

## Article

# Early Buddhist Wisdom Literature: The “Book with Verses” (*Sagāthāvagga*) of the *Samyutta nikāya*

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**Abstract:** The *Sagāthāvagga*, the *Book with Verses*, and especially its third chapter, the *Kosala-chapter* (*Kosala Samyutta*), is presented here as a collection of early Buddhist wisdom literature. As the first book of the Pāli *Samyutta-nikāya*, the *Book with Verses* seems as an anomaly—the other four books contain some of the denser articulations of early Buddhist philosophy in the canon. Thus, scholars question whether the first book, which normally introduces verses with stories, is a real part of the collection. Scholars are also inclined to assume that the verses are the heart of the text and have shown less interest in the work’s compelling literary style. This article has three aims: First, it shows how the book, and most distinctly its third chapter, is a form of wisdom literature, with protagonist King Pasenadi of Kosala being comparable to wisdom-kings like King Solomon or Alexander the Great, and anticipating the classic Buddhist wisdom-king Aśoka. Second, it shows how this collection was designed for a performance by storytellers or preachers, suggesting that this is a feature of the Buddhist genre of prose that introduces verses. Third, it demonstrates the organic connection between the first book and the other books of the *Samyutta*.

**Keywords:** wisdom literature; *Sagāthāvagga*; *Samyutta-nikāya*; *Tipiṭaka*; Pāli Canon; early Buddhist literature; early Buddhist philosophy



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## 1. Early Buddhist Wisdom Literature: The Case of the “Book with Verses” (*Sagāthāvagga*) of the *Samyutta nikāya*

The *Sagāthāvagga*, *The Book with Verses* or *The Poetic Book* (SGV), appears as an anomaly. As the first book (*Vagga*) of the *Samyutta-nikāya*, the canonical collection of the Buddha’s *Connected Discourses*, it seems to share little with the other four books of the collection, which offer some of the most captivating presentations of early Buddhist philosophy and the nature of the path within the discourses attributed to the Buddha (*The Basket of Discourses*, *Sutta-piṭaka*). Although not uniform, these latter four collections include comprehensive discussions of the key ideas of early Buddhism, such as conditionality (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), selflessness (*anatta*), and the examination of the senses (*saḷāyatana*), which each appear within the long and elaborate opening chapter of books two, three, and four, respectively. These books, and especially books three and four (the *Khandha-vagga* and *Saḷāyatana-vagga*, respectively), are relatively similar to each other and include many shared materials. The fifth, *Great Book* (*Mahāvagga*), offers a more advanced, perhaps Abhidhamma-oriented, synthesis of Nikāya materials, which are organized according to the scheme of the 37 “wings of enlightenment” (*bodhi-pakkhiya-dhamma*).

It seems odd to find a book of poetry at the opening of such a predominantly philosophical collection. In calling the SGV a book of poetry, I mean this in a loose sense, addressing the rich imaginative practices behind the collection, which as a genre requires that each and every “discourse” include, and normally end with, a verse or a set of verses, call it a Buddhist poem; hence, the title *The Book (vagga) with (sa) verses (gāthā)*. Indeed, the poems are not by rule strictly Buddhist, and some of the verses appear to have been adapted to Buddhist use.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, this collection can be defined as an early Buddhist

corpus of wisdom literature, in which dominant cultural and religious values and practical insights are expressed in a communicative and appealing manner. This characterization is especially true of the third chapter of *The Poetic Book*, the *Kosala-chapter*, in which the protagonist is King Pasenadi of Kosala, fills the role of the wisdom-king. A first major end of the present contribution is to bring the character of this textual corpus to light. This is meant to allow a greater appreciation of Buddhist canonical scriptures as masterful literary collections, which would be evident to a traditional “good-enough reader” or listener.<sup>2</sup> (Readers with more of an interest in wisdom literature and comparative religion, and who are less concerned with the specifics of Buddhist scripture, may prefer to head directly to the next section).

My second goal is to address the ostensible oddity in the placement of the SGV and to demonstrate how these two seemingly very separate types of teachings are closely interrelated and continuous. For some, the connection between practical wisdom that is relevant to the householder and the advanced meditations and insights cultivated by professional, celibate practitioners raises questions. For example, Oskar von Hinüber (2020) recently defined books two to five as “the ‘real’ or ‘true’ *Samyutta-nikāya*” (p. 8). This is because these four books “are usually considered as an early attempt to collect certain aspects of the teachings of the Buddha in a systematic way”, while the SGV “does not contain much material really relevant to Buddhist teachings” and is also the only book to be named after its literary form (“with verses”).<sup>3</sup> Von Hinüber’s perception of the text also relies on his understanding of the different organization of the opening of the commentary to this text, the *Sāratthappakāsinī* or *Samyutta-nikāya-aṭṭhakathā*, in relation to the commentaries on the other Nikāyas, a distinction that does not carry the weight he attributes to it.<sup>4</sup>

While the literary differences between the SGV and the rest of the *Samyutta* are undeniable, this article advances the position that these collections are closely related and that their connection is more than chance. Simply, the idea that the two must be separated relies on an untenable distinction between “doctrine”, philosophy, and practice, on the one hand, and literary materials, social vision, and cultural understanding, on the other. Indeed, the former cannot exist without the latter, and even emerges from it and works within it. Furthermore, the philosophical books of the *Samyutta* themselves offer creative presentations of early Buddhist doctrines and insights. A *samyutta*—the term that defines the 56 chapters of the whole collection and that gives the collection its name—can be seen as a *thread* that weaves texts together upon a shared theme in a creative manner; chapters are not mere “collections” but expressions within a particular generic mode and theme.<sup>5</sup> Opening the *Samyutta* with the SGV thereby suggests that creativity and aesthetic impression are also important for the other books of the *Samyutta* and beyond them for other collections, so that the authors/editors/reciters (*bhāṇaka*)<sup>6</sup> of these texts were doing more than faithfully reproducing scriptures through fixed recitation. While this is not the place to address the creative dimensions of the philosophical materials in books 2–5, the broader point will become clear—the stories of the SGV are no less “doctrinal” than the ones in other books and are themselves a valued form of Buddhist practice and mental cultivation. Philosophy and the Buddhist path, the advanced path of meditation and realization, take place within a Buddhist aesthetic that agents of the tradition had to cultivate a sensitivity for. Within such a devotional context, *Buddha* functions as a dense metaphysical concept that practitioners and followers should appreciate, while developing a heart that is capable of perceiving the depths he discovered. Text, thereby, often relates to “Mindfulness of the Buddha”, *Buddha-anusmṛti* (Shulman 2021, p. ch.3).

The third and perhaps main point relates to early Buddhist textual practices in their performative contexts of preaching and storytelling. The main mark of most texts and chapters in the SGV is the connection between a short story in prose and the poetry that concludes each discourse.<sup>7</sup> While the poems are often intriguing, here we will give greater attention to the prose sections that introduce them and to the overall format of introducing verses with a story. Simply, the richness of the stories and the subtlety of

narrative development between them precludes that the sole or main concern of the collection is with the verses. Moreover, it makes clear that these stories were meant to be told in public settings, in which the audience was not composed only of monks and with the performance going beyond fixed recitation of the texts in Pāli. An underlying issue I aim to address regards this category of Buddhist texts, which most distinctly characterizes the SGV and the *Udāna*, but which extends beyond them.<sup>8</sup> Here I will offer an interpretation of what the performance of these texts may have looked like.

Generally, and certainly in the finer chapters within the Book, the literary impact is remarkable. Yet since early acknowledgment of this fact by Rhys Davids (2017) and Winternitz ([1927] 1972), little work has been done on this subject. The chapters (*Samyutta*) and sub-chapters (*Vagga*) of *The Poetic Book* read smoothly and provoke rich sentiment.<sup>9</sup> Their aesthetic and emotive appeal is significant, and as such they can be considered as powerful expressions of the early Buddhist heart and mind. Although these appraisals may seem subjective, they are important for understanding the historical value of the literature within the life of the early tradition; here, aesthetic impact and emotivity are key to penetrating the *history* of the texts. These texts teach us about what the early Buddhist authors wanted to achieve with text and recommend that the stories that are included in these “discourses” had a life that goes far beyond the fixed recitation of canonical sources that scholars prioritize in their interpretation (Allon 1997, 2018, 2021; Wynne 2004; Anālayo 2011, 2017). These stories were obviously told in public settings, while the verses weighed in to imbue a performance with the sacred power of the Buddha’s word.<sup>10</sup>

Recent scholarship has not given us much to go by in the effort to assess the nature of the SGV. Focus has mainly been on technical questions and on the comparison between different versions of sections preserved both in Pāli and Chinese.<sup>11</sup> Recently, Oskar von Hinüber (2020) published an interesting article on the collection, which shows that materials in the SGV, and especially in its last chapter, the *Sakka-chapter* (*Sakka-samyutta*), offer reworkings of materials from the broader Indian literary context. This is an important idea, which contributes to our understanding of the practices of storytelling that contributed to the shaping of the early Buddhist texts.

However, von Hinüber’s study is produced within the reigning scholarly paradigm which sees textual collections mainly as efforts of preservation of valued materials,<sup>12</sup> so that for him one of the main ends of the SGV is to preserve the verses that were cherished by tradition. For example, while speaking of the SGV and the *Dhammapada*, von Hinüber says that “both collections share the common feature that they *preserve verses* from the collective memory of monks, most likely dating back to the early period of orality in our text tradition” (Oskar von Hinüber 2020, p. 12, emphasis mine). He further suggests that the materials of this collection are “an initial attempt to secure the many floating oral texts, which resulted in one of the first ‘minor’, that is, *khuddaka* texts” (p. 12).<sup>13</sup> Although von Hinüber also says that “structural arguments derived from the literary form would again support the high antiquity of the verses *and connected stories*” (p. 16, emphasis mine), his emphasis is more on the verses, as we can see plainly from his earlier statement that “the most important part of this text are the verses”.<sup>14</sup> His approach echoes that of Anālayo (2009) in his study of the *Udāna*, who also prioritizes the verses over the stories, suggesting that the connection between stories and verses “may not be original”, with the inspired utterances—the *udānas*, i.e., the verses—reflecting “an earlier textual layer” (p. 46, see further below).

Von Hinüber’s interpretation that the SGV is an early collection of materials that was closed before the assembling of the *Khuddaka-nikāya* may contain a kernel of truth. Scholars often like to see verses as early.<sup>15</sup> However, when we see how dominant the storytelling in the SGV is and how subtle its literary format is, we can leave behind the idea that the collection’s main end is to preserve the verses, or to think of the latter as in any way primary to the former. This can easily be understood from the cases in which a verse is repeated within two different, at times consecutive, stories (*suttas*).<sup>16</sup> This means that the repetition

of the verse is meant to serve an aesthetic effect. In fact, we will see cases in which verses were produced to fit the story and complete its expression. Between a “prose” story and a verse, we should take this as a feature that requires its own explanation.<sup>17</sup>

My focus here will be on a positive reading of texts within the *Poetic Book*, concentrating primarily on materials from four chapters that each offer a good example of a polished narrative text. Our main concern will be with the early Buddhist canonical specimen of wisdom literature in the *Kosala-saṃyutta*, for which we will discuss the main messages, narrative techniques, and literary practices behind it. This will lead to a shorter consideration of three other chapters—with *Vaṅḡisa* (#8), *Māra* (#4), and *Nuns* (#5), which help bring out the character of the SGV as a type of wisdom literature that was employed in performance.

## 2. Early Buddhist Wisdom Literature in *The Kosala Chapter*

The category of wisdom literature is nowadays contested, as it is today perceived to relate to a variety of genres (Millar 2022; Longman 2022). Nevertheless, it has been raising renewed, widespread scholarly interest,<sup>18</sup> given that religious literatures of the world commonly include a sub-set of texts that express key philosophical and ethical insights in a communicative and evocative manner. Among these texts, there are many that are said to have been composed by kings, or which include kings as their protagonists, so that the wisdom-king becomes a unique paragon of practical insight. This specimen of texts is not purely ‘religious’, as classic figures of the genre are Alexander the Great, whose philosophical tales were immensely popular in the Greek, Persian, and Arab worlds,<sup>19</sup> and the *Meditations* of the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius. In the more proper ‘religious’ context, consider the texts attributed to King Solomon in the Hebrew Bible, such as *Kohelet* (*Ecclesiastics*) or *Mishlei* (*Proverbs*), while the popular lore of King Solomon far exceeds them and receives canonical treatment in *Kings*.<sup>20</sup> In the Indian context, we can recall Upaniṣadic texts that include the figure of King Janaka in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣads*, or more potently the instruction that Udālaka Āruṇi receives in the Pāñcala court in *Chāndogya-upaniṣad* 5. Similar materials are well known from ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia.<sup>21</sup>

My contention is that the *Kosala-saṃyutta* is an early Buddhist specimen of the theme, with King Pasenadi acting as a model Buddhist wisdom-king. The paradigmatic expression of such a figure is, of course, Dharmarāja King Aśoka (Strong 1983), with King Milinda of the *Milindapañha* also echoing the idea. King Pasenadi and his wife Mallikā are favorite characters in the early discourses, appearing also in other collections in impressive ways.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, these are good examples of the way Buddhist “discourses” are stories more commonly than we have been accustomed to assume. The King’s framing as a royal paragon of Buddhist insight is, however, an achievement of the Chapter under discussion. Although it would be tempting to explore the interactions between these different texts in the context of comparative religion and literature, and within the development of the image of the Buddhist wisdom-king, here our focus will remain on showing some of the inner dynamics of the *Kosala-Saṃyutta*, as part of the broader analysis of the SGV.

The Chapter on [the King] of Kosala [and his Exchanges of Insight with the Buddha] consists of 25 so-called “discourses”; here the term *sutta* seems to mean ‘a literary communication of dharma’, framed as an exchange with the Buddha. These discourses are arranged in three sub-chapters, consisting of 10 discourses per chapter, with 5 in the last.<sup>23</sup> Here we cannot quote all texts fully, but will at least provide a summary in order to point out the narrative development of the collection’s main themes, while keeping in mind our basic questions regarding the nature of the collection and the relation between verse and prose.

**The first Vagga, the opening verses.** The discourse chosen to open the collection addresses the Buddha’s superiority in relation to the classic set of six rival spiritual teachers of ancient India;<sup>24</sup> here, the point is that while the Buddha can claim that he has attained full enlightenment, the others cannot. The King wonders whether this is because the Buddha is young (*dahara*), to which the Buddha responds by saying that one should not accuse a Kṣatriya, a snake, a fire, or a monk of being young. He then offers a verse on the matter, in



which he explains how each can ruin you, especially once they grow, while the burn of the monk endowed with morality may be especially strong.<sup>25</sup>

The placement of such practical folk-wisdom in the mouth of the Buddha is itself significant, and is a mark of *The Poetic Book* as a whole, and of this chapter particularly.<sup>26</sup> Take, for example, discourse #13, in which the Buddha instructs the King on the benefits of a measured diet. The King arrives after over-eating, breathing heavily, so that the Buddha speaks a verse on the healthy long life that awaits one who eats appropriately. The King then asks the young Brahmin who accompanies him to memorize the verse and recite it at each of his meals. Thanks to this, the King loses weight and makes an exclamation about how “the Buddha cares for me twice—for evident ends (*attha*) in this life, and in those of the afterlife”.<sup>27</sup> This statement marks the general trend in the collection, in which the wisdom that the Buddha articulates, and which the King accepts and at times expresses himself, has real practical value. Thus, in discourse #16, the Buddha comforts the King, whose wife has given birth to a girl, with a verse with sexist undertones that suggests that good women may give birth to great kings. The teachings are here not abstract or meditative, but offer practical insights that can help people navigate the hardships of life. These are stories that were meant to be told and passed on, not merely recited by austere monks from memory.<sup>28</sup>

The opening in which the King and the Buddha address the latter’s superiority in relation to potential rivals in receiving worship and generosity is suitable for opening a collection in which the Buddha is faced by a royal patron. Surely, one point made by this Chapter is that the Buddha is a worthier recipient of alms, an idea worth rehearsing in the face of any audience. Indeed, the second sub-chapter opens in a similar way, with the King worshipping a series of ascetics he encounters, mistakenly assuming that they are liberated arahants. These are a group of seven matted-hair ascetics (*jātīla*), seven Jains (*Nigaṇṭha*), seven naked ascetics (*acelaka*), seven one-robed ascetics (*ekasāṭaka*), and seven wandering recluses (*paribbājaka*), who the text cares to inform us had long hairs in their armpits and were carrying different kinds of grain;<sup>29</sup> they were thus unkept and lenient practitioners. When the King announces his belief that these are arahants, the Buddha explains that it is difficult for one like him to make such an identification, proceeding to show how difficult it is to discern character.

Interestingly, this last episode appears as a separate “discourse” in the *Udāna* (No. 6.2), with the only exception that the concluding verses are different; while in the SGV the verses generally fit the context, speaking about the difference between what one may perceive and what lies behind the surface, the verse in the *Udāna* is more thinly related. The fact that the stories and verses in the *Udāna* do not always fit is well known. This collection offers, however, a series of excellent stories, which is framed according to the exact same generic requirement of the SGV—stories introducing verses. Although the *Udāna* requires its own analysis, it too reads as a collection for storytellers, who could tell a story based on the prose framing that the textual practitioner may or may not have memorized.<sup>30</sup> The storyteller or preacher<sup>31</sup> could then end his performance by reciting the Pāli verse(s) that close(s) the text, thereby providing an aura of authority and some enchantment with what is perceived as the true and authentic *Buddha-vacana*. One consideration that speaks in favor of such an interpretation is that the *Udāna* collects numerous powerful episodes that are found in other texts, such as the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*,<sup>32</sup> and the *Mahā-vagga* of the *Vinaya*,<sup>33</sup> tales that could easily have been expanded upon in a live setting. The poignant, unique, and well-known verses that describe awakening in *Udāna* 8.1-4 could also be seen as materials aimed to inspire and to serve particular preaching occasions.

The interpretation I am offering here for the genre of prose introductions to verses is that a performer could retain the verses in his or her memory, and then recite them to end their act of storytelling or preaching. Hereby this I intend a public performance, which would not include a fixed recitation of the prose text, but which could have been inspired by the story that was canonized in the discourse. The memorization of the verse does not, however, make the story secondary, but takes the verses as cues for the wisdom conveyed by the stories, which relate key insights on morality, karma, and the like. In fact, much of

the analysis that follows is aimed at bringing out the ingenuity in the literary construction of the stories and the construction of each *Vagga*, in a manner that shows how the deep themes of the collection are brought out through the prose. In the case of the SGV, such prose was surely not recited to lay audiences in Pāli, a language they did not understand, but retold in live contexts in ways that were meaningful and communicative.

Moving back to the sequence of the first *Vagga*, the second and third discourses in the Chapter are again framed as occasions in which the King comes to meet the Buddha and asks a question, which provides the opportunity for the Buddha to share his wisdom. In the second discourse, the King asks about the mental states (or “phenomena”, *dhamma*) that would arise internally for a person (*purisassa*) that lead to pain, harm, and discomfort.<sup>34</sup> The Buddha’s answer enumerates the three defilements of greed, hate, and delusion (*lobha, dosa, moha*), after which he recites the verse—“greed, hatred and delusion—they arise within one’s self, and injure the man of evil heart himself, like a reed injured by its own fruit”. This simple verse is later repeated in discourse #23 in the collection, with the prose introduction being completely equal, except for the change of one word—the mental attitudes (*dhamma*) here arise “for the world” (or “for people”, *lokassa*), rather than for a person (*purisassa*). This is a simple example that recommends that the preservation of verses is not the main goal of the text. While potentially these could have been two very similar versions of a text that were kept, or a reproduction of the same text in order to reach the necessary number of 25 discourses arranged in two and a half sub-chapters,<sup>35</sup> the placement of the verses in this way shows that there are concerns beyond keeping the verses and their preservation that were active in shaping the collection. We will return to this verse and its repetition below.

**The voice of the wisdom-king: discourses 4–8.** In the fourth discourse, the pattern begins to change, and the figure of Pasenadi as a wisdom-king emerges more strongly. Now, instead of asking the Buddha a question, he shares his insight into the workings of karma and the importance of morality. In this text, he communicates a question that arose for him when he was in seclusion:<sup>36</sup> “for whom is the self dear, and for whom is it not?”<sup>37</sup> He answers his own riddle by relating his understanding that people who do not regard themselves as dear perform bad actions of body, speech, and mind, while those who do care for themselves perform good actions. The narrative next has the Buddha confirm the statement and repeat it word by word, then relating a series of poignant and relatively elaborate verses that emphasize that the only things one takes to the afterlife are one’s actions—

He who would know himself as dear, should not connect himself to evil;  
For joy is not easily obtained by one who acts badly.  
He who is held by the death-maker, having left his human state—  
What remains his own? What does he take with him?  
What would follow him like a shadow that never turns back?  
What that mortal performs here of both merit and evil,  
That remains his own, that he takes with him,  
That follows him like a shadow that never turn back.  
Therefore, one should do good, heaping good deeds for the afterlife;  
Merit is the only resort for beings in the world beyond. <sup>38</sup>

Potentially, this poem could have been one that tradition had an interest in preserving, as it provides a mature and valuable encapsulation of Buddhist thinking. We gain support for the idea that the prose is as important as the verses—indeed, verses may be an excuse for the prose—when we see how in the fifth discourse, Pasenadi further elaborates his statement, now asking “for whom is the self guarded, and for whom is it not guarded?”<sup>39</sup> His answer, again, is that he who performs good actions in body, speech, and mind is guarded, and he who performs bad ones is not guarded. He continues to express the pertinent kingly insight that even if such a person was guarded by elephants, horses,

carriages, or soldiers, it would only be his actions that guard him: “And why is this? For these are just external protections, not internal ones”.<sup>40</sup>

Again, rich ideas, and a bold assertion of the Buddhist emphasis on mind and karma as conditioning one’s reality. While the Buddha again confirms and repeats the King’s statement, the verse he articulates is a faint echo of the former one, and one that barely fits the text—

Restraint of the body is good, restraint of speech is good, restraint of mind is good;  
Restraint everywhere is good;  
He who is restrained everywhere, being modest, is said to be guarded.<sup>41</sup>

Tradition may have valued the verse, yet it cannot be given any primacy over the prose, which continues the narrative development of the Chapter and of the theme of caring for one’s self through action. In this pair of discourses, there is a clear development of the point in the second story, which has value independently of the verse. The theme—care for yourself through your own actions—will now continue in the next discourse, with the wisdom-king maturing in his voice and understanding. He now relates his insight that “few are those beings in the world who having obtained fine enjoyments, do not succumb to their power, grow negligent, become infatuated with sensual pleasures, and mistreat other people”.<sup>42</sup> In this case, the Buddha’s verse does the trick—

Those who are infatuated with sensual pleasures, dazed with greed for pleasure—  
they do not realize that they have gone too far,  
like deer who miss the trap that awaits them;  
later they will experience the pain, for doing wrong will always mature.<sup>43</sup>

The prose now reaches its full articulation of Buddhist insight, reaching the acme of this sub-chapter in discourse 7. Here King Pasenadi expresses his frustration at the rich and wealthy, who driven by desire tell conscious lies at the court of law. Exacerbated, he decides not to sit at court any longer, having his general Bhadramukho<sup>44</sup> replace him:

Here, as I am sitting at the court of law, I see the great wealthy Kṣatriyas, Brahmins and householders, who are rich, with great riches and possessions, who possess abundant gold and silver, abundant property and provisions, abundant riches and grain, who propelled by desire, conditioned by desire, for the sake of desire, tell conscious lies. Then it came to me—‘enough of holding the court of justice for me; now Bhadramukho can be known as the holder of court.’<sup>45</sup>

In accord with the narrative design, the Buddha will commend the King’s statement saying “It is so, great King, it is so, great King” (*evam etaṃ mahārāja*), and then repeat the king’s whole statement and conclude with a verse; sharp readers may pick up the difference from the last one—

Those who are infatuated with sensual pleasures, dazed with greed for pleasure—  
they do not realize that they have gone too far,  
like fish who miss the net that awaits them;  
later they will experience the pain, for doing wrong will always mature.<sup>46</sup>

The story is thick with Buddhist understanding of society and its inner conflicts. The King is the leader of the state, and here, he is a just one who would hold a true court of justice.<sup>47</sup> Such execution of justice is a dire need of society, and one of the wisdom-king’s main roles is to direct it. In the Buddhist case, he pays a heavy price for this, given that he must also instruct punishment and thus accrues negative karma.<sup>48</sup> It seems that Pasenadi is willing to pay the price and perform his duty, yet he must deal with the rich and powerful overpowering the weak at court, who are driven by desire and tell conscious lies. Deeply disturbed, he decides to quit.

The message is gripping, and offers one of the more acute formulations of Buddhist insight in the *Kosala Chapter*. In this case, it would be difficult to uphold a reading that prioritizes the verses over the story. In this case, the verse is almost equal to the previous one, with the fish who are heading toward the net replacing the deer who face the trap. This slight change offers an opportunity to rehearse the message of the previous verse and story, as the story about the court is also an elaboration of the king's realization in the previous one that few people who have fine possessions do not succumb to desires. The slight change in the verse is used to produce emphasis and repeat the message of the story.

The aesthetic interplay between the stories and verses drives home the insight that the rich should be more careful in their thirst for desires. This insight itself is part of the message of this wisdom collection that becomes more and more powerful as the Chapter develops. The theme still develops in discourse #8, when Queen Mallikā is drawn into the plot, to claim together with Pasenadi that “no-one is dearer than one's self” (*natthi . . . kocañño attanā piyataro*). This story, which clearly mirrors discourses 4 and 5 that created the build-up for the acme in discourse 7, sets the scene for the Buddha's verse that suggests that since nothing is dearer than one's self, one should not harm others. Discourse #8 thereby returns to the theme of the self being dear that was brought up in discourse 4, which is now enriched by the stories and their echo in the verses in key discourses 6 and 7.

We should notice that the storytelling does not end with the discourse, but is carried on when narrative potentials explored in the commentaries. To take an example, in discourse 8, the commentator (“Buddhaghosa” (von Hinüber 2015)) informs us about the first encounter between Pasenadi and Mallikā, in the factory (*ārāma*, usually “park”) of the Queen's father, who was a garland maker (*mālākara*). King Pasenadi hid in the place after losing a battle, to find the beautiful Mallikā who had gone there intending to eat a cake she had obtained, then seeing the Buddha on the way with his retinue of monks and offering the cake to the Teacher. The latter did her the honor of sitting to take his first meal of the day right there and then, and after eating and washing showed a smile. When questioned about his smile (as a literary trope, the Buddha's smile is a cosmic occurrence that relates to knowledge beyond the present), he explained that she is soon to become queen of Kosala, which immediately happened when the King experienced a sense of peace (*pasīdati*) upon seeing her face (that had apparently still had a special luster, being under the impact of seeing the Buddha). The King carries her away and establishes her on the throne, later to ask her the question on “who is dear?”, being interested in the response of someone from the challenged background as that of a caste of garland-makers. The King then heads to the Buddha in order to have her answer explained to him.

The *Atṭhakathā* thus helps us see the storytelling that surrounds the scriptural text. This is not plain “commentary” however, but rather a level of the story that was probably known to the people who composed the Sutta. *Atṭhakathā* is not necessarily later, but a different genre and textual world that must have been available to most authors.<sup>49</sup> Here is a small but significant example of the way the two kinds of texts interact, which points to the textual life behind the canon as we find it.

**The ending of the first Vagga and its narrative graph.** There is thus a clear narrative design to this first sub-chapter of the *Kosala Chapter*, with the Buddha teaching the King in discourses 1–3, followed by the Monarch expressing his own insight in discourses 3–7 and his joint insight with the Queen in discourse 8. These texts advance and deepen the message of the text that it is in one's best interest, in both this life and future rebirth, not to hurt other people, to be careful of desires even if they are readily available, and to perform good actions. Here, the stories convey the philosophy better than any concise definition we may provide.

In the resolution of the sub-chapter, we find the Buddha again instructing the King directly in discourses 9–10, expressing classic Buddhist approaches to kinship. In discourse #9, the Buddha hears of the great sacrifice that the king is about to perform, and recommends one with no violence. In discourse #10, the King has tied up many people in what appears as an act of punishment. Now the Buddha recommends breaking inner



bonds instead. These are ideas that must be included in a Buddhist wisdom-scripture that discusses advice to the king, and they must also be placed in the Buddha's own mouth. With this, the ending of the sub-chapter highlights the crucial insight of Buddhist religion that the Buddha is the source of any true authority, and the conclusion has the Buddha define his understanding irrespective of the King's formulations or questions.

**The second Vagga on the value of good friends.** The second *Vagga* relies on a narrative design that is very similar to the first, while developing the theme of good friendship (*kalyāṇa-mitta*). As we will follow the working of the narrative, our focus will now be more strongly on the verses, and how we can see them as part of the inspired performance that seems to be behind the collection. In fact, a close reading of the second *Vagga* shows that the formulation of the verses themselves can be part of the creative process of composition of this text, rather than verses being earlier, more authoritative and cherished textual elements that dominate the stories, as if the collection was only meant to preserve them.

We shortly surveyed the opening discourse above, in which the king mistakenly worships vain ascetics. The next discourse proceeds to show kings learning from the Buddha. Five kings argue between them "what is the best among sensual pleasures?" (*kiṃ nu kho kāmānaṃ aggaṇ'ti*), each of them preferring one of the senses. Pāsenadi suggests they approach the Buddha so that he now sets out with four other kings to visit the Buddha and receive spiritual instruction. The Buddha's response is a manifesto of pluralism, saying that what is agreeable to one may not be agreeable to another, and that to one who prefers one object of sense, nothing will be greater than it. There is thus no absolute truth on the matter.

At this moment, the Buddha's lay-follower Candanaṅgaliko<sup>50</sup> is so impressed by the Buddha's wisdom and its embrace of complexity that he receives an inspiring insight he wishes to share, saying in a formulaic manner—"this inspires me Lord, this inspires me Well-farer" (*paṭibhāti maṃ bhagavā paṭibhāti maṃ sugato*). The Buddha instructs Candanaṅgaliko to share his inspiration, so that he utters the following verse (not the most inspiring one in the collection, however):

Like a red-lotus with marvelous smell  
that flowers early in the morning full of smell  
See the shining Aṅgīrasa (the Buddha)  
Glowing like the sun in the middle of the sky.<sup>51</sup>

In a collection of poetry, such a verse of inspiration is not a negligent fact. That it is placed in the mouth of a follower—not the Buddha, that is—who articulates the verse as part of the story implies that we should read at least some of the verses in the collection as inspired moments of understanding that Buddhist storytellers and followers experienced while contemplating the Dharma. This could have happened in a live, social setting. This does not mean that some of the verses were not pre-Buddhist, or that they are not semi-Buddhist, as von Hinüber emphasizes. Nonetheless, some of the verses may not carry the weight of tradition that the story ostensibly contextualizes, but result from the aesthetic, emotive, and philosophical force of the stories. They emerge from the genre of story + verse, rather than await it in order to find their textual home; *geyya* produces both text and verse.

We can see how this may have worked when we examine the last discourse in this second sub-chapter (#20), a discourse that could go a long way in a context of storytelling. This text shares the beginning of its frame-story with discourse 19, in which the King visits the Buddha after appropriating the riches and possessions of a wealthy, childless banker who had died. Although very rich, the merchant enjoyed simple food, clothing, and vehicles. The Buddha's acknowledgment seems inadequate, when he speaks of a bad person (*asappuriso*) who attains possessions but does not use them to please the people who surround him. He likens the situation to a pond of cool water far away from human settlement, which remains unused, an idea that is repeated succinctly in the concluding verses. While the Buddha's answer and the verses fit each other, they do not connect well to the first part of the story on the childless merchant.

In discourse #20, the Buddha provides further details on the merchant's story in a way that is more convincing,<sup>52</sup> yet the story is difficult to grasp without the help of the commentator. The discourse relates how the merchant instructed the provision of alms for a recluse (*samaṇa*), later to become regretful. The commentator explains that the stingy and stubborn man told his wife to give *dāna* on a day he ate early, and then saw the Paccekasambuddha named Taggarasikhi passing by while he was sitting on the porch cleaning his teeth. The Solitary Buddha had arrived earlier by magical means from his regular abode. Given that when married to her petty husband this was such a rare opportunity to be generous, the wife provided this marvelous spiritual figure with the best of foods, even sprinkling the dishes with special smells. The Solitary Buddha thought that the alms should be shared with other figures like him, thereby enriching the merit. As he sets to leave, the merchant comes in, and is dismayed to see the ascetic leaving with his dish full. It is then that he announces his dismay, perhaps suspicious of the encounter between the mendicant and his wife. Earlier the discourse also related that this man killed the only son of his brother, which the commentator explains resulted from a conflict over the family estate, after the boy's parents and older brother died without dividing the inheritance.

Again, thick storytelling, with the text providing a springboard for further elaboration by a performer, perhaps with the help of materials today found in the commentary. Our focus now is, however, on the verse—

Any possessions one may have—grain, wealth, silver and gold  
 Slaves, workers, servants, and those who depend on one,  
 Without taking any of them—they must be given up;  
 he leaves [this world], having left them all behind.  
 But what one does with body speech and mind,  
 That remains his own, that he takes with him,  
 That follows him like a shadow that never turns back.  
 Therefore, one should do good, heaping good deeds for the afterlife;  
 Merit is the resort for beings in the world beyond.<sup>53</sup>

Careful readers may have noticed that the last four lines appeared above in discourse #4 as well. The line before them, “But what one does with body, speech and mind” (*yañca karoti kāyena vācāya uda cetasā*), further builds on the corresponding one in discourse #4, “what a man does here” (*yaṃ macco kurute idha*), replacing the object of his action—merit and evil (*ubho puññañca pāpañca*)—with the actions of body, speech, and mind that appeared in the story of discourses 4 and 5 and in the verse of the latter. Notice that the verse also repeats the well-known statement in *Dhammapada* 1.2 about the way one's actions follow one like one's shadow.

In the present case, it appears that the verse is adapted to fit the story-line of the prose that ‘introduces’ it; there seems little reason to assume that the verses are older than the story, and the idea that the poems were composed for the story seems more appealing. And when we can see from the nature of the stories that they related to performative events—again, these are not texts only shaped for recitation by monks in a language that people do not understand—we should consider the possibility that some of the verses also resulted from such performative moments, or at least that they were generated within the creative activity that put the texts together—including both story and verse. As the second discourse of the *Vagga* suggested, some verses arise through inspiration. Here, the second half of the poem consists of a fixed element regarding the need to perform good deeds that would act as a store of merit in the afterlife. But the reference to what has to be left behind—anything external, anything dear in the outer world—can change according to the context.

The two verses that precede the ones we just examined (#17–18) provide another example of a repetition of a verse while adapting it to context. In the first of these, King

Pasenadi asks the pertinent question, which is aptly suited to the overall message of the collection of the Buddha's teaching being good for one in this life and the next—"Sir, is there one thing that allows one to attain both goals, in this life and the next?"<sup>54</sup> The Buddha's answer is that this is surely attentiveness (or non-negligence, *appamāda*), which he goes on to clarify with a simile and then a verse—

For one wishing for long life, health, beauty, heaven, high-status,  
fine pleasures one after the other—  
The wise recommend attentiveness in relation to meritorious actions;  
Attentive, the wise gain both ends—  
Those in this life and those in the life beyond.  
By realizing these ends, the resolute come to be called 'wise'.<sup>55</sup>

This simple discourse is then elaborated in the next one, with the king introducing his insight on the value of good friendship (*kalyāṇamitta*) and companionship. The Buddha commends his statement and tells a story about how he taught Ānanda the value of good friendship, which consists in a relatively long exposition in terms of the present collection. This leads him to explain that attentiveness in relation to good action is the one thing that people rely on in order to become good friends. He then recommends that the king practice such non-negligence, which would then be imitated by the people that surround him and by the different people in his dominion—important advice for the wisdom-king. Our focus here is again on the verse—

For one wishing for  
fine enjoyments, one after the other—  
The wise recommend attentiveness in relation to meritorious actions;  
Attentive, the wise gain both ends—  
Those in this life and those in the life beyond.  
By realizing these ends, the resolute come to be called 'wise'.

This is the exact same verse as the previous one, only replacing the list of pleasures in line 1 with a general term for enjoyments—*bhoga*. Again, like in verses 6–7 we read above, and much like verses 19–20 we examined earlier—the minor changes in the verses do not justify seeing them as the heart of the text. Since the stories in all these cases are closely related, while the second text delves deeper into ideas raised in the first, we can prioritize the story in our interpretation and observe the practice of storytelling that is behind the collection, which makes use of the verse to produce poetic emphasis, and perhaps even generates it for this end to begin with. This practice of storytelling need not dichotomize between the prose and the verse, but can adapt the verses to fit the story, in the interest of bringing out its emphases. Recall also the verse that is repeated in discourses 2 and 23, in which the stories are nearly identical.

Such dyads of stories are central to the sequence of the second sub-chapter. Among them, it is important to mention discourses 14 and 15, in which once again stories dominate the verses. These are tales about King Pasenadi's military clashes with his nephew, King Ajātasatthu of Magadha. In the first, Pasenadi is defeated and then retreats to his capital of Sāvatti. The monks inform the Buddha of the incident, and he emphasizes how Pasenadi is a good friend and companion—the theme that will be echoed in discourse 18 that is the heart of the *Vagga*. However, he will sleep badly tonight, as is echoed by the short verse—"victory generates hostility, while the defeated sleep badly; the calm ones sleep well, having overcome victory and defeat".<sup>56</sup>

In the following discourse, Pasenadi emerges victorious, but demonstrates that he is a true Buddhist wisdom-king by sparing his enemy and nephew's life, while capturing all his forces. Now the Buddha utters a verse on people who harm others and reap their rewards later on, meaning that Ajātasatthu got his share. Again, it would be difficult

to claim that the story is tangential in this case; rather, this is a key moment in the text and in the narrative development of this whole section, when we see how Pasenadi is a real *kalyāṇamitta*.

**Verses to suit the story—*Kosala-saṃyutta* 3.1.** Perhaps the most evident example of a verse that was composed to suit the story is the first discourse in the third and final *Vagga*. Here, we find a story that is equal to the formulaic presentation of four types of persons that is shared between the *Aṅguttara-Nikāya* (4.85) and the *Abhidhamma* treatise of the *Puggala-paññati* (168 and 169).<sup>57</sup> In this case, the latter sources are probably the origin for the text of the *Saṃyutta*, as the mode of reflecting on types of persons is pervasive in these texts, so that the authors of the SGV apparently chose an articulation that fits the messages of the wisdom collection of the *Kosala Chapter*. More precisely, if there is an original version here, it is probably the *mātikā*, which summarizes the text, speaking of the four people who include (1) the one who goes from dark to dark (*tamotamaparāyaṇo*), (2) the one who goes from dark to light (*tamojotiparāyaṇo*), (3) the one who goes from light to dark (*jotitamaparāyaṇo*), and (4) the one who goes from light to light (*jotijotiparāyaṇo*). In the formulaic passage that expands on the list, we learn that being dark means being born in a family of low status (*nīce kūle*), ugly, sickly, and poor. Such a person who would do good deeds, however, is headed to light, meaning being rich, healthy, and so forth. At the same time, if the rich do bad deeds, they are headed for darkness, etc. That the placement of this formula in the *Aṅguttara* and the *Puggalapaññatti* is organic is shown by this *mātikā* being followed by another in which are presented the four options for people who replace darkness and light in this list with the one who goes from leaning down (*oṇato*) to leaning up (*uṇṇato*), etc. This list is then supposed to be explained with the same formulas as the previous one of darkness and light.

In accordance with the genre, this discourse in the SGV ends with a verse, which is surely not one of the heights of the poetry in the collection. It formulaically speaks of “a poor man, King, who has no faith in the Buddha, is selfish, miserly and disrespectful, one who has evil thoughts and wrong view”,<sup>58</sup> who further abuses and reviles renunciates and prevents others from giving them food. Such a person is headed for hell, and he is the one who goes from darkness to darkness. The poem has formulaic verses also to speak of the rich person and for the person who does good deeds, emphasizing his generosity to renunciates, which thus allows the poem to cover the four options of the *mātikā*. If we had any doubts that *this poem was composed for this specific collection*, notice the vocative *raja* used as a meter-filler, in which the Buddha speaks directly to the King.<sup>59</sup>

**The narrative development of the second *Vagga*** parallels that of the first one: the first discourse demonstrates the Buddha’s superiority to rival teachers. Then, after two discourses that bring out different themes (the second discourse in *Vagga* 2 is especially significant), discourses 4 and 5 in both sequences delve into the depths of the section’s message—‘who is dear?’ in the first, and the ‘good friend’ in the second. These two texts work together to establish the theme, which is brought to fruition in discourses 6–8 in the first *Vagga*, and 7–8 in the second. In both sub-chapters, one of discourses 6–8 relates to Queen Mallikā—in the first *Vagga*, her joint reflection together with the King in discourse #8 drives home the main emphasis expressed in discourse #7, while in the second sub-chapter, it is the text about her giving birth to a girl in discourse #6 that is less significant. In the second sequence, the text with Mallikā is placed before the two texts in #7 and #8, since the latter two form a couplet, which precedes the couplet that ends the sub-chapter, with both sequences keeping a key couplet in discourses #4 and #5. The second *Vagga* thus ends with two pairs of discourses, in which the second deepens the statement made in the first. In both *Vaggas*, the ending is with discourses that take a broader perspective on the main theme and treat more general ideas.

The relation in the narrative sequence between the two *Vaggas* is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** The narrative sequence between the two *Vaggas*.

	<i>Vagga 1</i>	<i>Vagga 2</i>	Notes
#1	Opening text on Buddha's superiority to rival teachers. (#1)	Opening text on Buddha's superiority to rival teachers. (#11)	
#2–3	Initial elaboration of main theme. (#2, #3)	Initial elaboration of main theme. (#12, #13)	
#4–5	Key idea is brought out in a pair of discourses, in which the second develops the statement of the first. (#4, #5)	Key idea is brought out in a pair of discourses, in which the second develops the statement of the first. (14, #15)	
#6	Building of main theme and its key articulation in following text (#6)	Story with Mallikā. (#16)	In <i>Vagga 1</i> , discourses 6–8 form a thematic sequence. Mallikā appears before the acme in <i>Vagga 2</i> , and continues it in <i>Vagga 1</i> , thereby occupying the place of #8.
#7	Acme of text and full development of the theme. (#7)	Building of main theme and its key articulation in following text (#17)	In <i>Vagga 2</i> , #17–#18 form a couplet, that is then followed by the couplet of #19–#20
#8	Story with Mallikā, which advances main theme (#8)	Acme of text and full development of the theme. (#18)	
#9–10	Closure with echoes of main theme and further relevant issues.	Closure with echoes of main theme and further relevant issues.	In <i>Vagga 2</i> , #19–#20 form a couplet

**Wrapping up the Wisdom Collection: *Vagga 3*.** The *Kosala-Chapter* could easily have ended with an elegant format of two *Vaggas* with ten discourses each: There are at least four pairs of texts that could have each been reduced to one discourse each,<sup>60</sup> while some texts are less inspiring.<sup>61</sup> However, we have seen a clear narrative sequence and a development of potent themes in the first two *Vaggas*, with what appears like careful literary and at times poetic taste. This continues in the final *Vagga* of five discourses, which closes the collection with a number of pertinent emphases.

The main point of this section is to establish the karmic benefits of positive action, as we have already seen in the discussion of discourse #21 (3.1) above. In the moving second discourse, we find the King sharing his pain after his grandmother died—he would have forsaken his treasures to keep her alive. This story echoes discourse #3 in the collection, which spoke of the way everyone dies, including the rich and powerful. Here, the king is indeed consoled by the Buddha's wisdom who reminds him that all beings will die. In the first *Vagga*, #3 was preceded by #2, which emphasizes the danger inherent in the defilements. Now, #22 is followed by #23, which is identical to #2, so that here the sequence is reversed; in this way, the relation between positive action and a good afterlife state is echoed once again.

The last two discourses highlight central messages. Obviously, an underlying theme of the collection is that support of the Saṅgha is a good act, for this life and the next. In discourse #24, tradition tries to secure our understanding of the worthy recipients of generosity. The king first asks—"where should generosity be given?" (*kattha nu kho dānaṃ dātabban'ti*). The intriguing answer is that this should be done where one's mind will receive peace and grace (*yattha cittaṃ pasīdati*). The king then asks when what is given bears great fruits (*kattha dinnaṃ mahapphalan'ti*), to receive a long answer that it is best to give to one



of virtue (*sīlavato*), which the Buddha then fleshes out through an idealized picture of the accomplished monk; the indication is that even during earlier stages of the path he is a better recipient than one who has not embarked on it at all. While we need not overly emphasize these worldly concerns, this is surely one of the goals of Buddhist storytelling—to fix the image of the Buddhist monk as the supreme object of religious generosity.

In the final discourse, #25, the key message of the whole wisdom-chapter is driven home—the Buddha-dharma is good for us in this life and the next; one should do good deeds in body, speech, and mind in order to reap both benefits. In this discourse, the wisdom-king is again placed up front, in order to reveal his insight. Echoing his contempt for the behavior of the rich and powerful, he tells the Buddha that he arrived to visit him after dealing with the ruling Kṣatriyas, who among other things are “drunk with power, overpowered by passion and lust” (*issariyamadamattānaṃ kāmagedhapariyuṭṭhānaṃ*). The Buddha presents him with a situation in which he would have learned that people are in great danger through a simile of an ominous cloud that crushes them in all directions, asking the King what he would do. In the face of such a perilous condition, the King reasons—“what could one do other than act according the Dharma, act fairly, do what is wholesome and full of merit?”<sup>62</sup> The wisdom-king continues to articulate this insight when asked about facing old age and death, suggesting that the noble Kṣatriyas who are preoccupied with worldly ends are best to realize this truth. The Buddha lauds the King’s response and offers a poem in conclusion that summarizes the message of this early Buddhist wisdom-book. After repeating the futility of all things in the face of old age and death, the poem ends by saying:

Therefore, the wise man who sees his own good  
Should invest in faith in the Buddha, Dharma and Saṅgha.  
He who acts according to the Dharma in body, speech and mind,  
Will be praised in this world, and after he departs rejoices in Heaven.<sup>63</sup>

### 3. The Inspired Poet Vaṅṡisa

We have seen how in discourse 12 in the *Kosalachapter*, Candanaṅganiko’s inspiration caused him to recite a verse, suggesting that verses in the SGV could have resulted from such inspiration, perhaps during performance. We receive further support for this idea when we find a full Chapter (*Samyutta*) in *The Poetic Book* devoted to the inspired poetry of the top Buddhist poet in the early tradition, Vaṅṡisa. That the *Vaṅṡisa-chapter*, the eighth in the collection, presents materials that were attributed to an inspired poet has already been recognized (Oskar von Hinüber 2020, pp. 13–16). Here we will not survey the full *Vaṅṡisa-chapter*, with its potent verses, dense narrative introductions, and subtle narrative sequence of the type we observed in the sub-chapters of the *Kosala-samyutta*. Rather, our focus will be on the general theme and the questions it raises in relation to textual practices and the shaping of the collection, which suggest that inspired poetry was considered a valuable textual practice.

The chapter begins with a progression of three discourses in which Vaṅṡisa is frustrated (*anabhirati*) by his succumbing to desire. In the first, he is said to be a newly ordained novice, who was left behind to guard the monastery (*navako acirapabbajito ohiyyako vihārapālo*). Beautiful women come to observe the monastery, and Vaṅṡisa’s mind is overpowered by desire (*rāgo cittaṃ anuddhamasati*). In order to drive away his frustration and give rise to content, that is in order to re-establish his peace of mind, he speaks a series of brilliant verses—

Even though I am one who has left the home for the peaceful<sup>64</sup> homeless state,  
these daring thoughts from the dark one still chase me.  
Were high-class archers, well-trained and firm, to surround me on all sides by  
the thousands,  
I would not run!<sup>65</sup>

Or worse,<sup>66</sup> if women would arrive, they would not make me budge,  
as I am established in the teaching.

As a direct<sup>67</sup> witness I heard this from the Buddha, the kinsman of the sun,  
the path the leads to nibbāna, to which my mind holds tight.

As I abide in this way, evil-one, you arrive—

I will act, Death, so that you will see nothing of my path.<sup>68</sup>

The poems of Vaṅgīsa are true poetry and require some unpacking. Here we find the poet going through a complicated process, working through his frustration to become an ideal of the tradition, while using his poetry to effect the transformation. Perturbed by the thoughts of desire that pervade his mind even though he has left the home-life for the quiet of renunciation, he sees these thoughts as actions of Māra. Māra is a central figure in the imaginative of the SGV (see below), and will be referred to again in the last verse of the poem. In the face of these troubling ideations, Vaṅgīsa expresses his firm stance that he can confront dexterous warriors and even women, the greatest danger of all. Transforming his passionate mind to an enlightened one, the poet echoes a favorite theme that the enlightened mind cannot be tracked, as in *Dhammapada* 179<sup>69</sup>. This possibility results from being a direct witness to the teaching of the Buddha. Then, Māra, will not be able to track him any longer.

This is an aspiration, a Buddhist vision of the path, a poem. It is placed in the mouth of an idealized Buddhist poet, a wandering bard who has become a monk. Was there such a historical figure that told the verses in this chapter and the ones placed under his name in the *Theragāthā*? Was he the one and only such poet whose verses became canonical? When we have so many such poets, men and women in the *Theragāthā* and the *Therīgāthā*—should not we assume that Vaṅgīsa was taken as an idealized figure to frame this specific Chapter, so that each of the texts within it, and the Chapter as a complete unit, offer a telling of his story in a manner that fits the genre of the SGV? Indeed, the idealized statement of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* that Vaṅgīsa is the foremost of the Buddha's students with relation to poetic inspiration<sup>70</sup> allows us to understand that there were others—were their verses not kept within the texts? When the practice of articulating verses is so common in the Nikāyas, and when we see full collections devoted to poems or built around them, we can assume that this was a creative mode that was active *while the corpus of the early discourses was being assembled and composed*. Vaṅgīsa here seems like a Buddhist adaptation of the figure of the inspired poet, much like Pāsenadi is the figure of the Buddhist wisdom-king.

Beginning with discourse 5, we encounter *Vaṅgīsa's* inspired poetry, which he shares with the community.<sup>71</sup> The occasion will be his observance of some impressive fact, which will cause him to tell the Buddha or a leading monk that he has been inspired (*patiphāti maṃ bhagavā*), after which he will be asked to share his inspiration (*batibhātu taṃ āvuso Vaṅgīsa*).<sup>72</sup> The event can be the Buddha's teaching (#5, #8), his viewing of Sāriputta teaching the monks who pay deep attention (#6), or Moggallāna seeing the minds of his liberated students (#10). After expressing his awe about the Buddha (#11), the sequence aptly concludes with Vaṅgīsa attaining arhatship and expressing his elation (#12).

We can take the moving discourse #9 as an example. Here, we find the tradition's first Arahant, "Venerable Aññāsi Koṇḍañña, approaching the Buddha after a long absence, falling with his head at the Buddha's feet, kissing his feet with his mouth and caressing them with his hands, and announcing his name—"I am Koṇḍañño, Lord, I am Koṇḍañño, Well-farer".<sup>73</sup> This is a ritualized expression of deep faith in the Buddha, expressed by esteemed students on special occasions.<sup>74</sup> This powerful moment of the first arahant falling at the Buddha's feet greatly inspires Vaṅgīsa, who expresses his inspiration, and is invited by the Buddha to communicate it. Expressing the inspiration that the stories of the SGV are meant to evoke—Vaṅgīsa would not have witnessed the event but only heard of it—the poet speaks—

Awakened by the Buddha, he, the elder Koṇḍañño of fierce endurance,

Attained the states of abiding in joy in seclusion repeatedly.

Whatever is attainable by a student who performs the instruction of the teacher,

That has been obtained by him, he who is thoroughly attentive in his training.

He is of great power, possessor of the three knowledges, skilled in the pathways of the mind.

Koṇḍañño, heir to the Buddha, worships the feet of his teacher. <sup>75</sup>

The fact that Vaṅḡsa speaks his inspiration is itself inspiring. As von Hinüber recognized, the collection distinguishes between his inspiration formulated on the spur of the moment and verses he knew before. In discourse #8, Vaṅḡsa voices his inspired verses regarding the Buddha's teaching on nibbāna, after which the Buddha asks him whether these verses were composed on the spot (*thānaso va taṃ patibhanti*) or thought out earlier (*pubbe parivittakittā*). When he says that the first is true, the Buddha asks for more verses that were composed before, to which Vaṅḡsa responds with a set of verses. While these verses are beautiful, they do not convey the same sharpness that the fresh, inspired verses do, and we learn that inspiration is supreme.

We thus discover that inspired composition was a valued art, and it surely was not confined to the one monk who carries this chapter's name. As this episode suggests, rehearsing verses that were previously composed was also cherished by tradition (here, most commonly by the Buddha, who stands for the voice of tradition), so that some of the verses we find in the texts must have circulated independently. No one answer needs to dominate all others, and there must have been a plurality of practices that flowed into a collection like the SGV—in some cases, the verses were ready and stories were told to introduce them; in other instances, the verses provided an excuse to tell the story, or were adapted to the story; in still further cases, inspired poems emerged while the stories were told. In any case, the idea that the SGV is an early collection whose main aim is to preserve verses is simply at odds with the materials.

As we might expect, the narrative sequence of the *Vaṅḡsa-chapter* ends with his enlightenment:

A mere poet I travelled before from town to town city to city,

Until I saw the Buddha, and faith arose for me.

He taught me the teaching regarding the aggregates, sense-bases and aggregates,<sup>76</sup>

So that after I heard his teaching, I went forth to homelessness.

The sage has verily realized awakening, for the well-fare of many,

For those monks and nuns, who have seen the effects of the training.

Welcome indeed I am to the presence of the Buddha;

The three knowledges obtained, the Buddha's teaching now completed:

I know my previous births, the divine eye has been purified,

Possessor of the three knowledges, having attained the supernatural powers,

An expert in the ways of the heart. <sup>77</sup>

Interestingly, these verses, which are no longer inspired poetry (*patibhāṇa*) of a "mere poet" (*kāveyyamatta*), express realization in ways that are favored by the awakened masters of the *Theragāthā*, *Therīgāthā* and *Apadāna*. Without attempting a comprehensive survey of the poetic technique here, it is informative to see that a phrase like "The Buddha's teaching is (now) completed" (*katam buddhassa sāsanam*) is repeated literally *hundreds* of times in these collections, while a couple dozen of them follow the statement on "the three knowledges (have been) obtained" (*tisso vijjā anupattā*), as they do here. The following line, "I know my previous births, the divine eye has been purified", is also repeated in a couple dozen poems attributed to liberated individuals. This helps us see how Vaṅḡsa is framed as a liberated person, who has his own special story, but whose realization fits expected models. This is a case where we can see that the SGV probably follows upon the materials

from the *Khuddaka-nikāya*, rather than preceding them as von Hinüber expects. Similar conclusions were reached by Bucknell (2007, p. 8), given the shared materials between the *Vaṅṅīsa-chapter* and the *Theragāthā*, and between the *Chapter with Nuns* (see below) and the *Therīgāthā*: “It appears likely that at least these two *saṃyuttas* were created intentionally out of existing material by providing each of the selected verses with a narrative introduction-commentary”. This need not become a ubiquitous rule, but helps us see texts as creative compositions, that are not merely “collected” in the corpora in which they are found, but rather generated by them. This idea is important for understanding the composition of the whole of the *Saṃyutta-Nikāya* (Shulman forthcoming).

#### 4. Encounters with the Dark Side in the *Māra-saṃyutta*

My own inspiration from the storytelling of the SGV came at first from the potent story-capsules in the *Māra-saṃyutta*. Here I will draw on this chapter shortly in order to give some back-wind for my interpretation of the SGV as a collection for storytellers, in which the prose is not secondary to the verses. Most of the texts of this *Māra-chapter* are similar to each other.<sup>78</sup> However, the subtle shifts between the stories, as well as the new emphases produced in each episode, enrich the theme of the encounters between Buddhist monks and Māra.

Buddhist monks (and nuns, see below) can be seen as cosmic battlegrounds of the forces of good and evil, which inhere primarily in their own minds. When they encounter the Dharma, good is on the rise and on its way to prevail, so Māra, the owner of evil (*pāpimā*), aims to set them off their path. At times he tries to convince them with words, but in the *Māra Chapter* he usually comes in disguise, or will try to startle the monks from his hiding. In some cases, he will speak a verse. Inevitably, the Buddha will recognize Māra, and speaks a verse of his own, which causes Māra to disappear. This constitutes the main message of the chapter—Māra is defeated when known; he acknowledges this by saying that “the Lord recognizes me, the Well-farer recognizes me” (*jānāti maṃ bhagavā jānāti maṃ sugato*), after which “he becomes saddened and disappears right there and then” (*dukkhī dummano tatthevantaradhāyī*).<sup>79</sup> Thus, we learn that evil forces are defeated when known, in an aesthetic expression of a powerful meditative point.

There is much subtlety in the storytelling in the collection, with many echoes between the texts, development of narrative themes, and captivating retellings of well-known Buddhist episodes. As remarked by Winternitz ([1927] 1972, p. 58) almost a century ago—“Some of the short ballads about Māra and the nuns [the following *saṃyutta*, see below] are among the most beautiful productions of ancient Indian poetic art”.<sup>80</sup> We will take as an example the second text of the collection, in which many of the themes come together.

The discourse begins with the Buddha “staying at Uruvelā, on the banks of the river Nerāñjarā, at the foot of the tree of enlightenment, right after awakening (*pathamābhisambuddha*)”. This formulaic opening is commonly used to frame a special reflection,<sup>81</sup> such as in the perplexing discourse #1, in which Māra tries to convince the Buddha after enlightenment that by leaving the path of asceticism, he lost the true path. In discourse #2, the Buddha sits out in the open in the thick darkness of night, while it is raining lightly. Māra wants to frighten him, so he takes the form of an immense elephant king—his head was like a great mass of soap-stone, his tusks pure silver, his trunk like a great plow. The Buddha recognizes him and speaks a verse—“you have travelled through saṃsāra for a long time, taking beautiful and ugly shapes. Enough of that, Evil one, end-maker, you are defeated!”<sup>82</sup>

Such episodes are repeated time and again in the *Māra-chapter*—once Māra is a bull, a snake, a dishevelled farmer; commonly it rains or is dark; on occasions he speaks verses. Always he is recognized and experiences defeat—an achievement of the Buddha and his community from the viewpoint of society, and a comforting message for meditating monks. Evidently, the repetition of this message reflects the manner in which the story was told and retold, a theme to which different authors could contribute.

### 5. The *Bhikkhunī-saṃyutta*: Female Subjectivity and Its Encounters with the Dark Side

An especially startling specimen of Buddhist encounters with Māra appears in the Chapter with Nuns, in which the Buddhist protagonists who defeat Māra are Nuns who practice in the forest. Here, between the lines of the formulaic structuring of the text that is shared with the previous chapter, we quickly pick up the sexual overtones as Māra approaches the nuns who are seeking seclusion in the forest, normally trying to seduce them with a verse. As in discourse #1, where he says—

There is no refuge in this world—what will you do with seclusion?

Enjoy the pleasures of desire, so you will not be regretful later.<sup>83</sup>

It is hard to tell what the reality behind these stories was like, but it seems that the text is eager to support the strengthening of female subjectivity in the face of assaults that may have been common; even if there was only fear of such encounters, this must have been an issue that troubled nuns and toward which such stories could help them prepare.<sup>84</sup> For example, the nun Uppalavaṇṇā who is the hero of discourse #5 is said in the pārajika rules in the Vinaya to have been raped by a Brahmin. Like in the previous sub-chapter, here too the nun will recognize Māra, return a verse to him, and thereby defeat him and cause him to disappear. As Ālavikā responds to the verse just quoted—

There is indeed a refuge in this world, flowering for me through wisdom;

Evil one, kinsman of negligence—you do not know that place!

Desires are like a knife or a stake, the aggregates the cutting block.

The pleasures of desire you describe, for me are only called ‘disgust’.<sup>85</sup>

The powerful statement becomes more compelling when placed in the mouth of a nun who is alone in the forest. Faced by the threat of assault, her piercing vision into the realities of Buddhist wisdom outshines the realms of desire and enjoyment she has left behind. Here too, the narrative serves an important purpose in communicating the message and in teaching us about the contexts in which these stories were told.<sup>86</sup>

### 6. Conclusions

The *Sagāthāvagga* calls us to open our eyes to the practices of storytelling that were behind the shaping of important parts of the early Buddhist discourses, if not of the textual corpus of the *Basket of Discourses* as a whole. In distinction to the idea that texts are meant to preserve, and specifically in this case to preserve verses, the SGV shows that here there is an important role of religious texts in the telling of stories in order to facilitate society’s internalization of the Buddhist views on life. No less than the stories introducing these prized verses, the verses are an excuse for the story, and the full aesthetic effect of the collection is perceived only when the two are seen together. The messages expressed in the prose openings are an end in themselves. Here, we can see how verses were often created to fit the emphases of the stories, and that the inspiration in the relation of verses could also be highly appreciated. The stories themselves are rich and moving, serve as fascinating articulations of Buddhist vision, and probably were told by Buddhist storytellers in different contexts, perhaps in ways that quoted the verses as well.

Whatever the precise performative practices behind the SGV, it is remarkable to see a text that communicates Buddhist practical insight in such compelling and enticing ways that fit the genre(s) of wisdom literature: The Buddha is good for people in this life and the next; good actions of body, speech, and mind are the only thing that will guarantee our health and prosperity in the long run; the only way to really care for one’s self is through caring for others and acting positively; harming others will cause one harm in the future, whether in this life or the next; the Buddha is the prime ascetic, the only truly enlightened teacher, and his students are the worthier recipients of alms; monks and nuns can defeat harmful spirits and even the armies of death through the powers of their knowledge and concentration; and poetic inspiration is a vehicle to truth. These are among the messages



that this wisdom book cultivates and communicates, which were crucial to the flourishing of Buddhism. Such ideas probably caused people to pursue the advanced practices of the Buddhist path described in the other Books of the *Samyutta*, and which imbued them with meaning and significance. The two cannot, in fact, be divorced from each other.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> According to Norman (1983, p. 51): “The fact that some of the verses are also found in Jain literature prove [*sic*] their non-Buddhist nature”. Von Hinüber has shown that the verses are at times Buddhist or semi-Buddhist reworkings of oral lore, for example when he says that “The *Sagāthā-vagga* preserves on the whole material that is very disparate and consists of a variety of verses, which, it seems, were current in and assembled from the collective memory of early Buddhist monks, who had learned and used to rehearse them even before they joined the Buddha” (Oskar von Hinüber 2020, p. 10).
- <sup>2</sup> Grinshpon (2003) called for a good-enough reading of the *Upaniṣads*, and performed ingenious close readings of these texts in order to uncover the real-life contexts in which *Upaniṣadic* doctrine was realized. Among the readers who were able to appreciate the subtlety and depths of the SGV were Winternitz ([1927] 1972, pp. 56–60; see further below) and Rhys Davids (2017, pp. v–viii), whose enticing descriptions convey the marvel of these texts. In many respects, this article calls for a return to such a style of reading, instead of the historicist emphasis that has come to dominate the field.
- <sup>3</sup> See also the way Bodhi (2000, pp. 22–28) for a position that takes the SGV to have a very different character from the other books of the *Samyutta*.
- <sup>4</sup> Here, von Hinüber reads far too much into what is actually a rather minor and technical distinction. All introductions to the *Aṭṭhakathās* to the *Nikāyas* begin with a rich explanation of *evaṃ me sutaṃ*. This leads into an explanation of the opening section of the discourse’s *nidāna*, which includes a reference to the place and setting. Then, after the Buddha expresses his decision to teach, the commentator introduces the four *Sutta-nikkhepas*, the reasons for the laying down of a discourse (see Oskar von Hinüber 2020, pp. 7–8, with a more elaborate discussion in von Hinüber 2015, p. 372ff.). These relatively simple points explain the Buddha’s motivation to speak this particular text (whether this is his own motivation, *attajjhāsayo*, for the sake of another, *parajjhāsayo*, etc.), which relates to the specific conditions of teaching. Much like in the *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī* in relation to the *Dīgha-nikāya*, where this section comes a little bit later in the text, once the Buddha officially begins to teach after the opening narrative ends, in the *Samyutta*-commentary this section comes once when the Buddha offers a standard teaching at the opening of the second book. In the first book, the *Book with Verses*, the verses do not constitute regular teachings events so the section on the motivation for teachings the discourse are saved for later. While the distinction between the *Samyutta*-commentary and its sister ones is of interest, it in no way suggests that the SGV is any less original, or early. It does perhaps suggest that the authors of the commentary were aware that there is a literary distinction between the collections, but the fact that the more potent and fundamental explanation of *evaṃ me sutaṃ* comes before this collection begins shows that they regarded the SGV just as highly as the other collections. See also the consideration raised by Choong (2020, pp. 895–96), that the structure preserved in the *Samyutta-āgama* with the SGV at the end of the collection makes better sense and explains part of the problem in the connection.
- <sup>5</sup> For a fuller expression of these ideas, see Shulman (2022, forthcoming); see also Gethin (2007, 2020).
- <sup>6</sup> On *bhāṇakas*, see Adikaram (1946) and Endo (2013), but see the approaches more in line with the ones I develop here in Deegalle (2006), Drewes (2011), and Shulman (forthcoming).
- <sup>7</sup> Even though many texts in the first two chapters do not include prose introductions, it seems adequate to assume that a full working out of the materials would have included this, or that such materials were provided in live performance.
- <sup>8</sup> As in the first 50 discourses of book 4 of the *Anguttara Nikāya*. See more generally Bucknell (2007, pp. 7–8). Choong (2007) takes materials from the SGV as an example of the early genre of *geyya*. According to the commentaries, the SGV is a prime example of the early genre of *geyya*, in which a discourse includes a verse, as in the commentary to the *Alagaddūpama-sutta* of the *Majjhima*—“*sabbampi sagāthakam suttaṃ geyyanti veditabbaṃ visesena samyuttake sakalopi sagāthāvaggo*. In the early list of 9 *aṅgas* that introduce the term *geyya*, *Udāna* is taken as a separate category.
- <sup>9</sup> To be clear, I use *Book* for *Vagga*, as in *Sagāthāvagga*, meaning the first verse of the *Samyutta-nikāya*; *Chapter* stands for *Samyutta*, as in *Kosala-samyutta*, of which there are 11 in the *Book*; *sub-chapter* or *Section* refers to *Vagga*, each unit of 10 texts within a *Chapter*. Not all *Chapters* have more than one *Vagga*.

- 10 In the Indian context, and beyond, verses can be seen as conveyers of sacred power, most familiar to tradition through the recitation of the *Veda*.
- 11 These include the introduction to Bodhi's (2000) translation, the valuable comparative studies of Bingenheimer (2007, 2011) and Choong (2007), and the interesting study by Bucknell (2007), who reaches the compelling conclusion on the placement of the *Bhikkhu-saṃyutta*, which now appears at the end of Book two in the *Saṃyutta*, being originally part of the SGV. This is an interesting effort to discover the underlying structure of the SGV, although I am not convinced by his idea that the collection was first based on the model of the four assemblies. One must consider the literary character of the text in assessing the structure of a collection of this sort.
- 12 For salient examples, see Allon (1997, p. 366); Anālayo (2011, p. 17); Salomon (2018, p. 52).
- 13 'Minor' refers here to materials that employ poetry; on this collection, see Shulman ([2012] 2013).
- 14 von Hinüber (1996, p. 38). In general, his 2020 article is a development of ideas he raised in his short introduction to the SGV in this last source. Similar ideas influence Norman (1983, p. 51) as well.
- 15 For example, Norman (1997, p. xix), Oberlies (2019, p. 8), Warder (1967, p. 226). These ideas seem to go back to Geiger ([1916] 2000, p. 1).
- 16 As when discourses #3 and #21 in the *Māra-saṃyutta* repeat the main part of the verse that precedes them. See also the discussion of discourses #2 and #23 in the *Kosala-saṃyutta* below.
- 17 This is true also regarding some of the materials in the *Sakka-saṃyutta*, the chapter von Hinüber focuses on, which I will not treat here. See, for example, the *Suriya-*, *Chanda-*, and *Dhajjagga-Suttas*, which told important stories with rich cosmological and mythological motifs, to be used from then onward, or at least later on, as *parittas* (protective chants). On this see Shulman (2019).
- 18 See the collection of Kynes (2021), Dell et al. (2022), as well as Stoneman (2022).
- 19 See Asirvatham (2012), and the new and authoritative Stoneman (2022); see Doufekar-aertz (2010) for the legends of Alexander in the Arab world, and Stoneman (1995) for the supposed meeting between Alexander and Brahmin ascetics.
- 20 On King Solomon, see Firth (2022).
- 21 For Egypt, see Fox and Millar (2022); for Mesopotamia, Cohen and Wasserman (2021).
- 22 As in discourse 87–90 in the *Majjhima*.
- 23 For the structure of the *Saṃyutta*, see von Hinüber (1996, pp. 69–77; 2020).
- 24 This list is most familiar from the *Sāmaññaphala-sutta*. The six teachers include the *Ājīvika* Makkhali Gosala, the Jain leader Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta, and the other ascetics Pūrāṇa Kassapa and Sañcaya Belaṭṭhaputta, Pakudha Kaccāyana, and Ajita Kesakambala, each identified with a particular position such as materialism or atomism. See classically Basham (1951). This appears to be a later level of the text, perhaps included while editing the collection, so that it will open with a claim on the Buddha's pre-eminence. This part of the text is not reflected in the verse.
- 25 This could easily be a Buddhist adaptation of a verse that reflects on the ominous powers of ascetics, which are well known in Indian religious literature, and are now attributed to a Buddhist monk (*bhikkhu*).
- 26 Norman (1983) and von Hinüber do not use the term *folklore*, which has yet to receive the place it deserves in Buddhist studies. However, they both include reflections that relate to the folkloric nature of the SGV, as when Norman speaks of the riddles and puns that the collection includes (p. 51), or when von Hinüber discusses the re-working of broader Indian religious and literary materials. In folklore, such reworking of a story into a new format is a key mark of text; see classically Ramanujan ([1991] 1994). While folklore can be performative, as in Ben-Amos (1982), it can also be literary, as in Hazan-Rokem (2000).
- 27 SN I.82: *ubhayena vata maṃ so bhagavā atthena anukampi diṭṭhadhammikenā ceva atthena samparāyikenā cā'ti*. See also the development of this idea in discourse #17 in the collection.
- 28 This point builds on the broader discussions of Buddhist orality, in which the popular position, which has been advocated most forcefully by scholars like Allon (1997, 2018, 2021) and Anālayo (2011, 2017), is that texts were meant to be memorized and recited verbatim from memory, rather than performed. These texts need not necessarily have been performed in the way we find them here, so that they may not relate to the Parry–Lord theory of oral literature, which has been revived in relation to the early discourses by McGovern (2016, 2019). In Anālayo's (2020) recent study of the *Saṃyukta-āgama* and its relation to the Pāli *Saṃyutta-nikāya*, he again argues against a theory of improvisation. He adds no new real considerations to the ones he raised in his earlier publications, thereby repeating his conservative stance. For him, there is simply no room for innovation. This is unrealistic in relation to the *Skandha/Khandha-saṃyukta/tta* on which he focuses, while for the SGV the conclusions would be even bolder.
- 29 The commentary adds that their state of their nails was not any better, and that they were carrying bundles with many kinds of requisites used by renunciates.
- 30 Anālayo (2009) takes the *Udāna* to be a collection that developed gradually, with the verses being original and the stories later additions. He believes that the texts were arranged according to the verses, with the stories being secondary. The stronger part of his argument is that in the first four *vaggas*, there is a shared term in the verses (*brāhmaṇa* in the first, *sukha* in the second, etc.). However, it can be shown that the stories also have their own logic as well, as for example the first three texts are part of the same sequence that is borrowed from the *Mahāvagga* of the Vinaya. It makes sense that as Anālayo argues, the fourth "discourse" in the

sequence, which in the Vinaya follows the first three, is placed in the *Udāna* at the opening of the second *vagga*, since it does not include the term *brāhmaṇa*, and rather starts the second decade with discourses that include a verse that mentions *sukha*. However, Anālayo is not sensitive enough to the high literary qualities of some of the stories, and highlights technical issues instead of aesthetic concerns. Here, it may be true that a certain term in the verses determined the placing of the story and accompanying verse in the sequence within the first half of the text. However, the fact that this does not continue in the second half, a fact Anālayo acknowledges himself, shows that other considerations were active. It could be possible that the verses helped establish the sequence in the first half of the text, but the stories dominate the collection in most of the second half, and arguably within the first half as well. Specifically, many of the stories in the *Udāna* were obviously told in public events and shared beyond the memorization and recitation of texts, if a text like the *Udāna* was ever recited communally at all to begin with. It seems reasonable to suggest that here too the verses were memorized in order to serve as cues for the telling the stories, while the verse could be brought in as part of the storytelling in order to provide a sense of beauty and power that is inherent in *Buddha-vacana*. Thus, sequences of verses could be memorized in order to frame the story, which could be told more loosely. Such an approach fits the textual practices we can assume were behind the SGV, and which may have been at work behind a collection like the *Udāna* and other contexts in which *Udānas* are framed within texts. I hope to devote a separate study to the storytelling practices behind the *Udāna* in the near future. One consideration that speaks in favor of this interpretation is the shared texts between the *Udāna* and the SGV. While *Udāna* 6.2 equals SGV 3.12 in the story but not in the verse, *Udāna* 5.1 is completely equal to SGV 2.8. The question of shared texts between collections exceeds the bound of the present inquiry, but here this could be a case of the texts having a similar function and serving the goals of both collections. While the story could also have been memorized, these are stories which would be easily adaptable to an event of preaching/storytelling, and could have been copied to fit the occasion.

The study of Buddhist preaching is still in its infancy, yet it seems clear that materials that are now considered canonical literature often related to such contexts. For discussions of preaching, see Deegalle (2006) and Langer (2007, 2013).

For example, *Udāna* 8.5, 8.6.

For example, *Udāna* 1.1–3, 2.1, and more.

SN I.70/I.113: *Kati no kho Bhante Purisassa Dhamma Ajjhataṃ Uppajjamānā Uppajjanti Ahitāya Dukkāya Aphāsuvihārāya'ti.*

Such an idea is appealing, but it would have been even easier to reach the number of 20 verses, in the more elegant form of two full *vaggas* of 10 discourses each, by dismissing some of the discourses that are more repetitive. See further below (esp. notes 71–72).

Pasenadi repeats a prevalent formula on “a thought arose for me when my mind was withdrawn in seclusion” (*mayhaṃ rahogatassa paṭisallīnassa evaṃ cetaso parivitatko udapādi*). As in other appearances of this formula, the idea could be that he was in meditation, or that he just had a quiet moment to think.

SN I.71: *kesaṃ nu kho piyo attā kesaṃ appiyo attā?*

SN I.72: *attānañ ce piyaṃ jaññā, na naṃ pāpena saṃyuje; na hi taṃ sulabhaṃ hoti, sukhaṃ dukkaṭakārinā. antakenādhīpannassa, jahato mānusaṃ bhavaṃ; kiñhi tassa sakaṃ hoti, kiñca ādāya gacchati; kiñcassa anugaṃ hoti, chāyāva anapāyinī. ubho puññaṃ ca pāpaṃ ca, yaṃ macco kurute idha; tañhi tassa sakaṃ hoti, tañca ādāya gacchati; tañ cassa anugaṃ hoti, chāyāva anapāyinī. tasmā kareyya kalyāṇaṃ, nicayaṃ samparāyikaṃ; puññaṃ paralokasmim, paṭiṭṭhā honti pāṇinan'ti.*

SN I.72: *kesaṃ no kho rakkhito attā kesaṃ arakkhito attā?*

SN I.73: *taṃ kissa hetu, bāhirā h'esā rakkhā n'esā rakkhā ajjhataṃ.*

SN I. 73: *kāyena saṃvaro sādhu, sādhu vācāya saṃvaro, manasā saṃvaro sādhu, sabbattha saṃvaro sādhu; sabbatthā saṃvuto lajjī rakkhito pavuccatī'ti.*

SN I.73: *appakā te sattā lokasmim ye ulāre ulāre bhoge labhitvā na c'eva majjanti* [PTS: *majjante*] *na ca pamajjanti na ca kāmesu gedhaṃ* [PTS: *gedham*] *āpajjanti na ca saddesu vipaṭṭipajjan'ti.*

SN I.74: *sārattā kāmabhogesu giddhā kāmesu mucchitā; atisaraṃ na bujjhati, migā kūṭaṃ'va oḍḍitaṃ; pacchāsaṃ kaṭukaṃ hoti, vipāko hi'ssa pāpako'ti.*

The commentary explains that this perplexing statement refers to Pasenadi's chief of staff. The message is clear, however, that the King will not serve as judge any longer, or at least that he has made such a resolution.

SN I.74: *idhāhaṃ bhante aḍḍakaraṇe nisinno passāmi khattiyamahāsālepi brāhmaṇamahāsālepi gahapatimahāsālepi aḍḍhe mahaddhane mahābhoge pahūtajātarūparajate pahūtavittūpakaraṇe pahūtadhanadhaññe kāmahetu kāmanidānaṃ kāmādhikaraṇaṃ sampajānamusā bhāsante. tassa mayhaṃ bhante etadahosi 'alam dāni me aḍḍakaraṇena, bhādamukho dāni aḍḍakaraṇena paññāyissatī'ti.*

Replace *migā kūṭaṃ* in note 50 with *maccha khippaṃ*.

Aside from the qualities of the wisdom-king, see the description of Pasenadi's character by the Buddha in discourse #14—“a good friend, a good ally, a good companion” (*kalyāṇamitto kalyāṇasahāyo kalyāṇasampavāniko*).

See a classic formulation in the *Temiya-jātaka* (No. 538). There is more than an echo of this in the closing discourse of the *Vagga* (see below).

These insights have been brought to my mind by my student Odeya Eshel, who will eventually publish more elaborate discussions and analyses of these themes.

To read *Candanaṅgalikho*—one whose limbs are inscribed with sandal paste?

- 51 SN I.81: *padumaṃ yathā kokanadaṃ sugandhaṃ, pāti siyā phullam avātagandhaṃ; aṅgīrasaṃ passa virocamaṇaṃ, tapantaṃ ādiccam*  
*iva’ntalikkhe’ti.*
- 52 The idea could be that this is a different figure than the one in discourse #19.
- 53 SN I.93: *dhaññāṃ dhaṇaṃ rajataṃ jātarūpaṃ pariggahaṃ vāpi yad atthi kiñci; dāsā kammakarā pessa ye cassa anujīvino; sabbaṃ nādāya*  
*gantabbaṃ sabbaṃ nikkhippagāmināṃ; yañca karoti kāyena vācāya uda cetasā; tañhi tassa sakaṃ hoti, tañca ādāya gacchati; tañcassa anugaṃ*  
*hoti, chāyāva anapāyini. tasmā kareyya kalyāṇaṃ, nicayaṃ samparāyikaṃ; puññāni paralokasmiṃ, patiṭṭhā honti pāṇina’nti.*
- 54 SN I. 86: *atthi nu kho bhante eko dhammo yo ubho atthe samadhiggaṃ tiṭṭhati diṭṭhadhammikañceva atthaṃ samparāyikañcā’ti?*
- 55 SN I.87: *āyuraṃ arogiyaṃ vaṇṇaṃ saggaṃ uccākulīnataṃ; ratiyo patthayanta uḷārā aparāparā; appamādaṃ paṣamsati puññakiriyaṃ*  
*paṇḍita; appamatto ubho atthe adhigaṇhāti paṇḍito; diṭṭhe dhamme ca yo attho yo c’attho samparāyiko; atthābhisamayā dhīro paṇḍito*  
*pavuccatī’ti.*
- 56 SN I.83: *ayaṃ veraṃ pasavati dukkhaṃ seti parājito; upasanto sukhaṃ seti hitvā jayaparājayaṃ’ti.*
- 57 In this case and many others like it, it can be shown that the *Puggala-paññatti* is probably the source of the *Aṅguttara*, rather than vice versa as would normally be assumed (as in [Kuan 2015](#)). I will discuss the relation between these two texts—almost the full *Abhidamma* text is found in the *Aṅguttara*—in a separate publication.
- 58 SN I.96: *daliddo puriso rāja assaddaho hoti maccharī kadariyo pāpasanikkappa micchādiṭṭhi anādaro.*
- 59 Notice the change in the presentation of the *mātikā* in the SGV—*tamo(/joti) tama(/joti)pārāyaṇo* in the *Aṅguttara/Puggala-paññatti*, with a space between *tamo* and *tamaparāyaṇo*, becomes *tamotamaparāyaṇo* in one compound. This changes the meaning of *tamo* from a nominative to an ablative sense. This change is equal to the way that the conclusion of each formulaic explanation is made, when the *tamo hoti tamaparāyaṇo* of the *Aṅguttara/Puggala-paññatti* is replaced with this compound, which comes after a short example that the SGV inserts here at the end of the formulaic presentation of the *mātikā*’s content. Although this change could be grammatical in Pāli and makes intuitive sense, it seems like a reworking that is also made to fit the solution in the verse.
- 60 #2 and #23, #4 and #5, #14 and #15, #17 and #18, and #19 and #20.
- 61 In my reading, this could include #3, #13, #16, #21.
- 62 SN I.101. *kim assa karaṇīyaṃ aññatra dhammacariyāya aññatra samacariyāya aññatra kusalakiriyaṃ aññatra puññakiriyaṃ’ti.*
- 63 SN I.102: *tasmā hi paṇḍito poso sampassaṃ atthaṃ attano; buddhe dhamme ca saṅghe ca dhīro saddhaṃ nivesaye/ so dhammaṃ cari kāyena*  
*vācāya uda cetasā/ idheva naṃ paṣamsanti pecca sarge pamodati’ti.*
- 64 *santaṃ* here should be understood both to express the first-person stance of the poet, and the quiet state that characterizes renunciation.
- 65 I take *apalāyinaṃ* as an accusative that describes *nikkhantaṃ maṃ santaṃ* for the first verse, the first-person speaker of the poem. [Bodhi’s \(2000, pp. 455–56, n. 488\)](#) solution of a shortened genitive plural is interesting but seems to miss the emphasis.
- 66 I take *etato bhiyyo* as “worse”, i.e., “even more than this”, which should make sense in this context as women should be said to be worse than thousands of archers.
- 67 “direct”, to catch the emphasis of the *hi* on *sakkhī*, which carries special rhetorical force, and introducing the reference to the authenticating formula of *evaṃ me sutaṃ*.
- 68 SN I.185–186: *nikkhantaṃ vata maṃ santaṃ agarāsmānagāriyaṃ, vitakkā upadhāvanti pagabbhā kaṇhato ime; uggaṇṭṭā mahissasā sikkhitā*  
*dalhadhammino, samantā parikireyyuṃ sahaṇṇaṃ apalāyinaṃ; sacepi etato bhiyyo āgamiṇṇaṃ itthiyo, neva maṃ byādhayissanti dhamme*  
*samhi patiṭṭhitaṃ; sakkhī hi me sutaṃ etaṃ buddhassādiccabandhuno, nibbānagamaṇaṃ maggaṃ tattha me nirato mano; evaṃ maṃ*  
*viharantaṃ, pāpima upagacchasi, tathā maccu karissāmi na me maggaṃ dakkhasitī.*
- 69 *Dhammapada* 179.
- 70 See [Oskar von Hinüber \(2020, p. 14\)](#). Again, the latter is trying to derive too much history from this statement.
- 71 Within the development of the narrative sequence of the *Vagga* and of *Vaṅgīsa*’s figure, the poet begins to call on his own inspiration, *patibhāna*, in discourse #3. He succumbs to pride while observing other monks (*atimaññati* seems to mean that he over-estimates his own worth) and through his own inspiration (*attano patibhānena*) formulates verses in order to cultivate remorse.
- 72 The instruction to reveal the doctrine through an inspired personal synthesis does not necessarily have to work through verses. See for example the request directed at *Sāriputta* in the *Sammādiṭṭhi-sutta* of the *Majjhima*—“It would indeed be good if the Reverend *Sāriputta* would enlighten the meaning of this statement” (*sadhu vatāyasmantaṃ yeva sāriputtaṃ etassa bhāsitaṃ attho*). *Sāriputta* will proceed to explain the issue at hand, right view, through a series of doctrinal formulas in prose that can each serve as a correct definition.
- 73 SN I.193–194: *atha kho āyasmā Aññāsi-kondañño sucirass’eva yena Bhagavā ten’upasaṃkamaṃ upasaṃkamitvā Bhagavato pādesu sirasā*  
*nipatitvā Bhagavato pādāni mukhena ca paricumbati pāṇihi ca parisambāhati nāmaṃ ca sāveti Kondañño ‘haṃ Bhagavā Kondañño ‘haṃ*  
*Sugatā’ti.*
- 74 For example, by the old and venerable Brahmin *Brahmāyu* in *Majjhima-Nikāya* 91.
- 75 SN I.194: *Buddhanubuddho so thero Koṇḍañño tibbanikkamo; labhī sukhavihārānaṃ vivekānaṃ abhiññānaṃ; yaṃ sāvakena pattaṃ*  
*sattusāsana-kārīnā; sabbassa taṃ anuppattaṃ appamattassa sikkhato; mahānubhāvo tevijjo cetopariyāyakovidō; Koṇḍañño Buddhāyādo*  
*pāde vandati satthuno’ti.*



- <sup>76</sup> This is an interesting definition of the teaching, which fits the theoretical emphases of the *Samyutta-nikāya*. See [Shulman \(forthcoming\)](#).
- <sup>77</sup> SN I.196: *kāveyyamattā vicarimha pubbe gāmā gāmaṃ purā puram, ath’addasāma sambuddhaṃ saddhā no upapajjathā; so me dhammam adesesi khandhāyatanadhātoyo, tassāhaṃ dhammaṃ sutvāna pabbajimī anagāriyaṃ; bahunnaṃ vata atthāya bodhiṃ ajjhagāma muni, bhikkhūnaṃ bhikkhūnīnaṃ ye niyāmagataddasā; svāgataṃ vata me āsi mama buddhassa santike, tisso vijjā anuppattā kataṃ buddhassa sāsanaṃ; pubbenivāsaṃ jānāmi dibbacakkhuṃ visodhitaṃ, tejijjo iddhipattomhi cetopariyāyakovido’ti.*
- <sup>78</sup> I refer her most directly to the first two *Vaggas*. Materials in the last *Vagga* are slightly different, and some of them, such as the story of Māra’s daughters, may be older than other materials. In the Pāli, this exchange occupies two discourses (#24 and #25), which are kept as one in the Chinese. On this and other questions regarding the ordering of the text in Chinese, see [Bingenheimer \(2007\)](#), who adds interesting details on this particular episode.
- <sup>79</sup> See also the short reference to this in [Bloss \(1978, p. 158\)](#).
- <sup>80</sup> Winternitz refers here to these texts as a type of ancient Indian ballad (*Ākhyānas*), considering both the verses and the prose as a complete unit.
- <sup>81</sup> This opening is used in different contexts, as in the first three discourses in both this chapter and the *Udāna*, and the first discourse of the *Brāhma-samyutta*.
- <sup>82</sup> SN I.104: *saṃsāraṃ dīghamaddhānaṃ vaṇṇaṃ katvā subāsuhamaṃ, alaṃ te tena pāpima nihato tvaṃ asi antakan’ti.*
- <sup>83</sup> SN I.128: *n’atthi nissaraṇaṃ like kiṃ vivekena kāhasi, bhuñjassu kāmarattoyo mā ’hu pacchāntutāpini’ti.*
- <sup>84</sup> See the discussion of this text and its insights into female subjectivity in [Collett \(2014\)](#).
- <sup>85</sup> SN I.128: *atthi nissaraṇaṃ loke paññāya me suphussitaṃ; pamattabandhu pāpima na tvaṃ jānāsi taṃ padaṃ; satiisulūpamā kāmā khandhāsaṃ adhiṃkuṭṭanā; yaṃ tvaṃ kāmaratiṃ brūsi arati mayha sā ahū.*
- <sup>86</sup> On some complexities in the assessment of female subjectivity as nuns, see [Ohnuma \(2013\)](#) and [Langenberg \(2020\)](#).

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