

The conversion of the Brahmin Sela in the *Ekottarika-āgama**

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Abstract

With the present paper I study the *Sela-sutta*, based on a comparison with a parallel version found in the *Ekottarika-āgama* extant in Chinese, of which I provide an annotated translation.

Introduction

The *Sela-sutta* of the *Sutta-nipāta*, a discourse found also in the *Majjhima-nikāya*, reports how a first meeting with the Buddha inspires the Brahmin Sela to such an extent that he decides on the spot to go forth as a Buddhist monk.¹ Besides the record of this successful conversion in the Pāli canon of the Theravāda tradition,² another version of the same event is extant in the *Ekottarika-āgama* preserved in Chinese translation.³ The school affiliation of the *Ekottarika-āgama* has up to now resisted attempts to come to a scholarly consensus.⁴ For the purpose of the present study, what can be said with certainty is that

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¹ Sn 37 at Sn 102,17 to Sn 112,20 and MN 92 at MN II 146,22 (E^s does not give the text and refers the reader to the edition of the *Sutta-nipāta*). The text of the *Sela-sutta* alternates between prose and verse, which Jayawickrama 1948: 254 reckons as an instance of the genre of “mixed-ballads with dialogue” in the *Sutta-nipāta*. The verse part of the *Sela-sutta* recurs on its own in Th 818-841. A version of these verses might be intended by a reference to the *śailagāthā* in the *Divyāvadāna*, Cowell 1886: 20,23 and 35,1, cf. also Rhys Davids 1896: 94, Law 1930: 175 and Lamotte 1958/1988: 162. This reference is found similarly in the Chinese and Tibetan translations of the (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, T 1448 at T XXIV 11b6: 世羅尼頌 and D 'dul ba ka 265b2 or Q *khe* 249a8 and again D 'dul ba ga 225b1 or Q *nge* 214b5: *ri gnas kyi tshigs su bcad pa*; cf. also Lévi 1915: 418 and Lamotte 1956: 260.

² For a study of conversion stories in the *Sutta-nipāta* in general cf. Bailey 1991.

³ EĀ 49.6 at T II 798a25 to T II 800b26, a discourse that to my knowledge has so far not been translated into a European language.

⁴ For a more detailed discussion of the *Ekottarika-āgama*'s school affiliation and of its translator(s) cf. Anālayo 2009c; for a recent study of its probable translator cf. Nattier 2010.

this account stems from a transmission lineage that differs from the Theravāda tradition.

In what follows, I translate the second part of the *Ekottarika-āgama* discourse, which reports the conversion of Sela. The first part introduces the Brahmin Keṇiya, who visits the Buddha and, after hearing a discourse,⁵ invites the Buddha and his monks for a meal the next day. The translated section sets in at this point, with Keṇiya busying himself with the preparations for this meal.

Translation⁶

At that time the Brahmin Sela,⁷ together with five hundred disciples,⁸ came to the house of the Brahmin Keṇiya.⁹ He saw from afar that in the house fine seats had been prepared.¹⁰ Having seen them, he asked the Brahmin Keṇiya: “Do you want to give a man or a woman in marriage,¹¹ or do you want to invite King Bimbisāra of the country of Magadha?”

The Brahmin Keṇiya replied: “I have not invited King Bimbisāra and there is no marriage. I now want to make offerings and set up a

⁵ Sn 103,19 only indicates that the Buddha gladdened Keṇiya with a talk on the Dharma, whereas EĀ 49.6 at T II 798b8 reports this talk in full, indicating that the topic was the claim to class superiority made by ancient Indian Brahmins.

⁶ The translated section runs from T II 799b15 to T II 800b26. In order to facilitate comparison with the *Sela-sutta*, in my translation I adopt Pāli terminology (except for anglicized terms like Dharma or Nirvana), without thereby intending to take a position on the original language of the *Ekottarika-āgama*. When quoting Chinese passages, I have occasionally adjusted the punctuation.

⁷ Sn 105,1 gives a more detailed description of the accomplishment of Sela in terms of his mastery of the three Vedas etc., and also reports that Keṇiya had faith in Sela.

⁸ According to Sn 105,6, Sela was in the company of three hundred Brahmin students.

⁹ Sn 103,2 introduces Keṇiya as a *jaṭila*; Ps III 399,5 then explains that he came from an eminent Brahmin family; and Ap 318,14 (389.26) qualifies him as a *tāpasa*. An account of Keṇiya’s meeting with the Buddha in the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya*, T 1428 at T XXII 873a26, introduces Keṇiya as a Brahmin; another account of this meeting, found in the (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, presents him as a seer, cf. Dutt 1984: 262,10. Tsuchida 1991: 82 comments that “the Keṇiya depicted in the Sela-s[uttas] exhibits several features which do not fit with the image of a hermit” and which would better suit a wealthy Brahmin; a discrepancy also reflected in the explanation in Ps III 399,6 that he had gone forth in order to protect his wealth, cf. Horner 1951/1982: 336 note 10. Another variation can be found in the **Karmavibhaṅgopadeśa* in Lévi 1932: 155,16, according to which Sela was a *tāpasa* and it was he who had invited the Buddha for a meal.

¹⁰ Sn 105,9 describes the on-going preparations in more detail.

¹¹ Olivelle 1993: 21 comments that the suggestion that Keṇiya might be preparing a wedding reflects the fact that *jaṭilas* were not necessarily living “celibate lives”; in fact EĀ 49.6 at T II 800b15 reports that Keṇiya had a wife who was pregnant.

great meritorious act.” The Brahmin Sela asked: “May I hear what offerings and meritorious act you want to undertake?”¹²

At that time, the Brahmin Keṇiya replied to the Brahmin Sela:¹³ “You should know that there is a son of the Sakyan clan,¹⁴ who went forth to train in the path. He has accomplished the supreme and become an arahant,¹⁵ a Fully Awakened One.¹⁶ I have now invited this Buddha and his community of monks. For this reason, various seats have been prepared.”

Then the Brahmin Sela said to the Brahmin Keṇiya: “Did you say: ‘a Buddha’?” He replied, “I just said: ‘a Buddha’”.¹⁷ [Sela] asked again: “It is very exceptional, very special, to be hearing right now the word: ‘a Buddha’ – where is the Tathāgata staying? I wish to see him!”¹⁸ Keṇiya replied: “He is now staying in the Bamboo Grove outside of Rājagaha,¹⁹ together with five hundred disciples who enjoy each other’s [company]. If you wish to go and see them, know that this is the proper time for it.”²⁰

¹² Such a question is not found in the *Sela-sutta*, where Keṇiya on his own continues to describe his intended offering.

¹³ Adopting a variant that reads 翅禽梵志報施羅梵志曰.

¹⁴ On this expression cf. the discussion in Freiburger 2000: 221-225.

¹⁵ EĀ 49.6 at T II 799b23: 至真, literally “reaching the truth”, an expression that in the *Ekottarika-āgama* stands for an arahant, cf. e.g. EĀ 13.5 at T II 574a27: 至真, 等正覺, counterpart to *araham sammāsambuddho* in the parallel version MN 7 at MN I 37,17; cf. also Hirakawa 1997: 995.

¹⁶ In Sn 106,1 Keṇiya uses the whole set of ten epithets to describe the Buddha (though these are abbreviated).

¹⁷ Sn 106,4 repeats this same exchange, thereby highlighting Sela’s surprise at hearing the word ‘Buddha’.

¹⁸ In Sn 106,6 Sela reflects to himself that it is very difficult even to hear this word and then ponders that one who has the thirty-two marks will become either a wheel-turning king or a fully awakened one. In the *Sela-sutta* it is after this reflection that he asks Keṇiya where the Buddha is staying.

¹⁹ The reference to Rājagaha is in keeping with the indication given at the beginning of the discourse, EĀ 49.6 at T II 798a25, that the Buddha was dwelling in the Squirrels’ Feeding Ground at Rājagaha. Sn 103,1 begins by indicating that the Buddha was dwelling in Āpaṇa, a town of the Aṅguttarāpans. Such variations in the location of a discourse are a common feature in early Buddhist oral literature, in fact the introduction to the *Ekottarika-āgama*, T II 550b13, indicates that in case one is not able to name the location, a discourse should simply be allocated to Sāvattḥī; cf. also its commentary T 1507 at T XXV 33b19 and the discussion in Schopen 1997/2994: 395-407 of similar instructions in the Mahāsāṅghika and (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda *Vinayas*. Such passages reflect a lack of concern for precise historical details which, as pointed out by Gombrich 1990: 22, “from the religious point of view ... is perfectly understandable: the narrative framework of the sayings is not relevant to salvation”.

²⁰ That Keṇiya encouraged Sela to go and visit the Buddha is not reported in the *Sela-sutta*, which also differs in as much as according to its description, given at the outset of the discourse at Sn 102,ult., the Buddha was in the company of one thousand two hundred and fifty monks.

The Brahmin promptly went together with his five hundred disciples to approach the Buddha.²¹ [799c] Having arrived, he exchanged greetings and sat down to one side. At that time, this thought arose in the [mind] of the Brahmin Sela: “The recluse Gotama is handsome, his body has the colour of gold.²² In our scriptures it is said: ‘Truly, it is [nearly] impossible to encounter the time when a Tathāgata emerges in the world, which is just like the occasional blossoming of the *udumbara* flower.’²³ If he has accomplished the thirty-two marks and the eighty good qualities,²⁴ he will have [either of] these two destinies: If he stays at home, he will become a wheel-turning king endowed with the seven jewels; if he goes forth to train in the path, he will certainly accomplish the supreme path and become a Fortunate One in the three realms.’²⁵ I now want to examine the Buddha for the thirty-two marks.”

At that time, the Brahmin saw only thirty marks. He did not see two of the marks, which aroused his doubt and hesitation. He did not see that the tongue was broad and long and that [what should be] concealed was [like] the hidden [parts] of a horse. At that time, the Brahmin Sela spoke these verses:²⁶

²¹ Sn 107,³ additionally reports that Sela instructed his company of Brahmin students to keep quiet, telling them that they should walk quietly, as those like the Buddha are difficult to approach, and that they should not interrupt him once he was speaking with the Buddha.

²² This description of the Buddha’s golden appearance occurs later in the *Sela-sutta*, as part of a set of verses spoken by Sela, cf. Sn 108,¹⁶ (548).

²³ Although the *Sela-sutta* refers to the rareness of the Buddha’s appearance at Sn 109,^{penult.} (559) and Sn 110,¹ (560), it does not have a comparison between this rareness and the flowering of the *udumbara* fig tree. The motif of the *udumbara* flower recurs in the *Uraga-sutta*, Sn 1,¹⁶ (5), which seems to reflect awareness of the fact that the *udumbara* flower is a myth. The relevant line illustrates the absence of any essence in existence with the inability of finding a flower on *udumbara* trees. Thus the point of this verse is that the *udumbara* tree cannot flower, not that such blossoming is rare. For a study of references to the myth of the flowering of the *udumbara* tree cf. Norman 1991/1993. The *udumbara* tree is also related to a Buddha in DN 14 at DN II 4,¹² and its parallel DĀ 1 at T I 2b2, according to which the former Buddha Koṇāgamana (Skt. Kanakamuni) attained awakening under an *udumbara* tree; an association also reflected in Bharhut sculpture, cf. e.g. Coomaraswamy 1956: 65 (pl. 22 fig. 57) or Lüders 1963: 85 (no. 722). In this context, however, the rareness or inability of the blossoming of the *udumbara* tree is not at issue.

²⁴ A reference to the eighty minor marks is not found in the *Sela-sutta* or elsewhere among the Pāli discourses. Endo 1997/2002:142 explains that “the concept of the eighty minor marks of a Buddha is a later development”. A listing of these eighty can be found, for example, in the *Mahāvastu*, Senart 1890: 43,⁸.

²⁵ A counterpart to this reflection occurs earlier in Sn 106,⁷, when Sela is still in the company of Keṇiyya.

²⁶ Sn 107,¹⁷ does not report an inquiry after the two marks by Sela, as in its account the Buddha realizes on his own that Sela has doubts about them.

“I have heard of the thirty-two
 Good marks of a Great Man,
 Now I do not see two marks,
 Where are they, after all?
 Chaste and pure, [what should be] concealed is [like] the hidden
 [parts] of a horse,
 That mark is very difficult to come to know.
 Do you have a broad and long tongue,
 With which it is possible to lick the ears and cover the face?
 May you stretch out the large and long tongue,
 So that I will be without doubt.
 Let me see it, so that I will be
 Forever without the bondage of doubt and disappointment.”²⁷

At that time, the Blessed One stretched out his tongue, licked his left and right ears, and then withdrew it again.²⁸ At that time, the Blessed One promptly entered into concentration,²⁹ so that the Brahmin could see that [what should be] concealed is [like] the hidden [parts] of a horse.³⁰ When the Brahmin saw that the Buddha had the thirty-two marks and the eighty good qualities, he was delighted and thrilled, unable to contain himself.³¹

At that time, the Brahmin Sela said to the Buddha: “Now I am a Brahmin, you are a recluse from the warrior class. Progress for all recluses and Brahmins is along a single path, they seek a single liberation. May you,³² [great] recluse, acknowledge it! Are we not able to progress along a single path?”

The Buddha said to the Brahmin: “So you have this view.” The Brahmin replied: “I do have such a view.” [800a]

The Buddha told the Brahmin: “Then you should arouse your mind for progressing to this single liberation. This is what is reckoned to

²⁷ Adopting the variant 罔 instead of 網.

²⁸ Sn 108,3 adds that he covered his whole face with the tongue (an ability also referred to in Sela’s inquiry in EĀ 49.6 at T II 799c14: “Do you have a broad and long tongue, with which it is possible to lick the ears and cover the face?”).

²⁹ Sn 107,penult. explains that he performed a feat of supernormal power, *iddhābhisamkhāraṃ abhisamkhāsi* (S^o reads *abhisamkhāresi*).

³⁰ The *Sela-sutta* adopts the opposite sequence, with the display of the tongue coming in second place at Sn 108,1.

³¹ Sn 108,6 proceeds differently at this point, as after having ascertained that the Buddha is endowed with the thirty-two marks, Sela is still in doubt whether the person in front of him is a Buddha or not. He thereon reflects that those who are fully awakened will reveal their accomplishment if they are praised. So he breaks out in a series of verses that extol the Buddha to his face; cf. also the discussion below.

³² Adopting a variant that adds 願 after 唯.

be right view.” The Brahmin said to the Buddha: “Is right view the single liberation. Is there still more to liberation?” The Blessed One said: “Brahmin, there is still more to liberation, to attaining the element of Nirvana. For that objective there are eight [requirements], namely right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. That, Brahmin, is reckoned the eightfold path to attain and reach Nirvana.”

At that time the Brahmin said to the Buddha: “Are there living beings who know this eightfold path?” The Blessed One said: “Brahmin, you should know that there are not [just] one hundred thousand, but innumerable hundreds of thousands of living beings who know this eightfold path.” The Brahmin said to the Buddha: “Are there living beings who do not understand this eightfold path?” The Blessed One said: “There are living beings who do not understand it, not [just] one.”

The Brahmin said to the Buddha: “Are there also living beings who do not attain this Dharma?” The Buddha said: “There are living beings who do not attain the path. There are eleven types of people like this. What are these eleven? They are reckoned to be those who cheat; who speak evil words; who are difficult to admonish; who do not reciprocate with what is good; who are of a hateful nature; who are cruel to their parents; who kill an arahant; who have cut off their wholesome roots and wholesome conditions; who keep coming back to what is evil; who speculate about the existence of a self; and who arouse evil thoughts towards the Tathāgata – these, Brahmin, are reckoned the eleven types of people who are not able to attain this eightfold path.”

As the eightfold path was being explained, the Brahmin attained the dustless and pure eye of the Dharma. At that time, the Brahmin Sela said to his five hundred disciples: “Let each of you do as he likes and [continue to] practice recitation on your own. I wish to correctly practice the holy life under the Tathāgata.”³³

The disciples replied: “We also wish to go forth and train in the path.”

At that time, the Brahmin and each of his five hundred disciples knelt down and said to the Blessed One: “May the Blessed One permit us to go forth and train in the path.” The Buddha said to the Brahmins: “Come monks, correctly practice the holy life under the Tathāgata for

³³ Sn 110,10 (564) also reports that Sela decided to go forth under the Buddha, without, however, preceding this with his attainment of stream-entry. The *Sela-sutta* also differs in that Sela does not suggest to his company of Brahmin students that they may keep on practising recitation on their own (presumably of the hymns that he had so far been teaching them).

gradually eradicating the origin of *dukkha*.³⁴ When the Tathāgata said this, the five hundred Brahmins promptly became recluses.³⁵

At that time, the Blessed One progressively gave sublime teachings to the five hundred,³⁶ namely a teaching on giving, a teaching on morality, and a teaching on rebirth in heaven; [he spoke] about sensual pleasures and the perception of their impurity, about the happiness of release; and he taught them the Dharma always taught by all Buddhas and Blessed Ones: *dukkha*, its arising, its cessation and the path. At that time, the Blessed One widely spoke to all of them. Then, the five hundred men reached the perpetual extinction of the influxes and attained the state of superior men.³⁷

At that time, the Brahmin Keṇiya said: “The time has come, may you condescend [to come].” [800b] At that time, the Blessed One said to Sela and the five hundred monks: “Each of you put on [your] robes and take [your] bowls.”³⁸ Surrounded by a thousand monks,³⁹ he went to the Brahmin’s place in the town and sat on a seat.

At that time, the Brahmin Keṇiya saw that the five hundred Brahmins had all become recluses.⁴⁰ He said: “Excellent, Excellent! Of paths to be followed by men, none surpasses this one in significance.”⁴¹ At that time, the monk Sela spoke these verses to Keṇiya:

³⁴ The request for going forth and the Buddha’s acceptance are also found in Sn 110,14, though in verse form (566 and 567).

³⁵ Sn 110,21 indicates that they received the going forth (*pabbajjā*) and the higher ordination (*upasampadā*), an indication which would reflect an early stage in the development of the Buddhist monastic order where these two levels of acceptance into the Saṅgha were conferred together, cf. Vin I 12,25 and e.g. Dutt 1924/1996: 147; Bhagvat 1939: 131; Upasak 1975: 138; Dhirasekera 1982/2007: 222; Gombrich 1984: 42.

³⁶ No such teaching is recorded in the *Sela-sutta*, which instead continues at this point with the meal offering by Keṇiya.

³⁷ According to Sn 111,penult., it took Sela and his company of newly ordained monks a week of practice in seclusion to become arahants. This appears to be a more plausible account, as the gradual teaching given in the present context elsewhere in the discourses leads only to stream-entry.

³⁸ Such an instruction is not reported in the *Sela-sutta*.

³⁹ According to the introductory narration of EĀ 49.6 at T II 798a26, the Buddha had been in a company of five hundred monks which, together with the five hundred new converts, accounts for the thousand monks that now accompany him to Keṇiya’s food offering.

⁴⁰ Keṇiya’s reaction on seeing Sela and his students turn up at his place as Buddhist monks is not mentioned in the *Sela-sutta*. The (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya* in Dutt 1984: 265,10 also reports that Keṇiya was pleased to see Sela in robes, in fact according to its account Keṇiya told Sela that, as soon as the meal offering was over, he would also go forth, a plan he then carried out.

⁴¹ Adopting the variant 過是 instead of 是過.

“Outside of this there is no other teaching
 Able to surpass this one in significance.
 [Among] comparable [teachings],
 None surpasses this in excellence.”

At that time, the Brahmin Keṇiya said to the Blessed One: “May the Blessed One wait a little. I shall right away bring more beverages and food.”⁴² The Blessed One replied: “Just distribute at this time the beverages and food that have been brought, don’t worry that it won’t be enough.” Then the Brahmin Keṇiya was pleased beyond measure, he brought the food himself and offered it to the Buddha and the community of monks.

At that time, when the Blessed One had completed his meal and the eating utensils had been removed,⁴³ [Keṇiya] scattered various types of flowers over the Buddha and the community of monks and said to the Buddha: “May the Blessed One [accept] the request by all men and women [in this household], young and old, to become his lay disciples.”⁴⁴ At that time, the Brahmin’s wife was pregnant. The wife said to the Buddha: “I am pregnant, I do not know: is it a boy or is it a girl? As for myself, I take refuge in the Tathāgata, may I be accepted as a female lay disciple.”

At that time, the Tathāgata taught the sublime Dharma to the great assembly and, while still on his seat, spoke these verses:⁴⁵

“Enjoyable, indeed, is the reward of such merit,
 The results that one wishes for will certainly be attained,
 [In this way] one gradually reaches the place of peace,
 That is forever without worry or distress,
 [Or else] at death one attains rebirth in heaven.
 Suppose [one] was disturbed by the host of Māra,
 They will no longer be able to disturb,
 [Or] cause the maker of merits to fall into evil ways.

⁴² Like the above exchange between Keṇiya and Sela, the present episode is not found in the *Sela-sutta*.

⁴³ EĀ 49.6 at T II 800b13: 除去食器. The Pāli commentarial tradition, Pj II 456,13, understands the corresponding expression *onītapattapāṇi* in Sn 111,8, as referring to having removed the hands from the bowl, *pattato anītapāṇiṃ, apanītahatthan ’ti vuttaṃ hoti*, which presumably functions as a sign of having finished eating. An alternative interpretation of *onītapattapāṇi* has been suggested by Norman 1992: 257f, cf. also Norman 1979/1991: 123f, according to which this expression refers to having washed the hands and bowl.

⁴⁴ The *Sela-sutta* does not record Keṇiya or members of his family taking refuge.

⁴⁵ According to Sn 111,12, at the conclusion of the meal the Buddha spoke a different set of verses. For a study of various versions of these verses cf. Skilling 2003.

One will also seek the means
 To arrive at noble wisdom,
 To eradicate the root of *dukkha*,
 And always be far removed from the eight disasters.”

At that time, when the Blessed One had spoken these verses, he rose from his seat and left.

At that [same] time, the Brahmin Keṇiya heard what the Buddha said, delighted in it and received it respectfully.

Study

In line with other conversions of eminent Brahmins, the *Sela-sutta* and its *Ekottarika-āgama* parallel report that for Sela to have confidence in the Buddha requires first ascertaining if the Buddha is in possession of the thirty-two marks of a great man. Such an examination necessitates the Buddha’s cooperation, since two of the marks are not readily distinguishable.⁴⁶ These are the reach of his tongue and the nature of his male organ.

In a passage in the *Divyāvadāna*, the Buddha demonstrates the length of his tongue to a Brahmin who is under the impression that the Buddha has spoken a falsehood.⁴⁷ In this context, the display of the tongue thus serves to prove that its owner would not speak a lie. In other words, the exceptional nature of the tongue is a token of the truthfulness of its owner. Interpretations advanced by modern scholars of the significance of the long tongue as a mark of a great man suggest that it may also represent ability at preaching.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ In the early discourses, this inability of Brahmins to assess the Buddha’s possession of these two marks is a recurrent feature. A contrast to this inability can be found in the introductory narration to the *Pārāyana-vagga*, Sn 196,4 (1022), according to which the Buddha was able to know that the Brahmin Bāvarī, whom he presumably never met and who was not present on that occasion, was endowed with these two marks (a parallel in T 202 at T IV 433b13 mentions only one of the two marks, the broad and long tongue); cf. also Zin 2003: 7. This passage thus implies that the Buddha’s ability to recognize such marks is far superior to that of Brahmins, who need the Buddha to be present and to cooperate for them to be able to ascertain his possession of these two marks.

⁴⁷ Cowell 1886: 71,14.

⁴⁸ Dayal 1932/1970: 305 holds that “the long tongue betokens success as a preacher.” Kramrisch 1935: 165 note 3 explains that the ability of the tongue to reach the ear symbolizes how the Buddha’s words reach the ears of the world. Wimalaratana 1994: 121 comments that the “long and slender tongue could as well be symbolic of the Buddha’s tongue’s flexibility for clear accurate enunciation.” Regarding the tongue as one of the thirty-two marks, it is also noteworthy that according to Powers 2008: 14 “the idea that a long, supple tongue is a desirable feature in men is also found in the classical medical text

The significance of the reference to “[what should be] concealed being [like] the hidden [parts] of a horse” emerges from the *Ekottarika-āgama* version, where Sela in his verses relates this characteristic to chastity and purity.⁴⁹ The *Saṅghabhedavastu* compares this mark to a well-bred horse or a well-bred elephant.⁵⁰ Occurrences of this mark in the *Madhyama-āgama* similarly note its resemblance to a king of horses.⁵¹ Since in the case of horses and elephants the male organ is retractable, these comparisons suggest a similar implication for the Buddha’s private parts.⁵² That is, perhaps the point of this mark is that he was able to retract his male organs.⁵³ If this should indeed be the case, then the act of demonstration might not involve the actual organ itself, but only a demonstration of its absence, of the fact that it has been successfully retracted.⁵⁴

Whatever may be the final word on the nature of this mark, the *Sela-sutta* and its *Ekottarika-āgama* parallel agree that the display of these two marks fulfilled its function of inspiring Sela with faith. From

Caraka’s Medical Compendium”; cf. also Coomaraswamy 1938/1977: 169, who holds that a comparable motif can be found in the Ṛgveda.

⁴⁹ EĀ 49.6 at T II 799c13: 貞潔陰馬藏, “chaste and pure, [what should be] concealed is [like] the hidden [parts] of a horse.” Similar connotations are associated with this mark by modern scholars. Thus according to Dayal 1932/1970: 305, “the covered male organ typifies lifelong chastity.” Barnes 1987: 120 explains that “a common Buddhist interpretation of the sheathed penis of the Buddha ... is ... that his penis is covered because he has abandoned sexuality completely.”

⁵⁰ Gnoli 1977: 50,15.

⁵¹ MĀ 59 at T I 494a5 and MĀ 161 at T I 686b16: 猶良馬王, counterparts to references to this mark in DN 30 at DN III 143,23 and MN 91 at MN II 136,17.

⁵² Verardi 1999/2000: 71 explains that this mark reflects the “sexually indistinct nature” of a superior being, comparable to the retracted penis of a horse or an elephant, whereby “outwardly, its sexual characteristics remain indistinct.” Egge 2003: 205 note 18 points out that “the phrase *kosohitaṃvatthaguyhaṃ* is usually rendered as ‘the genitals (lit. ‘that which is to be hidden by a cloth’) are enclosed in a sheath’. However, because *kosa* can mean foreskin, this mark thus understood is hardly distinctive.” On the term cf. also Sferra 2008.

⁵³ Several scholars have associated this mark with the idea that a woman cannot be a Buddha, cf. e.g. Kajiyama 1982: 65; Hae-ju 1999: 131; Romberg 2002: 164; and Ohnuma 2004: 304. I am under the impression that tradition is not unequivocal on the need for this mark to be a Buddha, cf. Anālayo 2009a: 181f note 54. Be that as it may, if an interpretation of this mark along the lines of what the horse and the elephant images suggest should be correct, then this *lakkhaṇa* would downplay maleness instead of emphasizing it as characteristic of a Buddha.

⁵⁴ Nevertheless, this act of demonstration has led to one of the dilemmas in the *Milindapañha*, Mil 167,26, which explicitly refers to the *Sela-sutta*. The solution to this dilemma is then in turn quoted in the commentary on the *Sela-sutta*, Pj II 452,11. Nagasena explains that the Buddha only showed an image of his private parts and made this visible only to his visitor. When King Milinda still considers this to be inappropriate behaviour, Nagasena explains that a Tathāgata is willing to go even to such an extent to lead beings to awakening, Mil 169,3.

here onwards, however, the two versions disagree considerably. The *Ekottarika-āgama* discourse continues with the Buddha delivering a teaching on the eightfold path to liberation,⁵⁵ a teaching that leads to Sela's stream-entry. The *Sela-sutta* instead reports that Sela decides to extol the Buddha, as he thinks that on being praised the Buddha will reveal his qualities.⁵⁶ The *Sela-sutta* thereby differs not only from its *Ekottarika-āgama* parallel, but also from other Pāli discourses, where the display of the thirty-two marks suffices to convince a Brahmin that he is in the presence of a Buddha.⁵⁷ According to the *Sela-sutta*, however, in spite of having ascertained the thirty-two marks, Sela is still in doubt whether the recluse before him is really a Buddha.⁵⁸

In order to get further confirmation, Sela engages in a series of praises of the Buddha's bodily perfection, suggesting that the Buddha is fit to reign as a king.⁵⁹ Sela's ruse works, as in reply the Buddha

⁵⁵ On the absence of the qualification "noble", usually associated with the four truths and the eightfold path in Pāli texts, cf. Anālayo 2006.

⁵⁶ Sn 108,9: *ye te bhavanti arahanto sammāsambuddhā, te sake vaṇṇe bhaññamāne attānaṃ pātukarontī* (S: *ye te bhagavanto*), "those who are arahants, Fully Awakened Ones, when their praises are spoken will reveal themselves."

⁵⁷ The Buddha's possession of the thirty-two marks is ascertained by the Brahmins Ambaṭṭha and Pokkarasati in the *Ambaṭṭha-sutta*, DN 3 at DN I 106,9 and 109,14; and by the Brahmins Uttara and Brahmāyu in the *Brahmāyu-sutta*, MN 91 at MN II 135,15 and MN II 143,19. Only in the last of these four cases is a display of the two marks of the tongue and the private parts accompanied by a verbal claim, and in none of these instances does the Buddha's possession of the thirty-two marks lead on to further investigations of his status. Thus, from the perspective of these discourses, ascertaining the presence of the thirty-two marks suffices for coming to a conclusion regarding the Buddha's accomplishment and status.

⁵⁸ Sn 108,5: *samannāgato kho samaṇo Gotamo dvattiṃsamahāpurisalakkhaṇehi, paripuṇṇehi no aparipuṇṇehi, no ca kho naṃ jānāmi: 'Buddho vā no vā?'* (S: *dvattiṃsāya mahāpurisalakkhaṇehi*), "the recluse Gotama is endowed with the thirty-two marks of a great man, they are complete, not incomplete – yet I do not know if he is a Buddha or not." Given that the person sitting in front of Sela has gone forth and thus has not taken office as a wheel-turning king, and given that Sela had earlier been told by Keṇiya that this person has reached full awakening and is a Buddha, from the viewpoint of the theory of the Great Man there would be no reason for Sela to still harbour any doubts, once he has ascertained the existence of the thirty-two marks.

⁵⁹ The suggestion that the Buddha should rather be a king can be found in another discourse in the *Ekottarika-āgama*, EĀ 24.3 at T II 617a18, where this proposal is made by his Sakyan relatives who would like to have a wheel-turning king governing them. Similar to the *Sela-sutta*, the Buddha then replies that he is already a king of the Dharma, T II 617a24: 法王. This discourse provides a more natural context for such an exchange than the *Sela-sutta*. Since the Brahmin Sela's earlier inspired reaction to merely hearing the word 'Buddha' depicts him as someone with a keen spiritual interest, an interest confirmed by his readiness to go forth right away as a Buddhist monk, it seems a little inconsistent for him to suggest that the Buddha would be worthy of becoming king and to belittle the status of one gone forth with the suggestion "what [use] is being a recluse to you?", *kin te samaṇabhāvena*, Sn 108,23 (551), (B^c and C^c: *kiṃ*).

proclaims that he is a supreme king of the Dharma and tells Sela to have no doubt about being in the presence of a Fully Awakened One, a supreme physician and a Holy One beyond compare.⁶⁰ In the *Sela-sutta*, this proclamation has the effect that in the *Ekottarika-āgama* version is achieved by Sela's stream-entry, since he now decides to go forth.⁶¹

Commenting on the present passage, according to which the Buddha reacts to flattery by praising himself, I.B. Horner observes that “in the Buddha's Teaching this is what a foolish person does, e.g. Devadatta, not arahants and ... not the Tathāgata”.⁶² She refers to a passage in the *Sampasādanīya-sutta*, according to which the Tathāgata does not reveal his qualities.⁶³ Another relevant passage could be found in the *Alagaddūpama-sutta* and its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel, according to which the Buddha will not be affected at all by any honour paid to him.⁶⁴

According to L.P.N. Perera, the language of several verses in this part of the *Sela-sutta* are “suggestive of a later phase of Pāli”. He concludes that the *Sela-sutta* “stands in contrast to many a Sutta of the *Sutta Nipāta* (which usually abound in archaic linguistic forms, old idiom and early phases of the doctrine) [and thus] is decidedly a later addition” to the *Sutta-nipāta*.⁶⁵ Hence J. Pérez-remón may be quite right when he concludes that the verses with which the Buddha praises himself in this part of the *Sela-sutta* probably “reflect more the high appreciation of the Buddha professed by his followers than the very way he spoke”;⁶⁶ a suggestion supported by the absence of any such self-praise in the parallel version in the *Ekottarika-āgama*.

If this passage in the *Sela-sutta* should indeed be a later development, it could be understood as expressive of a general tendency towards a gradual apotheosis of the Buddha, recognizable already in the early

⁶⁰ Sn 110,2 (560f): *so 'haṃ brāhmaṇa sambuddho, sallakatto anuttaro, brahmabhūto atitulo* (a counterpart to Sela's verses in Th 830 (E^c) reads *buddho 'smi* instead of *sambuddho*), “Brahmin, I am a Fully Awakened One, a supreme physician, a Holy One beyond compare.”

⁶¹ His decision to go forth in Sn 110,10 (564) is preceded by Sela explicitly expressing his faith in the claims made by the Buddha to being a holy one beyond compare etc., Sn 110,8 (563). This gives the impression that it is precisely these claims that motivate Sela's going forth.

⁶² Horner 1970: 335 note 4.

⁶³ DN 28 at DN III 115,20.

⁶⁴ MN 22 at MN I 140,18 and MĀ 200 at T I 766a17.

⁶⁵ Perera 1950: 201 and 202. Arunasiri 2007: 210 notes as another sign of lateness that Sāriputta is referred to as the “general” of the Dharma, *senāpati*, Sn p. 109,12 (556), a qualification frequently used to refer to him in the commentaries, but not related to him in the early discourses (one canonical instance can, however, be found in Th 1083).

⁶⁶ Pérez-remón 1980: 70.

discourses.⁶⁷ In the present instance, this tendency would stand at the background of the long eulogy of the Buddha's superior qualities. Such an importance given to the Buddha's qualities as the central means for converting an eminent Brahmin like Sela would be quite natural,⁶⁸ given the disdain that apparently existed among some Brahmins for the Buddha as a member of the recluse community.⁶⁹

The tale of Keṇiya's visit to the Buddha, which occupies the first part of the *Sela-sutta* and its *Ekottarika-āgama* parallel, is found also in several *Vinayas*. These differ in the detail in which they describe this visit, as some *Vinayas* only record that Keṇiya made an offering of beverages to the monastic community,⁷⁰ while others report him inviting the Buddha and the community of monks for a meal.⁷¹ The Dharmaguptaka and (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda *Vinayas* also mention Sela. Both report that Sela had noticed Keṇiya's meal preparations and thereupon decided to visit the Buddha. The Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya* continues by reporting that Sela received a talk on the Dharma from the Buddha and was highly delighted, though this *Vinaya* does not give further information on the contents of this talk.⁷² The (Mūla-) Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya* just reports that Sela went with his disciples to the Buddha and asked to be ordained, without recording any conversation

⁶⁷ Cf. in more detail Anālayo 2010: 130.

⁶⁸ A to some degree comparable tendency to enhance the qualities of the Buddha when faced with challenges to his accomplishment can be seen in the *Bāhitika-sutta* and its parallel, for a study of which cf. Anālayo 2007.

⁶⁹ An example for such disdain can be found in the *Ambaṭṭha-sutta*, DN 3 at DN I 90,15, which reports a Brahmin referring to the Buddha as one of those “baldpated petty recluses, menials, the swarthy offspring from Brahmā's foot”, *muṇḍakā samaṇakā ibbhā kiṇhā bandhupādāpaccā* (B^e, C^e, and S^e: *kaṇhā*; S^e also reads: *bandhupādāpaccā*). Comparable denigrating remarks, with some differences in formulation, can be found in the parallel DĀ 20 at T I 82b24; in fragment 411r6-7 of the *Ambāṣṭha-sūtra*, edited in Melzer 2006: 146; and in the (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, T 1448 at T XXIV 33b19 and T 1451 at T XXIV 378c17, for the Tibetan counterparts cf. Melzer 2006: 147. On the relationship between Brahmins and recluses that stands at the background of such disdain cf. in more detail Anālayo 2009b: 154f, to the references given there I would like to add the discussion in Gombrich 2009: 180-190 of Buddhist texts that poke fun at Brahmins.

⁷⁰ This is the case with the Mahāsāṅghika *Vinaya*, T 1425 at T XXII 464a28, and the Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, T 1435 at T XXIII 193a23.

⁷¹ The Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya*, T 1428 at T XXII 873b6; the Mahīśāsaka *Vinaya*, T 1421 at T XXII 151c3 (which describes his intention and the subsequent meal, without recording an explicit invitation); the (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, Dutt 1984: 263,10; and the Theravāda *Vinaya*, Vin I 246,2.

⁷² T 1428 at T XXII 873c6: “Then the Blessed One in various ways taught him the Dharma to edify him, so that he became delighted. On hearing the Dharma, Sela was exceedingly delighted”; 時世尊為方便說法開化，令得歡喜，施盧聞法極大歡喜。

between him and the Buddha.⁷³ Thus none of the *Vinaya* versions provides details on the talk given by the Buddha to Sela.

Such variations may be due to different degrees of abbreviation of the tale in order to fit it to the context of a *Vinaya* narration, whose purpose is to provide background to a particular rule.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, it also seems quite possible that the encounter between Sela and the Buddha grew from what at first may have been a relatively brief reference. If that should have been the case, then the way the *Sela-sutta* and its *Ekottarika-āgama* parallel depict Sela's conversion would be the final result of two somewhat independent developments that started off from an original that may have had considerably less to say on this theme.

Whatever may be the final word on the precise stages of evolution of these two discourses, the *Ekottarika-āgama* version does put the *Sela-sutta* into perspective. The present instance thus corroborates the importance of comparative studies of the early discourses, showing the potential insights that can emerge if parallel versions of a discourse preserved by other Buddhist schools are taken into account. In the case of the *Sela-sutta*, such comparative study suggests that the ideas that flattery will cause the Buddha to praise himself, and that such praise in turn then becomes the central means of converting an eminent Brahmin, probably reflect later developments.

⁷³ Dutt 1984: 264,5.

⁷⁴ The *Keṇiyajaṭilavatthu* in the Theravāda *Vinaya*, Vin I 245,8 to Vin I 246,uit., does not refer to Sela at all, even though its report of Keṇiya inviting the Buddha and of the ensuing offering of a meal corresponds to the respective sections of the *Sela-sutta*. Perera 1950: 199 comments that it could be argued that the reason for this would be that Sela's conversion was not relevant to the rule discussed in this section of the *Vinaya*, though *ibid.* p. 200 then points out that this assumption is weakened by the fact that Keṇiya is not mentioned at all in Sela's verses in the *Theragāthā*, unlike the historically probably later *Apadāna* verses, where Sela does refer to Keṇiya, cf. Ap 318,14 (389,26). Perera then concludes that the *Theragāthā* verses and the *Vinaya* account may have been two originally independent narratives that were combined in the *Sela-sutta*.

Abbreviations

Ap	<i>Apadāna</i>
B ^e	Burmese edition
C ^e	Ceylonese edition
D	Derge edition
DĀ	<i>Dīrgha-āgama</i> (T 1)
DN	<i>Dīgha-nikāya</i>
EĀ	<i>Ekottarika-āgama</i> (T 125)
E ^e	PTS edition
MĀ	<i>Madhyama-āgama</i> (T 26)
Mil	<i>Milindapañha</i>
MN	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
Pj II	<i>Paramatthajotikā</i>
Ps	<i>Papañcasūdanī</i>
Q	Peking edition
S ^e	Siamese edition
Sn	<i>Sutta-nipāta</i> ⁷⁵
T	Taishō (CBETA)
Th	<i>Theragāthā</i>
Vin	<i>Vinaya</i>

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⁷⁵ Since much of the *Sela-sutta* is in prose, my references are to page and line of the text, not to its verses (though wherever possible I supply the verse number in brackets). The edition consulted by me is the PTS edition by Andersen and Smith 1913/1984.

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