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The *Brahmajāla* and the Early Buddhist Oral Tradition (2)*

ANĀLAYO

Introduction

With this article I continue studying the *Brahmajāla* from the viewpoint of oral transmission, following up a previous paper on the same topic published in this journal.¹ In the earlier study I took a close-up look at the significance of the introductory phrase "thus have I heard", followed by in a way zooming out, as it were, to take more distant shots of the opening narration of the *Brahmajāla* and of its exposition on morality. In the present paper I continue along the same trajectory by taking a further step back to look at the discourse as a whole, that is, at its positioning in the *Dīgha-nikāya* and *Dīrgha-āgama* collections.

In what follows I first survey the order of the *Dīgha-nikāya* and *Dīrgha-āgama* collections (1), followed by turning to the principle of concatenation in relation to the *Brahmajāla* (2). Then I take a further step back to examine the basic division of these three collections and their different positioning of the section containing discourses related to morality (3). In the final part of the paper I return to the early Buddhist oral transmission (4), considered from the viewpoint of modern day psychological research on the functioning of memory.

1. The Order of the Long Discourse Collections

One of the striking features of the early Buddhist discourse collections is the contrast between the considerable degree of similarity in terms of content between parallel versions of a discourse transmitted by different schools and the substantial degree of disagreement when it comes to the position of a discourse in different collections. In the case of the Long Discourse Collections this is particularly evident, since here three different versions can be compared with each other: the Theravāda *Dīgha-nikāya*, DN, the Sarvāstivāda/Mūlasarvāstivāda *Dīrgha-āgama* preserved in Sanskrit fragments, DĀ (Skt),² and the Dharmaguptaka *Dīrgha-āgama* extant in Chinese translation as the first texts in the Taishō edition, DĀ (T 1).

* I am indebted to Adam Clarke and sāmaṇerī Dhammadinnā for commenting on a draft version of this article.

1. Anālayo 2014a.

2. Information on this collection is based on Hartmann and Wille 2014.

An impression of the degree of disparity can be gathered from the comparative chart below, which takes up only the discourses found in all three collections. The correlations are presented from the viewpoint of the *Dīgha-nikāya*. As the chart clearly shows, the disagreement in the placing of discourses is remarkable.

DN	DĀ (Skt)	DĀ (T 1)
1 <i>Brahmajāla-sutta</i>	47	21
2 <i>Sāmaññaphala-sutta</i>	44	27
3 <i>Ambaṭṭha-sutta</i>	35	20
4 <i>Soṇadaṇḍa-sutta</i>	33	22
5 <i>Kūṭadanta-sutta</i>	34	23
8 <i>Kassapaśhanāda-sutta</i>	46	25
9 <i>Poṭṭhapāda-sutta</i>	36	28
11 <i>Kevaddha-sutta</i>	29	24
12 <i>Lohicca-sutta</i>	28	29
13 <i>Tevijja-sutta</i>	45	26
14 <i>Mahāpadāna-sutta</i>	5	1
16 <i>Mahāparinibbāna-sutta</i> ³	6	2
18 <i>Janavasabha-sutta</i>	13	4
19 <i>Mahāgovinda-sutta</i>	14	3
20 <i>Mahāsamaya-sutta</i>	24	19
24 <i>Pāṭika-sutta</i>	9	15
28 <i>Sampasādanīya-sutta</i>	16	18
29 <i>Pāsādika-sutta</i>	15	17
33 <i>Saṅgīti-sutta</i>	3	9
34 <i>Dasuttara-sutta</i>	1	10

Only in one single instance do two discourses exactly follow each other in each of the three collections. This is the case for the *Soṇadaṇḍa-sutta*, DN 4, and the *Kūṭadanta-sutta*, DN 5, of the *Dīgha-nikāya* and their parallels, the *Śronatāṇḍya-sūtra*, DĀ (Skt) 33, and the *Kūṭatāṇḍya-sūtra*, DĀ (Skt) 34, as well as the *Zhōngdé jīng* 種德經, DĀ (T 1) 22, and the *Jiūluótántóu jīng* 究羅檀頭經, DĀ (T 1) 23.⁴ As the respective numbering shows, even this single pair occurs at different positions in the respective collections.

The differing position of single discourses is quite evident in the case of the *Brahmajāla*.

³ In the case of the *Dīgha-nikāya*, the Mahāsudassana tale forms a separate discourse, DN 17.

⁴ Less than exact correspondences, however, can be seen on several occasions, showing groupings of discourses that did stay together in all three versions, albeit with minor variations in the positioning of the respective discourses vis-à-vis each other.

Whereas in the Theravāda *Dīgha-nikāya* the *Brahmajāla-sutta* is the first of the thirty-four discourses,⁵ the *Brahmajāla-sūtra* is the last discourse in what appears to have been a Sarvāstivāda/Mūlasarvāstivāda *Dīrgha-āgama* collection of forty-seven discourses.⁶ In the Dharmaguptaka *Dīrgha-āgama* the corresponding *Fàndòng jīng* (梵動經) is the twenty-first of thirty discourses in this collection.⁷

2. Concatenation

A central dynamic that appears to have influenced the positioning of a discourse within a collection is the principle of concatenation. Such concatenation is a recurrent feature in the early Buddhist texts, evident, for example, in the *prātimokṣa*. Taking the case of the Theravāda *pātimokkha* as an example, the phenomenon of concatenation can be illustrated with the sequence of several *pācittiya* rules as follows:⁸

Pācittiya 4 prohibits teaching recitation word by word to someone who has not been "fully ordained".⁹ *Pācittiya* 5 takes up the issue of "lying down" in the presence of someone who has not been "fully ordained".¹⁰ Here the reference to someone who has not been fully

5. Bodhi 1978/1992: 1 takes this placing to be due to doctrinal motives: "that the *Brahmajāla* was assigned to this strategic position – that of the first discourse of the first collection – is not a matter of chance or haphazard arrangement, but a deliberate design on the part of the Elders who compiled the canon and set it in its present form. Its placement reflects a ... keen awareness of the significance of the discourse both intrinsically and in relation to the Buddha's teaching as a whole. For just as our *sutta*, in terms of its position, stands at the entrance to the total collection of discourses spoken by the Buddha, so does its principal message provide a prolegomenon to the entire Dispensation itself. It is, so to speak, the sentry at the gateway to the Doctrine." Regarding the perceived doctrinal significance of the *Brahmajāla-sutta* in the Theravāda tradition, it is worth noting that the *Mahāvamsa* records its recitation as an important aspect of the conversion of Suvāṇṇabhūmi, Mhv 12.51; and the *Samantapāsādikā* reports that the monks to be excluded from the third *saṅgīti* misrepresented the teaching of the Buddha as corresponding to the type of views taken up in the *Brahmajāla-sutta* (i.e., eternalism, semi-eternalism, etc.), Sp I 60,18 (the list of views in the Chinese counterpart, T 1462 at T XXIV 684a29, is shorter and does not correspond as closely to the basic structure of the *Brahmajāla* as the presentation in the *Samantapāsādikā*).

6. The position of the *Brahmajāla-sūtra* in the recently discovered Sarvāstivāda/Mūlasarvāstivāda *Dīrgha-āgama* can be deduced from the *uddāna* provided in Hartmann 2004: 124f; for a more detailed discussion of this *uddāna* cf. Hartmann 2002. Confirmation comes from the indication in the *Abhidharmakośopāyikā-ṭīkā*, C *mngon pa*, ju 68a1, D *mngon pa*, ju 68a2, Q *mngon pa'i bstan bcos*, tu 76a1, or N *mngon pa*, tu 74a1: *tshul khrims kyi phung po'i zhabs su tshangs pa'i dra ba las bshad pa*; reconstructed by Honjō 1984: 19 (Up 2036) as *śīlaskandikāyām paścime brahmajālasūtre uktam*.

7. Notably, the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya*, T 1428 at T XXII 968b15, reports that the recitation of the discourses at the first *saṅgīti* began with Mahākāśyapa asking Ānanda where the *Fàndòng jīng* had been delivered, 大迦葉即問阿難言：梵動經在何處說？ The fact that here the *Brahmajāla* is mentioned first, corresponding to the position of this discourse in the Theravāda collection as well as in the Theravāda account of the first *saṅgīti*, Vin II 287,16, has already been noted by Oldenberg 1898: 653; for a translation of this passage in T 1428 cf. Przyłuski 1926: 193. Taking the listing of discourses in T 1428 to reflect a different and perhaps earlier ordering of the Dharmaguptaka *Dīrgha-āgama* would also entail, however, that the *Brahmajāla* was not part of the section on morality, as the discourses mentioned next in T 1428 do not belong to this section; cf. Anālayo 2014c: 36 note 68.

8. The following is based on von Hinüber 1999: 20.

9. Norman and Pruitt 2001: 46,12: *yo pana bhikkhu anupasampannaṃ padaso dhammaṃ vāceyya, pācittiyaṃ*.

10. Norman and Pruitt 2001: 46,15: *yo pana bhikkhu anupasampannaṃ uttaridirattatirattaṃ sahaseyyaṃ kappeyya, pācittiyaṃ*.

ordained serves to connect otherwise unrelated rules. The same pattern continues with *pācittiya* 6, which turns to "lying down" in the presence of a "woman".¹¹ In this case it is the act of lying down that connects *pācittiya* rules 5 and 6. *Pācittiya* 7 then regulates teaching the Dharma to "women",¹² thereby providing a connection to the presence of a woman mentioned in the preceding *pācittiya* rule.

In this way, *pācittiya* rules that follow each other share a particular expression, such as "fully ordained", "lying down", or "woman". The way these particular rules are related to each other is peculiar to the Theravāda tradition, as the corresponding rules in other *Vinayas* do not follow the same sequence.¹³ In other words, such concatenation is not related to the original delivery of a particular textual item, but rather comes into being with the formation of textual collections or lists. The same principle can also be seen at work in the *Udāna* collection,¹⁴ for example, or in other Pāli discourses.¹⁵

In the case of the first discourse in the Theravāda *Dīgha-nikāya*, the *Brahmajāla-sutta*, the same basic principle provides connections to the next *Dīgha-nikāya* discourse in several ways. The *Brahmajāla-sutta* shares with the second discourse, the *Sāmaññaphala-sutta*, the giving of a detailed exposition on morality. In addition to this common theme of providing an account of the training in morality (*sīla*), shared among discourses in this section of the *Dīgha-nikāya*, the *Sīlakkhandha-vagga*, the first two discourses are also related to each other by other forms of concatenation.

The *Brahmajāla-sutta* and the *Sāmaññaphala-sutta* share the theme of providing a contrast between the Buddha's insightful understanding and the various views held by non-Buddhist teachers.¹⁶ These take the form of sixty-two standpoints for views examined in the *Brahmajāla-sutta*,¹⁷ whereas the *Sāmaññaphala-sutta* presents six views attributed to well-known contemporary teachers.¹⁸

A formulaic parallelism occurs in the case of the fourth type of equivocation among the sixty-two standpoints for views in the *Brahmajāla-sutta*, whose description uses the same terms and expressions as the record of the position taken by the teacher Sañjaya Belaṭṭhiputta

11. Norman and Pruitt 2001: 46,18: *yo pana bhikkhu mātuḡāmena sahaseyyaṃ kappeyya, pācittiyaṃ.*

12. Norman and Pruitt 2001: 46,21: *yo pana bhikkhu mātuḡāmassa uttarichappañcavācāhi dhammaṃ deseyya aññatra viññunā purisaviggahena, pācittiyaṃ.*

13. Cf. the survey in Pachow 1955: 6 (appendix I).

14. For a study of concatenation in the *Udāna* cf. Anālayo 2009a: 50–53.

15. Cf., e.g., Allon 2001: 18–22 and Anālayo 2011: 11–13.

16. My indications are based on Franke 1913c, who points out similar relations between other discourses in the *Dīgha-nikāya* as well. In view of the general lack of awareness of the nature of oral transmission it is perhaps not surprising that these findings led Franke to arrive at unconvincing conclusions regarding the authorship of the *Dīgha-nikāya* as well as the *Majjhima-nikāya*; cf. Franke 1913a: xff, 1913b, 1914 and 1915 as well as Sferra 2011. For critical replies to Franke cf. the references in Hartmann 2014: 149 note 15.

17. The examination of sixty-two standpoints for views shows considerable similarity in the different versions of the *Brahmajāla*, including a discourse quotation in T 1548 at T XXVIII 656b19 to 661a7; cf. Anālayo 2009b.

18. The parallel versions of this discourse differ considerably in regard to what particular view should be associated with which of these six teachers; cf. the studies by Bapat 1948, Basham 1951: 21–23, Vogel 1970, Meisig 1987, and MacQueen 1988.

in the *Sāmaññaphala-sutta*.¹⁹ Another instance of formulaic parallelism can be found in the ways those who hold eternalist views in the *Brahmajāla-sutta* qualify the self and the world. These correspond to the qualifications used for the seven basic principles on which according to the *Sāmaññaphala-sutta* the teacher Pakudha Kaccāyana based his view.²⁰

The *Brahmajāla-sutta* indicates that eternalist views can arise after one has achieved the ability to recollect one's former lives. The *Sāmaññaphala-sutta* describes this ability in recollection with the same standardized formula, differing only in so far as here such ability features as one of the fruits of living the life of a recluse.²¹

The third of the annihilationists in the *Brahmajāla-sutta* refers to a self of mind-made nature. The same terms recur in the description of another of the fruits of living the life of a recluse in the *Sāmaññaphala-sutta*.²²

The proclamations of Nirvāṇa here and now in the *Brahmajāla-sutta* share the standard description of the four absorptions with the *Sāmaññaphala-sutta*, where these feature as other fruits of living the life of a recluse.²³

In this way, the *Brahmajāla-sutta* and the *Sāmaññaphala-sutta* as the first two discourses in the Theravāda *Dīgha-nikāya* are related to each other through thematic and formulaic concatenation.

Now in the Dharmaguptaka and the Sarvāstivāda/Mūlasarvāstivāda *Dīrgha-āgama* collections the corresponding two discourses do not occur together. Nevertheless, some degree of concatenation can be discerned in the case of the Dharmaguptaka counterpart to the *Brahmajāla-sutta*, the *Fàndòng jīng* (梵動經),²⁴ and its neighbours.

The twentieth discourse in the Dharmaguptaka *Dīrgha-āgama*, the *Āmózhòu jīng* (阿摩晝經), DĀ (T 1) 20, shares with the next discourse, the *Fàndòng jīng* (梵動經), DĀ (T 1) 21, the fact that both of their introductory narrations involve a non-Buddhist teacher and his student. In both discourses one of these two behaves disrespectfully towards the Buddha: in the *Āmózhòu jīng* the student disparages the Buddha to his face, in the *Fàndòng jīng* the teacher

^{19.} This parallelism involves a substantial portion of text: DN 1 at DN I 27,11 to 27,31 and DN 2 at DN I 58,24 to 59,8, which report in the same terms how someone refuses to give an answer to a series of questions, differing only in so far as in DN 1 this is worded in the third person singular, whereas in DN 2 Sañjaya is the speaker and thus the same comes in the first person singular.

^{20.} DN 1 at DN I 14,2 (again at 15,6, 16,1, and 16,22) and DN 2 at DN I 56,22.

^{21.} DN 1 at DN I 13,14 and DN 2 at DN I 81,12.

^{22.} DN 1 at DN I 34,24 and DN 2 at DN I 77,10.

^{23.} For the case of the first absorption cf. DN 1 at DN I 37,1 and DN 2 at DN I 73,23. Such elements found in the standard gradual path account recur in all the *Dīgha-nikāya* discourses that have this account. In all such discourses these particular elements could in principle have provided concatenation with DN 1. The fact that DN 2 follows DN 1 would thus be due to those shared elements that are not part of the standard gradual path account, a relationship then further strengthened during oral transmission by elements such as the present one.

^{24.} On the title cf. Karashima 2006: 361.

keeps speaking in dispraise of the Buddha while following him closely during a journey.²⁵

The two discourses also share the standard description of the four absorptions, which in the *Āmózhòu jīng* is part of its account of the gradual path, whereas in the *Fàndòng jīng* the same description occurs in its exposition of views on Nirvāṇa here and now.²⁶ Again, the ability to create a mind-made body in the *Āmózhòu jīng* has a counterpart in the mind-made body as the ground for one of the views in the *Fàndòng jīng*.²⁷ The standard description of the ability to recollect one's past lives is also found in both discourses. In the *Āmózhòu jīng* this is part of the gradual path account, whereas in the *Fàndòng jīng* such ability leads to eternalist views.²⁸

Another motif in common between the two discourses is the image of seeing fishes in water. In the *Āmózhòu jīng* this comes as part of a simile to illustrate the destruction of the influxes, whereas in the *Fàndòng jīng* this motif features in a simile that explains the function of the whole discourse to be comparable to a fisherman who completely spreads his net over a small pond, thereby being able to catch all the beings that dwell in its water.²⁹

Turning from the discourse that precedes the *Fàndòng jīng* to the one that follows it, the topic of the Buddha's fame, broached at the outset of the *Fàndòng jīng* as something on account of which his disciples should not become elated, recurs at the outset of the next discourse in the same collection, the *Zhǒngdé jīng* (種德經), DĀ (T 1) 22. This discourse gives a detailed report of the fame of the Buddha and explains why even for a distinguished Brahmin it is appropriate to approach and visit him.³⁰

The *Zhǒngdé jīng* also has the gradual path account and thus shares with the *Fàndòng jīng* the four absorptions, the mind-made body, and the recollection of one's past lives.³¹

In this way, reciters of the Dharmaguptaka *Dīrgha-āgama* would have found their work facilitated by memory aids through concatenation comparable to those available for the reciters of the Theravāda *Dīrgha-nikāya*. In other words, the needs of oral transmission appear to have influenced the final shape of the two collections in similar ways, albeit with different results.

In the case of the Sarvāstivāda/Mūlasarvāstivāda *Dīrgha-āgama* collection the fragments that have been preserved of the *Brahmajāla-sūtra* and the discourse that precedes it, the *Kāśyapa-sūtra*, are unfortunately not sufficient to enable a full study of correspondences

25. DĀ 20 at T I 82b24 and DĀ 21 at T I 88b16.

26. For the case of the first absorption cf. DĀ 20 at T I 85b12 and DĀ 21 at T I 93b20.

27. DĀ 20 at T I 85c17 and DĀ 21 at T I 93b3.

28. DĀ 20 at T I 86b2 and DĀ 21 at T I 90a11; needless to say, elements found in the standard gradual path account recur in all the *Dīrgha-āgama* discourses that have this account. In all such discourses these particular elements could have provided concatenation with DĀ 21.

29. DĀ 20 at T I 86c9 and DĀ 21 at T I 93c28.

30. DĀ 21 at T I 88c13 and DĀ 22 at T I 95a1.

31. DĀ 22 at T I 96c5.

between these two discourses.³² Nevertheless, both are in the *Śīlaskandha-nipāta* and thus share an exposition of the theme of morality.

3a. The Section on Morality

The exposition on morality in the Mūlasarvāstivāda version of the *Brahmajāla* is rather short.³³ In addition to being much shorter than the exposition on morality as part of the gradual path account in the Theravāda *Brahmajāla-sutta* and the Dharmaguptaka *Fàndòng jīng*, it is also shorter than the exposition on morality in a version of the gradual path account preserved in the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*.³⁴ The section on morality in the *Fàndòng jīng* (梵動經) is similar in length to the sections on morality in the discourses in the Dharmaguptaka *Dīrgha-āgama* that have the gradual path account.³⁵ In the case of the Theravāda *Dīgha-nikāya*, the exposition of morality in the *Brahmajāla-sutta* is longer than its counterparts in those *Dīgha-nikāya* discourses that have the gradual path.³⁶

In view of these respective differences in length, it seems that the positioning of the *Brahmajāla* and its counterparts in the section on morality could have been influenced by length, in that the version with the longer exposition on this topic comes first, followed by the comparatively shorter exposition.

Following this rationale, the Theravāda *Brahmajāla-sutta* should indeed be the first in the *Śīlakkhandha-vagga* of the *Dīgha-nikāya*. On the same reasoning, the Sarvāstivāda/Mūlasarvāstivāda *Brahmajāla-sūtra* should indeed be at the end of the chapter on morality, the *Śīlaskandha-nipāta*, where it comes after all the discourses that share the longer exposition on morality as part of the gradual path, given in full or in abbreviation.³⁷

^{32.} For published fragments of the *Brahmajāla-sūtra* cf. Hartmann 1989: 48f and 54 (including SHT X 4189), Hartmann 1991 §§ 13 to 16 (for §14 cf. also Ye 2009: 240), Hartmann 2002: 135, SHT III 803 and 882b in Waldschmidt, Clawiter, and Sander-Holzmann 1971: 5–7 and 131f (for the latter cf. Skilling 1997: 470 note 8), SHT V 1571 in Sander and Waldschmidt 1985: 262f, and SHT VI 1248 and 1356 in Bechert and Wille 1989: 48 and 95. For published fragments of the *Kāśyapa-sūtra* cf. SHT VI 1296 in Bechert and Wille 1989: 70, Hartmann 1991 §§ 69–73 (including SHT V 1119 and SHT VIII 1874), perhaps Or. 15003/77 in Wille 2006: 89f, and SHT X 3656 in Wille 2008: 147f. I am indebted to Jens-Uwe Hartmann for kindly providing me with a preliminary draft transliteration of the as yet unpublished fragments of these two discourses from the recently discovered *Dīrgha-āgama* manuscript.

^{33.} Weller 1934: 12,6 to 12,30 (§§ 18 to 21); cf. the discussion in Anālayo 2014a: 47ff.

^{34.} Cf. the *Saṅghabhedavastu*, Gnoli 1978: 232,9 to 240,17.

^{35.} DĀ 20 at T I 83c14 to T I 84c13 and DĀ 21 at T I 88c19 to T I 89c18, thus in both versions the exposition on morality corresponds to one page in the Taishō edition.

^{36.} The exposition on morality in DN 1 ranges from DN I 4,1 to 12,14, comprising over 8 pages in E^c, whereas the same topic in DN 2 goes from DN I 63,13 to 69,31, less than 7 pages in the same edition. The difference appears to be mainly due to the fact that the similar exposition of each aspect of morality is followed by a different concluding statement in the two versions, where DN 1 keeps highlighting that a worlding might praise the Tathāgata for such conduct, whereas DN 2 just briefly notes that such is the conduct (of a monk).

^{37.} Melzer 2006: 23 notes that the full account of the gradual path is only given in the 27th discourse, which is actually the 3rd discourse in the *Śīlaskandha-nipāta*. This alerts to the fact that other influences must additionally have shaped the final order in the Sarvāstivāda/Mūlasarvāstivāda *Dīrgha-āgama* collection as now extant in the recently discovered fragments. Perhaps further relocations within this collection took place at a time when the requirements of oral transmission were no longer as prominent as during an earlier period, given that for one who embarks on memorizing the *Śīlaskandha-nipāta* it would have been natural and convenient if

Thus the opposite placing of the two discourses – the Theravāda *Brahmajāla-sutta* at the beginning of the entire collection and the Sarvāstivāda/Mūlasarvāstivāda *Brahmajāla-sūtra* at the end of the collection – could be following the same logic, according to which the longer account on morality is given precedence, and the shorter one comes after it. This comes combined with the fact that their sections on morality, the *Sīlakkhandha-vagga* or *Śīlaskandha-nipāta*, are also found in different positions in the respective collections. I will return to the positioning of the sections on morality in the next part of this article.

In the case of the Dharmaguptaka *Dīrgha-āgama*, the *Fàndòng jīng* (梵動經), DĀ (T 1) 21), is the second discourse in the section on morality. The *Fàndòng jīng* is preceded by the *Āmózhòu jīng*, DĀ (T 1) 20, which gives the full account of the gradual path; it is followed by discourses that abbreviate their exposition on morality. It would perhaps have been more natural if the *Āmózhòu jīng* had been placed in second position, thereby functioning as the leader during oral recitation for the ensuing discourses that abbreviate not only its exposition on morality, but also its exposition of the remainder of the gradual path. Nevertheless, given that the expositions on morality in the *Fàndòng jīng* and the *Āmózhòu jīng* have the same length, any of the two could be taking the leading position, so that perhaps concatenation or still other considerations influenced the respective positioning of these two discourses.

Needless to say, the positioning of the *Brahmajāla* in the collections of long discourses preserved by the Dharmaguptaka, Sarvāstivāda/Mūlasarvāstivāda, and Theravāda traditions does not carry any implications about the earliness or otherwise of its contents. If the shifting around of textual material results in a positioning that can be identified as comparatively later, this does not mean that the contents of the text in question must also be late.³⁸ It is perfectly well possible that a text was allocated to a different position without its contents being affected, just as a text that stays in its location can be affected by changes of its content during oral transmission.

3b. The Positioning of the Section on Morality

In an oral setting, the discourses in the *Sīlakkhandha-vagga* of the *Dīrgha-nikāya* that share an account of the gradual path of training are easily memorized as a group,³⁹ because of the substantial amount of text common to the discourses, which needs to be learned only once.

After the section on morality, the *Dīrgha-nikāya* continues with a group of ten discourses, most of which begin with the qualification "great", *mahā*°. Probably the best known of these "great" discourses is the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta* (DN 16), which records the Buddha's last

already the first discourse in this section gives the full account on morality.

³⁸ Anālayo 2010: 45.

³⁹ For studies of this gradual account cf., e.g., Franke 1917: 50–80, Eimer 1976: 26–34, Bucknell 1984, Meisig 1987: 35–80, Crangle 1994: 149–152, Ramers 1996, Freiburger 2000: 71–86, and Melzer 2006: 12–24. This gradual account has its counterpart in the *Brahmajāla-sutta* in three graded sections on morality: a short section, a middle length section, and a great section; for a discussion of which cf. Anālayo 2014a: 47ff.

days, decease, and funeral. Another discourse of similar hagiographic interest is the *Mahāpadāna-sutta* (DN 14), which provides a description of former Buddhas. The third section in the *Dīgha-nikāya* then is the *Pāṭika-vagga*, which takes its name from its first discourse, the *Pāṭika-sutta* (DN 24).

Regarding the division of the *Dīgha-nikāya* into these three sections, the *Samantapāsādikā* advises that a beginner in recitation should first of all start with the middle section, entitled the *Mahā-vagga*. This is unlike the case of the *Majjhima-nikāya*, where the *Samantapāsādikā* recommends the first of its three sections to a neophyte reciter, the other two sections being for those whose have already memorized this first group of fifty discourses.⁴⁰

Now, had the *Mahā-vagga* been considered the most important section to be memorized from the outset of the formation of the collection, it would have been natural for it to stand in first place. The fact that this is not the case suggests the possibility that the present order in the *Dīgha-nikāya* might still reflect a time when the expositions on morality were considered to be the material that reciters should learn first of all. These expositions on morality would in fact provide a reciter with basic instructions similar in kind to several of the discourses found among the first of the three sections of the *Majjhima-nikāya*.

With the passage of time, however, it could reasonably be expected that the inspiration provided by discourses like the *Mahāpadāna-sutta* and the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta* acquired increasing importance. After the passing away of the Buddha, with the increase of disciples who never had had a chance to meet the master in person, or even meet someone who had been in his living presence, there would have been an increasing demand for such type of information in order to foster inspiration and strengthen faith. With the notion of several past Buddhas in place, such interest would naturally have included former Buddhas.⁴¹ In this situation, it would indeed be preferable for a neophyte reciter of the *Dīgha-nikāya* to take up first the chapter that contains such inspirational material. If there should indeed have been such a shift of interest, it did not lead to a shifting of the *Mahā-vagga* to first position within the *Dīgha-nikāya*, but only influenced the commentarial recommendation.

The situation is different in the *Dīrgha-āgama* collections. The *Mahāvadāna-sūtra* and the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* are the fifth and sixth members of the first of the three sections of the Sarvāstivāda/Mūlasarvāstivāda *Dīrgha-āgama*, entitled the *Ṣaṣṭisūtraka-nipāta*. In addition to the *Mahāvadāna-sūtra* and the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, another discourse in the *Ṣaṣṭisūtraka-nipāta* that is similar to these two, in the sense of providing hagiographic information, is the *Catuṣpariṣat-sūtra*.⁴² This discourse gives an account of the coming into existence of the four assemblies of Buddhist disciples (monastic and lay, male and female). The *Catuṣpariṣat-sūtra* has its counterparts in other Buddhist schools in the respective *Vinayas*, a situation that

⁴⁰ Sp IV 789,14: *sace majjhimabhāṇako hoti, mūlapaṇṇāsako uggahetabbo, dīghabhāṇakena mahāvaggo*.

⁴¹ The inspirational effect of the account of former Buddhas is in fact explicitly stated in the Chinese version of the discourse itself, DĀ 1 at T I 3c9: "who, being a wise one, would on hearing this [*Mahā*]-*avadāna* not be delighted and give rise to joyful affection in the mind?", 何有智者聞此因緣而不歡喜,起愛樂心。

⁴² For a study of the *Catuṣpariṣat-sūtra* cf. Waldschmidt 1951/1967; for a translation cf. Kloppenborg 1973.

suggests a process of textual movement between *Vinayas* and discourse collections. In fact, even the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* may have originally been a *Vinaya* narrative that was subsequently shifted to the collection of long discourses.⁴³

The *Ṣaṣṭhraka-nipāta* was at times handed down independently of the whole collection.⁴⁴ The importance accorded to the discourses in this set of six is in line with the indication in the *Samantapāsādikā* that the grouping of discourses that contains the *Mahāpadāna-sutta* and the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta* should be learnt first.

The Chinese counterparts to the *Mahāvadāna-sūtra* and the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* are the first two discourses in the *Dīrgha-āgama* preserved in Chinese translation, the *Dàběn jīng* (大本經) and the *Yóuxíng jīng* (遊行經).⁴⁵ In this way the Dharmaguptaka *Dīrgha-āgama* shares with the Sarvāstivāda/Mūlasarvāstivāda *Dīrgha-āgama* and the Theravāda commentary, the *Samantapāsādikā*, a giving pride of place to the grouping of discourses that contains these two discourses.

The overall situation could be summarized by showing the respective placement of the chapter that contains the *Mahāvadāna-sūtra* and the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* in the *Dīrgha-āgama/Dīrgha-nikāya* collection of each of the three traditions – Dharmaguptaka, Sarvāstivāda/Mūlasarvāstivāda, and Theravāda – followed by giving also the indication on the importance of this chapter according to the Theravāda commentary, the *Samantapāsādikā*.

	<i>Mahā</i> -section
Dharmaguptaka	1 st in the collection
Sarvāstivāda/Mūlasarvāstivāda	1 st in the collection
Theravāda	2 nd in the collection
Theravāda commentary	1 st to be learned

Combining the pride of place given to the section that contains the *Mahāvadāna-sūtra* and the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* with the patterns apparently at work within the sections on morality, the diametrically opposed positions of the *Brahmajāla* as the first discourse in the Theravāda collection and the last in the Sarvāstivāda/Mūlasarvāstivāda collection could be the results of similar influences:

In the case of the Theravāda *Dīrgha-nikāya*, the *Brahmajāla-sutta* would stand in leading position in the section on morality because its treatment of this topic is longer than that given

⁴³ Cf., e.g., Frauwallner 1956: 46 and the discussion in Hirakawa 1993/1998: 264. On the interrelation between *Vinaya* and discourse literature cf. also Anālayo 2014b.

⁴⁴ The popularity of this group of six discourses was already noted by Schlingloff 1962: 7; cf. also Skilling 1980: 30f, Hartmann 1994, and Hartmann 2014: 144–148.

⁴⁵ DĀ 1 has been translated by Jin 2011; DĀ 2 has been translated by Weller 1939 and 1940 and Jin 2013.

in other discourses in this section. Due to what might have been an emphasis on this topic of morality at an early stage in the formation of the whole discourse collection, the *Śīlakkhandha-vagga* is still the first of the three sections in the *Dīgha-nikāya*.

The Sarvāstivāda/Mūlasarvāstivāda *Brahmajāla-sūtra* has an account of morality that is shorter than the coverage given to this topic in its version of the gradual path. Therefore the *Brahmajāla-sūtra* stands at the end of the *Śīlaskandha-nipāta*, which perhaps by yielding pride of place to the *Ṣaṣṭisūtraka-nipāta* has become the last of the three sections in this collection.

In sum, it seems that the requirements of oral transmission could have influenced the positioning of the *Brahmajāla* in these two collections of long discourses in similar ways, even though the net results of this influence are entirely different placements of the discourse.

Such different placing of the *Brahmajāla* reflects the circumstance that the order of the collection was clearly not seen as something fixed that needed to be kept at all cost, but rather as open to change in order to accommodate the particular needs of different reciter traditions. This stands in contrast to the contents of individual discourses, where accuracy in transmission was clearly an important concern.⁴⁶ In fact, had improvisation been characteristic for the contents of the discourses, one would expect parallel versions to be as different from each other as their order in the discourse collections. This is clearly not the case. Whereas the providing of a commentary on a discourse and its placing within a particular collection were relatively free at least during an early stage, the transmission of its actual contents were quite probably from the outset guided by a concern for accurate reproduction of what had been "thus heard" by successive generations of reciters.

4. The Issue of Memory

In order to appreciate how a concern for accurate reproduction of what had been "thus heard" could nevertheless result in the kind of differences we find between parallel versions of the early discourses in general and of the *Brahmajāla* in particular, modern day research on memory provides helpful indications.⁴⁷

Such research has for quite some time made it clear that memory is of a constructive nature.⁴⁸ At the time of attempting to recall, the mind constructs the information anew. Moreover, already at the time of hearing something that one intends to remember, information is not simply taken in. Instead, the information received is combined with inferences. These inferences are stored in memory together with the material actually heard.

⁴⁶ Cf. in more detail Anālayo 2014a.

⁴⁷ For a more detailed discussion cf. Anālayo 2011: 855–891, where I discuss various features of the early Buddhist oral transmission in relation to memory.

⁴⁸ This has already been pointed out by the pioneer in memory research, Bartlett 1932: 205, who explains that "if we consider evidence rather than presupposition, remembering appears to be far more decisively an affair of construction, rather than one of mere reproduction."

As a result, on recall one is at times not able to distinguish clearly between the original information and the inferences one has drawn.

As a general rule, a text will be better remembered if inferences are drawn.⁴⁹ Recent research has discovered an exception to this basic pattern, which is of importance for understanding the early Buddhist oral transmission in its ancient Indian historical setting. According to this finding, someone who does not understand a particular text at all could remember it with more precision than someone who understands this text. The experiment in question presented instructions about the use of Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel to three groups of readers, asking them to remember the text. Subsequently memory was tested through a recognition task in which the participants had to decide if a particular statement had been made in the original text. Of these participants, the first group had no experience with computer software at all, the second group had some experience, and the third group had advanced knowledge of computer software. Contrary to the expectations of the researchers, those who had no experience with computer software at all were more rapidly able to recognize sentences correctly than the other two groups.⁵⁰

These recent findings on the workings of human memory help to appreciate the nature and limitations of the early Buddhist oral transmission. Situated in their historical and cultural context, the early Buddhist reciters would have had a precedent in the Vedic oral tradition. This oral transmission had acquired a high degree of precision based on a systematic training of reciters from their early youth onwards. The existence of young Brahmins who at the age of sixteen had already mastered the *Vedas* is in fact reflected in the *Assalāyana-sutta* and a Chinese parallel.⁵¹ Notably, in the Vedic model young brahmin reciters trained in memorizing texts whose meaning they only learned later.⁵²

The early Buddhist oral tradition differs in two basic respects. One is that Buddhist monastics would start training in recitation of the texts only after ordination, which in most cases can safely be assumed to have taken place when they were older than young Brahmins embarking on their training in Vedic lore.⁵³ Moreover, whereas for the Vedic reciters correct wording was of crucial importance, for their early Buddhist counterparts the content of the text to be transmitted was central.⁵⁴ This is neatly exemplified in the *Alagaddūpama-sutta* and a Chinese parallel, according to which the Buddha reckoned those who learn his teachings

^{49.} Cf., e.g., Myers and Duffy 1990 as well as Mason and Just 2004.

^{50.} Caillies and Denhière 2002; on the need to distinguish between the bare information to be recalled and its relational processing when making sense of a text as a whole cf. also Long, Johns, and Jonathan 2012.

^{51.} MN 93 at MN II 147,10 reports that a sixteen year old Brahmin had acquired mastery of the three *Vedas*. The parallel T 71 at T I 876c10 also records his age to have been fifteen or sixteen, whereas another parallel, MĀ 151 at T I 663c8 (which also reports his ability, notably in terms of his knowledge of the *four Vedas*) does not specify his age.

^{52.} Cf. von Hinüber 1989: 67.

^{53.} Cf. von Hinüber 1989: 67f.

^{54.} In the words of Lopez 1995: 37, "the śrotriyas were concerned with the precise preservation of the sounds of the Vedas while the śrāvakas were concerned with the preservation of the meaning of the Buddha's word in the vernacular."

without endeavouring to understand them to be fools.⁵⁵

Expressed in terms of modern research on memory, early Buddhist reciters were encouraged to draw inferences, unlike those memorizing the Vedas, who from early childhood were instead trained in memorizing precise textual recall without understanding and thus without drawing inferences. The reason why this worked so well for the Vedic reciters is precisely because they did not understand the text they were memorizing, as the experiment with Microsoft Word and Excel shows.

This makes it only natural that the early Buddhist oral transmission could not arrive at a level of precision comparable to the Vedic reciters. In fact the Buddhist discourses reflect the use of repetition and other mnemonic aids to a much greater extent,⁵⁶ pointing to the evident need of the Buddhist reciters to boost their ability to recall with precision in a way not required by their Vedic counterparts.

In view of all this, we would indeed expect variations to come into being during successive generations of Buddhist reciters, simply because their attempt to memorize with precision was hampered, if I may use this word, by their understanding. Moreover, the difficulty of distinguishing original text from inference on recall would have facilitated the intrusion of commentarial exegesis into the original discourse.

Conclusion

Studying the *Brahmajāla*, which I had chosen somewhat at random simply by dint of its being the first discourse in the Pāli canon, brings to light the degree to which, from the introductory phrase of the discourse all the way to its location within the long discourse collections, oral transmission is a key influence. This oral transmission is best understood as the result of an attempt at precise memorization that due to the vicissitudes of memory, combined with lack of training comparable to the Vedic tradition, inevitably resulted in a gradual change of the transmitted material. This manifests in variations due to the constructing nature of memory, loss of material due to memory failure, as well as the intrusion of what originally was only commentarial due to the inability to distinguish between original and inference. Such gradual change manifesting in different ways in the course of time is precisely what enables us to reconstruct early stages in the development of Buddhist thought through comparative study of parallel versions that have been affected in different ways by the vicissitudes of their oral transmission.

⁵⁵. MN 22 at MN I 133,23 and MĀ 200 at T I 764a12. Lamotte 1949: 346 explains that "le religieux qui se borne à mémoriser les textes sans essayer de les comprendre manque à son devoir."

⁵⁶. Cf. von Hinüber 1994: 6 and Allon 1997: 363.

Abbreviations

C	Cone edition
D	Derge edition
DĀ	<i>Dirgha-āgama</i>
DN	<i>Dīgha-nikāya</i>
E ^c	PTS edition
MĀ	<i>Madhyama-āgama</i>
Mhv	<i>Mahāvamsa</i>
MN	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
N	Narhang edition
Q	Peking edition
SHT	Sanskrihandschriften aus den Turfanfunden
Sp	<i>Samantapāsādikā</i>
T	Taishō edition (CBETA)
Up	<i>Abhidharmakośopāyikā-ṭīkā</i>
Vin	<i>Vinaya</i>

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