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Martin Delhey

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Introduction

In an earlier paper¹ I have pointed to the well-known facts that suicide is by its nature a crucial and very intricate problem from an ethical point of view and that Buddhism has a long and complex history during which a huge variety of differing world-views were developed. I have also tried to show by means of selected examples from different Buddhist traditions that these factors obviously led to a multitude of at times widely differing Buddhist views on suicide. At the same time I have nevertheless singled out some typical features of Buddhist world-views which seem to have been instrumental in forming many of the respective different stands the traditions took on this problem. On the same

* A very early version of this paper was presented in German at the *29th Deutscher Orientalistentag* (20th to 24th September 2004 in Halle). English versions have been given in April and May 2008 at the University of Hiroshima and at the Ryukoku University in Kyoto, respectively. I am indebted to the listeners at these three occasions for their valuable comments. Moreover, I would like to thank my colleague Mr. Iain Sinclair for correcting my English. Finally, I am indebted to Prof. Enomoto Fumio for reading the text of my lecture given at Ryukoku University and for providing me with some important references. — Regarding the use of Pāli and Sanskrit words I would like to introduce the following conventions: The Sanskrit forms of technical terms are generally preferred, except when I am referring directly to a text passage written in Pāli. However, the names of disciples of the Buddha are for the sake of convenience always given in their Pāli form. The names of the *sūtras* dealing with these disciples are also always given in their Pāli form, as they appear, for instance, in SN (NDP). Accordingly, I use, for instance, “Vakkali” and *Vakkalisutta* and “Assaji” and *Assajisutta* regardless of the recension under consideration, while I always use the Sanskrit form of the technical term *sūtra* when it is not compounded with the name of a disciple of the Buddha.

¹ Delhey 2006.

occasion I tried to show that even with regard to the early Indian Buddhist texts, that is, the different recensions of the *nikāyas* or *āgamas* and of the *vinaya*, the situation is rather complex.²

In secondary literature, the pertinent sources of the Pāli canon have already been dealt with very often. Still, for at least two reasons much research work remains to be done regarding the early texts. To begin with, in most cases the different recensions preserved in other languages, especially in Chinese, have not been taken into consideration,³ although they are of equal historical value.⁴

² Delhey 2006, 29–37.

³ Western scholars on Indian Buddhism have hardly ever dealt with the Chinese sources, at least not in any detail. Lambert Schmithausen has — within the framework of important studies on more general problems — often briefly discussed the problem of suicide in early Buddhism on the basis of very heterogeneous sources, e.g. in Schmithausen 2000, 36f. There are also quite a few publications written by Japanese researchers which are based on a very broad textual basis and are often quite detailed. Some more or less recent contributions known to me are: Seki 1989, Sugimoto 1999 and Koike 2001.

⁴ Within this paper, I do not intend to discuss the basic methodological issues which are at stake when early and earliest Buddhism is dealt with in any detail. Basically, we are still confronted with the situation that there are at least three more or less incompatible basic methodological positions (for which see Schmithausen 1990). Therefore, the problems should better be addressed in a separate journal article or as a chapter within a book-length study. The extremely scepticist position regarding the possibility to uncover earlier historical layers within the canonical texts has recently been severely and in great detail criticized by Wynne (2005). In studying the suicide case of Vakkali I adopt the third approach sketched by Lambert Schmithausen which aims at a stratification of the material with the methods of higher textual criticism. I should, however, clarify what I mean by “equal historical value” when I am talking about recensions of early texts different from those ones which belong to the Pāli canon. I do not imply by this expression that the other *āgama* and *vinaya* collections as a whole are as old as the corresponding parts of the Pāli canon. As a matter of fact, Wynne has also argued in his recent article that the Pāli recension of these collections is particularly old, since it has been closed already when it was written down about the beginning of the common era and that very large parts of it even belong to the pre-sectarian period before 250 B.C.E. However, if we are interested not only in the earliest form of historical Buddhism but also in early changes of Buddhist positions toward suicide, slightly

Moreover, it is rare that one of these sources has been discussed in great detail, although many of them are characterized by particular features, which set them apart from the other pertinent texts or text passages, and pose very specific problems of interpretation. One example is the intricate way in which suicide is dealt with in the passage of the *vinaya* where the rule regarding homicide is cited and discussed. Other examples are three disciples of the Buddha who kill themselves by violent means and pass into *nirvāṇa* after death, namely Godhika, Channa and Vakkali. Each of these three cases is dealt with in a separate canonical sermon.

Among the few notable exceptions from the rule that individual cases are rarely dealt with in great detail is Damien Keown's article on the case of Channa.⁵ In this paper the case of Vakkali will be discussed.

later texts are, of course, equally valuable for uncovering these secondary developments. Moreover, the fact that one line of textual transmission became closed earlier than the other ones does of course not mean that it cannot contain secondary changes in certain places. It only renders the assumption probable that it does not contain as many changes as the other recensions. This does, however, imply, that the other recensions can never be *a priori* disregarded, since there is always the possibility that they contain older elements in the pertinent text passage. As a matter of fact, the Pāli recension does contain additional elements as compared to other recensions, at times even elements which cannot be found in any of the other extant versions. And I for one cannot see how all these idiosyncrasies can be explained by accidental or conscious omissions. For example, even the Pāli formula of the four noble truths contains such an idiosyncrasy, since hardly any other version contains its list of three kinds of thirst. The three kinds of thirst are also known to other traditions and sometimes mentioned in their canonical materials; therefore, there is neither a reason to omit them consciously (which implies that they were not considered as *buddhavacana* anymore) nor is it probable that they were not able to remember such a central formula as the four noble truths correctly. With regard to the citation of this formula in the *Dharmacakrapravartanasūtra* it has already been opined by Feer (1870, 408) that the Pāli recension has secondarily been changed. It is not quite clear to me how many alterations and additions Wynne wants to admit with regard to the Pāli *vinaya* and *āgama* after the pre-sectarian period. At any rate, it does not seem that they are insignificant or negligible.

⁵ Keown 1996. His investigation is, however, restricted to the Pāli recension of the relevant sermon.

There are quite a few references to a disciple of the Buddha called Vakkali⁶ in Indian Buddhist literature. According to many sources, including different recensions of the Śrāvakayāna canonical texts, he is praised by the Buddha as the foremost among his disciples as regards confident belief (*śraddhā*).⁷ Moreover, quite a few legendary accounts of his life or some events in his life are preserved.⁸ I would like to limit the present discussion almost entirely to the story of his suicide as contained in a canonical *sūtra* of the *āgamahnikāya* collections. It is true that some of the other narratives also contain episodes in which Vakkali intends or

⁶ I only use the Pāli form of this monk's name throughout this paper (see the note at the beginning of this article). — In SN III 119, 16, *Vakkhali* has, of course, to be corrected to *Vakkali* (as has been done in SN (NDP) 340, 15). Vakkali should correspond to the classical Sanskrit form Valkalin (“he who is clothed in a bark-dress”) as has already been suggested by Burnouf (1876, 238, n. 2). However, the only two occurrences of this monk's name in Sanskrit sources I am aware of are Vakkalin (*Divyāvadāna*), and Vālkali (! in a Sanskrit fragment edited by de La Vallée Poussin [1913, 580]). Many more or less different transliterations are attested in Chinese sources: 婆迦梨 (T 25.1507; EĀ 741c ff.; EĀ 557c20f.); 婆迦梨 (EĀ 642b29ff., 820a11f.); 跋迦梨 (SĀ); 跋迦梨 (T 25.1509, 239b1). 薄迦梨 (T 2.100, 431a7), 婆吉梨 (T 25.1507, 37a28f.) A very late translation dating from the 10th century has 末揭哩 (T 2.126). In the Tibetan *Mūlasarvāstivādinaya* (Derge-edition, Tōhoku No. 1, *kha* 3b3ff. [*Bhaiṣajyavastu*]) the name of this disciple of the Buddha appears in translated form: *shing gos can*. The corresponding passage in the Chinese *Mūlasarvāstivādinaya* (T 24.1448, 15b13) has 薄拘羅 (! Akanuma 1994, 732a: “Vakkula?”).

⁷ E.g. AN I 24; EĀ 557c20f.; T 2.126, 831b5; T 25.1509, 239b1. In the *Pārāyanavagga* of the *Suttanipāta* (Sn 1146) Vakkali's confident belief (*saddhā*) is mentioned as well. The exact interpretation of this passage is not easy; see Norman 1995, 129 and 389f. Norman considers, among others, the possibility that *saddhā* (which occurs in the Bahuvrīhi compound *muttasaddha* here) might be interpreted in this context as “desire.” At any rate, the passage is very noteworthy, since it is generally agreed that the *Pārāyanavagga* is one of the oldest texts of the Pāli canon. It should, however, be noted that the part of this text in which Vakkali occurs possibly represents an early addition (Vetter 1990, 38).

⁸ For a comprehensive survey of textual sources on the Vakkali legend see Akanuma 1994 s.v., Malalasekera 1983 s.v.; Lamotte, 1970, 1546, n. 1. Some additional sources will be cited at the appropriate places in this article.

attempts to commit suicide on other occasions in his life. However, they tend to be very late.⁹

Vakkali's 'successful' suicide has been dealt with very often in secondary literature.¹⁰ Most scholars still seem to agree that the narrative of Vakkali as presented in the Pāli recension suggests that in early Indian Buddhism under certain circumstances the decision to kill oneself has — at least by significant parts of the community — been accepted. Nevertheless, this suicide case needs some further consideration for quite a few reasons. First of all, some scholars deny that such a conclusion as cited above is inevitable or even probable.¹¹ Secondly, even among the many scholars who would subscribe to the lowest common

⁹ A very long account of Vakkali's existences including former ones as well as his last one can already be found in the canonical Theravādin text *Apadāna* [Ap II 465–468 (no. 529; vv. 5689ff.)]. However, the *Apadāna* is probably one of the youngest texts of the Pāli Tipiṭaka (see von Hinüber 1996, § 121; Norman 1983, 90). Moreover, it does not seem to be as relevant to our topic as some secondary sources suggest. According to Lamotte (1970, 1546, n. 1), for example, this text belongs to those Theravādin sources in which it is related that Vakkali, out of despair that he was deprived of the opportunity to see the Buddha, attempted suicide by throwing himself off a rock (Ap II 467). But in the original text of the *Apadāna* Vakkali is, if I am not mistaken, not yet depicted as throwing himself off with suicidal intentions (in contrast to the post-canonical Theravāda sources also mentioned by Lamotte).

¹⁰ E.g. de La Vallée Poussin 1919, 688ff.; de la Vallée Poussin 1921, 25; Lamotte 1987, 108–111; Filliozat 1991, especially 103–106; Berglie and Suneson 1986, 31–33. Notable and relatively detailed discussions of the Vakkali case on the basis of all recensions can be found in Koike 2001, 155–157, Sugimoto 1999, 95–98 and Seki 1989, 262–270. Vetter (2000, 232–234) is not immediately concerned with the problem of suicide; nevertheless his contribution is quite helpful, in particular, because he takes all recensions of the *Vakkalisutta* into consideration.

¹¹ Damien Keown has tried to show that the Pāli recension of Vakkali's death and the two other Pāli *sūtras* on a disciple's suicide mentioned above are consistent with his view that suicide in early Buddhism was unequivocally prohibited or regarded as intrinsically wrong (Keown 1996, especially 17). Keown has often reiterated his conclusions with no substantial revisions (e.g. in Keown, 2005, 106). Some scholars cite Keown's view approvingly, e.g.

denominator formulated above, quite a few very different views on why the suicide is accepted can be found.¹² Thirdly, in the case of Vakkali it is especially regrettable that most publications only deal with the Pāli recension, since the preserved versions do differ very much from another in important respects. The latter circumstance can give us a better idea of the different ways in which religious suicide was dealt with in earlier Indian Buddhism. Moreover, the fact that all versions must in spite of their differences be somehow related with each other imply that their distinctive features are results of a historical development. Since at least some of the differences can hardly be explained by the assumption that they came about accidentally in the process of transmission, it is very well possible that they provide us with some insights regarding the history of views on

Harvey (2000, 291). Keown's remarks on the Vakkali case will be reviewed later in this paper. It might, however, be useful, to add a comment here on one of the more general reasons he gives for his conclusion. Keown often adduces the falseness of the 'transcendancy hypothesis' as an important argument against the possibility of suicide acceptance in (early) Buddhism (e.g. Keown 2005, 106; Keown 2007, 723). According to the hypothesis criticized by him a liberated person like an *arhat* can transcend moral rules, since he is 'beyond good and evil.' I perfectly agree, that this hypothesis is indeed wrong as regards most, and probably even all, varieties of early Buddhist world-view. However, Keown's conclusion is obviously based on a false premise: He assumes that suicide must invariably be regarded as a breach of the *ahimsā* doctrine and of the first and most important moral commandment to abstain from killing living beings. However, there is plenty of evidence from historical Buddhist sources that according to large parts of the tradition these moral commandments only refer to killing other living beings (see Delhey 2006, 40, cf. 48 and 57). According to such a view an *arhat* can kill himself, although he is not only still obliged to follow the moral precepts, but has even become completely unable to transgress at least the fundamental ones among them.

¹² Lamotte (1987, 106f.), for instance, believed that Vakkali's case represents the normative position of early Buddhism according to which an *arhat* may kill himself. Young (1991, 89–91) is one of those scholars who think that the Buddha's acceptance of Vakkali's suicide represents a rare exception which he made from his strict prohibition of suicide, because he had compassion for the extreme suffering of his disciple. Bhattacharya (1973, 29 n. 5, 157–159) believes that the permission given to Vakkali and other monks to kill themselves represents a late development within the canonical material.

suicide in early Buddhism.¹³ It is true that quite a few publications which take all recensions into consideration are available, but most of them are not very easily accessible for large parts of the international scholarly community, since they are written in Japanese.^{13a} Fourthly, a more detailed treatment of the problems involved, which are, as a matter of fact, quite numerous, than has been published so far in any part of the scholarly world is certainly not out of place. And finally, it is hoped that some of the truly original suggestions regarding the interpretation of the sources, which will be presented in the following pages, will also prove to be helpful for further investigations into the problem of suicide in early Indian Buddhism.

Recensions of the sūtra on Vakkali's suicide

To the best of my knowledge, the *sūtra* dealing with Vakkali's suicide is preserved in three different recensions:

1. the Pāli recension as preserved in the *Samyuttanikāya*;¹⁴
2. the recension of the Mūlasarvāstivādins as preserved in the long Chinese translation of the *Samyuktāgama* (雜阿含經);¹⁵
3. the recension contained in the Chinese *Ekottar(ik)āgama* translation 增壹阿含經¹⁶ (probably representing a branch of the Mahāsāṃghikas¹⁷).

¹³ Regarding my methodological presuppositions, see n. 4.

^{13a} See n. 10 for some examples.

¹⁴ SN III 119–124. This old edition from the Pāli Text Society is not entirely satisfactory from the viewpoint of textual criticism. Therefore, I have also consulted the corresponding section [SN (NDP), 340–344] in the Nālandā-Devanāgarī-Pāli-Series which is somewhat more reliable, although it gives fewer variants (Vetter 2000, 18). — Some years ago Bhikkhu Bodhi has published a rendering of the whole *Samyuttanikāya* (Bodhi 2000) which may, thanks to its indisputable merits, be regarded as a very welcome new standard translation of this text, although it is certainly not a translation on strictly historical principles. The *Vakkalisutta* can be found on the pages 938–941 of this work.

¹⁵ SĀ 346b–347b.

¹⁶ EĀ 642b–643a.

¹⁷ See the references in Oberlies 2003, 72, n. 169.

Moreover, there is a Central Asian fragment of a Sanskrit version of the *sūtra*.¹⁸ Unfortunately, the preserved parts only allow us to conclude that its beginning rather agreed with the first two recensions mentioned above than with the *Ekottar(ik)āgama* recension.

Summary of the Pāli recension

First, I would like to give a short summary of the Pāli recension of the *Vakkalisutta*. The monk Vakkali, who is staying in a potter's shed, is gravely ill. He sends his attendants to the Buddha in order to ask him for the favour to pay Vakkali a visit. The Buddha agrees and comes to Vakkali's place. Asked by the Buddha about his condition Vakkali says that his illness is unbearable and that his pains are still becoming worse.¹⁹ Furthermore, the Buddha inquires whether he is feeling any remorse. Vakkali answers in the affirmative and explains that he has many regrets, because he cannot leave his sick-bed anymore in order to see the Buddha. The Buddha reproaches Vakkali and tells him that he should not care about this putrid body (*pūtikāya*). He adds that someone who sees the teaching (*dhamma*) is seeing the Buddha. The sermon continues with the Buddha's instruction on the unsatisfactoriness of the five "constituents of one's person" (*skandha*)²⁰ (and on their 'not being the self' resulting from this deficiency).²¹ The Buddha concludes with the statement that someone who has this insight becomes liberated from rebirth. As usual in the Buddha's sermons, Vakkali affirms the correctness of all steps in the Buddha's instruction. Shortly after the Buddha has left, Vakkali asks his attendants to carry him to the seers' hill (*isigiri*), since someone like him (that is, a homeless ascetic) should not die inside a house.

¹⁸ Edited by de La Vallée Poussin (1913, 580).

¹⁹ Berglie and Suneson (1986, 33) obviously misunderstood this passage. They state that Vakkali had no painful feelings.

²⁰ On the term *skandha* (Pāli *khandha*) see now Vetter 2000, especially 73–82.

²¹ In SN III 120, 32ff. the Buddha's instruction appears in an extremely abbreviated form. In SN (NDP) 341, 21ff. less text is omitted. See Vetter 2000, 325f. (paragraphs F II, F III and F IV) for the full wording of the instruction and *ibid.*, 86f. for an English translation.

During the following night the Buddha is approached by two deities. They tell him that Vakkali “is intent on release” (*vimokkhāya ceteti*) and add that he “certainly will attain release as a well-released one.” Early in the following day, the Buddha sends messengers to Vakkali in order to inform him about the words of the deities and about his own comment, according to which he should not be afraid; his death will be not bad (*apāpaka*). Vakkali assures that he has neither doubts regarding the unsatisfactoriness of the *skandhas* nor regarding the fact that he feels no desire nor love towards them. Shortly after the messengers have left again in order to report to the Buddha, what Vakkali had to say, Vakkali “takes the knife,”²² that is, he commits suicide as proposed. Accompanied by his

²² *satthaṃ āhāresi*. This expression has been interpreted as a euphemistic periphrasis for suicide (e.g. in Bodhi 2000, 420). Strictly speaking, it is a euphemism used to designate the particular suicide method resorted to by Vakkali and others (see Keown 15f. n.19, Vin III 74,14f. and the discussion below). It is not quite clear what *sattha*, which has been translated as “knife” above, means in this context. *sattha* (Skt. *śastra*) can theoretically designate any instrument used for cutting something. It is, therefore, also a word for sword, and seems to be used at times even for any weapon. Except for the *Ekottarāgama* recension, where Vakkali orders his attendant to bring him the instrument, it seems to be presupposed that the monk has such a device at his disposal. Therefore, it is also possible that in this context a razor is meant, which is one of the personal belongings a Buddhist monk is allowed to possess. At any rate, there is a post-canonical account of an intended suicide in which the technical term for the razor (*khura*) as well as the word *sattha* are used to designate the instrument employed (Dhp-a II 257, 5–258, 4). In Dhp-a I 431 it is said that Godhika committed suicide with a razor (*kesoropanasatthaka*). Nevertheless, it seems to be far from clear that the arguments given above exclude the possibility that a real weapon like a sword is meant in the canonical text passages where the expression cited in the beginning of the note occurs. Buddhaghosa, for instance, seems rather to have a sword in mind (also in the case of Vakkali, see Spk II 314, 28 and 315, 2 [*tikkhiṇena ... asinā*]). If Vakkali used a weapon the suicide case becomes even more disconcerting than it already is. A disciple of the Buddha should, according to a very common phrase, have laid down all weapons (*nihitadaṇḍo nihitasattho*, e.g. AN I 211, 21f.). This problematic aspect of Vakkali’s suicide is clearly alluded to in T 2.1507, 47a7f. (also see n. 53). For the sake of convenience, I stick to the translation of Pāli *sattha* as “knife” throughout this paper. — Regarding the fact that

disciples the Buddha goes to the site where Vakkali killed himself. There Māra is searching in all directions for Vakkali's consciousness (*viññāṇa*),²³ but in vain. The Buddha explains what is happening and adds that Vakkali has entered *nirvāṇa*, with his consciousness "not stationed [anywhere]" (*appatiṭṭhita*).²⁴ With this remark the sermon of Vakkali comes to its end.

Preliminary observations regarding the Pāli recension

A detailed interpretation of the Pāli recension will be given after a discussion of the differences in the other transmitted versions. But it might not be out of place to make three preliminary remarks already at this point. Firstly, Vakkali enters (post-mortal) *nirvāṇa* after his suicide. This fact becomes so clear from the wording of the text that, to the best of my knowledge, no one has ever tried to explain it away. Secondly, there can be no serious doubt as well that the Buddha not only tolerates Vakkali's suicide. He even encourages Vakkali to do so. For the Buddha's emphatically formulated message that Vakkali should not worry about his death immediately follows on the remark of the deities, that Vakkali "is intent on release." And it becomes quite clear from the context that this expression is an allusion to his intention to commit suicide: release (*vimokkha*) means in this

the lethal wound is inflicted at the throat, the tradition seems to be unanimous. Post-canonical Theravāda sources generally explain that the suicide cuts his jugular vein (see e.g. Spk II 314, 29 [read *kaṇṭha*^o instead of *kaṇḍa*^o], translated in Bodhi 2000, 1082). Other texts suggest that he even beheads himself (e.g. T 2.1507, 46c28). It seems that the description of these kinds of suicide as acts of "stabbing oneself" which can be found in many publications including my own (Delhey 2006, 34) are rather misleading.

²³ The term *viññāṇa* (Skt. *vijñāna*) has, as is well-known, already in the early canonical texts many shades of meaning, and the translation "consciousness" is at times misleading. For the present purposes it might, however, be convenient to stick to this popular rendering of *viññāṇa*. For a very exhaustive recent discussion of this term see Vetter 2000, 63–73.

²⁴ Scholars are divided on the exact interpretation of the term *appatiṭṭhita* in this context, which also occurs in the parallel section in the *Godhikasutta*. See now the thoroughgoing discussion in Langer 2001, 4, 33–36. I doubt whether her statement that Godhika finds release in the moment of death is correct, but this is more or less irrelevant for her line of reasoning, anyway. I have adopted Vetter's (2000, 234) translation of this word.

expression and in this text passage obviously — at least primarily —: release from his grave incurable disease by death from his own hand.²⁵ Note especially that immediately before the deities' visit to the Buddha it is narrated that Vakkali asks his attendants to carry him out of the shed (see above). Obviously he makes last preparations for his death. In view of the fact that Vakkali commits suicide afterwards and that it is not mentioned before that death by natural causes is immediately impending, it is highly probable that Vakkali already at this point in time intends to end his life by his own hand. The second part of the message of the deities makes very good sense as well when we understand *vimokkha* as referring to Vakkali's suicide. It contains the expression "being well-released, he will attain release" (*suvimutto vimuccissati*) which makes only good sense when both expressions refer to two different kinds of release which follow each other in chronological order. And in my view it is most natural to assume that these two kinds are the liberation from the fetters which bind Vakkali to *samsāra* (*suvimutto*) and, like in the term *vimokkha* used in the first part of the deities' message, liberation from his disease by death (*vimuccissati*).²⁶ In this context it is not convincing to assume, like it has been proposed by Keown,²⁷ that the

²⁵ A very similar interpretation of this expression has already been put forward by Vetter (2000, 233).

²⁶ Vetter (2000, 233) interprets the second message also as referring to two different kinds of release, but unlike me he prefers to identify the two kinds as the liberating experience during this life and the release from rebirth after death. Although his proposal in itself makes of course good sense as well, it is in my view more probable that *vimuccissati* refers primarily to the same kind of liberation as *vimokkha* does rather than introducing a third meaning of liberation into the text.

²⁷ Keown 1996, 17. To be sure, the Buddha's message itself does not contain any explicit hint to the way in which Vakkali dies. As a matter of fact, in two other *sūtras* of the Pāli canon (SN V 369–371) the same statement uttered by the Buddha refers to the monk Mahānāma, on whose actual death the sermons report nothing at all. But it goes without saying that one cannot disregard the context in which the Buddha's statement is found in this sermon when one wants to interpret it. Keown also suggests that the Buddha might simply say so because he knows that Vakkali will attain liberation later on and will afterwards die

Buddha's statement that Vakkali's death will not be bad might refer to death alone, that is, excluding the way death comes about. Vakkali must understand this message as an assurance that the Buddha approves of his intention to kill himself.

The third point I would like to mention before turning my attention to the other two recensions concerns the question of whether Vakkali was already released, when he performed the act of killing himself. Buddhaghosa says in his commentary on the *Vakkalisutta*²⁸ that Vakkali, while committing suicide, wrongly conceived himself to be an *arhat* without actually being one. Rather he was still a common person (*puthujjana*) at that point in time. Only immediately after cutting his throat did Vakkali realize that he had not yet been released and passed the stages of the way to salvation, so that he became an *arhat* in the last moments of his life. The problem with this interpretation is that the wording of the *sūtra* contains neither any hint whatsoever regarding the possibility of a salvific experience while committing suicide or dying, nor regarding the possibility that Vakkali wrongly conceived himself to be an *arhat* before killing himself.²⁹ In

as an *arhat*. Obviously, Keown alludes here to the post-canonical interpretation which lets Vakkali attain release only after he inflicted the lethal wound on himself. It will, however, be shown below that this late interpretation is not a convincing one as regards the Pāli recension of the sermon.

²⁸ In Spk II 313–315. Compare Berglie and Suneson 1986, 32f.

²⁹ The only feature of the text which might at first sight be interpreted in such a way is the future form in the expression *svimutto vimuccissati* used by one of the deities. Seki (1989, 268), for instance, concludes from the future form that at least at this point in time Vakkali cannot be an *arhat*. But I have already pointed out above that *vimuccissati* probably refers to his liberation from suffering. And even if *vimuccissati* refers somehow to the attainment of the religious goal it can only refer to post-mortal *nirvāṇa*, i.e. to liberation from rebirth, as Vetter (2000, 233) assumes. This implies that the salvific breakthrough attained in this life which is contained in the expression *svimutto* can have taken place at any earlier point in time. Admittedly, it is indeed somewhat unclear when exactly Vakkali attained release according to the Pāli recension. It seems that he is not yet an *arhat* in the beginning of the sermon, and there is no explicit reference to his liberating experience in the later parts of the

order to make Buddhaghosa's view plausible, one would have to suppose that the *sūtra* leads the reader (or listener) astray if it is not accompanied by detailed elucidations similar to those of Buddhaghosa.³⁰

There seem to be, moreover, certain motives for Buddhaghosa's interpretation. These are, most notably, the following two, which concern the conception of the nature of an *arhat*: To begin with, it was supposed by many that an *arhat* can easily endure physical pain.³¹ Secondly, the canonical dictum that the *arhat* neither longs for life nor for death has already become orthodox doctrine.³² Therefore, Buddhaghosa was facing a dilemma: On the one hand, Vakkali cannot have been an *arhat* when he performed the act of committing

sermon. I assume, however, that he already attained release immediately, or at least shortly, after the Buddha's instruction on the unsatisfactoriness of the *skandhas*. Regarding this topic, Tilmann Vetter points to the fact that the Buddha's sermon on the five *skandhas* which can also be found in many other places of the canon "is here not depicted as directly resulting in an experience of release" and suggests that Vakkali "achieved the result a little later, when he no longer clung to the wish to see the Buddha and felt free to dispose of a body that caused him unbearable pain." (Vetter 2000, 234). Also see n. 30 and the section containing the closer examination of the Pāli recension below.

³⁰ Bodhi (2000, 1082 n. 172), however, states that it is impossible to decide on the basis of the *sūtra* alone whether the commentator is right in his interpretation. — It is, by the way, interesting to note that according to the Vakkali legend in the *Apadāna* Vakkali becomes an *arhat* on another occasion in his life (Ap II p. 467, verse 33). It is, however, somewhat unclear whether this implies that the authors of the *Apadāna* were aware of this sermon and interpreted it in such a way that Vakkali was already an *arhat* when the events narrated in this *sūtra* took place. Strangely enough, even in the commentary on the *Aṅguttaranikāya* (Mp I 250, 22–251, 3) it is narrated that Vakkali becomes an *arhat* earlier in his life, although it is generally supposed (see von Hinüber 1996, § 207) that Buddhaghosa wrote this commentary as well as the commentary on the *Samyuttanikāya*.

³¹ This motive comes clearly to the fore in Buddhaghosa's remarks on Channa's suicide (compare Delhey 2006, 38) ; Mil 44f. has probably to be understood in the same way. — Strictly speaking, Buddhaghosa seems even to hold the view that all *āryas* can endure physical pain.

³² See e.g. de La Vallée Poussin 1937, 174; Mil 44f. (compare Delhey 2006, 37f.). At least this dictum seems to be interpreted in Buddhist (or at least in Theravāda) literature in

suicide. On the other hand, in view of the unambiguous wording of the canonical sermon he must have been an *arhat* in the moment of death. Consequently, Buddhaghosa had no choice other than to place the mastering of the way to salvation in the short interval between the suicide and its fatal result.³³ Another factor which may have made this case even more disconcerting for Buddhaghosa is the fact that Vakkali committed suicide in a violent and bloody way.³⁴

It will be seen below that the more explicit *Samṃyuktāgama* recension corroborates both the assumption that the Buddha approves of Vakkali's intention to commit suicide and the interpretation that Vakkali is already an *arhat* when he inflicts on himself the lethal wound. Before discussing this recension in some more detail, however, the *Ekottari(kā)gama* recension will be dealt with which shows that similar interpretations like that one put forward by Buddhaghosa were neither confined to him nor to the post-canonical Theravāda tradition as a whole.

The Ekottar(ik)āgama recension

The Chinese *Ekottar(ik)āgama* recension differs from both the other two versions to such an extent that only few common elements are remaining.³⁵ Basically, the correspondences are limited to the facts that the gravely sick monk Vakkali commits suicide with a knife and that Māra afterwards is looking in vain

such a way as to preclude the suicide of an *arhat*. A very similar version of this saying from the *Milindapañhā* has been quoted from Brāhmanical literature by Kamaleswar Bhattacharya, and he interprets it as an attempt to curb the enthusiasm of the liberated ones to commit suicide (Bhattacharya 1973, 113 n. 1). It should, however, be noted that at least the Jainas understood a state of mind in which one neither longs for life nor for death as a necessary prerequisite for the saint who dies the *paṇḍitamaraṇa*, that is, the voluntary death by starvation. See *Āyāraṅga*, p. 85, verse 19: *jīviyaṃ ṇābhisaṃkhejjā maraṇaṃ ṇo vi patthae | duhito vi ṇa sajjejjā jīvite maraṇe taḥā ||*

³³ This has already been noted by Filliozat (1991, 105f.; original article published in French 1963).

³⁴ See below for more details on this particular problem.

³⁵ Therefore, Demiéville's (1957, 351 n. 3) remark that the *Ekottar(ik)āgama* version deviates "a little" from the other two versions is rather misleading.

for Vakkali's consciousness (*vijñāna*), since this monk has entered *nirvāṇa*.³⁶

But in contrast to the other two recensions Vakkali commits suicide without having consulted the Buddha and even while being aware that he is not yet released.³⁷ Moreover, it is explicitly stated that Vakkali in the interval between the act of killing himself and its fatal result all of a sudden recognizes that he has acted contrary to the Buddha's teaching and that his deed will have bad consequences for him. However, immediately afterwards he gains the liberating insight into the arising and disappearance of the five *skandhas*, whereby he also according to this recension can pass into *nirvāṇa* after death.³⁸

Thus this recension of the *Vakkalisutta* is in line with Buddhaghosa's interpretation regarding the decisive question of when exactly Vakkali became an *arhat*. However, this hardly renders Buddhaghosa's interpretation of the Pāli recension more plausible. Rather, the considerably expanded version of the passage dealing with Vakkali's act of committing suicide in the *Ekottar(ik)āgama* seems to represent a secondary development within the transmission of this collection of sermons as well. It may have been inserted due to problems which were quite similar to those of Buddhaghosa.

There are, as a matter of fact, more passages than the one mentioned above which suggest that the *Ekottar(ik)āgama* version is an exegetical recension of the *Vakkalisutta*. To begin with, Vakkali does not only himself recognize that he is not yet released, but afterwards a narrator's voice stresses the fact that Vakkali at this point of time was completely ignorant of the fundamental Buddhist truths and of the operations of *karman*.³⁹ Moreover, only in this recension does the sermon end with a dialogue between the Buddha and Ānanda, in which once again the question of when Vakkali became an *arhat* is discussed. This addition is especially noteworthy, because the narrative has already found a natural end with Māra's

³⁶ Cf. the table in the appendix.

³⁷ See EĀ 642c5f.

³⁸ EĀ 642c11–20.

³⁹ EĀ 642c8–10.

defeat and because it seems to be redundant after the explanatory passages already added in the narrative itself.⁴⁰ Obviously, the original narrative of Vakkali's death was deemed so problematic that the new interpretation of this incident was incorporated in the canonical account itself and even given more than once within this framework.⁴¹

⁴⁰ EĀ 643a11ff. At any rate, the passage is redundant regarding its main topic, which is the question when Vakkali became an *arhat*. But even regarding other aspects of this incident, very few new details are added. It is, by the way, somewhat strange that this passage seems not to be as exact regarding the point in time when Vakkali became released as the earlier passages. It is, for instance, said that Vakkali became an *arhat* "today". However, I assume that at least the expression 捨壽之日 (EĀ 643a18f.) has to be understood in a weak sense, that is, as "at the time when he gave up his life" rather than as "on that day on which he gave up his life." As a matter of fact, this sentence dealing with his liberating insight follows on another one in which it is said that he contemplated the virtues of the Buddha when he was about to kill himself. This suggests clearly that he attained his liberating insight during or after inflicting the lethal wound on himself rather than shortly before this act. Therefore, there remains only one possibility of interpreting the phrase 捨壽之日 in a literal way: The process of preparing for suicide, committing it and dying because of it must in this case have extended over at least two days. This seems not to be very probable. There is, however, another passage in the EĀ which is at least at first sight (I have checked the context only in a very cursory way, since I detected the passage shortly before finishing this paper in Seki 1989, 268) quite confusing regarding the question when exactly Vakkali found release. The sentence in question runs as follows (EĀ 820a11f.): "At that time when the monk Vakkali looked at the knife, his mind became liberated" (婆伽梨比丘觀視於刀 ○ 即時心得解脫 ○). However, I doubt that this implies that Vakkali had not yet begun to make use of the knife. It might rather be understood in such a way that he was confronted with the situation that he (had) inflicted a lethal wound on himself by means of a knife.

⁴¹ The presence of a rather late, modified version of a *sūtra* in the Chinese *Ekottar(ik)āgama* is certainly not very surprising. It has already been noted before that this recension contains many expanded versions of older *sūtras* and late additions. See IC § 2082; Lamotte 1988, 154 and 156; Lamotte 1967, 106; Bareau 1988, 69. Admittedly, this has been stated especially with reference to Mahāyānistic sections of this text. But at any rate the mere fact that many later additions have been made shows that the final redaction of this recension took place rather late in early Buddhist history.

It is, by the way, quite interesting to note that another *sūtra* of the Chinese *Ekottar(ik)āgama* seems to underpin this new interpretation with a fairly convincing explanation of how Vakkali was able to find release in the last moments of his life.⁴² That sermon contains a version of the Buddha's well-known explanation as to how exactly the recollection of death should be practiced. As in the other recensions of this discourse, the interval of time which one should envision as one's remaining life span until death takes its toll is shortened more and more, starting with seven days, then six days etc. However, while in the other versions the Buddha concludes with the remark that one should contemplate death as occurring just within the time needed for eating one mouthful of food or for taking one breath,⁴³ he simply refers to Vakkali as the shining example of this practice in the *Ekottar(ik)āgama*.⁴⁴ This must be a reference to his suicide. As a matter of fact, Vakkali even knew for sure that he would die the next moment. One can very well imagine that this knowledge was instrumental in intensifying his quest for attaining liberating insight.⁴⁵ Compared to this, Buddhaghosa's explanation as to how it was allegedly possible for Vakkali to be released in such a short time is fairly weak. If I understand his explanation correctly, he mainly wants to hold the painful feeling evoked by the bloody suicide responsible for Vakkali's speedy way to salvation.⁴⁶ But since Vakkali is

⁴² EĀ 741c ff. Parallels according to Akanuma: AN III 303–306; AN IV 316–319.

⁴³ AN III 306, 3–13; AN IV 319, 20–29.

⁴⁴ EĀ 742a20ff.

⁴⁵ In the partial *Ekottar(ik)āgama* commentary T 25.1507 (37a26–37b7), the account of Vakkali's self-inflicted death is explicitly linked to the recollection of death: As an example for this spiritual practice and for its soteriological efficacy Vakkali's suicide is narrated. If I interpret this passage correctly (which is in this regard not explicit), the authors of this text want to depict — in contrast to my interpretation of the two canonical texts — already Vakkali's decision to commit suicide as part of his recollection of death. This is quite in line with the general tendency of this post-canonical text (see below) to interpret Vakkali's decision to commit suicide and his act of inflicting the lethal wound upon himself as a conscious attempt to attain *nirvāṇa*.

⁴⁶ Spk II 314, 29ff.

right from the start depicted as suffering terrible pains through his illness, this seems to be a rather far-fetched solution.⁴⁷ Buddhaghosa's unconvincing statement regarding this matter rather underscores the fact that Buddhaghosa was more concerned with denying the possibility of an *arhat* committing suicide than with uncovering the spiritual meaning of this story.

Interpretations which are related to those of the Ekottar(ik)āgama and Buddhaghosa

There are some more sources for the view that Vakkali only became released in the last moments of his life. Among them, a passage concerning Vakkali in the partial *Ekottar(ik)āgama* commentary 分別功德論 is especially interesting. This text is also only preserved in a Chinese rendering.⁴⁸ If the traditional opinion that this anonymous translation was produced during the Later Han Dynasty (25–220 C.E.) is correct, the reinterpretation of Vakkali's suicide would be proven to be much older than suggested by the other sources which deal with Vakkali's death in such a way.⁴⁹ However, there seem to be very good reasons to doubt this traditional dating.⁵⁰ According to this text, Vakkali attained release from the

⁴⁷ Interestingly enough, Buddhaghosa opts for another explanation in the very similar case of Channa which he also interprets in terms of a 'last-minute' release. Here he points to Channa's alleged fear (of death) (*bhaya* in Spk II 373, 10; *maṇabhaya* in Ps V 83, 20).

⁴⁸ T 25.1507. The passage on Vakkali is at 46c23–47a13. Details of the account in T 25.1507 can be found in Sugimoto 1999, 97. — There is yet another passage in this text in which a short account of Vakkali's suicide is given (T 25.1507, 37a26–37b7), which has already been referred to in Seki 1989, 269. See n. 45 for some details on this passage.

⁴⁹ The testimony of Buddhaghosa and the Chinese *Ekottar(ik)āgama* only show that the reinterpretation of Vakkali's suicide was in existence — and had gained some currency — roughly by the late 4th century C.E. The same holds good for its occurrence in Faxian's travelogue 高僧法顯傳 (see below).

⁵⁰ Most, if not all, experts agree that the traditional dating, which is derived from relatively late and unreliable Chinese catalogues, is not trustworthy. However, it is still disputed how much later the text exactly is. See Mori 1970, Mizuno 1989, 35ff. (I am indebted to Prof. Enomoto Fumio for this reference), Fang and Gao 2003; very short remarks can be found in Nattier 2003, 196, n. 7, Karashima and Nattier 2005, 372 n. 61. At

cankers when he had slit his throat half-way. As soon as he had beheaded himself completely he passed into (post-mortal) *nirvāṇa*. Therefore, this commentary is in agreement with the *Ekottar(ik)āgama* account regarding the fact that Vakkali was unreleased when starting to commit suicide. The texts are also similar in some details of minor importance. Still, both accounts and explanations of Vakkali's suicide are somewhat at variance.⁵¹ While the *sūtra* stresses the fact that Vakkali's act of committing suicide itself was wrong although he found release after doing so,⁵² the commentary comes up with a very original new explanation of how Vakkali consciously used the suicide not only as a means to escape disease but also to cut off the fetters which bind him to *saṃsāra*. Therefore, in this text rather a new reason is given for why his suicide was justified,⁵³ at least from a spiritual point of view. According to another passage in this text,⁵⁴ Vakkali committed suicide, although he was already immediately before doing so aware that this is contrary to the Buddha's prohibition to kill oneself. He nevertheless

least there can be hardly any doubt that the Chinese text must have been in circulation by ca. 500 C.E., since it is already listed in Sengyu's old and reliable catalogue (see e.g. Mori 1970, 32f.).

⁵¹ It is, however, quite clear that both texts are related to each other. Like in the case of the *Ekottar(ik)āgama* translation (see the reference in n. 17) the ascription of the commentary to the school of the Mahāsāṃghikas is not undisputed (see e.g. Mori [1970, 35] who refers to Hirakawa Akira). There seem to exist, however, some more problems regarding the formation of the Chinese text of the 分別功德論. Mori 1970, 37f., for instance, points to the fact that at least some comments written by Chinese Buddhists seem to have entered the text without having been recognized as such in the editions; Mizuno 1989, 35 ff. should also be studied regarding these problems (I regret that I was not able to make full use of the latter article).

⁵² Probably because of the intensity of his recollection of death (see above).

⁵³ Sugimoto 1999, 97. It should be noted, however, that this justification follows on a further doubt regarding Vakkali's suicide which is raised by an anonymous opponent, as has also already been noted by Sugimoto (ibid.). According to this objection someone like Vakkali who is, though not yet liberated, characterized by confident belief does not even resort to arms in self-defense, let alone in order to kill himself (T 25.1507, 47a7f.).

⁵⁴ T 25.1507, 37a26–37b7.

afflicted the wound on himself in order to attain *nirvāṇa*.

In Buddhist literature many other sources can be found where one monk or another⁵⁵ is said to have found release during or immediately after “the use of the knife,”⁵⁶ while at least the Sarvāstivādins stuck to the opinion that *arhats* sometimes commit suicide with a knife after they have found release. Regarding the case of Vakkali, it is especially noteworthy that the Chinese pilgrim Faxian relates a narrative of an anonymous monk which is in many ways very similar to that one found in the 分別功德論.⁵⁷

The Saṃyuktāgama recension

The *Saṃyuktāgama* recension is much more similar to the Theravāda version than the corresponding *sūtra* of the *Ekottar(ik)āgama*.⁵⁸

Quite a few things which have been presented above as highly probable

⁵⁵ That is, either one of the three disciples of the Buddha who killed himself with a knife or an anonymous monk.

⁵⁶ See e.g. the references to the **Tattvasiddhi*, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* and **Nyāyānusāriṇī* in Schmithausen 2000, 37 n. 56. While the latter two sources are roughly contemporary with the Chinese translation of the *Ekottar(ik)āgama* and Buddhaghosa, the **Tattvasiddhi* of Harivarman is generally regarded as being at least slightly older.

⁵⁷ 高僧法顯傳 (T 51.2085), 863a17ff.; cf. especially the discussion of this passage in Sugimoto 1999, 97f. Deeg 2005 contains a new edition (based on earlier editions by Zhang and Kuwayama), German translation and study of the whole text (the relevant passages can be found on p. 599, p. 553f. and 432f.). Faxian’s journey to India and Ceylon took place approximately between 399 to 413 C.E. (see Deeg 2005, 23–25 for a discussion of the exact dates). Sugimoto (1999, 98) identifies the anonymous monk as Vakkali. Zürcher (1972, 425, n.202) suggests that the monk Godhika may be meant. The legend is narrated with reference to the black rock near Rājagrha where Godhika’s and Vakkali’s suicide are located. Vakkali’s suicide, however, only takes place there according to the Pāli recension which might be an argument in favour of Zürcher’s assumption. Finally, Deeg opts for Channa, the third of the three disciples of the Buddha who commit suicide with a knife and enter Nirvāṇa (Deeg 2005, 432f.). This is the least likely solution. At any rate, Sugimoto is definitely right when he treats Faxian’s narrative as closely related to the account(s) of Vakkali’s suicide in the 分別功德論.

⁵⁸ See the table appended to this paper.

elements of interpretation regarding the Pāli recension are more explicitly dealt with in the *Samyuktāgama*. To begin with, the message of the deities that Vakkali is intent on release is supplemented by the statement that Vakkali wants to kill himself. Therefore, the Buddha’s reaction to the message of the deities refers here unambiguously to Vakkali’s intention to commit suicide. However, the Buddha’s message for Vakkali is formulated slightly differently in the *Samyuktāgama*. But it seems that the Buddha unconditionally assures that Vakkali’s death — and his fate after death as well — will be good, since he has no desire for the *skandhas* anymore.⁵⁹ So it seems that the Buddha also confirms that Vakkali is already released.⁶⁰ Probably it is also implied that Vakkali was released while committing suicide when the Buddha states in the end that Vakkali “killed himself by means of a knife with his consciousness (*viññāna*) not stationed [anywhere].”⁶¹ Therefore, it seems that the central message of this recension is expressed more straightforward than in the Pāli version and can be summarized as follows: The released one, who has no desire for the *skandhas* anymore, can, at least if he is gravely ill, end his life by his own hand.

⁵⁹ Literally, the Buddha rather says that Vakkali’s death is good, if he has no desire anymore (SĀ 346c27–29: 汝於此身不起貪欲 ○ 是則善終 ○ 後世亦善). This becomes even more explicit in an earlier part of the narrative where the Buddha reacts in the same way to Vakkali’s intention to kill himself (SĀ 346c6f.: 若於彼身無可貪 · 可欲者 ○ 是則善終 ○ 後世亦善). However, the Buddha’s messengers omit the conditional sentence when they convey the message to Vakkali (SĀ 347a19f.: 汝善於命終 ○ 後世亦善). This seems to indicate that there are no doubts regarding the question whether Vakkali has fulfilled this condition.

⁶⁰ It will be shown below that there are some other indications that Vakkali is already released at this point in time.

⁶¹ SĀ 347b10f.: 跋迦梨善男子 不住識神 ○ 以刀自殺. Cf. SĀ 286b13: 然比丘瞿低迦以不住心 ○ 執刀自殺. In this context, the expression “with his consciousness (*viññāna*) not stationed [anywhere]” rather refers to a psychological state than to the whereabouts of his consciousness after death. See Langer 2001, 33f. for the discussion of a text passage in the *Samyuttanikāya* where *apaṭiṭṭhitam viññānaṃ* refers to a state of liberation while still being alive.

Leaving aside other minor or negligible deviations, the *Samyuktāgama* version differs from the Pāli recension in one interesting respect: In the account of the Buddha's visit to Vakkali's sick-bed, that part of the dialogue is missing which deals with Vakkali's worries about the fact that he cannot visit and see the Buddha anymore. Instead, Vakkali utters his intention to commit suicide already on this occasion. The Buddha reacts to this announcement with a similar instruction on the unsatisfactoriness of the five *skandhas* as in the Pāli canon. Afterwards, he utters nearly the same words which he uses later in his reaction to the message of the deities (see above). Therefore, it is very well possible that according to the *Samyuktāgama* recension Vakkali is released right from the beginning. This assumption seems to be corroborated by another *sūtra* of the *Samyuktāgama*⁶² in which it is related how Vakkali finds release on another — and obviously earlier — occasion in his life.⁶³

However, there remains a certain doubt as to whether the *Samyuktāgama* as a whole takes the standpoint that a gravely ill *arhat* may end his own life by violent means. The *Samyuktāgama* recension of the *sūtra* dealing with Channa's suicide⁶⁴ has many elements in common with the *sūtra* on Vakkali's death. Like the latter disciple, Channa is an *arhat* who wants to die because of his illness and uses a

⁶² SĀ 235c–236b (no. 926); similarly T 2.100, 430c–431b (no. 151). In the corresponding Pāli *sūtra* (AN V 322–326) Vakkali is not mentioned.

⁶³ It is true that I have raised some doubts above (see n. 30) regarding the question of inconsistencies between different accounts of Vakkali's life. However, in this case there are less reasons to entertain such doubts: To begin with, both pertinent *sūtras* belong to the same canonical collection. Moreover, the narrative on Vakkali's release deals with practitioners who meditate in such a way that no-one can even understand what it is dependent on which (for the terminology see e.g. AN V 325, 8: *yam pi nissāya jhāyasīti*) they do so. I can very well imagine that this topic can be associated with the Buddha's final utterance in the *sūtra* on Vakkali's death according to which his disciple “killed himself ... with his consciousness (*vijñāna*) not stationed [anywhere]” (see above).

⁶⁴ SĀ 347b–348b (no. 1266). It is noteworthy that in contrast to the *Samyuttanikāya* both *sūtras* on ill monks who commit suicide are grouped together in the *Samyuktāgama* (and this seems to hold good also for the more original form of this collection; see n. 80).

knife for committing suicide. Nevertheless, the Buddha states in this case that Channa's suicide constitutes no "great transgression."⁶⁵ If we accept this limitation as part of the original text of this recension, there remain two possibilities to explain the difference between the two *sūtras* of the *Samyuktāgama*: First, two somewhat different standpoints on the issue might have entered this collection. Second, the fact that there are slight differences between the two cases of Vakkali and Channa might be held responsible for their different evaluation. In particular, the fact that Channa, unlike Vakkali, does not receive explicit permission from the Buddha to commit suicide might count for something.

A closer examination of the Pāli recension

Since the passage which deals with Vakkali's longing to see the Buddha has turned out to be an idiosyncrasy of the Pāli recension, the question arises as to what implications this additional passage has for the interpretation of the Pāli *sūtra* as a whole and for its specific message (in contrast to the other recensions).

As regards its form, it is not unique in the Pāli canon. Most notably, there is a passage in the following *sūtra* of the *Samyuttanikāya*, namely, in the *Assajisutta*,⁶⁶ which is formed according to the same pattern, although it is filled with different content. As regards its contents, it may have been inspired, among others, by possibly at that time already existing legends on Vakkali's deep confident belief in the Buddha; perhaps even narratives on his attachment to the Buddha's bodily appearance had already come into being.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ SĀ 348a24f.

⁶⁶ SN III 124–126; SN(NDP) 344–46. In the case of the *Assajisutta* the *Samyuktāgama* (SĀ 267b–c, no. 1024) and *Samyuttanikāya* are in agreement concerning the incorporation of such a passage. Also compare Vetter 2000, 234–235 on this *sūtra*. — Two other *sūtras* containing such a passage can be found in SN IV 46–48.

⁶⁷ That Vakkali was the foremost among the Buddha's disciples regarding confident belief (*śraddhā*) seems to be a quite ancient tradition (see the sources enumerated in n. 7). As regards his strong attachment to the body of the Buddha the situation is somewhat different. The earliest Pāli source other than the *Vakkalisutta* seems to be the *Apadāna* which probably is a very late part of the canon (see n. 8). However, at least Norman assumes that

At any rate, the passage seems to imply that Vakkali in the beginning of the Pāli version⁶⁸ was not yet released. I think, however, that it is possible to add some further considerations regarding the interpretation of the Pāli recension at this stage of the present investigation.

To begin with, the expression “putrid body” (*pūtīkāya*) used by the Buddha with regard to his own body deserves special consideration. It strongly reminds one of the Buddhist contemplation of the impure (*aśubhabhāvanā*) which serves the purpose to fight desire (*rāga*) by means of a contemplation of the human body as being horrible. Quite obviously, Vakkali belongs to those types of person who show especially strong tendencies to develop the character fault of passionate desire. As is well-known, the *Samyuttanikāya* contains another *sūtra* in which a mass suicide of monks occurs after these disciples of the Buddha have practiced the contemplation of the impure and as a consequence have begun to abhor their own bodies.⁶⁹ And like Vakkali these monks also commit suicide with a knife⁷⁰ — a method which fits very well with the vigour, impulsiveness and auto-aggressiveness of the feelings which are instrumental in causing the mass suicide.

It is possible that these reminiscences of mass suicides in the Pāli recension

Pāli *saddhā* might also have the meaning “desire” — a meaning which he does, as a matter of fact, also consider in the discussion of the old reference to Vakkali in the *Suttanipāta* (see n. 7). This might render the assumption that already in relatively early canonical times Vakkali’s positive attitude to the Buddha and his teaching was somewhat ambiguous quite probable.

⁶⁸ Probably in contrast to the *Samyuktāgama* recension (see above). Regarding the account of Vakkali’s fate in the *Apadāna* which seems to suggest that Vakkali was already released right from the start of the Pāli *sūtra*, see n. 30. Also see n. 29.

⁶⁹ SN V 320–322.

⁷⁰ A longer version of this mass suicide can be found in the *Vibhaṅga* to the third rule entailing life-long exclusion from the order, which deals with homicide (Vin III 68–71). Unlike the *Samyuttanikāya* version, this narrative contains additionally unambiguous — the word *sathahāraka* in SN V 320, 22 is difficult and has often been interpreted as referring to a “weapon” rather than to an “assailant” or “assassin” (see e.g. Vin III 73, 26–28; Spk III 268) — references to consensual homicide, and later on also to ordinary homicide. But

are responsible for Louis de La Vallée Poussin's conclusion — most clearly put forward in one of his later publications — that Vakkali committed suicide “in a sudden burst of disgust.” Furthermore, La Vallée Poussin stated that this case is a further proof of the fact that ancient Buddhism, which is often depicted as sober and rationalistic in outlook, already contained irrational elements.⁷¹

However, the case of Vakkali also differs in important respects from those mass suicides motivated by disgust. The use of the term “putrid body” in the *sūtra* is not followed by a systematic contemplation of the impure. Vakkali rather attains salvation by pursuing the sober, relatively rationalistic way of the examination of the unsatisfactoriness of the five “constituents of one's person” (*skandha*).⁷² One gets the impression that afterwards he proceeds with his

unlike the *prātimokṣa* rules themselves, the *Vibhaṅga* generally seems to be of relatively late origin (von Hinüber 1996, § 23). It is true that this does not seem to entail that introductory stories in the *Vibhaṅga* which can also be found in the *Suttapiṭaka* must necessarily have been taken over and adapted from the latter source. Rather, there seem to be examples for both directions of borrowing (see von Hinüber, *ibid.*) In this particular case, however, it seems to be highly probable that the authors of the canonical commentary on the *Prātimokṣa* have built their narrative on the account in the *Suttapiṭaka* and expanded it in order to include more forms of homicide than the special case of self-inflicted suicide in it. In the narrative of the Pāli *vinaya* only the words knife (*sattha*) and sword (*asi*) are used to designate the instruments of killing. In the *Samyuktāgama* version (SĀ 207b21ff. [no. 809]) of the mass suicide many different methods of suicide, including even a non-violent one like poisoning, are mentioned. However, in my view the *Samyuktāgama* version can already be shown to be of a secondary nature by the mere fact that elements of the *vinaya* version as it appears in the Pāli canon are added to the original narrative. Therefore, it is highly probable that the long list of different suicide methods represents a secondary expansion as well.

⁷¹ De La Vallée Poussin 1930, 48f., 77f.; compare de La Vallée Poussin 1937, 174 and 1919, 693.

⁷² I think it has been convincingly shown by earlier scholars that there are different paths to salvation in the early Buddhist texts which are at times incompatible with each other, although the canonical materials also offer many instances of a reconciliation of different methods with each other. The *Vakkalisutta* contains a path to salvation which is described by Vetter 1988, p. XXIII, as follows: “The ... path purports that one is freed from desire—and thereby from rebirth and future suffering—when, with discriminating insight,

preparations for committing suicide in a composed state of mind. He is, as he states himself, completely certain that he has no desire or love anymore for the *skandhas*, which he has clearly recognized as being unsatisfactory. Vakkali has simply succeeded in getting rid of his positive affections towards the *skandhas*; there is, except for the violent suicide itself, no hint whatsoever that these emotions of attraction have been superseded by equally strong emotions of dislike or disgust.⁷³

Therefore, de La Vallée Poussin's interpretation seems not to be correct in this regard. It should, however, be noted that we are touching on a fundamental problem in the investigation of Buddhist suicide here. Especially in later literature, for instance in the Sarvāstivāda texts, we often find positively evaluated suicides of an *arhat* or other living beings being entirely or partly motivated by a certain aversion against one's own body, the sense objects or life and world in general.⁷⁴

one perceives the five constituents of one's person as being transient, and therefore suffering (i. e. unsatisfactory), and that because of this they can neither be the self nor belong to the self. Here nothing is said of dhyāna or any other form of meditation." Ibid. p. XXVIII: "This method tried to obtain non-identification through reasoning ..." See also Schmithausen 1981, especially 214ff., on which Vetter's foregoing descriptions are mainly based. The original starting-point for singling out traces of a "rationalistic" way to salvation as against a "mystical" one is, by the way, found in one of de La Vallée Poussin's own articles (1937a).

⁷³ The instruction of the Buddha on the *skandhas* contains the word *nibbindati* (see the references in n. 21) which is, more often than not, translated as "to become disgusted" or the like in secondary literature. I am probably not the right one to judge how strong the aversion expressed by the English word "disgust" and its derivatives is. At any rate, *nibbindati* can certainly not designate a very emotional and intensive form of dislike, since this would not be in accord with the instruction as a whole which simply aims at recognizing the unsatisfactoriness of the *skandhas*. There are, as a matter of fact, quite a few other words in Pāli which are much stronger in this regard, especially those ones which are used in the account of the mass suicide committed by Buddha's disciples; *nibbindati* does not appear in the latter context. Tilmann Vetter translates the word on one occasion (2000, 53) as "to cease to take an interest," and I am quite sure that such an understanding is also appropriate in this context.

⁷⁴ See e.g. Delhey 2006, 39 for some references regarding the Sarvāstivādins' view on

On the other hand, the mass suicides committed because of disgust in the canonical sermons are generally depicted as being spiritually not wholesome or are criticized in other ways. Sometimes, however, it is rather difficult to draw an exact demarcation line between these two cases.⁷⁵ In this regard, also the problem of *vibhavatr̥ṣṇā* (thirst for non-existence) is of some interest, although this concept on the whole might have been far less important for the history of Buddhist dogmatics than often stated.⁷⁶

If we assume that Vakkali kills himself in a serene and detached state of mind, the fact that Vakkali kills himself in a way which is at least on a physical level aggressive and violent remains to be explained. It should be noted that even the first category of suicides, which have been mentioned in the preceding paragraph, are more often than not committed in a non-violent (or supernatural) way, although examples for violent acts are not missing in this category, while the second kind mentioned above is generally committed by a knife. Should one not consider the possibility that the mere fact of committing suicide as well as the

suicides committed by *arhats*, and *ibid.*, 44 for some other cases.

⁷⁵ Sometimes this might be explained by the fact that the semantics of different words used in this context have not received sufficient attention up to now (see n. 73). But this seems to be not the only problem involved here.

⁷⁶ See Frauwallner 1994, 26f. At any rate, it seems generally not to appear in the formula on the four noble truths except in the Pāli recension (compare the remarks in n. 4 on the list of three kinds of thirst in which this term is included). However, the term *vibhavatr̥ṣṇā* poses many intricate problems regarding its literal meaning, its dogmatic implications and its origination and early history. I intend to write a separate article devoted to this term. Therefore, I abstain from any further documentation of this problem. It should, however, be noted that the concept of *vibhavatr̥ṣṇā*, even if we interpret it as “thirst for non-existence” in the sense of a longing for death and consider it as a central doctrinal term coined by the Buddha himself or in early Buddhism, cannot be adduced as a proof that authentic Buddhism rejected the possibility of committing suicide outright. To be sure, that suicide is committed without any longing for death is extremely improbable in the case of the canonical instances of mass suicides. But if a Jain saint can kill himself without any longing for death (see n. 32), why should this not be possible for a Buddhist *arhat*?

violent method Vakkali chooses serve as a proof that the Buddha's instruction — and the practice of the “rationalistic” way to salvation — have been effective in Vakkali's case? On the one hand, Vakkali's suicide may show that he has got rid of his attachment. On the other hand, the method characterized by bloody violence against his own body may additionally emphasize that he does not care for the body anymore and its aesthetics, that is to say, he has gotten rid of his own individual form of attachment.⁷⁷

At any rate, this interpretation has the advantage that the combination of the passage on the Buddha's putrid body with Vakkali's suicide and attainment of *nirvāṇa* makes some sense. One would indeed expect that the transmitters of the Theravāda canon would not insert such a meaningful and peculiar statement into the sermon without any reason.

Perhaps even the peculiar features of the *Assajisutta*,⁷⁸ which, as mentioned before, directly follows on the *Vakkalisutta* in the *Samyuttanikāya*, become meaningful through such an interpretation. The monk Assaji is as sick as Vakkali, is also feeling some remorse and receives the Buddha's instruction on the unsatisfactoriness of the *skandhas* as well. Assaji, however, does not commit

⁷⁷ Regarding the method chosen by Vakkali, one must, however, keep in mind that there are other factors which may also have been instrumental. To begin with, suicide committed by a knife is a very fast way to kill oneself, which in the case of Vakkali, who suffers from great pains, is certainly more advisable than a ‘non-violent’ suicide by starving to death. Moreover, the use of a weapon “may perhaps indicate a *kṣatriya* background” (Schmithausen 2000, 37 n. 57). These two factors are probably the most important ones in the other recensions of the *Vakkalisutta* as well as in the related accounts of suicides committed by Godhika (who has to kill himself speedily before he falls back from his state of release again and who is praised by the Buddha for the energetic way he acts and for his disregard for life) and Channa (who is as sick as Vakkali). In the case of the mass suicides of the Buddha's disciples, however, the method chosen can better be explained in a different way (see above), and I still think that the violent method has a special meaning in the context of the present source, though not (exactly) the meaning obviously assumed by de La Vallée Poussin.

⁷⁸ See the references in n. 66.

suicide.⁷⁹ One might explain this fact by the hypothesis that the compilers of the *Samyuttanikāya* simply juxtaposed two different strategies of, and views on, dealing with incurable sickness. However, only in the Pāli canon do these two *sūtras* follow directly on each other. In the *Samyuktāgama*, this is not the case.⁸⁰ This — as well as the fact that the two *sūtras* in the Pāli canon have more similarities than their counterparts in the *Samyuktāgama* — might suggest that the differences regarding the commitment of suicide in the two *sūtras* of the Pāli canon can rather be explained with the peculiar features the Pāli recension of the *Vakkalisutta* has as against the other recensions. In the *Samyuttanikāya*, Assaji's abstaining from committing suicide may simply be explained by the fact that Assaji does not feel remorse because he cannot see the Buddha anymore. Instead, he is remorseful about the fact that due to his illness he has become unable to attain meditative states. Then the Buddha reproaches him for holding meditative states in highest esteem and teaches him, along the same lines as in the *Vakkalisutta*, the 'rationalistic' way of examining the *skandhas*. However, in this *sūtra* the Buddha adds a further instruction on becoming detached from feelings.⁸¹ This addition might be interpreted in such a way that a method different from suicide for dealing with incurable pain is taught. Since, however, not only painful but also pleasant feelings are mentioned in this context, it may equally well serve

⁷⁹ Keown (1996, 15f.) has rightly rejected Wiltshire's (1983, 131f.) claim that in the *Assajisutta* and other canonical accounts of sick monks suicide or suicidal intentions might be involved, although there is no hint whatsoever regarding this possibility in the respective sermons.

⁸⁰ In the transmitted version of the SĀ they appear in entirely different parts of the collection. It is true that it is generally agreed upon among scholars that the SĀ as it appears in the Taishō canon is in disorder (see e.g. Choong 2000, 8f., where also many of the relevant older publications on this problem are cited). In the restored original SĀ as it appears in Choong's study both *sūtras* belong to the same section, but do not directly follow on each other (see Choong 2000, 247).

⁸¹ In the *Samyuktāgama* version of the *Assajisutta*, the instruction of the Buddha differs in some interesting respects; see Vetter 2000, 234f.

the purpose to make Assaji detached from the pleasant feelings which are said to characterize (at least) the (lower) meditative absorptions.⁸² In other words: The Buddha might suggest to Assaji first that the ‘rationalistic’ way of examining the *skandhas* is superior to a ‘mystical’ way centred on meditative absorptions, and then give him a special instruction on how to become detached not only from the pains endured during his illness, but also from the pleasure attained by meditative absorptions. In this context it would be rather arbitrary to add an account of Assaji committing suicide, since such an act has no special relationship with Assaji’s attachment to attaining *samādhis*, his remorse resulting from this fact and the Buddha’s instruction on how to get rid of these individual spiritual problems.

Even if one does not subscribe to this interpretation of the *Assajisutta*, there remains the fact that the *Vakkalisutta* is placed in the Pāli canon in immediate vicinity to a similar *sūtra* which cautions against overemphasizing the ‘mystical’ way of the attainment of *samādhi* and teaches the ‘rationalistic’ way of systematically analysing the constituents of the personality as unsatisfactory. This seems to corroborate the hypothesis that in this recension of the *Vakkalisutta*, too, this way to salvation is far more important for an interpretation of the *sūtra* as a whole as it has been recognized up to now. The suicide of Vakkali might be a drastic proof for the fact that even strong forms of attachment to the sensual sphere can be transcended by this method without the need of entering into deep meditations like the *dhyānas*. As a matter of fact, Vakkali must have been physically as unable to enter such meditations as Assaji was.

My interpretation of the Pāli recension of the *Vakkalisutta* might not be regarded as convincing by everyone. But at any rate, it has the advantage that all the parts of the sermon neatly fit together.

There remain at least two open questions at the end of this investigation:

⁸² This additional instruction is found in other places of the Pāli canon as well. Note especially that at least one of these other *sūtras* also suggests that mainly feelings experienced in *samādhi* are meant (see Vetter 235, n. 104).

Firstly, what is the historical relationship between the *Samyuktāgama* recension and the Pāli recension? Such a meaningful passage as that one on the *pūtikāya* of the Buddha can hardly have been lost through mere neglect. One might of course argue that later transmitters of the *Samyuktāgama* somehow had problems with a passage in which the Buddha's body is described as *pūtikāya*. But I think that the discussion presented above shows that there are more good reasons imaginable for an addition of this passage under the influence of the *Assajisutta* and legends which might have already begun to develop on Vakkali's strong belief in or even attachment to the Buddha. Moreover, I generally tend to the assumption that the early Buddhist community was far more willing to add certain paragraphs to a pre-existing *sūtra* than to omit something which has once been recognized as *buddhavacana*. There are, as a matter of fact, more traces that some kind of secondary redaction of the Pāli *sūtra* has taken place. In contrast to the *Samyuktāgama* recension, the last part of the *sūtra* dealing with Māra and Vakkali's corpse agrees — except for the necessary change of names whenever the disciple of the Buddha is mentioned — literally with the end of the Theravāda recension of the *Godhikasutta*. Since, however, the beginning of the *sūtra* on Vakkali is situated at a potter's shed, this harmonization of both sermons becomes only possible by transporting the sick monk Vakkali to the location of Godhika's suicide. The *Samyuktāgama* recension only mentions that Vakkali left the house of the potter before committing suicide, but obviously it is presupposed that he has not been carried far away from the house.⁸³

This does, however, not mean that the *Samyuktāgama* recension is inevitably the direct predecessor of the Pāli recension. As a matter of fact, there seems to be some evidence that in certain places it is rather the Chinese text which contains secondary additions, for instance, when the message of the deities is supplemented by an explicit reference to Vakkali's intention to commit suicide.⁸⁴

⁸³ SĀ 347a1ff., cf. 347b3.

⁸⁴ SĀ 346c13.

But certainly the whole matter of the relationship between the two recensions and how their common predecessor might have looked needs some further consideration.

The second open point regards the question of the historical relationship between the *Vakkalisutta* as such and the other similar accounts of bloody suicide followed by post-mortals *nirvāṇa*. All three recensions are in agreement regarding the fact that they contain the narrative element of Māra searching in vain for Vakkali's *viññāna*. As already mentioned above, they share this feature with the narrative of Godhika's suicide. Recently, the archaic way in which the *viññāna* is treated in these parts of the two *sūtras* has been cited as one of the reasons why the suicide of an *arhat* might be a relic of pre-Buddhist forms of admissible suicide.⁸⁵ However, in contrast to the *Vakkalisutta*, Māra is right from the beginning one of the protagonists of the narrative contained in the *Godhikasutta*. This might suggest that the latter text is more original than the *Vakkalisutta*. The authors of this sermon might have had the wish to create a case of suicide quite different to that of Godhika, and in doing so they might have freely borrowed from this already preexisting case of an *arhat* killing himself with the approval of the Buddha. In any case, the *Godhikasutta* certainly deserves to be thoroughly studied on the basis of all extant versions. In addition to the Pāli recension and the two Chinese versions which are relatively well-known, this *sūtra* is also preserved in a Tibetan translation.⁸⁶

Conclusion

Finally, I would like to briefly summarize the main results of this paper:

1. Among the three recensions, the *Samyuktāgama* and the *Samyuttanikāya* versions are closely related, while the *Ekottarikāgama* recension differs considerably from both of them.
2. The first two recensions can hardly be explained in other ways than to assume

⁸⁵ Oberlies 2006, especially 218.

⁸⁶ Abhidh-k-ṭ *thu* 68b1–70b1.

- that Vakkali was already an *arhat* when he killed himself. The *Samyuktāgama* recension, especially, is quite explicit in this regard.
3. The *Ekottar(ik)āgama* recension, however, explicitly states that Vakkali attained release only after committing the act of suicide. Moreover, there is a marked tendency to describe his suicide as a rather problematic deed arisen from ignorance.
 4. However, it is precisely the emphatic way in which the *Ekottar(ik)āgama* recension expresses and interprets the circumstances of Vakkali's voluntary death, in addition to the motives discernable for the changes, which makes it very likely that this version can best be understood as a secondary reinterpretation of the original account.
 5. Such a change has definitively become quite widespread by approximately 400 C.E. without, however, ever becoming the interpretation that all schools of Indian Buddhism could subscribe to. Some post-canonical accounts seem to be closely related to the *Ekottar(ik)āgama* interpretation, but in contrast to the latter one they try to give some legitimacy to the act of suicide itself without returning to the theory according to which Vakkali was already released when killing himself.
 6. The Pāli recension contains a passage regarding Vakkali's attachment to the Buddha which probably represents a secondary addition to the original account as well. At any rate, it is a unique idiosyncrasy of the Pāli version. This element seems to suggest that Vakkali has, according to the redactors, not simply committed suicide because a released person is entitled to do so if he is incurably ill — which may be the main message contained in the *Samyuktāgama* version — but that he also proved in this way the success of his soteriological practice as taught to him by the Buddha.

Abbreviations

Abhidh-k-ṭ = *Abhidharmakośaṭīkopāyikā* of *Śamathadeva. In: *The Tibetan Tripitaka (Peking Edition, kept in the Library of the Otani University, Kyoto)*.

- Ed. by Daisetz T. Suzuki. Tokyo, Kyoto: Tibetan Tripitaka Research Institute, 1955–1958. No. 5595 (in vol. 118).
- AN = Richard Morris and E. Hardy, ed. *The Aṅguttara-Nikāya*. 5 vols. London: Pali Text Society, 1958–1979. [Reprints of the original edition 1885–1900, except for vol. 1 which is a revised second edition].
- Ap = Mary E. Lilley, ed. *The Apadāna of the Khuddaka Nikāya*. 2 vols. London: Pali Text Society, 1925–1927.
- Āyāraṅga = Muni Jambūvijaya, ed. Āyāraṅga-Suttam. Jaina-Āgama-Series No. 2 (I). Bombay: Shrī Mahāvīra Jaina Vidyālaya, 1976.
- Dhp-a = H.C. Norman, ed. *The Commentary on the Dhammapada*. 4 vols. London: Pali Text Society, 1906–1914.
- EĀ = Chinese translation of the *Ekottar(ik)āgama* (T 2.125).
- IC = Louis Renou and Jean Filliozat. *L'Inde classique: Manuel des études indiennes*. 2 vols. Paris: Payot 1947–1949; Paris: Imprimerie nationale, and Hanoi: Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient, 1953.
- Mil = V. Trenckner, ed. *Milindapañho*. 3 vols. London: Pali Text Society, 1880.
- Mp I = Max Walleser, ed. *Manorathapūraṇī: Buddhaghosa's Commentary on the Aṅguttara-Nikāya*. Vol. 1: *Eka-nīpatā[sic]-vaṇṇanā*. London: Pali Text Society, 1973. [Second edition, revised by H. Kopp.]
- Ps V = I.B. Horner, ed. *Papañcasūdanī Majjhimanikāyaṭṭhakathā of Buddhaghosācariya*. Vol. 5: *Suttas 131—152, Indices*. London: Pali Text Society, 1938.
- SĀ = the long Chinese version of the *Samyuktāgama* (T 2.99).
- SN = Léon Feer, ed. *The Saṃyutta-Nikāya of the Sutta-Piṭaka*. 5 vols. London: Pali Text Society, 1970–1976 (first published 1884–1898).
- SN (NDP) = Bhikkhu J. Kashyap, ed. *The Saṃyutta Nikāya: 2.-3. Nidānavagga & Khandhavagga*. Nālandā-Devanāgarī-Pāli-Series. Pāli Publication Board (Bihar Government), 1959.
- Sn = D. Andersen and H. Smith, ed. *Suttanipāta*. London: Pali Text Society, 1913.
- Spk = F.L. Woodward, ed. *Sāratthappakāsinī*. 3 vols. London: Pali Text Society,

1929–1937.

T = Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎, and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡辺海旭, eds. *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經. 100 vols. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–1932. [Cited according to volume no. and text no. (e.g. “T 2.99”).]

Vin = H. Oldenberg, ed. *The Vinaya Piṭakam: One of the Principal Buddhist Holy Scriptures in the Pāli Language*. 5 vols. London: Williams and Norgate, 1879–1883.

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**Appendix : Comparison of the three recensions of the Vakkalisutta
(simplified presentation)**

<i>Samyuktāgama</i>	<i>Samyuttanikāya</i>	<i>Ekottar(ik)āgama</i>	
<i>nidāna</i> (Rājagrha)		<i>nidāna</i> (Śrāvastī)	
The monk Vakkali is gravely ill			
_____		Vakkali wants to kill himself, although he is still unreleased	
		narrator stresses Vakkali's ignorance	
On Vakkali's request, the Buddha pays him a visit		_____	
On Vakkali's illness			
_____	On Vakkali's regrets		
	On the <i>pūtikāya</i> of the Buddha		
The Buddha questions Vakkali regarding the unsatisfactoriness of the 5 <i>skandhas</i> .			
Two deities (<i>devatā</i>) pay the Buddha a visit.			
The Buddha sends a messenger to inform Vakkali on the words of the deities and his own comments.			
Vakkali affirms that he has no doubts regarding the unsatisfactoriness of the <i>skandhas</i> .			
Commitment of suicide (with a knife)			
_____			Vakkali recognizes that suicide is a misdeed according to the Buddha's teaching.
		He contemplates the unsatisfactoriness of the <i>skandhas</i> ; his mind becomes released and he dies.	
Māra is searching in vain for Vakkali's <i>vijñāna</i>			
_____		Dialogue between the Buddha and Ānanda regarding the question of when Vakkali attained liberating insight	
Concluding formula	_____	Concluding formula	

*Wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter,
Centre for Tantric Studies
Abteilung für Kultur und Geschichte Indiens und Tibets
Asien-Afrika-Institut, Universität Hamburg
Research Fellow,
International Institute for Buddhist Studies*