

Oral Dimensions of Pāli Discourses: Pericopes, other Mnemonic Techniques and the Oral Performance Context

Bhikkhu Anālayo

Abstract:

The present paper examines the form and function of Pāli discourses as orally transmitted material. The first part takes up formal elements, such as "sound similarities", the "principle of waxing syllables", the frequent use of "repetition", and "pericopes". The second part turns to functional aspects of the Pāli oral tradition, examining its "purposes" and the "reciters" responsible for its performance.

1.1 Formal Elements – Sound Similarities

The standard opening to a discourse reads "thus have I heard, at one time",¹ followed by noting the whereabouts of the Buddha at the time of the particular event or teaching recorded in the discourse. The opening "I have heard" quite explicitly draws attention to the oral nature of what is to follow.² According to the traditional account, these words were spoken by Ānanda and stand for his oral reception and subsequent transmission of the teachings he had heard.³ Not only the content, but also the form of this formulaic beginning testifies to oral transmission. Even among these first few words, found at the beginning of each discourse, sound and metrical similarities can be detected that are used throughout the discourses to facilitate memorization and recitation. Such sound similarities can involve "alliteration", repetition of an initial

sound, "assonance", repetition of a sound found in the middle of a word, and "homoioteleuton", repetition of the final sound.

As illustrated in figure 1, the two parts of the standard opening to a Pāli discourse, *evaṃ me sutāṃ* and *ekaṃ samayaṃ*, each consists of five syllables. The first word in each part is closely similar, *evaṃ* and *ekaṃ*, differing only in respect to their second consonant. The words *evaṃ*, *sutāṃ*, *ekaṃ* and *samayaṃ* share the *-aṃ* ending,⁴ while the words *sutāṃ* and *samayaṃ* share the same initial consonant.⁵ Thus, even though these few words are merely a prose introduction to a discourse, a closer inspection reveals sound similarities that occur with considerable frequency in other prose sections of the early discourses, especially in listings of similar words or in formulaic expressions.

Figure 1: Sound similarities in the two sections of the standard opening of a discourse

| | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>evaṃ me sutāṃ</i> | <i>ekaṃ samayaṃ</i> |
| <i>e(v)aṃ</i> | <i>e(k)aṃ</i> |
| <i>(ev)aṃ (sut)aṃ</i> | <i>(ek)aṃ (sayaṃ)aṃ</i> |
| <i>s(utaṃ)</i> | <i>s(amayaṃ)</i> |

1.2 Formal Elements – The Principle of Waxing Syllables

Another oral feature of the early discourses can be found in the frequent use of strings of synonyms. Such a string of synonyms serves to safeguard against loss, since a whole set of similar words stands much greater chance of being remembered than a single word and also better impresses itself on the audience.⁶

A closer look at such strings or clusters of words brings to light that its members tend to occur in a metrical sequence that follows the principle of "waxing syllables". According to this principle, words with fewer syllables in a series of terms are followed by words with an equal or greater number of syllables. This principle is also applied to listings and enumerations whose members do not share the same meaning. A few selected examples in figure 2 show how a particular theme is expressed by a string of terms with ascending syllable count.⁷

Figure 2: The principle of waxing syllables

| Theme: | Pāli terms: | Syllable count: |
|-------------------|--|-----------------|
| old | <i>jiṇṇo vuddho mahallako addhagato vayo-anuppatto</i> | 2+2+4+4+6 |
| growth | <i>vuddhiṃ virūhiṃ vepullaṃ</i> | 2+3+3 |
| fear | <i>bhīto saṃviggo lomahatthajāto</i> | 2+3+6 |
| to (mis)-meditate | <i>jhāyanti pajjhāyanti nijjhāyanti apajjhāyanti</i> | 3+4+4+5 |
| able to attain | <i>nikāmalābhī akicchālābhī akasiralābhī</i> | 5+5+6 |
| poor | <i>daliddo assako anālhiyo</i> | 3+3+4 |
| wealthy | <i>addho mahaddhano mahābhogo</i> | 2+4+4 |

The crescendo effect that results from the application of this principle is a typical stylistic feature of the early discourses, further enhanced when word sequences arranged according to the waxing syllable principle also share sound similarities. If a sequence of words becomes relatively long, this principle is not applied to the sequence as a whole, but to subunits within the sequence. Such subunits can share a similar nuance of meaning or belong to the same category, and the division into subunits may have the function to set a rhythm that allows the reciter to take a breath before continuing recitation. An example in case is the description of various types of talks that are unbecoming and should better be avoided, presented in figure 3 below.⁸

Figure 3: Subunits in the description of irrelevant types of talk

1st subunit, syllable-count 4+4+6:

rājakathaṃ, corakathaṃ, mahāmatthakathaṃ,

talk on men to be reckoned with: "kings, robbers, ministers".

2nd subunit, syllable-count 4+4+4:

senākathaṃ, bhayakathaṃ, yuddhakathaṃ,

talk on war: "armies, dangers, battles".

3rd subunit, syllable-count 4+4+4+5:

annakathaṃ, pānakathaṃ, vatthakathaṃ, sayanakathaṃ,

talk on requisites: "food, drink, clothing, beds".

4th subunit, syllable-count: 4+4+4+4:

mālākathaṃ, gandhakathaṃ, ñātikathaṃ, yānakathaṃ,

talk on household life: "garlands, perfumes, relatives, vehicles".

5th subunit, syllable-count: 4+5+5+6:

gāmakathaṃ, nigamakathaṃ, nagarakathaṃ, janapadakathaṃ,

talk on geographical localities: "villages, towns, cities, counties".

6th subunit, syllable-count: 4+4+5+6+6:
itthikathaṃ, sūrakathaṃ, visikhākathaṃ, kumbaṭṭhānakathaṃ,
pubbapetakathaṃ,
 talk on gossip: "women, heroes, streets, wells, the departed".

The same principle can also be responsible for the order of terms in *dvanda* compounds. An example would be the *pācittiya* regulation according to which a monk should not teach more than "six or five" words in particular circumstances, *cha-pañca*, where the sequence of the numerals seems to follow the principle of waxing syllables against the natural ascending order of the numbers five and six.⁹ Another case is the expression *Dhamma-vinaya*, where the reason for *Vinaya* to stand in second position may well be its syllable count of three against the two syllables of *Dhamma*. The application of the principle of waxing syllables to *dvanda* compounds is in fact a rule recognized by Pāṇini.¹⁰

1.3 Formal Elements – Repetition

The oral nature of the early discourses also easily impresses itself on the reader – or perhaps better on its ‘audience’ – due to the frequent occurrence of repetition. When treating a particular topic in its positive and negative manifestations, for example, it is standard procedure in the discourses to repeat the same passage with precisely the same words and formulations used for the positive case, making only the most minimal changes required in order to adjust these to the negative case. The same procedure becomes even more prominent when a series of different perspectives on a particular topic are explored. Thus a treatment of, for example, four types of persons or modes of acting, will use four times nearly the same text in order to achieve its aim.

In addition to the frequent occurrence of repetition within a single discourse, the early discourses also make recurrent use of ‘pericopes’, formulaic expressions or phrases that depict a recurrent situation or event and whose purpose is to facilitate memorization.¹¹ Whether it is a description of how someone approaches the Buddha or of how someone attains liberation, pericopes will be employed with a fixed set of phrases and expressions, with only the most minimal changes introduced to adapt these pericopes to the individual occasion. These two features, the repetition of passages within a discourse and the use of pericopes throughout

a discourse collection, are responsible for the highly repetitive nature of the early discourses.¹²

These various oral characteristics of the early discourses testify to the importance of verbatim repetition in the early Buddhist oral tradition.¹³ In this respect, the transmission of texts in early Buddhism differs from oral traditions in general, where improvisation is a prominent feature. The performance of oral literature of an epic or narrative type demands innovation and improvisation from the performer, whose task is to present the main elements of a tale in such a way as to best entertain the audience. This type of oral literature is thus freely re-created every time it is told.¹⁴ In contrast, the purpose of the early Buddhist oral tradition was the preservation of sacred material, for which free improvisation is inappropriate.¹⁵ Moreover, recitation was often undertaken communally by the reciters, which leaves little scope for free improvisation.¹⁶

The emphasis on verbatim transmission in the early Buddhist oral tradition can even be detected in some transmission errors, where at times in otherwise closely similar Pāli and Sanskrit passages the counterpart to a particular term shows close phonetic similarity but a considerably different meaning. In such cases, it seems as if the attempt of the reciters to precisely remember has preserved formal aspects, even though the meaning was lost.¹⁷

As is only to be expected of material that has been orally transmitted over longer periods of time, in spite of the various measures undertaken to ensure correct transmission, variations nevertheless occur. In the case of the Pāli discourses, a significant portion of the early Buddhist reciters involved in the transmission of these discourses would not have been trained in memorization skills from their early youth onwards, as was the case for Vedic reciters.¹⁸ This makes it nearly unavoidable for errors in transmission to take place.

Such differences do not only occur between the material transmitted by different Buddhist schools, but can even be found within the material transmitted by a single school, such as within the Pāli texts transmitted by the Theravāda tradition. One type of differences that tend to occur involves variations in the use of pericopes. Such pericope variations usually affect those parts of a discourse that were added by the reciters in order to provide a background narration to the words spoken by the Buddha or his disciples.

1.4 Formal Elements – Pericope Variations

A difference in the use of pericopes can be seen, for example, between a discourse in the *Dīgha-nikāya* and a discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, two discourses that treat the same event, namely a visit paid by the minister Vassakāra to the Buddha in order to find out what the Buddha would say about King Ajātasattu's plan to attack the Vajjians.¹⁹ While the *Dīgha-nikāya* version describes in detail how Vassakāra got his chariot ready, drove with the chariot and then descended from the chariot to proceed on foot, its *Aṅguttara-nikāya* counterpart does not mention Vassakāra's mode of arrival at all, but simply notes that he approached the Buddha.

a) Vassakāro ... assented [to the order given to him] by Ajātasattu Vedehiputta, the king of Magadha, got the state carriages ready and mounted them, left Rājagaha by state carriage and went towards Mount Vulture Peak. After going as far as the ground was passable for carriages he descended from the carriage and approached the Blessed One on foot.

Vassakāro ... rañño Māgadhasa Ajātasattussa Vedehiputtassa paṭisutvā, bhaddāni bhaddāni yānāni yojāpetvā, bhaddaṃ yānaṃ abhirūhitvā,²⁰ bhaddehi bhaddehi yānehi Rājagahamhā niyyāsi, yena Gijjhakūṭo pabbato tena pāyāsi, yāvatikā yānassa bhūmi yānena gantvā yānā paccorohitvā pattiko yena bhagavā ten' upasaṅkami.²¹

b) Vassakāro ... assented [to the order given to him] by Ajātasattu Vedehiputta, the king of Magadha and approached the Blessed One.

Vassakāro ... rañño Māgadhasa Ajātasattussa Vedehiputtassa paṭisunītvā,²² yena bhagavā ten' upasaṅkami.²³

Another case where the records of the same event differ in the detail in which they depict how someone approaches the Buddha can be found between the altogether four discourses that describe the famous last meeting between Māra and the Buddha, in which the Evil One asked the Buddha to pass away.²⁴ While the *Dīgha-nikāya* and the *Udāna* versions report that Māra approached the Buddha, stood at one side and then addressed the Buddha; the *Samyutta-nikāya* version of the same event does not mention that he stood at one side, but only records that he ap-

proached the Buddha. The *Āṅguttara-nikāya* version does not record any approach at all.

a) Not long after venerable Ānanda had left, Māra the Evil One approached the Blessed One; having approached he stood on one side; standing on one side, Māra the Evil One said this to the Blessed One ...

*Māro pāpimā acirapakkante āyasmante Ānande yena bhagavā ten' upasaṅkami, upasaṅkamitvā ekamantaṃ aṭṭhāsi; ekamantaṃ ṭhito kho Māro pāpimā bhagavantaṃ etad avoca ...*²⁵

b) Not long after venerable Ānanda had left, Māra the Evil One approached the Blessed One; having approached he said this ...

*Māro pāpimā acirapakkante āyasmante Ānande²⁶ yena bhagavā ten' upasaṅkami,²⁷ upasaṅkamitvā²⁸ etad avoca ...*²⁹

c) Not long after venerable Ānanda had left, Māra the Evil One said this to the Blessed One ...

*Māro pāpimā acirapakkante āyasmante Ānande bhagavantaṃ etad avoca.*³⁰

Pericopes also differ when it comes to describing the respectful attitude with which someone listens to a sermon given after a meal by the Buddha or by a monk. For such occasions, the *Dīgha-nikāya*, the *Majjhima-nikāya*, the *Udāna*, and the *Sutta-nipāta* employ a pericope that describes how the listener(s) take(s) a low seat, an obvious expression of respect.³¹ Similar situations in the *Vinaya* and in the *Āṅguttara-nikāya*, however, do not mention a low seat.³² This difference is particularly notable in the case of a meal given by Prince Bodhi, as the same meal is recorded in the *Majjhima-nikāya* and the *Vinaya*, so that in this case the same event is described once with and once without the taking of the low seat.

a) When the Blessed One had eaten and had removed [his] hands from the bowl, Prince Bodhi took a low seat and sat down on one side.

*Bodhi rājakumāro ... bhagavantaṃ bhuttāviṃ onītapattapāṇiṃ aññataraṃ nīcaṃ āsanaṃ gahetvā ekamantaṃ nisīdi.*³³

b) When the Blessed One had eaten and had removed [his] hands from the bowl, Prince Bodhi sat down on one side.

*Bodhi rājakumāro ... bhagavantaṃ bhuttāviṃ onītapattapāṇiṃ ekamantaṃ nisīdi.*³⁴

The application of a pericope can at times result in inconsistencies within a discourse. An example is the pericope that describes how the Buddha or a monk gets ready to beg alms. Since food has to be taken before noon, such preparations are usually made in the early morning, so that this pericope describes how "in the morning" the Buddha or a monk dresses and takes his bowl and robe in order to approach the next village or town.³⁵ The frequent occurrence of this pericope has caused it to be also applied to a passage in the *Vinaya* and the *Udāna* where it does not fit its context. This passage records how the Buddha was travelling and arrived in a particular place where he was invited to come to the local hall. The villagers then approached the same hall and listened to a discourse by the Buddha that went on well into the night. Even though the circumstances make it clear that the invitation to come to the local hall must have taken place in the late afternoon or evening, the *Vinaya* and the *Udāna* nevertheless report that it was "in the morning" that the Buddha followed the invitation by dressing and taking his bowl and robe in order to approach the local hall.³⁶

The relatively circumstantial differences noted so far may seem negligible, since they do not affect essential matters. Not all such errors, however, are of such circumstantial character. A somewhat more significant variation in the use of the pericopes employed at the conclusion of a discourse can be found between the *Samyutta-nikāya* and the *Sutta-nipāta* versions of the *Kasibhāradvāja-sutta*. These two discourses treat the same event but differ in their conclusion, as according to the *Samyutta-nikāya* account Kasibhāradvāja took refuge and declared himself to be a lay follower, while according to the *Sutta-nipāta* version he took refuge, requested ordination and became an *arahant*.

a) I go for refuge to venerable Gotama, to the *Dhamma* and to the community of monks, may venerable Gotama remember me as a lay follower who from today on has gone for refuge for life.

*eśahaṃ bhavantaṃ*³⁷ *Gotamaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi dhammañ ca bhikkhusaṅghañ ca, upāsakaṃ maṃ bhavaṃ Gotamo dhāretu ajjagge pāṇupetaṃ saraṇaṃ gatan'ti.*³⁸

b) I go for refuge to venerable Gotama, to the *Dhamma* and to the community of monks, may I receive the going forth in the presence of venerable Gotama and the full admission ... and venerable Bhāradvāja became one of the arahats.

esāhaṃ bhavaṃtaṃ Gotamaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi dhammaṃ ca bhikkhusaṅghaṃ ca,³⁹ labheyyāhaṃ bhoto Gotamassa santike pabbajjaṃ labheyyaṃ upasampadan'ti ... aññataro ca kho⁴⁰ panāyasmā Bhāradvājo arahataṃ ahosi.⁴¹

In regard to variations in the use of pericopes, it is also of interest to compare their use in Pāli discourses to the usage in discourses from the Chinese *Āgamas*. Taking as an example the *Madhyama-āgama* collection preserved in Chinese, discourses found in this collection regularly describe how a monk fans the Buddha,⁴² a circumstance noted only rarely in discourses found in its Pāli counterpart, the *Majjhima-nikāya*.⁴³ On frequent occasions *Madhyama-āgama* discourses also mention the sitting mat,⁴⁴ one of the standard requisites of a monk, while their Pāli counterparts tend to refer to the same accessory only on very few occasions.⁴⁵ Another standard pericope in the *Madhyama-āgama* describes how a visitor or a monk will depart from the presence of the Buddha by performing three circumambulations, a circumstance not mentioned in *Majjhima-nikāya* discourses.⁴⁶ The two collections also differ in their descriptions of how listeners will express their appreciation of the teachings, since whereas in a *Majjhima-nikāya* discourse they exclaim "wonderful, wonderful", in a *Madhyama-āgama* discourse they rather inform the Buddha: "I understood, I realized".⁴⁷ Again, when someone asks the Buddha or a monk a question in the *Madhyama-āgama*, the actual question will be preceded by a request to be given permission to put a question,⁴⁸ a pericope found only rarely in the *Majjhima-nikāya*.⁴⁹

Other pericopes, found in the *Majjhima-nikāya*, are absent from the *Madhyama-āgama*. One example is the pericope employed regularly at the beginning of a *Majjhima-nikāya* discourse, in which the Buddha addresses his disciples with "monks", and the monks reply "venerable sir", after which the Buddha announces his topic and proceeds to deliver the discourse, an exchange not found in *Madhyama-āgama* discourses.⁵⁰ A closer inspection shows that this pericope does not fit too well with the remainder of the Pāli discourses in which it occurs, in as much as the vocative "monks", *bhikkhavo*, used in this passage, differs from the vocative address "monks", *bhikkhave*, used in the remainder of the dis-

course.⁵¹ Similarly, the first vocative "venerable sir", *bhadante*, used by the monks, is not the same as the vocative "venerable sir", *bhante*, used by them elsewhere in the discourse.⁵² Since there would be no reason for starting with one particular vocative and then switching to another type of vocative, this difference suggests that this pericope may have been added during oral transmission. Though this pericope is not found in the *Madhyama-āgama*, it does occur in an individual translation, i.e. a discourse translated individually into Chinese. Notably, this discourse stems from a (no longer extant) *Madhyama-āgama* collection.⁵³

2.1 Functional Aspects – The Purposes of Recitation

To make the above survey of formal aspects of Pāli orality come alive, the second part of the present paper gathers information from the Pāli canonical sources regarding the purposes of oral recitation. This will be followed by examining the individuals who, according to these same sources, were involved in carrying out the oral transmission of the canonical material to later generations.

The oral transmission of the early discourses may well be as old as Buddhism itself. According to the different *Vinayas*, soon after his awakening the Buddha sent his first monk disciples out to teach others.⁵⁴ For these disciples to engage in teaching activities, one would expect them to have taken some teachings along that they might use to explain the *Dhamma*, teachings they would then eventually have passed on to their disciples.⁵⁵

Such teachings would obviously have been in an oral form. Some of the first monk disciples, like Yasa and his friends, were not Brahmins trained in the art of oral transmission, so the material they took along must have been relatively easy to memorize. Though the discourses at that time would have been few, it may not be too far-fetched to suppose that already at that time some degree of formalization of these discourses, to facilitate their oral transmission, had taken place.⁵⁶

In fact, it could even be imagined that some oral features were already employed when the discourses were first spoken,⁵⁷ as even today repetition is used as a tool to drive home a point when giving a speech, whereas such repetition is avoided in a written presentation. Thus, some formalistic features could already have been integral to the discourses when they were first delivered, to ensure that the listeners kept the main

points well in mind. This need is reflected in a discourse in the *Anguttara-nikāya*. This discourse highlights that, even though listeners may be paying attention when the *Dhamma* is being taught, once they leave some might quickly forget what they have heard.⁵⁸ Hence, in order to satisfy the requirements of the expanding early Buddhist community, a to some degree formalized body of oral material may have already come into existence during the Buddha's lifetime.

Besides facilitating teaching and preaching, such a formalized body of oral material would also have had the function of creating a sense of unity and communal concord through group recital. In fact, the *Saṅgīti-sutta* and its parallels explicitly take their occasion from the need to ensure harmony in the face of the strife that according to these discourses had occurred among the Jains after the death of their leader.⁵⁹ The fortnightly recitation of the code of rules (*pātimokkha*) was another important manifestation of communal harmony, and a discourse reports that even monks who otherwise lived in complete seclusion would come to join the nearest monastic community for such occasions.⁶⁰ The relevance of group recitation to communal harmony can also be seen in the accounts of the later councils, where success in establishing communal harmony finds expression in the performance of communal recital.⁶¹

In addition to functioning as a tool for the preservation of the teachings and for expressing communal harmony, some discourses indicate that oral recitation in early Buddhism had still other functions. A discourse in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* and its parallels in two *Saṃyukta-āgama* translations report that on one occasion, just before dawn, Anuruddha was reciting texts by himself.⁶² A woman overheard him and told her child to be quiet, in order to avoid disturbing Anuruddha's recitation.

According to another discourse in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya*, on a different occasion the Buddha similarly recited a discourse to himself while being alone and in seclusion.⁶³ A monk chanced by and overheard the recitation. The circumstances make it clear that in both cases the recitation was undertaken merely for its own sake, without any teaching purpose in mind. Whereas one might suppose that Anuruddha was privately rehearsing, the Buddha would not have needed to rehearse his own discourses. In fact, what he recited on this occasion was a treatment of the six senses from the perspective of dependent arising (*paṭicca samuppāda*), a treatment that would have been familiar enough to him not to require any private rehearsing. This suggests that his recitation was simply a recollection of the truth he had discovered, perhaps similar to the

inspired utterances that according to the *Udāna* he made soon after his awakening, a time when he was also alone and in seclusion.⁶⁴

The above passages suggest that the early Buddhist oral tradition also served as a way of meditating or reflecting on the *Dhamma*. This impression is confirmed by a list of five possible occasions for reaching liberation, given in several discourses, according to which recitation can even issue in awakening.⁶⁵ These discourses explain that during recitation a deeper understanding can arise that eventually culminates in the breakthrough to liberation. Thus, recitation undertaken for its own sake does seem to function as a means of mental development (*bhāvanā*) in a wider sense, and as such could become a tool for progress on the path to liberation.

Another occasion for reaching liberation, according to the same discourses, is when listening to someone else expounding the teachings. Other discourses indicate that the oral delivery of a discourse can also help the listener to overcome a physical disease. One such instance is the *Girimānanda-sutta*. According to the Pāli and Tibetan versions of this discourse, the Buddha had told Ānanda to recite a teaching on ten types of perception to a sick monk. The monk recovered from his illness as soon as he had heard this teaching.⁶⁶

In this case one might assume that the sick monk found solace in hearing teachings that were new to him. However, three discourses in the *Samyutta-nikāya* indicate that the salutary effect of listening to a recitation can involve teachings that are quite familiar to the respective hearers. In two of these discourses, the Buddha recites the awakening factors to his disciples Mahākassapa and Mahāmoggallāna, respectively, who on hearing this recitation recover their health.⁶⁷ In the third discourse, the Buddha is sick himself and asks another monk to recite the awakening factors for him. On hearing the recitation, the Buddha recovers his health.⁶⁸

Accomplished senior disciples like Mahākassapa and Mahāmoggallāna would have had no need to be informed about the seven awakening factors, not to mention the Buddha himself. Thus on these occasions the recitation of the awakening factors cannot have served merely to convey information.

The discourse that reports how the Buddha recovered through hearing a recitation of the awakening factors has a Chinese and a Sanskrit parallel. Unlike the Pāli discourse, these two parallel versions follow the account

of this event with a set of verses spoken by another monk, who apparently was also present on this occasion. According to these verses, during the recitation the Buddha experienced the taste of liberation (according to the Chinese version) or the taste of the awakening factors (according to the Sanskrit version).⁶⁹ In this way, the Chinese and Sanskrit versions make it clear that the recitation acted as a support for meditative practice.

These instances further support the impression that recitation, whether performed by oneself or by another, served as a tool for meditation in early Buddhism.⁷⁰ A discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* and its Chinese parallels make this point more explicitly, as they advise to practise recitation to overcome sloth-and-torpor.⁷¹ According to the Pāli commentaries, recitation can not only act as an antidote to sloth-and-torpor, but can also help to overcome any type of unwholesome thought.⁷² Thus, the early Buddhist oral tradition was not only a means to preserve texts, but also functioned as an integral part of the practice of the path to liberation. In fact, oral recitation continued for a considerable time even after the writing down of the discourses and is to some degree still practised today, which shows that it serves a greater purpose than preservation of the text.⁷³

2.2 Functional Aspects – The Reciters

With this range of purposes, it becomes quite probable that oral recitation of at least some key texts would have been part of the general training of monks and nuns.⁷⁴ The commentaries explain that a monk who wishes to live a life of seclusion in the forest should memorize at least the code of rules (*pātimokkha*) and two or three recitation sections from a discourse collection.⁷⁵ Ability at reciting a group of texts from memory is reflected in a passage that records the first meeting between the Buddha and the recently ordained Soṇa Koṭikanna. During this meeting, the Buddha asked Soṇa to recite some *Dhamma*,⁷⁶ and Soṇa complied by reciting the sixteen discourses of the *Aṭṭhakavagga*, a collection now found in the *Sutta-nipāta*.⁷⁷ The circumstances make it clear that the Buddha, who had already been pleased by Soṇa's meditative conduct, wanted to see if Soṇa was also able to recite some section of the early Buddhist oral tradition, which would have been considered a complementary qualification of a well-trained monk. This particular incident is also noteworthy in so far as it shows that the Buddha himself sometimes checked to see whether oral recitation was correctly undertaken.

Though every monastic disciple might have had to memorize some material, as the years of the Buddha's ministry went by the oral material would have continued to grow in size, so that its preservation must have become an increasingly specialized and demanding task. Thus it is no surprise when the Pāli *Vinaya* reports that the reciter monks would sometimes pass the whole night busily reciting discourses.⁷⁸ At times, the concern with oral recitation appears to have become excessive and some passages voice criticism of those who neglect seclusion for the sake of recitation.⁷⁹

The recitation of the early Buddhist texts was not only undertaken by monks, but also by nuns. The Theravāda *Vinaya* records that the nuns Thullananda and Bhaddā Kāpilānī were well-learned *Dhamma* preachers and reciters.⁸⁰ In a similar vein, the *Divyāvadāna* refers to nuns who were knowledgeable in the *tripiṭaka*,⁸¹ and the *Dīpavaṃsa* records that nuns in Ceylon were capable at reciting the *Vinaya*, the five *Nikāyas* and the seven works of the *Abhidhamma*.⁸²

In general, the oral transmission of the texts was probably the domain of the monastic disciples.⁸³ In fact, a regulation found in the different *Vinayas* prohibits a monk or a nun from teaching recitation "word by word" to someone who has not received full ordination.⁸⁴ This would make it practically impossible to train laity in recitation to such an extent that they could play a significant role in the preservation of the texts.

Another *Vinaya* ruling shows that, nevertheless, laity also memorized discourses. According to the Theravāda version of this rule, monks are allowed to forgo the travelling restrictions during the rains retreat period for a variety of compelling reasons, one among them being that a lay disciple asks them to come in order to learn a discourse from him, lest it be lost.⁸⁵ The Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya* has preserved this rule differently. According to its report, the reason was not that the monks should come to learn the discourse from the lay disciple, but rather that the lay disciple had forgotten a discourse and wanted the monks to come to teach it to him again.⁸⁶

Whatever may be the final word on the rationale and wording of this *Vinaya* regulation and on how to harmonize it with the *Vinaya* prohibition on teaching recitation "word by word" to those who are fully ordained, other passages give the impression that, at least to some degree, householders were also involved in memorizing the discourses. An example

would be the householder Citta, who when putting a question to some monks would refer to the *Brahmajāla-sutta*, giving the impression that he was well acquainted with this discourse.⁸⁷ Apparently his knowledge of the *Dhamma* was such that at times monks found it difficult to properly reply to his deep questions, in fact some discourses indicate that at times he took his turn in teaching the *Dhamma* to monks.⁸⁸ No wonder the list of eminent disciples in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* reckons him as chief among lay expounders of the *Dhamma*.⁸⁹

Another prominent case is the laywoman Khujjuttarā, who according to the traditional account had memorized the whole of the *Itivuttaka* collection and thereby played a crucial role in preserving this collection for posterity. The Pāli commentary to this work explains that she transmitted the discourses she had memorized to the nuns, who in turn passed them on to the monks.⁹⁰ A closer inspection of the *Itivuttaka* shows that its discourses are set apart from other discourses by the use of peculiar pericopes. Thus, instead of beginning with "thus I have heard", *evaṃ me suttaṃ*, *Itivuttaka* discourses begin with "this was said by the Blessed One, said by the *arahant*, so I have heard", *vuttaṃ hettaṃ bhagavatā, vuttaṃ arahatā, 'ti me suttaṃ*, a peculiarity also preserved in its Chinese translation.⁹¹ The conclusions of *Itivuttaka* discourses are also unique, as are its transitions from prose to verse.⁹²

This is noteworthy in so far as these peculiarities seem to have resisted the natural tendency of oral transmission to stereotype the introduction and conclusion of a discourse. The present example thus complements the above listed examples of pericope variations, where changes would have occurred at some point during oral transmission. In the case of the *Itivuttaka*, however, it seems as if its formal aspects are related to the nature of its first recipient(s) and thus came into being soon after their original delivery, formal aspects that were then apparently passed on unchanged for many generations of reciters to come, without being adapted to fit the form of other discourses. This reinforces the impression that some degree of formalization of the material for oral transmission took place at a very early stage. If the formalization of the discourses had been undertaken at a comparatively late point in time, one would expect the procedure used in the case of other discourses to have been applied similarly to the discourses in the *Itivuttaka*.

Conclusion

In sum, the formal aspects of the Pāli discourses – the use of pericopes, the occurrence of metrical and sound similarities, the application of the principle of waxing syllables, and the recurrent use of repetition – testify to the nature of these discourses as the final product of a prolonged period of oral transmission whose aim was to preserve texts as accurately as possible. The present form of the Pāli discourses is thus clearly shaped by the exigencies of oral recitation, something to which the formulaic beginning of a discourse as *evaṃ me sutam* explicitly draws attention.

Such oral recitation in early Buddhism was not only a means for preserving texts for later generations. Oral group performance also functioned as an expression of communal harmony, while individual recitation – besides its obvious purposes for teaching and preaching – appears to have been used as a contemplative tool as well. Those involved in the oral transmission of the texts would have been predominantly monastic disciples, though lay followers also had memorized sections of the teachings and at times acted as teachers or, in the case of Khujjuttarā, even performed a rather crucial role in the transmission of a whole collection of discourses.

ABBREVIATIONS⁹³

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| AN | <i>Aṅguttara-nikāya</i> |
| B ^e | Burmese edition |
| C ^e | Ceylonese edition |
| D | Derge edition |
| DĀ | <i>Dirgha-āgama</i> (at T 1) |
| DN | <i>Dīgha-nikāya</i> |
| EĀ | <i>Ekottarika-āgama</i> (at T 125) |
| It | <i>Itivuttaka</i> |
| It-a | <i>Itivuttaka-aṭṭhakathā</i> |
| MĀ | <i>Madhyama-āgama</i> (at T 26) |
| MN | <i>Majjhima-nikāya</i> |
| Pj | <i>Paramatthajotikā</i> |
| Ps | <i>Papañcasūdanī</i> |
| SĀ | <i>Saṃyukta-āgama</i> (at T 99) |
| SĀ ² | partial <i>Saṃyukta-āgama</i> (at T 100) |
| SĀ ³ | partial <i>Saṃyukta-āgama</i> (at T 101) |
| S ^e | Siamese edition |

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| SHT | Sanskriithandschriften aus den Turfanfunden |
| SN | <i>Samyutta-nikāya</i> |
| SN ² I | <i>Sagāthavagga</i> of the <i>Samyutta-nikāya</i> , new PTS edition (1998) |
| Sn | <i>Sutta-nipāta</i> |
| T | Taishō |
| Ud | <i>Udāna</i> |
| Vin | <i>Vinaya</i> |

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NOTES

¹ In regard to this standard opening of a discourse, Brough 1950: 416 adduces the Tibetan version 'di skad bdag gis thos pa dus gcig na bcom ldan 'das in support of taking *ekaṃ samayaṃ* to qualify *evaṃ mayā śrutaṃ*, i.e. "at one time I heard: the Blessed One was staying at ...". Tola 1999: 54 points out that to use the qualification "at one time" in regard to the Buddha's whereabouts seems more meaningful than to use the same qualification to indicate that the oral transmission of the discourse took place "at one time". Moreover, the phrase *tena samayena* that regularly introduces the next sentence in the standard beginning part of a discourse obviously refers to the time when the events recorded in the discourse took place, in view of which it would be more natural for the preceding *ekaṃ samayaṃ* to refer to the same. For a criticism of Brough's arguments see also Galloway 1991 and Klaus 2007. According to von Hinüber 1968: 85-86, in as much as Pāli sources are concerned, no arguments can be found in support of assuming that *ekaṃ samayaṃ* qualifies *evaṃ me sutaṃ*. Samtani 1964: 49 notes that Jain *sūtras* have a similar opening: *suyam me*. For further references related to this topic cf. Bongard-Levin 1996: 90 note 1.

² Levering 1989: 61 also notes another function of this introductory formula, in that "teachings were authenticated by the fact that one could demonstrate that ... they had been heard by a specific hearer, that he had heard the Buddha teach them at a particular time and place".

³ Ps I 7.

⁴ The choice of the accusative *ekaṃ samayaṃ* instead of the locative *ekasmiṃ samaye* (cf. the gloss at Ps I 10 as *tasmiṃ samaye* and Wijesekera 1993: 56) might even be related to the sound similarity this creates with the preceding *evaṃ me sutāṃ*.

⁵ Allon 1997a: 195 and 242.

⁶ Oldenberg 1917: 42 comments that the use of such strings of synonyms gives the impression of a certain childlike insistence that ensures that all aspects of a particular matter find expression.

⁷ Examples are selected from the first volume of the *Majjhima-nikāya*, in particular from MN 12 at MN I 82,26; MN 16 at MN I 101,7; MN 35 at MN I 231,37; MN 50 at MN I 334,23; MN 53 at MN I 354,36; MN 66 at MN I 450,34; and MN 66 at MN I 451,36; taking a lead from von Hinüber 1994: 16-30 and Smith 1948: 35. Von Hinüber 1994: 33 draws attention to similar formulas found also in Jain scriptures, such as *naṭṭā*, *gā*, *vāi*, corresponding to *nacca*, *gā*, *vādita* found e.g. in MN 27 at MN I 180,6; cf. also Allon 1997a: 266.

⁸ Taken from MN 76 at MN I 513,23; discussed in Allon 1997b: 48.

⁹ Vin IV 21,37.

¹⁰ Caland 1931: 59-68 quotes Pāṇini 2.2.34 and provides a series of examples where, due to following the law of waxing syllables, the compound members in a *dvanda* come in a sequence that is in opposition to their natural order.

¹¹ Cousins 1983: 1 notes the "widespread use of mnemonic formulae" as a typical feature of early Buddhist oral literature. Griffith 1983: 58 explains that the use of pericopes is "a direct result of the methods by which sacred material was preserved and handed down in the early Buddhist communities; the demands of mnemonic convenience ... meant that the units of tradition ... had to be ... reduced to an easily memorized standard form". Von Simson 1965: 47 compares the function of such pericopes in Buddhist prose to the bones and tendons in the human body, in that both provide stability and support for the other parts. Smith 1987: 598, in an examination of modern oral literature in India, reports the finding that a Rajasthani epic that made frequent use of pericopes (which, according to his description, has the effect that "every battle ... is the same battle, every journey is the same journey, every meeting the same meeting") was transmitted with considerably greater accuracy than other comparable epics. Smith 1977: 151 explains that the reason for the employment of pericopes and the resulting greater accuracy "may lie in the fact that the epic is not merely sung for entertainment, but has a religious function", a reason that would hold true also for the use of pericopes in the oral transmission of the early Buddhist discourses.

¹² In his detailed study of these features in a *Dīgha-nikāya* discourse, Allon 1997a: 359 comes to the conclusion that over 80% of the text of this discourse

involves some form or other of repetition. He concludes (p. 360) that "repetition thus thoroughly permeates every dimension of this class of Buddhist literature".

¹³ Allon 1997a: 252 explains that "it is surely easier to remember a sequence of words arranged ... according to syllable length", just as "it is easier to remember two different words when they share sound similarities and have the same metrical pattern"; cf. also Wynne 2004: 108-112.

¹⁴ According to Lord 1987: 71, such oral transmission involves "never merely memorizing a fixed entity, but ... ever re-creating a new version of older forms and stories".

¹⁵ Bechert 1985: 21 points out that oral tradition in India had achieved a remarkable degree of precision. Hence, as Graham 1987: 138 explains, the "oral transmission of scripture should not be confused with folk oral tradition in which verbatim accuracy is not aspired to".

¹⁶ Allon 1997b: 42 notes that "communal or group recitation or performance requires fixed wording" and would not allow for improvisation. Coward 1986: 300 points out that "group listening to check for errors is still an accepted method of verification in rural India today".

¹⁷ Von Simson 1965: 137-138 gives the following examples: *brahmujjuggatto - bhādrjugātro*; *muducittaṃ - muditacittaṃ*; *aññataro - ājjātavān*; *sammodi sammodanīyaṃ - sammukhaṃ sammodanīṃ*.

¹⁸ Cf. Frauwallner 1956: 173-175 and von Hinüber 1989: 67-68.

¹⁹ Allon 1997a: 39.

²⁰ B^e and S^e read *yojetvā, bhaddaṃ bhaddaṃ*.

²¹ DN 16 at DN II 73,4.

²² B^e reads *paṭissutvā*, C^e reads *paṭissutvā utthāyāsana*.

²³ AN 7:20 at AN IV 18,4. Allon 1997a: 39 notes that a description of how someone approaches by chariot can, however, be found elsewhere in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* collection, cf. e.g. AN 5:50 at AN III 59,27 (King Muṇḍa approaches the monk Nārada); AN 8:12 at AN IV 181,23 (General Sīha approaches the Buddha); and AN 10:30 at AN V 65,9 (King Pasenadi approaches the Buddha); though the description given in these discourses is shorter than the "chariot approach" pericope employed in the *Dīgha-nikāya*.

²⁴ Allon 1997a: 62.

²⁵ DN 16 at DN II 104,12 and Ud 6:1 at Ud 63,13.

²⁶ C^e does not have *acīrapakkante āyasmante Ānande*.

²⁷ S^e adds (*ekamantaṃ aṭṭhāsi. ekamantaṃ ṭhito kho Māro pāpimā*) in brackets.

²⁸ B^e and S^e add *bhagavantam*.

²⁹ SN 51:10 at SN V 260,25.

³⁰ AN 8:70 at AN IV 310,11.

³¹ The pericope of "taking of a low seat", *aññataraṃ nīcaṃ āsanaṃ gahetvā*, leads from the pericope that describes the giving of a meal to a sermon e.g. in DN 3 at DN I 109,36 (for further reference and a discussion of this variation cf. Allon 1997a: 122). The same pericope can also be found regularly in the *Madhyama-āgama*, cf. e.g. MĀ 132 at T I 625b17: 取一小床, in which case it is also found in the Tibetan counterpart at D 'dul ba kha 105b3: *stan ches dma' ba zhig*

blangs te, whereas in the Pāli version MN 82 at MN II 64,²³ the whole episode is not found. Sanskrit occurrences are e.g. *nīcataram āsanaṃ grhītvā* in Dutt 1984: 265,15, being a counterpart to Sn 3:7 at Sn p. 111,9: *aññataraṃ nīcaṃ āsanaṃ gahetvā*; or (*nīcata*)[*r*](*a*)[*k*](*a*)*m-āsanaṃ grhītvā* in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* fragment S 360 folio 187 V5 in Waldschmidt 1950: 26, being a counterpart to DN 16 at DN II 126,26, where the low seat is not mentioned; or *nīcataram āsanaṃ grhītvā* in the *Saṅghabhedavastu* in Gnoli 1977: 145,14, being a counterpart to Vin I 18,9, where the low seat is not mentioned.

³² Instead of the pericope of "taking a low seat" after the pericope that describes the giving of a meal, only the pericope "sat down at one side", *ekamantaṃ nisīdi*, leads over to a sermon e.g. in AN 4:57 at AN II 63,4 (for further references cf. Allon 1997a: 123).

³³ MN 85 at MN II 93,9.

³⁴ Vin II 128,36.

³⁵ E.g. MN 5 at MN I 31,29: *pubbanhasamayaṃ nivāsetvā pattacīvaraṃ ādāya*.

³⁶ Vin I 227,10 = Ud 8:6 at Ud 86,13: *bhagavā pubbaṅhasamayaṃ nivāsetvā pattacīvaraṃ ādāya saddhiṃ bhikkhusaṅghena yena āvasathāgāraṃ ten' upasankami*, followed by describing that the laity heard a discourse from the Buddha and were then dismissed, *bhagavā ... upāsake bahud eva rattiṃ dhammiyā kathāya sandassetvā samādapetvā samuttejetvā sampahaṃsetvā uyyojesi*, where the reference to *bahud eva rattiṃ* makes it clear that the discourse was given at night time, so that the earlier reference to "the morning", *pubbanhasamayaṃ*, does not fit the context. Allon 1997a: 141 notes this error and also draws attention to instances where the pericope is properly adjusted to its context e.g. in MN 53 at MN I 354,12 or in SN 35:202 at SN IV 183,16, which introduce a similar situation only with *nivāsetvā pattacīvaraṃ ādāya*, without the specification *pubbanhasamayaṃ*.

³⁷ Following *bhavantaṃ* in C° against PTS *bhagavantaṃ*, B° and S° abbreviate.

³⁸ SN² 197 at SN² I 372,20 (SN 7:11 at SN I 173,23 reads *dhāretu*).

³⁹ S° adds *upāsakaṃ maṃ bhavaṃ Gotamo dhāretu ajjatagge pāṇupetaṃ saraṇaṃ gataṃ* before *labheyyāhaṃ* etc.

⁴⁰ B° does not have *kho*, S° does not have *ca*.

⁴¹ Sn 1:4 at Sn p. 15,23. The Chinese parallels SĀ 98 at T II 27b26, SĀ² 264 at T II 466c10, and SĀ³ 1 at T II 493b8 agree with Sn 1:4, as according to them he went forth and became an *arahant*.

⁴² E.g. MĀ 33 at T I 474a19: 執拂侍佛.

⁴³ MN 12 at MN I 83,20 and MN 74 at MN I 501,1 report that a monk was fanning the Buddha.

⁴⁴ E.g. MĀ 9 at T I 430b10: 尼師檀 (with a 宋, 元, and 明 variant reading 尼師壇); cf. also Minh Chau 1991: 29.

⁴⁵ MN 24 at MN I 147,5 and MN 147 at MN III 277,30.

⁴⁶ E.g. MĀ 132 at T I 623b23: 繞三匝 and its parallel MN 82 at MN II 56,22: *padakkhiṇaṃ katvā*. A reference to three circumambulations can be found in DN 16 at D II 163,27, according to which Mahākassapa performed three circum-

ambulations of the Buddha's funeral pyre. Part of this pericope has also been preserved in a Sanskrit fragment parallel to an occurrence of this pericope in MĀ 161 at T I 686a18, cf. SHT V 1148 R4 in Waldschmidt 1985: 147: *triprada(kṣiṇīkrtvā)*.

⁴⁷ E.g. MN 7 at MN I 39,27: *abhikkantaṃ ... abhikkantaṃ*, and its counterpart in MĀ 93 at T I 576a10: 我已知 ... 我已解.

⁴⁸ E.g. MĀ 29 at T I 461b27: 我欲有所問, 聽我問耶.

⁴⁹ MN 35 at MN I 229,35; MN 109 at MN III 15,23; and MN 144 at MN III 264,30. Notably, though none of these three Pāli discourses has a parallel in the *Madhyama-āgama*, each has a parallel in the *Samyukta-āgama*, where in each case this pericope is not found, cf. SĀ 110 at T II 35c11 (parallel to MN 35); SĀ 58 at T II 14b17 (parallel to MN 109); and SĀ 1266 at T II 347c23 (parallel to MN 144). A Tibetan version of this pericope can be found in the parallel to MN 90, D 'dul ba kha 88a1, in which case this particular pericope is also found in the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel to the same discourse, MĀ 212 at T I 793b15, but not in the Pāli version.

⁵⁰ E.g. in MN 1 at MN I 1,3: '*bhikkhavo 'ti. 'bhadante 'ti te bhikkhū bhagavato paccassosum*'; on the use of this pericope in the *Dīgha-nikāya* and the *Majjhima-nikāya* cf. also Manné 1990: 33; on its relative lateness Meisig 1987: 225.

⁵¹ MN 1 at MN I 1,5 continues with *bhikkhave*. On the vocative *bhikkhave* cf. also Bechert 1991: 11 and Lüders 1954: 13.

⁵² MN 1 at MN I 1,7 continues with *bhante*.

⁵³ T 48 at T I 837c25: "the Buddha said: 'monks!'; the monks replied: 'yes, indeed!'; the monks listened to the Buddha; the Buddha said ... "; 佛告諸比丘, 比丘應曰唯然, 比丘從佛聽, 佛說. According to the introductory remark in T 48 at T I 837c21, this discourse stems from a *Madhyama-āgama* collection, 出中阿含.

⁵⁴ This account can be found in the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya*, T 1428 at T XXII 793a7; in the *Mahāvastu* of the Mahāsāṅghika tradition in Senart 1897: 415,8; in the Mahīśāsaka *Vinaya*, T 1421 at T XXII 108a7; in the (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, T 1450 at T XXIV 130a20; in the Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, T 1440 at T XXIII 511a12; and in the Theravāda *Vinaya* at Vin I 21,1; cf. also SN 4:5 at SN I 105,24 (or SN² 141 at SN² I 236,10) and its parallel SĀ 1096 at T II 288b3.

⁵⁵ Cf. also Gombrich 1990: 25.

⁵⁶ Davidson 1992: 293 comments that the "processes of elaboration and consolidation must have begun during the life of the Buddha".

⁵⁷ Williams 1970: 166 suggests that "it is possible that the Buddha's teaching methods included repetition and stylized formulae to aid memorization".

⁵⁸ This is found in AN 3:30 at AN I 130,29, which illustrates the case of someone who listens but then forgets it all again after leaving with the example of having different types of seeds on one's lap and then getting up quickly, as a result of which the seeds will all be scattered around.

⁵⁹ DN 33 at DN III 210,18; DĀ 9 at T I 49c6 and Sanskrit fragment K 484 folio 11 Rc in Stache-Rosen 1968: 17.

⁶⁰ MN 77 at MN II 8,30 reports that even those disciples who excelled in living

in seclusion would come for the fortnightly recitation of the code of rules, *te an-vaddhamāsaṃ saṅghamajjhe osaranti pātimokkhuddesāya*; and according to Vin I 105,26 a monk should come for the fortnightly recitation even if he is living apart.

⁶¹ Tilakaratne 2000: 175-176 explains that "the fundamental purpose of the act of *saṅgāyana* and therefore of the events described as *saṅgīti* is the assurance of the unity of the Buddhist monastic organisation", "in the act of *saṅgāyana* ... the key activity was to recite together", " memorization or preservation of the Canon ... was not its main purpose ... the act of *saṅgāyana*, first and foremost, was meant to be a public expression of one's allegiance to the organisation which was represented by the Dhamma and the Vinaya"; " the recital of the Pātimokkha by the members of the Saṅgha every fortnight serves virtually the same purpose"; cf. also Bareau 1955: 134 and Witanachchi 2006: 721, who points out that "what is relevant in a *saṅgīti* is not so much the reciting of the text together, but the absence of any discordance".

⁶² SN 10:6 at SN I 209,19 (or SN² 240 at SN² I 451,11); SĀ 1321 at T II 362c10 and SĀ² 320 at T II 480c21.

⁶³ SN 12:45 at SN II 74,15: *bhagavā rahogato paṭisallīno imam dhammapariyāyam abhāsi*.

⁶⁴ Ud 1:1-3 at Ud 1-3; cf. also Vin I 1-2.

⁶⁵ DN 33 at DN III 241,26; DN 34 at DN III 279,12 (abbr.); AN 5:26 at AN III 22,14; DĀ 9 at T I 51c10; DĀ 10 at T I 53c22; and SĀ 565 at T II 149a6; cf. also Collins 1992: 126-127. Coward 1986: 300-301 explains that "the mere memorization of the text is not judged to be the most important aspect of the oral tradition ... by chanting or listening to the rhythmic words of a sacred text, the teaching and inspiration in the words becomes renewed and reinforced. In this sense the oral recitation of a text is a sacramental act".

⁶⁶ AN 10:60 at AN V 112,16 and D *shes ka* 279a1; translated in Feer 1883: 150; a Tibetan discourse that apparently was translated from a Pāli original, cf. Skilling 1993: 84-98 and 123-124.

⁶⁷ SN 46:14-15 at SN V 79-80. SN 46:14 has a counterpart at D *shes ka* 281b-282a, translated in Feer 1883: 150-152; another Tibetan discourse that appears to have been translated from a Pāli original, cf. Skilling 1993: 127.

⁶⁸ SN 46:16 at SN V 81,23.

⁶⁹ SĀ 727 at T II 195c23: 聞說七覺分, 深達正覺味, with its counterpart in *bodhyaṅgakathāṃ śrutvā, bodhyaṅgānāṃ rasam sa vijñāya* in Waldschmidt 1967: 244. The verses continue by describing that such listening to the teachings leads to the arising of joy and to calmness of the body. De Silva 1993: 33 (without knowing the Chinese and Sanskrit versions) explains that "when one is reminded of the spiritual qualities one has already cultivated ... great joy must be arising in the mind. Such joy is perhaps capable of altering the body's chemistry in a positive manner".

⁷⁰ Kwella 1978: 173 explains that "the texts repeat very often the same words... the *citta* ... comes to the same subtle pictures ever and ever again ... a comparatively high concentration of the mind ... will be the ... result".

⁷¹ AN 7:58 at AN IV 86,9: *yathāsutaṃ yathāpariyattaṃ dhammaṃ vitthārena sajjhāyaṃ kareyyāsi*, with its counterparts in MĀ 83 at T I 559c13: 當隨本所聞法, 隨而受持廣布誦習; and in T 47 at T I 837a21: 聞法如所誦法, 廣當誦習.

⁷² Ps II 91: recommends reciting with loud voice to overcome unwholesome thoughts, *mahāsaddena sajjhāyitabbo*.

⁷³ Bechert 1992: 53: explains that "oral tradition continued to exist side by side with written scriptures for many centuries. Malalasekera 1994: 46 notes that the "practice of learning up portions of the Scriptures continued ... for a very long time" even after they had been written down. This finds confirmation in the travel records by Fa-xian (法顯), who towards the end of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth century searched in vain for *Vinaya* manuscripts all over India, as the material was still transmitted purely through oral means, T 2085 at T LI 864b18: 皆師師口傳, translated in Legge 1998: 98 (though, as pointed out by Demiéville 1951: 247 note 1, the lack of *Vinaya* manuscript would also have been in part due to the intentionally restricted circulation of such material).

⁷⁴ Cousins 1983: 5 explains that "every monk would need a stock of small pieces for chanting when visiting the sick or for recitation after receiving food".

⁷⁵ Pj II 194: *pātimokkhaṃ dve tīṇi bhāṇāvārasuttantāni ca paṇaṇaṃ katvā*, cf. also Collins 1992: 123.

⁷⁶ Ud 5:6 at Ud 59,20: *paṭibhātu taṃ, bhikkhu, dhammaṃ bhāsituṃ* (following S^e-Ud 165, while B^e-Ud 148 and C^e-Ud 244 read *dhammo* and the PTS edition reads *paṭibhātu bhikkhūnaṃ*); cf. also Vin I 196,34.

⁷⁷ Ud 5:6 at Ud 59,22: *soḷasa aṭṭhakavaggikāni sabbān' eva sarena abhaṇi*. For a detailed study of the texts that according to the different *Vinayas* Soṇa recited on this occasion cf. Lévi 1915.

⁷⁸ Vin I 169,6: *suttantikehi suttantaṃ saṅgāyantehi*, which it mentions in addition to *dhammakathikehi dhammaṃ sākacchantehi*, discussion on the *Dhamma* by those who teach the *Dhamma*, and *vinayadharehi vinayaṃ vinicchinantehi*, investigation of *Vinaya* matters by the *Vinaya* specialists, which indicates that the first of these three intends mere recitation of the texts.

⁷⁹ AN 5:73 at AN III 86,25; cf. also AN 6:46 at AN III 355,6 on the conflict between monks who emphasized theoretical learning and those who emphasized meditation.

⁸⁰ Vin IV 254,4; Vin IV 255,4; Vin IV 256,23; Vin IV 285,18; Vin IV 290,4; Vin IV 292,14 and Vin IV 302,21 present the nun Thullananda as *bahussutā bhāṇikā*; epithets accorded at Vin IV 290,6 and Vin IV 292,14 also to Bhaddā Kāpilānī. Skilling 2000: 61 note 43, however, suggests to take *bhāṇikā* not in the sense of "reciter", as the term with this meaning is found only in later texts, but in the sense of "eloquent".

⁸¹ Cowell 1887: 493,8: *bhikṣuṇyas tripiṭā dhārmakathikā*; cf. also Skilling 2000: 62.

⁸² Dīp verse 18:13 in Oldenberg 1879: 97,6; cf. also Skilling 2000: 64.

⁸³ Gombrich 1990: 25 explains that, though some lay people knew texts by

heart, "only monks and nuns ... were so organized that they could hand them on to future generations".

⁸⁴ These are the *pācittiya/pāṭayantika* rule no. 6 in the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya*, T 1428 at T XXII 639a5, which prohibits "reciting together", 共誦者; rule no. 6 in the Mahāsāṅghika *Vinaya*, T 1425 at T XXII 336c20, which prohibits "teaching ... to speak the *Dharma* by sentence", 教 ... 說句法, which in the Sanskrit version in Tatia 1975: 19,16 reads: *padaśo dharmam vācaya*; rule no. 6 in the Mahīśāsaka *Vinaya*, T 1421 at T XXII 39c22, which prohibits "teaching ... to recite the discourse(s)", 教 ... 誦經; rule no. 6 in the (Mūla-)sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, T 1442 at T XXIII 771c22, which prohibits "teaching the *Dharma* in sentence and phrases by joint recitation", 同句讀誦教授法者, which in the Sanskrit version in Banerjee 1977: 32,11 reads: *padaśo dharmam vācayet* (the Tibetan version in Vidyabhusana 1915: 77,3 reads *tshig gis chos 'don na lhung byed do*); rule no. 6 in the Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, T 1435 at T XXIII 71a7, which prohibits "teaching the *Dharma* by way of sentence", 以句法教, which in the Sanskrit version in von Simson 2000: 205,3 reads: *padaśo dharmam vācayet*; and rule no. 4 in the Theravāda *Vinaya* at Vin IV 14,30, which enjoins that one should not "make recite the *Dhamma* sentence by sentence", *padaso dhammam vāceyya*. For a comparative study of the different *Vinaya* accounts of this rule cf. Lévi 1915: 422-423 and 436-441. Wynne 2004: 109 notes that the wording of this rule shows that "Sutta portions of the early Buddhist literature were learnt verbatim among the ordained".

⁸⁵ Vin I 140,36: *āgacchantu bhaddantā imaṃ suttantaṃ pariyāpuṇissanti pur' āyaṃ suttantaṃ palujjati*.

⁸⁶ T 1435 at T XXIII 174b28: 若先學忘欲誦, 大德來教我受學讀誦問義.

⁸⁷ SN 41:3 at SN IV 286,12. The parallel SĀ 570 at T II 151a12 differs, as according to its presentation he formulated his question without referring to any discourse in particular.

⁸⁸ In SN 41:1 at SN IV 282,28 and its parallel SĀ 572 at T II 152a12, Citta gives an exposition on the topic of "fettors" to a group of monks who had been unable to resolve a discussion on this issue. SN 41:5 at SN IV 292,1 and its parallel SĀ 566 at T II 149b14 report how Citta explains the meaning of a verse (found in Ud 7:5 at Ud 76,26) to a monk (though in this case it could also be that the monk only asked in order to test the householder's wisdom, not out of ignorance).

⁸⁹ AN 1:14 at AN I 26,5: *etad aggaṃ mama sāvakaṇaṃ upāsakaṇaṃ dhamma-kathikāṇaṃ yadidaṃ Citto gahapati*; while its counterpart EĀ 6.1 at T II 559c10 extols his superior wisdom, 智慧.

⁹⁰ Iti-a 32. Cf. also AN 1:14 at AN I 26,19, according to which Khujjuttarā was outstanding for "having heard much", *bahussuta* (the listing of eminent disciples in EĀ 7.1 at T II 560b1 instead reckons her outstanding for her wisdom, 智慧); and AN 2:12 at AN I 89,2, which presents Khujjuttarā as an exemplary lay disciple, worthy to be emulated by others.

⁹¹ It 1:1 at It 1,4, with its counterpart in T 765 at T XVII 662b15: "I, from the Blessed One, heard these words", 吾從世尊, 聞如是語,

⁹² The conclusion to a discourse, e.g. in It 1:1 at It 1,16, states that: "this meaning was also said by the Blessed One, so I have heard it", *ayam pi attho vutto bhagavatā, iti me sutam* (T 765 has not preserved a conclusion to its discourses). The pericope employed to lead over from the prose section to verse(s), e.g. in It 1:1 at It 1,8, reads: "this is the meaning of what the Blessed One said. In regard to this, it was said like this", *etam attham bhagavā avoca, tath' etam iti vuccati*. The counterpart to this transition pericope in T 765 at T XVII 662b20 reads: "at that time the Blessed One, taking up this matter again, spoke in verse", 爾時世尊, 重攝此義, 而說頌曰.

⁹³ In the case of Pāli and Chinese sources, quotations are according to the PTS and Taishō editions by giving first the discourse by number and then its location by volume, page and line; in the case of Tibetan sources, quotations are to the location in the Derge edition.