 1982: 151; Siderits 1987: 153; Jayawardhana 1988: 408; de Silva 1991: 273; Siri-dhamma 1998: 62–67; Halbfass 2000: 102; Hershock 2005: 6f; Nelson 2005: 4; Harvey 2007b: 59; and Pāsādika 2007: 319.

hats. Of someone who has reached stream-entry, all that can be said is that within a maximum of seven lives the final goal will be reached, but whether it will actually take that much time or less remains uncertain.³⁴

In other contexts, the type of prognosis given in the discourses appears to be of a somewhat symbolic nature. Thus proper practice of mindfulness is said to lead to non-return or full awakening after a variable period. The description of the time it may take to reach the decisive breakthrough counts down from a period of seven years via six years, five years, four years, three years, two years, to one year, but then continues with seven months, six months, five months, four months ... etc.³⁵ The circumstance that eleven months, ten months, nine months and eight months are not mentioned makes it clear that such listings are of a symbolic type and were probably not meant to be taken literal. That is, awakening may happen even after practice has been undertaken for eight months, for example.

The description of the future wheel-turning king – found in all versions of the present discourse – may similarly not have been intended in a strictly literal sense. Its purpose need not have been to make a precise prediction of what will certainly happen in the far away future, but may rather have been to employ the ancient Indian symbolism of a world ruler in the context of an allegorical tale.³⁶

³⁴ The uncertainty in this respect is reflected in a listing of different types of stream-enterers, one of which only requires a single life to reach full liberation: the *ekabījī* mentioned e.g. in SN 48.24 at SN V 205,3; AN 3.86 at AN I 233,17; AN 3.87 at AN I 235,3; AN 9.12 at AN IV 380,26; AN 10.63 at AN V 120,1; and AN 10.64 at AN V 120,16. This conception has its counterpart in the 一種 mentioned e.g. in MĀ 127 at T I 616a13 or EĀ 34.6 at T II 697a24.

³⁵ DN 22 at DN II 314,12 and MN 10 at MN I 62,35; with a counterpart in MĀ 98 at T I 584b16. A similar pattern occurs in the *Mahāvastu* counterpart to the *Mahāgovinda-sutta*, Senart 1897: 219,4. According to Dumont 1962: 73, the number seven in ancient India at times simply “indicates a totality”.

³⁶ Armelin 1975: 6, in his detailed study of the concept of a wheel-turning king, notes that the idea of such a ruler can already be found in Vedic times, though the use of the term *cakravartin* for this idea appears to have originated later; cf. also Sastri 1940; Zimmer 1951: 129; Horsch 1957: 73; Wijesekera 1957: 265; Drekmeier 1962: 203; Nanayakkara 1977: 592; Strong 1983: 48; Chakravarti 1996: 6; Collins 1998: 470; and Mahony 2005: 1350. A reference to the *cakravartin* can be found in the *Maitrī Upaniṣad* 1.4; on the *cakravartin* in the Jaina tradition cf. von Glasenapp 1925/1999: 282–285; on the term *cakravartin* cf. Gonda 1966: 123ff; on the significance of the *cakravartin* motif in Buddhist literature cf. Reynolds 1972: 19–21.



Figure 3.2 The *Cakravartin* Ruler

The figure above shows a wheel-turning king (*cakravartin*), surrounded by his seven treasures. Mounted on top of the pole right behind the head of the *cakravartin* appears to be the jewel-treasure. Above his left shoulder the head of the elephant-treasure can be seen, standing by his side the women-treasure, and further to his left the wheel-treasure and the horse-treasure; while among the persons standing to his right are the householder-treasure and the counsellor-treasure.

Phanigiri (Andhra Pradesh); courtesy Peter Skilling.

This is in fact the conclusion arrived at by Collins (1998: 481) in his detailed study of the Pāli version of the Discourse on the Wheel-turning King, in that according to him the whole narration should be considered a parable, a suggestion also made by other scholars.³⁷

³⁷ Thus Rhys Davids 1921: 53 concludes that “the whole is a fairy tale. The personages who play their part in it never existed. The events described in it never occurred.” Gombrich 1988: 84 also doubts “the seriousness of the ... myth, in which a mythical emperor of the world retires and instructs his son in the principles of good rule.” I intend to explore what appears to be an introduction of the Maitreya motif into the Discourse on the Wheel-turning King in more detail in a separate paper.

According to the Pāli commentary, when delivering the discourse the Buddha was surrounded by a large congregation of laity, monks and gods.³⁸ With such a variegated audience, it would have been quite apt to employ an extended allegorical narration in order to convey a teaching.

The actual teaching given in the Discourse on the Wheel-turning King in its various versions is to encourage its listeners to keep to their proper resort,³⁹ which is the central theme of the introductory advice and of the conclusion of the discourse. The Pāli commentary draws attention to this theme, quoting an extract from another discourse that employs a parable to make the same point.⁴⁰ This parable describes a quail that strays outside of its proper resort and is thereupon caught by a falcon.⁴¹ The clever quail, however, is able to outwit the falcon by returning to its proper resort. Just as the quail should keep to its proper resort, so the monks should keep to the practice of mindfulness as their proper resort.

As already mentioned in my study of the *jātaka* genre in the previous chapter,⁴² discourse versions of this narration found in the *Samyutta-nikāya* and in the *Samyukta-āgama*, as well as a version of this tale in a Chinese *Udāna* collection, takes the form of a parable. In the Pāli *Jātaka* collection, however, the same tale has become a *jātaka*, with the clever quail identified with the bodhisattva. That is, from the perspective of the *Jātaka* collection the story of the quail describes something that actually happened at some point in the past and the bodhisattva was one of the protagonists of this event. Yet, in the discourse versions this tale appears to be simply a parable.

³⁸ Sv III 846,5.

³⁹ According to Wiltshire 1990: 188f, "the declared purpose of the ... Cakkavatti-sihanāda-Sutta is to convince the bhikkhu-saṅgha that they must not lose sight of the value of the teaching that has been imparted to them but must endeavour to observe and preserve it for future generations."

⁴⁰ Sv III 846,31. The similarity between the two discourses is also reflected in their terminology, as both DN 26 at DN III 77,15 and SN 47.6 at SN V 147,26 conclude the respective parable with the advice: *gocare, bhikkhave, caratha sake pettike visaye*, followed by indicating in the same terms that by "dwelling in their own pasturage, the resort of their forefathers", the monks will be outside of the reach of Māra.

⁴¹ SN 47.6 at SN V 146,18 and its parallel SĀ 617 at T II 172c25. Another discourse of similar implications is SN 47.7 at SN V 148,8 and its parallel SĀ 620 at T II 173b20, where the parable involves a monkey.

⁴² Cf. above page 59.

In fact, from the perspective of the purpose of the tale – inculcating the importance of keeping to one's own resort – to identify the quail with the Buddha in a former life would not be required.

Similarly, in the case of the Discourse on the Wheel-turning King the *Madhyama-āgama* version's description of the wheel-turning king who keeps to his own resort fully serves its purpose of illustrating that the monks should keep to their own resort.

This purpose is common to the three versions, which agree that the Buddha delivered this tale to highlight the benefits of keeping to one's own resort by maintaining the ancient custom established by one's forefathers. Following this advice, the monks can expect to experience growth in relation to a number of qualities, similar to the well-being experienced by the wheel-turning king. The qualities whose growth depends on keeping to the proper resort of mindfulness practice range from upholding the precepts via the roads to [psychic] power to meditative absorption, culminating in insight into the four noble truths or the destruction of the influxes – key aspects of the early Buddhist path to liberation. Thus the injunction given through the medium of the image of the wheel-turning king points to the very heart of the teachings of early Buddhism.

In order to progress on the path to liberation, the monks should keep up the ancient tradition of practice transmitted to them, instead of neglecting it and following their own ideas. Though a departure from ancient customs could be well intentioned – as in the case of the king who gives wealth to a thief – swerving from tradition out of personal preferences or idiosyncrasies runs the risk of ushering in a gradual moral decline.

In order to make this point, Maitreya need not appear at all. In fact, Maitreya does not play any role in the final advice in the three versions of the discourse, which constitutes the culmination point of the exposition.

Collins (1998: 494) remarks that "it may seem odd, indeed unacceptable, to the dour-faced and humorless positivism with which these texts are so often read ... that the earliest text-place where a reference to the future Buddha is found should be a humorous parable." Yet, Collins' interpretation receives support from a comparative study of the extant versions, which make it quite probable that the reference to the future Buddha Maitreya is a later addition. That is, the Discourse on the Wheel-turning

King in its original form may not have been concerned at all with prophesying the advent of the next Buddha.

3.3 Maitreya in the Discourse on an Explanation about the Past

Though Maitreya does not occur in the Discourse on the Wheel-turning King in the *Madhyama-āgama*, he does make his appearance in another discourse in the same collection, the Discourse on an Explanation about the Past (說本經). In what follows, I briefly survey the entire discourse, followed by translating the episode in question.

The Discourse on an Explanation about the Past begins with the monks discussing whether a lay person would derive greater benefit from giving alms to a virtuous monk or from making a fortune.⁴³ To illustrate the superiority of providing a virtuous recipient with food, Anuruddha describes how in a past life as a poor scavenger he offered a meal to a Pratyekabuddha, as a result of which he was reborn seven times as a king of gods and seven times as a king of men.⁴⁴

The Buddha, who has overheard the conversation with his divine ear, joins the monks. Being told that Anuruddha has been delivering a tale of the past, the Buddha proposes to teach a tale of the future, to which the monks happily agree.

The Buddha thereupon narrates in detail how in a future time, when human lifespan will reach up to eighty thousand years, a wheel-turning king by the name of Śaṅkha will arise, who eventually will go forth and reach liberation. On hearing this description, a monk by the name of Ajita stands up and, with hands held in respectful gesture towards the Buddha, aspires to become the wheel-turning King Śaṅkha at that future time. The Buddha rebukes Ajita for postponing what could already be accomplished now – namely attaining liberation – after which he nevertheless predicts that Ajita will indeed become the wheel-turning King Śaṅkha.

⁴³ MĀ 66 at T I 508c9–511c12; cf. also Demiéville 1920: 161f.

⁴⁴ MĀ 66 at T I 509a20.

The Buddha continues by describing the Buddha Maitreya under whom Śaṅkha will go forth. Another monk by the same name of Maitreya stands up and, with hands held in respectful gesture towards the Buddha, formulates the aspiration of becoming the future Buddha Maitreya. The Buddha praises him for making such an aspiration, predicts that he will indeed become the future Buddha Maitreya, and bestows a golden coloured robe on him.⁴⁵

Māra enters the scene, trying to confound the listening assembly of disciples with a set of stanzas in praise of being reborn as a handsome, well adorned and merry-making citizen in the realm of the future King Śaṅkha. The Buddha immediately recognizes him and replies with a set of stanzas in praise of living the holy life under the future Buddha Maitreya for the sake of liberation. The discourse ends with the disappearance of the defeated Māra and the delight of the listening monks.

A significant difference between the present discourse and descriptions of the future wheel-turning King Śaṅkha and the Buddha Maitreya in the versions of the Discourse on the Wheel-turning King is that the latter do not record anyone who, while listening to this tale, forms the aspiration of becoming either the future wheel-turning king or the future Buddha.⁴⁶ The same is also the case for partial parallels in the *Ekottarika-āgama* and in an *Udāna* collection extant in Chinese translation.⁴⁷ An exception to this pat-

⁴⁵ On the motif of the gift of golden robes cf. Deeg 1999: 156–166; Lamotte 1958: 779–782; and Silk 2003b.

⁴⁶ DN 26 at DN III 75,19; DĀ 6 at T I 41c29; and MĀ 70 at T I 524b29, where, as discussed above, Maitreya is not mentioned at all.

⁴⁷ EĀ 48.3 at T II 787c14; EĀ 51.7 at T II 818c18; and T 212 at T IV 609c21, which do not give an account of the course of events from the time of the past wheel-turning king through the intervening period of decline etc., but only describe conditions at the time of the Buddha Maitreya. Another occurrence of just this description in the *Divyāvadāna*, however, is related to a prediction. Here the depiction of the future realm of the wheel-turning King Śaṅkha and the Buddha Maitreya is followed by a tale from the past, relating their antecedents. According to this tale, two kings aspired to and were given the corresponding predictions that in the future they will become the wheel-turning King Śaṅkha and the Buddha Maitreya respectively, cf. Cowell 1886: 65,12 and 66,21 (with counterparts in T 1448 at T XXIV 26a11+26). Their motivation for making such aspirations was the wish to be worshipped, as the first of them, who has just been humbled by the other, aspires to becoming a wheel-turning king after being told that such a king will receive homage from all other kings. On hearing about this prediction, the other king then finds out that even a wheel-turning king will have to pay

tern is a discourse preserved as an individual translation into Chinese, which in other respects is so similar to the Discourse on an Explanation about the Past in the *Madhyama-āgama* that it quite probably stems from a closely related transmission lineage.⁴⁸

Thus, apart from the *Madhyama-āgama* Discourse on an Explanation about the Past and this parallel version, within the textual corpus of the Pāli *Nikāyas* and Chinese *Āgamas* such future aspirations do not appear to be recorded. Given that the presentation in this *Madhyama-āgama* discourse differs from the version of the Discourse on the Wheel-turning King found in the same *Madhyama-āgama* collection, the present case appears to be comparable to the two *Madhyama-āgama* discourses discussed in the previous chapter of my study, which appear to reflect subsequent stages in the textual evolution of the meeting between the bodhisattva Gautama and the previous Buddha Kāśyapa.

In the present case, two discourses in the *Madhyama-āgama* collection similarly seem to testify to different moments in the development of a tale that appears to have gone through three main stages:

- In the first stage, reflected in the *Madhyama-āgama* Discourse on the Wheel-turning King, the future realm of the wheel-turning King Śaṅkha is just described without a reference to Maitreya at all.
- With the second stage, represented by the *Dīgha-nikāya* and *Dirgha-āgama* versions of the Discourse on the Wheel-turning King, the future advent of Maitreya has become part of the narration.

respect to a Buddha, and thereupon aspires to become the Buddha at that future time. It remains open to conjecture how far the humour underlying this description – in the sense of caricaturing conceit as a possible motivating factor for aspiring to future Buddhahood – is intentional. On the presence of humour in (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya* literature cf. e.g. Schopen 2007; Clarke 2009; and Schopen 2009.

⁴⁸ T 44 at T I 829b6–831a1. Quotations from a version of this discourse are preserved in Śamathadeva's commentary on the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, with the tale of Anuruddha found at D (4094) *mngon pa, ju* 244b3 or Q (5595) *tu* 279a6, while the tale of Maitreya (without the section on the wheel-turning King Śaṅka) is quoted in D (4094) *mngon pa, nyu* 90b1 or Q (5595) *thu* 138a3. A progression of ideas similar to MĀ 70 and T 44 can be found in the Discourse on the Wise and the Fool, T 202 at T IV 435a11–436a4, a text apparently compiled in China based on stories transmitted via Khotan, cf. T 2145 at T LV 67c10 and the studies by Lévi 1925 and Mair 1993. A *sūtra* quotation of the second part of the tale regarding the future realm and Maitreya occurs in the **Mahāvibhāṣā*, T 1545 at T XXVII 893c2–894b12.

- The third stage appears to manifest with the Discourse on an Explanation about the Past in the *Madhyama-āgama* (說本經), where the description of the advent of the future Buddha Maitreya becomes the occasion for a listener to aspire to becoming the Buddha at that future time.

The tale of the future King Śaṅkha suits the Discourses on the Wheel-turning King quite well, which begins with the reign of another wheel-turning king in the past, followed by depicting a gradual decline of living conditions in the world that in turn leads over to a gradual improvement of conditions that eventually culminate in the reign of the wheel-turning King Śaṅkha.

In contrast, judging from its title the *Madhyama-āgama* Discourse on an Explanation about the Past may initially have been concerned only with the past, namely with the *avadāna* of Anuruddha.⁴⁹ This tale of Anuruddha's past life experiences also fits the introductory narration of the discourse, as it provides an illustration of the benefits of giving alms to a virtuous monk, whose merits excel any material wealth.

For the Buddha then to come in and propose to relate a tale of the future is unusual in view of a standard pattern found in other early discourses. According to this standard pattern, on coming to join a group of monks the

⁴⁹ The character 本, found in the title of MĀ 66 at T I 508c9: 說本經, recurs in what would be the counterpart to *avadāna* in listings of the *aṅgas* in the *Madhyama-āgama*, rendered as 本起 in MĀ 1 at T I 421a19, MĀ 172 at T I 709b7 and MĀ 200 at T I 764a14; cf. also the title of MĀ 72 at T I 532c9. The parallel version T 44 at T I 829b6, however, takes the Maitreya tale into account, as it is entitled “Discourse Spoken by the Buddha on Former and Future Times”, 佛說古來世時經 (where the 佛說, “spoken by the Buddha”, would be just a standard phrase often added by Chinese translators to titles). Similarly, the (*Mahā*)-*karmavibhaṅga* refers to a version of this discourse as *Pūrvāparāntaka-sūtra*, cf. Kudo 2004: 56,9 and 238 note 9 or Lévi 1932a: 39,13 and footnote 6. Another reference in the *Maitreyavyākaraṇa*, Ishigami 1989: 297,6 (for a recent fragment finding of this text cf. Hartmann 2006), similarly speaks of the *sūtrapūrvāparāntika*, which has its Chinese counterpart in 前後經, cf. T 454 at T XIV 423c9; T 455 at T XIV 426a14; and T 456 at T XIV 428c17; and a Tibetan counterpart in *sngon dang phyi mtha'i mdo*, cf. Lévi 1932b: 381,ult. A quotation of this discourse in Śamathadeva's commentary on the *Abhidharmakośābhāṣya*, D (4094) *mngon pa*, nyu 90b1 or Q (5595) *thu* 138a4, has the similar title *sngon gyi mtha'dang phyi ma'i mtha'i mdo*, “Discourse on Past and Future”; cf. also Skilling 1997b: 283 for an *uddāna* reference to this discourse in the same work reading *sngon dang phyis*, “past and future” (amended reading, cf. *ibid.* note 66). Thus MĀ 66 may still be testifying to the time when the title of the discourse had not yet been adjusted to its expanded content.

Buddha will continue with the theme the monks have been discussing.⁵⁰ The present case differs, in that here the Buddha right away broaches a different subject.⁵¹ This gives the impression that the tale of Śaṅkha and Maitreya may have been appended to a discourse that originally was only concerned with the former life of Anuruddha, the two parts being fused together through the introduction of a proposal by the Buddha that he may give a teaching related to the future.⁵²

⁵⁰ Among passages that I have been able to locate among the Pāli *Nikāyas* and the Chinese *Āgamas*, which report the Buddha joining a group of monks in discussion, none depicts him as broaching a different topic in the way this happens in MĀ 66. Instead, two patterns can be observed on such occasions. One is that the Buddha delivers further teachings on the topic the monks had been discussing, examples for which are: DN 1 at DN I 2,33 and its parallels DĀ 21 at T I 88c9, T 21 at T I 264b12, Weller 1934: 8,28 (§ 8) and D (4094) *mingon pa, ju* 142a7 or Q (5595) *tu* 163b3; DN 14 at DN II 2,6 (cf. also DN II 10,16) and its parallels Sanskrit fragment 363 folio 115 R in Fukita 2003: 4, DĀ 1 at T I 1b26, T 2 at T I 150a17, T 4 at T I 159b9, and EĀ 48.4 at T I 790a23; MN 26 at MN I 161,34 and its parallel MĀ 204 at T I 776a1; MN 119 at MN III 89,8 and its parallel MĀ 81 at T I 555a6; MN 123 at MN III 119,15 (here the Buddha encourages Ānanda to expand on the topic that has been discussed by the monks); AN 4.195 at AN II 197,19 and its parallels SHT V 1348 V in Sander 1985: 235 and MĀ 12 at T I 434b14 (here the Buddha continues a discussion that took place between a single monk and a visitor); DĀ 30 at T I 114b22; MĀ 59 at T I 493c5; MĀ 160 at T I 682c1; and EĀ 40.1 at T II 735c10. The other pattern is that the Buddha rebukes the monks for engaging in unbecoming conversation, such as in: AN 10.50 at AN V 89,13; AN 10.69 at AN V 128,29; Ud 2.2 at Ud 11,15; Ud 3.8 at Ud 31,12 (cf. also T 212 at T IV 629a5); Ud 3.9 at Ud 32,11; SĀ 408 at T II 109b10; SĀ 409 at T II 109b23; SĀ 410 at T II 109c4; SĀ 411 at T II 109c15; SĀ 412 at T II 109c29; SĀ 413 at T II 110a10; SĀ 414 at T II 110a25; SĀ 415 at T II 110b12; EĀ 47.4 at T II 781c7; EĀ 47.5 at T II 782a14 (here the rebuke comes after giving some explanations); EĀ 47.6 at T II 782c5; EĀ 47.7 at T II 783a14; cf. also SĀ 1108 at T II 291c11 and SĀ² 37 at T II 385b21 (here the Buddha rebukes a monk for not accepting an apology). In both types of case, however, the Buddha takes up the topic that the monks have been discussing.

⁵¹ After the Buddha has joined the monks and inquired about the reason for which they have gathered, the monks reply, MĀ 66 at T I 509c1: “we were sitting together in the assembly hall today because the venerable Anuruddha has been teaching the Dharma in relation to a past event”, 我等今日以尊者阿那律陀因過去事而說法故，集坐講堂，whereupon the Buddha asks them: “do you wish to hear the Buddha teach the Dharma right now in relation to a future event?”, 汝等今日欲從佛聞因未來事而說法耶，to which they agree.

⁵² In fact another version of the Anuruddha tale, found in T 190 at T III 928b19 (translated in Beal 1875: 383–385), similar to MĀ 66 reports that the Buddha overheard the tale told by Anuruddha with his divine ear (T III 929c25), but concludes at that point, without the Buddha giving a discourse on future events. Other parallel versions found in Th-a III 72,20, com-

Whatever may be the final word on the evolution of the *Madhyama-āgama* Discourse on an Explanation about the Past (and by implication of its individually translated parallel), to be sure a rather significant contribution to the development of the bodhisattva notion can be discerned at this point, even though the term 'bodhisattva' itself is not used: In these twin discourses, a monk disciple of the Buddha Gautama reveals himself as being a bodhisattva, who not only formulates his aspiration to become the next Buddha, but is also given a corresponding prediction.

This involves a shift from a retrospective perspective prevalent in the conception of a bodhisattva representing former experiences of the present or past Buddhas to a forward perspective: a monk disciple of the present Buddha will in future become a Buddha. Though this shift is a logical consequence of the notion of multiple Buddhas,⁵³ it is only once this shift has taken place that the bodhisattva conception can become an ideal to be emulated by others.

3.4 The Prediction of Maitreya

The prediction given according to the Discourse on an Explanation about the Past by the Buddha Gautama in reply to this monk's aspiration reads as follows:

menting on Th 910; in Dhpa IV 120,23; or in T 203 at T IV 470c25 (translated in Chavannes 1911b: 51–53), also do not proceed from the past to the future, documenting the independent existence of this narration.

⁵³ As noted by Basham 1981: 28, "belief in future Buddhas is, in any case, an obvious logical corollary of belief in former ones." Reynolds 1997: 33 remarks that "the lineage of Buddhas has provided Buddhist communities not only with an important sense of their cosmic-historical past, but with a highly relevant perspective on the cosmic-historical future as well."



Figure 3.3 The Buddha Gautama and Maitreya

The figure above depicts Buddha Gautama standing with his right hand in the gesture of conferring a boon (*varadamudrā*). He is flanked by the respectfully kneeling Maitreya, identifiable by the small stūpa he carries in his hair.

Sulṭāngarāj (Bihar); courtesy Trustees of the British Museum.

“Maitreya, in the distant future, at a time when human lifespan will be eighty thousand years, you will become a Buddha called the Tathāgata Maitreya, free from attachment and fully awakened, endowed with knowledge and conduct, a Well-gone One, a knower of the world, an unsurpassable person, charioteer of the path of Dharma,⁵⁴ a teacher of gods and men, called a Buddha, an assembly of blessings – just as now I am a Tathāgata, free from attachment and fully awakened, endowed with knowledge and conduct, a Well-gone One, a knower of the world, an unsurpassable person, charioteer of the path of Dharma, a teacher of gods and men, called a Buddha, an assembly of blessings.

In this world with its gods, Māras, Brahmas, recluses and Brahmins, from men to gods, you will understand and awaken by yourself, and dwell achieving realization by yourself – just as I now in this world with its gods, Māras, Brahmas, recluses and Brahmins, from men to gods, have understood and awakened by myself, dwell having achieved realization by myself.

You will teach the Dharma that is sublime in the beginning, sublime in the middle, and also sublime in the end, with the [right] meaning and phrasing, revealing a holy life that is endowed with purity – just as I now teach the Dharma that is sublime in the beginning, sublime in the middle, and also sublime in the end, with the [right] meaning and phrasing, revealing a holy life that is endowed with purity.

You will spread the holy life extensively, to countless great assemblies, from men to gods, revealing it well – just as I now spread the holy life extensively, to countless great assemblies, from men to gods, revealing it well.

You will have a community of countless hundreds and thousands of monks – just as I now have a community of countless hundreds and thousands of monks.”⁵⁵

⁵⁴ MĀ 66 at T I 511a16: 道法御. Nattier 2003b: 227 explains that “having taken *anuttarapuruṣa* as a separate title ... translators were left to explain the epithet *damyaśārathi* on its own. In ... Prakrit languages ... *damya* would have been written *damma* ... Ignoring the unspirited character of the initial *d-*, this word was apparently read as *dhamma*, and the resulting **dhammasārathi* interpreted as ‘charioteer of the Dharma’; cf. also Minh Chau 1991: 326.

In the above translated section, each of the qualities of the future Buddha Maitreya recur in the present Buddha's indication that he possesses the same qualities now. Besides this internal repetition, which emphasizes that the future Buddha Maitreya will have all the qualities and achievements with which the present Buddha Gautama is endowed, the whole above text occurs four times (with the appropriate changes between the expressions "there will be", "I shall be" and "you will be"):

- at first the Buddha describes the future Buddha Maitreya,
- then the monk Maitreya aspires to become the future Buddha,
- then the Buddha quotes the aspiration made by Maitreya,
- and lastly the Buddha predicts Maitreya's future Buddhahood.

That is, the basic themes taken up in the above passage are brought to the notice of the audience for eight consecutive times.⁵⁶ Even for those used to

⁵⁵ The translated passage covers T I 511a14 to T I 511a29. A reference to this prediction is also found in Abhidh-k 9 in Pradhan 1967: 471,12: "in the future, Maitreya, you shall become a Tathāgata, an Arhat, a Fully Awakened One", *bhaviṣyasi toaṃ Maitreyānāgate 'dhvaṇi tathāgato 'rhan samyaksambuddhaḥ* (cf. also Jaini 1988/2001: 484 note 22); with its Chinese counterparts in T 1558 at T XXIX 156b17: "Maitreya, in the future you will become a Buddha", 慈氏, 汝於來世當得作佛 (the same wording recurs in a quote of this prediction in the **Mahāvibhāṣā*, T 1545 at T XXVII 893c1); and T 1559 at T XXIX 307c16: "Maitreya, in the future you will achieve being a Tathāgata, an arhat, a Fully Awakened One", 彌底履也, 今汝於未來當成如來阿羅訶三藐三佛陀; and a Tibetan version preserved in Śamathadeva's commentary on the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, D (4094) *mngon pa, nyu* 90b1 or Q (5595) *thu* 138a3: "in the future there will appear a Tathāgata, an arhat, a Fully Awakened One called Maitreya", *ma'ongs pa'i dus na de bzhin gshegs pa dgra bcom pa yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas byams pa zhes bya ba* (Q: bar) 'byung bar 'gyur ro. Xuánzàng (玄奘) refers to a stūpa that commemorates this prediction, T 2087 at T LI 905c2, trsl. in Beal 1884/2001b: 46.

⁵⁶ In the case of the Discourse Spoken by the Buddha on Former and Future Times, 佛說古來世時經, the same themes are presented in an abbreviated manner. Thus in T 44 at T I 830b10 the Buddha lists the ten epithets of Maitreya in his initial prophecy, but then only indicates that he has the same, 如我今也, without actually listing them. When the monk Maitreya expresses his aspiration at T I 830b19, he does not use the full list of ten, the Buddha's reply at T I 830b21 does not mention any of them, and the full set only occurs again in the actual prediction given by the Buddha at T I 830b24. This could be an intentional abbreviation on the side of the translator, as according to Zürcher 1991: 288 in the case of early Chinese translations "there is a strong tendency to avoid the monotonous effect of ... [a] characteristic feature of the Indian scriptural style: the verbatim repetition of whole passages", thus "the translators (or rather the Chinese redactors) time and again appear to have made concessions to the Chinese predilection for terse and concentrated description by leaving out sta-

repetition as a characteristic feature of early Buddhist discourse, this does convey a considerable degree of emphasis by repeatedly confirming and reinforcing the central message given in this passage.⁵⁷

Quite obviously it is impossible to be certain that the Discourse on an Explanation about the Past and its parallel constitute the historically first occasion for the arising of the idea of a prediction. Yet, in view of the fact that this appears to be the only instance of such a prediction within the textual corpus of the early discourses, it seems reasonable to explore the possibility that these twin discourses could be testimonies to the arising of this idea, at least until evidence – be this epigraphic, textual or iconographic – for an earlier occurrence of this notion can be located.⁵⁸

ges, cutting out unessential elements, and thus reducing the Indian luxuriant verbosity of the original.” In the passage preserved in Śamathadeva’s commentary on the *Abhidharma-kośabhāṣya*, the full set of ten epithets is listed twice in the Buddha’s initial prophecy and again in his actual prediction, D (4094) *mngon pa, nyu* 90b3 and 91b6 or Q (5595) *thu* 138a6 and 139b8, whereas Maitreya’s aspiration mentions them only once, D (4094) *mngon pa, nyu* 91a5 or Q (5595) *thu* 139a3.

⁵⁷ Incidentally, in line with a tendency noted earlier, neither aspiration nor prediction in the *Madhyama-āgama* version explicitly refer to compassion, and the saving potential of becoming a Buddha comes up only implicitly in the reference to a large following of disciples. This is also the case for the Buddha’s reaction to Maitreya’s aspiration, where according to MĀ 66 at T I 510c27 he replies: “excellent, excellent, Maitreya! You have aroused a superb aspiration, namely to lead the great assembly”, 善哉, 善哉, 彌勒! 汝發心極妙, 謂領大眾 (which is then followed by repeating Maitreya’s thoughts). What emerges as the central point in the Buddha’s praise is Maitreya’s aspiration to leadership, whereas the compassionate wish to save others is not explicitly taken into account. Similarly, in the corresponding section in T 202 at T IV 435c29 the Buddha simply predicts the future advent of Maitreya; and in the *sūtra* quotation preserved in Śamathadeva’s commentary on the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, D (4094) *mngon pa, nyu* 91b6 or Q (5595) *thu* 139b7, the Buddha just praises Maitreya for his vast and excellent aspiration, *sems kyi smon lam rgya chen po dang bcas pa rab tu legs te*. In this respect, however, the “Discourse Spoken by the Buddha on Former and Future Times” differs, as in T 44 at T I 830b21 compassion comes to the forefront in the Buddha’s praise, where he explicitly mentions Maitreya’s loving kindness, 慈, which motivated him to “aspire to rescuing innumerable and endless assemblies”, 欲救無數無極之眾. Similarly, in the *sūtra* quotation in the **Mahāvibhāṣā*, T 1545 at T XXVII 894b8, the Buddha praises Maitreya’s “aspiration to benefit countless sentient beings”, 欲饒益無量有情.

⁵⁸ The account of the bodhisattva’s meeting with the Buddha Kāśyapa in the *Mahāvastu* does mention such a prediction, Senart 1882a: 332,2, which is not found in the parallel versions. On the evident lateness of this particular episode cf. Oldenberg 1912b: 139. This passage seems in line with a general pattern in the *Mahāvastu* to incorporate later elements that reflect embryonic Mahāyāna tendencies, observed by a range of scholars, cf. e.g. Barth 1899:

If the notion of a prediction given to a bodhisattva by a Buddha should indeed have originated in relation to the text now available to us in the Discourse on an Explanation about the Past and in its parallel, the question could be asked if the present case provides any rationale for the arising of such a notion.

Now the central message underlying the above declaration centres on the three refuges. This starts with the standard listing of the qualities of the Buddha, elsewhere employed in the discourses for recollecting the Buddha; followed by affirming realization reached on one's own, the quality that makes someone a Buddha. Next the passage describes the Dharma with another standard set of epithets, and then turns to the community of disciples, with particular emphasis on a large following of monks.

These themes are already part of the description of the future Buddha Maitreya in the Discourses on the Wheel-turning King in the *Dīgha-nikāya* and the *Dīrgha-āgama*.⁵⁹ With the Discourse on an Explanation about the Past and its parallel, however, these same themes become considerably more tangible and alive. This takes place on the one hand through the active intervention of the two monks who will take up the central roles in this future eutopia,⁶⁰ and on the other hand through the repetition of the same message again and again, something that in an oral performance situation of the text would not have failed to leave a strong impact on the audience.

527, who notes that "le Mahāvastu a été profondément pénétré d'éléments mahāyānistes"; cf. also de La Vallée Poussin 1915: 329f; Winternitz 1920/1968: 192; Law 1930b: 12; Basak 1963: 43; Rahula 1978: 69–79; and Hiraoka 2003: 349f. Therefore it seems quite probable that an already existing notion of a prediction was adopted in the *Mahāvastu*, whereas to assume that this notion originally arose in the *Mahāvastu* and then influenced the *Madhyama-āgama* Discourse on an Explanation about the Past seems rather improbable.

⁵⁹ DN 26 at DN III 76,1 and DĀ 6 at T I 41c29; cf. also T 212 at T IV 610a3. EĀ 51.7 at T II 819a22 only lists the ten epithets of the Buddha Maitreya. In regard to the relevant passage in DN 26, Collins 1998: 612 note 28 comments that "this is a standard and very well-known list ... someone reading this ... would probably have recited it as a chant." The evocative nature of this 'chant' becomes even more evident with the number of repetitions made in the Discourse on an Explanation about the Past.

⁶⁰ Soper 1959: 214 comments that "it was an effective story-telling device to include Him among Śākyamuni's listeners. The prophecy of His mission could be made most dramatically when it was possible to point to a living being in the midst of the throng, and announce that that very man would some day be reborn as the Savior of the world."

The import of this passage seems to be related to a point I mentioned in the first chapter of my study: the need of the faithful to engage in some form of direct rapport with the three refuges, especially with the first refuge of the Buddha, after he has passed away. Underlying the above passage the same need makes itself felt, reflected in the description of a future time when all three refuges can be encountered again. At the time of the glorious reign of a wheel-turning king (whose description is given with the same number of repetitions), there shall be another Buddha, endowed with the same qualities as Gautama Buddha.⁶¹ Needless to say, these qualities are precisely what a faithful disciple would have been evoking regularly when recollecting the Buddha. This future Buddha will teach the Dharma to a large assembly of disciples – a rather heartening prospect at a time when the Buddha Gautama has become a fading memory of the past and his disciples are struggling to ensure their continuity amidst competing religious groups.

Besides giving an assurance of the advent of a future Buddha, the prediction given by the Buddha Gautama establishes Maitreya as a bodhisattva, even though the term itself is not used.⁶² This implies that he becomes part of the lineage of Buddhas and therewith shares their qualities. Thus at the time of his last birth he will be endowed with the same superior qualities that the Discourses on Marvels attribute to the newly born Gautama, sharing the nature (*dharmatā*) of all those who are about to become Buddhas.⁶³ As part of the same pattern, he will also take birth and live in Tuṣṭita before becoming a Buddha, as is the rule for all Buddhas.

⁶¹ Expressed in terms of ancient Indian art, the present passage could be considered a textual equivalent to the *abhaya mudrā*, which Inchang 1992: 62 holds to be a distinct feature of representations of Maitreya in early Mathurā art (cf. above figure 3.1 page 98); cf. also Myer 1986 on this *mudrā* in Mathurā art and Huntington 1984: 141 on its function as one of the iconic markers of Maitreya in Gandhāran art, noted en passant also by Boucher 2008b: 317. Huntington 2001: 114 explains that in general the *abhaya mudrā* is “a gesture of protection ... though this hand posture is meant to grant the absence of fear, it is by implication a teaching gesture.”

⁶² This trait appears to have had some continuity, as Baruch 1946: 71 observes that in early Chinese inscriptions “jamais Maitreya n’est expressément signalé comme *bodhisattva* ... par contre, lorsqu’il s’agit du Bouddha [Maitreya], on n’oublie pas de l’ajouter.”

⁶³ Thus e.g. one of the *Maitreyasamiti* texts, T 455 at T XIV 426c28, as well as the *Maitreyavyākaraṇa* in Lévi 1932b: 385 (2.38), report how Maitreya, after taking seven steps on just being born, proclaims that this is his last birth, a clear parallelism to the description in MN 123 at MN III 123,21 of the bodhisattva Gautama.

That is, besides the explicit promise of the advent of the Buddha Maitreya, underlying the prophecy of Maitreya's future Buddhahood is also an implicit assurance of the bodhisattva Maitreya's taking up residence in Tuṣita. Thus the present passage already contains the germs of two aspects of Maitreya: the future Buddha and the present bodhisattva dwelling in Tuṣita.⁶⁴ This rather effectively fills up the vacuum created by the Buddha's demise.⁶⁵

In sum, the primary purpose of the above translated passage in the Discourse on an Explanation about the Past appears to be similar in kind to the two Discourses on Marvellous Qualities, in that each of these discourses addresses the needs of the faithful in search of a way of compensating for the loss of leadership and inspiration after the demise of the teacher. The Discourses on Marvellous Qualities do this by nurturing a sense of awe in regard to the qualities of the deceased Buddha. The Discourse on an Explanation about the Past more directly addresses the dilemma of the teacher's disappearance by providing a substitute for the deceased Gautama: the bodhisattva Maitreya who will continue the lineage of Buddhas by becoming the next fully-awakened Buddha.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ On these two aspects reflected in art (which in turn suggests their cultic importance) cf. e.g. Huntington 1984: 138f; Inchang 1992: 38; and Filigenzi 1999: 21ff.

⁶⁵ Monier-Williams 1889/1995: 183 highlights the contrast disciples would have experienced between "the extinct Buddha, who existed only in their memories" and "the living, loving and energizing Maitreya", dwelling in Tuṣita. The close relationship between the Buddha's passing away and Maitreya becomes particularly evident in the Khotanese version of the *Maitreyasamiti*, where the text on Maitreya follows immediately after an announcement of the Buddha's passing away, cf. Leumann 1919: 65; Leumann 1933/1966: 255; or Emmerick 1968: 305. In the *Lalitavistara*, Lefmann 1902: 39,1, the function of Maitreya to fill up the vacuum created by the Buddha's demise manifests even in relation to Gautama's stay in Tuṣita. The text reports how Gautama informs the assembly of *devas*, who are sad about his impending departure in order to take birth as a human being and become a Buddha, that in his stead, "this Maitreya bodhisattva will teach the Dharma to you", *ayaṃ Maitreyo bodhisattvo yuṣmākaṃ dharmam deśayiṣyati*.

⁶⁶ Holt 1993: 1 sums up that "Maitreya is thus a mythic figure symbolizing the consummate spiritual future for all Buddhists." Latourrette 1926: 49–53 well captures the gist of the Maitreya prophecy by repeatedly employing the phrase "il viendra!" to introduce sections of his summary account of this prediction.



Figure 3.4 The Seven Buddhas and Maitreya

The above figure shows a row of seated Buddhas, with the Buddhas of the past beginning with Dīpaṃkara up to the present Buddha Śākyamuni, to whose left sits the future Buddha Maitreya.

Ajaṇṭā; courtesy Namit Arora.

The underlying message would be an assurance of continuity. Such an assurance would be especially important for those who fail to make substantial progress now – perhaps precisely because they lack the guidance of a Buddha – reassuring them that there is no need to despair by offering them a guarantee that there is someone else ready to help those who need assistance.⁶⁷ The final episode with Māra entering the scene builds on this by clarifying that the purpose of aspiring to come to the presence of Maitreya should not be for the sake of enjoyment, but rather in order to progress towards awakening.

⁶⁷ The notion of meeting the future Buddha Maitreya apparently inspired not only those who were incapable of making progress without the guidance of a Buddha. The *Visuddhimagga* reports the story of a monk who had not attained any of the stages of liberation because of his wish to meet the Buddha Maitreya. Being admonished by a companion, he changed idea on his deathbed and was still able to perfect his insight so as to pass away as an arhat, *Vism* 47,28.

From this perspective, the number of repetitions of the above quoted passage in the Discourse on an Explanation about the Past – achieved through the narrative frame of an intervention by the aspiring monk and the consequent prediction by the Buddha – seem to serve mainly to strengthen the impact of the message of assurance in an oral setting. That the fourth repetition of the above paragraph takes the actual form of a Buddha giving a prediction that confirms a bodhisattva's aspiration to future Buddhahood does not appear to be central to the discourse, in fact the monk who aspires to become the future wheel-turning king receives the same type of prediction that his aspiration will be successful. The central point rather seems to be the providing of encouragement and reassurance to the audience through the medium of repeating the prophecy over and over again.

Thus the prediction of a bodhisattva's future Buddhahood might be a by-product of the main purpose of the discourse. If the present instance should indeed be the original occasion for the arising of the notion of a prediction, which is at least possible, then the tale of the Buddha Maitreya in the Discourse on an Explanation about the Past would have had an effect similar to the tale of the meeting between Gautama and the last Buddha Kāśyapa, which may well have occasioned the arising of the notion of a vow taken by the bodhisattva to pursue the path to Buddhahood.

The relationship between these two tales becomes particularly evident in one of the numerous versions of the Maitreya legend, in which Upāli questions the Buddha about the monk who has been predicted as the future Buddha Maitreya. In his query, Upāli expresses his puzzlement about the fact that this monk neither engages in the development of concentration nor eradicates his defilements.⁶⁸ This brings to mind the problem underlying the tale of the bodhisattva Gautama's period spent as a monk disciple of the former Buddha Kāśyapa, which the *Madhyama-āgama* Discourse on Marvellous Qualities resolves through the notion of a vow taken by him at that time to pursue the path to Buddhahood.

⁶⁸ T 452 at T XIV 418c7 reports that, after noting that Maitreya is still an ordinary worldling (凡夫/*prthagjana*), who has not eradicated the influxes (漏/*āsrava*), Upāli points out that "even though this man has now gone forth, he does not develop concentrative absorption and does not eradicate the defilements", 其人今者雖復出家, 不修禪定, 不斷煩惱; for a translation of this passage cf. Lévi 1932b: 370.

Building on the elements surveyed so far, discourses in the *Ekottarika-āgama* complete the picture.⁶⁹ Two *Ekottarika-āgama* discourses record the Buddha presenting Maitreya, who is explicitly introduced as a bodhisattva, as an example for the monks, who should emulate his diligence.⁷⁰ Another discourse in the same collection then reports how the bodhisattva Maitreya approaches the Buddha for instructions on the bodhisattva path, in particular on the development of the six perfections (*pāramitā*).⁷¹

Summary

A comparative study of the three extant versions of the Discourse on the Wheel-turning King suggests the earliest canonical reference to the advent of the future Buddha Maitreya to be a later addition to a narration that originally had the function of a parable.

A more developed version of the advent of the future Buddha Maitreya, found in the *Madhyama-āgama* Discourse on an Explanation about the Past, reports the Buddha Gautama giving a prediction to a monk who aspires to become the Buddha Maitreya in the future, assuring his future success. With this prediction, another important element for the genesis of the bodhisattva ideal has come into being.

⁶⁹ On the occurrence of at times rather late elements in the *Ekottarika-āgama* cf. above note 6 page 13.

⁷⁰ EĀ 20.6 at T II 600a20 and EĀ 42.6 at T II 754b17.

⁷¹ EĀ 27.5 at T II 645b1.

Conclusion

The starting point of my exploration were passages that describe the period from Gautama's going forth to his becoming a Buddha, depicting Gautama as a bodhisattva in quest of awakening. With the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta*'s exposition of marvels, qualities of the Buddha's awakening are associated with the time of his birth. This marvel reflects a shift of the bodhisattva concept in the direction of standing for a being inevitably destined to reach awakening. With the *Mahāpadāna-sutta* and its parallels, the marvels of the bodhisattva Gautama become the norm for a bodhisattva in general, thereby introducing the generic concept of a bodhisattva who is destined for awakening.

The problem caused by the uninspiring canonical record of Gautama's past life meeting with the previous Buddha finds an ingenious solution in the Discourse on Marvellous Qualities in the *Madhyama-āgama* through the idea that the bodhisattva vows to become a Buddha at the time of that meeting.

The advent of the future Buddha then could have led to the idea of a prediction given to the one who aspires to become the next Buddha, a development reflected in the *Madhyama-āgama* Discourse on an Explanation about the Past.

With these various strands of thought – the generic notion of a bodhisattva, the idea that a bodhisattva is inevitably destined to reach awakening, the notion that a bodhisattva takes a vow to pursue the path to Buddhahood, and the prediction a bodhisattva receives from a former Buddha – the basic ingredients of the bodhisattva ideal seem to fall into place.¹

¹ With the present summary, I do not intend to propose a rigidly fixed chronology of development. I only attempt to highlight the strands of thought whose combined influence I take to have prepared the ground for the genesis of the bodhisattva ideal. I also do not intend to present the influence exerted by the Buddha's marvellous qualities and by the lineage of Buddhas as two independent separate developments, but instead see them as closely interrelated phenomena.

A central factor behind these various strands of development that appear to have contributed to the genesis of the bodhisattva ideal seems to be the gradual apotheosis of the Buddha, evident already in the early discourses.² This tendency to exalt the Buddha would have been a natural consequence of the vacuum created by his decease, manifesting in an increasing concern with his marvels and with his predecessors and successor(s).

In a recent study, Fujita (2009: 103) draws attention to a passage in the **Mahāprajñāpāramitā(-upadeśa)-śāstra* that indicates “the existence of renunciate bodhisattvas in Nikāya Buddhism who practice the bodhisattva path while conforming, like *śrāvakas*, to works that have been transmitted by Nikāya Buddhism.”³ Similar indications can be found in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Pra-*

² The manifestation of a growing tendency towards exaltation of the Buddha has been noticed by several scholars. Thus Coomaraswamy 1928: 838 comments that “the activity of the earthly Buddha, originally a living memory, has become, as it were, the *līlā* of a deity.” Dayal 1932/1978: 28f explains that “the competition of the rival Indian sects and movements also led the Buddhists to advance new claims on behalf of their leader ... they transformed him into a living immortal, powerful and gracious *deva*.” Horner 1936/1979: 203 observes that “the idea of Gotama as a god ... came more and more to be in the air ... as his life on earth receded into the past ... the urge to worship required some outlet in the present.” Nakamura 1960: 152 and 157 contrasts the early scriptures where the Buddha “was in every respect regarded merely as a superior man”, to later times when “as a consequence of the gradual process of deification ... he works wonders, he is omniscient” (cf. in more detail Nakamura 2000b: 213–225). Jaini 1970/2001: 87 asserts that “despite its anti-theistic dogma ... early Buddhism had all the ingredients of a theistic cult.” Behm 1971: 41 notes “definite and unmistakable signs of the divinisation of the Buddha” (in the *jātakas* in particular). Karunaratna 1973: 496 explains that the Buddha “was respected, adored and idealised. This tendency ... culminated in the belief that the Buddha was not a human being, but a superhuman being, a *deva*.” Halder 1977: 131 notes various “characteristics of the Buddha [that] remind us of the Supreme god of Brāhmaṇical literature.” Harrison 1978a: 37 explains that “with the passage of time the Buddha became ... [more and] more an object of devotion, growing in stature as memories faded.” Werner 1991: 16 speaks of an “elevation of the Buddha to a cosmic figure, if not a virtual deity.” Chaudhary 1994: 65 remarks that in general the “Buddha was gradually shorn of human characteristics and superhuman qualities were bestowed on him. He was deified.” Regarding the import of these tendencies, according to Rawlinson 1983: 167 the “glorification of the Buddha” was one of the transformations of Buddhism out of which the Mahāyāna arose.

³ Fujita 2009: 101–103 discusses T 1509 at T XXV 536a16+24, which describes a disciple who, “relying on the discourses of the auditor disciples (*śrāvaka*), practices the bodhisattva path”, 以聲聞經行菩薩道, and “seeks for [the way] to omniscience among the discourses of the auditor disciples”, 於聲聞經中求薩婆若.

jñāpāramitā.⁴ Fujita's finding could point to the practical result of the above delineated development, to bodhisattvas practising based on a framework provided by the early discourses.⁵

Taking the early discourses as the starting point would also explain quite naturally why the bodhisattva ideal became a pan-Buddhist phenomenon that drew followers from most, if not all, of the Buddhist schools,⁶ including the Theravāda tradition.⁷ Skilling (2004: 143) explains:

“Available scriptures of the eighteen schools allow all three options: it is one's own decision whether [to] become an Arhat, a Pratyekabuddha, or a Buddha, and to practice accordingly. That is, the eighteen or

⁴ The *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* in Vaidya 1960: 116,3 describes bodhisattvas who “think of studying and giving priority to discourses that are addressed to the stage of an auditor disciple”, *sūtrāntā ye śrāvakabhūmim abhivadanti ... tām adhikāraṃ paryavāptavyān maṃsyante*, a theme taken up again in *ibid.* 116,19+26 and 117,5+13+27, the last two instances indicating that such bodhisattvas think of searching for omniscience among these discourses, *sarvajñatām paryeṣitavyāṃ maṃsyante*. Similar passages can also be found in Lokakṣema's translation, cf. T 224 at T VIII 447a14+17+24 and 447b4.

⁵ Bechert 1973: 14 comments that, regarding “the early stage of the development of Mahāyāna”, “the new doctrine had developed from the concepts of the old one without a sharp rupture”; cf. also Deleanu 2000: 81, according to whom the hypothesis of a “gradual rise of Mahāyāna from within the traditional *saṅgha* can explain the doctrinal continuities between the two”; Jing Yin 2005: 171, who affirms that the “Mahāyāna ... was the result of a gradual evolution deeply rooted in Nikāya Buddhism”; and Skilling 2005: 107 who, in regard to the tendency of framing the study of the evolution of Buddhist thought and practice in terms of Śrāvakayāna versus Māhāyāna, queries: “at exactly what point does Śrāvakayāna end, and Māhāyāna begin?” MacQueen 1982: 60 then proposes that “the earliest *dharma*-preachers of [the] Mahāyāna very likely had no Mahāyāna *sūtra* (though they may have had a text of a different kind)”; and in a recent paper Walser 2009: 249 suggests that “the first generation of Mahāyāna texts might not be Mahāyāna texts at all, but rather texts from the *Āgamas* themselves, put to a different purpose.”

⁶ Early Mahāyāna should, according to Silk 2002: 383, best be considered as “a sort of meta-level movement”, “which has doctrinal but no institutional existence as such, which is neither a *nikāya*, an orthodox ordination lineage, nor a *vāda*, a school defined by doctrines”; cf. also Cohen 1995, or Sasaki 2009: 35, who suggests that “Mahāyāna was a movement that developed simultaneously across sectarian borders.” Moreover, as pointed out by Skilling 1996: 182, “the Mahāyāna began to take shape – not as the initiator of the theories of the bodhisattva career, but as a result of the speculation on that subject.”

⁷ On the bodhisattva ideal in the Theravāda tradition cf. Rahula 1971; Ratnayaka 1985; Endo 1996; Samuels 1997; Skilling 2003; Harvey 2007a; and Chandawimala 2008. For Sri Lankan inscriptions expressing the donor's aspiration for Buddhahood cf. Dohanian 1977: 20–25.

four schools embrace the three *yānas*. At an uncertain point, let us say in the first century BCE, groups of monks, nuns and lay-followers began to devote themselves exclusively to the Bodhisattvayāna. Eventually some of them exalted this *yāna* to the point of asserting that everyone else should do the same. For them the Bodhisattvayāna became the Great Vehicle, the Mahāyāna.”⁸

Similar to the elusive beginnings of the Mahāyāna, certainty about the precise way in which the bodhisattva ideal has come into being may continue to elude us, especially since what we have at our disposal for studying the earliest period of Buddhist history are mainly textual records that are the final products of a prolonged period of oral transmission. Nevertheless, I hope that my survey of relevant material from the early discourses has yielded a new perspective and led to a viable hypothesis on how the genesis of the bodhisattva ideal may have come into being, forming the starting point for further discussion and research that will correct and refine my findings and suggestions.

⁸ Bechert 1964: 535 similarly considers the idea that only the path of a bodhisattva should be followed as the beginning of ‘Mahāyāna’; cf. also Pāsādika 2001: 726.

Abbreviations

Abhidh-k	<i>Abhidharmakośabhāṣya</i>
AN	<i>Aṅguttara-nikāya</i>
Ap	<i>Apadāna</i>
B ^e	Burmese edition
Bv	<i>Buddhavaṃsa</i>
C ^e	Ceylonese edition
Cv	<i>Cūlavāṃsa</i>
D	Derge edition
DĀ	<i>Dīrgha-āgama</i> (T 1)
Dhp-a	<i>Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā</i>
Dīp	<i>Dīpavaṃsa</i>
DN	<i>Dīgha-nikāya</i>
EĀ	<i>Ekottarika-āgama</i> (T 125)
E ^e	PTS edition
It	<i>Itivuttaka</i>
Jā	<i>Jātaka</i>
Kv	<i>Kathāvatthu</i>
MĀ	<i>Madhyama-āgama</i> (T 26)
Mil	<i>Milindapañha</i>
MN	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
Mp	<i>Manorathapūraṇī</i>
Paṭis	<i>Paṭisambhidāmagga</i>
Pj	<i>Paramatthajotikā</i>
Ps	<i>Papañcasūdanī</i>
Q	Peking edition
SĀ	<i>Samyukta-āgama</i> (T 99)
SĀ ²	'other' <i>Samyukta-āgama</i> (T 100)
S ^e	Siamese edition
SHT	Sanskrithandschriften aus den Turfanfunden
SN	<i>Samyutta-nikāya</i>
Sn	<i>Sutta-nipāta</i>
Spk	<i>Sāratthappakāsinī</i>
Sv	<i>Sumaṅgalavilāsinī</i>

T	Taishō edition (CBETA)
Th	<i>Theragāthā</i>
Th-a	<i>Theragāthā-aṭṭhakathā</i>
Ud	<i>Udāna</i>
Vin	<i>Vinaya</i>
Vism	<i>Visuddhimagga</i>
Vism-mhṭ	<i>Paramatthamañjūsā</i>

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About the Author

Bhikkhu Anālayo was born in Germany in 1962 and ordained in Sri Lanka in 1995. In the year 2000 he completed a Ph.D. thesis on the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* at the University of Peradeniya (published 2003 by Windhorse in the UK). In the year 2007 he completed a habilitation research at the University of Marburg, in which he compared the *Majjhima-nikāya* discourses with their Chinese, Sanskrit, and Tibetan counterparts (forthcoming with Dharma Drum Publishers in Taiwan). At present, he teaches at the Center for Buddhist Studies, University of Hamburg, and researches at Dharma Drum Buddhist College, Taiwan. Besides his academic activities, he regularly conducts meditation courses in Sri Lanka.

In this book, Bhikkhu Anālayo investigates the genesis of the bodhisattva ideal, one of the most important concepts in the history of Buddhist thought. He brings together material from the corpus of the early discourses preserved mainly in Pāli and Chinese that appear to have influenced the arising of the bodhisattva ideal. Anālayo convincingly shows that the early sources do not present compassionate concern for others as a motivating force for the Buddha's quest for awakening. He further offers an analysis of the only reference to Maitreya in the Pāli canon, showing that this reference is most likely a later addition. In sum, Bhikkhu Anālayo is able to delineate a gradual genesis of central aspects of the bodhisattva ideal by documenting (1) an evolution in the bodhisattva concept reflected in the early discourses, (2) the emergence of the notion of a vow to pursue the path to buddhahood, and (3) the possible background for the idea of a prediction an aspirant to buddhahood receives from a former buddha.